



#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES





**#WE ARE
BENEFICIARIES**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide mandatory training for all WINZ office staff that improves empathy, cultural competence and communication skills. This must include an understanding of implicit bias and racism.
- Supervision and mental health support for all staff.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.
- Create incentives for staff to provide quality services and not targets about reducing number of beneficiaries.
- Develop anonymous online feedback and evaluation forms for people accessing WINZ support.
- Strengthen policies and processes for people with mental health issues so that staff are better equipped to support clients (e.g. in the way they have conversations, gather information) and so that the support people receive is easier to access and more transparent.
- Create better links between agencies so that support to people is more cohesive (e.g. the Mental Health Inquiry could look at the way WINZ could work with health and other agencies to better support people).
- Ensure that WINZ staff are only offering secure employment options.
- Support people pursuing further education or up-skilling courses for long term employment solutions.
- Re-look at policies around work in the community, caregiver and child care so that unpaid work is more appropriately valued.
- Create policies and practices that enable sustainable employment situations, for example, valuing part-time paid work as part of a person's wider work and family life.
- Do not offer inappropriate or illegal employment options
- Stop the sanctions and obligations.
- Allow people the right to refuse employment.
- Encourage staff to work with the interests and strengths of the person in front of them when seeking courses or employment options.
- Staff should not question people's medical conditions, experience of abuse and/or sexual violence.
- Improve staff supervision and support and training overall so that they understand WINZ policies and apply them in ways that ensure people are given access to the full range of support they qualify for. This includes making sure staff are providing appropriate employment options and making sure staff are equipped to gather sensitive information from people.
- Improve WINZ website so that information is more readily accessible and developed in a way that works for the people that are accessing support.
- Provide information about how to access WINZ services, and what services or benefits are available, in public places such as libraries and community centres.
- Abolish the current definition of relationships in the nature of marriage, and stop treating people in relationships as a single economic unit.

- Develop policies that better respond to individual and whānau need. We will know that this is working when better, more sustainable employment options are identified and when people accessing WINZ support aren't forced to end or change their otherwise supportive relationships due to rigid application of rules. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from. There should be particular attention paid to making sure Māori communities are served by WINZ, and that groups that government policy and other structural factors disadvantage repeatedly are able to have their voice included in this policy work.
- Rethink the way that WINZ offices are set up. There needs to be appropriate places to discuss sensitive information, and security guards should not be used to provide unnecessary intimidation.
- Improve privacy practice and policies - this goes from how receptionists respect the information and privacy through to how MSD holds information about people and what is shared and what is not. While it is good for people not to have to tell their story repeatedly, they need to also be able to know their information isn't shared for any other purpose than for providing them support.
- Develop more robust systems to protect people's paperwork
- Develop better systems to cut down on the number of errors. For example, improve communications systems, and provide information with every entitlement.
- Create an independent review process and access to justice for beneficiaries.
- Properly acknowledge mistakes and make reparations accordingly.
- Create a stop-gap measure to ensure people can meet their basic needs when a mistake has been made by the system. For example, a quick-access fund for rent or food money that people can request when they are penalised by a mistake made by the staff or system.
- Properly acknowledge mistakes make reparations accordingly and speedily.
- Change unnecessary systems – like requiring people with long-standing disabilities to fill out forms every year.
- Develop a culture of compassion
- Undertake an awareness/de-stigma campaign
- Make sure that all beneficiaries are receiving a liveable income so that all people can live with dignity.
- Provide mandatory mental health and disability training for all staff.
- Provide mandatory gender and sexuality training for all staff

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BACKGROUND

In mid-July 2017 Metiria Turei, the co-leader of the New Zealand Green party, spoke at the Green Party AGM about her time on social welfare¹ in the 1990's. She talked about lying to Work and Income NZ (WINZ) in order to have enough money to survive. "This is what being on the benefit did to me – it made me poor and it made me lie" she said.

She used her experiences to speak out about how the social welfare system was a broken safety net that needed to be mended. She spoke about a woman who committed suicide after being falsely accused of fraud and chased by WINZ. She spoke about the 200,000 New Zealand children living in poverty. She spoke about how much this was costing New Zealanders, and how important it is to care for our most vulnerable. Within the month she had resigned as the co-leader, because the scrutiny on her family was "unbearable".²

In the wake of her resignation a group of artists began creating art sharing their experiences as beneficiaries in the hope of "continuing the conversation Metiria Turei started - demanding a more compassionate welfare system." The group 'We Are Beneficiaries', began sharing their images online and were met with a huge response. The project has amassed over 5,000 likes on their Facebook page,³ and 1800 followers on twitter.⁴

We are that group of artists. We are Beneficiaries.

METHODOLOGY

The project began with a number of artists sharing their experiences of social welfare in New Zealand. They drew pictures of themselves, along with a few sentences about their experiences, and posted it online.

Due to the popularity of the project, we opened submissions to the public asking them to send in a picture of themselves, and to write 3-5 sentences about:

- Their time on the welfare system, or
- What they wish the welfare system was like, or
- How they've been treated as a beneficiary

We then assigned artists to illustrate the story, and we posted it online across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram⁵.

We allowed anyone to submit, although in our about section we encouraged people of colour and indigenous people to be involved:

"We're invested in keeping race and class at the forefront, but also recognise that it's a pretty vulnerable thing to do - and given what happened to Metiria in the last few weeks, these conversations can have pretty dire effects when we do share - particularly for people of colour and indigenous people."⁶

1 <https://www.greens.org.nz/news/speech/mending-safety-net---metiria-turei's-speech-green-party-2017-agm>

2 <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2017/08/09/41948/turei-resign>

3 <https://www.facebook.com/WeAreBeneficiaries>

4 <https://twitter.com/webeneficiaries>

5 <https://www.instagram.com/wearebeneficiaries/>

6 <https://www.facebook.com/pg/WeAreBeneficiaries/about>

THIS REPORT

Over the last 4 months we have collected over 200 stories of people who are currently accessing or have in the past accessed social welfare in New Zealand. Many of these stories are about interactions with WINZ, though there are also stories from people who have accessed ACC, Studylink and Housing New Zealand services.

Many of these stories illustrate a dehumanising, cruel and broken social welfare system in Aotearoa. However, they are by no means 'one-offs' or 'extreme' cases. Once posted online, people engaged and shared these stories across social media. Each image provoked discussion and often resulted in readers commenting that they had experienced something similar. This is important to note – the stories reflect experiences beyond just that of the original story teller.

We have collated the stories of people who submitted to our project and wished to be included in this report. We have then themed them under key headings to help illustrate some of the systemic issues that people are facing. It is our hope that these individual stories, when looked at as a whole, will illustrate some of the key issues that beneficiaries in Aotearoa face.

Under each theme we have provided a set of recommendations for MSD to consider, to help alleviate the issues highlighted. Some recommendations are easy to enact (i.e. removing specific sanctions), others require more complex and thorough actions. It is our hope that MSD takes on board these recommendations in order to honour the brave people who generously shared their stories, and to create a welfare system that supports people to live and flourish.



THEMES

LACK OF COMPASSION AND CARE

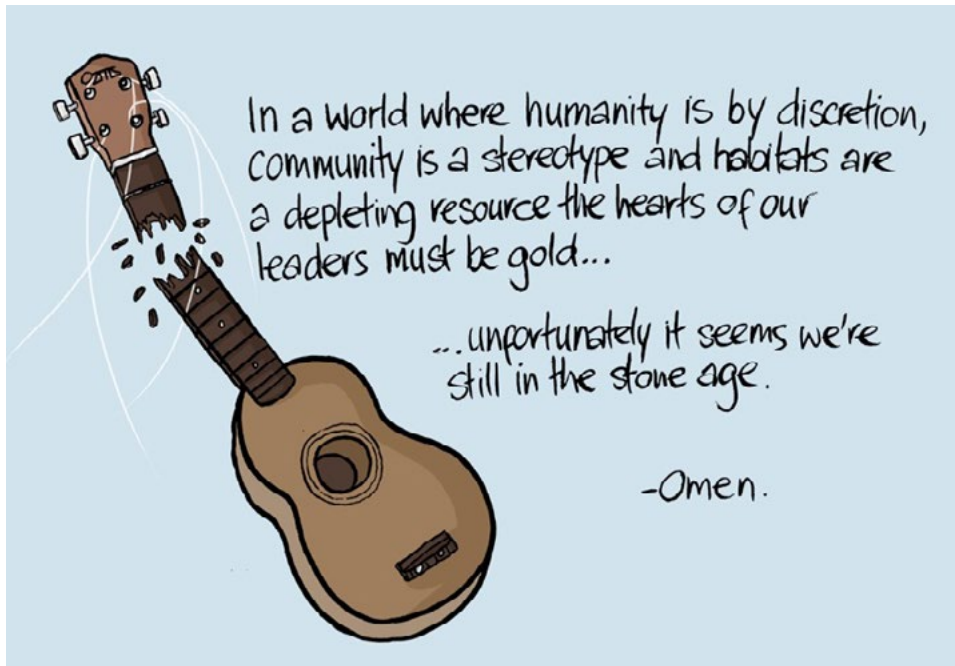


Image 179 "In a world where humanity is by discretion, community is a stereotype and habitats are a depleting resource the hearts of our leaders must be gold, unfortunately it seems we're still in the stone age."

Many people accessing support experience a lack of care and compassion from service providers. This can often create extra stress and pain on an already stressful and painful situation. Many people have shared stories about how this treatment has had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.



Image 001 "Every time I came out of WINZ I felt shitter than when I went in. And I felt really shit going in. It's supposed to be a safety net when things get dire, but instead of a compassionate system it's a dehumanising one. Because they don't want you to want to come back."

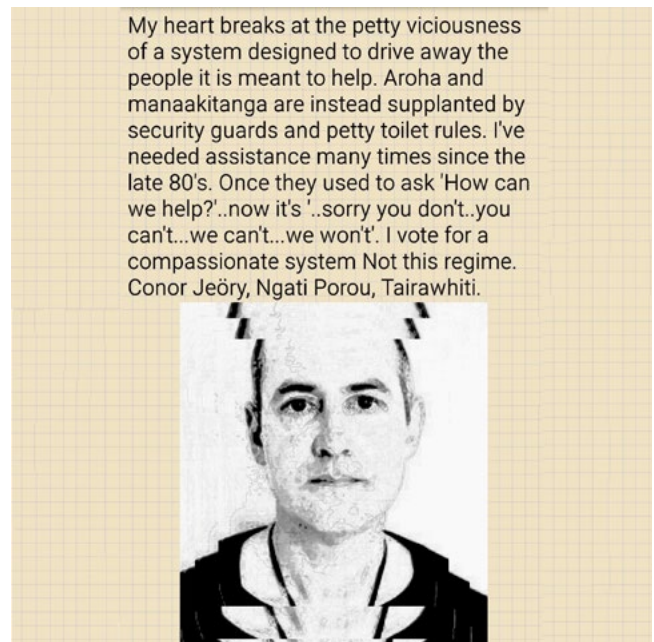


Image 002 "My heart breaks at the petty viciousness of a system designed to drive away the people it is meant to help. Aroha and manaakitanga are instead supplanted by security guards and petty toilet rules. I've need assistance many times since the late 80's. Once they used to ask 'How can we help?' ..now it's '...sorry you don't.. you can't... we can't... we won't'. I got for a compassionate system. Not this Regime."

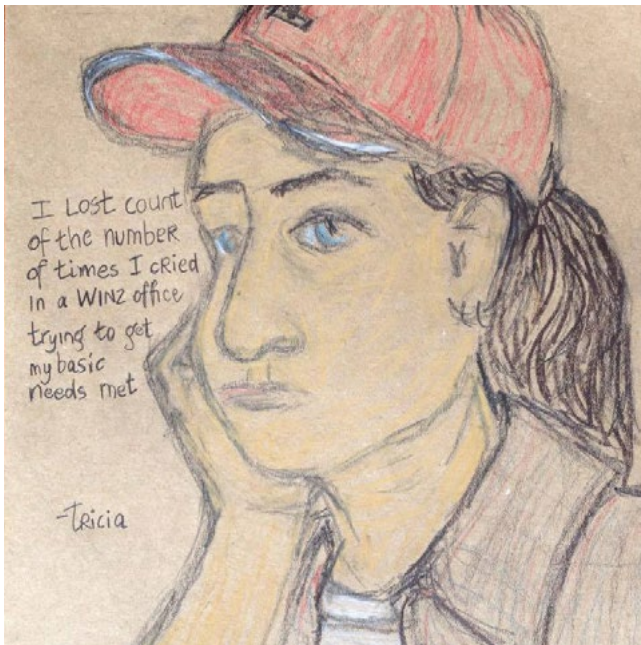


Image 003 "I lost count of the number of times I cried in a WINZ office trying to get my basic needs met."



Image 006 "I used to fear taking my baby to see my brother in prison. Now, having taken her into WINZ, I know at least in prison we'll feel love."



Image 009 "It's a cruel trick, making you feel so unwelcome in a place they demand you visit twice a week. I can only imagine what it's like if you're not a clean-cut white guy"

I'm a survivor of sexual abuse with PTSD, Agoraphobia and Anxiety. I routinely get given male case managers despite asking to be seen by a woman. This results in enormous stress when I'm already in an unbearably stressful situation of having to leave my house for a crowded place where you get the feeling everyone thinks you are a contemptible bug.



Image 053 "I'm a survivor of sexual abuse with PTSD, Agoraphobia and Anxiety. I routinely get given male case managers despite asking for females. This results in enormous stress when I'm already in an unbearably stressful situation of having to leave my house for a crowded place where you get the feeling the government thinks you are a contemptible bug."

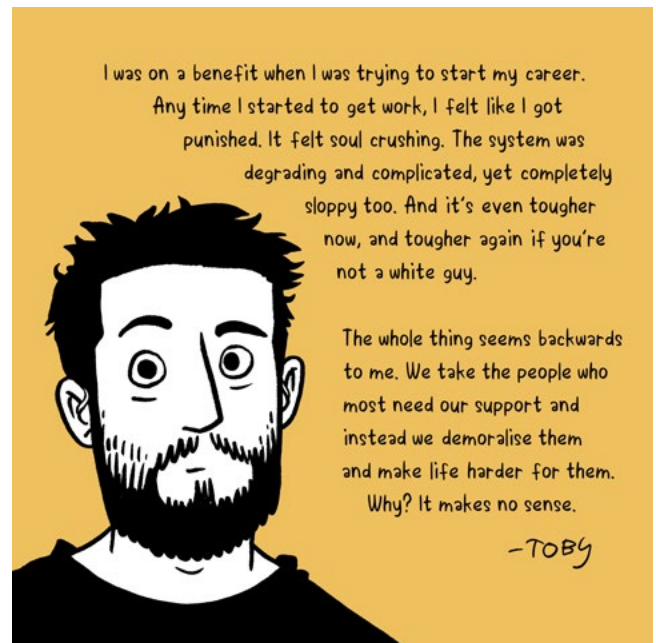


Image 055 "I was on a benefit when I was trying to start my career. Any time I started to get work, I felt like I got punished. It felt soul crushing. The system was degrading and complicated, yet completely sloppy too. And it's even tougher now, and tougher again if you're not a white guy. The whole thing seems so backwards to me. We take the people who most need our support and instead we demoralise them and make life harder for them. Why? It makes no sense."

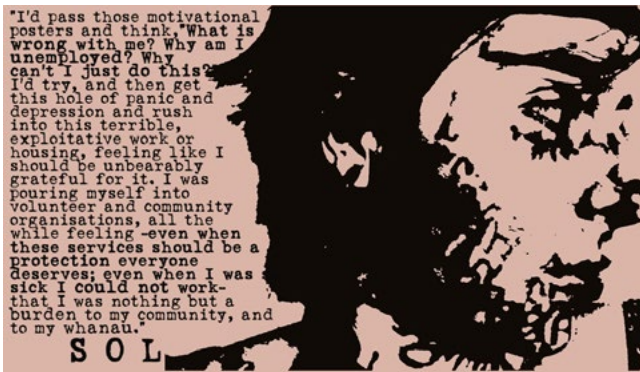


Image 071 "I'd pass those motivational posters and think, "What is wrong with me? Why am I unemployed? Why can't I just do this?" I'd try, and then get this hole of panic and depression and rush into this terrible, exploitative work or housing, feeling like I should be unbearably grateful for it. I was pouring myself into volunteer and community organisations, all the while feeling - even when these services should be a protection everyone deserves; even when I was so sick I could not work - that I was nothing but a burden to my community, and to my whanau."

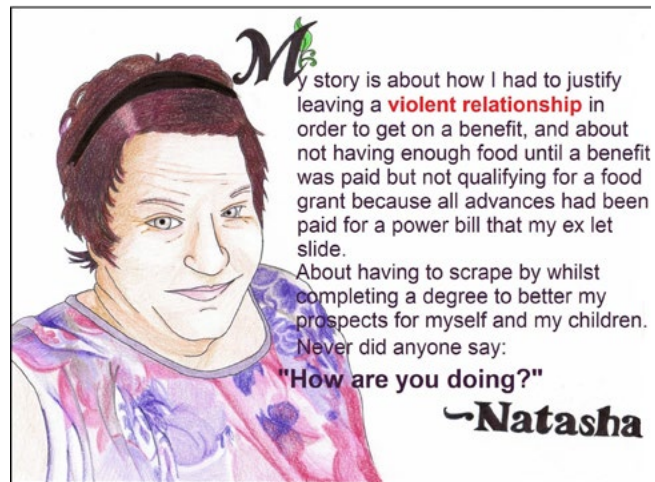


Image 084 "My story is about how I had to justify leaving a violent relationship in order to get on a benefit, and about not having enough food until a benefit was paid but not qualifying for a food grant because all advances had been paid for a power bill that my ex let slide. About having to scrape by whilst completing a degree to better my prospects for myself and my children. Never did anyone say 'How are you doing?'"

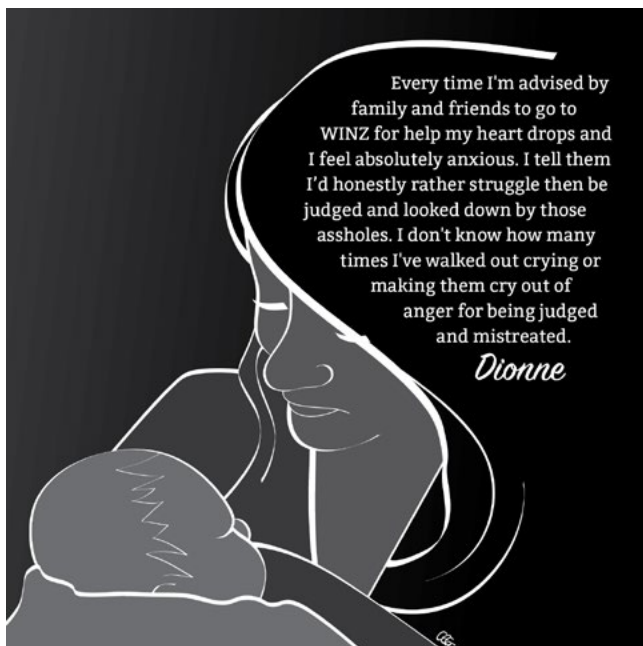


Image 081 "Every time I'm advised by family and friends to go to WINZ for help my heart drops and I feel absolutely anxious. I tell them I'd honestly rather struggle then be judged and looked down by those assholes. I don't know how many times I've walked out crying or making them cry out of anger for being judged and mistreated."



Image 121 "I was having a meeting about getting on the supported living payment, when I got upset while explaining I was waiting for an MRI to check for a possible head tumor. My caseworker awkwardly gave me some tissues and walked off to "check something with her colleague" This has happened multiple times to me, sobbing in an open plan layout with zero privacy and no empathy from the caseworker. They are dealing with vulnerable people but have obviously been given no training with how to deal with us"



About 4 years ago I needed to apply for the DPB after the break up of my relationship with my daughters father. I had severe post natal depression and was only working casually at the time.

At my WINZ appointment the case worker turned to my daughter and asked her age, to which she replied 'nearly five.' The case worker responded by looking my daughter in the eyes and saying 'well your Mother better had start looking for a proper fulltime job'.

Never in my life had I been made to feel so low and belittled in front of my child & promptly left in tears. Words can be damaging and I wish people had more understanding of the power & impact they have in that situation.

- Laura

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"It had been months of running around with piles of paperwork trying to have Mum and her partner approved for WINZ assistance.

I remember bursting into tears at a branch counter when I was trying to feed my 7 week old baby and go through yet another 'requested documentation' list at the same time.

I had been supporting Mum, opening my cupboard and organising food parcels, watching her life being torn to shreds.

It wasn't until my Mum ended up in ED after attempting suicide that a WINZ worker at the hospital sorted out her benefit application overnight."

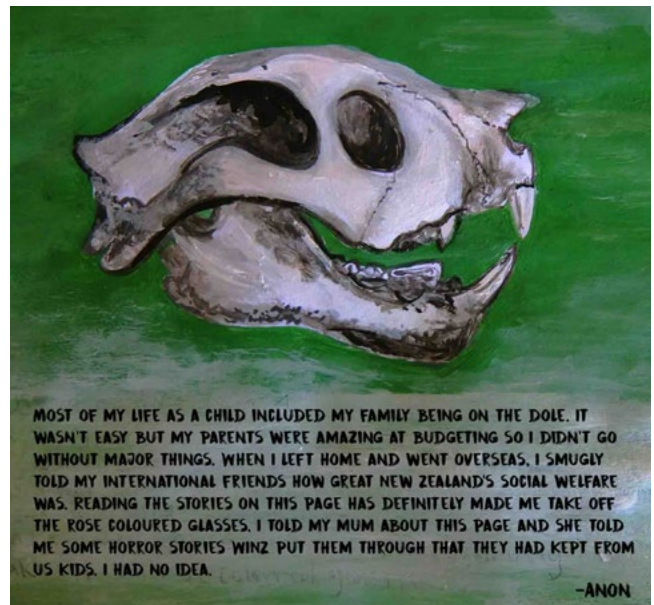
- Jalanda

Image 152 "It had been months of running around with piles of paperwork trying to have Mum and her partner approved for WINZ assistance. I remember bursting into tears at a branch counter when I was trying to feed my 7 week old baby and go through yet another 'requested documentation' list at the same time. I had been supporting Mum, opening my cupboard and organising food parcels, watching her life being torn to shreds. It wasn't until my Mum ended up in ED after attempting suicide that a WINZ worker at the hospital sorted out her benefit application overnight."



"After 3 years of being on and off the benefit, in and out of jobs, and multiple suicide attempts my doctor and I finally decided to put me on a sickness benefit and into intensive therapy. I started using Prozac and had to go into WINZ with the doctors certificate. The caseworker I had was cold and kept asking me why I needed a sickness benefit when I was a young, fit looking girl. I told him I had a medical certificate and he didn't need any other info. He asked me if I was on any medication (I thought this was relevant as it's an extra cost that would need to be added to my benefit) so I told him I had started taking Prozac after 3 years of refusing. He laughed at me and told me I should 'stop taking the drugs' and 'just try to get out more', and that I should get a puppy instead.... I left that meeting crying and later contemplated taking my own life."
- Anonymous

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MOST OF MY LIFE AS A CHILD INCLUDED MY FAMILY BEING ON THE DOLE. IT WASN'T EASY BUT MY PARENTS WERE AMAZING AT BUDGETING SO I DIDN'T GO WITHOUT MAJOR THINGS. WHEN I LEFT HOME AND WENT OVERSEAS, I SMUGLY TOLD MY INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS HOW GREAT NEW ZEALAND'S SOCIAL WELFARE WAS. READING THE STORIES ON THIS PAGE HAS DEFINITELY MADE ME TAKE OFF THE ROSE COLOURED GLASSES. I TOLD MY MUM ABOUT THIS PAGE AND SHE TOLD ME SOME HORROR STORIES WINZ PUT THEM THROUGH THAT THEY HAD KEPT FROM US KIDS. I HAD NO IDEA.

-ANON

Image 166 "Most of my life as a child included my family being on the dole. It wasn't easy but my parents were amazing at budgeting so I didn't go without for major things. When I left home and moved overseas, I smugly told my international friends how amazing New Zealand's social welfare was. Reading the stories on here has definitely made me take off the rose coloured glasses. I told my mum about this page and she told me some horror stories WINZ had put them through that they had kept from us kids. I had no idea."

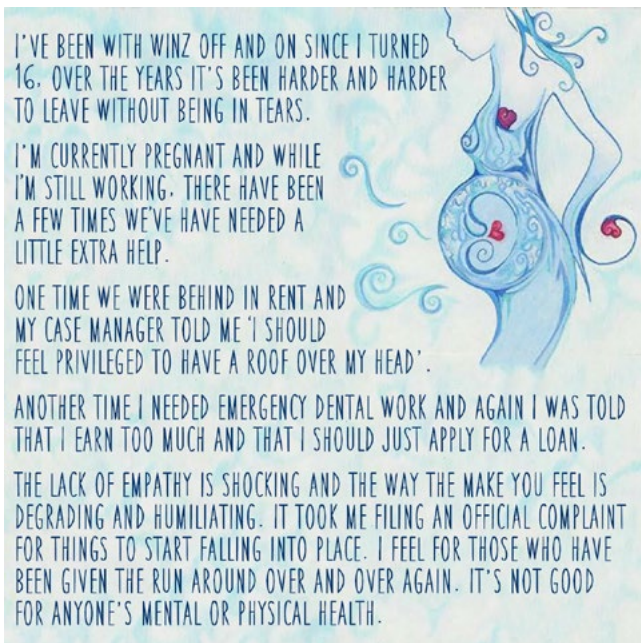


Image 172 "I've been with WINZ off and on since I turned 16, over the years it's been harder and harder to leave without being in tears. I'm currently pregnant and while I'm still working, there have been a few times we've have needed a little extra help. One time we were behind in rent and my case manager told me 'I should feel privileged to have a roof over my head'. Another time I needed emergency dental work and again I was told that I earn too much and that I should just apply for a loan. The lack of empathy is shocking and the way they make you feel is degrading and humiliating. It took me filing an official complaint for things to start falling into place. I feel for those who have been given the run around over and over again. It's not good for anyone's mental or physical health."

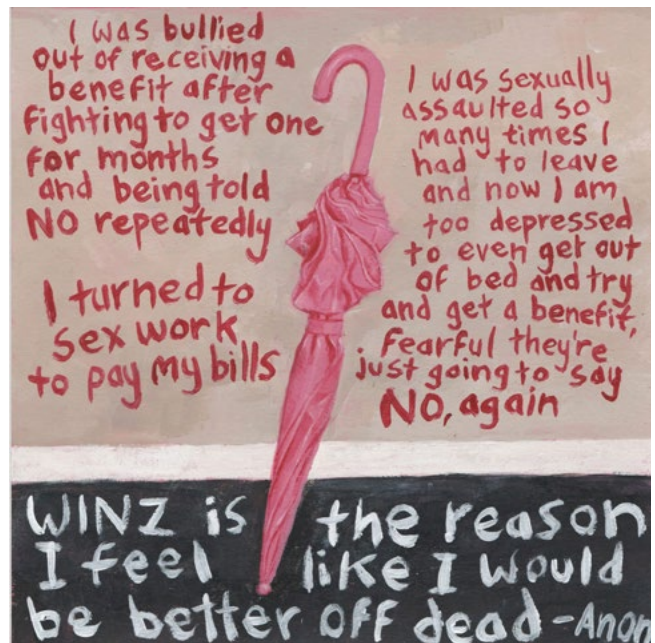


Image 188 "I was bullied out of receiving a benefit after fighting to get one for months and being told no repeatedly. I turned to sex work to pay my bills, I was sexually assaulted so many times I had to leave and now I am too depressed to even get out of bed and try and get a benefit, fearful they're just going to say no, again. WINZ is the reason I feel like I would be better off dead."

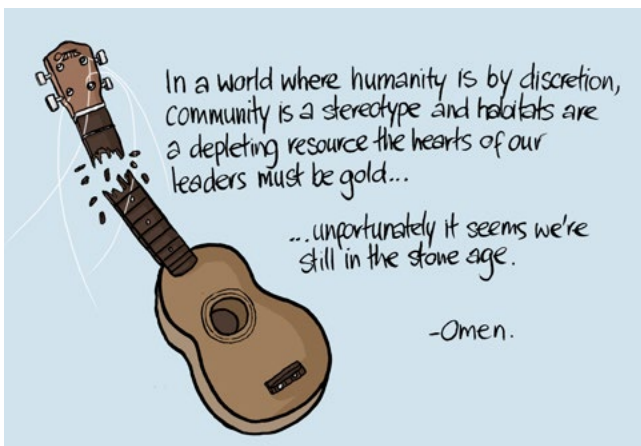


Image 179 "In a world where humanity is by discretion, community is a stereotype and habitats are a depleting resource the hearts of our leaders must be gold, unfortunately it seems we're still in the stone age."

'LACK OF COMPASSION AND CARE' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide mandatory empathy training for all staff.
- Supervision and mental health support for all staff.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.
- Create incentives for staff to provide quality services and not targets about reducing number of beneficiaries.
- Develop anonymous online feedback and evaluation forms for people accessing WINZ support.
- Strengthen policies and processes for people with mental health issues so that staff are better equipped to support clients (e.g. in the way they have conversations, gather information) and so that the support people receive is easier to access and more transparent.
- Create better links between agencies so that support to people is more cohesive (e.g. the Mental Health Inquiry could look at the way WINZ could work with health and other agencies to better support people).

WINZ AND WORKING

WORKING WHILE RECEIVING A BENEFIT



Image 120 "My partner was in the mental health unit, he was in crisis. He couldn't work, he was barely getting out of bed. I was trying to support us both on two part-time jobs. I went to WINZ and was told essentially that they couldn't help. I needed to get a better job, a full time job. I cried. And then tried to be strong enough for my partner and myself, until he could work again. I want a system that is flexible. I want a system that has compassion. No one gets left behind."

