

QMU Looking after the homeless on Christmas Day



What are you doing on Christmas Day? Well a team of kind-hearted podiatrists from Queen Margaret University, will be spending their time on Christmas Day and Boxing Day this year to run a foot care clinic for homeless people in Edinburgh.

When the rest of the city is opening presents and tucking into Christmas dinner at home, podiatry lecturer and lead podiatry volunteer for Crisis Evelyn Weir and 12 Queen Margaret University podiatry students will offer a specialist service for individuals who live on the streets.

The Queen Margaret University podiatrists are volunteering with the 'Crisis at Christmas' project run by the charity Crisis which helps single homeless people.

Christmas can be an incredibly difficult time of year for a person cut off from family and home. The 'Crisis at Christmas' project provides companionship and support to tackle loneliness and isolation, and helps people take their first steps out of homelessness. The project ran for the first time last year in Edinburgh on Christmas Day and was a great success. As well as offering some much needed foot care over the winter months, the 12 hour long Christmas Day and Boxing Day events this year will offer homeless people services such as hairdressing and massage, as well as providing breakfast, a hot Christmas meal, and supper on each day.

Evelyn Weir, Lead for Interprofessional Education and Lecturer in Podiatry at Queen Margaret University, has spent the last twenty years volunteering with homeless charities and is delighted that a team of university podiatry students have

again offered to support her work at Christmas. She explained: "People who are homeless tend to have specific foot health problems. Many walk for miles every day but don't have access to foot health care or good quality footwear, and may not have a change of shoes. Also, most people are out in all weathers, they spend large amounts of time standing on hard pavements, and often they have no place to dry shoes or socks. These difficulties can lead to quite significant foot problems." Evelyn and her team of students on the BSc (Hons) Podiatry course at QMU will provide a podiatry service to between 60 and 80 homeless people each day. This will include relaxing foot baths, general foot care treatments and advice, and the supply of new warm socks.

Evelyn said: "I am really heartened that some of our students volunteered to support this project on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and I'm also overwhelmed by the generosity of our sponsors – Algeos, C&P Medical and support from senior management at Queen Margaret University. Sponsors have provided absolutely everything on our project wish list – from essential medical supplies and instruments to new winter socks. It really does demonstrate that there is a lot of goodwill out there – from our podiatry students, QMU management, individuals and companies. Last year was an absolutely fantastic day, and the students worked hard and we all really enjoyed the experience I am really looking forward to Christmas again this year!"

Fiona Coutts, Dean of Health Sciences at Queen Margaret University, said: "We are delighted to support Evelyn's involvement in this important project and we believe that it's a great learning opportunity for our podiatry students. Not only will they develop both their clinical and interpersonal skills, an opportunity like this will no doubt enhance their student experience. Once again, this project is an excellent example of Queen Margaret's mission of improving quality of life."

