

Putting Carers **First**



The power of volunteering

Discover how Carers First volunteers are making a difference.

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Carers First



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Alison Taylor
Chief Executive,
Carers First

Welcome to your latest issue of **Putting Carers First**, a magazine created with and for carers.

In this issue, we celebrate the difference volunteers make to Carers First. We were inspired by Kehinde, a volunteer who set up a support group called Self-Care for Carers, which provides a safe space for carers to share their challenges and experiences. Rahul and Damien, talk about the positive changes volunteering has brought to their lives.

We also spoke to British Education Award winner, Katie, who was so inspired by volunteering with us that she is now employed by Carers First.

We are always keen to have more volunteers on board, and a recent exciting development has seen Carers First teaming up with East Midlands Railway to raise awareness of local services for carers and recruit more volunteers, which you can read all about on page twelve.

As many of you will know, a carer's journey can be complex and challenging. In her account of caring for her mother with dementia, Maria shares her story, explaining how our support has improved her life. Positive feedback like this is truly humbling and testament to the difference Carers First can make.

A recent report from Carers UK and WPI Economics revealed just how many carers are being swept into poverty. Carers First is there for the people who need help and, if you are in struggling financially or need assistance, I would urge you to read on page 16 about the support we can offer.

As always, the voices of carers bring the magazine to life, and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who has contributed. We value your feedback and we want to hear from you. Please email commsandinvolve@carersfirst.org.uk with any comments or suggestions for the next issue. Our contact details on the back page if you have any questions or need support in your caring role.

Warmest wishes,

Alison





Save the date: Carers Rights Day 21 November



This year's Carers Rights Day theme is **'recognising your rights'**. We will highlight key resources available to you, helping you to understand your legal rights and entitlements to help you to thrive in your role as a carer. Navigating difficult times during your caring journey can be isolating, we want you to know you are not alone in your caring journey and there is support available to help you.

Visit our website
to find out more about
our activities for Carers
Rights Day

carersfirst.org.uk/carers-rights-day

Know your rights

As a carer it is important to know your rights to enable you to access the variety of support available to you when caring. But often, many carers like you are unaware of your rights, especially when challenging decisions that may affect you and your caring role.

Carers First has developed a checklist around your rights as a carer and how to exercise them. You can download your copy at: carersfirst.org.uk/know-your-rights. Here is a quick overview of the rights you should be aware of when caring:

- Your right to have the freedom of choice to be a carer**
You have the right to choose to care and decide how much support you are willing or able to provide when looking after someone else.
- Your right to be identified as a carer**
You have the right to be identified as a carer amongst NHS and social care professionals, whether they're supporting you or the person you care for.
- Your right to a Carer's Assessment**
You have the right to request a Carers Assessment from your local carers organisation or local authority, to determine your needs for support.
- Your right to protection from discrimination**
As a working carer you have the right to request flexible working from your employer and to be given time off in emergencies.
- Your right to be free NHS Checks, flu and Covid jobs**
As a carer you have the right to receive a free NHS Health Check if you are aged between 40 and 74. You can also receive free flu and Covid jabs and boosters.
- Your right to be included in your cared-for's care plan**
As a carer you have the right to be included in the care planning of the person you care for, where there is an expectation for you to be providing care.
- Your right to financial support**
As a carer you have the right to apply for Carers Allowance, and where you do not receive the benefit due to criteria, you receive an underlying entitlement.
- Your right to Carers Leave from work**
The new Carers Leave Act 2024 gives carers the right to request up to five days of unpaid leave from work, per year. To help manage caring responsibilities.

Five years of volunteering

Kehinde's impact

“Becoming a volunteer is an opportunity to get to know, learn from, share experiences and support other family carers.”



Kehinde started volunteering for Carers First in 2019, establishing a support group called Self-Care for Carers (SCFC). The group provides a safe and open environment for carers to discuss their challenges and responsibilities.

We recently spoke to Kehinde to learn more about her volunteering experience. The SCFC group provides a supportive space for carers and meets monthly, with Kehinde as the host. She told us:

“Our monthly meetings provide a safe space for group members to express honestly what is actually happening in their lives.

“The demands, challenges, expectations, insecurities and ill-health, without being judged or criticised.”

