



# Self-Directed Support and Early Intervention

Tim Keilty

# Acknowledgements

We would like to give thanks to Jenny Dalby, service manager from Middlesbrough Council, Rachel Salter team leader for the Improving Futures Project in Worcestershire and Katie-Lee Percival, Programme Manager for BU Be Amazing at Mayday Trust. All of these projects have provided the inspiration for writing this paper.

## About the author

Tim Keilty has worked with people with a learning disability for 20 years, as a support worker in a village community, as a supporter to a People First group, an advocate, as a Person Centred Planning Co-ordinator and now as a Special Projects Manager.

Over the past few years Tim has supported a group of self advocates to set up and run a website [handsoffmyplan.co.uk](http://handsoffmyplan.co.uk). He's also trained hundreds of people in person centred planning and support planning in the north east through his work at Skills for People, and around the country as an associate for Paradigm.

Recently Tim has focused on work with children, setting up the Support Planning Hub in Newcastle and contributing to the development of Help and Connect at Skills for People. Tim passionately believes that people themselves, their families, friends and communities have the answers and often just need the time and space to discover them. Tim tries to offer people that space by being a thoughtful facilitator, a canny drawer, and by having a constant desire to keep it all simple.

Tim has recently joined New Prospects Association a cracking little support provider based in North Tyneside. Tim is a qualified social worker, but puts more store in the fact that he was once described by Jack Pearpoint (admittedly in an off the cuff comment) as 'a remarkably gifted leader'.

# Introduction

*“When I was first approached to be involved in the self-directed support and early intervention work and write this paper for In Control I must admit I had a little bit of a panic. The projects all seemed a little complex – I know this because I work on the Middlesbrough project referenced in this paper. I immediately thought about dusting off some of my old faithful tried-and-tested ‘tools’ – perhaps even leafing through some of the many handbooks I’ve created over the years. I suppose I was looking for a bit of safety and security. However years of practice have taught me that it’s not just the tools that are helpful when approaching work like this, it’s having the right attitude and ethos, and recently I have found a framework for my work that sits very nicely with me:*

## **‘Search for capacities, seek connections, be open to yes.’**

*“I read that phrase in *The PATH & MAPS Handbook - Person-Centered Ways to Build Community* by John O’Brien, Jack Pearpoint and Lynda Kahn a few years ago and it really stuck. I have it in the back of my mind, along with the question ‘What would it take?’ which was drummed into me during learning and facilitating the Big Plan - an approach to group support planning developed by Heather Simmons and Steve Coulson. In many ways, thinking about the phrase ‘Search for capacities, seek connections, be open to yes’ then figuring out what it would take to realise this, neatly encompasses the whole ethos and practice of person centredness.*

*“The three projects described in this paper share that ethos and practice. Although they are distinct pieces of work, each share the following characteristics:*

- *A focus on the assets, gifts, strengths of young people and of the communities in which the projects operate in*
- *A strong belief in the value of relationships*
- *A common sense approach and application of personal budgets*

*“To write this paper I needed to visit the teams working on the projects and I have to say that it has been a real privilege. What has struck me the most has been the similarities of the approaches they are using - such as ‘Advantaged Thinking’, ‘Person Centred Planning’, and although they each may be using different terminology, they are definitely slices of the same pie. Hopefully this paper will join together the pieces of pie so they can be sliced and shared again to enable others to benefit from their learning.*

*“This briefing paper sits well alongside Nic Crosby and John Wheeler’s paper ‘Exploring Self Directed Support and Signs of Safety’<sup>1</sup> with its exploration of ‘Real Wealth’ and the Signs of Safety approach to Child Protection as well as some work in Australia proposing a new ‘Citizen Capital’ approach to safeguarding in the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme: A Personalised Approach to Safeguards in the NDIS - Authors: Marita Walker, Kate Fulton and Bruce Bonyhady<sup>2</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.in-control.org.uk/media/140723/exploring%20self-directed%20support%20and%20signs%20of%20safety.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/by-az/a-personalised-approach-to-safeguards.html\).](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/by-az/a-personalised-approach-to-safeguards.html).)”

# ‘Search for capacities, seek connections, be open to yes’

The paper has been produced as part of In Control's commitment to exploring how the approach to early intervention can be personalised to better support people at times of crisis or vulnerability. The best starting point of course is to look at examples where this approach is already working and producing good results.

There are many different initiatives and programmes currently running across England that focus on early intervention, alternatives to long-term placements, ‘troubled families’, school exclusions and supporting people of all ages at times of crisis. However changing thresholds and eligibility criteria mean that many of these people are now not entitled to support.

