

Carers' Support (Bexley)

Greenwich Volcare

# Annual Report

2023–24



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## Who is an unpaid carer?

A carer is "a person of any age, adult or child, who provides unpaid support to a partner, child, relative or friend who couldn't manage to live independently or whose health or wellbeing would deteriorate without this help. This could be due to frailty, disability or serious health condition, mental ill health or substance misuse".

# Message from our Chair

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Being an unpaid carer to our loved ones, is one of the greatest challenges in life that many of us will face. We can find ourselves feeling completely lost, alone and very isolated in the daily grind and reality of caring. The physical and mental challenges we face, can be relentless, draining our energy and spirit and leaving us beyond exhausted.



**Nicky Fry**  
**Carers' Support (Bexley) Chair**

Carer's Support is here to help carers improve the quality of their daily life and to provide hope and support amidst the turmoil. The past year has seen a large increase in the number of carers seeking our support. The 'Cost of Living Crisis' has impacted people who are on low incomes, through no fault of their own, such as Carer's, disproportionately.

Our services aim to address many of the real challenges carers face. Our invaluable Respite Service provides in-home support, while our Information and Support Service helps people navigate the complex and often bewildering benefits system. Additionally, we offer free counselling, a befriending service, and numerous support groups that meet weekly and monthly, where carers can find companionship and friendship—essential for their health and well-being.

Our dedicated staff team and invaluable team of volunteers are really beyond-compare. The help they all give and the genuine heart for obtaining the best outcome for each family is priceless. Their kindness, dedication and professionalism are the reason why we are able to help as many Carer's as we can.

# Message from our CEO

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Welcome to our Annual report. It's a privilege to share a flavour of the work the team has done over the year. Carers Support wouldn't exist without the team, trustees, volunteers and our supporters. Thank you.

Unpaid carers are a lifeline for so many people in Bexley, and our mission at Carers Support (Bexley) is to be here to care for the carers.

I hope that you enjoy the report sharing what Carers Support (Bexley) and the team has done this year; from the gift of time and experience our volunteers give to our carers counselling service, support in the home, respite and breaks for carers, our extensive groups programme, welfare benefits advice, carrying out carer and care needs assessments and providing information and support to hundreds of people.

We also work hard to influence and advocate for a better deal for carers through our partnership work with other charities and statutory colleagues.

Thank you to the Trustees who have provided steady leadership of the charity and supported investment in the charity, including introducing a new database, moving to a new building and training for the team.

Bexley has over 19,000 unpaid carers, and we know that caring isn't always a choice and there are many demands on carers. Unpaid carers are more likely to be in poverty and can be affected physically and emotionally. We are here to care for the carer.



**Vikki Wilkinson**  
**Carers' Support (Bexley)**  
**CEO**

# Who we are and what we do

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Carers' Support (Bexley) is an independent registered charity that is supported by London Borough of Bexley and Royal Borough of Greenwich. We have a team of trained staff and volunteers who provide a wide range of information, support and respite services to local adult carers residing in the Bexley and Greenwich boroughs.

## Being an unpaid carer can be very challenging so we:



Provide a free information and support service offering welfare benefits guidance, help with claim forms or simply someone to talk to.



Host groups and events for current carers, their cared-for and former carers offering a vital space for relaxation, sharing experiences, and gaining support.



Have a team of Volunteers who assist with groups, events, form filling and also provide emotional support and a listening ear for carers and former carers.



Can provide a free breaks service provided by volunteers in your own home. This service is available in Bexley or Greenwich boroughs.



Offer a paid Support Worker Service which can provide companionship, trips out and assistance with appointments, but no personal care.



Provide a free counselling service.

**We are committed to making the lives of unpaid carers easier and more fulfilling. We are here to provide the support you need.**

# Review of our year

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Our information and Support team had over **4,000** interactions with unpaid carers



**208** support group sessions were hosted during 23/24, including a new monthly lunch club launched in February.



We organised **8** events throughout the year for unpaid carers including guest speakers, entertainers, day trips and evenings out.



Our free counselling service had **8** volunteer counsellors who provided **464** counselling sessions during 23/24 with appointments available in person, online, or by phone.



We were pleased to be asked again to distribute funds through the Household Support Grant Scheme, providing financial aid to unpaid carers struggling with the cost of living and energy bills. **£84,200** was given to unpaid carers who met the criteria.

# Review of our year

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Our Information & Support Team helps carers manage their everyday challenges. As the first point of contact for many, this is often where carers start their journey with us. The team make it their mission to get to know each person's unique situation so the charity can offer the best possible support. The team can help with welfare benefits advice, benefit checks and form-filling also advice on Blue Badge and Taxicard applications. They also offer general advice, emotional support and signpost people to the right services.

*"I would like to thank you for the help you gave me. You really took a weight off my shoulders"*

We run a full programme of support groups held at various locations across the borough and welcome carers, former carers, and those with their cared-for. These safe spaces allow carers to make friends and share experiences.

We understand that carers need to prioritise their own well-being to care effectively for others. Many experience feelings of guilt, anger, exhaustion, and low self-esteem. Our free counselling service is available to clients who need it. Counsellors assist carers in developing coping strategies, helping them feel more empowered and better equipped to manage their responsibilities.

