



Young people leaving care programme

Impact report

2024-2026



Report by:

- Mary Stokes, Senior Project Lead
- Sophie Hargreaves, Senior Analyst



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What is Shared Lives?

Shared Lives is a regulated community-based accommodation, care and support model anchored in the Shared Lives carers' home. Shared Lives carers are approved and trained and will 'share their life' with the person they support. This is likely to include taking part in family life and community activities, developing independent living skills and making decisions about their own lives, as well as personal care if needed. It involves either living with the carer or visiting for short breaks or day support.

What is the Care Leavers programme?

The aim of the Shared Lives Care Leavers programme is to support Shared Lives schemes to grow or develop their offer for young people leaving care who are autistic, have a learning disability, complex trauma, or mental health needs. We want to help end the cliff edge at 18, supporting all young people into Shared Lives as their first option, where it is right and most appropriate for them.

The programme was designed based on **four key objectives**:

- 1) Influence national policy to remove barriers to grow Shared Lives.
- 2) Improve outcomes for care leavers accessing Shared Lives.
- 3) Provide practical support to schemes delivering Shared Lives to care leavers.
- 4) Growth and evaluation to support the development, sustainability and innovation of the programme.

This impact report pulls together all the data that we have collected since the programme began in 2024. This includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence from the Shared Lives schemes signed up to the programme, as well as from young people with lived experience of Shared Lives. Collectively, this outlines both how the Shared Lives schemes have grown over this period - and what this means for Local Authorities and social care as a whole – as well as what it means to the young people being supported.

Impact statement

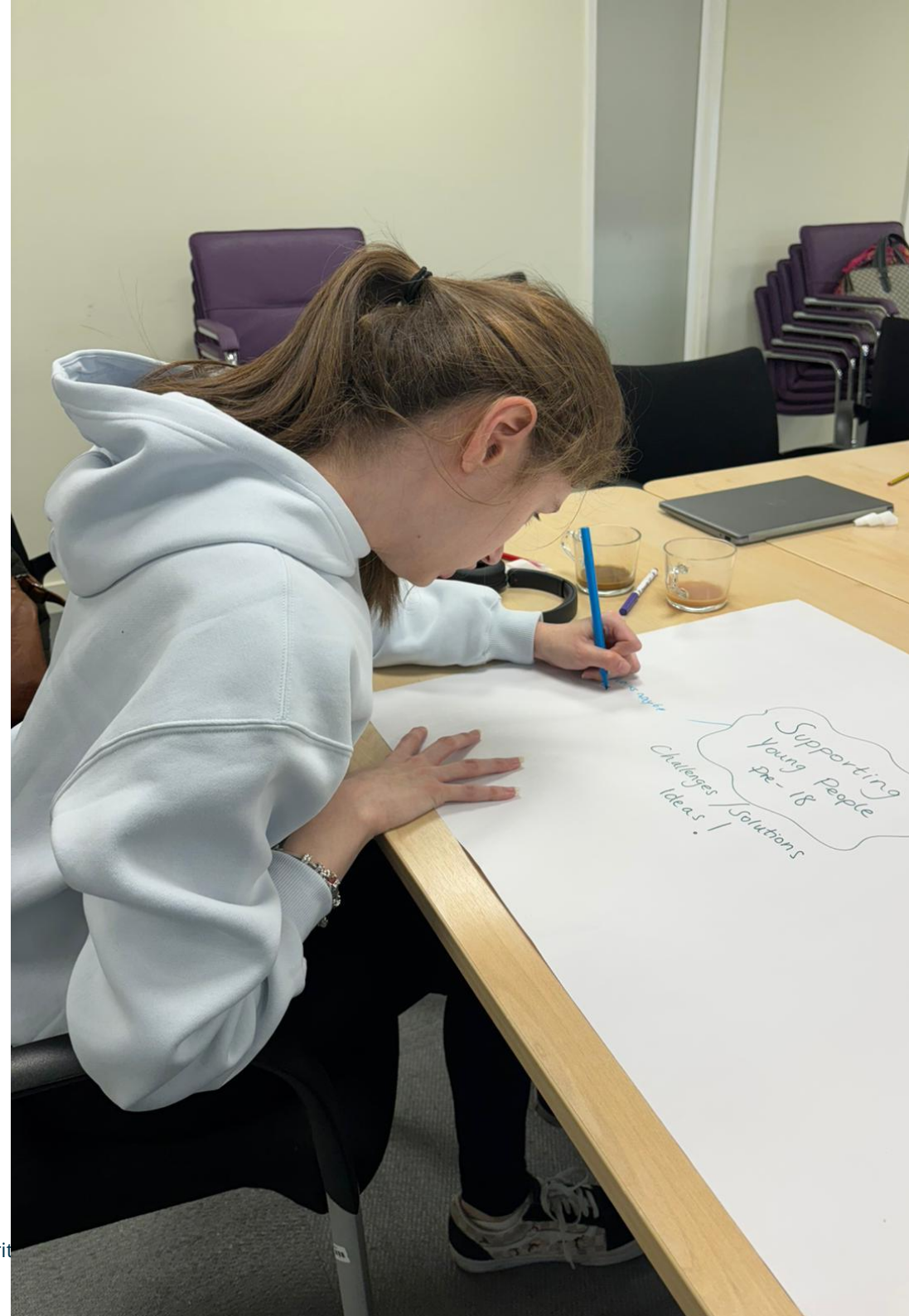
Over the past two years, the Young People Leaving Care Programme has been shaped, guided and strengthened by the voices of three remarkable Care Experienced ambassadors; Katie, Vicky and Gracie. From the very beginning, they have been at the heart of the programme, ensuring that the experiences, aspirations and priorities of young people leaving care have remained central to its development and direction.

