Carers Oxfordshire

FREE
Issue 2 - 2025

CARE MATTERS

A magazine for unpaid carers

Family fun for the school holidays

A round-up of Carers Week in Oxfordshire

Contents

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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Action for Carers Oxfordshire, charity number 1149577. Registered office address, 10 Napier Court, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3YT.

Hello and welcome to our summer edition of Care Matters, the magazine for those caring for someone in Oxfordshire.

In this edition, Ruth Wilkinson opens up about her life as a carer—sharing the ups and downs of a journey that many of us can relate to.

As we enjoy the lighter evenings and sunny days, we are encouraging you to take some time for yourself as even a small break can make a big difference to your wellbeing. Walking in nature, meeting up for coffee, phoning friends or reading a book are all great ways to relax. Remember, caring for yourself is just as important as caring for someone else.

If you're looking after children or grandchildren during the holidays, we've got a few fun ideas to help keep them entertained and make the most of your time together.

With best wishes for the summer,

Juliet

Could you spare an hour a week for a friendly chat? If you enjoy talking to people and want to make a difference, we'd love to hear from you.

We're launching **Carers Phone Friends**, a new project linking volunteers with unpaid carers who may feel isolated, lonely or find it hard to get out.

Keen to volunteer? Call **01235 424 715** or email **carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**. You could brighten someone's week—just by picking up the phone!

Summer wellbeing

Summer offers longer days, brighter skies and the promise of simple pleasures—but if you're a carer, it can also bring new challenges. From managing heat to balancing routines, it's important to care not only for your loved one but for yourself too. Here are some tips to help you manage the summer season.

Keep cool

Rising temperatures can be especially tricky for those with health conditions, mobility issues, or sensory sensitivities. Help the person you care for to stay comfortable by keeping living spaces cool, encouraging regular hydration and dressing them in light, breathable clothing.

For yourself? Take the same advice. Looking after yourself is important. Swap a hot drink for a refreshing iced one and take five minutes in front of a fan when you need it. Your comfort matters just as much.

Create a summer routine

Routines can go off track because of school holidays or services taking a summer break. Creating a loose, flexible daily routine helps reduce stress for both you and the person you support. Include time for rest, engaging activities, and small outings if they're manageable—like a shady walk or a trip to a quiet café.

And don't forget yourself in the calendar. Whether it's a quiet coffee break, time for a favourite book, or a regular phone catch-up with a friend, pencilling in your needs is not selfish.

Get outside
A dose of sunshine can lift moods and support wellbeing, but it doesn't have to mean a big day out. Sitting in a garden, visiting a local park in the cooler hours, or simply opening a window to feel the breeze can be enough.

Keep a bag prepped with suncream, hats, drinks, and any medications you or your loved one might need. Planning ahead makes spontaneous trips out easier.

Find inclusive and accessible fun
Many venues now offer sensory-friendly hours, quiet spaces, and accessibility support. From adapted gardening groups to SEND-friendly museum mornings, summer doesn't have to be isolating.

Ask for support
If someone offers to lend a hand, even for a short time, take them up on it. Accepting help isn't a sign of weakness—it's how you keep going.

Reach out to us about our wellbeing offers, we can discuss together what might benefit you.

Contact us at **carerswellbeing@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**, by calling **01235 424 715**, or visit **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/time-for-you**.

Caring for someone takes strength, but don't forget—you're only human. You matter too and even small acts of self-care make a difference.

Fun-filled school holidays

Families up and down the country face the joyful challenge of filling the long summer holidays. But if your child has additional needs, finding activities that work for everyone can take a little extra planning.

Whether you're keen to stay active, discover local low-cost adventures, or simply make the most of slow summer days together, we've pulled together ideas to help spark laughter, learning and lasting memories. Look out for venues that offer quiet hours, sensory-friendly sessions, or accessible spaces—small details that can make a big difference.

Summer fun on a budget

- Head to your local park with friends and children of similar ages. Pack a picnic, take a ball and bubbles, and let the kids enjoy some simple outdoor fun. Don't forget the suncream!

