

# **An introduction to volunteering with Age UK Oxfordshire**



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# Hello & welcome

On behalf of us all here at Age UK Oxfordshire, I would like to thank you for showing interest in becoming a volunteer.

I am thrilled that we attract people of talent and energy to our work, to support what we are trying to achieve with older people and their families. The commitment, time and enthusiasm that volunteers offer makes a major contribution to all our work and we recognise that volunteers bring something special to our teams, adding value, diversity and meaning.

I believe that together we will succeed in creating the world we want: where people can grow older in decent comfort, with the support they need when and where they need it, and above all with chances to live life their way, to the full; and where those who care for their loved ones can be helped to do so and at the same time enjoy their own life.

We are unusual, because of the wide variety of what we offer. From dancing and singing, to helping people claim their rights, to helping people get on with day-to-day life, to help around the end of life, through to a range of ways in which we help people stay connected. We recognise that people need people. All our work, in some way, is of service to that fundamental human needs for contact and to be valued.

We therefore believe that volunteers also deserve and should expect to receive as much information, support and training/development as any paid member of staff and should be valued, involved and respected in the design and delivery of the services we provide.

I really hope that we can be of use to you, and that you will find fulfilment and enjoyment by working as part of our team. Your support is precious to us – and above all, to the people we help, who may have a struggle on their hands in having the life they want and which they deserve to live.

This handbook will cover general guidance about volunteering opportunities and what you can expect from Age UK Oxfordshire.

By visiting our website you will find more information about our organisation, along with our various publications, reports and the charity’s strategy.

We hope you enjoy your volunteering experience with us and we will do all that we can to help and support you in your role.

Thank you!

**Paul Ringer**  
**Chief Executive**





# About Age UK Oxfordshire

## Our values underpin everything we do:



## Our vision

We are working for a world where all older people are living their best lives.

## Our mission

Enabling and empowering individuals and communities to support older people to stay independent and live life to the full.

## What we do

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity. We work with all older people across the county but focus most resources on tackling inequality and reaching older people who face a struggle, whether through low income, poor health, isolation and loneliness and/or the ‘digital divide’. Our vision is of a world where all older people are living their best lives.

Our aim is to enable and empower older people to stay independent and live life to the full.

We do this by influencing and campaigning and delivering a wide range of services, reaching an average of 30,000 people a year.

## Our services include:

- Information, advice and support, including a helpline, support to connect people into their community (Community Links Oxfordshire), dementia support (Dementia Oxfordshire), hospital discharge support, social prescribing, welfare benefits advice and support for carers (through Carers Oxfordshire, delivered by our sister charity, Action for Carers Oxfordshire).
- Practical assistance, including digital support, foot care, Homeshare, fraud and scams support and support to people at home (Home Support Options).
- Bereavement support, creative opportunities, physical activity (including falls prevention) and telephone befriending (Phone Friends).

## Our five strategic goals 2022-2025

Our plan for this three year period sets out five goals, with thoughts about how we will deliver them and monitor progress.

The goals focus on:

- making sure people can find the right help at the right time to live well in their communities
- a preventive approach, promoting good health and wellbeing for all
- enhancing meaning, joy and celebration in all lives
- ensuring that age is not a barrier to living well in age friendly communities
- strengthening the infrastructure and resilience of the organisation

We recognise the paramount importance of ensuring that services and support are as joined up as possible and are committed to strengthening our partnerships with a wide range of partner organisations.



# Our services

## Information and advice

- Our Helpline offers free and confidential information and advice for older people, their families and carers, on a range of subjects, including staying independent at home, social opportunities, welfare benefits and entitlements, and much more.
- Oxfordshire Specialist Advice Service is for people who have a long-term disability or ill health, and their families or carers. Helping with queries around benefits, money advice, budgeting, and other welfare issues.
- Our support service, Dementia Oxfordshire, provides support and advice for people with dementia and their families, from the point of diagnosis until end of life or a move to a care home. Our Dementia Advisers and Support Workers provide ongoing support and information on any aspect relating to dementia, including links to local services and opportunities, education and awareness, support for carers, advice on planning for the future, and financial and legal information.
- Community Links Oxfordshire is a free information service for all adults aged 18+, linking people into what matters to them. Helping people to discover local activities in their area, holding regular information drop-in sessions in local venues and providing email, telephone, face-to-face and home-visit support through locally based community teams.

## Practical assistance

- Our Digital Support Team assist those who may need help with their phone, computer, or tablet. Helping develop skills and safely getting people involved with the online world.
- Our Foot Care Service offers a basic toenail cutting service for adults over 50.
- Homeshare Oxfordshire carefully matches older people who may need a little help to continue to live independently at home, with another person who needs affordable accommodation, wants to be part of a home, and can lend a hand.
- Our Home Support Options Team provides tailored support to help older people stay independent at home. Offering support with domestic tasks, shopping, getting out and about and companionship.
- Our Fraud and Scams Support Team offer group talks to raise awareness of scams, and one-to-one sessions for those who have been affected by scams.

