

Shared Lives schemes working with older family carers

Many users of Shared Lives will come from a background where their main family carers are older people. There are two distinct groups among older family carers – those who are long-term carers for a family member with learning disabilities or a long term condition, and those who have undertaken caring in later life, usually for a husband, wife or partner, but

sometimes for a mother or father. The two groups face some similar challenges, such as the impact of caring on their health. They also face some different ones. For example, those who have been caring for several years tend to have found their way through the system, although they can still find getting support difficult as circumstances change.

Issues Shared Lives schemes should be aware of when working with older family carers

- Many older family carers experience high levels of stress and anxiety, as well as general health problems. Two thirds of older carers have long term health problems or a disability themselves. Commonly reported conditions are arthritis and joint problems, back problems, heart disease, cancer and depression.
- More than 8 out of 10 older carers have worries for the future, about what will happen to the person they care for if they can no longer care.
- Many feel lonely and socially isolated.
- There is a lack of financial support, since Carer's Allowance is not paid post-retirement
- Many carers have been or are unclear about what services are available, how to access services or who to contact about existing services.
- Information about benefits and entitlements can be hard to find and they find much information confusing. Carers need information, especially about how direct payments and personal budgets work.

Support Shared Lives schemes can offer to older family carers

Shared Lives schemes can help identify and plan with older family carers to enable them and their relatives to be better supported and able to plan for the future with greater confidence. Schemes can ensure that older carers:

- Feel confident that the Shared Lives scheme knows of both their existence and their needs.
- Feel confident that other family members and/or advocacy services will ensure that their relative is supported to speak up and that his/her happiness, safety, best interests and well-being will be prioritised.
- Are given time to plan for the future with their relative and others who can provide informed and consistent support.
- Are given information about the support available to enable them to continue their caring role and to plan for the future when the time is right for them and their relative.
- Are offered flexible breaks from caring, including overnight breaks in a setting which might possibly become a realistic long-term arrangement for the person they care for.
- Are offered opportunities to build up positive relationships with the Shared Lives scheme.
- Relate to workers who understand their lifetime experience of caring and don't feel judged about the way they have cared for and supported their relative.
- Can talk to people in the scheme about aspects of giving up their caring role, not only

the emotional difficulties but the practical including financial worries about losing the income they may have received as carers or the income related to the person they have been caring for.

- Have peace of mind that their relative will be well looked after when they are no longer able to care.
- Are able to remain involved and valued in their relative's life, even if that person is no longer living with them in the family home.

Carers UK and Carers Trust are organisations set up for carers. The Alzheimer's Society, the Stroke Association and Arthritis Care also support carers of people with a specific condition or illness. Many have carers' groups which provide the opportunity to meet people in the same situation and there are other opportunities provided by adult services in your locality which would be useful to signpost carers to.

Shared Lives Plus also ran a two year project in Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government, aimed at using Shared Lives as a way of supporting the older family carers of people with a learning disability or autistic spectrum disorders. A DVD of looking at some of the work of the project can be seen at <http://www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk/nations-and-regions/our-work-in-scotland>

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