

Newsletter

March 2025

**COVER STORY: HIGH SHERIFF OF SOMERSET
VISITS US**

**FEATURE: FUNDING AND BENEFITS TEAM
HELP MARIA TO THRIVE**

**PHOTOS: BOWLING NIGHT WITH SLSW
HOUSEHOLDS**





The High Sheriff of Somerset, Rob Beckley, met with the Shared Lives South West staff team as well as carers and people who use its services at the charity's base in Eaglewood Park, in the Dillington Estate, Ilminster. He heard about Mollie's many accomplishments in the last few years thanks to her own self-belief and the support of her carers – which include her completing a degree and now working in engineering. Couple Ivor and Carol who are also supported by Shared Lives Carer Rachel Bunce also sat and talked to the High Sheriff. They discussed their wedding and how they are living their "fullest life" together due to the support provided from Rachel and her husband Fran.

Their "impressive" artwork, which has raised thousands of pounds for Shelter charity was also at the forefront of their discussions.

All who were present during High Sheriff Rob Beckley's special visit were impressed with his ceremonial attire, including many reporting they enjoyed "looking at the detail and craftsmanship of his ceremonial sword and medals."

Shared Lives Carer Teresa Campbell, who attended, said: "It was a great experience to bring us altogether to talk. He seemed genuinely interested in the work we do and asked questions about all aspects of Shared Lives.

"Paul, who I support, thought it was great and loved the visual

side of it from seeing his sword to his special hat."

Overall, the wider Shared Lives South West team felt very grateful to High Sheriff Rob Beckley for his visit and for learning more about the charity and all the work they do behind the scenes.

Amanda Maggs, Shared Lives South West Somerset Team Leader, said: "We are extremely grateful that the High Sheriff came to visit and learn about the great work we do.

"He really took time and an interest in everyone who attended."

Shared Lives South West CEO Dominic Spayne added:

"We enjoyed meeting the High Sheriff and talking to him about how we've grown and evolved our services over the last 20 plus years and the positive impact we've had on the hundreds of people we've supported.

"He really took his time to talk to each staff member, carers and particularly those supported to hear their stories."

When reflecting on his visit, High Sheriff Rob Beckley said: "My visit was an example of how localised and personal care in the community is so much better than providing institutional living and is good value. It was very good meeting them all and encouraging them to keep up the good work."



Did you see Ivor and Carol's love story feature in national magazine Take a Break? Ivor, who is supported by Shared Lives Carers Rachel and Fran Bunce, married Rachel's sister Carol. It documents that they went to school together and came together as a couple when Carol moved in during the pandemic when her needs changed... and love blossomed! It's lovely that their story has made the national press.



We met with Martin Wrigley, MP for Newton Abbot, to talk about our model of care and ways he can support and champion it.

A big thank you to the MP for taking the time to meet us and for being so enthusiastic about our work.

Pictured is Shared Lives South West CEO Dominic Spayne with Martin at his Newton Abbot headquarters.

We look forward to speaking to him again soon.



“Love a club with a great vibe and the Rotary Newton Abbot had it in spades. Thanks for dinner and listening to my talk about Shared Lives,” said Gemma January, SLSW Community Engagement Officer.

“Your charity work is awesome as are your human fruit machines! Great to have such a warm welcome.”

Carers & households out in your community...

Don't forget we have resources available if you know of a coffee shop, church or community board where you could leave some leaflets or pin up a poster!

If you need any, do contact our offices and we'll be sure to some get sent to you. Your support to help us spread the word about Shared Lives South West is extremely appreciated.





Being in the Westcountry a lot of footie fans were thrilled with Plymouth Argyle's big win against Liverpool FC. However, there was a divide in one Shared Lives household. Colin, who is supported by Shared Lives Carer Maggie Byrne, follows Plymouth Argyle. However, the household is big Liverpool fans and has its own themed bar paying homage to the famous club! Here's a great pic of Colin wearing his argyle top in the bar while watching the game!



What a great photo of Colin looking dapper and ready for a Valentine's disco! He is supported by Shared Lives Carer Maggie Byrne.



Here's Piper, promoting Shared Lives South West at Barnstaple Pannier Market. His owner, Community Engagement Officer Gemma January said the pooch was a big attraction and got plenty of treats!

