



“I did it my way”

Volume two

13 stories of choice, control
and personal success



Solutions, not excuses . . .

It is a pleasure to bring to you our second volume of “I Did it My Way” which shares the inspiring My Choices personal journeys. In Phase 2 of the project, we continued to involve disabled people throughout– from designing their own outcomes, through researching and gathering information, to organising and evaluating their achievements. Participants have co-designed the project and it has been a privilege to work alongside them and see the amazing results.

Philosophy: Social Model and Independent living

The project was built around GDA’s understanding of the social model of disability: this defines disability as the barriers and discrimination disabled people face in their lives, rather than their individual medical conditions or impairments. This means that when we remove the barriers and provide support, disabled people can participate fully in their lives and communities, with the same choices as other citizens. We call this Independent Living. Of course, they need support to do this and for many of the participants, “My Choices” was the first time barriers had been removed. The impact of appropriate support and resources was incredibly powerful and in some cases, life changing.

“I’ve realised that I can achieve so much more than I thought possible because the right support has been available”.

The Support: My Choices enabled participants to access various types of simple support e.g. personal assistance, communication support, accessible transport, spending money, 1-2-1 coaching, basic and also specialist equipment, course fees, specialist services

and, often most importantly, time with a dedicated worker to support them through their journey. For many people this time and support made a fundamental difference including raising their aspirations: this finding was evidenced in the action research report.

Peer Support: The project also evidenced that peer support is an essential element of a disabled person’s support package. Connections with family, friends and with other disabled people – in this case, GDA members – are a key factor in everyone’s life. Yet for many disabled people, their connections are very quickly lost, or not even established in the first place.

“Support from My Choices enabled me to keep up my social activities and connections with my friends.”

Learning to leap: Every participant, regardless of their personal project, told us that accessible learning via GDA was the catalyst for taking their “leap of faith” on the My Choices project. It was through experiencing what is possible – with the right support and learning – that disabled people built confidence, self-esteem and trust. Through this they also discovered more about their own support needs.

"I genuinely feel that every time I attend a GDA course I gain more confidence and feel less isolated. Learning with support to participate, has been invaluable"

Daring to Dream: The effects of low self-esteem and lack of confidence cannot be underestimated and once more, we found that it was difficult for many disabled people to ask for help, or even identify what their ambitions and dreams were.

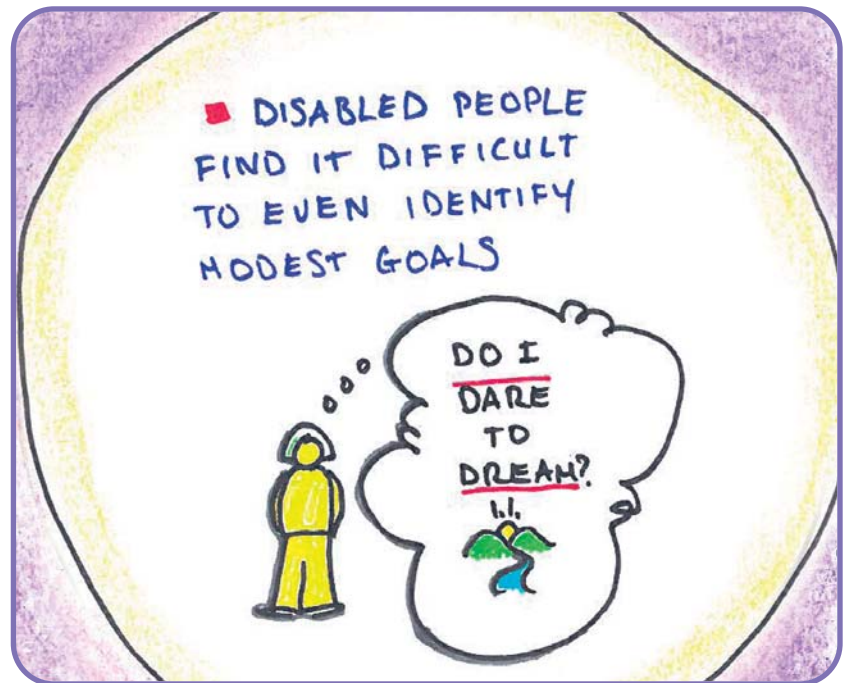
Added to this was a feeling of having to build up enormous trust before articulating their dreams, however modest or even basic.

Support & Coaching: Each participant was supported by GDA staff to put together their own personal action plan, outlining the outcomes they wanted to achieve and the resources necessary to enable them to succeed. This support was sometimes intensive – especially at first – as participants needed lots of reassurance and practical support to “dare to dream”.

Some participants received formal life-coaching; others simply needed ongoing support from the GDA staff member. Both ways helped to focus their journey and keep them on track. This level of dedicated support was a critical element to the success of the project, another key finding highlighted in the action research evaluation report.

"The 1-2-1 support and constant encouragement from GDA staff kept me going, kept me positive and kept me believing that I could achieve my dream".

Creativity & Flexibility: in a number of cases we had to really think outside of the box, take modest risks and support people to do this. People sometimes faced intractable problems that could be worked around when imaginative responses were explored. This involved them trusting GDA but it also meant us being empowered to take risks ourselves as staff. The learnings here were that creative and flexible responses were able to transform lives if staff were empowered to be creative. This did not always mean a huge investment of resources and in fact, there was no obvious or consistent relationship between the amount of money spent or the scale of impact. Again, the Action Research Report supported this finding.



Benefits: It was clear that My Choices had huge benefits. Confidence, self esteem and happiness levels were boosted. Confidence had a knock on effect, enabling and empowering people to try more and believe that they could achieve more. There was evidence that doing one thing opened doors to doing other things! This resulted in improved health and wellbeing.

My Choices proved that a range of simple things being put in place – support and access, together with access to learning and peer support – can result in amazing outcomes for disabled people. The project was preventative AND responsive at the same time and the success was entirely down to the approach taken which was not rocket science.

