



Ontario.ca/LifeShare

LifeShare

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What is LifeShare?

Do you have a place in your heart, and a place in your home?

There are many adults in Ontario with developmental disabilities who could benefit from a program we call LifeShare. And LifeShare needs you.

Through LifeShare (also known as host family), Ontario families and citizens (home providers) offer a nurturing and safe environment for adults with developmental disabilities (home sharers).

We call this a “place in your heart, and a place in your home”, because being a LifeShare home provider means so much more than just offering a room in your house. You’re giving someone with a developmental disability a place they can call home. A place where they are supported, valued, accepted and can have a real sense of belonging.

As a home provider, you are making a difference in someone’s life. In turn, you can look forward to an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience of your own.



What is a developmental or intellectual disability?

A developmental or intellectual disability:

- Is present at birth or develops before 18 years of age
- Affects areas of life such as language skills, learning abilities, the capacity to manage personal care and/or live independently
- Is likely life-long in nature
- Can be mild or more complex; affecting the person's ability or skills to manage certain aspects of daily life

People with developmental disabilities often require assistance to learn, understand or use information. The person's language and social skills may also be affected. It may also mean they need help with daily activities or other support to be independent.

People with a developmental disability want to actively participate in their communities. They can be athletes, artists, employees, advocates, community volunteers, neighbours and friends. They're an important part of the strength of our communities and province.

The history and mission of LifeShare

The FamilyHome program, LifeShare, started in 1984, as part of the Ministry of Community and Social Service's commitment to provide a range of services for adults 18 and older with developmental disabilities. Over time, the name of the program changed but the overall goals of LifeShare have remained constant:

- Provide adults with developmental disabilities a home-like setting with a sense of family, safety, continuity and security
- Promote a high quality of life
- Support community involvement, social inclusion, individual choice, independence, and rights and responsibilities



Overview

Who is involved? (home providers/sharers)

- There are currently more than 70,000 adults in Ontario with developmental disabilities
- As of 2016, approximately 18,000 people with developmental disabilities receive government-funded residential supports:
 - ~**57%** are part of traditional Supported Group Living Residences or Intensive Support Residences
 - ~**34%** are part of Supported Independent Living programs or specialized accommodation
 - ~**9%** participate in LifeShare (also known as host family)

What does it take to become part of LifeShare?

It doesn't take special skills or professional training to be a LifeShare home provider. Just a place in your heart, and a place in your home.

People and families providing support within LifeShare come from diverse backgrounds with different life experiences. What they have in common is the commitment to building a relationship and giving a stable home environment for a person with a developmental disability.

Whether you are single, in a relationship, have a family with children; LifeShare can be the right fit for a variety of lifestyles.

Developmental services agencies will take into account the following criteria as they meet a potential home provider, like yourself:

- Your desire to accept the person as part of their family, as well as a commitment to promoting and respecting the home sharer's independence, dignity and inclusion in the community
- Secure financial status (refer to Frequently asked Questions on page 24 for information on funding)
- Your ability to provide a safe, suitable and stable environment for the home sharer
- Your availability and readiness to participate in orientation, training and ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities
- Your cooperation with your developmental services agency to promote the organization's values, principles and best practices of supporting those with developmental disabilities
- Your cooperation with the natural family and friends of the home sharer to foster a healthy support system for the home sharer

How do I get matched with a home sharer?

Creating the right match is the key to ensure both you and the home sharer alike have a positive experience.

Once the application and screening process, including a home study, has been successfully completed, the developmental services agency will typically begin the process of matching you with an adult with a developmental disability. You and your family will have a chance to meet the person, develop a relationship and see if you're compatible.

This usually includes:

- An introduction to the person (and their family, if applicable) in your home
- Arrangement for visits, if both parties wish to proceed
- Arrangements for the home sharer to move into your home, if visits are successful

While the process can vary in length, the matching is done carefully and sensitively, to ensure compatibility. Once the matching process is complete, the developmental services agency will meet with you and the home sharer to offer support and guidance on an ongoing basis.



Home provider responsibilities

Every household and every family is unique. Therefore, each LifeShare arrangement is tailored to both you and the home sharer. While your developmental services agency helps develop an agreement of shared responsibilities, in general, you will be responsible for:

- Providing a safe living environment
- Providing a furnished bedroom (recognizing that the home sharer should have the opportunity to use his/her own furnishings in their bedroom)
- Providing nutritious meals, snacks and beverages
- Assisting the home sharer with their basic needs, health care, and other activities of daily living
- Assisting the home sharer to attend school, work and/or other daytime activities, extra-curricular activities, and medical appointments as required
- Creating opportunities for visits with the home sharer's family and friends

And while it's important to understand that this is a real commitment, let's not forget that there will be plenty of meaningful and fun moments as well!



What do I need to do to prepare for my home sharer?

