Having just read many of the submissions on the effects of welfare reform, I am not surprised; however I would like to express my views. I have had a medical condition from birth which has had an adverse effect on everything that I have or chose not to do with my life. My parents had to deal with a baby who had a condition for which, at the time, there were no life-saving options, and surgery was pioneering. My parents chose to take that option to give me life. Thankfully they did.

All through what was my working life I did go and work, expecting to be part of what everyone did. I never questioned my condition as anything more than something I had been born with, that was the way it was. It was not until I had problems with my health, consequential, or not, to a heavy working environment that I had to give up working and be placed on the then incapacity benefit. It turns out that working in such a heavy environment did make the condition worse; however such illness would have been expected from the original condition Hirschsprung Disease.

When the transition to ESA arrived, I did what was asked and attended a work related interview so that the DWP could find suitable employment for me. By this point I had decided to retrain and gain myself an education. So I attended college for four terms, and gained low level qualifications and eventually Highers and an HNC. This led me to apply to university for an honours degree course in Criminology.

I completed and graduated in 2013. However, before graduation, I had to go for routine day surgery, from which I caught a life-threatening infection, and am really lucky to be here. Apparently, this makes no blind bit of difference that I have a condition which accumulates infections underneath, so that my immune system always has to work so much harder to cope. Even my GP surgery told me that I had PMT and should cope with it, little knowing that I had surgery and had a serious infection. These infections and episodes have happened in a 7 year cycle for the past 18 years. It is probable that the infection and subsequent illness was a result of underneath infection from scars that were formed in 1969-1974. Therefore, it is probable that it will happen again although there is nothing certain.

I have serious scarring and lack of muscle in my abdomen which leaves me weak. I have constant pain from bowels and general digestive system. I have poly-cystic ovarian syndrome which causes infection at least until the menopause. I have recently developed positional vertigo as result of an ear infection, and I cannot see why this would not affect anyone. I have episodes of depression; because I always manage to achieve something then my health knocks me down. I would love a job with my qualifications but frankly no employer wants to take the risk. On the outside I look like anyone else (just a Norma) and therefore people always discriminate because they cannot see something, it does not exist.
I applied several times after coming out of hospital for DLA and at the time I was too young, I did not have a colostomy and therefore not disabled to qualify. I would love to see a change for people like myself, and also for me to be considered fairly and honestly. Equally for decision makers to look at what it really means to have a condition such as this, to design the questionnaire around the obstacles and use different panels and techniques to understand conditions which are rare, or unseen. And finally to understand that age should not also be a barrier. For the many groups that have fought for the rights of disabled people to be treated equally and fairly, I am asking for the contrasting to be considered, treat those with an unseen disability the same as you would one which you could see. Welfare and staying within a system for some people is not a lifestyle choice, therefore do not treat it as such. Not everyone on benefits scrounges, some people just look for equality and fairness in an unfair society where the people with power need to listen and understand.

As mentioned above, I was born with Hirschsprung Disease, a congenital bowel abnormality. This essentially means that it is either hereditary or caused by environmental factors present at birth. As such I would expect that under the legal definition for disability within the Equality Act 2010 that my medical condition which is pre-disposed at birth is a disability by definition. However, possibly due to welfare reform, which also by definition has been reformed because of uses and abuses that some people inflicted upon a social security system, which itself is ageing like the population, it appears that my condition should now not be considered as a disability. This appears to conflict with the purposes of the act. The reason for questioning the legislation and its interpretation and uses is this.

I recently applied for a community care grant from the welfare fund aware that it is now in control of local councils. I have been told that my needs for help towards a new cooker cannot be considered because I am not entitled to help because I do not fit the giving criteria. I should note that my council do not use the definitions set by the government but their own qualifying criteria. I was informed that I should apply for a social fund loan to which apparently I would be entitled.

I would like to ask if this is something that the government consider appropriate in the sense that local offices may be under-prepared or at least inexperienced in defining disability and who fits the qualifying criteria. It is blatantly obvious to me that this fund only accommodates those who are addicts or single mothers. If you would like to prove to me otherwise then I am sure that I would like to prove them reprimanded for their inability to use the defined criteria set by government. The current restrictions are that you are just out of care or that you would be in care if you did not get the help. I could not ascertain where I would end up without the help my guess is without a new cooker that I need and cannot afford out of benefit. Equally, I

1 www.oxforddictionaries.com 25/06/2015
2 http://www.legislation.gov.uk
believed that if it was needed i.e. to cook my food for which I have a condition that means I need to eat much like any other person then I would qualify? Equally that it would adversely affect my medical condition and my benefit because I cannot afford to eat out every day.

I am sure that there are many cases such as mine where people live every day without abusing the system or shouting too loud, and are ignored. It is my intention to campaign from now on to ensure that people like myself are not under-represented within the corridors of government or indeed society. Equally it is also my intention to highlight the needs of people with the same condition as me that are ignored as soon as adolescence occurs. Finally, as the Acts are defined disability is not a label I wear on the outside therefore my final question is, why should I need too, so that I qualify as disabled and as such help from this fund?