Carers Oxfordshire

FREE
Issue 3 - 2025

CARE MATTERS

A magazine for unpaid carers

Looking after your wellbeing this winter

Could you offer peer support as a Phone Friend?

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 autumn edition of Care Matters, the magazine for those caring for someone in Oxfordshire.

In this edition we shine a light on the incredible resilience and compassion of unpaid carers across the county. Please read our inspiring conversations with carers on pages 8 and 14.

This year, Carers Rights Day is on the 20th November. It's a great opportunity to help unpaid carers discover the support and services they're entitled to. If you know someone who provides care, simply pointing them towards Carers Oxfordshire can make all the difference. If you're part of an event to mark the day, we'd love to hear about it!

As we look ahead to 2026, it can be uplifting to pause and reflect on the good things from the past year. Often it's not the big milestones but the little moments that stay with us—catching a sunset, finishing a good book, sharing a laugh, or enjoying a quiet cup of tea. Why not note down your own list of "good things" to carry into the new year? It's a gentle reminder to celebrate what makes you smile.

As always, our team is here to help - whether you need practical advice, suggestions for local activities or support to complete a carer's assessment, do get in touch.

Best wishes,
Juliet Cocks
Head of Service, Carers Oxfordshire

New project with Oxford University Hospitals
This autumn, we're piloting monthly carer drop-ins at **Witney** and **Wallingford** Community Hospitals, run by our specialist Carer Advisers in partnership with hospital matrons.

Look out for the launch date on our website and social media.

Staying well this winter

As the days shorten and temperatures drop, caring for a loved one can feel even more demanding. Supporting someone with daily tasks or providing emotional care brings its own rewards, but it can also increase stress during winter.

That's why prioritising your own wellbeing is essential. When you're well-rested, supported and healthy, you can provide better care to others.

Financial support

Winter often brings extra financial pressure, particularly with rising energy costs. Make sure you're claiming all the support available to you.

A good starting point is to visit: **www.oxfordshireadvicenavigator.org.uk** or call **01865 410 660**.

Your physical wellbeing

Vitamin D helps maintain healthy bones, teeth and muscles. The NHS recommends a daily supplement of 10 micrograms for adults and children over four during autumn and winter. If you get little sunlight, you may need it year-round.

Vaccinations protect both your health and the people you care for. Speak to your GP to check which jabs you're eligible for and consider booking appointments early.

A balanced diet is vital for maintaining strength and immunity during colder months. Small adjustments, such as including more fruit, vegetables and protein, can make a noticeable difference.

Planning ahead

Preparing for unexpected events brings peace of mind. Keep a simple contingency plan for emergencies, including contact details, medications and essential items. Carry a Carer ID, and consider having a hospital bag ready.

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

Your home

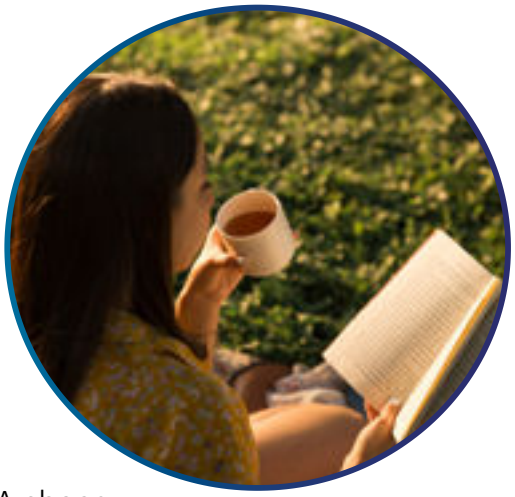
Keeping warm over winter helps prevent colds, flu and more serious health problems.

Aim to heat rooms you use regularly, like your living room and bedroom, to at least 18°C and keep bedroom windows closed at night. Make sure heating and cooking appliances are safe with a Gas Safe engineer, and check your home for fire safety. You may also be entitled to grants, benefits or advice to improve heating or help with bills.

A warm, safe home is essential in winter. Better Housing Better Health offers free support to help reduce energy costs and improve comfort. Depending on your situation, you may be able to access a range of support including emergency fuel vouchers, a free home energy visit and energy efficient items.

