Makhdoom's story

The Welfare Benefits Advice team have provided Makhdoom with financial support and dedicated advice. This is her story.

The impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has deepened poverty and inequality in Bradford District and Craven. This financial strain can cause instances of stress, depression, anxiety, and other associated illnesses.

The Welfare Benefits Advice project provides local people with welfare benefits advice including benefits (from applications to appeals/tribunals), council tax, debt, employment, housing, and immigration.

Makhdoom first accessed the service in 2020 when she was struggling with her mental health having recently sought refuge from domestic violence in local supported accommodation, "I was isolated, scared and emotionally stressed. When I left my husband I lived in fear and couldn't trust anyone, I was scared in case he would find me.

"I had no one and I was having problems with bills, debt, housing and setting up direct debits."

Nazia is a Welfare Benefits Officer who supported Makhdoom with her benefits. She said: "Makhdoom experienced domestic and financial abuse and as a result she just didn't know where to turn, she had no support, she had nothing. This impacted her mental health and anxiety.

"When she came to me as a client, she was not in a good way. Her health was really bad so I had to support her in the best way I could. She initially came with one debt but when we carried out the assessment there was more, so I referred her to the Citizen's Advice Bureau who helped her with her multiple debts. After this she continued to come along to the Manningham Advice Centre for support with her housing, council tax, charity grants, disability benefits and universal credit.

Nazia supported Makhdoom to move out of supported accommodation into a flat, but it was unfurnished. "She literally had nothing; her benefits were still in process, so she had no money. She was sleeping on the floor and had no basic necessities. We got a charity fund for her to get some furniture and a one-off payment. Makhdoom got a bed, washing machine, fridge, and cooker.

“She felt relaxed and comfortable talking to me, which is why she opened up about other things. I made her feel welcome. We developed a relationship and I have seen a change in her. Physically her confidence grew, we could no longer see the fear in her anymore. We’ve come a long way.”

Mahkdoom said: “I did not know I was entitled to many of these benefits, especially for my health. Nazia helped me and as time went on, I opened up. I am very comfortable with Nazia. I tell all my friends about the service. Everyone here sympathises with you and listens to you – and it makes a big difference. They were there for me. I have confidence and the fear that was in my heart has now gone. I have overcome a trust issue and now I am financially stable. I’m really happy that the Manningham Advice Centre team are here to provide the service.”

The service is in high demand and there are many people on the team’s waiting list who they have not been able to support yet. Nadia said: “When we get funding cuts it’s a scare to us and a scare to our clients, because they rely on us as a backbone to fall back on. When we met Makhdoom she was absolutely destitute – and we did what we could.”

Since using the service, Makhdoom has secured a financial benefit entitlement of over £30,000 and continues to receive ongoing payments.

Thank you to Makhdoom for sharing her story, as well as the Welfare Benefits Advice team for their amazing work. You can view more human stories from our RIC programme on our partnership website.