

Appendix B

Client Comments

We are grateful to the clients who generously allowed us to share their words, anonymously, so that their experiences can inform others. The quotes included in the appendix have been approved for external use and may be cited in publications, presentations, and communications to highlight the impact of HARC's work.

HARC

Strengths and Impact

"Teresa was kind, helpful and patient. If we ever need help again we will contact them, they were brilliant!"

"The man from HARC who helped me fill in the form - he was brilliant. He talked me through everything using my own words. Then he sent me a copy to check, and I was able to make changes."

"Clive was so supportive, I knew exactly what was going to happen and everything went to plan just as he said."

"Karen was very good... She helped me realise what I can and can't do - and what I may be able to claim for."

"Give Teresa a pay rise, she's an amazing individual. She's absolutely fantastic."

"They were open and honest and helpful. I am a post-op trans woman... she didn't show any prejudice which was helpful and made me feel safe."

Reflection and Learning

"My experience was marred by a lack of contact and the unfortunate circumstance of being left in the lurch on the day of my interview, and had to tackle it all myself. I don't necessarily blame my rep for this but it left a bad impression."

"She was great, but quite slow at getting back to me... basic communication matters. I wasn't bombarding her, just checking in now and then. But months would go by with nothing."

"It would just be helpful to know if someone we've been working with has left. Surely it should've been handed over to someone else and picked up."

"We'd have liked to have help filling in the forms in person, so my dad could have gone to their office."

HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

The comments below are about DWP health assessments not HARC services

Stress and Accessibility of Assessments

“It was a hot day and I was fatigued. I couldn’t have gone alone – my husband had to take me. The assessment is two hours long. What really frustrates me is how inaccessible these centres are. Why aren’t they done in a local health centre – somewhere that’s already set up for disabled people?”

“The whole experience was fine. I was very careful, because I know they try to be your friend, but they’re really not. I set myself up, went through lots of things in my head, had a glass of water, and then just answered any questions they asked.”

“It was stressy early on trying to get it all sorted because there was an awful lot of information that maybe I didn’t have... They disputed my name because I’ve been married twice. Send birth certificate, marriage certificates. That was stressful. Which is where Clive actually came in.”

Unfairness and Anxiety in the Process

“The health assessor said I looked ok on the outside and refused my initial claim.”

“You’ve got to go to these assessment centres, and for someone like me with mobility issues, that’s incredibly hard.”

“It feels like they’re coming at it from the perspective of trying to catch you out.”

“It’s like the system is set up to make you feel like a scrounger.”

Remote or Alternative Assessments

“I got the letter telling me to go to Brighton for my assessment, but I said I couldn’t get there. They told me it could be done over the phone instead. Luckily, my friend was with me and helped me through it. It took about two hours - the woman I spoke to was really nice.”

“I didn’t have to do a face-to-face, which was brilliant, so yes, I thought it was a fair process.”

HARC’s Support During Assessments

“Clive kept it really simple - he knew what to write. What I would have written would have been real stuff, but they probably would have ignored half of it.”

“They disputed my name because I’ve been married twice... Clive actually came in. He was really calm and said, ‘No, look, it’s part of the process. Just do everything they ask for.’”

“Clive was brilliant. He talked me through everything using my own words.”

GOVERNMENT CHANGES TO THE BENEFITS SYSTEM

Systemic Injustice & Distrust

“The benefit system feels like a closed environment, a big impenetrable wall designed to stop people getting the help they need. HARC helps you negotiate that and finds a way to get you what you really need and are entitled to.”

“The benefit system let me down. I have cancer and the benefits system was too complicated for me to navigate. Without Lorraine I would have been lost.”

“The system is punitive and unnecessarily cruel to people. The media exacerbates the way people are seen for claiming benefits. HARC are humane, sensitive and I’m sure are responsible for saving people’s lives. I was one of those people.”

“UC, East Sussex County Council and DWP have been awful but HARC made a huge difference. I wish the standard of care that HARC offer was universal to all agencies we have to deal with.”

