

Dignity & Opportunity for All: emailed case studies

#1 – female

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I don't really think it makes sense to pick out one policy that has 'the most' impact on disabled people. Over the past year I've been involved in four long legal battles with various branches of the public sector, three of them just so I can get the basics that I need to live independently - any one of them would have been manageable on its own but the cumulative effect has been disastrous physically, emotionally and financially. I'm used to having to fight to keep my independence, it's the increase in the scale and number of the fights that has been so damaging.

If I really had to pick just one, it would probably be ESA - the change to the structure of sickness benefits from IB to ESA, the cap so that the amount paid falls each year in real terms, and the more recent changes to the descriptors in particular. ESA is particularly harsh because of the number of people affected, and because being wrongly found fit to work reduces a person to begging - even when entitled to the 'appeal rate' of £71.70, this is so far from meeting a disabled person's basic needs that they become reliant on friends and family, or worse, face extreme debt and homelessness. While other changes might force me to move back in with my parents and lose most of my independence, losing my income would do that and in addition leave me dependent on begging even for pocket money.

Related to this, I'm being forced to quit my job by the ESA rules - for the last year I've been working three hours a week doing tuition for a correspondence course under the permitted work rules. The tribunal put me in the work-related activity group, so I'm not allowed to do permitted work earning more than £20/week until I've completed a full year of not working - but my employer will obviously be very unhappy if I ask to work alternate years. I'm still not sure what my options are to challenge this, as the local disability advice service has a full waiting list. They've said that they'll call me when they have a slot, I've been waiting for nearly a month now. As far as I can tell, my only choices are to keep my job (which pays around £45/week) and leave sickness benefits even though I'm not well enough to support myself through work, or to leave my job and, in the words of the government, "languish on benefits" so that I have an income that meets my basic needs.

What I see as the root of the latter problem is the gap between the declared intent of the WRAG and the way the policy is implemented - while the regulations that apply to the WRAG only make sense for people who have a realistic prospect of leaving sickness benefits within a year, or who can support themselves through work if they get appropriate support, in practice almost everyone is placed in this group - this is both the fault of the guidelines issued to decision makers, and the fact that there is no proper definition of "work-related activity" that I can find, making it impossible to argue that being found fit enough to do work-related activity would cause a substantial risk to health.

Feel free to contact me for more information if you want.

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In case you can use them anywhere else, my main three legal battles have been:

1) appealing against a decision that I was fit to work, made after a WCA in May 2012 and finally heard in August 2013;

2) repeated cuts to Housing Benefit which mean that the rate I'm paid is no longer even close to what I have to pay for the cheapest available accommodation with the wheelchair access that I need. I've applied for DHPs several times now and been turned down every time. The process of applying for DHPs is demeaning, you have to justify every penny that you spend on anything other than housing and my local council has refused to acknowledge that my necessary expenses are higher than they would be if I were healthy. I'm currently challenging the government's HB policy in the courts, it should be heard by an upper tribunal soon;

3) I've been applying for social housing in an attempt to solve the problem of cuts to Housing Benefit, but with the level of demand for one-bedroom properties social landlords are letting properties in incredibly bad condition. The one I accepted, based on false information from the Housing Association, had a huge number of repairs needed. The landlord agreed to the repairs, although they've taken months to complete, but there's also a substantial problem with damp which the landlord refuses to fix or even examine. I've been unable to move in, and so had to stop paying rent as I can't afford to pay for that property and the place where I'm actually living - the landlord has now started legal proceedings against me for rent arrears.

#2 – male

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I would like to share with you my experiences as regards ATOS and D.W.P Firstly a little about me Male 56yrs old I live on what is classed a deprived housing estate and i live with my wife daughter and 4yr old grandson. i have not worked for almost the last 5yrs due to my Disability. My working life has been mainly of a manual nature and for most of the time during my whole extensive working life i have suffered from constant back pain. I have always previously continued to work as i had learnt to block out the pain. The ability to do so diminishes as you get older and so my journey of living with limited physical ability began. Little did i know that the policies of the conservative government would now include attacking and dehumanizing the Disabled in an attempt to pour blame on them for the financial crash in the UK. I believe that you have personally experienced this nasty narrow minded Government and seen its true ugly face. A government that is totally out of control and out of touch with the needs of its people. I not only now have to learn to live with my Disability but also to live with the stigma from society which was fueled by this government. Having waited a year to be seen by a consultant at my local hospital i was advised that a return to my job was not advisable as my Degenerative Disc Disease was classed as chronic symptomatic and expected to be progressive for many years ahead. (by all accounts my condition was quite unusual for a person of my age not only by how extensive but by how

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symptomatic it had become and still remains so to this day. The first 6 months of SSP was paid by my employer after that i received ESA on the low rate prior to having a *Work Capability Assessment* it was conducted by someone with no qualification or knowledge of my condition. In fact no letters or medical records are of any relevance to ATOS in their determination of your ability to be able to work or not work. I passed the initial ATOS ASSESSMENT (please note this assessment was prior to DWP changing to the present rules regarding the Work Capability Assessment.) I was put into the WRAG group (work related activity group) as my condition was expected to improve within time (it is possible that my discs will in time fuse together and that may stop the pain but that is not expected to happen until my mid 60s almost a decade away at the time and by then i will be at the retirement age) There are a few practical implications involved with being put into the WRAG group. One is you now find yourself being told to attend a series of interviews to determine the barriers preventing you from working. (remember now ATOS and DWP have not been interested in any medical records or letters from my GP stating that i am unwell and i am under going a series of lengthy back procedures and that i would be expected to remain incapacitated for the foreseeable future) The interview is conducted in a disgusting quickly ill prepared building and the first 20 minutes is spent by the interviewer trying to access the computer. The interview soon turns to farce as i explain that i am unable to look for work for two reasons the first is that i am still employed and that my employer is in the process of looking at my consultants recommendations and only then will a decision be made as to my future employment with the company. (the look of shock on the interviewers face was worth the pain i endured to attend this interview) the second reason i should not have to attend these interviews is because i am too ill and that i was put into WRAG and not the support group. (the support group being a place where you receive more money/support/and qualify for help with you mobility and care needs) I was put into WRAG to appease the public who were up in arms about the amount of people claiming disability not because it was the correct group for me. I heard the building has now shut and my next interview was with a work adviser at my local job centre. The interview took 10 minutes once the adviser saw how bad my mobility was and how much pain i was enduring just to attend the interview. My next interview was booked to happen by phone in 6months.....6months later i received a call i explained that my condition had got progressively worse since i last saw them and this was documented by my consultant following yet another MRI scan. Another interview was booked for 9 months time. These interviews were set up by the government to appease the public so that they could boast that they were doing something to get the disabled off of benefits and improve the public purse. The fact of the matter was that the interviews were inappropriate for my condition and not once has it helped in fact it made me so ill it would take 4 days of bed rest to recover after each interview the same apply when i have to attend my hospital appointments. The public were unaware that each time i was interviewed i was clogging up an already full job centre and taking away the help needed from able bodied job seekers and costing the tax payer even more money than if i was placed into the support group in the first place. It could be argued that i should have appealed when i was put into the WRAG group but the fact was that i was just too ill to fight the DWP and my illness at the same time. Also when i was put into the WRAG it then released all my back money owed to me once i passed the WCA i was not the only one struggling i could see my family doing so emotionally and financially and i just knew that that extra little bit of money was needed right now and that neither i nor my family could endure the strain of an appeal after all we were going

