

Working parents missing out on benefits

Nearly half of all first time parents are worried about money, yet most have not heard of Child Benefit, let alone the other benefits to which they are entitled.

These shocking figures come as Usdaw, the shop workers union, published early findings of its survey into how working parents are coping with the impact of the global economic downturn. The survey revealed that working parents are twice as likely to be worried about money as those without children or caring responsibilities.

Early results also indicate that levels of awareness of entitlement to

Benefits amongst working parents tend to be low. The highest level of awareness of government support for parents who already have children is for Tax Credits, with over 90% of survey respondents indicating that they are aware of these. However, again, levels of awareness amongst first time parents fall significantly

below this.

Less than one third of the working parents surveyed had heard of the Sure Start Maternity Grant, which is worth

£500 to low income parents when a new baby is born. Fewer than one in ten new parents were aware of the new Health in Pregnancy Grant, even though the £190 grant is not means tested and is available to almost all pregnant women. Further information on a number of grants is available from the following:

- Child Benefit Helpline: 0845 302 1444
- Tax Credits Helpline: 0845 300 3900
- Health in Pregnancy Grant Helpline: 0845 366 7885
- Sure Start Maternity Grant Helpline: 08000 55 66 88
- Child Trust Fund Helpline: 0845 366 7870

Or call into the local CAB office for advice on what benefits or grants that might be available.

Improvements for Shankill Homes



314 Housing Executive homes in the Shankill area are getting major external improvements at a cost of almost £1m. The homes are a mixture of houses, flats and bungalows and were built by the Housing Executive between 1980 and 1991. Work is being carried out as part of the Housing Executive's Planned Maintenance Programme, which ensures that homes are upgraded on a regular basis and continue to meet modern day standards.

As part of the scheme the original window frames, which have reached the end of their useful life, will be replaced with double glazed uPVC windows. The Housing Executive will also take the opportunity to replace any defective external doors and carry out repairs to roofs, chimneys, rainwater goods, fencing and paths.

The planned maintenance service remains one of the Housing Executive's core

functions as a landlord and Gordon Reilly the Housing Executive's Shankill District Manager explained:

"It is essential that the Housing Executive continues to provide the best possible service that it can in terms of quality, efficiency, customer satisfactions and value for money. To this end staff from the local District Office and our contractor PK Murphy have carried out in depth consultation with the community and their representatives in the run up to this scheme and will continue to liaise with them to ensure that work progresses with the minimum of disruption. I am confident that, as well as demonstrating our commitment to provide tenants with quality homes, this scheme will also help to create a more modern and attractive environment for the entire community."

Local Councillor William Humphrey was delighted that the scheme was about to start

and added:

"It's always good to hear of investment in the Shankill area so this scheme by the Housing Executive has to be welcomed. It's great to see the homes getting a bit of a facelift and the improvements, especially the new windows, will make a real difference.

The local residents and I have worked closely with the local District Office in the development of this scheme and we will continue to liaise with them and their contractor."

Jim McDonald tribute

BY CLLR HUGH SMYTH

My friend and colleague passed away peacefully a few weeks ago just six weeks short of his 70th birthday. I knew Jim since the age of 12 as we literally grew up together in the traditional two up two down houses that boasted an outside toilet and a tin bath hanging from a nail in the back yard. Our first trip away from Belfast was to watch Tommy Dickson getting his first cap for Northern Ireland and despite being beaten 1-0 it was a worthwhile trip. Apart from his family his other passion was football especially watching Linfield and Rangers play.

It was along with Jim and David Overend as founding members of the Progressive Unionist Party that we all became immersed in working class politics. Jim travelled the length and breadth of Northern Ireland talking to anyone who was prepared to listen to him as he continually re-emphasised the importance of striving for the good of the working class people and that we should tackle the problems that were common to us all issues like bad housing, poor education, unemployment and inadequate health facilities.

Whenever someone needed help Jim McDonald was always first to respond, irrespective of who the person was or indeed the complexity of the problem Jim always looked for the answer or



looked for someone who could help or assist. In later years Jim was pivotal in supporting decisions taken by loyalist paramilitaries and supported the Combined Loyalist Military Command when they took the decision to announce their first ceasefire in 1994. Jim McDonald was a true loyalist in every sense of the word, in the past few weeks since his death a number of political commentators have written about his contribution to our

society as we know it today, they have spoken of how this quiet, honest and genuine man worked unstintingly for the benefit of his community. All of this is true and more I just know of him as my friend and colleague who never lost sight of the people and the community he loved so much. There is a saying that I feel sums up the man my friend Jim McDonald - He was weighed in the balance and found not wanting.

Advice on managing asthma in hot weather

Asthma UK Northern Ireland is issuing advice for people with asthma who find that their symptoms get worse at this time of year. Cher Piddock, Asthma UK Adviceline nurse, says: 'Asthma symptoms can worsen during hotter weather due to higher levels of pollen and pollution, such as ozone. High levels of pollution have been linked to an increased risk of asthma attacks and low peak flow readings, particularly on hot days. It has also been associated with increased visits to Accident and Emergency departments and the need for increased medication. Around two thirds of people with asthma say pollution triggers their condition, so Asthma UK Northern Ireland recommends that people who have pollution as a trigger avoid going out if air quality is poor. We also recommend that people always carry their reliever inhaler, avoid exercising outdoors on hot days, especially in the afternoon and keep windows shut whenever possible. It may also

be helpful to keep a regular check on air quality levels in the local area, so that it is possible to make changes to plans for the following day if pollution levels will be high.'

For people with asthma who suffer from a range of seasonal triggers, an online service is available via the Asthma UK website, www.asthma.org.uk. The bespoke service, Asthma Trigger Tips, offers people with asthma and parents of children who suffer with the condition the opportunity to access tailored information and advice to help them effectively manage their asthma during seasonal changes. The service also offers advice on a whole range of lifestyle triggers including diet, exercise, smoking and stress, and household triggers including animals, dust mites, moulds and fungi.

Anyone who is concerned about their asthma, or what to do during hotter weather, should contact their doctor or asthma nurse, or call the Asthma UK Adviceline on 0800 121 62 44



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Creative Legacies - Creative Development and Outreach Programme

The Creative Legacies Programme (funded through PEACE III) is now open to community and arts organisations in Belfast. Creative Legacies will be community driven and community focused. It will encourage community groups and arts organisations from across Belfast to work together. There must be a lead applicant, working in partnership with a minimum of two other organisations. We are now inviting groups to send in an Expression of Interest form.

Deadline for Expressions of Interest forms:
12 noon on Friday 3 July 2009.

Organisations must be formally constituted to apply to the Creative Legacies Programme. Expressions of Interest forms are available to download from the website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/funding

You can email: culture@belfastcity.gov.uk or ring our Culture and Arts Unit on (028) 9091 8734 for further information or if you would like an Expression of Interest form sent to you.

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/funding

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