

Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Victims of Modern Slavery, HC 803

Wednesday 14 December 2016

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(In private)

Members present: Frank Field (Chair); Heidi Allen; Mhairi Black; Steve McCabe

Questions 1 – 104

Witnesses

I: Client A, Key Worker A, Client M, Key Worker M, Client T, Key Worker T, Ann-Marie Douglas, Project Director for the Adult Victims of Modern Slavery Care Contract, Salvation Army, and Alexandra Lands, Public Affairs Assistant, Salvation Army.

Interpreters for witnesses were present.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [The Salvation Army](#)



Examination of witnesses

Client A, Key Worker A, Client M, Key Worker M, Client T, Key Worker T, Ann-Marie Douglas and Alexandra Lands.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome, everyone. We are really grateful to you for coming to this Committee inquiry. We know it is not an easy task for you appearing before a lot of parliamentarians. So that we identify everybody for the record, key worker M, might you start and then where possible people say who they are, just their name.

Key Worker M: Okay. My name is key worker M and I am client M's support worker. I work for The Medaille Trust, which obviously supports victims of human trafficking in the UK. I think I will have to help client M introduce himself.

Chair: Please do.

Key Worker M: So, it is client M and he is here to help you to understand the problem.

Chair: Great, thank you, client M.

Client T's Interpreter: KonstantinXXXX, Romanian interpreter.

Client T: Hello, I am client T. I am from Romania and I came here to help you.

Chair: Brilliant of you.

Key Worker T: My name is key worker T and I am from BAWSO. We work in Wales to support victims of human trafficking.

Key Worker A: My name is key worker A. I work for Midland Heart. I am here as client A's support worker.

Chair: It is a brilliant name. Client A, welcome.

Client A: Hi. The first thing I want to say is I appreciate that you give us a chance to come here. I really want to make an impact, hopefully after today, that there is going to be something done about it and we all can see the impacts. I know there are not a lot of people who come here having to say this, but hopefully us, a small group, can make any difference.

Chair: No, not at all. I helped put together the Bill for modern slavery, and you are a bigger group than we had for forming the Bill, so that is terrific. Might we ask the Salvation Army to identify themselves because they can join in?

Ann-Marie Douglas: Okay. I am Ann-Marie Douglas. I am the project director for the adult victims of modern slavery care contract.



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Alexandra Lands: I am Alexandra Lands and I am a public affairs assistant for the Salvation Army.

Chair: Brilliant, thanks.

Heidi Allen: Do you want me to do my bit?

Chair: Yes, you are going to start us off.

Q2 **Heidi Allen:** Okay. Perhaps working down, I want to understand how you got into a safe house. Was that easy and who was there to help you with that? Perhaps if we start with client M and then work along.

Key Worker M: Client M was just saying that it was quite difficult and it took him about four years.

Heidi Allen: Four years?

Key Worker M: Four years to get to the safe house since he has run away from the traffic house.

Q3 **Heidi Allen:** Was there anybody who helped him or was he completely on his own?

Key Worker M: Yes, there was a charity organisation that helped him to identify the problem and helped refer him to the Salvation Army and then he got to us, but it took him four years to find the people who have recognised the problem.

Q4 **Heidi Allen:** For me to understand, because I have no idea, is it the charity that tries to find people like client M or did he find them himself?

Key Worker M: I am his key worker so if I can answer that it will be easier. He was homeless and he was using the services for homeless people, and by having a chat with one of the people working there they have identified that he is a potential victim of human trafficking and they have referred him to the whole system.

Q5 **Chair:** So client M escaped to homelessness?

Key worker M: Client M has escaped from the traffickers and then he became homeless. He spent some time with helpful people but obviously he could not be with them all the time, so he was facing homelessness for a long time.

Q6 **Chair:** Before we go on, client M, which is your home country?

Client M (Translation): Poland.

Q7 **Heidi Allen:** Shall we move along?

Client T: I am from Romania and since having a problem with modern slavery I have been helped I think pretty fast. When I needed it, they were there and on time. I never had the chance to sleep on the street, so it was a lot of help for me.

Q8 **Heidi Allen:** How did you find that help? This was the help to go into the



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safe house, somewhere safe?

