



# CARE MATTERS

*A magazine for unpaid carers*

**Looking after your mental well-being**

**Do you have a Carer ID?**

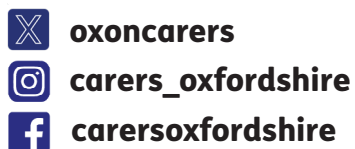
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**Carers Oxfordshire is a free service that offers information, advice and support to unpaid adult carers of someone living in Oxfordshire.**

**01235 424 715**  
[www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk)



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**Welcome to the spring edition of Care Matters, our magazine specifically for those caring for someone in Oxfordshire.**

As a carer it is natural to put the needs of the person you are supporting first, which often leaves little time for your own well-being. However, it's easy to become exhausted or feel overwhelmed and taking time to look after yourself is important so you feel stronger and more resilient.

It's important to take a break when you can - a telephone call to a friend or meeting up for a chat can be helpful, talking about problems and verbalising feelings can be a source of relief. Keeping active, enjoying hobbies and spending time outdoors are important and spring is a great time to start new habits.

If you want to find out more about local clubs and groups in your area, Live Well Oxfordshire [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livewell](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livewell) is the place to start.

It can also be helpful to let your GP know that you are a carer, to help them understand the extra pressure you are facing which may impact your health and well-being.

Have a look at page 16 for more information about our Carer ID card and how this can help you to be recognised as a carer.

Best wishes  
Juliet



## Looking after your mental well-being

**Our mental health affects how we think and feel, and how we cope with life's ups and downs. As we move through different stages of life and our circumstances change, our mental health can change too.**

As the saying goes “healthy body, healthy mind”. There are lots of ways in which you can keep your mind fit and help yourself to manage in your caring role. Here are some of the things that make the biggest impact:

- **Keep physically active**

Regular exercise can release chemicals in your brain that help lift your mood, and has many health benefits too. It's important to find something you enjoy to help build a habit. Adults are recommended to do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week. See pg 10 for more information.

- **Get enough good quality sleep**

Boosting your mood and reducing stress and anxiety are some of the many benefits that good sleep has. Having a regular routine each evening can help you wind down. If possible, try going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.

- **Look after your physical wellbeing**

It is important to get your seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations if you or someone you care for are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from these illnesses. If you are registered as a carer with your GP, you will qualify for a free flu jab. If you are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination you can book an appointment online or visit a walk-in COVID-19 vaccination site (contact your GP for information).

- **Stay socially connected**

When possible, spending time with friends and family, meeting new people and trying different things can all help reduce feelings of loneliness.



- **Eat well**

Aim for your ‘five a day’ of fruit and vegetables, drink around 5-6 glasses of water a day and limit the number of sugary foods and drinks you have.



- **Quit smoking**

Whilst smoking may help you feel calmer for a short period of time, it's actually causing more harm to your mental (and physical) well-being. When you smoke, nicotine quickly reaches your brain, giving you a short burst of pleasure and calm. However, this feeling does not last, and as nicotine leaves your system, it triggers withdrawal symptoms like irritability and anxiety. This leads you to smoke again to feel better. For more information about quitting visit [www.stopforlifeoxon.org](http://www.stopforlifeoxon.org), call **0800 122 3790** or text STOPOXON to **60777**.

Being worried or feeling low are important signs that you're not feeling as well as you should be. Signs of stress can include restlessness, feeling on edge or worrying. It's normal for us all to experience these at some time or other, but if the feelings remain it may be time to seek some support.

There is free, confidential support available from Oxfordshire Talking Therapies, which is a free NHS service available to anyone over the age of 18 registered with an Oxfordshire GP. It's easy to refer yourself online by visiting [www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies) or calling **01865 901 222**, or you can speak to your GP who can refer you.

# Better Housing Better Health

If you're worried about your energy bills, want to know how to make your home warmer or need advice on accessing financial support, Better Housing Better Health is here to help. BHBH is a free energy advice service working to improve people's warmth and well-being, as well as the energy efficiency of their homes.

