

A Husband's Guide to Blue Badge Applications & Appeals

Cool, I think we're ready to go. It seems to all be working. Okay, so we're here to talk about all things disability benefits, focusing on expectations and awareness.

We plan to publish these conversations on a website to help applicants with aphasia, their families and friends. We've heard government websites can be hard to use and people rely on friends and family or advisors, for example the folks here at Aphasia Reconnect. So we're here to chat today just about this topic and about specifically the blue badge.

So to begin, tell us a little bit about yourself and how aphasia has affected you in your life. It's fine, I mean it's not affecting me. Yeah it's not affecting you?

Well it's affecting me in that my wife's the one with the aphasia. So your wife has aphasia. Okay and how does it affect her day to day?

Aphasia basically has completely destroyed the life she had before. In the sense that she struggles to do anything, she doesn't want to go out, she doesn't really want to mix. If she's in a noisy environment she gets anxious and then she's got tremors which appear as well in her limbs.

So yeah it's not been a very good experience for her. Okay and so when did she get aphasia? She had an intracranial subdural hematoma on the 1st of July 2024, which basically she became totally non-responsive and we weren't really expecting her to survive.

Well we, and I say we, I mean the doctors as well. Anyway she mostly relieved the pressure on her brain by putting two burs in. She's gradually started to come round but she's been left with right sided weakness, aphasia, memory problems.

So now where we used to be you know sort of very lively and she would want to go places and restaurants and things like that, she doesn't really want to do that anymore. And even in family gatherings where you know we've got, it's purely family but because you know when everyone's together it's quite a big family group, she still panics and she has to take herself off and to calm down again.

I have to say this, I think this is not the first time we hear from people who have like an acquired brain injury, that the first thing it affects is their confidence, which leads to a lot of anxiety being you know going and talking to people because you lost your words. Yeah. And therefore it affects you, how you feel about it.

Yeah she does, I mean she's sort of, she becomes very sort of fretful when she cries and because she realises she's you know she gets frustrated and she can't really, when she's looking for a word and she just can't find it.

And also it's affected her speech, it's not just the loss of not being able to find the right word at the right time, it's the way she speaks has actually changed as well and she's developed this, I don't know if it's a habit or if it's part of the illness, in that she basically tries to draw a breath in the middle of a word, so it makes it difficult to understand her. Yeah.

And she's also got, she was diagnosed with hearing loss and another problem we've got now is because the hearing loss has been corrected, she thinks she's speaking louder than she actually is, so it means it's really difficult to understand what she's saying because she's not really speaking loud enough. She thinks she does.

Yeah she thinks she can hear it normally because her voice is being projected into her ears by the hearing aids, so that makes it sound to her, it makes it sound loud, but to me and you, it's like even from a couple of foot away, you can sort of, you have to struggle to hear what she's saying as she chooses her words. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Now all these things that you mentioned, problems and barriers and difficulties and disabilities is, and the confidence to begin with. Yeah.

I think that that's the reason why we want to talk to people about disability benefits because it seems, and we found a lot of reports and we talk to people all the time, that confidence will affect your decision-making and then you either give up or you will think that you don't deserve the benefits and so on.

And that is part of this project, to really deal and talk about those expectations because I think sometimes cheap people just give up. Yeah, they just give up. So, and that's maybe our first question is, how did you first hear about Blue Badge PIP or any disability benefits and how did that go?

The Blue Badge, we've been, [name], I shouldn't say the name. That's fine. My wife, basically, has had heart problems from being, you know, a sort of child.

She had rheumatic fever when she was a child which affected the aortic and the mitral valves and because of that, as she's been growing up, she's had all these historical heart problems. She had, she was given porcini, the pig valves, so she had the heart operation when they put pig valves in, took their existing valves out.

But unfortunately, they only lasted about five or six years and then she ended up having to have titanium metal valves put in, ball and cage valves. And if you sit close to her, you can actually hear them ticking. You can hear it clicking.

So because of that, it leaves her breathless and things like that. So she's always, she's found it difficult to walk any sort of distance. So she's been, you know, sort of claiming, she was eligible for the Blue Badge room, you know, for the last 30 odd years.

