


<p>Steps to being in Control</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What we did- Charlotte and Bens Story</p> 
<p>1. Assessment check list</p>	<p>The first stage was the self assessment and with support from a member of the ASC team we worked through the questions. It was a great relief, having in the past had to fill in the overly complicated DLA forms, to find that the questionnaire was very simple, quick and easy to complete.</p> <p>Although Ben's disability was not regarded as critical or substantial, his vulnerability and the pressures on us as a family had shown that he was a young man very much at risk. He needed support not only to catch buses, to become involved in social activities and the community, but to enable him to feel safe when outside of the home. It had also been proved essential that he had someone with him during the time I was at work.</p> <p>What I found the most significant difference of the self assessment was the effect it had on Ben; in the past assessments had been carried out by a social worker, with Ben present but not really 'included' & me having to talk about all the negative aspects of our lives causing him to feel bad while absorbing the information given. This self assessment was totally different, having a selection of questions with tick boxes that neither dwelt on nor compounded the negative aspects of our lives, leaving Ben happy to be included.</p> <p>Once completed the Individual Budget team were able to assess from our answers a, b, c, or d the level of need relative to each question; each answer was allocated a certain sum of money (this is called a RAS) and we were informed a few weeks later that Ben had been awarded an Individual Budget of £11,700 - we were ecstatic!</p>
<p>2. Making a plan</p>	<p>The next stage in the process was a workshop day where all who would be involved in the preparation and writing of the support plans for a group of 6 people with learning disabilities, could learn how to go</p>

	<p>about it. The workshop included social workers, advocates, inclusion workers, family carers and other family members.</p> <p>Ben & I attended a further 3 workshops, known as 'Planning Live!', so that we could begin the process of writing a support plan in a Person Centred way and to ensure that all the necessary criteria were included in it. Each member of the group of 6 had a circle of support around them selected from those who were at the first learning day workshop. Ben took his PATH, proudly pinned it to the wall and with great pride explained to our nominated group/circle all that he intended for his future; the basics of which was to have a life just like anyone else</p> <p>The importance given to Ben and to what HE wanted in life during those workshops enabled him to take an interest from the start and although he didn't fully understand the procedure he totally understood the implications and the possible outcomes: that he was being given the opportunity to be in control of what he wanted to do with his life and to be given the choice of how he would do it through the support of a PA. Already his self confidence was beginning to grow. There were moments when items we were having to discuss were beyond his understanding, but those were the times he used to get to know (and to charm!) everyone else in the room by making them coffee!</p> <p>As the weeks went on and he was continually being involved in the proceedings his interest didn't wane, he explained what was & wasn't working in his life, what he would like to change as I supported him in deciding how we could change those things. He described the sort of person he wanted as his PA right down to tattoos and muscles (he wanted to feel safe to leave the house without being victimised by bullies) & the PA definitely had to be 'a dude'! He also talked about the courses he would be interested in attending and the type of social activities he would like to do. His long term aim is to live independently and so we included how he would learn all the necessary skills to make that possible.</p> <p>Ben is on high rate DLA which, with an IB of over £200 per week, meant that he could be eligible for further money from the ILF (Independent Living Fund) pending assessment. This time it would be a traditional assessment carried out by the ILF, but Ben was well up for it as he now understood what 'funding' could mean to him & his future.</p>
<p>3. Getting the plan agreed</p>	<p>From the information gathered I chose to write his support plan myself as I felt I was the person who knew him, his dreams & his aspirations better than anyone. It took many hours to write up but I very much</p>