We set out to demonstrate to disabled people, their families and public agencies, that when disabled people are given choice and control and the support needed to exercise this, amazing things can happen. Ultimately, My Choices delivered this as evidenced throughout this report and the accompanying Action Research Report. As one participant said,

“My Choices offered solutions, not excuses and this is what Self Directed Support was intended to be about. It can, if done properly, enable disabled people to live lives that are ordinary – or extraordinary and I think I’ll go for the latter of these now that I’ve tried it!”



Finally, we discovered that when disabled people receive the support they need, they are better equipped to contribute to their families, communities, to learn, to do voluntary work or even paid work. This is a win for the whole community. Indeed it enriches the society that we live in when disabled people can make these vital contributions based on simple, solution focused approaches.



Jessica Burke

Acknowledgments

Glasgow Disability Alliance would like to offer sincere thanks to the following including:

- the Scottish Government for funding the Project and recognising the need for capacity building so that disabled people can dare to dream
- the excellent PAs, support and agency staff who worked with participants to offer personal support
- Kate Chambers, Life Coach, for inspiring and supporting people to stick with their goals
- Emer O’Leary for encouraging and supporting the Champions to develop their roles, their stories and their voices and for the wonderful project art
- Peter Patterson for following these journeys, capturing them on film and producing a wonderful film and DVD
- Janice Keddie for her talent and skills resulting in the beautiful design and layout of the I Did it My Way reports
- Scott Fleming for turning round printing and production in our usual rapid timescales!
- Sally Witcher who carried out the Action Research which accompanies these journeys and who produced a report which is rich in learning, reflections and considered analysis. Sally ensured both that learning, experiences, views and ideas were captured and that these shaped the evolving project model.
- the dedicated GDA Team members for their roles in identifying, supporting and advising participants and exceeding expectations of their roles and contributions as ever
- in particular, to Marianne Scobie for tireless efforts and attention to detail in collecting and editing powerful personal journeys
- a special thanks to Noreen – our amazing My Choices Organiser, who supported participants in a variety of ways and who went above and beyond at all times helping people to “dream bigger” – even when these seemed like modest goals –putting supports in place and offering unwavering dedication, warmth, encouragement and support.

Above all, GDA wishes to thank all “My Choices” participants for enthusiastically and honestly sharing their experiences, aspirations, knowledge and reflections. This has been crucial in understanding barriers and working together to remove these.

Most importantly we hope to influence models of SDS and services which can enable maximum choice and control. We hope that models emerge which build on this learning and support disabled people to live the life they choose with the support they need to do this.

Marie's story

“They took my ambitions seriously”

I'd been involved with GDA for a while and I had started to rebuild confidence, get out a bit more and make new friends. As a result of ill health I had to explore a career change and having worked for many years in catering I wanted to research new job areas such as administration. However I was very concerned that I had no IT skills and I was not confident using computers at all. **I felt I could trust GDA to help me and they took my ambitions seriously.**

I felt comfortable being honest with the staff and sharing my hopes and fears.

I was delighted to be accepted on to the My Choices project. I was supported to undertake and complete some introductory computing courses, such as the Digi Know course at Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living. I got on really well and was determined to carry on learning new and more complex IT skills. My Choices funding was used to purchase a laptop computer for me, along with the software I needed. This, along with support with transport meant I could continue to attend further training.

This included support to enroll on an ECDL distance learning course through Glasgow Life at The Mitchell Library. This course offers drop-in support sessions which I was able to access due to My Choices funding transport costs. I am progressing well on the ECDL course and my confidence in my IT skills is growing steadily. I have also completed various non IT courses at GDA. **I genuinely feel that every time I attend a GDA course I gain more confidence and feel less isolated. Learning with support to participate, has been invaluable.**

My Choices has opened up a lot of doors and given me the opportunity to pursue my goals for the future.

I would like to explore volunteering opportunities. I had been considering administration or office based opportunities but as a result of the My Choices life coaching sessions I am now exploring areas such as peer support, befriending and mentoring. I am also thinking about training as a life coach as I have found the experience so beneficial and it has made me positively evaluate my own interpersonal skills.



Arthur's story

“I had something to look forward to.”

I'm 82 and I live in a Care Home in Castlemilk. I used to attend a pensioners club twice a week but as my care needs increased I could not manage to go on my own and the care staff in the home could not accompany me.

I was referred to GDA by a member of staff from the Care Home. I attended some learning sessions which I really enjoyed. It was good to get out and keep my brain active. Through this, I heard about My Choices and spoke to

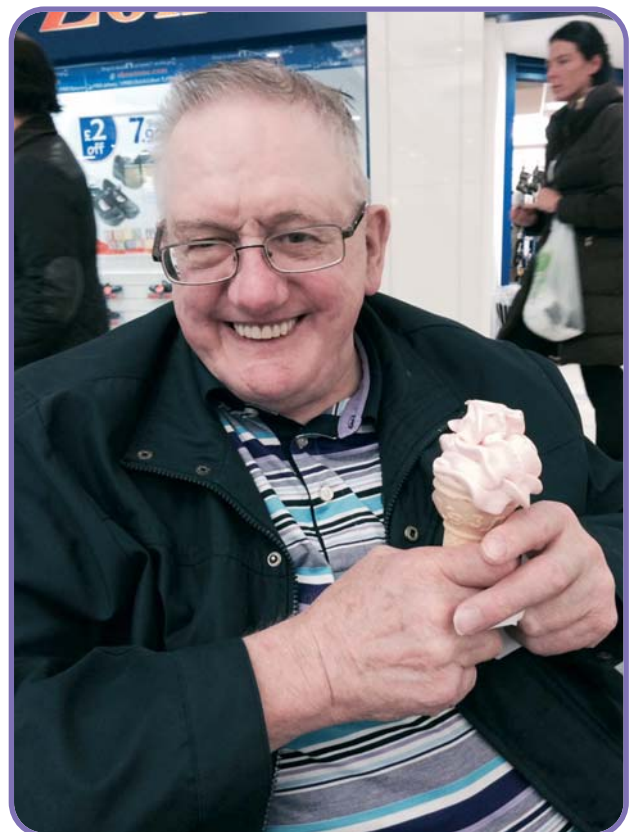
someone about it. I was so pleased to be accepted for the programme. **Support from My Choices enabled me to keep up my social activities and connections with my friends at the pensioners club.**

The project provided funding for a personal assistant (PA) who could attend the pensioners club with me as well as social activities other folk take for granted, like going to the pub to play dominoes and meet friends.

