OXFORDSHIRE UNCOVERED

THIRD EDITION

Why effective philanthropy is needed to build thriving communities in our county

Sponsored by The Scott Fund



"A powerful call to action to ensure Oxfordshire's success benefits all who call it home."

Professor Irene Tracey, CBE, FRS, FMedSci, Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford

Oxfordshire Community Foundation

About Oxfordshire Community Foundation

Oxfordshire Community Foundation is a charity that builds thriving communities through effective philanthropy.

For over 30 years Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) has worked to improve lives and tackle inequality by investing in Oxfordshire's dynamic charitable sector. We direct millions in philanthropic funding to local charities every year through grant-making.

Our role is to connect generous donors with grassroots organisations who are making a tangible difference in their communities – often under the radar and against the odds.

We work with philanthropists, businesses and the public sector, pooling their funds so that they can make a bigger difference together. Local donors choose to work with OCF because we bring an in-depth understanding of the needs and priority issues, alongside trusted relationships with our network of delivery charities and community groups.

By championing grassroots organisations across Oxfordshire, we've helped hundreds of thousands of people overcome hardship, find hope and build brighter futures.

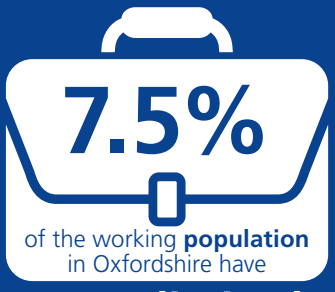
Introduction

Every person in Oxfordshire deserves to live a fulfilling life, filled with hope and ambition for the future. Sadly, this is not the case for all residents.

Our latest edition of Oxfordshire Uncovered reveals the daily challenges currently faced by many people, and the key role played by Oxfordshire's grassroots charitable organisations in supporting people to thrive. Community foundations throughout the UK have long been trusted to understand these needs and harness the power of philanthropy in meeting them.

Since we first published Oxfordshire Uncovered a decade ago, a transformation has swept across Oxfordshire, with the county attracting multi-million-pound investments from the private and public sector. Our area is set to witness game-changing growth and development, from cutting-edge science and technology innovation to vastly enlarged energy and transport infrastructure. Oxfordshire Community Foundation is committed to building thriving communities in a time of change, ensuring that no-one in Oxfordshire is left behind.









A tale of two counties

Oxfordshire is known for its wealth and beauty. Yet behind the headlines, parts of our county still face real disadvantage.

The prosperity of the county is visible in beautiful houses across the Cotswolds, designer retail spaces like Bicester Village, and the pioneering research hubs of Culham and Harwell. There is an abundance of stunning countryside, and it is rich in arts and cultural heritage.

However, for many people living in Oxfordshire, this is not the county that they experience. Life chances vary substantially across the county and even within neighbouring postcodes: while the University of Oxford tops global league tables, there are children living on the outskirts of the city who are not even attaining the English national average for education. This directly impacts their opportunities to grow up to lead fulfilling and happy lives. Poverty and deprivation affect people's health, wellbeing, education and aspiration. Life can be a daily struggle for many people to keep themselves and their family safe, warm and nourished.



Areas of particular hardship

Across Oxfordshire, many communities do not benefit equally from the county's prosperity. These areas reflect the reality that economic growth has not reached everyone.

In some neighbourhoods, longstanding inequalities have left residents feeling disconnected from opportunity and community. As Oxfordshire land becomes ever more valuable, the cost of everything goes up. For our residents, the impacts range from financial insecurity as they struggle to pay rent, or social isolation as even an hour of warmth and company over a cup of tea in a café becomes an unaffordable luxury.

In Greater Leys, on the fringes of Oxford, two communities have been classified as being in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in England. In addition, a further 23 communities – stretching from Banbury to Abingdon – rank within the 30% most deprived. Yet, what makes this hardship even more striking is that these pockets of deep deprivation sit side by side with neighbourhoods of relative comfort and privilege.

Top 25 most deprived neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire

Each neighbourhood typically contains a resident population of 1,000 to 3,000 people.



Banbury Grimsbury
Crime rates in 2025–26 were 27% higher than across Oxfordshire.

