

introduction

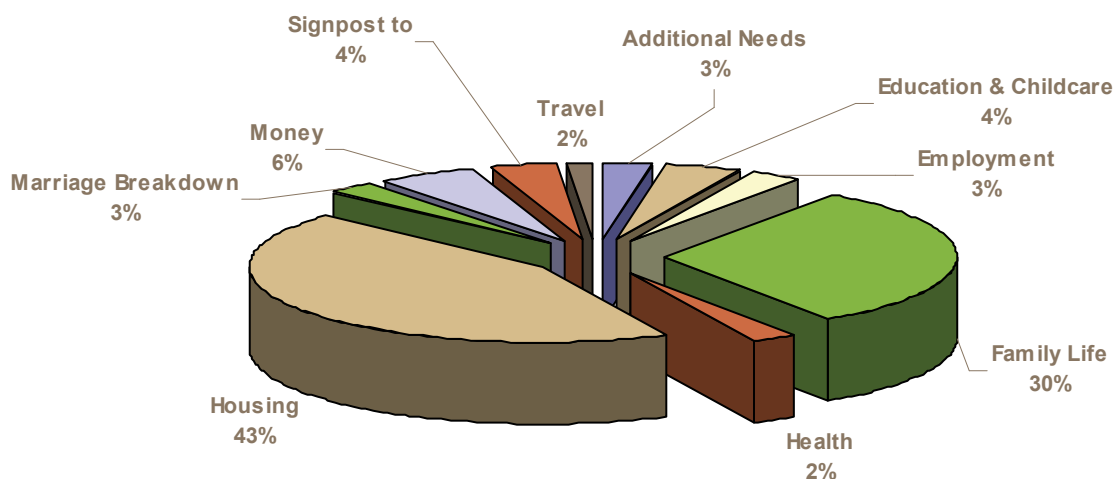
AFF Families' Concerns is produced quarterly to illustrate the issues and concerns that bring Army families to the Army Families Federation. Enquiries are gathered from Army families worldwide, and thus provide an accurate reflection of matters affecting the community. Some families contact AFF to find resolution to problems, some to talk to people who understand their issues and can raise them up the chain of command on their behalf; to log them and try and find resolution for the next generation of Army families. All issues included in this report have been raised with the appropriate agency or member of the chain of command for resolution.

This report is distributed to all those who have an interest in developing and delivering policy and assistance to families - who can help AFF secure a fair deal for all Army families.

methodology

This is a qualitative report. Families contact AFF staff around the world with their issues which are anonymously logged. This information is then entered onto a central database and used to provide the evidence for this report.

AFF worldwide activity chart



worldwide activity

Between October and December 2009 there was a **decrease of 8% in enquiries** (down from 1804 to 1656) to AFF staff compared to the same quarter in the previous year. Enquiries **increased by 7% compared to the previous quarter**.

