

Cyrenians want you to be a friend

Edinburgh Cyrenians launches its new Be-A-Friend campaign today to boost a shortage of Befrienders needed to help people who could be at risk of becoming homeless.

Eight people are currently on a waiting list for a Befriender because there are not enough on the charity's book – and nearly 40 people who might have benefited from a Befriender last year missed out on vital support.

The recruitment drive will carry on throughout the year – but a special one-off 'No Obligation' information evening is being held in February to allow would-be Befrienders to find out how they could help.

The charity offers befrienders to people at risk of becoming homeless as part of its wider Homelessness Prevention Service (HPS) in Edinburgh. The service works with people without a history of homelessness to prevent them from becoming homeless in the future.

David Scott, 29, became a Befriender after being made redundant in December 2009. He said: "Losing my job gave me an insight into how easily and how quickly someone can go from top to bottom. Luckily I had my family and friends to support me but for those that don't, life can be difficult. Being a Cyrenian's Befriender has taught me I can make a difference, no matter how small, and I'd urge people to give it a try and see how rewarding it can be for themselves."

Alison Dobbie, 46 became a befriender when she was not working and wanted to give something back to society. Working now, she is keen to continue befriending. She said: "Giving is better than receiving and in today's fast-paced life, volunteering is a way to make a big difference in a small way. I'd urge anyone

to sign up.”

Gary Young, 41, also decided to become a befriender. He said: “Having been homeless myself for a short period of time as a teenager, I know how easy it is to lose the roof over your head. I wanted to know I was making a difference, even in a small way.”

Su Moir, Service Manager for the HPS and co-ordinator of the Befriender service, said: “We are calling on people to keep the community spirit brought on by the recent big freeze going and commit just four hours a week to help make a big difference to someone’s life.

“We can help people sort out debt, arrears, or other would-be triggers that might cause homelessness – but what we cannot do is get people friends. Thirteen per cent of people we helped last year reported feeling isolated or lonely – which meant there were almost 40 people who would have benefited from a befriender. We’ve got eight people currently waiting just now. Come on Be-A-Friend to someone who needs you.”

The special one-off ‘Be-A-Friend ‘No Obligation’ Open Night’ will be held on February 24th from 6pm, at the charity’s office in Norton Park. Would-be Befrienders can come along and hear first-hand what befriending is like and ask questions about the service. For more information, [visit the website](#).

Su added: “Befrienders meet up with someone using our services to help them develop their own social circle, which could be about going to a class or community group with somebody-anything really as long as it’s legal, ethical and will help Cyrenian service users to get back on track socially.”

Befrienders are ‘matched’ with someone who has similar interests/likes/dislikes and spends time, usually every week, doing something outwith the customers’ homes. Full training and support is given.