

Video Transcript: KeyRing – People want choice, control, and just enough support

Claire Gleeson: Of the 28 local authorities that we work with across England and Wales, there are only six local authorities whereby support is funded through direct payments and at the moment there is no one whose is supported through and Individual Service Fund.

That's something that we are hoping to change. I think it's really important that people have as much choice and control over their support: deciding who supports them, when, and being able to reduce paid support as much as possible.

KeyRing has been brokering support for the last 20 years. We were involved in the controlled pilot up in Newcastle where people used a direct payment to pay for support. So we're really good at leveraging resource from the community, and we work alongside people to put a plan together for what a good life looks like to them. We connect them with the resources, whether that's from providers or community assets.

We work in 28 local authorities. We support around 2500 people each year within commissioned services. Everybody who joins KeyRing has faced some kind of barrier to living independently.

So it might be that somebody is leaving home for the first time, they might be at risk of homelessness, need some help to sustain a tenancy, feel isolated and want to make friends, [or] want to get job, which can be difficult for people with learning disabilities.

So what we do is, we listen to and work alongside people to create an environment where people do have choice and control, and feel equipped to make decisions about their future.

We help people connect, we help people get to know how to use facilities in the local community, so we're always promoting connexion and flexible support, and skill building, and we do that in a way that offers just enough support. It could be peer support from one another, it could be support from local volunteers, or paid staff.

Despite being involved in the pilot 20 years ago, it feels like so little has happened around self-directed support, and there just seems to be a really big gap between the policy on personalisation and people's real-life experiences.

There's a whole range of ways that providers such as KeyRing can be engaged with local authorities to change this. A really nice example of this in Darlington, where KeyRing are working with a number of people who are known to social care, and Darlington Council, and we've been looking at ways of how people can jointly commission their support through pooling their direct payments and buying KeyRing as an alternative to day services.

And what's worked really well is that people have told us what they want, for example they wanted to make friends, they've been to college and learned skills, but they wanted to learn more about the skills you need out in the real world, wanting to know how they could be connected and involved in groups and activities where they live.

So our role was to help people think about how that could work and how pooling their budgets could create something that was so much more valuable and personalised than just commissioning one-to-one direct payment hours.

So we're just in the process of testing the pooled budgets arrangement now. I'm really excited to see how this evolves.

Another great example of a local authority who are looking to co-produce support with us is Oldham. We've around 100 people who are Care Act eligible and their personal budget is council-managed. So we want to explore ways in which people can have more choice and control over their support. This could be through a direct payment or ISF.

So what KeyRing did, as a partner of TLAP, we used TLAP's 'Making it Real' sessions to meet with people with support and we looked at the domain 'My support, my way' and we explored what people understood about their support and how it was funded, and what was really interesting was that people didn't know about the different ways that they could take a personal budget and they didn't know how much that was.

But what they did say was that they wanted to have more choice and control over who supported them and how. So this led to a conversation with Oldham Council about how this would be an opportunity to really do something different – for the people with lived experience, for KeyRing as a provider, and the local authority to look at how together we could help KeyRing members and other citizens in Oldham to have more choice and control over their support including working towards much more self-determined outcomes.

So I can see that for local authorities, they may be facing barriers and things that might get in the way of implementing direct payments and ISF. I think importantly, it's within the Care Act. The Care Act is saying that legally, people have a right to manage their own personal budget.

I think it might appear that there's a cost upfront for changing the way that services and support is commissioned, but having done a recent desktop exercise with Chris Watson from Self Directed Futures, we took a small sample of people and just looked at what their care and support cost at the moment and how, if somebody took an ISF, that you could be more creative and the person would have much more control over their support, support would be much more joined up, outcomes would be better for the people and there would be some cost savings on that.

I think it can be difficult for local authorities to let go sometimes and feel that they can trust providers to be the ISF host, but there are things in place that can help to relieve some of that anxiety and reduce risk of exploitation.

We've been looking at virtual wallets and how they might be used, they can see what support has been paid for, the families can have access to that, the provider has access to that and the local authority has access to that.

So we're not currently supporting people in the East of England, but that's something that we'd really like to change. So I receive enquiries from individuals and families, from groups asking if KeyRing can work in areas in the East of England. That could be Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk....

I think the way that local authorities have contracted and commissioned services in the past has sometimes made it difficult for providers to work in a new area, but I think with the increased use of direct payments and ISFs, this will really open up the market to new providers.