**Empower and Advocacy**

My name is Alyre and I am 66 years old.  I am a paraplegic (with no balance) due to an accident in October 2004.  After several months of rehab, I came home with the support of my wife and Personal Support Workers. The staff were good to me, but there was no consistency in the scheduling.

We moved to Bracebridge in 2013 to be close to our daughter.  Which meant we had to change services. Before making the move, I was guaranteed my service would not change. I had workers come at 7 am till 9 am for morning care and again at 8 pm for evening care. Some said they would provide PSW’s for personal care, but they would not do my bowel routine which is done Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. The nurses were sent out those days to do this at 7 am. The PSW’s were to have me up and ready by 7:15 for the nurses. The service provider wanted to send the PSW’s out at 9. But the nurses schedule was set for 7.  It took some time but soon my PSW’s were coming for 7 am but my evening care was all over the place.  They were coming anywhere between 6 to 10 pm.  Again, no consistency with workers or scheduled times.  Plus, I was only getting care from Monday to Friday no weekends.  This left my wife to do every weekend.  Red Cross had 2 training sessions to have enough personnel to cover my shifts, but the dispatchers still sent untrained PSW’s.  One time my wife had to come running to help because the PSW did not know how to use my lift.  If she had not been there, I would have been hurt.

After several months, my service provider merged with another company and the nursing care changed.  My PSW’s could only do personal care, dress, bath, get me up and put me to bed.  The nurses said they would not do my bowel routine anymore.  I was lucky the two PSW’s said they would take it on, and my wife trained them.  But if they were not scheduled to work, that meant my wife had to do it. I now had a sore and the nurses were coming 3 times a week to look after it.

I was first informed about the Direct Funding program but did not consider it until one of the nurses asked if we had heard about it.  I started the paperwork early in the summer of 2014.  I was approved just after Christmas in 2014, but it did take some time to set up.  I hired my own staff. I have four-part time workers, plus a bookkeeper.  Three workers are PSW’s who look after all my personal care including bowel routine, some light house keeping and laundry.  That was not allowed with my prior service provider. My other staff helps by driving me to doctor appointments and some maintenance on my equipment.

I have care seven days a week.  Morning care starts at 7 am, and evening care I set at 7 pm winter and later during the summer.  If I have to be in Toronto for a doctor’s appointment, my main worker will start at 6 am.  If I am going to be later in the evening, my workers will accommodate me.  In return, I work with them if they need to come in a little earlier or later. Its great having four very able workers that I trust to be here on time, working for me.  I can not say enough about the Direct Funding Program.

Recently my wife went away on a weeks' trip.  With this program, it gave her the freedom to do this.  If I needed extra care while she was away this program allowed it. I would not have had that flexibility otherwise. My only regret is that I did not know about Direct Funding before hand. It is a great program and I hope more people, like me, will consider it.

​*(Alyre Martin, August 2017)*