They have actively influenced decision-making, challenged thinking, informed programme design and helped create opportunities for the voices of care experienced young people to be heard and valued. Through their leadership, authenticity, and commitment, they have played a pivotal role in growing the programme into a meaningful platform for change.

The impact of the ambassadors has been felt not only across the programme but within their own personal journeys. They have developed as leaders, advocates and role models, demonstrating the transformative power of providing young

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people with genuine opportunities to shape services and influence change. Their achievements reflect the programme's belief that young people are not just beneficiaries of support, but **experts by experience whose insight can drive lasting improvement.**

Equally, this impact would not have been possible without the commitment and engagement of the current 40 schemes involved in the programme. Their willingness to listen, collaborate and champion the voices of young people has created the foundation upon which this work has flourished. Together, they have enabled meaningful conversations, strengthened relationships and ensured that the experiences of young people leaving care continue to inform practice and inspire change.

As we reflect on the programme's first two years, we celebrate the collective efforts of our ambassadors, schemes and partners. Their dedication has helped create a programme that is not only delivering impact but is also empowering young people to lead the way in shaping a better future for those leaving care.

Mary Stokes, Senior Project Lead

Ambassador reflections



We thought different things going into this, but we didn't expect that we would reach the platforms that we have, meeting influential people, creating short films, and achieving awards for the work that we have delivered. Speaking about experiences does matter; and it works. We are truly making a difference by acting as role models for care leavers and giving a voice for those who are lost in the system.

Gracie, Shared Lives ambassador

When we first started, we had nothing. A few weeks on, we created the films for the programme, which we shared with Local Authorities and people in parliament. When doing the films, we all created a friendship. We presented at The Principal Social Worker event which created a great impact. We talked about life at 18 for care leavers. I like to always ask everyone; "if you weren't ready to leave home at 18, why do you expect us to?". We also recently met with Ofsted and have already been invited to speak at their conference next year. Now on the programme, we have 2 new projects going ahead. One is for day support, and one is for young people who don't meet the adult services threshold.

Katie, Shared Lives ambassador

Doing the ambassador role has given me the chance to advocate for young people who are leaving the care system into Shared Lives. This is important to me because I feel that young people under the care system don't have a voice to explain how they feel about their future. Young people need an advocate. I didn't have an advocate. I'm using my own lived experience to make a difference for young people.

Vicky, Shared Lives ambassador

Those who have made it possible

Funding

We are incredibly grateful to the below funders who have made the programme possible.



