

# Putting Carers **First**



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## Plan for the Best

Our information and resources can help you create an Emergency Plan so you can be prepared

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**Carers  
First**



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# Welcome

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**Alison Taylor**  
Chief Executive,  
Carers First

## Welcome to the second issue of Putting Carers First.

Following the launch of **Putting Carers First** last autumn, we would like to thank those who shared their feedback on our last issue. We have used your ideas and suggestions to help shape our latest issue, with articles on a range of topics to support carers.

In this issue, you will find information and advice on practical ways to help you and the person you care for now and in the future. We have put together some simple steps to help you put an Emergency

Plan in place, so you can be assured that your family member or friend will be looked after if suddenly you are not there.

We know that many carers are still struggling due to the rising cost of living, so we have tips on helping you apply for a grant, which may support you with the cost of a much-needed household item or cover a utility bill.

We also understand that many carers' main focus is on the person they look after, but it is important to find time to look after yourself too.

We hope you find your magazine informative and engaging, and if you have any suggestions on what you would like to see covered in future magazines, please let us know by emailing [commsandinvolve@carersfirst.org.uk](mailto:commsandinvolve@carersfirst.org.uk)

Warmest wishes  
**Alison**



# News and Updates

## Looking back on Lighten the Load

In October 2022, we launched our Lighten the Load campaign, which highlighted the plight of thousands of carers across the UK affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Survey results released at the beginning of the campaign found that 93% of carers were losing sleep because they were worrying about affording basic essentials.

The campaign reached over 175,000 people and helped carers like Heather access financial support.

***“I would never have known about this financial support if it wasn't for Carers First. I was shocked when I received my water bill as it had almost halved!”***

Heather looks after her husband Colin who has dementia. She was supported to receive a discount on her water bill and a council tax discount.

We were also delighted that Lighten the Load won the award for 'Best Charity Campaign' at the 2023 UK Digital Excellence Awards.



We know there are many more carers who still need support and we will continue to work with partner organisations to raise the profile of carers and connect them to the financial help available.





## Making time for young carers

In March we celebrated **Young Carers Action Day** which helps to raise awareness of young carers and young adult carers and the contribution they make to those around them.

The theme for this year's campaign was 'Make Time for Young Carers' and we enjoyed encouraging young carers to do that through hosting a range of activities and through our digital support.

We were able to bring young carers together in person and online through an interactive workshop, which was also live streamed on social media. Young carers had the opportunity to try activities like lyric writing and pebble painting; they also had the chance to win prizes throughout the session.



## Carers benefitting from free data

We have partnered with Good Things Foundation to offer free calls, texts and internet data for unpaid carers registered with Carers First, through providing free SIM cards. So far, we have been able to support over 200 carers with new SIMs, helping them to stay connected.

**If you are interested in applying for a free SIM, please call our Helpline on 0300 303 1555 and our team will be able to help you.**



## Our Days Out Directory is now live

We have built a digital directory of parks and attractions that offer either free or discounted entry for carers. Due to the cost-of-living, we know many carers have had to cut back on enjoying days out. Our directory lists country parks, theme parks, zoos and other attractions offering free or discounted entry for carers.

**You can view the directory at [carersfirst.org.uk/days-out](https://carersfirst.org.uk/days-out)**

# Tax and benefit changes and what they mean for carers

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**Benefit and tax rates change every year. This year, from April 2023, millions of carers receiving certain benefits will see an increase in the amount they are receiving, as they rise in line with the 10.1% inflation rate, helping to combat the rising cost of living.**

This includes Carer's Allowance and disability benefits such as the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), and Attendance Allowance (AA), which are claimed by millions of people to help with the extra costs of physical and mental health conditions.



