Carers Oxfordshire

FREE
Issue 3 - 2026

CARE MATTERS

A magazine for unpaid carers

Domestic abuse: a hidden issue

Understanding your rights as a carer

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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. The service is delivered by Action for Carers Oxfordshire.

Action for Carers Oxfordshire

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As summer gives way to autumn, many of us find our routines beginning to change. As the days become shorter and we look ahead to the winter months, it can also be a time to think about the support you need to look after yourself as well as the person you care for.

I want to take a moment to recognise the incredible dedication, resilience and compassion that unpaid carers across Oxfordshire show every day.

Whether you are supporting a family member, friend or neighbour, I know that caring can be both rewarding and demanding.

Inside this issue of Care Matters, you will find information about your rights as a carer (p4) and winter wellbeing (p10), plus we share news of a new mental health carers group in Witney (p20). Thank you to the carers who shared their stories in this issue.

As always, our team remains committed to ensuring that unpaid carers across Oxfordshire have access to information, advice and support tailored to their individual circumstances. We welcome your feedback, ideas and stories, which help us continue to develop services that reflect the needs of local unpaid carers.

Thank you for everything you do. I hope you find this issue informative, helpful and encouraging as we move through the autumn season and towards the end of the year.

Best wishes,

Juliet Cocks
Head of Service, Carers Oxfordshire

Your rights as a carer

Knowing your rights as a carer can help you feel more confident asking for support and making sure your needs are recognised.

Carers Rights Day on Thursday 19th November is an opportunity to highlight the rights of unpaid carers and help ensure no one misses out on the support, information and advice available.

For more information about Carers Rights Day visit **www.carersuk.org**. For support to understand your rights as a carer, call us on **01235 424 715**.

The right to a carer's assessment

If you provide regular unpaid care for someone, you have the right to request a free carer's assessment, regardless of how much care you provide or the type of care you give. The assessment looks at how caring affects your health, wellbeing, work, relationships and day-to-day life, and whether you may need support.

The right to information, advice and support

You have the right to access information and advice to help you understand your caring role and the support available to you. This includes information about local services, financial support, health and wellbeing, and planning for the future.

The right to ask your doctor's surgery to identify you as a carer

You can ask your doctor's surgery to record that you are an unpaid carer on your patient record. This helps your doctor understand your caring role and may help you access appropriate support and relevant public health programmes.

The right to request a free flu jab (if eligible)

If you are the main carer for someone who would be at risk if you became ill, or you receive Carer's Allowance, you may be entitled to a free flu vaccination. Speak to your doctor's surgery or local pharmacy to check whether you are eligible.

The right to unpaid carer's leave

The Carer's Leave Act became law in April 2024, giving eligible employees the legal right to take up to five days of unpaid leave each year to provide or arrange care for a dependant. This can help carers manage some of the challenges of balancing work with caring responsibilities, while supporting them to stay in employment.

The right to request flexible working

If you are balancing work with unpaid caring, you have the right to request flexible working from your employer. This could include changes to your working hours, working pattern or place of work.

The right to be involved when the person you care for is discharged

Where appropriate, hospitals should identify and involve you in discharge planning, helping to ensure the person you care for has the support they need when they leave hospital.

The right to be protected from discrimination or harassment

The Equality Act 2010 protects carers from direct discrimination or harassment because of their caring responsibilities for a disabled person. If you are treated unfairly because you are a carer, legal protections may apply.

Carer Q&A

George cares for his dad, who is living with dementia. He talks to us about becoming a carer in his mid-twenties, balancing work and caring responsibilities and how the support he receives has helped him realise he's not alone.

Who do you care for?

I care for my dad, who is living with dementia. An ex-army (& SAS) man, who as a kid growing up was (and still is of course) my hero! But seeing the decline in the last few years has absolutely torn me.

Can you share your journey into caring?

I've only just turned 30 in the last few weeks, so stepping into a caring role from around the age of 25 is something I don't think you can ever truly prepare for.

My dad had me later in life, and although it wasn't planned, I feel incredibly grateful for everything he's done for me. Being able to support him now, especially in this stage of his life, means a lot to me.

What challenges do you face?

One of the biggest challenges is balancing everything. I worked hard through university and built my way into a role I'm really proud of, but it's demanding and takes up a lot of time.

Trying to juggle work, caring responsibilities, and maintaining relationships with friends, family, and my own personal life can be difficult at times.