Our team

The programme would not have been able to deliver its successes without its core working team.



Gracie Rhodes

Shared Lives
Ambassador



Katie Hodgetts

Shared Lives
Ambassador



Mary Stokes

Senior Project Lead



Rachel Leslie

Strategic Advisor



Victoria King

Shared Lives
Ambassador

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The programme in figures

40

Number of Shared Lives schemes on the programme

Percentage of young people who remained with their previous carer, helping to reduce the disruption when reaching adulthood

73%

183

Number of young people supported since the beginning of the programme

Percentage of young people on the programme who were in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

68%

157%

Total increase in arrangements since 2024

Approximate annual cost avoidance of 94 young people on programme moving into Shared Lives instead of supported living

£2.9m

How we are doing it

We began with 12 Shared Lives schemes at our launch event in June 2024, and this has grown to **40 schemes in June 2026**. The programme has been delivered through multiple workstreams, focusing on four key objectives. Collectively however, the overriding objective is to **grow Shared Lives care provision for young people leaving care**:

- **to support with growing demand**, providing another care and support option across localities,
- **to support in reducing the cliff-edge** of leaving care,
- **to help build independent living skills** for those who may not be quite ready to leave care,
- **and to reduce financial pressures for local authorities** when provided as an alternative to options such as children's residential care.

We know of the benefits that Shared Lives can offer young people; and the programme is about making this known and supporting our schemes along the way.

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1

Influence national policy to remove barriers to grow Shared Lives

2

Improve outcomes for care leavers accessing Shared Lives

3

Provide practical support to schemes delivering Shared Lives to care leavers

4

Growth and evaluation to support the development, sustainability and innovation

- **We've delivered workshops** and provided guidance to the Department for Education to explore Shared Lives being listed in national guidance as a housing and support option.
- **We've created online training** which includes 10 modules. These are designed as a tool for Shared Lives carers, social care professionals and Shared Lives schemes to support the transition of young people leaving care. These are due to be launched later in the year.
- **We deliver quarterly Communities of practice with the schemes** involved in the programme as part of providing practical support for growth. These have included speakers from the Department for Work and Pensions, Break Charity, the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL), the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF), and the Department for Education.
- **We have collected and monitored data** across all schemes involved in the programme as highlighted [here](#) in this report. This has shown how arrangements across the schemes through the period of the programme has increased. It has also evidenced other

key measurables such as the number of young people in employment, education, or training, and where they were living previously – for example if they transitioned from foster care, supported accommodation, or residential care. From this, we can understand how **Shared Lives could potentially be providing a cost avoidance** to local authorities, depending on the alternative provision a young person may have been accessing if Shared Lives hadn't been an option.

- **Coproduction has been at the core** of the programme's delivery, with our three experts by experience both leading on and supporting with the development and delivery of key resources, events and workshops. They have empowered teams across the country to start conversations about they can better support care leavers and, from there, take meaningful action.
- **New projects have developed** through access to additional funding, enabling us to test new approaches and drive further growth and innovation. This includes securing grants from Esmée Fairbairn and Reaching Communities, creating more opportunities to develop innovative ways for Shared Lives to support young people leaving care.





Highlights



**Created and released
3 x films**
September 2025



Speaking on BBC Look East and
BBC Radio Sheffield
November 2025



**Meeting with the Minister
for Children and Families**
March 2026



**Nominations and wins at the Frontline
awards** and the National Learning
Disabilities and Autism awards
May 2026

More to come!



Speaking in Parliament
November 2025



**Community of
practice events**
(Photo from
November 2025)



**Speaking at Principal Social
Worker event**
February 2026



**Design and development of
training programme**
March 2026 - Present



**Meeting the National
Director of Ofsted**
June 2026

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How we evaluate

“Coming up to 18 is terrifying in care, you don’t know where you’ll end up. That’s what makes Shared Lives different, young people knowing they can stay, they’re safe and they’re wanted.” Young person supported by Shared Lives.

