

Case study: How supporting decision-making can protect people's freedom to choose

Supporting a young man with learning disabilities to say what he wants, in the face of some pressure from his mother

A learning disability team, at the time when the MCA was first introduced, was working with Julian, a man with significant learning disabilities. He lived at home with his mother, and attended a day centre during the week. Mrs Lott was a committed vegetarian, and as she did the cooking in the family, Julian also ate a vegetarian diet at home.

At his day centre, however, Julian tended to choose the meat option at lunch, and this distressed Mrs Lott greatly. Numerous discussions were had, in which Mrs Lott asked the day centre only to give Julian vegetarian food, or she would remove him from the day centre.

The situation was quite tricky, but the new Act gave the social work team a useful framework. Although Julian was non-verbal, the social worker and the day centre were easily able, with the use of food photos, to see that Julian had the capacity to decide which foods he liked, and it was clear too that this was mainly meat, sausages being a particular favourite.

That gave the social worker and her manager the confidence to maintain their position with Mrs Lott. Julian clearly liked eating meat, and demonstrably enjoyed the day centre. Having the MCA in place meant there was a decision-making framework to support his case. And in the end Mrs Lott did agree – she knew how much her son liked the day centre.