

COLLECTIVE ACTION GETS RESULTS

Our friends up in Glasgow have had a recent success in their fight against a letting agency. Vivien and Hartwig received the £187 that the agency took off them as "administration fees" – illegal under Scottish Housing Law – in a cheque on Friday after a demand letter delivery in December and a brief internet campaign in January. A great outcome – all thanks to great support from a great many people.

Similarly a victory for those fighting against workfare. This time in Scarborough where two weeks into the new year the Council, one of the worst workfare-using councils in the UK, has cancelled its involvement. Volunteer centre Knowsley CVS has taken the principled stand to have nothing to do with workfare schemes. On Friday, the DWP's social media strategists were forced to abandon use of their hashtag #takeoverday to promote 'work experience' when people literally took it over to campaign against sanctions and workfare!

Over Christmas, The Mirror and The Guardian published research into UK councils using workfare. Scandalously, councils have benefited from at least half a million hours of workfare labour since 2011. We highlighted some particularly shocking examples, including

Scarborough Borough Council, which had taken 120 Mandatory Work Activity placements in its Parks Department.

Apparently the Council didn't appreciate the national publicity, and following its first meeting in the new year, the scheme appears to have been cancelled practically overnight. Cuts to the Parks Department were proposed in 2012. This success should mean jobs are now a little more secure.

A couple of fine examples where collective action is already paying off in 2014.

Workfare is a range of schemes run by the Jobcentre, which force people who receive welfare to work without proper pay. Workfare profits the rich by providing free labour, whilst threatening the poor by taking away welfare rights if people refuse to work without a living wage. Anyone who refuses to comply will find they get their benefits sanctioned (cut) for weeks, months and in some cases years.

For the full stories and more information look here:

* <http://glasgowsolnet.wordpress.com/>

* <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

Care about your community? Got something to say?

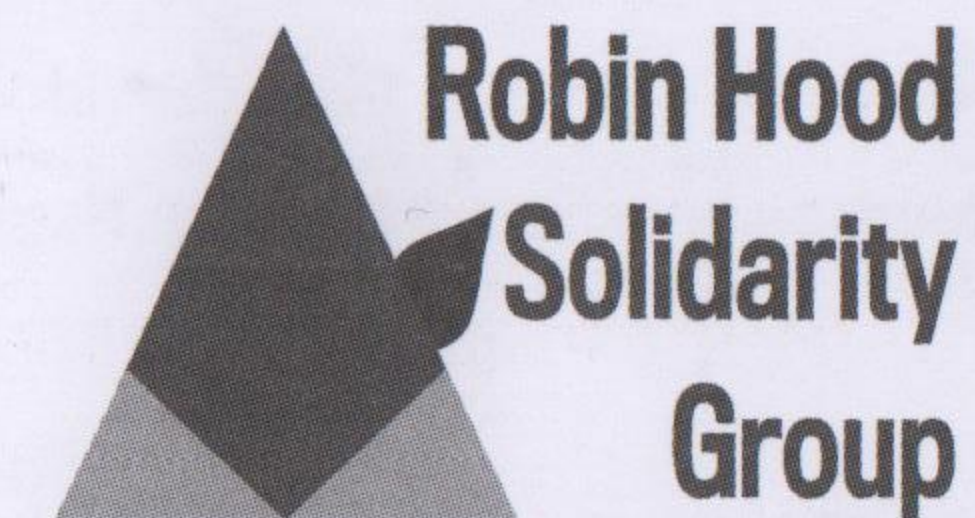
Give us a shout and we'll put it in the next edition.

0774743185

info@robinhoodsolidarity.org.uk

Facebook - Robinhood Solidarity

Twitter: @robinhoodsg



Robin Hood Solidarity Newsletter

Community News Through Your Door

February 2014

- This newsletter is about local stories and issues.
- It's written by a group of Forest Fields residents who are tired of feeling isolated within our community and powerless over our lives.
- If you have something you want say: a story you want to write, a story that we could write with you, or a comment about this newsletter, get in touch at:
info@robinhoodsolidarity.org.uk or call on **07747431859**.
- We run sessions tackling debt, housing, benefits, employment, or anything else at **Forest Fields Advice Centre** every **Tuesday 10am-2pm**.
- Sessions can be one-to-one or group focused, depending on needs. We offer information and problem solving if we can and if not we'll point you towards a decent organisation who can.

HOUSING BENEFIT

Housing benefit has been in the news a fair bit recently thanks to one particularly couple of greedy buy-to-let landlords, Fergus and Judith Wilson in Kent. Over the last 20 years they've used their wealth to acquire more than 1000 houses to rent out. This sort of speculation has

pushed up house prices and is the reason why many people are living in rented accommodation rather than homes that they own themselves.

In January the Wilsons sent eviction notices to each of their 200 tenants who was claiming housing benefit. Fergus then made some bizarre statements to the press, first off announcing that people on benefits should "go out and get a job" (this coming from a multi-millionaire who speculates with his wealth rather than working for a living) and then suggesting that northerners should move to the south for work. By Northerners we can only assume he means anyone north of London (or west for that matter). He then blamed the government's plans for housing benefit for causing the uncertainty which forced him to act in this way. Whilst its true that the coalition seems intent on not only slashing all benefits but also creating as much confusion as possible, we also think that landlords must take responsibility for their own actions. The Wilsons have chosen to evict 200 families simply because those families are already struggling to pay the bills.

