

Celebrating the support of

Jane Wates OBE

From 1998 to 2026



Jane Wates OBE was a treasured Patron of Oxfordshire Community Foundation until she passed away in 2020. Jane was a fundamental part of our success over 25 years, and her legacy lives on.



Jane's involvement with OCF

Jane was a trustee of Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) from 1998 to 2018, but had already been heavily involved as one of the foundation's earliest donors and a member of the founding steering group in 1995.

Jane was able to bring an understanding of the community foundation model to OCF right from the start. She made the first individual donation to OCF's endowment in 1997. Derek Wood QC, who chaired OCF at this time, commented: "This represents a real milestone in the development of the community foundation's endowment fund." Since then, the collective endowment funds we manage have reached £11 million. The building of an endowment, for the permanent good of the community, supports Jane's view that philanthropy needs to be a long-term commitment, tackling the root causes that lead to an ongoing cycle of lack of achievement and deprivation.



Jane spent 20 years in this role as one of OCF's most hardworking and passionate board members, alongside a similar role at Berkshire Community Foundation. She brought expertise from a lifetime of voluntary work, for which she was awarded an OBE in 1999. This work focused on the alleviation of deprivation for young people and families, building on family values, and crime prevention.

She was a mainstay of OCF's grants panel for many years, helping us allocate funds in a fair and impactful way to support thousands of people to make a better life for themselves.

In 2018, Jane agreed to join Sir Hugo Brunner in becoming a Vice-President of OCF. In this role she was keen to share her passion for giving through community foundations, and wrote to us (in her rather difficult-to-read hand!):

"I want to advocate for the personal fulfilment and joy that can be experienced through giving. I would encourage anyone who has the means to give to work with community foundations to understand the needs, and take action to help."

"Community foundations provide an opportunity for funders to form a similar and like-minded philanthropic group to brainstorm priorities, outcomes and KPIs. Collaboration is very important."



As always, Jane lived by her intentions, playing a key role in OCF's funder's forum events (pictured), which bring together philanthropists and trusts to understand how to work better together. In October 2026, we are hosting our eighth annual funders' forum, with a continued commitment to this key event that fulfils Jane's aspiration for more collaboration.



Jane's experience as a consummate host was also invaluable to OCF. She played a key role in organising our 21st birthday celebration at [Broughton Castle](#) (pictured), and was on the organising committee for OCF's [Call My Wine Bluff](#) event, an introduction to our work for people in Henley and South Oxfordshire. Events were a chance for her to again apply her perceptiveness, networks and sense of fun to benefit the community, and for OCF to engage existing and new donors. Thanks to events like these, OCF is now consistently achieving an annual income of £2m or more, with a structured and intentional approach to stewarding more philanthropic support every year.

Donations from Jane to OCF (all time)

Elizabeth Jane Foundation	Personal donations	Wates Foundation
£236k	£32k	£48k



Over time, Jane was reinforced in her belief that early intervention with families and young people is the most effective way to improve society, and she supported a pro-active approach. Writing about her passion for education in 2018, she said:

"It is acknowledged that early childhood education has the potential to nurture a young child's inherent relational capacity with themselves, family and wider communities. Children are exposed to fast-changing ways of learning in a fast-changing world, with online platforms becoming more and more relevant.

"But we need to develop offline opportunities to encourage socialisation and self-sustainability as well, which promote friendship and loyalty. To do this we must develop a sustainable programme that can be replicated and attract substantial government and charitable funding."

One of Jane's last philanthropic actions was to give significant support to the [Growing Minds](#) programme, which was incubated within OCF. Growing Minds brings together charity and statutory delivery partners to improve school readiness in disadvantaged communities. In investing in this programme, Jane once again showed herself to be a leading light of philanthropy in Oxfordshire.



Growing Minds continues to be delivered in Berinsfield and Littlemore, with the model starting to be replicated in other areas. It is now a well-known and valued service in both areas, with 685 children supported by June 2025. The impact of greater school readiness on these children and their families is proven to have an exponential effect, improving attainment throughout school and giving them access to better opportunities throughout their lives.

Before Jane's death in 2020 she set up the Jane Wates Patron Fund with her husband Jimmy Gordon, and this received a significant donation from her estate in 2022. In 2026, the fund has made its final grants, and the following pages celebrate what it has achieved in that time.



The Jane Wates Patron Fund

OCF has been incredibly proud to hold the Jane Wates Patron Fund between her retirement in 2018, making grants from the fund until 2026, when the fund is closing. With the support of her family, this has helped to keep Jane's memory alive within OCF. The fund's purpose was to support young children (both preschool age and once in school attendance, with priority for ages 2–11) and their families to help improve their general health and wellbeing and life outcomes.

Value of grants made



£178,014

Number of grants made



7

Support for OCF



£23,286

Impact of the fund

Since its inception, the Jane Wates Patron Fund has made the following grants.

