

Martha's Story

Martha, a 26-year-old woman with Cerebral Palsy and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has been under the care of mental health services since age 16. Despite various approaches to try and help her, including several lengthy admissions to hospital, different therapies and out of county placements, by 22 she felt defeated and lost, like every avenue had been exhausted.



At this time Martha had her first experience of personalised care via a conversation with a mental health professional. The professional didn't know her diagnosis or history which was a relief for Martha because she knew there would be no assumptions made. The essence of the meeting was to find out from Martha "What matters to you?" and resulted in her being a suitable candidate for Gloucestershire's Integrated Accelerator Pilot and a [personal health budget](#) (PHB).

"What matters to you?"

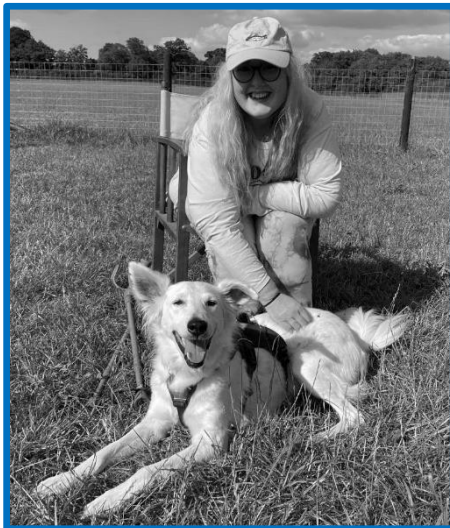
This conversation was the first time anybody had specifically asked questions around how being institutionalised had impacted Martha's physical health and Cerebral Palsy. She was able to speak without prejudgement, giving her hope that life didn't have to keep being a battle. It reminded her that she was a person first; her diagnosis was just a label, that she, and no one else, should let dictate her future.

Personalised care and support plan

Martha and the mental health professional co-produced her personalised care and support plan. They identified several things that would help facilitate Martha's recovery, meet her personal goals, and enable her to not just exist, but live her best life:

- to be able to get fit and healthy in a way that recognised the limitations of her physical disability
- to choose who was supporting her
- to experience the things in life she missed out on due to being in hospitals, like nights out and time with her family.

The positive impact of a personal health budget



Martha says her PHB has fulfilled and surpassed her expectations. She has personally chosen two personal assistants (PAs) to work with; one she describes as her “personal trainer” and with the support of her other PA Martha has lost almost five stone.

Her PHB paid for a gym membership and specialist physiotherapy which has proven invaluable in improving Martha’s physical health, mobility, confidence, and outlook on living life with a disability.

Her efforts to lose weight and get fit have been hugely motivated by the fact that she is now on the waitlist to be matched with a Disability Assistance dog. This dog, Martha says, is the greatest gift her PHB will give her and has given her hope and light in some of her darker times. Without the flexibility of a PHB, Martha wouldn’t have been able to apply for an assistance dog - which she says will be her mascot for PHBs and help her to try further to promote and advocate for this kind of personalised care to be “a given, not a blessing”.

“Life-changing gift”

Since receiving her PHB, Martha has had no hospital admissions, something she never dreamed possible. Martha has also been working with her local NHS trust to promote, advocate and give voice to the life changing gift of her PHB. She feels that working as an “expert by experience” alongside professionals is something she would never have previously considered, but thanks to her PHB, the support of her PAs and the confidence, agency and autonomy she has over her own care and life, she feels compelled to share her story and fly the flag for personalised care.



The thing she values most about her PHB and personalised care package, is the freedom and flexibility it gives her. She describes it as an organic approach that grows and changes with her as her needs and aspirations change.

Martha says “Never underestimate the power of truly engaging with your patients and service users in deciding how and what they want their recovery journey to look like. I was moments away from a secure unit, now I’m living my dream in my own flat, having adventures, every day is a day further away from my past and a day spent realising new possibilities, opportunities. All it took was somebody to walk into my life for an hour and essentially ask me “Martha, what matters to you?”

COVID19 update from Martha

“Although lockdown and COVID have been turbulent and difficult times I have felt so grateful to have my PHB and my PAs, because whether it is a bad or a good day, they will be there for me in whatever way I need them. They accept me, expect nothing from me and will do anything to make me smile. Including endless games of monopoly, piles of eggy bread, binge watching box sets, helping me keep on top of my fitness and generally being two of the best cheerleaders anyone could ask for.

There have been so many times during this period where I have thought “I could be sat in an inpatient bed right now, but instead I’m in my own home, working with two people who I trust and who trust me, and we’re having fun.” I feel very blessed. I truly couldn’t and wouldn’t have got through it without them.”

Further information

- A personal health budget is an amount of money to support your health and wellbeing needs, which is planned and agreed between you (or someone who represents you), and your local NHS team. It works in a similar way to [personal budgets](#) (but are not means tested).
- Find out more [here](#) or watch this introductory [video](#).
- eLearning is available for health and care professionals via eLearning for Healthcare [here](#).