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through at that very moment. Looking back was it the right decision YES we all still believe it was. Some time later the Government/DWP moved the goal post for being able to pass the Work Capability Assessment ATOS were set targets of how many should fail the Assessment and those targets were met regardless of whether that decision was the right one or not. I was now still undergoing treatment at my hospital and taking as i do to this day a lot of heavy medication when i was told i had to attend another Work Capability Assessment in 6 weeks time. I had spent many hours since the last assessment reading and understanding the new criteria that was needed to pass this new Assessment and i was confident that i would pass because to fail me would be illegal due to my conditions. I attended and this time i had sent ahead beforehand to DWP (as instructed by DWP) Gps letter of support saying i was unfit to work and why also a letter from my consultant outlining his findings and that my condition had indeed deteriorated since my last assessment and detailing my list of strong medication and the findings of my 2 MRI scans. To my surprise i was met by the very same assessor as before but this time his face was a little more serious (Oppps he hasn't met his targets i remember thinking) He had recognized me but showed no surprise that i was now using crutches to walk, giving to me by my physio. Assessment over in 20 mins no examination on the table like last time. After a few weeks waiting i received the bad news that i have be awarded zero point and that i may appeal if i wished. I was devastated for a couple of days and then i got very angry and then i decided to fight this and to appeal although it was the last thing i felt i was able to do at the time i knew i had to because there was no alternative i was to ill to work and my family needs money now. With the help of my A star student Daughter i was able to complete my appeal form in just a few days. I attended my appeal and i was treated very well and subsequently awarded 15 points and i left with a letter stating that the court did not want ATOS to assess me again for two years (oct 2014) and i was put back in the WRAG group. Was i going to appeal this decision God NO! Blind people were not even getting these results i was both mentally and physically drained all i wanted was the £900 back money that i was owed because whilst i was appealing i was put back down onto the minimum ESA starting rate and the money was needed by my family ASAP. Just to win was a massive achievement considering how ill i was at the time and also considering that the government had not only taken away my and everyone's qualification for ALL needed legal aid they also took away all funding for ALL Welfare rights support as well.They planned this well! but i couldn't help but stop and think (something i still do often) what if i had mental issues or i was older and a lot weaker or not as well educated or not in a supportive family environment or i had a drink problem as well. The answer to those thoughts are only to clear when we read of other peoples despair that all too often results in suicide.The Disabled were the first to feel the wrath of the conservative party and little was done to help the weakest in our society in fact the opposite. The media was on the band wagon and fueled the propaganda that detracted away from the real social problems. Banks mismanagement/Mps fiddles/Corporate tax avoidance/immigration control etc. Hang your head in shame all those that had a hand in these despicable acts. And remember ATOS it is unethical to put pressure on a doctor to change the conclusions of an assessment just so it suits your required outcome . History will name you all. Thank you for reading what started out to be a short rant.

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#3 – female

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Not sure if I am the right person but I am registered disabled.

I appeared in a BBC series in 2000 “How I See the World and the World Sees Me”. It was about 8 people who despite having a disability had achieved amazing things. I had uncontrollable epilepsy and dyslexia yet was a technical resource manager for a computer company, assigning people to projects all over the world.

It was not until 2002, when I was made redundant because there had been a computer business crash and I had a manager who could not cope with my disability, that I experienced the misunderstanding of disability by all the business and charity sectors.

I have 2 degrees yet cannot get into paid employment which uses my capability. Currently I work 1.5 days a week for a chemist (min. pay) – a job which I got by taking over my daughter Saturday job when she went to university.

The charity sector will use me as a volunteer but will not offer me a paid position.

So I am stuck in the “hardly any cash sector”. Disability, capability are 2 different words but my life has been frustrating because recruitment associates disability with not capable.

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One of the major impacts is that I have been called in for an interview by Acas for an assessment. It is amazing that they are spending this money on people who have epilepsy (or any disability) when it appears on the person medical records. The people who are assessing you do not specialise in the fields of medicine. They are meeting you for only short periods of time.

It would be much cheaper and realistic if they just asked for reports from peoples medical specialists.

We have to cope with the conventional misunderstanding (or no understanding) of disability. This results in many people with a disability often suffering also from depression due to rejection.

So the main negativity for me has been so far the pressure because of going for that interview.

Yet to be told if it will affect my benefits.

If this covers your research you are welcome to use it.

I feel that I need to kick management and HR in all sectors of business. I have tried to get some funding to do this but have not been successful. (That is one reason why I did a masters in HR).

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#4 – male

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I am a disabled man living in sheltered housing property for the disabled in Bath. The survey I received today asked for views and provided your email address for direct contact.

Much has been said regarding the hardships of the bedroom tax, and the daily lowering of attitudes towards disabled people. But little has been thought about as to how attitudes have also altered towards lone disabled people who are without living family and who are placed in sheltered housing accommodation and are reliant of the housing association to provide a safe and adequate service.

I would like to let you know what happened to me after I reported a gas leak in the property.

From the beginning of my tenancy I had cause to complain of the particularly poor standard of housing provided to me by the (then) Somer Housing, and in particular, the leaking gas system. The first of many letters of complaint written to them of the immediate dangers was in 2004, but mostly all the letters that were sent were either ignored or all liability of the safety issue was denied.

It took until June 2010 before the Gas Safe Register intervened along with Tony Brunton, the chairman of the Association of Registered Gas installers, and the (then) Tenant Services Authority who took the appropriate action because of the serious nature of the faults which were discovered at the property.

I have attached the PDF,

Once the investigation by the TSA and the Gas Safe Register were completed I was informed by the TSA that the Housing association from then on would be monitored for the next two years to ensure that the housing regulations were adhered to, and at that point all of the gas boiler systems in the immediate area were changed. I had hoped then that that would have been an end to the matter as it had already been a very difficult five years living the effects of the leaking gas system and Somers' refusal to even acknowledge the problem, but in April 2012 the TSA was disbanded.

Once the probationary period of monitoring had ended by the TSA the housing association soon changed its name to Curo, and then blocked the only entrance I had to the property with bollards

For a few months I tried to walk the distance from my vehicle to my home beyond the barricades but it proved to be too much. I could no longer even do the basic things which I once did. I could no longer get in my food, medication or even obtain fresh bed linen.

Last year I collapsed after trying to get up from my vehicle to the house with some provisions, and when I recovered I had lost part of my eyesight. Since then, because of the refusal by the housing association to conform to the law to make a reasonable adjustment for me as a disabled person my kidney transplant has also started to fail. At one point I really feared for my life because the situation was so desperate. My GP wrote on many occasions but the letters I believe were also destroyed as although copies were handed into the housing association as well as posted, none can now be recovered. Every

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single letter of complaint, my hospital medical reports, in fact my entire case history with this organisation has gone.

