

# Sharing social care's best kept secret



Growing Shared Lives in Wales  
– A practical guide



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# Foreword

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**Heather Thomson**  
Shared Lives Ambassador

"If I knew about Shared Lives when I was 16, my whole world would have changed faster and I wouldn't have had the anxiety of my future being so unknown. I think more social workers and people that work within the care system should know about Shared Lives because it could change someone's life for the better."

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**Albert Heaney**  
Chief Social Care Officer, Wales

"Shared Lives is a creative approach to supporting people, providing a strong voice in social care, continuing to encourage innovation, and working to bring together communities to offer care and support with families at home.

I am delighted to see that Shared Lives is looking to the future to expand opportunities for many more individuals who can benefit from living within families in their communities and becoming involved in their day to day lives."

– Albert Heaney in the foreword of Shared Lives Plus' 2022 *State of the Nation - Wales* report.

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## **Jo Williams**

Assistant Director of Adult Services, Caerphilly

"Since 2012, when the six local authorities entered into a partnership in South East Wales to develop Shared Lives across the region, the benefits of Shared Lives have been proved. The South East Wales Shared Lives Scheme is going from strength to strength, offering highly personalised care and support to a growing number of people. We are seeing individuals achieve significant positive outcomes.

Significant developments include: The partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board supporting individuals experiencing mental health crisis; the Health Initiative, providing preventative and hospital discharge arrangements; and a community-based Dementia service."

# A positive future for social care

Over 1,200 people are already living a Shared Life in Wales. The benefits and wellbeing outcomes are well documented, providing flexible, tailored support to match citizens' individual goals and needs.

In its 'Programme for Government' the Welsh Government has committed to: Protect, re-build and develop services for vulnerable people; Prioritise investment in Mental Health, Invest in prevention of family break ups; as well as a radical reform of existing services for care leavers. Shared Lives can help Government achieve these key priorities.

**"The Support of Third Sector including organisations like Shared Lives Plus Cymru is vital to the success of our Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act".**

**– Mark Drakeford\*, First Minister of Wales**

This briefing is for leaders in adult social care, such as Directors of Adult Social Services, Assistant Directors, Heads of Service and Commissioners, who want to grow Shared Lives.

It is centred on a desk-based review of recent evaluations and evidence, along with interviews and workshops with stakeholders from across adult social care.

We know, as does anyone whose had experience, that growing Shared Lives takes time and a set of promising conditions in which to flourish.

Much like the rest of the social care sector, Shared Lives schemes struggle to recruit carers and workers. Due to funding cuts, local authorities find it difficult to invest in the growth of Shared Lives. Public awareness about the benefits of Shared Lives is also low, which means that fewer people than we would like are requesting Shared Lives.

**For more ideas in the longer version of this briefing and more information about Shared Lives, go to: [www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk](http://www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk)**

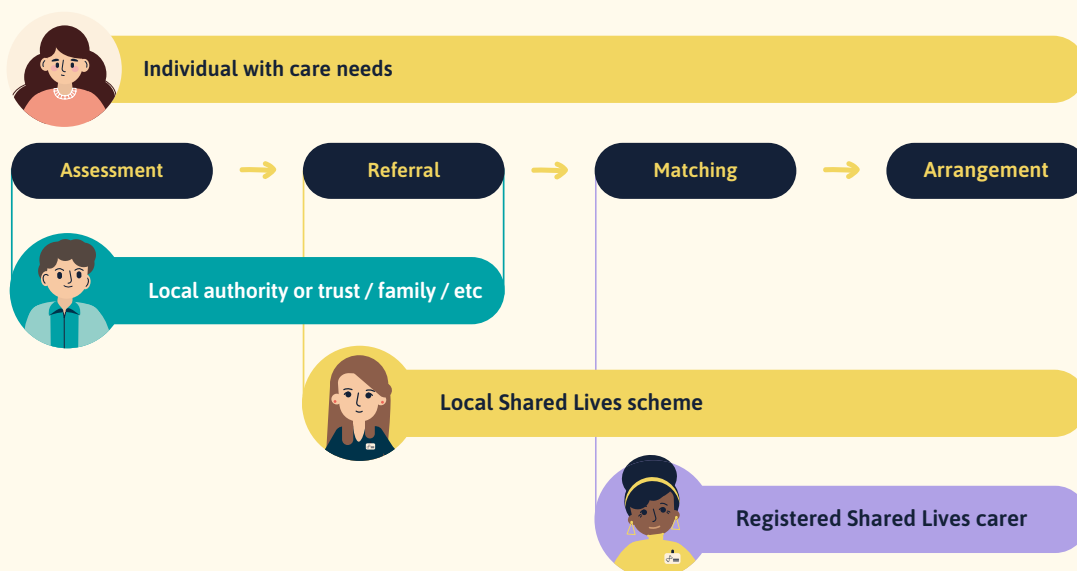


\*Mark Drakeford in the executive summary of Shared Lives Plus' 2018 State of the Nation - Wales report.