Growing Minds

Growing Minds is an ambitious, collaborative project, bringing together experienced organisations and tried-and-tested interventions to improve school readiness and support young children's life chances. It is now led by a partnership of third sector organisations in Oxfordshire: [Peeples](#), [Home-Start Oxford](#) and the [Berin Centre](#).

The Jane Wates Patron Fund has been one of the most significant supporters of Growing Minds, contributing three grants in 2019, 2021 and 2022 totalling over £132k.



The project targets families in Littlemore and Berinsfield, two areas on the outskirts of Oxford where many families experience income deprivation. Families are introduced to the project by their health visitor and can opt in. The Growing Minds birth-to-school pathway illustrates the joined-up approach to working with families with babies and children under five. It includes:

- 60 free books for each child to keep, delivered once a month from birth to age five, via the [Dolly Parton Imagination Library](#). This has helped not only to engage new families, but to support their confidence and enjoyment in sharing books. All families report doing this on a weekly or daily basis. Growing Minds families had received a total of 17,500 Imagination Library books by June 2025.



- Sharing initial information with families via people and services that they already have contact with, such as midwives, birth registrars, nursery nurses and health visitors.
- Developing responsive and flexible relationships with families, ensuring that their most urgent and basic needs are focused on first. The extraordinary pressures that families faced during the pandemic led to an increased need for both financial and mental health support. HomeStart Oxford visits families at home and develops trusting relationships, offering practical support, as well as signposting them to specialist support services and/or other community groups.
- Peep Learning Together sessions – incorporated into groups, home visits and/or stay-and-play sessions, for parents and carers with their babies or young children. The Peep sessions share information and ideas with families that support their child's learning in day-to-day life. 92% of parents report doing more things with their child that they learned about in the sessions, and 91% felt more confident supporting their child's learning and development after attending groups. Another important aspect is the further strengthening of relationships – with practitioners in their local communities where sessions are held (such as the family centre/hub, church, pre-school and school, which can include transition/school-ready sessions), and also with other families, providing ongoing friendship and support for each other.
- Staying in touch between face-to-face sessions, via online newsletters, WhatsApp groups and a closed Growing Minds Facebook group for each area.

One parent who took part in the project commented: "What matters most to me is that my kids can see a difference in me. I'm so much calmer now. I have the headspace for them. I nearly lost them. I can see a real difference in them too. They're more settled and confident and are doing really well at nursery and school. I feel like a good mum and that makes me really proud. I'm so grateful to (my support worker). I couldn't have done it without her. It's really changed my life for the better."

ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children in Oxfordshire)

ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children) is a highly regarded, multiple award-winning Oxfordshire charity that helps pupils in Oxfordshire who struggle with their reading. They send trained volunteers into primary schools and aim to inspire in the children a love of reading. ARCh support makes an enormous difference to children in terms of improvement in reading ability, comprehension, enjoyment, confidence and self-esteem.



A grant of £10,000 from the Jane Wates Patron Fund supported ARCh in recruitment, training, resourcing, and one year's support of 60 new volunteers to help at least 180 children in their first year with ARCh. Volunteers also had opportunities to engage with other volunteers to encourage cohesion and share good practice, enabling many volunteers who live alone to build friendships with other like-minded people.



The friendly relationships volunteers build makes the children feel valued, and they look forward to the time spent with their special ARCh friend in school. Through many conversations they have with the children over the course of the year, volunteers can raise aspirations in children and help break the deprivation cycle.

One volunteer commented: "More often than not, the children I read with are having to cope with disadvantaged and often challenging home lives, exacerbated further by resulting complexities from the Covid-19 pandemic. This can place them on the back foot in terms of their exposure to books at home and their experiences of reading for pleasure. With this in mind, it is always hugely rewarding to see a child, during our sessions, celebrating the progress they make with their reading, giggling at a particularly funny moment in a story and, perhaps of greatest consequence, discovering the magic of getting lost in a good book – a little escapism from the current stresses of everyday life."

Another volunteer shared that a child he was working with was a reluctant reader until ARCh supplied some books on football, which provoked the reaction: "Do you know, I think I am going to really like working with you!"

Home-Start Oxford

Home-Start Oxford supports families with under-fives through challenges that include mental health issues, illness, disability, autism, multiple births, relationship stress, refugeehood, social and rural isolation, domestic abuse, addiction, debt, trauma and poverty. Their unique service recruits and trains volunteers who visit families at home every week, giving non-judgmental, confidential emotional support as well as informed and practical help. Families with more complex/multiple needs are supported by a Family Support Worker.



A grant of £10,000 from the Jane Wates Patron Fund supported Home-Start's one-to-one and group services.

Within the first six months of funding, 55 families received one-to-one home visiting support by a volunteer or family support worker, and 222 families accessed Home-Start's group work programme in Oxford and West Oxfordshire.

The charity's inclusive and nurturing groups offer opportunities for parents and carers to feel less isolated and gain peer support. Parents often make friends and meet up outside of the group timetable to support each other. Carefully planned sessions offer children the chance to learn through play and socialising with other children.