Since the first year of the programme in 2024, **183 young people in total moved into Shared Lives arrangements** across the schemes we’ve worked with. As shown in our key figures, there was a **157%** increase in arrangements across 2025 and 2026.

Whilst this may not appear as a high number in comparison to overall figures across social care, this shows great progress in the context of Shared Lives, which accounts for approximately **1% of all social care across the UK**.

This also means that the arrangements established through support of the programme has provided 183 young people with the **choice** of Shared Lives care and support; and of those, 133 young people had the opportunity to **stay with their carer**. This also gave young people access to care and support in a family environment, particularly if they were not ready for independent or semi-independent living.

Data evidence

Throughout the lifecycle of the programme so far, we have collected quantitative data from all the schemes involved to help understand the growth of their arrangements. This has included data on:

- Where each arrangement **lived previously** (for example, foster care)
- If they **remained** with their previous carer when moving into Shared Lives
- Their age at **referral** into Shared Lives
- Their age upon **moving** into their Shared Lives arrangement
- If they were in **education, employment or training**
- Their **support needs**
- **Scaling questions** focusing on the strength of their relationships, choice and influence, wellbeing, and skills/independence.



What the data can tell us

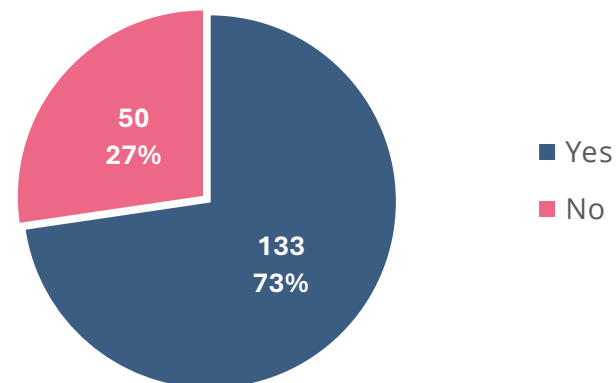
1. Reducing disruption

We know that Shared Lives enables many young people to **remain living with carers they already know and trust**, including transitioning from foster care. This can help to reduce disruption with education and work, as well as help maintain their emotional stability. As shown across the programme, **133 young people remained with their previous carer** – 110 of these young people had lived in foster care, whilst others had remained with a previous carer through provision including kinship and Staying Put.

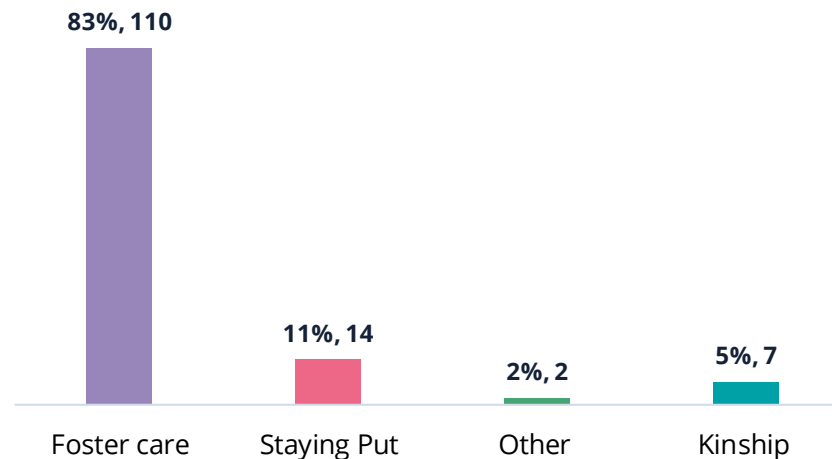
2. Being in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

Shared Lives schemes provided arrangement level data on whether individuals were in education, employment, or training (EET). Of the complete data shared with us, we know that just 47 care leavers out of 148 in Shared Lives were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This meant that 68% were in EET. This may be due to the reduced disruption experienced when leaving care, as discussed above, as well as the one-to-one support provided through Shared Lives. Mental health is often a significant barrier to EET and for many care experienced young people, these challenges can be

Percentage of young people **remaining** with previous carer



Young people who remained with their previous carer - Where they **lived previously**



compounded by the absence of a stable familial support network. Of those NEET, many attend day opportunities and others are being supported to actively look for work or return to education.

