**Parent Interview2**

**Date: 25 Feb 2022**

**Duration: 0:22:30**

Interviewer: Preamble  
So I thought it’s useful maybe just to start thinking about what you think it’s like for a family living on a low income these days, when we know everything is being squeezed.

Parent2: Well, to be fair, I know what that’s like, myself. I previously was a mortgage advisor, had a good salary coming in, didn’t have any children, was married, my partner had his own income, was relatively all right.  
  
And then, after being told I couldn’t have children, I found out, in my 40s, that it might be possible, so decided to try. And I had what I thought was a miscarriage, and then didn’t pick up from it. Went to see my GP, and eventually they discovered I was pregnant, at 13 weeks and 3 days. And the thought was that I’d probably lost a child; that it was twins, and I’d lost one.  
  
Because I’ve got high blood pressure, although it was fine in pregnancy, my waters broke at 24 weeks and 6 days, and I was rushed over to the [HOSPITAL NAME]. [childname] was born at 25 weeks and 1 day, in the [HOSPITAL NAME], and spent 16 weeks there. I spent 16 weeks at [Charitable accommodation].  
  
And that’s when also our income, and everything, changed. I had assumed that my pregnancy was going to go full term. I assumed that I would go on to proper pay, that I would have time to get it all prepared, and that I would go back to work part time. I hadn’t even put my sheet in to say I’d passed 20 weeks, when I was expecting to leave.  
  
My maternity pay started as soon as [childname] was born, although he was premature, so I lost out, and then we had the added expense of me living in [town name], and my partner having to come back to [town name], because he was self-employed, and we still had the mortgage, and we still had the bills to pay.  
  
So [childname] was born in June 2014, and our income has changed dramatically. I didn’t get to go back to work, because work wanted me to retrain for four weeks in [distant town name], which wasn’t doable, and they also wanted me to work three days a week as a mortgage advisor, which was what I was doing before I had [childname].  
  
So I became on to benefits, after I had [childname]. [childname] was on oxygen for the first 18 months of his life. I then didn’t go back to work as a mortgage advisor. Eventually, when he was about 18 months plus, I got a little job in [Supermarket name], in our town, in the town of [town name]. Our little [Supermarket name], as we call it. And did it for [no stress 0:05:24], and to get out.  
  
But I know the difficulties, financially. I had a good salary, and I’m probably now… me and my husband have split up. We were struggling before COVID. COVID knocked us over the edge. And yeah, I know exactly what it’s like. I am now on a disability benefit. I work one day a week.  
  
[childname] gets disability, because he's now got autism, and he’s got additional needs. So he’s got additional needs for autism, but he's also got additional health needs. Because he was born at 25 weeks, and needed oxygen at the start of his life, he’s classed as having chronic lung disease.  
  
He also is more susceptible to picking things up. So that means, if he’s ill, and I’ve got a shift at work, I lose that pay. COVID-

Interviewer: So you wouldn’t get any-

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: -paid time off from work.

Parent2: Yeah. COVID was particularly hard, financially, for us, because my son was put on the vulnerable list, in the March. So me and my husband were still together, we split that September. We had been struggling, and I’ve thought about it, and I think COVID just pressed the button, and we split.  
  
But he didn’t work, and because I was on tax credits when COVID hit, he couldn’t claim anything, because I was already getting tax credits. And tax credits wouldn’t alter what we got until at least eight weeks into COVID. Now, [childname] had to have 12 weeks off, and he was on the vulnerable list, and we had to all isolate with him, at the start of COVID, when it first hit.

Interviewer: Gosh, that must’ve been hard. Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah. And so, on top of that, I couldn’t go to work. My employer would’ve paid me to have the leave, if it had been me that needed to isolate, but because it was my son, [Supermarket name] decided not to pay me. So what I had to do was to take some of the holidays I’d accrued for that year, and then go unpaid. I lost £800 off my salary that year, which my salary isn’t big, but to lose £800 was a lot of money.  
  