“Often carers are not only caring for a loved one through illness, some are also in ill-health themselves. By sharing experiences, group members realise they are not alone and together we support each other.”

Kehinde explained that an important aspect of the group is to encourage a positive self-image among carers.

“The group supports carers to value themselves and see that they matter equal to the person they care for.”

Kehinde continues: *“There is always someone with something specific to share about their caring responsibility and from their sharing we all learn and also offer support.”*

“This fluidity means there is no formal script or plan, much flows from the group and this is its beauty.”

The group supports carers to rebuild the quality of the relationship they have with themselves, recognising the importance of carers’ wellbeing as well as respecting and listening to their voices.

Kehinde balances working full time with volunteering, generously hosting meetings in her time off. She says that her experience in volunteering has shown her how caring enriches her life:

“Caring can be enriching, not draining or overwhelming”.

Kehinde has found the support and training we provide to volunteers enormously beneficial:

“Carers First supported me from day one as volunteer host of the group. They are

simply there for us. They offer training opportunities and support us to host meetings remotely.”

“Carers First makes us feel cared for and part of the organisation. There’s never a feeling of us and them. But a feeling of being welcomed, appreciated and included.”

We are thrilled that Kehinde’s experience with us has been so positive that she feels confident recommending volunteering to other carers.

“Becoming a volunteer is an opportunity to get to know, learn from, share experiences and support other family carers.”

Inspired by Kehinde’s story?

Find out more about volunteering for Carers First by visiting our website or calling our helpline.

Meet Katie...

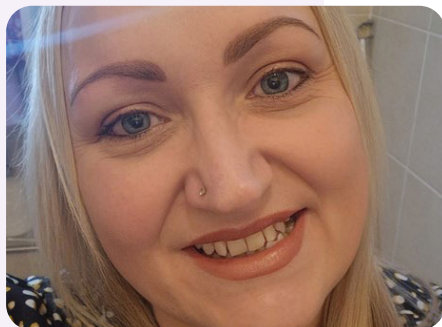
Our award winning volunteer

Katie began volunteering for Carers First in April 2022 as part of a student placement while pursuing her health and social care degree. Since then she has transitioned from volunteering to working full-time for us. Katie, graduated last year with First Class Honours, which culminated in her winning the British Education Award in the UK degree category. The BEA recognises students who excel in the British education system.

Katie shares how volunteering has given her insight into the challenges faced by carers.

***“I was absolutely in awe of the care and support that the organisation provides to unpaid carers.*”**

As part of my placement, I gained a lot of knowledge into carers and the challenges they face on a daily basis, as well as the support and advice available to the carer.”



Katie's volunteering involved making calls to unpaid carers to check on the carer's wellbeing and to identify if the carer needed any further support with their caring role. Katie said:

“As a volunteer, I made check-in and chat calls to carers who had not recently engaged with the organisation. The check-in involved ensuring the carers were emotionally and physically okay and identifying if they needed further support in their caring role. The chat calls were friendly discussions with the carers to make them aware of available support. These calls provided a safe space for the carers to discuss their roles and any assistance they might need. Carers always appreciate the calls.”

Katie also attended local community groups and events to raise awareness of of the kind of support available to carers. For mum of four, Katie, learning while volunteering was important:

“As part of my placement, I gained a lot of knowledge into carers and the challenges they face on a daily basis, as well as the support and advice available to the unpaid carer. I was given training and support by the volunteering team at Carers First.”

She added: *“The most rewarding aspect of volunteering is making a positive difference to carers, this can be through offering advice, support, signposting, or simply by listening to and chatting with carers.”*

Katie pursued a career change transitioning to the voluntary sector as she wanted a rewarding and fulfilling job role.

She said: ***“Carers First gave me this opportunity, and I would like to think that my empathetic and caring nature goes a long way towards supporting carers, and that my motivation and passion to help others makes a positive difference to Carers First also.”***

As a passionate volunteer, Katie is delighted to encourage others to give it a try.

“Volunteering is both rewarding and enjoyable, the staff are extremely supportive, and volunteering offers many opportunities to a person.

You gain valuable experience and knowledge, whilst also making a positive difference to carers.”

For more information on volunteering, visit carersfirst.org.uk/volunteer or email volunteer@carersfirst.org.uk



Why volunteer for Carers First?

