



## HARC Case Studies 2021

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### Case Study 1 & 2: John and Anita

*"We were knocking our heads against brick wall... [DWP] made you feel like a nothing, like a barcode".*

John and Anita are a retired couple who reached out to HARC on several occasions and describe the help they received from HARC as "fantastic" and having "taken a big weight off". Initially HARC helped John appeal his DWP assessment which stated John was no longer entitled to receiving his disability benefits when the system changed to PIP. John has Reactive Arthritis, fused toes and high blood pressure which left him unable to work and he was made redundant. John says, "I was getting whatever I was entitled to...but the money wasn't a lot. Then all of a sudden 2 -3 years ago they had taken it away. They said if you have a DWP car, they'll take it back..." John's DWP car gives him freedom and mobility, enabling him to go shopping for groceries, visit support networks and carry out essential daily tasks that support both him and his wife, Anita.

John went to HARC as he felt DWP's initial assessment wasn't fair. After having telephone conversation with DWP in which John was unsure as to what was being asked of him and what he said, due to the medication he was on and as he was called whilst taking a nap. HARC advised John he could request a transcript of his conversation. "When I put in for a transcript they said they didn't have it and they didn't have any record of it. That made me very angry. It disappeared, they had no knowledge...that is the type of people you are dealing with." HARC successfully appealed the DWPs assessment and enabled John to continued receiving his PIP, after John's several previous attempts to appeal.

John then approached HARC for help when some time later Anita became ill whilst on holiday abroad. Anita had coronary heart disease and was in hospital in a critical condition and in a coma as a result. Anita was left with mobility issues – she had to learn to walk again and to carry out other simple tasks. The experience of being in a foreign country (Mexico) - not speaking the language and trying to save Anita's life, coupled with having to sell their home as their insurance would no longer pay for medical treatment - had left John deeply traumatised. To add to this trauma, John had to appeal DWP's decision that Anita was not entitled to receive PIP. John took on the responsibility of dealing with DWP for Anita who was unable to physically and mentally do so. As such he

took on much of the stress and burden of the situation, "I developed PTSD with all that went on".

Still, for Anita the situation was distressing. There was the shame she says she felt and the emotional distress of trying to deal with now being disabled after being ill. For which an empathy and understanding was never conveyed by DWP. "Being ill and disabled which I had never been - which is now permanent - you don't want to say so much... You get embarrassed that you have to acknowledge that you are not how you were." As well as this lack of care from DWP, there was also the matter of having to fight to receive benefits. Assistance that would help Anita carry out daily tasks whilst adapting to life with her disabilities. Applying for and receiving benefits was a new experience for Anita who had worked all of her life and was lucky enough to have a pension saved. She had never claimed benefits as she never needed them before. Of her experience claiming for benefits, Anita says, "we couldn't deal with DWP - they are just awful people... We know in the past DWP were not reading people's requests. They really didn't read anything."

HARC were able to help John and Anita secure PIP benefits for Anita. Anita believes that her mental health would have suffered if it wasn't for HARC's help. "They actually managed to sort out all of our problems with PIP... [HARC] did a brilliant job".

### Case Study 3: Jane

*"There was no way I could have survived on what I was getting. I couldn't even afford to put my heating on. When I went through a stage of breast cancer, there is no way I would attempt to eat proper food with what I was getting. I owe my life to them. I was in a terrible situation worrying about money and everything."*

Jane has come to HARC for help on several occasions. The most recent time was when her benefits were cut in half after her recent DWP assessment. She was fighting breast cancer, suffering anxiety and depression, and has mobility issues. This was a time when Jane needed help the most and was at her most vulnerable. She desperately needed help. "Things were just getting so dire. I don't like getting in debt and that it was just so horrible. It was when I had cancer [that] they cut the money back...now you're doing this to me when I need it more? I had to fill in all these forms [for DWP] and I said well that's it, I may as well go home and slit my throat...It is just like you're a number, that's it."