In Control has long advocated for more personalised approaches to empowering people to take control of their lives using tactics such as person-centred planning, creative use of funding and ensuring the child or young person and their family's voice is heard. There is currently some very interesting work with a number of people and organisations to take these approaches forward and to explore how personalisation can work for a much greater number of people outside of the traditional support and care model.

This paper looks at three such projects in Middlesbrough, Worcestershire and the East Midlands.

## Returning Children to Middlesbrough

In Middlesbrough, as with other places of similar demographics there are a significant number of ‘looked after’ children many of whom are placed out of area, a long way from their families and communities and often in expensive residential and fostering placements. For some, this is the best option in terms of meeting their individual needs and achieving their full potential. However it may be the case that for others, their needs could be met more effectively and more efficiently closer to home. The ‘Returning Children to Middlesbrough Project’ set out to explore whether the expertise developed in connection with personal budgets locally with adults and children with disabilities could be used to return some children and young people to Middlesbrough. The project utilised the skills and experience in Middlesbrough and was supported by In Control.

The criteria for each child for the Returning Children to Middlesbrough project is:

- It would be safe and in their interests to return them home
- They would be willing to work towards achieving this
- Their families would be willing to work towards achieving this
- Those professionals working with the child/young person or their family see this as a positive way forward

After a slow start due to difficulty in identifying children meeting the criteria of the project, it finally took off in late summer 2013.

## Background

There are some talented and dedicated workers in 'looked after' children's services in Middlesbrough – protecting children and trying where possible to keep families together. The significant numbers of looked after children and the lack of a 'mechanism' to allow a more fluid use of resources can lead sometimes to the overuse of placements some distance from home. A child or young person is successfully placed in foster care or residential care and everything is often fine, the placement meets their needs and they thrive. For some however, the placement breaks down for a variety of reasons and in order to keep the child safe and often in a crisis situation another placement is found. In some cases, this cycle of placements escalates in distance from home, degree of 'control' and often cost. For a young person who may have entered the 'looked after' system because of an unstable, fractured relationship at home, their experience of the looked after system can appear to be a series of further fractured relationships.

The Returning Children to Middlesbrough Project offered the team in Middlesbrough an option to explore different solutions for children and young people. As with most pilot projects there have been successes and some challenges as Amy's case study below highlights:

Amy is 14-years-old and entered the looked after system when she was very young. She has always maintained contact with her mother. At the age of 12 following another placement breakdown Amy found herself in a local residential children's home. Amy says, "I hated it, I didn't like some of the staff who worked there, I did like some of them. I liked the kids but it was strict."

Amy's response to her unhappiness was to 'kick back' against the service. She started to gather a reputation for herself and it became increasingly difficult for staff in the home to support her. During her difficult time in the residential home she maintained contact with her mother. Amy says, "*I used to say I was seeing my friends but I'd sneak home to see mam.*"

Amy's mother says, "*They'd phone me up and ask me to speak to her and calm her down, or persuade her to go to school, it was like being a mam at the end of a phone*".

After a series of incidents at the residential home Amy was arrested by the police and was returned home to her mother's house because the residential home did not feel able to take her back. Amy's social worker was faced with the dilemma of finding another placement (probably further away, more restrictive and more expensive) or working with Amy and her mother to find out what it would take to successfully keep Amy at home.

## The use of personal budgets

In the case study example above, personal budgets offered a solution. Amy and her mother needed some real practical support such as a bed and some bedding, to be able to clear some rent arrears to enable them to move to a suitable home, some parenting support for mother, some support for Amy to explore her interests and give her mother some time on her own, and some encouragement for Amy to attend school. There wasn't an allocation system developed for looked after children (although this may be needed in the future) just a practical common sense approach to personal budgets and the new attitude of '*we used to spend £3,000 per week – if it's less than that and works - great*'

Since having a personal budget, Amy and her mother have moved to a more suitable house, which is closer to their extended family. Amy is establishing great relationships with the Home Support Team. She used some of her personal budget to buy horse riding equipment and some lessons to enable her to make use of some 'free' natural support at a local stable. She has a weekly allowance of £20 for travel to school – if she walks every day she gets to keep the money. The family has a direct payment for the

majority of the budget so they know what they have and are in control - support for Amy is organised by the local authority but Amy and her mother know the costs and choose how they use it.

