

How can this leaflet help you?

'People think that because I've got problems myself I've got nothing to offer!'

Older people who need support are often offered a very narrow range of choices, and are rarely given good information about the many possibilities.

This leaflet is about a range of options that you might not know about – and that care professionals may know little about. These options:

- rely on older people's contribution – they are based on positive mutual relationships (relationships that are important to both people, and make a positive difference in their lives);
- may be informal;
- are often set up by older people themselves.

If you are well informed about your possible options, you will be better equipped to make decisions about your future. You will also have the information you need to argue for change locally. The ten tips in this leaflet should help to get you started.

This leaflet is based on the findings of recent research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) – Widening choices for older people with high support needs.

About our research

JRF funded the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) and Community Catalysts (CC) to research the choices available for older people with high support needs. In particular, the research looked at options that:

- actively promote mutually valued relationships and the contributions you can make yourself;
- enable you to stay at home and not have to go into a care home.

The project included a study in four areas of the UK: Oxford, Swansea and Gower, Dorset, and Leeds, looking at different ways of providing support and help. More than 100 older people shared their stories with us.

The list of different support arrangements they were using appears in full in our report: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/widening-choices-high-support-needs>

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INSPIRING
SOCIAL
CHANGE

KNOW YOUR CHOICES - PLAN YOUR SUPPORT

Ten tips for older people with high support needs



Ten top tips for older people with high support needs

Find out more about the choices available to you, and how you can direct your own support.

- 1 Helping each other can make a positive difference.** The differences include making friends and finding long-term relationships, feeling less lonely, and better emotional and physical health.
- 2 No two arrangements will be the same.** Some will have an arrangement between just two people, and others involve a whole street or neighbourhood. Other people may go to a community group or day centre, where they can find help with everyday tasks and make new friends and connections.
- 3 When things work well, everyone is clear why they are doing it, and what they want from it.** This is the case whether the arrangement is informal, between two people, or more formal, involving a group of people. The needs of individuals, what they can expect, and what they can bring may emerge slowly. A successful arrangement will always have this understanding at the centre, which makes it easier to continue.
- 4 'Knowing how' and 'knowing someone that can' helps to make things happen.** Arrangements for individuals often involved knowing what was available locally, through word of mouth, local adverts, or through advice from others. Having one very committed person, and ensuring a wide range of options for support were available, also made for successful individual arrangements. For groups and networks, it was also important to have an expert with certain skills, such as lobbying local politicians. These experts give their time and energy to the project and are often the 'glue' that holds the project together.
- 5 Developing relationships and trust are important to all shared-support models.** Friendship and companionship were important to the older people

we spoke to. Having shared interests, and being able to trust each other, were also things that made the models successful.

"The Hub has opened up my life. I go and clean occasionally [for another member]. She's writing a book, her life story. Another friend takes her shopping."

- 6 Help professionals to think differently.** Challenge professionals if they are not providing the information that you need to make important choices about your life. You can also help professionals think differently by asking them about the kind of options described in this leaflet, and challenging them when they use jargon.
- 7 Making use of people's different gifts and talents will ensure success.** All of the examples we found relied on the skills and gifts that people brought as individuals
- 8 Being creative and knowing how to use what is available is essential.** This is not always about money – it can also be what people can bring to each other, for example offering transport, or sharing information.

"We learn from each other; if someone is well equipped with information I will ask for their help. People give each other a lift in the car. We draw on our strong community knowledge."
- 9 Taking a problem-solving approach works.** Many older people have 'survival instinct' and a positive attitude to problems. Many of the examples we found showed the same attitude – when things were not going so well, people were able to find solutions by working together.

"We are like a team, it's brilliant"
- 10 Keep connected: hold on to your wider networks and personal interests.** Make sure that those around you know about your needs and your gifts, and try to work with others to find the best solutions. This may be about continuing your hobbies, or maintaining relationships with your friends and close family.

Here are two examples:

In **TimeBanking**, people earn credits by helping others, and can use these to 'purchase' activities or support for themselves. The idea works very well for older people:

Age UK Bromley and Greenwich TimeBank

- Membership is open to individuals and organisations.
- Members' ages range between 24 and 98 but the majority are over 60.
- Members can get help from other members and take advantage of a range of opportunities provided by organisations, including cut-price theatre tickets.
- Some people donate their 'hours' to the 'Big Pot' – this provides time-limited support to older people with extra needs.

Shared Lives is another example, in which specially trained and approved individuals and families (Shared Lives carers) offer a range of services to other local people who need support. They use their home as a resource, and sharing family life is always part of the arrangement. Many Shared Lives carers provide long-term accommodation and support or short breaks. The person or their local authority pays them for their services. Mutually valued relationships are central to Shared Lives arrangements.

Shared Lives in Leeds

- Shared Lives carer ('Mary') supports an older person with learning disabilities ('Jane') in their own home.
- Mary and Jane both say how important they are to each other. They share hobbies (embroidery) and enjoy spending time together.
- Mary says she would be very lonely without Jane, and Jane says that she has never been happier.