



CARE MATTERS

A magazine for unpaid carers

Beating the winter blues

Carer's assessments: What you need to know

Contents

- 4 If the unexpected happens
- 6 Could you benefit from a call?
- 7 Carersline: Here to support you
- 8 Carer Q&A
- 10 Beating the winter blues
- 12 SEND Connect Carer Forum
- 13 The NEST: Raising Embers
- 14 What is a carer's assessment?
- 17 Oxford Congestion Charge
- 18 Connecting with your community
- 19 Everyone's care counts
- 20 Community hospital drop-ins
- 21 Useful contacts



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



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MIX

Paper from
responsible sources
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Hello and welcome to our winter edition of Care Matters, the magazine for those caring for someone in Oxfordshire.

As we step into a new year, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible dedication and resilience of unpaid carers.

Winter can sometimes feel heavy - the shorter days and colder weather often bring what we call the “winter blues.” In this edition, you’ll find an article that offers practical tips and gentle reminders to help lift your spirits and keep well during these months. I hope you find it encouraging and useful.



January is also a great time to think ahead. Life can be unpredictable, and having a contingency plan in place can make all the difference when unexpected situations arise. Whether it’s planning for emergencies or simply making sure you have support when you need it, we’re here to help you prepare. Please don’t hesitate to reach out - our team can guide you through the process and ensure you feel confident and supported.

And remember, you’re entitled to a carer’s assessment every 12 months. This is an opportunity to review your needs, explore available support, and make sure you’re not carrying the weight alone. You can find more information on page 14.

Thank you for everything you do. Your care makes a profound difference, and we’re committed to standing alongside you every step of the way. Here’s to a year of strength, support and moments of joy.

Best wishes,

Juliet Cocks

Head of Service, Carers Oxfordshire

If the unexpected happens...

Thinking ahead about what would happen if you, as a carer, became unwell is always important. Planning now can give both you and the person you care for peace of mind, knowing that arrangements are in place to manage unexpected situations.

Whether you care for a family member, friend or partner, creating a contingency plan is well worth the time.

What is a contingency plan?

A contingency plan sets out what needs to happen if the level of care you provide changes or if you are temporarily unable to care. These plans are useful whether you live with the person you care for or they live independently.



Preparing in advance allows you to think things through calmly, discuss options with the person you care for, family, friends, and any paid support, and reduce stress in an emergency.

Getting started

Plan at a time when you can focus and speak with everyone involved. If you care for more than one person, make a separate plan for each, as their needs and support networks may differ.

Consider who you can rely on to help, including family, friends, neighbours, paid support workers, health professionals or community organisations. Ensure everyone is comfortable with the arrangements.

Deciding how people can help

Support can range from practical tasks like shopping, cooking or taking someone to appointments, to companionship, phone calls or staying for part of the day. For professional care, ensure staff are aware of the plan and agree on responsibilities. The clearer you are about who does what, the smoother support will run.

What to include

Include essential information such as:

- Medication details, dosage, timing, storage, GP and pharmacy contacts and any allergies.
- Equipment, products and supplies needed, including how to order replacements.
- Daily routines, likes, dislikes, and ways to help the person cope on a good or bad day.

Other practical tips

- Share pet care arrangements if needed.
- Inform schools if children are involved.
- Ensure your GP and the cared-for person's GP records reflect your contact details.
- Talk to professionals about your role as a carer.
- Consider a Carer ID Card, a key safe and In Case of Emergency (ICE) numbers on your phone.

The image shows a 'Carer contingency plan' form. At the top right is the Carers Oxfordshire logo. The title is 'Carer contingency plan'. Below the title is a 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' section with fields for 'My carer name', 'My care name', 'Date of birth', 'I live in the north', 'Address', 'Town', 'Postcode', 'My phone', 'GP surgery name', 'GP surgery number', 'Sight & hearing', 'Religion', and 'Religious needs'. Below this is a 'MEDICATION' section with a 'Medication list' table and 'Allergies' and 'Medication' text boxes. At the bottom left is a small number '1'.