The effect on Amy and her mother has been dramatic. Amy's mother says, *"It's a big change for us and it's hard but it's better because this is not just 'contact' this is being with your family"*. People around Amy report a huge change, from a young girl who had a 'challenging' reputation, didn't engage with staff to a young woman who recently baked some cakes for a worker, who helped her with her support plan and left this note:



There have been some little 'blips' along the way but Amy and her mother, with the support of their social worker have overcome them and see them as just that – temporary 'blips'. People around Amy say she looks different, happier, healthier, they say her mother speaks differently, more confidently, it's a bit of a transformation all round.

From the local authority's point of view, the outcomes for Amy and her mother are great. When Amy started her journey of self-directed support she was unhappy in a placement costing £3,000 per week, and on the verge of moving further into the system – her current support now costs just £299 per week and with some significant one-off costs, her budget next year should be less, but hopefully just as successful.

Amy's story is just one of many in Middlesbrough, and they all follow a similar pattern of a willingness to discover 'what it would take' and a focus on the strengths and capacities of young people and their families.

## Learning from Middlesbrough

The inclusion of the Middlesbrough work in a paper entitled 'Self-Directed Support and Early Intervention' seems odd as the children involved in the returning Children to Middlesbrough pilot are a long way down the road of intervention. But the decision has been taken to include it within this paper as it highlights that with the freedom and confidence that personal budgets give workers, young people and families, this approach could prove a successful option for some families before children are 'removed'.

This individualised approach has also led to a reappraisal of 'supervised contact' between looked after children and their families in Middlesbrough – moving closer to 'supported contact'.

With some young people with complex needs placed a long way from Middlesbrough, a return to the family home may be impossible and unsafe - the pilot is helping Middlesbrough to explore more personalised responses from providers – creating individualised service designs based on the wishes, talents and aspirations of the young people involved.

The use of personal budgets gives workers another option to explore, gives them some freedom to be more flexible with resources and the possibility of looked after Children to be 'looked after' differently.

## Improving Futures Worcestershire

This is a project funded by the National Lottery with some match funding from Worcestershire County Council's children's services. The project aims to work with 100 families from three of the most deprived areas in Worcestershire working with families experiencing difficulties and where universal services have failed (or are not being accessed), and where social services are not involved.

By offering families early help to reach their own solutions, the hope is that families gain confidence to deal with any problems they face in the future – solving problems before they reach crisis point enabling families to quickly regain control and make lasting changes to benefit their children's futures. Each family is allocated a 'family budget' to buy the support they need.

The Improving Futures Worcestershire project is built on partnership not only with families but also in its delivery with local voluntary and community organisations including EPIC Community Interest Company, Worcester Community Trust and Onside Advocacy. Each organisation employs two family workers who work alongside families. The project is managed by Vestia Community Trust.

The spirit of personalisation runs through the project - Rachel Salter Improving Futures Team Leader says: *"Too often families cannot get the help they need early on; they are only given support when things have gotten really tough. By offering support early on and giving them control over what support they can access and how, families can ensure they get what they need at the right time, in the right way."*

Personalisation for improving Futures Worcestershire means consciously doing things differently. The family workers are encouraged to work in different styles providing the workers, as Rachel says, *"get personalisation in their gut"*. Rachel says that *"from a structural point of view it's a bit woolly – because it is family led."* Family workers are encouraged to explore their feelings in supervision and are challenged, supervisions are more about supporting workers on their personalisation journey rather than discussing 'cases'. The approach works, as one family highlights:

*"Usually we just get told what to do and always feel like we are being judged in some kind of way. But this one is completely different. We feel we have a say in what goes on and we get to make decisions - rather than being made to feel about one inch tall."*

From a workers' perspective this means working differently and staying with people. When meeting families there are no clip boards or ID badges, workers may join the family on a weekly shop or a trip to B&Q. When families are ready they complete their own family STAR, to decide their own priorities, assess their own strengths and plan for their own priorities. The family STAR is described as the 'anchor' of the work, to set direction, reflect and chart progress. There are no set processes and family workers utilise a range of approaches when needed such as solution circles if families are stuck – but all the while encouraging families to discover 'what it would take' to improve their situation.

The family workers and the project as a whole focus on family strengths rather than jumping in with solutions – allowing people to build on their assets to find their own solutions, for example:

*"It does feel different – I feel like I have rights, actually she (family worker) has taught me I have rights and it's ok to try things."* – Family Member

The family workers stick with families and support them to make the most of the resources available in their community. Initially family workers may spend significant time with families, but as people find their own solutions, texting to stay in contact may take the place of more structured support.