Greater Leys
23% of people leave education with no qualifications. This is 70% higher than the Oxfordshire average.

Blackbird Leys
Life expectancy for men in the Blackbird Leys area of Oxford is 13 years less than those living in the Summertown area of Oxford.

Abingdon South
Adults aged 16 and over are over 2.5 times more likely to be economically inactive through long-term sick or disability than the Oxfordshire average.

Rural inequalities

While Oxfordshire's urban centres drive economic prosperity, smaller towns and villages face additional challenges linked to higher living costs, limited access to services and hidden forms of deprivation.

36%

of people in **Oxfordshire** live in **rural or semi-rural areas**

1/3

of **neighbourhoods** in Oxfordshire are more than **30 minutes from essential services**

In rural Oxfordshire, additional challenges can have a major impact on daily life. **Limited transport and fewer social and support networks** can leave residents isolated from healthcare, employment and education. While countryside living offers many benefits, it can be particularly difficult for vulnerable people experiencing illness or loneliness. Many rely on voluntary transport schemes to attend hospital appointments and volunteer-led groups to support their wellbeing.

The **cost of everyday life is often higher** in rural areas. Longer journeys to work, shops and services increase travel costs, while dependence on off-grid heating can make households more vulnerable to rising energy prices. Together, these factors can make financial insecurity harder to manage.

Affordable housing is also a significant challenge. High property prices, driven by demand for rural living, often sit alongside lower local wages, widening the gap between those who can afford to live locally and those who cannot.

Deprivation in rural communities is often **dispersed and less visible**, making need harder to identify and address. Residents can feel overlooked in decisions that affect them, while local charities play a vital role in ensuring their voices are heard.

In **southern Oxfordshire**, around 60% of residents live in rural areas, with some communities facing significant disadvantage despite being surrounded by affluence.

Berinsfield, near Dorchester-on-Thames, has a child poverty rate of 21%, compared with 9% across South Oxfordshire as a whole.

FUNDED BY OCF
OCF
Donor-advised grant

STORY OF HOPE:

The Berin Centre

The Berin Centre is a community hub providing family and community services for Berinsfield and the surrounding villages.

Alongside family services, the charity provides access to learning and employment opportunities, and food services including a community larder and food bank. They also host organisations such as Citizens Advice and Riverside Counselling, helping local people access support within their own community.

Nina first contacted The Berin Centre after a car accident left her unable to work, facing significant financial hardship and without food to feed herself and her two children. Alongside emergency food support, she was helped to access benefits, manage challenges relating to her child's special educational needs and overcome social isolation through volunteering and learning opportunities. Nina has described The Berin Centre as a 'lifeline' when she most needed it.



The power of small charities

Small charities are a cornerstone of community life across Oxfordshire. In many places, they are the first point of support and often the most consistent presence for individuals and families facing hardship.

There are **3,404 registered charities** in Oxfordshire

280 community halls and buildings

70 community transportation groups

299 Community Interest Companies (CIC) registered in Oxfordshire

2,781+ other unregistered community groups and organisations

Small charities and community groups play a vital role in supporting communities, plugging gaps left by other organisations. 92% of all charities have an income under £1 million and 63% of charities have an income less than £100,000. Many are much smaller, with minimal income, run largely by volunteers.

These organisations are rooted in the places they serve, staying around for the long term with a **deep understanding of local needs**, meaning they are incredibly well placed to respond to them. By their nature they serve the most vulnerable, but their 'everyone welcome' approach results in people feeling able to join without stigma. These charities' close relationships with residents enable them to build trust, particularly among individuals who may be less likely to engage with larger or more formal services.

Research shows that smaller organisations also approach the people they serve in a holistic way, effectively **addressing multiple interconnected challenges** at once. For example, in one Oxfordshire charity a former prisoner came to a food bank, then found a stable place he could volunteer and regain respect in the community, and slowly repaired his relationships with his estranged family.