Visit **www.bhbh.org.uk**, call **0800 107 0044**, or ask about a referral during your carer's assessment.

Supporting your mental wellbeing



Caring for someone you love is rewarding but can also be exhausting, and winter can make it harder to stay active and connected.

Signs of strain include feeling low, anxious, irritable, changes in sleep or energy, or feeling emotionally "switched off".

Small steps can make a big difference. A phone call, a short walk, reading, or quiet reflection can ease isolation and help you recharge. Looking after yourself isn't selfish—it builds resilience.

Be clear about what you can and can't do, give yourself permission to say no, and remember: like putting on your own oxygen mask first, you'll be able to support others better if you're rested and well.

If you're worried or feeling low, Oxfordshire Talking Therapies offers free NHS support for anxiety and depression. Their practical, short-term treatments can help you manage these feelings and improve your wellbeing.

NHS Oxfordshire Talking Therapies

You can self-refer online at: **www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies**, call **01865 901 222**, or ask your GP for a referral.

Recognising burnout

If you feel overwhelmed or notice signs of burnout, don't wait—speak to your GP, reach out for support, and take the time you need. Asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.

Rethink Mental Illness

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**.

Live Well Oxfordshire

Live Well Oxfordshire is your easy to search online directory, packed with thousands of services and activities. It has a wealth of information and advice tailored to the needs of carers.

Whether you're looking for equipment and care services to help keep your loved one independent at home, or you're interested in finding transport services, new hobbies and activities, it's all there.

You can also find carers' support groups, providing a space to connect with fellow caregivers over a coffee and a friendly chat. Take advantage of respite or short break care options, allowing you to enjoy a well-deserved break every now and then.

Visit the website: **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livewell**

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Carer Q&A

We spoke to Adela about the challenges she faces caring for her son, and the support that helps her manage daily life while being a mum.

Who do you care for?

I care for my son who is nine years old, with epilepsy and severe learning disabilities.

Can you share your journey into caring?

From early on, I knew my son would need ongoing support due to his complex needs. He had epilepsy from three months old and wasn't meeting developmental milestones. By age two, he was still nonverbal, couldn't follow instructions or manage toileting, and it became clear he would need specialist support.

It was when he started at special school that I began to see myself not just as his mum, but also as his carer. I realised others struggled to care for him, and I couldn't leave him with friends or babysitters. Counselling helped me accept my role as a carer.

What challenges do you face?

My son needs one-to-one care at home because of his seizures, clumsiness, and lack of danger awareness. I have a safe room where he can move around, giving me space to manage daily tasks.

It's not very different to when he was a baby. He needs one-to-one care, and I support him with everything. I help him to eat, change him and look after him. As he is getting older, he is more physical and his complex behaviour problems because of his learning difficulties mean that he can get frustrated.

How would you describe your caring role?
Hard work – almost like a job – but I am still his mum. He is very affectionate, and I feel that love every day. At times, he treats me like anyone else providing care, which can be challenging, but he is always happy to see me.

Then, there's the admin. Booking appointments, chasing medication, and coordinating different services. It really is a full-time role.

Where do you turn for support?
I have a good group of friends who I met through different channels including school, groups and services. They 'get it' as they have children themselves with similar difficulties. Being a carer has affected my family relationships and friendships.

Friends I knew from before don't really understand my daily life and what we go through. Sometimes it feels that people offer sympathy to your face but forget about it as soon as they leave. It is hard to understand how difficult it is being a carer unless you are in a full-time caring role. Caring can be lonely and isolating, for sure.

How do you maintain connections with your family?
Our families are not local and so we see them when we can, probably every couple of months. I think they see a snippet of what life is like for us.

What is one piece of advice you would share with someone who may be going through a similar experience?
Reach out to people that have some insight. See your GP if you need to, they offer great help. Counselling can be good. Be wary of social media, sometimes it can be helpful but sometimes it's not, and I would only make connections on social media that are right for you.

We'd love to hear from you! If you'd like to share your experience as a carer with our readers, email **carersvoices@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**

Making time for you

Time for You is a collection of wellbeing offers tailored to unpaid carers aged 18 and over who support someone living in Oxfordshire.

