The state of Shared Lives

Shared Lives care in the UK 2025-26





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Our lives get better when they're shared

Foreword

I am pleased to write the foreword to Shared Lives Plus's State of the Sector Report, which presents the latest data on the growth and innovation of Shared Lives across the UK.

Shared Lives shows social care at its best: **relationships, belonging and community connections that help people live life on their own terms.**

The report shows continued growth in carers, people supported and staff. Shared Lives carers have increased by 14% across five years - a significant achievement amid financial and workforce pressures. Services are also expanding to support more care-experienced young people and people living with dementia. But Shared Lives does not grow by accident. It needs committed leadership, co-production with people who draw on Shared Lives, carers and staff, strong partnerships, and sustained investment.

An example is in South Yorkshire, where Doncaster, Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley worked together to use the government's Accelerating Reform Fund to strengthen Shared Lives across South Yorkshire. We supported the areas to improve referral pathways, raise awareness, recruit carers and broaden support for young adults, people experiencing mental ill health, people living with dementia and unpaid carers.

Coordinated investment and partnership working generated **200** new carer enquiries, increased carer numbers by **13%** and enabled 30 more people to receive support - laying the foundations for sustainable growth.

We want Shared Lives to keep growing, diversifying, and innovating and urge colleagues to make it central to local social care reform so that more people can live the lives they choose.

Yours,

Ewan King, Chief Executive Officer, Shared Lives Plus



Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) South Yorkshire Shared Lives event, facilitated by Shared Lives Plus

Introduction

Shared Lives is built on something simple but powerful: relationships, connection and belonging

Across the UK, Shared Lives carers offer more than care. They offer friendship, shared experiences and opportunities for people to be part of family and community life. Our new organisational strategy, Connection and Belonging: Accelerating the Growth of Shared Lives, sets out our ambition to help more people benefit from Shared Lives and Homeshare.

This State of the Sector report examines how the Shared Lives sector is changing, by highlighting progress, challenges and what is needed to support future growth.

For the first time, we have five years of national data on the numbers of people supported and Shared Lives carers. This gives us a clearer picture of how the sector has developed and the progress it has made.

The findings are encouraging

The number of people supported through Shared Lives increased by 8% this year. This is particularly significant in the context of the pressures facing social care, including the lasting effects of the Covid pandemic and ongoing financial constraints. Despite these challenges, Shared Lives has continued to develop and is now supporting more people than five years ago.

The data also suggests that growth across the sector takes time. Investment in the infrastructure and workforce of local schemes is an important foundation for developing carer numbers and, ultimately, supporting more people. The longer-term figures offer encouraging signs of progress at each of these levels.

There is more to do

Sustaining growth requires enough Shared Lives carers, strong local schemes and investment in the support and infrastructure that enable services to thrive.

We are grateful to the Shared Lives schemes and carers who contributed to this year's data collection. Their work provides an important national picture of a model that continues to make a real difference to people's lives.