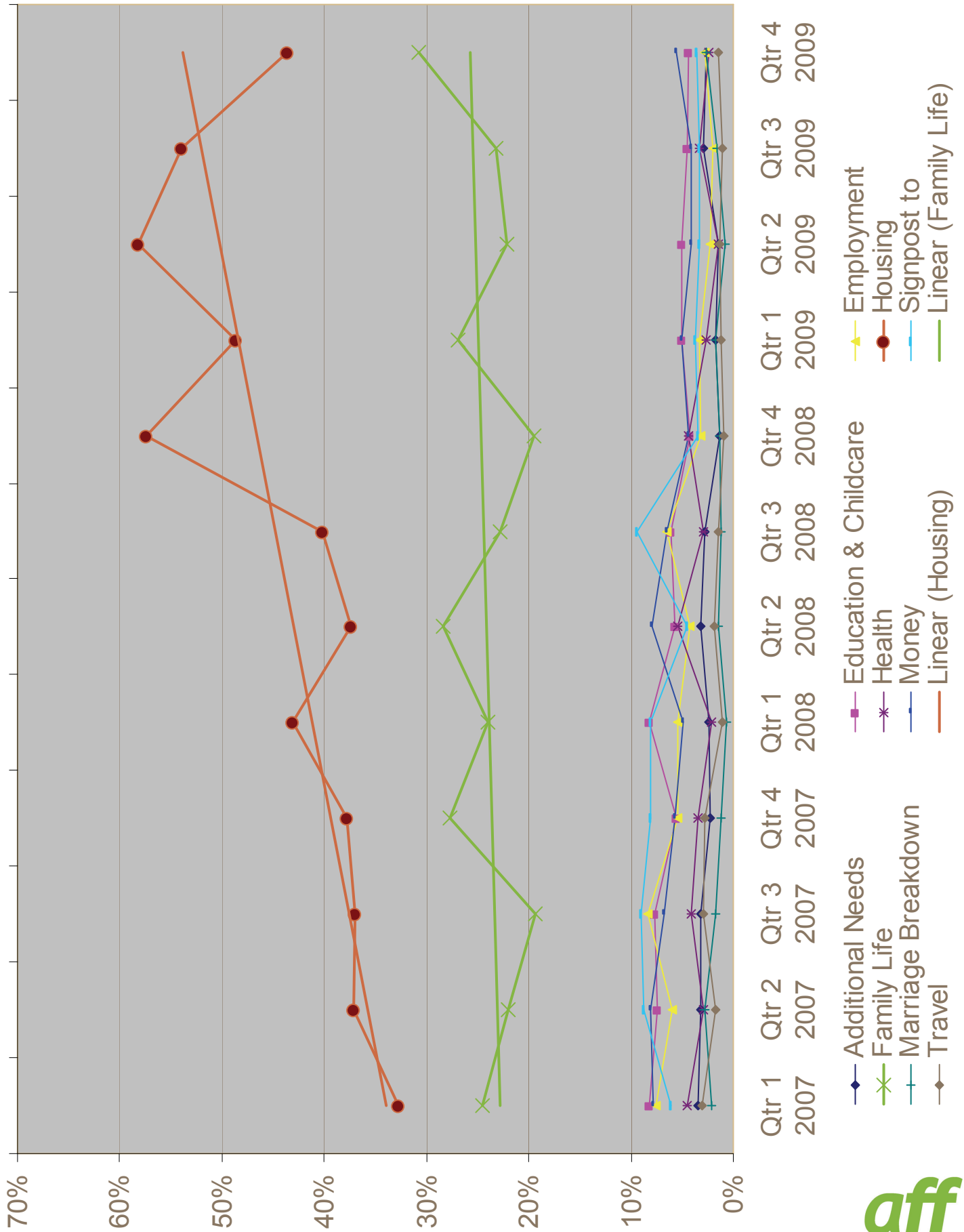
In comparison with the same period the previous year, several areas saw significant increases in the number of enquiries received; Additional Needs 83%, Family Life 45% and Marriage Breakdown 91%. In line with the current economic conditions, enquiries regarding Money and Employment both increased by 45% and 52% respectively in comparison to the previous quarter. Education enquiries were down compared to the previous year but have increased by 4% compared to the previous quarter.

trends

Trends since January 2007 illustrate the fluctuations in the number of contacts to AFF for most issues. Housing enquiries are showing a decrease in their number whilst Family Life and other issues are plotting a steady line in the main.

