

One couple's Person Centred Planning story



This story has two beginnings and a happy ending...

Sally

Back in 2002 Sally was the single parent of Alex, a boy with an Autism diagnosis who had just finished a successful inclusive primary school and was starting out at a 'resourced' secondary school. Sally had always been active in local parents groups and considered herself to be well informed but had never thought about dreams.

She attended a Partners In Policymaking course and a short session on person centred planning really fired her imagination. To Sally, person centred planning seemed straightforward and logical so she set about getting as much training

as possible as she realised the life changing potential of the approach. Quite a few training and development agencies offer free places on their courses to family carers and Sally took up all offers, learning about MAP, PATH, essential lifestyle plans and person centred reviews.

Sally did Alexander's first PATH in 2004 which was a great opportunity to bring others on board with supporting his plans for life. Alexander doesn't always say what he means but with gentle persistence Sally uncovered a goldmine of information including a dream of a helicopter ride that was quickly realised.



Alexander also revealed a passion for the army and he joined the army cadets for a while. Sally says that **working/not working** is as natural as breathing now and she doesn't even realise she's doing it, but back then it helped them work with Alex to find an alternative to the cadets when they were not working. He now takes part in World War 2 Re-enactment and has a fantastic time. He is supported at these events by a personal assistant (PA), and when his PA was unwell recently other members of the group offered to support him so he could join them on a weekend event. Of course he had his **one page profile** and **essential lifestyle plans** to make this possible and although he didn't stay for the whole weekend everyone declared it a huge success - the connections he had made with the WW2 community are very real friendships - and what a creative way



to enable his interest in the army to be followed up in a way that works for everyone.

Sally now facilitates person centred reviews for Alexander and although quite a few local service staff attended person centred review training she thinks very few person centred reviews take place. It really proves the value of training family carers who cannot conceive not using a tool that so obviously benefits their loved ones. Before person centred reviews Sally said she and Alex felt excluded from the process and this made her feel anxious and at times ill, Alex wasn't present and it was all 'can't, won't, not allowed', now it is 'can, will, enjoys'. The reviews have transformed life now that schools are on board and running with it.



Alan

Back in 2003 Alan became a single parent. He employed staff using Direct Payments to enable him to work and support Hannah. For four years he continued to work long hours but exhaustion and a pressing need to improve Hannah's life led to him taking the big decision to stop working in 2007.

Until then Alan 'just went to meetings, not taking anything in and living on a hope and a prayer.' He had known Sally for many years through parent support groups and at the beginning of 2008 she persuaded him to attend a Citizen Leaders course and then Partners in Policymaking.

Alan has a real gift for forms, figures, technical and legal things which combine very powerfully with person centred thinking to create effective action plans.

With a strong focus on what is **important to** Hannah there were gradual changes to the type of people employed to support her. He realised that she needed to be around other young women and her personal assistants are now similar ages to Hannah. Alan says,

"The first time I saw her walking down the road laughing with her peers it brought a tear to my eye."

Hannah has a really busy life now doing all the things she enjoys and has plenty of personal assistants, including her sister Sarah, who have a range of skills and interests and introduce Hannah to their own network of friends. She's really getting to know people in her community now and Alan is delighted by the number of people he doesn't know who speak to her when they are out together.

It didn't take long however to realise that all Hannah's eggs were in one basket - called Alan! Her life and support were all organised by him, and



he was taking a lead with the planning. They looked at Hannah's circles and decided to set up a **Circle of Support** for her. It is hard for most families to take the brave step of inviting other people into the support circle - no matter how much we are told, or know from other people's experience that others actually want to help - but with the added complications of a typical modern family, ex's, new partners etc. there are additional barriers to overcome. Alan asked Cate, a friend who is a person centred planning co-ordinator to facilitate the circle and it has got off to a very successful start including Hannah's mum, personal assistants, grandparents, friends and members of Our Lives Cumbria (more about them soon).

Hannah's life has completely transformed; she's now happy and giggly, but hers is not the only life to have got better.

Sally and Alan

This is not the place to tell the story of the romance, but Sally and Alan's motto of 'don't plan alone' may have played a part!

They are both passionate about person centred thinking and the benefits it can bring to the whole family - indeed they both have a **one page profile**. They now deliver training to parents and professionals to spread the use of person centred planning and know that it leads to happier parents as well as children. They have arranged support for Alexander and Hannah to allow them to spend time separately with their own children, together as a big family and alone as a couple too. It is a learning process and there will be mistakes along the way but it is important to have a good time too.

Sally and Alan and another local family formed Our Lives Cumbria which is a family leadership organisation brought together through the North West Citizen Leader and National Partners in Policymaking programmes.

In Our Lives Cumbria, members share common goals and use their own stories about how managing and being

in control of your own support has transformed family lives for the better. They share their stories and help other people to share their stories too.

Many of the people Sally and Alan meet feel isolated from their community, so with help from other members of Our Lives Cumbria they have established regular informal parties that provide an opportunity for people to relax and make friends. This is proving very successful and genuine friendships are developing and continuing away from the party.

More recently, they have used 'Living Well Before You Die and planning for the end of your life' to enable Sally's mum to move back into her own home with support for her dementia and health needs. They are supporting friends to make changes in their lives too and one of Sally's friends is now a Buddhist nun.

Sally and Alan don't use formal person centred thinking tools very often any more, it's live, part of everyday life and constantly updated. It is really clear that person centred thinking is making a positive difference to their family, friends and communities and will continue to do so for a very long time.



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