Eventually, the tax credits gave us more money, and my ex claimed for the self-employed grants that came in, that were based on what his tax return had been previously. But we did a break on our mortgage. I was the one that was paying all the bills, so I was trying to keep the bills going.  
  
Things were more expensive, as well, because I was having to get things online, because we couldn’t go out shopping.

Interviewer: Yeah. Couldn’t go out.

Parent2: And, of course, everybody was rushing to get toilet rolls, and all those kind of things. And I can remember having a job ordering kitchen roll, and having to order it off some site, and getting like 12 kitchen rolls, just for the sake of that I couldn’t get it. So yeah, I do know what it’s like to have a dip in income.

Interviewer: And presumably you have quite a lot of interactions with the healthcare service, then, if you’ve got-

Parent2: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: If [childname] has health needs, and you’ve got your own back problem.

Parent2: Yeah. Well, we both have, to be fair. [childname] had a laser eye operation, with [town name2], so he gets checked over there yearly now. And we were going twice a year to see the consultant that was in special care, that kept an eye on him, but now he’s hit the age of seven. They look at them until they’re school age, and then it stops.  
  
We’ve been over there, because at one point they thought about taking [childname]’s tonsils out. [town name] won’t do it, because he’s too risky to put under anaesthetic, because he’s a previous preemie, and he’s had problems with his lungs in the past.  
  
So he’s also been over that way because he’s got an undescended testicle, and we talked about the possibility of doing two operations on the same day, because of the risk of [childname] with anaesthetic. And this was just before COVID hit.  
  
We’ve put the operations on hold, we haven’t had them done, and they’re thinking that he probably won’t need the tonsil one done, because he’s actually had less cases. COVID actually helped his health, to a degree.

Interviewer: Because he was isolating, maybe. Not out being exposed.

Parent2: Yeah, because we isolated, and [ \_\_\_ 0:11:10] he’s gone back to school. And the bubbles. The bubbles were really good, for us, because they helped his health, and we had a year of 100% attendance, which we’ve never, ever achieved.  
  
He wears a mask at school, to try and ward off him getting infections. Because what happens for us is that he’ll get an infection, but then some of the GPs aren’t keen to give him antibiotics, so he’s off longer. So that can impact our income, as well, because if my ex doesn’t have [childname], I can’t go to work, and if I don’t go to work, because I only work six hours, I don’t qualify for sick pay.

Interviewer: So you can’t get on that.

Parent2: The only time I’ve qualified to be paid when I was off ill is COVID. Because my son got COVID in October, and so did I, and it was the only time I felt safe about being off ill, because they actually paid us, because it was COVID. So yeah.

Interviewer: So if you’re having to take [childname] to the doctor, or to the hospital for an appointment, then would that impact on your salary, as well, then? Presumably, you won’t be able to take time off work.

Parent2: Yeah. I mean, for us, going to [town name2], like you said-

Interviewer: Yeah, well that must be an expense.

Parent2: I mean, I’ve never really sat down and thought about it, but yeah, we actually spend more when he goes to an appointment in [town name2].  
  
And I think, as well, because we’re from [town name], when we go across to [town name2], we think, “Oh well, we might go to the [shopping centre],” for that particular shop that we haven’t got over here. Or we might go to [shop], because we haven’t got an [shop]. So it becomes a dearer day.  
  
And then, of course, even food to eat, when you’re out. And the car park at the [hospital name] is quite expensive.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is.

Parent2: But you need to be in the multistorey one, because it’s near to where you have your appointments, isn’t it? It’s not a distance away, and you’re not going to be walking miles.

Interviewer: And do you get any help with those expenses, if you’re going, for travel and parking?

Parent2: I’ve never, ever looked into it. I don’t know whether we would or not. Because I’m on Universal Credit. When me and my ex split, it was particularly horrendous. Because I was Child Tax Credit with Working Tax Credit, I assumed that all they would do is take his name off it, and keep paying me. But they didn’t.  
As soon as I rang in, to say he’d left, I was told that my claim with Working Tax and Child Tax Credit ended, and I needed to claim Universal Credit. And then, when you claim Universal Credit, they won’t pay you for five weeks.  
  
