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Homesitters® News & Views

The Newsletter of
Homesitters Limited
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Introduction

Dear Homesitters,

Christmas has been and gone, but as I write this message in February we are currently experiencing cold, crisp winter days, which are much more welcome than the terrible storms, gales and floods the country experienced just a few weeks ago. Several sits were cancelled because of the adverse weather and I am aware of at least one gallant homesitter, Roger Noon who travelled several hundred miles to support a fellow homesitter who could not reach a sit because of flooded roads in her area. Naturally the client was very grateful and for me it exemplifies the commitment and high quality standards of our team. I was so impressed by Roger's action and dedication. Such actions make me very proud of Homesitters.

In this edition of the Newsletter there is an article written by Kathryn Hughes, a public relations professional who is closely working with Benjamin several days per month. The aim is to help promote Homesitters via the national press and other media, both to existing and potential new clients but also to support our homesitter recruitment drive as we aim to modestly expand the homesitter pool, so we are confident that those homesitters on our books are of the highest calibre.

Our objective remains to maintain our high quality standards with modest growth via

a focussed strategic marketing campaign positioning us as the UK's "Number One" quality and professional home and pet sitting company. Already we see an increased interest in our services for the coming holiday season, so Rebecca and the team are actively screening and recruiting homesitters all around the country. For every 100 applications less than 10 make it through our rigorous selection process.

Last Christmas we had many more clients wanting to use our services than we had homesitters available. I include an article detailing a proposal where we seek your feedback by way of a questionnaire to see if an altered fee structure could lead to more homesitters willing to cover the Christmas period.

Finally it remains for me to welcome those homesitters who have joined the team since our last Newsletter in September 2015 and to thank you all for your ongoing commitment to the company.

I wish you all a great 2016.

Dr Alan Irvine
Managing Director

Social Media

Homesitters has been busy building up its Public Relations with the help of Kathryn Hughes, Kayak PR (see article from Kathryn on page 2). Our new website is now having blogs uploaded on a weekly basis, in addition to posts going out onto our Facebook and LinkedIn pages.

Why not have a look when you're next online to find news from Head Office, press articles we're featured in, tips for homesitters, who's the pet of the month and much more.

With the increasing use of the internet in our daily lives and changes in how we communicate, get information and news, and source goods and services, one can often hear "Have you Googled?" or "Have you looked on the internet?" Clearly we want to continue our

more personal one to one contact with you all via telephone, after all nothing can replace a good discussion, but if you are an internet user Homesitters Ltd is now up to date with 21st century technology and welcomes your involvement and input.

Benjamin Irvine
Marketing Manager



Homesitter Payments

In the October 2015 Newsletter, we announced the increase in remuneration rates as from 01 April 2016.

We would now like to simplify the payment process. We have a monthly payroll and currently there is a payment made for all sitting days in a calendar month. From September 2016, we would like to rationalise and streamline the process and want to move to a process where:

- If a sit starts and ends in a calendar month the payment will continue to be made in the end of month payroll as currently.
- If a sit runs across two calendar months and if it commences on or before the 20th of the month, the initial payment will be made as currently in that initial end of month payroll and days worked in the next calendar month will be paid that month as currently.
- However, if the sit commences after the 20th of the month and runs into the next month, the total payment will be made in the payroll of the second month.

Example 1

A 2 week sit commences on Sunday 17 July 2016 running until Sunday 31 July 2016. The complete payment will be included in end of July payroll.

Example 2

A 2 week sit commences on Sunday 17 July 2016 running until Sunday 07 August 2016. The initial 15 days will be paid end July payroll with the 7 sitting days in August being paid end August 2016.

Example 3

A 2 week sit commences on Sunday 24 July running until Sunday 07 August 2016. The entire payment will be made in the end August payroll.

We hope this is clear and that you can accept the logic behind the change.

The payroll is a heavy administrative process and carries ever increasing costs – most notably bank charges. This relatively modest change will economise both administrative workload and our overheads.

Do let us know if you have any questions relating to this change.

Homesitters in the Media



Five months ago, Kayak PR was appointed to promote Homesitters in the media and increase awareness of its brand and services to attract new homesitters and clients.

"We're a boutique PR company located in Kingston Upon Thames with good experience of working with the customer, property and retirement lifestyle media.

When we first met Alan and Benjamin Irvine and the team at the Homesitters' Head Office, we were struck by the fact it is such a friendly company.

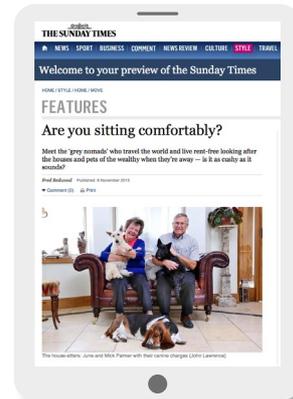
We also realised quickly that it is a very interesting business, with a great track record and a good story to tell. Since then, we've been busy talking to many homesitters and clients and promoting their stories to the press.

