



# Rachel's story



## EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY AND REDUCING DEPENDENCE

*This isn't about saving money. It's actually about enabling.*

**Person-centred planning has been life changing for Rachel and her sons, Shaun, 28, and Greg, 30, who have learning disabilities and autism. A dynamic approach to how their funding is spent and a creative attitude towards assistive technology have resulted in significant cost savings and increased independence.**

Rachel, from Somerset, was introduced to person-centred planning (PCP) when Shaun and Greg were teenagers. Before this time, she describes her family's approach to receiving specialist support as "passive". PCP opened her eyes to the need to ensure the services they were receiving were meaningful and preparing the boys for adulthood.

Rachel carried this attitude forward into adult services. Opting out of local authority commissioned services, Rachel's sons were given more choice and control through direct payments.

Since taking this step, the family have used an online costed-support planning tool called the 247Grid. This helps them to manage their personal budgets.

The visual weekly grid encourages Shaun and Greg to plan activities and allocate costs to the support, while keeping an eye on the weekly support budget. It prevents overspending, while empowering the family to make informed decisions about how and where the budget is spent.

The grid uses colours to indicate progress and areas of high dependence

on support. Blue celebrates progress towards independence and red identifies where 1:1 support is needed.

Greg has tasks that are important for him to do every week; these go in the grid first and are mostly red areas. He also loves swimming, volunteering in his community, dog walking and meeting up with his friends.

"Greg is very motivated to improve his independence around the red tasks on his grid, as he knows this frees up money to pursue his other chosen outcomes and interests," says Rachel.

Social workers also find the planning tool useful as comparing grids allows them to see progress over a period of time.

Greg also had the support of an online platform called My People and Places, where he could find others with direct payments and shared interests. They would pool their budgets to share support and save money. But local government cuts have resulted in the closure of this website, which Rachel believes was "short-sighted".

She explains: "Pooling budgets is one of the greatest benefits of taking a direct payment but finding others to pool budgets with is now impossible. Direct payments and Individual Service Funds give the opportunity to pool budgets, so it's essential local authorities give people the platform to do it."

Rachel has creatively used many everyday digital gadgets to empower her sons and reduce their reliance on paid support.

Simple digital keyrings store photo prompts that Greg uses to travel by bus or on foot, as a shopping list, or as a 'what to do in an emergency' reminder.

Greg also uses a fitness watch to monitor his 'inactivity' level.

"It visually rewards activity and therefore motivates Greg to be proactive towards everyday tasks and daily exercise." Rachel explains.

Greg is a big fan. He says: "The man on the watch keeps me moving. If I keep going and do enough steps cleaning my house, shopping and walking every day, a star appears. So cool!"

Technology also plays a big part in Shaun's wellbeing. Instead of accepting a residential care bed, many miles away from his community, Shaun purchased a house via HOLD - a home ownership

scheme for people with long-term disabilities. Supervision and prompting techniques are provided in his home with the use of assistive technology.

Shaun has a Careline 'on call' system and room sensors, a chair sensor, a bed sensor and an interactive smoke detector. Gadgets including a tipping sensor on his water bottle, which vibrates if not used every hour, contribute to his health and wellbeing.

Shaun's autism means that he is very sensitive to noise and he finds interacting with people, including personal assistants, unsettling. Before he was using technology, Shaun would get stressed having somebody with him all the time and would repeatedly shout "enough noise" and "people away, away".

He embraces and trusts his assistive technology. It is silent unless it is needed, doesn't seek interaction and it is dependable and predictable.

Shaun's feedback has been positive: "Quiet house now, just my noises."

This 24-hour background support gives Shaun the full supervision he needs while giving his family the confidence to reduce the presence of paid staff.

As a result, Rachel has reduced Shaun's annual budget from £42,000

to £14,800. The residential care he was offered was costed at £1,700 per week, whereas his package of support in his own home came to £810 per week. Incorporating a wide range of assistive technologies, this quickly reduced even further to £285 per week.

After opting out of traditional day services, Greg's direct payment remains steady at £350 a week. By using the digital planning tool and assistive technologies to manage and pool his budget where possible, he has significantly increased his skills, his community presence and his ability, over time, to reduce reliance on paid support.

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ENABLES 24-HOUR BACKGROUND SUPPORT THAT PROVIDES SHAUN THE FULL SUPERVISION HE NEEDS WHILE GIVING HIS FAMILY THE CONFIDENCE TO REDUCE THE PRESENCE OF PAID STAFF.**

"This isn't about saving money," says Rachel. "It's actually about enabling.

"By reaching their greatest potential and reducing their reliance on social care funding, the surplus underspend achieved produces the savings. It's a win - win."