Many people talk about the difficulty of finding sustainable work options while receiving a benefit. The current practice is to focus on people having full-time work. This is often not what people are capable of, or is not sustainable for them— due to childcare, health restrictions, and mental health issues. Many people also shared experiences of wanting to go back to study in order to pursue vocational work, update their CV, or with the long term goal of being able to access higher-paid employment. These people often voiced that WINZ was not supportive. Furthermore, often people are encouraged into low-paid, insecure work and are subject to the 90 day trial period, resulting in a cycle of going on and off the benefit while being subject to stand down periods and the stress of reapplying for benefits.



Image 082 "When my child turned three I was told I needed to go find 30 hours work or have my benefit cut off. I told them I wanted to go back to university to finish my degree. They told me that someone like me (later clarified as meaning a single mother) should be grateful to get a job as a supermarket checkout operator. Regardless of having 7 years HR and Managerial experience under my belt. Their opinion? I chose to keep my baby therefore I needed to deal with the consequences of that."

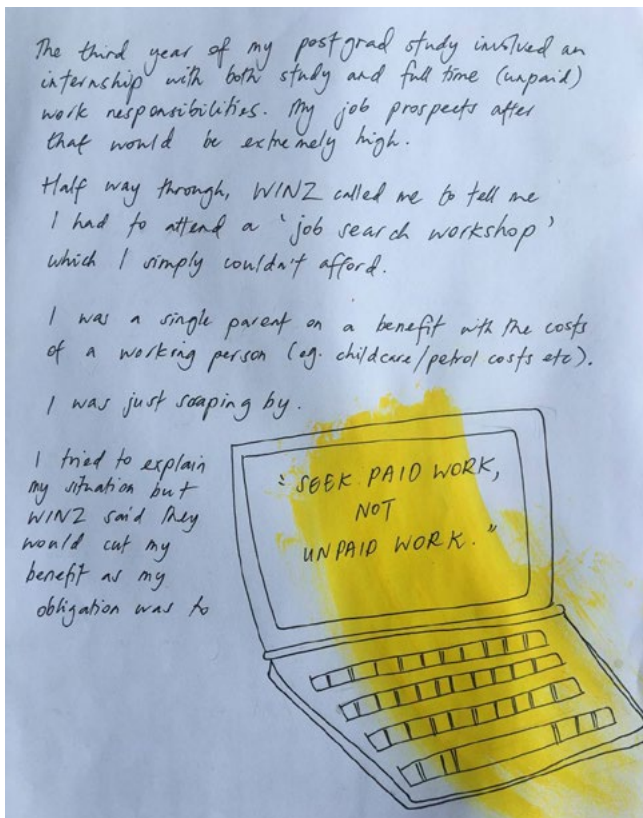


Image 112 "The third year of my postgrad study involved an internship with both study and full time (unpaid) work responsibilities. My job prospects after that would be extremely high. Half way through, WINZ called me to tell me I had to attend a 'job search workshop' which I simply couldn't afford. I was a single parent on a benefit with the costs of a working person (e.g. childcare/petrol costs etc.). I was just scraping by. I tried to explain my situation but WINZ said they would have to cut my benefit as my obligation was to "seek paid work, not unpaid work."

ADDITION: I'd love for the Minister for Education to know the challenge of educational psychology in particular - we work for free for 1 year during our internship (in addition to the 2 years postgrad we study without student allowance- NB Intern Clinical Psychologists are paid a stipend from DHBs which we don't get) which is completely prohibitive to so much of our society, which is really counter-productive to the type of work we do - we could access so many more communities if our socio-economic/ethnic make-up was truer to the communities we work within...It was HORRENDOUSLY difficult to do this as a solo mum and I'm still paying for it now (in student debt/bank debt/general difficulty after 4 years working as an educational psychologist). It's HARD. Gosh there's so much I could say!! People think that a psychologist is well paid, honestly, I struggle! I worked so hard to get here and there's so much awesome stuff that I do but I'm just like some of the families I work with, I live pay-check to pay-check (and I'm a bloody good budgeter!) and I have a post-masterate qualification! Seriously, what has our society come to?! Anyway, enough ranting from me lol, thanks so much for all the work you've done - it's highlighting such important areas of our society



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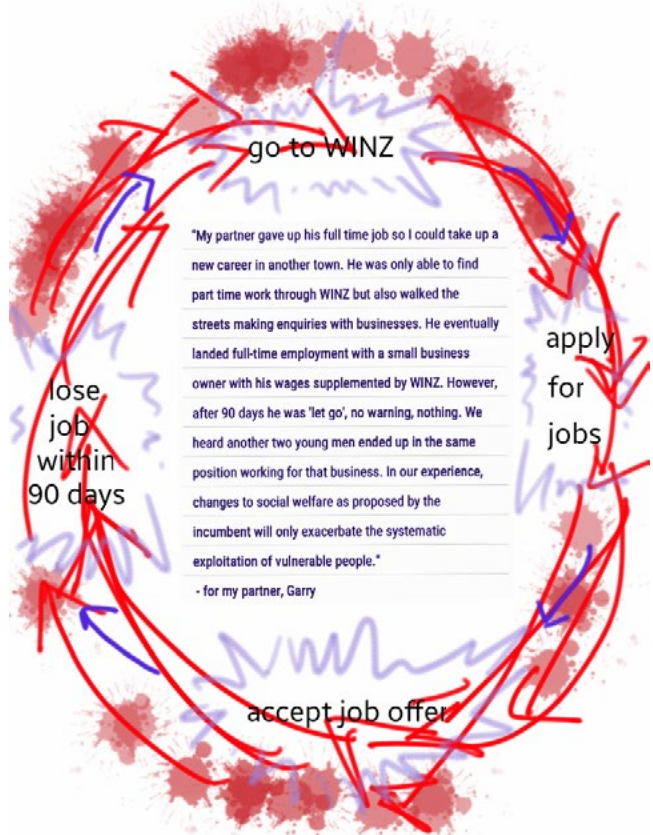


Image 130 "My partner gave up his full time job so I could take up a new career in another town. He was only able to find part time work through WINZ but also walked the streets making enquiries with businesses. He eventually landed full-time employment with a small business owner with his wages supplemented by WINZ. However, after 90 days he was 'let go', no warning, nothing. We heard another two young men ended up in the same position working for that business. In our experience, changes to social welfare as proposed by the incumbent will only exacerbate the systematic exploitation of vulnerable people."



"I'm studying psychology part time to help vulnerable kids, and not eligible for most benefits. When work decreased my hours, I asked WINZ if there was anything I was entitled to as my new income wouldn't even cover my rent BEFORE tax. Every person I spoke with gave conflicting information. Some blamed me for 'getting myself into the situation', others for not being willing to get a flatmate to share my one bedroom unit with. One even told me there was one way I'd be entitled to more - I just had to get pregnant."

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ADDITION: To be eligible for a benefit it's expected everyone should fall into neat little categories which don't take into account individual circumstances. As someone over 30, single with no children, and who both works and studies part time, I don't fit into many of those categories. Studylink and WINZ both assist me depending on the time of year, but nothing is made easy. Both agencies consider me under the others purview, so no matter which agency I call I'm told I should be calling the other, and I have to report my wages to both agencies. Due to different calculations being used to define what a full time student is, I'm considered a part time student when applying for student allowance, yet at the same time I'm considered a full time student when applying for TAS making me ineligible for both. I'm lucky to say I'm a strong educated person who is willing to advocate for myself, but it's made difficult when you are consistently given contradicting information. WINZ and Studylink are agencies that discriminate and dehumanise its vulnerable clients, making them afraid to ask for the assistance they are entitled to. I wish I could say things had gotten better since I first did my submission. Most recently I applied for TAS to help over the summer as work wasn't able to offer me more hours. Studylink contacted me to say I was entitled to Jobseeker Student Hardship between semesters and advised how to apply, but their eligibility online test said I wasn't entitled. Within five minutes I was on the phone with a different person who informed me they had no idea why the previous person had said what they had as there was no way I wasn't entitled to anything. I was unsympathetically told that as I don't have children or a partner I'm not entitled to TAS, and as I'm in summer school and am employed they felt I'd not be able to adhere to the conditions of jobseekers requiring me to be

able to seek full time employment which made me ineligible. In essence I was being told I wasn't entitled to assistance unless I quit my job of three years so I could look for a full time job for a period of two months.

I questioned the staff member if I would be entitled to TAS through WINZ and was told that even though I likely was, I wasn't allowed to apply. I sobbed on the phone then spent the next hour crying as I tried to figure out how I was going to be able to afford rent let alone food for the next two months. I contacted WINZ the next day for advice and to see if I was eligible for Jobseekers, and the person I spoke with commented that although there were notes from my first phone call the previous day, they couldn't see notes to show the second call had even occurred. All I could think was that my hardship meant so little to that employee that I wasn't even worth recording anything from our conversation on file. All this has all occurred within the past week, and I still don't know how I'm going to make it through.

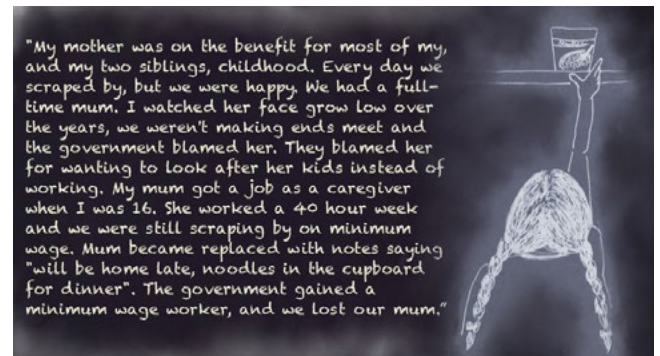


Image 143 "My mother was on the benefit for most of my, and my two siblings, childhood. Every day we scraped by, but we were happy. We had a full-time mum. I watched her face grow low over the years, we weren't making ends meet and the government blamed her. They blamed her for wanting to look after her kids instead of working. My mum got a job as a caregiver when I was 16. She worked a 40 hour week and we were still scraping by on minimum wage. Mum became replaced with notes saying "will be home late, noodles in the cupboard for dinner". The government gained a minimum wage worker, and we lost our mum."

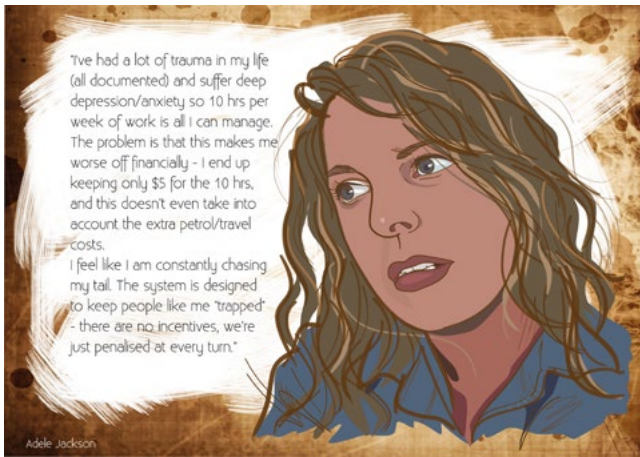


Image 149 "I've had a lot of trauma in my life (all documented) and suffer deep depression/anxiety so 10 hrs per week of work is all I can manage. The problem is that this makes me worse off financially - I end up keeping only \$5 for the 10 hrs, and this doesn't even take into account the extra petrol/travel costs. I feel like I am constantly chasing my tail. The system is designed to keep people like me "trapped" - there are no incentives, we're just penalised at every turn."

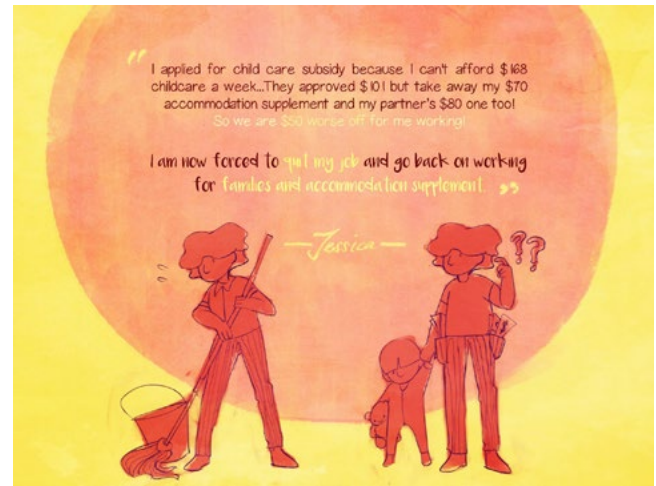


Image 195 "I applied for child care subsidy because I can't afford \$168 childcare a week.... They approved \$101 but take away my \$70 accommodation supplement and my partners \$80 one too! So we are \$50 worse off for me working! I am now forced to quit my job and go back on working for families and accommodation supplement."

'WORKING WHILE RECEIVING A BENEFIT' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that WINZ staff are only offering secure employment options.
- Support people pursuing further education or up-skilling courses for long term employment solutions.
- Re-look at policies around work in the community, caregiver and child care so that unpaid work is more appropriately valued.
- Create policies and practices that enable sustainable employment situations, for example, valuing part-time paid work as part of a person's wider work and family life.

INAPPROPRIATE WORK OFFERS

I proactively asked about a course in hospo (something I'd done heaps of) thinking it might include barista training, then told them I wasn't going to go once I found out it didn't. They cut my benefit anyway because I'd "missed a course", I had to argue the money back explaining it was my idea in the first place.

Finally I sat in a room with 6 others for a 'motivational' course where the guy up front berated everyone for choosing the wrong career. At this point, I'd just learned I'd got a job, and took great satisfaction in telling him that, standing up, then walking out. WINZ puts you off believing in anything, including yourself. Kindness, care + trust would be much greater 'motivational' forces.



Image 181 "I proactively asked about a course in hospo (something I'd done heaps of) thinking it might include barista training, then told them I wasn't going to go once I found out it didn't. They cut my benefit anyway because I'd 'missed a course', I had to argue the money back explaining it was my idea in the first place. Finally I sat in a room with 6 others for a 'motivational' course where the guy up front berated everyone for choosing the wrong career. At this point, I'd just learnt I'd got a job, and took great satisfaction in telling him that, standing up, then walking out. The way it works, WINZ put you off believing in anything, including yourself. Kindness, care, and trust would be much greater 'motivational' forces."

Some people shared stories of being offered work or courses that weren't relevant or suitable for their skills and experience, or were inappropriate as requests from a staff member (for example military based training, illegal cash work). The combination of low-paid, insecure or unsuitable work with sanctions and stand down periods creates an untenable situation for people; if they do not take the work they are penalised, and if they do take on the work it is short-term because of its inappropriateness and they are then penalised with stand-down periods.



I REMEMBER GOING TO WINZ AFTER DRAINING MY SAVINGS TRYING TO FIND A JOB. THE LADY LOOKS OVER MY RESUME AND SAYS I'M TOO QUALIFIED TO GO ON THE DOLE... BUT SHE CAN OFFER ME A CASHIE TO BUILD A FENCE ON HER FARM... SHOULD REPORT HER... LONG STORY SHORT I MANAGED TO GET MY \$179 A WEEK AFTER TWO WEEKS OF PROVING I COULDN'T FIND A JOB.

Image 017 "I remember going into WINZ after draining my savings trying to find a job. The lady looks over my resume and says I'm too qualified to go on the dole.... but she can offer me a cashie to build a fence on her farm... shoulda reported her... long story short I managed to get my \$179 a week after two weeks of proving I couldn't find a job"

My boss gave all my hours to a colleague of mine without reason or warning. I walked straight to WINZ because I didn't know how else I'd be able to pay rent while I looked for a job.

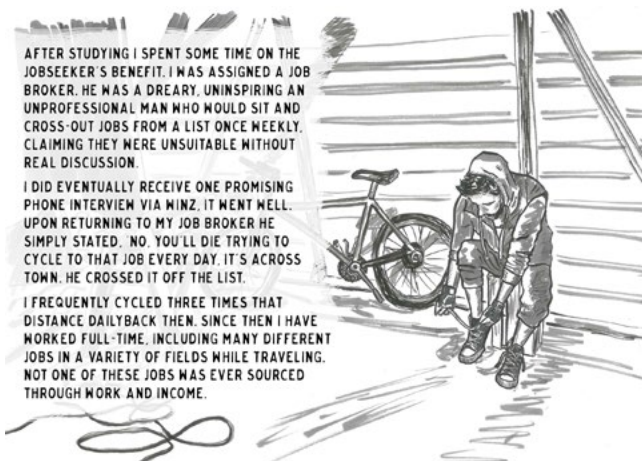
My initial experience with a WINZ staff member was helpful. The job seekers meeting was less positive - We were told to stay in the room until we had signed a paper saying if we didn't find work by a certain date we would do a military based course.

Afterwards I researched the course and read that it is supposed to be voluntary.

I'M REALLY NOT IN FAVOUR OF THE MILITARISATION OF OUR SUPPORT SYSTEMS.



Image 119 "My boss gave all my hours to a colleague of mine without reason or warning. I walked straight to WINZ because I didn't know how else I'd be able to pay rent while I looked for a job. My initial experience with a WINZ staff member was helpful. The job seekers meeting was less positive - We were told to stay in the room until we had signed a paper saying if we didn't find work by a certain date we would do a military based course. Afterwards I researched the course and read that it is supposed to be voluntary. I'm really not in favour of the militarisation of our support systems."



AFTER STUDYING I SPENT SOME TIME ON THE JOBSEEKER'S BENEFIT. I WAS ASSIGNED A JOB BROKER. HE WAS A DREARY, UNINSPIRING AN UNPROFESSIONAL MAN WHO WOULD SIT AND CROSS-OUT JOBS FROM A LIST ONCE WEEKLY, CLAIMING THEY WERE UNSUITABLE WITHOUT REAL DISCUSSION.

I DID EVENTUALLY RECEIVE ONE PROMISING PHONE INTERVIEW VIA WINZ, IT WENT WELL. UPON RETURNING TO MY JOB BROKER HE SIMPLY STATED, "NO, YOU'LL DIE TRYING TO CYCLE TO THAT JOB EVERY DAY, IT'S ACROSS TOWN. HE CROSSED IT OFF THE LIST.

I FREQUENTLY CYCLED THREE TIMES THAT DISTANCE DAILY BACK THEN. SINCE THEN I HAVE WORKED FULL-TIME, INCLUDING MANY DIFFERENT JOBS IN A VARIETY OF FIELDS WHILE TRAVELING. NOT ONE OF THESE JOBS WAS EVER SOURCED THROUGH WORK AND INCOME.

Image 133 "After studying I spent some time on the jobseeker's benefit. I was assigned a job broker. He was a dreary, uninspiring and unprofessional man who would sit and cross-out jobs from a list once weekly, claiming they were unsuitable without real discussion. I did eventually receive one promising phone interview via WINZ, it went well. Upon returning to my job broker he simply stated, "No, you'll die trying to cycle to that job every day, it's across town". He crossed it off the list. I frequently cycled three times that distance daily back then. Since then I have worked full-time, including many different jobs in a variety of fields while traveling. Not one of these jobs was ever sourced through Work and Income."



"I couldn't find work with my degree so I signed up for a benefit. Soon after I went in for a group session about CV and interview skills. Surprisingly, it was mostly other people in their 20's, who also couldn't find work after finishing their education. I had a meeting with a case manager right after, who tried to force me back into disability work after I stated I had experienced depression after working with awful, abusive staff in a greatly flawed system. My shiny, sparkly dream of finally becoming an adult with an education and stable, fulfilling job was shattered, and I left feeling down but also guilty that I had probably received better treatment than the P.I and Maori people waiting their turn and trying their best - just like me."

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"I went to a job assistance program, and the lady at WINZ ticked the wrong box and signed me up for the wrong course. I was then forced to go to, complete and pass the course under protest that this isn't what I'd agreed to. The course got me a job I didn't want and I was fired within a week. I had to survive for 26 weeks on debts I still haven't paid back 10 years later because "we got you a job and you failed to stay at it." - Joseph



Image 177 "I went to a job assistance program, and the lady at WINZ ticked the wrong box and signed me up for the wrong course. I was then forced to go to, complete and pass the course under protest that this isn't what I'd agreed to. The course got me a job I didn't want and I was fired within a week. I had to survive for 26 weeks on debts I still haven't paid back 10 years later because "we got you a job and you failed to stay at it."

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'INAPPROPRIATE WORK OFFERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that WINZ staff are only offering secure employment options.
- Do not offer inappropriate or illegal employment options.
- Stop the sanctions and obligations.
- Allow people the right to refuse employment.
- Encourage staff to work with the interests and strengths of the person in front of them when seeking courses or employment options.

CRUEL AND JUDGEMENTAL STAFF

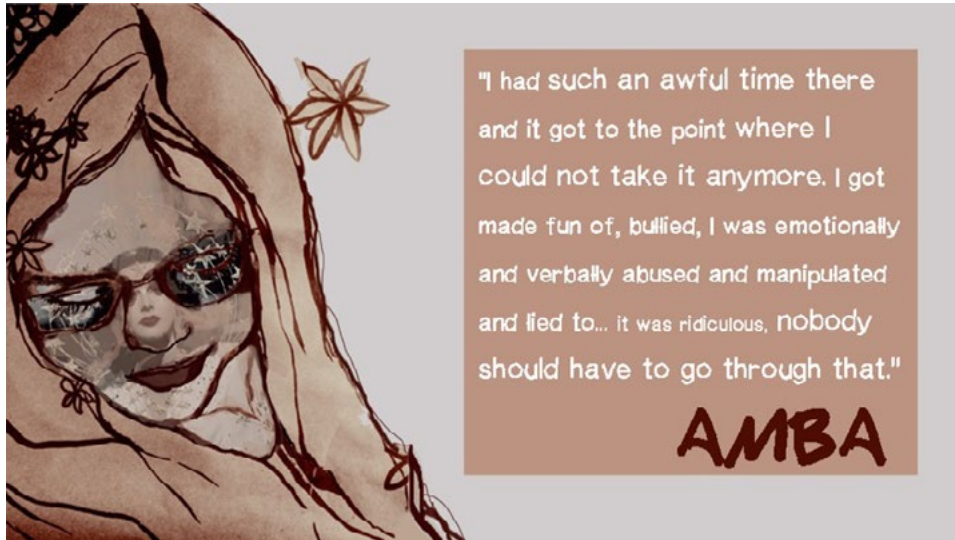


Image 028 "I had such an awful time there and it got to the point where I could not take it anymore. I got made fun of, bullied, I was emotionally and verbally abused and manipulated and lied to... it was ridiculous, nobody should have to go through that."

There is a culture of cruelty and judgement by WINZ staff towards people accessing support – from belittling comments and inappropriate questions, to mocking people for crying and asking clients “if they were sure it was rape”. This culture results in people not seeking the support they are entitled to, being triggered when they do seek support, and feeling consistently unsafe.



Image 018 "SHE can go home as their daughter" but not as who he is. Apparently that wasn't a break down in the family to justify youth payment. It did eventually get over turned after it was taken to head office for review. I was also given a reduced payment for declining an interview with an agency I had previously interviewed with that were terribly homophobic and transphobic. Feeling safe isn't important when considering possible employment."

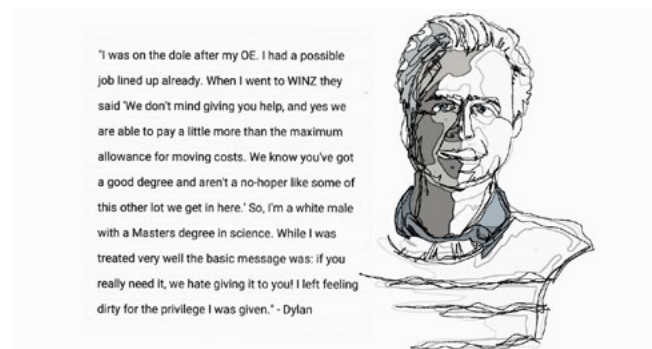


Image 026 "I was on the dole after my OE. I had a possible job lined up already. When I went to WINZ they said "We don't mind giving you help, and yes we are able to pay a little more than the maximum allowance for moving costs. We know you've got a good degree and aren't a no hoper like some of this other lot we get in here" So, I'm a white male with a Master's degree in science. While I was treated very well the basic message was: if you really need it, we hate giving it to you! I left feeling dirty for the privilege I was given."



Image 027 "My years on benefits were nothing short of a lesson on "how a once caring society" has devolved into one that sees its most vulnerable as unclean and worthless. I remember, just after I had a semi break down how my "case manager" dragged my fragile psyche over the coals and belittled me and suggested I should "harden up" and that "I should be glad to have recently had a job" and then questioned my doctor and counsellors letters to support my application for a sickness benefit.

What do I wish for our social welfare system? I wish for dignity I wish for empathy I wish for help when needed and not a SS inspired interrogation..."

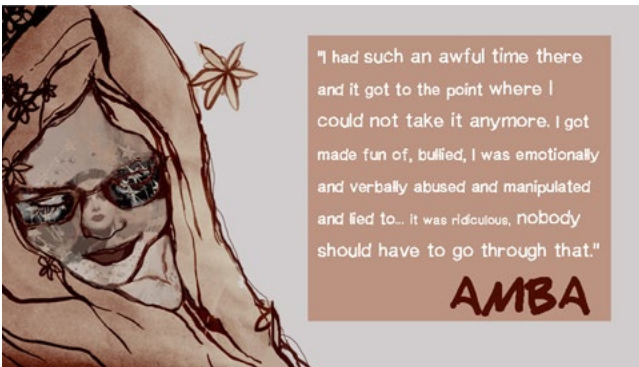


Image 028 "I had such an awful time there and it got to the point where I could not take it anymore. I got made fun of, bullied, I was emotionally and verbally abused and manipulated and lied to... it was ridiculous, nobody should have to go through that."



Image 038 "I was a victim of domestic violence - I had to leave my job and move from Wellington to Auckland with a black eye and my seven-year-old son in tow. Going into WINZ I was made to justify why I left my job and made to feel like I should have stayed and dealt with my abuser every time we exchanged care of our son just so I kept having income."

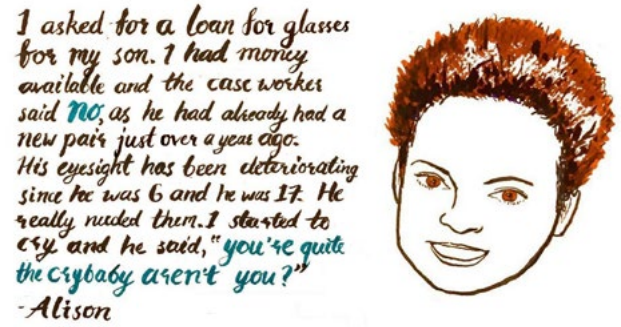


Image 041 "I asked for a loan for glasses for my son. I had money available and the case worker said no, as he had already had a new pair just over a year ago. His eyesight has been deteriorating since he was 6 and he was 17. He really needed them. I started to cry and he said "You're a cry-baby, aren't you?"



Image 042 "I had a job lined up and was about to start but had burnt through my savings to avoid asking WINZ for help. I needed money to pay for transport. But I never made it past the front desk because the person there gave me a dirty look and said I could fill out a form but since I already had a job I shouldn't need a hand out. I tried to explain the situation but she looked at me like she was disgusted and I felt so ashamed that I never bothered to try. It makes such a huge difference who WINZ employs - it's like Russian roulette and the changes they've made have pushed out a lot of the staff who were willing to really help and treat you with respect."

Addition: the staff member said that I wouldn't qualify for help without looking into my situation and steered me away from help, said I could fill out a form but that I wouldn't get any help. So it wasn't just their dirty looks and saying I shouldn't need a hand out but possibly giving me the wrong information based on their own bias and misjudgement of my situation as well.



"My advice is never to show weakness at WINZ. Shake their hands and look them in the eye. Let them know you are just as good as them."
- Gabrielle

Image 058 "My advice is never to show weakness at WINZ. Shake their hands and look them in the eye. Let them know you are just as good as them."

I spent my last \$5 for petrol to get to my appointment with WINZ, so I could re-apply for temporary support so I would be able to continue to pay my rent. At the same time I requested a food grant to keep me going in the meantime. I was told by the receptionist "if you can afford to drive here, you can afford to put food on the table" and was sent away.

How can I overcome serious mental and physical health conditions and get myself well enough to rejoin the workforces if I can't feed myself?

-Josh



Image 062 "I spent my last \$5 for petrol to get to my appointment with WINZ, so I could re-apply for temporary support so I would be able to continue to pay my rent. At the same time I requested a food grant to keep me going in the meantime. I was told by the receptionist "if you can afford to drive here, you can afford to put food on the table" and was sent away.

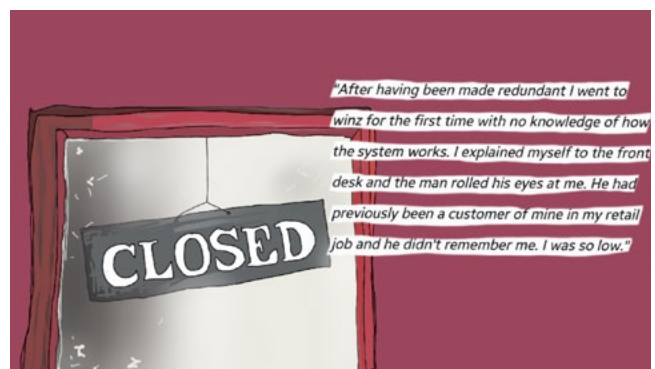
How can I overcome serious mental and physical health conditions and get myself well enough to re-join the workforces if I can't feed myself?"



"When I left my abusive marriage I spoke with many people; Doctors, police, a judge, a lawyer, a victim support person but only one agency humiliated me by questioning how an educated teacher like myself could have no savings after 6 years of full time teaching. I wish I had said that financial control can be part of the coercive control tactic that an abuser uses... but I just let my face turn red, kept my mouth closed, clutched my letter from my family violence co-ordinator, and hoped like hell I qualified for some kind of help.*

*I didn't that time - Bex

Image 063 "When I left my abusive marriage I spoke with many people; Doctors, police, a judge, a lawyer, a victim support person but only one agency humiliated me by questioning how an educated teacher like myself could have no savings after 6 years of full time teaching. I wish I had said that financial control can be part of the coercive control tactic that an abuser uses... but I just left my face turn red, kept my mouth closed, clutched my letter from my family violence co-ordinator, and hoped like hell I qualified for some kind of help.* *I didn't that time"



"After having been made redundant I went to winz for the first time with no knowledge of how the system works. I explained myself to the front desk and the man rolled his eyes at me. He had previously been a customer of mine in my retail job and he didn't remember me. I was so low."

