**Parent Interview Group1**

**Date: 16 Mar 2022**

**Duration: 1:05:00**

Interviewer Preamble

Interviewer What do you think it's like for people living on low incomes these days?

Interviewer It's very, very hard. It's a big struggle on a on a day-to-day basis. Especially, I mean I don't drive, and I live in a little village, and we have a bus once a week. So, if I need to go anywhere other than that it's taxis or trying to get lifts off people and you just don't have the money. It's like this week it's my, my poor week as I call it, I get like £63 today to last me a week and out of that I've got my bills to pay my food to pay. You know, I've got a teenage daughter, it's just impossible to live on it. You know it's not a lot, is it?

Interviewer No, it's not.

Parent1 Especially since everything is going up, I mean, we've been obviously notified now that all the Bills are going up, so how are people supposed to manage? It’s ridiculous.

Interviewer And does it impact on you being able to access healthcare?

Interviewer Yes it does, because I have to try and arrange obviously doctors’ appointments or anything like that, around trying to go in on the bus and because obviously with more so doctors now it's all done on phones. And obviously they, you ring them then they say the ring you back but, you're not always, I mean, you're having to sit around all day waiting for them to get you back or get back to you, should I say, and then if they turn around and say, oh you come in for an appointment then you have to get a taxi or something in so it affects it a lot. It stops me from ringing the doctors more times than enough to be fair.

Interviewer OK, and does this impact upon the health care for your daughter?

Parent1 Yes, it does, because we've lost our dentist and during covid, obviously you couldn't make appointment and now my daughter does not have well, none of us have a dentist because we didn't, couldn't get in for appointments and it was emergency appointments only, they've now kicked us off the register. So, she's desperate to go out with dentist, but I'm gonna have to see if I can try and get her into the hospital at [town name], which then means I've got to get a taxi into [small town name] and then a train from [small town name] to [town name].

Interviewer And then the walk from the station.

Parent1 Yeah, I can’t walk very far as it is. So yeah, it affects a lot, to be fair, it really does.

Interviewer Yeah, I mean no doubt having just one bus must be really problematic.

Parent1 It is, yeah 'cause when I first moved here there was two a week but now it's on a Thursday. It goes in at half past ten and comes back at one o'clock. So, you've got to try and do everything you need to do in that time and trying to carry shopping back on a little bus, 'cause it's only little fell runner. So, it's only like 13 seats. So again, it's it's a big, big problem.

Interviewer OK, so in terms of appointment scheduling, does the timing and availability of appointments cause problems for you?

Parent1 Yes, big time because like I say, UM. As you probably know, you’ve got to ring your doctors at 8:30 in the morning, to try and even get a hold of the doctor. And then you've got to try and wait for them to get back to you. And it's all done on a stupid timescale. It's, it was easy when you could ring and say right, I want an appointment, but you've got to wait for them to ring you back and then decide whether you get an appointment. It's yeah, it's a nightmare. I mean my daughter last year,

Yeah, last year, she had really bad tonsillitis and her glands swelled up. Anyway, I left it for a day or two thinking it'll go down, she has problems, but then we finally got hold of a doctor and they just said oh ‘just give her fluids’. I ended up having to take at a hospital where she collapsed and even when we got to the hospital, they said to us ‘oh you have to do it online. You have to make an appointment’, and as it is, luckily, not luckily but she collapsed so they did take us in, otherwise they were gonna make us go back and try and to do it online.

Interviewer That was for A&E?

Parent1 Yep Yep in [small town name].

Interviewer OK, for the for the walk-in centre.

Parent1 Yeah, only you're not supposed to be able to walk in now. You've got to ring that, is it one, one, one thing? Yeah, and you've got to try and do it online. You can't even really walk in now.

Interviewer And do you have Internet access?

Parent1 And I mean I, I live in a small village, but luckily, yes, we've just changed our Internet so we do have Internet access, but I would need, I need it for my daughter anyway for school. But she has, you know she has a lot of work to do.

Interviewer Yeah, I could imagine for quite a lot of families with low-income Internet access might be a problem.

Parent1 Yeah it is. 'cause I mean it's not the cheapest of things, obviously and UM. I have got. I mean I had the cheapest one last time, but it wasn't fast enough for my son and my daughter, so I had to upgrade it. But I literally have just the broadband. I don't use a home phone line or anything like that, so I know I've got that set amount going out, but even that's hard enough, but I can't not have it.