How would you describe your caring role?
It's very varied. It ranges from practical, day-to-day support, to trying to provide mental stimulation and help slow the effects of dementia as much as possible. On tougher days, it's also about staying positive and being there emotionally, which can be just as important.

Where do you turn for support?
For a long time, I didn't really turn to anyone. I just tried to manage everything myself. More recently, I've become aware of the support networks available for carers, and it's reassuring to know they're there. It makes a real difference knowing you're not alone.

How do you maintain connections with your family?
It takes a lot of planning and organisation. I don't have a large family network beyond my parents, but my friends and my partner have been incredibly supportive. Having people around you who understand and are there on the tougher days really helps.

What is one piece of advice you would share with someone who may be going through a similar experience?
You're never alone. And use the resources around you to help guide you through what isn't an easy task or role.

Also, if you're new to it, I recommend reaching out to a carers group. I wasn't aware of them at first, but the level of support and guidance they provide is invaluable. I'm genuinely grateful they're there.

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

Understanding sensory support

The Oxfordshire County Council Sensory Support team supports people who are living with hearing loss, sight loss, or are deaf, blind or deafblind.

How can they help?

Whether you, the person you care for, or someone close to you is living with hearing loss, sight loss or dual sensory loss, the team may be able to help.

They provide assessments, advice and equipment tailored to individual needs, including long canes, specialist clocks and alarm clocks, TV loops, pagers and smoke alarm alerting systems.

They can also help people develop skills to maintain their independence, such as preparing meals safely with sight loss. Fully qualified rehabilitation specialists provide mobility and orientation training, including support with using a long cane safely.

The team can offer advice on making the most of your home or workplace environment, including lighting, making use of remaining sight or hearing, and getting the most from hearing aids and technology.

For hearing support, call **01865 323 155** or email **hearing.support@oxfordshire.gov.uk**, and for vision support, call **01865 323 133** or email **vision.support@oxfordshire.gov.uk**.

You can also contact the team by text or WhatsApp on **07713 329 501**. BSL users can contact the team via the InterpretersLive! Directory.

Share your experience of caring for someone with severe mental illness

Researchers from the University of Oxford are looking for people who provide unpaid care to someone with a severe mental illness (SMI) to take part in a study exploring carers' wellbeing.

There is currently limited research into what helps improve the wellbeing of people supporting someone with an SMI. This study aims to understand whether taking part in social groups, such as support groups, clubs or other activities, is linked to improved wellbeing.

If you provide unpaid emotional or practical support to someone close to you who is aged 16 or over, and they could not manage without your support due to an SMI, the researchers would like to hear from you.

The study is open to adults aged 18+ who live in the UK. The research team defines SMI as including psychosis, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and complex emotional needs/personality disorders.

The anonymous online survey takes around 40 minutes to complete. You can take breaks and return to the survey within one week, as long as you use the same internet browser.

To find out more and take part, scan the QR code, or visit: **https://tinyurl.com/CaregiverSMIWellbeingOrgs**

If you have any questions about the study, contact Dr Eiluned Pearce by emailing **eiluned.pearce@psy.ox.ac.uk** or calling **07775 229 377**.

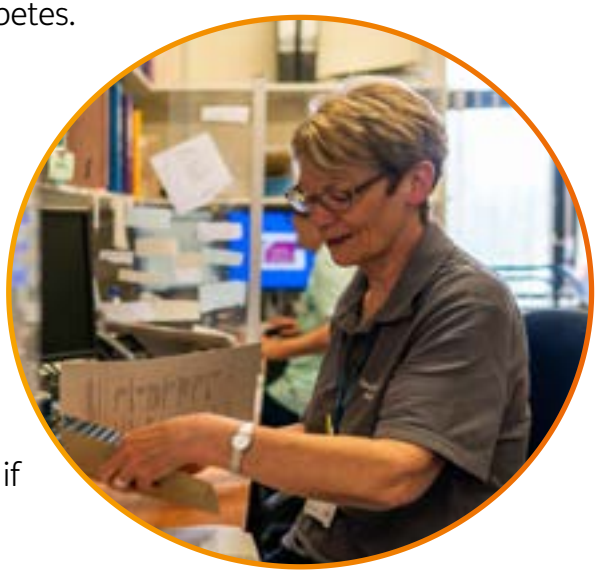
Getting ready for winter

Winter can bring extra challenges for unpaid carers, from keeping homes warm and managing rising energy costs, to protecting health and wellbeing during colder weather.

