

Media release – for immediate use
Available for interviews and comment

Forced work is wrong. Forced work for sick and disabled people is even worse.

UK-wide co-ordinated action to take place against forced work schemes

On Saturday 8th December, actions and protests against forced unpaid work schemes will take place across the UK to mark the start of a Boycott Workfare [1] week of action. The actions take place just days after workfare for sick and disabled people claiming ESA has been introduced [2]. They aim to challenge the role charities using workfare play in pushing people into poverty, and to expose the companies profiting from replacing Christmas staff with workfare workers.

Actions which range from surprise parties at workfare-using shops to workfare carol-singing, from a conga through workfare stores to pickets and direct action, are planned in Birmingham, Brighton, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Norfolk. [3] Other groups are expected to target workfare users alongside tax evaders, as part of UK Uncut's day of action. [4]

The week of action has already claimed some success with Age UK the latest to announce it is instructing its stores to avoid workfare placements [5]. Activists warn that others, such as the British Heart Foundation, who have announced their intention to step back are in fact still using mandatory work placements in their stores. [6]

Argos and Superdrug are expected to be the focus of protests in many locations since local groups have reported that Christmas staff have been replaced with unpaid workers.

Joanna Long, a member of Boycott Workfare, has said:

“This Christmas, tens of thousands of people are being forced to work for no pay and more people than ever before have their benefits stopped. Charities complicit in these schemes are helping force sick and disabled people to work without pay on threat of benefit sanctions. This is wrong, wrong, wrong, and our week of action will show that they cannot get away with exploiting the people they are meant to help.”

“Employers who think they can reduce the wages bill this Christmas by replacing paid work with workfare placements should know that they will be exposed, and that there will be a public backlash against their unscrupulous practices.”

[Ends]

Notes to editor

Boycott Workfare Media Liaison 07840 381195

[1] Boycott Workfare is a UK-wide campaign network to end forced unpaid work for people who receive welfare. Workfare profits the rich by providing free labour, whilst threatening the poor by taking away welfare rights if people refuse to work without a living wage. We are a grassroots campaign, formed in 2010 by people with experience of workfare and those concerned about its impact. We expose and take action against companies and organisations profiting from workfare; encourage organisations to pledge to boycott it; and actively inform people of their rights. We are not affiliated to any political party and are open to all who share our aims. More info: <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

[2] Since Monday 3rd December, Work programme providers can mandate sick and disabled people claiming ESA in the WRAG group to full-time work placements with no maximum time limit: <http://consent.me.uk/2012/11/27/workfare/>

[3] An up to date list of the actions taking place in the week of action can be found here: <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?p=1741>

[4] UK Uncut also plans actions on Sat 8th December: <http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/>

[5] Age UK has announced it is pulling out of mandatory work schemes; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/dec/06/age-uk-shuns-mandatory-work-scheme>

[6] British Heart Foundation has continued to take on Mandatory Work Activity placements since the announcement it would step back: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/nov/09/mandatory-work-activity-names-withheld>
<http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?p=1761>

[7] DWP research has repeatedly found that workfare has no impact on job outcomes. In June 2012, peer-reviewed research by the DWP concluded that Mandatory Work Activity had “no impact on the likelihood of being employed compared to non-referrals”:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jun/13/mandatory-work-scheme-government-research>

2008 DWP research concluded “it can even reduce job outcomes”:
<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep533.pdf>

[8] For more information on workfare schemes and links to key documents, see the Boycott Workfare “The Facts” page: http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?page_id=663