ARCh – Assisted Reading for Children in Oxfordshire


Sunrise Multicultural Project, Banbury

Another key strength of small organisations is their flexibility. With strong local knowledge and fewer layers of bureaucracy, they can **adapt quickly as needs change**. This agility has become increasingly important in recent years, as communities have faced rapid shifts in economic and social conditions. We have seen a group that was set up for environmental action become a powerful place for supporting young people's mental health, by working with school refusers after the pandemic.

While they deliver significant impact within their communities, many small charities operate with limited capacity and resources. They may lack the time, infrastructure or specialist expertise needed to raise funds beyond their immediate networks, and are the least likely to access government funding. As a result, their contribution can be under-recognised, despite being essential to the wellbeing of local communities.

A sector under pressure

Despite their crucial social value, small charities are operating in an increasingly challenging environment, shaped by a ‘triple threat’ of rising costs, growing demand and declining income.

Just like businesses, small charities have faced higher expenses for several years, including utilities, rent and staffing, after already drawing on reserves to meet sustained need.

Due to the increased cost of living for individuals, demand for support continues to increase, with more people turning to charities for help. Local charity leaders tell us they are struggling to cope, having to turn away vulnerable people due to lack of capacity. For example, children’s suicide prevention service Nai’s House in Bicester has a waiting list of approximately 200 young people in need of help.

Increased need comes at a time when income is less certain, as the number of people donating has fallen, making fundraising more difficult and unpredictable. Grant funders are seeing more international and national competition for funds, given decreasing government funding and global instability.

For small charities, these three factors create significant pressure as they work to meet rising need with limited resources.

The wider impact of small charities reaches far beyond helping individuals. Charities carry out preventative work that reduces demand for statutory services, increases people’s contribution to work and the economy, and enriches lives across generations. Ensuring their long-term sustainability is critical to maintaining the local, trusted support networks on which so many of us rely.



41% of charities’ expenditure **exceeded their income** in 2024

83% of charities recorded an **increase in demand** during 2025





Total UK giving has **fallen by 10%** since 2024

“Local government and the NHS look to the sector in the community. But if organisations aren’t properly funded and people don’t have capacity to carry on running these organisations, then they won’t be there.”

Laura Price CEO (2020 to 2026), Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action



Wallingford Accessible Boat Club

An answer from philanthropy

Thriving communities benefit us all. For those who care about the place they live and work, building a stronger grassroots charity sector is an imperative in building a better society.

Philanthropy helps build strong, resilient communities by supporting local organisations, encouraging civic participation and addressing needs that public funding alone cannot meet. Increasingly shaped by personal values and a desire for impact, it is becoming a more intentional expression of social responsibility rather than simply a financial contribution.

Many people do not think of themselves as philanthropists, yet philanthropy is simply the act of using your resources to make a positive difference. Regardless of scale, philanthropy plays an important role in creating lasting social impact.

"When you become wealthy and you have a lot of money, you're starting to think about giving it away on a slightly industrial scale! Even if you give away the same percentage as ordinary people, you're giving away larger sums of money so the way you're going to do it is different."

Sir David Harding, Founder and Chair of Winton Investment Management and OCF fundholder

"At RWK Goodman, making a meaningful difference in the communities we serve is central to who we are. Our partnership with Oxfordshire Community Foundation is a reflection of that purpose and is an essential part of our efforts to support positive change within our local communities."

Tracy Norris-Evans, Partner at RWK Goodman

From a corporate perspective, social responsibility and equity are now a core part of modern business, as stakeholders increasingly expect organisations to create positive social impact as well as financial value. Businesses that invest in their communities and demonstrate social responsibility are better placed to build trust, attract talent and support long-term sustainability.

Place-based philanthropy often forms part of people's wider giving portfolio alongside giving to international and national charities. Covering every postcode in the UK and with a presence internationally, community foundations are the go-to partners for any kind of place-based philanthropy, directing funding where it will make the biggest difference.



My Life My Choice

A sustainable funding model

To maximise the impact small charities can make, it is essential that funding reaches them, and that it is provided in ways that enable rather than constrain their work.

