

Reading  
**Shared**  
Lives

A graphic element consisting of a thick, curved ribbon that starts in red on the left and transitions into purple on the right, looping under the text.

 **Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

A square logo with a complex, interlocking geometric pattern in purple.

## What is the Shared Lives Scheme?

The Shared Lives Scheme recruits carers to offer family based care to adults who may require some level of support. A carer's role is to maximise individual's potential and support them to maintain a sense of independence.

The scheme was started by Social Services (then part of Berkshire County Council) in 1989 and has been running successfully ever since. The scheme offers placements to adults aged 18 - 65 who may have a physical or learning disability, mental health needs, or are older and become frail.

This booklet gives you an overview of the Shared Lives Scheme and explains our recruitment process for carers. Our aim is to give you the information you need to help you make the right decision about applying to become a carer.

We hope this booklet will encourage you to apply, however we do understand that being a Shared Lives Carer is a very big commitment and is not for everyone. We would like to thank you for taking the time to find out what being a Shared Lives Carer means.

## Why are carers needed?

Some adults may require support from others to take care of themselves and develop independent living skills and have made the decision that they would like to use a shared lives placement. This could be because:

- their family are no longer able to provide care and support in the family home
- the adult does not wish to continue living at home
- the adult wishes to leave residential accommodation
- the adult is no longer able to live independently
- there are risks of isolation and vulnerability

They may have decided that other options do not suit them and feel that shared lives support can offer them stable, consistent and individualised care and support which will enable them to meet their full potential.

## Why do people offer care?

Having an adult requiring your support, spending time with you or living with you in your home is a big commitment and can require a lot of patience, understanding and at times hard work. But it can also be very rewarding and worthwhile.

Being a carer for adults who require support due to their health or disability value the opportunity to live with people who can give them the support that they need, share hobbies and interests, enjoy family life and fulfil their potential. Knowing that you can make such a difference in someone's life can be very rewarding.

## What does it involve?

Caring for an adult with support needs can be a very rewarding and yet challenging task. As a carer you would be expected to treat the person as a member of your own family, understand the particular difficulties they face and give them the support and care they need to help them be as independent as they possibly can. Being a carer could include:

### Providing a home

Being an adult carer is not just about offering a person a room in your house. The person you support will need to feel that they belong in your home and are treated like a member of your family. This means caring about them, offering them some stability, including them in family activities and respecting their rights.

### Being flexible

Living in someone else's home can be very strange at first. Everyone has different ways of doing things and customs/habits

which may seem strange to an outsider. When an adult is placed in your home, you will need to be flexible while you adjust to each other.

## **Having patience**

Things that may seem straightforward to you can be more difficult to an adult that needs your support. You will need to have a good understanding of their needs and have the patience to deal with things in a calm manner.

## **Developing practical skills**

It is really important that the person has the opportunity to develop independence to their full potential.

They should be supported to make informed decisions around things that may initially have some risk related to it.

## **Encouraging social contact**

You will also need to be willing to support the person to become involved in local activities and social events, attend a day service or take a college course to support them become more integrated in the community. This may involve including them in things that you do, accompanying them if they are interested in going somewhere different or giving them encouragement to go independently.

## **Building confidence**

As well as practical and social skills, the person you care for may need your support to help them build self-confidence. This will involve offering encouragement and praise, being constructive when things go wrong, taking an interest in their views and supporting them to assess issues/risks so they can make sound choices/decisions for themselves.

## **Offering emotional support**

There will be times when the person needs someone to confide in,

share their worries or concerns or discuss personal issues. As their carer it is likely that the person they choose will be you. They will need you to offer emotional support by being prepared to give them the time they need, listening to their concerns.

## **What qualifications do I need?**

You do not need a specific qualification when you apply to become a carer but you must be willing to work towards gaining a caring qualification (currently the Care Certificate, on induction). It is helpful if you have experience of being in a caring role, but this is not essential. It is more important that you have a caring attitude.

## **Training and Development**

As a Shared Lives Carer you will be expected to complete all mandatory training. This can be completed as class room based or online.

