Shared Care

General information about a service for the families of children with disabilities

What is shared care?

Many families who have a child with a disability need an occasional break from caring for their child. Children and young people also benefit from the chance to make new friends and enjoy new experiences which isn’t always easy when they have additional needs.

Shared care is a family-based scheme that provides short breaks (respite care) for disabled children through specially recruited carers. The breaks can be provided in the following ways:

**Sitting service carers**
A sitter from the shared care service can offer a break by going to the child’s home for a few hours and either looking after them there or taking them out so that the rest of the family can then take a break.

**Fostering service carers**
These carers offer care in their home and can include both day and overnight care. This can be anything from a few hours a week to regular weekend stays.

**Befriending**
Any child who receives either of the above services may also be taken out by the carer so that they can take part in social activities or sports.

Who are the shared carers?

Most shared carers and sitters are volunteers and come from many walks of life. We aim to recruit carers from a wide variety of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. They can be single individuals, couples, male and female, working or not working, with children or without.
The county council has a responsibility to ensure the safe caring and wellbeing of children who are cared for through the scheme, providing reassurance to parents using the shared care system that their child will be properly looked after.

All prospective carers have to attend a preparation course to help them decide if they want to become a shared carer. They then undergo a process of assessment and checks, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, before a report is prepared and presented to a professional panel or a designated manager for approval. The carers receive comprehensive training so that they are able to confidently look after a child with special needs.

What does the child do when they are with the shared carer?

Every shared care placement is different. The child may be looked after in the carer’s family home – they may take part in artwork, cooking or play. Or they may be taken out to activities in the community, such as swimming, go to the park, or go shopping.

This will depend on what the parents and the child have identified as favourite pastimes and can include promoting independence and self care skills, encouraging communication programmes and learning life skills, like using public transport or money. Continuity between home, school and shared care will always be encouraged.

How can my child receive this service?

If your child has a disability and you think he/she would benefit from shared care, or any other service offered by Hertfordshire’s Children, School and Families, then contact the customer service centre on 0300 123 4043 and ask for an ‘assessments of need’ for your child. Explain that your child has a disability and that you are interested in the shared care scheme.

You will receive a home visit from a social worker who will decide alongside you and your child if appropriate, what services he/she is eligible for and what services you would want to access. Together you and the social worker will complete an assessment report that takes into account the needs of your family outlining what support can be offered.

If the shared care scheme is identified as a suitable service for your child, a referral will be made to the shared care team.

For more information please see the leaflets called ‘How we can help disabled children and young people and their families’ or ‘Information for parents/carers when children are receiving short breaks (respite care)’. Your social worker will also be able to answer any queries you may have.

The above leaflets and more information can be accessed on www.hertsdirect.org/specialneeds and go to the Special needs at home section.
How long will it take?

Once the shared care scheme receives a referral, a shared care team worker will contact you to discuss your child’s needs, the frequency of care the family requires, and to answer your questions about the scheme. We also ask you to complete a form giving details such as the child’s routine, likes and dislikes and medical needs. This is called a child profile and we use this information to help us match the child with a suitable carer.

Much thought is put into matching your child to a shared carer, and factors such as location, skills and availability of the carer are considered.

If we do not have a carer available, we keep your child’s name on our waiting list and will check from time to time that their circumstances and/or requirements have not changed.

When a suitable carer has a vacancy, we send them a copy of your child’s profile, and we send you a copy of the carer’s profile. If the carer wishes to meet your child and you would like to meet the shared carer then a shared care social worker will arrange a meeting.

The matching and introductions are undertaken carefully and at the pace of you and your child, ensuring the majority of shared care placements flourish successfully.

Are you interested in becoming a shared carer?

We are always looking to recruit more shared carers and sitters. So even if you have not had any experience of children with disabilities but think you could spare a little of your time to provide this valuable service please contact the team on 0800 917 0925.