

Personal Budgets Story - Mental Health

SANDRA'S STORY...

Sandra Wysocki, aged 60, was depressed and housebound for 20 years. She lives in Lincolnshire with her partner, Brian.

Twenty years ago I had everything, including a job in Nottingham working as a training instructor for a textile company. My role included working in Sri Lanka for three months.

But it all changed after the break up of my marriage, followed by the tragedy of my first brother who collapsed and died.

For twenty years I have been depressed. I can not go out anywhere on my own. I spent my days sewing and knitting, and I stayed all day in my house with my dog.

One of my biggest problems is that I am frightened of people. I just have no confidence in myself. I don't like shopping and I will panic in supermarkets. Lots of people don't understand all of this. I am on anti-depressants, and can not live without them. I came off once, but it made me ill. I have been on them since 1983.

I am now on a state pension, but until I reached 60 I received

incapacity benefits. I did not ask for anything else.

Brian has been very good and supportive over the years, and he takes me everywhere. I have a psychiatrist and a community psychiatric nurse, called Ken, who is very good. Whenever I get a problem I am on the phone and he will come over to see me straight away.

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In March 2007, I found a copy of a card-making magazine, called Parchment Craft, and started to learn how to make cards for birthdays, Christmas and other special occasions.

When Ken used to visit he could see that getting involved in card-making had brought a real change in me. I was more relaxed and talkative. Getting involved in this intricate card-making was making a difference to my life. When making cards I'm in a world of my own. Nothing upsets or worries me. It was building my confidence back up. Doing card-

making parchment is delicate work. It is not something that you can do in an hour. I can sit for six hours and not finish one card.

But it is expensive to get card-making tools, and there are so many bits and pieces you need. Items can cost between £2 and £15 each. So it was Ken who came up with the personal budgets idea, which we talked about. And I went onto the internet to find the prices of all the items – such as grids, paints, pencils, inks and knives – I would need for card-making.

I was granted £2,500, including £1,700 to buy card-making tools, plus £44 per month for carer expenses. This is to cover petrol and lunch during my travel to craft shops in, for example, Peterborough and Mansfield. Brian usually takes me, but the £44 can cover anybody who has a car and would be willing to take me.

When I started buying the tools, I would sometimes find them cheaper. So, from any money I saved from my original budget of £1,700, I was able to get extra things that were not on my original list, such as an easel.

If someone had asked me 12 months ago what a difference this has made for me, I would not have even been able to answer the question because of the state

I was in! I could not even answer the door, and was paranoid about people being outside the house waiting for me.

It would not have been possible for me to do all this on my own. The equipment I need for card-making costs a lot, and my partner, Brian, is low paid. Until we had the personal budget money we were only able to afford one piece of card-making equipment per week. And to do it properly you need about 100 tools – and that's without including the bottles of ink and crayons.

Now I have really got my confidence back, and would like to teach parchment card-making. That's my next aim. I would like to teach people who have been in my situation. Maybe in village halls or schools. So, via Parchment Craft magazine, I have enrolled in a home tutoring course after which I will get a certificate. I am really looking forward to it. The course costs between £180 and £200. All this has done such a lot for my confidence. I feel normal now. I don't feel ill or different.

As told to Adam James.

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CSIP is grateful to the people and families concerned for sharing their personal stories.

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