Even Victoria Stone who led the the anti-abuse team in Bath police in Bath who requested it was denied and she certainly got no co-operation.

I could never have believed that any disabled tenant would have received such abuse after reporting a gas safety concern, but this housing association has, and are now still acting above the law and it is no exaggeration to say that I have been completely blacklisted.

Because the situation was so extreme, I was moved to Calne to stay with friends on a temporary basis for a couple of weeks while we all attempted a resolution. That was in May, but still the housing asociation ignores the situation and I am fearful of returning because I physically cannot endure more abuse.

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Today I contacted EQUALITY. Did you know that although we gave a right as disabled people to have a reasonable adjustment made to assist our disabilities, the housing association has no obligation to do them?

Or even that as disabled people we now have 'legal aid'.....that us if course if you can find a solicitor who will accept us. And that is zero!

I feel extremely disheartened by all of this. I received a letter from my consultant this week and apparently the additional stress on my body added to my eyesight loss.

No-one should ever have to go through this. There is a slim chance it may improve in time, but as the situation is worse rather than easier with the Curo housing association, it is unlikely that I shall now recover.

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As the weeks go by, the one thing I have learnt is that as a disabled person has very little actual tangible help from anywhere. Not even the disability charities really want to know and each only exists to pass disability advice from one to the other.

From my understanding, the legal system is now completely closed to us unless we can pay, and that is certainly out of the question. The ambulance chasers are still around of course but in much smaller numbers than before, but that isn't what I seek either.

I had one this week who said i may get 'hundreds of thousands of pounds' for my eye injury but it is all nonsense of course because the actual help I need is just to bring this situation to the attention of the authorities so that those involved can be brought to account, but believe me, that is not what they are interested in.

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The housing association, Somer/curo, have still been as difficult and obstructive as they possibly can be. Still mocking and joking about the disability situation because they know that without legal assistance I have no hope to beat them.

My MP, Don Foster also refuses to answer any direct questions as to why I was blocked into my home by his councillor who was working with this Curo group, and is only prepared to assist to get me out of the area which is all too convenient.

All in all the Jonathan, the poor treatment and harassment which I have experienced is now one huge cover up but something which I am not surprised at as it took years before the gas issue was recognised.

At times I feel as if I am fighting alone and the stress and worry is at times quite overwhelming, so much so that my health has now deteriorated, especially with my transplant which is now failing. But I'm sure there must be many other disabled people out there in a similar situation to myself and this keeps me going as best I can.

I never could have believed though that I could have ever got into such a low spirit that I wanted to just end it all and get out of the awful situation, but when I have had difficulty seeing and have pain combined with this housing harassment it is I suppose natural to feel so unhappy.

Similarly, there have been times Jonathan when I felt that had I living family it may have been easier to bear, but the bottom line is family or not, I am now trapped into a system that no longer respects or cares about people with birth abnormalities and we are treated with ridicule and as figures of fun.

I also received an email recently from the police claiming dis-application on all the cases of hate crime and destruction of my property. How can they justify that? Almost twenty vehicles destroyed since 2005 just written off without a single word of explanation as to any investigations? It was originally claimed that their internal standards committee had asked them to delay investigating, now I am informed it is a dis-application? Why?

So yes, things in Bath could not get any worse right now for me but I did want to write back and thank you for your kind thoughts and your recent email

#5 - female

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My daughter has ME and has suffered from it for 3 years she claims DLA

She had been dropped 3 times by social services we have been dropped time and again from Physio all due to funding.

Finally she had been awarded a Disabled facilities grant to improve the quality of her life.

I fight almost daily for her rights with DLA college social services etc. We are trying to secure personnel payments for treatment but it is a nightmare.

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Add to this the public discrimination she receives her life is not improved by gvmt they have made it harder with their cuts x

#6 – female

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Hi I've had ME for 5 years on top of other conditions but it was ME that finished my working life,I was on ESA for three years until the law changedI had a phone call one afternoon to say my ESA had finished because the law had changed, I was sent for by WCA which awarded me 6 points which didn't entitle me to anything .I then went 1 year without any help,lots of phone calls, letters, etc., I appealed, it took over a year for it to be heard ,when I went for the appeal it was a terrible experience I felt like a criminal ,not a hard working woman ,who had worked for 38 yrs.the experience left me shocked and very depressed, they completely wiped the floor with me I was left confused trying to explain what a fluctuating illness is like from day to day. To cut a long story short I lost my appeal, asked for a statement of reason, which again left me in shock they said I was not a credible witness and so much more. (A month before I was asked to sit on jury service which they excused me with my illness). I have not wrote a letter back trying to clear my name as I am not good at putting things on paper but I will try .I have now had to sign on job seekers and look for work which I know I can't do consistently but I have told them I will try,it puts so much pressure on you life's bad enough just trying to be normal again. JSA ,they will only give me six months, after that I get nothing after paying into a system,should you be ill, you are looked after. Normal hard working people like me haven't got a chance in a court room with a judge and doctor who question everything you say.My hope is they will pick on someone who is really clever and can take them on,for all the people like me who can'tAnon.

#7 – female

1 of 1

Where do I start I am unfortunately disabled.

The welfare cuts and what they have done to me and are going to do to me.....

I suffer with chronic pain 24/7 plus vertigo and osteoporosis to name a few of my problems.

Since this government has come into power and implemented the cuts I spent months dreading the brown envelope

to the point every time one came through the letter box I suffered great anxiety and panic attacks. I am at the stage of waiting for the WCA medical and anxiety/ stress and pain levels are through the roof.

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But it isn't just me this is affecting, it is affecting my family too, seeing me going through this. It has also gotten to the point where seeing all the reports of people who are clearly unfit for work found fit it tipped me over the edge and I am now on anti depressants.

Its has got to the stage where I am trying to stock up on food as I know I will have to fight and they have made it harder to do so by removing payments while asking for the decision maker to re look at award.

I then in 2015 will be left house bound because of the new PIP. So really I feel most of the time ... is there really any point in carrying on.

#8 - male

1 of 1

I have been disabled since 2008 and have worked solidly since leaving school in 1974. I had a visit from an Atos "Health Care Professional" in March this year who found me fit for work and my DLA was stopped. I have a diaphragmatic hernia which has been operated on three times with each repair failing and the most mundane things like walking, bending, lying flat, sleep or eat regularly are beyond my capability as my stomach moves in to my lung area and restricts breathing. In June this year I had my mobility car taken from me and was forced to try to take the bus. The vibrations caused me to vomit after only a few minutes so I was effectively housebound. The tablet to control the acid also cause depression and being housebound made things considerably worse. The DWP wrote to my doctor, surgeon who I hadn't seen since 2008 and the consultant I was referred to who I hadn't seen. In September my benefit was reinstated but I have never received and apology or explanation as they had all mhy medical records to confirm my condition.

