



CASE STUDY

MS L



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The Green Doctors visited Leeds resident Ms L in November 2019.

Suffering with multiple health conditions that often left her feeling tired, lethargic, and weak, Ms L had recently missed two appointments at her local Job Centre. Having informed the Job Centre that she would not be able to attend on both occasions due to health complications, Ms L did not expect to be given a 300-day benefit sanction for non-attendance. Upon appeal the sanction was reduced to 150 days, leaving Ms L to face the winter with no income.

An underactive thyroid leaves Ms L particularly vulnerable to the cold, potentially exacerbating other existing health conditions as well as encouraging new ones. An Age UK study revealed that cold homes currently cost the NHS £1.36bn a year.

Ms L would be surviving the winter on Local Authority hardship loans, to be repaid once her benefit sanction had ended. The process of applying for such loans can be an uncomfortable experience, with each item required having to be detailed. For adults accustomed to living independently this can feel exposing, and be a painful reminder of their situation. Additionally, Ms L's flat is heated by notoriously expensive and inefficient storage heaters. The heaters were not modern or well insulated, and the heat from them had usually dissipated by the afternoon. This left Ms L without heat during the evening and night. The cost of charging the heaters was becoming increasingly prohibitive, and Ms L needed a heating option that afforded greater flexibility and control.

Due to the recent price cap on prepayment meters, there is little difference in price between suppliers, and paying via a credit meter would not be suitable for someone in Ms L's situation. In order to ease the burden of winter energy bills the Green Doctors applied for the Warm Homes Discount for Ms L, providing her with £140 electricity credit. A portable oil filled radiator was also provided. This would allow Ms L to heat only the parts of the home required, and when it is needed.

The oil-filled radiator has an integral thermostat, giving Ms L the control required to keep warm whilst managing on a tight budget. Given the level of vulnerability in the household, the Green Doctors felt it necessary to seek further support. Searching online identified several charitable organisations offering hardship grants to those in exceptional circumstances. The Green Doctors applied on behalf of Ms L and were awarded £200. An agreement was made with the benefactor that a portion of the grant would be used to top up Ms L's electricity meter, ensuring that she would be able to keep warm over the winter. Food and household supplies were purchased too, stocking Ms L's kitchen with fresh and tinned food to help her keep healthy. The remainder of the grant was given in cash to Ms L, providing a means to regain independence; boosting self-esteem in a difficult time.