



Jenny's story – Personal Budgets in action

Jenny has been widowed for 23 years and now aged 69, she lives alone in a bungalow that used to belong to her mother who she had cared for there until her death.

It was just as well that Jenny knew the bungalow well because, after an operation to cure a hereditary condition went sadly wrong in 1996, she slowly lost her sight. Her two daughters live nearby but they have their own medical problems. She manages well alone because she is so methodical "I can tell you exactly where everything is" she tells me and its true, there isn't a thing out of place.

"While it was happening I had plenty of time to learn how to cope. Des Gander, from the sensory team, taught me the art of cane-walking but when he saw I daren't cross the road because I couldn't tell which way cars were approaching he realised I couldn't hear very well either" she laughs.

Sadly this is far from Jenny's only problem. She also has kidney stones, a liver problem (not through drinking she assures me), diverticulitis, and IBS, Lichen Sclerosus both inside and outside her body, caused by a thyroid problem. Arthritis, both osteo and sclerotic, causes her to regularly break her fingers when attempting everyday tasks like emptying the washer-dryer. Her emphysema wakes her in the night unable to breathe. So far she hasn't needed oxygen, it's kept at bay by a nebuliser.

At first, her care was provided by an agency. Some very personal care was necessary and Jenny felt embarrassed by the young girls that were sent along, often different ones each time. "I even sent them away and had to get my daughter to do the most intimate things" she said.

Then someone told her that she could have a personal budget to arrange her own care using a direct payment and she hasn't looked back since. "As I can't sign cheques very well, my daughter has a special bank account for me so we pay my carer, Rita, monthly from that".

"It's not like having an employee around its more like a trusted friend"

"It's fifty times better" she tells us. "It doesn't matter what's going on, we can always work it out between ourselves. It's not like having an employee around its more like a trusted friend. I don't feel inhibited, Rita knows everything about me."



"She rings first thing to check I'm OK and then comes round to help me shower, applies creams to all my nooks and crannies and helps me dress. Usually, after leaving me sandwiches she pops back in the afternoon with my supper, but if not, I can heat something up in my talking microwave. She gets my shopping, we do cleaning and polishing together and I still like to bake cakes.

"I can still be in charge of my life"

"I don't want to lose my independence and have everything done for me and that's where direct payments have helped, they let me be my own person and still be in charge of my life".

"I have talking books from the library and talking newspaper too, but I like to listen to the TV more than the radio. I can follow the soaps and I love challenge programmes and quizzes, they keep me sharp".

With all her problems, you could forgive Jenny for being depressed or grumpy but not a bit of it. She is unquenchably optimistic. "Every New Year's Eve I say to myself, maybe this year will be better, but it isn't!" she jokes, "Of course, I do get down days but what's the point? No-one would want to come and see me then."