## Social, creative and physical activities

- Our Physical Activity Team offers in-person and online exercise and wellbeing classes to help people get moving in later life, along with a specialist falls prevention programme.
- Phone Friends provides a free and friendly telephone call from a caring, trained volunteer at the same time each week to someone who feels lonely.
- Our Bereavement Support Team helps people who have been bereaved and would value the opportunity to meet others who understand.

# Volunteering for Age UK Oxfordshire

## Who are our volunteers?

There is no upper age limits to who can volunteer, we believe that volunteers, across all ages, bring a wealth of personal interests, skills and experience – all of which can be channelled into volunteering activities that benefit our service users and support the work of the charity. Service volunteers must be 18 years and over. Occasionally we can consider younger people for supported volunteering activities.

We strive to be an inclusive charity and encourage people with personal experience to volunteer. We recognise the huge benefits that can be derived from volunteering, not just for the people we support but also for volunteers as it can help bridge the gap of understanding, stigma and discrimination which continues to impact on the lives of older people, their carers and families.



## Recruitment and application process

We are open to applications all year round and details of the current roles can be found on our website or you can call **0345 450 1276** or email **[volunteering@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk)**.

Following an enquiry you will be offered an informal chat to establish that the role, service and you are a good fit. It is important for everyone that there is a clear understanding of requirements before any applications are made.

Following this you will be asked to complete an application form and the process will begin! The Central Volunteer Admin Team and your team lead will keep in touch with you to ensure that references are taken and a DBS (if required) is completed, along with any mandatory training. This can all be completed simultaneously and after your induction with your service lead you'll be ready to go!

# Our volunteer commitment

We see volunteering as a reciprocal relationship between Age UK Oxfordshire and the people who volunteer, one that is built on mutual trust and respect. We believe it is important therefore to set out clearly what we expect from you and what you should expect from us.

## We require you to...

- Commit to our charitable objectives and to abide by our values in all activities
- Perform your volunteering role and key responsibilities, as outlined in your role description, to the best of your ability
- Participate in training, in line with your job role, and as identified through support and supervision sessions
- Keep yourself regularly informed about our policies and procedures relating to service users supported by us, whether you work with individuals or in groups
- Act in the best interests of service users supported by us and work in a manner that is empowering and motivating and which enable service users to achieve their personal outcomes
- Follow any service reporting requirements, as set out in your volunteering role, and maintain regular contact with your service lead, informing them if your contact details change or if personal circumstances affect your availability to volunteer
- Maintain client confidentiality at all times, as well as all matters relating to the charity.

## What you should expect from us

- An induction about Age UK Oxfordshire, including its vision, mission and values; in-service training and support on your chosen volunteering activity and any other training needs which may be identified in the course of your volunteering
- A dedicated service contact who will provide regular support
- Guidance on standards we expect from you, in line with our charity’s policies and procedures
- Reimbursement of all reasonable travel and out-of-pocket expenses
- Insurance cover for approved volunteer activity
- Fair hearing and resolution of any problems, grievances and difficulties and, in the event of an unresolved matter, the offer of an opportunity to discuss the issues in accordance with our complaints policy and procedure
- The opportunity to feedback on your volunteering experience
- Regular and timely updates about the charity
- Opportunities to change or add to your volunteering opportunities if wished.

**“On a personal level Age UK [Oxfordshire] volunteering has brought me such joy, confidence, and structure to my week. Not to mention such valuable experience I have learnt making these calls each week. I take so much pride in these calls, and always go above and beyond.”** Phone Friends Volunteer

## We will also try to ensure that you...

- Are kept informed of changes and developments that may affect you in your volunteering role, and of any new volunteering opportunities
- Have the opportunity to be involved in discussion groups and decision making across all areas of volunteering, but particularly from your area of experience
- Are able to say no to inappropriate requests outside the volunteer role
- Have access to a complaints procedure via an independent member of staff
- Feel your contribution is valued by us
- Are able to see how your contribution fits into the broader charitable objectives.

Volunteers give their time and effort so that the charity can be there when it is needed most. Whatever you choose to do, and however much time you have to give, you will be making an incredible difference for older people at a time in their lives when they need help the most. We are always looking for friendly and enthusiastic volunteers to join our team. Our roles are flexible in terms of time and are available across the whole of Oxfordshire. Whether you have family commitments, work full time, part time, are retired or currently unemployed, we’ve got a role for you.

