Oxfordshire Community Foundation

Living Essentials Fund

Winter 2026 update



Introduction

Oxfordshire Community Foundation's (OCF) Living Essentials Fund supports grassroots charitable organisations helping people across Oxfordshire access the essentials needed to live a stable and safe life.

Each year, OCF makes grants of up to £10k to a cohort of small, local charitable organisations that are helping people with issues such as **homelessness**, **food insecurity** and **warmth**, as well as **debt advice**.

Thanks to the generosity of fundholders, businesses, charitable trusts and individual donors, this collective fund enables grassroots organisations across Oxfordshire to respond to these challenges, and help local people in every part of the county access the support they need.

We are especially grateful to Oxfordshire County Council for their commitment to this work, providing £100k annually for the past three years from the Household Support Fund, and £150k in 2026–27.

This report shares the impact of our Living Essentials grants awarded during 2024–25 and 2025–26, highlights the ongoing need for support, and showcases the difference small local charities make to people's lives in our county when they have the funding they need.



Unaffordable essentials in Oxfordshire

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.

In October 2026, OCF published the third edition of our Oxfordshire Uncovered needs analysis report, which rounds up the latest third-party research on disadvantage in the county, and makes the case for philanthropy in Oxfordshire. The report confirmed that a lack of affordability of life's essentials continues to be a major issue for communities locally.

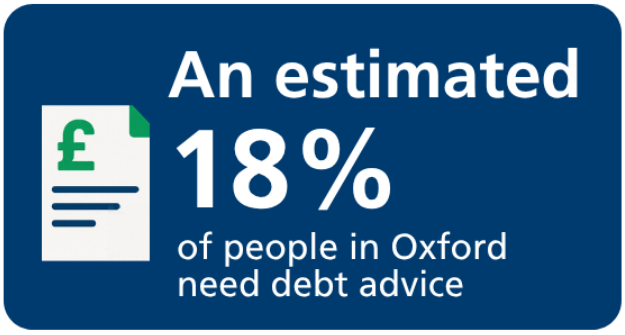
Behind the county's overall prosperity are individuals and families struggling to afford a safe home, keep their homes warm, put food on the table and manage mounting debts. The constant pressure of making impossible choices between housing, heating and everyday necessities can take a profound toll on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

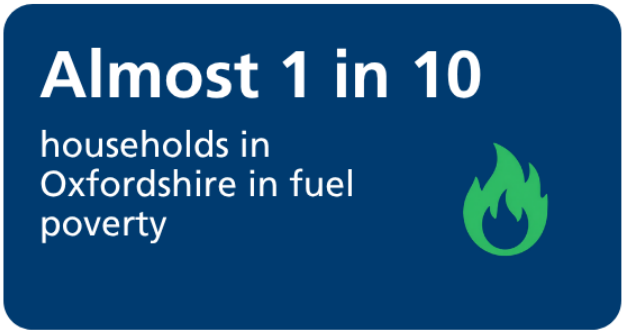
Across the county, hundreds of children are trapped in unsuitable temporary accommodation, living without a secure place to call home. This lack of stability can have life-changing effects, and is often the root cause of poor educational outcomes, ill health and the risk of exploitation.

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.









For these reasons, OCF remains deeply committed to an annual round of Living Essentials grant-making, supporting grassroots charitable organisations at the coalface of basic needs in neighbourhoods across Oxfordshire.

Grants awarded in 2025–26 – work now in progress

In January 2026, OCF distributed £250,000 to 31 grassroots charities providing life's essentials for Oxfordshire residents.

One grantee, Abingdon Foodbank, was awarded £10,000 to refurbish its facilities and make the space more practical for clients, which is now in progress. Foodbank Manager Philip said: "The aim is that people who come to us should feel more welcome and comfortable, be able to discuss their situation in a fully confidential space and receive support to overcome the obstacles they face."

Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre received £10,000 to support its work providing debt, benefits and housing advice in one of Oxford's most deprived communities. The funding has increased the number of advice they are able to offer, enabling the charity to support more people. The Centre's manager said: "Our work will have a lasting impact on their household budgets, stopping them slipping into greater need, and building financial stability."

Our 2025–26 grantees will report back to us in Spring 2027, and we will continue to keep donors updated about the impact of these grants.