#9 – female

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I was diagnosed with Osteoarthritis at 22, from being a keen athlete, to broken in just a few sports injuries. I spent the next 15 years fighting with 2 employers, one Telecomms giant who refused to make adjustments which ended up in court (I won) and last year with a Govt Public Sector employer for exactly the same thing - I fought so hard to prove I was fit enough to work - eventually I had no choice, I left via a confidentiality agreement. that was 12 months ago. I worked full time through 2 children and my disability for 23 years - I got 6 months JSA before falling off the radar, you see, my husband ears 'too much' now, I am entitled to nothing, I cant sign on, I cant have anything. If that wasn't bad enough, I got a review from DWP for my DLA, now, I get no DLA either, apparently im not sick enough! I fought for years to prove I was well enough to work, now Im having to fight to 'prove' im sick. My Motability car is gone, how can I possibly actively seek work now?! How can I be a productive member of society when public transport is so lacking, and I no longer have my own transport? Did Cameron think of that before branding people like me as scroungers? No, I bet he didn't... I've gone from a Degree educated

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Criminologist, to someone who doesn't exist in his 'official figures' I am No One, I don't Exist, I don't count.

#10 – female

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diabetic epileptic and worst of all i have PTSD for those who dont know its post traumatic stress disorder before i left south africa to come home i was dragged from a car and into a grave yard where i was gang raped by 15 men at gun point the local police couldnt find me so the army were called to sweep the area to recover me. On top of that i suffered a car accident where i broke the windscreen with my head and removed the dash board with my knees and rear view mirror with my right shoulder ... anyway nowadays i hurt a lot i have arthritis and displaced bones in my legs my neck i dont think will ever be right physio was tried but i passed out so cant do that anymore my head feels to heavy for my body most of the time i need to prop it up .. im haunted by the attack and i never go out alone my contact with the outside world is via the internet which i stand to loose as my atos medical is on thursday comming . i dont sleep i havent had a night out for a long long time i dont drink i dont take drug apart from all the prescription ones that help keep me sane . i dont know what company would ever put up with my agoraphobia which is so bad i am physically sick my problems probably seem trivial to most but to me they are huge put yourself in my shoes ... how would you fair if you couldnt go out hurt all over most of the time had fits that left you scarred and scared and constant anxiety attacks and depression ... and now im waiting to be told to get a job heaven help us all !

#11 - male

1 of 1

I am being affected by the bedroom tax. I have used my "spare" room as a home office for the past 10 years because working from home is the only viable way for me to try to earn a living. I work part-time (up to 15 hours per week), so I still qualify for Housing Benefit. A lot of investment has been made by Access To Work and myself in tailoring this workspace to my requirements. Without this workspace it would be very difficult for me to remain in employment. As a result of there being no exemption for homeworking in the "bedroom tax" rules I have to pay £12.77 per week, which I list as a business expense. However, I fear that doing this will cause the Council to classify my workspace as liable for business rates, which would be financially crippling for me.

#12 – female

1 of 1

I am in full receipt of benefits for long term sickness; ESA (CB), DLA (M+C), CB, CTC, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit.

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I suffer from Mental Health (panic attacks, agoraphobia, depression ongoing 10 years +, Asthma, eczema, incontinence, birch oral allergy) which has resulted in a delays in my ability to deal with my DWP matters, Also due to my agoraphobia i am unable to attend hearings held outside of my safe zones and therefor require alternative methods to be heard, please advise as necessary.

I have suffered extenuating issues financially resulting directly from;

-Department of Work And Pensions maladministration of my benefit payments, both during phase over from Incapacity Benefit to ESA. -whilst being on a reduced rate of benefit during appeals and for maladministration to deductions through Fuel Direct scheme to Thames Water (case currently going to ombudsman), this has left me with additional debts caused through having to survive on a reduced income (£20pw at times after bills) with care needs and providing for my displaced child.

My daughter was kidnapped from my loving sole care for 5 1/2 years during which period I still had to provide upkeep/meals/clothing/shoes/extra curricular activities etc for her which left me emotionally, mentally and financially debilitated (i recieved no benefit for her during this period) till the courts instructed her return to my sole care in december 2012, she is still undergoing resettlement which requires additional expenditure to ensure her ability to thrive.

My food costs are also proportionately higher than most due to my allergies which also has a negative chain reaction effect on my wellbeing, causing further health issues when I cannot afford to eat in line with my dietary requirements, further damaging my health and disrupting my recovery/treatment/ability to manage.

Our home is in the shadow of a huge tree (Which my landlord is currently taking action against a private owner for removal) so recieves very little natural sunlight requiring additional expenditure on lighting as i am in the home more than most due to my illness's, it is also extremely cold due to being on the ground floor and does not have any ground floor insulation internally & has asbestos, I am currently due to be decanted to an alternative property for works to be carried out, this lacking has left me with a hefty expenditure debts and bills to fuel providers for gas & electricity, 6 years of arrears of which i cannot afford to repay, and rising bills which are putting additional pressures on my finances and living circumstances.

These issues alone leave me with a backlog of paperwork to deal with thus leaving me with very little energy/time to rehabilitate from my multitude of illnesses.

Since the budget cuts my ability to deal with the onslaught of correspondence and continual failings caused to services (namely DWP, NHS) I engage with has become unbearable and is now damaging my health, namely causing untold amounts of stress which leaves me feeling harassed thus aggregating and worsening my multitude of disabilities I am already struggling to rehabilitate from (rehabilitation consisting of a prescription with side effects and little else of anything beneficial) anything else I should be able to access to support/aid my rehabilitation I am unable to due to strict limited criteria and mostly lack of provisional funding to my local authority and or appropriate management of this funding with my borough (HOUNSLOW

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#13 – male

1 of 1

[I'm a] law graduate who spent twelve of those years with the Ministry of Defence the rest with private industry before I became too ill to work. My wife is a part time intensive care nurse and our son 11. I get help with rent (lost our family home) and council tax. I receive higher rate of DLA for mobility and care.

I get no help from Employment Support Allowance and there is no more incapacity benefit. How am I to feed myself, clothe myself and keep the house warm in which I spend 95% of my time in bed or in a chair? Where is the help? I paid in National Insurance specifically for this, how can the government renege on their promises. I was also lucky enough to earn a decent wage to pay a huge sum in tax. The DWP and the Mobility scheme bombard me with letters on how I can get a disability vehicle, it looks great yes please! Oh, but I use the mobility allowance for food and heating and my child's school dinners so I am forced into being housebound like a prisoner in a cell. I cannot afford to use the care elements for toiletry needs during the night, help with meds and their side effects for free and the other joys of being disabled this falls to my loving partner and eleven year old son.

I am no longer proud of serving 'this corporate country' where profit is put before men, women, children and the sick and vulnerable. I am ashamed and feel betrayed on a personal level and as a member of society being used and abused by this corrupt regime that calls itself a fair and modern democracy how hypocritical can they get?

#14 – female

1 of 1

I have worked all my life, as have every member of my family, but three years ago I became too ill to work, and had to claim benefits for the first time in my life. Because I had worked, I had a mortgage,, so it wasn't as if I was claiming housing benefit or anything.

I've had three years of hell at the hands of the DWP, firstly waiting for over a year for my ESA appeal to be heard, an appeal I won, but which left me in severe pain for 4 months, as I had to struggle up three stairs, with the help of another disabled person as the appeal centre had no disability access. Even the disabled toilets were locked,, when we finally got into the building. Incidentally, the DWP managed to lose 5 of my appeals which the CAB submitted, even faxed appeals which they verified they'd received

During the year of waiting I was only able to eat as my 85 year old mother was sending me cash in the post every week, I amassed a huge amount of debts, with bank overdraft bank charges. When I finally got my backdated ESA, within a few weeks, my DLA was stopped and for three years I've had no option but to rely on food from my aged mother.