## The path to Shared Lives

Shared Lives is a community-based service that offers accommodation and support to adults with learning disabilities and other social care needs. It can offer long-term accommodation, where the person with support needs lives with the carer in the carer's home as part of their family and community life.



**Ewan King,**  
CEO, Shared Lives Plus

"Anyone working in social care knows that the future of social care is deeply uncertain. The cost-of-living crisis is placing huge additional pressures on social care and those of us who draw on support. We believe Shared Lives has to be part of the solution to the challenges we face.

Growing Shared Lives in Wales will help transform the social care landscape, giving far more people a better quality, more personalised care and support option, along with significant potential cost savings for commissioners.

We call on leaders across social care to join us in developing a positive vision for the future and to commit to growing Shared Lives in Wales."



# Worth your investment: why grow Shared Lives?

**The case for Shared Lives is clear: it supports people to live the life they choose. Shared Lives care creates the best outcomes for people who need support and helps them to live the best lives they can.**

The latest data from My Shared Life, 2022 shows that 98% of people in Shared Lives felt they were part of a friendship group or family most or all the time, while 88% of people felt that their Shared Lives carer's support improved their social life.

Shared Lives is also cost-effective, saving between £8k and 30k per annum, depending on the person's support needs and local alternative services.

**"We were sending an adult with complex needs out of the borough It was costing us £2,500 a week to find his support. We are now supporting him through Shared Lives at £700 a week."**

**Local authority commissioner**



# Growing Shared Lives: lessons from local authorities

## Committed leadership

Committed leadership is crucial to growth, with leaders who include Shared Lives within their wider vision for an asset or strengths-based approach to care and support, which supports more people to live independently within their communities. Leaders seek to:

- Develop clear plans to grow Shared Lives – Create clear priorities and embed these in service strategies and plans, to communicate its strategic importance
- Role-model commitment – leaders should take opportunities to show they are committed to Shared Lives
- Leaders use stories, case studies and examples to communicate the benefit and impact of Shared Lives widely
- Build awareness and leadership among middle managers
- Value a co-produced approach to growth and diversification, drawing on people with lived experience of the service

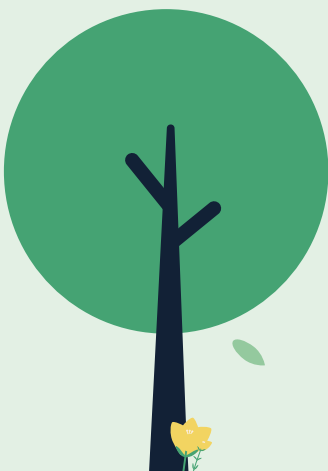
### Case Study: Shared Lives West Wales

Following a restructure of the Shared Lives team in West Wales, opportunity arose for the creation of three new roles to develop stronger links between social workers and adult social care.

The introduction of our new Area Coordinators in Shared Lives West Wales has meant we have been able to build closer relationships with our social care colleagues. These new roles allow us to be more visible, provide timely information on this unique model of care and be part of referral conversations at the very start thereby ensuring the best outcome for individuals who are seeking accommodation and a lifestyle of their choice with a focus on overall wellbeing.

Having Shared Lives as an option of choice at the very beginning of conversations with citizens, is vital.

**Sharon Frewin,**  
Senior Manager Community Inclusion  
Carmarthenshire County Council



### Align housing strategy with Shared Lives growth

Any Shared Lives strategy will need to consider the local housing market, housing stock and creative ways to ensure high quality Shared Lives carers have the right housing to support people.

### Regional collaboration

In many areas where there is a mutual desire to grow Shared Lives, local authorities are coming together to collaborate.