Volunteers play a crucial role in our services, helping us to improve our support in so many ways. There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer with us, from events and group activities to fundraising and online support. Every role makes a real difference, and we always love hearing positive feedback from our volunteers about their experiences.

Telephone volunteer, Rahul, plays a vital role in supporting carers who reach out for advice.

Many carers tell us they couldn't manage without his compassionate guidance. By giving his time and expertise, Rahul makes a huge difference to their lives. For Rahul, the experience of volunteering has been transformative, offering him a fresh outlook on life.

“Being part of Carer’s First has been such a rewarding experience. It has changed my perspective on life, caring, resilience and the power of organised community support.”

Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose. Helping another human feel heard is one of life’s most underrated gifts.”



Damien, a full-time carer for his wife, volunteers as a Digital Champion with Carers First.

Volunteering gave Damien the confidence to join a local radio station as a volunteer broadcaster. Damien continues to support us on the radio by promoting various events and inviting colleagues to talk about the services we provide.

This increased community visibility for Carers First will help more people recognise themselves as carers and raise awareness of the support and services available to them.

“I have used the radio to promote various Carers First events on air and have had guests on from Carers First. Also, a well known broadcaster did a 24 hour non-stop radio show raising funds for Carers First after I mentioned the charity to him. He raised over £500!”

Volunteers tell us that they feel appreciated because they receive support, guidance, and training from the beginning.

We tailor our volunteering experience to ensure that volunteers feel part of our community, acquire valuable skills, and have access to training. Volunteers can take online courses covering topics such as “safeguarding” and “mental health first aid,” as well as more specialised training on “bereavement,” “working with dementia,” and “managing difficult conversations”.

Our volunteer support team appreciates everyone who has so generously given their time to the charity:

“We really value our volunteers here at Carers First, and we provide them with support and training. We’re a small and friendly team, and volunteers make an enormous difference to the work we do and to the support we can provide to unpaid carers.”



For more information on volunteering, visit carersfirst.org.uk/volunteer or email volunteer@carersfirst.org.uk



East Midlands Railway

Partner with Carers First

Carers First and East Midlands Railway are joining forces in a project to raise the visibility of local services for unpaid carers and encourage more people to become volunteers in the local area.

Volunteers will have the opportunity to support unpaid carers in a range of activities, as well as helping raise much needed funds for local carer events. The Community Fundraiser and

Promotion Volunteers will assist with fundraising events and organising activities in their local community. For example, volunteers recently helped to raise over £700 in a bucket collection at their local football club.





Sam Marshall, Volunteer Manager at Carers First, said:

“Volunteering can be such a good thing to do, whether you’re looking for a way to connect with your community, learn some new skills, find a job, or feel committed to supporting carers.”

A stronger community presence for Carers First will empower more people identify themselves as carers and raise awareness of the support and services available to them.

Backed by the East Midlands Railway Foundation, this project seeks to recruit passionate community fundraising and promotions volunteers. The goal is to

boost awareness and generate vital funds for carer events, activities, and initiative that make a real difference.

Volunteers will be given all the training and support they need, along with opportunities to volunteer for additional roles available within Carers First or other local organisations.

This project aims to transform carers’ lives, boosting emotional wellbeing, increasing recognition, and helping them feel more valued and included. It will empower more people to identify as carers while reducing loneliness and isolation, creating a stronger, more connected community.

Locally, the goal is to boost awareness of our services and elevate the visibility of carers within the community while strengthening ties with local support organisations. For Carers First, this project will expand our support network, heighten awareness of carers’ needs, and build stronger referral pathways for more seamless support.



Would you like to volunteer? Visit carersfirst.org.uk/volunteer or email volunteer@carersfirst.org.uk

Maria's Story

Finding Strength



There are times when caring for someone is emotionally draining. Maria, 56, a full-time carer for her mum Esther, 91 was so overwhelmed from her caring responsibilities, she was ready to walk away. Maria shares her story about how having support networks like Carers First is crucial to being able to care for someone.

“I was ready to walk away. I was so stressed and felt so guilty, but I couldn't see any other option.”

Maria and her mum, Esther, live together. Up until nine years ago, Maria was living independently in Australia. She returned to the UK as Esther's health started to decline. Esther has frontal temporal lobe dementia. Maria told us; “I temporarily

moved in with Mum to help her settle but soon realised she needed more help.” Now, nine years later, due to deteriorating dementia, Esther needs around-the-clock care.

