

Benefit of Shared Lives to family carers

Shared Lives remains a little known form of support and personal care and is not offered to many family carers and service users, especially those seeking support for older people or those living with dementia. This guide looks at some of

the benefits of Shared Lives that family carers may not be aware of and that schemes could highlight in any direct work with carers' groups or with individual family carers.

Shared Lives offers home based care, not in an institution

Shared Lives supports adults with a range of difficulties through approved paid Shared Lives carers who use their own homes to offer a full time live-in arrangement, short breaks or day care. Shared Lives carers and those they care for are carefully matched for compatibility and considerable time is taken at the matching stage to ensure that everybody is happy and comfortable with the arrangement.

A Shared Lives arrangement is based on the active consent of all those involved. The person using the service has choices about their care and their Shared Lives carers, nothing is imposed. The reason the matching process can take a long time is to be absolutely sure that this is the best life choice for the service user and that they can make the most of the opportunities Shared Lives can offer.

Regulation

Shared Lives is regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate in Wales, the Care Inspectorate in Scotland and the Regulatory and Quality Improvement Agency (RQIA) in Northern Ireland. Like all other forms of personal care, each Shared Lives scheme has a Registered Manager and receives regular inspections looking at all aspects of the care that is being offered. This includes the recruitment and training of Shared Lives carers as well as the standards of care each user receives.

In 2010, England's care inspectors gave 38% of Shared Lives schemes the top rating of excellent (three star): double the percentages for other forms of regulated care. CQC also logged 3,473 safeguarding alerts and 39,115 safeguarding concerns related to social care provision in England 2011/12. Of those, 109 concerns and just one alert arose from Shared Lives. Figures from 2012 Care Inspectorate inspections in Scotland, which are themed, so do not cover every aspect of inspected services, showed Shared Lives schemes outperforming the forms of care it was compared with (home care and supported housing).

Family environment

Shared Lives offers a uniquely person centred approach to each individual. People using Shared Lives enter into a family relationship with their Shared Lives carers rather than an institutional association. These relationships can be lifelong.

Shared Lives carers often say, "She/he is just one of the family." People who use Shared Lives have sometimes lived in many different institutions and some have been considered "too challenging" to live in an ordinary household, but many find, for

the first time, a sense of belonging with the Shared Lives carer. They will get to know the Shared Lives carer's friends and neighbours and go to family events like weddings with the Shared Lives carer.

People who use Shared Lives are encouraged to be involved with their families, friends and outside interests and live as full a life as possible, engaging with their wider communities and circles of interest. They are encouraged to try new activities, even if that means they might fail. In a recent survey which asked 500 Shared Lives users what they had done for the first time, we found that:

- 35% had learned a household task:
- 35% had carried out a personal task:
- 30% had their first ever holiday in the UK and 16% abroad
- 12% had met their first boyfriend/girlfriend:
- 26% had joined a club not exclusively for disabled people:
- 4% had started a job and 13% volunteered
- 30% had made one new friend
- 32% had made two to four new friends
- 34% had made five or more new friends.

Costs

In general terms, Shared Lives is considerably cheaper than residential care. A recent report quoted Shared Lives as saving local authorities £26,000 a year for a full time arrangement for someone with learning disabilities and £8,000

for someone with mental health issues (Social Finance: Investing in Shared Lives 2013). However savings for older people or people with dementia are likely to be less, although still competitive.

Involves family carers as the 'experts'

We know that family carers do a fantastic job looking after the person who needs care and support. We also know that family carers are expert on the needs and wishes of the person being cared for and, as such, their comments and concerns need to be listened to and taken account of. Shared Lives offers an approach that not only puts the service user at the center of the care offered but also makes room for the important people in their lives.

We also recognise that family carers are people in their own right with their own physical, social and emotional needs. Shared Lives offers time off from caring to give family carers a chance to recharge their batteries or attend to self-care through offering the person they support short

breaks and regular day care. Because the service user will only go to the home of a Shared Lives carer who they have been matched with and have had time to get to know, the family carer can have confidence that there is a sound relationship and that the service user is somewhere they want to be, with people they like spending time with.

To sum up, Shared Lives is a service which:

- is built around individuals: developing their strengths, gifts and potential;
- promotes equality and diversity;
- is safe but also enables people to take risks in pursuit of their goals;
- is cost-effective, with consistently better outcomes than alternatives