So I had a bit of a nightmare time, because of that period, as well. I missed the next payment I was due with Working Tax and Child Tax, and then I had to wait five weeks to get what I was due from Universal Credit.

Interviewer: And so, for that time, you just had your own salary coming in, from your few hours a week? Or…?

Parent2: Well, I had my salary from a few hours a week, and [childname]’s disability benefit.

Interviewer: Oh yeah. And just had to try and manage on that. Yeah.

Parent2: And I was trying to manage on it. Thankfully, I had an overdraft. And, at the same time, I was trying to remortgage, to make life cheaper and easier, and to take my ex off the mortgage, but I couldn’t do it, because I didn’t know what my Universal Credit was.

Interviewer: What your income would be. Yeah.

Parent2: And again, they said, “Oh, you can take the statement, after you’ve been paid.” Well, I told them, on the 29th of September, that he’d left, and then I didn’t get my first Universal Credit until the first few days of November.

Interviewer: Crikey. So that’s a really long time to manage, isn’t it?

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you need that money.

Parent2: Yeah. And also, as well, there’s things like I qualify to get free prescriptions, and obviously I am, at the moment, getting quite a few different items too, as I’ve got high blood pressure, and I’m on medication now for life, and also with the back, and everything.  
  
When I was on the tax credits, I got a little card, or a letter, and I could take it into the chemist and prove I was on it. Obviously, I lost that, when I was going through this claim. So then I’ve had to buy a prepaid certificate, so that was more money that I paid out, until I got on to Universal Credit, and it tells you on it that you’d qualify for free prescriptions.  
  
It's also quite hard, as well, when you’re on Universal Credit, because you’ve got nothing to prove, like the little card or the letter. Because you’ve got an account online, and you can’t really print something off-

Interviewer: It’s hard to show to someone. Yeah.

Parent2: -that says that you’re on Universal Credit. You either have to print off a statement, which to me is embarrassing, because it’s got every bit of how they break down how much you’re going to get paid.  
  
Fortunately for me, my local chemist haven’t asked me for proof, but in the past, the dentist has wanted proof. And me and [childname] were going to the dentist yesterday, for the first time since COVID, and I was [bagging 0:17:21] myself that she was going to say, “Well, can you prove that you’re on Universal Credit?” because I didn’t really want to have to show-

Interviewer: Yeah, no, totally understand.

Parent2: -something that’s, like…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah. I’m quite proud, and I’ve worked 20-odd years of my life, and I don’t like being on benefits. And also, you get tarred with the brush of everybody else, and, “Oh, they’re lazy,” and what have you. And I’m not. I’ve worked, and paid my dues.  
  
I left school, and my parents said I either went back to do A-Levels, or I got a job. So I got a job in the August, and worked in a bank, and worked, from being 16, up until 43. So, full-time work. And then obviously [childname] comes on the scene, and everything changes.  
  
But yeah, it’s hard. This is another thing I wasn’t aware of. There’s a lot of things that would give you money off, but people don’t tell you. So, for example, I’m with [provider name] for water, and I rang them up, because I’m on a meter, because I live in a flat, and I’m on a meter, and my water was quite expensive, it was something like £50-something a month.  
  
And I rang them up, and they said, “Oh…” and it was only because this girl answered a few questions with me that we got a better deal. She said to me, “You’re on the Priority Services Register. Can you tell me why you’re on it?” And I said, “Well, yeah,” I said, “I’ve got a little boy that’s got health problems,” and I explained, and I said, “He’s also got autism.”  
  
And then she said, “But did you not know that we do a scheme? Because your usage of water might be more, because your son, with his autism, might like the sensory thing of water, or he might struggle with baths, and there’s more water used, because it’s splashed about, or whatever, we cap your water bill, and you won’t pay any more than a certain amount.”  
  