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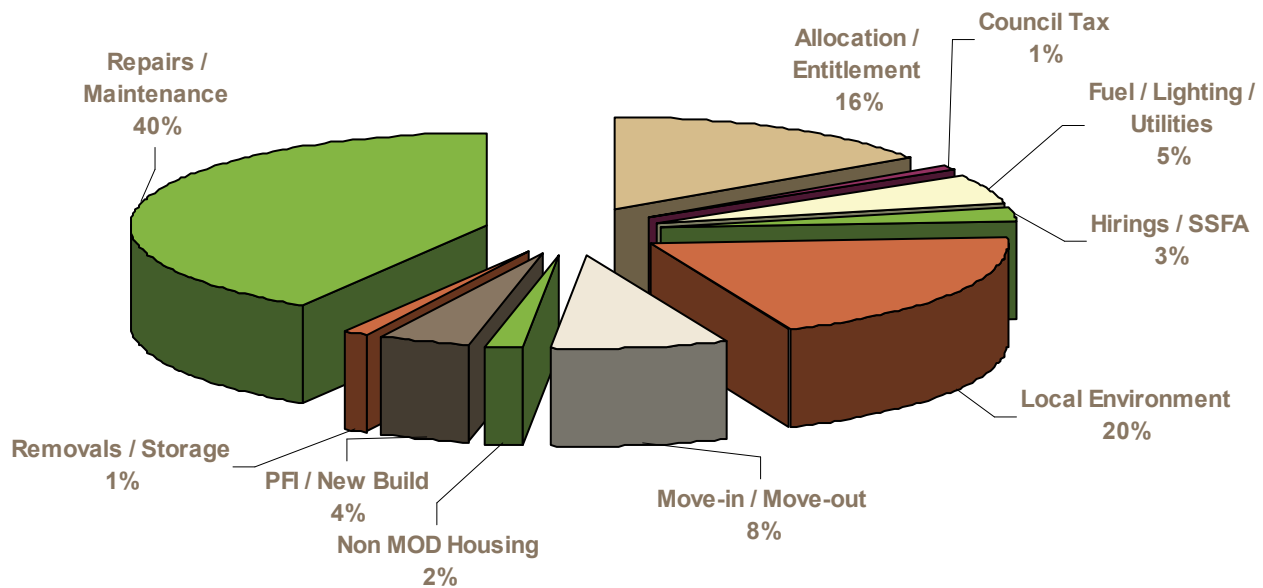
families' concerns - October–December 2009



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families' concerns - October–December 2009

housing (44% of all enquiries)



Housing continues to be a major source of concern and worry for Army families throughout the world although compared to both the previous quarter and the previous year, the number of enquiries had indeed decreased (**by 14% and 30% respectively to 72%**). This must be seen as a positive given the numbers of issues being raised with AFF in previous quarters.

Of particular note is the reduction in the number of issues concerning allocation and entitlement, **down 15% to 11%** and repairs and maintenance, **down 34% to 29%**. Given the lower number of moves in the winter months, it was perhaps unsurprising that the number of allocation and entitlement enquiries had decreased but, when compared to the same quarter in the previous year, there was still a decrease of 18%. However, there still appears to be a number of areas where both DE and MHS 'could do better'.

Perhaps as an indication of the pressure on housing, the number of enquiries regarding Substitute Service Families Accommodation (Hirings) has increased this quarter; receiving 19 in this quarter compared to only one in the previous quarter.

“Toilet broke in our hiring and for two days I had to drive my wife, who is eight months pregnant, down to the local Co-Op to use the loo. Repairman finally arrived at midnight on the second day”

There seemed to be particular problems in the Salisbury Plain area with both the internal cleanliness and state of the gardens on move-in being reported as below standard:

“The garden is extremely overgrown at the back”, “The fire alarm is broken”, “There are faulty lights”, “The windows are in poor condition, some of the latches are faulty and some are draughty”, “It was quite dirty in some areas of the house”

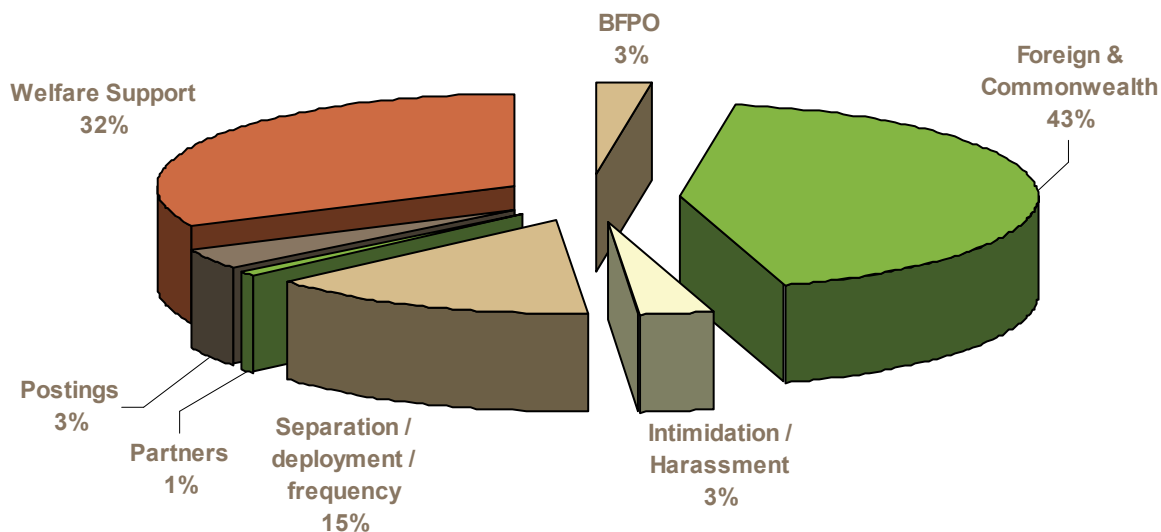
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housing continued....

