



Speaking-up to Win a Benefits Appeal Case Study 2015-16

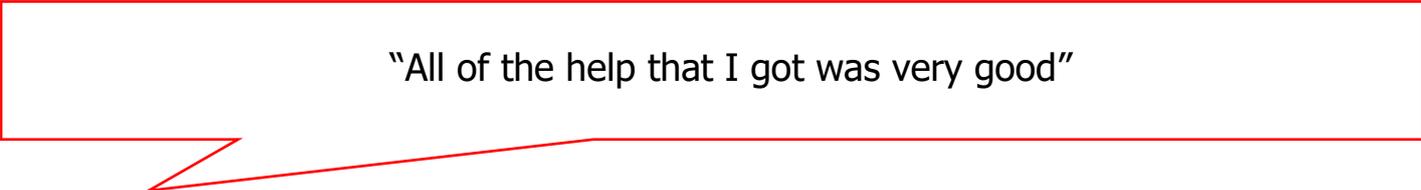
Miss Imran was referred to Merton CIL by a local organisation for support with an upcoming appeal over her Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claim. Following the initial claim and mandatory reconsideration, she had been awarded just 1 point and was told she was not eligible for the benefit by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This was despite the fact that Miss Imran lives with bipolar disorder, depression and borderline personality disorder. Her day to day challenges mean that she does not leave her home, answer her phone or read her post. She has 3 children, one of whom still lives with her. Outside of her children, she only has contact with her support worker from a local organisation, who had been the one to contact us.

At the start of the case Miss Imran found it very difficult to communicate with her allocated worker from Merton CIL. We were unable to contact her directly and had to pass messages on through the support worker. It was very difficult to support Miss Imran, or help her appeal her benefit claim decision, without being able to communicate. We knew that we had to adapt our approach and our worker was eventually able to communicate through SMS text message, which led to a home visit meeting with Miss Imran. At the home visit, we went through the court papers, what PIP was actually for, and discussed Miss Imran's day to day life and what support she needed. We supported her to understand the quite technical PIP questions and explained what information she needed to provide. Miss Imran told us that she was not very confident or optimistic about her life, and she felt that she was often disbelieved and that the DWP thought she was a liar. Through discussion, it became clear that Miss Imran does not eat, cook, wash or change her clothing regularly due to her depression. She is unable to leave the house unless accompanied by her support worker. She has to be supported to take medication and maintain her health, and she is unable to manage her finances.

Merton CIL put an appeal submission to the tribunal based on the information Miss Imran had given us and backed it up with medical evidence. Merton CIL and Miss Imran's support worker, went with Miss Imran to the benefits tribunal hearing. Merton CIL's role was to enable Miss Imran to speak up, and the support worker was there to provide a witness statement to the tribunal. This was really important because Miss Imran was worried about forgetting information under pressure, but having the support worker let her feel that she had back-up.

The tribunal judges over-turned the original DWP decision. Miss Imran was awarded 28 points, a huge increase from the original DWP assessment of a single point, and she was awarded the enhanced rate for both daily living and mobility components of the benefit. This case highlights some of the additional barriers faced by people with mental health needs when they apply for disability benefits.

Miss Imran also received back payments in excess of £3,000 and is using this to pay off debts accrued while she was unsupported. She feels this money may enable her to heat her house better and pay for the extra costs she accrues due to her disabilities. Overall, Miss Imran was very pleased with the outcome. She felt she had now been heard and believed about the extent to which her disabilities affect her daily living. Miss Imran was even able to contribute to a telephone feedback survey we did to find out how she felt about the service. This is not something she could have done at the start of the case.



“All of the help that I got was very good”