Their trained advisers are ready to provide:

- Home visits to assess your energy needs and offer tailored advice.
- Clear bill advice to help you understand and manage energy costs.
- Support to guide you through challenging financial situations.
- Access to financial assistance and schemes you may be eligible for.
- Fuel vouchers to provide immediate support with energy costs.
- Energy-saving tips and accessories to help you to reduce costs and stay warm.

No matter what your situation, BHBH are here to offer expert advice and practical solutions to help you feel more confident about your energy usage and household expenses.

For more information call  
**0800 107 0044** or  
visit  
[www.bhbh.org.uk](http://www.bhbh.org.uk).



# Carers Week 2025

Carers Week is taking place this year from 9th to 15th June and our team will be running events throughout the county to celebrate the week.

Carers Week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, highlight the challenges unpaid carers face and recognise the contribution they make to families and communities throughout the UK. It also helps people who don't think of themselves as having caring responsibilities to identify as carers and access much-needed support.

The theme for Carers Week 2025 is 'Caring About Equality', calling for an equal society where carers are truly valued, recognised and supported.

Helen Walker, Chief Executive of Carers UK, said ***"Caring for a loved one should never be a reason for facing inequality, but sadly this is a reality for many in the UK. Unpaid carers are desperate for a break, for better health and social care provision, financial support and equality in the workplace. Over half say they need better understanding and recognition from the public."***

***"We want to see a future where they have the right support and the same opportunities to lead healthy and financially secure lives alongside their caring role."***

Each day of Carers Week will have a specific focus:

- **Monday:** Health and social care
- **Tuesday:** Financial wellbeing
- **Wednesday:** Work and employment
- **Thursday:** Younger carers
- **Friday:** Older carers
- **Saturday:** Mental health and wellbeing
- **Sunday:** Reflections on Carers Week



More information will be shared over the next couple of months on our website and social media.

## Experiencing prolapse as a carer

**Carers' health is known to be worse than that of non-carers due to the pressures of the role. Sally\* suffers from pelvic organ prolapse (POP) and wants to raise awareness of this issue.**

“ A gynaecologist explained to me that more and more these days women are expecting to care for others at an older age, both because people we care for are older, and because we have children later in life. I was 44 when I had my child, never thinking of course that any of this would happen.

My child, who is now an adult, has a severe learning and mobility syndrome and needs all personal care and a lot of physical support. I don't lift them which at their age and mine would be impossible. I support them when they're walking or trying to get up, and I deal with their double incontinence.

I developed a vaginal prolapse. It seems to have been caused by the wear and tear associated with caring and the physical demands. I feel like my skin is falling out of my vagina. It feels heavy when I walk, I feel like I'm dragging myself around. I have to push the prolapse up daily.

Last summer it got really bad. I was walking a lot carrying a bag, which is generally understood to worsen a prolapse. My only option was to eliminate all lifting from my life, including caring, shopping and everyday things like taking out the heavy used nappy bags.



A prolapse can happen very easily, it becomes a whole way of life, a struggle to deal with.

***Because I'm the main carer, I don't want to take any risks with my health.***

I decided not to use the GP recommended vaginal cream, as it has oestrogen in. An NHS physiotherapist recommended a cream without oestrogen and the one I use seems to be helping me.

Another option is an operation, which I definitely don't want. I wouldn't be able to look after my child for months afterwards!

What helps – and I really want to get this across, to younger women especially – is to do the pelvic floor exercises they recommend when you have a baby. I do these now, it helps me to manage my situation.

I do weekly yoga or Pilates. I tell teachers about my pelvic floor problem, they guide me on how to use the exercises to strengthen the related muscles. I've also been treated by an Osteopath which I found really helpful, they specialise in helping women with this problem.

I believe the NHS needs to give carers with such problems priority. This is a problem closely linked to the physical demands of caring. It impacts my health and limits what I can do without worsening the prolapse and limiting my options for treatment!

