

Melanie's Story

Melanie wrote her own story.

I am 23 years old and I have cerebral palsy. I use a wheelchair for mobility and live at home with my parents. I enjoy travelling and having new experiences. In spite of my physical dependence on people, I think it is very important and empowering to be able to run your own life by directing your own support and care the way you want and need it to be.

Self-managed support has enabled me to live a 'normal' active life, comparable to other 23-year-olds. I volunteer regularly for the Red Cross in their call centre. My support worker helps me with the aspects of the job that I need physical assistance with, but I am able to verbally communicate with all clients independently. I am supported through my self-managed funding to make a valuable contribution to my local community. I also present a disability awareness program called *Just Like You*, which is a program targeted at primary school aged children in Years 5 and 6.

When I first received Post-School Funding, I was initially supported by a traditional day service. This service did its best to cater for my needs while working within the prescribed boundaries for service provision. During the time I received this style of support, I knew there must have been a more flexible way of doing things.

When I found out about the Self-Managed Support Model, I was initially worried about how I would manage things such as worker recruitment, payment, and other day-to-day issues. I quickly learned that with family support and good agency facilitator relationships, self-management can be done. In the 12 months since I started on the program, my decision to try the self-managed package has been well-tested and has constantly been proven to be a good decision. There will be no turning back for me now.

If you are thinking of starting the self-managed support journey, some helpful hints that have worked for me include:

1. In the interview, have some value-based questions so that you can get an idea of your potential support worker's beliefs and attitudes—this will help you decide whether you can work well together.
2. Have an open, honest relationship between support worker and yourself.
3. Use the facilitator's help when you need it.
4. Acknowledge and make use of family and friends' support throughout the process, as they are likely to have your best interests at heart, and have—in my case—been a good source of strength, motivation, reassurance and encouragement.

5. Try and choose someone you will have fun with!

Everyone will have different criteria for what makes a good support worker in their eyes, but these are just a few hints that I use when looking for a worker. Most importantly, don't be scared to step out and make a change, because you never know where it could lead you.

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