

Branch welfare officer presentation

About UNISON Welfare

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening colleagues.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this Branch AGM/Branch Committee/Stewards meeting.

My name is..... And I am your branch welfare officer/ welfare contact.

I am delighted to be here to talk to you about UNISON's registered charity, UNISON Welfare.

We have come along way from our beginnings in 1910 when our annual income was £54. Today we are an organisation with a £1 million turnover and we are amongst the top 500 charities in the UK.

Today I would like to tell you

- A little bit about UNISON Welfare and the support we can provide to members.
- Some of the findings of our Modernising Welfare survey and report.
- How you can use UNISON Welfare for recruitment and help us spread the word about this valued service.

About UNISON Welfare

UNISON Welfare is a unique confidential service offering advice and support just for UNISON members and their families.

We offer

- Listening and support
- Financial assistance
- Breaks and holidays
- Debt advice

- Personal advice

All these services are free.

Whether it's an accident or injury at work, bullying or stress or a legal issue there is usually a role for UNISON's charity to play in helping members as well as addressing problems collectively.

There are many other personal problems where we can help such as illness, relationship breakdown, domestic violence or debt.

In short UNISON Welfare enhances and complements the work of the union in supporting members at work and at home.

In 2005 we gave over £670,000 in grants to 1900 members and their families.

Many more contacted us for debt advice and support.

And four hundred adults and children benefited from a family holiday.

Financial assistance

Sometimes confidential advice or a sympathetic ear is enough.

But one of the other ways we can help is with a grant or loan.

We provide financial support to members and their dependants who are experiencing unforeseen financial hardship or other circumstances that have placed an unreasonable strain on the household budget. For example:

- A sudden loss of income or increase in expenditure because of illness
- Relationship breakdown
- The death of a partner or relative

Its main purpose is to act as a short-term safety net whilst we work with the applicant, other agencies and other parts of UNISON to help them to adjust to their situation.

A grant could be made, for example, to help with household bills, or for items of furniture or equipment. We can often help with the

extra costs of coping with a disability or caring for family member with special needs.

One of my main roles as branch welfare officer is to assist members with completing the application form for financial assistance.

This asks for quite a lot of financial information. This is necessary as a registered charity to ensure we make proper use of funds and also that we offer the most appropriate type of assistance.

There is also a section of the form, which I must complete as the branch welfare officer, which includes a recommendation as to the type of help required.

Having said all this it is important to recognise that we are not just for a crisis.

We want to encourage members to contact us before their situation is serious.

Wellbeing breaks

We are aware of the pressures on UNISON members and the many obstacles to achieving a happy and healthy work-life balance.

Our new wellbeing breaks, delivered in partnership with the Family Holiday Association, can provide welcome relief from the stresses of daily life and the space and time to reflect away from difficult or depressing circumstances.

We can help with all or part of the costs of a break depending on your situation.

The wellbeing breaks include:

- Family holidays and outings
- Get well breaks
- Breaks in other special circumstances

The service is flexible depending on the need with a choice of accommodation such as hotels or guest houses, holiday centres or traditional convalescent facilities.

UNISON's award winning Croyde Bay Holiday Village in Devon is a popular destination.

Family holidays

Despite the growth in tourism in the past few decades a quarter of UK households, including many families with children, are excluded from taking holidays, mainly because they cannot afford them.

Our family holiday service is designed to provide a week's holiday for members with children who have not had a holiday for at least four years.

We offer several types of holiday to suit different family needs including shorter breaks, day trips and leisure outings.

Get well breaks

A break, following illness can help with rest and recovery and the transition back to work or improved health for the retired.

Our get well breaks are designed to support any members with or without children, or their dependants, who are recovering from illness (including stress), accident or an operation and who are not in need of nursing care.

We recognise that ill health can sometimes impact on the whole family and that there will be occasions when it will be better for everyone to get away together.

Other special circumstances

We can provide respite breaks for carers with day to day responsibility for a disabled dependant and breaks following bereavement of a partner or dependant child.

Breaks are also available for those with a terminal illness.

