

Newsletter

April 2026

**COVER STORY: SHARED LIVES SOUTH WEST
MEET THE KING**

**FEATURE: WELCOME TO SLC JO POLKEY
IN CORNWALL**

**PHOTOS: AWARDS, DAYS OUT AND
HOLIDAYS GALORE**



Michael Brooks, known as Spike, is celebrating being nominated for the Dimensions Leaders Awards 2026. The Learning Disability and Autism Leaders' Awards celebrate people with learning disabilities and autistic people who are making a difference and changing our society. These awards recognise outstanding leadership, courage and impact, shining a spotlight on people whose achievements are too often overlooked. His nomination is for 'outstanding work and taking a lead in your life'. He'll find out next month if he's a finalist. Spike is supported by Shared Lives Carer Susan Smith.



"A lovely little trip to Newquay Orchard for hot chocolate and cake with Liddy and Declan," said Holly Lyons, a Shared Lives Carer. It looks like great cake and



A new Shared Lives Coordinator has joined our Cornwall team.

Jo Polkey joined us recently.

Here we catch up with Jo and find out more about her...

Can you tell us a little bit about your background?

I'm passionate about helping people to live where they want to, often at home in the community, and have dedicated my working career to this and developing support services to make this happen. I have had a long career in healthcare services and have spent more than ten years in hospice care. I've enjoyed working in the charity sector and am pleased to be employed within it again.

What made you apply for the role?

Shared Lives values are closely aligned to my own as I'm passionate about family and home. The office is also close to home for me. The coordinator role draws on my previous experience with case-load management, and I also love working with people, so this seemed like the right role for me.

How are you finding it so far?

The team has been very supportive and organised, it's great to come into a role with



a clear induction plan. I've enjoyed going out on visits too.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I love the sea, seeing it and being in it, and try to go in when I can and when the weather lets me! I'm also a part-time student studying for a Master's degree.

What are you looking forward to the most at Shared Lives?

Being out and about in Cornwall, meeting carers and people supported, and seeing the sea en route.

What three things would you take to a desert island?

My bikini, sunglasses, and a good book!

Shared Lives Carer Debbie Robus sent in these great photos of her household getting creative in different ways!

She supports Michael and Allan long-term and also James and Karen for short breaks.

James has been busy making Easter cards, Allan baked a cake and so did Michael, while Karen has been making bead bracelets! Great work all!



"Chanroth and I are pictured at our Zumba class/retirement party for the instructor," said Bex McKnight, a Shared Lives Carer.

It looks like you both had a fun time!





One of our households has been getting out and about to enjoy the sunnier weather we've been enjoying in Cornwall recently! Carer Nicola Drewett shared these lovely pics of a beach and carvery trip to Newquay with Jamie, Charlotte, and Helen who use Shared Lives services.



We recently spent the afternoon at the main entrance at Torbay Hospital spreading the word about Shared Lives South West. Pictured is Communications Officer Dawn Gillingwater.

Look at these great photos sent in by Shared Lives Carer Melissa Boardman of Hattie and Laura, who she supports, enjoying pancake day with Melissa's son. "We enjoyed making and flipping the pancakes, but most of all eating them with lots of lovely sickly toppings," said Melissa.



Steve Race MP, for Exeter, took time out to meet with Shared Lives Carers Norma and Jeff Spry, along with the people they support - Anita, Iain and Janie. He heard first-hand about their experiences and the positive difference Shared Lives makes to daily life. Ed Bunce-Phillips, Team Leader, also attended. Steve asked thoughtful questions about the Shared Lives scheme and showed warmth as he spoke with Norma and Jeff about their careers in care and supporting people in their own home. A big thank you for the visit and for the continued support.

Shared Lives Carers Claire and Rob Thomas have had a fantastic time in Spain with Emma and Martin, who they support. It looks wonderful!



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 a Shared Lives Carer is definitely a lifestyle and not a 'job'", said Shared Lives Carer Holly Lyons. She shared these great photos of 'happy days' with Sadie, Charles, Jude, Declan and Nathan, who have all enjoyed short breaks with Holly recently.



We were at Lanivet NHS Health and Wellbeing event recently. Thanks to everyone who stopped by and found out more about the great work we do. Pictured is Shared Lives Coordinator Rachel Moore who attended the event.



