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A brighter life for Rachel

New care scheme
comes to the
rescue

Bringing a smile to Rachel

A new care scheme has transformed the life of Rachel Mason-Harvey from Ryde. Here we look at the difference 'personal budgets' has made

Every day is a real challenge for mum Rachel Mason-Harvey. While she struggles with an illness that drains her energy levels – her two year-old son Corin bounces around their Ryde home with enough energy for two toddlers.

Earlier this year the strain of coping

was becoming just too much for Rachel – diagnosed with Post Viral Chronic Fatigue Syndrome a few years ago following a serious bout of shingles.

Rachel's diagnosis followed a period in which, as she puts it, "I was under stress from all directions." The shingles followed

being made redundant three times over two years and whole range of serious family issues to deal with. Her life as a successful IT software manager seemed to have completely disappeared.

But earlier this year a major change came to her rescue. Following an assessment by

the council's community services she was approved to go on the new personal budget scheme.

"Quite simply it has transformed my life," said Rachel, who moved to the Island a few years ago so she and her family could be nearer her husband's parents.

"The impact has been enormous in the four months or so I have benefited under the scheme.

"Before, we received support amounting to three-and-a-half hours a week, with carers coming in for half-hour periods to help mind my son and give me a breather," said Rachel, whose husband around this time was undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

"It was very difficult for us to cope with even the most basic of domestic duties."

But it all changed when a social worker decided to voluntarily give Rachel's family an extra bit of help by coming in to "deep clean" their kitchen.

"She got a real first-hand feel for what our life was like – and how we were so limited by my condition. She was able to gauge how much help we needed and in what areas."

Following the assessment they were approved for the equivalent of 35 hours of care a week under the personal budget scheme.

"This means we have a budget which we can spend on buying-in the personal care suited to our needs and also on key goods and services which can help lessen the level of care we need," said Rachel.

"Since we have been on the scheme it has helped in so many ways to make our lives better. It has helped with many little things like properly securing our windows so Corin can't climb out of them.

"He has the get-up-and-go of two children and is constantly into climbing. Often I haven't had the energy to keep up with him and in the past he has climbed out of windows and over walls.

"The personal budget scheme has given me peace of mind in coping with Corin's energy levels. We have been able to put fencing in the garden so I can enjoy being outside with him. This means I don't constantly need a second person nearby if he needs chasing after."

A key area Rachel said the personal budget had helped her with was giving her the chance to interview for live-in help at home.

"As well as live-in help, it gives me the freedom to seek respite care when needed, paying for Corin to be looked after elsewhere on occasions, giving me a break at home."

Rachel admitted before the personal budget scheme she was struggling to go out.

"It has enriched my whole life, giving freedom and flexibility in choosing personal

and domestic care. It has also helped with those areas of life you miss out on through disability, such as hobbies."

She said it is all a far cry from when she was first diagnosed with the neurological Post Viral Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, also known as ME.

"At Christmas a few years ago it was so bad that I was struggling to even put a sentence together. Since then it has gone in peaks and troughs, with a lot of physical weakness, fatigue and pain, and all very unpredictable.

"It can vary throughout the day, a week or even a year. I have periods when I can't physically pick up a piece of paper, or my left leg won't work, and I have frequent joint, muscle and skin pains."

Rachel said the personal budget scheme had in turn had a positive knock-on effect on her condition. "It has reduced the strain of trying to do things myself that I couldn't or shouldn't, and as a result has improved my mental outlook.

"I am now finding I can do more things again; simple things like enjoying cooking, even making jam. Before, it got to a situation when we seemed to be constantly living on pasta and tomato sauce." Having a personal budget has helped Rachel buy lighter crockery that she can properly manage.

"I was even able to have a yard sale recently. Others lugged the stuff outside, but I was able to contribute in a way I couldn't have in the past."



Pictured (below and left): Rachel Mason-Harvey enjoys time in the garden with her son Corin



A major highlight for Rachel has been getting outside with Corin to enjoy the fresh air, safe in the knowledge the garden is secure and he can't suddenly dash off.

"I can now sit outside and watch him play without the worries I had before. It really has made life so much better."

About personal budgets

The personal budget scheme is designed to give people more control over their own health, independence and choice of care services.

Its introduction on the Island followed the government asking councils providing social services to "put people first" by giving them greater input into and choice about their care.

It moves away from the system of professional assessment and commissioning care on behalf of vulnerable individuals – to a situation where they can assess their own needs (with professional support) and are given their own budget.

The budget varies according to need, and people can purchase their own support while meeting an agreed set of targets.

If you would like to find out more about personal budgets, please contact community services, tel: 520600, and ask for transforming social care.