Grants awarded in January 2026

Organisation funded	Amount	Type of activity funded	Local authority
Abingdon Foodbank	£10,000	Premises upgrade	White Horse Vale
Apollos Clothing	£10,000	Emergency clothing parcels	West Oxfordshire
Barton Community Association	£10,000	Additional community café opening day	Oxford City
Botley Larder	£1,700	Low-cost food club with social café	Oxford City
Cafe 103 - Orchard Baptist Church	£10,000	Community café, activities and support	Cherwell
Cutteslowe and District Community Association	£9,700	Community larder, advice drop-in and warm space	Oxford City
Didcot Baptist Church	£2,000	Emergency food support	South Oxfordshire
Henley on Thames Churches Debt Centre	£10,000	Debt counselling and Life Skills courses	South Oxfordshire
Home-Start Banbury, Bicester & Chipping Norton	£9,950	Volunteer home-visiting and parent support	Cherwell
Home-Start Oxford	£10,000	Parent and child group provision	Oxford City
Life Centre (Wychwood)	£9,600	Community larder, warm space and meals	West Oxfordshire
Open Door	£3,850	Refugee and asylum seeker drop-in	Oxford City
Oxford Churches Debt Centre	£8,000	Home-based debt advice	Oxford City
Oxford Community Action	£10,000	Foodbank and community activities	Oxford City

Organisation funded	Amount	Type of activity funded	Local authority
Oxford Winter Night Shelter (The Living Room)	£5,000	Winter shelter and day centre support	Oxford City
Parish of Cowley St John	£10,000	Warm space sessions and food	Oxford City
Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre	£10,000	Debt, benefits and housing advice	Oxford City
Rose Hill Junior Youth Club	£7,350	Food education and wellbeing clubs	Oxford City
Sunrise Multicultural Project	£10,000	Family advice, activities and food	Cherwell
Sustainable Didcot	£9,250	Energy-saving and resilience activities	South Oxfordshire
SYRCOX	£10,000	Food parcels, healthy-eating and energy workshops	Oxford City
The Branch Trust	£2,000	Practical support, food and advice	West Oxfordshire
The Porch	£9,200	Day centre for homeless adults	Oxford City
Thrive OX7	£1,500	Food and essentials distribution	West Oxfordshire
TRAIN	£9,200	Youth mentoring sessions	South Oxfordshire
Transition Lighthouse Empowerment Space CIC	£10,000	Community sessions and essentials provision	White Horse Vale
Vale Community Impact	£9,000	Energy and debt advice	White Horse Vale
Waste2Taste	£9,800	Free nutritious meals and activities	White Horse Vale
Wigod Way Wallingford Family Centre	£6,550	Family support and food parcel distribution	South Oxfordshire
Witney & West Oxfordshire Foodbank	£10,000	Foodbank-linked debt and benefits advice	West Oxfordshire
Witney Baby Bank	£5,600	Emergency baby equipment	West Oxfordshire
TOTAL	**£249,250**		


Abingdon Food Bank


Cutteslowe Community Association


Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre

Grants awarded in 2024–25 – reports on impact

In January 2025, OCF distributed £270,000 to a total of 33 charitable organisations, which we can now report back on.

One year after their grant, we ask funded organisations to share the outcomes of their work during the period funded. Across Oxfordshire, Living Essentials grants helped charities provide food, warm spaces, advice, transport, family support and community activities. Together, funded organisations reduced hardship, improved financial stability, tackled isolation and ensured thousands of residents could access essential support with dignity.

Below is a selection of stories of impact from OCF's 2024–25 grantees. The full list of grantees for this financial year can be found on our website.

Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Support Scheme

The charity provides welfare benefits, housing and debt advice to people experiencing financial hardship. Living Essentials funding helped the organisation continue delivering advice and advocacy services for residents facing complex financial challenges.



During the year, the service secured more than £2.3 million in welfare benefit gains, and helped prevent homelessness for 36 households.

One family supported by the service was Amna, her husband and their four children. Their youngest child has a disability and the family were struggling with low income, the cost of living and unsuitable accommodation. The advice centre helped Amna access additional benefits and support, increasing the family's income by over £27,000 in the course of one year, while also helping address housing issues.

