

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE – ALI KASHMIRI

I've been using Personal Assistance for 29 years. By day, I'm an Access Officer and an accredited auditor and when not working, I do all sorts using personal assistance. So when ILA invited me to speak today on personal assistance, I wondered how I could do that: And that's because everyone uses Personal Assistance differently.

There is no model, or blueprint, and that's because Personal Assistance is about one leading a self-defined life, so it is as individual as people are. It evolves with us as we grow and develop as people.



So where did it begin for me?

Right here with Auntie. I lived with her from age 11 after my parents separated. She taught me to harness my individuality without her knowing anything about personal

assistance. It was just innate. Me doing what I wanted with her assistance. Simple.



If I wanted egg and chips at 3 AM, that's what I had, even if she didn't agree. That was liberating! But of course Auntie had to move on, so at age 18, it was time to fly solo.

Personal Assistance was in its infancy in 1990. Funding was scarce, so to avoid an existence in institutional care, I set out to do electronic engineering and live using Community Service Volunteers.



It was here that I began discovering the physical and attitudinal barriers in society that ultimately prevented me from achieving a qualification.

And so I embarked on a social crusade to put the world to rights, and soon after a job at the local Disabled People's Organisation. I bought my first van and employed a part-time driver from my salary.



It wasn't long before I hit a personal crisis, which, in short, led me to buy my own flat and approach social services for funding to employ my own Personal Assistants. With all responsibilities of employing people, it was a steep learning curve to say the least, but life was now good and it was time to start living.

So fast forwarding 12 or so years, how have I been using personal assistance since then? Under my direction and instruction I used personal assistance to:

- renovate my bungalow
- travel back from Pakistan
- make an MOT failure roadworthy

The Wheelchair Service condemned my wheelchair to the graveyard and after 5 years with no solution I was either going to lie down in bed forever and stop living or do something about it!

My choice of PA is crucial in the processes: a versatile PA, who is willing and able to adapt. And continuity is important as there are lots of trial and error moments along the way... But using personal assistance alone, I've finally nailed it!



I promised myself a holiday after all this, but was I going to take my new wheelchair with me as I hurried to finish it. Of course, I did. It was either going to be a holiday disaster, or brilliant. We headed for the cruise ship the next day.

Deck 12, I recall. That was where I learnt to drive my new wheelchair. To be away from home, work and with another great PA who was calm, capable, patient, and just happy to listen and follow directions. That's what I needed. For the first time in six years, I was able to drive my wheelchair independently. An amazing feeling!

And I think that my journey through life demonstrates that a Personal Assistant is not a just Carer with a fancy title.

And last but by no means least, I must mention an extraordinary episode of my life. Many of you will know Katherine Araniello. Well I didn't. That was until she enquired about my wheelchair, and then proceeded to ask me to make one for her.

Katherine and I spent many an hour discussing the world of Personal Assistance and so I will end with a quote that she and I cobbled together one evening...

“A perfect PA is someone who is comfortable and content with following directions, who doesn't find their role undermining or intimidating, and will do everything possible not to intentionally or inadvertently alter the choices or individuality of the PA User. “

Katherine Araniello & Ali Kashmiri, 2018