Lynne Harrison, Director of Operations, Shared Lives Plus



About Shared Lives

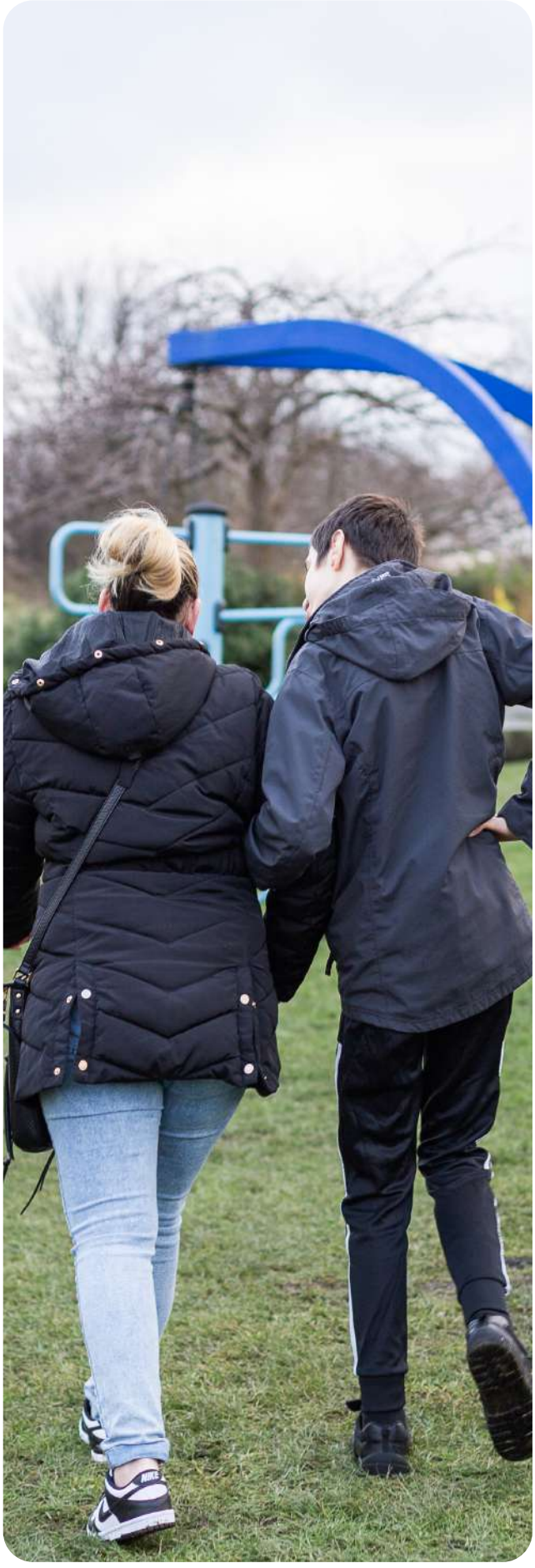
Shared Lives in practice

Shared Lives is a form of social care built around relationships, connection and belonging. A young person or adult who needs support is carefully matched with an approved Shared Lives carer through a local scheme. They share everyday life with their carer, from meals and routines to interests, experiences and relationships with family and friends.

For more than half of the people using Shared Lives, this means moving in with their chosen carer and becoming part of their household. Others visit for the day or overnight breaks, building a relationship and sharing their carer's family and community life.

Shared Lives offers more than support. It gives people opportunities to develop lasting relationships, make choices, build confidence and take part in their communities. By focusing on what people can do and contribute, as well as the support they need, Shared Lives helps create the conditions for people to live fulfilling lives with a genuine sense of home, connection and belonging.

Across the UK, more than **10,400 Shared Lives carers support nearly 10,600 people.** Carers are carefully recruited, trained and approved through local schemes, helping to ensure people receive safe, high-quality support within ordinary family and community life.



Shared Lives Plus

Shared Lives Plus is the national membership organisation for Shared Lives carers, schemes and Homeshare organisations across the UK. We want everyone to have the opportunity to share their lives, homes and communities, and to belong and contribute, whatever support they need.

Our mission sets out how we will help more people benefit from Shared Lives and Homeshare. We work to create the conditions for these models to grow, support members to deliver high-quality, safe and sustainable services, and ensure the voices of people with lived experience shape our work.

We do this by bringing people and organisations together, providing practical advice, guidance and legal support, influencing policy and practice, and helping local organisations develop and improve their services. We also work to strengthen the evidence and understanding needed to support the sector's future.

This year, our membership included **146 Shared Lives schemes, 6,479 Shared Lives carer members and 16 Homeshare organisations** across the UK. This gives us a unique perspective on the sector and a collective voice to champion its value, address the challenges it faces and help more people benefit from connection, belonging and community-based support.