We understand that caring can be exhausting, so Time for You offers the chance for unpaid carers to take a break, look after their wellbeing, and enjoy time for themselves.

Carefree short breaks

Registered carers can enjoy a one or two-night hotel stay with a family member, friend or partner. While a small admin fee and travel costs apply, these breaks enable carers to have a welcome chance to rest, experience a change of scenery and return feeling refreshed.

Counselling for carers

Subsidised sessions offer a safe space to reflect, process feelings and build resilience. Taking time to care for your emotional health helps you cope better with the challenges of daily caring.

Spa & wellbeing treatments

Home spa packs bring relaxation straight to your door. Enjoy a little pampering at home, helping you unwind and recharge.

Social activities

Whether alone, with friends or with family, carers can enjoy outings, theatre trips, cinema visits or days out. It's a great way to connect, have fun and create positive memories.

Fitness

Better Leisure Memberships give carers a free annual membership, with up to 50% off activities at centres across South and West Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. From swimming and gyms to fitness classes and courts, it's a boost for both body and mind.

Carers who've accessed Time for You speak of the difference it makes:

"I was near breaking point when the counselling started. It helped me step back, focus on the positives, and make challenges manageable."

"A night away in a beautiful hotel after a tricky half term was just what I needed to rest and recharge."

"Seeing Derek Paravicini live was a once-in-a-lifetime experience I'll cherish forever."

"It allows me to get away without guilt—just for my wellbeing. I feel seen."

How to apply

Offers depend on individual caring situations. To find out what's available for you, email **carerswellbeing@carersoxfordshire.org.uk** or call the Carers Line on **01235 424 715**.

Get involved

We're inviting unpaid carers to join our Carer Friendly Oxfordshire Focus Group and help shape support across the county.

By sharing your experiences and ideas at flexible meetings, you can help ensure carers get the recognition and resources they deserve.

We know your time is precious, so you can take part whenever it fits around your caring role. To find out more, email us at **carerswellbeing@carersoxfordshire.org.uk** or call **01235 424 715**.

Could you be a Phone Friend?

We're looking for compassionate, reliable volunteers to support unpaid carers across Oxfordshire with our new Carers Phone Friends project, launching this autumn.

We know that caring for someone you love can be rewarding, but also, at times, very isolating. In fact, 50% of unpaid carers report feeling lonely (State of Caring 2023 survey).

You could make a real difference to other carers by becoming a telephone befriender and offering regular companionship to someone who also gives to others.

What you'll do

- Be matched with an unpaid carer in your community.
- Call them regularly for a friendly chat and support.
- Offer a listening ear, peer support and companionship, helping them to feel connected.

Sarah's story

Sarah, 58, lives in Didcot and cares full-time for her husband, who has a learning disability and vascular dementia. She also has her own health challenges and a mild learning disability. With little family support, Sarah often feels isolated.

Since being matched with volunteer, Margot, for regular befriending calls, their friendship has flourished. Sarah calls Margot her "very best friend" and looks forward to their weekly chats, where she can share her worries, have a laugh, and feel truly supported. She is very appreciative of the friendship, reassurance and support that these weekly calls provide for her.

**Names have been changed for privacy.*

What you'll gain

- The satisfaction of giving back and making a real difference in someone's life.
- Training and ongoing support from our friendly, experienced team.
- The chance to connect with your community and develop new skills.
- Enjoy meaningful conversations - many of our volunteers say they get just as much out of the calls as the carers they support.

Flexible opportunities

We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds and can work around your schedule, whether you can spare a few hours a week or more.

If you could spare some time to support another unpaid carer in Oxfordshire, call **01295 234 850** or email **lauraspillane@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**.

You could brighten someone's week—just by picking up the phone!

Help us reach more carers

Half of all carers feel lonely, and nearly 80% experience stress and anxiety. Our Carers Phone Friends offer a lifeline—regular calls that bring comfort, connection and support.

Could you help us reach more carers by making a donation? Every gift, big or small, will help us pair more carers with a friendly voice.

Visit **www.justgiving.com/campaign/carers-phone-friends** to donate, or scan the QR code. Thank you for your support.