So my water bill’s gone down 20-something-pound a month, because I’m now on this scheme.

Interviewer: Wow. And that was-

Parent2: [ \_\_\_ 0:19:49].

Interviewer: -really just luck, that you found out, then, about it.

Parent2: Yeah. Yeah. And it’s luck that you find these things out. I’ve only got electric in the flat, so I’ve got ceiling heating, and obviously electrical appliances. The electric do a Warm Home Discount, where you get £140 back on your electric bill. Again, that was something that I found out along the way, but didn’t know about.

Interviewer: Yeah. So it’s not always clear what things you are entitled to, that could just help a bit.

Parent2: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And somebody else put me on to some card, MyCumbria, that gives you discounts when you go to places, and things like that. Again, something else I didn’t know about.  
  
I think there’s the stigma that you’re on lower income, but also there’s things that you qualify for that you don’t know about.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the stigma thing, would that maybe put you off things that you are entitled to, just because you don’t want to have to show your Universal Credit account, or those type of things? Is there a way to make it easier?

Parent2: [ \_\_\_ 0:21:08]. Yeah, there’s a stigma. I’m quite proud, and yes, I’ve been quite proud. It was like last year, in between the COVID, our local authority was giving people £100 back, because of the utility bills in COVID times. And the only reason I knew to claim that was because my cousin, she claimed it, and she said, “Do this.”  
  
At first, I thought it was a scam, but it was something that you got in touch with Citizens Advice locally, and they put you forward to this thing, and I got £100. It’s that scheme where you go into a little grocery shop, and you get the money back out. I can’t think what they call it.  
  
And I got the cash. I went into the local [Co-op 0:22:10], and I came out with £100 cash. And again, wouldn’t have known about that.

Interviewer: But you wouldn’t have known. Yeah. Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah. And I think, as well as there being a stigma about people claiming benefits, and, “Oh, you’re useless,” and, “You’re timewasters and scroungers,” and everything else-

Interviewer: Which is not true.

Parent2: -there’s a lot of things that you could benefit from. I could probably claim towards the expenses of coming to [town name2] for appointments, but I don’t know-

Interviewer: I bet you can. And I don’t know either, but I would imagine, if you’re on Universal Credit, there will be some provision.

Parent2: Yeah. I presume that, yeah. But nobody’s ever told me, and I’ve never, ever probed about it, to get it back. Probably just even if it was the car parking.  
  
It’s like, because I’m struggling with walking, and things like that, and mobility, I’ve applied for a Blue Badge, locally. Now, I know that some places, if you have a Blue Badge, you can park for nothing. Other places, you’ve got the Blue Badge, and you still pay. So there’s things like that.  
  
Because [childname] had a Blue Badge when he was on oxygen, so we had one back then, and we knew [ \_\_\_ 0:23:32] things. But there’s a lot of grey areas, I would call them. Things that you don’t know about, that if you knew about them, you would say, “Oh right, well I’ll claim that,” or, “I’ll do that.”

Interviewer: Yeah. And it feels like, in terms of healthcare, you know you were saying about sometimes the pharmacist will want proof that you’re on Universal Credit-

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: -before you get your free prescriptions. Would it be helpful, then, if there was better communication, so that it was just known-

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: -and somehow, professional organisations-

Parent2: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: -were communicating that information, so you weren’t having to say, and it was just all passed on.

Parent2: Yeah. And the other thing that I find quite embarrassing is, if, for example, my son’s admitted into hospital, like to kids’ ward locally, they’ll ask me about what our situation is. Do I work or don’t I work? And do we have social worker? And do we have…? And I feel that’s quite probing.

Interviewer: Do they explain why they’re asking those things?

Parent2: No. And they never [ask 0:24:45] me why they’re asking. And I’m like, “But why are you asking me this?” And, for example, my back has obviously gone downhill tremendously, and my parents very graciously said, “Get yourself a private appointment with somebody over at [town name2], like a neurologist, and we’ll pay for it.”  
  
