

Shared Lives and Family Carers – Benefits of short breaks

What is Shared Lives?

Shared Lives is a little known, but important, alternative to home care and care homes for people in need of support. Shared Lives offers personalised, quality care where Shared Lives carers share their lives and often their homes with the people they support.

Shared Lives enables people to live life to the full in their community, without having to live alone, in supported living or in a care home. Individuals who need support are matched with compatible Shared Lives carers and families who support and include the person into their family and community life. In many cases that person moves in to the Shared Lives carer's home, to become a permanent part of a supportive household. Shared Lives also offers day support and regular short breaks (also known as respite) for unpaid

family carers. Shared Lives carers help people to develop independent living skills, friendships and roots in their community: a sense of belonging and being part of a family. There are around 7,000 Shared Lives carers in England supporting some 9,600 people. Shared Lives carers are recruited, approved and supported by a regulated Shared Lives scheme.

Shared Lives is used by adults of all ages with a wide range of disabilities, conditions and support needs, including people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, older people and people living with dementia. Shared Lives can also support care leavers, disabled children becoming young adults, parents with learning disabilities and their children, people who misuse substances and ex-offenders.

What are short breaks?

Short breaks can be used as a temporary alternative to a person's usual care arrangements. People who care for someone often carry on without realising how tired or tense they have become. A break or holiday can help them relax and recharge their batteries. It is important that carers have regular breaks and make time for their

own needs. Short breaks may also be needed in other situations; for example, the carer might have to go into hospital or might have other important commitments. It is important that the break should be a positive experience for both the carer and the person they care for in order to improve the quality of their life and to support their relationship

What does Shared Lives offer?

Shared Lives, regulated by the Care Quality Commission, offers support to 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.

Shared Lives carers are recruited, trained, approved, monitored and paid by one of the UK's 152 regulated Shared Lives schemes. Many of the schemes are run directly by the local authority, although a number are independent registered charities. The manager of the scheme is usually the Registered Manager and schemes are inspected by the CQC in the same way as other forms of care.

Short breaks are offered in the Shared Lives carer's home and can be anything from a few hours a day on a regular basis to overnight stays by arrangement for an agreed length of time. At the heart of Shared Lives is the relationship between the person using the service and the Shared Lives carer and their family. The time spent on making sure that the match between the service user and

the Shared Lives carer is a positive and happy one means that using short breaks or day care will be a good experience for everyone. The family carer can relax and feel confident that the service user is in an informal, familiar and comfortable place with people they know well, rather than being in a formal residential setting.

It is natural for the person being cared for to want to stay somewhere that is familiar. The person may not fully understand why they have to go away and may feel confused, or may say they don't want to go. This can make the person who cares for them feel guilty about wanting or needing some time away. However, it is important to remember that taking an occasional break is good both for the carer and the person being cared for, as time apart will enable the carer to recharge their batteries and feel refreshed.

How is it funded?

Shared Lives is funded in the same way as other forms of short breaks or day care. The first step is usually to approach the Local Authority to ask for an assessment for the person being cared for and their carer. The Local Authority social worker doing the assessments will consider the needs of the person being cared for, and consider what services they may be able to provide (bearing in mind local priorities and availability of services).

They will also do a financial assessment under their Charging Policy which means that the family carers or the person being cared for may be charged for the services according to means.

It is very important that family carers have an assessment of their needs. Under the Carers' Equal Opportunities Act 2004, and Caring for our Future 2012, carers have a number of rights

when their needs are being assessed. A carer's wish to work, undertake training or pursue leisure activities should be taken into account as part of a carer's assessment.

Local Authorities are now being encouraged to provide individual budgets both for people with care needs and for carers. This means that both the carers and the person being cared for should be offered choice in the way that services are provided, and may be able to use the funding to organise services themselves.

More information about Shared Lives, including case studies and more general information, can be found on the Shared Lives Plus website at www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk or visit the website of your local authority and look under Adult Social Services – Shared Lives.