If there is a change in the needs of the person you are supporting and you require training for this, the scheme will provide you with this training. You can discuss any training needs when your Shared Lives Officer visits.

## **Carers events**

As part of the scheme's registration, we hold two or three events each year that carers are required to attend. We occasionally invite speakers along to talk about subjects of particular interest to the group. These events are also opportunities to socialise and get to know other carers and for you to build on your support networks.

## **Financial support**

You will be paid a fee for each adult you support. We can tell you current fees when you enquire or meet with a Shared Lives Officer.

## Specialist equipment

If you need special equipment for the adult you look after, this will be provided for you.

## Who can be a carer?

Lots of people think that to be a carer they must be married, own a home and be financially well off. None of this is true. What you are able to offer an adult is much more important to us than your personal circumstances.

Reading has a diverse population and adults who choose to live in a family setting come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our policy is to recruit suitable carers from all walks of life. The following notes explain what we look for and why:

### Your home

It doesn't matter if you own, rent or your home is a council property. What is important is that you have a spare bedroom that an adult in your care can have sole use of while sharing other family rooms.

### Your family

We welcome applications from all sorts of families and households. You may be married, living with your partner or single. You might have children (of any age) living in your home or visiting/staying over on a regular basis.

### Your health

We would not normally exclude people because they may have ongoing health issues, however supporting an adult can be demanding and you do need to be in reasonably good health so that you can provide care consistently.

There are some medical conditions that we may need to seek further guidance on. At an early stage we will take up a medical reference with your GP to check that this is nothing of concern in

your recent health history.

## What type of carers are there?

There are different types of care which reflect the different needs and circumstances of the adults who need placements. If you decide to apply to become a carer you will need to think about which type of care would suit your lifestyle best:

### Full-time care

This is where an adult lives with a carer on a full-time basis. The main role of the carer is to provide a home which offers stability and gives the adult the support they need to reach and maintain their full potential.

Some adults we place may never be able to be completely independent and will always need to live with people who can provide them with the support they need. Others will, with your support, develop the skills and confidence they need to allow them to move to more independent living.

### Short break respite care

Some carers provide the same sort of care and support as full-time carers but on a short-term basis. They have the adult who needs support to stay in their home for an occasional night or for a week from time to time. This arrangement allows full-time carers to have a break. Respite carers can choose how much time they wish to commit to the Shared Lives Scheme.

### Day support

Some carers provide daytime support either based from their home or out in the community. These carers play an active role in encouraging the adult to participate in different practical and social activities and offer them support to integrate into the local community. Day carers can choose how many days they wish to provide each week.

## **Personal care**

If carers are willing to provide support with personal care, the Shared Lives Scheme will assess whether the carer is able to provide this. The Shared Lives Scheme is registered with the Care Quality Commission for the provision of personal care, therefore any carer that supports an adult who requires support with their personal care will need to make themselves available when the Scheme is inspected.

## **Who uses the scheme?**

The Shared Lives Scheme is open to anyone over 18 years of age who is dependent on the support and care of others and who we believe will benefit from the support that the scheme offers. We currently offer support to several service user groups.

### **Adults with a learning disability**

Adults with a learning disability can have several areas that they require ongoing support with. The adult will have capacity to develop their skills and reach a level of independence if they get the right support and encouragement.

### **Adults with mental health needs**

The scheme offers support to adults who have ongoing mental health needs or are recovering from a mental health problem which may have caused them to become withdrawn and lose confidence in their ability to cope. The Shared Lives Scheme can offer them an important stage in the recovery process.

### **Adults with a dual diagnosis**

This could be an adult who is diagnosed with a learning disability but has also later on in life been diagnosed with some mental health needs or vice versa.

### **Older people**

Older people can become isolated, unable to care for themselves

effectively, or diagnosed with dementia. The Scheme offers them the care and company they need. There is an increasing need for carers to give short-term respite care to older people within a family home.

## **Is there support for carers?**

Our carers offer an essential service to adults who require support so it is important to us that you feel valued and supported when you take on this vital role. You won't be on your own - you are part of a professional team working closely together to provide the care and support needed.