I was able to attend the Active Seniors Club where I met people, had a cup of tea, chatted and watched old time favourite films. This weekly outing was so important to me. Once a month Liz, the PA, took me out for the day. We'd go for a run and to the shops. I really enjoyed the quality time and support that I got from Liz as the staff in the home do not have the time for this level of one to one support.

I'd generally felt so isolated and socially excluded when I was stuck in the home seven days a week all day every day.

However, I felt so very happy and content when I was able to get out with support. **I finally had something to look forward to and it fairly improved my health and wellbeing.** I'm trying to find a way to keep it going and to stay connected to life outside of the home.



Allan's story

“Helped me get my life on track”

I'm 22 and have been disabled all my life. I've been involved with GDA for a few years and have really enjoyed building my skills and confidence through attending the courses, especially those for young disabled people, like CIRCLE and PX2. As well as courses, I've had lots of 1-2-1 support, via coaching and from GDA staff.

GDA peer support has been invaluable to me and really helped me get my life on track.

When My Choices was first mentioned to me, I could not believe that someone was prepared to help me reach my goals.

When I started My Choices, I already had some ideas of what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it. I was really keen to improve my confidence further and learn

“It was totally amazing and I kept thinking I would wake up and it would all have been a dream!”

skills to feel more in control of difficult situations. This included being more in control of my temper and feeling safer when out and about, especially with hate crime against disabled people being on the rise.

I've always been interested in Martial Arts and Boxing, but I've never been able to find a club that would support me as a disabled person. GDA staff helped me to find Glasgow Thai Boxing Academy in Clydebank, and make arrangements to meet with the tutor Mark. As soon as we got talking, I knew it was the right place. My Choices helped by paying for my course fees and transport to get to and from the gym as my energy levels are quite low and I was exhausted after each session.



My Choices support kept me going and meant I could attend without giving up.

Mark creates a very welcoming and safe environment and I enjoy the boxing immensely. When I'm boxing I feel full of energy and "normal" - I don't get treated any differently from the non-disabled athletes. The weekly sessions get me out of the house and I've made new friends and attended big events with them. It's brilliant fun. My boxing helps my health and wellbeing. It helps me get rid of stress and frustration. I love the social element and having something to look forward to.

GDA gave me a great start, but My Choices has opened up my world further and led to me pursuing other opportunities I'd never dreamed of before. I'm now exploring further education so watch this space!



Rose's story

“I could achieve my dream”

I completed a degree course in humanities and social science after 3 years of study. Now in my 4th year I am studying Community Education & Development. As part of this I had to undertake a placement and experienced many barriers to finding something that was accessible and appropriate for me. Finally, through my own efforts, along with information and encouragement from GDA, I secured a placement at a community unit for people with dementia.

The support and constant encouragement from GDA staff kept me going, kept me positive and kept me believing that I could achieve my dream.

I applied for My Choices funding to enable me to complete training to enhance my placement, as I could not get this type of funding and access support elsewhere. I was delighted to be chosen for My Choices. It has been of such great value to me, enabling me to access services and support which complemented my studies. I identified a number of training courses and opportunities including some organised by GDA such as the Introduction to British Sign Language.

My Choices funding meant I was able to complete a Graphic Facilitation training course which I absolutely loved. I feel so much more confident in using my artistic skills and interests now in a training setting. I have enjoyed using all my new skills at the placement where I offered a range of courses to service users. I have also assisted other GDA members and I particularly like speaking to the younger members and sharing ideas.

I love My Choices because I am passionate about disabled people being able to make our own choices in relation to our lives with the support we need to do this. **The project enabled us to learn together and develop critical consciousness about our own experiences, barriers and solutions.**

Without the support from My Choices, I would not have been in a position to achieve such positive outcomes. **The extra support gave me additional skills and experience which will help me compete against non-disabled people in an increasingly hostile jobs market.**



Alan's story

“My Choices was so creative and flexible”



I have been a member of GDA for many years and I am also involved in a range of community activities for example I'm a volunteer DJ. I am blind and for most of my life I have been a Braille user. I have an SDS package which is helpful although limited in the support available.

I applied to join the My Choices project as I wanted support with new assistive technology. I felt my knowledge and skills with IT were far behind the more modern technology. I knew that current developments in assistive technology mean more opportunities for people with visual impairments to use computers in their daily lives. I was keen to increase my confidence so that I could use information technology both to support me in my community activities and DJ-ing but also in the longer term to improve my connection to the world and my job prospects.

The project purchased me an Apple Mac Book Pro computer which was a really creative and flexible way to use the money and something I could not have done with my SDS. I completed a number of individual training sessions with a trainer who, like me, is also Blind.

I took time out of the project as I needed a kidney transplant. Although held back while recovering, the surgery was successful and I was keen to get going again. To take forward my IT skills, GDA picked up the support again and arranged weekly support and training sessions at the Apple store in Glasgow, with transport provided.

I am now regularly using e-mail and I'm much more confident when searching for information and music using the internet.