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## **Carers and Disability benefits**

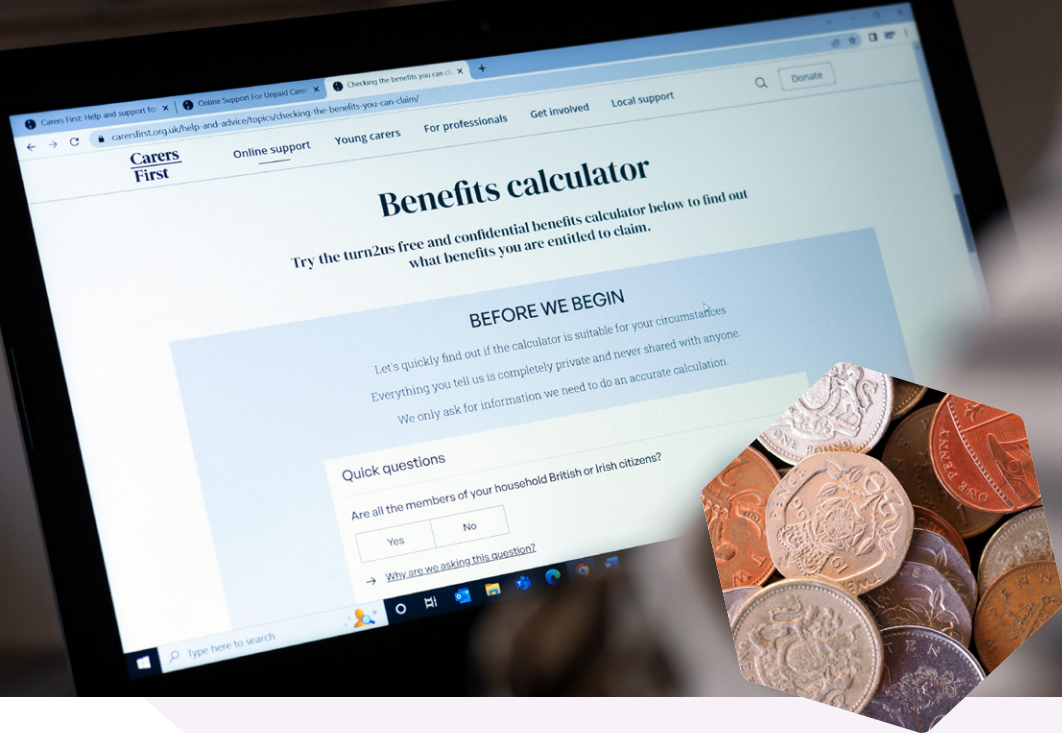
Carer's Allowance is a benefit given to one person looking after another for at least 35 hours a week. The weekly rate was previously £69.70, and in April 2023 it increased to £76.75.

Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, and Attendance Allowance rates also increased. The rates for these benefits are all the same, but which benefit you receive will depend on your age.

The enhanced daily living component weekly rate was £92.40, which increased to £101.75. The standard rate was previously £61.85, and increased to £68.10. The mobility enhanced and standard rates also rose from £64.50 to £71 for the enhanced rate and from £24.45 to £26.90 for the standard rate.

## **Income Tax, Tax Credits and other benefits**

The assessment year for both tax and tax credits runs from 6 April one year to 5 April the next year. This is known as a 'tax year'. Tax rates are usually increased on the first day of the tax year, which, for this year, was 6 April 2023.



Tax on income from paid employment or self-employed earnings is charged at three rates: the basic rate, the higher rate and the additional rate. For 2022/23 these three rates were 20%, 40% and 45% respectively. These rates remain unchanged from the previous year and will remain frozen for the year ahead.

If you are already claiming benefits or tax credits, you will automatically be contacted about changes in rates when this affects your entitlement.

Brian Myciuk, Carers Benefits Adviser at Carers First, welcomes the increase in the benefits' amount, but says more still needs to be done to support carers:

***“It’s good to see an increase in benefits to help struggling families, especially***

***with the cost of living and difficulties we all face. Although these rises are in line with inflation, households and individuals will still feel the pressures of everyday costs.***

***It’s important the government continues to help families on lower incomes. Carer’s Allowance is still too low for carers who are caring for more than 35 hours per week and save the UK government millions each year. It’s good that there has been an increase, but more can be done to help carers.”***

For more information on financial support, visit our website **carersfirst.org.uk** or call our Helpline on **0300 303 1555**.