Taking a few simple steps now can help you and the person you care for to stay safe and comfortable in the months ahead.

Winter-proof your health

Looking after your own health is important, especially during winter. A free NHS Health Check can help identify early signs of conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes.



Available to most adults aged 40–74 without existing health conditions, the check includes measurements such as blood pressure, weight and cholesterol, plus personalised advice to help you stay well.

If you're eligible, your doctor's surgery will invite you. If not, contact your surgery to find out if you qualify.

Staying up to date with your vaccinations can help protect your health this winter. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist to check which vaccines you're eligible for.

Winter-proof your home

A warm, comfortable home is important for the wellbeing of you and the person you care for.

If you're worried about heating costs, energy bills, or living in a cold or damp home, Better Housing Better Health may be able to help.

This free service offers practical advice on reducing energy use, improving energy efficiency, and accessing financial support to help lower household bills.

Find out more at **www.bhbh.org.uk/make-a-referral** or call **0800 107 0044** (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm).

Apply for a Carer ID card

A Carer ID card can help you show that you are an unpaid carer and make it easier to access support when you need it.

It can be useful when attending appointments, collecting prescriptions, speaking with health and social care professionals, or in an emergency.

If you don't already have a Carer ID card, apply ahead of winter at **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/carer-id** or call us on **01235 424 715**.

Prepare an emergency plan

An emergency plan can give you peace of mind and help ensure the person you care for is supported if you're unable to provide care.

Include important information such as routines, medications, contacts and care needs. Find guidance and templates on our website at **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/be-prepared** or call **01235 424 715**.

Meet the carer

Andreia cares for her nine-year-old daughter. She shares how her journey as a parent carer has inspired her to support other families.

When people ask me what it's like to be a carer, my answer is simple: I'm Melody's mum. Melody is my beautiful daughter. She is autistic and has a speech and language delay. She experiences the world differently and, while that brings its own challenges, I wouldn't change who she is for anything. She is funny, kind, determined and has taught me more about life than I could ever have imagined.

I first became a carer while helping my grandmother when she was living with vascular dementia, although I didn't recognise it at the time. Like many people, I simply saw myself as a family member doing what felt right.

The hardest part of our journey hasn't been Melody's autism. It's been navigating systems that aren't designed to meet the needs of neurodivergent children and their families.

Whether it's education, healthcare or accessing the right support, we've encountered barriers that can leave you feeling exhausted. Yet despite this, we live a happy life. We focus on Melody's strengths rather than what she can't do, and try to give her the freedom to be herself.

I'm also neurodivergent. I have ADHD, which brings strengths such as creativity, determination and the ability to think differently, but can also make the day-to-day juggling act of caring more challenging. We're fairly certain Melody has ADHD too, although she hasn't yet been assessed. Together, we're learning what works for us as a family and embracing our differences.

Like many parents, my understanding of autism didn't happen overnight. When Melody was first identified as autistic, I went through a period of denial and grief. Looking back, I realise these feelings came from my lack of understanding and the stereotypes I'd absorbed. Everything changed when I began attending peer support groups. Being alongside other parents who understood made me realise I wasn't alone.

It was at one of those coffee mornings that I first heard about Carers Oxfordshire. Until then, I had never considered myself an unpaid carer. I thought I was doing what every parent does. But parenting a neurodivergent child often means becoming an advocate, coordinator, therapist, researcher and navigator of complex systems, all while being their safe place. I realised that I wasn't just a parent, I was a carer too.

Since registering with Carers Oxfordshire, I've benefitted from practical support such as a Carer ID card, short-breaks and discounted access to Better Leisure Centres. More than anything, I've felt recognised. Knowing there is a team who understands the realities of caring makes an enormous difference.

My lived experience inspired me to establish Neurodiverse Voices Connect CIC. What began as a podcast has grown into a community where parent carers of neurodivergent children come together each month to share experiences and support one another.

If I could leave other carers with one message, it would be this: if you're supporting someone you love, you are a carer, even if you've never thought of yourself that way. Don't be afraid to ask for help, connect with others and accept support. Caring can sometimes feel lonely, but it doesn't have to be. Together, we are stronger.