Interviewer You don't have to answer, do you get free telephone calls?

Parent1 No, no,

Interviewer So that means if you're ringing the doctors, UM, you're having to pay for those calls.

Parent1 Yes, yes.

Interviewer So, uhm, I don't know what your doctor’s like when you call, but mine, for example, it answers and then you're waiting.

Parent1 Yeah, to speak to someone. Yeah yeah, you ring at 8:30 when it's supposed to start, it's it's always engaged so you constantly on recall and then it'll say, oh, you are, say, tenth in the queue or whatever. It's very rare you get down to one or two in the queue. So, then you have to sit and you know you’re having to sit and wait. And that's only to speak to the receptionist, never mind the doctor.

Interviewer So, are you working?

Parent1 No, I haven't been working for a long time. I'm signed off.

Interviewer Okay, I was just going to ask if appointments impacted on your ability to work or impacted on your earnings. But I would imagine if you're taking your children, does the scheduling of appointments have effects for their education?

Parent1 Yes, uh, I mean my son. A few years ago, he went through a really, really bad time. He didn't go to school all through year 10 and now my daughter is going through a similar thing. She's 13 and she's being bullied at school so she's, her dad’s just brought her back today, actually, she's in her room, and so, their education and obviously because we have school bus as well. If they miss that bus that means she's got to miss a day at school. So, you know if it's it's, if that bus doesn't turn up for any reason, or she misses it. Like I say, that's her done, she's basically stuck.

Interviewer Okay. So, is there a way that GPs could better organize the way they do appointments? Is there a way that it would work better for you?

Parent1 Yes, I think they need to rethink the whole system, to be fair. I mean they've changed it a few times but being out in a small village with no transport, having to wait for them to respond back to us, it's an absolute nightmare, and because they don't even, I know it's down to the receptionist a lot of the time, but they can't even give you a time, they'll just say, oh, they'll ring you back this afternoon. Or you know they'll ring you back when they can or whatever. So, I think they just don't assume that people are stuck for getting into town. You know they just, they just plan it assuming that everybody has vehicles and everybody’s nearby. I mean [name] had a, my son had an appointment come, for to see a specialist couple of weeks ago and they wanted us to be into [town name] for nine o'clock in the morning. Well living here it's a nightmare 'cause for one even if you wanted a taxi, a lot of them do school runs so you know you're absolutely stuck. So, I think a lot of the times that the whole system needs to be rethought for people like us who are stuck out in a little village.

Interviewer So can I just get some sort of practical information then? So, you're living in a village outside of [small town name]?

Parent1 I am yeah

Interviewer But if you needed hospital appointments, presumably when you took your son that was to [town name].

Parent1 Yeah.

Interviewer So what's the distance?

Parent1 It's 20 erm, it’s about 25, 26 mile away so like I say to get to [town name], you’ve either got to get a taxi from [village name] to [small town name] and then a train from [small town name] to [town name] or we've still got to get from [village name] to [small town name] and then get a bus which the bus takes about 45 minutes. The train takes about 10 minutes, but they don’t run as often. And of course, the prices have just gone up really badly on all of them,

Interviewer and how much is that going to cost you then for a taxi into [small town name]?

Parent1 For a taxi into [small town name] its £15 each way.

Interviewer And then how much would you train fare or bus fare be?

Parent1 The train I think it's about 7 or 8 pound return now and. Yeah, they're about so that would be for both of us. So, you’re looking, by the time you got taxis and that, you're looking at 50 odd pound before you even get to the appointment.

Interviewer Absolutely.

Parent1 I mean, when I’ve got like a week like this week where I literally only get 60 pounds anyway, what am I supposed to do? So, you have to cancel appointments or work around it.

Interviewer Yeah, and I mean as well as for your son, that's quite a lot out of the school day, isn't it?

Parent1 He's 18 now, so he's not in school, yeah, there's just my daughter, She's 13. She's still in school.

Interviewer But, if you were taking your daughter for a hospital appointment, she would pretty much have to lose the whole day, wouldn't she?

Parent1 Yes, yeah. By the time we would travel in there and back, it's yes I have to miss the whole school day. It's not literally a 5-minute job.

Interviewer And where is your GP at?

Parent1 In [small town name]

Interviewer So if it's a non-bus day you're talking about £15 there and back to get to the GP.

