

Inspection Report

Name of Service: Age NI Shared Lives

Provider: Age NI

Date of Inspection: 24 March 2026

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1.0 Service information

Organisation/Registered Provider:	Age NI
Responsible Individual/Responsible Person:	Ms Linda Robinson
Registered Manager:	Ms Alison Milford
Service Profile: Age NI's Shared Lives service is an Adult Placement Agency which seeks to provide personalised, safe care and support to people over 65 years who are in need of support. The agency seeks to promote the independence and wellbeing of older people, enabling them to remain living in their own communities for longer. At present, Age NI Shared Lives service offers day support and plans to develop opportunities for short breaks and adult long term placements.	

2.0 Inspection summary

An announced inspection took place on 24 March 2026 between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. by care Inspector.

The last care inspection of the adult placement agency was undertaken on 27 March 2025 by a care Inspector. No areas for improvement were identified. This inspection was undertaken to evidence how the adult placement agency is performing in relation to the regulations and draft standards; and to determine if the adult placement agency is delivering safe, effective and compassionate care and if the service is well led.

The inspection established that safe, effective and compassionate care was delivered to service users and that the adult placement agency was well led. Details and examples of the inspection findings can be found in the main body of the report.

It was established that carers promoted the dignity and well-being of service users and that staff and carers were knowledgeable and well trained to deliver safe and effective care.

Service users said that the care and support provided by Age NI Shared Lives was a good experience. Refer to Section 3.2 for more details.

No areas for improvement were identified during this inspection.

3.0 The inspection

3.1 How we inspect

RQIA's inspections form part of our ongoing assessment of the quality of services. Our reports reflect how the adult placement agency was performing against the regulations and draft standards, at the time of our inspection, highlighting both good practice and any areas for improvement. It is the responsibility of the provider to ensure compliance with legislation, standards and best practice, and to address any deficits identified during our inspections.

To prepare for this inspection we reviewed information held by RQIA about Age NI Shared Lives. This included registration information, and any other written or verbal information received from service users, service user representatives, carers, staff or the commissioning trust.

Throughout the inspection process inspectors seek the views of those supported by or working for the adult placement agency; and examine a sample of records to evidence how the adult placement agency is performing in relation to the regulations and draft standards.

Information was provided to service users, service user representatives, carers, staff and other stakeholders on how they could provide feedback on the quality of services. This included questionnaires, an electronic survey, email, and telephone.

3.2 What people told us about the service

Throughout the inspection the RQIA inspector will seek to speak with service users, their representatives, Adult Placement Carers and staff for their opinions on the quality of the care and support, and their experiences of Age NI Shared Lives

Feedback received from one service user illustrated how impactful the support offered has been in improving their quality of life. They described how they had initially "not been in a good place" however due to the consistent support provided by their carer they have greater self-confidence, increased engagement within the community and now have hopes and aspirations for the future. The service user told us, "you need someone that you can trust and I've found that with [carer's name]".

One relative we spoke with told us how the service has "enhanced" their loved ones life, stating, "[carer's name] has actually given him [their loved one] his life back and I don't think that is an overstatement". We were told how effective relationship-based care was in overcoming initial resistance to accepting support and that carers illustrated respect for service users' choices.

The service was described as "absolutely fantastic" and "really progressive". Service user representatives provided positive feedback regarding the Registered Manager. One relative said the Registered Manager, "has been absolutely brilliant you can ask her anything. She is supportive and provided loads of advice. She was personally supportive of me. She is very, very knowledgeable".

Carer feedback regarding the agency was positive. One carer told us “the whole experience of recruitment was very good” and that staff were “brilliant”. Another carer advised they receive “amazing support” from staff and that staff are available “if I need anything, or if I am unsure about something. They keep me right.” Carers told us that the support they deliver is directed by the service user they support and the array of activities engaged in was reflective of this for instance watching sporting events to attending theatres. Carers consistently commented how their support decreased service user’s experience of isolation and loneliness and improved self-confidence. One carer told us, “I have never been so happy. I am so grateful to be working with AgeNI Shared Lives”.

Discussions with staff demonstrated their passion and commitment to the values associated with the Adult Placement Agency model of care and support. Staff expressed appreciation for employment in an agency that they feel “makes a true difference in the lives of people the service supports”. In discussing service user outcomes a staff member described the support provided as “transformative”.