*“Just to know that there is someone who can fight our corner so to speak and actually seek out local resources, that we didn't know existed is fantastic. I haven't and wouldn't have the confidence to ever have done this myself.” – Family member*

## The use of personal budgets

In the early days of the project, Improving Futures Worcestershire piloted a resource allocation system (RAS). This RAS was tied to the family STAR and banded. Linked to the creation of the RAS were some 'uncomfortable' conversations such as 'what if the family spend it on... they might not spend it wisely...' Some workers and families felt uncomfortable with discussions about money as it changed the dynamics of the relationship. Therefore in line with similar projects with small scale use of personal budgets, use of the RAS was found to be disproportionate and an instead a simple upfront allocation of £1,500 was introduced for every family.

Personal budgets have proved really useful for practical things such as hiring carpet cleaners, washing machines and been most useful for buying 'specialist' support such as counselling. For one family which struggled to think of any positive memories, the budget bought them a trip to a safari park and a memory box to collect good memories as explained by one family worker:

*“Following the trip I met with a very happy family who were brimming with smiles and happy memories of their day. Lots of photos were taken and a family trip to the library was made to download the images. The children had saved their wrist bands for the happy memory box. Mum reported that she had seen an improvement in the way in which dad had dealt with the children during the day trip and also in the following weeks.”*

## Learning From Improving Futures Worcestershire

As Rachel Salter says, *“It really has nothing to do with the money, if you 'get' personalisation it does and will challenge what you think your role is – that is for you to deal with, not families. 'Supportive' boundaries, systems, processes, procedures, checks and balances don't help families – advice and support does.”* Having a simple upfront allocation of funding enables people to focus directly on support and allocation.

Initial research into the project using the information gathered from the family STAR shows promising positive change. All families had accessed their budget, 70% of families have reported a 'risk reduction' in three or more areas of family life and of this 70% - 40% had reported a reduction in risk factors in all areas of family life.

A family member said: *“The support is fantastic, always a phone call or text away and is always there no matter when. The project is really good because we can trust our worker.”*

Improving Futures Worcestershire is taking some bold steps in the future. They have just completed a pilot where families accessed 10 weeks of 'training sessions' focusing on self-esteem and the ability to make choices and take control. Rachel Salter says, “A comment really stuck with me at my first In Control sessions: 'If the only colour you have ever been offered is red, when you are asked what colour to pick - you will say red.' Often the families we are working with have not experienced the opportunity of choice'. Participants have reported having more direction and confidence following the course, *“I never thought good things would happen for me. Now I believe I can make them happen and that I deserve good things – I am going to get myself sorted.”* The next steps will be for the family workers to complete the same course – so that they experience it the same way families did and then they will be trained to deliver it in groups and on a one-to-one basis. The project is also supporting families to come together

to offer each other sustainable, peer support again, this is 'structurally woolly' as it is family-led so they will be setting the direction and pace.

## The Mayday Trust – BU Be Amazing

The Mayday Trust is an organisation that has undergone a significant transformation over recent years – describing itself as the following:

*“We are about supporting people to take control of their own lives, to live independently and to use their talents to their full potential.”*

BU Be Amazing is a great example of helping people use their talents to their full potential. The project, based in Northampton, aims to support young people to recognise and build on their assets - enabling them to thrive, be healthy and motivated, and feel that they have a voice and opportunities in their community. Young people are supported by a Personal Asset Mentor and have access to a small personal budget.

BU helps young people who:

- May not be achieving at school
- Have poor attendance/punctuality
- Experience barriers to education or employment or have learning disabilities
- May also be experiencing tension in the family
- Be a recent victim of crime
- Have a low income or accommodation or transport issues
- Experience domestic abuse, or be a young person prone to disengagement
- Have peers involved in anti-social behaviour, low level criminality, risky behaviour, drugs, or alcohol
- Have low-level mental health problems, low self-esteem, or lead an unhealthy lifestyle.

BU Be Amazing follows the US 'Developmental Assets' model<sup>3</sup> for positive youth development which works on the principle that by increasing a young person's 'assets' they are more likely to succeed in life. This approach sits well with the principles and ethos of self-directed support, and the project also integrates a small personal budget. The BU approach also utilises 'Advantaged Thinking'<sup>4</sup>

BU be Amazing works in partnership with local charity Blackthorn Good Neighbours, and the work is supported by In Control.

Referrals come through Blackthorn Good Neighbours and a trained personal mentor engaged by Mayday Trust will then work with the young person to identify their strengths, aspirations and significant networks and local resources and then put together a plan that will aim to build their assets and give them an opportunity to integrate positively within their local community.