The image shows an 'Emergency plan for the person being cared for' form. At the top right is the Carers Oxfordshire logo. The title is 'Emergency plan for the person being cared for'. Below the title is a 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' section with fields for 'My carer name', 'My care name', 'Date of birth', 'I live in the north', 'Address', 'Town', 'Postcode', 'My phone', 'GP surgery name', 'GP surgery number', 'Sight & hearing', 'Religion', 'Religious needs', and 'Religious needs'. Below this is a 'MEDICATION' section with a 'Medication list' table and a note: 'In case of conditions that make it hard to speak, people often need to know that you can indicate you will be understood the way you are feeling. Use I will communicate'. At the bottom is a 'CONTACT INFORMATION' section with fields for 'Name of carer who only can for support', 'First name', 'Last name', 'Relationship', 'Phone', 'Address if different', and 'Town', 'Postcode'. At the bottom left is a small number '1'.

Get a copy of our Contingency Plan templates and find further guidance on our website: www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/be-prepared or call **01235 424 715**.

Could you benefit from a call?

Being there for someone else can take a lot of strength, patience and energy, and we know it can also be isolating.

Our new **Carers Phone Friends** service offers unpaid carers regular phone calls with a trained volunteer, providing companionship and a listening ear in a way that fits around everyday life.



Would a friendly call make a difference to you?

If you're looking after a family member or friend, you don't have to do it all on your own. Your volunteer will call at a time that suits you, and the conversations are relaxed and confidential.

Whether you'd like a proper chat, a chance to offload, or simply to hear a friendly voice, the calls are shaped around what you need.

If you could benefit from a regular chat, call **01295 234 850** or email lauraspillane@carersoxfordshire.org.uk to find out more.



Farewell and thanks

After more than two decades supporting unpaid carers and older people in Oxfordshire, we say farewell to William Norton as he retires from the board of trustees at Action for Carers Oxfordshire.

Drawing on his lived experience of caring, William brought compassion, insight and commitment to our work. He also previously volunteered as a trustee with our sister charity, Age UK Oxfordshire.

Carersline: Here to support you

Need advice or guidance in your caring role? Our Carersline is here for you. Our experienced Carers Advisers are available Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm. If we're busy, your call may go to voicemail - just leave your details, and we'll call you back as soon as possible.

What we offer:

- Free, confidential information and guidance
- Help with carer's assessments
- Signposting to local services for you and the person you care for
- Information about your rights as a carer
- Help finding support with benefits, foodbanks and the cost-of-living

What we can't do:

- Offer legal advice, intervene in family disputes, assist with housing, school or care home issues, give specific benefits advice, provide paid carers, or recommend care homes/agencies
- Share information about you or the person you care for without permission



Important to know:

- If you share information that raises a safeguarding concern, we are required to follow this up appropriately
- We have a zero-tolerance policy for verbal abuse. Calls may be ended if this occurs
- We're often confused with the Carer's Allowance Unit (DWP). While we can answer general questions about Carer's Allowance, we cannot update your details, check your claim or confirm payments, as we are not linked to the DWP

If you have questions or need support to make caring a little easier, please get in touch on **01235 424 715**. We'll guide you to the right services and organisations for additional support.

Carer Q&A

We sat down with Nicki, from the Vale of the White Horse, who cares for her 25-year-old son, supporting him through the daily realities of living with a rare metabolic condition.

Who do you care for?

My youngest son, Brandon.

Can you share your journey into caring?

My first son passed away at six days old from a rare metabolic disease. It was devastating and my first introduction to rare conditions and their impact. I was tested in my next two pregnancies and had two healthy children, Bradley and Krystal. With my fourth pregnancy, we chose not to test as it wouldn't have changed our decision.



When Brandon was born, he was tested at eight hours old and diagnosed with Arginosuccinic Aciduria (ASA), a rare inherited metabolic disorder. I knew immediately that I would be both Mum and carer.

Those early days were hard - caring for a baby with a rare disease while looking after two young children. Any mum of three under five would be busy, but I knew I had more on my plate than most.

What challenges do you face?

Brandon is now a young man living at home with me. We have a lovely life, but he sees his siblings becoming independent and knows his path is different. As a child, he missed out on parties and playdates and, despite good support at school, he was often left out socially.

I never knew if it was due to his needs or uncertainty from others. My message: if you're unsure how to include someone with disabilities, just ask - most parent carers are happy to help.