I won my DLA claim on the 14th October, and was awarded high rate dla indefinitely, and medium rate care DLA indefinitely, and have still not been reimbursed to date. Allegedly the DWP sent me a letter,

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which I didn't sign and send back to them, but I've not received any letter. So at present still fighting to get my backpayment, and my DLA reinstated.

I know first hand of many people the DWP have sent invisible letters to, and are refusing to pay people what they're owed and entitled to.

#15 – female

1 of 1

I was discharged from The Lakes - a psychiatric unit - on 20 September 2013, having spent 6 months on a section 2, due to my having had a number of breakdowns with suicidal ideation for the previous 14 months. I have since been diagnosed with Schizophrenia.

Prior to being sectioned I was receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA). I lived with my husband and 2 children in our 2-bedroomed flat in London, but they left to live in Scotland just before my being admitted to hospital, and my husband told me he did not want a relationship with me anymore and we are now separated.

Whilst in hospital my DLA was stopped and I was put on ESA at £71.00 per week. Approximately 4 months ago, whilst still in hospital my landlord (Camden Council) threatened me with eviction if I did not start paying off the rent arrears that had accrued since March 2013. My husband did not want anything to do with it and I had to start paying for it and was left with over £1000 arrears. Luckily my mum put in a claim for housing benefit for me and the bulk of the current rent is in payment, but I have been subject to Under-occupancy Charges (UO) and this is crippling me.

Since my release from hospital I have had to live off £45 per week. I receive £142.00 per fortnight and have to immediately pay £52.00 to Camden Council for the UO and rent arrears.

I have had to have someone helping me most days, to get through this stress. I had to go to the Foodbank last week.

I had to apply for a Social Fund grant to buy a fridge and bed and clothes. The new system is cumbersome. I had to ring premium rate 0845 numbers from my pay-as-you-go mobile phone to activate the payment card they sent me. They did not fully explain the activation process in the award letter and I got it wrong the first few times. They assume people in need all have access to computers and enough money to pay for calls to premium rate numbers.

I had to ask my GP for a supporting letter for my application for a Freedom Pass - to give me free travel to get to appointments & support groups - but she wanted £15 for the letter, which I have not got.

If it wasn't for all the moral support from my friend & my mum - she has Emphysema and lives miles from me - contacting all these agencies, I would not have survived the past months. I am not capable of

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doing all of this in my condition. I am stressed by just being back in the community again. I am struggling with the amount of things and how difficult it is to know where to get help and what I can apply for and the length of time it takes to sort anything out.

Like many people living on low income I am faced with bleak choices between eating or heating my home. I do not know how I can remain living independently in the community without sufficient means.

I hope you can help to get the current government to amend their Draconian Welfare Reforms.

#16 – female

1 of 1

I'm 21 years old. I have Cerebral Palsy and I'm deaf with a cochlear implant and I use a communication aid called a Dynavox and a wheelchair.

I have Direct Payments for my team of female Personal Assistants which I have had since I was 8 years old. I have had many different PAs with various skills to meet my needs. PA's are one of the most important needs in my life, because without them I cannot have a fulfilled life or access to my community, society or the world.

I went to a mainstream school and every night a PA would help me with homework and feeding me. Sometimes they would work at the weekend as I loved to go to the cinema, shopping, out for a meal, the theatre, and meet my friends.

I went to a mainstream college for 3 years. The first year was full time and 2 years part time. I have had different PAs live in our house for 4 years since I started college. I finished nearly two years ago.

Last year I had a problem with my social worker wanting to cut my funding for PAs and said carers could visit me at home 4 times a day instead. This was awful, and not an acceptable option. I was so angry; if I only had 20 minutes with a stranger 4 times a day, this would mean that I would not be able to access any activities or do anything! What if I need the toilet? Or I'm thirsty or hungry and no one is there? How will I communicate with the world outside my home? I have an active life and this plan would mean I would just sit and watch the Jeremy Kyle show on TV every day, no thank you. That is not a life.

I was lucky and this didn't happen because I talked with my social worker about my life and how important it is that I have PAs and so my budget was saved. Not everyone has been as lucky as me.

I have been writing article about budget cuts and I made programme that was on ITV; I was breaking news!

I am now 21 and having PA's is still so important to me. I am a role model for young disabled people and I have a really busy, full life. I am volunteer at Imagineer in Halifax which is an organisation that helps people direct their own support and I help provide training courses about disability and equality. I also

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have a new job at Triangle which is a team that promotes communication with children and young people where I will also be helping give training for deaf and disabled people. I regularly give speeches in conferences and Universities with students about my story and experience. For all of these things I need a PA with me so I can travel to the various places I need to be, to interpret using sign language and to help with my personal needs throughout the day.

When I am not working I enjoy socialising. I love to go away for the weekend and on holiday. I went to travel in Europe and America with my two PAs for three weeks and I sometimes stay in London.

If I didn't have a PA I would not be able to do any of this, or be able to learn about the world and other cultures. I love to meet new people.

I have a big family; two brothers and three sisters. One brother has a new job, one sister is studying at University of Nottingham, one sister is studying at college and twins (brother and sister) have GCSEs at school. My parents work full time. My mum has her own business and my Dad is a child and family psychologist. I also have other family living in Scotland, Israel and China. My Grandpa and Gran live in Harrogate.

I currently have a PA living at home because I want to be independent. I don't want my parents to look after me, I am not a child, I am a young adult. I don't want my other family to look after me either because I am not their responsibility. They are busy too and have their own lives like I do mine. They influence me to try different experiences and be just like the rest of my family.

In the future, I would like to go to the University and study disabilities. I want to move out on my own because I want to be independent. My PAs would help with me clean the house, cook, organise my schedule, help me eat and with personal care, just like they do now. I also eventually want to travel the world for a year with two of my PAs. I also dream of becoming a model. I am already a role model so I am half way there!

Most importantly, I want to train people about disabilities, help support families with disabled children, and work on how education could be improved; as well as change political rights for disabled people.

It is important that my PAs work full time with me in order to achieve my goals. I eventually want to have a family of my own. I want to continue to have a great team of PAs in the future.

If I was to lose the Independent living fund, which would mean that a stranger from a care agency to visit me for a maximum of 1 hour and 20 minutes each day there would be no possible way I could achieve any of the things I am already working towards. My family are extremely supportive and already help me so much but they should not be expected to care for me, they are my family, not my PA's. They should not be expected to give up their life in exchange for mine. If these cuts happen I would be isolated, depressed and vulnerable. I would have no life. My life would not be my own but would belong to the people who made the cuts and therefore worthless to me.