***It's important that we share these experiences, even if it's an embarrassing subject.***



**See a GP if you have any of the symptoms of a prolapse, or if you notice a lump in or around your vagina.**

\*names have been changed for privacy.

# Keeping moving

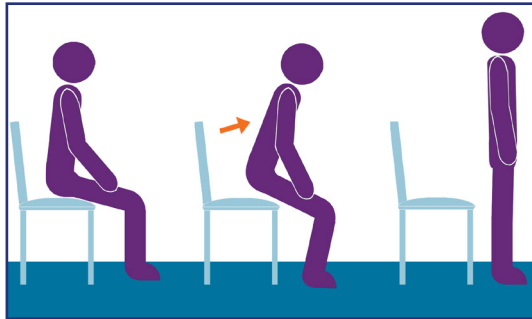
Our bodies were made to move and it is one of the best things we can do to look after our health and help reduce stress and anxiety.

## Being active has lots of benefits. It can:

- Improve your mood, self-esteem and energy levels
- Strengthen your muscles and bones
- Support you in getting a good night's sleep
- Prevent many aches and pains from worsening
- Reduce your risk of developing health-conditions

The best way to be active will differ from person to person and it's always a good idea to find something you enjoy. Below is a short exercise routine you can try at home. Being active is safe for most people and it has many benefits for your health and well-being. If you are concerned about an existing medical condition, please contact your healthcare professional to check before you start.

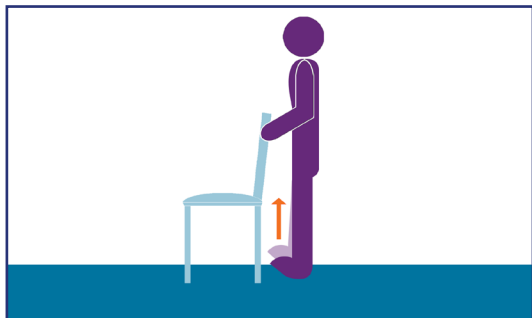
**Before you start, march on the spot for 2 minutes to warm up.**



### Sit to stand

*Repeat 8 times*

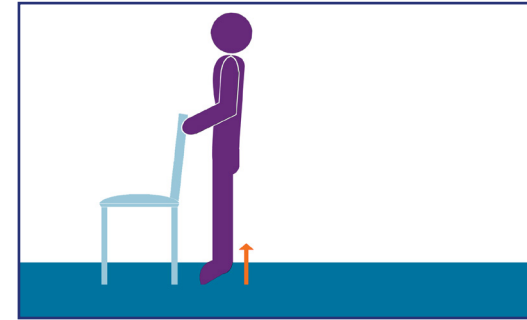
Sit tall near the front of the chair. Place feet slightly back and lean forwards. Press down through feet and thighs to stand. Bend knees and hips to lower down slowly.



### Toe raises

*Repeat 10 times*

Raise and lower toes slowly, keeping your tail bone tucked underneath you. Stand upright looking forward.



### Heel raises

*Repeat 10 times*

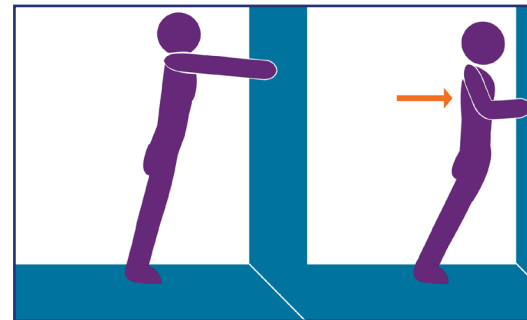
Raise and lower heels slowly, keeping weight over big/second toe. Stand upright looking forward.



### One leg stand

*Hold for 10 seconds each leg*

Stand upright, look to a point in front of you that isn't moving and lift one leg off the floor.



### Wall press

*Repeat 8 times*

Place palms on wall then shuffle feet backwards keeping heels on the floor. Slowly bend then straighten elbows, keeping back straight and tummy muscles tight.