Meet the carer

We sat down with Hazel, 61, from Banbury, who spent many years caring for her late husband, Ian, and now supports her friend Adam, 43, navigating the challenges of daily life with his health needs.

Hazel: I spent many years caring for my late husband, Ian, who had heart failure, a stroke, blindness and memory loss. After he passed away last year, I found myself caring for my friend, Adam, who needs support with his oxygen and personal care because of respiratory failure caused by COVID-19.

Living with arthritis in my hands and managing diabetes every day isn't easy, but even with all that, every day I'm busy making sure Adam's needs are met. I get him up in the morning, help him get ready, drive him to work and then come home to the cooking, washing and shopping. There's not much sit-down time, and even when he's at work, there's plenty to do.

Adam: Before COVID, I was a frontline railway guard, constantly on the move. During the first lockdown of 2020, people weren't observing social distancing or wearing masks, I was in the thick of it.

I caught COVID-19 in 2021 and spent five months in hospital. I had to learn to walk again and come to terms with being incredibly dependent. I now rely on Hazel for almost everything—from getting to work to daily living.

If it wasn't for her, I don't know where I would be. It's more than invaluable.

Hazel: Carers Oxfordshire has been a lifeline for me. After a tip-off from a neighbour, I spoke to my GP, who referred me. They got in touch and arranged a carer's assessment with Carers Adviser, Moira Collier, who helped me to apply for Carer's Allowance and explore ways to maintain my health and wellbeing.

Moira was fantastic. She was very professional, took the time to listen and helped me along quite a long way. It's basically recognised that I am a carer, and I now know that if I need help or advice, I just have to pick up the phone.

Adam: The support Hazel has received has also given me reassurance. Carers Oxfordshire has allowed us to put in place a framework and contingency plan to support me should anything happen to Hazel. That's a massive peace of mind, not that anything is going to happen, but there's always that 'what if'.

Hazel: I've also been able to explore courses to stay fit and maintain my own wellbeing. With Adam at work three days a week, I can take part in the courses Carers Oxfordshire has recommended, something I wouldn't have known about otherwise.

Adam: I couldn't do anything without Hazel. She's more than a rock and it's a great comfort to me knowing that Carers Oxfordshire are there to support her and allow her to achieve things that she wants to do. I know caring is difficult, because whilst I've not been a proper carer, I've helped with caring in the past.

It's mentally draining and physically demanding, and you can't do it alone. Knowing that Hazel has a group of like-minded people that she can talk to, who understand and appreciate what it is to be a carer, is fantastic.

Hazel: My advice to other carers is not to be afraid to ask for help. It can be very lonely, especially if you don't recognise yourself as a carer. Speaking to your GP and organisations like Carers Oxfordshire can make a huge difference.

Meet Vicky - Carer ID cards

Vicky Steaman oversees Carer ID applications, and tells us more about the benefits of having a Carer ID card.

"A Carer ID card is a photo ID that shows you are an unpaid carer. It can be used at medical appointments, when collecting prescriptions, with employers or in emergencies.

"We know not every carer has access to the internet, or feels confident applying online. If that's the case, there are other options. Providing a photo is often the main hurdle. Some carers ask a neighbour, friend or family member for help.

"If needed, you can post a passport-size photo to us, and we'll upload it for you and return it safely. We'll then call you and complete the application together over the phone."

*__David's story:__ At his library, staff helped David take a photo and send it to us. We then helped him to complete the application by phone. He was relieved and delighted when his Carer ID card arrived.

*__Amira's story:__ Amira was nervous about applying but was surprised how quick and simple it was. The form took less than 15 minutes, leaving her reassured and confident once her card arrived.

*__Jean's story__: Jean found the process straightforward and kept us laughing while we completed the form together. She said she was grateful for the support, as carers face so much paperwork already.

To find out more about Carer ID cards or for help applying, call us on **01235 424 715** or visit **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/carer-id**.

**Names have been changed.*

Top tips: Caring for smiles

Oral health is often overlooked in caring, but it's vital for overall wellbeing. People with care needs may forget to brush, struggle with dentures, or be unable to explain they're in pain.