To find out more visit
www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk



About this report

Five years of national data: two key measures

We now have five years of national data for two key measures: number of people supported and number of Shared Lives carers. This allows us to look beyond annual changes and understand some longer-term trends.

Data coverage varies between measures. We have five-year comparisons for number of people supported and number of Shared Lives carers, while workforce data covers a shorter period. Collection in Scotland and Wales began in **2022/23,** with Northern Ireland providing data for the **2025-26** period.

Improvements to data collection and analysis since **2021/22** have strengthened the consistency of the national dataset. However, differences in coverage and recording methods mean that not all measures can be compared reliably across five years.

We received fewer returns for several measures this year. Respondents also told us they were stretched, with limited time and resources to complete the survey. This highlights the pressures facing schemes and the need to ensure they have the capacity to support people and contribute to sector-wide learning.

Where possible, we include longer-term trends alongside annual figures. Any limitations are noted in the relevant sections.

Data collection period

The report draws on data collected during or relating to **April 2025** to **April 2026.** Measures vary in how they are recorded: some capture activity across the year, while others provide a snapshot at a particular point in time.

For example, some individual data entries for people supported and Shared Lives carers may represent a snapshot rather than a total across the year. Membership figures are based on a snapshot taken in **March 2026.**

The data provides a national picture of Shared Lives across the four UK nations. However, differences in coverage and recording methods mean that figures are not always directly comparable between measures or years.



Executive summary

The findings demonstrate the resilience of Shared Lives and its ability to continue developing in a challenging social care environment.

The longer-term data suggests that growth in the sector takes place at different levels. Developing scheme infrastructure and workforce capacity provides an important foundation for recruiting and supporting more carers, which in turn creates opportunities to support more people.

This year's **8% increase in supported people** is an encouraging indication of the sector's potential. Continuing this progress will require investment in carers, scheme staff and the local infrastructure that makes Shared Lives possible.

Key trends



Supported people

There were **10,686** people supported through Shared Lives across the UK this year.

788

This is an increase of **788** people **(8%)** from last year.

The increase is particularly encouraging given the difficulties facing social care and the challenges to growth across the five-year period:

6%

Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, the number of people supported decreased by **6%.**

3%

Growth over the last two years has brought the total to **3%** above the 2021/22 figure.



Shared Lives carers

There were **10,477** registered Shared Lives carers this year.

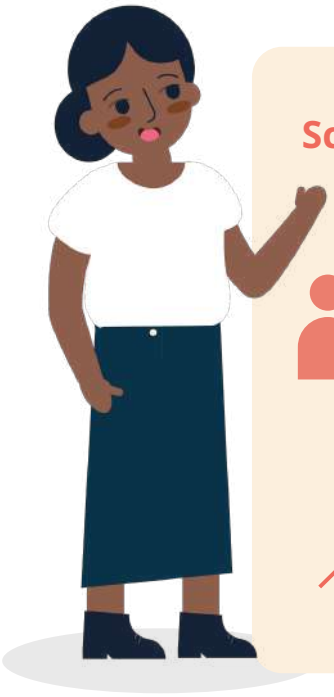
71

This is an increase of **71** carers **(1%)** from last year.

14%

Carer numbers have increased by **14%** since 2021/22.

This longer-term growth represents an important part of the sector's development and provides the foundation for supporting more people.



Scheme staff

There were **1,009** staff working in Shared Lives schemes this year.

12%

This is an increase of **12** staff **(1%)** from last year and **5%** over four years. [1]

1 The longer-term comparison excludes Northern Ireland, as staff data was not available for previous years. Northern Ireland is included in the 2025/26 total. Excluding Northern Ireland, the increase would still be 5 staff (1%). Longer-term comparisons should also be treated with some caution because of changes in how staff numbers were recorded across the nations in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Sector data and analysis

Supported people

In numbers

There were **10,686** people supported through Shared Lives across the **UK** this year, an **increase of 788 people (8%)** on last year.