Maria contacted our helpline when she picked up a Carers First leaflet in her GP's surgery. At the time, she was considering placing Esther in residential care due to the stress of the situation and the effect it was having on her mental health.

Esther doesn't like many people coming into the house, which means that Maria provides most of her care. Maria explains;

“I cook all her meals since she can be very forgetful. She also gets up often during the night to use the toilet, so my sleep is usually disturbed.”

“Carers First has been brilliant. They supported me to access direct payments to help me pay for someone to come in and sit with Mum so I can go out for a drink or a meal with friends, giving me the chance to do girly stuff and to just be me.”

Recently, Maria has had some of her own health concerns and used up her monthly direct payment so she could attend her appointments.

“I was called in for a day-stay appointment but I had no respite hours left. Carers First arranged for a carer to sit with Mum, which was a great relief.”

After Lockdown Maria was also asked to return to the office by her employer. As Esther’s care needs had increased, Maria felt she had no other option other than to give up work to care for Esther full-time.

“The team has supported me in so many ways, from council tax reductions to applying for Attendance Allowance for Mum and Carers Allowance for me.”

“Whenever I have a problem, Carers First knows who to contact. They’ve been a lifeline. I honestly wouldn’t be able to care for Mum without their support.”

“Carers First arranged for me to have a counsellor and set me up with a dementia navigator. I also now attend a weekly dance class, which I enjoy. Before I connected with them, I was so stressed that I was having heart palpitations and was grinding my teeth, which led to needing dental work. The groups are fantastic, giving me something to look forward to, especially the free massages.”

“I always come away with a smile and a feeling of relief.”

“I can’t sing Carers First’s praises enough. They go above and beyond to ensure I feel supported. I’d give them 100 out of ten.”

It is always encouraging to hear that as a charity, we can make a positive difference to carers like Maria.

“I tell everyone about Carers First.”

If you have had an experience similar to Maria’s and need to talk to someone, please call our Helpline for support.



Helping you to manage the cost of living

A recent report from Carers UK and WPI Economics has revealed that 1.2 million unpaid carers in the UK are living in poverty, with 400,000 experiencing deep poverty. These statistics serve as a reminder of how important it is for carers to be aware of the available support and their options.

For many, knowing where to start can be overwhelming. Carers First provides useful resources and tools to help carers navigate an often complex system.

For carers who use our website, you can find a range of financial information from applying for smart metres to how to claim benefits when reaching state pension age. Carers can also call our helpline for information and support.

It is always worth checking if you are entitled to Carer's Allowance. You might still be eligible even if you are working – currently, you can earn up to £151 a week before it affects any entitlement.

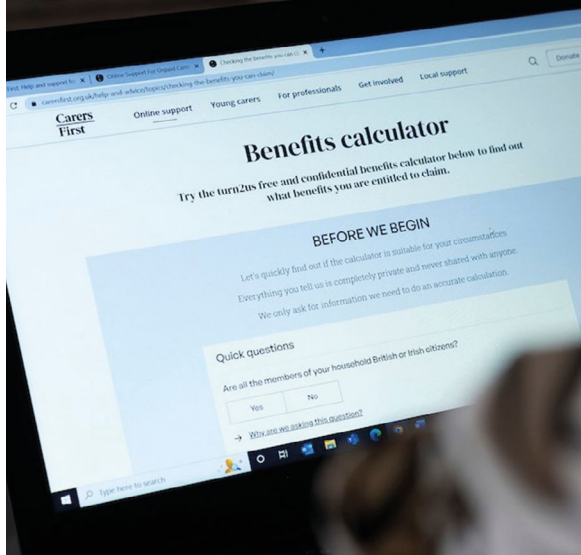
Accessing our financial support is straightforward and always makes a positive difference to carers.

Carer, Jayne, told us;

“The Household support fund helped my family pay the electricity bill and other essentials, due to the increase in prices we just couldn’t make up the difference quick enough. For us as a family it supported us to not stress and put in place the essentials that we needed, without that we would have been stuck and would need to have made more sacrifices.”