The Berin Centre

Based in Berinsfield, the charity supports local residents experiencing food and fuel poverty, financial instability and isolation. A Living Essentials grant helped fund the salaries of the charity's Community Outreach Worker and Family Services Manager, as well as the launch of their community café, The Burrow. The café provides affordable food and drink, a warm space, access to WiFi and charging points, and a route into wider support.

During the funded period, the charity provided more than 300 appointments to 64 individuals, with five people receiving support during a crisis linked to food, fuel or housing insecurity.

Arthur, aged 89, visits the café twice a week. He enjoys the company, the hot meal and somewhere warm to spend time with others. Through conversations with café staff, he was connected to additional support when he became worried about how he would travel to a hospital appointment. The charity later hosted his 90th birthday celebration in the café with three generations of his family.



Arthur says: "It's something that's been needed for a long time. I live on my own, so it saves the electric. It's a *great* thing!"

The Porch



Based in Oxford, The Porch supports homeless and vulnerably housed people with food, showers and longer-term help. OCF funding helped support the charity's weekend Winter Welfare provision, and the Moving Forwards Programme, which helps members build resilience, and provides food and a warm space at The Porch community café.

During the year, the charity supported 637 individuals, more than at any other time in its history. They also provided 19,922 meals and 1,902 showers, while their longer-term support helped 56 members improve their accommodation situation.

Emma was supported by The Porch after fleeing domestic abuse and becoming homeless. She was experiencing anxiety and poor physical health, and found it difficult to stay in work. Through the Moving Forwards Programme, Emma helped run the Community Café, with the reassurance that it was ok to step away when she needed to. The Porch reported that her confidence and self-esteem increased dramatically, and within three months, she had moved into full-time work at a local café.

TRAIN – Inspiring Young People



TRAIN provides open-access youth clubs and street-based outreach work to young people in Didcot and Wallingford. Living Essentials funding supported this work, as well as the introduction of 'Living Essentials cupboards', and helped young people access money management support.

Of those surveyed, 86% (92 respondents) said TRAIN had helped them feel better about their future, and 92% (65 respondents) said it had helped them make positive choices.

Sam first met TRAIN's youth workers at a local skate park, where they regularly brought food and drinks for a group of young people. As trust grew, they learned Sam was facing pressure to shoplift, difficulties at school and responsibilities as a young carer. Taking part in *The Code*, an open-air theatre production in Didcot, helped Sam feel seen positively by his community. TRAIN then connected him with young carers support and one-to-one mentoring. The charity reported that Sam is now doing well at school, and is more confident and less isolated.

Three Parishes Community Fridge



The Living Essentials Fund helped Three Parishes Community Fridge to provide free food and household essentials to local people facing hardship. Alongside reducing food waste, the project ensured families could access fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy products and frozen food at a time when many were struggling with rising living costs.

During the year funded, the fridge reached 15% more beneficiaries than the previous year.

One local family said that support from the Community Fridge had been "genuinely life changing", helping them provide food and household essentials for their children during an exceptionally challenging time. Another family of six explained that the money saved on groceries each week means their children can now take part in activities such as Rainbows and swimming lessons, opportunities that would otherwise be beyond their budget. Through practical support delivered with dignity, the project helped local families not only meet essential needs, but also create opportunities for their children to thrive longer term.

How you can help communities with the essentials this winter

The Living Essentials Fund will make another round of grants in January 2027 to grassroots charitable organisations that enable access to housing support, debt advice, warm spaces and, perhaps most importantly, human connection.

Thanks to generous funding from Oxfordshire County Council, as well as several local trusts and donor-advised funds, we have secured £230k for this year's grants. We are now seeking at least a further £20k to reach our £250k target.

With 70 applications now received with a total amount requested of £880k, every donation we secure before January 2027 will help us meet even more of the demand, enabling more local charities to support people facing hardship across Oxfordshire.

We know that our donors have the compassion and kindness to help us reach or exceed our target. If you are in a position to do so, we urge you to spread a little hope and care, and give what you can to the Living Essentials Fund today.

If you would like to find out more about the fund or discuss how your support could make a difference, please contact OCF Deputy CEO Kate Parrinder.

Alternatively, you can make a donation of up to £500 on our online giving page.

GIVE ONLINE NOW