Thanks to their willingness to participate, we're delighted to report that The Telegraph, The Sunday Express, The Sunday Times and The Daily Express have written articles about

Homesitters, as well as other publications including The Lady and Retiremove.

Thanks to all of you who got involved in PR to date – it is really paying off."

We want to reassure you that we maintain high ethical standards and the confidentiality aspects of our clients and homesitters, and always obtain full agreement before involving you or clients in PR.



You can view examples of the media coverage in the news section of the Homesitters' Blog on our website.

Kathryn Hughes
Kayak PR

Children in Need Internal Raffle – What a Success!

During 2015, we supported two of our favoured charities.

Via our Christmas card, which was sent to over 2000 recipients, we supported Cancer Research UK. Personally I have had a long association with Cancer Research UK and am delighted that Homesitters are now involved.

Late October, we launched a raffle among the homesitter team with a view to support Children in Need on 13 November. Head Office staff additionally held a cake sale and dressed up in Halloween costumes and paid for the privilege to do so!



We raised a massive £1000 mostly via the Homesitters' raffle. What an achievement. I was so proud to be part of this effort.



The winners of our raffle were Sue and Roger Matthews, in Honiton, Devon who won a £100 M&S gift voucher (pictured above).

Second prize of £50 M&S gift voucher went to Sandra Gibbons in Colchester, Essex and third prize of £25 M&S gift voucher went to Janette Wilson in Motherwell, Lanarkshire.

Homesitters envisages us taking part in more charitable fundraising in the near future. Stay tuned and think pink in October!

If any of you have ideas as to how we could help support an animal, or other environmental projects, let us know. We are currently thinking of Hearing Dogs (based locally here in Buckinghamshire) or Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Rebecca Irvine
Human Resource Manager

Tips and Reminders

1 Security System – Burglar Alarms

Many homes are now filled with security systems sometimes linked to a surveillance company who will notify the police in the event of alarms being activated.

It is very important that we operate alarm systems as instructed because the client's insurance cover may be conditional upon the system being activated at night or during periods of absence.

It has been reported that quite often clients tell you not to bother with the alarm system during the sit. This may well be their routine. However, please do get the client to document this on the 'Handover Notes/Instructions' and retain a copy for your record. Also, notify your Administrator at the earliest opportunity so that our files detail the situation correctly.

Finally, in the event of a security system being fully utilised ensure that you have not only the code(s) and/or tags to activate and deactivate but also contact numbers for the company responsible for maintenance etc. Also remember to ask the client about re-set processes for alarms in event of power cuts.

2 Diaries and Contact

The administrators have asked that we remind you all to routinely take your diaries with you when you are on sits or travelling away from home. This will enable us to quickly ascertain if you are available for future sits when we contact you.

Similarly if we leave you a voice message it would be very much appreciated if you could return the call at your earliest opportunity as clients are often waiting to hear from us.

We are entering our busy period where many spring and summer bookings are made and having your cooperation at this time will make us all more efficient.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

3 Dog Microchipping

Under the new Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations legislation which is updated and effective from April 2016, the person who primarily cares for the dog and keeps them in their home is called a 'keeper', not an 'owner'.

The dog's microchip must be registered to the 'keeper', who may not always be the owner e.g. the owner could be the breeder or a relative of the 'keeper'.

As homesitters you are not the 'keeper' as you do not keep the dog in your home.

The 'keeper' has legal responsibility for their dog and can be held responsible if the dog falls foul of any law including straying or causing injury, but it does not prove legal ownership.

So as homesitters, nothing has changed for us. While looking after dog(s), we continue to use all due care on behalf of the 'keeper' to ensure that they do not violate any law e.g. fouling, running loose...



4 Recycling

An important subject brought to our attention by homesitter Anne Smart.

Every area has different rules – whether glass, plastic, cardboard etc... is accepted. Some refuse collectors will not empty a bin if it contains 'wrong' materials.

It would be advisable to ask clients to explain what is accepted by their area collectors and what is not accepted – an opportune time would be during the preliminary meeting.

WE NEED MORE OF YOU!



Homesitter Referrals – Reminder!

We are constantly on the lookout for good new homesitter candidates and as many of you will recall have a referral scheme, which rewards homesitters £50 who successfully introduce a homesitter (alone or with a partner).

You will have excellent judgement as to who might be a suitable homesitter. Successful homesitters should have good pet experience especially those who enjoy caring for dogs or cats. We are happy to consider applicants in all regions: attitude, motivation and enthusiasm are key.

For more information please contact Rebecca Irvine, Human Resource Manager.

Christmas and New Year 2016

This past Christmas and New Year, we had many more clients wanting homesitters to cover the holiday period than we had homesitters prepared to homesit.

We appreciate that for many of you this is a special time to be spent with family or friends. For others, we wondered perhaps if the remuneration was a little more tempting whether you could be persuaded to commit to a sit either for the Christmas period or New Year or both!

Our objective is to be able to offer cover for this period, in particular to our regular clients and all of any additional client fees would be passed onto those homesitters covering the holiday period.

