

66) VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

Yesterday I took a rare day off and, wandering happily into Thurso, decided to avail myself of the public conveniences at Riverside. On trying to enter I found the facilities to be locked and further examination revealed a fiendish device, complete with what looks like a credit card reader would you believe, affixed to the door. I gathered that in order to gain access I would be obliged to hand over the incredible sum of fifty pence. I decided that in view of the vast amount of income tax, council tax, capital gains tax, duty, VAT and everything else I already render unto Caesar because I have no choice but to do so, there was no way on this earth I was paying 50p for a two minute visit to the bathroom and nor will I in the future, so I headed (urgently) for CAB instead.

Which brings us neatly to today's topic – the work of Caithness CAB and our need for Volunteers prepared to join us in our work. We deal with people from all walks of life and with all kinds of questions, but a substantial percentage of issues involve clients finding themselves excluded from their entitlements, often simply because the sheer complication of the system means that they are unable to navigate it and, unlike me, they do not have a choice. We were formed originally to provide basic advice services to people in the County, but today we have developed way beyond that and exist as the default agency for everyone who needs some expert help in coping with today's ever more complicated world. Just as a guideline we advise on benefits, employment, debt and money, consumer issues, housing and homelessness, family problems and rights, immigration, health service access and issues, legal matters and countless other topics as well. It is fair to say that we have never found a subject on which we were unable provide guidance and we can refer clients to specialist agencies and charities throughout the UK. We also regularly take action to change social policy by raising matters with the Government, in both Holyrood and Westminster, and neither Jill nor I have any hesitation in fighting our clients' corner no matter what the opposition.

Just as an example - If you happen to be aged under 25 and you have a health issue meaning you currently cannot work, or you have been made redundant, then you will receive a payment of just under £58 per week to live on. Therefore a charge of 50p to use the bathroom is an unaffordable expense and we see examples every day where people are in real trouble because they simply cannot afford the basics. And we need you to help them. CCAB is totally dependent on volunteers to allow us to provide the services that our fellow citizens need and deserve. It does not matter what your life history is – we only ask one question – Do you want to help others and do you want to try? We provide very high quality training and support and everyone is welcome. There are no age limits and we are only interested in what you can do in the future – not the past. So why not contact us on (01955) 605989 or (01847) 894243 or visit caithnesscab.org and make a difference? Please come and join us