These great photos were sent in by Shared Lives Carer Caroline Hill from their cruise with Kat and Sylvia on board an MSC ship. They sailed from Southampton onboard MSC Poesia and visited Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. It looks like you all had a smashing time!



"Elvin is seen here on a walk to the beach with our Romanian rescue dog," said Di Cole, Shared Lives Carer.

"We've only had her for five weeks, but we all agree in the household that we love her very much and she loves us too."

Di also sent in this great photo of the Northern Lights she captured when they gave a good show recently in the south west! What an amazing photo.



A truly incredible night to remember for Shared Lives nationally Shared Lives Plus Community and Shared Lives South West.

Many went to a reception at Windsor Castle by invitation of the King and Queen this evening.

The prime minister Keir Starmer, and many celebrities including Kate Garraway and Dr. Ranj attended the event in recognition of carers in the UK. It was great to spread the word about Shared Lives and meet many other inspiring carers. Ian and Gill Richardson from SLSW attended with Communications Officer Dawn Gillingwater.

It was wonderful that all the Shared Lives schemes in attendance came together at the end of the night for group photos.



"A wholesome day at Meldon Dam with a lovely walk to Meldon quarry," said Shared Lives Carer Melissa Boardman.

She enjoyed the day with Laura, who she supports, as well as her husband Daniel and son.

It looks like a great time was had by all.



Josh enjoyed a lovely cream tea with his Shared Lives Carer Maggie Byrne recently. Question- Do you put cream or jam first on the scone?



What a lovely photo! Pictured is Trudy Foster-Williams, who is celebrating being a Shared Lives Carer with us for a year! She supports Harry long-term and they are seen here enjoying the sunshine.

Cara is seen her enjoying a sweet treat!
Her Shared Lives Carer Sylvia Marsh sent in the photo of her enjoying toasted marshmallows. Delicious!



Lilly wanted to share an update on her journey. She joined Slimming World and proudly received her ½ stone award!
A huge well done to Lilly for her dedication and commitment in reaching her goals!



What a great day! We had so many Shared Lives Carers join us at our Devon Carers meeting at the Kenn Centre packed with learning, reflection, and great discussions. Thank you to Adele Bourne from Recovery for All - gambling awareness, who gave a presentation. Also, to Geanie from the NHS Oral Health Team, who gave a really informative talk on oral hygiene. The day wrapped up with a fun session on boundaries and dilemmas in a SLSW Household. A big thank you to all our speakers and everyone who took part - your energy and insights made the day a great success!



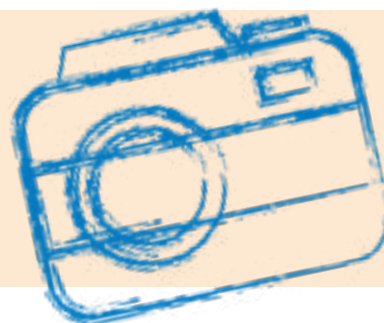
Short Breaks Carer Liz Winter hosted a fantastic 'Afternoon Cream Tea Party' for the people she supports and their families. What a spread! Liz made all the scones, quiche and cake for the party with those she supports at her home in Somerset. Pictured is carer Liz, with Paul and Nick whom she supports. What a fantastic way to enjoy the summer with friends and family!



Photos!

We love seeing your photos and hearing your news.

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



Shared Lives Carer Mel Thomas enjoyed a fantastic getaway to Benidorm with Sarah and Abby, who she supports through the Shared Lives South West. Joining them was Abby's daughter, Isabella, making it a truly special trip full of sunshine, laughter, and unforgettable memories.



Shared Lives Carer Lisa Drew enjoyed a birthday meal out with partner David, who is a support carer, as well as Matthew who she supports. We hope you had a lovely birthday!



Bob, who uses Shared Lives services and is supported by Shared Lives Carer Caroline O'Sullivan, was part of The Reminiscent Project. He went to Crediton Library and chatted to Chris about his memories, which were recorded and will be stored and used as historical and educational references. Bob will receive a copy. He really enjoyed sharing his life and still had lots to talk about after an hour, so has been invited back for part two!

"A very happy Bob," said Caroline O'Sullivan, a Shared Lives Carer. Caroline supports Bob in her Devon home and ensures he goes fishing, as it's a hobby he really enjoys.



