Frequently asked questions for prospective Shared Lives carers

- **What is the application process?**
  Prospective carers are allocated a Shared Lives social worker who will work closely with them to talk through their background, life experiences and reasons for applying. They will write a report which they present to a panel of people who decide whether to approve the carers. The social worker will obtain a criminal record check, medical reference, work reference and 2 personal references. They will visit a referee in person as well. The application process takes between 3 and 6 months.

- **Do I need to have experience to apply?**
  No. We have Shared Lives carers with different degrees of caring experience and some have none. Supporting a family member or even bringing up children can count as relevant experience. As long as you have the right attitude and approach that is all that matters.

- **Is there training available?**
  Yes. As part of the application process, prospective carers attend 6 days of training on subjects (including first aid and safeguarding which need updating every 3 years). Once carers are established, there are on-going training sessions available as well as carer meetings to talk to other carers and listen to guest speakers.

- **Do I have to do it full time?**
  No. Carers can work part time, offering short breaks and respite, or work for us full time and offer a long term placement.

- **Do I get paid?**
  Yes. There are different payment rates depending on the level of need of the person who uses the service. Carers are self-employed and not employed by Oxfordshire County Council. Tax breaks are available. Carers are paid mileage for using their car in some circumstances. It isn’t essential to be a driver or own a car but it is preferable.

- **What are the accommodation requirements?**
  You don’t need to own your property. As part of the application process we get a reference from your mortgage provider or landlord. You need to have at least one spare bedroom available. Your allocated social worker will look around at your home at the start of the application process to check it’s suitability.
• **What type of people can be carers? Is it OK to be single, have children, etc?**
Anyone over 18 can apply to become a carer regardless of whether they are single, in a couple, have children, etc. Both partners in a couple need to apply and attend training even if one person will be the main carer. There is no upper age limit as long as carers are fit and healthy enough.

• **What Support will I get?**
A carer’s social worker will visit them at least every 3 months to offer supervision and support. The service user will also have their own Shared Lives social worker. You can contact your Shared Lives worker at any time to discuss problems and there is an emergency team available for out of office hours. If you want to end a care arrangement your social worker will support you in this decision.

• **What type of people will I be caring for?**
We have a wide range of service users over 18. They may have mental health needs, a learning disability, physical health needs or be an older person with additional needs.

• **Can I choose who I support?**
Yes. The social workers discuss with you who might be a suitable match for your home, family and lifestyle. We then do a series of introductions carried out over sufficient time to ensure everyone is happy with the arrangement. It is your choice whether this person is a good match for you.

• **How many people can I support at once?**
The scheme allows carers to support up to 3 people at once, but this is dependent on what the approval panel agree for your specific circumstances such as number of bedrooms and your time available.

• **Do I need to be at home all day or can I have another job?**
Yes, you can have another job alongside working with Shared Lives as long as you are available enough for the person / people you are supporting. They may go out to work, college, a day centre, etc. We would consider your availability when matching you with the people who use the service.

• **Am I allowed to have a break from caring?**
Yes. If you support someone on a long term arrangement you are paid for 6 weeks break a year. If you provide respite breaks you simply tell us when you are available or not to work.
• I often meet up with friends and family. Is it OK for service users to come too?
Yes. We actively encourage carers to involve people who use the service in their family life and activities. This includes day to day tasks such as shopping and cooking as well as social activities such as going to the cinema or out for a meal.

• Will I need to help people use the toilet, get washed, brush their teeth, etc?
Some of the people who use the service need help with personal care and some Shared Lives carers support them with this. However, it is not a requirement in becoming a carer and it will be discussed as part of the matching process.

• I am currently a foster carer. Can I also do Shared Lives?
Yes. We have many Shared Live carers who have fostering experience and it is OK to do both although there may be restrictions. Your fostering assessment and training may count towards your application to become a Shared Lives carer.

• I live in a rural area. Do I need to be near a town?
No. We have carers all over the county in towns, villages, on farms, etc. Your location will be taken into consideration when being matched with a person who uses the service.

• I want to apply. What do I do next?
Great! Look at our website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sharedlives to watch our video clips and read the information available. Then you can contact the Shared Lives team to ask for a home visit to discuss your suitability to apply.

Contact details:

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