

# Face mask boost for deaf community

by Paul Kiddie

Newly established Edinburgh firm Breathe Easy is producing the first face masks for the deaf community in Scotland.

Set up last month by city businessman Gavin McAdam to help in the fight against Covid-19, the company has been inundated with orders for their reusable face coverings since trialling the first prototypes in early April this year.

Breathe Easy is currently manufacturing around 200 masks a day, with over 5000 having already been distributed for free to those in need around the Capital and beyond. Plans are being put in place to increase production in line with demand.

Gavin, who is fully funding the operation from his own pocket, took over rental of a tailoring workshop in Newington to complement his Corstorphine base and now has a staff of seven, including three full-time seamstresses to cope with the soaring demand – all adhering to the social distancing guidelines in the production process.

He has been working closely with Deaf Action Scotland, National Deaf Children's Society (Scotland), Forth Valley Sensory Centre, NELFT foundation trust in England and has supplied each organisation with the masks that allow lip-readers to have access to protection via a plastic insert which allows sight of the movement of the mouth.

“The initial plan was to manufacture and distribute quality

fabric masks to front line workers, those at-risk, vulnerable groups and anyone concerned for friends or family,” said Gavin, who is using material bought from surplus John Lewis stock.

“While not medical grade, the masks are ideal for casual use and provide a barrier which brings a real source of comfort for many people worried about contracting coronavirus while out in public.

“I was keen to produce something to help the deaf community and the designs have been well received. The thicker material works well for these masks as it is more structured and is better for holding the soft, malleable plastic – which is the same as used as covers for boats – in place.

“The outward fabric is 100 per cent 2-ply cotton and at least 600-800 thread. The inside liner is soft linen so it’s very comfortable on the face and we have over-the-ear and behind-the-head ties. The masks are all washable and will be as good in six months’ time as they are on day one. We also have a variety of designs to suit all tastes.”



Hundreds of the face coverings have also been distributed to other charities in Edinburgh including Steps To Hope, Visualise Scotland and Positive Pathways, while a special needs primary school in south London, who are keen to trial the masks with their pupils, has been in touch. Businesses preparing for the relaxing of guidelines in the weeks to come have also lodged orders.

Gavin owns MACI Innovations, an established project management company specialising in support of client organisations in the aviation sector.

After posting a turnover of nearly £1 million for the past three years, the business came to a standstill in the wake of the pandemic, prompting Gavin to wonder if he could help alleviate the situation regarding personal protective equipment.

“I feel really quite excited about this project and am getting

a lot out of trying to do good for people in these worrying times," he said. "It is amazing how quickly things have progressed from a wee idea to where we are now.

"I've invested a lot of money and time in this but it's been well worth it due to the positive feedback from so many people. I have run many successful businesses in the past and been involved in the corporate world for some time but this just has a different feel about it completely and is giving me a real buzz.

"We just ask for donations for the masks destined for frontline, care sector workers and vulnerable groups and every penny we get goes to the production of more masks to help others and that is why we're all enthused by this. Bliss Dancewear in Corstorphine is applying our branded logos and we have a couple of local taxi drivers delivering the masks for free so there is a real feeling of being in this together and doing what we can to help."

Members of the public and businesses can now purchase standard masks from Breathe Easy on 40 Corstorphine High Street [www.breathe-easy.info](http://www.breathe-easy.info)