Client T: I didn't search for specific help. I only knew to have a place to stay and continue on to search for some work and finally afterwards move somewhere. I have been to the police and from the police to the Salvation Army and things have moved very fast. One week or two weeks and everything was set to move into a safe house. Since then, since I moved, I await something to happen.

Q9 **Heidi Allen:** Okay. We will talk about that later. I am not sure I still understand. How was it that you broke free? You did that like client M? Did you do that on your own and you found some help? Were the police the first people you went to?

Client T: First of all, I got food poisoning where I worked and I was depressed as well. I was going to a pharmacy to speak with the pharmacist about my health and what I should take, and the pharmacist saw that I am not okay and she asked me more questions. She got involved afterwards to help me further in my problem so that is how I—

Q10 **Heidi Allen:** It was that meeting of that person that helped you? Were you aware that there were charities or people that could help you?

Client T: No, not really, not too much. I just wanted a place to rest for a few days until I find somewhere else to work, a proper job.

Q11 **Chair:** Did the pharmacist tell you to go to the police?

Client T: She was actually with me.

Chair: She took you to the police?

Client T: Yes.

Chair: Brilliant of her, yes.

Client T: A very good help.

Q12 **Chair:** Did the police understand what you were trying to tell them?

Client T: I couldn't find my words at first, but the pharmacist spoke for me at first and afterwards I got courage to express myself and my problem. That is how it happened.

Q13 **Heidi Allen:** You get to a safe house then. I forgot to ask client M, how long did you stay in the safe house?

Client T: For almost four months.

Q14 **Heidi Allen:** Four months, okay. For client M?

Key worker M: He is still in the same house and is one of the longest clients in our service, more than a year.

Q15 **Heidi Allen:** Okay. Key worker A and client A, what is your experience?



Client A: I used to work for a human trafficker. He was running a charity company. When I found out in three weeks' time that I had been exploited by him and that there is not something clear about the way he is running the charity company—because I used to be homeless myself before and the Church and charities helped me to understand how hard it is. It gives me more experience to understand people, how they survive these days. When I realised that something is really not up to the top with my gang master, I took a couple of days off and then I found myself employment. Basically, I registered for a couple of agencies and one of them I could not say yes. I could not choose which agency I will take employment, and when I explained the situation that I was in, because I was living in one of the gang master's houses, so if I will take the job I would not have a place to stay so I would become homeless. I explained that to the agency. They got in touch with the head office and then they put me to Hope for Justice, which is the charity. They interviewed me. They have seen me out of the house. Basically, they took the interview of me, they got in touch with the Salvation Army and then I find employment and start work. I had a full-time job and I was asking for help to move into the property where I could be safe, carry on living and be safe.

But then they noticed the best thing for me would be doing my job and to move out from the city, from Bradford, and come to Birmingham, which would be more of a safer environment and I would have the chance, first of all, to think over what happens and to try to focus on carrying on chasing career opportunities or employment. Since then, I fell into the system of the jobcentre. I had a really bad experience and since September this year I am still in a safe house. I don't know how to move on, really, because in the safe house we are being provided the help, but it is hard to choose which way to go and start from scratch. It is not easy when there is limited help you can get.

Q16 **Heidi Allen:** It sounds like you tried to break free by looking for a different job?

Client A: Yes.

Heidi Allen: Somebody good in the agency then called the head office and realised that your old job should not have been connected to your house and that was a bit unusual? Now you have tried to change jobs again. You said the jobcentre has been the problem. Explain to us why that is and what has happened.

Client A: Well, the jobcentre found I have been in employment and receiving at the same time benefits, which was not true. They took my benefits away and they have asked me to provide information: am I actually employed? They sent me the letter with a name of a company, which I don't recognise and I haven't been registered there. They have asked me for proof of that, which I do not imagine how I would get that. I have asked the jobcentre to get in touch with the company as to my



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application form, my copy of IT, my timesheets for the job that actually I am working there.

Then I pointed out that I cannot be working and signing up at the same time, not to mention that I have not received a penny for that period that they have accused me to work and receive a benefit at the same time. I think that makes a big impact of the reason why I cannot get benefits now. At this point, I have back payments to pay for housing benefits and council tax. With my little amount of what I am having from the Salvation Army I am paying £1 towards paying it back and it is more than £300.

Q17 **Heidi Allen:** In terms of accommodation, are you still in the safe house?

