

MY LIFE DID CHANGE

My name's Irene I am 48yrs of age, am a full time carer for my son Darren whom is 28yrs old and has complex medical needs. I live with my partner Alan; we've been together for 20yrs now. My youngest Son Adrian also lives with us, he's 22yrs old.

Here is my real life story:-

Back in October 2003 I was fortunate enough to take part in the Partners in Policymaking course. The course was facilitated jointly by Wigan & Leigh Scope and NWTDT. The course runs over two days once a month and lasts for 8mths. At the time of me writing this story I am only on the 7th Session, just one more to go before I Graduate !

On starting the course I was very frightened / anxious / angry / excited / honored / wondered what it was all about.

- **FRIGHTENED = How people would react to me**
- **ANXIOUS = Not knowing what to expect**
- **ANGRY = I,d been let down too many times with Authorities**
- **EXCITED = I'd never done anything like this before**
- **HONOURED = I'd been chosen by Professionals**

Briefly the course arms you with lots of information regarding issues surrounding disabilities of all kinds. Each session takes you through the early history of disability, Education, Communication, Equipment, Transition, Independent Living, the list is endless.

On starting the course I was very negative, thought I knew everything regarding disability issues, was very proud to have got through 28yrs of caring ,with the constant battles I'd experienced over the years without the help of other peoples support, apart from my family. I never had any reason's to celebrate; my life and my families lives were mundane. Often the feeling of guilt that I'd wished Darren's life to end before mine. I know this was selfish of me, and know that I am not on my own in feeling this way, we could not see a light at the end of the tunnel. Darren's future was non-existent.

There were times I felt like throwing the towel in but I haven't, especially when I felt that strangers were trying to tell me how to run my life. My initial reaction on this subject was ` WHO DO THESE PEOPLE THINK THEY ARE 'THEY ARE NOBODY 'NOBODY CAN TELL ME WHAT TO DO. !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I was so wrong and by the end of about the third session I was a changed person. I had got friends this was something I'd never had.

I'd met some interesting people/families who'd changed their lives in such an inspiring way and I wanted so much for this to happen to me but, and there's always a but, with me there was one main factor that kept getting in the way :- I WAS FRIGHTENED OF CHANGE.

I have just completed the Final Session and have now GRADUATED this is a fantastic feeling. I have now realized that it's possible for my son Darren to live in his own home with the right amount of support. Although realistically this appears to be such a huge care package, therefore a lot of ground work has to be done in order for this to become reality. I will not give up until this is in place. At the moment a lot of research has been done but still need to network with all professionals to engage to this dream to become real.

It's an emotional Roller Coaster Experience I will never forget....

At the end I decided to do a before and after PHOTOGRAPH to see how I'd changed as everybody kept saying I had (I didn't believe them)

The change was PHENOMINAL my words on seeing this is that's not how I looked 8mths ago.

I WAS SHOCKED

Here are the two PHOTOS for you the public to judge for yourselves

STRESSED
BEFORE 3-10-2003



POSITIVE
AFTER 25-5-2004



On completing the Partners course I had come alive, having been asleep for the past 28yrs. I am now fully awake and something else exciting happened to me. A fire in my belly had been lit, be rest assured that this flame is better than the Olympic flame; this flame is never going out. This gave me that **WOW** factor. I had my identity back. Really liking my new name which is **IRENE** (not just Darren's mum)

Running alongside of the Partners course is another course called Families Leading Planning. This course enabled me to excel more and look towards the future.

This course supported me to learn about how to develop an Essential Lifestyle Plan for my son.

This style of planning has been brought over from America and was developed by Michael Smull.

I can imagine what you are thinking right at this moment, (probably the same as I did) Which is this will never work in England; America is bigger & better than us at doing anything.

YOU ARE WRONG THIS DOES WORK (believe me)

These plans are exactly what they say, A lifestyle plan is a must for everyone, and they are very adaptable and can be used in so many different ways for example

- **For when the Person goes into Hospital**
- **For Service Land**
- **For their Dreams & Aspirations**
- **For Respite**
- **For Supported Living Staff**
- **For all the Famil**
-

On the course you are asked if you could possibly have the best life ever:-

WHAT WOULD THIS BE?

MY ADVICE TO YOU IS THINK LONG AND HARD

(THE FUTURE IS YOURS)

First do your own personal plan. This is amazing when you see it on paper; you don't realize that you are only asking for the simple things in life, which is what everyone takes so much for granted.

Secondly you do your Son's / Daughter's plans this is where it becomes exciting!!!

You sometimes find out that it is your Son's / Daughter's dream to live independent!!!!

Don't let the thought of this put you off, as with the right amount of support they can achieve this.

This method worked for me and also put things into perspective for me and by the time I'd reached the 3rd Session I knew where and what my dreams was. It was at this point that I continued to work towards achieving all my dreams.

Although there's work that still needs to be done, before this becomes reality, you can rest assured that I'm about to set up a meeting with professionals to sign up and make this dream happen.

When the dream for Darren is complete and he is able to live a life he so rightly deserves. Then and only then can I make my dream come true. These are as follows:-

- GET BACK INTO PAID WORK
- LEARN TO DRIVE
- SOCIALISE
- REACH FAMILIES WITH SIMILAR ISSUES / TO SUPPORT THEM / HELP THEM FULFIL THEIR DREAMS.
- BE HAPPY / KNOWING THAT DARREN'S NEEDS ARE MET IN HIS OWN PROPERTY.

I have been asked to learn how to become a Family Mentor, this is an exciting opportunity for me and I can now look forward to the future in helping families.

So! There's one final thing to say is **REMAIN FOCUSED AT ALL TIMES
DON'T FORGET YOUR DREAMS
IT WILL HAPPEN.....**

A MESSAGE FROM THE HEART
GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR DREAMS
LUV
IRENE xxxxxxxxx