

Shared Lives South West: ARF evaluation summary

The strategic opportunity

Shared Lives is a proven model that delivers strong outcomes and value but remains underused. This report draws on independent evaluation evidence from the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) in the Cornwall, Devon, Torbay and Plymouth Council areas, demonstrating both the progress achieved and the significant opportunities still ahead.

Why Shared Lives matters

Shared Lives is a model of adult social care that enables people to live ordinary lives in families and communities while delivering much better client outcomes, cost savings for commissioners, and progress towards national priorities.

- **People supported** receive person-centred care in a permanent family and community setting. This helps them build confidence, independence skills, long-term family-style relationships, active social lives, agency over what they do, ability to work or volunteer, and improved health and wellbeing (1). In short – a ‘normal’ life.
- **Commissioners** save at least £25k per person supported per year (2) on average compared to alternative care packages - in many cases, this is much higher.
- **The shared Lives model aligns with national priorities** to improve care quality and enable client choice and control (3), as well as shifts to preventative and community-based care (4).
- **Shared Lives carers**, who, despite the significant personal commitment involved and being relatively underpaid compared to other caring roles, report high levels of satisfaction due to developing family-style relationships, seeing the difference they make, and the flexibility and choice they have with the work (5).

The challenges facing the scheme

Despite the strength of the model, prior to the ARF, Shared Lives was underused due to major structural barriers:

- **Public awareness** was low due to the small scheme size compared with other ASC models.
- **Referrals:** The bespoke matching process, internal time pressures to place people, and limiting perceptions among referring social

workers lead to low referrals from commissioners. Long term care vacancies in 2025 averaged 26 per month across the region – if filled, this represents a potential annual saving of £650k or more.

- **Carer recruitment:** Coupled with low awareness, finding carers with the right experience, desire, home and life circumstances to become a Shared Lives carer makes it difficult to recruit. Prospective carers often take years (sometimes 10+) to consider before applying.
- **Wider system factors** include the way the scheme is set up (e.g., with carers self-employed and relatively underpaid) and less integrated within commissioners’ workflows, practices and working relationships than other models.

The Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF)

The ARF aimed to address some of these barriers across Cornwall, Devon, Torbay and Plymouth and generate evidence about what works, what doesn’t and where future investment and system change could unlock further growth.

ARF activities to **increase carer numbers** included:

- **Research** to build understanding of existing carers and inform future recruitment strategy.
- **Multi-channel marketing** (Meta, Google, radio, podcasts, print, i-van and more) to drive interest in becoming a SLSW carer, using a specialist industry partner and bespoke materials.
- **Community engagement** across a range of formats and events to improve awareness, with two dedicated full-time roles (one covering Cornwall, one covering Devon).
- **Engagement, retention and training activities** for existing carers – e.g., training on delivering person-centred care, engagement around improving job satisfaction.
- **Learning and development** using insights from the above to inform strategic direction.

ARF activities to **increase referrals from commissioners** included training, workshops, communications and information sharing targeted towards Council staff, and focused relationship building between SLSW and Councils.

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Impact of ARF funding on the scheme

ARF-funded activities achieved their specific goals (detailed on this page), with these successes also highlighting opportunities to address further systemic barriers (next page).

Strategy, insights and direction for future work

- The initial research about carer characteristics and resulting recruitment activity (marketing, community engagement) generated **significant insights into who to target and how, what works, what doesn't and why**. Learning reports produced by SLSW and partners triangulated these insights to inform future carer recruitment strategy homing in on audiences, areas, events, channels, content, and approaches.

Improvements to public awareness

- **The marketing served >20m impressions** across digital advertising (>14m), audio, radio and podcast (>5m) and print. Total reach across all channels is likely more than half of the 1.84m population, fulfilling the goals of the broad public outreach campaign.
- **Community engagement** officers noticed significant uplifts in public awareness during their time in the roles, with one estimating a shift from roughly ~10% to ~40%.

Interest in becoming a carer

- **The digital marketing** alone generated >200k clicks, with high click through rates compared to industry norms (1.21% for Meta, 1.53% Google Demand Gen, 2.62% Google Search), suggesting the ads were reaching the right people.
- **Website views increased rapidly following marketing**, from 3.1k in February-March 2025 to 14k in March-April 2025, with enquiries to become a carer maintaining relatively high levels for months afterwards compared to before the marketing.

Enquiries to become a carer

- **130 new enquiries to become a carer** were recorded from the digital marketing (60) and community engagement (70). Past data tells us that around 5% of enquiries convert to applications, projecting 6-7 potential new carers and a cost saving of >£160k from this alone.

- The lead in time for a prospective carer to decide to apply is long (10+ years for some), indicating the **future benefits that could be realised** when further barriers are addressed.