Jane found that the experience of having her health assessment with DWP had a hugely negative impact on her mental health and wellbeing. "I thought it was disgusting. They (DWP) had me sitting there for 3 hours waiting for them so obviously by the time they see me I wouldn't be out of breath. When they told me how long I was going to have to wait, that stressed me and I started crying. I said I am going home and they can book it for another day and I was told not to as they wouldn't book another appointment - I would

have to start the process all over again. It was so stressful, the forms are so stressful...I just feel like I am being harassed by them (DWP).”

Jane approached HARC for help in receiving the benefits to which she was entitled and which she so desperately needed in order to survive. “They helped me with all my forms, they were there all the way and after... I just wanted people to listen to me for once...HARC were really effective in getting [DWP] to listen.”

HARC were able to successfully fight for the benefits that Jane was entitled to, after supporting her appeal and completing her benefits forms. “They really did save my life.”

#### Case Study 4: Robert

*“They listened...No one else was offering any help or even any solutions. It wasn’t intrusive or aloof. I didn’t feel as though I was lesser for asking for help.”*

Robert approached HARC for help after continuously being refused benefits and financial assistance in paying for his mobility car. Robert has various health issues and for the past 10 years has been unable to work. He has received chemotherapy treatment and undergone operations for his cancer, as well as suffering from other health conditions - however as Robert was self-employed and his wife still worked, he was told that he was unable to receive any benefits. Unable to work and earn a living, Robert spent 10 years without financial support and as a result he and his family were in debt.

Not only did this experience of the benefits system disregard Robert’s physical health conditions, it also impacted his mental health. He had tried to apply for benefits several times and was either turned down after mere minutes of questions from his local Job Centre, or when he did make it as far as the application process, he was unsuccessful.

*“I went into the Job Centre on my knees, financially wise. Someone met me out the door, said a few quick questions – “you’re self-employed? You won’t get anything, goodbye... Filling in the application forms is very demeaning when you’re in desperate need of help.”*

After approaching HARC a year ago, Robert now receives help in paying for his car and receives PIP. This has been life changing for him and his family.

*“Since receiving the PIP it has made a humongous difference to my life...It has eased the pressure in so many ways. It’s only a small amount but the impact has been phenomenal. Which leaves me to think that whilst getting no help for the last 10 years it has been absolutely hell...We’ve ended up in debt....I do feel very aggrieved that help was consistently refused.”*

## Case Study 5: Matthew

Matthew had fractured his spine in an accident. As a result he has mobility issues and chronic back pain; Matthew is hardly able to move and as such, is unable to work. Despite this, Matthew was told by his DWP assessor that as he could move freely, he was able to work and would not receive benefits. Matthew approached HARC to appeal this decision. *"I was mortified" says Matthew. "The lady that assessed me clearly lied. On the assessment it stated that I was observed to sit-to-stand in a chair with no difficulty whatsoever and people who don't even know me can see that I can hardly move...I brought that up to the judge as that really upset me."*

Matthew says that HARC helped him *"an immeasurable amount... [They] took a lot of stress away from me in dealing with it."*

Of his experience with the benefits system, Matthew states *"it was horrendous. It's upsetting me now just talking about it... I shouldn't have had to fight to get that, considering there are people out there who aren't deserving of help and they get it."*

Retelling his story, Matthew was clearly still angered and upset by his experience with DWP. *"I would like to sit in a court room with DWP and have it out with them" says Matthew, "because it's disgusting...It's criminal."*

## Case Study 6: Neil

*"Without them, I wouldn't be here."*

Neil lives with severe mental health conditions that affect his ability to carry out daily life, to work, to engage with others and to function at every level. These conditions include anxiety, depression, cataplexy, dissociated personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder. He has a carer at his home to assist him with daily living. Neil's coping mechanism is to stay away from people. As such he has been receiving disability benefits for the past 20 years until the benefits system recently changed and Neil now needed to switch his benefits to PIP. He was then told he was not eligible to receive benefits any longer.