Parent1 Yes.

Interviewer So are there any ways you think that families on low incomes can be supported to access healthcare?

Parent1 I think a couple of years ago there was, when the buses were stopped, there was some talk of like volunteer driving schemes and stuff like that, but in a small village, there's not always a lot of people who are willing to do stuff like that. I don't know, they just need to think of another way, for people like me who can't drive and can't get access to places like the hospital and everything else, you know it's just it. It all needs rethought. I know it's a hard thing to think about, you know, to say well, what do you do? But it is a nightmare, an absolute nightmare.

Interviewer So do you know of any way you can go for help, financial help towards the costs?

Parent1 No, I have no idea about anything that even exists. Because you try to, somebody messaged me not long ago and said, oh apparently, if you get in touch with the Citizens Advice, there's £200 towards your fuel bill, not your fuel bill, your heating costs and stuff. But when it's going up 54%, that's that's not gonna go very far. I mean, yeah, it would help. But with everything else. If you've got to think about support on top of that to get to doctors and stuff like that, it's another thing you’re having to constantly think about, well in advance.

Interviewer So if I move on. Uhm, have you ever been in the situation where you or your children have needed to attend multiple appointments to get a diagnosis?

Parent1 Yes, my son a few years ago had something called Jumpers Knee syndrome. So he, this particular summer he was in plaster one leg and then the other and then we had to go for Physio, erm every single week in [town name] for him to try and repair and build his legs back up again. And now that that obviously as you can imagine every week for about six weeks that was an absolute nightmare.

Interviewer And that whilst you were going through that, did anyone ever talk to you about assistance with the transport costs?

Parent1 Nothing at all. No.

Interviewer Did that cause other problems for you?

Parent1 Yeah,

Interviewer I mean obviously you've explained very clearly about the transport problems. Are there other problems caused by having to do that to keep going backwards and forwards?

Parent1 Yeah, well, at that particular time, obviously there was my daughter to try and arrange to get back for it as well. Plus, I suffer quite badly myself with a lot of different things. So, for me to walk any distance or be on my feet for any length of time, it's it's. It's very stressful. Plus, obviously the stress of going through, taking my son to hospital every week to try and get him back on his feet. It was a very very stressful time for all of us.

Interviewer And did you say that was in [town name]?

Parent1 Yes, that was in [town name]. Yeah, the physio 'cause of the one [small town name] wasn't advanced enough so we had to go to a special group therapy in [town name].

Interviewer Thanks, thanks for that. Have you ever been in a situation where you've had an emergency admission to hospital?

Parent1 Just with my son up with like sport injuries, but it hasn't been like from home. It's it's been from like I say, some kind of sports thing, but that's been an ambulance job or whatever.

Interviewer So presumably then you would have to get there to join him.

Parent1 Yes yeah, uhm. I mean his dad and lives up at [another small-town name] which is 6 miles the other way to where we are and so obviously with things like that, he gets there before me usually. And then yes, I have to get there.

Interviewer So when you arrive is there, can you describe sort of how you manage when you're at the hospital? Are there things like affordable food?

Parent1 No, I mean all there is at the hospital is like a [café name] which, I'm sure you know, they're not the cheapest of places. But no. I mean, it's not, there's only one, I think there is a hospital restaurant which is further down, which isn't as expensive. But if you sat upstairs where the appointments are, it's very, very expensive. I mean, you're looking at nearly £3.00 for a coffee.

Interviewer And did your son ever have to stay over overnight?

Parent1 Yes, he’s had to, because again, sports injuries, he broke his wrist and so it had to be put into, back into place. And so yeah, his dad ended up having to stay with him 'cause obviously he drove, but I had to come back for my daughter.

Interviewer So were there things like nightwear and toiletries available for overnight stays?

Interviewer No, you've got to take your own stuff. Even when I had my daughter, they don’t even supply, I mean, when I had my oldest son who's in his 30s. You know the hospital supplied everything, but now you've got to take everything in nappies, bottles, clothes, everything.

Interviewer So how many children have you got at home now?

Parent1 I've got two, two at home now; I've got two older ones who don't live with me anymore. I've got my 18-year-old son and my 13-year-old daughter.

Interviewer Yeah, it's changed, hasn't it, over the years. Have you ever had experience of being discharged from hospital out of hours?