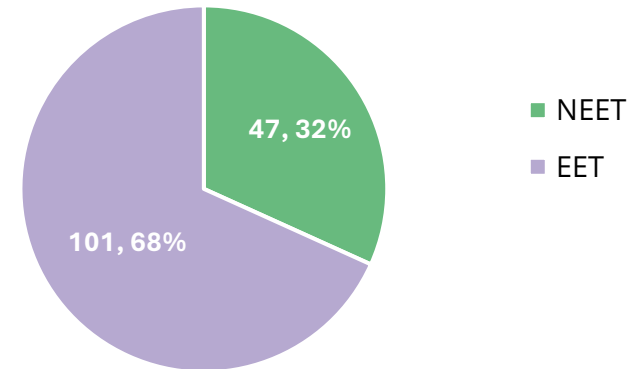
3. Reducing financial pressures for local authorities

The average cost between Shared Lives and alternative provision options across the UK can significantly differ. As highlighted in our [business case for Care leavers and young people transitioning to Shared Lives in England](#), we have previously calculated an average net cost of Shared Lives at roughly **£695 per week per arrangement** (exc. housing and board) – this includes average running costs from 8 Shared Lives schemes. From our data, we can then identify comparative costs for alternative provision that a young person may otherwise access if they were not in Shared Lives.

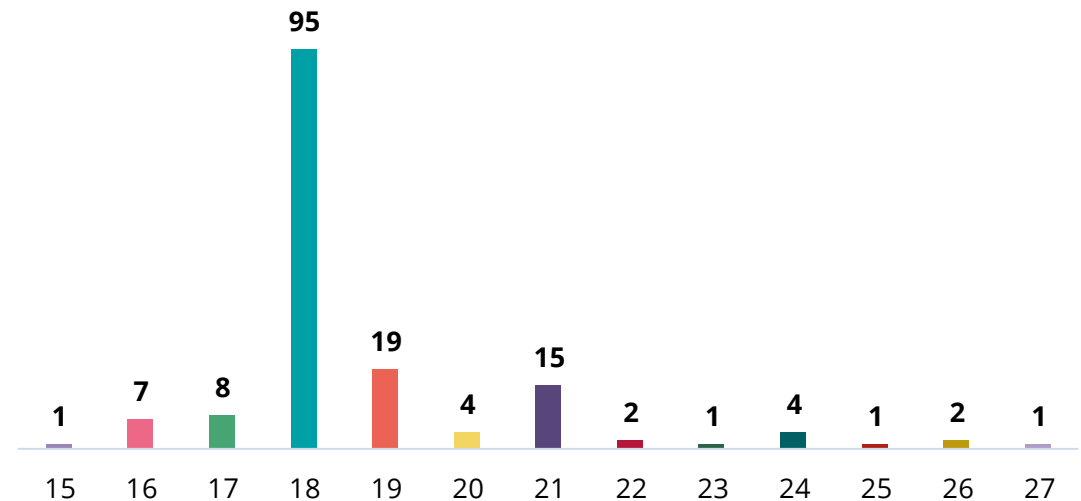
For example, 144 young people were 18 and above when their arrangement started. 94 of these young people had a learning disability. If these 94 young people were to access supported living as an alternative, this could incur an **additional cost of 2.9m** to social care – based on average supported living costs of **£1300 per week** for learning disability support collected from four local authorities.



Young people in **Education, Employment, or Training (EET)**



Age that the young person moved into Shared Lives





"Shared Lives has given [me] my forever family, opportunities to employment, but also to share my experiences of being in care and for others to know they aren't alone."

Survey feedback from young person supported in Shared Lives



What we have learnt

*"Shared Lives has made my life feel so full and bright. **My outlook on life has completely changed** and I am excited about what the future holds instead of fearing it."* Young person supported by Shared Lives.

The programme has also generated significant learning about **why** the model works for young people leaving care, as well as **how** best to support the transition into adulthood in practice.