Okay. So that's how we got the introduction into the Blue Badge. But where the, where the Blue Badge was renewed every three years without having to provide any more evidence, the system sort of changed so that instead of renewing your existing badge, you're reapplying for a new badge.

You have to prove. So then you've got to prove your health and your disabilities all over again. And since, I think the first time we experienced that was in 2019 and she was actually rejected.

They turned her down for the Blue Badge because the, because the assessor was only interested in the amount of pain she was, she was in. And with [name], my wife, she doesn't necessarily get lots of pain. She becomes breathless.

You know, so they rejected it and then we had to appeal. And in the meantime, I managed to get letters from her consultants to say they supported the application for a Blue Badge. And it was actually, you know, she became eligible for it again because of the doctor's letters.

Okay. So just to get some understanding. So she was always an applicant.

She always received the Blue Badge because of these long term health conditions and difficulties walking long distances. And then suddenly in 2019, they changed the rules and terms. She got denied her renewal and then you didn't appeal that decision, but you had to reapply.

Well, on the, on the online form, it actually states that they don't need to see any medical evidence. So we didn't provide any medical evidence as such, but we just filled the form in with all the, you know, the problems that she's got and the conditions that she's got, the medications that she's got, how it affects, you know, how the, you know, the conditions affect her well-being and the ability to walk distances.

But obviously that wasn't, we went, she then went for an assessment, but the assessor wasn't really interested in anything to do with breathlessness. And in fact, they tried to hide the fact that where the, the interviewing would be in order to force us to try and search for it so they could see how well she walks. Wow, gosh.

So, so, so that process of reapplying and then being assessed was was quite, was quite traumatic. And the interview would normally take about 20 minutes, we were told. We was there for an hour and a half and all the assessor wanted to, to know about was pain.

Whatever we spoke about, it came back to pain. So because she wasn't getting a lot of pain, obviously, the assessor, you know, sort of made the recommendation not to, not to reissue the badge. But then when you're informed of the fact that you're not eligible anymore, they also give you a link where you can, on an email, where you can appeal.

So we did the appeal, I went and got the letters from the doctors and they were kind enough to issue us letters. And then, you know, we gave, we appealed, sent the letters off, gave our reasons of why we were appealing. She then had another assessment by the face-to-face assessment and the assessor couldn't understand why it'd been refused in the first place.

So the second time, you know, she wants to actually say whether she would recommend that she, you know, she gets it or not. She just said she would put a recall in and we'd hear in due course. And then about three days later, we got an email saying that she'd actually been accepted and to pay £10 and they would issue the blue badge.

Can we just pause for a second there? Because I think what you said is super important. It's you saw a link in the email.

Yeah, when they reissued the email. Is it like in a footnote? Is it like a small letters or?

No, no, it was just saying if you wish to appeal, you know, go to the... Was your immediate reaction, yes, we're going to appeal? Or you took some days to think about it or consult with someone?

Well, no, what I did is I thought, well, if we appeal, with the information we've already done, we've given, there's a chance you might be turned down again. So that's why I went to see the doctors. And then because you get 28 days in order to appeal.

So from the date of the email, you get 28 days to appeal. So I'll use that time to get the letters through. Do you think that's enough time to appeal or it's like very tight?

Well, it depends if you've got to get more, you know, if you're going to provide more information or in my, in our case, it was letters from the consultant supporting her application for a blue badge. And so they did the letters of support and once I got those and then I clicked on the link and filled the form and then they asked you why you're appealing. And then you've got to give a reason why you're appealing.

The reason I asked about the time is because I'll go back just to PIP for a second, because once you receive the PIP book, you have one month, I think. I'm not sure. Yeah.

But I think you have about one month. However, there is this thing that most people are not aware, which is reasonable adjustments. So you can request additional extra time, especially if you have language disabilities, because the form is like a 40 page form that you have to fill out and you have to collect those, all these things.

You have to answer some difficult questions, you know, have to reflect on your own life. But the thing is, they ask, they'll ask you a question, you're given an answer, then ten questions down the line, they're asking you something similar. Yeah, it doesn't, you know, you've already given an answer to that question up there and then they're asking about it again in a different way.

