

Why was this Guide written?

Prior to developing disabilities, I was unfamiliar with the assistance, benefits and entitlements that were now available to me, and how they could and should be claimed. In being unable to work and financially support myself, my circumstances and lifestyle dramatically deteriorated. Unfortunately, with limited energy, I became isolated and invisible. As a result, I still remained unaware of the wide variety of assistance that was available to me, in order to ensure a minimum quality of life.

However, there are many benefits, both financial and practical, from many organisations, that are available to us as 'rights' which when used, help us to partially restore our quality of life and relatively independent living, as well as helping to enable us to better lead more fulfilling lives as we did before we developed our disabilities.

Unfortunately, nobody seems to know all of these entitlements, as they are available from many different organisations. It is a bit of a 'Catch 22', in that before we can get the assistance or benefit, we need to know what to ask for. However, nobody tells us what we need to ask for, or from whom. Over a period of time, I have been increasingly surprised to discover the assistance and entitlements that I have missed and may request.

Quite often, the relevant organisation has formally requested me, sometimes to reply in writing, as to why "I have not applied for it before?". To which, my inevitable irritated answer has always been "Because nobody told me!"

Since joining the county support group for my own health condition, ***Hampshire Friends with M.E.***, I have networked and discovered even more!

I have felt that with all this knowledge available, I should first of all write it all down in one list, as some are renewable and I will need reminding. In addition, I felt that I should also pass this knowledge on to others, who may be in a similar position to me, and who may feel hopeless and unaware of what assistance they can achieve. But, this list has grown very quickly, from one page to its current size and is still growing quite rapidly, to a booklet in excess of 80 pages.

If anybody knows or discovers more, or has noticed any mistakes or omissions, please let me know via my contact details below or **Barrie Hill at Fareham Shopmobility**. This will enable us to continue to pass on, up to date knowledge and help, to those newly disabled and still working their traumatic way through the maze that we may have already travelled.

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