- If you have a garden, a good old-fashioned water fight is a great way to cool off. Got a tent? Set it up and have a back garden camp out – sleeping bags, torches and midnight snacks included!

- Even young children love helping with stirring and mixing in the kitchen. For older kids, organise a bake-off and see whose creation comes out on top!

- Visit a local pool to burn off some energy – afterwards, unwind together with a film at home.

- Head out on a walk and keep an eye out for bugs, birds, plants and other wild wonders. You could even make a little nature-spotting checklist or collect leaves for crafts later.

- Head to a museum. We're lucky to have some fantastic museums nearby – perfect for keeping the kids busy, especially on rainy days. Many are free to visit or ask you to pay what you can.

The holiday activity and food programme (HAF) is running again this summer, for children in receipt of free school meals (Reception to Year 11) with heaps of fun and exciting activities. You can explore activities and book online: **https://eequ.org/hafoxfordshire**. If you need any help, call **01865 328 460** or email **activitiesoxfordshire@oxfordshire.gov.uk**.

YouMove offers free or low-cost local activities like swimming and badminton for eligible children and families such as those receiving free school meals, Universal Credit, early help, or refugee families—plus help from local Activators. Learn more: **www.getoxfordshireactive.org/you-move**.

Home-Start Oxford's summer events are back!
Home-Start Oxford is running free summer events in Witney and Rose Hill this August, with games and activities for families with children aged 0–5 (older siblings welcome), every week from 10am–12pm. Find a full list at: **www.homestartoxford.org.uk/summer-is-almost-here**

Apply for a Max Card
The Max Card offers children with SEND free or discounted entry to attractions across the UK. In Oxfordshire, it's run by Carers Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire County Council. Eligible children and young people must be aged 0–25, live in Oxfordshire, and have a disability or additional needs.

The child must be present to use the card, and ID may be required. Apply at **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/max-card** or call **01235 424 715** for help or more information.

Carer Q&A

Ruth Wilkinson became a carer for her husband in 2019 after he was diagnosed with advanced cancer and needed ongoing support. We spoke to Ruth about her experience as an unpaid carer.

Who do you care for?

My husband who is in his 80s. He has advanced cancer and other medical conditions. He has very little energy, problems with balance and bouts of pain. I also keep an eye on the wellbeing of my son who has episodes of mental and physical illness.

Can you share your journey into caring?

I took early retirement as a Library Manager in 2016 to care for my mum until she passed in 2019, and when my husband was diagnosed with advanced cancer that year, I stepped down as a local councillor to focus fully on his care. Overnight, my life changed completely.

What challenges do you face?

It's tricky to keep my husband's spirits up since he's mostly confined to his chair, having spent much time outdoors before. He has a mobility scooter, but assembling it is difficult. He can manage short trips to accessible places like garden centres and cafés, for about 20 minutes.

My self-confidence took a hit after a while, and I realised that I needed to find a hobby I could enjoy that would fit around my caring role. I'd always loved music at school, and I found out that I could pay for online singing lessons.

I hire my local village hall three times a week to sing along to the piano while my husband rests—it's a great stress relief. Last November, my teacher encouraged me to perform three songs in public.

How would you describe your caring role?

I make sure my husband is comfortable and safe, and has freshly cooked, balanced meals. I do all the jobs in the house and garden, the money side of things and drive him to medical appointments. The other part of my role is to encourage him to talk about things, and entertain him – that's not always easy after a busy day.

Where do you turn for support?

I know how important a support network is, especially as my husband's condition worsens. Carers Oxfordshire provided me with information on local groups and activities. I joined a Carers' Group at Sobell House and meet regularly with partners from the Oxford Prostate Cancer Support Group for coffee and walks.

With my mobility declining due to arthritis, I also attend Good Boost sessions at Barton Pool. The gentle exercise and friendly chat give me a welcome break and help me stay fit enough to manage daily tasks.

How do you maintain connection with your family?