Consideration is not always given to family circumstances when allocating hirings; this may be a breakdown in communication with the family or an inability in the application process to identify specific areas of need.

“I have to walk forty minutes each way, four times a day to get my daughter to nursery. I have epilepsy and can't drive. I really want to move closer to the Garrison!”

family life
(31% of all enquiries)



Family Life enquiries *rose by 42% to 51% this quarter* and by 45% compared to the same quarter in the previous year. By far the largest sub-categories seeing increases were Foreign and Commonwealth with 204 enquiries, Separation and Deployment with 72 enquiries and accessing Welfare Support with 153 enquiries.

Enquiries from families regarding Separation and Deployment were not just about those experiencing difficulties due to deployment, although they were the most common;

A spouse reported that her husband was due to go away in November for six months. He is currently on a months training (Oct) and will come back for two weeks before he goes again. *“This makes it more gruelling and if they start twelve month tours the reality is that it will be more like 14 months all in.”*

“I feel isolated and lonely as my husband is often in UK on courses and working.” **aff**

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family life continued

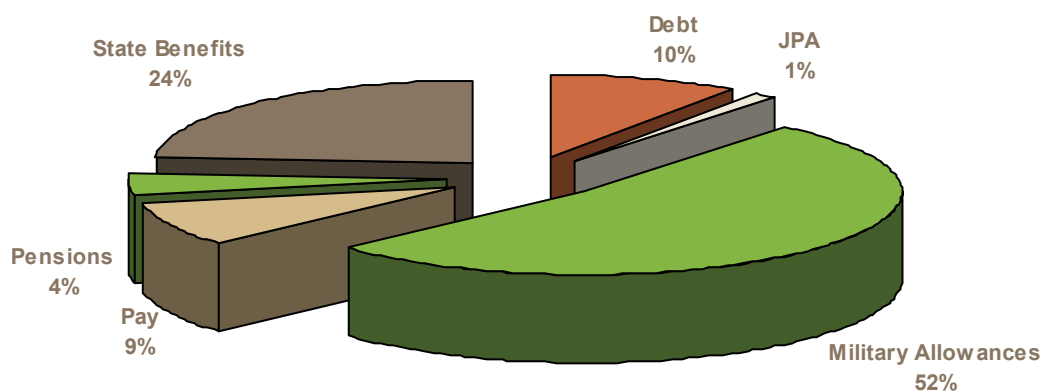
Sometimes, despite the best efforts of Unit Welfare teams, spouses still find it difficult to take part in organised events. Some of the comments below may go some way in explaining why:

“Wives’ events are so intimidating that if you didn’t already know a gang of people to go with you would be far too scared to go, so they are actually pretty pointless.”, “I can’t get a babysitter”, “There is no transport to get me to the unit”

Where battalions or regiments have a solid welfare structure and are equipped to provide a high level of support to families, especially during times of deployment, AFF has felt for some time now that other units are not as well served despite having many of the same issues.

“The training establishment does not have the same levels of support as when with the battalion and actually you are more isolated and need more support because you don’t have the long standing friendships that develop when you are with your battalion.”

money (6% of all enquiries)



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money continued

Enquiries regarding Money *rose to 93% from 60% this quarter* and by 16% compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

Many enquiries were regarding military allowances, specifically the Operational Allowance and Continuity of Education Allowance.

