

Self-directed support in practice

Sami's story

Background: Sami is a 30-year-old young man. He is interested in heavy machines, Finnish music, photographs and good food. He has his own computer that he uses to listen to music and to look at photos. Sami exhibits distinct characteristics of autism spectrum disorder and has a visual impairment. It is extremely difficult for him to express his emotions and what he wants to do, and he has trouble leaving home. Sami takes part in daytime activities a few days a week. He lives in a housing unit with 12 other residents.

Self-directed support in practice: At first, we tried to find a place where Sami could look at heavy equipment and find information regarding them on the internet. However, Sami was not as excited about this as we expected, so we had to change the plan.

We started visiting the local supermarket with Sami. The morning usually goes like this: First, we go to physiotherapy at the public swimming pool, then we go shopping at the supermarket, have lunch at a burger restaurant, and finally visit a store where we can print some photos on A4-sized sheets of paper for Sami's home. Sami's half-day daytime activity was changed to self-directed support to finance this.

What has changed: To make leaving home easier, Sami picked a CD that he would listen to in the car with the employee. A few months after the start of self-directed support, Sami no longer took the CD with him, but rather wanted to listen to the radio. During one drive, much to the employee's surprise, Sami said: *"I want to talk with you,"* and the radio was not turned on during that trip. Leaving home has become considerably easier now, especially during the self-directed support days.

When having lunch at the burger restaurant, Sami has been able to express his will a few times, which he has not done before. Once, to the surprise of the employee who was walking past the cashier, Sami ordered a Coca-Cola for himself instead of a Fanta without anyone suggesting this to him.

We can see that self-directed support has been a success also because Sami is very happy and cheerful on these days. One time, when Sami was returning used bottles at the supermarket before going shopping, he said: *"This is the best job ever!"* When sitting in the car, Sami once spontaneously said: *"You know what: I'm happy now!"* For the employee, this really tells that the day has been a success. Sami also really looks forward to the self-directed support days. *"It's rewarding that we can actually talk with Sami about other things than just about who will come work with him in the evening or what's for lunch,"* says the employee responsible for Sami's personal budgeting.

Sami's personal budgeting has also resulted in changes to another tenant's support solutions and services. An employee at the housing unit says that without the changes made to Sami's services, they probably would not have even thought about changing Eeva's services, too.