**Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Information Exchange - June 2017**

**Volunteer project recruitment**

Recruiting volunteer trainee advice workers for training course and work placements, option for NVQ Level 3 in advice and guidance, two days per week, one year commitment.

Looking for advice work placements in advice agencies one day per week for one year

Email: jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk

**Universal Credit Update**

       Meeting attended at Job Centre Plus 14th June to discuss issues below – two managers from Dod Street and Tench Street didn’t turn up

       I suggest that you continue to refer clients who need help to claim Universal Credit to the JC Plus with attached referral letter, send a copy of the referral form to me and another to Hanshaw Stephen JCP HOXTON STEPHEN.HANSHAW@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK - follow up what happens with the referral (I’m following up some of them)

       I have had a meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP caseworker to discuss DWP/UC complaints and problems.  She has asked me to put all the issues in a letter from ‘THCAN’.  She stated she will raise them as a MP query/complaint.  Please check list below and see if there is anything not covered.  She also agreed I could send details of any individual client/cases/problems - she has access to a separate (person/department?) in DWP who responds to her (MP) complaints quickly - it won’t be necessary for the client to see/attend MP surgery – if you have any such cases send me details

**Universal Credit – Issues raised about Universal Credit problems**

1.    Length of time it is taking to answer phone calls UC (and cost implication for clients). When they do get answered, often they take details say they will phone client back so advisor can’t liaise, sometimes don’t ring back

2.    Claimants moving from legacy benefits to UC, why are they being asked to carry out ‘right to reside’ and/or ‘work capability’ assessments, claimants are being told to be available for work until assessment has been completed

3.    Claimants found fit for work being advised to claim UC and not informed that can remain on ESA whilst appealing

1. UC refusals – decision is on their journal, they don’t get written confirmation that benefit has been refused, clients are not always aware, they should be sent written decision, can this be done?
2. Can advisors be given a different number to ring when helping clients?
3. Can we do a mandatory review on the UC portal/journal?
4. Our policy of not helping claimants with applying for universal credit and sending them to DWP has had mixed results.  Mostly clients who attend are being told that they won’t get help and that they need to do it themselves, they are being offered use of computers but when it is seen they are struggling they sometimes get some help and/or are asked to come back the following day.  Some refused, some helped, seems to be luck of the draw.  **Can we have a more structured referral system** where (vulnerable) clients that we have identified as not being able to go through the process of using the portal get support and assistance from the DWP with their claims.  DWP have stated that additional funding has been made available for agencies to provide this support (and financial literacy) but as far as we are aware this is not true – hence us referring clients to the DWP for this help, it takes advisors around 2-3 hours to do the claim for clients and then they will need ongoing support (possibly long term) to check journal and carry out required actions. We don’t have the capacity to offer this assistance and benefit work we priorities will be problem cases, mandatory reviews and appeals – not assisting to make claims

8.    Claimants are not being given their work coach contact details

9.    Advisors complaint/s that have been raised have not been responded to – mixed feedback some good, some not

1. Someone who has had claimed closed, not being able to do a Mandatory Review

11. You can’t see how housing costs is calculated, it just gives an amount for the month, we can’t tell if there are non-dependent deductions, whether the correct amount is being paid

12. Housing Associations are getting letters from universal credit with no reference except National Insurance number, not client name/address so they can’t identify who letter relates to

**Welfare Rights -  Free Training Session – NOTE DATE CHANGE – email me if you want to attend**

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| **Personal Independence Payment****APPEALS** | •      Introduction and eligibility•      Understanding the points test•      Appeals Procedure•      Preparing cases for appeal **Suitable for** anyone dealing with PIP claims and refusals, anyone who is doing (or wanting to do) Mandatory Reviews and/or Appeals that would like to review/increase PIP knowledge | Island HouseRoserton StreetE14 3PG | Thursday13th July 201710am to 1pm Fatima Begum |

**Benefits Information**

**1.**    **Universal Credit Claimant Housing Under 21 years**

From 1 April 2017, some 18 to 21 year olds claiming Universal Credit will not be entitled to help with housing costs. The change will only apply in [Universal Credit full service areas](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-full-service-and-live-service) – check for exemptions Some 18 to 21 year olds claiming Universal Credit will still be able to get help with their housing costs. Details have been released on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-costs-for-18-to-21-year-olds) and check CPAG

**2.**    **Removal of Work Related Activity Component**

From 3 April 2017, new ESA claimants (and UC) who are placed into the work-related activity group (WRAG) following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) will not get the work-related activity component.

This change doesn’t affect:

* existing ESA claimants who made a claim before 3 April 2017
* claimants in the support group, who will continue to get the support group component
* existing ESA claimants who have a further WCA (re-assessment) after 3 April 2017 and are placed into the WRAG, even if they move from the support group to the WRAG
* Incapacity Benefit re-assessment cases that are awarded ESA
* claims made from 3 April 2017 which are backdated for up to 3 months to a date before 3 April 2017
* claimants who have a break in their claim and come back to ESA within 12 weeks and their original date of claim is before 3 April 2017
* claimants who claimed ESA before 3 April 2017 and their ESA claim was closed due to getting Maternity Allowance who then make a new claim to ESA within 12 weeks of Maternity Allowance ending
* mandatory reconsideration and appeal decisions for claims made before 3 April 2017

3.    **CPAG's ADVICE SERVICE FOR ADVISERS**

CPAG**universal credit email advice service** for advisers [advice@cpag.org.uk](http://cpag-mail.org.uk/5MI-4YX91-HILBJ-2NCO5H-1/c.aspx). Please ensure you include all relevant details. Your enquiry will be acknowledged and you will receive a substantive response as soon as possible. Please note that the service is limited to providing email advice and that CPAG is unable to take on cases or provide advice and advocacy directly to clients.

**ORDER NOW**

**CPAG WELFARE BENEFITS AND TAX CREDITS HANDBOOK 2017/2018**

3.    **Referrals to Tower Hamlets Specialist Welfare Rights Caseworkers**

**Legal Advice Centre**: Only take referrals for appeals when got the appeal bundle, not Mandatory Reconsideration.  Otherwise can be ‘signposted’  (ie send client to drop in advice session) for assistance. Referrals can be emailed to 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

**Island Advice**: Tower Hamlets clients only, limited casework and usually all appointments are taken up through our drop in advice session clients but can try by email 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. 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)

3.  **Information on other services/referrals**

**Account 3** – Family Law Clinic – Tuesdays 5.30 – email Shah to make a referral: shahb@account3.org.uk

**Legal Advice Centre** – First Saturday of the month referral to Education Legal Advice Session – email Jennie@legaladvicecentre.org.uk

**BBBC**-  Getting on With Money budgeting advice 1-2-1 appointments – contact Mosrath:  Mosrath.Jahan@bbbc.org.uk