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## **Thin socks and sandals – is this what dreams are made of?**

Jo Clare on a computer project which helps people realise their true choices

**Editor:** I understand that, after a two year development partnership with Paradigm, Aspirico and three other providers, Three Cs was the first organisation to launch iPlanit in July 2011. Why did Three Cs invest so much time and money in the development of iPlanit?

**Jo:** Back in the early 1990s, we were one of the national pilot projects for Person-Centred Planning (PCP). By 2008, PCP was no longer innovative and had become old hat. It was time to dust off and modernise PCP and make sure it delivered verifiable results for the people at the centre of it. At Three Cs we were already saying that PCP stands for Plans Carry Promises and that it was our job to deliver. We hadn't quite settled on how.

When Sally Warren from Paradigm approached me about participating in the development of iPlanit in December 2008, I jumped at the chance. It offered both an exciting prospect of a computer-based tool to assist the process and a change management opportunity for putting the action into planning and keeping it there.

**Editor:** So how does it work exactly?

**Jo:** Everyone we support has a user-friendly account where outcomes and actions are logged. People we support can be involved as much as they want to and in the way that they want to. It can be short and sweet and very functional: this is what I want and the actions to get there. It can be very full and personalised with photos, films, music which is particularly good for people with learning disabilities who don't read or use words. Quite often the latest photos or video are the starting point in a planning circle – a much better starting point than minutes.

## **Outcomes**

At the end of the person-centred meeting – no matter where it takes place or how it takes place, staff make sure that the most important outcomes to the person are uploaded to their account. Actions to achieve all those important outcomes are also uploaded, allocated and dated. From thereon, the computer really comes into its own. So long as it is kept up-to-date, all actions and outcomes can be monitored and reported by anyone, anywhere and anytime so long as they have the person's permission. As a manager, your chance of keeping on top of the things that are most important to the people you support increases enormously and you can home in on the overdue actions and the incomplete outcomes.

**Editor:** Has it worked as advertised and was it worth it?

**Jo:** Yes, even with all the challenges that go with computer-based projects, and at just 75 per cent of the potential benefit at the first year milestone, it has been worth every minute and every penny. The quality of people's recorded dreams is changing, as is the pace of achieving them. There is a notable increase in people wanting and achieving more of the difficult-to-have stuff like qualifications, jobs and relationships. Whilst that is clearly not all iPlanit's doing, those ambitions which would not have stayed in view on our paper systems now stick out like a sore thumb if no action has been taken. Things are less likely to get stuck. It is much easier to find out when things are stuck, why they are stuck and what we can do about it.

Because it is computer and web-based, it is helping us vanquish some old enemies of action. You can access it from anywhere and at any time; the data does not get filed away or shoved in a drawer; it uses icons, buttons and graphics and is visual, accessible, quicker. Like social media, its demands for text are short and to the point so it's a time saver for writer and reader.

We have started to make improvements in planning, monitoring and evaluation that we could not have made through the long, arduous and bureaucratic route of conventional paper recording and reporting – we know, we tried it!

**Editor:** You said that you are achieving 75 per cent of the potential benefit of iPlanit. What's left to achieve?

**Jo:** All outcomes can be linked to key performance indicators and standards. We are making good use of those performance reports for contract monitoring and internal performance reports but not yet achieving the full potential of our new reporting system. There is an e-mail alert which can be switched on and sent when actions or outcomes are overdue – not everyone is using that yet.

### **Involvement**

Some people we support have more technical involvement in their iPlanit accounts and some family members and independent advocates, with permission of the person, are linked in to iPlanit and can keep us to task. We aim to extend this involvement to as many people who want it. As we sweep into the corners of staff competence, even fuller benefit will come from achieving 100 per cent consistency in quality of iPlanit accounts.

**Editor:** What is the biggest difference iPlanit is making?

**Jo:** There is a seismic shift in staff's understanding of the difference between routine activities and dreams and much better grasp of the world of difference that exists between 'important to' and 'important for'.

Three years ago, before iPlanit, the ambition to 'buy thin socks and sandals' might have slipped under the radar and been registered as a person-centred outcome when the person's real dream was to go nightclubbing in Ibetha.

I am now confident that our staff understand the difference between the person's dream and their need to care – and if they don't, with iPlanit as our new radar, the days of staff-centred outcomes and lost dreams are truly numbered.