Get to know the person's story and preferences to ensure that you're creating a setting (home) that is comfortable and suited to their needs. You'll want to make them feel at home.

Talk to the home sharer and ask them what they feel comfortable with. Sometimes, a home provider will hold a celebratory dinner or barbecue, inviting extended family members, neighbours and friends who will be part of the home sharer's life. This could be a great way for you to introduce the person to their new community, and make them feel a sense of belonging.

The developmental services agency will provide as much support as you need through the placement process and is invested in your long-term success as a LifeShare home provider. Sharing your home is a big commitment that will have a significant positive impact on the quality of life for the person you are supporting. Please do not hesitate to ask questions and seek out support and advice.





Jacob, Erica and Scott

Jacob is 21 years old and experiences autism. Growing up, he lived with his foster family and his natural mother, who continues to be an important part of his life. Two years ago, ready for the next step in his life, he joined LifeShare and was matched with Erica and Scott, a young couple in their 20s with no children. Scott manages quality control for a hydraulics company. Erica, who is part Ojibway, shares her culture and traditions with Jacob through drumming and smudging ceremonies which he finds soothing.

As a trio, they like to go bass fishing, RV'ing (across and out of province) and enjoy dancing at concerts; anything from folk to rap to rock. All three are also quite active in their community, participating in the stream clean up with the Ontario Steelheaders, and Grand River Clean Up. They love animals, and have a Great Dane, a cat, and a Vietnamese potbellied pig, who are important members of the family.

Jacob loves school and is looking forward to graduating from high school. He hopes to get a job, ideally something that involves animals, fishing, or music, and dreams of travelling within Canada and beyond. Erica and Scott have seen a tremendous change in Jacob.

"He's part of our family."

– Erica and Scott



Lucas, Barbara, Alayna and Nathan

Lucas is a 21-year-old with Down Syndrome and a heart condition, who lives with Barbara, her daughter Alayna and her son Nathan. Before arriving at Barbara's house, Lucas lived with his natural family and continues to see them regularly.

Since moving in with Barbara and her family, Lucas' natural enthusiasm for life and love of people has flourished. Lucas and Nathan have formed a brotherly bond and like to deepen their connection at the local coffee shop.

"I hardly remember what it's like for him not to live here."

- Alayna

Lucas recently graduated from high school and proudly received the Citizenship Award for community service. Now that he's graduated, he's focusing on getting a part-time job, assists with coaching a local track and field team and hanging out with friends.

"Lucas has become an important part of our family. This has been such a worthwhile experience and had such a positive effect on us all!"

- Barbara



Karen, Dave and Leanne

Karen is 54 and has lived with Dave and Leanne since 2014 and couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

Before moving in with Dave and Leanne, Karen lived in a group home with several housemates. She told her developmental services agency that she wanted to live with a family that shared her common interests and values.

Living with Dave and Leanne has brought music into Karen's life. Dave is an accomplished guitarist, and he and Karen will often play blues and rock music together, putting on a great show for Leanne. The trio also go out to community pubs to enjoy live music with friends.

Leanne works full time at a local service agency and Karen is part of an employment collaborative that prepares and packages meals for seniors. The ladies enjoy singing on their morning commute to work.

All of this has helped Karen come out of her shell and feel much more comfortable in her skin. People closest to her have noticed a real change in her.

Together, they are looking forward to a road trip to Florida, the beach, and a visit to Disney World.

"I don't think you have to be a pro. You just have to be a human being with a heart."

– Dave





Brent and Kathy

After growing up with his mom, Brent, 42, lived on his own in an apartment but sometimes found it a bit lonely and isolating. He now lives with Kathy who is an experienced home provider. Brent is her fourth home sharer in 20 years.

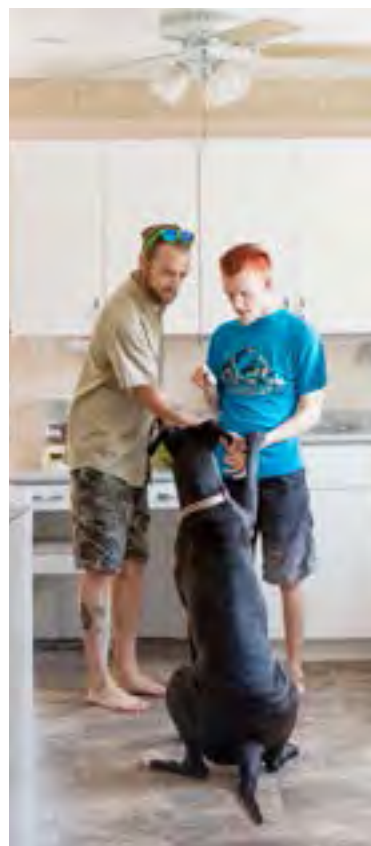
As an active leader in her community, Kathy volunteers at a homeless shelter, helps women who are incarcerated, and works with other community agencies. With Kathy, Brent can remain independent while enjoying a sense of belonging and a genuine friendship. Together, they like to play bingo at the local lodge and spend quality time with Kathy's adult children who, with Kathy and Brent, make up a close-knit family.

