

Press release: November 25, 2010

DEBT CHARITY TALKS TURKEY ABOUT OVERSPENDING AT CHRISTMAS

...and gives ten top tips for having a debt-free festive season

Debt counselling charity Christians Against Poverty has today issued a stark warning of the dangers of relying heavily on credit to fund Christmas.

With a month to go before the big day, the organisation which helps people with spiralling debts, wants people to do their Christmas shopping with a clear strategy.

CAP's Chief Executive Officer Matt Barlow said: "These are difficult times for a lot of us and the temptation is to say, "at least we'll have a great Christmas" and use that as an excuse to spend what we haven't got.

"If you've already caught yourself saying this, we want your alarm bells to be ringing loud and clear. The New Year is full of uncertainty: job losses, VAT will be going up, benefits are changing, energy bills are rising and we don't know what interest rates will do. If we were ever going to get our spending under control at Christmas – it should be this year."

Half of those with out-of-control debt have at some time taken out a loan to cover the cost of festive season, according to the charity's own national client statistics.

Many of those then went on to lose their homes, be unable to feed and clothe their children, suffer mental health problems and even consider suicide.

"We're not party poopers. We just want people to enjoy Christmas and not be anxious about whether they will be able to pay it all back," he added.

CAP has 150 church-based centres spread around England, Wales, Scotland and NI which give free face-to-face debt counselling to all quarters of the community, not just Christians.

The service is unique because the charity visits people in their own home, sets a budget, contacts creditors and then offers holistic support until the client is debt free – often within five years.

- To find out if CAP can help you with your debt, call 0800 328 0006 or visit www.capuk.org

CAP's Top Ten Tips for Avoiding Festive Debt

1. Decide what you have to spend. Make a list and be realistic. Paying in cash may help you keep control. Let your children see your careful planning – you'll be teaching them a valuable life-long lesson.
2. Manage expectations early. If things are tight don't be afraid to say so to family members. You'll probably all be in the same boat and it may lead to a happier Christmas for them too!
3. See if relatives will club together with you to buy children what they would like, rather than individually over indulging them and all feeling out of pocket.
4. Buy fewer presents but cheaper trimmings like paper chains and crackers. They all add to the fun without costing very much.
5. Never take out a Christmas loan! Remember the possible consequences could be disastrous for you and your family.
6. Give ironing or baby-sitting vouchers or make presents as opposed to buying them. For example, delicious homemade biscuits, chocolates and fudge make a lovely gift and show you've spent time and care.
7. Remember - you can't buy love. Don't feel guilty if you can't afford the latest present for your children. Your love and affection will last longer in the memory than any toy can.
8. Don't fall into the trap of reciprocal gift giving and don't buy out of obligation.
9. Don't overspend in the January sales, in spite of how good a bargain you might see. Make a budget and stick to it and if possible, leave those credit cards at home.

10. Enjoy all the low cost things on offer – the lights in town, get together, making mince pies, playing family board games, seeing your kids in the school nativity - and have a very Happy Christmas!

ENDS

Notes to editors:

For more information about Christians Against Poverty, please contact Marianne Clough at the press office on 01274 761924 or marianneclough@capuk.org

CAP aims to show God's love in action by providing sustainable poverty relief through debt counselling, advice and practical help. CAP's unique 'hands on' approach empowers people to help themselves out of poverty and be released from the fear, oppression and worry generated by overwhelming debts. Vital financial and budgeting life skills are developed through our services, thus ensuring poverty relief is sustainable.

The charity operates through a growing network of 150 centres based around the UK, all opened in partnership with a local church. Over the last 14 years, the charity has grown from one man working from his home with a donation of £10, to a national charity dealing with £64m of clients' debt at any one time.

CAP's vision is to answer the national problem of debt in the UK by having at least one CAP centre operating in every major town and city across the UK by 2015.