# How an Emergency Plan can help you plan for the best

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**An Emergency Plan ensures that the person you care for will continue to receive care if you are suddenly and temporarily unavailable. They can be hugely important, yet many carers have yet to make an Emergency Plan.**

Writing an Emergency Plan is straight forward. Whether you would like advice on where to start or need help on how to improve your existing plan, we are here to support you.

The sooner you have your plan in place, the more confident you will feel knowing that should the worst happen, you have already planned for the best.

Carers First has advice and resources to help you with creating your Emergency Plan, follow our **Four steps to Plan for the Best:**



## 1 Download our plan template

We have created a handy Emergency Plan template specifically for carers to help you to write your plan. The template makes creating a plan easy by guiding you through the things you may need to think about to ensure the person you care for continues to receive support in your absence. You can download the template from the Carers First website at [carersfirst.org.uk/plantemplate](https://carersfirst.org.uk/plantemplate)

## 2 Inform your GP

It is important to tell your GP that you are an unpaid carer so that they know if you are suddenly taken ill, they will be aware that the welfare of a vulnerable person may be at risk because you are no longer able to care for them. It is simple to register as a carer with your GP. Some surgeries have a form on their website you can fill in to notify them. You can also download our GP letter template from our website at [carersfirst.org.uk/GPletter](https://carersfirst.org.uk/GPletter) to complete and share with your GP.

## 3 Message in a bottle

In addition to writing an Emergency Plan, you might also want to use the free 'Message in a Bottle' scheme. This is where you put a summary of the most crucial information from the plan in a bottle in the fridge. You then put stickers on the door to notify everyone that they can find this information there. People who work in the emergency services are trained to look out for this.

## 4 Get added to the Priority Services Register

It is a good idea for you and the person you care for to be added to your gas, electricity and water company's Priority Services Register. This is a free service for older and vulnerable customers that provides a little extra support, such as being prioritised for repairs. Just get in touch with each of the companies directly and ask to be added.

For more information and support on emergency planning, visit the Carers First website [carersfirst.org.uk](https://carersfirst.org.uk) or call our Helpline on **0300 303 1555**.

# Emergency Plan

It is important to think about what would happen if you were unexpectedly unable to provide care for your relative or friend. An emergency situation could be an unexpected childcare issue, a period of illness, travel disruption, or even a matter of what life throws at you, you've already planned for the best.

Carer's details  
My name

Phone number



# Grants for unpaid carers

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## How do I apply for a grant as a carer?

**Being a carer can bring additional worries into your life, like wondering how you and the person you care for will manage financially. If you are struggling to fund an essential item, bill or break, there are grants you can apply for. You can apply for special mobility equipment, disability adjustments to be made in the home, or a contribution for you and the person you care for to go on holiday.**

There are charitable trusts set up across the UK to offer financial assistance, but finding the right ones for you and your situation can be difficult. If you are wondering what grants you may be eligible for, a great first step is to check with your local council what grants or other assistance they may offer. You can also reach out to your energy supplier and find out what relief they may be able to offer to low-income households.

## Tips to help you secure a grant

- To best prepare for the application process, gather documentation on your income and outgoings as this will help during your financial assessment.
- Save time and check you fit within the criteria of the grant before applying, for example you may need to be in receipt of certain benefits to be eligible.
- Give as much information as possible to find what will best suit your circumstances, even if you think it's not relevant. The more informed the grant funder is, the more options may be available to you.
- Use grant search tools online for grants specific to your caring situation, this could be around the disability or condition of the person you care for, or around your own occupation.

Lightning Reach is a website that allows people to access financial support, including grants, from multiple support providers. Visit [lightningreach.org](https://lightningreach.org) to find out more.

If you would like to know more about grants, you can find information on our website [carersfirst.org.uk](https://carersfirst.org.uk) or by calling our [Helpline on 0300 303 1555](tel:03003031555).



