'We are all human beings.' Understanding the effects of the vouchers scheme on 'Section 4' claimants in Sheffield.

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Aims

To assess the experience Section 4 claimants have using vouchers and gift cards in Sheffield.

Methodology

A qualitative survey was conducted with 33 respondents accessed through the Northern Refugee Centre advice drop in and M&Q office where vouchers are distributed.

Key issues

The report identifies a number of problems with the cashless voucher system relating to: being unable to use public transport to shop or collect vouchers; stigma; isolation without money to pay for telephone or internet use; expense of shops that accept vouchers, and not getting change; getting the right foods for health needs; and not being able to buy appropriate foods, a haircut or clothes.

Conclusions

The voucher system creates practical problems, hardship and psychological problems, leaving people angry, isolated and feeling victimised, punished and exploited.

Recommendations

Replacement of vouchers with cash support through legislative change. In the interim, the introduction of a Visa gift card [such as the ‘Mint card’]; offering bus passes; allowing choice of a mixture of vouchers and gift cards; delivery of vouchers or multiple collection points.

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