

## **Reflections on Work Capability Assessments: Stephen**

This is my recollection of 4 Work Capability Assessments (WCAs) since November 2009. I am due another 1 at the end of 2016/beginning of 2017. These WCAs are meant to determine your fitness to work and not your health, which surely determines your fitness to work. A case of putting the cart before the horse!

At my first assessment back in 2009, I received 5 points when I needed 15 to get Employment Support Allowance, (ESA). I mistakenly made my own way to the meeting and wore a suit treating the assessment as a job interview. You should always dress smartly but not too smart and if you can you should be accompanied by an advocate. I appealed this decision not to award me ESA but due to stress, closed the appeal before it went to an employment tribunal. I claimed Job Seeker's Allowance, (JSA) and had to comply with an agreement which said I would look for paid work within 1 and a 1/2 hour's travel of my home and apply for at least 2 jobs a week. I did lose an application form once which the Jobcentre staff was tracking and I got sanctioned briefly before my Disability Employment Advisor, (DEA) showed her boss my job search record and said this had been an aberration.

In 2010, my Mum collapsed due to a brain haemorrhage, too much drinking I believe. I found her and got an ambulance to take her to hospital, Needless to say, my stress returned big time and I was readmitted to a Community Mental Health Forum, (CMHT) after being given a lengthy assessment by a social worker. I went for my 2<sup>nd</sup> WCA, got 0 points this time, was described as passive in the final copy of the report I saw and so appealed to a tribunal especially because the WCA assessor appeared to blame my health problems on my meagre alcoholic intake and not my Mental Health problems. She was not qualified at all in my view to make these recommendations which are decided on by a Department of Works and Pensions decision maker who doesn't know me at all. The judge at the tribunal was described as a 'Tartar' by the lady who accompanied me from the local Disability Forum, who handled all my appeal paperwork. She said the judge would dismiss my appeal as she, the judge had no empathy at all, she was right!

My 3<sup>rd</sup> WCA assessment was in January, 2013 and I was accompanied by an undercover journalist who secretly taped the process. I again got no points and

again not once did the assessor look up from her computer. They are in my view not qualified to assess Mental Health problems at all! I appealed and took the DWP again to a tribunal. A local organisation I was involved with wrote a letter which summarised in their view how much/little I could do, I had been volunteering for them since 2008 and they knew me. The disability forum delivered this letter to the tribunal. The tribunal judge's clerk phoned me on the morning of the appeal and said the judge had accepted my appeal and I didn't have to turn up to the court. So now I got ESA Support for 2 years which meant I had new financial security/money. I was offered some Freelance Permitted work which the staff at the local accepted as the work would be therapeutic.

That meant my next assessment would be in January, 2015 and towards the end of 2014, I was getting increasingly distressed/nervous so a friendly staff member at the local Job centre took my National Insurance number and checked the status of my claim. I was given another 2 years ESA Support until January 2017.

Unfortunately, rumours are that the local disability forum have closed and I will have to look elsewhere for support when appealing my claim in January, 2017.