Soldiers at some deployed units had experienced delays in receiving their Operational Allowance on return from theatre. This had had a knock on affect on their families as they had wanted to use the allowance to fund a holiday or trip. The soldiers have all now received the allowance.

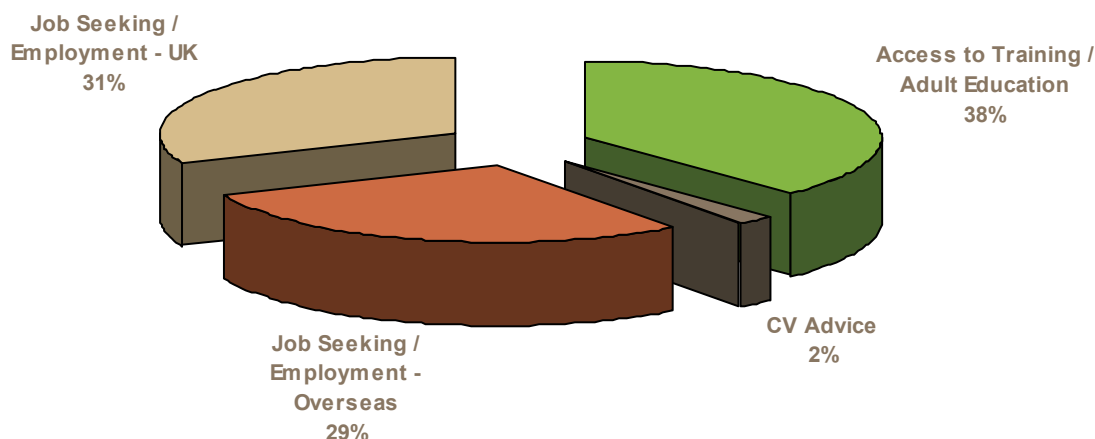
Some families find that having taken the decision to send their oldest child to boarding school for continuity, the requirement for them to be mobile has an affect on their younger children.

“How is it that in order for one child to receive CEA it may mean that the other child’s education is disrupted needlessly because of the need to move with your partner in order to be eligible for the allowance?”

AFF has advised all families applying for CEA to consider the implications for the whole family. What is best for one child may then have implications in later years on the education of their younger siblings. The Children’s Education Advisory Service can provide families with advice and information for specific circumstances.

Numerous enquiries were regarding eligibility to benefits both when going overseas on assignment and coming back to the UK. Particular issues late last year involved spouses who had been unable to work abroad and, because they had not made any National Insurance Contributions, were not entitled to Jobseeker’s Allowance, or maternity benefits if pregnant. These issues may be resolved with the new legislation being introduced in the next few months regarding NI credits for Service spouses accompanying their Service person overseas.

employment and training (3% of all enquiries)



Although a small percentage of the whole number of enquiries this quarter are in the Employment and Training category, they have seen an **increase of 52%** compared to the previous quarter.

Overseas, pressure on budgets in Cyprus has caused difficulties with accessing both training and employment opportunities.

"My courses were cancelled at the Education Centre at very short notice due to budget restrictions."

"The low chances of finding employment are really going to affect my time in Cyprus"

At a time when the Theatre Reserve Battalion is deploying on a regular basis to Afghanistan it is essential for their well-being that families have full access, not only to employment opportunities but also to training courses. AFF Cyprus has expressed its concerns to the chain of command and is hoping that a new financial year will bring some positive news for families.

In Germany, the application of rules pertaining to the use of Defence Estates' property by dependants' businesses, charities and other agencies is causing problems for all of those concerned. By applying extra costs to these organisations and small businesses, there is a risk that they will have to close down, thereby reducing the availability of activities and support for families.

"I've started up my own fitness classes in the gym on camp, as a registered business. I've now been told that I'm liable for the fire insurance for the gym as an encroachment. This is really unfair and puts other people off wanting to set up a business."

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employment and training continued

Other enquiries were from spouses whose soldiers were considering leaving the Army (for unspecified reasons) and who were concerned about the recession and the economic impact on their family, exacerbated by their own difficulties in obtaining work.

“My husband wants to PVR! I’m so worried about the financial implications in the current economic climate”