They say they reformat the question, but the answer is still the same as you gave them up there. Is this for the blue badge? Yeah.

So it should almost pre-populate based on your initial answers later down the line or they're asking too many questions about the same thing. Yeah. I mean, it's as though they're trying to catch you out, you know, so you've given an answer saying, oh, if it's different here.

Yeah. So by re-wording the question, the question's got the same meaning, but using different wording, they, you know, you think, well, why are they asking that again? I've already told them that.

Yeah, that's quite nefarious. So they're like getting you to answer details multiple times and then seeing if there's inconsistencies. Yeah.

Ask you something about this whole process. Like it's a reflective question in the sense of what was your role? Was your role completely doing this on behalf of your wife?

Yes. Was she somehow involved? Like, for example, you read the question, maybe ask her.

No, she, I'm with her 24 hours a day. And I know, I mean, in my case, I know, I know all the, I mean, I'll do her medications, I'll give her all the medications. I know when she's, you know, I'll change her, stay in the bank.

Uh, I'll do everything. I've cooked for her or I came for her. I'll do everything for her.

So there isn't anything that she, you know, with, especially with the impairments that she's got now, that she would be able to process any sort of questions like that. Do they ask you about that? Like the assessors, you know, did you fill this out on your?

Yeah, they do. If you, yeah, you know, you ask you if you're the applicant or you're filling in the form on behalf of someone else and then they may ask you. If you say it's someone else, then they ask you what your relationship is.

So, I mean, that's, uh, but I think this really changed when they changed the rules about who's eligible for blue badge, because it used to be like, you know, there was at least a few conditions that would actually be applicable or eligible, um, but then they changed it. So if you've got depression, if you've got anxiety, if you've got a hundred and on other things, uh, you could still apply for a blue badge.

Do you think that's good? No, I think it's good, but they're expanding the list of, yeah, because it is, uh, it's mean that it means that they're issuing more blue badges now. So I think they're trying to make some of the criteria harder to fulfill in order to try and keep the numbers down.

That's what my gut feeling is anyway. Yeah, you're probably correct. Um, out of interest, we can make this a tad more positive, but like what, what has getting a blue badge done for you in retail?

Well, it's basically changed their lives. I mean, it always has done, but the fact that we couldn't, we didn't have it for three or four months while all this appeal process went through, because once you apply for it, they sent you an email to say you're, you know, you renew your blue badge three months before it's due to run out. So they give you three months to actually apply for it.

Cause they say it can take 12 weeks to process it. Um, but the, you know, so there is sort of warning there, but, um, I've lost the track of what I'm saying. Yeah.

What, what does the blue badge do for you? Three months or four months that it took to get the blue, get the blue badge through again, it actually, I mean, it just restricted on movements going out anywhere. We had to forward plan everything even more than we do normally.

So we've got to know what parking, you know, if we're going to a shopping center, we need to know where we can park.

And then we'd end up taking a wheelchair with us because you can't manage all that, the walking around the shopping center, although she's finding a supermarket because you're walking around very slowly and she's hanging onto a trolley and then you're stopping every few yards, pick things out, but look at something.

So that, you know, and then, uh, yeah, it was made it, it made life quite difficult in that, you know, for those three months and then, yeah, it's not, you know, it really affects your day to day life. Were you at any point anxious about this whole process of applying for it? I was anxious.

I was anxious about it six months before, before I knew because I mean, she, we had to renew it again in 22.

And in 22, we re-sent, we had all the letters from the doctors and everything else, and we sent those through and they decided with the application, online application, and this time, you know, they decided to issue it anyway, we had an assessment and the same thing happened because we had to renew it in July this year and the same, again, we sent all the letters through from the consultants and they don't take much notes of letters from the GP, but if it's a letter from the consultant saying, um, you know, I support this because of this, that and the other, they don't go into too much detail on the letters because, um, but they always end up saying that if you require

more information, um, with the patients, you know, with the patient's permission, we'll provide all the information that's needed.

So, and you already give you a permission for them to do that when you actually, uh, fill the form in. So you give them permission to check your health records and things like that. Yeah.

