



**Creative Carers: cultivating connections and confronting challenges**  
by Helen Fountain, October 2023



*The woman who became invisible by Clare Johnson*

We had been hoping for an opportunity to work with Carers Oxfordshire for some time. They are part of our Age UK Oxfordshire family and do such important and innovative work with carers across Oxfordshire that they are natural partners for our creative ageing work. We wanted to find a creative and collaborative way to amplify carers' voices and showcase their creativity, by recording their stories and setting them to a series of personalised photos. A recent small grant from Oxford City Council enabled us to make that hope a reality, and we couldn't be more pleased with the resulting films.

The initial recruitment process was a stark reminder of the reality of carer's lives. Some carers signed up only to be overwhelmed by their caring duties which resulted in them withdrawing from the project. One of the participants asked that someone else voice their words as life was so busy for them at that time.

Conversations painted a picture of exhaustion, burn out, carer ill health, tiredness, still hanging onto the lifeline of creative interests but unable to find time to reflect and talk about them. The project journey told us as much about the lack of value placed upon carers in our society as it did about the importance of creativity in carers' lives. Carers shared deeply personal insights including: "in a creative writing class it reminds you that you have your own life" and "it's helped me give myself permission to be someone important in my life again".

There is so much more that needs to be done to support carers to lead healthy and enriching lives whilst they provide unpaid care estimated to be worth £530,000,000 per day ([All-age Unpaid Carers Strategy for Oxfordshire 2023-26](#)). We hope the Creative Carers project offers an inspiring glimpse into creative caring and the rewards it can bring.

As with all our projects, the process was a collaboration and Creative Carers Anne and Eva guided the content and design of their filmic stories. You can view their films here:

[A Creative Carer's Story – Anne](#)  
[A Creative Carer's Story – Eva](#)

More information about Carers Oxfordshire can be found [here](#).

Helen is the Age Friendly Creative Manager in Age UK Oxfordshire's [Creative Team](#), where she supports the Oxfordshire Age Friendly Creative Network and leads on Lived Experience.

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