Client A: Yes.

Q18 **Heidi Allen:** But you have to pay for that?

Client A: No.

Q19 **Heidi Allen:** Were you saying housing benefit?

Client A: No, the previous housing benefits, they asked me to repay that money back. I have explained the situation where I am, but they still make the pressure.

Q20 **Heidi Allen:** Because they think you are working somewhere else?

Client A: Yes. Therefore, I agreed to pay £1 a week. That is all I can really afford and it won't bring me or cause any bigger trouble. It is hard to think that when you are in this situation and then you want to try to find employment and move on with your life, when you have so many things going on, your employer expects you to work full-time but you need to take time off to go and do something about it to prove that you are innocent, not to pay money back that you don't have to. A part of that money is actually for that employment period.

Q21 **Heidi Allen:** Do you think the jobcentre has just made a mistake?

Client A: I think that they did but if they have any proof, all they have is me registered in the company, which automatically goes into the Home Office. So they probably picked it up from the Home Office. If I register with an agency, it doesn't matter if I work or I don't work with that agency. I still can register. But the agency job has registered me down to the Home Office and they picked it up from there that I have been working, but they don't have any proof of that. Nor do I to prove to them that I haven't. In the position of that, if the benefit has been taken off and you have tried to prove yourself, you do not really have much time or money to find a solicitor to prove your innocence. When I tried to explain to them—

Q22 **Steve McCabe:** Heidi, I am just wondering, listening to client A, is this just a case of the jobcentre getting into a bit of a mess that we have experience of, or do you think this is connected to the previous gang master? Is this part of something else that was going on? I am just



wondering.

Chair: Client A, was it the gang master who was actually claiming a housing benefit on behalf of you?

Client A: No, it was before. I have been homeless for a year before I came to Bradford. Because I could not find a job living in Yorkshire I have moved. I found it online that you can work for charity, and what it says online is that the house is going to be provided and an amount of money for a day's work, for delivering charity bags to the homeless. People are working for several hours for £30 a day and most of the charities where they have been collected it is 10 tonnes of coats being all delivered then abroad, nothing being left here. It is basically using trafficked people to work for them and then all the coats that were being accomplished in the country in here would be taken out, which I think is a huge thing. It should not be that way.

Heidi Allen: It is wrong.

Client A: It is wrong and the people who are getting payments for the job they try to do—because is it not easy to walk 10 miles a day, 12 hours, and get £30 for that. When you start getting into the position where you have to pay the rent and survive, eventually you get to taking the money towards your wages, I would say. I had this trouble. My gang master put me into that big a debit that I could not afford to stay working for him. I told him that I cannot. When I have noticed that there is something wrong about the way he does it, and I didn't have that much experience at the time but I have noticed something is wrong and I have chosen to go out and search for a job myself, but when he finds out that I am going to leave him—I was living in one of his properties—he was about to evict me out and I would be homeless. Then he threatened me if I am going to do something about it I will be ending up in the ditch.

Q23 **Mhairi Black:** Obviously, you are describing there a horrible situation that you encountered with the jobcentre. Is that something that you other guys have experienced as well? For yourself, for instance, key worker T, what has your experience been of the DWP and the jobcentres?

Key Worker T: We are first responders, so we detect if this person is a potential victim of human trafficking. Then, together with the Salvation Army—we are subcontracted to the Salvation Army to provide the support for them—we put them in the safe houses and then from there we start the procedure because they are there for a short period. We take them to the Department for Work and Pensions, to the housing. They don't really get housing benefit unless in very critical cases. The Department for Work and Pensions, if they are from the EEA, they will get three months and after that they will not qualify. That is for people from the EEA, but others are not entitled to jobseeker's allowance or any treaty rights.

Q24 **Mhairi Black:** What about yourself, client M?

Key Worker M: Would you like to hear about client M?



Mhairi Black: Yes.

Key Worker M: One thing that links to the previous question a little bit, once client M has managed to run away from the traffickers, after two months he managed to make a JSA claim. He has shared his experience of what has happened to him with the adviser there. Client M was aware that something wrong happened to him and that was not right. Someone beat him up, he had a horrible experience, but he was not aware that it is really modern slavery. When he was explaining that to the adviser in the jobcentre, he has not picked up on that and he has not pointed him further where he will be looking for the help. Then he lost four years before someone finally offered him the help and pointed him where he should go further.

