PEARLS OF WISDOM

Choosing Direct Payments – a personal perspective

Kim Pose lives in Far North Queensland and has been directing funding for her son, Ariel, for nearly nine months. Kim and her husband chose to use the Direct Payments method and have offered to share their experience so far.

Why did you choose the Direct Payments method of self-direction?

We knew first of all that we wanted to direct Ariel's funding ourselves rather than continue to use support from a service. We wanted the flexibility to organise different kinds of support for Ariel– a flexibility that was not possible with the service. The other reason is that, even when we were involved with a service, I was still doing a lot of the work – organising rosters, trying to fill gaps when workers were off sick. We thought we may as well continue to do this but not pay a service at the same time.

We chose Direct Payments rather than going with a Host Provider mainly because our son has very little funding. We thought that we could use the funds more efficiently if we did the management ourselves rather than pay a fee to a Host Provider to do some of this. We would have money left over for more support.

How has the experience been so far?

We are certainly pleased with the flexibility we have and what we have been able to achieve for Ariels's life so far. We have not found too many problems with Direct Payments. We thought that reporting to the Department might be difficult but that has been quite straightforward. The initial setup and having an ongoing method /system in place that suited our family was challenging and still is at times, as Direct Payments is not the same as running your own business.

Finding quality staff is always difficult, even when we were with a service provider. Fortunately the support workers we have were already familiar with Ariel. We are just about to employ new people for the first time and have found information that can help with this. We hope this experience is a positive one.

What has been helpful?

A good decision we made was to use some of the funding to contract a mentor to help us with our thinking and planning as well as utilising the resources available through Pave the Way. We knew basically what we wanted to achieve for Ariel but we needed help to think about this in terms of the long term future and how this linked to planning on a daily basis with staffing and rosters etc. The person we contacted understood how the system works so could help us translate the planning into budgeting for day to day support. We have continued to use the mentor's help at different times through the year; it is a good use of money. Having someone local in the role has been particularly helpful. Utilising Skype and email are good but I like being able to sit around the table and talk face to face to someone about these matters.

It might be good in the long term to have some initial advice from a tax agent or book keeper. I don't want to ask people to do this voluntarily, though, so we would need to think about how this might fit in the budget.

Some online resources we have found have been helpful, particularly the booklet from Western Australia, *A guide to employing your own support workers.*

We both have some experience in working in a business so we are used to managing paperwork and systems but I think the main thing that has made it possible is the motivation to create a good life for our son. Someone with a business degree would find the actual managing of all this easy but if they are not really passionate about using Direct Payments to make a better life for their son or daughter then they probably would not keep going.

What has been difficult?

The most challenging part was the actual planning for Ariel. We had some ideas about the kind of life we wanted for him but had never done any concrete planning that linked our general ideas to his day to day life and then to the budget . Once this was sorted the rest just fell into place.
It would have been good to have had some guidance about the steps to go through if you want to use Direct Payments – a simple step by step process. Some templates to help with record keeping and managing the money would also have been useful. I set everything up from scratch and it works well now but I would have appreciated some help with this at the beginning.

The future

I find it hard to ask other people to be involved in what we are doing so am not sure about the whole succession planning idea – the question of who will keep this going in the future if we can't. I would have no qualms about approaching a Host Provider and negotiating payment for them to take on some of the responsibilities for management if we could no longer do some of the work. It is something we have to think about but right now we are just concentrating on getting it all working well and enjoying the positive change in Ariel's life .