

## A's story: "I'm reaching for the light at the end of the tunnel..."

A was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2004. She had a major breakdown in her mental health in 2006, which resulted in a number of lengthy hospital stays. She has been in secondary mental health services since this time.

In 2010, A was referred for a personal budget as part of a pilot study within mental health day services, and was assessed using the new self-directed assessment questionnaire.

During the assessment it became clear that she had eligible needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing, and that being able to take advantage of leisure, work and learning opportunities was vital to improving her quality of life and aiding her recovery.

"Hopefully this will mean friends, freedom and most of all, a future!"

She had been attending a local mental health day centre for a number of years but said she felt 'stuck' within the service and was keen to have the opportunity to develop friendships and mix with people who do not share her mental health problems.

A put together a support plan which identified a range of personal goals, including being able to go swimming or take some other regular exercise, and studying art with a view to further studies in the future.

Currently A is unable to do these activities alone due to high levels of anxiety, low mood and poor motivation. She felt it was important that her support was focused on enabling her to eventually pursue these activities independently.

A uses her direct payment to pay for six hours of agency support a week to enable her to meet the goals outlined in her support plan.

The support agency has liaised closely with professionals involved in A's support and was recently able to alert the care coordinator within the Community Mental Health Team during a recent crisis which enabled a swift response and admission to day hospital.

The agency uses the Mental Health Recovery Star approach, which provides Adult Social Care with an evidence-based tool to use at review, to check how well the support is working, and whether a person's goals are being achieved.

A's feedback so far has been very positive. Talking about using self-directed support (SDS) to get involved in more activities to improve her quality of life, she said,

"I can see the light at the end of the tunnel now and I'm slowly and carefully reaching out for it and I'm not going to let go... My life after SDS will hopefully mean friends, freedom and most of all a future!"

