

# Case Study: Johnathan's Story

**"I have anxiety and chronic fatigue. If I hadn't had support from Merton CIL I don't know where I would be now. My voice is never really heard, but you helped me."**

Jonathan contacted us in 2015 for help speaking up at a benefits assessment after he experienced issues at a Work Capability Assessment, where he was left waiting for so long that he had to leave the assessment centre to go and collect his son from school. We supported Jonathan to re-organise his assessment, prepare, and one of our caseworkers went with him to provide support on the day.

Jonathan was really pleased when he was awarded ESA and put in the support group. He told us

**"You helped me hold on to my ESA, I couldn't even talk that day and had I not had your support I would have lost ESA. Without ESA I would have suffered severely."**

Jonathan came back to us a year later because he was experiencing multiple issues getting health and social care support for himself and his son. We worked through some of the issues with Jonathan and were flexible with appointments because Jonathan often found that he was unable to keep to an appointment with us because of ill-health. For some issues we weren't the best organisation to help and signposted Jonathan on to other sources of support.

In June 2017 Jonathan came back to us as he had been told to change over from DLA to PIP. We supported him to fill out his application form and Jonathan got a supporting letter from his GP, which cost £30.

When Jonathan was called for his health assessment he was initially told to go to Vauxhall, but this was impossible for him to manage due to childcare constraints and the pain he would be in for such a long journey. Jonathan asked for a home assessment, however, he was told that he would have to get a GP letter saying he was 'bed-bound'. He was offered an assessment in Wandsworth instead and with our support a taxi was provided by the assessment centre.

However, when he arrived for the assessment, he was told there would be a 2 hour wait. During the wait he kept asking the receptionist how long he would have to wait and kept being told he was next. He was struggling with exhaustion and the seating was uncomfortable, causing significant pain and distress. Following the assessment Jonathan was only awarded standard rate daily living and no mobility.

He told us "I am feeling more depressed and anxious because my benefit is now much less than I was getting on DLA and doesn't accurately reflect my conditions and how these affect me. I was pushed beyond my limits when I was already highly anxious and exhausted. After the whole ordeal only a week later I was so low that I became unwell and was taken to A&E in an ambulance and given IV meds and a drip."

Jonathan was particularly upset by some of the assessment report which called him "hostile" and "unkempt" but didn't mention his anxiety throughout the appointment, nor his walking aid.

Jonathan decided to appeal the decision and did a Mandatory Reconsideration, for which he gathered more evidence and got another GP letter – another £30. However, the DWP made their decision less than 24 hours after the additional evidence was recorded on their system and in their decision-letter (which didn't revise their decision) only referred to a telephone call.

Both Jonathan and our caseworker repeatedly contacted the DWP in the months that followed, asking them to review the evidence properly and were repeatedly assured that would be done. 5 months later, DWP finally said they had made a revised decision a while ago but no correspondence had been sent out and that even with the medical evidence and MR, they would not award any more points. We supported Jonathan to complete the SSCS1 form to make an appeal and he is waiting for a Tribunal hearing date. Jonathan said



**"I need PIP to get my independence back, I don't want to have to get rid of my car. Having Merton CIL is like having a powerful voice to help me be listened to. It's nice to have someone have a voice for me, but I never thought I'd need that."**

We asked Jonathan why he had come back to us several times over the years. He said it was because Merton CIL is **"about giving others a helping hand to help you get back on your feet."**