We know that you will help to make a real difference when you volunteer but being a volunteer can make a difference to you too;

- **Make a positive impact to those you are supporting**
- **Support your local community**
- **Share your knowledge**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Meet new people and make new friends**
- **Make a positive impact to your own wellbeing**
- **Enhance your CV by gaining valuable work experience**

## Our current volunteering roles:

**Bereavement Support:** As a Bereavement Support volunteer you can help support older people in the county who have been bereaved. Support is provided in a variety of settings.

**Befrienders:** Help support people to overcome barriers and loneliness, build social connections and rebuild confidence. A DBS check will be required.

**Digital Support:** In the digital age we live in, you can make a real difference by helping to build someone’s confidence online by guiding them to get online and help provide support to get the best use out of their tech. A DBS check will be required.

**Admin Support:** Providing general administration support, across many of our services.

**Physical Activity:** The physical activity team offer a variety of classes across the county, all suitable for people in later life, as well as online classes. The role would include supporting the exercise tutor to welcome and register participants, helping create a friendly and sociable environment.

**Phone Friends:** Help us fight loneliness in Oxfordshire, by becoming one of our telephone befrienders. Make regular calls and build friendships while being supported by the team.

**Activity & Group Volunteer:** Do you have a hobby or take part in an activity which you think you could help deliver in one of our groups?



# FAQs

## How much time do I need to give?

There is no time limits as to how long anyone can volunteer, but we usually seek a minimum commitment of six months for volunteering in administration roles and would seek a longer commitment for those who wish to befriend.

On average, volunteers usually give between two to four hours per week but this may depend on the volunteering activity. For example, a befriender volunteer may spend 2 hours per week with a client with a little bit of travel time on top of that. Whereas office volunteers may be able to offer half or full days on a regular or intermittent basis. In some instances, volunteers are engaged in more than one regular volunteer activity at a time, while others support one-off fundraising, focus groups or information awareness raising activities.

We actively encourage volunteers to explore new opportunities as they arise within the charity as training and support is given.

## What happens if I need to stop volunteering?

We understand that from time to time volunteers may need to take time out from volunteering or bring their volunteering to a premature end due to unforeseen circumstances.

We ask volunteers to give us as much notice as they can so that we can put in alternative or new measures to ensure service continuity. For example, if volunteering within the Phone Friends team we may need time to find a suitable volunteer replacement to continue support to the client without much interruption.

It may be that a volunteer is finding the volunteer role challenging and that even with additional support and discussion with the service lead it is judged that this may not be the most appropriate placement for them. Some volunteers may decide to end their volunteering altogether while others may wish to be considered for alternative opportunities, either within the same service or elsewhere.

Should there be a complaint from or about a volunteer this will be conducted in line with our complaints policy and procedure. We do however reserve the right to end a volunteer's role, as a last resort, if we feel that the task or their performance is not benefiting service users or the charity, or there has been an irresolvable complaint.

## Can I volunteer if I am an asylum seeker or refugee?

Yes you can. Many of our volunteer roles are available to asylum seekers and refugees.

## Can I ask for a reference?

Age UK Oxfordshire is pleased to offer volunteers references provided they have completed six continuous months of satisfactory volunteering work with us. All references will be provided by a senior manager and will contain only the factual information about the dates of volunteering, a brief overview of the role/s undertaken and training completed. A copy of any references will be retained in your volunteer notes by the central volunteer administration team.

## Can I claim benefits while volunteering?

Yes. The benefit regulations are clear that you can volunteer but you should inform the appropriate agency before you start volunteering. For more information please visit [www.gov.uk/guidance/volunteering-and-claiming-benefits](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/volunteering-and-claiming-benefits).

## What if I don't have experience, can I still apply?

You don't need to have any experience, specialist skills or qualifications for the majority of our roles. The qualities we look for in volunteers are:

- Reliability
  - Ability to relate to and empathise with the people we support and their aspirations
  - Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, especially listening skills
  - Ability to be non-judgemental, self-aware, patient, understanding, flexible, positive and supportive in all situations
  - Ability to challenge own assumptions and negativity
- Plus you will receive full training and ongoing support by the charity.

## What if I have a criminal record, can I still volunteer?

Having a criminal record does not necessarily mean you can't volunteer with us. If you want to apply for a role, there's a section on the application form for you to add details about the offence. We will then make a decision based on the information you've provided and the role you've applied for.

## Will I be given equipment or a uniform?

If your volunteer role requires any particular clothing or equipment, this will be discussed with you as part of the application process and provided free of charge.

## Can I volunteer if I am under 18 years of age?

Most of our volunteer roles are for those aged 18 and over. Occasionally we do have opportunities for those aged 16-17. If these opportunities are available, they will be advertised on the volunteer webpage.

## Can I volunteer for you if I live outside the UK?

Our volunteering roles are mainly Oxfordshire based, therefore whilst volunteering for us, you must be a resident in the UK and we are unable to support a sponsorship application.