Exhaustion, Fear & Hopelessness

“I don’t know if I’ve got it in me to go through all that again.”

“I was asked to leave the job centre when I got stressed. HARC had an open mind and helped me get benefits when I was suicidal.”

“You’ve got to prove yourself every time you fill in these forms - that you really do have a problem. It feels like they’re [DWP] coming at it from the perspective of trying to catch you out.”

“There’s no clear path - you’re just thrown in and left to figure it out.”

“It’s like the system is set up to make you feel like a scrounger.”

Resilience & Hope Through Support

“I’d have thought, ‘I’m not bothering claiming, it’s too stressful,’ and dealt with it myself. But everyone kept saying, ‘Try HARC, try HARC,’ and they got me through it.”

“They make it even harder now. I didn’t know there were certain ways that forms needed to be filled in. I assumed the government would make it easy to do - but they don’t.”

SHORT QUOTES

Survival

“I don’t think I would be here without it [HARC]”

“HARC had an open mind and helped me get benefits when I was suicidal.”

“She absolutely saved my life when I was having suicidal ideation.”

“HARC are angels. I wouldn’t be alive today if they hadn’t helped me when my mum died.”

“HARC ... are responsible for saving people’s lives. I was one of those people.”

Stress, Mental Health & Not Coping Alone

“I probably would have just given up. I’d have thought, ‘I’m not bothering claiming, it’s too stressful.’”

“Clive kept it really simple ... Getting PIP has made my life a lot easier. It’s taken the stress off.”

“Accessing the benefits system has improved my mental health overall.”

Finances & Security

“Claire helped me get the higher PIP and a home near without damp ... She helped me get a bus pass, council tax and fuel voucher.”

“I’m so grateful ... Kim at HARC helped us with the appeal and got us the higher rate of PIP and a mobility car.”

“If I hadn’t got my PIP, I would’ve lost my house.”

“I would have been unable to turn my heating on when it was really cold.”

“I would have had to skip meals.”

THEMES

Mental Health

“I was asked to leave the job centre when I got stressed. HARC had an open mind and helped me get benefits when I was suicidal.”

“The system is punitive and unnecessarily cruel to people. The media exacerbates the way people are seen for claiming benefits. HARC are humane, sensitive and I’m sure are responsible for saving people’s lives. I was one of those people.”

“Becky gave me outstanding help and support. She was a godsend, she absolutely saved my life when I was having suicidal ideation.”

“Accessing the benefits system has improved my mental health overall. Truly every connection I’ve had with HARC has been excellent.”

“You’ve got to prove yourself every time you fill in these forms - that you really do have a problem. It feels like they’re [DWP] coming at it from the perspective of trying to catch you out.”

“It’s like the system is set up to make you feel like a scrounger.”

“I don’t know if I’ve got it in me to go through all that again.”

Finances & Debt

“Lorraine is very, very good and got me £5,800 back that I was entitled to. She was friendly and kind. Universal Credit had not been paying me the right amount and she sorted it out for me.”

“Claire helped me get the higher PIP and a home near without damp and near the shops and buses. She helped me get a bus pass, council tax and fuel voucher for me and my wife.”

“The benefit system let me down. I have cancer and the benefits system was too complicated for me to navigate. Without Lorraine I would have been lost. If I hadn’t got the help I would be in massive debt now.”

“Harc secured me PIP and Universal Credit – it’s completely changed my life.”

“I can’t get the higher rate of PIP but when I said I would appeal, they offered me a one-off payment of £3,000. Lorraine said it was a good deal and advised me to take it. I’m in debt to the vet so I did.”

“If HARC hadn’t helped me, I’d be borrowing off family and friends or going to the food bank.”

Housing & Stability

“Claire helped me get the higher PIP and a home near without damp and near the shops and buses. She helped me get a bus pass, council tax and fuel voucher for me and my wife.”

“Lorraine has been great, she helped me with vouchers after I got into debt when my UC was stopped after I had a stroke and an aneurysm.”