	<p>enjoyed doing it & included photos of him as a way to illustrate who he is.</p> <p>I included the potential ILF money in his plan, as, if he qualified, it could make a significant difference to the amount of hours he could employ a PA.</p> <p>Once the plan was finished it was sent up to ASC to be agreed; I was hoping to get it all through before Ben started college in the September - unfortunately the 'powers that be' weren't accustomed to this type of support plan & we had a further month's delay while they received training!</p> <p>It sailed through! Nothing was contested & Ben's IB was agreed - we were on our way!</p>
4. Money for my support	<p>I opened a bank account in Ben's name, specifically for his IB money.</p> <p>He had a financial assessment from ASC to calculate his contribution & I was asked to send in some basic accounts for him - I wasn't at all sure of what should or should not be included in this & through the social worker I was able to arrange a meeting with a FABA (Financial and Benefits Advisor (<i>I think!</i>)). He was excellent & even managed to save me £250 a year on my council tax payments through a scheme I was unaware of!</p> <p>The final weekly contribution came out at around about £5.</p> <p>Once this was sorted & Ben had signed his IB contract with ASC his first monthly payment arrived very quickly.</p> <p>The ILF was agreed at a much later date, which then pushed his contribution up to around £35 per week - however the additional money that the ILF was contributing made this sum nominal.</p>
5. Organising my support	<p>It was difficult to start advertising for PAs until we knew whether or not he would be getting the extra hours from the ILF, but as always luck was on our side & a house husband friend of ours, who's step son was a very close friend of Ben's, came up trumps & worked the period of waiting - he even had the tattoos & muscles that were so essential to Ben's for his PA!</p> <p>On Ben's first day of 'Choice & Control' he chose, among other things, to have his hair cut - Mohican style!</p> <p>It was about 8 weeks later that we received confirmation that Ben had qualified for ILF. I immediately contacted Job Centre Plus to advertise the post. We had decided that 3 different PAs would not only give him choice & diversity but would also be a good contingency plan for sick leave & holidays.</p> <p>We also put adverts up in the Rugby Club, the Leisure Centre & other places potential to finding tattooed & muscled dudes and ended up with many applications to wade through. We started the interview process &</p>

	<p>although we both had our designated questions to ask the main criteria was how Ben related to each person (if he liked them he was particularly noisy, exuberant & tended to jump all over them) & how they reacted to him - if they couldn't deal with being leapt all over they weren't put on the short list! Some of the interviewees, on first sight, Ben didn't like & after only a couple of minutes into the meeting he would just say 'I'm off to play X Box mum!' leaving me to go through the formalities, knowing that the person wasn't going to get the job! He has an uncanny perceptiveness of people - those he didn't like I didn't either!!</p> <p>After many such interviews Ben chose the 3 he liked best - they were all dudes, one was even a weight lifter, though none of them had tattoos!</p> <p>Then came the paper work - luckily they all chose to be self employed, which meant no PAYE or National Insurance, but I had to get confirmation from the tax office that they were registered; insurance to protect against potential claims from them or the general public; and rotas - I never realized how complicated it is to organize a rota!</p>
<p>6. support that suits me</p>	<p>We had a few meetings all together to ensure that the 3 PAs knew each other & had each other's contact details - I insisted that if any of them couldn't come in they were to arrange with another to come in their place & just inform me of what was happening. I supplied a list of Do's & Don'ts to ensure that they supported Ben to do things & not do them for him; emphasizing that he is the boss & that what he does is his choice - if they felt his choice was wrong they were to explain to him (& me) their reasons - if there were things he should do for learning (like housework or cleaning his room etc) which he didn't like doing he was to be reminded that these are necessary skills for independent living & encouraged & cajoled, not forced, to complete them.</p> <p>I have to say the do's & don'ts list was quite long, but I wanted to ensure that they understood that only by treating him as an adult would he master that role & attain the future he desires.</p> <p>The rotas were worked out with Ben's agreement & alternated between necessary learning & fun so that neither got too much for him & each PA had a bit of both - I discovered quite early on that to put the 'chores' first each day the fun activities could then be used as encouragement to complete the more onerous tasks.</p>

7. Being accountable

Ben brings me back receipts for all costs for which he has used his IB money; the PAs submit invoices for their hours which I check & Ben then writes them a cheque.

With his original circle we organized to hold quarterly meetings to follow his progress & achievements & to ensure that he kept to his plan - at present he is surpassing all expectations & his dreams for the future are arriving quicker than anticipated - many unthought-of opportunities have arisen & been taken which have only enriched his life, including driving lessons, taking part in a television advert, a role as an extra in an Eastender's episode & 16 hours a week paid work at MacDonald's.



For Ben, receiving an IB has been life-changing - in these last 10 months he has made extraordinary progress, not only in his overall abilities but also emotionally; his self confidence has blossomed as he feels safe while out & about & valued in society; he has a girlfriend, a job, choice & control in his life & a dream of a future that now looks possible - what else could anyone ask for!