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#17 – unknown

1 of 1

I'd been on Incapacity Benefit since October 2003 after having a breakdown and I was hospitalised after two suicide attempts. I was a voluntary patient for about 3 months during which I had a course of ECT. During the next three years I was a basket case, barely existing and being unable to function properly on any level and my family did virtually everything for me, I've improved gradually since then to a state in which I can function with support. I still have depression, for which I take anti-depressants, and I'm generally agoraphobic with social anxiety, panic attacks etc. I say 'generally agoraphobic' as I can (very occasionally) go out on my own to familiar places within my 'comfort zone' but I must park next to my destination (too anxious to use public transport) and know I can leave quickly if I need to. Most of the time I need someone with me, usually my husband, and I must always be accompanied to unfamiliar places. This problem is hugely variable - I can spend months at home being unable to go out at all, whether there's a 'chaperone' or not, and my anxiety places many restrictions on my life, such as missing important medical appointments, doctors appointments and missing out on holidays and a social life away from home.

Between October 2003 and September 2011 I attended at least three medical assessments (it just isn't true that no-one was tested before the Work Capacity Assessment (WCA) was introduced) and in each case the doctor was satisfied I was unable to work, mainly as I was agoraphobic.

However, in September 2011 I was asked to attend a WCA by Atos as part of the migration from Incapacity Benefit to ESA and I was awarded a total of 18 points which qualified me for ESA. Had not 6 of those points been awarded for sciatica I wouldn't have qualified for ESA and would've immediately been found 'fit for work' ... tell me, what kind of job am I likely to find let alone keep, especially as I still have problems with concentration and lack of motivation, I was placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) and awarded contributions based ESA, time limited to one year. Several weeks later I was asked to attend a work focused interview which was eventually carried out over the phone after a farcical two weeks in which I couldn't attend on the dates they gave me and they couldn't see me on the dates I had someone to go with me. They never asked me again, probably because it would be a waste of time.

I asked the DWP for a reconsideration of their decision as I thought I should be in the support group and, as they wouldn't, I made a formal appeal. Over the months, the worry of the impending tribunal and the prospective loss of my ESA, has had a considerable negative impact on my mental health and, to make matters worse, I had to attend another WCA in August for which I'm still awaiting a decision. Much of the hard earned progress I'd made has gone and I feel like a burden to my family. I've been literally tearing my hair out and my physical health has gone down too. All in all, I feel like a wreck.

I feel humiliated by the WCAs and having to expose my frailties to complete strangers (neither one of them qualified mental health practitioners) and subject myself to unwanted physical examination. The

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whole system has made me feel like a beggar and a scrounger, never mind that I actually paid my fair share of income tax and national insurance over the years.

The tribunal took place on 25 September and I chose to attend as I was told it might help my case. I wish I hadn't bothered, It was more soul destroying and humiliating than any WCA. The judge was actually very nice but the doctor was obviously a fan of IDS and his 'tough love' ideology. His attitude was smarmy and overbearing and his questions were clearly designed to catch me out. He made light of my physical conditions, my high blood pressure in particular which has been proven to spike at an alarming level when I'm over anxious. I'm not a liar and I knew that telling the panel that I've been known to go out alone (albeit rarely) would go against me but I felt too stressed and confused by the proceedings to explain the abject terror I usually feel if I have to go out alone and the worry beforehand. That doctor treated me like a malingerer.

Needless to say my appeal was refused.

I receive Disability Living Allowance at the lower rate for mobility as I need someone with me when I go to unfamiliar places and I've recently asked for a reassessment - after all, if the DWP reckon I'm fit for work but I'm unable to use public transport or walk more than 50 metres because of painful sciatica and breathlessness caused by panic attacks, then surely I'm entitled to DLA at the higher rate for mobility? Surely can't have it all their own way.

My opinion is that current 'welfare reform' is nothing of the sort. It's simply an excuse to slash benefits and people like myself, with chronic mental health issues are being discriminated against. Especially within the WCA as the descriptors are more geared towards physical conditions.

I'm particularly concerned that there is no descriptor for 'getting about' in Schedule 3, which includes the descriptors which count towards eligibility for the support group ... so that excludes those with agoraphobia. I'm lucky to have a supportive husband and that we won't be left utterly destitute by the impending loss of my ESA but where does that leave people who aren't so fortunate? And what if my husband loses his job?

Another descriptor in Schedule 3 must be virtually impossible to satisfy:

*13. Coping with social engagement due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder

Engagement in social contact is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.*

I failed on the grounds that I can email and telephone friends and sometimes visit nearby family. I think the word *always* should be replaced with *often* or *usually*. After all, I pass on about 98% of all invitations.

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I've tried to be as brief as I can but, as you can imagine, there's a lot more to my story. And, sadly, my story isn't unique or unusual in these times. I think MIND do magnificent work ... thank God the most vulnerable in our society have someone to fight their corner.

After battling for several months following my failed appeal I finally managed to get assigned to the support group under the 'special circumstances' rule with the help of my GP and my ESA was reinstated. My (Labour) MP, who has been very critical of the 'welfare reforms' also helped by writing directly to the DWP as they'd really messed up with my claim.

I found the whole process extremely stressful, what with the sheer ineptness of the DWP staff dealing with my claim (for which I was given a verbal apology by a Complaints Resolution Manager) and ATOS asking me to attend **three** Work Capability assessments in a little over twelve months. Now, I don't suffer from paranoia but that actually made me feel persecuted.

My whole ESA journey has been quite a saga so, once again, I've been as brief as possible. I'd be happy to provide more detailed information if you wish.

#18 – female

1 of 1

we have "all women shortlists" and discriminatory policies to address ethnicity so how long will we have to wait until we seen more disabled MPs in parliament? In order to have a genuine voice it is estimated 124 disabled MPs (to cover all disabilities) are required to address the current iniquitous situation that enables our "representatives" to persecute and alienate us even further from our communities. It is this active discrimination that facilitates hate crime, suicides, and extreme poverty and depressing lives and living conditions. Disabled people can be active, educated and intelligent so when will there be a culture change within our political parties to address this deliberate victimisation of the most alienated and now despised socio- (un) economic culture group?

#19 – female

1 of 1

Having a diagnosis of mixed personality disorder - emotionally unstable and impulsive, dependent and schizoid as well as two forms of major depression, totally unrelated to the personality disorder I was called to an ATOS assessment. Assessed by you guess a PHYSIOTHERAPIST!

The end outcome was 0 points and refusal of ESA, stating work could be considered within 3 months - not to mention I did also throw in one or two of my physical health problems which were stress related Naturally I took my case to my MPs office. What came back on the reconsideration letter decision unchanged, naturally my MP has written to my paying office since the reconsideration had been done by the same office as the original decision which under the old system it was sent to another DOCTOR. I am

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going to appeal which will take about a year but I have been told my benefit will be £67.50 a week nearly £35 less than normal - as well as the fact nothing is being contributed to my council tax at the moment. I feel with my benefit being cut by around 1/3 being forced into poverty and debt my condition will worsen not improve. I get low rate care of around £20 a week but that should not be considered in benefit assessment. Legally I feel there's a human rights issue since full benefit should be paid for at least the 3 months - Is not the English Law

INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY ie the Independent Tribunal should be the decision maker. ATOS are clearly unprofessional in not using the right staff to assess each case. WOULD YOU VISIT THE DENTIST TO HAVE A BROKEN ARM PUT IN POT? It clearly shows information is not read, read but misinterpreted so people don't get the benefits to which they're entitled. Assessments are an expensive political manipulation of statistics to perpetuate the social class divide and through media coverage turn people against each other. ATOS have been banned in other countries and have had law suites against them so why is Britain feeding their greed? They won't face the media because of their guilt. My story is just one of many but I urge people with mental health problems who have had hassle of any kind with welfare and benefits to see their MP since mental health is being targeted due to the vulnerability of sufferers and loop holes in the law which if they do obtain jobs they can be bullied, dismissed etc with no redress so work is not always an option .