So I did go and see the neurologist, the neurosurgeon, at the [private hospital], back in October, and he said he would see me on the NHS. And, of course, once you go on to the NHS, you see such a difference. I’ve seen him in the [private hospital], and it cost, I think it was, £220 for me going and seeing him for half an hour.  
  
I mean, he’d done his research. He had gone into other things. But then, as soon as you go on to the NHS, I get an appointment in November. The earliest appointment I can get to see him, in December, is April, on the NHS.

Interviewer: Yeah. The waiting list is a totally different thing, isn’t it?

Parent2: Yeah. Also, I went to see him, so of course that incurred money for going across to [private hospital], and then he asked for an MRI scan, which [town name] did, and then he sent me an appointment to have an MRI scan done with contract, but at the [hospital name].  
  
So then, in January, I went for a scan at the [hospital name], so that’s more money. You’re filling the car with petrol. I’m quite lucky, I’ve got a little Vauxhall Viva, that isn’t as petrol guzzling as the car I used to have, but even so, it’s still the petrol, the parking…

Interviewer: It does cost a lot, doesn’t it? Yeah.

Parent2: And, as you say, especially now. I mean, I’ve seen a difference in the [hospital name]. When [childname] was in, back in 2014, we used to walk to that bit where the food court is, and the end where the children’s outpatients is, and there was all sorts of different places you could pick up a cup of tea, and one thing or another.  
  
And when I went for my appointment in January, for the scan, and I had a quick glance, I thought, “Heck, it’s got really dear,” and there’s not many places to get something. And again, when you’re coming from a distance, you’re not sitting thinking, before you go out, “Well, I need a flask of tea to take with me, because I can’t afford the price [ \_\_\_ 0:27:47].”

Interviewer: Yeah. It takes some forward planning, doesn’t it, to do that.

Parent2: Yeah. I mean, when we go for appointments, I do make packed lunches, and stuff like that, and I have them in the car. Partly because my son’s quite picky about what he eats, and doesn’t like smells, and excessive noise, but partly to save the cost. So I do that quite often, that if I’m going somewhere, I’ll make a picnic that we’ll eat in the car. It’s far cheaper.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, no, I do the same. It’s much cheaper.

Parent2: Yeah. So it’s all those kind of things.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, generally, have you found relationships with staff in the hospitals have been good? Because you talked about them asking you these questions, about whether you’re working, and things. Or does it vary? Or…?

Parent2: It varies. And I have to say, there’s a bit of a feeling, over on this side, if you want anything done, and you want to get something done well, you go to [town name2].

Interviewer: Really?

Parent2: Yeah. If you were to have an operation, or whatever, a lot of people would say, “Well, I only feel safe about it if I go to [town name2].” There’s a lot of respect, over in Cumbria, for the expertise that [town name2] has got. There’s people I’ve spoken to, many a time, who have said, “Well, I wouldn’t let [town name] anywhere near my back,” or whatever. So yeah, there is.  
  
And I have to say that our experience… I mean, [childname] was obviously born at 25 weeks, and he went straight into special care in [town name2], and spent 16 weeks there, and we were tret by the staff almost like we were one of the family.

Interviewer: Ah, well that’s nice to hear.

Parent2: Yeah. And the consultants, we called them by their first name. We were included in the ward rounds every day. It wasn’t a big deal for us to ask a question. If there was something bothering us, we just went and said. And it really helped. Especially when you’re miles away from home.

Interviewer: Yeah. That must be really [ \_\_\_ 0:30:22].

Parent2: And we have nothing but admiration and respect for the people in there, because had it not been for them, our son wouldn’t be alive. To us, they’re miracle workers.

Interviewer: Ah. Oh, that’s nice.

Parent2: Everybody in the department, from the people that keep it clean, and keep the bedding, and everything else, up to the consultants. We have no end of admiration and respect, and we do believe that our son is here because of him being in [town name2].

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, I mean, that’s nice to hear, although it’s a shame you don’t have a facility in [town name] that could do the same.