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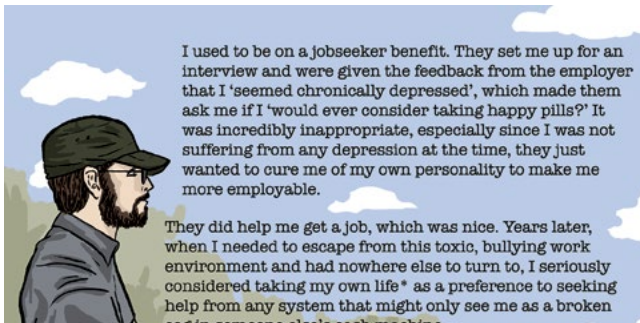


Image 095 "I used to be on a jobseeker benefit. They set me up for an interview and were given the feedback from the employer that I 'seemed chronically depressed', which made them ask me if I 'would ever consider taking happy pills?' It was incredibly inappropriate, especially since I was not suffering from any depression at the time, they just wanted to cure me of my own personality to make me more employable. They did help me get a job, which was nice. Years later, when I needed to escape from this toxic, bullying work environment and had nowhere else to turn to, I seriously considered taking my own life as a preference to seeking help from any system that might only see me as a broken cog in someone else's cash machine. *I am only alive today because I made the right friend at the right time. Thank you <3"*

I WAS 36 WEEKS PREGNANT, AND I WENT IN FOR MY BOOKED APPOINTMENT AT 10AM. I SAT THERE IN THE HOT WAITING ROOM FOR OVER 4HRS. TOO AFRAID TO GO TO THE TOILET IN CASE I MISSED MY NAME BEING CALLED. WHEN I WAS FINALLY SEEN I WAS RIDICULED FOR MY RELATIONSHIP FALLING APART.

I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION FROM THE STAFF.

A SMILE CAN WARM A HEART <3



Image 098 "I was 36 weeks pregnant, went in for my booked appointment at 10am. I sat there in the hot waiting room for over 4hrs too afraid to go to the toilet in case I missed my name being called. Was finally seen and ridiculed for my relationship falling apart. I would like to see more understanding and compassion from the staff. A smile can warm a heart <3"

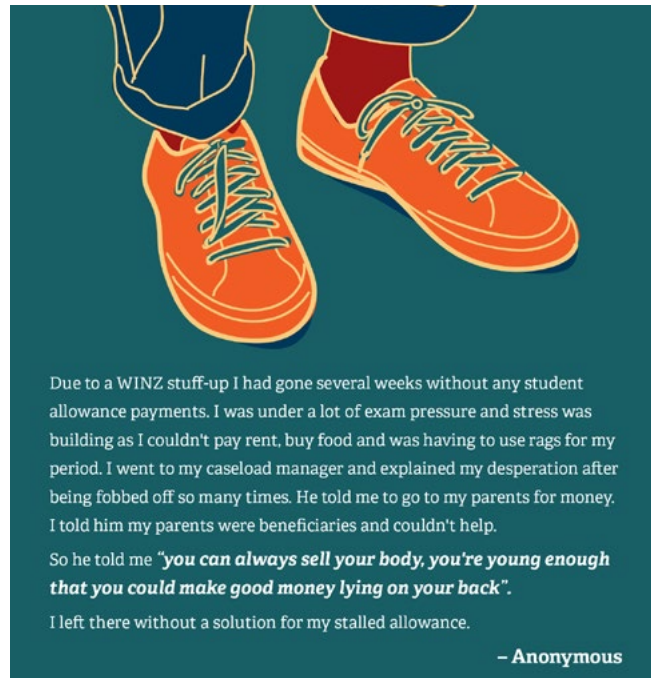


Image 118 "Due to a WINZ stuff up I had gone several weeks without any student allowance payments, I was under a lot of exam pressure and stress was building as I couldn't pay rent, buy food and was having to use rags for my period. I went to my caseload manager and explained my desperation after being fobbed off so many times. He told me to go to my parents for money. I told him my parents were beneficiaries and couldn't help. So he told me "you can always sell your body, you're young enough that you could make good money laying on your back" I left there without a solution for my stalled allowance."

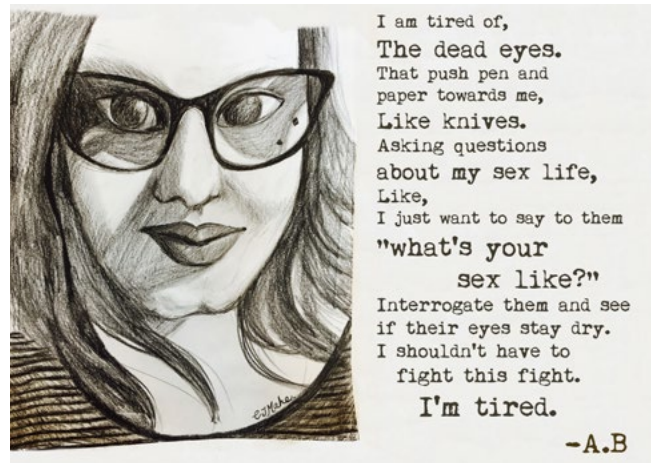


Image 155 "I am tired of, The dead eyes. That push pen and paper towards me, Like knives. Asking questions about my sex life, Like, I just want to say to them "what's your sex like?" Interrogate them and see if their eyes stay dry. I shouldn't have to fight this fight. I'm tired."

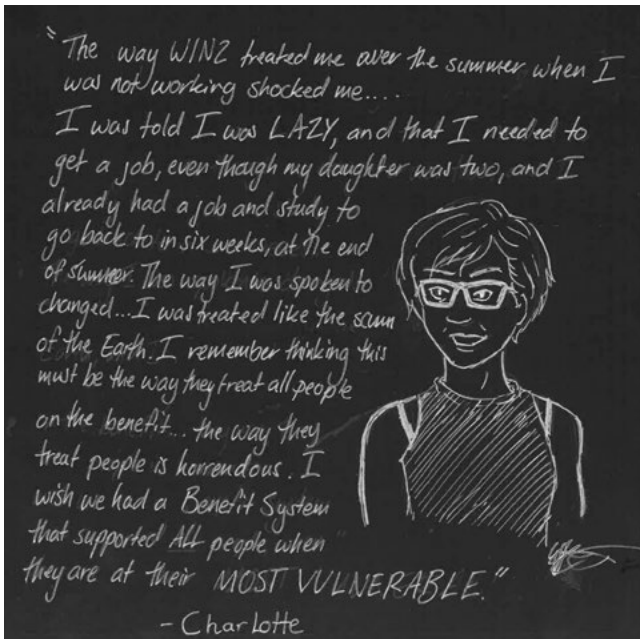


Image 157 "The way WINZ treated me over the summer shocked me. I was told that I was lazy and needed to get a job, even though my daughter was two and I already had a job and study to go back to in six weeks. The way I was spoken to changed, I was treated like the scum of the earth. I remember thinking that this must be how they treat all people on the benefit who are not working as well. The way that they treat people is horrendous - I wish we had a benefit system that supported all people when they are at their most vulnerable."



Image 165 "I was kicked out of home when I was 13, dropped out of school at 15 and fell pregnant when I was 16. As a single mum, I still managed to get to university and become a lawyer by the time I was 22. I was bright, had motivation and all the potential that WINZ could want. Still, I encountered a lot of judgement, and little sympathy. I remember being made to cry in WINZ numerous times when I'd ask for assistance with childcare and transport costs for study. One case officer told me that it was a luxury that I was allowed to attend university instead of getting a job."



Image 186 "I have a medical exemption on my job seekers support due to PTSD, anxiety and depression. My case worker thought it was appropriate to ask me why I have these conditions, I had to explain to her I am a survivor of rape and abuse due to an ex friend. I felt so dirty and inhuman when she said was I sure it was rape."

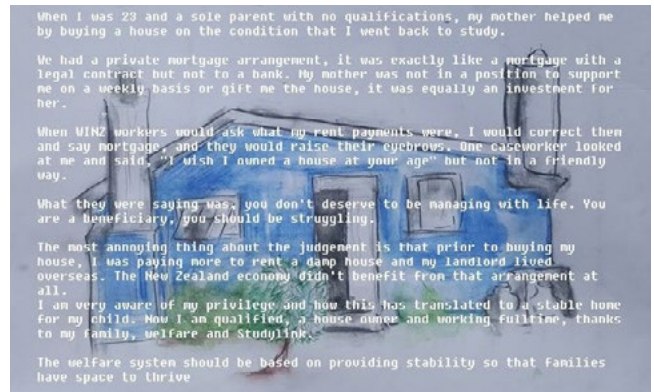


Image 189 "When I was 23 and a sole parent with no qualifications, my mother helped me by buying a house on the condition that I went back to study. We had a private mortgage arrangement, it was exactly like a mortgage with a legal contract but not to a bank. My mother was not in a position to support me on a weekly basis or gift me the house, it was equally an investment for her. When WINZ workers would ask what my rent payments were, I would correct them and say mortgage, and they would raise their eyebrows. One caseworker looked at me and said, "I wish I owned a house at your age" but not in a friendly way. What they were saying was, you don't deserve to be managing with life. You are a beneficiary; you should be struggling."

'CRUEL AND JUDGEMENTAL STAFF' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Staff should not question people's medical conditions, experience of abuse and/or sexual violence.
- Provide mandatory training for all WINZ office staff that improves empathy, cultural competence and communication skills. This must include an understanding of implicit bias and racism.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.
- Improve staff supervision and support and training overall so that they understand WINZ policies and apply them in ways that ensure people are given access to the full range of support they qualify for. This includes making sure staff are providing appropriate employment options and making sure staff are equipped to gather sensitive information from people.

LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

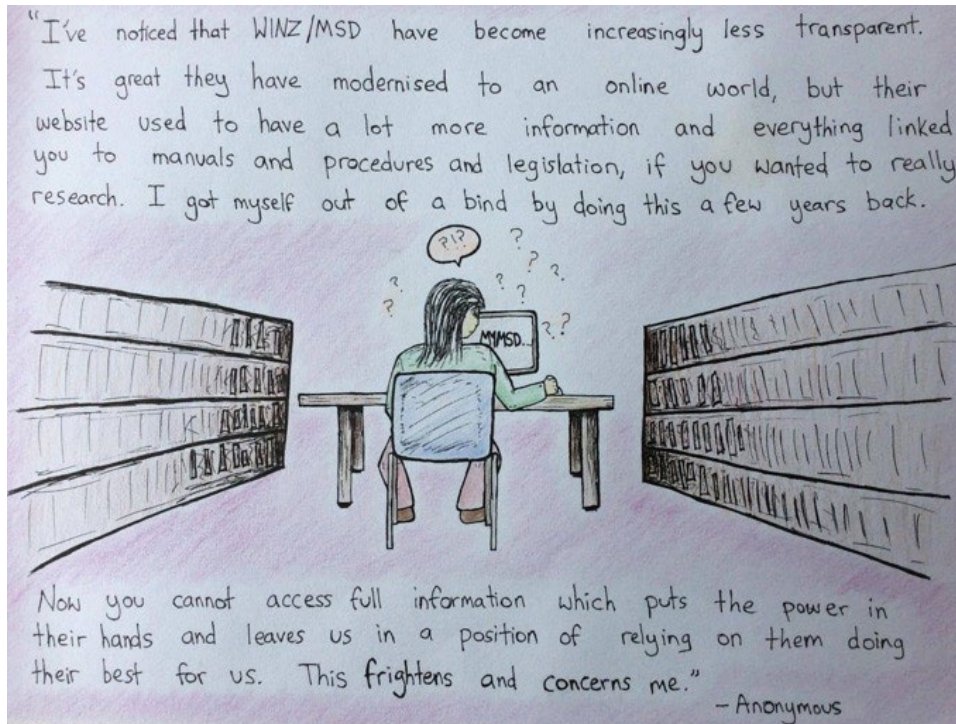


Image 110 "I've noticed that WINZ/MSD have become increasingly less transparent. It's great they have modernised to an on-line world, but their website used to have a lot more information and everything linked you to Manuals and Procedures and legislation if you wanted to really research. I got myself out of a bind by doing this some years back. Now you cannot access full information which puts the power in their hands and leaves us in a position of relying on them doing their best for us. This frightens and concerns me."

There is a lack of transparency and access to information, particularly about entitlements. This causes undue stress and confusion for people seeking support. Many people spoke about receiving different information from different staff members but not being able to access information that would clarify criteria or entitlements or processes.

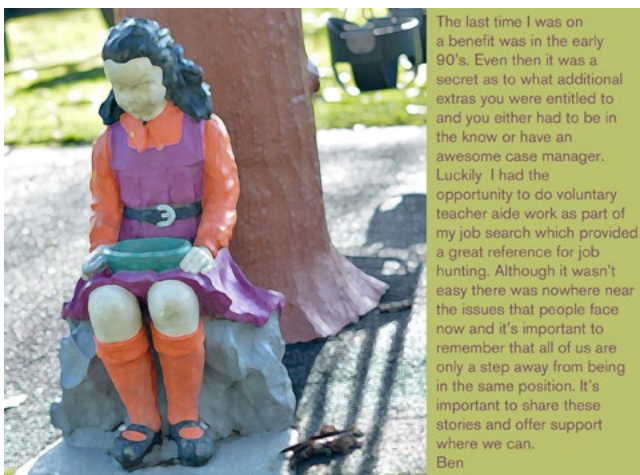


Image 052 "The last time I was on a benefit was in the early 90's. Even then it was a secret as to what additional extras you were entitled to and you either had to be in the know or have an awesome case manager. Luckily I had the opportunity to do voluntary teacher aide work as part of my job search which provided a great reference for job hunting. Although it wasn't easy there was nowhere near the issues that people face now and it's important to remember that all of us are only a step away from being in the same position. It's important to share these stories and offer support where we can."

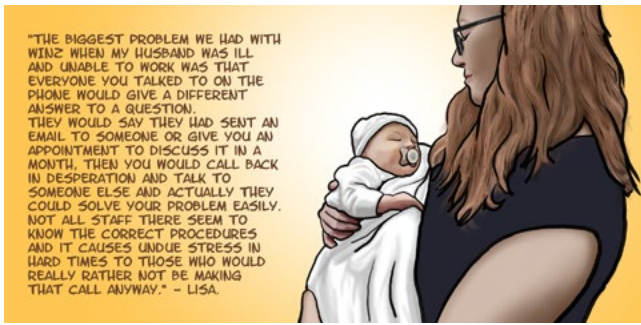


Image 064 "The biggest problem we had with WINZ when my husband was ill and unable to work was that everyone you talked to on the phone would give a different answer to a question. They would say they had sent an email to someone or give you an appointment to discuss it in a month, then you would call back in desperation and talk to someone else and actually they could solve your problem easily. Not all staff there seem to know the correct procedures and it causes undue stress in hard times to those who would really rather not be making that call anyway."

When a new doctor messed up my paperwork WINZ cancelled my benefit without notice, and my case manager stopped returning my calls. It took six weeks and a complaint to her supervisor before she made contact with me again, and eight weeks for any income to start coming in again. It was terrifying sinking deeper into debt while the person who had all the power ignored me. Even though I had money coming in it took about six months before my benefit was secured again and I felt somewhat safe. It had a huge impact on my mental and physical health and made me even more unlikely to be able to come off the invalids benefit

anonymous

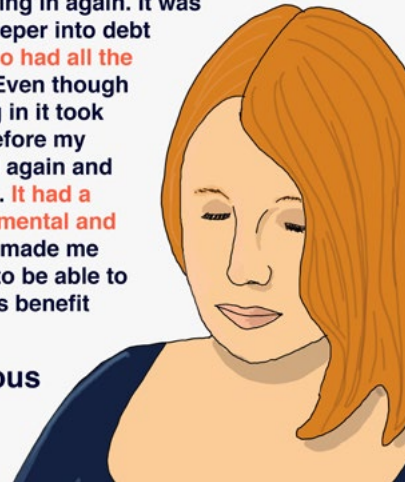


Image 162 "When a new doctor messed up my paperwork WINZ cancelled my benefit without notice, and my case manager stopped returning my calls. It took me six weeks and a complaint to her supervisor before she made contact with me again, and eight weeks for any income to start coming in again. It was terrifying sinking deeper and deeper into debt while the person who had all the power ignored me. Even though I got money coming in, it took about six months before my benefit was secured again and I felt somewhat safe. It had a huge impact on my mental and physical health and made me even more unlikely to be able to come off the invalids benefit."

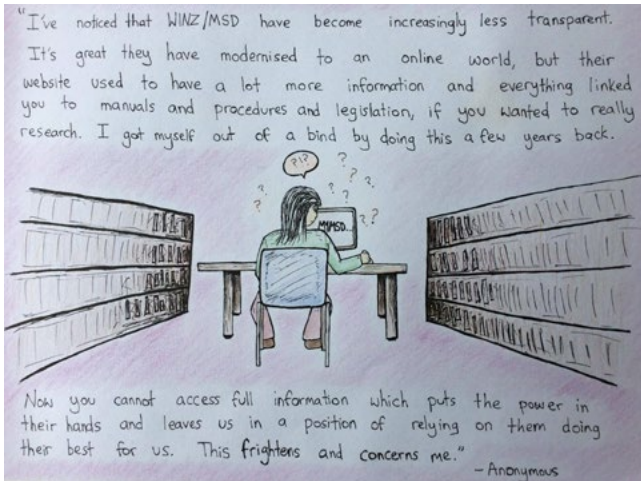


Image 110 "I've noticed that WINZ/MSD have become increasingly less transparent. It's great they have modernised to an on-line world, but their website used to have a lot more information and everything linked you to Manuals and Procedures and legislation if you wanted to really research. I got myself out of a bind by doing this some years back. Now you cannot access full information which puts the power in their hands and leaves us in a position of relying on them doing their best for us. This frightens and concerns me."

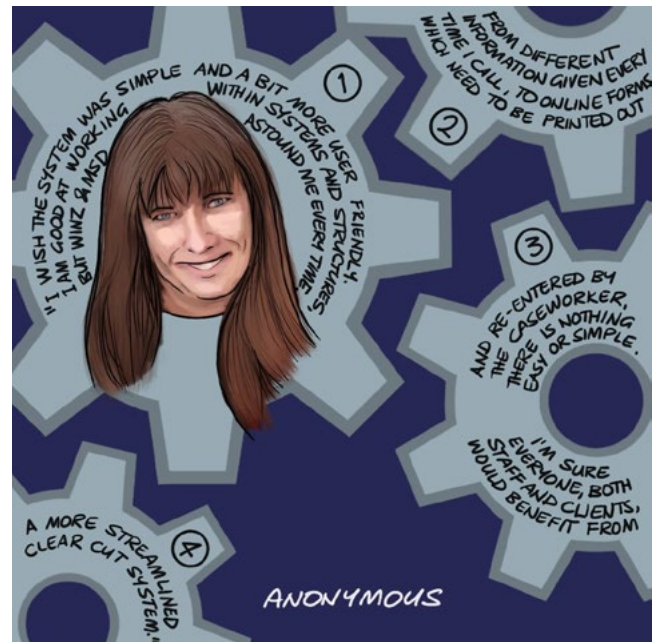


Image 168 "I wish the system was simple and a bit more user friendly. I am good at working within systems and structures, but WINZ and MSD astound me every time. From different information given every time I call, to online forms which need to be printed out and re-entered by the caseworker, there is nothing easy or simple. I'm sure everyone, both staff and clients, would benefit from a more streamlined, clear cut system."

'LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Actively change the culture of WINZ to ensure staff assist people to access their full entitlements.
- Improve WINZ website so that information is more readily accessible and developed in a way that works for the people that are accessing support (this will need to involve actively seeking feedback from the people who use WINZ services) and make sure information is widely available in the community for example at public libraries.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.
- Provide information about how to access WINZ services, and what services or benefits are available, in public places such as libraries and community centres.

CULTURE OF FEAR AND SANCTIONS

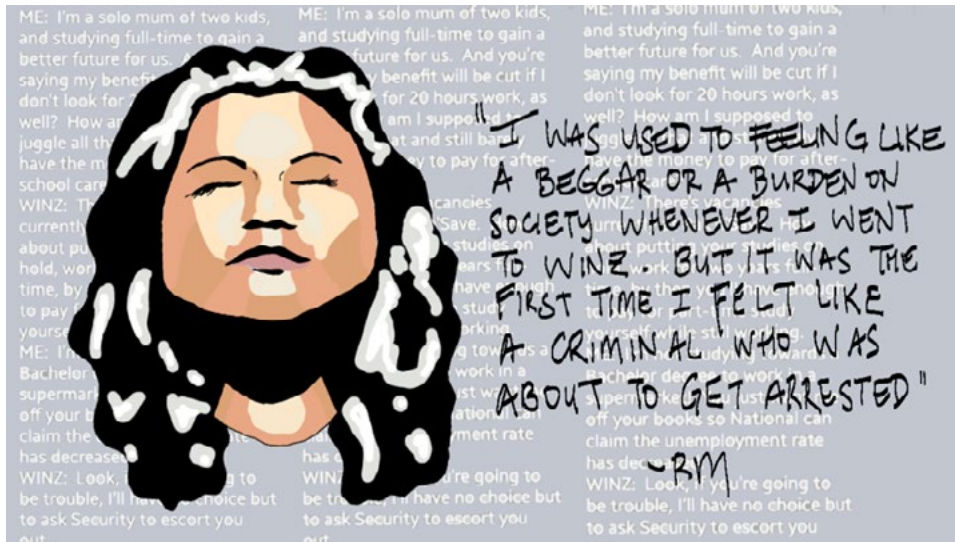


Image 014 "I was used to feeling like a beggar and a burden on society whenever I went to WINZ. But it was the first time I was treated like a criminal who was about to get arrested"

Many people feel intimidated and scared in the WINZ office. The culture of fear is both about the physical premises (unwelcoming staff, intimidating security guards), and the fear of sanctions.

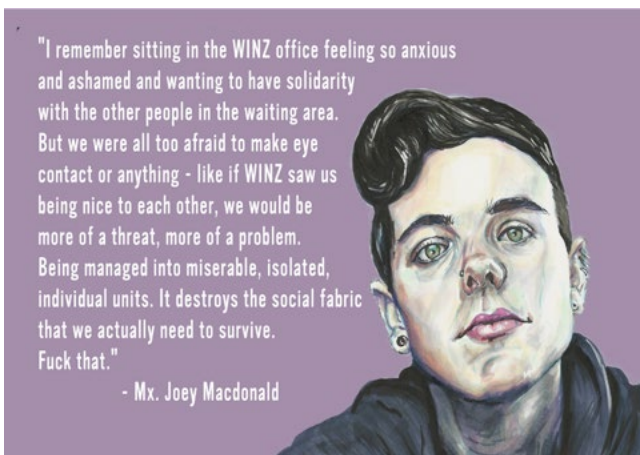


Image 012 "I remember sitting in the WINZ office feeling so anxious and ashamed and wanting to have solidarity with the other people in the waiting area. But we were all too afraid to make eye contact or anything - like if WINZ saw us being nice to each other, we would be more of a threat, more of a problem. Being managed into miserable, isolated, individual units. It destroys the social fabric that we actually need to survive. Fuck that."

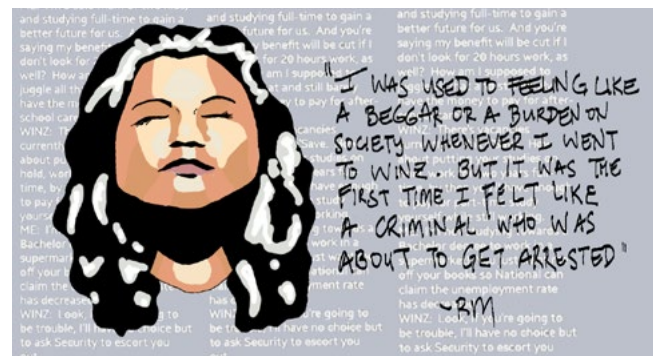


Image 014
BACKGROUND –

"ME: I'm a solo mum of two kids, and studying full-time to gain a better future for us. And you're saying my benefit will be cut if I don't look for 20 hours work, as well? How am I supposed to juggle all that and still barely have the money to pay for after-school care?
WINZ: There's vacancies currently at Pak'n'Save. How about putting your studies on hold, work for two years full-time, by then you'll have enough to pay for part-time study yourself while still working.
ME: I'm not studying towards a Bachelor degree to work in a supermarket! You just want me off your books so National can claim the unemployment rate has decreased.
WINZ: Look, if you're going to be trouble, I'll have no choice but to ask Security to escort you out."

FOREGROUND –

"I was used to feeling like a beggar and a burden on society whenever I went to WINZ. But it was the first time I was treated like a criminal who was about to get arrested"

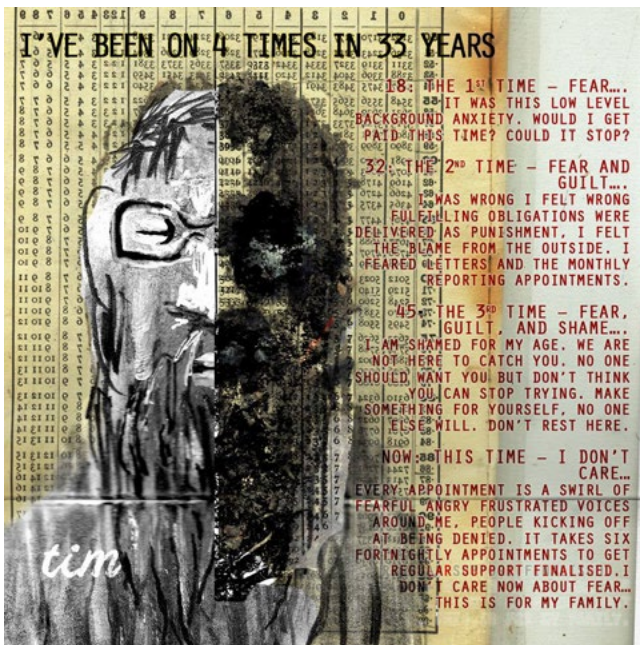


Image 020: "I've been on 4 times in 33 years
18: the 1st time – fear... it was this low level background anxiety. Would I get paid this time? Could it stop? 32: the 2nd time – fear and guilt... I was wrong I felt wrong fulfilling obligations were delivered as punishment, I felt the blame from the outside. I feared letters and the monthly reporting appointments. 45: the 3rd time – fear, guilt, and shame... I am shamed for my age. We are not here to catch you. No one should want you but don't think you can stop trying. Make something for yourself, no one else will. Don't rest here. Now: this time – I don't care... Every appointment is a swirl of fearful angry frustrated voices around me, people kicking off, at being denied. It takes six fortnightly appointments to get regular support finalised. I don't care now about fear... this is for my family."

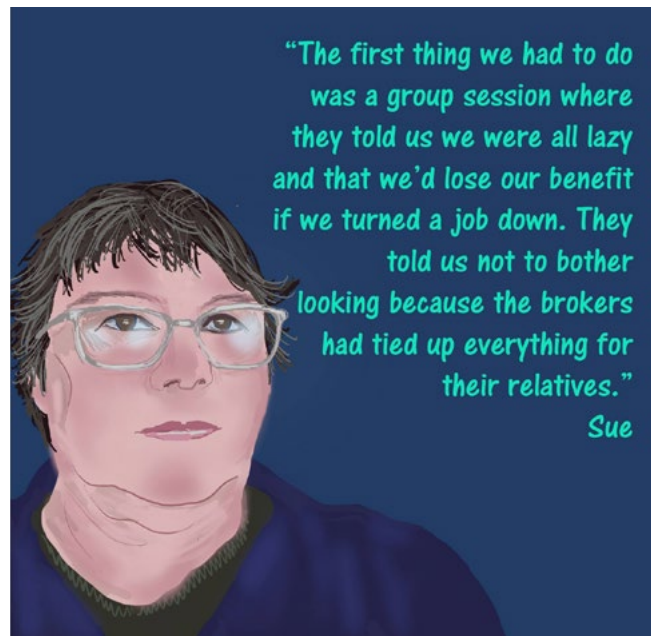


Image 045 "The first thing we had to do was a group session where they told us we were all lazy and that we'd lose our benefit if we turned a job down. Then they told us not to bother looking because the brokers had tied up everything for their relatives."



Image 024 "About a year ago I was invited to a conference overseas. At that time I was aware of the new overseas travel restrictions on Supported Living Payment, and I heard of 2 people who had their payments cut off when their plane took off to leave New Zealand. I was very anxious about this and I chose not to go overseas because I just did not want to return and have to sort out my payments."

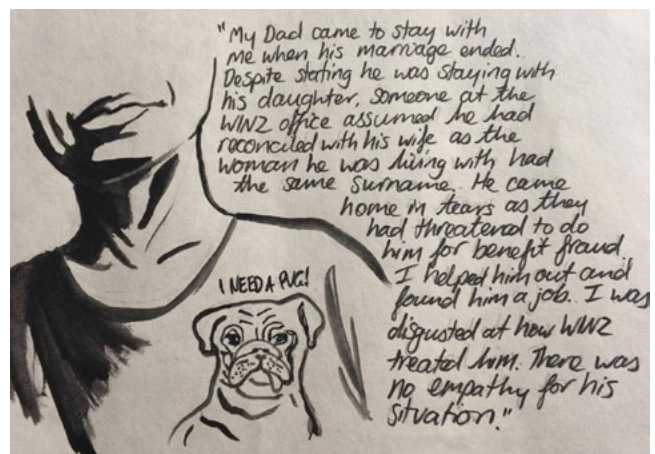


Image 074 "My Dad came to stay with me when his marriage ended. Despite stating he was staying with his daughter someone at the WINZ office assumed he had reconciled with his wife as the woman he was living with had the same surname. He came home in tears as they had threatened to do him for benefit fraud. I helped him out and found him a job. I was disgusted at how WINZ treated him. There was no empathy for his situation."

