

## **THE SUPERMARKET**

**By Reesha Armstead**

As a disabled person, there may be times when you need help or support from places like social services or health services. This could be for a variety of things such as support in living independently in the form of personal assistance, a direct payment to enable you to pay for your own personal assistance or equipment to help you to get around or do things more easily. If you are a disabled parent, you might be asking for support so that you can look after your children.

In order to get the things you need, you will probably need to see someone like a social worker or an occupational therapist who will ask you lots of questions about the support you are requesting. In any such situation, it is very helpful if you have thought things over beforehand and have some idea of what you will be asking for.

It's a bit like going shopping to a supermarket! A supermarket stocks thousands of items for people to buy. There are many different varieties of the same product for you to choose from and they differ in price so that you can buy things according to your budget. There are different departments and the people who work there all know about what they are selling.

It is unlikely, however, that you would go into a supermarket and just expect a shop assistant to instantly know what you want to buy, what you're going to eat for the next week or how much money you have to spend! Instead, it is far more helpful if you arrive, having already thought about all those things. Only you know what you like and what you need and you may even go there with a shopping list.

This is the same when you're being assessed for support from social services. You are likely to benefit more if you are clear about what you're asking for. So, for example, if you need help with personal care to get up in the morning, think about all the things you need help with. Is it to get up out of bed, go to the toilet, have a wash, bath or shower, brush your teeth, have a shave, get dressed, do your hair, have your breakfast, etc? Is it every aspect or only some aspects of all these things? For example, can you put some of your clothes on but not do the fastenings? Can you wash yourself in the bath or shower if someone helps you in and out?

There are many different ways of receiving such help too. Social services may offer you a home help or someone from a care agency to come in every day but they may not guarantee what time they will arrive and you are likely to get different people each day. You may prefer to have a direct payment which means that you can receive an amount of money to enable you to pay for the type of support which suits you best. Many disabled people use direct payments to employ their own personal assistants which can mean more control over your own life.

You may not get all the things you ask for and you may not get as much help as you would like from social services. These things can also take time too so you may need to be patient. Your local social services department may not offer direct payments in the same way that the supermarket may not stock the exact product you are looking for and you may sometimes have to settle for something slightly different. As the saying goes, 'if you don't ask, you don't get'. With social services, this is certainly true!

In saying that, it is always good to know what you definitely don't want. If you went to the supermarket to buy a tin of garden peas but they only had mushy peas (and you can't stand mushy peas!), surely you wouldn't waste your money on buying them? If you've asked social services for some support in caring for your baby but want complete control over the care your baby receives, would it be acceptable if their solution was to take the baby to a family centre for ten hours a day to be cared for away from you? If you need assistance in getting your children to school, is it appropriate for them to go with someone else or use a school bus or would you prefer to be enabled to go with them so that you can be as much a part of school life as any other parent?

Be clear about what you won't accept and stick to your guns! You can always ask questions about why you're not getting what you've asked for just like you can complain to social services or a supermarket if you are not happy with the service that either of them is offering. The difference is that if you do not get the service you deserve from the supermarket, you can always go to another. This is not the case with social services – there is no where else to go.

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