Through the My Choices project I feel my confidence and self-esteem have increased greatly. I am back working towards my goal to resume DJ-ing. I particularly value the support I received to get to and from training sessions. I am also receiving regular life coaching sessions which are really helping me to develop coping skills, set goals and to put things into perspective.

The flexibility of being able to stop when I needed and start again was really important. My transplant gave me my life back and I feel that taking part in My Choices means I have been supported to do it justice.

Marya's story

“GDA would deliver what they promised”

I have various health issues which make it difficult for me to get out of the house. I joined GDA to get out, learn new skills, build confidence and meet new people. **I was interested and surprised to find the level of support and access available to disabled people. I found this encouraging and inspiring.**

I first applied for My Choices support as I was physically unable to use my computer. I was completely isolated, bored and depressed. My Choices funded voice-activated software and training in how to use this. **I was much happier and felt I could open up to GDA enough to explain the full extent of my housing situation which was undermining my access to support.**

I'd bought a new kitchen two years ago, but due to a complicated variety of reasons, this was delivered and abandoned in my bedroom. This was very dangerous and inconvenient as I had to clamber over boxes to get into bed. The sink was not working properly and the original kitchen was not a functioning room.

I had been awarded a Self Direct Support package via social work, but I was unable to have this put into place due to my difficult housing situation. It was so frustrating for me and I seemed to be constantly battling negativity and facing brick walls at every turn. I felt that I could not move on in any area of my life until my housing situation was resolved. It was like a blocked sink, holding everything back!

When I heard about My Choices, I was cautious but willing to explore this further as I had built trust with GDA staff. We investigated whether My Choices could pay for professional joiners to install my kitchen but I was hesitant as my experiences of dealing with other agencies meant I had always been let down. This pattern made me find it difficult to put my trust into any organisation. I was therefore delighted to find that the project was adaptable enough to consider this.

I was reassured constantly by GDA staff and had to trust that they would deliver what they promised. I knew that it would be stressful, letting strangers into my home and trusting them to do the job properly. In the end I was most impressed with the joiners who installed my kitchen in a very professional and efficient manner. They were very sympathetic to the upheaval and my distress. GDA arranged for a PA to support me, including accompanying me on a stress free day out whilst the kitchen was being installed.

I tried everywhere else and no one would help. GDA were the only organisation to find solutions not excuses.

GDA reduced my isolation and allowed me to voice my opinions and share ideas with other participants. I love the diversity of members and this helps us understand and appreciate other people's disability experiences. We all share common fears and experience the same barriers and it is good to voice your fears and concerns together.

"My quality of life has improved because the right support was provided."



KEY MY CHOICE

■ WITH CHOICES AND THE RIGHT SUPPORT YOUR LIFE CAN BE AMAZING!



■ EVERYONE, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR LEVEL OF IMPAIRMENT IS CAPABLE OF EXERCISING SOME CHOICE AND CONTROL



■ PERSONAL COACHING SESSIONS ARE A KEY ENABLER



■ A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT IN A PERSON'S LIFE



■ IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY ARE KEY



■ DISABLED PEOPLE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO EVEN IDENTIFY MODEST GOALS



■ PARTICIPANTS WORRY THEY WON'T QUALIFY FOR SDS



GDA

Glasgow Disability Alliance

Equality, Rights and Social Justice

KEY LEARNINGS

■ NO CORRELATION
MONEY SPENT AND
IMPACT



■ RELATIONSHIPS,
CONNECTIONS AND
COMMUNICATIONS WITH
ORGANISERS ARE
THE HEART OF
SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT



■ THE WAY
SERVICES ARE
DESIGNED CREATE
BARRIERS TO
CHOICE AND CONTROL



■ TIMING
IS
KEY



■ DISABLED
PEOPLE
HAVING CHOICE
AND CONTROL
HAS A
POSITIVE
EFFECT ON
THE WIDER
COMMUNITY



■ HUGE VALUE IN
PEER
SUPPORT - CONNECTIONS
AND RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OTHERS
IN THE
SAME
BOAT



■ ACCESS TO
LEARNING IS
IMPORTANT
FOR RAISING
ASPIRATIONS
AND ACHIEVING
OUTCOMES



■ CONFIDENCE
GAINED HAS A
KNOCK ON
EFFECT AND
MOTIVATES
PEOPLE TO DO
OTHER THINGS



■ THERE IS
NOTHING
INEVITABLE
ABOUT
BEING OLD OR
DISABLED AND
HAVING A POOR
QUALITY OF LIFE



■ HAVING CHOICE
AND CONTROL
HAS A POSITIVE
EFFECT ON
HEALTH
AND
WELLBEING



■ RELATIONSHIPS
WITH
FAMILY
MEMBERS
ARE
'NORMALISED'



I can
be
the
mother
again

Debbie Lee's story

“I can achieve so much more than I thought”

I live in a really remote and rural area. It's not well served by public transport which I often find impossible to use anyway, so it is very difficult for me to meet or spend time with other young people. It's also very tough to access employment and training options. My health has not been great and I've found it hard to participate in everyday things, so I've become even more isolated and disconnected. I didn't know what was possible and what

support was available particularly to help me train for work.

My Choices funding meant I was able to have taxis to travel into Glasgow to complete training which will help increase my employability skills and keep me connected. Just being able to take part and keep up with my friends has been a life saver – it's so boring being stuck in the house, especially at my age. Meeting other young disabled people has been really empowering and we've all learned from each other and supported each other. These relationships have been as valuable as the

SQA Employability programme I completed with GDA.

Support to learn has really boosted my confidence and improved my skills.

I particularly enjoyed the Activate the course, which is run by Glasgow University. I was also lucky enough to spend a work experience day at BBC Scotland which was brilliant especially as I want to work in the media or creative industries.

My Choices has given me a routine, challenged me and taken me out of my comfort zone. Support to learn, be active and participate with my friends has been vital. The social aspect has been most enjoyable and kept me going when other things in my life have been really tough.