If you have hope the system does it's best to beat it out of you.

I was on the job seekers benefit for around 3 months as a recent grad looking for work post recession. I was getting close, getting interviews, only to be dragged through the gutter twice a week at WINZ. And I was privileged compared to so many people there, having their lives interrogated in ears reach if everyone, in much worse situations than I was.

Anon



Image 160 "If you have hope, the system does its best to beat it out of you. I was on the job seekers benefit for around 3 months as a recent grad looking for work post recession. I was getting close, getting interviews, only to be dragged through the gutter twice a week at WINZ. And I was privileged compared to so many people there, having their lives interrogated in ears reach of everyone, in much worse situations than I was."

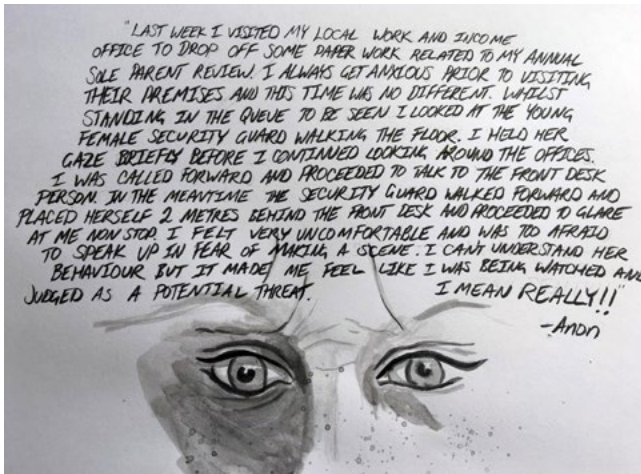


Image 163 "Last week I visited my local work and income office to drop off some paper work related to my annual sole parent review. I always get anxious prior to visiting their premises and this time was no different. Whilst standing in the queue to be seen I looked at the young female security guard walking the floor. I held her gaze briefly before I continued looking around the offices. I was called forward and proceeded to talk to the front desk person. In the meantime the security guard walked forward and placed herself 2 metres behind the front desk and proceeded to glare at me non-stop. I felt very uncomfortable and was too afraid to speak up in fear of making a scene. I can't understand her behaviour but it made me feel like I was being watched and judged as a potential threat. I mean really!!"



I was unemployed in the 1970s - the "good times" to be a beneficiary.

There were no foodbanks, no guards at the benefit office door. But the stress of missed payments, of not being believed, of review meetings, endless queues, forms, declarations and Catch-22 traps led to panic attacks and depression.

So my heart goes out to today's beneficiaries who have so much more to contend with.

-JAN

Image 175 "I was unemployed in the 1970s - the "good times" to be a beneficiary. There were no foodbanks, no guards at the benefit office door. But the stress of missed payments, of not being believed, of review meetings, endless queues, forms, declarations and Catch-22 traps led to panic attacks and depression. So my heart goes out to today's beneficiaries who have so much more to contend with."



Image 183 "I kept getting sicker because of the cold and damp where I was living. When that place was sold, the only place I could find that was warm and dry was more than I could afford. WINZ approved extra support but later on they sent me a letter accusing me of 'arranging my circumstances' to get help and then said they had never approved anything. By that time, I had signed the lease and would be liable for the rent and a termination fee if I broke it. It was only because an advocate had been with me and taken written notes the first time, and then argued for half an hour the second time, that I was granted half of what was originally approved. I cried and a staff member swore at me. I'm pretty sure the person who originally granted the support got in trouble for trying to help me too."



Image 194 "It took me two months to convince my husband to apply for an unemployment benefit after he was made redundant. We had used all our savings, and needed it to feed our kids and pay our bills. We went along to the first appointment with the bills to prove that we needed urgent help. They sent us into a seminar that was all about how they might decide we weren't eligible for help and how if we didn't follow their rules they'd cut the payments we hadn't even got yet, and we would have to reapply. We went home and cried out of fear and worry, and we didn't sleep well for days and days. I wish we had a system that didn't add pressure to the lives of already struggling families. We both work full time now, but the memory of that first seminar and the following fear worry and trauma lasts."



Image 200 "I was unemployed in the 90's. The first thing I remember about the WINZ offices was the sound of an old lady crying. She explained, while sobbing, that her late husband had done the banking and she didn't understand what she was being asked to provide. She was snapped at and sent on her way. All she needed was an ounce of respect and the person to tell her what to ask the bank teller for.

If a little old lady, trying to sort out her super was treated like this, dehumanised and humiliated, how would they treat me?

I complied meekly to everything they demanded, even when I knew they were wrong. I was terrified of what they would do if I didn't."

'CULTURE OF FEAR AND SANCTIONS' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stop the sanctions.
- Abolish the current definition of relationships in the nature of marriage, and stop treating people in relationships as a single economic unit.
- Develop policies that better respond to individual and whānau need. We will know that this is working when better, more sustainable employment options are identified and when people accessing WINZ support aren't forced to end or change their otherwise supportive relationships due to rigid application of rules. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from. There should be particular attention paid to making sure Māori communities are served by WINZ, and that groups that government policy and other structural factors disadvantage repeatedly are able to have their voice included in this policy work.
- Rethink the way that WINZ offices are set up. There needs to be appropriate places to discuss sensitive information, and security guards should not be used to provide unnecessary intimidation.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

Some people were concerned about the lack of privacy they encountered when seeking support. This was experienced in two ways; there was a fear of their paperwork being shared, and there was a fear of being overheard in the open plan office.

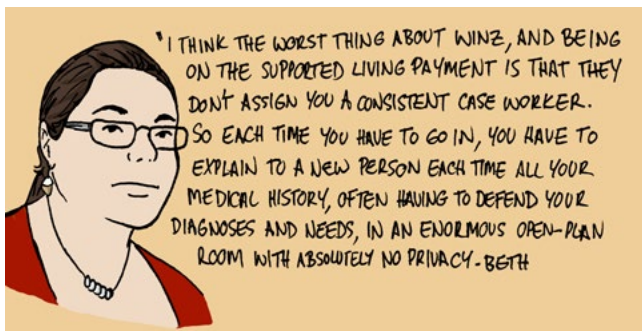


Image 011 "I think the worst thing about WINZ and being on the Supported Living Payment is that they don't assign you a consistent case worker. So each time you have to go in, you have to explain to a new person each time all your medical history, often having to defend your diagnoses and needs, in an enormous open-plan room with no privacy."

"I was once handed someone else's paperwork, I was told not to read or copy it and that someone would come to my house to collect it! I refused to have someone come to my residence so was threatened with being kicked off the benefit. I asked to meet with a manager... she made me feel like a criminal and told me what I had done was illegal. It wasn't even my fault!" -Anonymous



Image 077 "I was once handed someone else's paperwork, I was told not to read or copy it and that someone would come to my house to collect it! I refused to have someone come to my residence so was threatened with being kicked off the benefit. I asked to meet with a manager... she made me feel like a criminal and told me what I had done was illegal. It wasn't even my fault!"

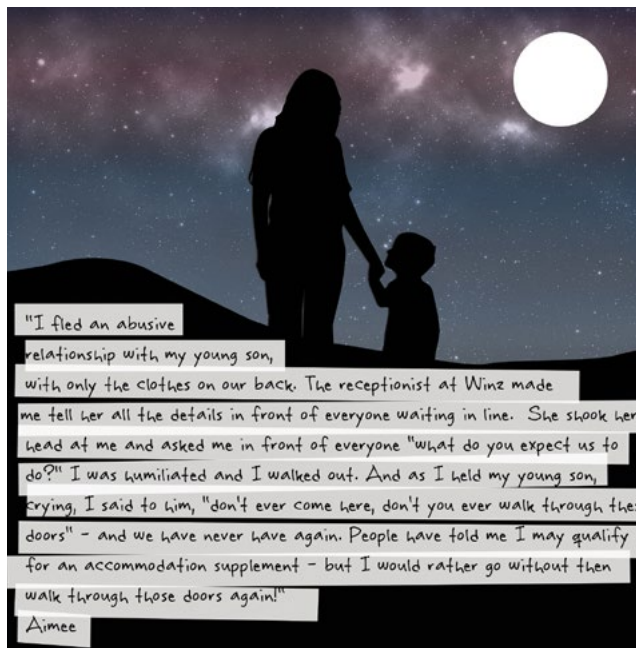


Image 103 "I fled an abusive relationship with my young son, with only the clothes on our back. The receptionist at WINZ made me tell her all the details in front of everyone waiting in line. She shook her head at me and asked me in front of everyone "what do you expect us to do?" I was humiliated and I walked out. And as I held my young son, crying, I said to him, "don't ever come here, don't you ever walk through these doors" - and we have never have again. People have told me I may qualify for an accommodation supplement - but I would rather go without then walk through those doors again!"

'PRIVACY CONCERNCS' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Improve privacy practice and policies - this goes from how receptionists respect the information and privacy through to how MSD holds information about people and what is shared and what is not. While it is good for people not to have to tell their story repeatedly, they need to also be able to know their information isn't shared for any other purpose than for providing them support.
 - Develop more robust systems to protect people's paperwork.
 - Change the office layout so there are more private rooms.
 - Ensure receptionists are upholding client privacy at all times.

BROKEN PROCEDURES

SYSTEMS NOT WORKING EFFICIENTLY, OR AT ALL

WINZ cut off my payments once.
When I went in to see them they said i had missed an appointment
I told my case worker i hadnt known about it.
He said a letter was sent to me.

I told him I didnt recieve the letter.

He said "everyone says that".

I asked what address they sent it to.

*He looked it up and showed me and i told him
it was not my address and i had never
given them that address.*

Never recieved an apology for the stress caused at that time
through no fault of mine.



Image 004 "WINZ cut off my payments once. When I went in to see them they said I had missed an appointment. I told my case worker I hadn't known about it. He said a letter was sent to me I told him I didn't receive the letter. He said "everyone says that". I asked what address they sent it to. He looked it up and showed me and I told him it was not my address and I had never given them that address. Never received an apology for the stress caused at that time through no fault of mine."

Many people spoke about systems not working efficiently and the errors that occur resulting in people losing their benefits or facing sanctions. This can have dire consequences for people relying on this money to provide basic necessities like food and shelter. Often the consequences of these mistakes are downplayed by staff.

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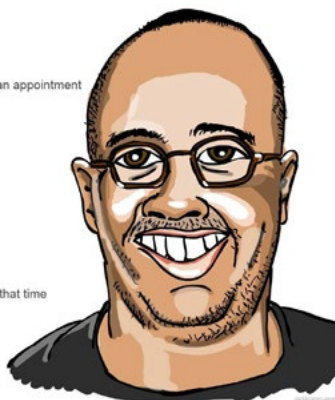
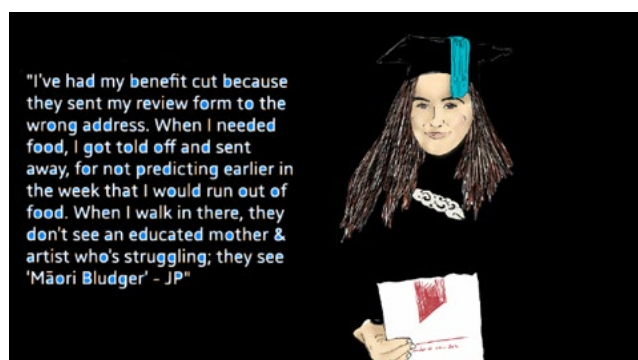


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"I've had my benefit cut because they sent my review form to the wrong address. When I needed food, I got told off and sent away, for not predicting earlier in the week that I would run out of food. When I walk in there, they don't see an educated mother & artist who's struggling; they see 'Māori Bludger' - JP"

Image 008 "I've had my benefit cut because they sent my review form to the wrong address. When I needed food I got told off and sent away, for not predicting earlier in the week that I would run out of food. When I walk in there, they don't see an educated mother and artist who's struggling; they see 'Māori Bludger'."

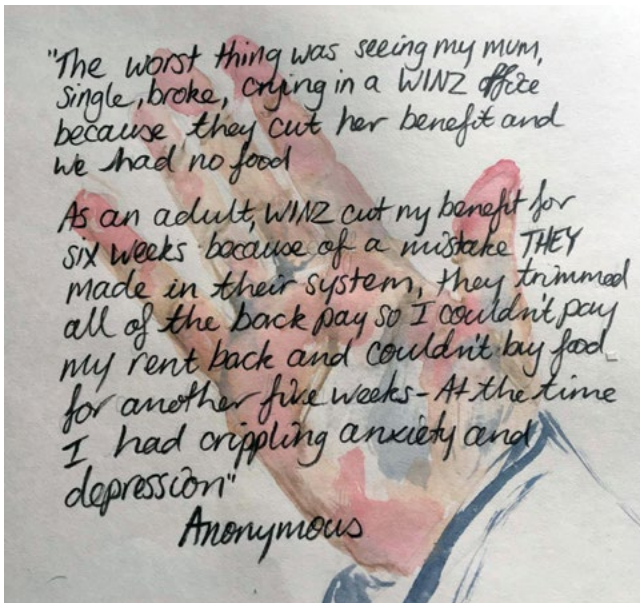


Image 043 "The worst thing was seeing my mum - single, broke, crying in a WINZ office because they cut her benefit and we had no food. As an adult, WINZ cut my benefit for six weeks because of a mistake THEY made in their system, they trimmed all of the back pay so I couldn't pay my rent back and couldn't buy food for another five weeks - at the time I had crippling anxiety and depression"

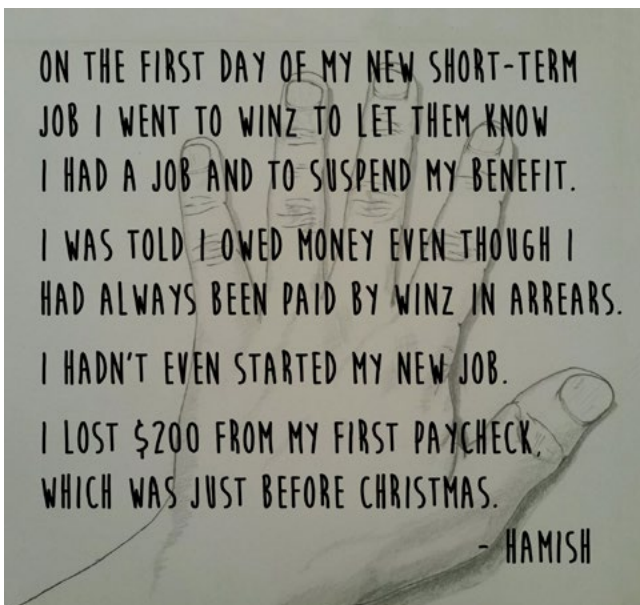


Image 047 "On the first day of my new short-term job I went to WINZ to let them know I had a job and to suspend my benefit. I was told I owed money even though I had always been paid by WINZ in arrears. I hadn't even started my new job. I lost \$200 from my first pay check which was just before Christmas."

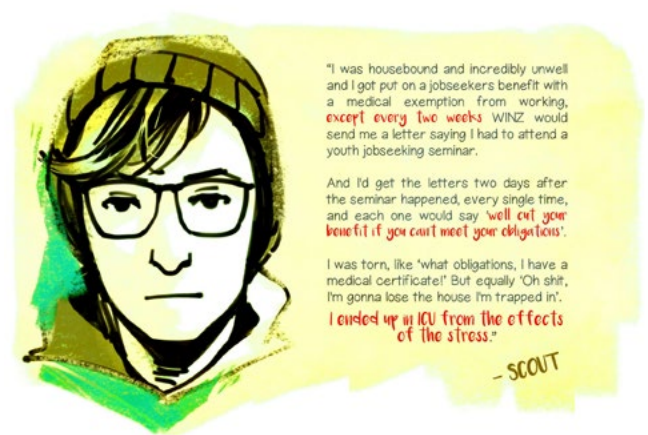


Image 068 "I was housebound and incredibly unwell and I got put on a jobseekers benefit with a medical exemption from working, except every two weeks WINZ would send me a letter saying I had to attend a youth job seeking seminar. And I'd get the letters 2 days after the seminar happened, every single time, and each one would say "we'll cut your benefit if you can't meet your obligations". I was torn, like "what obligations, I have a medical certificate!" but equally "oh shit I'm gonna lose the house I'm trapped in". I ended up in ICU from the effects of the stress."



Image 087 "As a student during my off-study period last year I was unable to work due to mental health reasons. I fought with StudyLink for two months to get the financial support I needed. I was told something different each time I asked why my application had been declined. I spent eight weeks without a consistent straight answer. A week before I was to start studying again in the new year, StudyLink called me to say that my declines were all due to a 'hiccup' in their reviews of my application. They told me that I had qualified since the beginning. Despite the back payment and the sheepish apology delivered I will never forget those eight weeks when I was dissected to the point of tears every time I called in. I discovered how little apologies mean when they're coming from a stranger over the phone who only knows your name from your on-screen file."



Image 099 "I needed help from WINZ when my daughter was very young. I was 23 and on my own as a single mum. I was trying to learn how to parent my baby while working part-time. I remember a lot of stress every time I had to go into that office. There was a lot of hostility and a lot of waiting. I remember being so gutted on one occasion when they lost all of my paperwork and claimed that I'd never submitted it. I had to start the process all over again. On top of everything else I was going through back then it was a really difficult system to deal with."

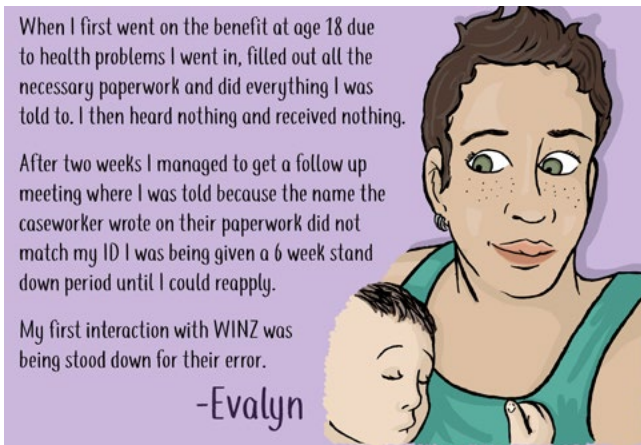


Image 128 "When I first went on the benefit at age 18 due to health problems I went in, filled out all the necessary paperwork and did everything I was told to. I then heard nothing and received nothing. After two weeks I managed to get a follow up meeting where I was told because the name the caseworker wrote on their paperwork did not match my ID I was being given a 6 week stand down period until I could reapply. My first interaction with WINZ was being stood down for their error."

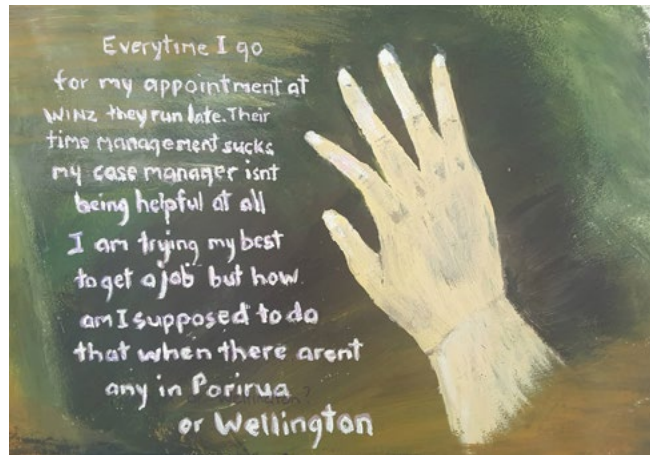


Image 135 "Every time I go for my appointment at WINZ they run late. Their time management sucks. My case manager isn't being helpful at all. I am trying my best to get a job. But how am I supposed to do that when there aren't any in Porirua or Wellington?"

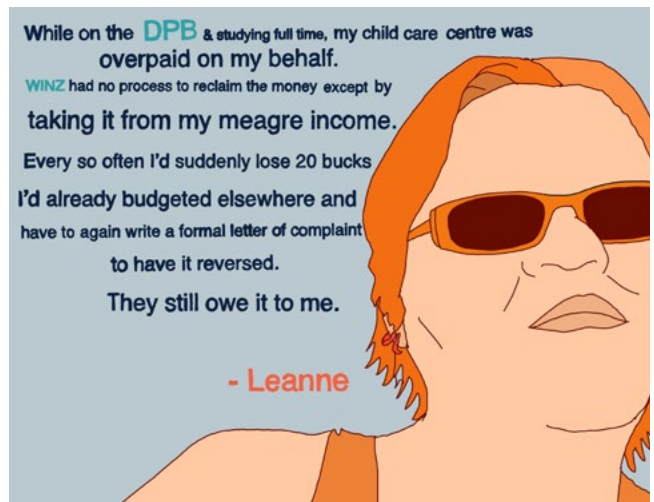


Image 140 "While on the DPB and studying full time, my child care centre was overpaid on my behalf. WINZ had no process to reclaim the money except by taking it from my meagre income. Every so often I'd suddenly lose 20 bucks I'd already budgeted elsewhere and have to again write a formal letter of complaint to have it reversed. They still owe it to me."



Image 141 "A fresh uni IT graduate, I applied early and diligently in case my job hunt came up empty. After six weeks of no money, jumping through bureaucratic hoops while WINZ screwed me around with cancelled appointments and broken promises, I finally received my first payment - the morning after I signed the contract for my first full-time job. WINZ kicked me at my lowest moment. I will never go back."

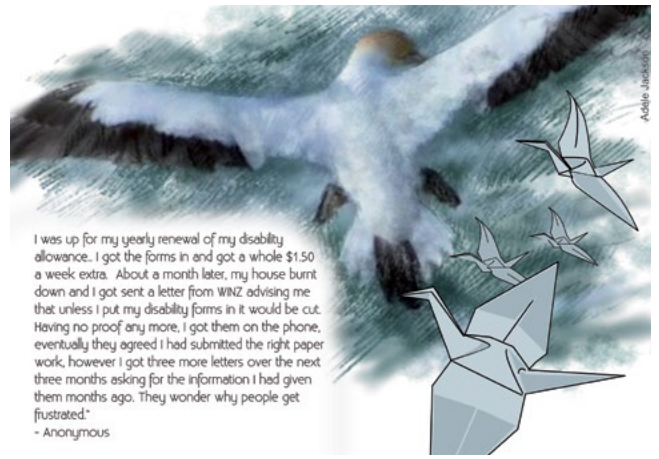


Image 164 "I was up for my yearly renewal of my disability allowance. I got the forms in and got a whole \$1.50 a week extra. About a month later, my house burnt down and I got sent a letter from WINZ advising me that unless I put my disability forms in it would be cut. Having no proof any more, I got them on the phone, eventually they agreed I had submitted the right paper work, however I got three more letters over the next three months asking for the information I had given them months ago. They wonder why people get frustrated"

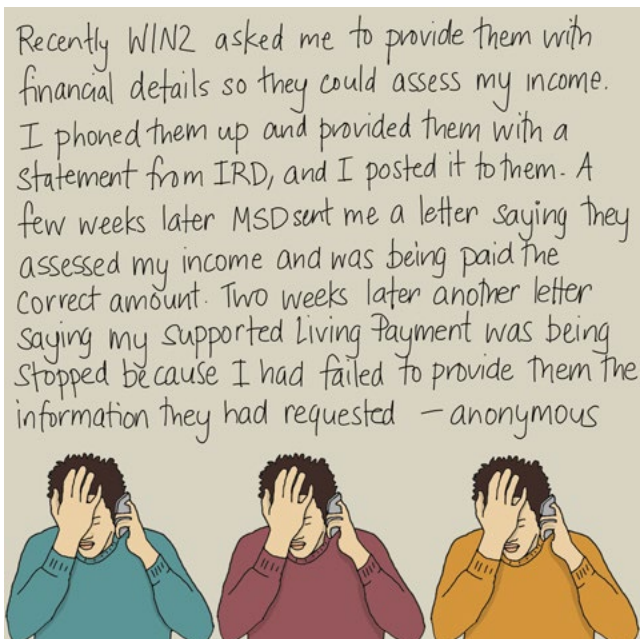


Image 148 "Recently WINZ asked me to provide them with financial details so they could assess my income. I phoned them up and provided them with a statement from IRD, and I posted it to them. A few weeks later MSD sent me a letter saying they assessed my income and I was being paid the correct amount. Two weeks later another letter saying my Supported Living Payment was being stopped because I had failed to provide them the information they had requested"

'SYSTEMS NOT WORKING EFFICIENTLY, OR AT ALL' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop better systems to cut down on the number of errors. For example, improve communications systems, and provide information with every entitlement.
- Create an independent review process and access to justice for beneficiaries.
- Stop the sanctions.
- Properly acknowledge mistakes and make reparations accordingly.
- Create a stop-gap measure to ensure people can meet their basic needs when a mistake has been made by the system. For example, a quick-access fund for rent or food money that people can request when they are penalised by a mistake made by the staff or system.

WRONG ADVICE



Image 109 "I moved my 2 year old son and I to Wellington after leaving my ex - it was an emotionally abusive relationship and I had postnatal depression, anxiety, general depression, and PTSD from a difficult birth. I called WINZ about psychiatric care and understood it could be provided. But I turned up to the psychiatrist appointment to find out that the information I'd been given was wrong. I was in desperate need and could barely function while trying to care for my son but I had to leave the psychiatrist without any help. It took me weeks to sort out WINZ and get the psychiatric support I needed."

Like system errors, wrong advice can have dire consequences for people seeking support. There are a number of stories in which people have been given the wrong advice over the phone or in person by staff members.

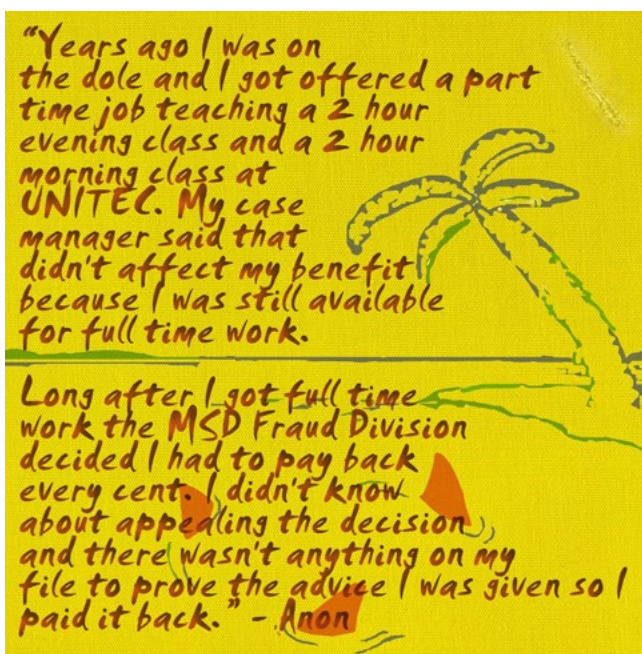


Image 07 "Years ago I was on the dole and I got offered a part time job teaching a 2 hour evening class and a 2 hour morning class at UNITEC. My case manager said that didn't affect my benefit because I was still available for full time work. Long after I got full time work the MSD Fraud Division decided I had to pay back every cent. I didn't know about appealing the decision and there wasn't anything on my file to prove the advice I was given so I paid it back."

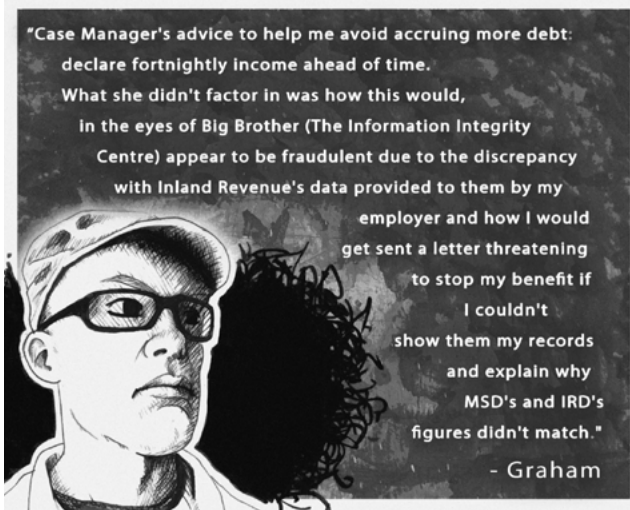


Image 108 "Case Manager's advice to help me avoid accruing more debt: declare fortnightly income ahead of time. What she didn't factor in was how this would, in the eyes of Big Brother (The Information Integrity Centre) appear to be fraudulent due to the discrepancy with Inland Revenue's data provided to them by my employer and how I would get sent a letter threatening to stop my benefit if I couldn't show them my records and explain why MSD's and IRD's figures didn't match."

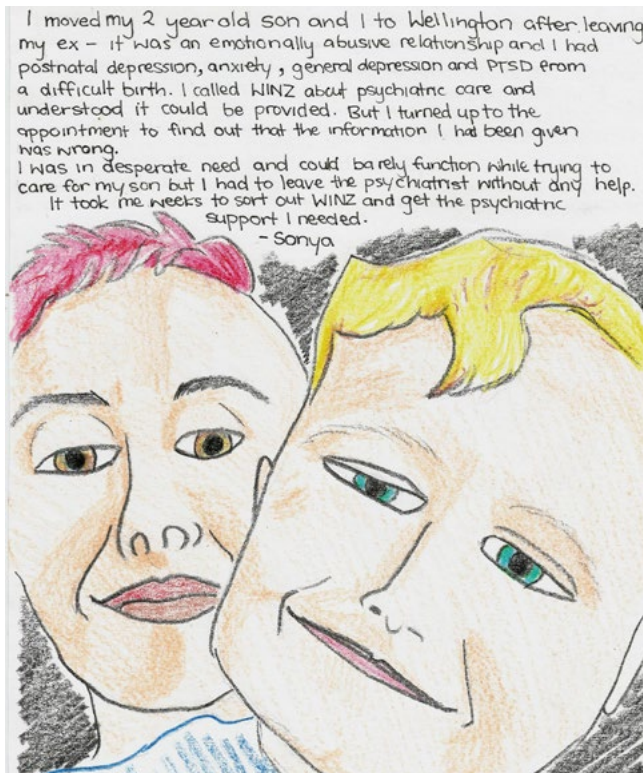


Image 109 "I moved my 2 year old son and I to Wellington after leaving my ex - it was an emotionally abusive relationship and I had postnatal depression, anxiety, general depression, and PTSD from a difficult birth. I called WINZ about psychiatric care and understood it could be provided. But I turned up to the psychiatrist appointment to find out that the information I'd been given was wrong. I was in desperate need and could barely function while trying to care for my son but I had to leave the psychiatrist without any help. It took me weeks to sort out WINZ and get the psychiatric support I needed."



