

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

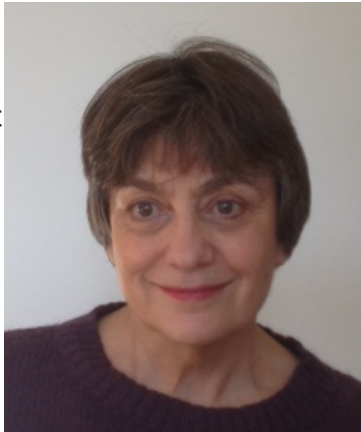
Summer 2017

Letter from the editor

Dear Unlimited Members,

Gardening is an enjoyable activity for many people but do you find it increasingly difficult as a result of your impairment? Or maybe you would like to grow some veg or flowers but don't have a garden?

In this issue we feature some gardening stories including two community garden projects which welcome disabled visitors and volunteers, and a charity dedicated to helping disabled people carry on gardening.



Are you a disabled person who has the assistance of a carer, or are you providing care for a disabled person? Carers save the economy £132 billion pounds a year - and yet receive very little support from the state. We provide some information about carers and sources of support for them.

We would like to engage members more in activities such as 'mini' access audits which can be done at any time to suit the member so with this in mind a simple access audit form is included with this newsletter. Please will you try to complete at least one form each about a venue which you would like to use but is inaccessible or has poor access features? Unlimited will collate the forms which will provide useful information at our next meeting with Oxford City and Oxfordshire County councils. Forms can be returned to Unlimited c/o Cherry Cottage, Noke, OX3 9TX or emailed to info@unltdox.org.uk. Call 0800 044 8192 if you want an electronic version.

Unlimited is still looking for a new Chairperson, so if you are disabled or have lived experience of disability, or you know of someone who might be interested in taking up this voluntary role and would like to help improve the lives of disabled people in Oxfordshire, please do get in touch.

Diane Sider, Editor

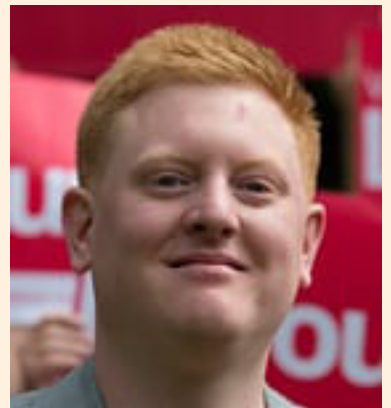
New Disabled MPs

Following the 'snap' election two new disabled MPs have been elected.

Marsha de Cordova is Battersea's first Labour M.P. since 2010. She is blind after being born with the eye condition nystagmus. A former chief executive of the South East Vision charity, which helps those with visual impairments, Marsha has combined disability rights campaigning with being a councillor.



Jared O'Mara is a seasoned disability rights campaigner who has cerebral palsy. He ousted Nick Clegg from Sheffield Hallam, winning the seat for Labour - a seat held by the former Liberal Democrat Leader since 2005.



Before his election Jared studied journalism at Staffordshire University – he got a first-class degree – and he worked as a campaigns officer for the British Council of Disabled People. 'I've always volunteered and fund-raised. I am a governor and trustee of Paces, which is a school and community resource for disabled people.' Seven years of austerity have, he says, brought devastation to disabled people. In parliament he hopes to have the chance to fight for the restoration of legal aid for equality cases. 'We've got a lot of rights enshrined in law, but you can't uphold that law if you don't have access to the system.'

Care for Carers



Are you providing care for a disabled person? One in ten adults in the UK are carers and by 2030 it is anticipated that the number of carers will increase to 10 million. People providing high levels of care are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled themselves. The Carer's Allowance is the main benefit available to carers but at £62.70 for a minimum of 35 hours (equivalent to £1.79 per hour) this falls far short of the national minimum wage and national living wage of £7.50 per hour for those over 25.

Carers Oxfordshire is a free service for carers based on a partnership between Action for Carers Oxfordshire, Guidepost, Rethink and Oxfordshire County Council.

The service has four elements:

- **a telephone and web-based information service** - providing information about benefits and entitlements, support services, carer's breaks, emergency back-up, employment, helping carers to look after themselves, training opportunities to support carers in their caring roles and much more
- **an outreach support service** – providing advice and support over the phone and face-to-face
- **a network of peer support groups**
- **training and wellbeing opportunities.**

To contact Carers Oxfordshire

Telephone: 0345 050 7666

Email: carersoxfordshire@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Carers' personal payment

Changes to carers' personal budgets in Oxfordshire were agreed by Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group following the carers' consultation last year. The decision made is that as of 1 April 2017, there will be a 'flat rate' payment of £300 awarded following a carers' assessment or a carers' review to those carers who are assessed as having high needs. This will be called a carers' personal payment, and it is for carers to use for themselves in a way that supports them in their caring role.

For information on how to claim contact Carers Oxfordshire as above.