I've realised that I can achieve so much more than I thought possible because support has been available.



Shena's story

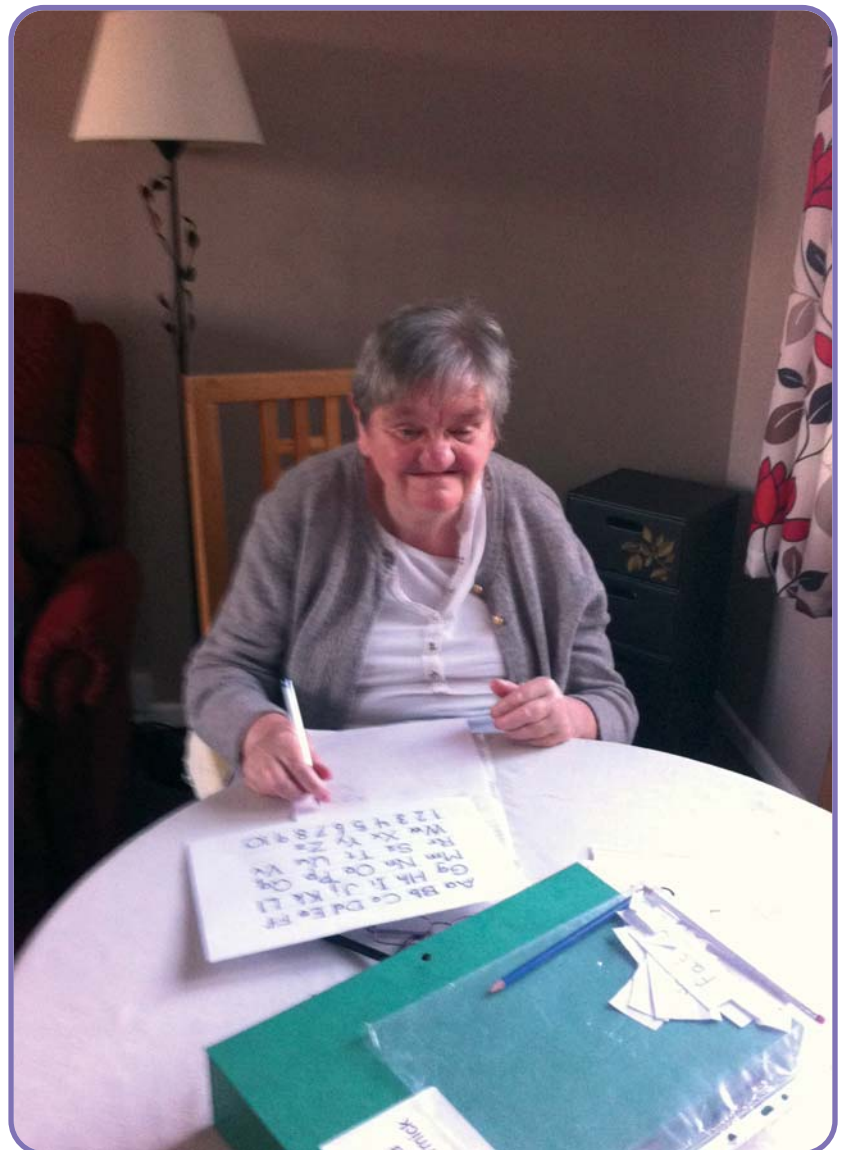
“My Choices allowed me to stay connected”

I live in Lenzie and share a supported accommodation house with my friend Jane. Due to various health issues I have never been able to read or write properly. I was delighted that I was able to get My Choices funding to pay for a tutor from Glasgow Women's Library. The tutor was able to come to my house every week, where we could work in a calm, safe, welcoming place.

We worked on reading, writing, letter formation and I progressed very quickly. The tutor says I have lovely handwriting. I really enjoy reading and writing and I like to practice every day. Since improving my reading and writing I have written a letter to my brother who I don't see very often. This means I can share my news with him more often and it makes me feel very happy to stay in contact.

I've loved getting the weekly visits from the tutor. I am so happy when I am reading and writing and I feel a great sense of achievement. I was always sad that I could not do this before. Now with the correct support I am managing very well.

I'm sad that My Choices will end very soon. However, my care provider is already working with me to try to identify a support worker who can continue to take me to the Women's Library so I can continue my studies.



Nasreen's story

“Daring to dream”

I've been a GDA member through the young disabled people's programmes. I've found the support so helpful and I love getting out and meeting new people. I've benefitted so much. I love how everyone is treated equally. I feel comfortable and can speak freely to other GDA members.

Every time we did a goal setting exercise on a GDA course, my goal was the same: I'd never had a night away from home and I wanted to prove to myself and to my family that this was possible. Although I have my own PA, funded from Self Directed Support, my hours are limited and I get no funding for respite breaks. So when My Choices came along, I didn't have to think twice what my personal project would be! I wanted to stay away overnight on my own, with support.

