

Putting Carers First

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Carer Communities

In celebration of Carers Week 2026:
Building Carer Friendly Communities

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About Us:

Carers First works directly with and for carers, providing personalised information and tailored support in the way that suits you, helping you find balance, and to live your life to the fullest.

We're here for carers across Medway, Lincolnshire, Essex, Southend-on-Sea, and the London Boroughs of Haringey, Waltham Forest, Croydon and Merton.



Kelly Rust
Chief Executive,
Carers First

Welcome to the latest edition of **Putting Carers First.**

As I write this, I've just completed my first three months as CEO of Carers First. It's been a busy and enjoyable few months, spending time with carers, volunteers, colleagues and partners across our communities, listening and learning about the experiences of carers and the difference that support can make.

One thing that has really stood out to me is the importance of connection. Caring can sometimes feel isolating, which is why this year's Carers Week theme, Building Carer Friendly Communities, has felt so important.

Looking ahead, one of my priorities is developing our new organisational strategy, and I want carers to be at the heart of shaping what comes next. The experiences you've shared with me over the past few months have reinforced how important it is that our future plans reflect what matters most to carers and the communities we support.

Over the coming months, we'll be creating opportunities for carers to share their views, ideas and experiences. Whether you've been connected with Carers First for many years or have only recently found us, I'd encourage you to get involved.

Your feedback will help us continue to develop services and support that meet the changing needs of carers now and in the future.

If you would like to be involved more directly, please contact us at commsandinvolve@carersfirst.org.uk.

In this edition, you'll meet Nicky on pages 4–5, who shares how she found a strong support network while caring for her daughter, who has a rare neurodevelopmental disease. On pages 10–11, Sophie shares her experience as a young adult carer and the support that has helped navigate life.

You'll also find a look back at Carers Week celebrations and stories celebrating the incredible difference carers, volunteers and supporters make every day.

Thank you for being part of the Carers First community. I hope you enjoy reading this edition.

With all best wishes,
Kelly



Nicky's Story: Building a carer friendly community



Caring for a child with a rare neurodevelopmental disease can come with many challenges, ones that parents would never expect when faced with such a diagnosis. Nicky cares for her 14-year-old daughter, Carly, who was diagnosed with WARS2 just last year. Her immense strength comes from years of advocating for her daughter, and for herself as a parent carer. Now, a member of the Carers First team, Nicky offers her guidance and support to other parent carers, helping them to feel part of a community who understand.

For many parent carers, having a strong support network can make all the difference, even if it just lets you know that you are not alone. Finding out about Carers First around 10 years ago gave Nicky a chance to feel seen and heard, not just by professionals who understood and cared, but also by other parent carers who knew firsthand what she was experiencing.



“It made me stronger – I feel that I will fight for everything I want now. The knowledge I’ve gained is amazing. I won’t just settle for any kind of care for my daughter.”

“It’s giving back – when you speak to carers (especially parent carers), I feel like I understand. A lot of the ones I speak to, I relate to them. With that the whole demeanour of that carer changes and they open up.”

She explains how she wants to reassure parent carers that it is possible to achieve their goals, and return to work if they wish to, speaking from her own experience, *“I want to try and inspire carers to get back into work. I juggle working, a house, a family. Some days it’s challenging but ultimately it’s rewarding.”*

There have been many challenging times where Nicky has felt frustrated and stressed about the lack of answers surrounding her daughter’s disease, with her questioning why their situation came to be,

“Sometimes I feel a bit like why me? I feel guilty sometimes, it’s not fair the situation we’ve been given. I try and bring myself out of it. I blamed myself after getting the diagnosis – as me and my daughter’s father carried the gene.”

She feels as though caring has only made her stronger as a person. Her determination to advocate for her daughter and herself shines through her work and in her personal life.

Carers Week



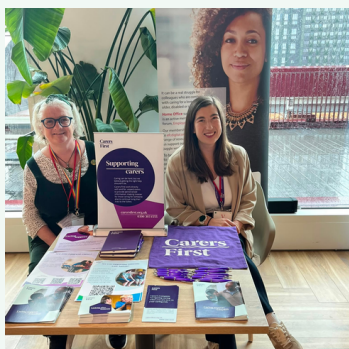
This Carers Week (**8–14 June**), Carers First celebrated this year's theme **"Building Carer Friendly Communities"** by sharing how they bring carers together for wellbeing and support.

Carers Week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring and help people who don't think of themselves as having caring responsibilities to identify as carers and access much-needed support.

The theme for 2026 highlights the impact carer friendly communities can have in making a real and lasting difference to the lives of carers everywhere.

