

Cost-of-living mental health crisis – Can lift sharing help?

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The cost-of-living crisis rumbles on, and continues to affect us all, from shopping around for the best prices at one end of the scale, to having to go without essentials like heating or food at the other extreme. Understandably, it's also having an impact on 8 out of 10 people's mental health. In a survey by Censuswide on behalf of Mind earlier this year, 78% said the cost-of-living crisis is impacting mental health, rising to 94% for those with existing mental health problems.

The mental health toll can be hard for those who must make big compromises. At least there is a respite on heating bills with the warmer weather. However, there is a shift towards more people not being able to drive as they can't afford the cost of car ownership, many of whom also don't have public transport available. Mind's survey revealed that "18% can't afford to travel to their usual support networks in communities," leaving those without transport more likely to feel isolated.

But there is something that can help - lift sharing. Not a new concept, but one that's fitting for these times, sharing a ride splits the cost of travel at least two ways, or more with multiple passengers. So, the driver benefits from a contribution towards fuel, and the passenger/s can get from A to B more cheaply. Platforms include BlaBlaCar, where ad-hoc journeys are generally posted 2-3 days in advance and payment is made through their booking system. Or with [Liftshare](#), you can post regular journeys, or one-off journeys further in advance for things like festivals and other events. Liftshare's suggested contribution means you know how much to pay based on the distance, with payment being exchanged directly between members. Or, of course, if the driver is able to help a passenger out without payment, that's entirely at their discretion.

Saving money isn't where the story ends though, as having companionship on a journey is also a great way to combat loneliness and make new connections – providing a boost to mental health. And, for two drivers sharing, taking it in turns to drive on a regular commute can reduce the daily stress and tiredness of driving, as well as having someone to unwind with on the journey home after a long day at work. While many already informally share lifts to and from work, lift-sharing apps make it easy to find someone going your way that you don't already know.

For Harriet Ninsiima, sharing a lift has enabled her to stay in her job, which otherwise wouldn't have been affordable: "I have saved half of what I spent using the train. I don't think I'd still be working for the same company if I didn't bring down my travel costs, but thanks to Liftshare, I am able to do the job I love with the company I love. Plus, sharing a lift gives me the space to have conversations with like-minded people about our challenges at work and at home, as well as just talk about silly life stuff - I have gained new friends."

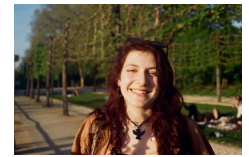
Likewise, Lisa Tine has been able to meet new people and save money lift-sharing. She says: "As I don't drive, lift-sharing is a way more affordable and eco-friendly way for me to get to my internship. The person who gives me a lift is very nice. There were already other people that were riding with him and they are all great people."

Liftshare Community Manager, Amy Young, comments: "Year on year we've seen an increase in the number of people using Liftshare because they don't drive (from 29% in 2022, to 39% so far in 2023), indicating that the cost of driving is becoming increasingly prohibitive. Naturally, a significant number of members also use our platform as drivers to save money, so we're a kind of matching service between drivers and passengers. Sometimes, in more ways than one as they get to meet new people and form friendships."

Interestingly, this year's results from Liftshare's annual Commuter Census Survey showed a drop in people working exclusively from home for the first time since pre-pandemic. Amy Young comments "This means there's an uptick in people driving to the office again this year and more people available to share a lift". Of the 7,440 people surveyed, working exclusively from home has dropped significantly since last year - from 16.3% to 3%.

Sharing a ride can lighten the load in more ways than one – cutting the cost of travel as well as having someone to chat with and potentially form a friendship with – all very important for mental wellbeing.

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