Parent1 Yes. I am I lost a baby uhm? Before [son’s name] so it was over 18 years ago and I had to go through the whole experience of going through the labour, so it was late at night when I came out. I could hardly walk, but they were quite keen to discharge us, and you know, not keep us in, yeah and yeah, it wasn't, it wasn't a nice experience to have to go through that, but coming out in the middle of the night. It was very, very hard.

Interviewer So thinking generally about families on low incomes, what do you think the main problems are for them in accessing hospital care?

Parent1 Uhm, well, obviously transport’s one, having the money to get in and out of places. Getting the appointments in the first place, it's it's really hard, and the fact that you don't have the income, you can't even turn round and say, ‘Oh well I'll just book something in and pay for it separately’. You know, because it, yes I have to rely on the NHS but. It does a good job in general. But even with all this, this Covid carry on, you know, I mean, I've had all my Jabs and stuff, but. It's just accessing things, I mean they bring apps out all the time saying access this online, access that online, but it's still not easy. You've still got to go and see your doctor in the end, and when you've got a very, very low income like I do, you just can't do that. You can't just jump in the car and say, right? I'm gonna go. I mean even taking, I know this is completely different, but even taking my dog to A to a vet. I took her in a taxi once and she was sick so I can't even take my dog to the vet's now because it's not a good traveller. Well, there's just, there is nothing for people like us. You know nothing at all, no different facilities or whatever.

Interviewer So what about communication, in what way is information about your health and the treatments you need communicated to you and as your children’s mum.

Parent1 Well, obviously everything is done online. Now you know pretty much everything. But I have a lot of ongoing things, waiting for appointments coming through and it affects my kids badly because I, literally, I mean I'm 57-year-old and I feel like I'm about 90 half the time. It's not good for their wellbeing either seeing me like this, but just trying to get things organized, it's yeah. I mean I I suffer with depression as well, on top of everything else. So, most of the time I just sit in my bedroom, away from everything and it's. It would be easier if I could go and talk to somebody or just go and talk to the doctor, you just can't! Like I say I put off ringing them purely because it's too much like hard work.

Interviewer So when you sort of communicating with health care services, you know, do they use language you can understand?

Parent1 Yeah yeah. I mean basically you ring the doctor surgery and then there's a long, obviously phone message saying about Covid and about this, that and the other UM. And then obviously you just get the receptionist, but other than that it's pretty simple, but you just need the right person to speak to. So, a lot of the times you can't get past the receptionist.

Interviewer Yeah is there any information about your circumstances that you think it would be helpful for healthcare professionals to share with other professionals that you're likely to come in contact with? So, for example. If your GP was to refer you or your children for an appointment at the hospital. Do you think it would be useful if they shared your financial situation with them?

Parent1 It might be an advantage if they explain that for a hospital appointment, for a start getting there with a stupid time. But yeah, I mean in some circumstances, yes, but others maybe no.

Interviewer What sorts of information would you not want shared?

Parent1 Uhm, I don't know to be fair. Because when you're on about like explaining about my financial circumstances and I mean. I would like to think my normal doctor knows what's going on, but I think they've got enough other things going on and so I don't know if my sort of circumstances or anybody else’s, would have an effect on it that much to be fair.

Interviewer What about if the doctor was to, you know, to point out that you live in a remote community and that transport’s an issue, would that be helpful?

Interviewer Yeah, yeah, that would, that would be a better thing, and because, another example, I was going to pain management course in [town name]. And that was a six-week course. But the first time I went there, it was absolutely in the middle of nowhere in [town name]. I'd never been in my life. It took me an hour to find it. So, by the time I got there, I was in complete agony, but luckily there was a woman there who I knew. So, she was giving me a lift every week, and so something like that. It's alright them suggesting, ‘yeah, go and do this pain management costs for six weeks’, but it wasn't easily accessible.

Interviewer Was is at [clinic name]?

Parent1 Yes it was yes. I didn't, you know, I've never been there in my life. It took me ages to find it.

Interviewer You see, that's perfect if you've got a car.

Parent1 Yeah exactly

Interviewer But not if you haven't.

Parent1 Yeah. Even trying to find the place I got off the bus on the main road thinking it would be easier to find from there, but I was getting sent in one Direction and then another, like I say, actually it took me nearly an hour 'cause I thought I'd give myself plenty of time to go and have a coffee beforehand. But I literally got in as the class was starting because I couldn't find it. So yeah, it's easy. When you've got like I said, things like that when you've got vehicles or transport some sort, but when you again like me, who doesn't then? You can't, yeah well.