Image 145 "My husband left me. I went to work and income, for the first time, to find out about the sole parents benefit. I asked them what happened if I had a private child support arrangement. They said that was fine. I just had to sign up for the benefit and I could still get the private child support. So I did because it would help me get on my feet after 5 years of not working. 6 days later I found out that wasn't true. I went and yelled/cried at WINZ and cancelled all the payments from them. But from that day on my ex-husband has viewed me as a money grabbing bitch. All because a week after he left I tried to access the support I was told I could receive and they lied."

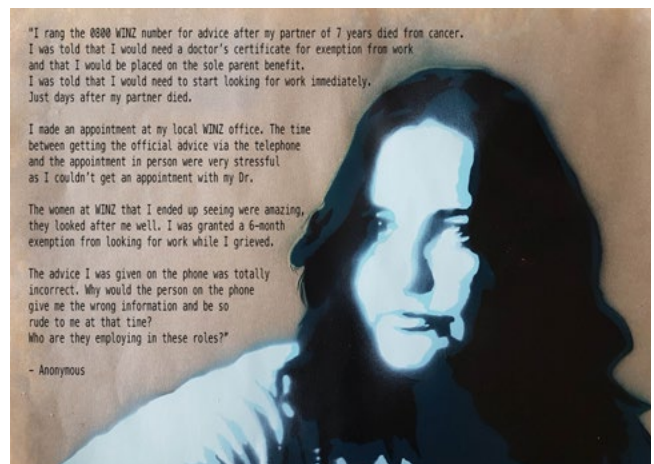


Image 161 "I rang the 0800 WINZ number for advice after my partner of 7 years died from cancer. I was told that I would need a doctor's certificate for exemption from work and that I would be placed on the sole parent benefit. I was told that I would need to start looking for work immediately. Just days after my partner died. I made an appointment at my local WINZ office. The time between getting the official advice via the telephone and the appointment in person were very stressful as I couldn't get an appointment with my doctor. The women at WINZ that I ended up seeing were amazing, they looked after me well. I was granted a 6-month exemption from looking for work while I grieved. The advice I was given on the phone was totally incorrect. Why would the person on the phone give me the wrong information and be so rude to me at that time? Who are they employing in these roles?"

'WRONG ADVICE' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure all staff know all current WINZ policies and procedures.
- Properly acknowledge mistakes, and make reparations accordingly and speedily.
- Actively change the culture of WINZ to ensure staff assist people to access their full entitlements.
- Improve WINZ website so that information is more readily accessible and developed in a way that works for the people that are accessing support.
- Provide information about how to access WINZ services, and what services or benefits are available, in public places such as libraries and community centres.

NONSENSICAL SYSTEMS



029 "Every year my mum has to prove to WINZ that my adult sister's amputated leg has not grown back, and that the chromosome that causes her intellectual disability has not changed. Having to confirm this every year seems a real waste of taxpayers' money"

There are a number of requirements and procedures in place that are nonsensical. These often require people accessing support to complete difficult and/or superfluous tasks, to face stand-down periods, and/or to put themselves in financially unsustainable situations.

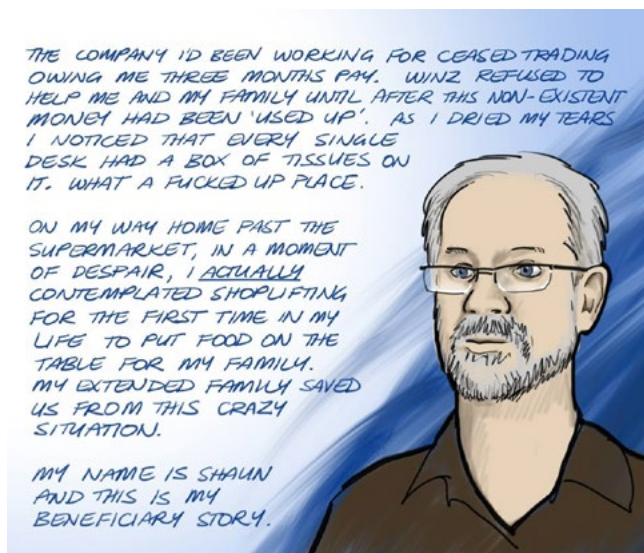


Image 013 "The company I'd been working for ceased trading owing me three months' pay. WINZ refused to help me and my family until after this non-existent money had been 'used-up'. As I dried my tears I noticed that every single desk had a box of tissues on it. What a fucked up place. On my way home past the supermarket, in a moment of despair, I actually contemplated shoplifting for the first time in my life, to put food on the table for my family. My extended family saved us from this crazy situation. My name is Shaun. This is my beneficiary story."



Image 029 "Every year my mum has to prove to WINZ that my adult sister's amputated leg has not grown back, and that the chromosome that causes her intellectual disability has not changed. Having to confirm this every year seems a real waste of taxpayers' money"

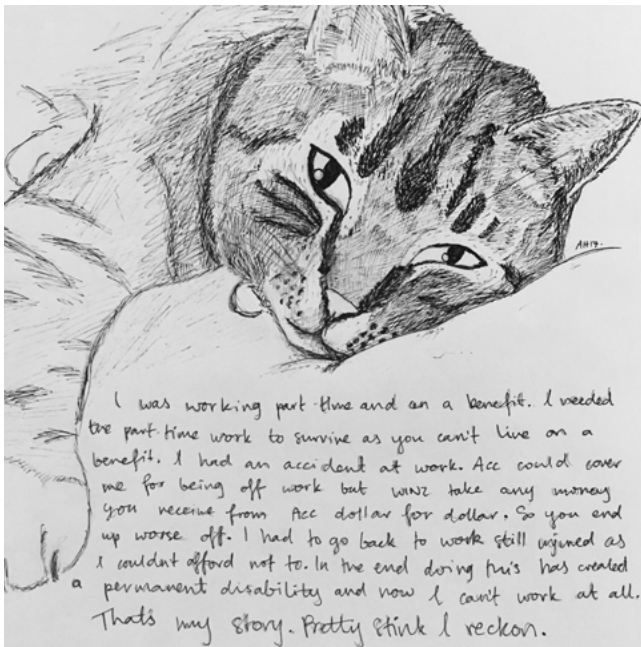


Image 072 "I was working part time and on a benefit. I needed the part time work to survive as you can't live on a benefit. I had an accident at work. ACC could cover me for being off work but WINZ take any money you receive from ACC dollar for dollar. So you end up worse off. I had to go back to work still injured as I couldn't afford not to. In the end doing this has created a permanent disability and I now can't work at all. That's my story. Pretty stink I reckon."



Image 073 "My partner and I split up and I needed to move out. I got the cheapest quotes I could find - \$80 bed and two \$20 bookshelves - and the first thing my case manager said to me was "we don't like false claims around here." I had to explain about breaking up and write down why I needed a bed ("to sleep on") and bookshelves ("for books"). My flabbergasted case manager said "books! Nope, you can't say books. Say they're for clothes." I was told to lie to get my needs met. WINZ knows we have to do this, but when we admit to it, pointing out how broken the system is, we are personally dragged through the mud."

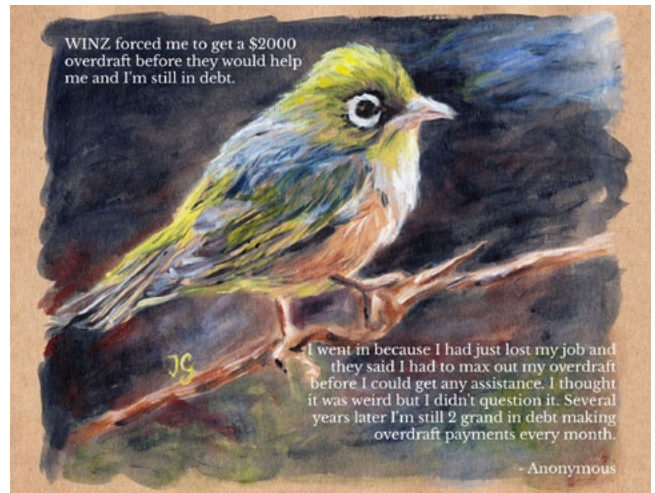


Image 075 "WINZ forced me to get a \$2000 overdraft before they would help me and I'm still in debt. I went in because I had just lost my job and they said I had to max out my overdraft before I could get any assistance. I thought it was weird but I didn't question it. Several years later I'm still 2 grand in debt making overdraft payments every month"



Image 086 "WINZ redirected some of my benefit to pay 1/3 of my power bill each week, and told me this would stop me from being disconnected, but refused to help with the outstanding amount. Two weeks later, my power was disconnected for just under a week. My flatmates and I spent four days in a freezing, uninsulated flat because WINZ was too incompetent."

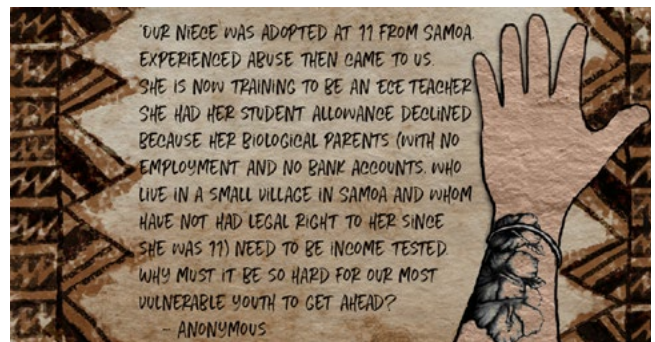


Image 089 "Our niece was adopted at 11 from Samoa, experienced abuse then came to us. She is now training to be an ECE teacher. She had her student allowance declined because her biological parents, with no employment and no bank accounts, who live in a small village in Samoa and whom have not had legal right to her since she was 11, need to be income tested. Why must it be so hard for our most vulnerable youth to get ahead?"

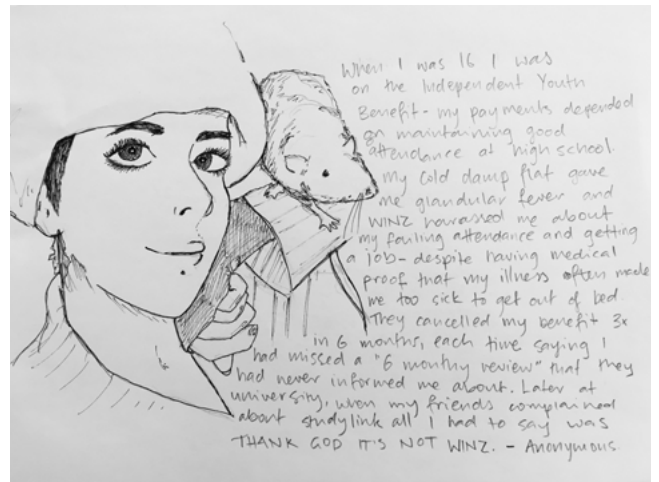
MY BROTHER HAD NO CAR WHEN HE WAS ON WINZ, BUT WAS EXPECTED TO TRAVEL TO THE NEXT TOWN FOR HIS APPOINTMENTS OR LOSE HIS BENEFIT. THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WAS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT & TOO EXPENSIVE FOR HIM

SO HE GENERALLY ENDED UP HITCHHIKING.

Alex



Image 174 "My brother had no car when he was on WINZ, but was expected to travel to the next town for his appointments or lose his benefit. The public transport was almost non-existent and too expensive for him so he generally ended up hitchhiking"



187 "When I was 16 I was on the Independent Youth Benefit - my payments depended on maintaining good attendance at high school. My cold damp flat gave me glandular fever and WINZ harassed me about my falling attendance and getting a job - despite having medical proof that my illness often made me too sick to get out of bed. They cancelled my benefit 3x in 6 months, each time saying I had missed a "6 monthly review" that they had never informed me about. Later at university, when my friends complained about Studylink all I had to say was thank God it's not WINZ."

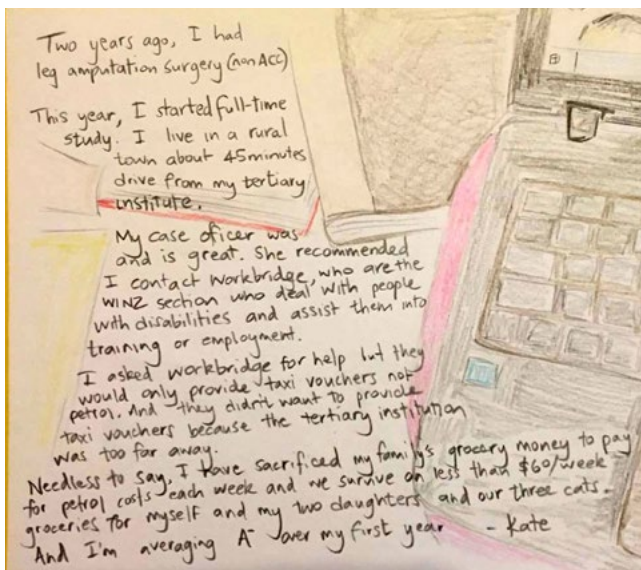


Image 184 "Two years ago, I had leg amputation surgery (non-ACC). This year, I started full time study. I live in a rural town about 45 minutes drive from my tertiary institute. My case officer was and is great. She recommended I contact Workbridge, who are the WINZ section who deal with people with disabilities and assist them into training or employment. I asked Workbridge for help but they would only provide taxi vouchers not petrol. And they didn't want to provide taxi vouchers because the tertiary institution was too far away. Needless to say, I have sacrificed my family's grocery money to pay for my petrol costs each week, and we survive on less than \$60/week groceries for myself and my two daughters, and our three cats. And I am averaging A- over my first year."

ADDITION: From age 16 I received the Independent Youth Allowance for 2 years (2007-2008), and shifted from Christchurch to Wellington to escape domestic abuse. While on the IYB many of my interactions with WINZ left me feeling sub-human. My allowance and accommodation supplement was ~\$200 per week, \$180 of which went immediately on rent and expenses (power, gas, phone), allowing me \$20 for food and everything else. I went vegetarian out of necessity - spending \$10 a week at the Sunday vegetable markets (which in Wellington were affordable and \$10 went a long way. I was lucky to have this access to cheap healthy food), then \$10 on canned food at the supermarket. It was a meager existence, if I wanted to go to the movies with a friend, or buy a birthday gift, etc. I had to choose between that and eating. At 16 it's hard to find a flat. My first house in Wellington was so damp I had to throw out 50% of my clothes because they all went mouldy beyond repair. I couldn't afford to replace them so I just went without. Within a month of living there I was diagnosed with glandular fever, over the course of a year this progressed to a point where I was often unable to leave bed for more than 10mins, and would go for as long as 3 weeks without having enough energy to leave the house. I was even hospitalized for a week due to respiratory complications, and had recurring tonsillitis. All of this medical information was given to WINZ, as maintaining good attendance at school was a pre-requisite for my allowance, yet I was pressured (in meetings & phone calls) to either maintain a perfect attendance record or get a job. I felt like they didn't believe how unwell I really was. I don't remember a single appointment that didn't make me cry. My highschool teachers, who saw both

how sick I was and how hard I was trying, were my only support network and several became advocates for me when dealing with WINZ, after this I stopped getting pressured about finding employment. During a 6 month period my benefit was cancelled three times without warning. All three times I phoned to ask why I hadn't been paid and was informed I had "missed a six monthly review". When I asked what they had done to try and communicate these supposed meeting times, as I had never been made aware, I was told that "you should have just known". By the third occurrence I was so upset I cried on the phone because it so was clearly absurd! Each time this happened it caused the weekly automatic payments I had set up with my bank to bounce. I had two automatic payments, and each failed payment would incur a \$15 fee. So every time WINZ cancelled my benefit I would end up in "unarranged overdraft" due to the \$30 bank fee, and then the overdraft would incur a \$15 fee too! So one non payment from WINZ would set me back for a month. I vividly recall bursting into tears at the bank when trying to explain what had happened to get the fees reversed. I felt so utterly humiliated I changed banks and have never been into that branch since. On several occasions I attempted to apply for a food grant and was turned away by reception as I had arrived after 4pm and it was their policy to not give out grants beyond 4pm! A clearly redundant policy as it was impossible for me to arrive before 4pm without having to take time off school - which could then affect my benefit! These are just a few of the examples that upset me during my time on the IYB. There were many more. During this time I felt like I was stuck in a never ending cycle of catch 22's, I was treated like a liar trying to take advantage of the system rather than a very unwell child that needed help and guidance from supportive adults. Despite all adversity (and a 30% attendance rate in 7th form) I passed highschool with good grades and received university entrance. Later at university I went on the Student Allowance and was astonished by how nice and supportive the Studylink staff were, telling me about all my extra entitlements and how to apply for them. Studylink staff treated me with respect and seemed to have genuine interest in my field of study. I just wish I had have had that kind of encouragement and support from WINZ to get through highschool.



"My daughter has Autism and receives Child Disability Allowance. We recently received the medical review form, filled it in and returned it to our local office only to be told we have make an appointment to return the form. That's my time and theirs wasted when that appointment time could go to someone who needs support right now. Bravo WINZ, bravo" - Caroline

Image 191 "My daughter has Autism and receives Child Disability Allowance. We recently received the medical review form, filled it in and returned it to our local office only to be told we have make an appointment to return the form. That's my time and theirs wasted when that appointment time could go to someone who needs support right now. Bravo WINZ, bravo"

'NONSENSICAL SYSTEMS' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stop the sanctions.
- Change unnecessary systems – like requiring people with long-standing disabilities to fill out forms every year.

PUBLIC STIGMA



"I TALKED ABOUT HOW I LIED TO WINZ 23 YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS A SINGLE MUM WITH A LITTLE BABY. I TALKED ABOUT WHAT BENEFICIARY LIFE IS REALLY LIKE SO WE COULD CHOOSE TO MAKE IT BETTER. I WAS NAMED A CRIMINAL, A CHEAT, A THIEF, A BLUDGER, A 'SELF CONFESSED BENEFIT FRAUDSTER.' SO BE IT. THERE ARE THE JUDGEMENTAL AND THE JUDGED. I STAND WITH THE JUDGED."

- Metiria Turei

Image 100 "I talked about how I lied to WINZ 23 years ago when I was a single mum with a little baby. I talked about what beneficiary life is really like so we could choose to make it better. I was named a criminal, a cheat, a thief, a bludger, a 'self-confessed benefit fraudster.' So be it. There are the judgemental and the judged. I stand with the judged."

The public stigma that beneficiaries have to face is immense and pervasive. This project was inspired by the beneficiary bashing that Metiria Turei faced when talking about her experience on the benefit.



Image 015 "NZ has a culture of kicking down people who are struggling, but we should actually be holding MSD accountable for its failures in helping people to get back on their feet. Instead of saying "Why doesn't she..." people should be saying "Why doesn't MSD..." Have you tried to stand up when everyone's kicking you?"



"Society says I am a Loser for being on the benefit. I am grateful that I am eligible for the Invalids Benefit. WINZ pays all my living expenses. I am very grateful for what I get but it's hard being looked down on by the general public. I hate saying what I do when people ask me. Just lately I have started telling the truth. I am an Artist. I go to a shared art studio in Dunedin. Artsenta. There I am a real person with skills and talents. I am a Full-Time Knitter. Sometimes if the person asking seems really judgemental I say I am Retired. (Retired from society)" - HydroGirl Dunedin

Image 019 "Society says I am a Loser for being on the benefit. I am grateful that I am eligible for the Invalids Benefit. WINZ pays all my living expenses. I am very grateful for what I get but it's hard being looked down on by the general public. I hate saying what I do when people ask me. Just lately I have started telling the truth. I am an Artist. I go to a shared art studio in Dunedin. Artsenta. There I am a real person with skills and talents. I am a Full-Time Knitter. Sometimes if the person asking seems really judgemental I say I am Retired. (Retired from society)"



Image 035 "I felt a strong obligation to 'earn' the DPB with volunteer work in the community. I organised events, edited newsletters, sat on committees, & taught workshops ...while also studying, working part time & single parenting. Yet I still feel so much shame for having been a bludger."



Image 096 "I was the kid who chose her school camp based on which option was cheapest, knowing my Mum would have to approach the school for help to fund it. I was also the kid who topped the country in Bursary English and won scholarships, because I wanted to prove that "beneficiary" does not equal "worthless". Growing up on the DPB directly influenced my choice of career: Every day I give back to children, teenagers, and families who are struggling to restore their own sense of worth."

I still find it difficult to tell people I was on a benefit for 17 years. I needed and was entitled to be on a benefit and I am thankful that I live in a country that provides that possibility but why do I feel ashamed? A lot of people make negative judgements. Do they believe the benefit is something they are missing out on? I think there are many reasons, some of them complex some of them simply ignorance. I want to live in a country that is compassionate, a country that values all. I was a solo parent and recovering from a Bone Marrow Transplant and subsequent infection of Hep C which the Ministry of Health did not approve screening for at the time. When attending a WINZ appointment I would always try and have another adult with me as I was treated better, told different rules and offered more assistance on those occasions. This should not be necessary. New Zealand, stop looking down on beneficiaries.



Image 061 "I still find it difficult to tell people I was on a benefit for 17 years. I needed and was entitled to be on a benefit and I am thankful that I live in a country that provides that possibility but why do I feel ashamed? A lot of people make negative judgements. Do they believe the benefit is something they are missing out on? I think there are many reasons, some of them complex some of them simply ignorance. I want to live in a country that is compassionate, a country that values all. I was a solo parent and recovering from a Bone Marrow Transplant and subsequent infection of Hep C which the Ministry of Health did not approve screening for at the time. When attending a WINZ appointment I would always try and have another adult with me as I was treated better, told different rules and offered more assistance on those occasions. This should not be necessary. New Zealand, stop looking down on beneficiaries."



Image 100 "I talked about how I lied to WINZ 23 years ago when I was a single mum with a little baby. I talked about what beneficiary life is really like so we could choose to make it better. I was named a criminal, a cheat, a thief, a bludger, a 'self-confessed benefit fraudster.' So be it. There are the judgemental and the judged. I stand with the judged."

My back was fractured in an accident. While I was struggling with the impact of the disability on my life and scraping to survive on a benefit. My sister had to go into the WINZ office for our mum. She came back talking about the "scum of the earth, dole bludgers" and announced that she would "never go on a benefit, no matter what happened". That judgement compounded the shame I already felt.



Image 104 "My back was fractured in an accident. While I was struggling with the impact of the disability on my life and scraping to survive on a benefit. My sister had to go into the WINZ office for our mum. She came back talking about the "scum of the earth, dole bludgers" and announced that she would "never go on a benefit, no matter what happened". That judgement compounded the shame I already felt."

The thing I wish would change regarding the welfare system is society's view.

Why see those who are desperately in need as a plague on society or bludgers?

If society's view changes to have more compassion and understanding,

there's a better chance of getting the system changed for the better too, because Kiwis will fight for it in droves as we have always done for things that matter to us as a country."



Image 178 "The thing I wish would change regarding the welfare system is society's view. Why see those who are desperately in need as a plague on society or bludgers? If society's view changes to have more compassion and understanding, there's a better chance of getting the system changed for the better too, because Kiwis will fight for it in droves as we have always done for things that matter to us as a country."



Image 169 "The case manager that I got was very nice, she spoke to me like an equal. I appreciated being spoken to with respect. I already had work, so I was meeting my work obligations. It was my ex-partner who shamed me for going on the sole parents benefit, when he realised he would have to pay child support. It made me feel ashamed of needing that assistance. I was on it 2.5 years until I got more work, and had fully recovered from the acrimonious breakup. Because I was an educated, middle class woman with a good part time job, I think I felt even more ashamed of being a beneficiary. No more shame, from society, from ex partners, from MSD itself. We should be coaching women to make a better life, not sledging them for being in dire straits."



Image 192 "I was never a beneficiary but I so easily could have been. My innate fear of being classed as a beneficiary meant I did everything I could not to be one. I was 19 years old, unmarried, with a baby. I got \$9 A fortnight family assistance. We literally ate bread and water for months. People would shout at me on the street, telling me to stop taking their hard earned tax money or, the worst, that I should have offered myself while pregnant so the government didn't have to support me and my baby. That's how I was treated without being a beneficiary. Why would I ever choose to walk through WINZ doors knowing they would be the same or worse?"

'PUBLIC STIGMA' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a culture of compassion
- Undertake an awareness/anti-stigma campaign

NOT ENOUGH

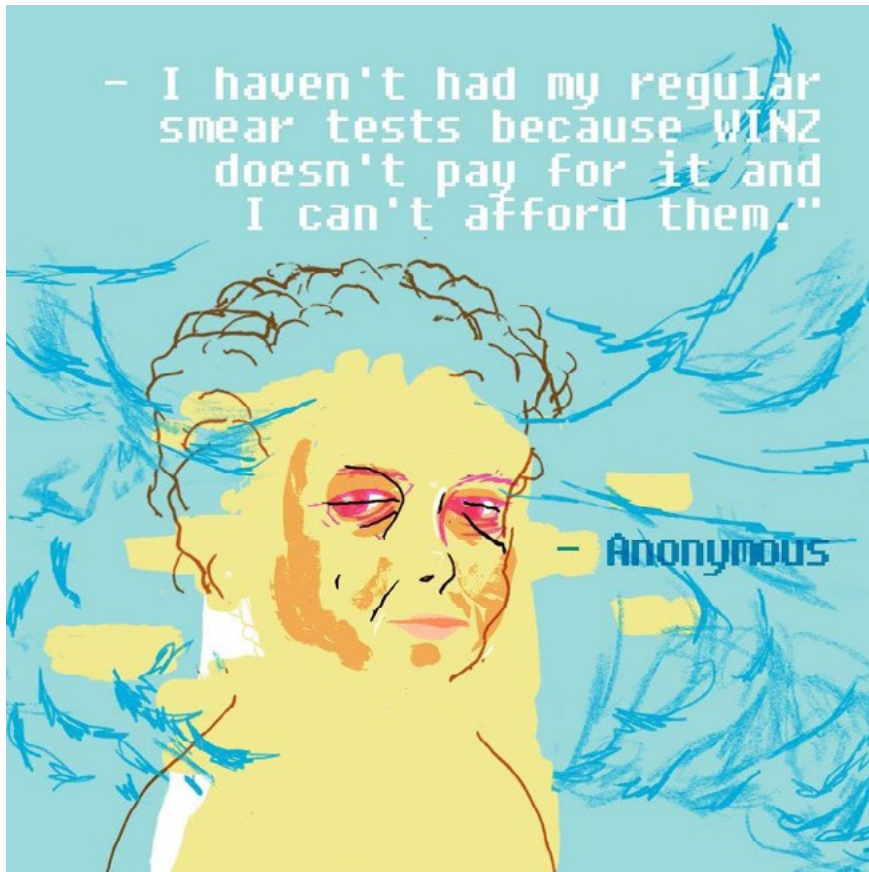


Image 040 "I haven't had my regular smear tests because WINZ doesn't pay for it and I can't afford them."

One of the strongest themes that comes through our stories is that beneficiaries simply do not receive enough to live on. Many people cannot meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and warmth, let alone complete the extra requirements of WINZ (including covering transport costs to WINZ appointments, or getting doctors appointments to fill out WINZ forms).

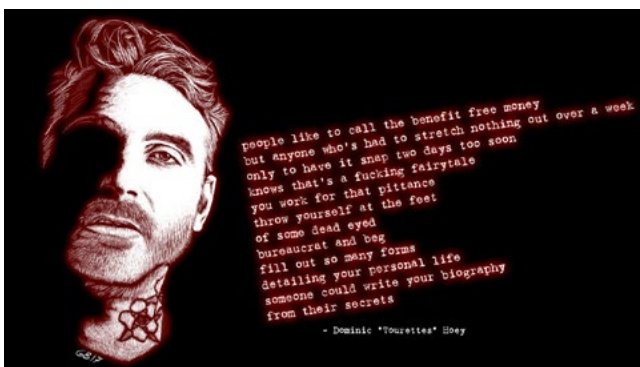


Image 025 "people like to call the benefit free money but anyone who's had to stretch nothing out over a week only to have it snap two days too soon knows that's a fucking fairytale you work for that pittance throw yourself at the feet of some dead eyed bureaucrat and beg fill out so many forms detailing your personal life someone could write your biography from their secrets"



Image 030 "My mother suffers from serious mental illness, she has not been able to work for the last 12 years because of it. She is on the sickness benefit. My father worked for a government branch until it got shut down in 2012, and has been fully unemployed for the last 3 years. I am a first year full time uni student, I live with my parents. I pay rent with my Studylink living costs because my parents WINZ money goes towards our food + everything else. I've thought about leaving uni but that would mean losing my Studylink money and we can't make it week to week without it"

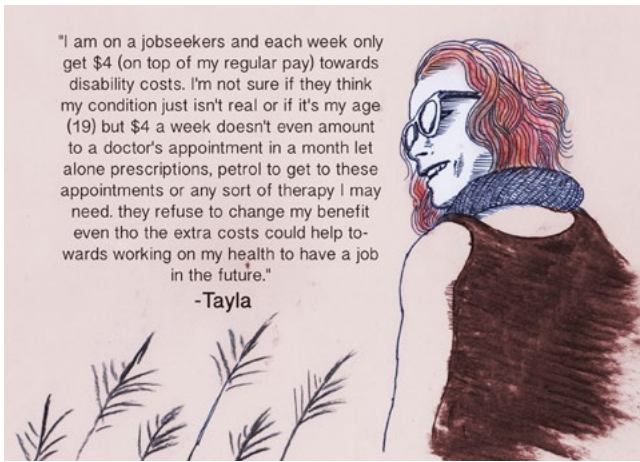


Image 032 "I am on a jobseekers and each week only get \$4 (on top of my regular pay) towards disability costs. I'm not sure if they think my condition just isn't real or if it's my age (19) but \$4 a week doesn't even amount to a doctor's appointment in a month let alone prescriptions, petrol to get to these appointments or any sort of therapy I may need. they refuse to change my benefit even though the extra costs could help towards working on my health to have a job in the future."

