About this story

This case study highlights how a person-centred approach can work well for long-term clients. In the story, a service has been able to work with a long-term client, involving both the family and the client to address goals, increase social connectedness and support the care relationship. An individualised, timely service approach has been adopted to improve the client’s capacity and independence.

Meet Seren

Seren has pretty simple dreams. She longs to get out and about – to visit the Melbourne aquarium, go to the movies with friends and see the State Library for herself. She wants to ride public transport and navigate her way around her home town independently. Most of all she wants to feel a part of the community where she lives.

But for the past seven years since Seren has been accessing respite services, staff have felt restricted by the wishes of Seren’s family who, because of a range of safety concerns and religious values, have not felt willing to allow their daughter to venture out. Staff have been aware of Seren’s wishes and have approached her parents to discuss it, but, because of their daughter’s mild cerebral palsy, the family has remained reluctant.

Engaging with the family

During a routine review of Seren’s support needs, the service’s respite coordinator again raised the issue with Seren’s parents. Drawing on the importance of optimising person-centred care, the respite coordinator cautiously negotiated the topic, careful to respect Seren’s parents’ cultural values.

The parents finally agreed and it was decided that Seren’s respite package would now include a once a month outing, and that Seren would be actively involved in planning the trips. A community care worker said she would be happy to accompany Seren on her excursions because it meant helping her to achieve her goals.

Newfound abilities

Since the review Seren has gone on five outings. She has helped plan them all and is working with her community care worker to plan more.

Seren has really enjoyed the trips; the process of planning them has enlivened her. Staff report that Seren is learning about the public transport system, and is now busy exploring other options and activities she would like to try. Her parents have noted changes with her self-confidence and her newfound ability to plan and make choices.

‘It’s really exciting to see her have the opportunity to develop her independence and communication skills’, said one staff member.

Seren has told staff that she likes talking to the care worker about things that are bothering her – things she feels she can’t discuss with her parents. She also said she has a lot of fun on her outings and is very pleased that her parents have continued to allow her to go.
‘I have been to the State Library, a writers’ festival, out to the movies and to a party with friends with support from my community care worker’, Seren reported.

Reflection

Assessment and care planning:

- What systems do you have in place to prompt a review of respite packages?
- How would you start the conversations in the case study – both with Seren and her parents?
- What issues would the team have considered when setting up this care plan? (OHS, cost, matching staff to client, possible family conflict).
- How would you know which community care worker has the skills and confidence to teach a person how to access public transport?

Strategies:

- What strategies do you use to build confidence with clients?
- What makes this plan achievable and what are the benefits to the person?
- Is there a possibility to build Seren’s independence further? How might you do this? What natural networks might be available?