

Dorothy's Story



I used to be a music teacher; I am 69 years old and live with my husband in an adapted bungalow. I have a number of health difficulties, including spondylitis, osteo - and rheumatoid arthritis and glaucoma. For the last 7 years I have used an electric wheelchair. My husband also has his own health difficulties as he has had 2 strokes. As a result he has become forgetful and sometimes has difficulty walking.

I was initially reluctant to accept any personal help, but after a period in hospital some years ago, I agreed to receive agency care morning and evening to assist with my personal hygiene needs.

It was 18 months later that Dorothy was approached about Personal Budgets. My first reaction was sceptical – is the government really going to give me money?

My social worker helped me through the self-assessment process and the support plan, encouraging me to think about ways in which I could make my life better. I identified that my priorities would be to continue my personal care, to have assistance with the garden, household jobs and shopping trips, and keeping my Motability car in good condition.

I was offered help from the Independent Living Association (ILA) with my support planning, but I decided I would like to do this myself and just call for help when required. I felt strongly that although I have a physical disability: I wanted to use my brain.

I found the whole process helped me to be more in control – everyone has been wonderful. I haven't been made to feel dependent and the budget has given me my freedom. It's not an easy thing to admit to being disabled, and before the individual budget it felt as if people were doing me a favour – now the relationship has changed and we work together.

I decided I would try and get the best value for money from my

personal budget. I did this in a number of ways:

- Firstly, I changed the domiciliary care agency to a smaller local one. Not only do they charge less but they also only charge for hours actually received. This enabled me to save money to spend on other items in the support plan
- I shopped around to get the best deal for my car cleaning. Quotes ranged from £8 to £40. (It is important to keep a Motability car in good condition as there is a bonus payable at the end of the period)
- I shopped around and engaged a gardener at the most economical rate
- I employed my grandson as my personal assistant for shopping trips (having checked that I only needed to pay him at student rates)
- I employed a personal assistant to help with household jobs
- I am now able to afford chiropody once a month
- I am also able to hold a small float for such things as Bank Holiday agency rates

I really felt I needed to get the best price for the job and believe that this can only be good and lead to competition between agencies – there is a lot of difference between £13 and £18 an hour for my care.

I have really enjoyed the process of planning my support: I didn't find it tedious. I knew that support was available from the ILA and my social worker, but it gave me a real sense of purpose doing it myself. I don't use the ILA's payroll service either – I have found it is quite easy to do it myself with helpful assistance from the Inland Revenue.

I have found that my Personal Budget has made me more independent and it has altered my relationship with my family, which includes 3 sons: I don't feel so dependent on my family – I like to be part of their lives, but I don't want to **be** their lives.

Social services are trusting me with this scheme and I feel privileged to be taking part. I feel more cared for, appreciated and valued as a result.