How would you describe your caring role?

Alongside being a mum, it's a mix of doing everything for Brandon or helping him do it. His life feels like it paused at a younger stage. I can feel strong one moment and very low the next. His health can change suddenly, which makes life unpredictable.

Where do you turn for support?

What impacts me most isn't being a carer, it's fighting for Brandon's rights with medical providers and local authorities.

This led me to set up a support group, Carers Community Vale of the White Horse, so other carers wouldn't face the same battles. The group gives space to talk, feel empowered and ask for help. It was set up by three of us and is led by carers.

How do you maintain connections with your family?

I don't see my whole family, as I felt unsupported when Brandon was younger and I spent so much time in Great Ormond Street Hospital and living in Ronald McDonald Houses. It was a very intense period, and those long stays made it difficult to stay connected in the way I needed.

My older children are a great support. We keep in regular contact and my older son is even a trustee of the carers group.

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

If you're new to caring, contact your local carers group. It's a simple way to find information and support.

Carers Community Vale of the White Horse meets monthly at the Travelodge, Henry Blake Way, Faringdon, SN7 7GQ. To find out more, email: carerscommunityvowh@gmail.com or visit the group's Facebook page.

If you'd like to share your experience as a carer with our readers, we'd love to hear from you! Email carersvoices@carersoxfordshire.org.uk or call **01235 424 715**.

Beating the winter blues

Winter can be a challenging time. Roughly two-million people in the UK experience what's often called the "winter blues", or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Shorter days, colder weather and extra responsibilities can make you feel tired, stressed or low in mood. It's natural to feel this way, but there are simple steps you can take to look after yourself while continuing to support the person you care for.



Let in the light

Winter days are darker, but light boosts mood. Open curtains, sit near windows, and use soft lamps in the evening. Natural light helps your body clock and lifts your spirits.

Keep active

Exercise doesn't have to be strenuous to make a difference. Gentle walks, stretching or even a few minutes of movement around the house can lift your energy, improve circulation and boost your mood. If possible, step outside for a short walk each day.

Stay connected

Caring can feel isolating, especially in winter. Reach out to friends, family, or fellow carers for a chat. Even a quick call can reduce loneliness and provide reassurance. If you could benefit from a friend on the end of the phone, consider our Carers Phone Friends service (**p6**).

Looking after your body

Eating regular, balanced meals and staying hydrated helps you cope better with stress. Include plenty of fruits, vegetables and warming foods that keep energy levels steady. Small routines, like a comforting breakfast or a relaxing cup of tea, can make your day feel more manageable.

Feeling overwhelmed?

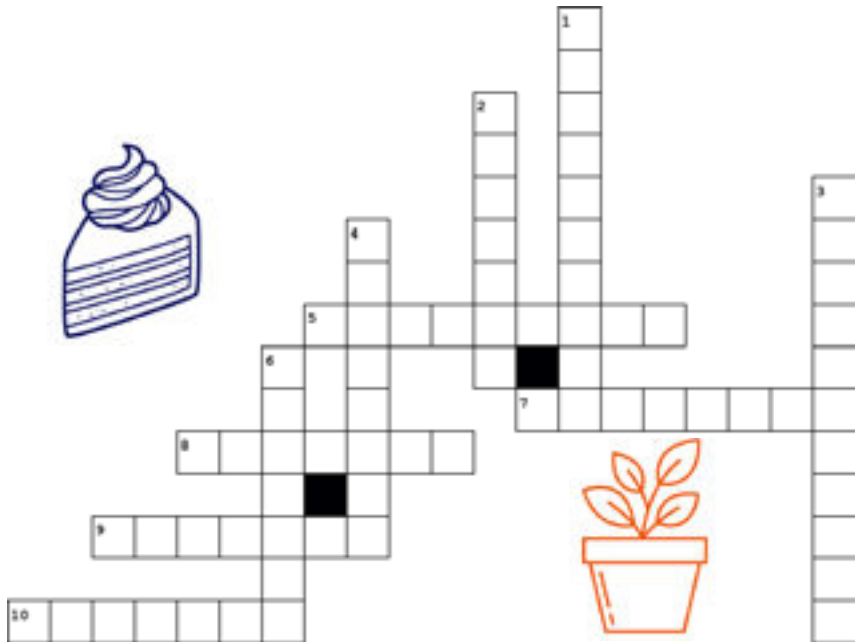
If you notice signs of stress or burnout, it's important to reach out for support. Talking to your GP, a friend or a professional can make a real difference - asking for help shows strength, not weakness.

