

EXAMPLES OF CLIENTS' PROBLEMS DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

The vulnerability of lodgers

A resident landlord evicted a client who was a lodger by locking her out while she was out of the house and dumping all her belongings in the street. She had been dismissed without notice from her job as a hairdresser as soon as the Covid-19 lockdown was announced but with our advice had applied quickly for Universal Credit. She had kept the landlord informed of her efforts to persuade her employer to put her on furlough and her application for Universal Credit and he knew that she would get payment towards her housing costs with her first UC payment. Nonetheless, he made no allowance for this and evicted her without warning in the middle of a Bank Holiday weekend. The client was terrified of having to spend time in a hostel with rough sleepers who might have contracted Coronavirus; but she managed to find a hotel where she could stay cheaply until after the bank holiday and then we helped her with an emergency charity grant to put down a deposit for a room elsewhere.

In another case a client who was lodging with a family had to stop work as a result of the lockdown and asked for a rent reduction. The family responded by asking her to leave within two weeks to make way for another family member. We advised her to contact the Council who explained that she could apply for help to pay her rent; but the family did not want to have a lodger dependent on benefits.

In a third case the client was lodging with an elderly couple. As soon as the lockdown was announced the couple asked the client to leave by the end of week.

The financial impact on clients of DWP's current delays in dealing with Universal Credit (UC) claims

We had one client who after trying to apply for UC for two weeks was still unable to progress his claim because he could not get through to DWP due to the volume of applications. In another case a client who became ill and was unable to work had been receiving UC but then got a job in a clinic. When she reported this to the DWP her claim was stopped. However because of the Coronavirus lockdown the clinic closed and she could not start the job. She tried to contact UC staff on the phone and through her UC journal, but could not get any response. We had to provide her with food bank vouchers and advise her on the local food bank's arrangements for delivery of food parcels.

Problems with the Government's Furlough scheme

Employees paid nothing when their jobs stopped

In one case a client who had recently started working for a hairdresser was dismissed immediately when the shop had to close during the lockdown without notice or any pay in lieu of notice when she could have been furloughed with 80% of her salary from the Government. In another case a single parent with two children to look after who had been working on a zero hours contract for a restaurant was left in limbo when the restaurant had to close during the lockdown with no information and no money so that she now has to depend entirely on UC.

Problems for employees of private health care firms involved in NHS work

One example is a client who before the lockdown worked 3 days a week on cancer care. After the lockdown the company continued its cancer care in a separate clinic from the hospital where patients infected with the Coronavirus were being treated, but the client could now work only one day a week on cancer care.. She did not want to work in the hospital with Covid-19 patients on the other two days because of the risk of infecting her elderly and frail mother, but she could not be furloughed for those two days because the Job Retention scheme did not allow for employees to do any work for their employers while they were being furloughed. So she was faced with having to take annual leave to receive the rest of her salary until August when the furlough scheme becomes more flexible to allow employees to work part time for their employers while receiving money from the government for the other days when they cannot work.

Failure to protect key workers and their families from Covid-19 infection

One example of the problems caused by not being able to use the Furlough scheme for key workers is that of a 72 year old caretaker who was first sent home on full pay for 4 weeks but then asked to return to work as normal. Another example was a firefighter who was also the carer for his wife who had significant medical conditions and at the lockdown received the shielding letter warning her to stay at home because she was vulnerable to the infection. At first the firefighter was allowed paid time off work to care for his wife at home but then was refused any further paid leave.