Neil says, *"when my disability benefits were taken away it threw my life into turmoil. I was forced in a situation I couldn't cope with...I was scared."*

Of his DWP health assessment, Neil states, *"he didn't ask anything to do with my mental health even though that was what I was there for. It was terrible and they lied with what they wrote."* The questions Neil were asked were mostly to do with physical abilities - to sit and stand, for example – and did not address his severe mental health conditions that, for the past 20 years, had left him incapable of living a normal life. Neil further explained that things he could do today or on the day of his assessment, he can't necessarily do the next day. This all depends on his mental health on any given day. This is also how Neil

navigates his working life – he does “work here and there” but this largely depends on his mental health on the day. Needless to say this impacts the type of work and the regularity of the work that he can do. It also impacts his ability to plan and to engage in employment that requires routine and also requires working with others, as due to his condition Neil needs to work alone.

At the start of the pandemic when his benefits and, as such, his lifeline were being taken away, Neil approached HARC for help. They made Neil feel comfortable in a distressing situation. He commented on HARC’s ability to communicate and to give him the help he needed. “I was worried to death,” says Neil “...they managed to reassure me and get me the information I needed.”

The benefits system had had a huge effect on Neil’s mental health. *“I already tried to commit suicide because of this. [Without HARC] I would be dead.”*

*“I have dissociated personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder...my coping mechanism is to stay away from people and not engage...when my disabilities benefits were taken away it threw my life into turmoil. I was forced in a situation I couldn't cope with...I was scared.”*

## Case Study 7: Ben

*“I'd never filled in a form in my life and never claimed a benefit in my life. [HARC] was a nice independent organisation that helped you through, especially in that first year or two.”*

For the past 20 years, Ben has lived with MS. Ben’s is a rare form of MS where he doesn’t suffer relapses followed by periods of remission. His symptoms gradually get worse over time, rather than appearing as sudden relapses. Before Ben was diagnosed with MS, he owned his own business, he was in good health and he had never had to fill in forms for benefits as he had never needed them. He found his experience of visiting a benefits office daunting and also shocking. He remembers entering the benefits office with a walking stick, there were no spare seats and no-one gave a seat up for him, so he sat on the floor to wait for over 2 hours. A man next to him was asleep on a chair and was being sprayed by a security guard to stop the smell. *“It was an awful experience”*, Ben recalls.

He then approached HARC for help. Ben felt supported knowing that his HARC advisor, Clive understood MS and what comes with the condition. *“He knew MS and not everyone knows MS - all the fatigue and everything. It's huge when you're getting help. I know a few of my girls at the club [for MS], they got rejected when PIP came along and got their cars taken away from them...it's awful. The benefits have gotten harder the last few years...we're quite vulnerable, emotionally...I never cried before I got MS and now I cry. MS really affects you...you're confidence gets knocked.”*

With HARC’s help, Ben successfully applied for PIP and says he feels lucky that he wasn’t refused the benefits he needs to help him carry out his daily life. He also has a modified car that gives him his freedom and independence. Ben does say however that

he is anxious for the future; with stress heavily affecting his MS, he is not looking forward to the PIP reapplication process when the time comes. *"I wish they would leave people with MS alone. I think they've [DWP] been very harsh. MS doesn't get better it only gets worse...you're under a lot of stress in life and the last thing you need is people to annoy you and I'm waiting for PIP next year to say I need to fill out all these forms."*

Ben says he would definitely recommend HARC to others as it has helped him so much. *"I am reassured now that there is someone like HARC."*

### Case Study 8: Paul

*"HARC made me aware of things that I was entitled to and got me on the right track to claim the benefits I was fully entitled to, which I was turned down for."*

Paul has MS, a life-long condition that over time gets progressively worse. He has pain from top to toe; as he describes, there is no part of his body without pain. Paul also has TTP, an autoimmune condition where his immune system attacks his red blood cells. As a result of his medical conditions, Paul is no longer able to work and he greatly relies on his benefit payments. Payments that he and his wife had to fight for as Paul was turned down three times before HARC were in touch with him about their services.