One mum, who has attended the Little Splashers Group in Witney, said: "The group has been so lovely, it's one of the friendliest we've ever been to. I've loved how there's been a mix of structure and free play and how nice and relaxed and friendly it is."

Martin is a volunteer at Home-Start, and says volunteering has been a way to help his own mental health:



"About a year and a half ago I had a bit of a mental health crisis. I needed something to help me and I felt I needed to take a step back from work and do something different, something where I would be helping and have a positive impact.

"I did my volunteer preparation training with Home-Start Oxford last year. It's very thorough so you really feel like you know what you're doing and how you can help the families you are going to be supporting. Home-Start also took the time to understand what our experiences were, which also helped with the process of matching us volunteers to individual families. I have a child on the autistic spectrum, so I've got the knowledge and experience of what that looks like when you're bringing up children, and I was matched with a great family, who needed support in this, so it was a great fit.

"I clicked with my matched family really quickly. I'm glad I can be someone they can talk to and share their experiences with. I've been there, so I understand what they're going through. I really enjoy being able to see the family grow. I've seen such a difference from when we started to now, in how confident they all are. I think we have a great relationship. The little one asks when it's my turn to visit – he calls me Hedgehog, which is a name I was given when I was in the Scouts – so it's 'Is it Hedgehog day?!'.

"Through volunteering I've confirmed to myself that I really like working with young children and helping out. You get to see something positive come out of what you're doing. And you get to really help a family! It's also given me that work/life balance to help with my mental health too."

Oxfordshire Family Support Network

A recent grant from the Jane Wates Patron Fund is enabling this community group to run half termly coffee mornings for parent carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Wantage and Witney.

The coffee mornings are facilitated by two members of the staff and volunteer team, both of whom have lived experience of being a parent carer of a child or young person with SEND. The coffee mornings are, in part, an opportunity for parent carers to chat, and part discussion about a specific topic. Refreshments and biscuits are provided to encourage attendance, because the cost of a drink is a barrier for some people.

The groups reduce individual isolation and loneliness and promote emotional resilience by providing parent carers of children with SEND a safe space to talk with other people in a similar situation, to build networks and to have the opportunity to be signposted to other resources.



Support for OCF

"The wellbeing of OCF is fundamental to the wellbeing of the charitable sector in Oxfordshire. This is why I would like Jane's legacy to support OCF as a Patron."

Jimmy Gordon, Jane's widower

As well as making grants to impactful charities delivering work on the ground across Oxfordshire to support children and families, the Jane Wates Patron Fund has also directly funded OCF's core costs, continuing the legacy of support for the team that Jane provided during her lifetime.

These donations help cover essential costs that make effective philanthropy and best-practice grant-making possible. OCF prides itself on being a kind and approachable local funder, and building strong relationships with both donors and grantees. This includes:

- **Donor-advice services** – ensuring effective giving by recommending potential grantees, especially the smaller ones who go under the radar but offer great value for money; providing regular impact reports and news stories; and fostering a network of philanthropic individuals and organisations that creates greater collective impact together.
- **Grantee support** – taking the time to support grassroots charities throughout the application process; consulting with them to understand local needs; hosting advice sessions to help recipients improve how they report on their impact; recruiting diverse grant panels to ensure fair and informed funding decisions; and providing personalised and supportive feedback to unsuccessful applicants.
- **Financial and governance due diligence** – ensuring donations are securely processed and grant payments made promptly; checks on safeguarding, trustees/directors and bank accounts; policies to enable donors to give to non-charities in a compliant way, which also avoids unnecessary pressure and paperwork for recipients.

By supporting these functions, Jane's contribution continues to strengthen the entire grant-making ecosystem, making philanthropy more effective across Oxfordshire.

It has been a huge privilege for OCF to host this fund on behalf of Jane Wates and her family. In 2025 OCF celebrated its 30th birthday, and acknowledged the significant role Jane has played throughout our history.



Inspired by Jane's contribution?

We can help you achieve your philanthropic ambitions in Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is a registered charity that builds thriving communities through effective philanthropy.

Our county's wealth and beauty hide some serious social problems, with people from the most deprived areas dying 12 years earlier than those in affluent ones, and one in nine Oxfordshire children living in poverty. The pandemic and increases in the cost of living have made these issues worse, while the impacts of the climate crisis are becoming ever more visible.

Local donors choose to work with OCF because we bring an in-depth understanding of these needs and priority issues, alongside trusted relationships with our network of grassroots delivery charities and community groups. We champion this vibrant local charity sector as a crucial way to combat issues such as homelessness, food and fuel poverty, poor health, unemployment and lack of opportunity, awarding around £2 million in grants annually.

We work with philanthropists, businesses and the public sector, pooling their funds so that they can make a bigger difference together. Funders can feel confident of a safe pair of hands for their contributions, as we implement strong governance processes; conduct thorough due diligence on all grant applications; and report back with inspiring stories on the impact of their support.

If you'd like to find out more, contact our Deputy CEO Kate Parrinder for an informal chat.



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