

Reflections on Practice – Self-Directed Support Across Scotland

Flexible use of Direct Payments across Scotland

The Social Work Scotland Self-Directed Support Practice Network provides thinking space and peer learning opportunities for those people leading on the development of SDS from around Scotland. Being actively involved in the Practice Network has led to SDS leads thinking differently and more creatively about meeting personal outcomes through flexible use of Self-directed Support options, particularly Direct Payments (Option 1).



Our work links with

**SDS Standard 3: Strength-
and asset-based
assessment, planning
and review**

**SDS Standard 8: Worker
autonomy**

**SDS Standard 12: Access
to budgets and flexibility
of spend**



Our learning approach

Self-directed Support is going through much change in 2024, with a renewed national interest in the policy but we are facing many challenges too. The Social Work Scotland Self-directed Support Practice Network is a central point where SDS leads from around Scotland can come together to share good practice, keep up-to-date on national developments and think through solutions to local issues together.

The Self-directed Support Practice Network is a long-standing group that sits under the Adults Standing Committee of Social Work Scotland, the national membership organisation for leaders in social work. The Practice Network meets quarterly, usually online, but sometimes in person, and maintains regular email communication managed by the chairperson and admin support, where members can pose questions for feedback and suggestions from others.

The Practice Network has influenced national developments with members getting involved in the National SDS Collaboration, the development of new statutory guidance and the SDS Improvement Plan. The Practice Network is the source of important insight for the Social Work Scotland Self-directed Support project in developing the Framework of Standards and the Practitioner Toolkit, with members of the network coming together with others in the project's Community of Practice.

Our story of change

The process to getting a Direct Payment under option 1 can be really difficult to navigate and social work practitioners don't always have the confidence to support people who want this option. It can be especially difficult to empower

long-standing social work practitioners to become more creative with support arrangements.

SDS leads say that the Practice Network is invaluable to sharing ideas and building a bank of good practice. This collaboration has led to greater creativity in how option 1 is offered. One of the SDS leads, who works in Dundee, has been an active participant in the Practice Network for about four years. She finds the network vital in helping her to improve practice in her local area. In Dundee, she and her colleagues have adapted good practice from elsewhere for use locally, and have brought back rich discussions from the network to team development meetings in Dundee.

More and more, practitioners are exploring the boundaries of creativity and are checking in with their local SDS lead on the art of the possible. The principle is that if it is legal and meets the supported person's outcomes, then it should be allowed. But personal outcomes can be difficult to define and navigate. The Practice Network makes it possible to see what can be done. In turn, SDS leads support local managers and leaders to open doors to moving away from siloed thinking and make change happen.

In turn, national projects (supported by the Scottish Government SDS Improvement Team and the Fair Work directorate's PA programme) support SDS leads by providing guidance and resources that are consistent across Scotland. These resources include a handbook for PA employers, the Self-directed Support framework of standards, the Self-directed Support Practitioner Toolkit, and the development of a learning-based approach to self-evaluation and improvement for local leaders.

Barriers and tensions

Self-directed Support Standard 12: Access to budgets and flexibility of spend is one of the more complex standards to implement. Social work practitioners and team managers can find it challenging as it doesn't fit with the way they have always done things.

Implementation of any of the options is exacerbated by the significant budget and staffing challenges faced by local authorities. When eligibility thresholds are at critical level, there is little space for creative thinking.

The crisis in social care also means that there are not enough social care staff to meet demand of service. If there is a lack of provision locally, the local authority might offer a Direct Payment as an alternative to option 2 or 3. But some supported people don't want to be an employer, reluctantly agreeing to option 1 only because there are limited other options to securing support in their local area.

There is demand pressure too on those organisations who provide support to Personal Assistant employers. It can be difficult for some people, such as supported people who lack capacity, to get the support they need to operate a Direct Payment.

Different authorities do things differently, and this can be an issue when supported people move from one area to another. There can be differences in the rates that Personal Assistants are paid, differences in how personal budgets are allocated across options, and differences in what is covered under a Direct payment agreement, like redundancy payments and sickness cover.

Enablers

During the pandemic the rules were made simpler, and this had the effect of breaking down some of the barriers to people being able to get support. Examples of this included greater use of technology by supported people and local authorities, lighter touch audit for smaller levels of budget spend and increased flexibility in what people could spend their Direct Payment on in order to meet their outcomes. This happened because many supports became unavailable due to Covid-19 restrictions, however, we are now seeing local authorities drawing back from this degree of flexibility as budgets tighten and as the care crisis continues.

To change the way they work and to sustain good practice in SDS, it helps to establish local readiness for improvement. This might include time and resources set aside for self-evaluation, developing a local improvement plan that aligns with the Self-directed Support Standards, identifying local teams of SDS supporters and having senior leaders on board and leading from the front.