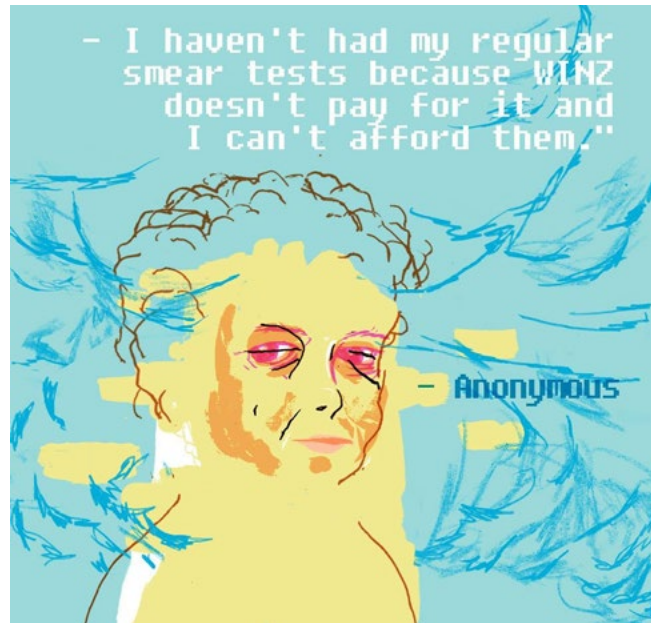


Image 040 "I haven't had my regular smear tests because WINZ doesn't pay for it and I can't afford them."



Image 034 "I've been on the benefit 4 times in 20 years. Each time for 1-3 months. It was barely enough to live on in 1998 with rent, food or other costs to cover. Now it's even harder. Everything costs more and the benefit hasn't kept up. Also you are treated worse. No-one wants to be that poor and that badly treated."

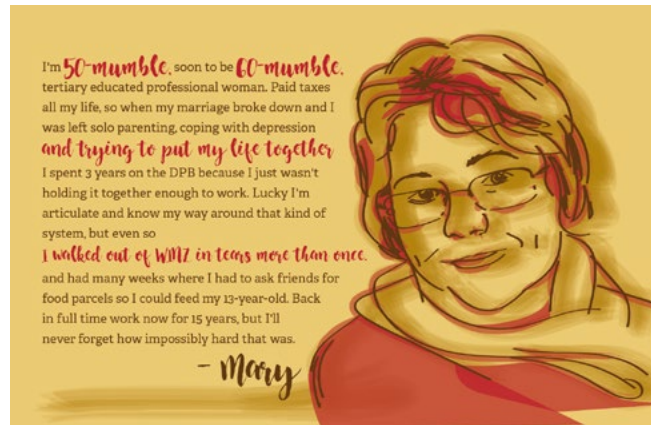


Image 051 "I'm 50-mumble, soon to be 60-mumble, tertiary educated professional woman. Paid taxes all my life, so when my marriage broke down and I was left solo parenting, coping with depression and trying to put my life together I spent 3 years on the DPB because I just wasn't holding it together enough to work. Lucky I'm articulate and know my way around that kind of system, but even so I walked out of WINZ in tears more than once, and had many weeks where I had to ask friends for food parcels so I could feed my 13-year-old. Back in full time work now for 15 years, but I'll never forget how impossibly hard that was."



Image 060 "I was 17 and living in a small town with my son. I was judged by other mums in town who were older than me. I used the benefit to study social work and during my studying years I set up a young mother's group. It was hard work, I remember having \$2 and having to choose between catching the bus to university or buying toilet paper. I am now a team leader of a social work service that supports single mums to be the best they can be."



Image 105 "My parents are both on benefits and it's been really hard to see them struggle relentlessly. One of my saddest memories is mum needing to borrow money off me while I was on the student allowance so we could get her some food for the week."

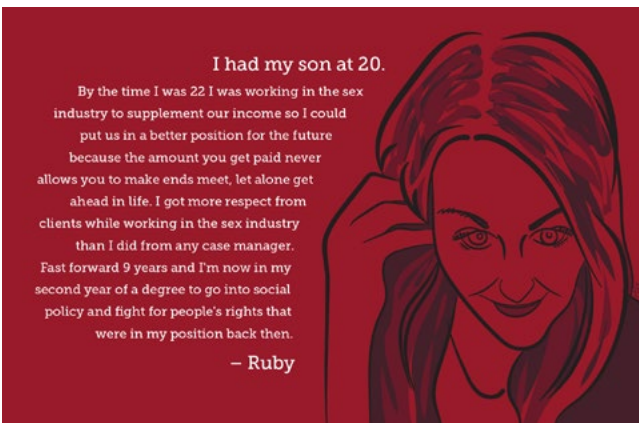


Image 102 "I had my son at 20. By the time I was 22 I was working in the sex industry to supplement our income so I could put us in a better position for the future because the amount you get paid never allows you to make ends meet, let alone get ahead in life. I got more respect from clients while working in the sex industry than I did from any case manager. Fast forward 9 years and I'm now in my second year of a degree to go into social policy and fight for people's rights that were in my position back then."

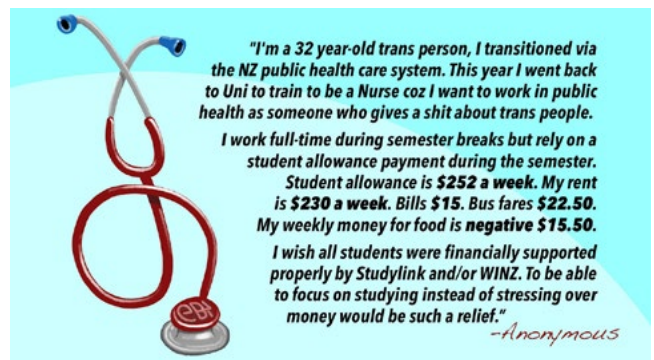


Image 111 "I'm a 32 year old trans person, I transitioned via the NZ public health care system. This year I went back to Uni to train to be a Nurse coz I want to work in public health as someone who gives a shit about trans people. I work full-time during semester breaks but rely on a student allowance payment during the semester. Student allowance is \$252 a week. My rent is \$230 a week. Bills \$15. Bus fares \$22.50. My weekly money for food is negative \$15.50. I wish all students were financially supported properly by Studylink and/or WINZ. To be able to focus on studying instead of stressing over money would be such a relief."

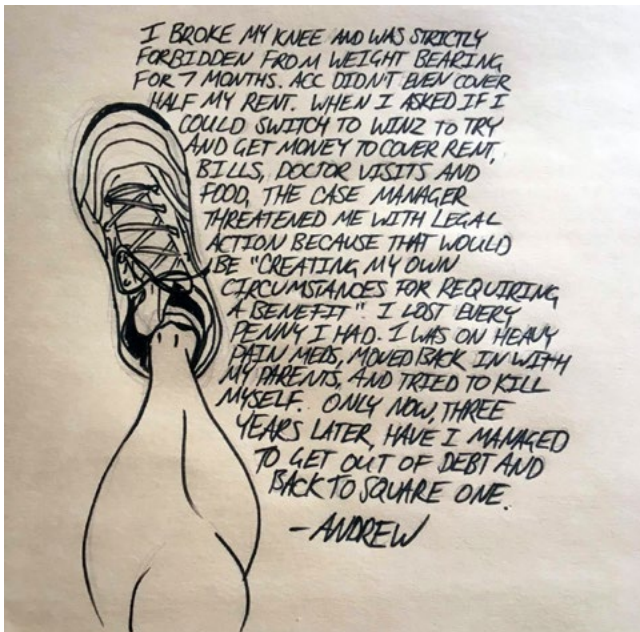


Image 113 "I broke my knee and was strictly forbidden from weight bearing for 7 months. ACC didn't cover even half my rent. When I asked if I could switch to WINZ to try and get money to cover rent, bills, doctor visits, and food, the case manager threatened me with legal action because that would be "creating my own circumstances for requiring a benefit." I lost every penny I had. I was on heavy pain meds, moved back in with my parents, and tried to kill myself. Only now, three years later, have I managed to get out of debt and back to square one."

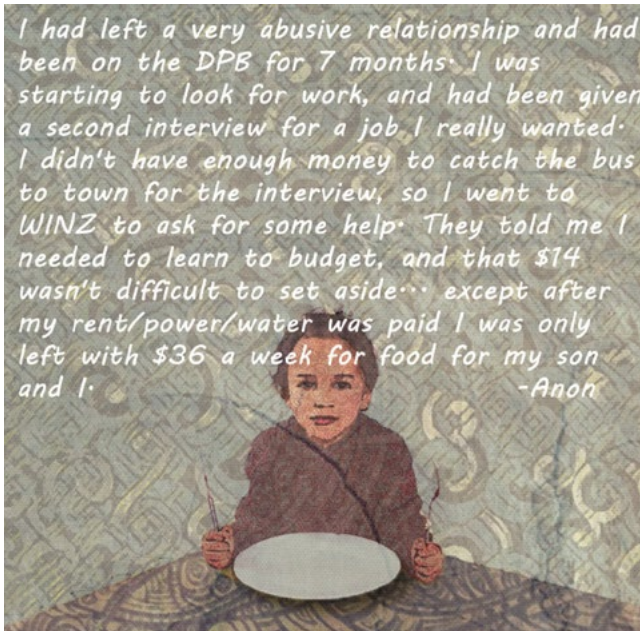


Image 123 "I had left a very abusive relationship and had been on the DPB for 7 months. I was starting to look for work, and had been given a second interview for a job I really wanted. I didn't have enough money to catch the bus to town for the interview, so I went to WINZ to ask for some help. They told me I needed to learn to budget, and that \$14 wasn't difficult to set aside... except after my rent/power/water was paid I was only left with \$36 a week for food for my son and I."

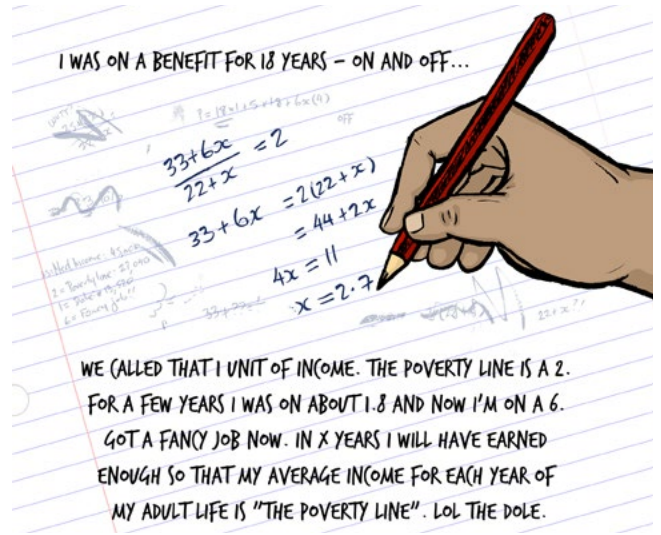


Image 126 "I was on a benefit for 18 years - on and off. We called that 1 unit of income. The poverty line is a 2. For a few years I was on about 1.8 and now I'm on a 6. Got a fancy job now. In X years I will have earned enough so that my average income for each year of my adult life is "the poverty line". lol the dole."



Image 134 "I became a beneficiary when I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome at age 23. The \$200 per week benefit was not much to live on! We really need to reconsider how we treat the chronically ill. Condemning them to a life of poverty is not going to help them recover. They need to receive enough money to allow them to live comfortably, eat healthily, see doctors and specialist regularly, and not be stressed daily trying to make ends meet. That was not my experience. The ill staying ill is in no one's benefit - not only does it hurt individuals, their families and their communities, but people being out of the work force is a major drain on the economy. So why do we force our most vulnerable into poverty?"



Image 158 "Recently I had to find a home urgently after the landlord issued a 42 day notice on the home we had rented for 7 years. There is next to nothing available to rent, however, I found a place which was \$30 more per week. I asked WINZ for support but they told me "you're getting the maximum accommodation supplement". I have no family after my Mum passed away, and when I tell the WINZ staff I have no family and no support they look at me like I'm lying, as in surely you have someone. I just don't know what to do. It's a very lonely existence."

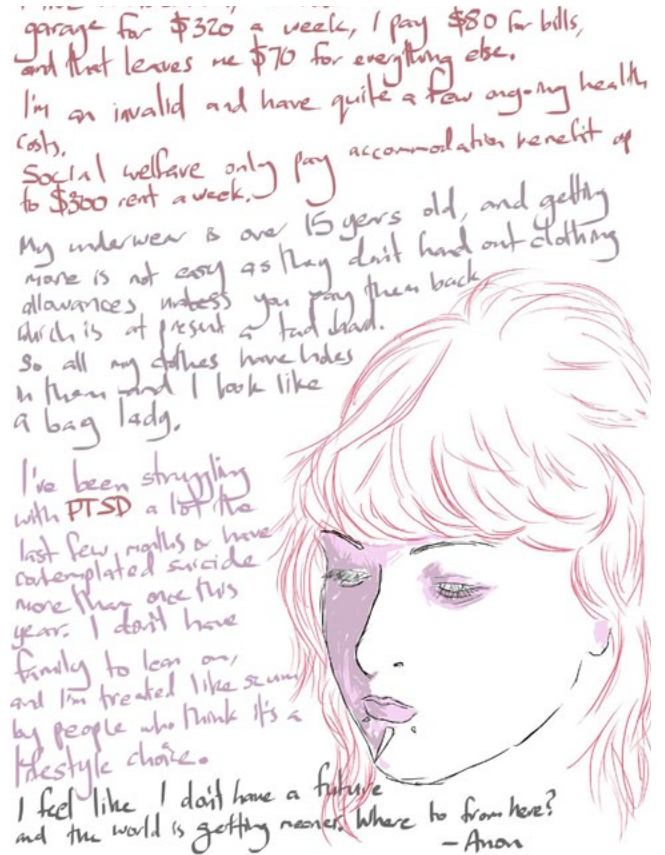


Image 190 "I live in Auckland, and have been forced to live in a garage for \$320 a week, I pay \$80 for bills, and that leaves me \$70 for everything else. I'm an invalid and have quite a few ongoing health costs. Social welfare only pay accommodation benefit up to \$300 rent a week. My underwear is over 15yrs old and getting more is not easy as they don't hand out clothing allowances unless you pay them back, which at present is a tad hard. So all my clothes have holes in them and I look like a bag lady. I've been struggling with PTSD a lot the last few months and have contemplated suicide more than once this year. I don't have family to lean on, and I'm treated like I'm scum by people who think this is a lifestyle choice. I feel like I don't have a future, and the world is getting meaner. Where to from here?"



Image 159 "I am a disabled Maori transgender person with a disabled child. We experience extreme employment and housing discrimination. I can't afford housing in my city and I can't get my kid to specialist services if I move out of town. We have been homeless for 11 months"

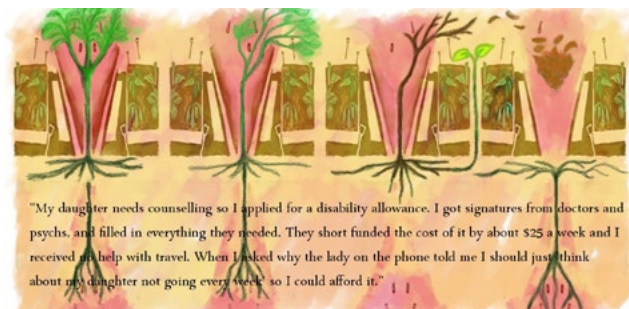


Image 167 "My daughter needs counselling so I applied for a disability allowance. I got signatures from doctors and psychs, and filled in everything they needed. They short funded the cost of it by about \$25 a week and I received no help with travel. When I asked why the lady on the phone told me I should just think about my daughter not going every week so I could afford it."

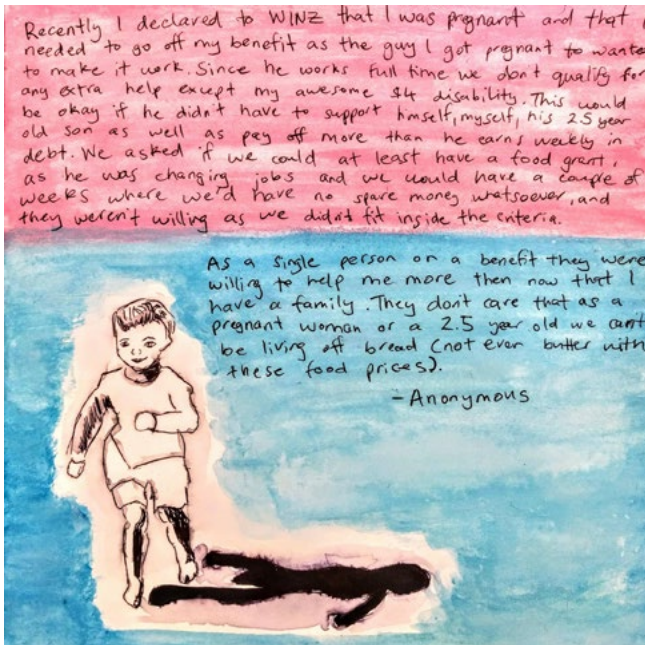


Image 192 "Recently i declared to winz that i was pregnant and that i needed to go off my benefit as the guy i got pregnant to wanted to make it work. since he works full time, we don't qualify for any extra help except my awesome \$4 disability. this would be okay if he didn't have to support himself, myself, his 2.5 year old son as well as pay off more than he earns weekly in debt. we asked if we could have at least a food grant, as he was changing jobs and we would have a couple weeks where we'd have no spare money whatsoever, and they weren't willing as we didn't fit inside the criteria. as a single person on a benefit they were willing to help me more then now that i have a family. they don't care that as a pregnant woman or a 2.5 year old we can't be living off bread. (not even butter with these food prices)."



Image 198 "Poverty destroys potential and everyone becomes the poorer for it."

'NOT ENOUGH' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Make sure that all beneficiaries are receiving a liveable income so that all people can live with dignity.

INSTITUTIONAL BIAS AND PREJUDICE



I have not had the troubles of other beneficiaries.

I hear of women being derided for their gender, doctors visits not being funded because it's "women's troubles." Skilled women being pressured into care jobs or hospitality because it's "women's work."

Maori and Pacific Islanders get taken off the benefit or sanctioned for no good reason, names mispronounced at best, and complete cultural negation at worst.

I do not have these troubles, because I am a blonde and blue eyed man, because I've been trained in the language and the bureaucracy. There is no qualitative difference, but I benefit every day, and in every WINZ interaction because of my whiteness and my maleness.

Image 016 "I have not had the troubles of other beneficiaries. I hear of women being derided for their gender, doctors' visits not being funded because it's "women's troubles." Skilled women being pressured into care jobs of hospitality because it's "women's work." Māori and Pacific Islanders get taken off the benefit or sanctioned for no good reason, names mispronounced at best, and complete cultural negation at worst. I do not have these troubles, because I am a blonde and blue eyed man, because I've been trained in the language of bureaucracy. There is no qualitative difference, but I benefit every day, and in every WINZ interaction because of my whiteness and my maleness."

Many people noted inconsistencies in the ways in which people were treated when accessing services. In particular people noticed the poor treatment of people of colour, and single mothers. Single mothers, and people experiencing illness, disability or poor mental health were also vulnerable to extra requirements or sanctions, and found the system difficult to navigate.

RACISM

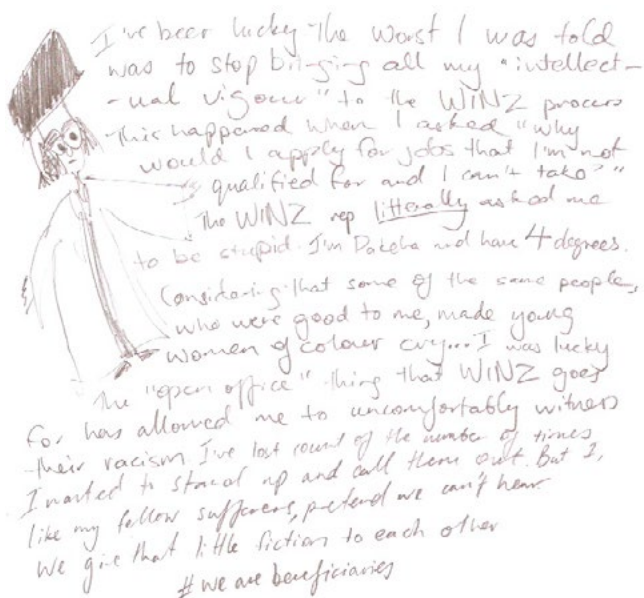


Image 005 "I've been lucky. The worst I was told to stop bringing all my 'intellectual vigour' to the WINZ process. This happened when I asked "Why would I apply for jobs that I'm not qualified for and can't take?" The WINZ rep literally asked me to be stupid. I'm Pakeha and have 4 degrees. Considering that some of the same people who were good to me made young women of colour cry... I was lucky. The 'open office' thing that WINZ goes for has allowed me to uncomfortably witness their racism. I've lost count of the number of times I wanted to stand up and call them out. But I, like my fellow sufferers, pretend we can't hear. We give that little fiction to each other."



I have not had the troubles of other beneficiaries.

I hear of women being derided for their gender, doctors visits not being funded because it's "women's troubles." Skilled women being pressured into care jobs or hospitality because it's "women's work."

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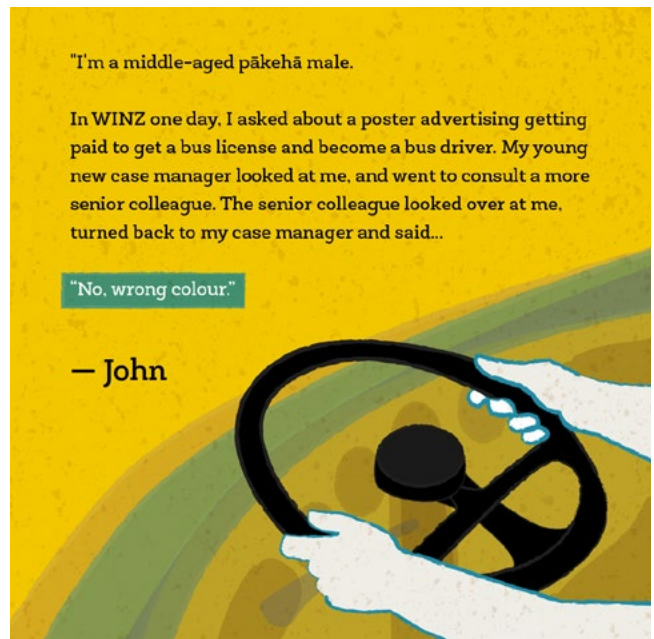
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"I was in the office for some meaningless seminar a few years back - at the height of the last recession - and I go up to the bench to sign in. On this day I happen to be the only white guy there. The lady looks around the room: "Why haven't YOU got a job yet? You are super employable". Apparently this was because I had a full drivers' license. But we both knew the real reason."

- Reuben

Image 037 "I was in the office for some meaningless seminar a few years back - at the height of the last recession - and I go up to the bench to sign in. On this day I happen to be the only white guy there. The lady looks around the room: "Why haven't YOU got a job yet? You are super employable". Apparently this was because I had a full drivers' license. But we both knew the real reason."



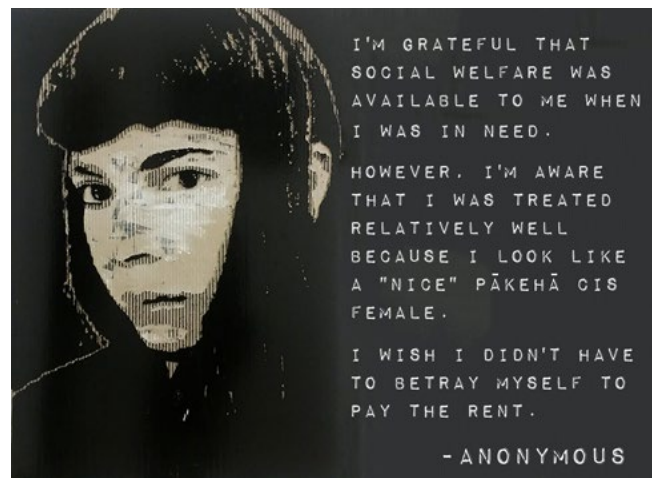
"I'm a middle-aged pākehā male.

In WINZ one day, I asked about a poster advertising getting paid to get a bus license and become a bus driver. My young new case manager looked at me, and went to consult a more senior colleague. The senior colleague looked over at me, turned back to my case manager and said...

"No, wrong colour."

— John

Image 088 "I'm a middle-aged pakeha male. In WINZ one day I asked about a poster advertising getting paid to get a bus license and become a bus driver. My young new case manager looked at me, and went to consult a more senior colleague. The senior colleague looked over at me, turned back to my case manager and said "No, wrong colour."



I'M GRATEFUL THAT SOCIAL WELFARE WAS AVAILABLE TO ME WHEN I WAS IN NEED.

HOWEVER, I'M AWARE THAT I WAS TREATED RELATIVELY WELL BECAUSE I LOOK LIKE A "NICE" PĀKEHĀ CIS FEMALE.

I WISH I DIDN'T HAVE TO BETRAY MYSELF TO PAY THE RENT.

- ANONYMOUS

Image 122 "I'm grateful that social welfare was available to me when I was in need. However, I'm aware that I was treated relatively well because I look like a "nice" pākehā cis female. I wish I didn't have to betray myself to pay the rent."

'RACISM' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide mandatory training for all WINZ office staff that improves empathy, cultural competence and communication skills. This must include an understanding of implicit bias and racism.
- Make sure that understandings around family are decolonised e.g. grandparents looking after moko, Tangi grants for extended whānau
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.

SEXISM (IN PARTICULAR, AGAINST SINGLE MOTHERS)

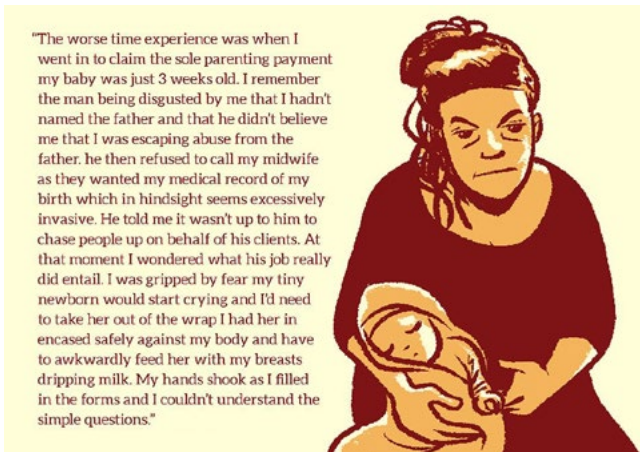


Image 044 "The worst time experience was when I went in to claim the sole parenting payment my baby was just 3 weeks old. I remember the man being disgusted by me that I hadn't named the father and that he didn't believe me that I was escaping abuse from the father. He then refused to call my midwife as they wanted my medical record of my birth which in hindsight seems excessively invasive. He told me it wasn't up to him to chase people up on behalf of his clients. At that moment I wondered what his job really did entail. I was gripped by fear my tiny new-born would start crying and I'd need to take her out of the wrap I had her in encased safely against my body and have to awkwardly feed her with my breasts dripping milk. My hands shook as I filled in the forms and I couldn't understand the simple questions."

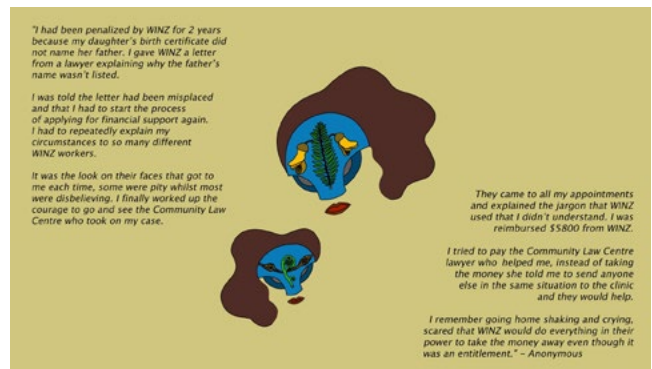


Image 076 "I had been penalized by WINZ for 2 years because my daughter's birth certificate did not name her father. I gave WINZ a letter from a lawyer explaining why the father's name wasn't listed. I was told the letter had been misplaced and that I had to start the process of applying for financial support again. I had to repeatedly explain my circumstances to so many different WINZ workers. It was the look on their faces that got to me each time, some were pity whilst most were disbelieving. I finally worked up the courage to go and see the Community Law Centre who took on my case. They came to all my appointments and explained the jargon that WINZ used that I didn't understand. I was reimbursed \$5800 from WINZ. I tried to pay the Community Law Centre lawyer who helped me, instead of taking the money she told me to send anyone else in the same situation to the clinic and they would help. I remember going home shaking and crying, scared that WINZ would do everything in their power to take the money away even though it was an entitlement."



Image 067 "I remember going in for assistance when one of my boys was three weeks old. Two minutes into the conversation the case manager says to me, "why has it taken you so long to come in? Do you know how the father is?" It was like a punch in the face. I had spent the last two weeks in hospital with a sick baby. All I could say was, "I dunno, do you know who you sleep with?"

