

“WHERE THERE’S A WILL THERE’S A WAY”

An everyday saying, a cliché that we have all used at some time or other I’m sure.

For me, the simplicity of this saying can belie the amount of effort, determination and imagination required when a person decides to embark upon a course of action that, on the face of it, is fraught with unknowns and uncertainties and appears to be **JUST TOO HARD**.

And I believe this sums up Sue’s request for assistance 6 years ago.

I joined the Market Harborough Adult Commissioning Team as a Social Worker in February 2002, and almost immediately became the social worker for Sue.

Sue had contacted the department indicating that she wanted to explore the possibility / idea of leaving the care home where she was living and move into a place of her own. With this idea in mind, Sue therefore wanted to have information, advice and assistance as to whether this was and could be a feasible undertaking.

And this was the start of a 4 years partnership, with Sue and me working closely together towards this objective.

From the moment I met Sue and all the way throughout our work together it was very evident that Sue was and remains very motivated and willing to take on new challenges (as evidenced by the launch of her website).

In our working together, I very clearly put it to Sue that it was **SHE** who was in the ‘driving seat’ when it came to identifying how she wished to live her life; in what environment; where she wanted to be and when; and what support she felt she needed.

And my role would be to help identify all the options with Sue, discuss any pros and cons, and identify means and measures of support. And basically I would help to ‘pull it all together’ with Sue.

However, at the same time it was also important for Sue to know that it was always possible for her to redefine and change plans if she so wished or, if she felt it really was too much, the whole process could be halted and picked up again later. Or totally abandoned if that was what she decided. But the decisions had to come from Sue not anybody else.

Importantly, throughout all of this, it would be **SUE** not me who would make all the final decisions.

Now, that sort of statement can be, I imagine, quite a scary position for any individual to find themselves in but perhaps more so for an individual who had experienced, throughout the course of her life, a variety of different institutions, some on a residential and, in the case of the care home in Fleckney, on quite a long term basis.

Sue and I are both of a similar age – actually - to be precise – Sue is a year older than me (and I have reminded her of this on occasions!!) And we are both very much of the time when the welfare state was well and truly at its optimum functioning.

And part of that era was the belief that people with disabilities could not be (and were not) part of the mainstream milieu of daily life.

And to some extent I believe that Sue's experiences typified those times which we have lived through.

Sue's move from living in a residential care home to choosing her own home and having all the responsibilities that are entailed with living independently is in my view an example of how much has changed since those times (and indeed shows many changes in recent times as well) and is a prime example of good, positive joint working across a number of sectors and agencies.

To give you an example of this, Sue and I worked with the following people and agencies:

Jim from VISTA (Voluntary Sector); Dyal (rehab officer VISTA); Margrid and Jo from the Guide-Communicator scheme (VISTA Voluntary Sector); a person from the Integrated Centre for Independent Living (Voluntary Sector); Harborough Home Search (District Council); John a very helpful housing officer from Market Harborough District Council; Benefits Agency (statutory); Staff at the residential care home (private sector); Support Staff from the care agency (private sector) On-going support from Care On Line (Statutory, LA); Handy Persons Scheme (Statutory, LA); OT(statutory, LA); Adaptations Team (statutory, LA); Piper Life Line (District Council); Stuart– a very helpful person who would pop round on his way home every time Sue and support staff blew the electrics!! (Housing Maintenance, District Council); Direct Payments Support Staff (Statutory); Independent Living Fund.

Sue also brought her own personal resources, receiving support from family and friends and from her local church.

However, Sue's experience of embarking upon the life changing action she so clearly determined was not without it's 'wobbles'. Sue would experience some moments of self doubt which primarily arose in response to significant others who, whilst clearly wanting the best for Sue and obviously not wanting any harm to come to her, were uneasy and uncertain about **'THE RISKS'** or, put another way the **'HOW WILL YOU MANAGE IF.....'** Scenarios and questions.

These issues were quite reasonable and proper to raise and, importantly, had been identified and discussed by Sue and myself resulting in what we both identified as appropriate support and responses to address the 'what if's' and 'risks'. Again, these matters were addressed in a multiplicity of ways, with support coming from the variety of sources previously identified.

So, for example, prior to the allocation of a property and Sue choosing her new home, Sue used her remaining time in the care home with staff providing opportunities and support for Sue to further develop her independent skills around issues like shopping, meal planning and preparation, laundry.

The care home was also supportive when Sue had a trial run at her first night in her flat, on her own.

We were also able to provide Sue with staff from a care agency (who would be working with her on a daily basis once she moved) to also work with Sue in further developing her skills, before she actually moved into her new home.

Once all the necessary changes had been made to the flat, Sue was able to move in and live on her own with support (initially provided by the care agency) from care staff who would call in at particular times during the day.

However, as Sue's confidence developed and her need for greater control, choice and flexibility grew, Sue was ready to rise to the new challenge of using Direct Payments (and later on the ILF) becoming an employer of her own care staff.

In the 4 years that Sue and I worked together, a great many changes took place for Sue and happily Sue achieved exactly what she needed and wanted. Thus demonstrating that where there's a will THERE REALLY is a WAY.

Just one more thing with regards to Sue and the development of the web-site. In all of my working with Sue it has always been the case that Sue is the first person to 'give' to others. I believe the website is an expression of this 'giving' in that Sue will want other people to be able to access and experience the benefits of Direct Payments and independent living and all the good things that she feels go with this choice. And if Sue can help people do that then she will, through the website.

I rang Sue at the point of where my support for her was clearly no longer necessary and to advise her that I would be closing the case relating to her circumstances.

At this point Sue tells me that she had an 'enterprise' that she wanted to explore with me and could I come out and see her.

This was my last meeting and final visit to Sue.....And the launch of Sue's website is the happy outcome of that visit.

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