



Diane Morrison's client Keithley (pictured above)

Ashley's story

I am a part-time teacher and single dad of three. At the time when my case took place, my kids were 15, 10 and 9. One day, I received a letter telling me that I owed the council £17,000 and that my Council Tax and Housing Benefits payments had been suspended. Even though I work, it was not enough to cover all the bills, food and clothes for the boys and so I needed to claim top-up benefits. I found out about Hackney Community Law Centre through a friend. Diane made me an appointment. She assessed me to check I was eligible for legal aid. I just about was. We had quite a lot of meetings and it was incredible for me to see how the system worked. Diane was always reassuring and she went through the council's documents with a fine tooth comb. My confidence started to grow. Going to the first hearing was petrifying but Diane was amazing. She thought tactically about including the fact that I was a single parent. I would have never thought to have done that. Three weeks after the hearing, I got a letter saying we'd won. I had to read the judgment about 20 times before I believed it. I immediately felt a massive release of all sorts of things – the pressure, the stress - it just went. I could finally get on with my life again. I really hope Diane gets this award as she was outstanding. Without Diane, I would have been lost and not able to "take them on".

Keithley's story

I worked as a cabbie for six years then I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I was off for two months but when I came back to work my employers sacked me. They said there was no job anymore but I know that wasn't true as they had hired a new person to replace me. They sacked me at Christmas and it was planned. Other people knew I was going to be sacked before I did. Some of my other colleagues made monkey noises around me. I was under so much stress working there. When they sacked me they offered me only two weeks' pay. They didn't tell me that I should get legal advice about the offer. As it happened over Christmas, and I had no money, I felt forced to just accept it. I went to Hackney Community Law Centre and Diane took on the case. She wrote to the company for me but they didn't respond so she helped me to lodge an Employment Tribunal claim. The company had been making itself bankrupt every two years so every employee had to keep being reemployed on new contracts. I felt very badly treated. I was a loyal worker. I had always been on time. Diane really prepared the case well for me. She listened properly to what I had to say. She's a good lady. If the Law Centre hadn't helped me I wouldn't have been able to bring the case. I was still recovering from the cancer and there is no way I could have afforded private lawyers. I feel so much better now that the case has been dealt with. I have got justice. I am very pleased and grateful Diane was my solicitor.

Christine's story

I first got the letter in January 2012. The DWP said that I had made fraudulent claims for incapacity benefit and I had to come in for an interview. My support worker said not to worry about it as it didn't make any sense. When I went to the interview, the interviewer told me he could see that I was not well. But afterwards I received a letter claiming that I had been working two different jobs simultaneously whilst receiving incapacity benefit and that I owed the DWP £10,000. After about a year of going back and forth, I contacted Hackney Community Law Centre and I got through to Diane. For the first time I felt like someone was really listening to me. Diane immediately got hold of the DWP's paperwork to assess the case and said if I was not able to go to her because of my mobility problems then she would come to me at home. She took on my condition on as a job as well as my legal case. She didn't just do the law bit. At every stage she considered how I was. "Are you feeling well enough to go through the paperwork today?" "We can just do a little if you're not up to it". Diane was everything that you would need in a lawyer. When I was told I had won at the tribunal – after two long years - I just burst into tears. It was a weight off my shoulders. Before then I felt like I couldn't speak to anyone about it. I had felt ashamed about what was going on. I will never be able to praise and thank Diane and Hackney Community Law Centre enough.