What we are therefore proposing is to pay homesitters £48/day for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

We have included an availability/interest questionnaire as a survey to gauge the level of potential interest.

could do to facilitate your role?'

The feedback received was globally very positive. Still being very much one of the new girls in Head Office, albeit on a very steep learning curve, I found the exchange of ideas and experiences enriching and very informative.

I extend a very sincere thank you to those who joined us on 10 February. I very much hope that such meetings can become a regular feature.

Rebecca Irvine, Human Resource Manager

Homesitters Forum Group



On 10 February, we met with a small group of homesitters at a local hotel here in Buckinghamshire.

While I personally know the various members of the team who regularly sit for "the Irvines", it was great to go beyond this group and to meet some other members of the team and to discuss various aspects of home and pet sitting.

The subjects covered ranged from "What are the benefits and pleasures of home sitting?" to "Is there anything that would make your job easier especially anything that Head Office

Sometimes the best moments happen when they are unplanned

Hogmanay Surprise by Roger Noon, Colne, Lancashire (homesitter)



It was the morning before New Year's Eve and I was in bed listening to the rain outside beating against the window thinking how lucky I was to be warm and cosy when the phone rang, "Roger, we need you to go to Scotland now", said the voice at the other end of the line.

In the past, I have always had a homesit over the Christmas and New Year period but, this year decided I would volunteer to be an emergency homesitter. Everything was quiet over the Christmas period, I then received the call.

It was Jill Whitford on the phone explaining that due to the heavy rain, the original homesitter a lady who lived in Dumfries & Galloway, had attempted to travel to the sit but found that all the roads out were flooded and impassable. Jill said that the client lived in Clynder, a little village near Helensburgh. I showered, checked the map to try and find the place and worked out that it was just less than 300 miles away (I live on the Lancashire/Yorkshire border near Skipton). Jill also gave me the client's phone number so that I could liaise with him.

The journey along the M65 then M74 was

fairly uneventful apart from the rain and the sheer volume of traffic. At the service station prior to Glasgow for a coffee, I laid my map out on the table, and a voice behind me said: "Throw that away mate, all the roads are flooded and blocked". It was a wagon driver who had to turn round halfway along the side of Loch Lomond. "Oh well, wish me luck", I said.

The journey onwards was straightforward though. The client had kindly agreed to meet me at the junction just before Helensburgh to guide me to his home where his wife had a hot meal prepared.

The sit was fabulous with great views over Gare Loch. A great place to welcome in the New Year. Well worth the journey! So thanks to Jill and Homesitters and who knows I may volunteer for emergency sit, next year.

Head Office News

As you may recall, in our last newsletter, we announced that Tara Purser kindly offered to temporarily take on some administrative responsibility until we had found Janice Lawrence's replacement. Since then, the team and I are happy to announce that we have recruited not 1 but 2 new members of staff.



Sarah Bennett joined Homesitters on 12 October 2015 as an Administrator. Sarah previously worked as Senior Achievement Leader, Assistant Head of Year;

Facilities Development Manager at John F Kennedy Catholic School. Some personal words from Sarah: *"I have heard it said that you should never work with children or animals – well I have swapped one for the other as I worked with teenagers prior to joining Homesitters in October! So far so good though and I have enjoyed speaking to homesitters whilst they are on assignments or to offer them sits on behalf of other Administrators. I have even dressed up as a cat for Children in Need! I am currently working with Tara as I get to know my section of homesitters and clients and am very much looking forward to building relationships with you all."*



Maria Long joined Homesitters on 04 January 2016 as an Administrative Coordinator. Maria previously worked as a Training Coordinator at

Whitbread HR in Dunstable. Some personal words from Maria: *"I've really enjoyed my first month with Homesitters – having not known what exactly to expect, everyone has been really friendly and it's been amazing seeing how busy the business is! I've spoken to a few homesitters who have been really welcoming and made my life a lot easier; I'm looking forward to getting to know them and working with them on a regular basis."*

With effect from 01 April 2016, Tara Purser will transfer back to her Administrative Coordinator position. We thank Tara for all her hard work during this interim period.

Client/Homesitter surname letter

AOWXYZ Boo-Boz Ri-Rz Sh-Sk

CBe-Bh Brj-Bz Ra-Rh St-Sz

DEFG

HIKNQT

JLPUV Bra-Bre

M Ba Bi-Bon Sa-Sg Sl-Ss

Administrator/Minder

Gill Gregory

Heather Reid

Jill Whitford

Kathryn Cockell

Sarah Bennett

Karen Whitehead

Celebrations – Homesitters Who Have Completed 100 Sits

Homesitters are pleased to announce that we have several homesitters who have recently celebrated their 100 sits, thus we are spoilt for choice to feature here.

Jean and Clive Spinks of West Malling, Kent (pictured right) joined the team on 23 July 2002 and celebrated their 100th sit in July 2015.



Raymond and Maureen Probert of Llandrindod Wells, Powys (pictured left) joined the team 12 years ago on 24 September 2003 and are now celebrating their 100th sit.

The Team at Homesitters would like to congratulate all of those who have reached 100 sits.



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