

## *Lifesharing in My Home and Model Agreement*

Living in one's own home, enlightened as that may be, does not by itself provide enough support for a person who is severely or moderately affected by a disability. It is vital to find, inspire and appreciate the very best supporters who can help to grow a good life and keep it flourishing. Support people may include those who are paid because this is their livelihood—as caregivers, mentors, coaches or tutors or specialists in communication, sensory integration, personal fitness, nutrition, and various kinds of therapies. Friends who are not paid but choose to share their interests and parts of their lives also bring valuable gifts to a vulnerable person.

Having one's own home can give an adult with a disability opportunities for another form of personal support. Lifesharers can provide companionship and help with the tasks of daily living in return for sharing the home of a person with special needs—free or at a reduced cost. Lifesharing of this kind is a fairly new concept in Ontario. At first GSA used the term “homesharing” on the model of agencies that help to match seniors or other people who have health or developmental challenges (but wish to continue living with dignity in their own homes) with caring companions who are available to live in for reduced or no rent in return for their support. Lifesharers may be inspired by the ideals of inclusion and intentional community in helping to meet the special needs of the people they are living with, and from the relationships that evolve between the various members of the household.

In the GSA model, a lifesharer is neither an employee nor a tenant. A person with a disability who lives in his or her own home makes the choices about what happens in the home and does not have to move when a support relationship might have to end. Here we offer both a general agreement and a sample schedule itemizing what a particular lifesharing companion agrees to.

True lifesharing in which the vulnerable or disabled person owns the home (or has lifelong occupancy) must be distinguished from the “FamilyHome” in which a caring person or family owns the home and is paid a per diem rate by the Government to accommodate and care for one or more persons with a disability. (The word “homesharing” has recently come into use for this relationship.) True lifesharing also involves more than the relationship between housemates who each have a bedroom but typically share bathroom and kitchen facilities in a house or apartment.

All support people in the life of a person with a disability must be carefully chosen—most particularly those in an unsupervised position of trust, such as a lifesharer. GSA upholds the right and ability of adults with autism to be centrally involved in the process of recruiting, interviewing, choosing and monitoring lifesharers. GSA is involved because the right lifesharers make it possible for persons with a disability to make a success of living in homes of their own. GSA also depends on the directors of a person's Aroha who support the person through facilitated planning meetings, interviews and decision-making. Similar agreements are made between an Aroha and other support workers and practitioners who do not live in.

Alex, who has a full occupancy agreement with GSA, has expressed wise thoughts about the qualities he needs in lifesharers, making a distinction between two kinds. Students or recent graduates may stay for shorter times and have smaller responsibilities in his household: they are lifesharing companions who make a financial contribution

below market rates in return for sharing their interests and lives for a while with Alex. An anchor lifesharer, on the other hand, has much larger roles in helping Alex to run his household, and in ensuring that everything works well to support his good whole life. An anchor lifesharer should be able to make a longer-term commitment. Alex, whose large home could accommodate up to three lifesharers, has expressed very clear ideas about what he needs:

*I want to feel that the people in my house are here for me, not because the rent is cheap. I think it will be clear by the way they react to me and by the greetings and interactions. I think I will know after two real meetings and maybe a trial overnight or weekend. Lifesharers should be interested in the environment, so the house will be run by people who care like me. I want loving people. In my mind loving people is loving God. I want to be able to teach but not be a guinea pig. I like to think I can inspire others.*

*Lifesharers should be different from each other, but have some beliefs and interests in common. I think it is important that they devote time to getting to know me and my needs. Some understanding and willingness to learn. Their life philosophies, caring about the environment and about others. Spirituality is essential. Balance--knowing when to encourage and when to support. I think lifestyle is the key.*

*The anchor lifesharer idea is perfect--like a mother, helping to keep things running, but not being my only friend. I think it is important for the anchor to be older than me but not too old. Build relationship first. The anchor person (or even couple, but no babies!) must know who I am. Yes it's like dating before marriage. Need to be organized but flexible. Not like wardens. I need to be central to the house. I know I won't be the only one but the central one. Taking responsibility for my special diet is essential. It is like my hostess. It will be hard to replace my mother in that way but we must be ready to accept new ways. I like this conversation. It is fun to imagine my perfect anchor woman!*

*I need good lifesharers and friends who listen to and understand me; I need more people to talk with me using Supported Typing. I want them to ask me questions and I can answer them. I need some framework. I want everyone to know it is important that more people try to support me with ST.*

*Having a part-time lifesharing companion this past summer, I felt like I had a companion and a friend. I liked having her live here because it felt like family. I liked knowing that my mother wasn't the only person I could depend on. I became more able to see another person as a companion. I put myself in a position of control. I led the way more. I really liked being out in the community more. I did more and I felt good about it. She was a good fit. I need quiet calm people and lively ones too--lively but not loud!*

The GSA lifesharing agreement reproduced here --with Alex, his parents, Aroha and GSA as parties with the lifesharer—is the basic one for all kinds of lifesharers. Particular roles (in this case for a companion lifesharer) are spelled out in the sample Schedule that follows the agreement.