Growth was strongest in **England** in the last year, where **9,087** people were supported, a **10% increase** from **8,226** the year prior. **Wales** saw a smaller **increase of 2% with 940 people supported** while the number supported in **Northern Ireland** remained broadly stable at **231.**

The number reported in **Scotland fell by 19%**, from **526** to **428**. However, this reduction is largely explained by half of one scheme's carers being reclassified as providing a different form of support. The Scotland figures should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of a comparable reduction in Shared Lives activity.

The five-year picture helps put this year's growth into context. Between **2021/22** and **2023/24, the number of people supported decreased by 6%.** This reflected a combination of cuts across the social care sector and the impact of the Covid pandemic. Growth over the last two years has reversed this trend, bringing the overall number supported to **3% above the 2021/22 figure.**

Support type

There are three main ways people access Shared Lives support in terms of duration.

- **Live in arrangements:** People who live with their Shared Lives carer long-term are said to be in live-in arrangements.
- **Short breaks:** Those who visit a Shared Lives carer for overnight stays or a few days at a time use Shared Lives for short breaks.
- **Day Shared Lives support:** People who visit a Shared Lives carer for support for a day, or a few hours, without staying over, are using day Shared Lives support.

Some people use only one of these types of support, and some use a combination of two or all three.

The year-on-year comparison shows:

Live-in arrangements remained broadly stable, with **5,798** people supported compared with **5,760** last year. This is an increase of just **38** people, or less than **1%.**

Short breaks increased by **6%,** from **2,712** to **2,870** people. This suggests a modest increase in the number of people using Shared Lives for short breaks.

Day Shared Lives support increased by **22%,** from **1,728** to **2,115** people. This is the largest change across the three types of support.

The proportion of records where the type of support was unknown increased from **9%** in **2024/25** to **13%** in **2025/26.**

Further analysis of **103** schemes with consistent data across the five reporting periods provides further evidence of growth, suggesting that some schemes are expanding their offer to reach more people.

- In England, the number of schemes offering day Shared Lives support increased by **13** over five years, although five schemes stopped offering it.
- The number of people receiving day arrangements also increased by **7%.**
- In Wales, day arrangements grew by **11%** over three years.

What this means

The increase in day Shared Lives support is encouraging and may reflect growing recognition of how Shared Lives can offer flexible support alongside wider care arrangements. 2

Taken together, the findings suggest that Shared Lives has potential to reach more people through different types of support. Realising this potential requires investment in the carers, scheme staff and local development needed to expand provision and sustain growth.



2 Differences in recording may account for some of the changes, and further data will help establish how much reflects growth in provision.