What we have achieved

Under option 1, social work practitioners across Scotland help supported people to carefully think through how they will use their budgets to directly contribute to achieving their personal outcomes agreed through the assessment process, and to ensure that their outcomes are met within the allocated SDS budget,

Here are a few of the many examples of where allocated budgets have been used as Direct Payments across Scotland.

Thinking outside the box leads to good outcomes for carers in Dumfries and Galloway:

- A traditional type of carer support (a sitter service to allow his wife some time out) wasn't working for one older man with dementia. He had always been an active man, so he started attending sports sessions. His wife now drops him off at his sport session and then has a couple of hours to herself.
- A carer who lives very rurally had real trouble getting support for her husband – no agency would cover where they live. This meant that she needed to provide care round the clock, and had no time out. On top of this she was struggling to manage housework and cooking. It was agreed that she could use her Self-directed Support budget to pay for two hours a week for a cleaner. This relieves a lot of pressure and means that she doesn't have to worry about housework.
- One family was struggling to employ a Personal Assistant for their son with learning disabilities. Due to his needs, he doesn't cope well with new people in his life and can react in a challenging way. Previously,

this had led to PAs leaving. So the family employed a family member who knew their son well. The son is very comfortable with the family member as his PA as he had grown up with them around. This is good as mum can now enjoy her respite knowing her son is happy in a safe environment, whereas before she had been constantly worried or had to cut short her break.

East Renfrewshire uses Option 1 to support young people and their families through transitions:

- Option 1 is used for shared support between three young people to travel to and from college where there is no viable public transport and efforts to achieve independent travel have not been successful. This is better all round than having a one-to-one arrangement for each of them.
- Shared supports were put in place for another three young people attending college and accessing community supports. This is the least restrictive approach as it puts the young people's natural relationships first, allows them to use support that is already in their community and also makes best use of their personal budgets.
- An option 1 budget is paid to an extended family member to provide respite for a single parent of a young person with additional support needs living in a remote location where it is not possible to source care through a personal assistant or an agency. As well as meeting the needs of the young person, this arrangement supports the rights of the carer in line with the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016.

A social worker in South Ayrshire has shared her experience of working with G to use option 1. G is very happy for us to share his experience, and has given explicit consent for his story to be told:

- G has significant physical, personal and communication needs due to Cerebral Palsy. G is a very successful athlete and is known throughout the world for his sporting achievements. He is a World and European Frame Running Champion, winning Gold in the men's 100m at the 2019 World Championships in Dubai. He lives with his parents in South Ayrshire. His social worker supported G and his parents to achieve his outcomes by implementing SDS option 1 in 2022. The budget enabled G to be employed while still studying at university, provided his parents with respite, supported him to attend training and competitions and also enabled him to gain employment with the CIPRSA (Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association). Through his employment, G travels internationally with his PA. Until the age of 21, G had never been anywhere on his own, without one of his parents.

In Dundee, people's paid-for support is being built around their natural support networks:

- One supported person visits his son and his son's family and gets support while he is there, rather than getting traditional paid-for support at home. This means that he can remain connected with his son and grandchildren while meeting his support needs in a much more flexible and natural way.

Purchasing equipment through Option 1 can make all the difference to quality of life:

- In West Lothian, a woman with a disability used a Direct Payment to purchase a bidet and a body drier, meaning that she doesn't need a traditional support package. Mrs X and her family took this decision after they had the right information to consider the different options available under the SDS framework. The bidet and body drier were less intrusive ways of supporting Mrs X to meet her personal hygiene needs. The service has been reviewed and Mrs X remains happy with the choice she made. Moreover, she remains independent without the risk of an increased dependence on a traditional package of care.
- Here are some of the things purchased under Option 1 to meet assessed personal outcomes in East Dunbartonshire: outdoor play equipment, puppy training classes, dog grooming training course, a garden pond project, electric bed replacement mattress, flights abroad, a treadmill, photography equipment, tennis club membership/tennis coaching classes and equipment, holistic therapies, football coaching, and festival tickets.

- In Dundee during the pandemic, a Direct Payment was used to purchase a hot tub for a supported person because the NHS hydrotherapy pool was closed. Water therapy is an important way for this supported person to manage their emotions and wellbeing, leading to them being more stable and relaxed and their family carers less stressed.
- In a test of change supported by senior leaders, a Direct Payment is being used in Dundee to install a level access shower in an upstairs flat, something that the housing budget couldn't be used for. This means that the supported person can stay in their own home while having support in place that is adapted to their own needs rather than being subject to blanket rules and restrictions. Workers have delegated authority from their personalisation board to progress with this venture and they are learning about how to manage liability and risk if something goes wrong. All the learning from the test of change will be included in the local authority's SDS toolkit, and will be shared with the Practice Network.



If you would like more information about creative approaches to using Direct Payments across Scotland, contact the Social Work Scotland Self-directed Support team at sds.team@socialworkscotland.org