

Individual Budgets Pilot Programme - George's story



My name is George. I was born in Norwich, where I still am now. I was brought up in the countryside in Norfolk which is quite rural and isolated.

When I was roughly about 16 and a half, I became ill. It was a struggle to come to terms with my illness at the time but I've slowly been doing so over the past several years.

This time last year I was basically a broken man, with my wife telling me that she wanted a divorce. I was in a psychiatric hospital but I've become better now than when I was previously to going into hospital.

Individual Budgets has just been piloted in my area and I was asked if I'd go along with it. I met Jill from the Social Services team at my local council, and with my community practice nurse we talked about how Individual Budgets would work. I decided nothing ventured, nothing gained.

They had a rough idea of how much my Individual Budget would be and I had to fill in a short questionnaire, and some mathematical equation was done and that equalled my Individual Budget.

Basically my social care money was allocated from a professional doctor's opinion that I desperately needed a break. I needed some time out, some rest and a change of scenery. I think it's a positive thing to have spent some of my Individual Budget for a break in Tunisia. Basically for what it cost me, it was probably cheaper than being in a residential care home for a week, or on a residential holiday. It was literally cheaper than a bed and breakfast in England and a nice opportunity and very beneficial for me.

I went with my friend Abraham who was going anyway. It was a great, real spur of the moment thing. All of a sudden I was about to go to Tunisia in three weeks time and it was really quite exciting to do it like that. And it was really nice to be with someone I know and have contact with in a foreign country. It has really lifted my morale and spirits. I came back refreshed ready to change my life.

While I was away, it gave me time to think about what I wanted in my support plan. It was a good experience really – I really thought about what I want to be doing. Being on benefits, it is quite easy just to drift. One year becomes another year and another year, and you just drift your life away.

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I wanted to spend money for my long term future. I'll be able to take some driving lessons soon. It's a skill I need because ideally in the future I'll be off my benefits and hopefully working. I've recently divorced and would like to meet someone again. I tend to be quite shy with meeting people of the opposite sex so I have received some support from a dating agency to help introduce me to people.

With my illness at the moment I don't need a personal assistant - I manage day-to-day quite well . I have a nurse who comes to visit me once or twice a month. She keeps an eye on me.

Living on benefits and having a little extra money coming in with Individual Budgets allows me to do things that seem quite small but actually are a very big thing for me. I've always enjoyed painting since I was at school. When I became ill I got back into it because I needed something to be interested in. Having an Individual Budget has helped me quite a bit with my artwork as it has allowed me to purchase some more materials, which can be quite expensive. It helps me an awful lot to relax - my way of chilling out really. I'd like to do it more professionally one day, if I get recognised as the next Pollock or something.

My Individual Budget was paid into my bank account and I have to show receipts for things I've purchased and keep invoices. You have to manage it properly. I chose to manage it myself because it's only a small amount of money.

Providing I need it again, I see Individual Budgets working quite well for me in the future. Next year I might not need it, so I'm trying to make it last the 12 months it has been allocated for.

Hopefully I'll be able to help other people do their individual budget plans and hopefully they can look at my plan and my experiences with the pilot and get some inspiration to make their lives better. I'd be glad to put something back in the system as I've had a lot of positive things out of it myself.

www.individualbudgets.csip.org.uk