## The use of personal budgets

Although the pilot project is still in its infancy the outcomes demonstrated for young people are already 'amazing'. Taking for example, a group of young people at Blackthorn Good Neighbours who describe their experience as isolated where they live and describe spending their time, *walking from here to there smoking a spliff*. BU Be Amazing offers them an opportunity to 'escape' that isolation and a small

<sup>3</sup> [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

<sup>4</sup> The Foyer Federation <http://foyer.net>

personal budget of £250, as Katie Lee Percival programme manager says, *“Acts as a hook for the young people, and a lever to broker other things for free – people tend not to spend it all.”*

The success of BU Be Amazing is founded in the focus on both the ‘assets’ of the young people and the ‘assets’ of the community. Matt Boylan – Personal Asset Mentor described a bewildering array of contacts he had made, voluntary agencies, council departments and more importantly people from his own network he has drawn in to benefit the young people – BU Be Amazing uses Twitter to create and sustain these networks. Young People who are connected benefit from these networks and also from the wider Mayday trust offer.

Mary is a young woman who would probably hit all of the ‘criteria’ for access to the project, with the support of Matt she identified two ‘talents’ to build on, singing and cooking. She was easily connected to the Mayday Health hub and some cooking lessons were brokered for free this provided her with a space to build on her assets and some new relationships. The Personal Asset Mentor has also helped Mary to develop better relationships with all of the other people in her life, family and school. The Personal Asset Mentor brokered some free singing lessons and access to studio space. Mary says, *“Before I went to my first singing lesson I felt a little bit nervous but after a while, I felt comfortable around the teacher and Matt – I want to achieve how to reach my higher notes and my breathing techniques”*. Mary’s time outside of the home gives her mother time to spend five minutes doing homework with the other children and the peace of mind that Mary was back from school on time and out to her singing lessons safely.

## Learning from BU Be Amazing

The impact of BU Be Amazing on Mary is beginning to be seen. She uses her time more constructively, is meeting new people, has renewed self-confidence and self-belief, a sense of achievement and in common with other young people involved with the project has not moved up Northampton’s Vulnerability Matrix.

The use of personal budgets in BU Be Amazing is offering isolated, vulnerable young people the opportunity to grab those ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunities. As one young person describes, *“I want to see Ed Sheeran live by the time I’m 16”*. Opportunities such as these would be beyond them without BU Be Amazing – opportunities which could spark a whole other life or a new direction.

Matt describes the time in the car going to and from the connections he has brokered as a bit of breathing space and a chance for the young people to be themselves and think about their ‘assets’.

The focus on assets, in common with the ethos of self-directed support helps us uncover people’s true potential, as Matt says: *“How can a young person who got an F in English tell me all about ‘Of Mice and Men’?”*

This focus on assets allied with a small budget is unlocking potential and opportunities for young people who could easily remain isolated, *“walking from here to there smoking a spliff....”*

# Conclusion

This paper has highlighted three important projects taking place across the country that are focusing on assets and the use of personal budgets to unlock potential in young people, families and communities. The scale of the budgets and the scale of the challenges facing the young people and families may differ but the approach, ethos and values of the projects is evident in the outcomes for young people and their families.

In many ways, these three projects reflect the early days of self-directed support when the focus was on the following rather than on process, red tape and bureaucracy:

- The assets, gifts, strengths of young people and the communities in which young people and their families live
- A strong belief in the value of relationships
- A willingness and desire to find a way to 'yes' not taking 'no' for an answer and working with young people, their families and others in their lives to work out 'what it would take'
- A common sense approach and application of personal budgets

These three projects demonstrate just what can happen when people focus on assets and capacities, and the success that can be gained from using the mechanism of a personal budget to keep families together, build strength and confidence in parents and above all allow young people to be 'amazing'.

It is important to add that all three projects have had a 'grown up' approach to personal budgets. In Middlesbrough there could have been a big debate about using 'social care' money to clear rent arrears but the team has been able to see beyond this and see the 'bigger picture'. At BU Be Amazing an Ed Sheeran ticket could be questioned until you explore the potential opportunities or 'outcomes' that might spark. In Worcestershire a family day out at a safari park may not be seen by some to meet 'need' until you hear the context and the outcome.

In the midst of a lot of unnecessary bureaucracy, rules and panels surrounding self-directed support, these three projects highlight that control over the decisions in personal budgets is what's important, not control over where you put the receipts.

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**For further information about this paper or In Control's Children's Programme or work on early intervention, please email [communications@in-control.org.uk](mailto:communications@in-control.org.uk)**