#20 – female

1 of 1

We had advice from CAB and our local MP wrote directly to the minister on our behalf, in addition to us asking DWP to reconsider their decision. Finally, after many months of worry, DWP have put my wife on the Support Group rather than the Fit For Work Group. So we have some relief from our stress, but, quite frankly, we are so wary of DWP that we are always expecting further notifications or questionnaires that may set us back again. Some of the horror stories of people's treatment by ATOS and DWP are heartbreaking and, now in our 60s, leave us in a state of dread and fear of the future.

My wife continues to be in very poor health. I think perhaps that her spinal condition has deteriorated somewhat and she is now taking heavy doses of morphine every day along with about 15 other drugs for this condition and her other long term health problems.

Apart from the financial aspects of receiving ESA, there are several points I have been trying to get across, which may be of interest:

Despite all my wife's health problems (spinal problems, diabetes, thyroid problems, gout, reflux, arthritis, long term clinical depression and related daily problems caused by reactions to all her medication), we get no recognition to her being disabled or for me being her carer under the governments strange tick box procedures for defining this position. I have been unemployed myself since a second redundancy 4 years ago, after 40 years of work and paying taxes and national insurance. I

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can't find a job which allows me the time and flexibility to also care for my wife. Her conditions mean that sometimes she is able to get out and about and look after herself but at other times is in too much pain, physically or mentally or both, to even get out of bed. I do most of the housework, washing, ironing, cooking, shopping etc and have to take a lot of time driving my wife to hospitals, doctors etc. We rely on my wife's ESA, my small occupational pension and we also had to sell our house to pay off debts and use the balance to make up our weekly shortfall in income just to have enough to eat and pay the bills.

Savings will run out within the next 12 months and we will have to apply for housing benefit – we live in a small 3 bed semi, which is rented privately, so will have a reduction due to too many bedrooms!! One bedroom is so small that it could only take a cot, and my wife uses it for her craftwork, which is just about the only thing that she enjoys and is physically able to do, and which gives her some reason to live. Another bedroom is used by our daughters when they come to stay for a day or two and where we store some of our treasure/memorabilia of our past times together. If DWP had their way, we would have one bedroom, no hobbies, no one able to visit and stay over etc – ie no life worth living!!!

You can understand that my wife spends a lot of the time in the house. She will go out if she is feeling reasonably well. She relies a lot on me driving her places although she can drive if her spinal pain is less severe than it can be at times. We therefore have need of the heating being on more than average. Recent huge rises in both gas and electric prices mean that we have to be very careful with using both. Last winter, we had to go well over budget to keep the house warm. This year, we will definitely have to use significantly less energy and this will have an impact on our health no doubt.

My wife worked very hard for many years before a breakdown caused her to initially be on Incapacity Benefits. Her mental and physical health have both further deteriorated since then and she has been unable to work due to multiple long term health problems. As I said earlier, I worked and paid taxes and national insurance for over 40 years until recently. We have 4 adult children, who have all worked hard and paid taxes and national insurance and rarely been out of work. We now have grandchildren, some of who are working hard to earn money to help them complete university courses. So we are by no means a family of work-shy shirkers and scroungers. However, the recurring theme from government ministers recently appears to us to brand anyone and everyone on benefits as scroungers and a drain on limited resources. That makes us feel bitter and afraid for the future.

We would like to be treated with some care and consideration and dignity. This is a concept that the current government seems to have thrown out amid their eagerness to reduce costs.

I hope this is helpful to you.

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#21 – female

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I hope that you are able to use the information I provided to MIND in March in the report. I would like to add that since then my mental health has deteriorated significantly. The whole process of applying for ESA is nothing short of traumatic. Despite being placed in the Support Group without having to attend a face-to-face assessment, I found that completing the form alone was massively stressful, and has had an enduring effect on me.

I submitted over 10,000 words, detailing as much as I could about how my illness affects my life and makes it impossible for me to cope with the most basic of day-to-day activities, let alone hold down a job. And yet the DWP only placed me in the Support Group for 6 months. Knowing that I had to go through it all over again (with the worry that "next time I wouldn't be so lucky"), I became extremely suicidal in September. As I expected the ESA50 form to arrive at any time, every day that passed without it arriving became more stressful. In the end I rang the DWP to ask when it would be arriving, only to be told that I wasn't due to be assessed until next April.

I was very upset and angry that their letter to me in May 2013 hadn't been more clear. There had been no mention of being placed in the Support Group for 12 months. Just a misleading statement that the amount of benefit I would receive would change in November. As it turns out, this is because of a £10 bonus in December, but there was no explanation of this in the letter.

I made a formal complaint to the DWP, and received a paltry apology for their misleading computer-generated letter. I was also given a specific date for when to expect my next ESA50 (information that should have been provided initially). So in February 2014, I will have to complete another ESA50, and go through the whole process again. Furthermore, I will have to apply for PIP next year too, as my DLA expires in November 2014. I dread 2014. I'm really not sure if I can go through it all again. Twice.

I have suffered from mental ill health for as long as I can remember. I haven't been able to work for years, and when I did work, it was with extreme difficulty and resulted in having a nervous breakdown and subsequently being dismissed. How and why do the DWP think that my situation is going to have changed within 12 months? And do they not realise that these reassessments only make someone like me even more unwell, and even more unlikely to ever be able to return to work? I think that these are the core issues. And I know that I am not alone in this regard.

#22 – female

1 of 1

To seek redress for social care maladministration I have been trying to navigate as a disabled person, social care complaints, the Ombudsman and the Civil Legal Aid service for discrimination.

I am entitled to legal aid.

That is irrelevant because accessing these services is extremely difficult making it practically impossible for myself to access as a disabled person.

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When I have asked for reasonable adjustments the request is ignored or worse adjustments that actually cause me harm and are a barrier, are imposed.

I have found hostility when asking for help. They just don't seem to get it.

I live in an area where there is no advocacy. I am told by many organisations that they do not have the capacity to help.

I am living the nightmare as a disabled litigant in person against a major public body.

#23 – female

1 of 1

I am rapid cycling Bipolar, and in 2012, was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis.

I first had experience of the E.S.A in 2008, when a good friend of mine with severe anxiety jumped to his death in the summer of that year. He was found fit for work and his GP would not sign a fit note for him and he could not appeal, then in December 2010, a friend of mine with Bipolar jumped to her death two weeks before Christmas as she too was found fit for work and ATOS knew she was suicidal, but that did not matter to them.