Support needs

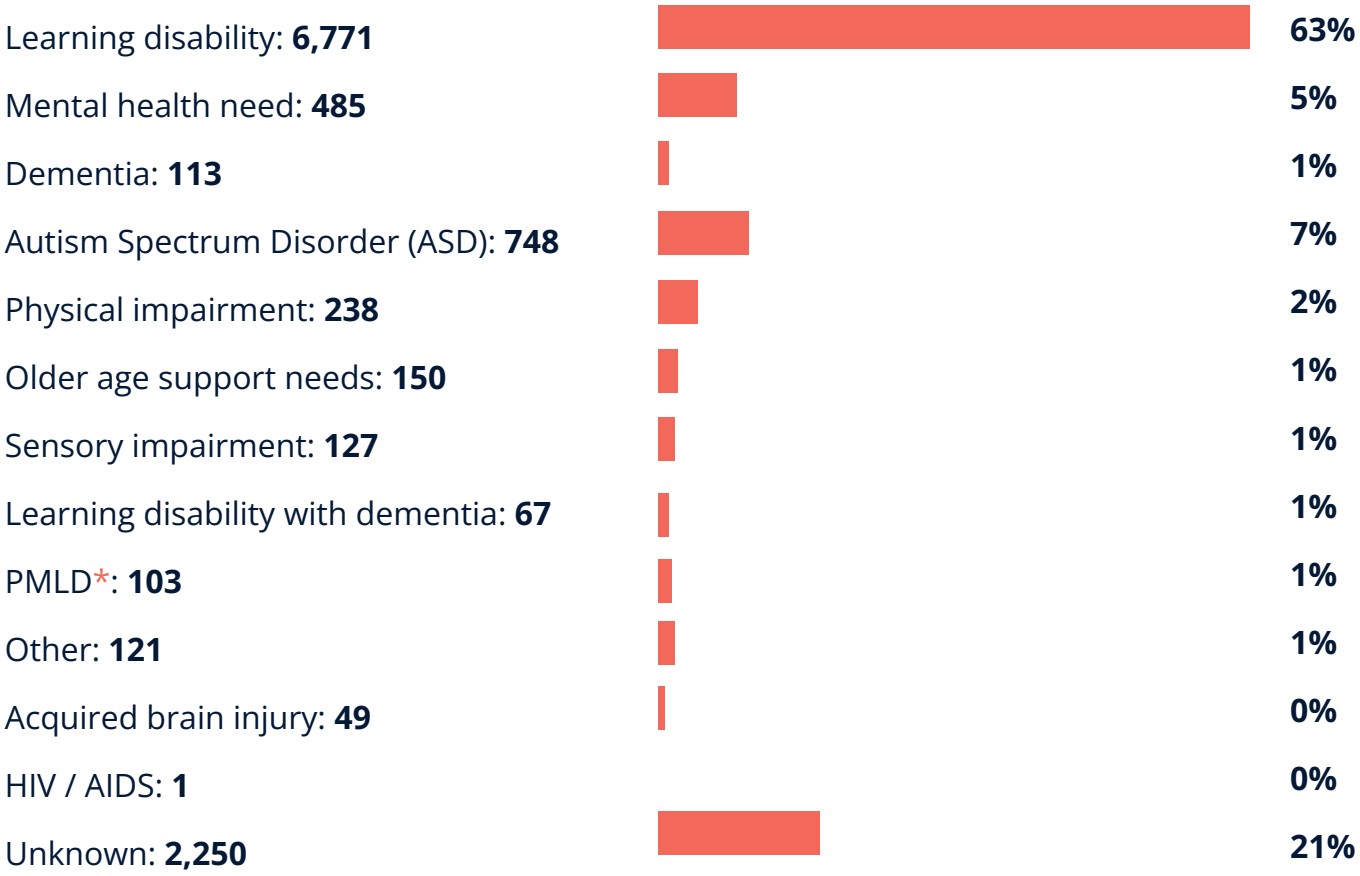
Shared Lives continues to support people with a wide range of needs. The year-on-year data shows that:

Learning disability remains the largest group, with **6,771** people supported, representing **63%** of the total. This is an **8%** increase from last year, although the proportion remains unchanged.

The number of autistic people is broadly stable, at **748** people **(7%),** as is the number of people with mental ill health at **485** people **(5%)**.

Numbers across the smaller support-needs groups remained relatively stable, with some variation between categories, including people supported with physical impairments **(238 people or 2%)** and needs associated with older age **(150 people or 1%).**

The proportion of records where the primary support need was unknown increased from **12% in 2024/25 to 21% in 2025/26.** This represents an increase from **1,235 to 2,250 people.**