We work with Rethink Mental Illness who provide specialist support to carers of people living with mental illness. There is lots of information, advice and self help guides on their website at www.rethink.org.

**Rethink
Mental
Illness**

Be kind to yourself

It's important to acknowledge that caring is hard work. Allow yourself rest, accept help when offered, and celebrate small wins. Even short moments of relaxation – reading, listening to music, enjoying a hobby, or even completing a puzzle – can recharge you. Why not try our crossword below and see if you can find the ten hobbies and interests?



Across

5. Tending to plants and soil (9)
7. Craft with yarn and needles (8)
8. Act of diving into a book (7)
9. Exercise done on foot (7)
10. Preparing food (7)

Down

1. Practice of focused calm (10)
2. Brain-teasing challenges (7)
3. Art of capturing moments on camera (12)
4. Making things by hand (8)
6. Creating images with lines (7)



SEND CONNECT

Parent Carer Events

What is SEND Connect?

These frequent events hosted by Oxfordshire Parent Carers forum (OxPCF) provide a friendly, informal and supportive space for parent carers to connect and share experiences.

These gatherings offer a chance to engage with a welcoming SEND community, discuss common challenges, and stay informed about local initiatives and resources.

Where are our events?

We visit towns across Oxfordshire. Coming up:



February

Carterton
Chipping Norton



March

Wallingford
Bicester
Banbury

We also hold some online sessions.

We hope to see you at a future event!

For more details on these events, please visit the OxPCF website:

www.oxpcf.org.uk/send-connect

The NEST - Raising Embers

The NEST is a SEND playgroup for pre-walking children (ages 0-6), offering a welcoming space for families with babies and young children who have additional needs or disabilities.

Run by parents of under-6s with medical and developmental needs, this group offers understanding and support from people who truly understand - because they're on the same journey.



Why join The NEST?

- Enjoy play sessions with children at similar developmental stages and meet other parents who share your experiences.
- Each week explore practical and emotional challenges families with SEND often face. From 11am-12pm, there's an optional discussion with expert input, such as psychologists or speech and language therapists to answer your questions. It's understood that some conversations can be triggering, so joining the discussion is completely optional.
- No need to commit - come when it works for you. Just let the organisers know if you're planning to come so they can manage space.

What to expect

- Singing & Makaton
- Play and connection
- Optional info sessions on topics like applying for DLA or Carer's Allowance
- A chance to meet other parents and build a supportive network



The NEST is run by Oxford Family Support Network in partnership with Cafédias and funded by Global's Make Some Noise. Scan the QR code to register or email imogen.liddell@oxfsn.org.uk for more information.

What is a carer's assessment?

If you regularly care for someone, a carer's assessment gives you the opportunity to explain about your caring role and the support you need.

As a carer, under the Care Act 2014 you are entitled to have a carer's assessment to understand the physical, emotional and practical impact that caring has on your life.

The carer's assessment:

- looks at your caring situation
- checks that your needs are taken into account
- identifies the effect caring has on your physical and emotional wellbeing
- asks whether you can carry on caring
- and is an opportunity to discuss things which could make caring easier for you.

How often can I have an assessment?

You can ask for an assessment every year, or sooner if your circumstances change.



How can I prepare for the assessment?

You can prepare for the assessment by gathering together all the information you will need, including your GP name, address and phone number, your email address and details of the person you care for including their address, date of birth and ideally their NHS number.

It's helpful to think about your caring role. Make a list of all the ways you are providing support, such as helping with shopping or personal care.

Think about how it affects your life? Does it have an impact on your health or finances? Are there things which caring is stopping you from doing? How do you feel about caring?

How do I request an assessment?

The quickest way is to fill in an assessment form online by visiting our website at www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/carers-assessments.

This is called a self-assessment and can be completed in your own time. There is a link on our website and some useful guidance about the questions.