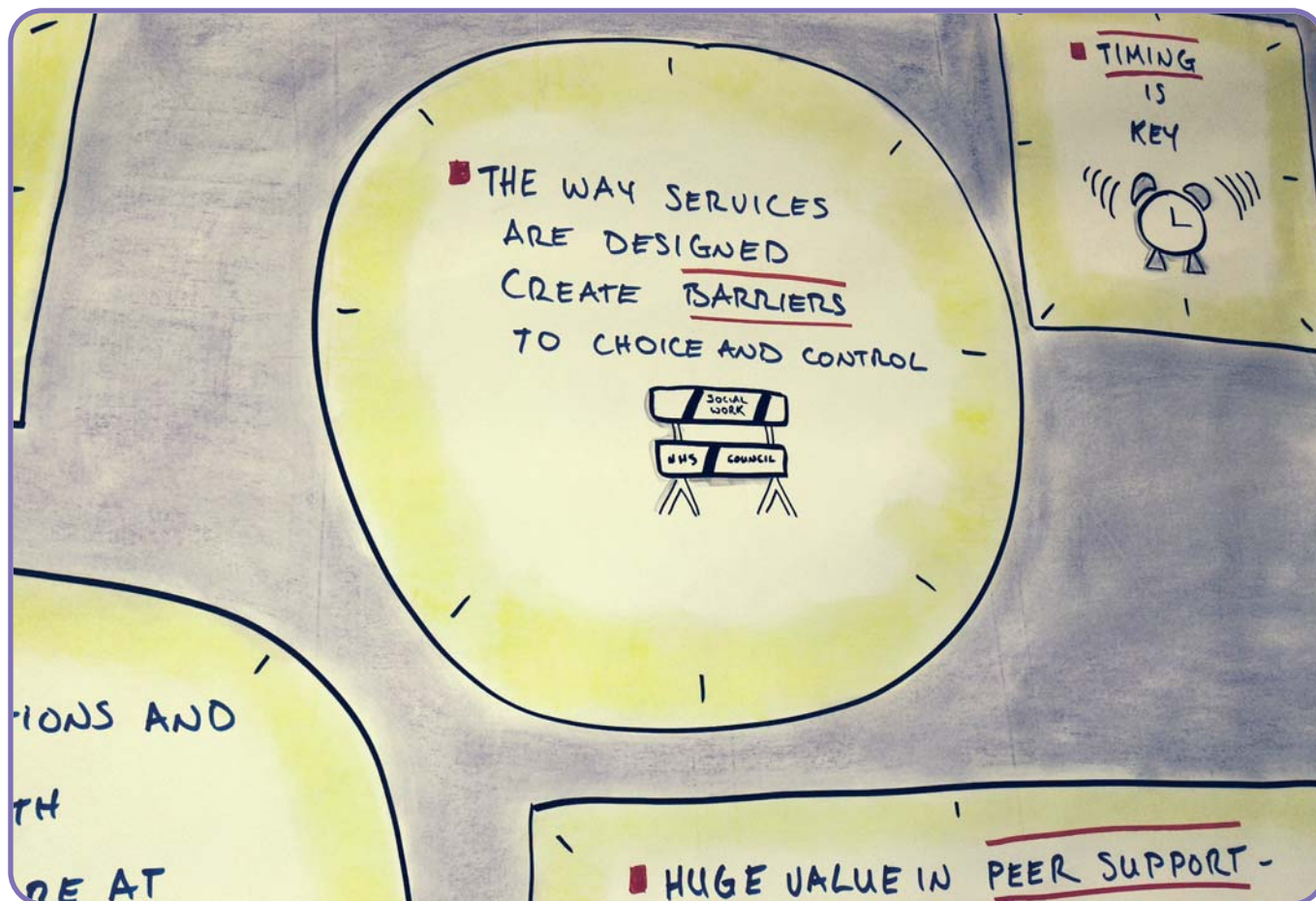
It took time to build my confidence and belief that I could reach my goal. We spent a lot of time getting everything in place, so it would be as perfect as possible. With support, I planned two short breaks away.



I was so excited I could not stop smiling – everyone I met said I looked so well and happy and that was before I'd even been away!

Daring to dream had benefits before the dream came true.

To help me feel safe and reassure my family we planned one night in a local hotel. It was so amazing – just being able to do what I want, when I want was a dream. We even went for a big long walk in the rain as I felt a sense of freedom I'd never had before. Believe it or not, my most favourite thing was being able to spend ages in the shower, with no one complaining or needing to get into the bathroom! An ordinary thing which many people take for granted.



On the 2nd stay over, we stayed 2 nights back in the same hotel. This time we went bowling, to the cinema and out for lunch. I enjoyed the independence and having fun time with my PA.

After these two short breaks, we decided to research a day visit to the British Red Cross Options for Independence Centre in Irvine. I'd heard about this from another GDA member who had been before and told me all about it. This facility provides rooms with suitable beds, washrooms and accessible kitchen area to enable disabled people to try out living in an accessible environment. They also run daily activities and there's support provided too if needed.

I was so impressed and really wanted to go for a longer stay, but could not see how that would be possible. I cried with happiness when GDA told me My Choices could fund one week's stay in March. I'm currently packing my bags to go and can't wait to share the experiences of my big adventure when I get back!

I've experienced what life could be like if I had the support I need for all aspects of my life. I feel my confidence and self-esteem have increased so much. My PA is really proud of what I've achieved and said she's seen me really thrive.

I've enjoyed so much being part of My Choices and attending the training courses especially My Choices Champions.

With choices and support, my life has felt amazing!

Stephen's story

“My whole attitude is more positive”

I'd worked all my life but had to give up when I became disabled. I gradually lost all my confidence and my self-esteem was very low. A friend of mine told me about GDA but I was too nervous to contact them myself. He encouraged me to come along with him to an information stall where I joined GDA.

Within a few weeks, I'd done a taster course and I never looked back! Before joining I was very nervous when out and about and in company or socialising. But the minute I joined GDA everyone was so nice and supportive I was instantly put at ease.

After a few courses, I did “Keeping Well” an 8 week programme and during this time my confidence started to really improve. I felt I could trust GDA and opened up to one of the staff about the barriers I faced due to severe dyslexia.

I was told about My Choices and I applied for a place. Through My Choices I got Cerium Tinted Spectacles after an assessment by a specialist optician.

With these it was as if I could see a whole new world. Everything was clear and bright. I could read better and recognise everything in a different perspective.

“My glasses have changed my whole life, not just helped with my dyslexia. My whole attitude is more positive and I have more confidence to access other courses and attend social events.”



I also got a laptop through My Choices which has opened up many new opportunities. I joined weekly classes at Partick Library to learn computer skills.

