

## Personal Budget Holder gains confidence and participates in aerial dancing to open the Paralympics

This case study talks about my use of online assessments and how they supported me to understand my role as an employer, safeguard myself and identify my PA's training needs. Working with The Grey Matter has given me confidence and empowered me to achieve far more than I imagined.

### Highlights

- Enabled me to better understand my role as an employer and how I can safeguard myself
- Enabled me to identify and prioritise basic first aid training for my PA
- Helped my PA to understand my needs because English is her second language
- Empowered me to manage my own business interests
- Finalist for Skills for Care Accolade
- Gained confidence to participate in activities I never imagined I would as a disabled person



### Background – Mel Stevens

In 2003, at the age of 29, I acquired a spinal injury which resulted in me needing a lot of care. I was unable to look after myself or my family. Eventually, this led me to taking a personal budget.

I was given the opportunity to use the online assessments with my Personal Assistant through my local authority.

I was previously very active with a high profile career in modelling, acting and dancing. I now have various volunteer roles, I give motivational presentations and I have recently started to rebuild my modelling and acting career. I am passionate about sharing information with anyone who wants a different perspective on living with disabilities.

**“Empowered and given me the tools to manage my care and my own businesses”**

### Outcomes and impact

One of the key benefits of using [CIS-Assessment.co.uk](http://CIS-Assessment.co.uk) is that **it can be used anytime**. With illness and disabilities, you cannot easily plan for time out. For me it could be 2am and for my PA, it could be 7am. It just totally depends on us as individuals. I have realised that it is not just the care relating to me that matters, it is also the support and guidance my PA receives because if she doesn't understand my needs, feel valued and confident, she cannot provide me with a high quality tailored service.

For my PA, English is a second language. **If she were to try to do e-learning or a training course, she would be so confused** with all the different terms and language being used that she just wouldn't learn much. **Using the online assessments, we have worked together, taking our time understanding each outcome** and how it applies to my situation and what I want for my care. When we identified my PA needed to attend First Aid training, she knew exactly why she had to attend, what she had to learn and we were able to prepare for her to better understand the subject and terminology.

On a personal budget, **I cannot afford to send my PA to lots of training courses**, but by using the assessments **we eliminated training that was not needed**, and so far, my PA has only needed one form of training in First Aid. **This has saved me a fortune and removed my anxiety about my PA's competence because we used the Common Induction Standards as a framework to agree how I wanted my care to be personalised to my needs.**



My PA and I completed the assessments together. We went through each question and discussed the answers. It gave us a framework to identify the standards my PA should be working to and what I could reasonably expect.

## Customer involvement and satisfaction

I was asked by my local council to participate in a service user involvement group to help them improve their services which were mostly aimed at older people. Customer involvement and satisfaction is very important. By involving individuals like me, we can highlight our problems and support service providers to better understand our needs. I was given the opportunity of using [Three60degree.co.uk](http://Three60degree.co.uk) as a satisfaction and ratings tool to check the quality of the care I was receiving.

This is **another fantastic tool. The whole family participated** and it helped us to look at my PA's work, not just from my point of view, but also from my family's point of view. This is important because my PA isn't just there for me, she's there to help me to integrate with society and also, most importantly, with my family.

My PA is there to assist me in the things that I cannot fully do for myself. If my family are not happy with the way this is being done, it can change who we are as a family. Having everybody involved in giving feedback means that everybody is valued and we have a safe way of raising issues so we can all enjoy being together and being confident in what we're doing.



**“having everybody involved in giving feedback means that everybody is valued”**



## The Future

Working with The Grey Matter and these online tools is **definitely the way forward for people with personal budgets**. They give people control over their own lives and a framework to identify what is important to each individual's situation. I would highly recommend this organisation and their online systems which are easy and straightforward to use. Their staff are passionate and dedicated people who have a lot of experience of working in the social care sector.

I now run a company called **AIM**, which stands for **Achieve, Inspire and Manage**. The Grey Matter has given me and my company a great start. I support other service users to take control of their lives, I am involved with Skills for Care as a service user representative and I participate in training delivery. I also volunteer with my local authority and with Healthwatch.

Going through these processes has given me the support and confidence to do things I didn't think I would be able to do. I took my family to France on holiday when we hadn't been away together for 10 years. My family entered a UK wide competition and were voted "Family of the Year". I have finally returned to acting and modelling and was privileged to participate in the opening ceremony of the Paralympics as an aerial dancer. There are still incredibly difficult days and I am in constant pain but I know that every second of every day counts and I am making the most of every opportunity that comes my way.