### Rob's experience

Through the assistance of Carers First, Rob who cares for his wife, Josie, secured grants to help fund a stairlift and a dishwasher. With reduced income due to Josie being off work, Rob couldn't have otherwise afforded the equipment to adapt their home for Josie's needs, or the dishwasher to help relieve Rob's housework. Rob said:

*"With a baby and a four-year-old, I was spending so much time washing up. The dishwasher helped give me more time to spend with Josie and the children."*



# Taking breaks

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## as a carer

**Taking breaks can be one of the hardest parts of your caring role and taking care of yourself can sometimes take a back seat compared to everything else.**

Taking time to look after yourself while still ensuring that the person you care for is being looked after can be a real challenge, but having time away from the person you care for can be good for both of you.



## Carefree

### What breaks should I be taking?

Taking regular shorter breaks can help you take a breather and feel refreshed, and therefore better prepared to be looking after another person. This could be something like grabbing a coffee with a friend, giving yourself an hour out of your day to dedicate to a hobby, or something bigger like a day out by yourself or with your loved ones.

More occasional longer breaks are a brilliant way to provide yourself with a real opportunity to rest from the stress and worries of your caring role. Many carers find that the time they spend alone while on a break helps them to reflect, process and unwind.

*“Mum adores football and she’ll watch any game on, so her and my husband will watch the football and I’ll use that time to go and have a bath, catch-up on TV or talk to friends virtually.”*

Marian, cares for her mum who has Alzheimer’s disease

### Carefree Breaks

Carers First can support you in applying for a short break with Carefree. Carefree is a charity that offers breaks for unpaid carers, working with accommodation providers to turn empty rooms into a priceless short break.



**In 2022, Carers First were able to support over 230 carers to apply for a Carefree break and 95% of carers who benefitted from a break said they felt an improvement in their wellbeing following the break.**

*“This service is amazing and I am so grateful for it. I was at breaking point but knowing I had this to look forward to helped me keep going. Thank you!”*

Charlene enjoyed a short break with Carefree

Call our Helpline or visit [carersfirst.org.uk/carefreebreaks](https://carersfirst.org.uk/carefreebreaks) to find out more.

## What are other options for breaks?

- If you have a family member or friend who would be able to give you time to take care of yourself, don't be nervous to ask for the support. Friends and family are often eager to help, but may not realise you need it unless you tell them.

- Replacement or respite care: this could be a 'sitting-service' using trained volunteers or a local centre.
- Get in touch with your local authority, who may be able to help you arrange replacement care through a Carer's Statutory Assessment and they may have funding available to assist you financially.

## Carer's Leave Bill

Taking breaks as a carer is important, but we understand that for many carers, including working carers, it is a challenge. Carers First is proud to support the Carer's Leave Bill, which would benefit over two million people who juggle paid employment and unpaid care. The Bill aims to give carers in employment the right to take unpaid leave, allowing carers to take leave if an emergency arises or they are suddenly unable to balance their caring role and work responsibilities. The Bill has now begun its journey in the House of Lords, with a successful Second Reading on Friday 3 March 2023.