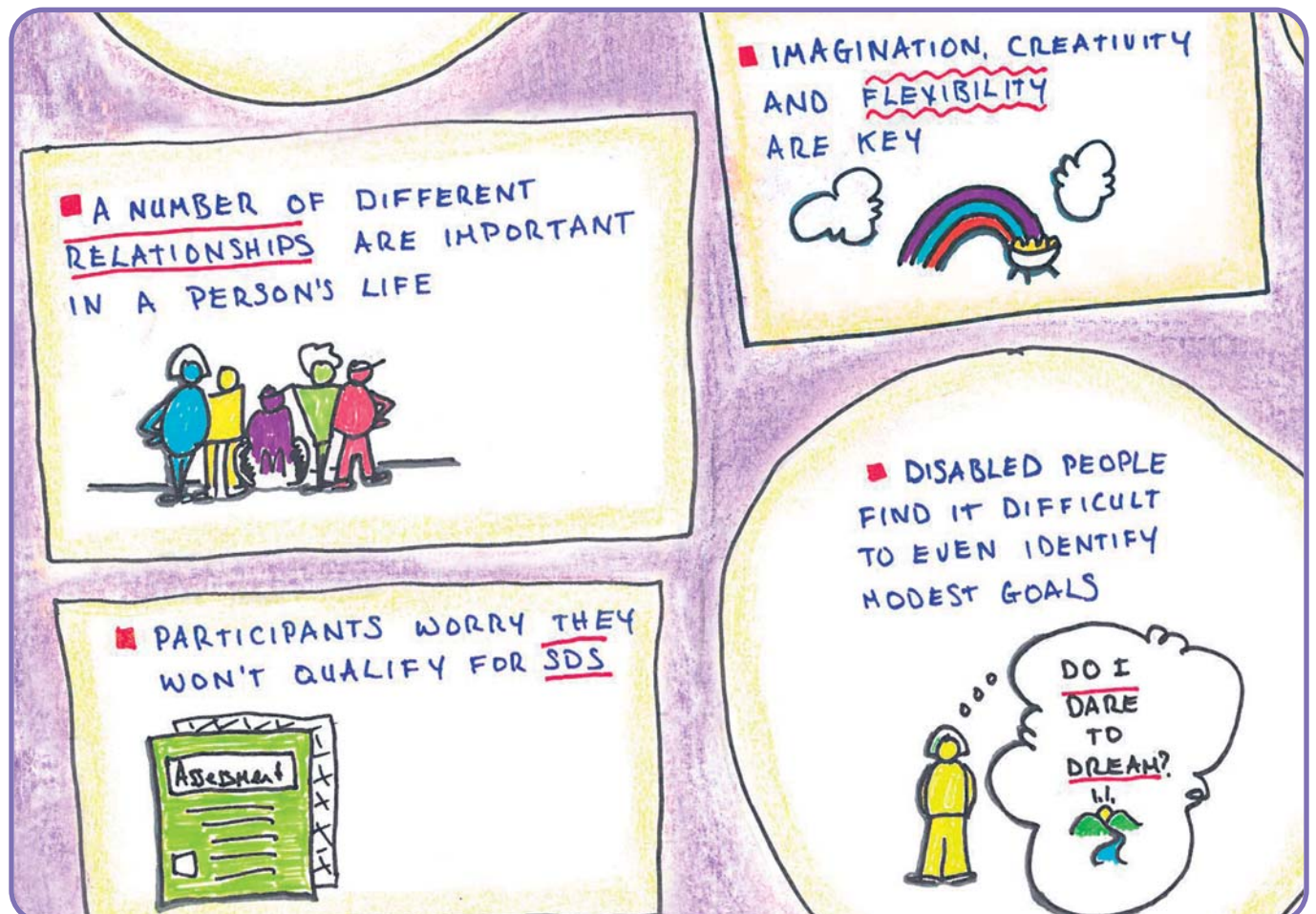
It's amazing to think I initiated this on my own and I look forward to going out to the class. I can now access the internet and listen to music which is a great passion of mine.

I play the Guitar, so with my increased confidence, I went along to a music group in the Gorbals and I now teach guitar as a volunteer. I'd like to pursue this further and eventually teach guitar as a means of paid employment.

I did a course with GDA, run by Glasgow University and was thrilled to attend the course graduation. I'd never in a million years have done that without the support and encouragement I received from My Choices.

The knock on effect is that I've joined other organisations, ventured out socially, become a volunteer and I'm researching walking groups. I wouldn't have done any of this if I hadn't joined GDA.

Through My Choices I gained confidence, raised my self-esteem and had opportunities to socialise. GDA has made me feel like my life has value and that I've got an important contribution to make to the community and wider society.



Tricia's story

“Taking control of my situation”

“My Choices opened up a whole new world for me.”

I have multiple health problems which cause pain and loss of mobility. I was once a really sociable person and I used to run my own business. I had become very isolated and depressed as I couldn't get out and about as much as I used to.

I joined GDA fairly recently after a friend told me how they had been helped. I quickly started to gain confidence and knew I wanted to make changes in my life.

There was one thing that I really knew would make a huge difference to my life and I realised I'd need to be brave to take it forward. I told GDA staff members that I wanted to learn to drive but didn't know if it was possible for me or what assistance I'd need. I was supported to arrange an appointment at the Driving Assessment Centre at Astley Ainslie hospital in Edinburgh.

I was terrified but I knew I had to take a big risk and trust that I'd be supported by GDA. I was very apprehensive about the journey to Edinburgh but I had a My Choices Personal Assistant with me which helped me feel at ease and safe. I was doing what I wanted, with the support I needed!

I had to do practical tests with a driving simulator, then drive round the hospital in an adapted car. I was so shocked when the assessor said he'd never allowed anyone to drive out of the hospital grounds, but he felt very safe and confident so took me for a drive around the streets of Edinburgh!



I had not had an exam in years and despite my nerves, I passed with flying colours. I felt on top of the world after the assessment. I was told what adaptations I needed and was given advice about learning to drive.