The sort of support you can expect includes:

### **The Shared Lives Officer**

The Shared Lives Officer is your main source of support. He/she will monitor the placement to make sure you are happy with how things are going and offer advice and support to help you deal with any issues that arise. They will carry out visits and reviews of the placement.

You can contact the Shared Lives Scheme any time between office hours if you have anything you need or want to discuss.

### **Care manager**

The person you support may have an allocated care manager you can make contact with, if not you can still contact the care management team if you have any concerns.

### **Out of hours/emergency duty team (EDT)**

If you have any concerns outside of the Shared Lives Team's normal working office hours then you can contact the EDT, who can offer you support and guidance.

## **What should I consider?**

Offering a home to an adult with support needs is not something

you can decide on in isolation as it will affect everyone living in your home and your lifestyle. Before making a decision you should consider:

## **Your partner**

If you are married or in a couple then you must consider your partner's wishes. Both of you can register to become carers, however if your partner decides not to become a carer, having someone else living in their home could have an impact on the environment.

## **Your children**

If you have children you must consider if having an adult with support needs is the right thing for you.

## **Your normal routine**

No two families are alike in the way they do things and when an adult first comes to you, lots of things may change. You will need to be patient while the adult living with you learns how you do things. It is helpful at the start if you can be flexible around some of their routines so that changes are introduced in a more comfortable and manageable way.

Caring can also have a positive effect on your own family life. Sharing your life with someone who has support needs can be an enlightening experience. Families have found that it has helped improve their own understanding and communication.

# **Becoming a carer**

## **Home visits**

We will visit you at home to discuss your application and get to know you. We will talk to you about your background, your way of life, your approach to adults with support needs. We will ask for three or four references and ask your permission to carry out checks which include health/GP references, DBS check and

mortgage/rental landlord references.

We will explain things you need to know and answer any questions. The Shared Lives Officer will write a report on your suitability as a carer to present to the Shared Lives Panel. You will have the opportunity to read the report.

If at any stage during visits you feel that being a carer is not right for you please let us know. Equally if during our visits we have any concerns or worries, we will talk to you about them straight away.

## **Shared Lives Panel**

The panel is made up of representatives from other local authorities, the private and voluntary sector and the NHS. The Shared Lives Officer will present his/her report and make recommendations to the panel. The panel will consider the information and make the decision about whether or not to accept you as a carer. If the Registered Manager does not agree with the panel's decision they are able to override the overall outcome.

## **How are adults and carers matched?**

Once you are approved there may be a gap until an adult is matched with you. Once we find a match we can start the process with you.

### **Stage 1: Sharing information**

The first stage involves sharing confidential information about the adult with you and telling the adult about you. Once you have had a chance to discuss this with us and everyone is happy we can arrange an introduction.

### **Stage 2: Getting to know each other**

It is important that you get to know each other before either party makes a commitment. There is no set time for this - we always work at a pace that suits everyone involved and the type of care you have decided to offer.

Initially it might involve having tea together, spending a day together, introducing overnight, a weekend or a week long stay and then a trial period agreed by all parties.

### **Stage 3: Making the decision**

At the end of the trial period all parties have to decide if they want to go ahead with the placement. The placement will not go ahead unless everyone agrees.

### **What if a placement doesn't work out?**

Usually we know by the end of the trial period whether or not the match is going to be a success. Very occasionally placements don't work - if either you or the adult in your care are not happy it is in everyone's interest for us to make alternative arrangements. It is unusual for matches to fail - most are very successful. Carers often continue for many years because the role is so rewarding.

Because a placement does not work out does not mean that we will not try to make another match with a different adult when someone is referred to the service. Sometimes it can take time to find a match.

#### **How can I find out more?**

If you want to know more about the scheme please contact the Shared Lives Team, who will be happy to answer any questions and arrange a home visit.

**Shared Lives Scheme**

**The Avenue Centre, RG30 4BZ**

**Tel: 0118 937 3700**

**Email: [sharedlives@reading.gov.uk](mailto:sharedlives@reading.gov.uk)**