Parent2: Well, the other thing was, when I was rushed in to [town name] Hospital, at 24 weeks and 6 days, because my waters had gone, I hadn’t a clue, because I hadn’t done the antenatal classes, because you don’t do them until 28 weeks. And I was pretty lucky, because when I went into [town name] Hospital, I was literally there, in and out in an hour, and had I not had a registrar who was ex [hospital name], I don’t know whether I’d have been as lucky.  
  
Because he knew there was a good chance that I might go into labour, and he also knew that if [childname] had been born under 28 weeks in [town name], he would’ve had to go to [town name2], or wherever there was a bed. And if that had happened, I would’ve given birth, then [childname] would’ve gone off in an ambulance without me, and then I would’ve been expected to make my own way, and what have you.  
  
By him sending us to the [hospital name], when he did… I mean, I went on the Friday night. I was with my husband, at the time, and there was a nurse and a doctor in the back of the ambulance with us, ready, in case anything happened. So they brought us to [town name2], and handed us over, and if anything had happened, I knew that there was experts on hand.  
  
And then, of course, I had [childname] in the [hospital name], so I then got to be on the ward for a few days, and then I went into the charity house, across the way, [Charitable accommodation].

Interviewer: Yeah. And was that provided for free, through the charity, then, [Charitable accommodation]?

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: You don’t have to pay to stay there?

Parent2: Yeah, [Charitable accommodation] is provided by The Sick Children’s Trust, and the patron of it is Michael Crawford.

Interviewer: Oh right. Oh, I didn’t know that. So that’s why it’s [Charitable accommodation].

Parent2: Yeah. Yeah, so that was [Charitable accommodation]. So there’s only a few, at certain hospitals throughout the UK. There is one at the [another hospital], I think, as well. And what they do is, they provide you with a room, and you have a shelf, or shelves, in the fridge, there’s a communal television area, communal kitchen, the bathrooms are shared as well, and you’ve got your bedroom. And then there was laundry facilities, so I could wash and dry.

Interviewer: So you’re kind of self-catering.

Parent2: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So it made life easier, in a way, because you darted from there, just over the car park, back into the hospital. But, again, the expense that we incurred then, as well. My ex came back, and because he was self-employed, he tried to split the week. He used to do four days here, and then come for a long weekend.  
  
But, initially, we were getting charged for the car being in the car park. And it wasn’t until somebody said, “Well, there’s some additional parking that you can use,” it’s where some of the staff use it, at the General, that we got a bit of a reduction.  
  
But the only problem was, it was a shuttle bus that took you between the [hospital name] and also the [another hospital], where you parked, but on a weekend it wasn’t available.

Interviewer: Oh, so it was just through the week. Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah. So my husband would sometimes come on a Thursday, later on, on a Thursday, or on a Friday, and go on a Monday, so that he could catch the bus from either end, and not have the worry of thinking, “Well, how do I get to the car?”  
  
And there was the odd time where we had to get a taxi, to go and get the car, because we had an emergency, or something cropped up, and we needed the car. So yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. All these are tricky things to sort out, aren’t they, when you’re dealing with-

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: -a very premature baby, and everything [ \_\_\_ 0:35:47].

Parent2: Yeah. And, to me, I think sometimes it’s… there’s a lot about car parking, and costing us a lot of money on car parking, just because our children are in hospital.  
  
And you were saying about the difference in staff. I mean, we left [town name2] special care, and we knew every member of staff that had dealt with [childname], and chatted away to many people, which helped.  
  
When [childname] came back to [town name], he was put in a separate room, because he might have an infection. And I was horrified. Because he’d gone from a room where there were four incubators in it, with two nurses keeping an eye on it.  
  
When he went to [town name], he went in a room on his own, and then next door to it was like a nurses’ station, in a room, with glass round it. And then, on the other side of it was the other babies that were in that room, four or six beds, and again, the nurses were in this station in the middle.  
  