### Pelvic floor

*Repeat 10 times slow, 10 times fast*

Tighten/contract the muscles around your back and front passages and lift up inside as if trying to stop passing wind and urine at the same time. Hold and then release.

# Looking to try a new hobby?

This spring, a variety of free courses for carers are being offered by Abingdon & Witney College, designed to enhance skills, provide valuable support, and cater specifically to carers' needs.

Enrol now to secure your place and avoid disappointment, as spaces are limited. **Courses available for carers:**

- Art for Relaxation
- Mindfulness for Carers
- Yoga for Relaxation
- Pilates for Wellbeing
- Film Club
- Britain Through the Ages
- Creative Writing – Non-Fiction
- Move and Connect: Fitness in the Park
- Eastern Philosophy and Wellbeing
- Self-Massage
- Cooking on a Budget
- Mindfulness Walks
- Sleep Wellness
- The Everyday AI Companion: Making Technology Work for You

To enrol or for more course-specific information on free carers' courses, please visit the website or contact the college directly at [oal@abingdon-witney.ac.uk](mailto:oal@abingdon-witney.ac.uk) or **01235 216 278**. Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity—secure your place today!



## Bursary support for adult learners (separate from carers' courses)

While carers courses are completely free, adult learners enrolling in other courses at Abingdon & Witney College may be eligible for bursary support to help with essential costs. This financial support is available for those on funded adult courses (Level 2 and below) and advanced learner loan-funded courses (Level 3 and above).

### Key bursary options include:

- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund – For learners with a household income below £47,000, covering travel, childcare, course equipment, and other essential costs.
- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary – For students aged 19 or over studying Level 3 or higher qualifications, supporting childcare, equipment, and travel expenses.

To check bursary eligibility and apply, learners need to provide evidence of household income and complete an online bursary application form. For full details on bursaries for adult learners, visit <https://abingdon-witney.ac.uk/support/fees-bursaries>, email [studentbursaries@abingdon-witney.ac.uk](mailto:studentbursaries@abingdon-witney.ac.uk) or call **01235 216 212**.



## Carer Q&A

**We caught up with Mike Johnson who has been caring for his son Olly since a life-changing illness in 2016.**



### Who do you care for?

I've been a carer for my 12-year-old son, Oliver, since February 2016 when he got an illness which caused his immune system to attack his brain, doing substantial damage. He went from a bright and happy 3-year-old to visually impaired, wheelchair bound, fed by a feeding tube, having seizures, double incontinent and totally reliant on someone else for all his needs.

### What challenges do you face?

I face challenges every day. I have to keep a close eye on Olly all the time, so he doesn't hurt himself.

Then there's the logistics. Especially at the start of his illness, I would often be called by his school to pick him up. This meant travelling from work in Bicester to Didcot to pick up the disability car, with another 25-minute drive to school.

A lot of the time he would go into hospital. Sometimes he was discharged around 4am. We'd get home then have to start the day at 6.30am, getting ready for school and work! I was drained all the time and sometimes so tired I couldn't stay awake. It turned out that I have severe obstructive sleep apnea.

I had to change my job within the military when Olly became ill. I did well, but I watched people fly past me in rank, which was very disheartening. After a while me being off so much became an issue and although flexible working was advertised, it didn't work out for my job.

In November 2023 I left the army and there was real pressure for us to leave the military house, and little understanding about the difficulty of trying to find an adapted house. I think the military have a lot to learn about supporting carers.



### How would you describe your caring role?

I do everything for my son; as well as keeping a close eye on his health, I wash him, dress him, feed him, give him his medication, put him in his chair, change his pads multiple times a day and make sure he's safe. Without an adult carer he just wouldn't be able to live.

### What is one piece of advice you would share with someone who may be going through a similar experience?

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't ever give up. Unfortunately, everything is a fight but be strong and it will work out in the end.

### Is there anything you do to help reduce stress and look after yourself?

All I have been doing religiously over the years is running and going to the gym. It's hard to do anything else because I can't be away that long.