Q25 **Heidi Allen:** Can I just check? When he first tried to go to the jobcentre and tried to explain what had happened, was he doing that on his own?

Key Worker M: No, with someone else who was helping him at that time. That was like a friend, I would say, yes. So, definitely the person in the jobcentre knew what has happened to him. On the one hand, the person in the jobcentre was helpful because client M was entitled to the JSA. However, there was that big gap after—

Heidi Allen: Nothing else?

Key Worker M: Yes. So that was the first bad experience, and now we are facing a very big difficulty because client M was paralysed two years ago. We as a charity are trying to help him to apply for the employment support allowance. However, it has been refused him, even to the complex physical health matters. We have managed to appeal against the decision. That happened very, very recently. Even though the tribunal had set aside the decision from April and we were so happy, yes, everything is fine, finally client M will get some extra support, when we rang DWP and we were trying to find out if we have to make any new applications, "What is the next step because everywhere we can find the information we will try to help you to go through the whole process," the person said to us, "Just wait. Yes, everything is fine, you don't have to fill in any more applications. Just wait for the letter with the calculation of how much client M will be entitled to and then client M just needs to wait for the money transfer." I said, "If we are not going to receive the letter by how many days do we need to contact you back?" We were told, "Just give us a ring back Friday if nothing arrives." We did that and the next person said to us, "No, client M is not going to get any money because even though the tribunal set aside the previous decision, it is only regarding the credits regarding his health but not HRT." They said he is not entitled to any money at all. So, in the first instance when we contacted them and spoke to the adviser, he said something completely different, "Just wait on the letter, it is going to arrive."

I even have the letters on me. It is very surprising that everywhere—we tried to be clear as much as we can. It is three pages and it doesn't say



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anything because one of the things that it says here is, "We cannot pay you income-related employment support allowance because you have as much or more money coming in than the law says you need to live on."

Q26 **Heidi Allen:** They think he has other moneys coming?

Key Worker M: That is one of the bits. Even on the phone they have explained that because client M has not passed his HRT, that is the main reason. The letter says something completely different.

Q27 **Heidi Allen:** So it is to do with health and to do with money?

Key Worker M: Yes. We spoke with the adviser and I said, "This gentleman unfortunately is not capable of work. Even the decision from the tribunal says that, so what do you advise us because we really want to help this gentleman?" So I was told, "Just apply for the JSA and they may have a different HRT requirement." I said, "This gentleman cannot look for work and I know exactly what the application for JSA looks like." I think the third or the fourth question is, "Do you recognise yourself as a person with disabilities?" and obviously this gentleman does.

Q28 **Mhairi Black:** Forgive me for this, does client M have other income coming in?

Key Worker M: No, just the one from the ESA, which is £65 or £50 after the other money for the contributions to the house.

Q29 **Heidi Allen:** Is this still happening now?

Key worker M: Yes. Client M has an appointment this Friday to speak with the supervisor who is specialised in ESA claims, so hopefully they are going to help him. I do not understand why the tribunal has not looked at that point in making the decision. It is very stressful for him because we were so happy to see the decision, "Yes, finally someone has recognised his health issues," and a week later, not really.

Q30 **Heidi Allen:** The safe house that he is in is charity?

Key worker M: Yes, it is a charity.

Q31 **Heidi Allen:** He will stay there, I suppose, until he can have more benefits?

Key Worker M: That is another part because in general any victim of human trafficking, when both decisions are positive, the reasonable grounds decision and the conclusive grounds decision, it is more than two months they can stay in a safe house. At the moment, we are having—that is going to be the wrong word—the battle with the Home Office. Every four weeks we have to put in an extension for client M to stay with us. We have to do that a week in advance, so this gentleman here is quite depressed and stressed because he does not know what is going to happen next. If we will not be able to support him, he is lost. There are quite a few people engaged in his case and they are trying to help him, but he doesn't know. Last Monday, I put an extension through and I am



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just waiting for the results, so client M's stay is confirmed until Friday but I do not know what is going to happen after that.

Q32 **Mhairi Black:** What about yourself, client T? What has your experience been of the DWP and the jobcentre?