Paul had never heard of HARC before and unbeknownst to him, his MS nurse had got in touch with HARC as she knew they could help. Paul had been turned down for PIP because his DWP assessor had advised that he was not entitled to benefits as he believed that MS was not a lifelong condition. Although this was incorrect, Paul was left fighting a system tooth and nail for the support he was entitled to. *"I became very down about the whole thing, very depressed about the whole thing. I just accepted the fact that I wasn't going to get anything"*

*"It was bloody awful and it wasn't fair...the person who assessed me was a paramedic...it was very wrong for the person to state in writing what they stated. Because of that person's ignorance to the condition, I could have been left without anything."*

Paul now receives the benefits he needs to support his daily life. *"I have had depression, I don't use that word lightly...It was definitely pushing me that way...we really had to fight for it."*

### Case Study 9: Andy

*"To be honest I was on the verge of suicide. There's been a lot of problems for a very long time and when I was unable to work we were getting further and further into debt."*

Andy has had several kidney transplants, the first one taking place when he was 19 years old. His kidneys, coupled with the effects of all the drugs he has had to take over the years have affected Andy's health further. He now has severe muscle weakness, is unable to walk long distances and has difficulty concentrating.



Due to their health, Andy and his partner are now both unable to work. Before approaching HARC, they were on Universal Credit but it wasn't enough to live off. They were getting deeper and deeper into debt. Andy's anxiety and depression were worsening and he felt suicidal. Andy says, *"I was in such a bad state that I couldn't read the forms, I just couldn't concentrate."* HARC were able to assist, ensuring that Andy began receiving a higher level of Universal Credit as well as PIP. It made the world of difference for him and his partner.

*"[HARC] just took us through the whole process, it's really confusing. They know the ins and outs etc. We had Becky helping us at HARC and she was fantastic. Really approachable, friendly, knowledgeable."*

Before HARC, the benefits application process was taking a strain on Andy's mental health and wellbeing. *"It nearly pushed me over the edge to be honest."* Now, they are out of debt, able to feed themselves a balanced diet and this financial assistance has taken some of the strain off of daily life for them both. *"They've been fantastic, we wouldn't be here without them."*

### Case Study 10: Laura

*"As far as HARC is concerned I think it is needed by a lot of people. If you take things like this away, then you're making the lives of people like me with mental health or other disabilities, ten times worse."*

Laura suffers from anxiety and depression, and has mobility issues and other health concerns. She was receiving Universal Credit but felt the amount she was getting should have been higher and she also didn't think her tax payment was correct. This is when she came into contact with HARC. As a result of this one telephone conversation with the HARC, Laura was successful in getting her Universal Credit amount increased and in paying the correct, lower amount of tax. *"The support [from HARC] is 100%. I only had one conversation and they told me what I was entitled to... Because of my state of mind I shy away forms."*

Laura no longer works because of her medical conditions. She finds filling in forms for her benefits stressful. She felt all it took was one phone call with HARC in order for her to receive the advice and help she needed. *"I just felt that just in the tone of voice, that I was getting support. They said this is what you're entitled to... it's really supportive. It really helped."*

When asked if the benefits system has impacted her mental health and well-being, Laura stated, *"Well, it's hard. It's difficult. It's embarrassing and it reminds me that I'm not the person I used to be unfortunately, at the moment."* In order to get the help Laura needs to support her through her mental and physical health conditions, she has to undergo what she feels is an extremely stressful and demeaning process – one that puts her health at further risk.

With HARC's help, Laura is now getting the financial support she is entitled to and so desperately needs. However despite the increase in her benefits, Laura stated that she sometimes goes without food in order to afford other essentials. She is currently unemployed but will be undergoing IT training to help her secure future work. For this, Laura will need broadband and is prepared at that point, to go without food in order to afford broadband. *"You need to do it, don't you"*, Laura says.