The fear for me was building, and I was getting obsessed with brown envelopes, and being assessed, my friends death and the worry of the atos assessment in January 2011 lead me to attempt to take my own life, and I was hospitalised for three months in my local psychiatric unit. I could not bear to hear the words DWP, or ATOS, or brown envelopes, or people looking at me, I thought my own dr was an atos assessor and the hallucinations were so bad, I was put to the floor and injected to calm me.

Later that year, I started feeling dreadfully fatigued, and suffering dreadful headaches, later that year in 2011, I could not use my hands. In January 2012, I was diagnosed with R.A. Rheumatoid Arthritis, in May 2012, I FINALLY got that brown envelope and I went to pieces where I could not function at all, and the mental health team were going to section me over the stress and fear. It took me with a lot of help, three weeks to fill out that ESA 50 out, and the stress caused my pain to go through the roof, where I needed morphine to help me, which I still use now. It took 14 weeks to get through that process, and the 8 week wait was torturous, the anxiety was sky high, and I could not function properly. ON the day that the channel 4 dispatches programme came out 31st july 2012, the programme came out and I was so unwell worrying and stressed that I tried to kill myself again, my decision came through a couple of days later but I did not understand the decision letter or how long I would be assessed for.

The drs have since told me the stress and fear probably triggered my R.A. and the disease has progressed where I am now on monthly treatment infusions and need aids to help with my mobility, and my mental health has never stabilised.

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In three years I have lost seventeen friends, their health has deteriorated due to the stress of the W.C.A process and their illnesses deteriorated and they have passed away, or many friends have taken their own lives, many of them at train stations. A good friend of mine died on 12th August 2013, and he was a mental health campaigner alongside me.

All I want to know is why, why are they persecuting us like this, how many more will die before this cruel and callous process is stopped.

#24 – female

1 of 1

I read here that disabled people can send you their accounts with the UK benefits system. I fear that the worst off won't be able to, won't even see this link, and that you'll only get accounts from people who are not so badly off just at the moment, like me. But I am sure you'll allow for this. I know its a bit late, but here is my account in case useful. All the very best in your work.

I am partially disabled from the remnants of CFS which I had in my twenties (mostly affecting mind/memory), and from my current mild psychosis which has existed since my psychiatrist and I agreed I should stop taking Risperidone after recovering from a serious psychotic episode in 1999. (diagnosis paranoid schizophrenia, given in 2007). Among other symptoms I tend to see double meanings in speech etc where none are intended - so I would probably be disabled by/unable to read real "double speak" - , I see things as personal which are not, and hear quiet voices (very quiet & mostly not a problem). I also tend to fall asleep suddenly during the day time, even when I sleep well at night.

I think I am now also disabled from circumstantial depression, from general problems like political changes and the recession etc and trying to look after a child as a single Mum through this, from break ups in family and some friendship relationships and from apparent mental abuse in recent years, although most people either believe this mental abuse to be entirely delusion or are too uncertain to venture an opinion or are lying. I am worried it may be connected with benefit system spying if real, but that is a total guess. Anyway, I believe someone has got into the house at various times and taken/moved things and this has left me with something like post traumatic stress reaction if I think it has happened again. (Nearly always I am wrong when I think this, and with therapist, have worked out a good technique to remind me that I am likely to be wrong, when I think it has happened. This allows me to calm down enough to analyse critically what the evidence says!)

I also now have a depressive reaction when trying to cope with anything difficult from the benefit system. They've been great lately but I had months of nonsense Dec 2010 - Aug 2011. Letters which did not make sense. Leading to a tribunal which they did not defend. And more nonsense later. Throwing me off the benefit system when I moved to Caerphilly from North Somerset after I had been promised I would not even need to sign off and back on again but that there would be a smooth transition. Taking 3 months to get back on system (with help from some decent people within the system). And more, intermittently, later, tho not so bad.

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I ended up sick and shaking every time a new brown envelope came through the door. Every time I questioned any decision I won.

I learnt to record everything in dated hand written log books. For a while I carried these around with me everywhere in a rucksack for fear someone in the benefits system would seize them so that they could get away with lying about my case.

I claim JSA rather than ESA because I can do some work and enjoy my paper round and would like more work. But this position, job hunting for basic admin and unskilled jobs (which I do as well as I can), is not ideal for someone with postgrad qualifications and some work experience in maths and statistics, nor is it ideal for someone liable to get ill if pushed too hard or if work conditions are wrong, to the detriment of her own health and her ability to care for her daughter. I tried to start up my own company in 2010 but it was effectively ended by the benefit system within two months of start up. I just looked back at some of the designs. Some are quite attractive. Some of the items and kits I made have sold when I have tried to sell them in an amateur way at cost price, then and since. I bore all the cost which was not high (and was happy to do so because it was fun making/designing them). I am not sure stopping this start up company was sensible of the benefit system or for the country. Unless it is so I can do something that uses my skills more. Which I would be delighted to do, if there was any obvious opportunity.

I volunteer for the Citizen's Advice Bureau. I am afraid to claim ESA, despite being advised by my mental health worker to do so, because of the stress of the application process and the likelihood of being turned down. I am worried about the effect of the benefit changes on others more vulnerable than me, especially those used to being treated civilly, to whom the abuse (accidental or deliberate I am unsure) of the current system comes as a complete shock. I wish we had more statistics and information on what is happening to disabled and very poor people in the country as a whole. I wrote to my MP asking about this.

#25 – female

1 of 1

I think this bedroom tax is very unfair as there are very few places that people can move too, and disabled people need their stair lifts etc to enable them to live independently as possible at home.

Sometimes people have a spare room that they need for a disabled child so it is unfair to make them leave.

The task of getting people back to work is flawed as I do some voluntary work on a thursday at mayfield which is a place for people with mental health problems where they can work and socialise in a secure work environment that is nice and doesn't have any pressure.

Not many of these places exist any more and they are needed to help people regain confidence. |

Dignity & Opportunity for All: emailed case studies

people don't need to be pressurised and put under stress. I found the year that has just gone very stressful and now luckily i am not under stress and feeling a lot better.

i am being almost left alone with just one phone call a month from the work people who are now more understanding of the problems i have encountered.

#26 – male

1 of 1

i'm a gulf war 1990-91 veteran that has been denied any pensions compensations n medical attentions, i am also on t E.S.A. sick since 1998 with my illnesses, i have been trying for 7 years nearly to get down sized to a one bed accomodation n get help with the bedroom tax...just to be totally ignored n now threatened with reposession, i can't afford any medications nor foods that i need & now they want me to use my medical monies to pay their ilegal taxes as i have never been informed n have been forced into serious debt, all i want is a one bedroom bungallow or ground floor flat due to dissabilities & the councils n housing are ignoring my requests for help, what is going on with britain n the way us veterans are being shunned n ignored, please help as i don't fancy going to prison for self defence against pre meditated abuse or murder as it is.

#27 – female

1 of 1

I have to use my DLA as my contribution towards my care needs, i have been told by social services this is legal and accepted by government? If i do not pay i do not receive care is what i been told? if i was over 60 all these 'rules' including the bedroom tax would not be applied but because i dared to be made spinal cord injured and under that age i have to pay out of my meagre benefits. This is NOT equality!! unfair, unjust.