I create a weekly newsletter for our grandchildren with quizzes, puzzles, photos, and stories to give them lasting memories of Grampy. For our anniversary, I bought my husband a Meccano set he'd always wanted, which has given him a new lease of life. Each week, he builds something new, and I feature a photo of his latest creation on the newsletter's front cover.

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

A friend who had cared for her wheelchair-bound husband for many years told me that an important part of her role was as "news bringer". I've found that to be true, I try to bring my husband news that I glean from neighbours and friends to help him feel informed and less isolated.

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

Carers Week 2025 round-up

The theme for Carers Week 2025 was 'Caring about Equality', a great opportunity to raise awareness of caring and the inequalities faced by many carers. Our team were out and about across Oxfordshire celebrating carers and creating spaces for carers to connect with each other.

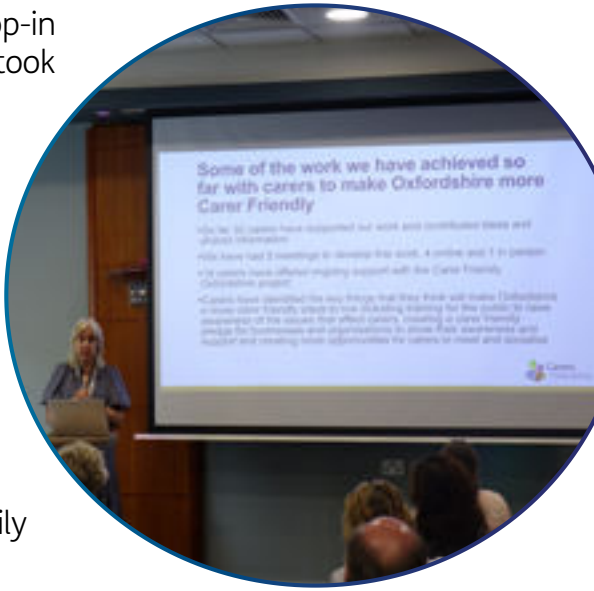
More than 60 carers came along to our Information and Connect event in Oxford where we had some great questions and interesting new ideas–thanks to everyone who joined us.

One carer said: "Really lovely atmosphere and energy in the room. A great range of information stands and it was lovely to have the opportunity and time to meet other carers."

The event included a wide range of information stands, informal networking opportunities, and space for carers to feel seen and supported.

We were pleased to welcome a range of organisations who led sessions or hosted stands, including Citizens Advice Oxfordshire, Rethink Mental Illness, VoiceAbility, Carefree, Community Catalysts, Dementia Oxfordshire, Healthwatch Oxfordshire, Better Leisure, Tellmi, Connect Neurotherapy Services, and Abingdon & Witney College.

Elsewhere around the county, drop-in sessions, cafés, and carer groups took place, giving unpaid carers the opportunity to meet a member of the Carers Oxfordshire team, receive advice and support, and connect with others.



Head of Carers Oxfordshire, Juliet Cocks, said: "Thank you to everyone who joined us during Carers Week 2025, taking the opportunity to highlight the inequalities carers face in their daily lives.

"I was moved and inspired listening to your carer stories and on behalf of Carers Oxfordshire, say a heartfelt thank you to all carers. You are amazing!"

"I thought the Carers Information and Connect event was very well organised and everyone was so welcoming and helpful. From speaking to the participants throughout the day, they were very positive about the event and the sessions." - Attendee

Did you know there's a voice for **SEND parent carers** in Oxfordshire?

OXFORDSHIRE PARENT CARERS FORUM

oxfsn IN PARTNERSHIP

WHO ARE WE?

A dedicated group of parent carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and disabilities.

WHAT DO WE DO?

