Written evidence submitted by Constantina Christou, Visual Signs Promotions Deaf Open
(ATW0298)

I’m very disappointed with Access to Work situation. I will explain from the start what’s happened. I was on JSA (Jobseeker’s Allowance) for 2 years. It was hard for me to find a job. I couldn’t find a job. I also have many qualifications and studied at university and also other studies.

I decided to set up my own business back in December 2013, Visual Signs Promotions Deaf Open. I contacted Access to Work (AtW) and they accepted to support me from 13th January 2014 to 30th April 2014. This was a 4 month contract. I informed AtW that I wanted 40 hours communication support, but they sent me information which wasn’t clear. For example they only gave me 25 hours support. I felt trapped.

I needed to have 40 hours Communication Support Worker (CSW) support for telephone translations, translating emails and letters also the website. I needed communication support to translate meetings.

I was struggling with the hours, they were not enough. Why? I set up business bank account so delays with that which involved many phone calls, also many problems with AtW. this has wasted my time. Also trying to get funding for my business to improve it this also delayed my time, hence why time to spend on business ran out. I needed AtW to give me 1 year contract, why did they give me 4 months contract; it should have been reversed for 1 year.

On 30th April I heard nothing from AtW. My CSW called the centre in the April 2014. The staff informed me that AtW had been successful and they accepted and that I would have support from 2014-2017. I then waited for the letter to arrive as I needed proof. The CSW called the call centre again and asked what has happened to the letter. The person said it was successful and even asked the manager, which she also agreed. This happen 3 times we called with the same answer.

I waited for 5 weeks, also not being able to pay my CSW nothing. I owed CSW a lot of money and I’m panicking. I fight for AtW as I owe CSW. AtW changed their policy after 30th April 2014.

They asked me proof of CSW qualifications, pay slips, I sent them to AtW. then they posted me a letter to say that my application has failed. Why? My wages wasn’t enough the information from before wasn’t clear. The CSW explained my situation for my business for need of support, but they said they were not interested.

After they said that I can apply for a new application, so I filled in new forms and sent it to them. Then they came back with another reason that I don’t pay National Insurance Contributions so they didn’t accept. My CSW phoned the accountant to sort it out, the accountant had proof that I do pay National Insurance (NI). So I sent proof to AtW.

They didn’t accept again. I’ve just been building up my business. What can I do? My aim is to improve the deaf community.

MY CONCLUSION:

6 reasons why I need support

1) I need AtW to continue supporting my business
2) My business Visual Signs Promotions Deaf Open
3) I want the deaf community to live a normal life like Deaf Open before they are blocked they can be open to communication, they can go to Gym’s, Town centres, Museums, hotels etc. we will teach the hearing people to be able to communicate with the deaf.
4) I also support the deaf community to set up their own business, why? Because many deaf people face many barriers.

5) I also like to encourage and bridge the gap with the hearing and the deaf so that all can mix together.

6) My whole aim for Visual Signs Promotions is to support the deaf community and help to improve it. Please support me.

Thank you for your time.

3 July 2014