If you are facing unexpected expenses like replacing essential household items or covering respite care, we can help you to find grants, so you don’t have to tackle these challenges alone. We were encouraged to receive feedback from a carer who accessed a grant;

“Carers First is a godsend. Perfect timing too as I was in great need of replacing and repairing worn-out essential kitchen items to make my hectic 24/7 caring role a little easier and not stress about where I will find the funds from.”



Plus, a Carer’s Assessment could open the door to more support, including Carer Direct Payments, to make your caring experience more manageable.

One carer told us;

“The time Carers First takes to help carers in accessing financial support is worth its weight in gold!”

We are here to support you every step of the way and ensure you know about the support available to you. If you need assistance, call our helpline on 0300 303 1555 or visit our website at carersfirst.org.uk.

For more information and support on finances, visit the Carers First website carersfirst.org.uk or call our Helpline on 0300 303 1555.



Latest Fundraising News

Liberty Ladies raise funds for Carers First

A big thank you to Liberty Performing Arts in Southend for their incredible support of Carers First Southend.

The talented Liberty Ladies put on an amazing show at the Palace Theatre in Southend, raising funds for Carers First. An impressive £1,254 was raised and split between Carers First Southend and HARP. Carers First will use their share for group activities and practical support for local carers.



If you are interested in raising funds for Carers First, please get in touch by emailing fundraising@carersfirst.org.uk. We want to hear from you.

Easy fundraising for Carers First

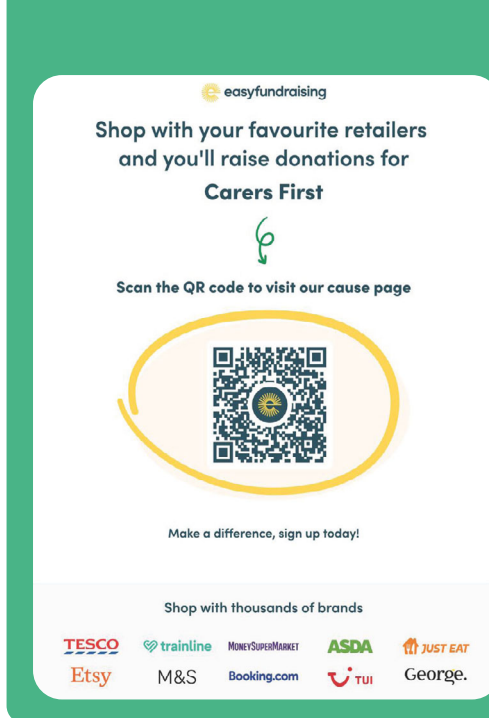
You can now support Carers First whilst shopping online thanks to our partnership with easyfundraising

You shop as normal with over 8,000 retailers and Carers First receives a donation as a result.

For a limited period, every new supporter will earn Carers First a £1 bonus donation. Scan the QR code or click the link to sign up. Thank you for your support!

Donations

Carers First is looking for your support. Whether you choose to fundraise or volunteer, you'll be making a difference to the lives of carers, helping them find balance and thrive in their role. There are numerous ways to get involved, from organising a local cake stall to running a marathon, leaving a gift in your will, or simply making a donation. Every contribution makes a difference and is deeply appreciated.



easyfundraising

Shop with your favourite retailers and you'll raise donations for Carers First

Scan the QR code to visit our cause page

Make a difference, sign up today!

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Etsy | M&S | Booking.com | TUI | George.

Scan the QR Code or visit our cause page easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/carersfirst/



To donate online visit carersfirst.org.uk/donate and if you have any questions please contact the fundraising team via email at fundraising@carersfirst.org.uk

Register with us

By registering with Carers First, you will get access to a range of information, advice and support – including financial, practical and wellbeing advice, one to one and group support, workshops and activities. Visit carersfirst.org.uk/register or call our helpline on **0300 303 1555**

Stay in touch





We want to hear from you and your stories.

Email us at:
hello@carersfirst.org.uk

Donate

Your donations make a difference. Visit carersfirst.org.uk/donate or **scan the QR code** to support Carers First and help us improve the lives of unpaid carers and their families.

Follow us on social media

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-  @carersfirst

Join our online Facebook community group, a peer to peer group where you can chat amongst yourselves rather than a platform for direct support from Carers First. Visit: facebook.com/groups/carersfirstcommunity to join.

Get in touch
carersfirst.org.uk
0300 303 1555



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