You can find out more about Andreia's journey, upcoming events and podcast at **www.neurodiversevoicesconnect.org**.

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

Working with your child's school

Being a parent carer of a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) comes with unique experiences and challenges.

You know your child better than anyone, and your knowledge and experience are an important part of making sure they receive the right support.

Understanding your rights can help you feel more confident when working with schools, accessing services and making decisions about your child's future.

Schools and families are encouraged to work together, recognising that every child and family is different. You should have clear communication, opportunities to share your views, and information in a way that works for you. This might include having a consistent point of contact or flexibility around meetings if your caring responsibilities affect your availability.

If your child needs additional support, you don't have to wait until things become difficult before asking for help. Speak to their school about what support is available.

Some children receive support through their school, while others may need more specialist help. An education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment can help determine whether a child or young person needs additional support beyond what is usually available.

Parents and carers can request an assessment themselves — you do not need permission from your child's school. To request an assessment, you can apply through Oxfordshire County Council's SEND local offer website — see link on opposite page.

The council must decide within six weeks whether to carry out an assessment, and your views should be included throughout the process.

Remember, your wellbeing matters too. Caring for a child with additional needs can affect many areas of life, including your health, work and relationships. A carer's assessment can help explore how your caring role affects you and what support could help.

Support may include practical advice, short breaks, or connecting with other families who understand your experiences. Short breaks can give your child opportunities to take part in activities while giving you time to rest and recharge.

At Carers Oxfordshire, we're here to help you understand your rights, find support and feel more confident navigating services. You don't have to manage everything alone.

Find out more at **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/supporting-a-child-with-additional-needs** or call **01235 424 715**.

Useful places to find additional support:

SEND local offer: information about local services and support — **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/children-and-families/oxfordshire-send-local-offer**

SENDIASS Oxfordshire: impartial advice about SEND processes and rights — **www.sendiass-oxfordshire.org.uk**

Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum: support and shared experiences from other families — **www.oxpcf.org.uk**

Domestic abuse: a hidden issue

Despite a lack of national data, evidence suggests domestic abuse is a significant but often hidden issue for unpaid carers.

Many experience abuse within caring relationships, yet their experiences can go unnoticed and unsupported. At Carers Oxfordshire, we're committed to raising awareness.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse happens when someone close to you – like a partner or family member – uses harmful behaviour to control or hurt you. It can happen in any family or relationship and even a single incident can be abuse.

As an unpaid carer, you may experience physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse from the person you support. Whether the behaviour is intentional or not, abuse is always harmful and you deserve support and safety.

How it might affect you

Domestic abuse isn't always obvious and can affect people in different ways; the effects can be emotional, physical, financial and social.

As an unpaid carer, you may be vulnerable to abuse. You may often be isolated, behind closed doors with the person you care for. You may find their personality or behaviour has changed and now you find yourself fearful of their words or actions.

Abuse can be difficult to recognise, especially when it involves someone you care for. If someone's behaviour makes you feel frightened, controlled or unsafe, it may be domestic abuse.

Understanding child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA)

CAPVA can affect families of children and young people with disabilities, long-term health conditions or additional needs. This may include physical aggression, verbal abuse, intimidation, damage to property, or behaviour that leaves a parent feeling frightened or controlled.

Many parent carers find it difficult to talk about these experiences due to guilt, fear of judgement, or concerns about the impact on their child. While understanding the reasons behind a child's behaviour is important, no parent carer should feel ashamed of seeking support or feel they have to cope alone. Both the child and the parent carer deserve support.

Where to find support

Providing care can be isolating, but support is available.

If you're in immediate danger, call **999**. If you can't speak, press **55** from a mobile to be connected to the police. For non-emergencies, call **101**.

For support, contact the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline on **0800 731 0055** (10am - 7pm, Monday to Friday) or the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on **0808 2000 247** (24 hrs).

You can also find information and resources from Oxfordshire-based charity, Reducing the Risk: **www.reducingtherisk.org.uk**. The website includes a quick safety exit button.

Many carers experience stress, exhaustion, frustration and isolation. If you're worried about your behaviour, or feel close to breaking point, seek support by calling us on **01235 424 715** or speaking to your doctor.

Asking for help is a positive step that can help keep both you and the person you care for safe and well.

Courses for carers

Making time to learn something new, try a different activity or connect with others can make a real difference. Alongside Abingdon & Witney College, we offer a range of free online courses designed especially for unpaid carers.