If you need help filling in the form, you can complete the contact form on our website or call **01235 424 715**.

If you are working with another professional such as a social worker, please ask them to help you fill in the form or refer you.

If the person you care for is having their own assessment, you can ask to have your assessment at the same time.

What happens next?

- Our admin team processes your referral or self-assessment
- You will receive confirmation that we have received it
- Unfortunately, we are busy and it will be several weeks before we get back in contact with you, but don't worry - we will be in touch

Completing a carer's assessment with help

If you need help with the assessment, one of our team will contact you to arrange a time for the assessment. During the appointment they will let you know what support may be available to help you.

If your needs are eligible for support, we will create a support plan with you. If you're not eligible for support, we will be able to help you with information and advice on where you can go for help.

Please call **01235 424 715** if you would like any more information.



Oxford Congestion Charge

In autumn, Oxfordshire County Council introduced a temporary congestion charge while Botley Road is closed, to reduce traffic and improve public transport. A £5 daily charge applies to cars without a permit at six locations across Oxford, running until August 2026.

If you are an unpaid carer, you may be eligible for a free permit. This applies if you provide care to someone living in the Oxford permit area or central Oxford, or if you live in these areas and care for someone anywhere in Oxfordshire.

The permit allows you to drive through all six congestion charge points without paying during charging hours when travelling to or from the person you care for.



Congestion charge locations

Hythe Bridge Street, St Cross Road, St Clements Street, Thames Street, Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way. All locations are clearly marked with signs showing when you are approaching or entering a zone.

Key points:

- One permit per unpaid carer, covering one car
- Up to two permits can be issued per care recipient's address
- The car must be registered to you or at your home address
- Charge applies to cars and motorhomes; electric cars are not exempt.
- Oxford hospitals are accessible by car without entering a charge zone.
- Charge applies during signposted hours, all year round.
- You cannot qualify if you live at the same address as the person you care for.
- Permits are virtual - Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras operate in the zones.

Find out more or apply at: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/congestioncharge or if you need assistance, please call our Carersline on **01235 424 715**.

Connecting with your community

Caring for someone you love is one of the most meaningful things you can do, but it can also feel overwhelming and extremely isolating at times.

When you're focused on someone else's needs, it's easy to put your own wellbeing on hold. However, it's so important to look after yourself too, and connecting with other people in your community can give you a lifeline of support.



Talking to others who understand what you're going through can make a huge difference. Whether it's joining a local carers' group, attending an event or even connecting online, these interactions remind you that you're not alone. Sharing experiences, tips and encouragement can lighten the emotional load of caring.

Connecting with others also helps you maintain your identity outside of your caring role. Taking part in social activities, volunteering or simply meeting friends can restore a sense of balance and belonging. You deserve time for yourself – it's not selfish, it's necessary.

Finally, being part of a network gives you a voice. When carers come together, they can raise awareness and influence decisions that affect their lives. Your experiences matter, and sharing them can help shape better support for all carers.

So, if you've been feeling isolated or unsure where to start, please do reach out. At Carers Oxfordshire, we run carers' groups and we can also connect you to other groups that take place across the county.

To find out more, email carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk or call **01235 424 715**. You can also find lots of information about carers' groups and activities at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livewell.

Everyone's care counts

Are you from a diverse cultural or faith background - in particular Caribbean, Hindu or Sikh?

We need your help to make life easier for people who care for others in your local community.

We know that many people who look after someone else don't identify as a carer, and we want to work with communities to make sure every unpaid carer gets the support they need.

Your voice matters

In the first instance we are working with Caribbean, Hindu and Sikh communities. Are you able to help us understand why carers from these communities don't often ask us for help? Can you share your experience with us to help us improve the support we offer? Your insight and experience can really help us, so please do get in touch.

Together we can make sure every carer gets the support they deserve.

To find out more, email carersvoices@carersoxfordshire.org.uk or call **01235 424 715**.



Community hospital drop-ins

In October, our adviser team joined forces with colleagues at Witney and Wallingford Community Hospitals to launch a three-month pilot of carer drop-in sessions.