Staff described their team as highly motivated and felt well supported by colleagues and the Registered Manager. The Registered Manager was described as a compassionate and effective leader who promoted a positive culture within the agency.

3.3 Inspection findings

3.3.1 Staffing and Carer Arrangements

Safety in Adult Placement Agencies begins at the point of staff and carer recruitment and continues through to induction with regular training, continued monitoring and support for carers and supervision for staff.

A review of records evidenced that there were robust arrangements in place for the recruitment of staff and carers; for carers, this included full employment histories, obtaining criminal record checks (AccessNI) for all household members over 10 years, suitable references and proof or declaration of medical fitness.

All applications to become an Adult Placement Carer were fully scrutinised by a Panel before being approved. Positive practice was identified with records evidencing that recommendations arising from panel discussions were acted upon in a timely manner. This included obtaining additional information to inform decision making and/or development of specific, individualised risk assessments to mitigate presenting risks.

Feedback received from both service users and carers indicated that the matching process utilised by the agency was effective. Discussions and review of documentation illustrated consideration was given to service users’ needs, interests and compatibility when arranging placements. A carer told us that they and the service user they support “are very well matched”. One service user in speaking about their matched carer told us, “we’re cut from the same cloth”. They explained how the sense of shared identity and interests aided in the development of a trusting, supportive relationship which has assisted them in achieving improved outcomes.

There were records of carer induction and training. A review of these records confirmed that carers and the agency staff had completed sufficient training for their roles including mandatory training elements such as Safeguarding Adults and Children, Dysphagia and Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS). Provision of dementia training assured both carers and staff are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills required to effectively meet the needs of those living with dementia. Discussion occurred with the Registered Manager regarding review of provision of complaints training at a level which aligns to duties and responsibilities, assuring compliance with draft standards is maintained. This will be reviewed at a future inspection.

One carer advised that they felt that elements of e-learning training were not relevant to their role. This information was shared with the Registered Manager who agreed to review the content of training and subsequently follow up with carers.

Positive feedback was received in relation to information shared by the agency regarding additional training opportunities available. Carers told us about the benefits of participation in recent training completed with the Royal Institute of Blind People regarding sight loss and another delivered by Compassionate Communities that sought to enhance communication skills.

Staff described training they had undertaken as “excellent”. One staff member described a culture of continual learning and development within the agency that they felt was supported by the Registered Manager. This staff member told us that they had completed additional training in respects to anticipatory grief and spoke highly about learning outcomes achieved and the impact for practice.

Discussions with staff and records reviewed evidenced that regular supervision had occurred. There was also evidence that appraisals had been completed. An area of good practice was identified in the implementation of peer supervision sessions with another regulated adult placement agency. Evidence demonstrated that this approach provided valuable opportunities for shared learning, reflective practice and demonstrates a proactive commitment to continuous improvement promoting consistency in practice.

3.3.2 Systems in place for identifying and addressing risks

The agency’s provision for the welfare, care and protection of service users was reviewed. The organisation’s policy and procedures reflected information contained within the Department of Health’s (DOH) regional policy ‘Adult Safeguarding Prevention and Protection in Partnership’ July 2015 and clearly outlined the procedure for staff in reporting concerns.

The organisation has an identified Adult Safeguarding Champion (ASC). The annual safeguarding position report had been completed satisfactorily. Carers and staff were required to complete adult safeguarding training during induction and at regular updates thereafter. The Registered Manager and staff consulted were knowledgeable in matters relating to adult safeguarding, the role of the ASC and the process for reporting adult safeguarding concerns. The agency has a system for retaining records of any referrals made to the HSCT in relation to adult safeguarding.

The Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making decisions on behalf of service users who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves.

The MCA requires that, as far as possible, service users make their own decisions, being helped to do so when needed, and any decisions made on their behalf are in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible.

Carers and staff had completed appropriate Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) training appropriate to their roles. Discussions with the Registered Manager and review of documentation illustrated an awareness of the agency's responsibilities in relation to DoLS and the use of restrictive practices. No service users are currently subject to DoLS or have restrictive practice interventions prescribed as part of their care or risk management plans.