*"I felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for my husband and resentful as it had taken over my whole life. Talking to the counsellor kept everything in perspective".*

*"truly a life-changing experience, which has altered my thought patterns. Even on my 'bad' days, I am now able to process my thoughts differently and not disappear into that 'black hole'"*

*"it was very useful being able to chat to someone about how you feel. It's not always easy to talk to family or friends. I think we all need someone to confide in and my counselling proves this."*

# Review of our year

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Funded by the UK Government, the Household Carers Support Grant supports those most in need of help with significantly rising living costs. We were delighted to work in partnership with the Local Authority once again to facilitate the dissemination of the Household Carers Support Grants to unpaid carers living in the London Borough of Bexley from July 2023 until February 2024. Feedback showed that this support had a significant positive impact.

Our Pathways team consists of three staff members: Vicky Baker (Operational Lead), Hazel Grout and Tracey Youngs (Trusted Assessors). Together, they carry out Care Needs Assessments, Carers' Assessments, and Reviews on behalf of Bexley Adult Social Care Services, in partnership with seven other charities that form the One Bexley consortium.

Vicky Baker was on maternity leave from April 2023, and Kayleigh Gibson from Bexley Mencap was seconded to cover some of her duties. We would like to thank Kayleigh for all her hard work.

“  
I feel much more positive  
about things after your  
visit.”

“  
Your visit really helped my  
dad realise that a bit of  
support would be helpful  
and he's now very positive  
and even relieved, I think.  
And it is a big relief to me  
not to be coping  
singlehanded.”

“  
I can't thank you enough for all  
the help and support you've  
given us and that kick up the  
backside I needed.”



# Review of our year

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Our One Bexley Trusted Assessors completed

**5** Assistive Technology Assessments

**47** Carers' Assessments

**46** Single Assessments

**64** Care Plan Reviews

**7** Carers' Reviews



Our support worker service provided **6485** hours of support to clients enabling the carer to have a few hours respite each week



During carers week in June 2023, through a generous donation from a former client, we were able to host an afternoon tea for over **80** carers. We also helped plan and attended the Carers Week "Bexley Wellbeing" event.



We continued our work with the Carers Hub and helped to plan and support the launch of a new Carers Café, part of the Bexley Carers Partnership initiative. Our team provided information on available services, while the events allowed carers to connect with other organisations and fellow unpaid carers.



Smyth Lodge and Carers Support (Bexley) sponsored the launch of the Sidcup Storyteller Cinema's Dementia Friendly Screenings which started in September 23.

# Review of our year

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Our Support Worker Manager, Vicky Baker, commenced maternity leave in the Spring of 2023. Felicity Packard took on the interim role of Support Worker Manager and a new staff member, Hannah Flitton, was employed on a fixed-term contract to cover the admin tasks of the service.

In December 2023, we made a big change to our Support Worker Service, which is a lifeline for many unpaid carers in Bexley. The aim was to offer a more consistent and reliable service, giving carers the essential break they need while ensuring that clients continue to get regular support. The new model was designed to better meet the needs of both our clients and carers by providing steady, uninterrupted care. As part of the new model all our Support Workers are now permanent, salaried staff (as opposed to being on “bank” contracts). As well as working with clients they undertake administrative tasks associated with the service. This change has helped them become more integrated into the wider staff team and provides them with more financial security.

*“As a Support Worker at Carers Support (Bexley), I enjoy meeting people in different situations and providing consistent, weekly support, which can be long term, if needed. My aim is to get to know the person I am working with and establish how best I can support, within my role. Building connection is important to me, so I often use different activities to help with that, especially when working with someone with dementia. These activities include crosswords, singing, creative art and puzzles. I also accompany clients to appointments and outings. Supporting emotional wellbeing is a key part of what I do, and I make sure to show value and listen actively to the people I work with.”*

**- Julie Yandle, Support Worker**



Artwork by Gail with Support Worker Julie

# Review of our year

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Our amazing respite volunteers provided a total of **1,451** breaks for Bexley clients and **1,121** breaks for Greenwich Volcare, supporting up to **80** clients across both boroughs.



We distributed **3000** copies of the Carers Voice newsletter and sent **6** e-bulletins to **460** subscribers.



We said goodbye to Crayford Manor House as we moved to our new offices in Wolsley House, Crayford.



Our CEO kept busy attending and speaking at different meetings, while also serving on several Boards to champion the needs of unpaid carers.



Our website underwent a comprehensive redevelopment. We also introduced a new database which significantly improved our record-keeping processes, enabling more accurate, organised and accessible data management.

# Review of our year

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23/24 was a remarkable year for the respite service, thanks to our incredible volunteers who generously dedicated up to twelve months of their time, demonstrating unwavering commitment and resilience. Despite the demanding and emotional challenges of the role, they consistently rise to the occasion with remarkable strength. We are continually impressed by our volunteers, many of whom complete an intensive induction despite English being their second language. We ensure the respite volunteers have well-deserved time off, and they certainly make the most of it, exploring the UK and Europe more than most of us!