Across the week, Carers First ran local events, dropins, support groups and online sessions to help carers connect, learn and thrive.

Our Carers Week in Photos



Our Carer Community



“Carers First have been a lifeline for me. They’re the only ones to help.”

John, who cared for his wife with Alzheimer's

Our Young Carer Community



“Through Carers First I went out of my comfort zone by going to events they offer. Some just on my own, some with family and I realised that it is such an amazing and safe place to talk about everything that life throws. Honestly, I cannot thank them enough.”
Sophie, Young Adult Carer

Sophie's Story as a Young Adult Carer



My name is Sophie, I'm currently 21, and I care for my mum, dad and little siblings. There are too many medical conditions to sit here and name them all, but the major ones are depression, diabetes and hypertension with my mum and dad both having these (only mum has diabetes, phew). My little sister is suspected to have autism; she is 8 so communication is key as well as trying to keep cool during the hard times. My other younger brother Toby also helps where he can, and he is also excited to be hopefully joining Carers First too.

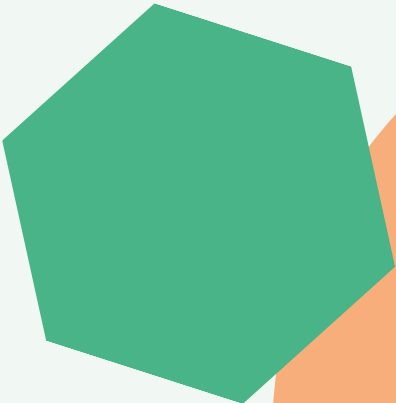
My journey with caring started at the age of 13 and at the time I didn't realise I was a young carer, I just thought I was helping out, until it got to the point of breaking and I spoke to teacher at my school who gave me loads of advice and help. So, one main point is to talk, open up as keeping it hidden can build up and eventually hurt you in the long run. Anyway, after I left school, I was given the option to join Carers First Young Adult Carers and I'm so glad I did. The support they provide is incredible.

As a carer it is really hard to go out and socialise with what I call “normal people”, but through Carers First I went out of my comfort zone by going to events they offer. Some just on my own, some with family and I realised that it is such an amazing and safe place to talk about everything that life throws. Honestly, I cannot thank them enough.

Through the last couple of years I haven't been very good within myself, with not only looking after my family's health but my own as well and being able to go out on the days out and activities has just brought me comfort in the fact I'm not alone and there are so many people out there wanting to help.

I've walked alpacas, been out for afternoon tea, played unlimited arcade games for hours, bowling and burgers, even been to a Christmas party. None of that would be possible without the support of Carers First.

If you can take anything away from this is that you're not alone, even if you think you are, just talk about it. And with the support given I've even had the confidence to get my own place. It's nothing special and I'm only a two-minute walk away from my parents so if they ever need anything I can be there within seconds.



**“You're not alone,
even if you think you
are, just talk about it.”**

Energy Costs and Support: What Carers Need to Know 2026



National Energy Action

NEA offers direct support and practical guidance to help households struggling with energy costs.

They can help with:

- Understanding available grants and schemes
- Improving energy efficiency
- Navigating issues with energy suppliers

nea.org.uk/get-help

Citizens Advice – Energy Supply Support

Citizens Advice provides detailed support on issues including:

- Finding the most affordable tariff
- Switching suppliers
- Negotiating payment plans on energy debt
- Help for those using prepayment meters
- Support for families using alternative fuels such as logs, coal, or oil

Go to citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer - Your Energy Supply

What Carers Can Do Next

Here are practical steps carers can take straight away:

- Check benefit entitlement

Since many families don't claim despite being eligible, a benefits check can make a significant difference.

- Look at energy debt options early

Both NEA and Citizens Advice can help negotiate payment plans or find financial assistance.

- Explore support for health related heating needs

If the person you care for requires a warm environment due to medical conditions, you may qualify for additional help.

- Ask for advocacy support

If dealing with suppliers feels overwhelming, both NEA And Citizens Advice can guide you or speak to suppliers on your behalf.

**[Click here for more
online help and
support](#)**

Hear From Our Carers



Kerry, a parent carer: *"The groups are really supportive and friendly. Seeing the regular people, hearing from the speakers, and going to a diverse group in ages and activities is really good for me. You find new friendships as well."* and *"talking to others in the caring role, or other mums, is really great to have. People that go through it, get it."*



John, who cared for his wife before she sadly passed away:
"Carers First have been a lifeline for me. They're the only ones to help."