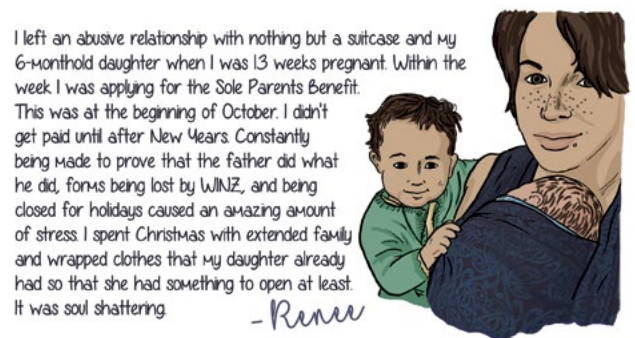


Image 091 "I left an abusive relationship with nothing but a suitcase and my 6-month old daughter when I was 13 weeks pregnant. Within the week I was applying for the Sole Parents Benefit. This was at the beginning of October. I didn't get paid until after New Year's. Constantly being made to prove that the father did what he did, forms being lost by WINZ, and being closed for holidays caused an amazing amount of stress. I spent Christmas with extended family and wrapped clothes that my daughter already had so that she had something to open at least. It was soul shattering."

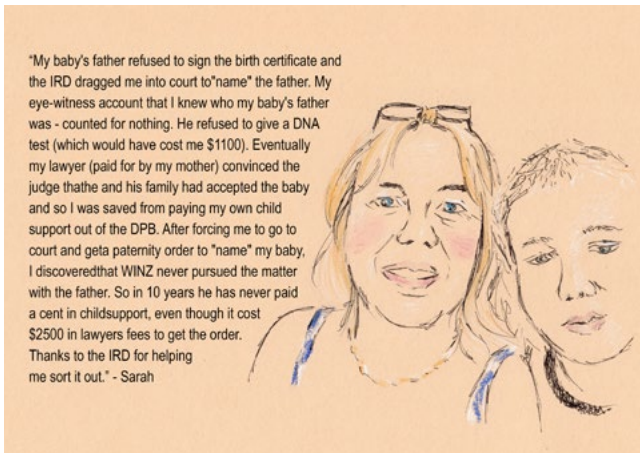


Image 132 "My baby's father refused to sign the birth certificate and the IRD dragged me into court to "name" the father. My eye-witness account that I knew who my baby's father was- counted for nothing. He refused to give a DNA test (which would have cost me \$1100). Eventually my lawyer (paid for by my mother) convinced the judge that he and his family had accepted the baby and so I was saved from paying my own child support out of the DPB. After forcing me to go to court and get a paternity order to "name" my baby, I discovered that WINZ never pursued the matter with the father. So in 10 years he has never paid a cent in child support, even though it cost \$2500 in lawyers' fees to get the order. Thanks to the IRD for helping me sort it out."

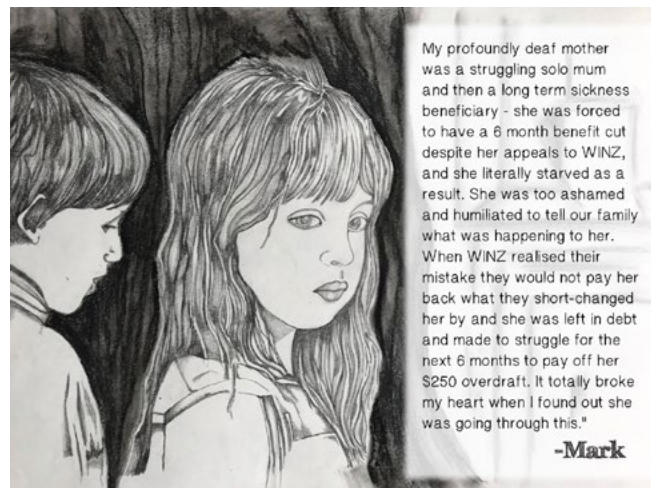


Image 170 "My profoundly deaf mother was a struggling solo mum and then a long term sickness beneficiary - she was forced to have a 6 month benefit cut despite her appeals to WINZ, and she literally starved as a result. She was too ashamed and humiliated to tell our family what was happening to her. When WINZ realised their mistake they would not pay her back what they short-changed her by and she was left in debt and made to struggle for the next 6 months to pay off her \$250 overdraft. It totally broke my heart when I found out she was going through this."

'SEXISM' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stop the sanctions – including s70A punishing single mothers for not naming the father of the child.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.
- Ensure staff do not question people's experience of abuse and/or sexual violence

ABLEISM



Image 007 "They cut off my disability benefit because 'PTSD isn't curable so there's no point in funding therapy that won't fix you'."

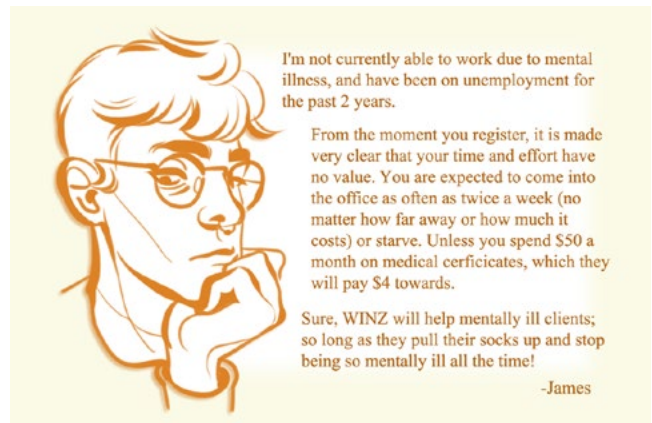


Image 022 "I'm not currently able to work due to mental illness, and have been on unemployment for the past 2 years. From the moment you register, it is made very clear that your time and effort have no value. You are expected to come into the office as often as twice a week (no matter how far away or how much it costs) or starve. Unless you spend \$50 a month on medical certificates, which they will pay \$4 towards. Sure, WINZ will help mentally ill clients; so long as they pull their socks up and stop being so mentally ill all the time!"

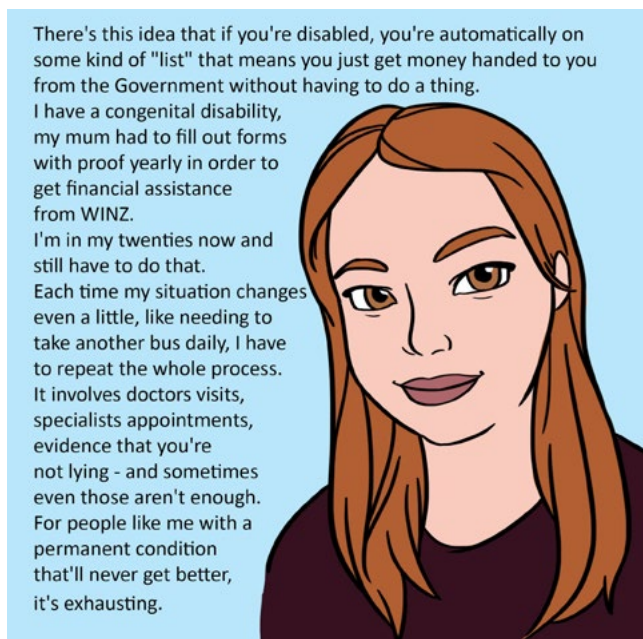


Image 021 "There's this idea that if you're disabled, you're automatically on some kind of 'list' that means you just get money handed to you from the Government without having to do a thing. I have a congenital disability, my mum had to fill out forms with proof yearly in order to get financial assistance from WINZ. I'm in my twenties now and still have to do that. Each time my situation changes even a little, like needing to take another bus daily, I have to repeat the whole process. It involves doctors' visits, specialists appointments, evidence that you're not lying - and sometimes even those aren't enough. For people like me with a permanent condition that'll never get better, it's exhausting."



Image 048 "My mum had to prove to WINZ that she has a disability. She cannot speak very well English so I took leave from work to go with her. She had to wait 1-2 hours even when she turned up on time. It was so heart-breaking to see her sitting there when I know she has worked so hard all her life. WINZ didn't give her allowance for medication because she had only a week's \$50 bill/receipt with her and they needed to see that it was an ongoing cost. I am so glad I could pay for my mum. I cannot even imagine what will happen to someone who is alone and with no family support."

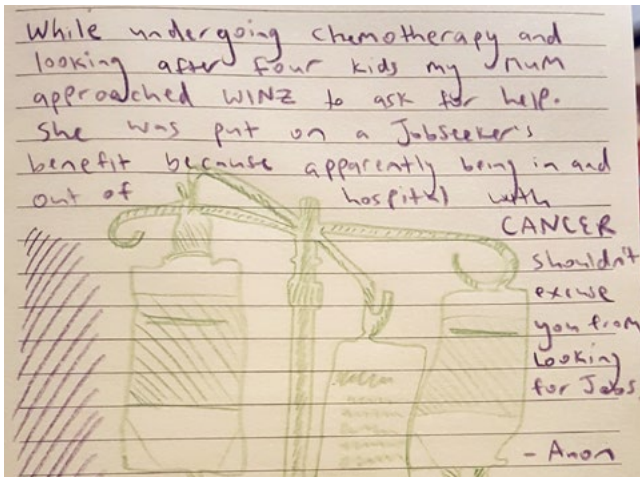


Image 069 "While undergoing chemotherapy and looking after four kids my Mum approached WINZ to ask for help. She was put on a Jobseeker's benefit because apparently being in and out of hospital with cancer shouldn't excuse you from spending hours looking for jobs."

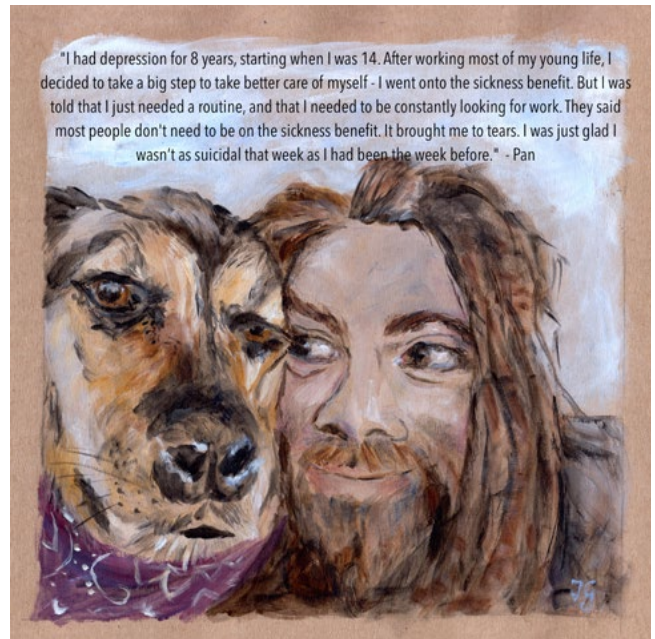


Image 106 "I had depression for 8 years, starting when I was 14. After working most of my young life, I decided to take a big step to take better care of myself - I went onto the sickness benefit. But I was told that I just needed a routine, and that I needed to be constantly looking for work. They said most people don't need to be on the sickness benefit. It brought me to tears. I was just glad I wasn't as suicidal that week as I had been the week before."



Image 093 "I'm a survivor of domestic and sexual abuse and struggle with PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Despite notes and forms from multiple doctors my case manager still thought it was appropriate to ask me (in the open plan office) about why I was taking psychiatric medication and to suggest that I stop doing so. One of my medications is dangerous to stop taking suddenly. I was actively (through therapy and meds) trying to work on my mental health. I wish there was more support and compassion from WINZ surrounding abuse, trauma and mental illness."

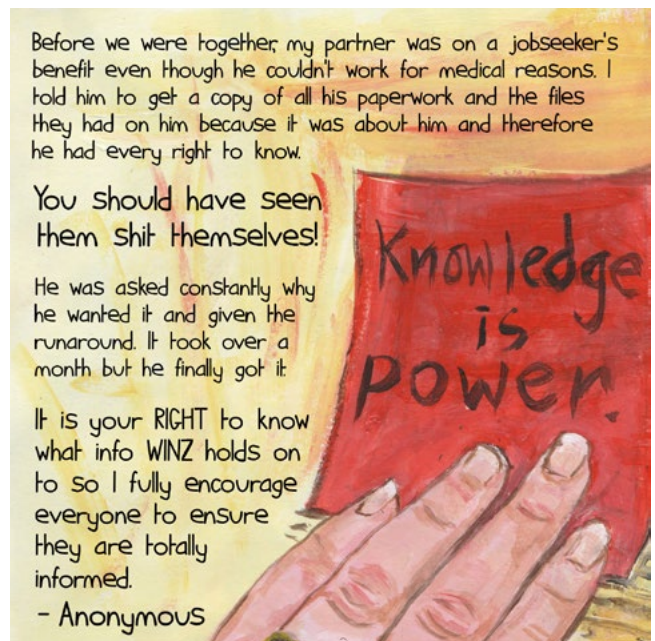


Image 114 "Before we were together, my partner was on a jobseeker's benefit even though he couldn't work for medical reasons. I told him to get a copy of all his paperwork and the files they had on him because it was about him and therefore he had every right to know. Omg you should have seen them shit themselves! He was asked constantly why he wanted it and given the run-around. It took over a month but he finally got it. It is your RIGHT to know what info WINZ holds on you so I fully encourage everyone to ensure they are totally informed."

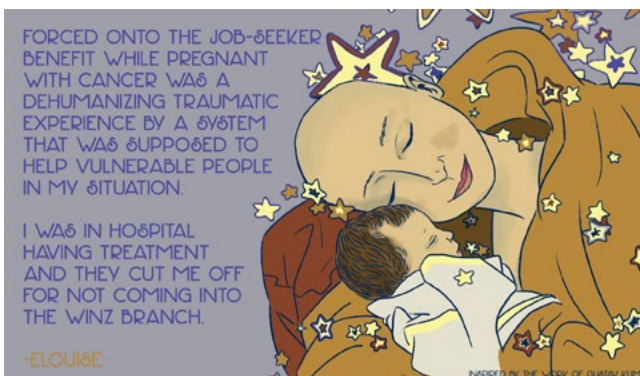


Image 094 "Forced onto the job-seeker benefit while pregnant with cancer" was a dehumanizing traumatic experience by a system that was supposed to help vulnerable people in my situation. I was in hospital having treatment and they cut me off for not coming into the WINZ branch."

I'm a single parent and I've been notified by WINZ that as the father of my child is not paying child support, I have to pay it. I have to pay \$28 per week to the IRD. If I want to "opt" out of this then I must put the father's name on the birth certificate. I already have a reduced benefit of \$30 because he is not on the birth certificate, and now I have to pay my own child support?? What the very fuck?? WINZ advised me to speak to IRD and IRD advised me to speak to WINZ." -Rebekah



Image 138 "I'm a single parent and I've been notified by WINZ that as the father of my child is not paying child support, I have to pay it. I have to pay \$28 per week to the IRD. If I want to "opt" out of this then I must put the father's name on the birth certificate. I already have a reduced benefit of \$30 because he is not on the birth certificate, and now I have to pay my own child support?? What the very fuck?? WINZ advised me to speak to IRD and IRD advised me to speak to WINZ."

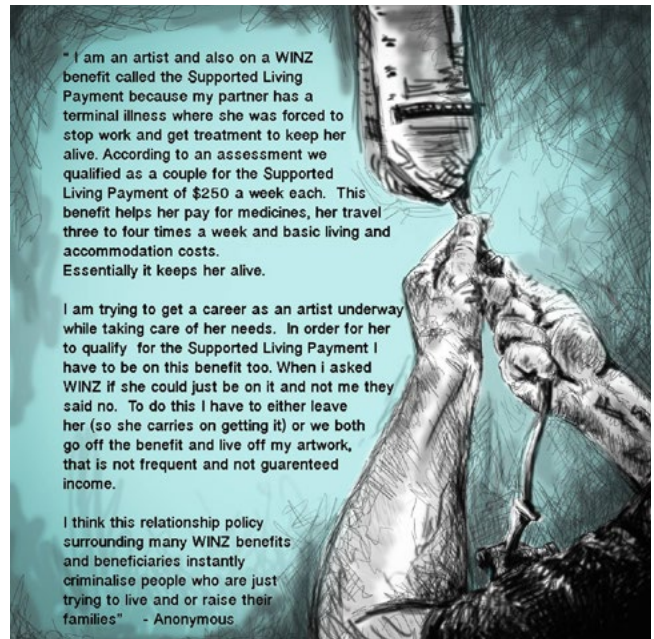


Image 185 "I am an artist and also on a WINZ benefit called the Supported Living Payment because my partner has a terminal illness where she was forced to stop work and get treatment to keep her alive. According to an assessment we qualified as a couple for the Supported Living Payment of \$250 a week each. This benefit helps her pay for medicines, her travel three to four times a week and basic living and accommodation costs. Essentially it keeps her alive. I am trying to get a career as an artist underway while taking care of her needs. In order for her to qualify for the Supported Living Payment I have to be on this benefit too. When I asked WINZ if she could just be on it and not me they said no. To do this I have to either leave her (so she carries on getting it) or we both go off the benefit and live off my artwork, that is not frequent and not guaranteed income. I think this relationship policy surrounding many WINZ benefits and beneficiaries instantly criminalise people who are just trying to live and or raise their families."



Image 144 "I was in hospital, scared, heart failing. Tube fed, confused and fighting for my life: I missed a WINZ appointment. I came home 2 weeks later to letters telling me off - sickness money cut, threats of debt collectors. I felt so small. I walked to WINZ, fragile, and the security guards jokingly refused to let me in. Humiliated, I enrolled in study because a loan is more reliable than compassion from the state. There was no way I could prioritise my recovery, I just had to get enough money to scrape by. I was 21. I want the system to treat people with dignity. Not a big ask!"

'ABLEISM' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Staff should not question people's medical conditions, experience of abuse and/or sexual violence.
- Provide mandatory mental health and disability training for all staff.
- Improve staff supervision and support and training overall so that they understand WINZ policies and apply them in ways that ensure people are given access to the full range of support they qualify for. This includes making sure staff are providing appropriate employment options and making sure staff are equipped to gather sensitive information from people.
- Review and improve organisational culture so that it is easier for staff to do the right thing for the people they are working with. This should be done with people who use WINZ services and their whānau so that it is designed around their needs and their experiences are learned from.

TRANSPHOBIA



Image 010 "I remember being told by a male case manager, that being transgender wasn't an excuse for why I couldn't get employed even though I proactively was seeking employment and kept getting turned down, the same case manager also refused to use she/her pronouns even when I had changed my name by deed poll in 1993. WINZ also refused to change my name on my file. It was hell then and it is still hell now, as I advocate for others to get full entitlements, it's just a soul breaking, harsh system that makes you feel even more worthless and hopeless!"

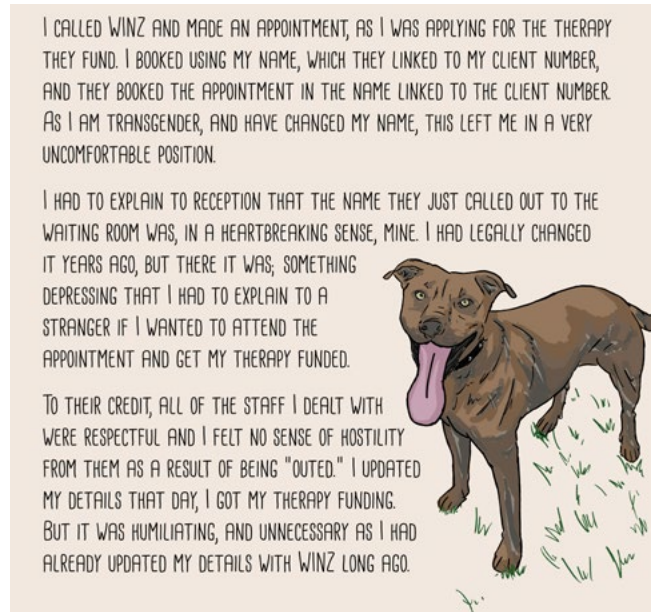


Image 199 "I called WINZ and made an appointment, as I was applying for the therapy they fund. I booked using my name, which they linked to my client number, and they booked the appointment in the name linked to the client number. As I am transgender, and have changed my name, this left me in a very uncomfortable position. I had to explain to reception that the name they just called out to the waiting room was, in a heart-breaking sense, mine. I had legally changed it years ago, but there it was; something depressing that I had to explain to a stranger if I wanted to attend the appointment and get my therapy funded. To their credit, all of the staff I dealt with were respectful and I felt no sense of hostility from them as a result of being "outed." I updated my details that day, I got my therapy funding. But it was humiliating, and unnecessary as I had already updated my details with WINZ long ago."

'TRANSPHOBIA' RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide mandatory gender and sexuality training for all staff

GOOD STUFF

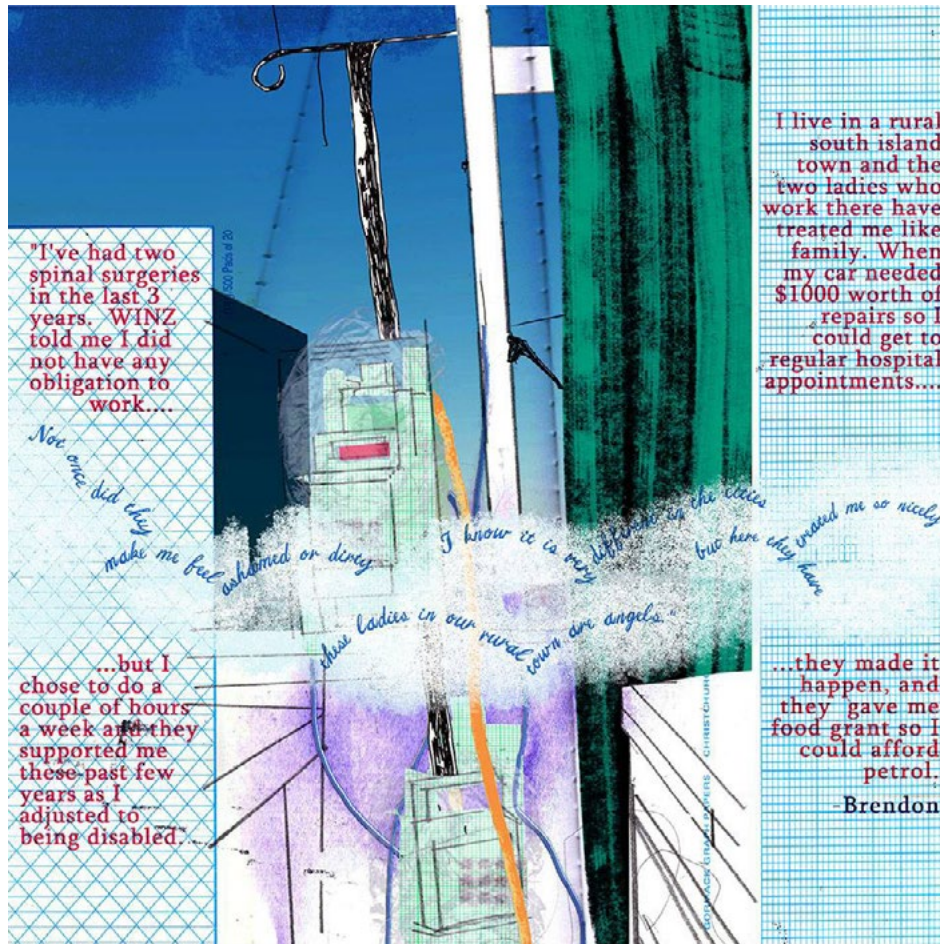


Image 156 "I've had two spinal surgeries in the last 3 years. WINZ told me I did not have any obligation to work but I chose to do a couple of hours a week and they supported me these past few years as I adjusted to being disabled.

I live in a rural South Island town and the two ladies who work there have treated me like family. When my car needed \$1000 worth of repairs so I could get to regular hospital appointments they made it happen, and they gave me food grant so I could afford petrol.

Not once did they make me feel ashamed or dirty. I know it is very different in the cities but here they have treated me so nicely - these ladies in our rural town are angels."

A number of people shared positive experiences of their time accessing benefits. When the system works well it saves lives, empowers people, and allows them to flourish.



Image 023 "I certainly couldn't have survived without it when I was a solo mother at 24. I feel extremely lucky that we live in a country that even HAS a decent welfare system. National has cut a lot of funding and tightened the criteria for the eligible - there is definitely room for improvement"



Image 036 "When I was trying to leave my violent father, StudyLink bent the rules so I could get an independent student allowance to cover rent. Made leaving a lot easier because I had a safety net - I wouldn't have otherwise"

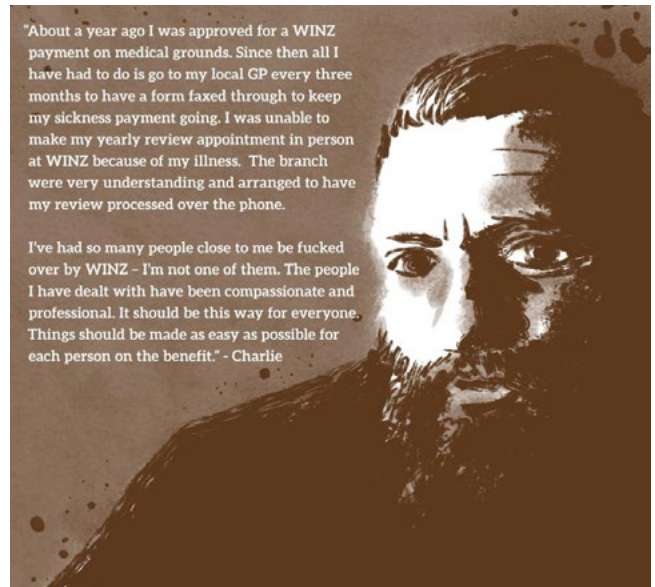


Image 059 "About a year ago I was approved for a WINZ payment on medical grounds. Since then all I have had to do is go to my local GP every three months to have a form faxed through to keep my sickness payment going. I was unable to make my yearly review appointment in person at WINZ because of my illness. The branch were very understanding and arranged to have my review processed over the phone.

I've had so many people close to me be fucked over by WINZ - I'm not one of them. The people I have dealt with have been compassionate and professional. It should be this way for everyone. Things should be made as easy as possible for each person on the benefit."



Image 125 "was on the unemployment benefit after I finished my computer science degree and I was looking for work in IT. Because both myself and my case worker were confident that I would find a job, they were pretty easy and friendly going about things. I attended the mandatory initial meeting, and a few appointments with my caseworker, but it was otherwise a pleasant experience. I would say that period was the happiest of my life. I had free time to work on stuff that I wanted and I felt I had a future ahead of me. I would start my day going for a long run, then have breakfast, apply for a job, and otherwise work on my portfolio."

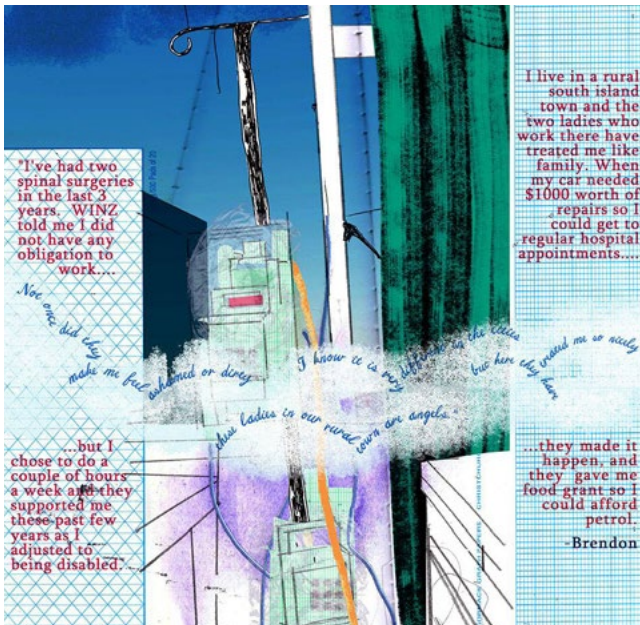


Image 156 "I've had two spinal surgeries in the last 3 years. WINZ told me I did not have any obligation to work but I chose to do a couple of hours a week and they supported me these past few years as I adjusted to being disabled.

I live in a rural south island town and the two ladies who work there have treated me like family. When my car needed \$1000 worth of repairs so I could get to regular hospital appointments they made it happen, and they gave me food grant so I could afford petrol. Not once did they make me feel ashamed or dirty. I know it is very different in the cities but here they have treated me so nicely - these ladies in our rural town are angels."

I've been on a benefit with my son going on 8 years. My case manager was awesome, a real person, nothing generic about her manner. She treated me like a person, asked about my son, how was life etc. She pushed for me to go on to Supported Living, so I wasn't obligated to keep going to seminars. I've been on Supported Living for 3 years now and things are ok.



My dad is a long time sickness beneficiary, he's now on the Pension, and has always had great case managers. Caring and attentive.

We're with the Clendon WINZ in Manurewa. Not all Māori are treated like rubbish. Not all case managers are assholes.

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WISHES



Image139 "I dream of a system that lifts people up, and helps without judgement. Feed children, warm beds and safety."

Many people shared their wishes for the system – these wishes range from being quite specific changes, to more broad complex changes. Many of these wishes reflect the recommendations we have offered.



Image 031 "They should offer to train beneficiaries to be welfare (WINZ) workers. No one changes the workforce better than those who have experienced it."



Image 039 "Please treat our older citizens with deep respect especially if they are caring for grandchildren. And please provide full and correct information to everyone."

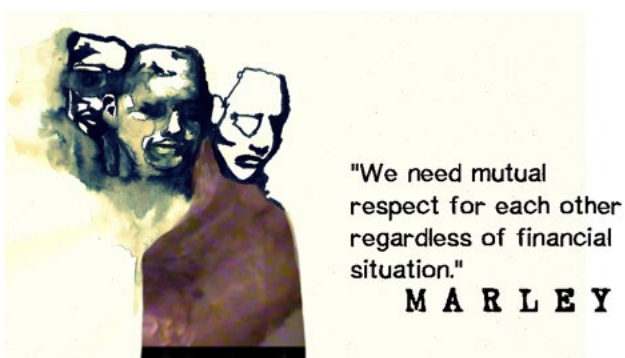


Image 033 "We need mutual respect for each other regardless of financial situation."