“We live in a caravan, which isn’t classed as permanent housing. Every year we’re forced to leave for six weeks and still pay to keep our pitch and for somewhere else to stay. It makes no sense. When I went to the council for housing help, they assessed us and agreed it’s not a permanent residence. But they wanted to separate our family-saying they could house me and my daughter but not my partner. It would have ruined my mental health. I refused their offer and told them I didn’t want any more help from their services. I felt completely unsupported. I went to them for help, and they made me feel like I never should’ve asked in the first place.”

“My world would have got a lot smaller - mostly financially, because we’d have had to really stop doing a lot of things and work out how to just live on my husband’s income. But also because of my mobility as well.”

“I was lucky to meet good people who helped me find my way.”

“If I hadn’t got my PIP, I would’ve lost my house.”

“Lorraine was so good and I’m so grateful for all her help. My sisters are taking me to court to sell the flat I live in and I’m going to reach out to Lorraine for her help again.”

“Without HARC, I would have ended up homeless.”

Food & Fuel Poverty

“We got help from a Warm Home scheme earlier in the year. They helped pay off some of our gas bill and gave us a warm home kit. They also gave us a slow cooker, which runs on electricity instead of gas.”

“The money he did earn went on trying to fix the car, which still isn’t fixed. So we’re constantly having to choose what to pay for each month - whatever’s most urgent at the time.”

“I don’t use my cooker anymore - haven’t in years, actually. I just use the air fryer now. It’s cheaper to run and a lot more convenient. I can’t remember the last time I switched the oven on; it’s just not worth the cost.”

“When it comes to food, I’ve definitely been struggling. There’s a small community project near me called Dragonflies that’s been a big help. On Wednesdays, they put out a communal fridge where you can pick up food, and they also give out fruit, vegetables, and loads of bread.”

“I’m so grateful, I was borrowing off family and friends, going to the food bank after getting turned down for PIP. Care for the Carers really let us down, but Kim at HARC helped us with the appeal and got us the higher rate of PIP and a mobility car which has changed our lives.”

“If HARC hadn’t helped me, I’d be borrowing off family and friends or going to the food bank.”

“Meant I could eat properly.”

“I would have had to skip meals.”

“The Blue Badge has made such a big difference... It would have made my life very claustrophobic.”

Systemic Frustrations

“The system is punitive and unnecessarily cruel to people. The media exacerbates the way people are seen for claiming benefits. HARC are humane, sensitive and I’m sure are responsible for saving people’s lives. I was one of those people.”

“The benefit system feels like a closed environment, a big impenetrable wall designed to stop people getting the help they need. HARC helps you negotiate that and finds a way to get you what you really need and are entitled to.”

“It’s like the system is set up to make you feel like a scrounger.”

“You’ve got to prove yourself every time you fill in these forms - that you really do have a problem. It feels like they’re [DWP] coming at it from the perspective of trying to catch you out.”

“UC, East Sussex County Council and DWP have been awful but HARC made a huge difference. I wish the standard of care that HARC offer was universal to all agencies we have to deal with.”

“None of what you are able to access is properly signposted – it’s like an underground system that only works if someone points you in the right direction. I was lucky to meet good people who helped me find my way.”

“The DWP refused and I ended up taking them to tribunal. One person from DWP was telling me one thing, and another was saying something completely different - they don’t talk to each other and haven’t got a clue.”

“There’s no clear path – you’re just thrown in and left to figure it out. It really is a postcode lottery.”

“The language used around benefits is demeaning... The system never recognises that these benefits help people stay independent and part of the community.”

“Universal Credit has been really stressful. They couldn't care if you were struggling or not. They don't want to help, they just judge you.”

“I don't know if I've got it in me to go through all that again.” [in relation to health assessment]

“They disputed my name because I've been married twice... Clive actually came in. He was really calm and said, 'No, look, it's part of the process. Just do everything they ask for.'”

ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO TELL US?