All this information is contained in the special wellbeing breaks application form and accompanying guidance notes.

Debt advice service

You may be wondering why we have a debt advice service.

Many people fall into debt at some point in their lives and UNISON members are no exception.

In fact debt is clearly a factor in around 85% of the requests for help we receive.

People get into debt for a variety of reasons, but in most cases it is not because they have been careless or reckless.

Sometimes all it takes is a small change in circumstances to tip the balance and turn a manageable situation into a debt problem.

Debt affects relationships, work performance and health.

The problem is growing and personal debt in the UK is now at its highest level ever.

The increase in demand for debt advice and restricted opening hours has made it more difficult to access traditional sources of help, especially for those in work.

Now members can call UNISON Welfare Debtline for immediate access to free and confidential advice to help clear their debts.

The service is provided in partnership with Payplan, a free national debt advice company with links to the voluntary sector.

For example, Payplan can negotiate with creditors and reduce multiple debts to a single regular payment.

The service is paid for by the credit industry so every penny of the member's repayments goes towards their debts unlike some of the fee-charging debt management companies that advertise on TV and in the press.

This is just one of the ways they can help and members will be offered a solution that best meets their individual circumstances.

The additional help available from UNISON Welfare is an important part of the service. Although we can't make a grant for consumer credit debts we can often help with priority debts such as council tax or rent or help with a much needed wellbeing break.

By working with Payplan we can maximise the effectiveness of any grant we can offer instead of just applying a sticking plaster to the problem.

How you can help

These are some of the ways that we are supporting UNISON members and their families but we can only fulfil this role if they know we are here.

This is where you come in.

I need your help to publicise our services to members.

I need you to be my eyes and ears, to refer any members to me that you think we might be able to help.

But there is another very good reason for asking you to help spread the word.

In 2004 we undertook a major survey of member's needs.

The detailed review looked at the welfare needs of members in relation to trends in society and provided us with a complete picture of how we are perceived in the union.

Debt, long term sickness, domestic violence, childcare and caring responsibilities, the needs of loan parents, housing and the ageing population were just some of the areas explored.

The accompanying report, 'Modernising UNISON Welfare Services' is helping to shape the future direction of the organisation.

But the report also emphasises the role UNISON Welfare can play in recruitment.

In our survey two thirds of members felt that knowing about UNISON Welfare would encourage new members to join the union. This figure increases to 85% amongst young members and black and ethnic minority members.

And no wonder! For no other trade union offers a similar service.

Of the big trade unions such as the T&G, RCN or GMB, many offer extensive membership services but none have a charitable organisation attached to the union to provide welfare services.

And this makes us unique. Something that you can use whenever you come into contact with members and potential recruits.

And we do need your help to get this across.

To help us tell members and potential recruits about this wonderful service.

Although we are more widely known than we were a few years ago the survey still identified that at least a third of members, probably more, are unaware of the support on offer.

Publicity

Everything a member needs to know and how to get in touch is available on a handy credit card sized card.

Eye catching and colourful, the member can just slip this in their wallet or purse.

Have a box for recruitment events and fairs; give out to colleagues in your workplace.

You can ring me or UNISON Welfare's national office if you want further information or need to discuss a specific problem that one of your members has.

Most importantly, if you know anyone you think needs our help please do tell them about what's on offer. All calls and applications are handled in complete confidence and with utmost sensitivity.

I can be contacted at.....(give contact telephone number (s) days, times as appropriate).

You can also obtain more information from our web pages on the UNISON website and you can print out application forms from [here](#).

Conclusion

I hope this snapshot of UNISON Welfare has given you an insight into our work.

The scope of society's problems and their impact on UNISON members means responding to many different needs.

Unlike the other affiliated services, UNISON Welfare is completely free. It comes with being a member of UNISON.

Members can contact us for advice and support on a wide range of issues. No other trade union offers this service.

We hope you will help us to get this message across.

As one member who came to us put it:

“Thanks for not judging me. Thanks for treating me with respect and for all your help and kindness. You all helped me breathe again.”