And I think that they thought we were unusual, because when we came back, we asked them about, “Can we see the doctor?” and I remember one day saying to them, “Is it okay if I speak to the doctor?” “Well, what d’you need to speak to them for?” And we thought it was normal, and it was something that you would do.

Interviewer: You’d been used to that at [town name2]. Yeah.

Parent2: And it was so easy to do. But yeah, we got to [town name], and there was a difference in the staff, and we didn’t feel as involved. I felt very out of it. I also felt that I needed to be there always for my child, because I felt he was just going to get left in this room, if I wasn’t there. So when he was at [town name], I used to sit in the room with him for 10, 11 hours a day.  
  
The only good thing about [town name] against [town name2], at that time, and I don’t know whether it will have changed… I was expressing milk for [childname], because I was told it was the best thing to do. In [town name2], obviously, we had the facility to express milk, and we got the bottles, and you had the machine to do that, and you could borrow a machine.  
  
When I came back to [town name], there wasn’t the borrowing the machine thing, because I’d had to buy one, but they made an effort to feed and give me drinks. Because I was breastfeeding, in a way, I was entitled to free food and drink in [town name].

Interviewer: Which you hadn’t had at [town name2].

Parent2: Which I hadn’t had at [town name2]. Which, again, when-

Interviewer: You’d think they would.

Parent2: -you’re going through the situation that we were going through, makes a bit of difference. Because, again, that’s quite expensive, if you’re trying to buy food, because that’s the only…  
  
I mean, when I lived at [Charitable accommodation], yes, I had a shelf in the fridge, but I didn’t always want to use the communal microwave, or the communal oven. So I found that I didn’t always eat a hot meal. I didn’t look after myself the same way.  
  
Whereas, in [town name], because I was catered for, I just went next door to where the maternity unit was. But because I was catered for with a meal, it was better for me and my health-

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, sure. That makes a big difference.

Parent2: -and it didn’t cost me anything. So yeah, I think there’s a lot of things that could be improved on, to make you feel not as scummy about the way you are.  
  
I mean, I’ve come on to benefits, not through choice, but because of necessity, for [childname], and to give [childname] the best life, and to be about, if he needs me. That was why I didn’t go back to work in the same capacity. But it’s hard, and there’s stigma about stay-at-home mums.

Interviewer: Yeah. And there shouldn’t be, should there? No.

Parent2: And there shouldn’t be. I mean, I had [childname] at 43, and I was very blessed to have him, and I also have the added that I’m an older mum. So I’m now 51, with a 7-year-old, so again, you feel that you’re judged for that, as well. And you shouldn’t be.

Interviewer: You absolutely shouldn’t be, no.

Parent2: For example, I now qualify for free school meals, or pupil premium, at school, for [childname]. And I’m a governor of [childname]’s school, because I wanted to give something back and be useful, and when I sit in governors’ meetings, I squirm, at times, when they start going on about pupil premium. As if it’s a terrible disease, that you’re claiming pupil premium.

Interviewer: No, it’s not a nice [ \_\_\_ 0:41:30].

Parent2: I only did it because I qualified. I qualified, because of my income, and being on Universal Credit. I qualified for this. And it means that I get help towards uniform. So I get £25 a year. I get £25, where I go and cash it-

Interviewer: A year. Won’t help that much. (Laughter) Yeah.

Parent2: I cash it in July. I get it every July, and I go and cash it, to go on his uniform. I’m lucky, because that probably pays for a pair of shoes at [local outlets] for [childname]. Because I go to the [shop name] at the outlet. I don’t go to [shop name]in the town, because it’s far too expensive. And that’s all it’ll pay for.  
  
We don’t have the free school meals, because [childname] won’t eat them, so I send him with a packed lunch. But when he’s been off school, I’ve been getting supermarket vouchers for free school meals, and, I have to say, it’s helped. But, again, you feel like there’s a bit of a stigma, that you’re using these vouchers, these gift cards on your phone, in the supermarket. “Will they know? Will they know that I’m on…” you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. I know. And it shouldn’t be like that, should it?