What a fantastic morning at Victoria for our Cornwall Carer meeting!

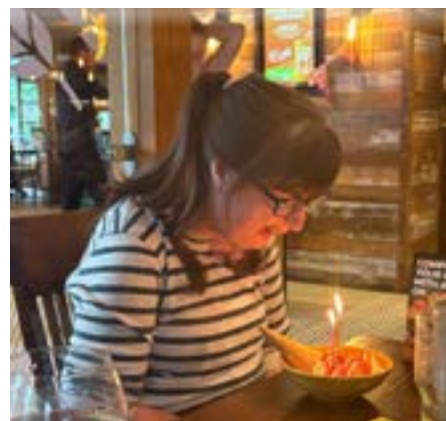
Graeme Hickey, from Cornwall Council's commissioning team, attended and spoke to carers and our Funding and Benefits Team answered questions on a video call.

Carers also discussed training, talking about what works well and what they'd like to see improved.

Thank you to everyone who joined – it was great to see you all!



Happy Birthday to Cara!
We hope you had a super day.
These great photos were sent in by her Shared Lives Carer Sylvia Marsh.





What a lovely round-up of photos of Tom's recent respite breaks with Shared Lives Carers Sarah and Andy Ford. "We've had a lovely time and we'll look forward to the next break," said Sarah.

Alistair, Kevin and Luke enjoyed a 'happy holiday to Tenerife' with Nick Higgins, their Shared Lives Carer. Just look at that blue sky!



Hattie's brother Barny surprised her with a trip to watch Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. "A great result for them 3-0," said Melissa Boardman, a Shared Lives Carer who supports Hattie. What a great experience and fantastic photos!



"We were due to spend the day on the Waverley Paddle Steamer sailing from Falmouth to Penzance, but sadly, due to the weather and sea conditions, the sailing was cancelled," said Nicola Drewett, a Shared Lives Carer. "Rather than waste the day, we drove up to Polperro and had a lovely time. Jamie thoroughly enjoyed his day out and enjoyed buying himself some souvenirs and postcards for his scrapbook."



"We spent a full five hours watching Scotland v Canada and shortly afterwards, Wales v Fiji. It was such a fantastic day, making great memories, and the matches were terrific, just like Elvin !"



Some of our funding and benefits team spent their volunteering hours helping out at HITS Foodbank. While there, they met Aaron, a fellow volunteer, and experienced first-hand the sense of community and support that makes the food bank so important. It was a wonderful reminder of the difference a little time and care can make in people's lives.



We loved seeing Shared Lives households at our open board meeting in Somerset. For the first time, we used an easy-read agenda and incorporated easy-read into the day - helping make the meeting more inclusive for everyone.



Laura finds getting out very difficult without something to motivate her, so her Shared Lives Carer Melissa, found something to help Laura and the environment...

"On a recent dog walk, we noticed that there was quite a bit of litter blown around after bin day, so we discussed purchasing a little picker and Laura doing something positive on her walks by helping clean up the village," said Melissa. "She has been enjoying it and brings home the litter to show me how much she has collected each day.

"Laura is very proud of her achievement, and we are so thrilled at the effort she is putting in."

Way to go Laura! Great effort



"We've been to see the Far Away Magic Tree at the Regal Redruth Theatre, Cinema, Restaurant & Bar, and had lunch beforehand," said Nicola Drewett, a Shared Lives Carer.

"Sam spent the day with us (but not on respite, just as a friend).

"It's safe to say Jamie, Charlotte, and Sam have enjoyed their day together!"

"Sylvia and Catherine had a nice few days away in Cornwall," said Caroline Hill, Shared Lives Carer. "We stayed at Rose Cradock Holiday Village, and they had a nice day at Milendreath beach. We were really lucky with the weather." It's always great to see Shared Lives households getting out and enjoying themselves.



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.

Emma won the silver medal for "Speaking Out" at the Celebrate CEDA Awards! She is pictured with her Shared Lives Carer Mel Brunsdon at the ceremony. A BIG well done to Emma.



"We went roller skating this evening! Chanroth got better with every lap," said Bex McKnight. It looks like a fun night!

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www.sharedlivessw.org.uk

The deadline for the next edition is May 15

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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