We strongly believe that how philanthropic funding is distributed to charities is as important as the funding itself. OCF is focused on implementing modern best practice as a grant-maker to small charities – and influencing other funders to do so. Our grant-making is rooted in trust-based approaches, including:

- **Flexible principles** – such as multi-year grants and funding core operating costs that allow organisations to plan ahead, adapt to changing circumstances and deliver what they see is needed on the ground
- **Supporting applicants** – going out to every town and district to meet new groups, running in-person and virtual advice sessions for open grants rounds, and offering feedback to all applicants
- **Simple and fair processes** – such as straightforward application forms and proportionate reporting, ensuring that smaller organisations with limited capacity are not excluded.

OCF champions small charities and supports them to tackle the issues identified in this report, remaining a constant presence to support and fund them over three decades and counting.



"It's incredibly refreshing to encounter your charity-friendly, trust-based approach."

Ben Drabble, CEO at Train

Oxfordshire Community Foundation's track record

Established in 1995, OCF is an expert grant-maker that is delivering millions in funding every year to improve lives across Oxfordshire.

Over 2,000
local organisations
supported
through grants

£22 million
awarded in
funding

Our trusted reputation and extensive links with local community groups enable us to deliver gold-standard grant-making programmes with maximum impact. We enable donors to take a portfolio approach by investing in multiple groups.

As well as managing funds on behalf of individuals and businesses, we are also entrusted to deliver multi-year funding programmes on behalf of statutory bodies such as local government, Public Health Oxfordshire and Thames Valley Police.

"Oxfordshire Community Foundation has been a key partner in delivering efficient, effective and independent rounds of community funding. Their evidence-based approach and broad reach into the community sector have helped us deliver support across Oxfordshire's communities in a way that is transparent as well as fast."

Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Oxfordshire County Council

In 2025, award-winning construction company, Beard Construction committed a seven-figure sum to OCF through its donor-advised fund with us, donating a substantial share of its profits to support communities and young people across Oxfordshire, and creating a long term and sustainable source of grant funding.


Maymessy, Wantage

"As a company, at Beard, we've always been committed to strengthening the communities in which we live and work, beyond the site boundaries. Through our partnership with Oxfordshire Community Foundation, we can channel our team's passion for positive change into meaningful support for local causes."

Mark Beard, Chairman, Beard Construction

Over the past three years, OCF has awarded £1 million in grants through the Thriving in Nature Fund, helping more people prosper by engaging with green spaces and the rural environment. This impact has been made possible by pooling donations from individuals, charitable trusts and businesses into a single collective fund. Powered by OCF's local knowledge and robust grant-making expertise, donors are able to achieve greater impact together than they might alone.



Leys CDI (Community Development Initiative), Blackbird Leys, Oxford

How you can take action

Every day we are supporting grassroots charities in Oxfordshire to make small and meaningful changes for local people. Can you join us to help make a bigger difference?

On the pages that follow, we will take a deeper dive into four thematic areas that we have identified as affecting Oxfordshire, in particular:

- **Unaffordable essentials**, such as housing, food, and warm or cool spaces
- **Poor health**, including disability, obesity, mental health and pollution
- **Isolation and division**, including loneliness, crime, social polarisation and fear
- **Lack of opportunity**, such as educational inequality, unemployment and lack of cultural access.

Fortunately, for every one of these issues, OCF has a concrete way that you can take action, and a mechanism that will connect you to the most effective small charities working every day to tackle them. OCF's Development Team provides a bespoke and personalised service to philanthropic people and organisations, and is always keen to meet new contacts interested in joining our giving community.

Here's what you can do to help.

If you would like to find out more about how you or your organisation could take action, please visit **www.oxfordshire.org/giving**, or contact our Development Team at **ocf@oxfordshire org**.

Personal giving

Tailor your local philanthropy to your personal interests or those of your family

- Set up a donor-advised fund
- Leave a legacy in your will
- Become a Patron or Friend
- Transfer shares or property

Collective giving

Give with others who share your philanthropic interests

- Donate to our Living Essentials Fund
- Join our Thriving in Nature Fund
- Contribute to the Step Change Fund
- Seed our Cultural Opportunities Fund

Corporate giving

Support your organisation's CSR objectives or local grant-making strategy

- Set up a community benefit fund
- Consider our grant-making services

Unaffordable essentials

Too many of Oxfordshire's residents are facing a daily struggle to provide the basics for living a stable and safe life, which can lead to a spiral of instability, debt, and other problems throughout life.