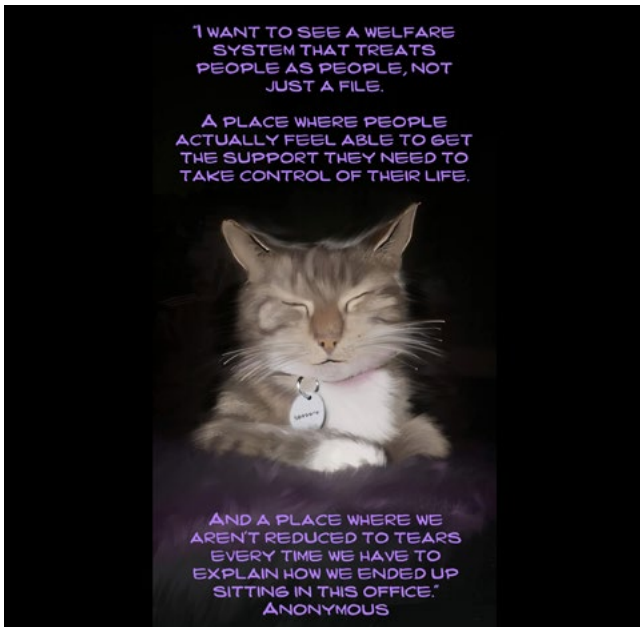


Image 046 "I want to see a welfare system that treats people as people, not just a file. A place where people actually feel able to get the support they need to take control of their life. And a place where we aren't reduced to tears every time we have to explain how we ended up sitting in this office."

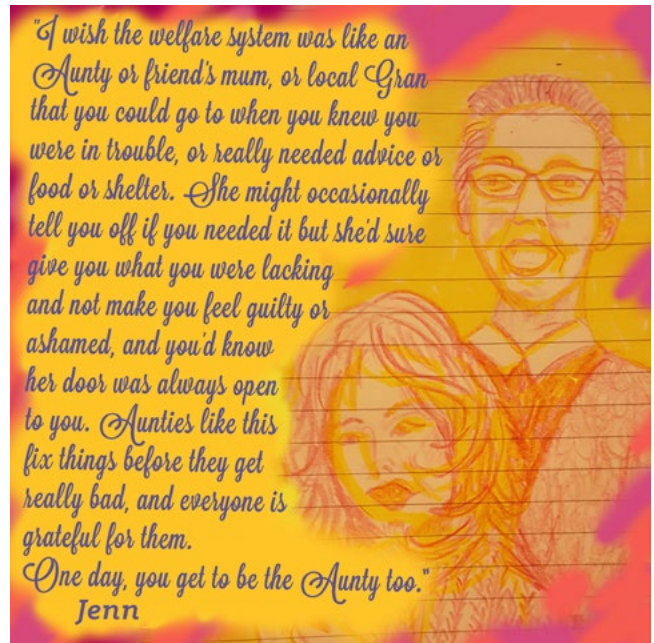


Image 050 "I wish the welfare system was like an Auntie or friend's mum, or local Gran that you could go to when you knew you were in trouble, or really needed advice or food or shelter. She might occasionally tell you off if you needed it but she'd sure give you what you were lacking and not make you feel guilty or ashamed, and you'd know your door was always open to you. Aunties like this fix things before they get really bad, and everyone is grateful for them. One day, you get to be the Auntie too."

Anonymous: As a mother on the solo mothers benefit



I wish the welfare system looked like a cloak of protection (korowai) around me and my babies.

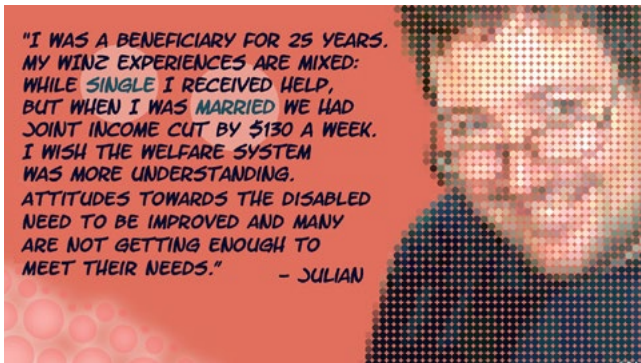
Symbolic of support, empowerment and nurturing. A spiritual tool to heal the wounds of separation and hurt.

A mana uplifting place to prepare the world for the new women about to emerge from the light rather than the dark.

Image 049 "As a mother on the solo mothers benefit I wish the welfare system looked like a cloak of protection (korowai) around me and my babies. Symbolic of support, empowerment and nurturing. A spiritual tool to heal the wounds of separation and hurt. A mana uplifting place to prepare the world for the new women about to emerge from the light rather than the dark."

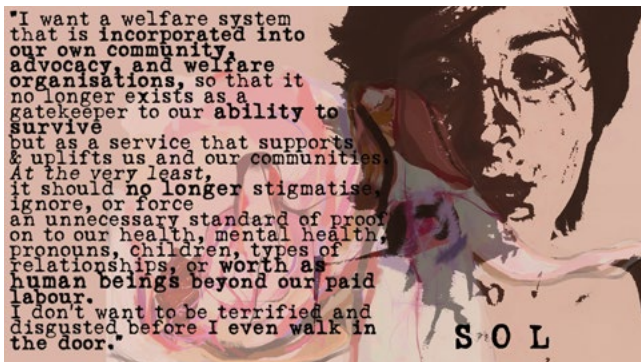


Image 057 "I wish our welfare system cherished whanau. I remember the heartache of changing my baby's nappy on the toilet floor at WINZ because there were no facilities. That was a rock bottom moment for me - the shame, guilt and anger that being a mum wasn't valued, and no help was on offer. I'd like to see a welfare system that actually nurtures the welfare of everyone in Aotearoa."



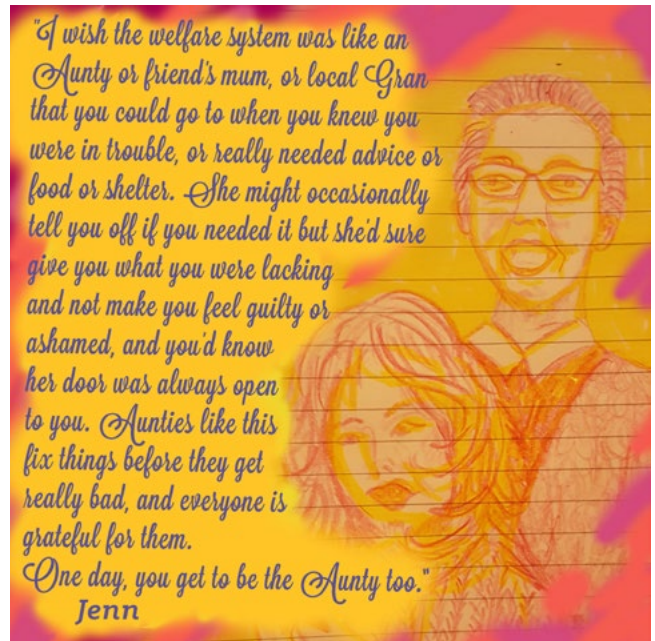
"I WAS A BENEFICIARY FOR 25 YEARS. MY WINZ EXPERIENCES ARE MIXED: WHILE SINGLE I RECEIVED HELP, BUT WHEN I WAS MARRIED WE HAD JOINT INCOME CUT BY \$130 A WEEK. I WISH THE WELFARE SYSTEM WAS MORE UNDERSTANDING. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE DISABLED NEED TO BE IMPROVED AND MANY ARE NOT GETTING ENOUGH TO MEET THEIR NEEDS." - JULIAN

Image 070 "I was a beneficiary for 25 years. My WINZ experiences are mixed: while single I received help, but when I was married we had joint income cut by \$130 a week. I wish the welfare system was more understanding. Attitudes towards the disabled need to be improved and many are not getting enough to meet their needs."



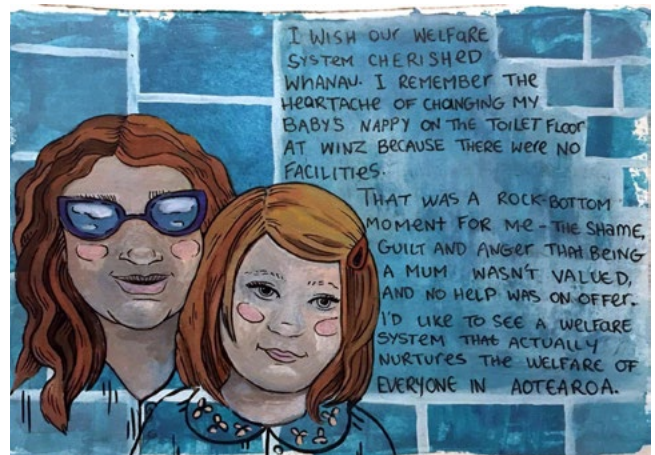
"I want a welfare system that is incorporated into our own community, advocacy, and welfare organisations, so that it no longer exists as a gatekeeper to our ability to survive but as a service that supports & uplifts us and our communities. At the very least, it should no longer stigmatise, ignore, or force an unnecessary standard of proof on to our health, mental health, pronouns, children, types of relationships, or worth as human beings beyond our paid labour. I don't want to be terrified and disgusted before I even walk in the door." SOL

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"I wish the welfare system was like an Aunty or friend's mum, or local Gran that you could go to when you knew you were in trouble, or really needed advice or food or shelter. She might occasionally tell you off if you needed it but she'd sure give you what you were lacking and not make you feel guilty or ashamed, and you'd know her door was always open to you. Aunties like this fix things before they get really bad, and everyone is grateful for them. One day, you get to be the Aunty too." Jenn

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I WISH OUR WELFARE SYSTEM CHERISHED WHANAU. I REMEMBER THE HEARTACHE OF CHANGING MY BABY'S NAPPY ON THE TOILET FLOOR AT WINZ BECAUSE THERE WERE NO FACILITIES. THAT WAS A ROCK-BOTTOM MOMENT FOR ME - THE SHAME, GUILT AND ANGER THAT BEING A MUM WASN'T VALUED, AND NO HELP WAS ON OFFER. I'D LIKE TO SEE A WELFARE SYSTEM THAT ACTUALLY NURTURES THE WELFARE OF EVERYONE IN AOTEAROA.

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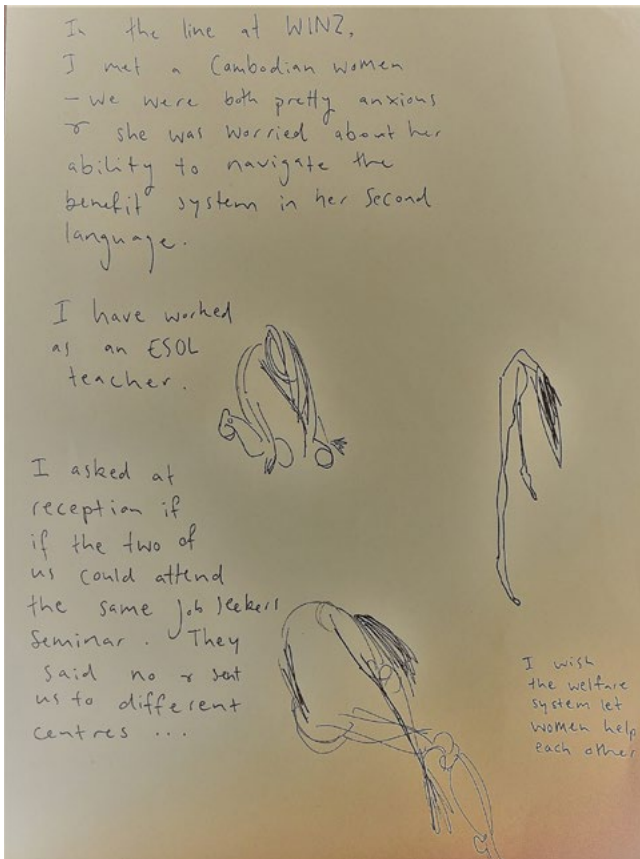


Image 083 "In the line at WINZ, I met a Cambodian woman - we were both pretty anxious & she was worried about her ability to navigate the benefit system in her second language. I have worked as a ESOL teacher. I asked at reception if the two of us could attend the same seminar. They said no & sent us to different centres... I wish the welfare system let women help each other."

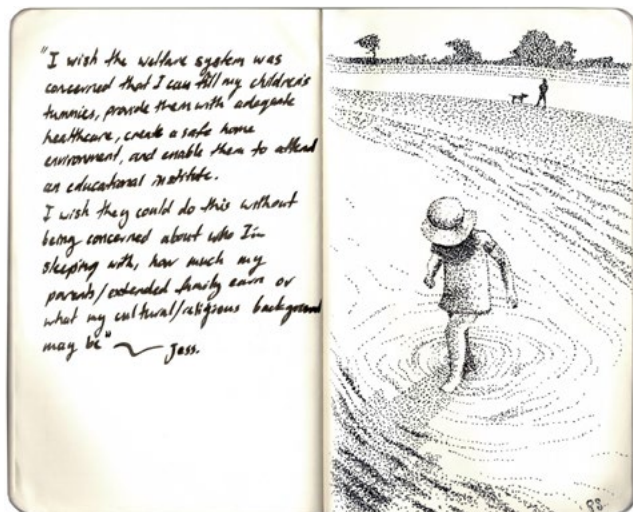


Image 085 "I wish the welfare system was concerned that I can fill my children's tummies, provide them with adequate health care, create a safe home environment, and enable them to attend an educational institute. I wish they could do this without being concerned about who I'm sleeping with, how much my parents/extended family earn, or what my cultural/religious background may be."



Image 090 "Being in your late 20s, stuck in your small minded hometown with no job because your career plans didn't work out, and having to ask your Mum to accompany you to the WINZ appointment because you don't feel confident in asking for help is a really s*** situation to find yourself in. The system needs to change to one which offers hope, recognises that every individual they're working with has a unique situation and that we're all only one step away from needing some form of assistance. I've got one thing to thank WINZ for... showing me the bureaucracy of state provided welfare and therefore providing me with the drive to become a qualified social worker and stand in the gap."

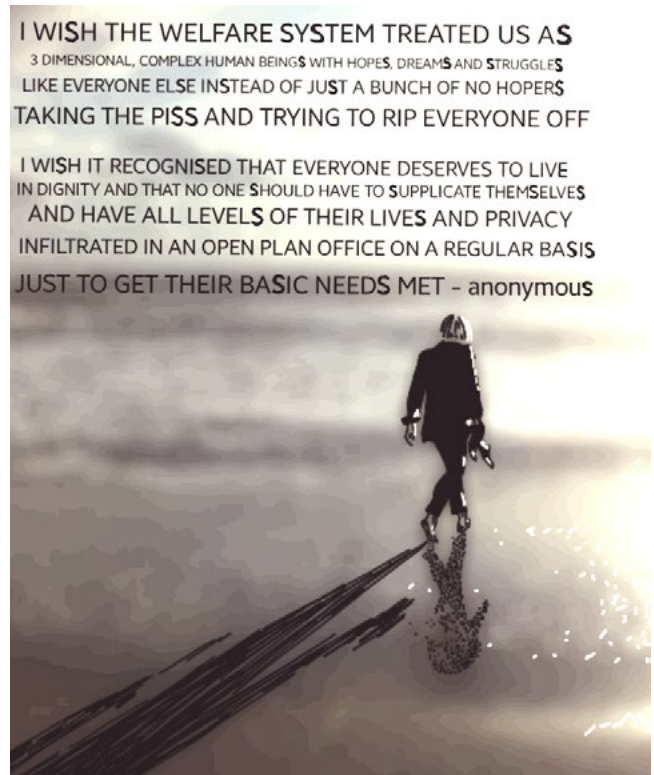


Image 092 "I wish the welfare system saw us as 3-dimensional, complex human beings with hopes, dreams and struggles like everyone else, instead of just a bunch of no hoppers taking the piss and trying to rip everyone off. I wish it recognised that everyone deserves to live in dignity and that no one should have to supplicate themselves and have all levels of their lives and privacy infiltrated in an open plan office on a regular basis just to get their basic needs met."

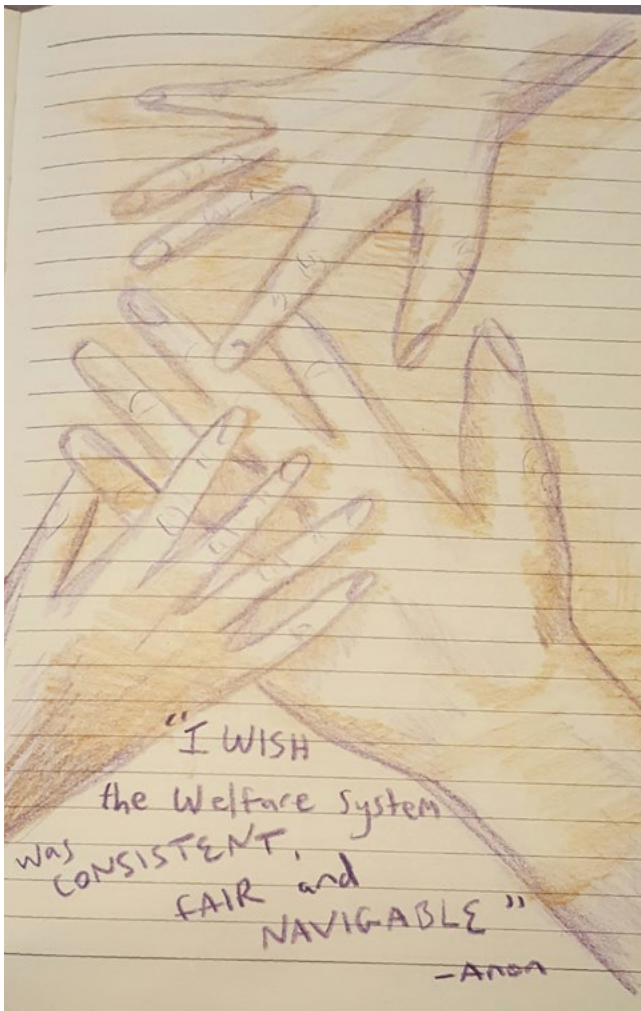


Image 097 "I wish the welfare system was consistent, fair, and navigable."

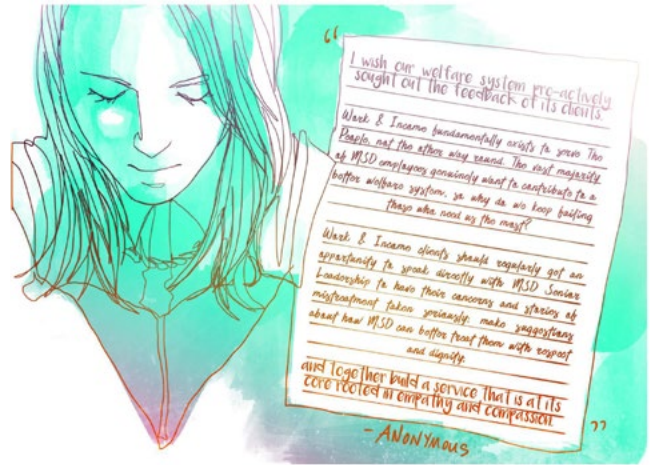


Image 115 "I wish our welfare system pro-actively sought out the feedback of its clients. Work & Income fundamentally exists to serve The People, not the other way round. The vast majority of MSD employees genuinely want to contribute to a better welfare system, so why do we keep failing those who need us the most? Work & Income clients should regularly get an opportunity to speak directly with MSD Senior Leadership to have their concerns and stories of mistreatment taken seriously; make suggestions about how MSD can better treat them with respect and dignity; and together build a service that is at its core rooted in empathy and compassion."

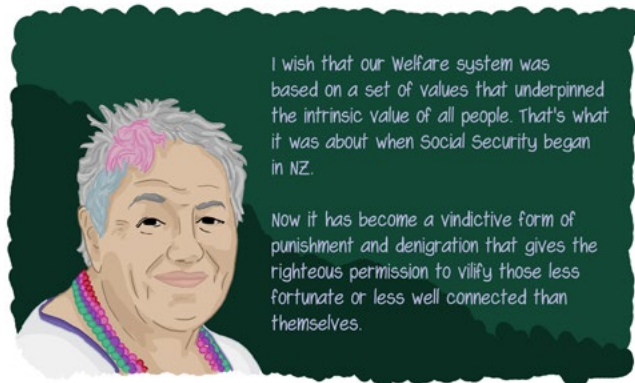


Image 101 "I wish that our Welfare system was based on a set of values that underpinned the intrinsic value of all people. That's what is was about when Social Security began in NZ. Now it has become a vindictive form of punishment and denigration that gives the righteous permission to vilify those less fortunate or less well connected than themselves."



Image 116 "I wish the welfare system treated me as a human that needs help, not a scammer trying to rot the system."



Image 117 "If standing up against a cruel system threatens the establishment, then I want the establishment to feel threatened. Let's truly put people – all people – at the centre of everything we do."

"WHAT I WISH THE WELFARE SYSTEM WAS LIKE:

- Be built on the recommendations written in Te Puao-te-Ata-tu
- Be a system that does not put you in a position where you feel you have to lie in order to survive
- Be able to direct the entitled quota of childcare payments to grandparents and other whānau who look after their mokopuna when parents are working
- Open up the study grants that used to be in place and make them more easily accessible
- Remove the restrictions on study payments for when mothers 'should' or are required to return to work"

- ANONYMOUS



Image 124 "What I wish the welfare system was like:

- * Be built on the recommendations written in Te Puao-te-Ata-tu
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Image 139 "I dream of a system that lifts people up, and helps without judgement. Feed children, warm beds & safety."

"I WANT A WELFARE SYSTEM THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND RECOGNISES THAT WELFARE SUPPORTS CITIZENS TO PARTICIPATE. I WANT IT TO PROTECT PEOPLE FROM POVERTY AND ENSURE THEY HAVE CHOICES, INCLUDING MAKING IT EASIER TO TRANSITION TO WORK. AND I WANT IT TO BE A REAL SAFETY NET THAT IS VALUED AS SUCH SO THAT THE PEOPLE RECEIVING WELFARE ARE ALSO VALUED." - DEBORAH



Image 129 I want a welfare system that is accessible and recognises that welfare supports citizens to participate. I want it to protect people from poverty and ensure they have choices, including making it easier to transition to work. And I want it to be a real safety net that is valued as such so that the people receiving welfare are also valued.

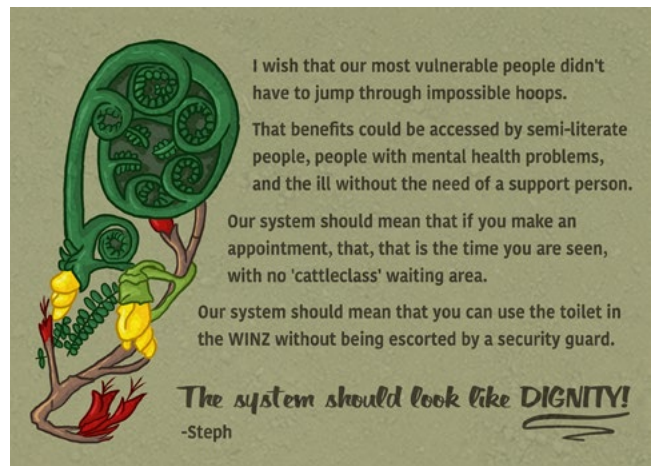


Image 131 "I wish that our most vulnerable people didn't have to jump through impossible hoops. That benefits could be accessed by the semi-literate, people with mental health problems, and the ill without the need of a support person. Our system should mean that if you make an appointment, that, that is the time you are seen, with no 'cattle class' waiting area. Our system should mean that you can use the toilet in the WINZ without being escorted by a security guard. The system should look like DIGNITY!"

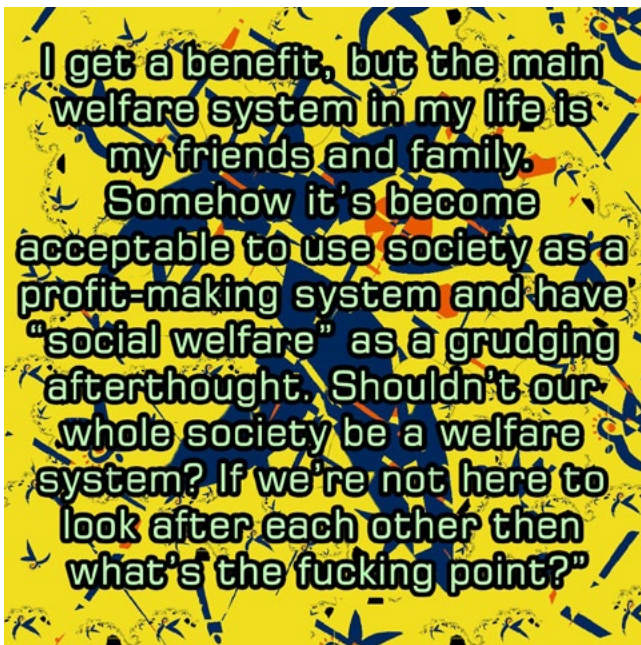


Image 146 "I get a benefit, but the main welfare system in my life is my friends and family. Somehow it's become acceptable to use society as a profit-making system and have "social welfare" as a grudging afterthought. Shouldn't our whole society be a welfare system? If we're not here to look after each other than what's the fucking point?"

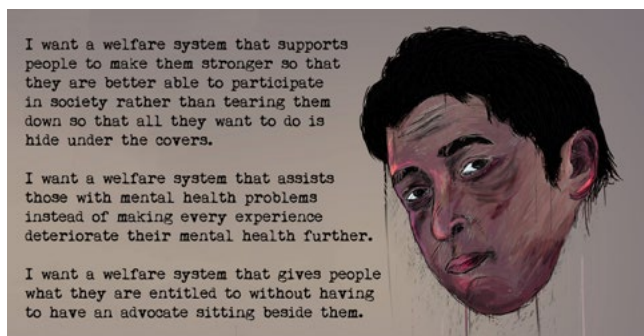


Image 153 "I want a welfare system that supports people to make them stronger so that they are better able to participate in society rather than tearing them down so that all they want to do is hide under the covers. "I want a welfare system that assists those with mental health problems instead of making every experience deteriorate their mental health further. I want a welfare system that gives people what they are entitled to without having to have an advocate sitting beside them."

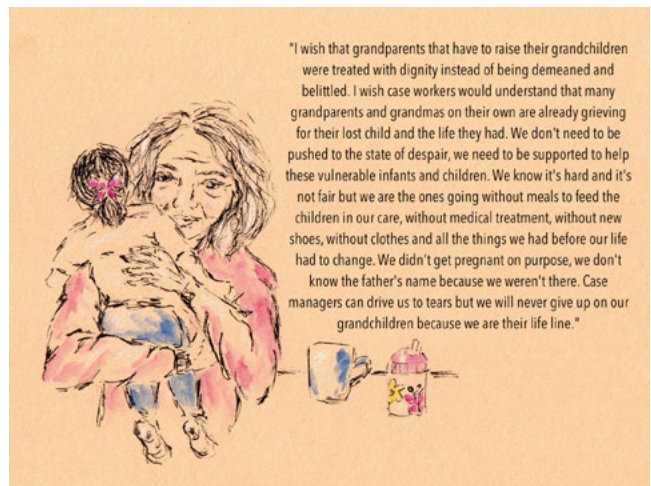


Image 171 "I wish that grandparents that have to raise their grandchildren were treated with dignity instead of being demeaned and belittled. I wish case workers would understand that many grandparents and grandmas on their own are already grieving for their lost child and the life they had. We don't need to be pushed to the state of despair, we need to be supported to help these vulnerable infants and children. We know it's hard and it's not fair but we are the ones going without meals to feed the children in our care, without medical treatment, without new shoes, without clothes and all the things we had before our life had to change. We didn't get pregnant on purpose, we don't know the father's name because we weren't there. Case managers can drive us to tears but we will never give up on our grandchildren because we are their life line."

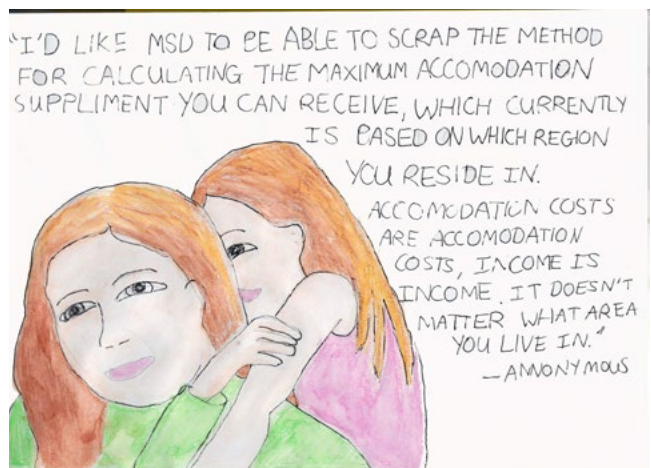


Image 173 "I'd like MSD to be able to scrap the method for calculating the maximum Accommodation Supplement you can receive, which currently is based on what Region you reside in. Accommodation costs are accomodation costs, income is income, it doesn't matter what area you live in"



Image 197 "I'm the agent for most of my family due to mental health or addiction issues. My family recently received notice from their landlord and it was impossible to find them somewhere else that was safe and appropriate for them. My husband and I gave up our house to let them live there and I went to WINZ to discuss how this would work with their benefits. The case manager was incredulous that I was charging them rent that covered my mortgage payments. I was dumbfounded. We'd saved them from another family being homeless and we were expected to lose out even more?"

I wish the system was set up to work with all stakeholders: employers, families, and agents who are doing their damn best in really hard situations."

THANK YOU:

This work could not have been done without the incredible generosity of New Zealand artists, many of whom have been, or are, beneficiaries. Many thanks to the following artists, and to those who wish to remain anonymous:

Adele Jackson	Alexandra Bowers-Mason	Alisha Henry
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Leah Jameson	Loux McLellan	Luna Debris
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Nat	Kemi Niko and Co	Paula King
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Semira Davis	Shaun Craill	Sol Eleda
Stace Robertson	Stephen Canning	Stuart Kent
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Ash Spittal	Gabrielle Baker	Joey Macdonald
Nathan B	Penelope Sewell	Philip Wills
Stace Robertson		



#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