Brent also does many activities on his own, socializing with friends, riding his bicycle to visit his mom, taking karate lessons, and going fishing with his brother, Randy. He is currently exploring potential courses to expand his skills with the goal of finding employment within the hospitality industry.

"It's heart first...home second."

– Kathy





Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are there special skills or experience I need to be a home provider?

No professional qualifications are necessary, but anyone wishing to provide support in their home must be responsible, caring, and successfully complete the training and screening process. You must be willing to take CPR/first aid and other training and be open to regular communication, oversight and ongoing support from your developmental services agency. Your home must also meet fire, safety and health standards.

Q: What staff supports will there be — how often and what things will they assist me with?

Once the home sharer has moved in, the developmental services agency will provide you with flexible support that is adapted to your needs to ensure a successful and ongoing relationship. Agency staff will act as a liaison between all parties to ensure that everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Q: What is involved in the screening and matching process?

To give each pairing the greatest chance of success, you and all other potential home providers undergo a screening process, including interviews with all people living in your home, and a thorough background check including a police records check. This also includes a review of personal references, a home and property inspection, and a confirmation of current home and vehicle insurances. Lastly, you will need to take an oath of confidentiality.

Q: What is "respite" and how does it work?

"Respite" means services and supports that are provided to a person with a developmental disability by a person other than the primary home provider. The purpose of respite is to provide temporary time off for you, including vacation time.

The developmental services agency you are working with for LifeShare may have respite options available to you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What happens if I want to take vacation or need to be away for a period of time?

If you'd like to bring your home sharer with you on vacation, it's best to advise your developmental services agency to discuss the details of the trip, the location, and any personal documents that may be needed (e.g., a passport).

Alternatively, the agency may provide you with respite if you wish to take vacation without your home sharer. In some situations, the home sharer may spend time with their natural family (if appropriate).

Q: How much do I get paid as a LifeShare home provider? And what is covered through financial assistance (such as home sharer meals, transportation, personal needs)?

The Government of Ontario funds developmental services agencies throughout the province to provide the LifeShare program. As a home provider you will receive a per diem (daily rate) set by the agency. The home sharer may also receive direct financial support through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) that can be used for living costs such as room and board. Any additional expenses that the agency may reimburse would be outlined in your Service Agreement with the agency. Please speak with your agency for full details on remuneration and costs that may be covered.

Q: How long does a LifeShare match last?

The arrangement varies on an individual basis and can span a few months, a year, or a lifetime.

Q: Will I be required to participate in training? What kind of training do I need?

Developmental services agencies will provide training and orientation to you on various LifeShare topics including:

- CPR and First Aid
- Abuse prevention and reporting
- Confidentiality
- Serious occurrence reporting (as may be applicable in the agency's policies and procedures)
- The agency's complaints process

You may require additional training and orientation to make sure that the unique needs of the home sharer are met.

Q: Is it OK if I have family and/or friends over to visit while the home sharer is present?

Yes, LifeShare is about building relationships and, ideally, the home sharer becomes a part of the home provider's family. Talk to the home sharer to make sure they're comfortable with visitors.

If a visitor is expected to stay in your home for a longer period of time, you must inform your developmental services agency. The agency will assess the impact a visitor will have on the home sharer including the living arrangements, regularity of visits, and length of stay.

Q: Who takes the home sharer to medical appointments, etc.?

If it's agreeable between you and the home sharer, you may take the home sharer to appointments and provide support during the appointment, if needed and/or appropriate. Your developmental services agency may cover the cost of out-of-pocket expenses such as mileage.

Questions about travel to/from appointments and support during appointments will be answered by your agency.

Q: Whom do I contact in the event of an emergency?

Call 911 if personal safety is at risk. Some emergency situations may be discussed in advance so that you are prepared in the event of need, such as fire safety plans, local weather emergencies, etc.

Your developmental services agency will provide you with ongoing support as needed. This could include an agency staff contact person in the event of an emergency.

Q: What modifications will I have to do to my home to make it accessible?

People with developmental disabilities have a range of needs and abilities.

In screening and matching you with a home sharer, the developmental services agency will consider the suitability of a home in meeting the home sharer's mobility and accessibility needs. Depending on the home sharer's needs and abilities, modifications to the home may not be necessary.



The Ministry of Community and Social Services funds agencies and programs that support inclusion for adults with a developmental disability and their families. These services allow them to live, work and participate in a wide range of activities in their communities.

To see if LifeShare is right for you,
visit Ontario.ca/LifeShare

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