Phoenix, a young carer: *"When I'm at Young Carers, I feel more relaxed. It's a nice place where I don't have to think about everything I usually worry about. It helps me escape from the struggles and worries I face, and it helps me feel a bit better."*

"I've also met other young carers. I met someone who liked some of the same things as me, had the same breed of dog as me, and liked the same band as me. I enjoy the outings too. The main one for me was roller skating, because that was really fun and I enjoyed it."

Jean, who cares for her husband: Support from Carers First has had a positive impact on Jean's wellbeing. She shares how being in the presence of other carers who understand firsthand the experiences she is going through is so helpful and that it's a great comfort knowing that Carers First is there to turn to.

Jean's advice to other carers would be not to let your caring role define you in a negative light, no matter what you have been through or are going through. Reclaim your life and be sure to prioritise yourself, in addition to the person you care for,

"I think my caring role has changed me as a person, in a positive way. I've decided I'm not going to give priority to taking care of others all my life again."

Our Summer Appeal: Good Care is Supported Care



This summer, Carers First is asking for your support to help ensure unpaid carers can access the information, advice and emotional support they need. Every donation helps us be there for carers when they need us most.

While caring can be rewarding, it can also be demanding, exhausting and, at times, isolating. That's why carers need support too.

At Carers First, we believe that good care is supported care. When carers have access to information, advice, emotional support and opportunities to connect with others, they are better equipped to continue caring while looking after their own wellbeing.

This summer, your support can help more carers access:

- Information and practical advice
- Emotional support when times are tough
- Peer support and community connections
- Wellbeing activities and opportunities to recharge
- A trusted place to turn when they need help

Together, we can help build more carer-friendly communities and ensure that no carer has to face their caring journey alone.

If you would like to support our Summer Appeal, please consider making a donation. Every contribution helps us continue providing vital support to unpaid carers.

Because good care is supported care. Thank you for your donation.

After being referred to Carers First following her son's autism diagnosis, Cynthia discovered a welcoming community of carers. Seven years on, she still attends our support groups each week, where she enjoys friendship, shared experiences and practical advice from our Carer Support Advisers.

[Click
here to
donate](#)



“It’s nice to sit down, have a cup of tea and talk. It’s very beneficial and takes away some stress. I go there for advice and always get answers. It’s good to speak to other carers and know that you are not alone.”

Volunteers' Week

As part of Carers First's celebrations for Volunteers' Week 2026, we are saying a huge thank you to the volunteers who help make a difference to carers and communities every day.

Volunteers' Week, which took place from 1–7 June, is a UK-wide campaign recognising the contribution volunteers make across the country and celebrating the positive impact volunteering has on communities.

At Carers First, around 65 active volunteers support carers in a wide variety of roles.

Kelly Rust, Chief Executive of Carers First, said:

"Volunteers are at the heart of so much of what we do. Their kindness, commitment and generosity help carers feel less isolated, more connected and better supported. During Volunteers' Week, we want to say a sincere thank you to every volunteer who gives their time to support carers and communities through Carers First."

To all our volunteers — thank you.

There are a range of flexible volunteering opportunities available across Carers First.



Get Involved



[Click here
for current
volunteer
vacancies](#)

Whether you fundraise or volunteer, you will be helping carers to thrive in their role and find much needed balance in their lives. There are lots of ways to get involved, so find one that suits you.

If you see yourself as a telephone befriender, a digital champion or an events organiser, there are endless opportunities to make a difference while gaining valuable experience.

We're always looking for kind, compassionate people to join our amazing team of volunteers. There are all kinds of roles to suit your time and skills – and you'll be fully supported along the way. Find out more at carersfirst.org.uk/get-involved or emailing [**volunteer@carersfirst.org.uk**](mailto:volunteer@carersfirst.org.uk).

Register with us

By registering with Carers First, you will get access to a range of information, advice and support – including financial, practical and wellbeing advice, one to one and group support, workshops and activities. Visit carersfirst.org.uk/register or call our helpline on 0300 303 1555

Stay in touch

We want to hear from you and your stories.

Email us at:

hello@carersfirst.org.uk

Donate

Your donations make a difference. Visit carersfirst.org.uk/donate or scan the QR code to support Carers First and help us improve the lives of unpaid carers and their families.

Follow us on social media

-  @carersfirst
-  @carers_first
-  @carersfirst
-  @carersfirst

Join our online Facebook community group, a peer to peer group where you can chat amongst yourselves rather than a platform for direct support from Carers First. Visit: facebook.com/groups/carersfirstcommunity to join.

Get in touch

carersfirst.org.uk
0300 303 1555



Scan to donate

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