## GSA's Model Lifesharing Agreement

THIS AGREEMENT made this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ (month) \_\_\_\_\_ (year)  
BETWEEN:

**Guelph Services for the Autistic**, (GSA) a non-profit charitable corporation,  
and **Alex Skelly** and **Friends of Alex Skelly**  
-and-

\_\_\_\_\_ (The lifesharer)

### A. Terminology:

For the purposes of this document,

- *Alex* is Alex Skelly
- *the family* is Alex's parents \_\_\_\_\_
- *Friends of Alex Skelly (FAS)* is an incorporated Aroha entity whose directors consist of Alex and five others, who have voluntarily organized themselves as a group to safeguard and work for the interests of Alex. FAS is recognized by GSA as having a critical role in facilitating Alex's successful occupancy of the property.
- *the property* is the property located at \_\_\_\_\_
- *the housing agreement* is the agreement between Alex, the family, FAS and GSA for the use of the property.

### B. Purpose:

Alex, the family, FAS and GSA have entered into the housing agreement, which is intended to provide a home for Alex for his lifetime.

The parties to this Lifesharer agreement acknowledge that under the terms of the housing agreement Alex has a lifetime right of occupancy in the property, and that he will require support and assistance to maintain such occupancy.

The purpose of this agreement is to contract to provide high quality residential support to Alex to enable him to maintain his occupancy within the property.

*In consideration of the above noted purposes and covenants, and for other valuable considerations the sufficiency of which is acknowledged, the parties agree as follows:*

### 1. Role of Lifesharer:

By entering into the agreement, the lifesharer agrees:

- To live co-operatively together in the property with Alex and any other lifesharers
- To provide residential support to Alex, as may be required, for the purposes of allowing him to remain living in the property, and to provide appropriate support, encouragement, assistance and supervision, as outlined in the Appendix.
- To fulfill the duties required for the smooth operation of the household as agreed with the FAS and any other lifesharers, as outlined in the Appendix.
- That the provisions in the Appendix will require review from time to time, and to meet with FAS from time to time to make adjustments to it as appropriate.

- That she/he is not a tenant, and shall not have any rights as such under any Residential Tenancy legislation, but will live in the home without paying rent, may contribute a monthly amount towards the cost of utilities and food, as described in the Appendix, and will pay for all long-distance telephone calls she/he makes.
- That she/he is not an employee of Alex, GSA, FAS, nor the family
- That the primary purpose of the property is to be the home of Alex, and so agrees that: if the relationship between the lifesharer and Alex does not work out, the lifesharer will move out within seven days of being asked in writing to do so by GSA, acting on the request of Alex, the family, or FAS.

## 2. Role of GSA

- GSA is the legal owner of the property, and agrees to be responsible for its financing, maintenance and insurance.
- GSA will make legal agreements with individuals who are selected by Alex, the family, and FAS to provide residential support to Alex so he can maintain his occupancy in the property (the lifesharers).
- GSA will enforce the terms of agreements with lifesharers, acting on the advice or at the wish of Alex, his parents or FAS. In particular, GSA acknowledges the right of Alex, his family, or FAS to instruct GSA to withdraw the residential support being provided by a specific lifesharer or lifesharers.
- If support cannot be provided by a resident lifesharer, GSA and FAS will make other support arrangements to ensure that Alex is able to maintain his occupancy in the property.
- GSA shall support the work of FAS in relation to the occupancy of the property to the extent that is practical for it to do so.

