

# Personal Budgets Story - Mental Health

## PATRICK'S STORY...

**Patrick Reid, aged 37, who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, lives in Skegness, Lincolnshire, with his partner Susanna.**

I suffer from schizophrenia. I see a community psychiatric nurse, Peter Morley, every three weeks and a psychiatrist every three months. These are the only services I have. I am on incapacity benefit and disability living allowance. Four years ago my dad died and this affected me badly. Since then I have not had any contact with the rest of my family. The medication I am on is quietipine (Seroquel). It really knocks you for six. But it is my girlfriend Susanna who has been the main part of my life for the last two years. She has helped me more than anyone. She is unpaid, but gets £40 per week carers' allowance.

When I first came to Skegness four years ago I was in a psychiatric unit for seven months. When discharged I was homeless. Now I have a flat run by Havelock Housing Association – everyone here has a serious mental health problem.

It was Peter who told me about personal budgets. The most important thing for me was to focus on getting physically fit.

My psychiatrist said all along that the more exercise you do the better. Peter also backed me on this. Because I have been on antipsychotics for four and a half years my weight has gone up to 22 stone. Although I have always been bulky, and was a rugby player, I was very overweight. I was doing little exercise – just a bit of walking.

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I was allocated £4,200 personal budget money, which I received in November, 2007. I got a shock as this is a lot of money for me. How did I spend it? Firstly, I joined a gym. This cost £588 per year – covering me and Susanna. I also bought gym clothes and swimming gear. I go to the gym five times per week and use all the facilities I want. This includes using the machines to do Nordic training. Since going to the gym I have lost 43 pounds in weight.

I also bought a second-hand Subaru estate from ebay for

£1,500, plus insurance which cost £500 per year. This has helped me enormously to go shopping and for days out. Because of my paranoia I used to avoid going out. But having my own transport has made a massive difference. It has improved my life no end. I also bought a kite, a bike and other clothing for outdoor activities. I'm on my bike around Skegness nearly every day.

Originally, instead of getting a car I was going to use half of the £4,200 as weekly payments to Susanna for caring for me. But we decided against that. I could have also used the money to pay for a private therapist, for example. But I already get a lot of that kind of help from Peter. I thought owning a car would help me the most.

I have real problems sleeping so I also spent £200 on a new bed. Because of the exercise I now do I am, anyway, sleeping better. But the bed is a lot more comfortable and has made a difference. I also bought a shower, because my flat only had a bath. To do all of this I have had to set up a savings account. I have to keep a receipt for everything I spend.

The money I received from personal budgets has made a colossal difference. It has helped me get back on my feet. I have not felt as good as I do now for 10 years. Before I was so solitary - not seeing anyone. Now I see

the regulars at the gym, and am meeting a lot more people. Not just at the gym, but at the other places I now visit.

My paranoia and suspiciousness is also considerably better. This is because I feel more confident which is mainly down to me being a lot fitter. My mental health has improved. I am doing much more. Peter has also noticed a big difference.

Just before Christmas last year [2007] I finished a mechanical engineering degree through the Open University which I had started at Sheffield University back in 1993/94, but had dropped out of. Although I don't think I will use the degree, what I want to do next is set up my own landscape business. I have already started doing gardening. Gaining employment is a real problem for someone with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. If you mention schizophrenia to people who might employ you they run a mile. The newspapers do no favours - anything you read about schizophrenia is horrendous. So I think it would be easier to work for myself. Therefore Peter is to find out if I am eligible for the personal

budget scheme next year. If so, it could help on the gardening side - such as buying tools.

Personal budgets has been a learning curve for everyone. But the whole process has given me hope. It represents a chance for people to think about what direction to take their life. There is certainly a trust aspect. With such a large amount of money involved some people with a mental illness might not be able to handle spending it how they should. But if people can not make their own plans, there are organisations which can do it for them. Without personal budgets I would have probably have just struggled on as I was doing last year. It has given me a kick start. I am feeling alive.

(Names have been changed)

*As told to Adam James.*

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***CSIP is grateful to the people and families concerned for sharing their personal stories.***

For further information please contact:

Carey Bamber  
Senior Consultant,  
Personalisation Programme

CSIP NW Office: 0161 351 4920

Care Services Improvement  
Partnership (CSIP),  
North West Development Centre,  
Hyde Hospital,  
2nd Floor,  
Grange Road South,  
Hyde,  
Cheshire,  
SK14 5NY