#### Case study: North East England and East of England collaboratives

In the Northeast of England, for example, council areas (supported by ADASS and Shared Lives Plus) have worked together to invest in a joint programme of growth workshops, cost benefit analyses and communications support. In the East of England local commissioners with a common interest in growing Shared Lives regularly come together to share intelligence and combine resources. Shared Lives Plus is also in conversation with regional groups in other areas of England and Wales.

### Effective commissioning

In areas where growth has been demonstrated, good general commissioning approaches have been fostered: commissioners have developed a comprehensive understanding of key issues, needs and assets. In these areas, commissioners also tended to have a good understanding of how Shared Lives operates and its expected benefits, not just for people with learning disabilities but also for other groups who can benefit, such as those with mental health conditions, dementia, and older people leaving hospital.

### Making the case for investment

A business case or feasibility study is often required to support a leader in making the case for investment in Shared Lives. A good business case is evidence based, drawing on the best available data sources, including demographic trends and projections of needs and current levels of service use and capacity, and explores the cost benefits of different growth options, based on a comprehensive analysis of Shared Lives compared against other models of care **(for more information about business cases, search 'Shared Lives consultancy')**.

### Embedding Shared Lives into business-as-usual

It is essential for leaders and commissioners to spend time on building the right conditions for Shared Lives to thrive. This means reviewing and improving systems, ensuring that IT and case management systems support referrals into Shared Lives, re-designing processes so they are easy to use and support fast-paced referrals, and ensuring that staff are well trained and have a good understanding of Shared Lives.



## Ensuring carers' fees are reviewed

Shared Lives carers need to be included in any annual review of care fees by the local authority to ensure their fees reflect any uplifts to other providers. Local authorities should benchmark Shared Lives with other forms of care and should be aware of other local authority's fees.

## Ensuring there are sufficient carers' breaks provision

Carers need a genuine choice of breaks. Market shaping by commissioners and good business planning by providers – including diversifying services - can help deliver this choice. Flexible funding can help local groups and social enterprises to deliver tailored, innovative solutions and improve equality of access to breaks.

## Developing champions

Develop champions based within social care teams, to promote Shared Lives and help colleagues solve problems.

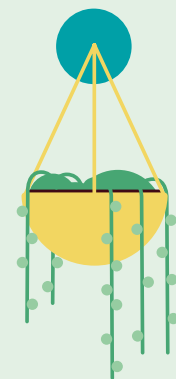
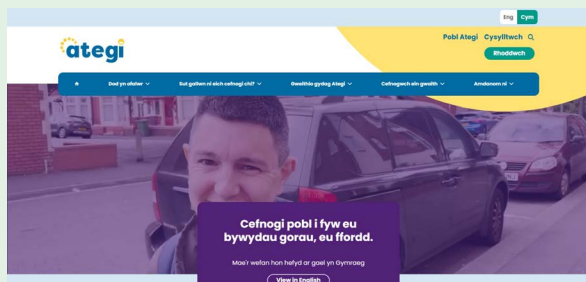
## Targeted communications and recruitment

Recruitment of carers is a continuous and vital aspect for Shared Lives schemes; however, it is a major challenge. Key activities that contribute to effective marketing include:

- Relevant messaging for target audience
- Collaborate on recruitment – work with other organisations, such as the NHS or foster care teams, to promote Shared Lives
- Encouraging word of mouth referrals – provide cost-effective financial rewards for people to recommend a friend or family member to become a Shared Lives carer
- Recruiting from diverse communities - targeted work with local community groups, black and minority ethnic communities, LGBTQ+ media, faith organisations, and social clubs can increase the numbers of carers recruited from diverse communities

### Case Study: Ategi Shared Lives

With a strong focus on development and investment, Ategi Shared Lives have started on the road to digital transformation with refreshed branding, improved social media presence, and a new bi-lingual website. They have also enhanced easy read information, and Welsh language offers.



# We can support you

**Shared Lives Plus has more than 35 years' experience of supporting local authorities and schemes to grow to their potential.**

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## We can help with:

- Needs analysis
- Cost benefit analysis
- Business cases and options appraisal
- Implementation planning
- Commissioning strategies and plans
- Co production
- Recruitment strategies
- Audience insight
- Communications and marketing strategies, and practical support
- Training of social workers in the benefits of Shared Lives

**To find out how Shared Lives Plus can help meet your goals, please contact us:**

✉ [consultancy@sharedlivesplus.org.uk](mailto:consultancy@sharedlivesplus.org.uk)

☎ 0151 227 3499

🌐 [sharedlivesplus.org.uk](https://sharedlivesplus.org.uk)





