

Ian's story

in Control is grateful to Ian for sharing this story

Ian is 30 and lives in Oldham with his family. Ian has a learning disability. He employs his own support staff and also has his own job.

In the Past

My name is Ian. I was born on 17th October 1971, and I have Downs Syndrome. When I was five years old, I went to a special school, because there was no other choice for me. I spent the next 14 years in a special place during school time and had “ordinary time” with family and friends after school had finished.

When I was 18 and looking ahead to leaving school, I decided I wanted to get a job and earn a wage. I didn't want to go to a Social Services day centre. I needed to escape and now was the time to do it.

My Mum invited people from the Careers Service and from Training and Employment to come to my review. At the review, the teacher and head teacher were very angry because my Mum and I had invited people to the review. The teachers said it was their job to invite people to reviews. My Mum had to explain that she was doing her best to make sure that I had the chance of a job when I left school. The teacher explained that there were people at school who were more able to find me a job than I was and they should have a chance first. My parents and I decided that I would leave school. Training and Employment helped me find my first job. I've had about four jobs since leaving school and lots of periods of being unemployed. In the past, I've lost some jobs through my own fault and some when it's been outside my control.

All of this has been a good learning experience and one that I would never have had in segregated day services. All the experiences have made me more able to cope with the world.

For the past six years I have worked for Littlewoods. I love my job. I've lots of friends at work who help me if I get stuck, just as I help them if they do.

At first, the only people who could help me lead an ordinary life were my family. They helped me get a job, and also helped me when I was out of work. They introduced me to the right places at the right time so I could develop my social life and make friends.

Social Services could not help me because I did not fit in with their shift patterns. I started my job at 6.00 am. Social Services could not support me until 8.30.am to 9.30.am.

I can honestly say that since leaving school, my life has got better and better. I am now making my own choices and decisions and living more independently from my parents.

One way I realised this was that I did not want to go away any more with my parents to their caravan every weekend. We had reached a stage when we cramping each other's style.

What happened next made a difference!

My mum found out about Individualised Budgets. Karen came to our home and explained how an individualised budget would get me real control over my life.

We filled in a Resource Allocation questionnaire which was good because it made me think about how well I was doing in my life. After this, we made a support plan. We used lots of pictures and line drawings. In this way, I could understand my own plan as well as anyone else. I did the contract for my support staff in the same way and then kept all the information in a green file.

We then advertised locally for my first staff. I call them carers. This is when I met Netty and Keith. I met with them a couple of times to have a cup of tea. I would take my file with the contract information and my support plan and tell them what was important to me, how they could support me and do their job properly.

I employed Netty and Keith for a couple of hours a week to support me in my own home. This went really well for about a year but then their situation changed and they had to leave. These things happen when you are an employer.

Mum and Karen said they would help me find new staff. What they did not know was that I had my own ideas!

Taking Control and being in Control

I made my own new friends - in particular a couple called Pete and June. They lived down the road and went to my local pub. I got on very well with them. I went to their house one day and asked them if they wanted to be my carers. They both said they would like to do this. What I did not know until later was that June had telephoned my Mum and was worried that she was going to throw me out. My Mum explained about Individualised Budgets; June came to the house and we sorted everything out. The support plan changed because I had decided that I would rather stay with them at their house.

I felt really good about June and Pete and I learned a lot about myself. I was the one who had made the decision and told people afterwards that I was in control! I was the employer and my parents are very proud of me.

Life now

I love my life now. I have a good job and great friends. I play football and I'm in the pool and quiz teams at my local pub. I go where I want, when I want - and I do this independently. I can live my life this way now because lots of people in my local community whom I've made friends with watch out for me.

My Mum and Dad don't worry about me anymore; they know I have lots of places to go and people who can help me. They can get on with their lives and I can get on with mine.

What would you tell others?

If someone asked me if they should have an Individualised Budget, I would say, go for it. Don't be afraid because there are people out there who can help. You would be surprised to see what can change. I would advise people who have support to do a pay roll. It is important to be a good employer. Having a little bit of help has made big changes in my life!