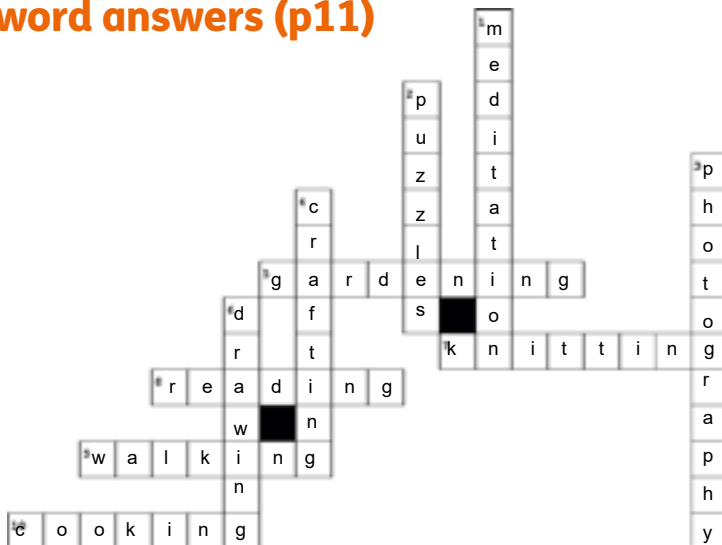
These sessions provide unpaid carers with a welcoming space to:

- Connect with our specialist advisers for free advice and support
- Enjoy a hot drink and a friendly chat
- Access information on carer's assessments, local support groups and help with emergency planning

Since the pilot began, we've met carers visiting loved ones as well as hospital staff keen to learn more about the services available for carers in Oxfordshire. We've also learned that many hospital staff are carers themselves, juggling their careers with their own caring responsibilities.

Looking ahead, we're aiming to expand this initiative to all community hospitals in 2026 and hope to make it a permanent fixture. For updates, keep an eye on our social media channels.

Crossword answers (p11)



Useful contacts

Age UK Oxfordshire

0345 450 1276
www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire

Better Housing Better Health

0800 107 0044
www.bhbh.org.uk

British Red Cross Mobility Aids

01235 552 664
www.redcross.org.uk

Carers UK

020 7 378 4999
www.carersuk.org

Child & Adult Social Care

0345 050 7666
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dementia Oxfordshire

01865 410 210
www.dementiaoxfordshire.org.uk

Getting Oxfordshire Online

01235 424 715
www.gettingoxfordshireonline.org

Good Neighbour Scheme

01993 776 277
www.goodneighbours.org.uk

Home Library Service

01865 810 259
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Out of hours Duty Social Worker

0800 833 408
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Oxfordshire Advice Navigator

01865 410 660
oxfordshireadvicenavigator.org.uk

Oxfordshire Family Info Service

01865 323 332
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Oxfordshire Family Support Network

07821 987 080
www.oxfsn.org.uk

Oxfordshire Mind

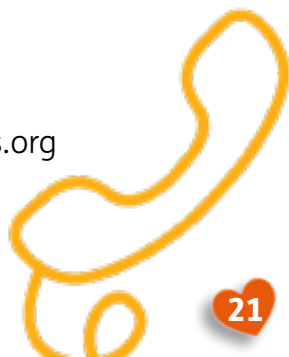
01865 247 788
www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk

Rethink Mental Illness

01865 904 499
www.rethink.org

Samaritans

116 123
www.samaritans.org



Sign up to receive Care Matters

If you would like to receive Care Matters magazine in the post, fill out this request form and return it to: **Carers Oxfordshire, 10 Napier Court, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3YT**, call **01235 424 715** or email **carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**. If you received this copy through the post you'll already be on our mailing list.

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

Alternatively, you can visit www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/contact to sign up to our email updates which will include this magazine.

You can change your mind at any time and contact us as above to unsubscribe. For further details of how your data is used and stored, please visit www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/privacy-policy.



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, scan the QR code, call us on **01235 424 715** or donate online via **www.justgiving.com/actionforcarers-oxfordshire**. Every donation makes a difference. Thank you.



Title..... Name..... Surname.....
Address.....
..... Postcode.....
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 make from the date of this declaration, for the past four years and in the future until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and / or Capital Gains Tax in a tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all of my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

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
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**.