## 3. Role of FAS

**FAS** shall be responsible for:

- Working out an agreement with each lifesharer which makes clear the duties of that lifesharer both with respect to residential support and with respect to the smooth functioning of the living arrangements in the property
- Organizing the training of lifesharers in their residential support roles
- Organizing the ongoing support for lifesharers
- Ensuring that among the duties divided among the various lifesharers are those required for the keeping of appropriate household accounts
- Ensuring that GSA maintains the property properly in good repair
- Ensuring that there is open and appropriate communication between the lifesharers, Alex, the family, FAS and GSA.
- Reporting regularly to the board of GSA, and in particular seeking the agreement of GSA for major decisions it makes which are relevant to the role of GSA outlined in section 2.
- Meeting with lifesharers from time to time to adjust their duties as appropriate.

## 4. Term

The lifesharer shall begin to provide residential support on the date that she/he takes up residency in the property.

The first \_\_\_\_\_ month(s) from the date of the lifesharer taking up occupancy in the house shall be a trial period. Towards the end of this period, the lifesharer shall meet with Alex, the family, and FAS to evaluate the

satisfactoriness of the arrangements to Alex and to the lifesharer. At this time, the details in the appendix may be adjusted, or either party may decide to terminate the arrangement by giving written notice.

GSA has a right to terminate this agreement:

- Immediately in the case of evidence or observation of any form of abuse
- Upon seven days notice to the lifesharer, upon the request of Alex, the family, or FAS, as provided in section 1
- Otherwise, with no less than thirty days written notice given to the lifesharer

The lifesharer can terminate this agreement with thirty days written notice, submitted to GSA.

## 7. Amendments

This agreement may be amended by mutual agreement among the parties. An amendment to this agreement shall not be valid unless it is in writing and properly executed by all parties.

**SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED** by the parties hereto

this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed

Lifesharer \_\_\_\_\_

Alex \_\_\_\_\_

For FAS \_\_\_\_\_

For GSA \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix: Agreement on specific duties of this lifesharer, negotiated by FAS with Alex and the lifesharer

## Schedule to Sample Lifesharer Agreement with J-S Benefits, Expectations and Specific Responsibilities

**Benefits:** J-S as lifesharing companion during the summer can help everyone.

### Alex

- gets practice relating to a new companion in: making some meals and eating together; looking after himself, his dog and his home; and depending on others for help he needs;
- looks forward to communication with someone who signs and is willing to use supported typing, and who can offer some shared and new leisure interests;
- knows that his dream of increasing independence in his own home is taking another step forward.

### J-S

- shares a spacious home for the summer, with free room and board;
- gains unique learning and practical experience of an innovative form of support from the inside.

**Alex's family, with FAS and GSA,** know that Alex's plan and the GSA lifesharing model are moving ahead.

**Expectations:** Alex says “Good lifesharers, like friends, support me through what they are as well as what they do. I am looking for lifesharing friends who

- Respect me as a person who is smart and has thoughts and feelings
- Listen to me and share in my ways of communicating
- Understand what it’s like to be me and what helps me to cope
- See that I try my best to help and contribute to other people too
- Support me to do all I can for myself rather than doing it all for me
- Share interests and abilities with me in some lasting ways, so I learn and practice more skills and leisure activities—such as cooking, music, gardening, hiking, my relationship with my dog, meeting new friends, some kinds of volunteering together.”

### ***J-S’s Specific Responsibilities***

1. Being proactive in building a good relationship with Alex
2. Accepting and co-operating with Alex’s modes of communication including basic supported typing
3. Attending to Alex’s health (including diet, micronutrient supplements and sensory integration) and the safety of his home
4. Regular responsibility, three evenings a week, for making and sharing dinner with Alex, with cleanup, evening activities, bath and retiring routines. We suggest Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (including training Alex to sort and put out the garbage).
5. Sharing in family dinners all evenings she is at home here (we will have menus that are good for all tastes and sensitivities).
6. Keeping anchor lifesharer (or Alex’s co-ordinator) informed of her schedule and, over dinner, one evening each week (such as Monday?), discussing how everything is going.
7. Recording her experience and helping us to connect with other possible lifesharers through the University and other volunteer networks
8. Co-operating in the smooth running of the whole household (as a responsible adult does in any home), including cleaning and care of her own room and the upper bathroom, doing her own laundry, and sharing in general care and cleanup of kitchen, living and common rooms.

In exchange, J-S receives free room and board and shared enjoyment of the amenities of Alex’s home. She pays only for her special snacks and meals out, and for any personal use of Alex’s phone for long-distance calls.

Signing this specific lifesharer agreement means that the parties seriously wish this arrangement to succeed. J-S knows of no factors that could interfere with her roles as a co-operative member of the household or as Alex’s companion and supporter.

Signed and dated by all parties to the agreement