Client T: Not a good one. I have moved from London in January. I have been here only one and a half months, so it was very hard for me to find a good job or a stable one at least. I have decided to move to Manchester because the rent is cheaper and I think I will be better there rather than here. I have been to jobcentre in the first week because I could not find anything fast to work. I have been there to ask and to find ways to obtain a job or in the worst case a benefit, something to survive, not to die and starve. I have been mistreated and I have felt like it was my fault I am there. They just put to me some questions that were not necessary and I felt really bad. They just put to me, "Okay, stay there and wait." Okay. I got angry and I said, "I don't need anything. Even if I sleep outside and I starve, I will manage somehow to get up on my feet by myself. I don't need any help." That was my bad experience that I had. I am going there to ask for minimum help and, "We don't have any jobs." Why the hell do you have a jobcentre? It is a big jobcentre. Should be no "job", just "centre". I know it is a centre, I don't care.

Q33 **Heidi Allen:** This was in London?

Client T: That was in Manchester. I said, "Okay, thank you, bye. I don't need your help. I will try to do it somehow," and I did, but not too good.

Q34 **Mhairi Black:** Throughout the entire process that you guys have been through, have you found at any point that you have come across somebody who has been a Government official or jobcentre staff who has fully grasped and understood the situation that you guys have been in and appreciates the struggles that you have had?

Client A: On this point, I would say I found that the jobcentre staff are not experienced enough to notify these people that I really need that help. I have been in the country for 10 years and I know the staff always get updates and proper training from time to time. I think that there is so many going on on this point that this training is not really the training they need. They really need a little bit more than that because, as the gentleman just mentioned, if the jobcentre could notify that he is a victim of trafficking, this limited time on an appointment, these five minutes, does not really give you much time to discuss with your coach what is going on. Or let's say representatives from charities, they know more and they can find these victims and they are more keen to do that and help them. The generosity of all the people living in the UK and generating this money to the Salvation Army—whatever they get they also pay taxes; they also try to survive like everyone else—but from their willing and good hearts we all can be here and we all could be taken care of. Otherwise the point of that is there will be more homeless people around here that would be housed.



On this point, of course, the jobcentre has its own deadlines as well, which everyone understands, but I think that there is too much pressure on them. They start thinking, "Yes, I would spend 10 minutes with you discussing these questions, but I have to be really short for five minutes because I have another appointment coming through." The lack of this time that the jobcentre is working, its working times—the NHS is working seven days a week now. It used to be five days.

Heidi Allen: We do not want to have that conversation.

Client A: The jobcentre could take this point as well because the more days they work, it makes more trained people, more helpers, which makes more employment. Even for foreign people like me, I could take an apprenticeship and help in the jobcentre and notify people like this, and be probably one of them who can notify and point them in the right direction in the Jobcentre. People know about the jobcentre. Eventually, all foreign people know what the jobcentre is. If there would be more information about modern slavery in the language of the people, where they could read a booklet and go through and they know where to ring, what language line, and if they make sure that that language line is in their language, they know where to get in touch. Sometimes people do not think that this phone call or any of this that they try to do makes any impact.

Q35 **Chair:** Client A, do you think the gang masters make a special effort to recruit from homeless people?

Client A: Yes, because to be honest, before I moved from Bradford, there were quite a lot of vans driving around and seeing people on the corner of the street and just stopping by, "Do you want to have a job?" delivering the leaflets or charity bags and stuff like this, because they find cheap labour. The people who find it difficult to go to a jobcentre and go through the system are in the same position. Like the gentleman said, I am just going to go out and try to do it myself. If you go out there, eventually you are going to end up with a gang master, but you are better off like this and you are going to be quiet, you are going to be respectable, you are going to do whatever he says. At the end of the day, you are going to get that money and you can survive or you can even go through the months, save up and then you leave, whatever the chances, but they find it difficult to get in touch with the jobcentre. Not to mention with lots of people coming in, there is going to be eventually more and more and more and these discussions are going to be even—I mean years after years, it is going to be ages while we are going to fix this. That is my opinion.

Q36 **Steve McCabe:** There are two things. I just wanted to check that I understood what you said there. Are you saying that there are vans driving around the country picking up and enticing homeless people on street corners under the pretence that you are getting a job helping a charity? Is that your experience?