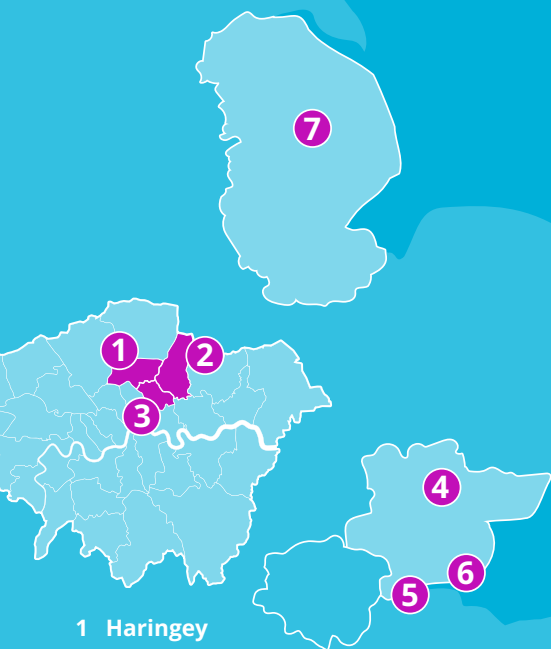
# What's happening near you

While providing digital support to carers across England, Carers First also works in the community across Essex, Southend-on-Sea, Lincolnshire, Medway and the London Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Waltham Forest, providing a range of personalised services such as face to face activities and events. Find out what we've been up to at the beginning of 2023.



## Lincolnshire Archery

Our **Men Care 2** programme for male carers in Lincolnshire recently held an event for male carers to enjoy an afternoon of archery.



- 1 Haringey
- 2 Waltham Forest
- 3 Hackney
- 4 Essex
- 5 Medway
- 6 Southend-on-Sea
- 7 Lincolnshire



## Essex Care2Walk groups

Carers in Essex completed the **Rayleigh Heritage Walk** in February with our **Care2Walk** group. Carers enjoyed the Rayleigh surroundings, learning historical facts about the town whilst meeting other carers for conversation and a hot drink afterwards.



## Southend Blue Monday competition

Deborah Gardener, a carer from Southend-On-Sea won tickets to Adventure Island and Southend-On-Sea Sea Life Centre in our competition on Facebook for Blue Monday in January.

Deborah commented:

*“A trip out to Adventure Island would help us feel like big kids, and just be husband and wife for a while. We can have fun together and leave our worries behind, just for a few hours. Thank you so much for this prize.”*

## Medway Care2Cook sessions

Carers in Medway had a soup-er time at our Care2Cook session in January learning healthy, affordable, quick and easy recipes whilst meeting other local carers. We made a range of soups and homemade bread rolls with Chef T, not forgetting fairy cakes for pudding.



## Waltham Forest spring get together

Carers in Waltham Forest met for the Quarterly Catch Up in March for a spring get together where carers enjoyed meeting other carers.

## Hackney carers celebration

Around 90 carers joined us at the event in Hackney. We were also joined by Councillor Kennedy who spoke about the need to recognise and value the contribution of carers and thanked carers for all they do.



## Haringey Health Day

Carers First were delighted to welcome 41 carers at the end of January for our Haringey Health Day at the Cypriot Community Centre on Earlham Grove. The event was designed to raise awareness of health and wellbeing services for carers in Haringey.

**To find more events and activities near you, visit your local page on our website or follow us on Facebook.**

# Danielle's story

**Danielle is a carer for her daughter Phoebe, 6, and her son Jack, 7. Danielle also has five older children. Danielle shares her story about how her caring roles affect her and how the support she has received from Carers First is helping her and her family.**

*"Six years ago, my daughter Phoebe had her first seizure when she was five months old. Over the next 18 months, her condition gradually became worse. Shortly before Phoebe was two, and after many hospital admissions and difficult conversations, she was diagnosed with Dravet syndrome, a rare form of epilepsy."*





*"Due to the stress of the situation, feeling judged by health professionals, and dismissed as a stressed, worn-out, over-reactive mother whose instincts weren't to be trusted, I began to suffer with anxiety, insomnia and was constantly on edge. Also caring for my son Jack who has ADHD and sensory processing disorder, combined with being pregnant, I reached crisis point and began struggling to get out of bed in the mornings."*

*"I began to reach out for support, and with the help of Carers First, I am now getting some quality time for myself. My older children access their young carer trips and activities, giving them space to talk about any worries they have as well as the time to simply be teenagers. It also helps me to get a bit of a break."*

*"Carers First have also supported me with applying for a wellbeing grant for some pamper treatments. I often struggle to get any time for myself, so being supported to get some 'me time', to get my hair and nails done is a real treat for me. I'm really looking forward to it."*

*"I first heard about Carers First through the children's school, but I didn't realise*