Funding Social Care

The Commission on Funding of Care and Support, led by Andrew Dilnot, reported back to Government in July 2011. But six years later no decisions have been made and new Conservative plans for the funding of social care for older people – particularly on charging – were widely seen as one of the reasons the party failed to secure an overall parliamentary majority in the recent general election. It was also criticised for failing to include in the Queen's Speech any mention of how it would reform the funding of working-age social care or care for disabled people who are a third of all social care users. Now the Government is proposing yet another consultation.

The Care and Support Alliance represents over 80 of Britain's leading charities campaigning alongside the millions of older people, disabled people and their carers who deserve decent care.

Vicki McDermott, Chair of the Alliance, said, 'The fact is we've had 20 years of consultations and commissions but there has been a political failure to act to secure sustainable funding for care. The case for reform has never been so strong. The Government needs to act quickly to find a solution that ensures people get the care they need. Currently at least one million people do not get this care. The current system is woefully inadequate, the help that our most vulnerable older people and disabled adults and their families rely on simply isn't there ... Reforms need to deliver enough money, look at both the social care for older people and disabled working age adults and address the unfairness people face when trying to get the basic care they need.'

Join the campaign on Twitter [@candsalliance](https://twitter.com/candsalliance)

www.careandsupportalliance.com

You may wish to write to your local MP about your own experiences of social care, hardship etc.

Or you can contact Judith Heathcoat who holds the Health and Wellbeing portfolio at Oxfordshire County Council

judith.heathcoat@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Unlimited Oxfordshire would welcome being copied in on any correspondence.

**CARE &
SUPPORT
ALLIANCE**

Meet the Member - Larry Gardiner



'I joined Unlimited about 2 years ago because I wanted to show solidarity with other disabled people. I have an "invisible impairment" because I have a neurological condition, not an obvious physical one, although after a stroke that I had few years ago I do walk with a stick. My problems are more to do with memory so some times I need to be reminded to take medication and I need to be accompanied in journeys. Although I think Unlimited's campaign for better access to shops and businesses is important, I think the biggest challenge facing disabled people are budget cuts which means council services we desperately need are disappearing. Disabled people's rights are under seige and I feel we are being abandoned. I would like Unlimited to fight for our rights.'

The single thing that would make my life better would be more staff support in the sheltered accommodation I live in. We only have a visiting warden and many of us are disabled so health and safety is a real concern. I enjoy getting out and about as much as possible. I used to be a keen motorcyclist but I had to give that up but I still enjoy another hobby which is steam trains. A place I visit which is accessible to wheelchair users is Bridewell Organic Gardens near Long Hanborough. It is run by service-users for people who have complex needs and those living with mental health issues. It is a very beautiful setting and you can buy plants there.'

The Walled Garden, Wilcote
Oxfordshire OX7 3DT

01993 868313 (Garden) 01993 864530 (Office)

Email: info@bridewellgardens.org
www.bridewellgardens.co.uk

Barracks Lane Community Garden

Barracks Lane Community Garden, just off Cowley Road Oxford, is a beautiful green space at the heart of a vibrant community. You can enjoy it by visiting, booking for a private function or by coming along to one of the many events and activities that are held throughout the year. Visiting the Garden is free as are many of the events taking place there. The garden does however rely on donations to keep the Garden open for everyone. Please note that children must be accompanied by an adult.

The Garden Project has charitable status and is run by members of the local community who volunteer their time and expertise. At the Garden you will find a large octagonal eco cabin with a wood burning stove, a bonfire and barbeque area, a basic kitchen, table and chairs, a wood fired bread oven, cob oven and tandoor oven, sandpit and small, fenced pond. The Garden is fully accessible if you are using a wheelchair (no gravel!) or have limited mobility and safe if you have small children. There is a fully accessible composting toilet. New disabled gardeners and volunteers are especially welcome.



The volunteers are particularly proud of the Garden Project's low carbon and green credentials. Within the Garden is a living green roof and solar panels, a rain-water harvesting system, a compost system, a wildlife corridor and bug hotel. These were designed, built and sponsored by members of the community. In particular the Garden Project cares for the environment and wildlife, and offers everyone access to a green space for relaxation and leisure; demonstrates practical ideas for healthy living including growing food, recycling waste, cooking, building and using renewable technologies; encourages play and learning through demonstrations and workshops; is safe and welcoming, celebrating diversity and promoting equality; is creative and innovative, a place where art meets science across generations and cultures.

Barracks Lane Community Garden,
Barracks Lane (off Cumberland Road),
Oxford, OX4 2AP

Email: barrackslanegarden@yahoo.co.uk
Phone/Text: 07729 655 543

www.barrackslanegarden.org.uk

The nearest bus stop on Cowley Rd is Howard Street.



Thrive Trunkwell Garden Project

Thrive is a charity that uses gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health, or who are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable. This is known as social and therapeutic horticulture - the process of working with plants to improve physical and psychological health, and communication and thinking skills.

