**This is Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network’s welfare rights advisors monthly information exchange, it is sent to around 200 individuals and organisations with an interest in welfare rights in Tower Hamlets and is available to see on the** [**www.thcan.org.uk**](http://www.thcan.org.uk) **Up-to-date information on advice providers services and opening times are available on the website**

**Welfare Rights Advisors Forum   Thursday 7th March 2 - 4.30 pm**         **VENUE**            **Carers Centre, 21 Brayford Square, Stepney Green, London E1 0SG**

**Agenda**

2pm    CPAG presentation                         Welfare Rights Benefit updates/changes   Owen Stevens - London Universal Credit Adviser

3pm    Real Presentation                            Paying for Social Care – LBTH now for adult social care services that used to be free before 2017 – information on how financial assessments are

Calculated/challenged

4pm    Resident Support Scheme             Discussion and comments on how we are finding the new application/awards process

4.15    Any other business

information share

**Free Training Sessions**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Housing Costs**  2 hour workshop | * Renting and Homeowners entitlement to help with rent/housing costs * whose entitled, how’s it calculated * Non-dependent deductions * Bedroom tax   **Suitable for** Benefit/advice workers with some knowledge of benefit system | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Fatima Begum  14th March  1-4pm |
| **Welfare Rights Overview**  One day | * overview of the benefits system * check which benefits your clients may be entitled to * use CPAG handbook/resources * online calculations and claims   **Suitable for** new volunteers and support workers with little or no experience in benefits | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Jo Ellis  Thursday  11th April  10am – 4pm |
| **Universal Credit**  ½ day workshop | * General information about this new benefit including: claims, migration, conditionality, sanctions   **Suitable for** basic session but suitable for anyone including benefit advisors | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Fatima Begum  9th May  1-4pm |

**Email** [jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk](mailto:jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk) to book a place

**Benefit Up-dates**

1. Will be available on next information email and also Welfare Rights Advisors Forum will be covering
2. CPAG - test case victory for a group of working lone mothers, the High Court found the way the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been assessing income from employment through its Universal Credit (UC) work assessment periods is unlawful. Ruling is that the DWP has been wrongly interpreting the universal credit regulations. They said in their judgment that treating claimants as having earned twice as much as they do if they happen to receive two pay cheques in one monthly assessment period, and as having no earnings in the next assessment period is “odd in the extreme” and “.... could be said to lead to nonsensical situations".

We’re not sure how DWP plan to respond to this judgment yet.  However, DWP were recently refused permission to appeal.  And advisers can cite the case in revision requests

<http://cpag.org.uk/content/high-court-finds-dwp-unlawful-universal-credit-assessments>

1. Benefits and Work reported on tragic deaths of two claimants who committed suicide after disability benefit claims stopped. DWP and Capita have been ordered to pay damages/compensation of £10,000. Victoria Smith died just weeks after having her PIP award stopped, a decision that was later overturned at tribunal. Capita were subsequently ordered to pay £10,000 in damages for maladministration. Jodie Whiting committed suicide as a result of having her ESA wrongly stopped. An ombudsman ordered the DWP to pay her family £10,000 in compensation. Is £10,000 set to become the official value of a claimant’s life?  Steve Donnison Benefits and Work Campaign

**Social Policy/Campaign Information**

* Resident Support Scheme replaced Crisis Support Grants in January – if you have any comments, compliments, complaints, suggestions on how the scheme has been running (especially if you are a partner agency) please email details to me – I am collecting information to send to Ellie Kershaw (Tower Hamlets Tackling Poverty) and Paul Smith (Northgate).

**Other Information**

* **Info about free school meals and UC**

Universal Credit claimants can get free school meals provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700139/Free_school_meals_guidance_Apr18.pdf>

* **Info about health costs and U**C

Not everyone who gets Universal Credit is entitled to free NHS prescriptions and dental treatment. Universal Credit claimants are only entitled if their earnings in their last assessment period were:

* £435 or less
* £935 or less if their Universal Credit includes a payment for a child or they have limited capability for work or work-related activity

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/universal-credit-toolkit>

* Standard Financial Statement – attached – also THCAN factsheet with guidance on how to become a qualified debt advisor

The **Standard Financial Statement** (SFS) is a landmark development for debt advice in the UK which delivers, for the first time, a universal **income** and expenditure **statement**, together with a single set of spending guidelines. The tool is used to summarise a person's **income** and outgoings, along with any debts [*https://sfs.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/what-is-the-standard-financial-statement*](https://sfs.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/what-is-the-standard-financial-statement%0d)

* How to make a complaint to DWP including email contacts has been amended and updated – will be available on <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/> but is attached

**Information exchange/services**

* DWP benefits information newsletter attached
* Housing advisors minutes Jan 2019 – if you are interested in this forum please contact; Sadaf Mir [s.mir@thlc.co.uk](mailto:s.mir@thlc.co.uk)
* **Help with Universal Credit Claims** and Maintenance for Tower Hamlets residents - attached final version of factsheet is attached it  will also available on <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>
* Leaflet with debt advice services in Tower Hamlets attached will also be available on <http://thcan.org.uk/debt-advice/>

**Specialist Welfare Rights Advisors Referrals for Tower Hamlets Residents**

**Legal Advice Centre**: Only take referrals for appeals when got the appeal bundle, not Mandatory Reconsideration.  Otherwise can be ‘signposted’ (i.e. send client to drop in advice session) for assistance. Referrals can be emailed to [admin@legaladvicecentre.org](mailto:admin@legaladvicecentre.org) they will email back to confirm that clients have been booked – full guidance available on [www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/](http://www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/#_blank)

**Law Centre**: Chris Parsons very limited capacity but to email or phone him, has no particular criteria [c.parsons@thlc.org.uk](mailto:c.parsons@thlc.org.uk)

**Island Advice**: Tower Hamlets clients only, limited casework and usually all appointments are taken up through our drop in advice session clients but email  [steph@island-advice.org.uk](mailto:steph@island-advice.org.uk)  or phone direct line 020 7538 0094 (phone number is for advisors only) Clients can ring 0207 987 9379

**CAB** advisor Eukay email [eukandu@eastendcab.org.uk](mailto:eukandu@eastendcab.org.uk)  Also their full drop in services sessions are available on:  [www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/](http://www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/#_blank)