

Shared Lives and family carers: What does Shared Lives offer and what are the benefits?

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 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 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, although 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. 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 and with a wide range of disabilities, illnesses 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.

How does it work?

Shared Lives is regulated by the Care Quality Commission to offer support and personal care to adults with a range of difficulties through approved paid 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. In many cases that person goes to live with a Shared Lives carer and their

family, although Shared Lives is also used to support people living in their own homes, as day support, as breaks for unpaid family carers, as home from hospital care and as a stepping stone for someone who wants to get their own place.

Many of the schemes are run directly by the local authority, although a number are independent registered charities. The manager of the scheme is the Registered Manager and schemes are inspected by the CQC in the same way as other forms of care.

Who pays for the care provided by Shared Lives?

People using Shared Lives are often eligible for financial support through Fair Access for Care Services (FACs). This means the individual who needs support will have gone through an assessment undertaken by someone from the adult social care team in their local authority and a plan will have been agreed. Funding may go directly from the local authority to the care provider or the individual user may be on

a personal budget, which often provides more flexibility. As with all forms of personal care, there would also be a financial assessment which may mean that some aspects of the care received would need to be paid for by the user or their family. There may also be services that Shared Lives offer that the user and family decide to pay for themselves.

How much does Shared Lives cost?

Costs vary according to what care you are asking for, where you live (London and the South East are often more expensive than other parts of the country), and how complex

the care requirement are. In general terms, Shared Lives is considerably cheaper than other forms of 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 considerably less. If you are interested in finding out more, you would need to discuss costs further with your local scheme.

Why should we consider Shared Lives as opposed to other forms of care?

Shared Lives offers a uniquely person centred approach to each individual. People using Shared Lives enter into a family relationship with their 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 often 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 go to family events like weddings with the Shared Lives carer and get to know the Shared Lives carers’ friends and neighbours.

Shared Lives carers are paid a modest amount to cover some of their time and expenses, but they are not paid by the hour and they do huge amounts without being paid: there is no “clocking on and clocking off”. In Shared Lives, everyone gets to contribute to real relationships and the goal is ordinary family life. This applies as much to short breaks or day care as it does to live-in arrangements.

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.

What does Shared Lives offer family carers?

We know that family carers do a fantastic job looking after the person in their lives who need 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 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 carers a chance to recharge their batteries or attend to self-care through short breaks and regular day care. Because the service user will only go to the home of a Shared Lives carer that 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

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.