

PRESS RELEASE

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Charity infrastructure grants of up to £75k on offer from OCF's Step Change Fund

Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is seeking applications to its Step Change Fund – formerly Future-Building Fund – which is offering grants of up to £75,000 to local charities that want to build their capacity.

The Step Change Fund is unique in providing the sort of infrastructure funding that charities find difficult to come by elsewhere. Grants can be used to fund costs such as research projects, strategic planning, computer hardware, staff training or donor relationship building. OCF believes that by helping visionary charities with strong leadership to build their capacity in this way, these organisations will be empowered to do more to improve the lives of Oxfordshire's most vulnerable.

Step Change has grown out of the Future-Building Fund, which has awarded £600,000 in infrastructure grants to 18 charities since 2014, equipping them to tackle areas such as learning disability, citizens' advice, sexual violence, youth offending and dementia. Charities can apply to the fund all year round, with a bespoke panel meeting regularly, five times a year to review applications.

Donors to this fund wish to support charitable projects in Oxfordshire that can demonstrate realistic plans for increasing reach and impact, and for building longer-term resilience for the future. This is a vital step in addressing some of the most surprising and pressing social problems in the county, as identified in OCF's recent research publication *Oxfordshire Uncovered*. The report found that despite the wealth and privilege around them, some Oxfordshire residents are suffering from distressing conditions such as homelessness, child exploitation and crippling loneliness.

Crucially, in addition to funding, Step Change will provide an experienced project manager to guide charities through their infrastructure project. Some examples of projects already funded are:

- **The Agnes Smith Advice Centre** in Blackbird Leys received £48,000 to adapt their office space and train volunteers in order to scale up their service providing debt management and benefits advice to some of the most deprived communities in Oxford.
- **Be Free Young Carers** received £40,000 to transition from helping young carers in a certain age bracket and geography as South & Vale Carers Centre, to expanding specialist provision to all young carers across the county via a holistic programme of emotional, social and practical activities.
- **The Archway Foundation** received £31,600 to increase the capacity of their befriending service for people suffering from mental and physical ill health through the recruitment and training of more volunteers.

OCF's Chief Executive Jayne Woodley comments: "The Step Change Fund is an integral part of OCF's grant-making strategy. The generosity of the fund's donors, panel members and project managers means that the Community Foundation is in a position to help make the charitable sector stronger and more effective – which is absolutely vital in addressing some of the unacceptable social problems we see right now on our doorstep."

Nigel Hamway, a donor to the Step Change Fund, comments: "It is the most effective way of channelling my money to make a real difference that I have come across. After supporting 18 Oxfordshire charities since 2014, it is now clear that we are helping local organisations meet growing social needs sustainably."

Lisa Ward, Director of Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC), which received £40k of funding through two different grants to develop sexual consent training, awareness programmes, and to strengthen internal capacity, comments: "The fund has helped improve OSARCC's ability to respond and deliver in an ever-changing landscape. We have been able to pilot our youth outreach work, and this has enabled us to secure long-term funding for our consent and awareness work. The fund has also provided support for us to manage an increase in service provision of more than 30% in the last financial year, and to ensure we are able to plan to meet continued demand on our services."

The Future-Building Fund launched as a pilot programme in May 2014 and was successfully completed in April 2016. Further funding was secured and the lessons learnt from the pilot have shaped Step Change's focus and methodology.

Grants in the first instance will be between £10,000 and £50,000, with the possibility of further funding up to £25,000 for follow-on projects. Applicants must be registered charities or social enterprises in existence for at least three years, with an annual income of not less than £75,000 and not more than £400,000. In particular, applicant charities should have outstanding leadership and the capacity to grow.

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Notes for editors

About Oxfordshire Community Foundation

- Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is an independent charity that connects people who care with causes that matter. We inspire local philanthropy, and nurture community-based solutions to key social problems across Oxfordshire.
- We are one of 46 community foundations in the UK, and over 1,800 similar foundations around the world. Community foundations collaborate with private philanthropists, family trusts, businesses and the public sector to provide a permanent, flexible and growing source of local charitable funding.

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