Cara enjoyed a break at Finlake Resort with her Shared Lives Carer Sylvia Marsh and got time to chill in the hot tub! She also enjoyed visits to the surrounding area.

It sounds like a wonderful break.

She also recently went to see Mary Poppins at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, and said it was 'practically perfect' in every way!

It looks like the household has been having a fantastic time lately.



Shared Lives South West Funding and Benefits Team Leader Donna Bounden has now celebrated her 20th anniversary with the organisation.

She's seen the charity grow from very humble beginnings and has been part of it growing and evolving, with it now operating across three counties and across five local authorities.

"I've had the opportunity to lead the funding and benefits team, consisting of myself and three colleagues," said Donna. "Together, we've built an in-house welfare benefits service, the only one of its kind within the Shared Lives sector nationally."

Donna's role is focused on ensuring that the people Shared Lives South West supports receive the financial help they're entitled to, giving them the independence to live life on their own terms.

"Over the years, we've worked to improve the accuracy and speed of benefit claims, often achieving better results than local authority teams, while always putting the needs of individuals first," she said proudly.

"The most rewarding part of my job is seeing how financial security can empower people to pursue their goals, whether that's moving towards independent living or simply being able to enjoy life's opportunities."

During her time at Shared



Lives South West, she's led the development of an in-house funding and benefits service. This service helps people gain financial independence by maximising their benefits, sometimes securing back payments of over £10,000.

"What we do is largely unseen. However it's vital in giving people the financial freedom to pursue meaningful activities, such as holidays, work opportunities, or simply planning their lives with greater confidence," she said.

"Our approach is person-centred. This means we focus on the individual's needs, offering support with benefit applications, appeals, and ongoing reviews. What makes me proud is knowing we've made a real difference, not just for the people we support but also by easing pressure

on local councils, who benefit from increased contributions towards care."

Key achievements have included supporting financial understanding in employment, where Donna has guided numerous individuals through the complexities of managing their benefits as they enter employment.

"This personalised support helps them transition into work while maintaining their entitlements, giving them the confidence to take on new challenges," she said.

Donna has also helped people with budgeting for when they can move on to independent living.

"This equips them with the skills and knowledge to manage their own finances. It can also foster long-term independence," she said.

Shared Lives South West is committed to promoting independence together with work and volunteering opportunities for those supported.

Supporting an individual to do this requires the carer, the Shared Lives South West funding and benefits team and their Shared Lives Coordinator to work closely together.

The funding and benefits team can support with the first stepping stone into work by providing money information about how work will impact the person's benefits, so that they can make an informed decision about moving into work. To highlight the journey into work and the impact it has had on them, Maria chatted with the funding and benefits team and is happy to share her story.

Pictured are Shared Lives Coordinator Hayley Nicholls with Maria and Cara Humm from our funding and benefits team

Maria started using Shared Lives services in October, 2023 and at the time, she wasn't working.

She had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety, which made her hesitant to start working. She mentioned that she used to get bored easily and preferred to keep her mind occupied. After some consideration, with Maria started to apply for jobs all with



her carer's support. They were on hand throughout and provided lots of encouragement. Reassurance was given where needed, support with applications, and preparation for interviews to ease the anxiety.

Following successful interviewing, Maria decided to start working as a kitchen porter at a garden centre for 16 hours a week.

The SLSW funding and benefits team worked with Maria and explained as she is claiming Universal Credit and not ESA, she can work the hours she likes and it will be worked out in the background with HMRC reporting.

The funding and benefits team explained that if she started working full time, she would need to pay something towards the cost of her care to the local authority, but the earnings are all hers to keep. We explained that the personal allowance may have to be reduced to cover this, but while she is working part-time this is unlikely to be affected.

Maria's carers also support her by breaking down information to a format that she can understand and reduce any heightened anxieties. Maria will also contact the funding and benefits team herself if she is unsure about something or ask her carers for support. On her first day, Maria felt very nervous about meeting new people and stayed quiet. She said the first few weeks were challenging as she adjusted to the tasks and got to know her colleagues. However, after some time, Maria made new friends and now enjoys taking breaks with her co-workers, who she describes as being like family.