Carers benefit from our service, gaining peace of mind knowing their loved ones are in safe compassionate hands. Volunteers, in turn, form strong bonds with their clients and lifelong friendships with fellow volunteers.



**Respite Volunteers**

We are fortunate to provide accommodation for the respite volunteers, with rented properties from Penge Churches Housing Association (PCHA) and the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG). While managing these facilities can sometimes be challenging, we are grateful for the continued support of PCHA and the RBG repairs team. A special thanks to the facility management company, Equans, whose staff volunteered to redecorate our Bexley accommodation as part of their 'Responsible Business Scheme,' making a tremendous difference to the house. We also extend our gratitude to Lynn Cooper, who goes above and beyond for the two volunteers who live with her. Finally, our volunteers are a true credit to both our organisation and their families. It's a privilege to support and see them grow. Through their dedication, we continue to make a meaningful impact on the lives of our clients.

*"The respite service has made a big difference for me, allowing me to get out. The volunteers are well-trained, polite, and show great respect toward my wife"*

**Respite Service Client**

*"I feel like I have helped someone have a better day."*

**Respite Volunteer**

# Our Staff, Volunteers and Trustees

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We were delighted to welcome Lesley Skinner and Sandra Nutkins to the Information and Support team this year. Vicky Baker started her maternity leave, and during that time, Hannah Flitton joined us on a fixed-term contract, providing excellent administrative support to the Support Worker team until June 2024. Hannah did a fantastic job, and we sincerely thank her for all her hard work. In December 2023, we also welcomed our new Support Worker team.

A huge thank you to all our staff for your continued dedication and hard work over the past year. Your passion, resilience, and commitment are amazing. You consistently go above and beyond to provide exceptional support to the unpaid carers we support

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our Trustees for their tireless dedication and hard work throughout the year. Their commitment to guiding and supporting our charity has been invaluable. We are truly grateful for their time, effort and support, which plays a vital role in the work we do.

Our volunteers bring unique skills and experiences that significantly enhance the values of the charity. Many of them have been carers themselves or know a friend or family member who has, which often gives them an exceptional sense of empathy that resonates with carers. Our volunteers do all sorts of things, like telephone befriending, helping with support groups and events, giving welfare advice and assisting with Blue Badge/Taxicard applications.

# Our Staff, Volunteers and Trustees

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## A Fond Farewell and Sincere Thanks to Ian Pardoe

This year, we say a very special thank you and farewell to Ian Pardoe, who has been a dedicated In Touch volunteer befriender since October 2005. Over the years, Ian has formed meaningful connections and friendships with many carers and former carers, leaving a lasting impact on their lives. His compassion, kindness, and commitment have been an invaluable part of our charity, and while we are sad to see him step back from this role, we remain deeply grateful for all he has done. Ian, your dedication will be truly missed, and we wish you all the best!



## Interested in Volunteering with us?

Our volunteers are highly valued members of our team. If you would like to volunteer your time, skills and experience we would be very pleased to hear from you. Current volunteering roles include:

**Café Volunteers** – serving drinks, assisting with activities and chatting to unpaid carers

**Benefits Volunteer** – Would you like to make a difference by helping carers and their loved ones maximise their income? We are seeking volunteers to join our dedicated team in assisting with the completion of disability benefit application forms.

For more information on these roles and how to apply please contact:

**Felicity Packard**

**Email:** [felicity@carerssupport.org](mailto:felicity@carerssupport.org)

**Call:** 020 8302 8011

**[www.carerssupport.org](http://www.carerssupport.org)**



# Our groups and events



A very kind and generous donation from a former user of our respite service enabled us to host an afternoon tea dance throughout carers week 2023.



Seated Exercises

Day Trip to Whitstable.



Xmas Carers event



A night out at Crayford Dogs

# Our Donors

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The achievements highlighted in this Annual Report have also been made possible thanks to the generosity of individuals, community groups, businesses, and charitable trusts. We deeply appreciate every donation we've received this year, and your kindness continues to make a real difference.

This year, we were honored to receive some incredibly meaningful gifts given in memory of loved ones who have sadly passed away. These heartfelt contributions, often made at funerals or in the weeks and months after, celebrate the lives of those we have lost while providing hope and support to unpaid carers in our local community.

We also received a special legacy gift this year, assigned to our Respite service enabling the service to further enhance support for those who need it most.

**To everyone who has supported us, thank you for being part of our journey. Your generosity enables us to continue helping unpaid carers and their families in profound and lasting ways.**

## Help us support even more carers

If you would like to make a donation to Carers' Support (Bexley) please use the bank account details below:

Carers' Support (Bexley)  
Sort Code: 40-52-40  
Account number: 00009013

If you would like to set up standing order then please visit our website [www.carerssupport.org](http://www.carerssupport.org) for more details.

This report and our Annual Accounts report will be available on our website. You can also sign up for our informative e-bulletin [www.carerssupport.org](http://www.carerssupport.org) or follow us on social media:

**Facebook:** Carers' Support Bexley  
**X:** @CSBex

For information, advice and guidance please also see: [bexleycarers.co.uk](http://bexleycarers.co.uk)