As an independent group, we gather the lived experiences of families in Oxfordshire. We share this feedback with the local authority, education settings, and health providers. The forum aims to help your voice be used to shape and improve services in Oxfordshire, to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Sign up to our mailing list: bit.ly/OXPCF
Relevant news and events, updates on our work, and opportunities for feedback and participation - for parent carers and professionals

Join our SEND Room: facebook.com/groups/oxsendroom
A private peer support group on Facebook to connect with other parent carers

Volunteer: oxpcf.org.uk/volunteer
A range of opportunities to make a real impact for SEND families in Oxfordshire

Connect: oxpcf.org.uk | bit.ly/whatsapp-oxpcf | /ox_parentcarers_forum | /oxpcf | /company/oxfordshire-parent-carers-forum

TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE

Financial support available

Caring for a loved one can be rewarding, but it can also bring financial challenges.

Oxfordshire County Council's Residents Support Scheme offers one-off emergency assistance for those in, or at risk of being in crisis, or facing financial hardship, with no other financial support available. It is intended to meet one-off crisis or emergency need and is not designed to meet any type of ongoing expenses.

The scheme can help with short-term living costs like food and gas/electric top-ups, and in some cases, white goods, furniture or clothing.

For details, visit **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk** and search 'Residents Support Scheme'. Need help applying? Visit your local library or call **01865 804 171** (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm, excl. bank holidays).

Free Priority Services Register

Signing up to the Priority Services Register (PSR) ensures you receive priority assistance during power, gas or water outages, whether due to emergencies or planned work.

The service helps utility companies support customers with extra communication, access, or safety needs, tailoring their services for those requiring additional help with energy matters.

You may be eligible if you're of pensionable age; use medical equipment that relies on electricity or water; have a hearing, sight, or smell impairment; live with a disability, chronic illness, or mental health condition; need temporary extra support; live with a child under five; or require information in another format or language.

For more information, visit **www.thepsr.co.uk** or contact your utility provider.

Meet the carer

We recently spoke to Barbara about her experience caring for her husband through leukaemia and prostate cancer.

My journey through my husband's ill health began in 2003, when he was diagnosed with hairy cell leukaemia—a rare and little-known form of the disease. At that point in time there was not really any emotional support for the patient let alone the partners.

Despite the shock of his diagnosis, we were fortunate to receive excellent treatment from the Haematology Team at the Churchill Hospital. After a course of chemotherapy and immunotherapy, he entered remission—and remarkably, remains in remission to this day.

It was a frightening and uncertain time, but we soldiered on—as we always have—taking it in our stride and facing yet another challenge together. We've had our share of hurdles in married life, and somehow, have always managed to cope remarkably well.

Then in 2018, our journey took another turn when my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Thankfully, we had access to private health insurance, which gave us options. A friend recommended looking into brachytherapy—a form of internal radiotherapy—which wasn't available through our local cancer unit at the time. After careful research and discussions, we decided to pursue it.

Before undergoing the procedure, my husband received both radiotherapy and hormone therapy, and the brachytherapy operation took place on a day we'll never forget—our 49th wedding anniversary in April 2019.

All went well initially—but in 2020, his PSA levels began to rise.

Further tests revealed that some prostate cancer cells had escaped the radiotherapy, so he was prescribed additional medication to stop further prostate cancer cell growth.

It hasn't been plain sailing, but my husband continues with the treatment and, thankfully, is coping well.

What really got to me was how often people would brush off prostate cancer when I mentioned it. I'd hear things like, *"Oh, my father had that—didn't die of it"* or "*My neighbour's husband has it, and he's fine,"* sometimes even, *"That's the best cancer to get, isn't it? "*

It was clear that many people didn't understand what living with it—or alongside it—is really like.

In the end, I decided to join the Oxfordshire Prostate Cancer Partners Support Group, and I'm so glad I did. From day one, everyone was warm, welcoming, and in the main happy— even though they have all got a lot to cope with.

I know that if I ever feel I can't cope, they'll be there for me—just as they are for anyone else who needs a friendly, non-judgemental ear or some honest, lived experience and good advice. There's nothing quite like talking to someone who truly gets it.

The OPCSG Partner Support Group meets on the first Saturday of each month from 10.30am at the Hilton Garden Inn, Abingdon, OX14 1TZ (next to the Tesco Superstore).

