

House exchange needed urgently – Edinburgh to London!



Mark Cooper has been offered a year long placement at ITV's London HQ on Southbank, but risks losing his specially adapted home. The 26 year-old has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair to get about. His flat has all the adaptations needed to allow him to live independently. If he quits the tenancy however he believes that he will be declared as voluntarily homeless, making it difficult to get a similar house in London.

The vacancy of project co-ordinator is one Mark really wants to take up. He desperately wants to work in London, but has not had much luck in achieving this. He was previously offered work for Lehman Brothers and was due to start just at the time of their collapse. He laughed when he regaled us with the story that the Jobcentre had wanted him to be a store manager for Woolworths at one time....

He told The Edinburgh Reporter that he is ineligible for transfer to another social housing provider in London and is financially unable to pay the rent his flat in Edinburgh at the same time. One option available would be to find someone in London facing the same predicament, who would perhaps like to come and live in Edinburgh for the next 12 months. Mark has been house hunting since April and has until June 13th to find a suitable house.

✘ Mark has been living in his current home for 3 years and manages most daily tasks without too much in the way of help. He pays £136 every 2 weeks for rent, and expects that to be much more in London. His ITV salary would allow him to do it however if he could only get the right property.

After graduating in 2007 with a degree in politics and international relations from the University of Aberdeen, he worked as a parliamentary officer for Capability Scotland. However he has struggled to find permanent work and sees this trainee scheme as a chance to secure a job in today's tough climate.

Mark said:-" The best way for me now is to find someone to do a mutual exchange. I can't get help in London because I'm not a resident.

There should be a stop-gap situation. I accept that there is a shortage of social housing, but I am prepared to wait. I have looked into living in hostels, but I need someone to help pay for this house here."

A spokesman from The City of Edinburgh Council said to us:-
"This council always tries to help our customers resolve their housing problems.

In these circumstances we would be able to look at the poss of Mr Cooper subletting his tenancy for a period using national exchange registers that are designed to help people find homes in different parts of the country." The spokesman was not able to tell us if Mark could sublet the specially altered accommodation to an able bodied person.

Mark has the support of his local MP. Edinburgh South MP Ian Murray believes there needs to be more flexibility in the system to support job seekers with disabilities, who want to take advantage of short term training or development opportunities like this.

And he is challenging Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg to show he is serious about improving social mobility by intervening to find a solution.

He said: "Mark is a talented, determined and highly qualified young man. And after a number of months where he has struggled to obtain permanent employment he has secured a great placement with ITV.

"He is rightly delighted with the offer of such a sought-after position. But now he's in an absurd Catch 22 situation, where he must choose between a job or a home. This should be proof enough that changes to the system are needed.

"I have already written to Nick Clegg to highlight this situation and today I challenge him to make good on his commitment to social mobility.

"Nick Clegg has said that improving social mobility is the principal goal of the Coalition Government and he has said that tackling the opportunity deficit is the guiding purpose.

“But unless he is willing to take practical steps to redress the balance, no matter how honourable his aims – they are just words.

“So today I say to Nick Clegg – make good on your promise of social mobility and ensure there is flexibility in the system so that determined individuals like Mark Cooper aren’t held back.”