Increases to referrals

- **Referrals received** by SLSW from any of the four Councils were 62 in the six months from July to December 2024, 51 in January to June 2025, but rose to 80 in July to December 2025, coinciding with the public awareness campaigns and engagement work with commissioning staff.
- This was described as supporting the **continuity and sustainability** of the service (referrals dropping significantly between 2023 and 2025).

"I think it [ARF activities] has whipped up investment into the service as a whole. I think if we hadn't had the ARF, we may have stopped working with them [Shared Lives] maybe a year ago" (Council staff)

Partnership working & relationship development

- **The structures, relationships and ways of working** between SLSW and some Councils improved, with more Council staff becoming involved with Shared Lives placements, Shared Lives having greater focus from Councils than it did before, better 'unblocking' of issues (among Council staff), and sustaining placements that may have otherwise ended.
- **Relationship improvements** have led to inception of new Council initiatives post-ARF to boost referrals.
- The **learning, leadership and momentum** generated through the ARF in the South-West has attracted greater collaboration with national organisations and initiatives (e.g., Shared Lives Plus, Westminster, the Casey Commission), building the profile of SLSW.

Assets for future use

- **High quality materials and resources** (e.g., marketing materials, promotional toolkits, training) are being used and adapted post-ARF, building on learnings and providing foundations for future activity.

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Conclusions and opportunities

ARF activities done to high standard

- **The ARF funded a wide range of experimental activities**, including, but not limited to: community engagement; multi-channel marketing; and varying communications, training and engagement activities across both the SLSW carer cohort and Council staff.
- **Evidence from performance metrics and outputs** shows that the work was done to a high standard, using specialist industry expertise, including newly recruited roles and multiple external partners - coordinated effectively to lead best-in-class programme activity.

ARF activities were overall successful

- **Activities were largely successful in doing what they set out to.** For example, the digital content generated clicks, shares, website views, and enquiries to become a carer. The community engagement generated brand awareness, wide-reaching conversations, enquiries and a strong local presence.
- **Prospective carers often take years** to (a) decide they want to share their home in this way, and (b) wait for life circumstances to align. The fallout of this activity could yet support growth in carer numbers for years into the future.

Remaining barriers need addressing

Remaining barriers to carer recruitment fall between awareness/interest (improved by ARF activity) and deciding to become a carer, with some structural barriers yet to be addressed:

- **Carer pay** was identified in the initial research, carer engagement, and wider literature (5), as being low compared to other caring roles, considered as unfair by carers, and a deterrent to prospective carers. *Research into fair pay arrangements is a necessary next step.*

- **Financial viability** of carers as they (a) wait for a matched placement and (b) are required to cover costs of self-employment, training and registration. *Exploring financial support and incentives (e.g., Council tax cuts) is being discussed but should be more widespread.*
- **Long lead in time to become a carer** (sometimes 10+ years) is well known and should be factored into recruitment activities. *SLSW use this and other insights to build trust/word of mouth alongside other promotional activity.*
- **Referrals from commissioners need boosting** to realise the full potential of the scheme, with over 20 carers typically waiting for long term placements per month across all of Devon and Cornwall. *Dedicated roles in Councils to support placements could bridge this gap.*

Strategic opportunities

With important benefits evidenced by SLSW but many ongoing care vacancies and barriers to both carer recruitment and referrals, there is significant unrealised potential for Councils to:

- **Further reduce costs** of care
- **Improve outcomes**, independence and wellbeing for more people and families
- **Support national priorities** around person-centred care, client empowerment, community-based care and preventative care.

With strong evidence of success and valuable learning from ARF, there is a compelling **opportunity to build on this momentum** through ongoing cycles of action, learning and refinement to maximise the scheme's impact. The potential benefits to the system are clear.

The insight from this report is taken from the two evaluations of the ARF programme. These independent evaluation can be found at <https://healthinnovationsouthwest.com/programmes/accelerating-reform-fund-evaluation/?highlight=arf>

References

1. Brookes, N., Palmer, S., Collins, G., & Callaghan, L. (2024). Supporting people to live well: A multimethod study of Shared Lives (adult placement). *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 52, 131–139.
2. Todd, R., Williams, B., (2023). Investing in Shared Lives (Social Finance). *N.B. Cost avoidance was also modelled as part of this evaluation, with £25,000 calculated as the minimum average likely to be saved.*
3. DHSC (2026). Adult social care priorities for local authorities: 2026 to 2027 (online policy paper).
4. DHSC (2025). 10 Year Health Plan for England: Fit for the Future
5. Health Innovation South West (2024), Shared Lives South West Carers in Cornwall and Devon (not published)