Dear Special Rapporteur Team,

My brother John had learning difficulties and cerebral palsy died on 22nd April this year.  He had taken an overdose one month previously and was hospitalised.

He had money worries and had received huge bills from the DWP and housing after going on Universal Credit.  Before this John had very good mental health and was a positive happy person.

The circumstances leading up to his suicide attempt and eventual death were as follows:

My 60 year old brother who lived in sheltered housing, had been found fit for work by a DWP medical assessor.  Eventually he obtained an ill suited job via the DWP Work Programme giving out newspapers in various locations and where his wages fluctuated weekly. He went to the job centre with his wage slips every week to notify them of his earnings. He had been told by all the authorities such as the Job Centre and Housing not to worry about his benefits and then he was very shocked to receive bills of £1,000 and £500. By then he was not working again as his employer said he had special needs and could not cope with the job.

I do not understand why my brother on Universal Credit and who did everything he was told to do, received huge frightening bills due to the fact that neither, Universal Credit, or Working Tax Credit Benefit has not re-assessed him in a timely manner. John was a very law abiding person and did everything that DWP, etc. told him to do but was seriously let down by this department. His benefits had been in chaos for several years but no one cared from the various departments that John and myself contacted.

I feel strongly believe that due to austerity in this country, finding disabled people fit for ill suited work, and being one of the first batch of people to go on the chaotic Universal credit John's rights as a human being with disabilities had not been considered by the DWP and other authorities.

His individual needs had not been taken into account and DWP, etc. rely on algorithms to assess people and do not consider their personal circumstances or health.

At the same time John also tried at least six times to get a refund of Council Tax he had overpaid but each time he visited the LB Hammersmith and Fulham to say he was not working they said he had he had the wrong form or piece of paper. They did not help at all and fobbed off my obviously special needs brother, and he never received a refund from them.

Unfortunately John and myself were from mid January of this year also trying to access help from the Learning Disability Social Services team at Hammersmith and Fulham to solve some of his problems but were not listened to despite about 39 emails and phone calls saying he needed urgent help as we was ringing for an ambulance most nights in despair and was not eating.

John has been totally let down by this country and died in such tragic circumstances that could have been avoided if those charged with helping the vulnerable, the disabled, had thought about him as a human being - not as a nuisance and a statistic.

I do hope you can help and after reading your areas of concern see below have put below where perhaps Johns case may fall into your brief.  I am a so sad about John's death that could have been prevented and do need your assistance if it is possible.

(9) Have austerity measures implemented by the government taken adequate account of the impact on vulnerable groups and reflected efforts to minimize negative effects for those groups and individuals?

(16) What has the impact of Universal Credit been on poverty and the lives of the poor in the United Kingdom until now? It would be helpful to also distinguish the specific impact of Universal Credit on specific groups, including for example children, persons with disabilities, women and other groups which may be more vulnerable on the basis of their identity and circumstances.

(20) What use does the national government, as well devolved governments and local governments, make of such new technologies in the context of decision-making in the welfare system? A recent report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on ‘Algorithms in decision-making’ (May 2018) concluded that the central government does not currently produce, publish or maintain a list of algorithms it uses for public purposes, despite the fact that some of the new technologies that are employed, for example in welfare fraud and error investigations, can may have major negative human rights implications, especially for the poor. The Special Rapporteur is especially interested in learning more about concrete examples of the use of such new technologies by governments in the welfare system.

Thank you for your help,

Maggie

I give permission for you to use John’s details and use the above letter for publication.

This is the link below that is relevant to John’s case.

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/CallforinputUK.aspx