3.3.3 Management of Care Records

Service users care records were stored securely and accessible to authorised personnel in accordance with data protection regulations.

Service agreements were found to comprehensively outline the roles and responsibilities of carers, including expectations regarding the provision of care, safeguarding, record-keeping and engagement with the agency. The agreements also detailed the level of support provided by the agency, including training, monitoring visits and out-of-hours assistance. Information was presented in a clear and user-friendly format, supporting carers to fully understand their obligations and the standards expected of them in line with regulatory requirements.

Review of records identified that consent was sought from both service users and carers in relation to information sharing; this also included their consent for external professionals, including RQIA to access records. Consent was also featured as part of the service user handbook developed by the agency. It was positive to find information presented in a user-friendly format that outlined the rights of service users, promoting awareness, choice and autonomy.

Care and risk plans were found to be reflective of individual's assessed needs. Use of language and expressions used by service users within their records provided a sense of individuals' personalities, offered insight into their preferences and what matters most to them. This demonstrated meaningful engagement and the agency's commitment to person-centred practice.

Following review of one service users' plans, discussion occurred with the Registered Manager with regard to benefits of inclusion of additional detail to better guide carer's in how best to respond to presenting behaviours displayed in response to visual hallucinations. The Registered Manager agreed to review the plan and make any amendments necessary.

Variation and inconsistencies were observed in records submitted by carers. The importance of standardisation to ensure accuracy, completeness and reliability of information was acknowledged by the Registered Manager who agreed to review current practice in this area to assure compliance with draft standards. This will be reviewed at a future inspection.

3.3.4 Arrangements for promoting service user involvement

There was evidence of regular contact with service users and their representatives.

Monitoring visit templates evidenced whether service users were present within the home at the time of the visit. Where individuals were in attendance, observations and/or verbal feedback from service users were recorded. This supports meaningful engagement and provides insight into the lived experience of the placement, informing ongoing review and quality assurance processes.

Effective communication was further enhanced by the agency's bespoke newsletters that were distributed to service users and carer's. The newsletters showcased engagement in activities, detailed training opportunities availed of and those upcoming and celebrated successes achieved.

An area of good practice was identified in relation to the agency's proactive approach to seeking feedback. Systems were in place to ensure the views of service users, carer's, staff and stakeholders were regularly obtained and used to drive ongoing improvement.

The agency's service user guide detailed how individuals could provide feedback, including complaints. There was a process in place for management and investigation of any complaints received. Compliments recorded by the agency illustrated a high level of satisfaction among those engaged with the agency.

Service users' described a sense of autonomy over the nature of support they received. Activities were person-centred and varied, aligning with individuals' own needs and interests. Support offered was found to be flexible and responsive to changes in presenting needs and/or risk.

It was positive to find service users and/or their representatives had engaged in the annual review process with their opinions documented.

An area of good practice was also observed in service user's engagement in promotional videos. The videos provided an authentic representation of the service provided, whilst valuing and amplifying the voices of those who use it.

3.3.5 Quality of Management Systems

There has been no change in the management of the adult placement agency since the last inspection. Ms Alison Milford has been the Registered Manager in this adult placement agency since 29 December 2022.

The agency were found to have undertaken monitoring visits at frequencies that aligned with regulations and draft standards. These visits were identified as beneficial in supporting placements, providing opportunity to assess changes in service user needs and/or risks as well as consider any changes affecting the household. Oversight of health and safety of the living environment was also found to have been undertaken by the agency. This regular review process helped to ensure care remained responsive and that placements continued to effectively and safely meet the needs of service users.

The agency completed Quality Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis. These reports evidenced consultation with service users, their representatives, carers, staff and professionals. The report sought to identify any developing patterns or trends in relation to incidents, accidents, complaints and safeguarding.

The annual quality report was found to incorporate feedback received from surveys and provided an analysis of the agency's activity over the reporting period. It demonstrated a reflective and learning-focused approach, identifying areas for improvement and outlining objectives for the year ahead.

4.0 Quality Improvement Plan/Areas for Improvement

This inspection resulted in no areas for improvement being identified. Findings of the inspection were discussed with Ms Alison Milford, Registered Manager, as part of the inspection process and can be found in the main body of the report.



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