All partners of men with prostate cancer are welcome for a coffee and a chat. For more information, contact: **partners@opcsg.org** or visit **www.opcsg.org**

Free courses for carers

This summer and autumn, 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.

Delivered by Abingdon & Witney College

- Cooking on a Budget
- Breath-work for Wellbeing
- Craft for Relaxation
- Sleep Wellness
- Cognitive Fitness
- Far Eastern Philosophy and Wellbeing Course
- Yoga for Relaxation
- Creative Writing Fiction Part 1
- Art for Relaxation
- Meditation and Breath-work
- Understanding Cinema: Storytelling Through Film
- Writing a Novel for Beginners

Available from the Autumn:

- Pilates for All
- Mindfulness for Carers
- Mind Body Connection

For more course-specific information on free carers' courses or to enrol, please visit the website or contact: **oal@abingdon-witney.ac.uk** or call **01235 216 278**.

Most of these courses are delivered online.

Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity—secure your place today!

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

Oxfordshire advice Navigator

Oxfordshire Age UK

Agnes Smith Advice Centre

Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre

Funded by OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Rethink: A lifeline for carers

Caring for a loved one with mental health challenges can be overwhelming, but help is available thanks to our specialist service for carers of people with mental illness, Rethink Mental Illness. We spoke to a carer who has benefited from their support.

"Rethink have made me feel validated for all of the care and support I provide to my daughter.

"In January, before I spoke to Rethink, I was a frustrated mum. My beautiful daughter had been diagnosed with an emotionally unstable personality disorder, and I was really struggling to understand her condition and how I could support her through this.

"I felt totally isolated and alone, with no outside support, until a friend of mine suggested Rethink Carers Support Service, she had used the service herself and highly recommended them.

"After a few days, I gave Rethink a call and straightaway my life started to change for the better.

"What the person who answered that call offered in that hour was literally a revelation to me. She helped me understand my daughter's condition much better. And she just listened to my worries and stresses, which meant a great deal.

"Being able to benefit from this incredible level of knowledge, expertise and support for free has been a real eye opener to me. It's made me realise not only how special Rethink Mental Illness is but also how fantastic the people are who make their services possible.

"I continue to receive regular support which has enabled me to put into practice what I have learnt from my support worker, such as setting clear boundaries with my daughter and allowing myself time to look after my own health and wellbeing".

Rethink Mental Illness

New
Carer Support Group

The first Thursday of each month 10 - 11.30 am

The group will provide support and encouragement to family and friends of anyone experiencing mental health challenges.

It will be a safe space to share experiences and learning, to enable members to feel less isolated and more empowered in their supportive role.

How to find us

High Street Methodist Church, 40 High St., Witney, OXON, OX28 6HG

For further information please contact Rethink Carers Service

Phone: 07760775463
Email: oxfordshirecarers@rethink.org

rethink.org

Disability Employment Advisers

Are you caring for someone who is disabled or living with a long-term health condition and looking to get into work?

The Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) Team at Oxfordshire's Jobcentres offers tailored, voluntary support for people with health conditions or disabilities who are claiming a working-age benefit—such as Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance, or Employment and Support Allowance.

Disability Employment Advisers can provide additional guidance beyond the usual Jobcentre support, helping people move closer to work at their own pace. For those not ready to take that step, the team can help build confidence and explore what's possible in the future.

The team also offers a retention service for anyone in the community who is currently working but off sick long-term, or at risk of losing their job due to their health. They can help explore reasonable adjustments and—with permission—contact employers on the individual's behalf. This support is available to anyone, whether they're claiming benefits or not.

Advisers also work with local employers to help them feel more confident about hiring and supporting disabled staff. They encourage inclusive ways of working and help find suitable opportunities—like work experience, volunteering, or paid jobs—for Jobcentre customers.

If the person you care for would like to access this support, they can ask at their nearest Jobcentre to speak to a Disability Employment Adviser. You can find the details of the nearest Jobcentre at:
https://find-your-nearest-jobcentre.dwp.gov.uk/search.php

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
0207 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

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

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

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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

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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

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**.