She feels that her colleagues are very supportive and have really helped her feel at ease. After some time, Maria was offered extra hours at work, and she discussed this with the funding and benefits team. They informed her that, as she receives Universal Credit, she was free to work as many hours as she likes, with the earnings automatically

adjusted in the background. HMRC reports her earnings each month.

If you are currently in receipt of the old style of benefit entitlement such as Employment Support Allowance, then the journey would be more restrictive in that you would be advised to apply for permitted work, so please discuss this with the funding and benefits team. However, on a more positive note going forward, it is the intention of the Department for Work and Pensions to transfer people onto the Universal Credit system and it maybe that we will be in contact with you to discuss this at some point in the future and as you can see Universal Credit is more flexible around people that work.

As Maria was working, it also allowed the funding and benefits team to discuss the "Help to Save" scheme with her.

Maria is passionate about her holidays and has a goal of learning to drive. She was eager to work more hours to save extra money towards these goals. Each month she has been saving half of her wages and is determined to put money aside to achieve these goals.

To qualify for the Help to Save scheme your take home pay must be more than £793.17 per month, Maria was pleased that she was eligible for the Help to Save scheme. This

scheme offers a 50% bonus on the amount saved.

Over a four-year period, Maria can save up to £50 each month, which totals £1,200 after 24 months. She can continue saving for another 24 months, bringing her total savings to £2,400. After two years, she will receive a bonus of £600, and another £600 after four years, resulting in a total of £1,200 in bonus payments. Maria has signed up for the Help to Save account, with the assistance of the funding and benefits team. One of the team sat with Maria to do this and guide her. She plans to use the savings and bonuses toward purchasing a car once she has passed her driving test.

Currently, Maria is working in the deli and hopes to pursue a qualification in catering to gain more experience and develop her cooking skills.

When asked what advice she would give to others with mental health issues or disabilities who are hesitant to start working, Maria had a suggestion. She said start with something simple and easy to get into, then work your way up once you build confidence. She also shared that working helps keep her mind occupied, which has been beneficial for her.

Maria has developed a variety of skills through her work experience. She has learnt how to cook, built friendships, work independently, stay

organised, plan effectively, and make commitments. She has expressed that she is grateful for having a job.

As you can see from Maria's journey not only is she working towards full financial independence, she also talks about the positivity and confidence it has brought to her.

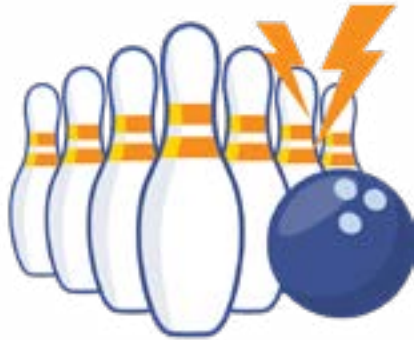
Maria will now work towards managing her own benefits, this is a long-term goal for the future.

Her carers have conversations with her about budgeting.

Initially, the support was greater – talking through outgoings, identifying how much money is needed for these, and what Maria has left. She now manages this mainly independently but requests support from her carers around savings.

If you use Shared Lives services and would like to look at work opportunities, please do not hesitate to contact the funding and benefits team for advice.





Some of the staff team and Shared Lives households met up for a social evening and a couple of games of ten pin bowling in Plymouth. The evening was filled with chat, cheering and laughter! A big thank you to all who came along.





David, who uses our services, is celebrating receiving the Mayor's Recognition Award from Teignmouth Town Council.

He won the 'Individual Excellence Award' for being an exemplary community member and volunteering countless hours to support many local initiatives and good causes. He moved in with Shared Lives Carer Annie in 2018, who has helped him extensively to realise his passion for volunteering.

Rain or shine, he volunteers at Teignmouth Football Club, diligently checking tickets at the gate.

His commitment extends beyond the football club to the Teignmouth Carnival, where he plays a vital role in raising funds by selling programmes. David's enthusiasm is infectious—he always dons fancy dress during the festivities, raising smiles to many who see him.

He has spent years collecting donations. Events include the Teignmouth's renowned air displays, fireworks nights, and the annual Christmas light switch-on.