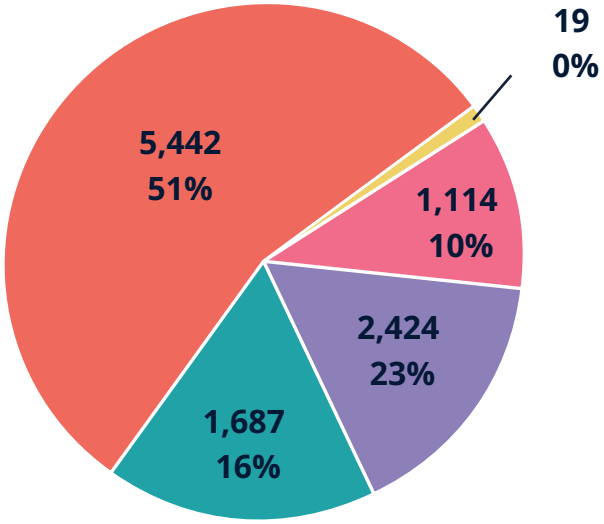
* profound and multiple learning disability

Age of people supported

The largest group was people aged **25-64,** with **5,442** people supported **(51%).** There were 1,687 people aged **18-24 (16%)** and **1,114** people aged **65** and over **(10%).**

The proportion of people with no recorded age increased from **16% in 2024/25 to 23% in 2025/26,** representing **2,424** people this year.

Year-on-year changes in the reported age groups should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of changing patterns of demand or provision.

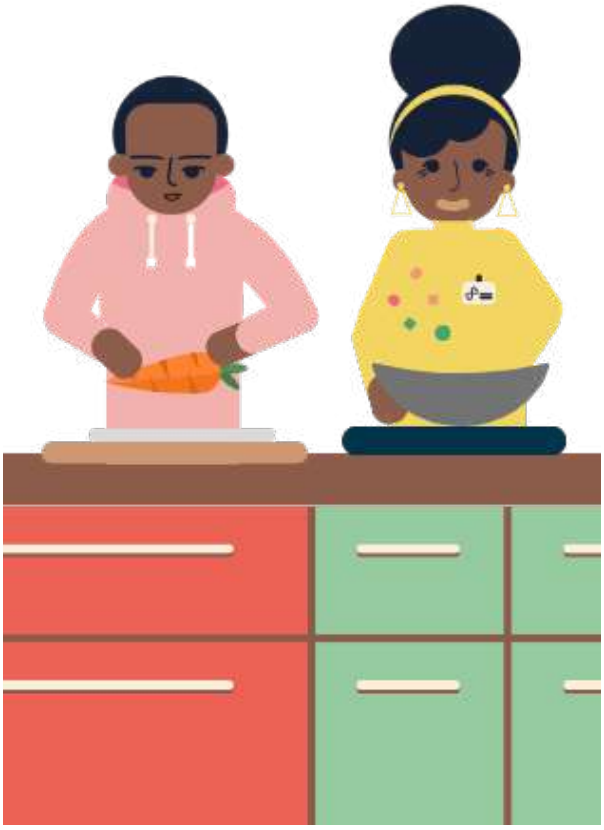


Care leavers

98 schemes supported young people leaving care. There were **363** transitions, an increase of **12 (3%)** from last year. The number of transitions has increased by **7%** since **2023/24.**

Growth in support for care leavers is an emerging area for Shared Lives. Data collected over the past two years shows that **714** care leavers have been supported by Shared Lives. As data collection continues, we hope to build a clearer picture of trends over time.

Now in its third year, our Young People Leaving Care programme collects regular data from **41** scheme partners. You can read more on the analysis of this programme in our **Impact report 2024-2026.**



Shared Lives carers

In numbers

There were **10,477** Shared Lives carers registered this year, an increase of **71 (1%)** from last year. This continues a positive longer-term trend, with the number of registered carers increasing by **14%** since **2021/22.** The strongest annual growth was recorded in **2023/24,** with numbers increasing by **7%** in one year.

Further analysis by nation shows that Wales experienced the greatest growth, with an increase from **748** to **872** carers **(17%).** Northern Ireland experienced a modest increase from **218** to **226 (4%),** as did England, from **8851** to **8864 (<1%).** The number of Shared Lives carers in Scotland decreased from **589** to **515 (13%).** This is largely because half the carers in one scheme are now recorded as providing a different type of support. Therefore, the figures do not mean that Shared Lives activity in Scotland has fallen by the same amount.

