Member Case Study: Miss K

Miss K has various health problems including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, depression and anxiety. Her COPD will not improve and she is unable to work. Miss K did not score sufficient work capability points and her ESA stopped on 10th July 2016. She first approached us on 2nd August 2016 in a distressed state and was invited into the office by our Income Officer.

**Chronology of events and issues with UC claim:**

* Delays in housing costs being processed by DWP resulting in delay in first payment of housing costs.
* ‘Housing cost contribution’ deduction from UC incorrectly applied. UC service centre staff advised their guidance did not reflect legislation. This was chased up a number of times.
* UC housing element not paid in full when Miss K received first payment.
* Case escalated at the DWP in October 2016.
* Miss K told payment would be released, then told that no payment was due to her. This was again escalated within the DWP.
* Miss K contacted MP, received a response to say housing element would be reinstated and backdated to cover shortfall. No change made to customers next payment.
* Officers escalated within the DWP who confirmed the error had been put right. Applied for an APA.
* Miss K contacted us in December to advise that payment was again incorrect causing significant hardship.
* Miss K contacted officers to advise that she had received less UC than expected. Previous corrections had been overlooked resulting in customer losing £138.74, causing significant hardship. The case has been escalated again and is on-going.

**Concerns**

* Guidance at the service centre does not reflect legislation for complex cases. This was a basic query which should have been resolved with no issue.
* DWP routes to escalate issues have not worked, resulting in case being escalated via other routes to try to resolve for the customer.
* A sanction was imposed on the vulnerable customer. DWP sanctions guidance has stated that they cannot sanction on first offence and should provide a warning. Miss K missed her appointment by one day. She was reassured by her work coach her sanction would only last one day at a cost of £10.70. She was sanctioned £220.
* Original FIT note lost by JobCentre Plus. Miss K had to get another copy of this.
* Without our support, Miss K would not have known to challenge some of the decisions made. Other claimants may not be able to access this support.

**Impact on customer**

* Considerable decline in health and wellbeing as a result of mistakes and delays in processing her claim and the sanction imposed. Miss K has GP notes to support this.
* Lack of trust in any authority. Mixed messages from different UC staff have confused her.
* Monthly UC reduced incorrectly by £69.37 for every month and from January is now £138.74 which is significantly less than it should be.
* Monthly UC reduced by £220 for sanction. Whilst this has since been overturned, Miss K was placed in hardship unnecessarily.
* Due to multiple issues with payment Miss K has struggled to pay her rent. Prior to UC the customer had a clear rent account.