His contributions significantly impact the town's ability to host



these beloved traditions. David's dedication extends even further as he volunteers at three local businesses weekly, enriching his skill set while providing invaluable support to the companies. "He makes a lasting difference

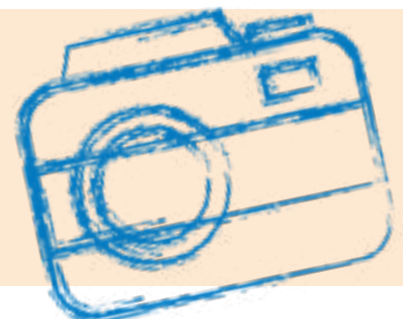
in the lives of many," said Charlotte Williams, his Shared Lives Coordinator.

"A big well done to David, he really deserves this mayor's recognition award."

Photos!

We love seeing your photos and hearing your news.

**Don't forget to send photos to:
dgillingwater@sharedlivesw.org.uk**



What a positive and engaging Devon Care Homes Collaborative conference. We met Linda, whose son Thomas is the boyfriend of Stella who is one of our supported adults and is featured on the image on our pull-up stand no less. We also met Jo Rice, senior case worker for Martin Wrigley MP for Newton Abbot who is pictured with our CEO Domininc Spayne. Thanks for a brilliant day!



Peter is seen here showing off his artistic talents with his Shared Lives Carer Rachel Bunce. They made these brilliant banners for a house party.





Just to say thanks to Proud to Cornwall for having us at their latest recruitment event at Shire House, Bodmin. Also a big thank you to everyone who stopped by at our stand and asked about how to become a carer with us. Pictured are community engagement officer Sophie Essex and Shared Lives Coordinator Claire Connor at the event.



A great turn out for the Cornwall carer meeting recently in Camborne. Fantastic to see you all.

SHARED LIVES CARER REFERRAL INITIATIVE

As a Shared Lives Carer you know the benefits of the role more than most and now you have the chance to receive up to £500 if you refer someone who goes on to become an approved Shared Lives Carer.

If you know someone who would be perfect for this role, and encourage them to apply — ensure your name goes on their application form!

The details of this initiative are regularly sent to you in your monthly email from us if you would like more information.



Emails from SLSW

We send SLSW events, news, updates information to you by email. We send organisational updates once a month, carer handbook updates every few months and as and when needed. You will also receive invites to carer meet ups and carer meetings via email. We would be grateful if you could open and read them as they could well help you in your role and contain important information.



What an incredible needle felt picture created by Charroth. Her son bought her the kit as a present and it was her first attempt at creating needle felt work.

We think it's brilliant! Her carer Tracey Chase shared these photos. Shared Lives Carer Bex McKnight also enjoyed a day with Charroth, "Dog cuddles, dog walks and hot chocolates in the sunshine with 5.5 miles covered," said Bex.



Our leadership team and trustees met for an 'away day' at Roadford Lake. They came together to discuss strategies and the future of the organisation.



"Thank you to Lucas for cooking a lovely valentine's meal for me and everyone," said Shared Lives Carer Jo Crocker.

Jo supports Lucas, Florentina and Lynn in her Cornwall home.

Pictured are Lucas and Lynn and a selfie of all who enjoyed the meal Lucas cooked.



The SLSW Cornwall team wrapped more than 100 presents to help a good cause in the run up to Christmas. They volunteered with Transformationcpr Foodbank as part of their Christmas drive. Some of the team were also interviewed for ITV Westcountry .




Pictured is David with his friend Sue in Torbay. They have been friends for 35 years and regularly meet up for lunch.


David is supported by Shared Lives Carer Julie Hughes.




Did you see community engagement officer Sophie Essex on Cornwall Council's social media promoting Shared Lives South West? She filmed a video for the council's channel talking about the benefits of being a Shared Lives Carer and talked about what Shared Lives is all about.

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 [shared_lives_south_west](https://www.instagram.com/shared_lives_south_west)

 www.sharedlivessw.org.uk

The deadline for the next edition is May 24

If you have any questions or comments about this newsletter or any stories you'd like to share with us, please do get in touch - we would love to hear from you!

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