Behind the county's overall prosperity are individuals and families struggling to afford a safe home, keep their homes warm, put food on the table and manage mounting debts. The constant pressure of making impossible choices between housing, heating and everyday necessities can take a profound toll on people's wellbeing, affecting not only their finances but also their physical and mental health.

Unaffordability is worst in the city of Oxford, which has been classified as the most expensive city to live in the UK. The average house price is 12½ times higher than the average yearly wage, meaning that, despite Oxford having the tenth highest average weekly wages in the country, many families are unable to own their own home, forcing people to turn to unaffordable rental properties or even be made homeless.

Oxford residents spend on average **HALF** of their **income on rent**

21,000 children in Oxfordshire are living **in poverty**

17% of secondary school children in Oxfordshire are entitled to **free school meals**

Across the county hundreds of children are trapped in unsuitable temporary accommodation, living without a secure place to call home. This lack of stability can have life-changing effects and is often the root cause of poor educational outcomes, ill health and the risk of exploitation.

Homelessness is rising in Oxfordshire, with a 69% increase in households estimated to be homeless. Research suggests there may be more than twice as many women sleeping rough in Oxfordshire than official counts indicate, with many avoiding visible rough sleeping to protect themselves from violence or abuse.

STORY OF HOPE:

The Porch

FUNDED BY OCF • OCF • Living Essentials grant

This charity provides day-long support for homeless and vulnerably housed people in Oxford.

Members receive help on housing, employment and health, alongside opportunities to develop catering and food preparation skills at The Porch Community Café, and horticulture skills at its allotments through the Moving Forwards Programme.

One member, Simon, came to The Porch with no formal ID and was suffering from alcoholism and suicidal thoughts. With the charity's help, he secured accommodation and alcohol rehabilitation support. Simon is now off the streets and has secured an apprenticeship at a local hospital.



Up to
14%
of Oxfordshire's **residents** experience
food insecurity

The high cost of housing can leave households with little income for food and energy, while unexpected expenses or rising bills can quickly lead to debt. Food prices are on track to be around 50% higher by November 2026 compared to levels at the start of the cost-of-living crisis in 2021, with global wars and weather changes pushing up the cost of the weekly shop. This leads to food insecurity, meaning people go hungry, cut back on meals and worry about being able to obtain food.

Almost 1 in 10
of **households** in **Oxfordshire** in
FUEL POVERTY

STORY OF HOPE:

Carterton Community Food Bank

Carterton Community Foodbank provides much-needed food for families in the town and surrounding villages through referrals from other services.

Over the years the food bank has grown to offer several other community services from its hub, including a community fridge, day centre for seniors, lunch club and a warm space, which provides social connection and support. It also hosts drop-in sessions from various agencies and supports the many veterans who live in the town.



An **estimated**
18%
of people in Oxford
need debt advice

Many of the people we support are already on the edge of crisis. By meeting their immediate, practical needs, our staff help prevent further decline into poverty, homelessness, or long-term dependence on statutory support."

Tamsin Gaskell, Apollos Clothing UK

STORY OF HOPE:

Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Support Scheme

FUNDED BY OCF
OCF
Community Capacity grants

This charity provides free, independent and confidential advice to residents in the Blackbird Leys area of Oxford, where deprivation is at a significant level.

Their team of advisors help people maximise their income, find solutions to unmanageable debts and maintain their tenancies. It also provides crisis support, including food and fuel vouchers, food bank referrals and charity applications for essential household items.

One beneficiary, Adaoma, and her family were uprooted from their home when escaping domestic violence. They had fallen into rent arrears and were at risk of homelessness. Adaoma, who was caring for her disabled child and sick father, had not realised her family was entitled to disability and carer's benefits. With the charity's support, the household income increased by £13,000 per year, and back-payments helped resolve their debts.