"Having never had a day off in my 30 years as a freelancer because I've never had sick pay, to find myself in this position, and then kind of find a whole world of support and lovely people helping, it's just fantastic."

"Everything was followed up. Any letters I received from the DWP were explained to me straight away. The information was realistic – there were no false promises."

"Teresa's been amazing, and if she's not been able to do something, if you call the main number, they've always been helpful and I've never really had an issue at all."

"I was lucky to meet good people who helped me find my way."

"HARC knew more about the benefits system than Citizens Advice. Navigating the system is awful."

"Very, very professional outfit. They are regarded very highly in the MS community locally. I steer new members toward HARC. Clive was brilliant!"

"They've been extremely supportive and I don't think I would have the same quality of life without them."

"Keep up the good work. I wish I had some money to give them."

ALL APPROVED QUOTES

“HARC are marvellous, the person I spoke to was fantastic.”

“Lorraine was brilliant and helped me with my appeal.”

“Thank you very much for the help Teresa and Sarah gave me I don't think I would be here without it.”

“I can't stress enough how grateful I am. I was asked to leave the job centre when I got stressed. HARC had an open mind and helped me get benefits when I was suicidal.”

“Claire helped me get the higher PIP and a home near without damp and near the shops and buses. She helped me get a bus pass, council tax and fuel voucher for me and my wife. When I text her she helps me.”

“Keep up the good work. I wish I had some money to give them.”

“Teresa was kind, helpful and patient. If we ever need help again we will contact them, they were brilliant!”

“Just a BIG thank you!”

“Accessing benefits system has improved my mental health overall. Truly every connection I've had with HARC has been excellent.”

“Universal Credit has been really stressful... They took money off us and didn't really explain why.”

“Teresa's been amazing, and if she's not been able to do something, if you call the main number, they've always been helpful and I've never really had an issue at all.”

“Everything was followed up. Any letters I received from the DWP were explained to me straight away. The information was realistic – there were no false promises. It was all clearly explained.”

“I want to say thank you to the person who helped me at HARC – Clive Edwards. He was kind, understanding, and professional. We talked about really personal things, but he made me feel completely at ease. It's a rare skill.”

“HARC secured me PIP and Universal Credit – it completely changed my life.”

“The man from HARC who helped me fill in the form - he was brilliant. He talked me through everything using my own words. Then he sent me a copy to check, and I was able to make changes.”

“I recommend HARC to anybody & everybody. They’re phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal.”

“They were open and honest and helpful. I am a post-op trans woman, the person that helped me was brilliant, she didn’t show any prejudice which was helpful and made me feel safe.”

“Give Teresa a pay rise, she’s an amazing individual. She’s absolutely fantastic. Brilliant. I couldn’t speak higher of her.”

“HARC were very reliable and helped me.”

“They’ve been very good. Karen really helped us.”

“They’re excellent, Rebecca really helped us.”

“HARC is very important for people like me and needs to be well funded.”

“HARC knew more about the benefits system than Citizens Advice. Navigating the system is awful.”

“The gentleman that I deal with, Clive Edwards... He’s a specialist in multiple sclerosis and has given me support through the benefits system, which can be extremely daunting.”

“They’ve been extremely supportive and I don’t think I would have the same quality of life without them.”

“Very, very professional outfit. They are regarded very highly in the MS community locally. I steer new members toward HARC. Clive was brilliant!”

“She supported me through a PIP appeal after I was turned down twice. She took it to tribunal, and we won - I got the high rate, which was amazing.”

“UC, East Sussex County Council and DWP have been awful but HARC made a huge difference. I wish the standard of care that HARC offer was universal to all agencies we have to deal with.”

“Brilliant generally. Clive was so helpful.”

“I’m very grateful to them.”

“I’ve never had a bad experience with HARC - they are absolutely amazing.”

“Becky gave me outstanding help and support. She was a godsend, she absolutely saved my life when I was having suicidal ideation.”