These figures need to be considered alongside wider challenges around recruiting and retaining carers. Schemes need ongoing investment to attract new carers, support existing ones and sustain a diverse range of provision.

The long-term growth in carer numbers reflects the positive impact of recruitment, supported by targeted investment such as the ARF over the past year. However, this growth needs to be considered alongside the number of carers leaving their roles. Although data on departures is not yet consistent enough to provide a complete picture, the significant proportion of older Shared Lives carers, alongside Shared Lives Plus membership data showing that many carers leave when they retire, highlights the importance of retention in sustaining growth and overall carer numbers.



10,477
Carers registered this year



14%
Increase in registered carers since 2021/22



17% increase in carers in Wales



4% increase in carers in Northern Ireland

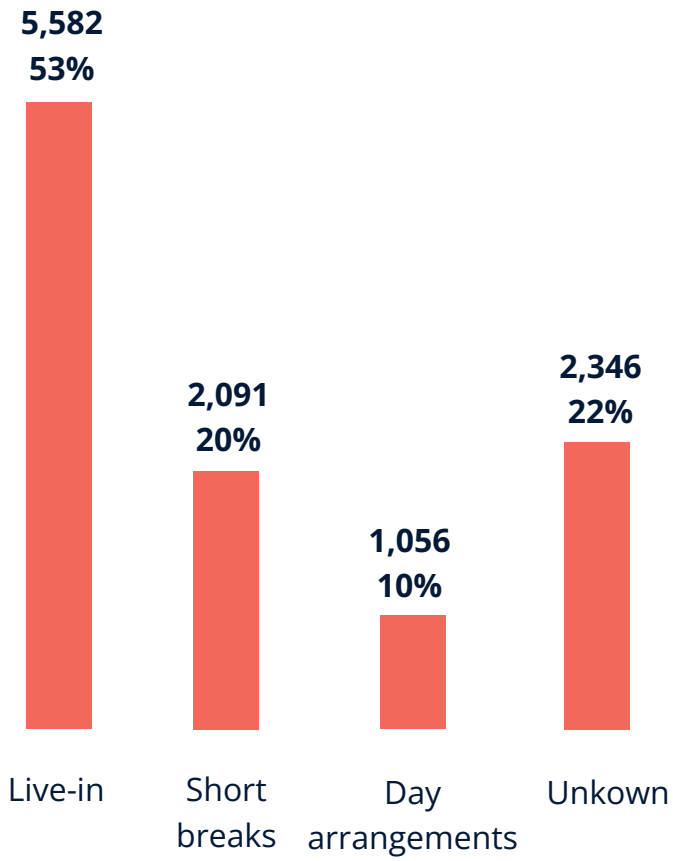


Carer support types

The overall pattern of support remains broadly consistent since **2024-25,** with live-in support the most common arrangement, followed by short breaks and day Shared Lives support. [3]

The proportion of carer records where the type of support was unknown increased from **11%** in **2024/25** to **22%** in **2025/26.** This makes it harder to draw firm conclusions about changes in the types of support being offered.

Of the carers recorded, **5,582** offered live-in support, **2,091** offered short breaks and **1,056** offered day arrangements. These figures include carers who provide more than one type of support. Live-in support increased by **2%** compared with last year.



3 Carers may provide more than one type of Shared Lives support, so these figures should not be treated as separate groups.

Age of carers: year-on-year change

The age profile remains broadly similar to last year, with carers aged **45–66** continuing to make up the largest group. The figures also show that people continue to take on the Shared Lives carer role into older age.

In **2025-26** the largest group was aged **45-66,** with **4,677** carers **(44%).** There were also **1,182** carers aged **25-44 (11%), 1,381** aged **67-74 (13%)** and **582** aged **75 and over (6%).**

A further **2,604** carers **(25%)** had no recorded age, compared with **20%** last year.

