

ALTERNATIVES TO CARING AT HOME

There may come a time when you feel you cannot go on providing the level of care needed at home by the person you are looking after. Your health may not be good, your personal situation may have changed or the health of the person you look after may have deteriorated, so that you can no longer go on. Take time to consider the needs of both of you. If possible, talk things over together and fully explore all practical options. Could you move house? Have more help in the home? Extra respite? It can help to talk to someone who isn't directly involved, perhaps outside the family - a friend, your doctor or social worker or a voluntary agency.

You may eventually have to make the extremely difficult decision that the person you care for would be best looked after in a residential or nursing home. Try not to feel guilty or that you are shirking your responsibility. Sometimes though, it can feel like bereavement.

Give yourself credit for all you have managed. See it more as a change in caring arrangements, in which you can still share a vital part in caring and supporting. No longer being constantly tired and busy with practical tasks, you may in fact have more quality time to share together.

Types of Homes for older people

Many older people live in **Specialist Retirement Homes**, such as those of the *Abbeyfield Society*, *Anchor Retirement Housing*. Contact *Age Concern* for details.

Sheltered Housing

There is housing specifically set aside for older or disabled people, with a Careline fitted and a visiting warden. This may be suitable for someone who is still able to look after themselves with limited help. There is also grouped accommodation in a complex, which has individual self-contained accommodation with community facilities, lunch club, an emergency call system and a warden on site. This is suitable for those needing more supported care. Contact *Adult & Community Services*, your local council Housing Department or local Housing Association for details.

Residential Homes provide 24-hour care, with help for personal care and should provide social activities. They are not legally required to provide trained nursing help. Increasingly homes are now run by the independent or voluntary sector, but all homes are registered by the local authority and inspected regularly. Contact the *Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)* for their latest reports; alternatively, you can download inspection reports from the www.csci.org.uk under the heading of 'find a care service'. They contain useful information to help you decide about different homes. They also have a useful information leaflets.

Nursing Homes provide 24-hour nursing care and there has to be a registered nurse on duty at all times. Most are run by the independent sector and again are regularly inspected.

Respite Care

Respite care usually takes place in a residential or nursing home and can either be self-funded, where the person pays the costs themselves, or can be funded or part-funded by *Adult & Community Services*.

It is important to check if the person intending to go into respite care receives Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. Also, inform the *Department for*

Work and Pensions about any other benefit entitlements a person may have at this time.

Dual Registered Homes provide both residential and nursing care, so that a resident would not have to change homes if their health changes for the worse and they need a higher level of care.

Registered homes for people with Learning Disabilities or with Mental Health Problems will provide specialist care in residential or nursing settings.

Alternatives for younger people

There are a variety of options available, depending on the nature and level of disability, care needs and preferences of the person receiving care. These include complex care packages, which will enable the person to live independently, and schemes, where a small number of people with disabilities live in a community home. Eligibility for funds from the **Independent Living Fund** to employ carers is dependent on an assessment. (See section on Adult & Community Services). Most options are organised through *Adult & Community Services* and need an assessment.

Financial implications

Adult & Community Services can provide information and advice about what is available and how to meet the costs. Following an assessment and a separate financial assessment (see section - Adult & Community Services), they will give you advice on types of accommodation and whether the person receiving care will have to pay part or all of the costs. If the preferred home costs more than *Adult & Community Services* usually pay, it is possible to take up a place if you can pay the difference. In some cases, it might be better to make the financial arrangements independently, rather than through the Council. There are organisations that can give independent advice such as *Care Aware*, *National Home Fees Agency (NHFA)*, *Age Concern*, *Help the Aged*, *Scope*, *MIND*.

The move to a care home could affect your benefits as a carer. If you are not the spouse, your rights to stay on in your house may be affected. Do get legal advice if you are uncertain.

People who belong to specific professions, unions or who were in the armed forces may also be eligible for financial help or places in residential accommodation through their organisations.

Choosing a home

It takes time to choose the right home. Talk to other people, professionals or voluntary organisations. There are useful leaflets you can get from *Age Concern*, *Help the Aged*, *Carers UK*, the *Benefits Agency* and *Social Services*. Try to visit several homes. Look around. Ask questions about the accommodation, staffing levels, atmosphere, social activities etc.

Your feelings

When the person you have been caring for moves into some form of permanent care, you, the carer, will probably experience many complicated and perhaps unexpected feelings. Sadness can be mixed with relief and you could feel guilty about this. Relieved or not, it is an enormous change. You may feel very lonely and find it difficult to fill your day. Give yourself time to adapt. Visit the person you care for as often as you like, but try not to rush over every day because you feel you must.

Remember too that it is a big change for the person you care for and they will also need time to adapt.

The *Relatives and Residents Association* offers support and advice for people over 60 in a Home or in hospital long term, their relatives and friends.