Parent2: It shouldn’t feel like that. It shouldn’t feel at all like that. But yeah. There’s a lot of things that the world could get better at, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. So we’re coming to our last few minutes, but are there any practical things you can think of that would help, in terms of accessing healthcare on a low income? So to make it easier for you?

Parent2: I think if it was made easier, and if there was something that was popped on your Universal Credit, or something that was popped in with the information that you get, to say, “If you’re on this benefit, you can be entitled to this.”

Interviewer: Yeah. So you know what you’re entitled to.

Parent2: Yeah. I think if you knew what you were entitled to… you know? I think I’ve read, in one of the leaflets, for one of the hospitals, “You may be able to claim expenses back,” but it doesn’t say how, it doesn’t say in what circumstances, and, to be fair, I wouldn’t have taken that further.  
  
But if I knew that, because I was on Universal Credit, and because I’ve got an income under a certain band, then I would claim it back.

Interviewer: So a part of the [ \_\_\_ 0:44:09].

Parent2: Because I keep the car park tickets. I could work out all the mileages. Those kind of things. And that would mean a lot, really.

Interviewer: Yeah. Definitely.

Parent2: Especially when, for a lot of the experts, a lot of the children’s experts are in [town name2].

Interviewer: Yeah, so you have to do travelling.

Parent2: Yeah. So [childname]’s had to go to [town name2], because they thought he had a hernia, and that was when we went to see about, you know, his balls, and what have you. We’ve had to go across there for EMT, we’ve had to go across there after he was born, for his checks.  
  
For instance, when [childname] was born, and on oxygen, he was under community health here. The health visitor wouldn’t do anything, because community health were involved. So his one-year check and his two-year check, that would’ve been done by the health visitor, ended up being done in [town name2] by the special care unit people.

Interviewer: So you had to go all the way across. Yeah.

Parent2: You know, like they test them on how many Cheerios they can move, and what their movement is like, and things like that. Ours was done by the physio from the special care unit at [town name2], when we were over for an appointment.  
  
So yes, it’s lovely that we’ve got such great access to great help at [town name2], but I think sometimes, for the people in Cumbria-

Interviewer: But it’s a shame it’s not local for you, though. Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah, yeah. For example, when [childname] was in special care, had it not been for the social worker on the ward… she applied to the Family Fund, for getting money towards the expenses of my ex coming back and forth to [town name]. So we got money that we could use towards the fuel that we were putting in the car.

Interviewer: Right. But that wasn’t really obvious to you, if she hadn’t-

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: -let you know. Yeah.

Parent2: Yeah. Recently, as well, I’ve got involvement with a local charity, based in West Cumbria, called [charity name], and it’s an autism charity, and I’ve gone on their Facebook pages. They’ve put on one of their Facebook pages, obviously, because of our situation, disability, and all that, about applying to the Family Fund.  
  
So then I went on to the Family Fund, and I applied to get a Haven break. So I got money to enable me and my son to go to Haven for four nights in May. It took six months to get it-

Interviewer: But you got it.

Parent2: -and we had to go through an assessment. But again, something I didn’t know about.

Interviewer: Yeah. So there’s something about-

Parent2: [ \_\_\_ 0:47:25].

Interviewer: -communicating those opportunities, and things.

Parent2: Yeah. Yeah, I think there’s a lot of things that yes, you’re on a low income, but genuinely, I’m on a low income because I’ve put my son before anything else, and his needs. Because there’s times where I’ve had to whiz up to school, because he’s had a febrile convulsion, and he’s ended up in hospital. Or I’ve needed to be there because he’s struggling, or whatever.

Interviewer: Yeah. So you want to be around for him, don’t you?

Parent2: Yeah. So I’ve had to be around, so that’s why I didn’t go back to work during the week.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

Parent2: So yeah. Yeah, yeah. Does that help?

Interviewer: That’s really helpful. It’s been great speaking to you. I’ll switch my little recorder thing off now, Parent2. So I’ll just do that.

Parent2: Yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you very much indeed.

END AUDIO