

Many could find peace of mind at the start of Financial Planning Week

My epiphany in church (where I met a financial adviser friend)



CONVERT: Jonathan and Joanne Rountree, with Peter and Ellen, have made a plan

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THROUGHOUT his working life, Jonathan Rountree has never had any time for financial advisers or life insurance salesmen.

Getting his fingers burnt as a result of the Equitable Life debacle of the late Nineties didn't help and as a successful businessman running his own electronic components distribution firm he has always preferred to trust his own judgment.

But in the past three months, Jonathan, 39, from Donaghcloney, County Down, has experienced an epiphany. Financial planner Jason Holmes, a longstanding friend from church and a member of the local business forum in Craigavon, has convinced him that sensible financial planning can pay and does not necessarily mean buying often incomprehensible financial products that simply earn the adviser lots of commission.

'It's been a cathartic experience,' says Jonathan, whose wife Joanne, 47, is a part-time midwife. The couple have two children, Peter, 12, and Ellen, 10.

'After sitting down with Jason and discussing my future, I now feel I have a financial plan in place that will enable me and my family to achieve our goals,' he says. 'For the first time in my life, I feel confident about the future and retirement.'

'Life insurance has been put in place so that if I die, Joanne and the children will be financially protected. I've consolidated my various pensions into one plan, while Joanne and I are also in the process of setting up wills so that when one of

us dies, assets are passed down in accordance with our wishes. Jason has done us proud.'

But Jonathan is in a minority. According to research by the Institute of Financial Planning to mark the start of Financial Planning Week tomorrow, only 46 per cent of adults have some form of plan to help cope with important events such as retirement. And of that 46 per cent, few use a financial planner, such as Jason Holmes, to lay down these plans.

'So many people are facing an uncertain future right now, yet few are taking appropriate steps to improve their financial position,' says Nick Cann, chief executive of the IFP.

'Our research shows that only 19 per cent of people believe they are saving enough for their future, while two-thirds of women say they worry about money either always or most of the time. We need to change this so that more people are in control of their financial future.'

Getting people to think about their long-term finances is one of the key reasons why Cann launched Financial Planning Week, now in its fourth year.

The website financialplanningweek.org.uk contains a mountain of information designed to get people to think about financial matters,

IMPARTIAL: Jason Holmes doesn't take commission from products he sells



including free planning software, an 'ask a planner' section and details on how to find a certified planner or an accredited planning firm.

The idea is backed by some of the biggest brands in the country, including Jupiter, Prudential and Seven Investment Management.

'The idea of the week is not simply about encouraging people to talk to a financial planner, though most would benefit from doing so,' says Cann.

'It's about getting people to take control of their finances against the backdrop of a difficult economic outlook.'

Jason Holmes is one of 1,000 planners certified by the Institute of Financial Planning. This certification means he holds suitable financial qualifications, adheres to strict rules and regulations, and abides by a code of ethics that requires him to give appropriate planning advice at all times.

He runs Lumen Financial Planning in Lurgan, County Armagh, one of 28 firms accredited by the IFP to deliver a comprehensive planning service. Lumen has about 60 clients and Jason charges for his services by the hour. He doesn't take commission from any products that he sells.

'It's all about getting our clients to achieve their financial goals,' he says. 'I'm not interested in product sales.' His typical hourly rate is £115.

From 2013, all advisers will have to charge fees like Jason does rather than take commission payments from the financial products they sell. This change will result from implementation of the Retail Distribution Review by the Financial Services Authority.

The regulator believes that the review will improve professional standards among independent advisers, though sceptics fear that many people will not be able to afford to pay for advice.

How will you pay for joblessness or retirement?

MORE adults than ever admit that they would struggle to survive financially if they lost their job, according to financial website unbiased.co.uk.

This worrying statistic comes as unemployment rose 129,000 in the three months to September to 2.62 million. According to Unbiased, more than 15 million adults (32 per cent) would struggle to cope financially if they lost their job. This compares with a figure of 24 per cent last year.

Despite this Unbiased says fewer than a third of adults are doing anything to address their issues. Chief executive Karen Barrett says: 'Most of us

now have to contend with the prospect of longer working lives, reduced pensions, unemployment or the threat of it and rising financial constraints, none of which will have been planned for.

'Taking action with your finances and factoring in these changes now could prove critical to your future goals, whether it's buying a house, saving for a wedding or living comfortably in retirement.'

Unbiased's website enables consumers to find details of local independent financial advisers.

It also allows them to find local accountants, mortgage advisers and solicitors.