### Is there anything else you would like to add?

I love my role. I wish I didn't have to do it and my son wasn't how he is, but it happened, and I will do anything for my kids.

If you'd like to share your experience as a carer with other readers, please contact us via email [carersvoices@carersoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:carersvoices@carersoxfordshire.org.uk) or call **01235 424 715**.





# Carer ID

## What is a Carer ID?

A Carer ID card is similar in size to a credit card, with a QR code which provides the phone number for a carer's emergency contact and GP surgery.

The cards can be useful when you need to accompany the person you support to medical appointments, when informing employers and teachers of your caring role, and when accessing social care support.

The ID cards can be particularly important if the person you support is admitted to hospital. Once an unpaid carer is identified, where possible, hospital staff will make reasonable adjustments for you whilst the patient is on site, to allow you to maintain contact with the person you care for.

This can include access to the ward outside of the usual visiting hours as well as being included when discussing the patient's care when in hospital and consultations around that patient's care plan for their discharge and further support.

Additional support can also be provided to help alleviate the pressures you may face during a hospital admission, including ward staff working with catering teams to ensure that you have something to eat and drink if you don't have the time to look after yourself.

## Who can apply?

If you are aged 13+ and provide unpaid care and support to another person who, due to a disability, illness, addiction, condition or other additional need is unable to carry out typical day-to-day activities without your support, you may be eligible. The person you support can be a child or adult of any age, but must live in Oxfordshire.

Carers Oxfordshire can't provide a card for carers aged 12 or under, however, they can still receive carer support in Oxfordshire University Hospitals by speaking to hospital staff.



## What you will need to do before you apply:

Check with the people who you want to be an emergency contact and ensure they agree and understand their role as an emergency contact.

Talk to the person you look after and ensure they understand what would happen if you were in an emergency.

Consider completing a contingency plan so that you can provide information about supporting the person you look after at home in your absence. To learn more about contingency planning please email [carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk) or call **01235 424 715**.

Have access to a clear up-to-date digital photo of you on your own (no other people, animals or personal items), that can be used on the card. A passport photo is ideal.

## How to apply

Fill out the Carer ID application form by scanning the QR code with the camera on your smartphone, visiting [https://platform.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/public/carers\\_id](https://platform.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/public/carers_id) or you can call our helpline on **01235 424 715**.



We will check the information you provide to confirm that you are a carer. If you are looking after more than one person, apply for a card by entering the details of the main person you support. Additionally, you can apply for a Carer ID on behalf of an unpaid carer.

# Rethink Mental Illness

**Carers Oxfordshire includes a specialist service for carers of people with mental illness, delivered by Rethink Mental Illness. Rethink have a team of highly experienced advisers who offer flexible support to carers, recognising and valuing the huge role carers play in helping people to recover from mental illness. Ted and Violet's story below highlights how specialist support helped a carer to navigate his caring journey.**

Ted and Violet\* retired to Oxfordshire following a full life of family, friendship, travel and exploring new cultures. At the time of their move, Violet had started to feel mentally unwell and had been behaving in what Ted described as a 'very unusual way'. She stopped wanting to see friends and suddenly had little interest in having a conversation with anyone. One day, things culminated with Violet having a mental health crisis and physically attacking Ted. Violet was admitted to hospital and diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Ted became her carer, and despite professional support felt depressed and despondent. He struggled with the significant change to their life, from having a big circle of friends and busy social life, to feeling trapped at home as Violet didn't want to leave the house, and Ted didn't feel comfortable leaving her alone.

In the summer of 2023, Ted was told by the Adult Mental Health Team about Carers Oxfordshire, which includes bespoke support for carers from Rethink Mental Illness. An initial meeting was arranged in a local café, where Ted explained he just wanted someone to talk to.

Over the next few months, his regular coffee shop meetings gave him space to express his fears and concerns and explore his life from different perspectives. He realised that he needed to be more patient with Violet and leave it up to her to decide if she felt able to leave the house. This helped their relationship, and they were able to enjoy trips out and lunch in town.