Interviewer Did they supply a map?

Parent1 Yeah, I tried with a map. I tried with my Google Maps on my phone, I still had to ask loads of people and I still got lost.

Interviewer So in in terms of relationships, to what extent do you feel that you build trusting relationships with health care staff?

Parent1 I think it's very hard these days to build any kind of relationship. I mean, I've had the same doctor for, well, as long as I've been here, but getting to see that doctor, you just obviously get any doctor that's available, which is fine apart from the fact they don't know your circumstances. So, you're trying to explain something to them, and because you don't know them. Yeah, they have to look up on your records, but you feel like you're doing like repeat, repeat, repeat because you're trying to say things and because they haven't got any kind of relationship with you. I mean, I know doctors are run off their feet. I mean, I know they are, but you just, there's no relationship there whatsoever. Not like it used to be..

Interviewer OK. Can you think of ways that relationships might be better?

Parent1 These days no because the doctors just don't have the time, they’re literally having a conversation with you on the phone and what others, if you're not doing face to face with people and you're not getting to find out, you know it's it's, I can't find a way that things are gonna change 'cause there's a lot of pressure on them as well as people like us who can only get there at certain times. But yeah, I will find it hard for a relationship of any sort with doctors or any kind of medical. Healthcare these days.

Interviewer Uhm. Do you think there are particular reasons why families on low incomes may struggle more than others?

Parent1 I think everybody is pretty much the same, other than well, again, obviously places like where we live and not driving and not having transport, and I think it's hard for anybody these days to have any kind of relationship or easy way of getting to doctors. Unless you're absolutely minted and you get private health care, of course, which I think you know these days for anybody trying to get access to any kind of health care, whether it's dentist, doctors, whatever, it's just. Yeah, it's. It's really, really hard, really hard.

Interviewer OK, thank you and I've come to the end of my questions. UM, is there anything I should have asked you?

Parent1 No, no thanks. You've covered quite a bit up. Yeah, but if you need to know anything else, just let me know.

Interviewer Yeah, I mean, do you think there's any other problems that families on low income are experiencing in getting their health care?

Parent1 Just the whole the whole thing in general, I mean like I said they, they just assume everybody has transport and everybody can drive, but if you if you can't afford to keep getting to places like me, you just put off going and now my health, you know my health deteriorates, gradually, waiting for scans, waiting for doctors’ appointments. But because you can't get through to people and you can't get to places it puts a lot of pressure on things in the long run because you just can't get to them in the in the early stages and then things have gone a lot worse.

Interviewer So you mentioned you mentioned right at the start that your daughter's starting to struggle to go to school.

Parent1 Yes.

Interviewer Are you being supported with that?

Parent1 I am having a meeting at her school next week because we are also with family support, and so I talk to them. So we're just waiting to have a school meeting, but even with you know something like that, it's getting to the school. Yes, she can go on the bus, but I’d have to get a lift or a taxi in, just even to have a half an hour meeting with the schoolteachers. But yeah, I mean they are quite supportive and it's just we need to get on top of it before it gets as bad as what it did with my son.

Interviewer Is that something that you might need to access health care for?

Parent1 Yes, because it's getting to the point where we'll have to go to a doctor’s appointment and then if she needs referred on to counselling or something like that. Again, that's a long list of appointments and waiting for appointments coming through and getting to places and where the appointments are going to be. So yes, it could cause a bit of a problem, really.

Interviewer And does that make you worried?

Parent1 It does because it as well as the stress of her any way, it's just stressful trying to get, wait for appointments to come through. Getting to the appointments. Having the money to get to the appointments and it's it's, it just goes on and on and on. You know there's just one thing after another, and that's not just one thing, there's a whole list of things. So yeah, completely stresses you out.

Interviewer Yeah, and makes you feel more unwell.

Parent1 Well, yeah, exactly, uh. I mean just doing the simple things and then I have to lie down. UM, 'cause I have dizzy spells. I have headaches. There's a long list of things, but yeah, it just adds to what already is ongoing.

Interviewer OK then [name], thank you very much for talking to me. I'm going to switch the recorder off ….

**END AUDIO**