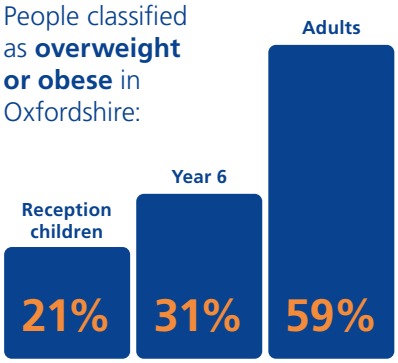


Poor health

Poor mental and physical health has a disproportionate impact on many of Oxfordshire's residents. It affects people's ability to work, be independent and live a long and fruitful life.

Good health is fundamental to living a fulfilling life, yet not everyone in Oxfordshire has the same opportunity to enjoy it. People in the most disadvantaged communities are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health and live with long-term conditions. These inequalities can affect every aspect of life.

People classified as **overweight or obese** in Oxfordshire:



Poor physical health can limit independence and quality of life, as well as placing pressure on health and social care services. Preventable health issues are often influenced by wider circumstances, including access to healthy food, and access to safe green spaces and opportunities to be physically active.

15% of **people** in Oxfordshire



are living with a **disability** that impacts their **day-to-day activities**

Research suggests that access to healthcare accounts for only around 20% of differences in health outcomes, while wider social determinants – including income, education, employment, housing, community connections and environmental conditions – play a much larger role. For many people, poor health is both a cause and consequence of disadvantage, creating a cycle that needs support to break.

64%



of children in Oxfordshire are not **physically active**

STORY OF HOPE:

EnrychAbility

This charity supports adults with disabilities to enjoy life choices and have the same opportunities as everyone else.

EnrychAbility volunteers work with members to improve health, wellbeing and social isolation through personalised support plans.



C has been disabled from birth. His world was very small and he suffered from low self-esteem, but with the support and encouragement of a volunteer, he felt able to join an online seated exercise class. His confidence improved so much that he started to attend monthly pub lunches. He started joining in conversations, making friends and smiling!

Mental health is an equally important part of the picture. For children and young people, mental health challenges can have lasting consequences that extend into adulthood. For adults, poor mental health can contribute to financial insecurity and social exclusion, while increasing the demand on healthcare and community support services.

Around **23%**

of young adults aged 17 to 19 have a **mental health disorder**



STORY OF HOPE:

Pennyhooks Farm

This charity provides meaningful work-based opportunities for autistic adults on a small organic beef farm in Oxfordshire.

Many of their young people have little or no spoken language, and the farm provides them with an environment that helps them to make sense of life's patterns and routines, and reduces anxieties brought on by sensory overload. Students take on real responsibility within a working farm environment and are trained, trusted and given responsibility in areas such as animal care, conservation and woodwork.

13% of **adults** in Oxfordshire are diagnosed with **depression**

Ageing in Oxfordshire is not an equal experience. As people live longer, more residents are managing multiple and complex health conditions, often relying on support from family members and friends. Unpaid carers tend to experience significant impacts on their own physical, emotional and financial wellbeing.

Climate change is also emerging as an important health inequality issue.

8% of **people** in Oxfordshire provide **unpaid** care

Extreme temperatures can have serious consequences for health, particularly for older people, young children and those with existing health conditions. These risks are often greatest in communities already experiencing disadvantage. In Oxford, for example, Barton, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys have been identified as particularly vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat, reflecting a combination of poor-quality housing and dense urban development with limited access to green space.

The environment in which people live continues to have a significant influence on health outcomes. As environmental and climate challenges become more pronounced, addressing these wider causes of ill health will be increasingly important in ensuring that everyone in Oxfordshire has the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

STORY OF HOPE:

Dementia Active

Dementia Active provides social activity groups for people with dementia, helping them to stay connected, capable and at home in a world they know.

The charity has recently established a second centre in Chipping Norton, responding to increasing referrals from West Oxfordshire. The centre provides activities designed to encourage cognitive and physical responses and create pockets of pleasurable experiences.

Small groups create a sense of familiarity and enable friendships to build. The centre also provides respite time for carers, supporting them in their caring role and helping to delay the point at which residential care becomes the only alternative.

