What self-direction has meant to our son and his family

A *Bespoke Lifestyles* User Perspective

Cheryl & Peter Allen

Our son, Nathan is now 21 years of age and, due to his significant disability, has been in receipt of substantial formal paid support from the age of 13. The service provider at the time gave our son and his family great support and provided a person-centred plan created with our help and to our satisfaction. Unfortunately, it did not continue in this way in his adult life. After leaving school, he attended a day respite service where his only option was pursuing leisure activities in groups with others with disability and his individual interests and skills were not acknowledged or developed. Then we were introduced to the concept of self-direction through a hosting agency and we knew immediately that's the road we wanted to choose. We were amazed at the difference it could and has made to all our lives. It can only be described as a breath of fresh air.

Nathan is now free to choose the lifestyle he wants and pursues activities that he prefers. He no longer attends day respite, he likes the staff and he is more communicative than he has been in the past. He is beginning to build community networks that will ensure his well-being into the future. We, his parents, are very involved in the hiring, training and management of staff and this is our preference. It gives us a real sense of autonomy and the freedom to hire the most appropriate persons for this role. We now manage our son's lifestyle in a more relaxed and positive way and our own health, well -being and family life have improved.

Our hosting agency, *Bespoke Lifestyles*, is very supportive and their focus is assisting us to achieve the visions and goals we've set for Nathan's future. In less than two years, he is well on the way to achieving an independent lifestyle and may possibly soon run a small business of his own. We thought this was impossible when he left school. Now we have the confidence and support to pursue so many more options for his future.

Interaction, Vol 26#2&3, pp.43:
Republished with the permission of National Council on Intellectual Disability
www.ncid.org.au