



# Amanda's Story

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**Interviewer: Addison**

**Addison:** As we are talking about Direct Payments can I start by asking how did you find out about Direct Payments?

**Amanda:** It was through Short Breaks. They've changed their name but I can never remember what it is. I think it was in 2011, 2012, it must have been. They've changed their name to Early Year's Help or something but if you say Short Breaks then a lot of people will know what you're going on about.

**Addison:** Okay, what did they do to help you find out about Direct Payments?

**Amanda:** My daughter was receiving higher rate DLA and there was an advert saying if you receive higher DLA then you'd be entitled to Short Breaks. So, we were like, "What's that?" We contacted them and they came out and said Direct Payments were to do with respite and things like that. They said, "Okay, you qualify. So, you'll need someone to be a PA and there's these Direct Payment things." And I thought, "That sounds a bit easier." All I had to do was fill in a timesheet and send it off.

**Addison:** So, you had been using Penderel's Trust?

**Amanda:** Penderel's to start with yes.

**Addison:** And now you've moved over to Purple?

**Amanda:** Yes, because the Cambridgeshire County Council have said I have to change to Purple, I think the contracts have changed over. What it is, is we used to get the money into a designated bank account. However, now we're doing a holding account which means I don't have to do statements or anything anymore because they have it all there. So, that's why Purple have been nominated from Cambridgeshire County Council to do that part. If we were still getting the money into the original bank account we'd have stayed with Penderel's.

**Addison:** How did you find applying for Direct Payments?

**Amanda:** To start with not that great because we'd got all the info from Short Breaks. I'd been paying cash and it wasn't until we'd had our first yearly review that they said, "No, you're supposed to be using Penderel's!" And I'm like, "No one's contacted me!" So, after that point we then had someone come out and actually explain it to me. So, to start with it wasn't that great and apparently the person who was assigned to us had left but the paperwork had

just been filed somewhere. This was Social Services themselves. So, the person who was dealing with us had left and we were just in limbo but then the other person from Penderel's took us on once we'd had our review and then it was fine.

**Addison:** What were you doing for that first year then?

**Amanda:** Basically, I was just paying cash from the account. Obviously, I had the bank statements, as cash, cash, cash but then when we had our yearly review from Short Breaks they were like, "Well why are you using cash, you're supposed to be using Penderel's?" I was like, "Because no one contacted me and I didn't know what to really do because it was our first year!" So yeah, it wasn't the best experience to start with. That's because we were forgotten about but once everything was in place it absolutely fine.

**Addison:** It's a big process, you want stuff explained to you properly.

**Amanda:** Well Short Breaks thought Penderel's would just contact us and everything would just be sorted. Because I didn't know what to expect, I didn't then go and contact Short Breaks because, I didn't know.

**Addison:** There's a lot to it, hiring PAs, holiday pay, sick pay.

**Amanda:** Yes, which obviously I didn't know. However, once we got it sorted it was all fine.

**Addison:** Okay, that's good. There's also a lot of paperwork involved at the very beginning. How did you find dealing with all that?

**Amanda:** It was fine. When the guy came out he said, "This is what you need to get your PA to do and then you can just take pictures of it and email it to here." So, it was really simple. Purple took over and they've been out and they basically sit with you and go through it with you. So yeah, it was fine.

**Addison:** Okay. Do you feel like you had enough help and support through the process?

**Amanda:** Yeah.

**Addison:** That's good. If you have problems now do you feel like you know where to go for help and support?

**Amanda:** Yeah, now we've done the changeover. There was a bit of a muddle with the changeover from Penderel's to Purple. But, now I know who to contact with at Purple. I don't know who it is off the top of my head because

it's literally only happened in the last couple of week but I've got the email address.

**Addison:** Great. So, what were some of the problems you found with Direct Payments and how did you resolve them?

**Amanda:** Apart from the first initial part when I didn't really have a clue, there hasn't really been one. The only problem with the changeover was I was told by the lady we deal with at Short Breaks we're changing to Purple. Purple then contacted me and left a message on the answer phone. We were on holiday at the time, and then I called back someone said they'd emailed me but I never received an email. I called back a couple of times and either they're in a meeting or, "We'll get them to you call back." No call back.

