

## Sheila's Story

What a difference a day makes... so the songs says... and it can be perfectly true.

A major illness or event can bring life crashing down. The everyday routine, the people we see, the activities we enjoy can all change beyond recognition following a traumatic event. Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, socially - even our meaning and purpose in life can change following a breakdown in health. I know because that has been a very painful and traumatic experience for me, following a heart attack which came totally out of the blue, and the disability which followed as a consequence. Everything in my life changed - in one day - and not just mine.

As a consequence of the stress of my illness, my husband [and carer] suffered a breakdown, and is no longer able to work full time, with the ensuing financial implications. My 'friends' whom I had always been there for suddenly became so busy they had no time to be there for me when I needed a little help. Over the coming months, I became increasingly isolated, unable to get out of the house on my own. Even the simplest household task became a major effort. Slowly, depression overtook me. I had had to give up almost all the things that brought me the greatest pleasures in life. There was little to look forward to. Increasingly, I felt devalued, a burden to my husband, some days, even useless and ashamed because I could no longer do the things I had always done.

After 3 months, I had a visit from a Social Worker - she was an absolute Godsend. She was able to assess my situation, see what aids were needed to help me become safer in the home and could see how socially isolated I had become. She suggested Direct Payments to me and explained how they could be used. Day Care is a very valued and necessary option for many people but for me would not have been suitable. Direct Payments would give me the option of choosing how best to use the money to put some 'normality' back into life. Together, we worked out a care plan that was workable, would give me the opportunity to get out of the house at times that were best for me. For many people with limited mobility, morning activities [which are the most catered for] are too early in the day to attend. Evenings I wanted to spend with my husband. There is very little available in the afternoons. It also gave me the choice as to what kind of activities I could pursue, that I could enjoy and would help to fill the time pleurably while on my own - which is all day during the week. I chose to pursue my love of creativity with crafts of many kinds, embroidery, tapestry, rug making, sewing, card making, to name a few.

To date I have made over 300 Christmas cards and over 100 general greetings cards! I also had the opportunity to join The National Trust and, together with my husband, visit new places; joined the Friends of Chatsworth - a place we love to visit; purchase Trentham Gardens season tickets where I can get around on my mobility scooter [while my husband tries to keep up!] So for the spring to autumn months, there is somewhere to look forward to visit at the weekends. I have been so impressed by the way so many places are so disabled friendly and have assistants who are so helpful. Many also have Christmas openings - something to look forward to in the winter months. I also get a break from the kitchen sink once a week with a planned meal out with my carer. This is a much appreciated break for both of us.

Direct payments is the best thing that has happened to me since my illness. It is not about having a financial benefit to me, it is about taking some control of my life back again, going

out when I am able, choosing where I want to go - with an occasional treat to the Theatre for a play or concert - doing whichever activity I choose to do, and taking a break away from the house. It doesn't solve every problem, but it does go a long way in giving you back some sense of purpose, enjoyment and boosts your self-esteem. I tell my Social Worker that Direct Payments are my life blood, and in many senses, they are. I dread to think how life would be if they were to be discontinued. They could prove a very valuable asset to anyone who finds themselves in a similar situation to mine.