### **Alison McDowell**

Vice chair for the ADASS Northeast region,  
and Director of Adult Social Care and Integrated  
Services for Newcastle City Council

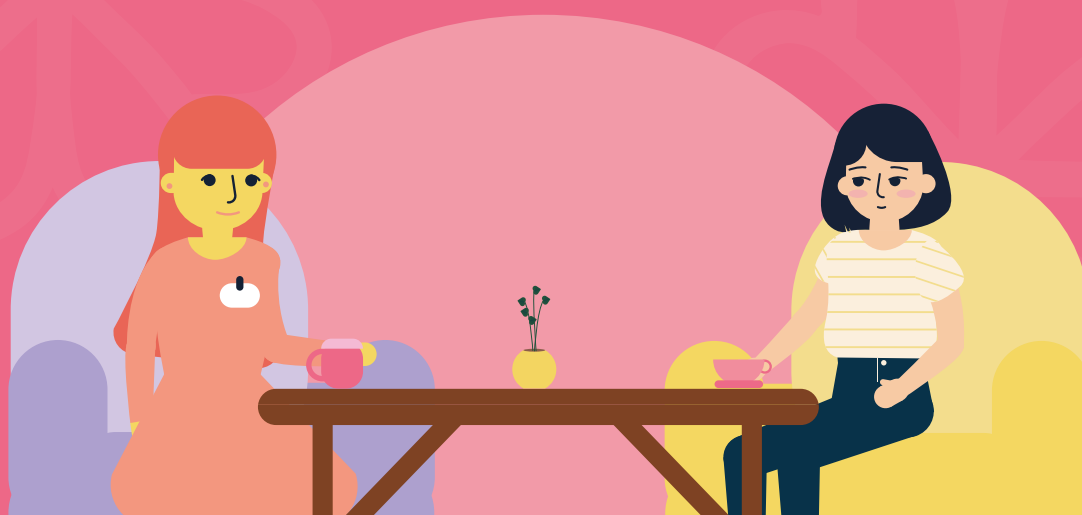
“One of the successes of the project so far, which is led by Shared Lives Plus and involves 12 local authorities, was establishing communities of practice, exploring ways we can scale up from a regional perspective so that everybody feels it is moving positively rather than competitively.

Providers have also been supported to embrace growth and diversification through a sequence of workshops, using people with lived experience to inspire and encourage stakeholders to consider how they can expand their service.

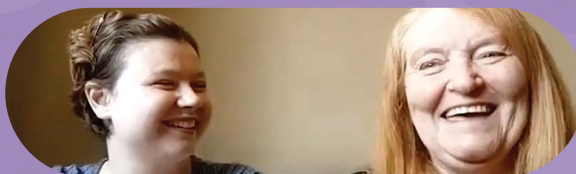
We’ve also provided marketing insight, with a series of demographic reports showing a regional picture for what a typical Shared Lives carer might look like. This has helped to inform key messaging and marketing campaigns that are focused on a local or regional perspective, rather than a generic, national one.”

This is a shortened version of the toolkit, and a longer version is available online [www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk](http://www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk)

**Q Search keywords: ‘Growing Shared Lives’**



## I knew it was a great opportunity for me to grow




25 year old Nikita moved in with Shared Lives carer Maggs as part of South East Wales Shared Lives for mental health crisis service. They lived together for 10 weeks, sharing family and community life.


**Nikita explains "Before Shared Lives I had no fixed abode and I kept going back to hospital. I was feeling awful and suicidal."**


When Nikita first heard about Shared Lives from scheme worker Kerry, she had no idea what it was. "I was pretty apprehensive – I'd never heard of anything like this in my life. When Kerry told me I could stay with someone rather than be on the ward I knew it was a great opportunity for me to grow and so much better than the ward. The ward can't offer you the same amount of one-to-one attention. They have limited resources and you can't do a lot of activities which would promote your wellbeing after your stay. When I was at Maggs', I was able to do my university work on my laptop. On the ward I couldn't go on my laptop, so I was already behind which was making me so anxious."

The new environment helped Nikita in her recovery and has given her a sense of optimism about the future. She says "It's so much quieter here and great to be able to be outdoors with someone's support. I trained for a half marathon at Maggs' and did it just after I moved. It was a huge achievement for me. I've started to live independently now – lots has changed but it's all positive. I want other people to know about this."

## Get in touch today!

 [www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk](http://www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk)

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