*there was also support for me, as well as my children. Now we have support in place, life is a lot better, and I've learnt that I need to look after myself too."*

Danielle wants to empower other parent carers to stand up and trust their own judgement when they know that something is wrong and reach out for support if they are struggling:

***"Now thanks to Carers First, I get more help and I've relaxed a little bit. Just knowing that they're there helps a lot."***

**Are you looking for further support in your caring role? Get in touch with Carers First today to find out how we can help. Visit [carersfirst.org.uk](https://carersfirst.org.uk), email [hello@carersfirst.org.uk](mailto:hello@carersfirst.org.uk) or call 0300 303 1555**



# Stress busting tips for better mental health



**When caring for someone else, it can be hard to switch off and focus on your own health and wellbeing but looking after yourself is important too. Read our top tips to help you to balance managing stress and looking after your mental health when you are caring for someone.**

## 1 Get active

Finding the time to keep active can be a challenge when you are caring for someone, but physical activity can benefit you in lots of ways. Did you know that physical activity is also beneficial for your mental health and wellbeing?

We should all aim to complete 10,000 steps a day. Try going for a walk in nature if you can, or look to join a local walking group or exercise class. Carers First offers a range of events to support your physical activity too. Visit [carersfirst.org.uk/local-support](https://carersfirst.org.uk/local-support) to find out what's happening near you.

## 2 Connect with people

Caring can be socially isolating and having a good support network of friends and family can ease your worries and help you to see things from a different perspective, helping you to relax and relieve stress.

Denise, 56, who cares for her son, Jamal with mental health difficulties told us how reaching out to her friends helped her:

*“My friends from the group were a lifeline and a great comfort to me as I went through such difficult times with Jamal. They were always there at the end of the phone or to meet for a coffee when I needed it.”*

Connecting with people who are in a similar situation and who understand your experiences can also be a significant help and be useful for sharing hints and tips around caring. Carers First has an Online Community of carers you can join, as well as a range of support groups. Visit [carersfirst.org.uk/onlinecommunity](https://carersfirst.org.uk/onlinecommunity) to find out more.



### 3 Explore new therapies

There are many techniques and methods that have been proven to help relieve stress, anxiety, depression and trauma. These include some simple exercises that you can try at home, such as meditation or journalling. Carers First also offers a **Virtual Wellbeing Programme** for carers, which includes a session on breathwork and **Emotional Freedom Technique Tapping**. The programme provides a safe and supportive environment to explore ways to manage stress, build your emotional resilience and increase your self-care through these therapies.

One carer told us how she found our Virtual Wellbeing Programme:

*“I start off feeling guilty taking time out for myself, but afterwards it makes me realise that I do need to care for me. It reduces tension in my body and shows me that if I can reduce the stress in my brain and body I have room to actually deal with stuff going on around me.”*

To find out more, visit [carersfirst.org.uk/wellbeing](https://carersfirst.org.uk/wellbeing)

If you would prefer to speak to someone about any of the topics above, contact our Helpline on 0300 303 1555

# Meet the team behind our Helpline who are helping carers to thrive

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**The Carers First Helpline is often the first point of contact for carers contacting Carers First; supporting many people at crisis point.**

Helping people to explore the support options available to them at home and in their community as an unpaid carer, our Helpline Team can support carers to achieve the balance in their lives they are looking to achieve.

**91% of the carers we have supported told us they feel listened to**

**89% feel more confident to continue caring**



## **What happens when you call our Helpline?**

When you contact us, a friendly and experienced Carer Support Adviser will be on the other end of the phone ready to help you. Through their diverse range of personal experiences of caring, as well as the carers they support every day; our skilled and dedicated team offer a professional, compassionate and helpful approach.

From exploring how you can make time for you, to legal aspects and finances, they are here to support you in your caring journey, regardless of how long you have been caring, how many hours of care you provide or whether you have contacted us before.

## **Who will you talk to?**

**Ann-Marie** is our Helpline Manager, she provides leadership to the Helpline Team. Ann-Marie's background is in customer service, but in the last eight years of working at Carers First, her passion is supporting carers.