Okay. Uh, so if there's someone out there listening to this, who's considering applying for a blue badge and they've also maybe had a stroke and aphasia, what tips would you give them?

Um, first of all, check to make sure that you're not automatically eligible, i.e. there's certain conditions, um, which is like if you've got a visual impairment, um, if you've got a visual impairment, you need to get a certificate visual impairment from your consultant and then register it with your council wherever you live.

And then once you got there, you automatically, because you can register blind, basically, you automatically get it. Uh, and there's several other conditions, uh, and if you're, um, a disabled soldier or things like that, then you can automatically get it without going through the assessment process.

So are you saying that with some disabilities, it's easier to get it with where, where, for example, thephasia might be a bit more difficult to explain why it's important? Well, this year it was actually made easier because she's obviously got the right-sided weakness, apart from the heart issues, she's also got the right-sided weakness in her arm and her leg.

So she drags her left leg, so it makes the walking even more challenging. Yeah, that's right. So the, the, um, the cardiac, um, doctors or the cardiologists and the, um, one of the other medical consultants basically did, uh, the letters that they did brought that issue into, into play as well, where she's had a bleed on the brain and it's left her with these disabilities basically.

So, so your tips are, you know, check automatic routes and then make sure you get good evidence and letters from these consultants. Yeah.

If you're, if you're not under a consultant, then I'm not, you know, um, I've sent in, you know, I'm not sure that they take any notice of GP letters because, but with a consultant, I think they find it, uh, and even if they do an assessment, if it's an occupational therapist, then they're not, and there's a sort of orthopedic surgeon saying, you know, they support your, I don't think any sort of, um, any, any assessor is going to go against the word of a consultant, you know, so if you're an, an occupational therapist and you're doing the assessment and you've got a consultant there saying, well, she's got this thing and I'll support her application.

I think it's not going to be quite as easy for them to say, no, you're not eligible for it. I think we have about two more questions and then we can. Yeah.

A couple more questions. Um, what would you say to someone who's maybe like, I'm an R-ing whether to get a blue badge or not. They don't know, you know, they maybe have a disability, but they're not fully accepting of it.

Yeah. Well, I would say go for it because it's, if you can get it, it's life changing. I think that's a great point.

And, um, another one is, uh, what do you think, what do you say to, you know, fellow caregivers out there who are maybe trying to support someone through a blue badge application? Do you

have any tips or advice for them? Be patient really, and list everything that you can think of, you know, I go for the worst day of the person's life.

When they're at their worst, not when they're feeling not too bad and they can walk further or they're less pain or whatever, you always put down the worst-case scenario, you know, that they've ever been.

Um, and, and really just don't just focus on the primary cause that, you know, the reason that you're applying for it, look at the knock-on effects of that, you know, what that primary cause is having away, you know, do you also get anxiety, do you, do you get depressed about the fact that you're going to go out because you, you know, you can't say any psychological, anything like that affects it, you know, sort of walking or the fault of walking too far.

Yeah. So, and also list all your medications that are, um, so if you put down an ailment, put down all the medications that you're, that you're, um, you're sort of taking to mitigate that. So, um, and also what you've done to help yourself, IE, you know, do you, you went and bought yourself walking sticks, uh, you went and bought yourself a wheelchair so people, uh, can sort of immobilize with you.

You like, so you just put down whatever it is that you've already tried to do. What's interesting here when you say put down, um, I think that can be quite difficult because if you ask me now to sit and write about my life and my problems, I feel like I can maybe come up with a few things, but I'm going to miss and skip a lot of other things.

And I wonder, were you like taking little notes and going back to them, like little memory, or you just sit and, and you write it up because you have everything here, you can like do that, but I think, yeah, you can.

Um, yeah, I mean, the thing is, is it, this is all, it's not something that came automatically, I mean, filling in that very first form, uh, after so many years, um, you know, sort of actually supplying any new evidence, um, it was, you know, you know, I had to sit down and I really struggled doing it.