The courses are flexible and can be accessed from home, making it easier to fit learning, creativity and wellbeing activities around your caring responsibilities.

Whether you'd like to try something new, build confidence, improve your wellbeing or simply enjoy some time for yourself, there are a range of courses to choose from, including:

- **Art for Relaxation** — explore creativity as a way to support your wellbeing and reduce stress.
- **Creative Writing** — develop your writing skills through fiction, non-fiction or poetry in a friendly online group.
- **Film Appreciation** — share your thoughts and discover more about classic and modern cinema.
- **Pilates for All** — gentle movement to support strength, flexibility and wellbeing.
- **Yoga for Relaxation** — mindful movement and breathing techniques to help you unwind.

Visit **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/learning-opportunities** to find out more and explore the full range of free courses for carers.

Taking a break from caring

We caught up with our short breaks coordinator, Matt Carter, to find out more about Time for You.

What is Time for You?

Time for You is our range of wellbeing and short break opportunities designed to help unpaid carers take a break from their caring role, focus on their own health and wellbeing, and have some valuable time for themselves.

What types of breaks and support are available?

Our current offers include:

- one or two-night Carefree hotel breaks
- subsidised counselling sessions
- discounted access to Better Leisure gyms, swimming and fitness activities
- free courses for carers.

What would you say to carers who feel anxious about taking a break?

Many carers feel guilty about taking time for themselves, but looking after your own wellbeing isn't selfish. Taking a break can help reduce stress, build resilience and make it easier to continue in your caring role.

What difference does Time for You make?

Carers tell us it makes a huge difference. Having time for themselves helps carers relax, improve their wellbeing, regain confidence and feel more able to cope with the challenges of caring.

How can I find out more?

If you have any questions about our wellbeing and short break offers, our team will be happy to help. Call us on **01235 424 715**, visit our website **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/time-for-you** or email **carerswellbeing@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**.

New group for carers supporting someone with their mental health

Are you supporting a family member, partner or friend with their mental health?

This autumn, we're launching a new support group in Witney, offering a safe and welcoming space for unpaid carers to connect with others who understand the challenges and experiences of supporting someone close to them.

The group will provide an opportunity to:

- meet and talk with other carers who understand your experiences
- share experiences in a supportive environment
- access information, advice and local support
- explore ways to look after your own wellbeing
- build connections and reduce feelings of isolation.

Whether you are new to caring or have been supporting someone for many years, you are welcome to join us.

Location: Witney, launching autumn 2026.

Please email **carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk** or call us on **01235 424 715** to register your interest.

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
0121 522 7009
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.

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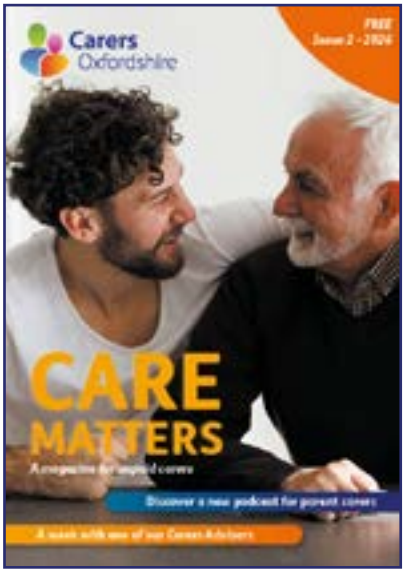
Alternatively, you can scan the QR code or visit **www.carersoxfordshire.org.uk/contact** to sign up to our email updates which include this magazine. You can change your mind at any time and contact us as above to unsubscribe.

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 **www.justgiving.com/actionforcarers-oxfordshire**. Every donation makes a difference.

Title..... Name..... Surname.....

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I wish to make a donation of: £..... Date.....

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

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 in the past four years, and all future donations until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that I must pay any shortfall if the tax I pay is less than the Gift Aid claimed on my donations.

Fundraising communications

When you donate, we may contact you about future fundraising activities on the basis of our legitimate interests. You have the right to object to receiving these communications at any time.

☐ I do not wish to receive fundraising communications

Would you like to receive email news and updates from us?

☐ Yes, send me information and advice, news, details of your latest campaigns and Care Matters magazine.

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 cards, 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 **fundraising@carersoxfordshire.org.uk**.