With encouragement from Rethink, Ted agreed to meet with a family therapist and afterwards fed back how grateful he was that he was encouraged to give this therapy a chance. Ted has now started to take up an old hobby and feels more able to open up to friends and family about his feelings.

***"I've been telling my cousin all about your service and how important you are at the moment. You quite literally saved my life and have given me hope".***

Ted summed up the support he received from Rethink Mental Illness.

\*names have been changed for privacy.

Rethink Mental Illness is a partner in the Carers Oxfordshire service, and can provide you with help and support if you are caring for someone with a mental illness.

Make a referral by visiting [www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/contact](http://www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/contact) or calling **01235 424 715**.

To find out more visit [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org).



Julie (Rethink) and Juliet (Action for Carers).

# Don't know where to turn?



Navigate your way to  
**FREE** tailored advice on

- debt management
- benefits
- support services

and much more – one question at a time.

Local support  
from local  
advice teams



01865 410 660 [oxfordshireadvicenavigator.org.uk](http://oxfordshireadvicenavigator.org.uk)

## Useful contacts

### Age UK Oxfordshire

0345 450 1276

[www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire)

### Out of hours Duty Social Worker

0800 833 408

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### Better Housing Better Health

0800 107 0044

[www.bhbh.org.uk](http://www.bhbh.org.uk)

### Oxfordshire Family Info Service

01865 323 332

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### British Red Cross Mobility Aids

01235 552 664

[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

### Oxfordshire Family Support Network

07821 987 080

[www.oxfsn.org.uk](http://www.oxfsn.org.uk)

### Carers UK

0207 378 4999

[www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

### Oxfordshire Mind

01865 247 788

[www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk)

### Child & Adult Social Care

0345 050 7666

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### Rethink Mental Illness

01865 904 499

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

### Dementia Oxfordshire

01865 410 210

[www.dementiaoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.dementiaoxfordshire.org.uk)

### Samaritans

116 123

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### Getting Oxfordshire Online

01235 424 715

[www.gettingoxfordshireonline.org](http://www.gettingoxfordshireonline.org)

### Good Neighbour Scheme

01993 776 277

[www.goodneighbours.org.uk](http://www.goodneighbours.org.uk)



# Donate

Action for Carers Oxfordshire relies on donations to ensure that we can continue to support unpaid carers in Oxfordshire. To make a donation please complete and return this form to: **Action for Carers Oxfordshire, 10 Napier Court, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3YT.** Alternatively call us on **01235 424 715** or donate online via **[www.justgiving.com/actionforcarers-oxfordshire](http://www.justgiving.com/actionforcarers-oxfordshire)**. Every donation makes a difference. Thank you.

Title..... Name..... Surname.....  
Address.....  
..... Postcode.....  
Email address.....

I wish to make a donation of: £.....

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Action for Carers Oxfordshire

Date.....

What prompted you to donate? .....

## Gift Aid declaration

*giftaid it*

Please add to your donations through Gift Aid. If you are a UK tax payer, we can reclaim 25p for every £1 you donate.

Yes, I want Action for Carers Oxfordshire to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of UK income tax and/or capital gains tax to cover the amount that all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs will reclaim on my donations in the tax year.

If you would like to hear about our events, campaigns and how you can support local carers please tick your contact preferences below. You can opt out at any time.

Email

Post



**Carers Oxfordshire is a free service for unpaid adult carers of someone living in Oxfordshire.**

Offering information, advice and support, including: carer's assessments, Carer ID, carers' groups, short breaks, offers and discounts, courses for carers and Max Card.

Call us on  
**01235 424 715** or visit  
**[www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk)**  
for more  
information.



## Leaving a legacy of kindness

A gift in your will could help give unpaid carers in Oxfordshire someone to turn to. You can make sure we are always there for those who need us for years to come. To leave a gift in your will you will need to provide your solicitor with our charity details, see page 2. To find out more please call **01235 424 715** or email **[carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk)**.