Uh, but then I sort of built on that because I knew what answers we put down in that particular application, which is the one that failed. Uh, and then what I did to, uh, to appeal it. And then, you know, so when we did the second one, you know, in 22, uh, 2022, well, not the second one, but the following one, um, we, I used those, some of those answers so you can build on.

So it is in a way like taking notes because you were like building on previous years and answers. So it was like a process, right? Yeah, it is.

And when you actually meet the assessors, you can get, you can get a sense of where they're, where they're trying to, what they're delving into.

So, and I suppose it depends on the assessor you get, because someone might focus on the pain and another one might focus on something else, uh, because none of them are, I don't know if there's a script that they're supposed to follow or a particular, you know, ask us what questions there, but in my, in my experience, they, they sort of tend to be more orientated again about one thing rather than asking about everything, you know, the reason why I asked this is because something I came to this conclusion that it seems like it would be very beneficial to actually have a little diary and if you're starting this, you know, and, and, you know, it's your first time you want to apply for blue badge, PIP or whatever to really start slowly, like putting down the things you

struggle with.

Yeah, absolutely. Every day, you know, so you should keep it in. If you think that you might be applying for a blue badge, just keep a diary.

So, you know, you're going on a shopping trip. What happened? How did you manage it with that shopping, uh, shopping trip?

Um, and then, you know, so, and build up a bit of background of what your daily life is like, you know, so, you know, if you, you may have 10 good days and 15 really bad days, you know, and it could be that you've been given some sort of medication and it's affected you in a certain way, but you know, you might take, I don't know, antibiotics and they might give you diarrhea, in which case you need to, you know, you need to mention that.

Yeah. You know, so, um, I think it's, it's unfortunate, but everyone has this intuitive nature to them, uh, to kind of minimize their experiences. And I think it's very hard because the application really wants you to not minimize it wants to do the opposite.

The only way you'll get one is if you maximize the, you know, your difficulties. Yeah. And that's the only way you'll get one.

If you say, you know, if you give them all the information about the best day you've ever had in your life, of course, they're not, you know, they're not going to give you nothing, but so, um, yeah, and there are, you know, when they ask the questions, there are, they'll say, for example, and they will actually within the question, give you sort of the type of thing that they're after, you know, um, do you get anxious or, you know, there are some things on the questionnaire actually, um, you know, within the question, they'll say, for example, you know, this, you know, this type of thing.

So you give the, you know, the question itself gives you an idea of where, where they're trying to get to, if you see what I mean, because they'll give you an example of a tip, you know, of a, of a typical answer. So maybe last question, but it actually relates to that. You mentioned a leaflet and that it helped you a lot with the application.

So my question, maybe two questions. How did you find, uh, that leaflet and how did it help you with the application? Uh, yeah, I mean, with the, uh, finding it, it was just, I just did a search on the internet and just put down blue badge sort of an application.

Uh, and it came up with all sorts of, um, sort of from different hospitals and different health trusts and things like that, and different cancer, uh, different cancers that have got, they've produced leaflets and like with advice on how to, to apply for it basically, and it does actually. Um, so you picked one. Yeah, I just think I read for a few.

Okay. And I picked the best one. Basically the one I thought was the best.

Cause it explained about the auto people that, um, you know, illnesses that automatically risk getting eligible for blue badge without going through any assessments. So all you've got to do is say, um, partially blind and providing you got certificate of impaired vision. Um, are you looking for more?

Yeah. I mean, it's, you know, you're, you know, you'll get that. So you still got to fill in the form, but you, you'll, you haven't, you won't have to go through any, for an assessment.

Okay. So, but the, the important thing with that, you know, with the vision thing is, uh, most councils want you to register that certificate with them. So if you get the certificate from the, um, from your consultant, get it registered, get it registered because you, you know, um, I think there's a, there's a re-able thing called re-ablement in most department in most councils.

Um, and then you, you know, they'll tell you who needs to have it. But then when you, when you do the application, you send a copy, you know, sort of have a digital version of that, you know, scan it or whatever, or photograph it and send that photograph in with the application. So, and there are at best, there's probably about eight or nine elements that automatically qualify.

Awesome. Yeah, that's it. Thank you very much.

Thank you so much. Yeah, that's brilliant advice.