The continuation of support

- One of the clearest learning points from the programme is that care experienced young people **continue to need meaningful support well beyond the age of 18** – removing the 'cliff-edge' of leaving care is vital in supporting young people's mental health, employment or education, as well as generally navigating the systems into adult's social care.
- Learning from the programme also suggests that transition support should not focus solely on accommodation or practical independence skills. Young people also need support to **build confidence, social networks, emotional resilience and a sense of belonging**. There is also a great benefit for young people where independence is developed progressively, rather than through abrupt transitions.
- These learning points also reinforce the importance of approaches that recognise adulthood as a **continuing developmental journey**, rather than a fixed point reached at 18.





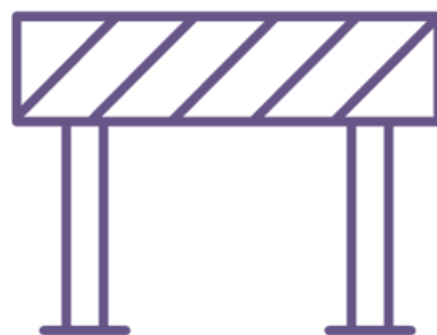
The importance of relationships

- Relationships are the defining feature of what makes Shared Lives so effective. Young people have repeatedly told us that the most valuable aspect of Shared Lives was not simply accommodation or formal support, but the **experience of trusted, consistent and caring relationships**.
- Positive and stable relationships have been linked to improved wellbeing, increased confidence, and greater participation in education and employment. Relationships support with creating the foundation from which **young people can feel able to develop independence safely**. Learning from the programme has also reinforced evidence on why relational practice is essential in supporting care experienced young people.



The barriers from systems

- One significant challenge is the **divide between children's and adults' services**. Young people and professionals have described how support models, eligibility thresholds and regulations changed abruptly at 18, often resulting in young people losing services or no longer meeting criteria for support despite continuing needs. This can be particularly challenging for young people who are neurodiverse, have learning disabilities or mental health needs.
- Systems can be designed in ways which **create additional stress or instability** during transition for young people, for example a young person's 18th birthday being the catalyst for their daily life changing. This can include systems such as benefits, housing pathways and mental health services. Young people have described these processes as confusing, inaccessible and difficult to manage without trusted adult support. Following the barriers and challenges in navigating these systems, can also come delays – including accessing benefits or suitable accommodation. This can then create further anxiety and instability.





What next?

We have successfully completed **two years** of the programme – but we are now thinking forward to the next two years. We have already planned and secured some exciting opportunities as part of this.

- **Two new projects** – funded by Esmee Fairbairn and Reaching Communities – will build on our learning to innovate more ways Shared Lives can support care leavers.
- **The Shared Futures project**, funded by Esmee Fairbairn, will test and scale pathways into Shared Lives for care leavers who do not meet Care Act/Social Services and Wellbeing Act thresholds.
- **The Shared Days Inspire Project**, funded by Reaching Communities, will support with developing day support for young people leaving care, as well as creating peer support groups.
- The programme, led by our ambassadors, has been asked to present at the **Ofsted annual conference** in June 2027.
- Our ambassadors will continue co-leading the programme, and with this we will be **seeking more opportunities to prioritise coproduction** across Shared Lives schemes as well as other social care organisations.
- We will be further **optimising our data collection**, with Shared Lives schemes as well as people supported, to help us improve our evaluation into the effectiveness of Shared Lives for young people leaving care.
- **Our training programme** will be released later in the year. This will include 10 modules, all tailored to support Foster Carers transitioning to be Shared Lives carers. This will be available to all Shared Lives schemes through our online Carer training platform.
- We will be partnering with an **external evaluator** in order to build on our growing evidence base, strengthening our understanding of the impact Shared Lives is having for care leavers across participating schemes.

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# Thank you!



**If you are a Shared Lives scheme and are interested in joining the programme, please  
get in contact!**

**Mary.stokes@sharedlivesplus.org.uk**

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**Find out more visit our website  
or contact our friendly team:**

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

 [info@sharedlivesplus.org.uk](mailto:info@sharedlivesplus.org.uk)

 0151 227 3499

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