



Shared Lives Better Lives

CARER:
Gill Evans

How did you find out about the Shared Lives service?

I first heard about the service when I was working as a cleaner for a day centre. Some of the people there liked to come round with me and help out so I'd show them what to do and we'd talk as we went. One of the social workers commented that I was good with people and asked if I would be interested in Shared Lives.

My family had grown up and moved out so I wanted to find out more. Someone from the service came round to see me and we started the process straight away.

What was your assessment like?

It was quite a few years ago now so I don't remember too much but the Shared Lives worker asked me questions to help them decide if I was the right kind of person for the role. They wanted to know how I'd handle difficult situations and whether I could cope with different behaviours that people might show.

What training have you had through the service?

The Shared Lives team provided all the training I needed including first aid, health and hygiene courses and also specific

courses for things like dementia awareness. They also suggested I go on a voluntary summer scheme placement to support people with learning difficulties so I could get more experience.

Some of the training is mandatory and you need to do refresher courses every so often, but there are also other courses available and you can do as many as you like. I try to do at least one or two a year.

What type of placement do you offer?

When I first started I helped pilot day care services and supported a gentleman who had been barred from

his local day centre due to behavioural problems. I went to introduce myself and was told he could be quite aggressive. However when I spoke to him we just seemed to hit it off and by the end of the meeting he was holding my hand and making eye contact – something he didn't normally do with other people.

I now have two people living with me permanently – David and Tracey. They both have learning difficulties and have come on leaps and bounds since they've been with me. It's really rewarding to see someone look much better and happier since I've been caring for them.

What support do you receive from Shared Lives?

There's always someone on the end of the phone if you need help or advice. They also took the time to match me with the right people - David fit in with the family straightaway.

What changes have you seen in the people who stay with you?

When David came to me 10 years ago he was in quite a state. His appearance and hygiene were very poor and he wasn't very good at communicating with people. Now he takes pride in his appearance and his speech has improved a lot. We think of him as a brother.

Tracey had a number of behaviours that other people found difficult to get on with. It took a lot of patience but now she is getting on so much better and has more dignity when dealing with her personal care needs. She is also a complete chatterbox.

I've also been caring for a younger girl temporarily for the last few months. When she came to me she covered her face up all the time and wouldn't do very much for herself. Now she's out at college, going to meet friends and she'll help out around the house. She'll be living independently soon in her own home.

What do your friends and family think of your role?

Honestly? They think I'm crackers and don't always understand why I'd want to open up my home. But I believe I have found my vocation and I've loved it from the word go. I've never looked back. I've been a Shared Lives carer for 15 years now. I get so much pleasure from my role and it's really satisfying to hear someone say 'thank you' or 'love you'. This job came to me and I believe I've transformed the lives of the people who stay with me.

Do you have any advice for a prospective Shared Lives carer?

Don't expect it to be easy but it is very rewarding. To do this kind of job you have to stop treating people as if they have learning difficulties and treat them like individuals.

To find out how to become a Shared Lives carer:

Visit: leicester.gov.uk/sharedlives

Call: 0116 221 1370



**Shared
Lives
Better
Lives**