Poor oral hygiene can lead to infections, eating difficulties and reduced quality of life—but with patience and the right approach, carers can make a real difference. Here are some helpful tips for daily care:

- **Stick to a routine** – Brushing morning and night builds familiarity.
- **Keep calm** – Toothbrushing does not have to be done in a bathroom. Choose a comfortable environment; spitting into a cup or tissue works fine.
- **Give clear instructions** – Break tasks down, show as well as tell.
- **Use the right tools** – Adapted brushes, bite guards, or mild-tasting toothpaste can make things easier.
- **Spot problems early** – Look out for bad breath, refusal to eat, or changes in behaviour.

Tell dental professionals about any adjustments needed—many offer longer or adapted appointments. If getting to a practice is difficult, ask about community or mobile dental services.

Remember, support is available if you're struggling with oral care. Visit the Community Dental Services website for resources, or contact the Oxfordshire Oral Health Improvement Team on **07818 560615** or email **ohimp.oxfordshire@cds-cic.nhs.uk**.

Find a local NHS dentist at **www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist**.

Supporting adults to live well

Thinking about a time when the person you're caring for might need extra help can be tough. But don't worry, you're not alone. There are plenty of resources available to support you both.

Knowing where to start may feel overwhelming at first. From figuring out what kind of support you both need to understanding how to pay for adult social care, there's a lot to consider.

That's why Oxfordshire County Council's Living Well guides are essential. They help you navigate support, from assessing care needs and finding home care, to accessing aids, equipment and understanding costs.

The guides include:

- **Planning ahead** – What to think about when planning for future care needs.
- **Paying for social care** – How social care is funded, the threshold for financial support and paying for care.
- **Housing options** – Exploring different housing options so you can make a decision that's right for you.
- **Support to live at home** - How to make your home work for you, from daily living aids, mobility aids to assistive technology.
- **Care at home** - Your home care options and what to consider when looking for a care at home provider.
- **Assessing care needs** - Occupational therapist assessments, drop in clinics and what happens at a care assessment.
- **Caring for someone** - Support available for unpaid carers, including young carers.

You may not need to think about extra support now, but by planning, you have time look into and discuss what support might be needed.

This could include things like grab handles, perching stools, personal alarms, or small changes at home.

It's worth remembering that adult social care isn't free, and most people will need to pay part or all of their care costs. So, it's important to find out whether you're eligible for financial support.

Also, don't forget to check if there are any benefits or allowances you or the person you care for are entitled to.

Visit **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livingwell** for more information. If you're not online, you can pick up a copy of the **Living well at home** guide from your local library.

Carer workshops

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust run several carers workshops and support groups.

NHS
Oxford Health
NHS Foundation Trust

Our voice
A monthly forum for adult patients and carers in Oxfordshire with lived experience of mental health services. Share your experiences, connect with others, and work with charities and staff to improve the care you and your loved one receive.

The forum meets online, on the **third Friday of every month from 1pm – 3pm**. Contact: **getinvolved@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk** for more information.

Carers Open Space
A supportive peer group for carers, held online on the **third Wednesday of every month, 11am–12.30pm**. Join other carers to share experiences, ask questions and connect with people in similar situations.

Family and Carer Support Group
For those supporting someone who self-harms or experiences suicidal thoughts. The group meets every **third Thursday each month, 6–7pm**, with a mix of online and in-person sessions. This is a safe space to listen, share and receive support from others who understand your experiences. For more details or to book, email: **icareyoucare@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk** or call **07888 156 646**.

Carer workshops
For carers, family or friends of service users who are currently under the care of our Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Adult Mental Health Services.

To find out more about any of the above workshops, visit: **www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/carers**.

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

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

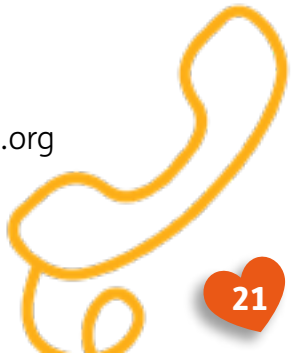
Oxfordshire Family Info Service
01865 323 332
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

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



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**.