Client A: Yes. Another experience was finding that online, mostly Facebook and official pages. There are a lot of different pages where the people use the chats. You can find them on Facebook that they are offering charities and a house, but none of this employment or employees who are typing all this in ever mention about the procedures: how you are going to pay the tax or what you are going to do about it. They put you in the house and you work for them. They give you the payments you survive on, the money you can survive on, basically to pay the rent and eat. But the people there, they are better off than going to the jobcentre and going through all the procedures because they are more intimidated, thinking, "How will I go through that?" I have a gentleman living in our property as well who has this common issue for three years being in this position. Now, for spending a month being on benefits and not to have a chance to attend English courses to start studying and really choose a career opportunity, you have three months to attend an appointment with the jobcentre to discuss what you have done to look for work.

Q37 Steve McCabe: Can I ask client A what happens? Do people come to this country because they think they have been promised a job and that job falls through, so they find themselves homeless and then they are on the street and they come across the van or they are online and they come across this pretend charity? Is that how it works? Is that what happens?

Client A: I used to help charities myself when I realised how it is being dealt and what the system is. I used to help people quite a lot and I have been in the country for 10 years. I have noticed there are a lot of people really happy about the lives they have and they keep ringing back abroad with their loved ones and friends and they keep telling them how brilliant this country is. But when the people come here, they are thinking they are better off, but when they come here they do not know the procedure, the basics of how to live in the UK. People don't realise that and they are not prepared when they come here. When they are not prepared and they come here, they find it difficult, stressful, depression, and that is why they end up like this: being homeless, couldn't figure it out, or abused; most of the time abused. I have seen this quite a lot as well, a lot of people I would say.

I have met a lot of people I have helped myself to go to the jobcentre. I tried to make an impact on them because the person could not speak English. I find it difficult that even if you try to help, I am not a representative. All I try to do is that I have seen the system going through and I try to make a little bit of an impression that the person understands how the system works. The jobcentre staff are not really experienced. I would say they are experienced in the big picture but they are not experienced to see what that person really needs. If I come in and I do not speak any English and I do not have any experience, what would be best to start with to change this, to study, to learn and to get my first employment?



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Q38 Steve McCabe: I am not sure, listening to this, whether it should be jobcentre staff we should be talking about or, if it is, it should be a specialist adviser of some description. I think the problem is as you described it yourself. You have people who have a particular job that they understand, but if anything is outside the box they do not understand it. I think that might be the situation. I just wonder, are other people's experiences similar to client A in terms of the way people come here and what happens and how they end up in this predicament? Does it sound familiar when client A describes this?

Client T: It is pretty much the same experience.

Steve McCabe: Pretty much the same?

Client T: Yes.

Chair: Client M the same?

Key Worker M: Client M would like to say that some people approached himself in the other country but he very rarely mentioned the person because he has been quite a long time in our service so he has seen the people who were trafficked in the UK. They left our service. They thought that they will make it and unfortunately they end up in the same situation twice and even a third time. It is happening abroad that the people will be approached there, but it does happen over here as well.

If I can just add one comment, you were saying about the advisers in the jobcentre can be specialists and I just would like to say one thing. I know that it is mainly about those people, but it is still about them. Unfortunately, I came across a situation and the people in the jobcentre did not know what human trafficking is and even how to spell those words. I do apologise but I really had to say that.

Q39 Chair: Can we ask the Salvation Army, one of the safe planks in all this is the national referral mechanism, isn't it? Given what we are hearing now, how does this relate to what you know about the workings of the national referral mechanism? You are the agency, aren't you, that runs the referral mechanism on behalf of the Home Office?

Ann-Marie Douglas: The Salvation Army has the contract to provide the support to adult victims of modern slavery. I am in an interesting position because I used to work for what used to be DWP, DHSS, for 21 years, so I am quite familiar with the organisation and I can appreciate a lot of what has been said.

In our experience, I am in a position where I get feedback from our 12 subcontractor organisations, and based on that feedback I am aware that the experience can vary in different regions of the country. There is some evidence of good practice and that seems to come about where the subcontractor organisations have taken the time and effort to go out of their way to find somebody at DWP who is prepared to even listen to what the service does, what they are trying to achieve and the benefits of



them working together to support the individuals. Typically, staff on the front-line are not aware of human trafficking or modern slavery and too often do not seem interested in knowing what it means. As you say, they deliver a benefit system and you had better fit into it or we cannot help you. Victims of modern slavery do have particular needs and experiences that mean that often they cannot meet the evidence requirements, for example.