Households

There were **5,605** households reported, compared with **5,589** last year.

The fact that there are fewer households than registered Shared Lives carers suggests that some households include more than one carer. The data does not show specifically how carers are distributed across households.

Shared Lives scheme staff

There were **1,009** staff working in Shared Lives schemes this year, an increase of **12 (1%)** from last year. This continues a positive trend, with staff numbers increasing by approximately **5%** since **2022/23.**

The workforce includes a range of roles and working patterns. Of the staff for whom working pattern was recorded, **692** were full time and **266** were part time. In terms of roles, **172** were managers, **656** were workers and **130** worked in other roles.

Some schemes provided only their overall staff numbers, without a breakdown by working pattern or role. The figures therefore do not cover everyone included in the national total.



45-66
year olds made up the largest group of carers



5,605
Households reported this year



1,009
staff working in Shared Lives schemes this year



5%
Increase in staff numbers since 2022/23



Conclusions and implications

Shared Lives is showing renewed growth



The findings show that Shared Lives continues to demonstrate resilience and potential for growth, despite the difficult climate facing social care and the challenges of growing a relatively small model of support.

The **8%** increase in the number of people supported this year is particularly encouraging. In the context of the wider pressures facing social care, it is a significant jump.

The **3%** overall growth across the five-year period is also a notable achievement, given that numbers fell by **6%** between **2021/22** and **2023/24.** This year's increase suggests a positive shift in the sector's trajectory and provides a strong foundation for further growth.

Over the same five-year period, the number of registered Shared Lives carers increased by **14%.** This is another important sign of the sector's ability to develop and expand, despite the pressures facing local schemes and the wider social care workforce.

Growth needs to be supported by workforce capacity

The number of registered carers increased by **1%** this year, although it has grown by **14%** over five years. Staff numbers also increased by **1%** this year and by **5%** over four years.



These figures raise important questions about the capacity needed to support further growth. Shared Lives depends on having enough carers, alongside skilled and well-supported scheme staff to recruit, match and support them. Growing the number of people who can benefit from Shared Lives will require continued attention to both recruitment and retention, as well as the capacity of local schemes.

Schemes need the capacity to deliver and develop

Respondents told us that schemes were stretched and had limited time and resources to complete this year's survey.

This reflects the importance of ensuring schemes have the resources and infrastructure to do more than maintain existing services. This includes having the capacity to develop new provision, provide ongoing support to carers, and strengthen local partnerships. It also means contributing routinely to the growing evidence base needed to better understand the sector and make a compelling case for further growth and investment.



Investment offers opportunities to build on progress

Recent investment in Shared Lives, including the Accelerating Reform Fund, the Young People Leaving care programme and the Live More dementia pilot, offers opportunities to develop and expand the model. These initiatives may have contributed to the growth seen this year, although the data from State of the Sector alone cannot establish their individual impact.



Evaluations of these initiatives can be explored in recent Shared Lives reports:

Young People Leaving Care: Impact report

Live More: Evaluation report

Further evaluation and data over time will be important in understanding what these programmes achieve, which approaches work well and how successful developments can be sustained and extended.

Continued investment is essential for sustained growth

This year's findings demonstrate that Shared Lives can grow and reach more people. The challenge now is to build on that progress and ensure growth is sustainable.



This means investing in the recruitment and retention of Shared Lives carers, the staff and local schemes that support them, and the infrastructure needed to develop the model. With the right support, Shared Lives has the potential to play a greater role in providing relationship-based, community support for people across the UK.

shared lives plus

Our lives get better when they're shared

To find out what Shared Lives can do for you, please contact us:

www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk

info@sharedlivesplus.org.uk

Company Number 4511426
Reg Charity Number (Scotland) SC042742
Reg Charity Number (England and Wales) 1095562