



A Registered Charity serving North London and South Hertfordshire

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To whom it may concern

22<sup>nd</sup> January 2009

Please reply to:

**Re: Welfare Rights Unit**

I am dismayed to hear that this unit may no longer be funded and am writing to ask if this decision can be reviewed.

I have been working as a social worker for Noah's Ark Children's Hospice since June last year and prior to that was employed as a social worker in the Barnet Disabled Children's Team for over 3 years. My work has therefore been with families who have severely disabled children and, in my present job, children who are life limited.

I have found that there is no other comparable service available for benefits advice and the support offered by the Welfare Rights Unit is irreplaceable.

- I have tried on many occasions to liaise with staff at the CAB or to refer families to them. I have never been able to get through on the phone.
- Staff at the CAB are volunteers and, although they undoubtedly provide a very good service for many clients, this does not compare with the expertise offered by staff who are doing this work on a full time basis.
- Families have to queue to be seen at a CAB on a first come, first served basis. Parents with severely disabled children often cannot do this. It has been much more helpful for me to be able to refer a family by phone and e-mail and to be able to discuss the, often complex, situation with an adviser who is then able to work with the family by phone or visit if needed.
- Over the last few years, particularly since the advent of Tax Credit, it has become much more complicated for social workers to give correct advice. The Unit provides training for workers and advisers are readily available to talk through the family situation with social workers who can then continue to advise the family.
- The leaflet provided for staff each year on benefit rates is an invaluable resource which I carry with me for all family visits.

We are all aware that this is a time of great hardship for many families and advice on obtaining benefits is even more essential. It is not the time to cut back the support available.

Yours faithfully,

*Mary O'Toole*

Mary O'Toole  
Social Worker