Q40 Chair: Might you explain to us what the national referral mechanism is and how this might help with some of the issues that we have heard this morning?

Ann-Marie Douglas: The national referral mechanism is the framework through which the Government collates data about instances of modern slavery, human trafficking, and also provides support for those affected by it. That support consists of a menu of different interventions. We have 12 subcontractors around the country that provide the support directly to victims.

Q41 Chair: What would be the support?

Ann-Marie Douglas: The support will consist of safe accommodation, an amount—

Q42 Chair: Is that time limited?

Ann-Marie Douglas: It is time limited and victims are eligible for a minimum of 45 days' support if they get a positive reasonable grounds decision. There are two decisions that are made during the period they are supported. The first one should be made around five days after they come into the service to say that there are sufficient indicators to suggest they might be a victim. Then the final conclusive decision is made 45 days thereafter, but in reality the timescale can be much longer, particularly if they are non-EU.

Q43 Steve McCabe: I laugh because the idea that anything like this is processed in six weeks is still an issue. What kind of length of delays are we really talking about?

Ann-Marie Douglas: With DWP?

Steve McCabe: Well, notionally 45 days is a six-week turnaround. I do not believe it, so I am wondering what it would be normally.

Ann-Marie Douglas: For clients who are from the EU, including Brits, we find that the average length of stay in the service for the last complete year was around 59 days. If they are outside of a safe house and receiving outreach, and that is usually because they are non-EU, the average length of stay I think was around 153 days, something like that. The waiting times we have experienced with DWP, it can take up to four weeks to get that first appointment to say they wish to make a claim. If they need to apply for a National Insurance number, then that can be



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another four to six weeks. Overall, it can take several months for a payment to be received.

My concern is that under the contract the expectation is that we do support for roughly six weeks, if you like, but that period is extended because clients cannot move on because they have not received their benefits. They are also not eligible for housing benefit, for example, so they are stuck in the system. We are having to commission more safe house beds to keep them while they wait for the benefit, so we are incurring additional cost.

Q44 Steve McCabe: Is this cost in addition to the contract you are paid for? It is the Salvation Army money?

Ann-Marie Douglas: No. The contract is paying for the accommodation, the subsistence, supporting them to access legal advice, the time that all the support workers put into the individual. On top of that, that time is extended while they await the benefits to come through. The benefits, if they are entitled, they will only be entitled to it for a limited period of time and once that benefit is exhausted they become vulnerable again and could be re trafficked.

Q45 Mhairi Black: What do you think has to change? If there was one big blockage with the system just now, is it that we need a specialist service?

Ann-Marie Douglas: I do think they are not generic cases and in the same way that DWP has recognised that victims of domestic violence, for example, have particular needs and because of their circumstances need some concessions, for want of a better word, I think that even if victims of modern slavery were treated in the same way as victims of domestic violence, it would go a long way to enabling them to access services and to give them the additional time and space needed to be able to access and exist in communities on somewhere resembling a level footing.

Q46 Chair: So the NRM should extend until people have landed safely?

Ann-Marie Douglas: The period of support allowed under the NRM is okay for some people, but where it is not the victim should not be the person who is left in that uncertainty not knowing from week to week whether they are going to be asked to leave tomorrow. That is the position that client M is in.

Q47 Steve McCabe: I do not want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds to me as if what I am hearing described is the Government have done the good bit. We have acknowledged modern slavery exists and we have this referral mechanism and we have a contract with the Salvation Army, so if you do find yourself a victim in this way it is a lot better than it was a few years ago because we are saying, yes, this is real, this is wrong. But it sounds like there is then a pause in what comes next, and what comes next is you could end up going right around the wheel and back to where you started. Is that a fair way of—



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Ann-Marie Douglas: Yes, sadly that is the case because the scope of the contract is the support available under the national referral mechanism. Once that support has been delivered, they are out in the community competing with everybody else, and many of them are unable to.

Q48 **Steve McCabe:** As client A was saying, does not understand you or does not have time for you or whatever, yes.

