



“ I ended up in financial difficulties when my income was drastically reduced at the same time as the coronavirus lockdown (I was in the high risk group). Health Watch told me about WHAM and after I got in touch Joe contacted me and gave me a voucher for my electricity. Then together we negotiated with my energy supplier to get my debt recovery payments reduced to the minimum, and applied to the E.ON Energy Fund to get the remaining debt wiped. It’s made things so much easier for me during this difficult time.”

Kayleigh Pullenger, Portishead

Kayleigh Pullenger was referred to WHAM by Health Watch at her GP clinic. Kayleigh and her two children were self-isolating during the COVID-19 lockdown as one of her daughters has multiple disabilities which put her in the extremely vulnerable group.

The family’s living expenses had increased while they were all isolating at home, but keeping the electricity meter topped up was proving particularly difficult. Their circumstances were made much harder by the fact that Kayleigh’s daughter had recently had her Disability Living Allowance (DLA) stopped; this was due to an error at the Department for Work & Pensions and happened when Kayleigh applied for a higher rate. The DLA cancellation in turn caused Kayleigh’s Carer’s Allowance to stop, meaning that the overall family income was severely reduced.

Because of the Coronavirus epidemic, no home visits could be undertaken. But WHAM was able to give Kayleigh and her family a great deal of support, as Joe Pitt explains ...

"I called Kayleigh to see how we could support her with the difficulties she was having. She'd already spoken to her electricity supplier, E.ON, who'd several weeks ago had given her £30 discretionary credit for her gas and electricity. But this needed to be repaid and the credit was running low, particularly on her electricity meter which was almost into the emergency credit. Kayleigh wasn't going to receive her Income Support for another few weeks, and was worried about going short, so we gave her a £49 electricity top-up voucher to help keep the family safe and comfortable.

"Kayleigh talked me through the problems she had been having with her Carer's Allowance claim and her daughter's DLA. The situation had become quite complex

KEY OUTCOMES

Through WHAM, Kayleigh benefitted in the following ways:

- £49 emergency fuel voucher given during a time of restricted income and high energy costs.
- £273.82 debt cleared with E.ON, relieving the financial pressure of repayments and also enabling a switch to a cheaper tariff.
- In-depth benefits advice provided by Citizen's Advice North Somerset, helping to resolve a complex benefits issue.



as Kayleigh made a new claim for the higher rate of DLA at the same time that she submitted the documents for a DLA renewal. In the confusion, the DWP had stopped paying DLA altogether, and at the same time stopped paying Kayleigh's Carer's Allowance. Kayleigh was unsure how to resolve this and was concerned that the family may lose these benefits as well as others. I referred Kayleigh to Citizens Advice North Somerset, and a caseworker has now taken up her case.

"Kayleigh and I also spoke about behavioural changes to reduce electricity and gas usage, and during this conversation she mentioned that her electricity top-ups weren't going as far as they should because there was a debt of £273.82 on her meter. As the debt had occurred due to the income-related problems described above, we applied to the E.ON Energy Fund for help to clear it.

"Thankfully, the application was successful, and E.ON told us that the debt would be cleared in four months if Kayleigh continued to top up the meter. In the meantime, the debt recovery rate was set to just £0.01 per week, relieving some financial pressure on the family.

"We've since heard that Citizens Advice has managed to sort out Kayleigh's benefit issues with the DWP; her DLA and Carer's Allowance have been reinstated and payment backdated for the period she missed.

"I am continuing to work with Kayleigh and in four months (when the debt is cleared) I will be helping her choose a new gas and electricity tariff to reduce her ongoing energy costs. We are also going to arrange for a smart meter to be installed so she can easily top up the meter without leaving home."

Joe Pitt



WHAM is funded by Bristol City Council, Bristol Energy and the Warm Homes Fund.

It is delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, Talking Money and We Care Home Improvements, Bristol and North Somerset councils, Citizen's Advice, Bristol Energy Network and AMS Electrical.