Will landlords in Forest Fields and elsewhere in Nottingham follow suit?

UPDATE FROM NG7 FOODBANK

Written by NG7 Foodbank Collective

Dear Supporters,

Since our last update in early November the number of people fed has now reached over 3,000. This festive period has been particularly outstanding in terms of financial donations, leaving us in a healthy position going forward into 2014. Thank you for your ongoing support. Sometimes the smallest gesture of kindness can be the most humbling. One Friday we fed a man whose benefits had been delayed going into his bank. Once paid the following Friday he walked from Aspley to bring 2 cans of soup for us.

Here's a few of the things that have been happening:

► *Due to the impact of welfare reforms we have increased the referral places to our main referral agency Nottingham Law Centre to 25 places each week. Please note we're still not taking new referral agencies on at present.*

► *We are now feeding on average 55-70 people per week.*

► *Once again we have declined an offer from Channel 4 to take part in a*

documentary they are currently making about poverty. We made this decision for various reasons, particularly after their last invitation to be a part of the documentary "Skint".

► *After asking NCC the question "why can't people who have had a Benefit Sanction access the NCC Discretionary Emergency Hardship Scheme (DEHS)." We met with the senior staff who implement this decision; Lisa Black and Liz Jones. We asked directly for them to change this decision and we await their responses.*

► *We continue to direct our food resources to asylum seekers awaiting NASS support, refugees awaiting NI numbers, those with NRPF (No right to public funds). Local families; people who have taken out pay day loans or used other unscrupulous money lending outlets. People affected by DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) benefits sanctions. Women/ families fleeing domestic violence.*

We are still being asked about why and how we differ with the Trussell Trust Food Banks so just to reiterate the points made in March 2013 update:

► *We are not a Christian led food bank but work across the range of faith groups.*

► *We are a collective of different political organisations, campaigns and local individuals who work around deprivation and poverty within the city.*

► *We operate on a referral only program: This process is designed to maximise our*

resources to reach the hardest pressed groups within the city. The referral agency works closely in addressing the individual's/ family's problems, hopefully to the point of a positive resolution.

► *We encourage users of the food bank to get involved in its' running and assisting others.*

► *We believe that food banks should be the last line of defence for people experiencing food poverty. We seek to find our own community solutions but recognise we need to put pressure on local government policy.*

► *The NG7 food bank will not to be co-opted by state agencies who have resources for interventions available to them. Neither will we monitor/ share information with them.*

Finally a massive thank you to the following: The Basket Brigade, NCC staff donations from Canning Circus Xmas lights event, another amazing fundraiser from the QMC School of Health Sciences for the donations from the "World Feast Holiday Treats". The fantastic cash donation from The Church of the Holy Spirit West Bridgford-Christmas Fair.

The many local individuals that give us food and money, the Friday volunteers and food collection drivers, Bike repair man and his friends. Inter Varsity Press, Nottingham Interfaith Council, Hope Nottingham and Trussell Trust network, UNITE, UNISON, City Care, Mary Potter Health Centre, Nottingham Law Centre, St Ann's Advice Centre, The Sumac Centre, Nottingham Solidarity Network, Veggies, Partnership Council, NCHA, Metropolitan HA, Framework HA, Sherwood Methodist Church,

Our Lady of Grace(Cotgrave), St Barnabus Catholic Cathedral, Evangelical Free Church (Radford), Seventh Day Adventist, The Baha'i Community, Himmah, The Friends Meeting House, Nottingham Hebrew Synagogue, Nottingham Progressive Synagogue, The Derby Ashram, Guru Nanak Satsang Gurdwara. The many other Churches in Nottingham who we don't have the names of.

Forest Fields Primary School, Seely Primary School, Bentinck Primary School, Mellor's Primary School, Djanogly (Sherwood Rise), Ali's Fruit and Veg Store, Kemet FM, St Lukes Surgery Radford Health Centre. I'm Not From London, LeftLion. The Place Sherwood. Madni Trust. Radford History Group, Shoosmiths Solicitors, Clarion Choir, Bronwyn's Choir, Sherwood Singing for Fun Choir, The Parish of Radford, Nottingham Hunt Saboteurs, Flo Skatepark, NGCircle, Medina Stores, staff at MCN Bentinck Rd. The Maze/Amazement Festival Crew, Masters Management Services.

Food donations can be taken to:

- **Park House (Framework), 20 Bentinck Road, Radford/Hyson Green, NG7 4AD, 9am to 9pm Monday to Sunday**
- **Sure Start, Mary Potter Centre, Gregory Boulevard, Hyson Green, NG7 5HY, 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday**

For further information please
Email: ng7foodbank@gmail.com
Tel: 07534167354
Facebook: NG7 Foodbank
Twitter: @NG7Foodbank