“They are brilliant and helpful and HARC treats you well. Lorraine has been great, she helped me with vouchers after I got into debt when my UC was stopped after I had a stroke and an aneurysm.”

“Keep on doing what you’re doing. I run Chichester and Bognor MS Society and we recommend HARC to our service users all the time, so we know just what a brilliant service they offer.”

“Difference HARC has made: Oh, a hell of a lot... Getting PIP has made my life a lot easier. It’s taken the stress off... So yes, I definitely would have given up on the process. I came close a couple of times. But everyone kept saying, ‘Try HARC, try HARC,’ and then my MS nurse actually got him to phone me.”

“Other feedback: Having never had a day off in my 30 years as a freelancer because I’ve never had sick pay, to find myself in this position, and then kind of find a whole world of support and lovely people helping, it’s just fantastic.”

“Andrea was fantastic - in touch with Clive who helped me get PIP for my broken leg. I had to take 6 months off work - she helped me navigate the system.”

“I’ve recommended them to other people, they provide an excellent service.”

“I’m very pleased with the support I had. The lady that helped was great. They’re still helping me get my UC backdated.”

“Grateful for Teresa’s help in getting me the right level of benefit, I didn’t know I was on the wrong amount until she told me and helped me with all the forms.”

“Becky has been brilliant and has changed our lives. She’s very understanding and is always quick to respond to my emails and offer support.”

“Lorraine was amazing, totally understanding and couldn’t do more for me. A really lovely lady.”

“Lorraine is very, very good and got me £5,800 back that I was entitled to.”

“The benefit system feels like a closed environment, a big impenetrable wall designed to stop people getting the help they need. HARC helps you negotiate that and finds a way to get you what you really need and are entitled to.”

“The benefit system let me down. I have cancer and the benefits system was too complicated for me to navigate. Without Lorraine I would have been lost. If I hadn’t got the help I would be in

massive debt now. I've paid into the system all my life and was in a situation I had no control over and Lorraine helped me get through all the obstacles the government put in the way. She was a beacon of light in the darkest time in my life."

"The benefits system is horrendous but HARC are a life saver. Clive was invaluable."

"This is the first point in my life where I've had to claim benefits and I've had to do it because of ill health. The PIP application process is impenetrable... My MS nurse recommended HARC. Clive helped me through the appeal process, made everything clear and I got what I was entitled to. He was brilliant."

"I'm so grateful, I was borrowing off family and friends, going to the food bank after getting turned down for PIP... Kim at HARC helped us with the appeal and got us the higher rate of PIP and a mobility car which has changed our lives."

"HARC are very good at what they do. They put me in touch with charities that help with social housing."

"HARC was excellent and I recommend them to all my friends. Lorraine helped me with everything and got benefits for my adult autistic son."

"I believe in the circle of life and I'm happy to give back to HARC. Lorraine was so good and I'm so grateful for all her help."

"I struggle to remember and I appreciated all Lorraine's help. I will definitely contact her again if I need her help when my PIP is reviewed."

"Clive was so supportive, I knew exactly what was going to happen and everything went to plan just as he said."

"I can't get the higher rate of PIP but when I said I would appeal they offered me a one-off payment of £3000. Lorraine said it was a good deal and advised me to take it."

"The system is punitive and unnecessarily cruel to people... HARC are humane, sensitive and I'm sure are responsible for saving people's lives. I was one of those people."

"I'd like to thank HARC and keep up the good work."

"HARC has been extremely helpful. I would recommend their wonderful service."

"HARC are angels. I wouldn't be alive today if they hadn't helped me when my mum died and my mental health deteriorated. Lorraine came to my house and has been a friend to me ever since."

“I’m very pleased Lorraine got me a blue badge.”

“The whole system is terrifying. Lorraine is such a good worker and she made me feel like I wasn’t alone.”

“My son has autism and has some very special needs and I suffer from depression and anxiety. The assistance she gave us has been invaluable.”

“I hate waiting on the phone and there’s no email address for the benefits system. Lorraine helped me apply for PIP.”