Further support from My Choices, in the form of information and encouragement, resulted in me securing another source of funding for the adaptations and my driving lessons.



My family see a huge difference in me and can't believe how much taking control of my situation has impacted on my wellbeing.

I can't wait to get out and about once I pass my test. I am happy and excited knowing that I will be able to go where I want, when I want to go!

I am totally amazed by how quickly this all happened and how little it actually cost, how much confidence I've gained and how far I've moved forward in life – no pun intended!

Jordan's story

“Dedicated,
flexible and
creative”

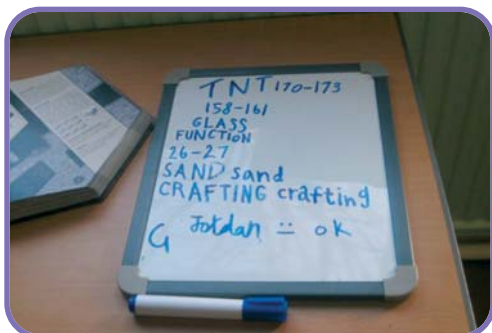
Jordan was referred to My Choices by the Depute Head Teacher of his school who knew GDA via links with one of the staff team. The school was concerned that although Jordan was very intelligent and capable of learning, he communicated all his learning verbally and artistically. The school was concerned that he would miss out on post school opportunities due to this and had tried to seek adult literacy support for him from a variety of sources. However, as he was still at school, this proved impossible. GDA was approached as there was an urgent need to introduce activities that could provide a different type of learning experience to improve his literacy skills (something that Jordan was keen to do) which could continue once he left school, even if he chose to not engage in the more structured college environment. The Depute Head told us “*We didn't want him left with no learning opportunities if college didn't work out for him.*”

GDA worked with the school and Jordan to work out what he wanted to achieve and found a literacy tutor who could help him. The tutor explains further:

“I took time to get to know Jordan and what he liked. I saw that he is an outstanding artist and very keen to show off his skills. He is also a fabulous listener. I was able to link in his main interests with his key skills to develop a programme of fun learning for him. By being very creative, for example using a small wipe-off whiteboard and his favourite games book, we discovered together that he can read and understand a lot

more than he realised. I helped him find out how to explore information in books by using the index page. He quickly worked out how to do this very effectively and enjoyed piecing together lots of information.

*We've been working together for some time now and Jordan's reading, writing and concentration are really progressing. He remains keen to learn and thrives with the one to one dedicated time. Jordan has also taken some of the materials and whiteboard home so he can practice. **The school have told me that they see a positive difference in Jordan and are exploring with social work how to fund this support longer term as part of his transition planning for when he moves onto college.**”*



Jamie's story

“Broadened
my
horizons”

I have a hearing impairment and I rely on support to communicate, especially when out and about and while learning. Communication support is rarely available which means Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are often excluded from everyday life. It is so unusual to find an organisation like GDA who make a commitment to include people by providing this type of access.

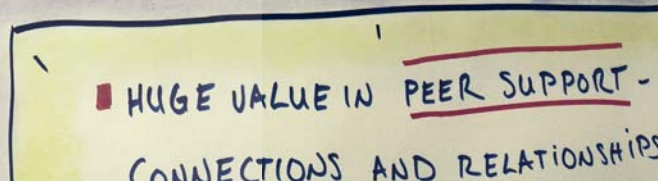
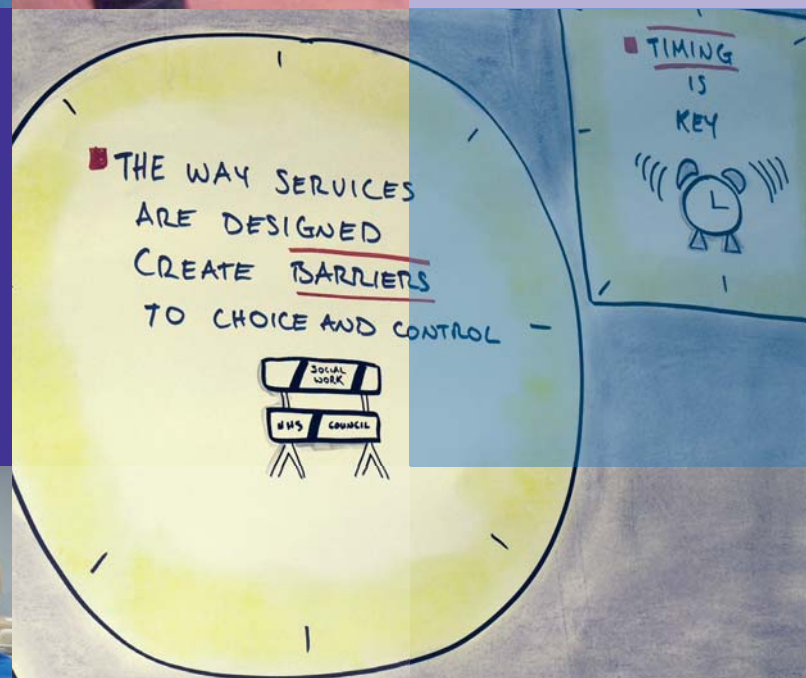
I have enjoyed learning with GDA and have really built up my skills and confidence, as well as getting the chance to meet so many new people.

I was so keen to take my learning further and My Choices has meant this could happen. I completed a personal development programme called Steps to Excellence and was provided with transport and communication support so I could take part alongside everyone else.

I was also supported to attend a large conference aimed at bringing together all the most recent good practice for supporting Deaf people. There were keynote speakers from Scottish Government and Third Sector and interesting workshops to attend. It was a long and exhausting day, but I loved it.

My Choices has been most beneficial to me and has broadened my horizons and knowledge.









Glasgow Disability Alliance

Equality, Rights and Social Justice

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