Ann-Marie Douglas: Absolutely, yes.

Q49 **Chair:** All right, we ought to draw this to a close, and we are immensely grateful to you. Are there any last words, particularly for anybody who hasn't spoken? Key worker T, yes? Key worker A, do you want to come in?

Key Worker T: I think Ann-Marie was reading my mind, because I was going to have this comparison between victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, and we should have the same sympathy for victims of human trafficking as well as we have for victims of domestic violence, because we are an organisation who were originally working with victims of domestic violence, and we are working now with victims of human trafficking and it is pretty much the same, I think in some types. It's more—the trauma of being trafficked is more than being a victim of domestic violence.

Q50 **Chair:** Yes. Any last words from anyone? I am really grateful. You have helped explain to us the report that was done by the Centre for Social Justice; it can happen here. You have been telling us that it is around us all the time.

Client A: I came across one; it is just not about the human trafficking as some gang masters. There are actually companies involved in this part as well. First, what the gang master does is—I've seen people working for less than minimum wage, £5 an hour, cash in the envelope. Mainly you have a farmer who is making potatoes, and she's finding the employees for him. He is paying generously everyone, as it is the minimum wage, but the lady is taking her cut and giving the rest of the employees the money. So lots of employers actually are going ahead with this because it's cheap labour and they work for more hours than they could, and they don't have a rest between the shift and people are just harming themselves doing that. Not to mention the accidents that might happen in the workplaces. But what they do is just, they are collecting money because they are able—if the people without English cannot find a job, they are better off with the modern slavery and to work that way, if they don't have any English or information appropriate to this situation.

Q51 **Chair:** It says something about the work ethic, doesn't it? Better to opt in to the gang master and slavery than do nothing. This has been immensely important to us. You might want to give us more evidence afterwards; we would love that. If we can hear some more about how the NRM should be developed too, because it is great, it is wonderful, when



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the timing is suitable for people, but the idea that everybody is going to be processed at a set pace seems to me to be appalling.

Ann-Marie Douglas: There is flexibility now in the NRM for the support period to be extended, but my concern is that it has been extended to accommodate the inefficiencies of the other organisations that we engage with.

Q52 **Chair:** Yes, a very important point, thanks. Thank you all very much for coming. Key worker A, do you want to make any comment at all to us? You have been great. But if you have any further thoughts, you will come back to us, won't you?

Client A: I think that to understand more of this issue it would be appropriate to have it in every single language, online or booklets around, where the people can actually somehow write a letter in their own language or put anything they can say about their own experience or the way they are living now at this point, online, where you can get the bigger picture of the rest of the people who want to say something about it.

Chair: But also the jobcentre Plus ought to ask for, in a sense, champions, where there is one person who is really interested in this topic to whom other staff could refer you.

Q53 **Heidi Allen:** Client T, did you want to say something?

Client T: If you want to start about somewhere in human trafficking and exploitation, you might have to take a look at the carwashes. All of them, they are working without any contract or they are very, very badly paid, and they work a lot of hours. I tell this because of my experience since I had no other help found in jobcentres. I chose the fastest way to earn some money, so I have been to a carwash. So there I have seen lots of things.

Q54 **Chair:** Do you think you might also think about—just like that, client T, which is terrific—in what occupations might one more often find people who have been enslaved, and others, so that one has a list for the police where they should raid, for goodness's sake? We know in Brussels the numbers of people who are pushed into sex working; do they raid? No. All right; really helpful.

Client T: I think there should be tunnel carwash everywhere. There will be only one employee, and that is all.

Chair: Great.

Client A: If the police start raiding town by town, the companies are looking to a system the way they generate the money, how many employees they have and do the employees pay National Insurance and tax? I know the people who are in carwashes do not speak the language, and they are getting the money and they are spending the money they want, but when it comes to the system, when they want to apply at the



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jobcentre, I actually witnessed a person who hasn't got any paperwork and he'd been on board with the jobcentre in April. Some people who deserve it don't get it, and people who are less likely to get it, they get it in no time.

Q55 **Chair:** You have been brilliantly helpful, thank you. I just wonder whether the Salvation Army might be part of our second session as well? Is that all right?

Ann-Marie Douglas: Yes.

Chair: Thank you very, very much, all of you, for coming. It has been terrifically helpful.