65 excess deaths across Oxfordshire **during heatwaves** in 2022



Isolation and division

Despite living alongside one another, many people across Oxfordshire lack strong connections to their neighbours and communities. Growing divisions can leave individuals feeling disconnected from the support networks that help communities thrive.

Strong communities are built on connection, trust and a sense of belonging. But for many people in Oxfordshire, these foundations are becoming increasingly fragile. Factors such as the county's rural geography, an ageing population, changes in working patterns and increasing reliance on digital communication can make it harder for people to maintain meaningful social connections.

There is substantial evidence that a lack of social connections significantly increases the risk of premature mortality with increased risk of stroke, heart disease, diabetes and cognitive decline.

Around 10,000

people **aged 65 and over** in Oxfordshire are **often lonely**

27% of households **in Oxfordshire** are lived in by a **sole occupant**

In some parts of Oxfordshire, communities are becoming increasingly fragmented. Social, cultural and ideological differences can create barriers between people, limiting opportunities for meaningful interaction and understanding.

9% of residents' main language in Oxfordshire **is not English**

Over **400** people

seeking asylum

are held in **temporary accommodation** in Oxfordshire

This can lead to mistrust and isolation, preventing some residents from accessing the networks that help communities to celebrate difference and thrive. These divisions can be particularly challenging in Oxfordshire, where areas of significant affluence sit alongside communities experiencing disadvantage, and where residents have a wide range of cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.



STORY OF HOPE:

Cholsey Day Centre

FUNDED BY OCF · OCF · Living Essentials grant

The day centre creates a warm and safe environment for individuals to visit for social stimulation, a home cooked lunch and fun and games.

As well as hosting sessions at the day centre, the charity also employs an outreach worker to visit older people living alone to ensure that people's needs are identified and addressed.

One member, Janet, whose cognitive capacity, sight and hearing had deteriorated, was struggling to live independently. The day centre helped organise finances, arrange transport to hospital appointments and ensure access to support services. Staff also helped make sure laundry, cleaning and meals were taken care of, enabling Janet to continue living independently.

STORY OF HOPE:

Dialogue Society



Dialogue Society Oxford promotes interfaith understanding and intercultural dialogue across Oxfordshire.

The charity runs educational programmes and community activities that promote discussion, social cohesion and inclusion. Its work includes outreach to local schools, weekly cooking classes and community gatherings that bring people together from different backgrounds.

One participant, a single mother of two from Abingdon, had been experiencing isolation and limited social support. Through the charity's community gatherings, she was able to access a supportive space where she met other residents and built friendships. As a result she feels less isolated, more confident and more connected to her local community.

"At Asylum Welcome we saw moments of extraordinary community strength. When anti-migrant threats reached Oxford in August 2024, hundreds of people turned out to show solidarity, surrounding our offices and local hotel with warmth, welcome, and defiance."

Asylum Welcome annual review 2024-25

The number of recorded hate crimes in Oxfordshire has risen over the last seven years, suggesting that divisions and intolerance continue to affect some communities. Whilst Oxford has the highest number of hate crimes, reflecting its larger population, rates in Cherwell and Vale of White Horse are disproportionately high. The majority of incidents are motivated by race, demonstrating how hard it is for some residents to feel safe and included within their communities.

56%
of hate crime
in Oxfordshire was
classified as racist



Creating cohesive communities with a strong sense of belonging ensures that people feel valued and able to contribute, which in turn strengthens resilience at a neighbourhood level. Communities where people know their neighbours, participate in local activities and feel part of something larger than themselves are often better equipped to respond to challenges.

STORY OF HOPE:

Didcot Baby Monday

Didcot Baby Monday supports expectant and new parents to build connections and access support during pregnancy and early parenthood.

They offer open access support through antenatal and postnatal groups, workshops and activities. As well as providing opportunities to connect and share experiences, the charity helps parents navigate the transition to parenthood through evidence-based information and non-judgmental support.

One parent said: "Didcot Baby Monday was a lifeline during those early months when I was struggling with postnatal depression and a baby who couldn't feed properly."



Lack of opportunity

For those born into deprivation, there are fewer opportunities to fulfil personal potential. Low educational attainment, unemployment and lack of cultural opportunities can have a stifling effect throughout life.

