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LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH MEETINGS

Watch your back!

WHEN YOU WORK alone there's no health and safety officer to check you're not doing your back in or crippling yourself in other ways. We focus on how to watch your back (and the rest of you) at the London Freelance Branch meeting on **Monday 9 March**.

We will look at back pain and other problems associated with sitting in a chair all day typing into a keyboard: problems such as Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). LFB Committee's Carol Lee, a journalist and Alexander Technique practitioner, will be among the speakers. We hope also to have a speaker from the RSI Society and an occupational health officer from the NUJ staff, and a contribution from a Branch member themselves recently diagnosed with RSI. Is it possible to get funding, or tax deducted, for professional consultations on occupational health or home office ergonomics, or for ergonomic furniture?

The London Freelance Branch meeting in April will be on **Monday 20 April** – the third Monday of the month and *not* our usual second Monday slot, as that turns out to be

some kind of Bank Holiday. The theme for the meeting is not yet finalised: it could be reporting from “forbidden zones” including Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank), Zimbabwe and (for some journalists who have been officially excluded from the country) Russia. Or it could be about developments in the field of UK copyright policy. We will confirm details of the meeting nearer the time: if you don't get the emailed virtual *Freelance* go to **www.londonfreelance.org/linkup**

This issue went to press on **17 February**. Your deadline for the May/June print edition is **10 April**.

LFB meetings are 7pm to 9pm at **Friends' House, Euston Road**, which is accessible to people who use wheelchairs. If you need the Branch to pay for care for a child or dependent so you can attend a meeting, call a Branch officer. For updates on meetings see the Branch calendar web page **www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings**

Here to help: NUJ Extra

THE NUJ's charity, now called NUJ Extra, is there to help members in need, Chris Wheal told the February London Freelance Branch meeting. Its work is of course confidential, but he could give general examples.

There was a member who fled her partner due to violence: the charity worked with the women's refuge that had housed her for a couple of years and bought furniture for her new house when she got rehoused. The charity has bought wheelchairs, orthopaedic beds... and sometimes paid bills – first those whose non-payment would lead to prison; next those that might lead to homelessness, then utility bills – never credit card bills. It has even had to pay the £400 fee for going bankrupt, for a member whose finances were so dire that they couldn't afford this way out.

The charity works closely with the Journalists Charity – better known by its old name the Press Fund – and with whatever other body can help anyone who has been an NUJ member for at least a year and is in genuine need.

Chris, who specialises in reporting on insurance, business and public finance, chairs NUJ Extra's board of trustees. He outlined the origins of the name “NUJ Extra”: first there was the traditional Widows' and Orphans' Fund; then the Charity Commission

instructed it to split off the part that supported people who were neither widows nor orphans; then the Commission wanted the two charities to merge.

The charity has to be very conservative with investing its capital. As a trade union body it couldn't possibly invest in an enterprise that might use child labour. It doesn't use branded “ethical investment” funds. These may be untainted by booze and fags, but none has anything to say about workers' rights. “Corporate Social Responsibility guidelines allow companies to get gold stars for using fewer paperclips and recycling memo paper,” Chris says, “even though they don't recognise trades unions and pay contractors 90 days late.”

So NUJ Extra was talking to investment advisers and people in the City about worker-friendly investment funds – they were really excited about the idea eight months ago. It was going to be the biggest thing that had hit the City for ages. Then something bigger hit the City.

The first thing the charity does on receiving an application is to talk to the Branch Welfare officer, who can visit the member. Chris asked us to thank Chris O'Donnell for the fantastic work she's done over recent years: and we do.

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WRITING AND SELLING FEATURES course on idyllic Greek island of Paxos, 4 - 11 May. Trainer Judi Goodwin has run courses for NUJ and IPC Magazines.

Morning workshops - relax in afternoon. Telephone 01625 439000 or **www.paxoslife.com**

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