So, eventually managed to speak to a lady and she said, "Oh no, if you've got Penderel's already set-up you don't have to come with us." I was like, "Oh, I was told I had too." "No, it's fine you don't need to." Okay. Purple or whoever then contacted Short Breaks and I had this manic phone call going, "What are you doing?" I said, "I've just been told because I've got Penderel's set up I don't need to go to Purple and it was Purple that told me that." And they were like "No, because you're now in the holding account. Cambridge County Council have said you need to go to Purple." I said, "That wasn't what the lady told me!"

So, it was a bit of people not being told certain things and the lady I was originally talking to at Purple being confused basically. A guy then called me and said, "Right, we need to set you up." And, then it was all fine. So, just a bit of miscommunication and I was in the middle going, "But I've been told this and I've been told that. I've tried to change to Purple but Purple told me I didn't have to."

**Addison:** This is the first time I've actually heard somebody being told that they have to change from Penderel's to Purple.

**Amanda:** Yeah. I think that's because Cambridge County Council have said because I've now got this holding account it had to be Purple, Penderel's have lost the contract or something like that. So yeah, apart from that little bit in the middle, it otherwise been okay.

**Addison:** You've had regular contact with your social worker during that time?

**Amanda:** It's not actually been social workers. Short Breaks aren't social workers so I haven't actually got a social worker. I've got a support worker. Initially we were Short Breaks because we only had up to a certain amount of money. Then when I needed more because we were doing more hours with the PA plus paying for swimming lessons as well. Short Breaks said that they can't

because we were already at their highest level but if we went to Social Services we could get more money.

So, we did briefly have a social worker for 6 months or so but then Short Breaks were able to increase their amount so we then went back to them. Actually, in that way, it's been a bit simpler because you don't have to have monthly "Child in Need" meetings and things like that. Basically, you have a review every 6 months and it's actually a lot simpler. But yes, we did briefly have a social worker. However, now because Short Breaks have increased their amount we've gone back with them.

**Addison:** Brilliant, how have you found getting PAs and things?

**Amanda:** Fine. To start with we used a friend of mine but as my daughter's needs got more I just put an advert in. My daughter goes to a special needs school so I just asked if I could put an advert in the staff room and they were like, "Yeah that's fine." Then one of the TAs from the school contacted me and we use them. I know they've had all the training because they do it through the school so actually it was very simple.

**Addison:** Fantastic. And, how have you found working with the PAs?

**Amanda:** Fine. One of them was in my daughter's class for a year. She was in a couple with someone else. They knew her and I knew them, so it was absolutely fine.

**Addison:** Always good when you know the people.

**Amanda:** Exactly, because I didn't have to do a whole interview process. They came round to see us, because obviously they only knew her at school, so they came round to see my daughter in her home environment. Then I went up to their house because she goes to them rather than them coming here, so it was all fine.

**Addison:** What about like times when they go on holiday?

**Amanda:** They're on holiday this week actually. Last year it was okay because we were on holiday at the same time. So, we've got a little bit of a gap but there's some groups I can go to so it's not too bad.

**Addison:** What are some of the things that you do with Direct Payments?

**Amanda:** I mean basically it pays for the PAs so I get respite. They do so much at school with her, come a weekend or a holiday she wants my undivided attention to the point where I couldn't even get dinner ready. I was having to wait until 6 o'clock when my husband finished work before we could even start

cooking. If I went into the kitchen for more than 5 minutes she was creating havoc. So, it just gives me a chance to do normal things. We've moved furniture around whilst she's been away with the carers and stuff like that. Then she also does swimming lessons. And, what they do is the swimming lesson people invoice Purple and then they send the money to them. She's done really well with the swimming.

**Addison:** Brilliant. Okay, what have the benefits of Direct Payments been for you and your family?

**Amanda:** It's just the ease of use. I mean, it'll be easier if they could go electronic. Apparently, they are hoping to do that in the future. At the moment they are getting the PA to sign the timesheet, as long as I remember to take it, and then email it. It would be easier if I could do it all electronically to start with. I think in this day and age everything is done electronically. At least I can email it to them, I don't have to actually physically send it in the post, I can just email a photo of so that's absolutely fine. They're partway there.

**Addison:** Okay. So, what advice would you have for other people wanting to use Direct Payments?

**Amanda:** I'd definitely recommend doing it. There might be a couple of little niggly problems at the start but then that's the case with a lot of things. Once it's all settled down it's easy and then you don't have to worry about anything. It's all taken care of and that's good.