Ann-Marie says: ***"As a working carer myself, I understand the importance of being heard and getting the right help to enable you to make the choices to continue in your caring role."***

*The team has varied backgrounds within the social care sector and over 50% are working carers of adults and children. We understand your caring situation and are here to help when you call."*



**Tracy** is our Helpline Team Lead, she provides support for the team in addition to working directly with carers to complete wellbeing summaries. Tracy has previously worked in the mental health field as a nurse and then in the social care sector for over 30 years, many of those years in statutory services as a frontline manager. She is also a carer for her 21-year-old son who has a mental health diagnosis.



**Kathleen** is a Carer Support Adviser who has a background in retail and has personal experience of caring for someone with autism, ADHD and social anxiety. Whoever you speak to you, you can be assured that our team will be ready to support you, providing you information, advice or practical help in your caring role.

**For information and guidance in your caring role, contact our Helpline today on 0300 303 1555 or [hello@carersfirst.org.uk](mailto:hello@carersfirst.org.uk)**



# Fundraising

## news

### Become a Carers First Friend

We rely on donations to help us increase the support we can give to carers. This includes developing new courses, groups and wellbeing trips and activities. We would like to ask if you might consider setting up a regular gift to Carers First to help us support more carers.

You can set up a regular gift quickly and simply by visiting our website [carersfirst.org.uk/carersfirstfriend](https://carersfirst.org.uk/carersfirstfriend)

As a thank you, we will send you your own Carers First pin badge and bi-annual updates on the difference you're making.

We do appreciate times are tough and now might not be a good time for you to give.

If you are struggling with your caring role, please call our [Helpline on 0300 303 1555](tel:03003031555).



## Carers win in our Christmas Prize Draw

We were delighted to see carers win half the prizes in our Christmas Prize Draw alongside our supporters.

This was our second annual Christmas Prize Draw and we sold 28% more tickets than last year. The funds raised will support our services helping carers to feel less alone including telephone befriending and our peer groups like Moving On Staying Together for former carers.

One winner was Charlie from Grantham who cares for her 83 year old mother-in-law as well as two children who have disabilities. Charlie won two £100 Amazon vouchers and says: "As a full-time carer, there isn't much money to spend on luxuries like Christmas. Winning these vouchers means I can buy my children presents and make a nice Christmas meal for my family. Thank you so much."

## New benefits advice service for older carers in Essex

Carers First are delighted to increase our support to older carers in Essex through a new telephone benefits advice service. This means that throughout 2023, we can help more carers aged 65+ to get money into their pockets during the cost of living crisis.

The new benefits advice service has been made possible thanks to a grant from Independent Age to help older carers aged 65+ with the cost of living.

Veronica Sadowsky, Essex Services Manager said:

*"We are delighted to secure this funding which will help us get more money in older carers' pockets at a time so many are struggling."*



## Register with us

By registering with Carers First, you will get access to a whole range of services, including news, information, advice, training, groups, events and lots more. Visit [carersfirst.org.uk/register](https://carersfirst.org.uk/register) or call our helpline on **0300 303 1555**

## Getting online

We want you to be able to access the full range of information and support available, including our online groups and website. If you are not already online, someone in our team or an IT buddy can talk you through the process step by step.

## Stay in touch

We want to hear from you and your stories.

Email us at:  
[hello@carersfirst.org.uk](mailto:hello@carersfirst.org.uk)

## Help us lighten the load of caring

If you're able to donate today, you can help us be there for more carers who need us.

### It's easy to donate:


Visit [carersfirst.org.uk/donate](https://carersfirst.org.uk/donate)

To donate £5, text

**CARER to 70970**

Send a cheque made out to Carers First to Carers First, Unit 4, Michael Gill Building, Tolgate Lane, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4TG

### Follow us on social media

 @carersfirst

 @carers\_first

 @carersfirst

### Get in touch

[carersfirst.org.uk](https://carersfirst.org.uk)

T: 0300 303 1555

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