While many people in Oxfordshire benefit from the county's strong economy, world-leading educational institutions and thriving cultural sector, these opportunities are not shared equally. For those experiencing deprivation, barriers to aspiration and opportunity can emerge from an early age and persist throughout life, making it harder to thrive.

The foundations for opportunity are laid early in life. Educational inequalities can be seen before children even begin school and often widen as they progress through the education system. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to achieve expected educational outcomes in their early years, and continue to face attainment gaps at every milestone in their education.

These differences can have long-lasting consequences, influencing future employment prospects and wellbeing.

60%

of **disadvantaged children** in Oxfordshire **age 11**

do not reach **expected educational standards**

For some young people, additional responsibilities such as caring for family members can further affect their prospects.

The average young carer **is absent from school for 60%** more days than their peers

Some young people leave education without the skills, qualifications or connections needed to enter the labour market successfully. The number of young people not in education, employment or training in the county has risen in recent years, even compared to the worrying national picture, raising concerns about the long-term impact on them and the economy.

8%

of 16- and 17-year-olds are not in **education, employment** or **training** in Oxfordshire

(England average: 5.6%)

STORY OF HOPE:

Peeple

Peeple works to improve the lifelong opportunities of babies and young children by working with families to support children's home learning environments.

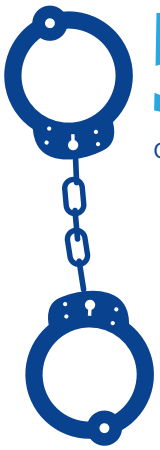
Through its Peep Learning Together Programme, practioners have worked with families in the Leys, Rose Hill and Littlemore areas of Oxford to make the most of day-to-day learning opportunities through listening, talking, playing, singing and sharing books and stories – helping to narrow the attainment gap, which begins before children even reach school.

One parent said: "My son loves books, he has one with him all day everyday, in and out the house. No screen time for the past four weeks. Books are best thanks to Peep."

FUNDED BY OCF • OCF • Donor-advised grant



Certain groups face additional barriers to opportunity. Adults with disabilities often encounter challenges in accessing training and employment, despite having valuable talents and aspirations. Similarly, children in care and care leavers continue to experience some of the most unequal outcomes in society. They are more likely to experience challenges relating to health, employment, housing and financial stability as they move into adulthood. Without targeted support, these disadvantages can persist throughout their lives.



52%

of **care-experienced children** in England

have a **criminal conviction** by age 24, compared to 13% of children who have not been in care

Access to opportunity also extends beyond education and employment. Cultural activities, creativity, sport and enrichment opportunities play an important role in building confidence and skills, opening doors to employment and helping individuals reach their potential. However, financial barriers and lack of access mean that people from less privileged backgrounds are often less able to participate and reap these lifelong benefits.

Only **9%** of adults with **learning disabilities** in Oxfordshire are in **paid employment**



STORY OF HOPE:

Yellow Submarine

FUNDED BY OCF Step Change grants



Yellow Submarine supports young people and adults with learning disabilities and autism through programmes that build independence and employment skills.

An OCF Step Change grant helped Yellow Submarine open a new Life Changing Bakes space in Witney, enabling the charity to support more trainees to gain practical work experience and meet growing demand for its baked goods, which are sold online and stocked by local outlets.

Trainees gain experience in all aspects of bakery production, from weighing ingredients to packing orders, and benefit from a setting better suited to those who do not thrive in customer-facing roles.

STORY OF HOPE:

People's Theatre Collective

FUNDED BY OCF Donor-advised grant



People's Theatre Collective provides inclusive creative opportunities for young people through theatre and the arts.

The charity works with a wide range of young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disabilities, neurodiverse people, and refugees, creating spaces where young people can express themselves and explore the issues that matter to them.

One participant, J, joined the charity after struggling to make friends. Through a range of projects and online mentoring, he found his unique voice as a writer. Reflecting on his journey, J said: "I definitely left my comfort zone on this project. I always regret it when I don't try something now, which is not how I was a few years back."



Hill End Centre, Farmoor

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A full list of references is available at www.oxfordshire.org/uncovered/references

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