## Testimonials

*"I am really, really happy. They have been amazing... [HARC] helped me find my way back. Now I have my own business. They pushed me out of the darkness... They are like my angel."* – Sue, HARC service user.

*"The whole service is brilliant. I couldn't ask for anything more."* - Edward, HARC service user.

*"...The response [from HARC] was within 48 hours. A very, very quick turnaround which was marvellous... That meant an awful lot."* – Michelle, HARC service user.

*"They have changed my life 100%... My consultant Lorraine was just an amazing lady."* - Ray, HARC service user.

*"Before, I was struggling - going without food to pay bills and...they got all the sorted out. And then to top it off I got back pay which HARC helped with."* - Jane, HARC service user.

*"They did everything very well as far as I am concerned. Without them I probably wouldn't be where I am today."* – Chloe, HARC service user.

*"Just having someone behind you...that makes a difference, I believe."* – Caroline on behalf of Harriet, HARC service user.

*"They listened...No one else was offering any help or even any solutions. It wasn't intrusive or aloof. I didn't feel as though I was lesser for asking for help."* – Colin, HARC service user.



*"It made me feel that I wasn't alone. That I actually had somebody on my side supporting and someone who understood my position"* – Will, HARC service user.

*"I'm just so grateful [to HARC]...don't ever go anywhere!"* – Heather, HARC service user.

*"When they stopped my money we had just gotten into lockdown and I was left with nothing whatsoever. We got into contact with them and they gave us hope."* – Tom, HARC service user.

*"Without them I wouldn't be here."* – Bryan, HARC service user.

*"I can't fault the service. The communication was excellent. They rang, they turned up to come with us to appointments. They didn't overstep their mark either. They supported but they didn't take control of the appointments, they still allowed me and also Jack to speak up when we needed to."* – Sophia on behalf of Jack, HARC service user.

*"It was absolutely superb service and we wouldn't have done it without [their] help....I have nothing but praise for them"* – Jenny on behalf of Robin, HARC service user.

*"I am very very grateful to HARC and if HARC wasn't there, I don't really know what would have happened to the both of us."* – Yvonne on behalf of Peter, HARC service user.

*"HARC are fantastic, they're brilliant."* – Mollie, HARC service user.

*"I am reassured now that there is someone like HARC."* – Ben, HARC service user.

*"They've been fantastic, we wouldn't be here without them."* - John, HARC service user.

*"HARC are my heroes."* – Greg, HARC service user.

*"They really helped me out with everything. If it wasn't for HARC I don't know what I would have done."* – Joe, HARC service user.

*"As far as HARC is concerned I think it is needed by a lot of people. If you take things like this away then you're making the lives of people like me with mental health or other disabilities, ten times worse."* – Laura, HARC service user.

*"Clive from HARC went above and beyond"* – Faith, HARC service user.

*"Rebecca (from HARC) was very attentive and listened to every question, and she ran through a number of scenarios and was really helpful"* – Hannah, HARC service user.

*"It's a service that is greatly needed"* – Kim, HARC service user.

*"I can't see what they could do better - they were fantastic. Five stars all the way"* – Kim, HARC service user.

*"They gave me correct advice and support, even when I felt like I wanted to give up"*

Diana, HARC service user.

*"I can't put into words how helpful they were. Ten out of ten, five stars"* – Tim, HARC service user.

*"It was really important knowing that I had full back up from Robyn from HARC. I had things explained to me when I didn't understand...They were fantastic."* – Carol, HARC service user.

*"I just think that it is such an amazing resource."* - Anya, HARC service user.

*"It's invaluable the assistance I got from HARC."* – Michael, HARC service user.

*"They are super helpful, friendly....They were brilliant."* – Sally, HARC service user.

*"Lorraine was very helpful, went above and beyond."* – Emma, HARC service user.

RELIEVING POVERTY  
ADDRESSING INEQUALITY  
IMPROVING WELLBEING  
FIGHTING INJUSTICE