## When am I normally expected to volunteer?

Most volunteer roles take place during office opening hours (Mon-Fri 8.30am – 4.30pm). This is so that there is always someone around should you have any questions/queries or need to get hold of someone. Anything outside of these hours must be pre-arranged and you will be given a separate contact number in case of any emergencies.

***“I would encourage anyone to give Phone Friends volunteering a go. There is a real need for it and it’s a great way to make friends. I have a good laugh with my friends and it is a privilege to share in their lives. I hear so many good stories. You only need a couple of hours a week to spare. We have a good support system and I always have support if I have any worries about someone I talk to.”***



## Supporting volunteers

### Induction and training

All volunteers must complete our basic volunteer training courses as this is part of the recruitment process. These are held online and if you don’t have access to a computer we can set this up in the office. Our essential courses are listed below but we may add to these.

- Safeguarding
- Data protection/GDPR/Confidentiality
- EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion)

Once completed, volunteers are provided with an induction to their volunteering role by their service lead.

A lone working course may be required dependent on your role.

### Additional training

There is additional training available to volunteers through our ‘Grey Matters’ online courses. As part of your induction your service lead will talk through the different options available to you to enhance your volunteer role. From time to time there may be ad hoc training opportunities which the charity will share with you.

***“It doesn’t take up a huge amount of time and makes me feel helpful. I look forward to making my calls; it’s a lovely way of giving something back to the community. I have really made friendships over the phone.”***

Phone Friends Volunteer

### Support and supervision

Each volunteer will have a named service lead contact who is their main ‘go to’ for all usual questions and queries. If they are unavailable or it is a more general question, support is available from our main office during normal working hours.

Volunteers are actively encouraged to participate in support and reflection sessions. Some sessions may happen on an individual basis and some as part of a team meeting. They are designed to help volunteers talk through any difficult situations individually and as part of the team, build team morale, increase confidence and promote a sense of togetherness.

Age UK Oxfordshire aims to treat all volunteers with fairness and respect. If you should ever encounter a personally distressing or difficult situation involving a client, staff member or other volunteer/s please discuss this with your service lead, in the first instance. If this is not possible, you should contact the main office as soon as possible.

## Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS)

Age UK Oxfordshire may request a DBS check as part of its volunteer recruitment process, if it is warranted by the role. For certain roles the check will also include information held on the DBS children and adults barred lists, together with any information held locally by police forces that is reasonably considered to be relevant to the applied for post.

These checks are to assist the Charity in making safer recruitment decisions. However, this is just one part of a robust recruitment practice. When a check has been processed by the DBS and completed the individual will receive a DBS certificate which remains in their possession. All volunteers must inform the Central Volunteer Admin Support of their certificate number and date of issue of DBS certificate.

## Expenses

All volunteers are given guidance when they first start on what expenses they can claim and how to submit their claims. This guidance is also reviewed from time to time.

Car mileage is currently paid at 45p/mile. Cycle mileage will be paid at 25p/mile. All claims must be no older than 3 months than the date of the activity/receipt. Payment is usually made directly into your nominated bank account by BACS.

## Health and wellbeing

There are many reasons why you may have volunteered and volunteering can itself impact positively on your general health and wellbeing. For instance, by making new friends and helping others, many volunteers feel an improvement in their own self-esteem. We do however require to know from you if you have any health conditions that may affect your volunteering, such as asthma or other allergies, epilepsy or any mental health conditions. We require you to inform us of any health conditions and any additional support that you require. All information is treated in the strictest confidence.

## Personal safety and ID cards

Volunteers whose roles require them to be out of the office or away from home will be issued a Charity ID Badge which must be worn/carried at all times when volunteering. As part of the recruitment process we ask for an emergency contact and telephone number in case of emergencies.

## Personal appearance and what to wear

If you are in contact with service users or members of the public (or both), then it is very important that you convey a professional manner in your personal appearance and dress appropriately at all times. This is important to service users you may be supporting and also because you are a representative of this charity.

## If you need to make a complaint

Although dealing with complaints can be difficult, it can give us a positive opportunity to improve and provide a better service for people.

We have a complaints policy and procedure to ensure that we respond to all complaints, whether informal or formal, and that the complainant sees that we will respond quickly to any complaint. If you wish to make a complaint or you receive a complaint from someone about your service or anything to do with the work of Age UK Oxfordshire, please pass this onto the Chief Executive's Assistant on [contactus@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:contactus@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk). If unavailable this should be forwarded to the HR Team via [personnel@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:personnel@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk).

## What's next?

We have a range of volunteering opportunities available, each with a different ask, but all come with support and training so you can feel confident and enjoy supporting others.

Call **0345 450 1276**

Email [volunteering@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk)

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

Write to **Age UK Oxfordshire, 10 Napier Court, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3YT**





Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity.

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