It also uses the garden as a safe and secure environment in which to develop an individual's ability to socialise, make friends, and gain practical skills that make them more independent and self-reliant. Using gardening tasks and the environment Thrive horticultural therapists build a set of activities for each gardener aimed at improving their health and wellbeing and achieving particular goals identified by the gardener themselves or by their family, support workers or carers.

Gardens offer the peace and tranquillity needed for rehabilitation and recovery. And being given the opportunity to develop an interest in gardening will give benefits that can last a life time.

The Thrive Trunkwell Garden Project is located in beautiful countryside in the village of Beech Hill, near Reading, Berkshire, and is set in a Victorian walled garden next to Thrive's head office.

Thrive therapists work with more than 100 disabled people each year ranging in age from 14 to 70 years. Thrive gardeners travel to the Project from across Berkshire, North Hampshire, Surrey and South Oxfordshire. They may have learning disabilities, mental health needs including dementia, a physical disability or a sensory disability such as partial sight or deafness.

The garden is designed to help disabled gardeners develop their skills with a variety of plants and has areas for growing herbs, fruit and vegetables, butterfly and woodland gardens, a glasshouse and polytunnels, a bee border, a tree nursery, a large wildlife pond and a shop selling plants grown at the project. The Thrive website has some really useful information for disabled gardeners anywhere including tips to make gardening easier if you have a specific impairment such as gardening after a stroke, sitting down and from a wheelchair, if you have the use of one hand only or weak grip, if you can't bend easily, and if you are blind or visually impaired. It also lists tools according to the job to do and your disability.

These can be purchased from most garden centres and can make gardening easier and more enjoyable.
www.thrive.org.uk Tel: 0118 988 5688

www.carryongardening.org.uk/top-tips-for-disabled-gardeners.aspx

Unlimited Committee Members Steph Talbot and Sue Butterworth were recently asked to review the **Stonehill Community Garden** between Drayton and Abingdon.



Set in a beautiful, natural area of unspoilt pasture land Stonehill is an interesting, if ambitious project to provide outdoor activity, outreach and consultation about gardening, nature and its preservation for anyone of any age and background. In particular it works with local Oxfordshire user groups via hands-on activity, workshops and open days to further the interests and opportunities of disabled people and others to improve the wellbeing and health of the local community. It also wants more volunteers!

Whilst there is much still to be done in terms of access around the site, for example its vegetable gardens, compost area and chicken coop, it has an innovative outdoor kitchen with pizza oven. A ramped accessible eco-toilet is being built and there are more plans for accessible paths after consultation with Thrive and other specialist garden advisors. You can get around with a mobility vehicle but self-propelling is a difficult option at the moment.

info@stonehillgardens.co.uk
www.stonehillgardens.co.uk
richard@stonehillgardens.co.uk
 07565421637

Stonehill Community Gardens,
 Oday Hill, Oxon OX14 4AA

The Stonehill Community Garden is accessible from Abingdon and Drayton and it is possible to get a bus (X1 & X2) to a 15 minute walk away (get off at Saxton Rd, Abingdon or Sutton Wick, Drayton).



Early in 2017 I wrote an article saying how traumatic I found attempting to complete the PIP questionnaire booklet; I can now conclude my story (drama?). I did not exaggerate, I found writing down everything that was wrong with my body (so having to think deeply about all these problems) made me feel awful, and depressed. I do suggest, if you can, to find someone (preferably experienced with these questionnaires) to help you. You do need to think of absolutely everything that causes you some inability to do what others find easy. You might obtain help from Age UK, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, your Social Care Manager (if you have one), etc. If they cannot help, ask them who can.

I do still feel it is inhuman to put someone who is disabled, ill, in constant pain, an OAP, and struggles anyway, through the PIP process. Last time I joked about 'squeezing until the PIPs squeak', I'll add now that the system gets on everyone's PIP!

I had the interview at my home (you may request this if it is difficult to get to the PIP centre they chose). I had a friend with me for the interview; do have someone with you as they can witness what you said, in case there is a dispute later.

The interviewer was not impolite, but stern and unfriendly – and rather impatient. She was told of my difficulty in moving my legs, but after the interview my friend pointed out that three separate times she told me to move a leg (I declined each time). Towards the end she asked me to sit on my music stool. I do not sit, too painful, unless really necessary; and I do need back and side support. I would have simply fallen off the stool! I felt that, throughout the interview, she was trying to 'catch me out'; she didn't because I was telling the truth. She seemed excessively interested in what gadgets I had in the house, this seemed to be her main criteria. I do have: several grab-rails including for the stairs, crutches, a sock-aid, long shoe-horns, blanket-cradle (for my bed), complete adapted bathroom, adapted kitchen, raised sockets, etc.

During the interview, don't lose your temper (makes things worse for you), remain calm, and think carefully about your answers. When I said sometimes I just

cannot do things, I was asked precisely 'once per week? per month?, etc.'. If necessary, turn to your friend to reply for you. Don't let the interviewer put words in your mouth, they do try; e.g. they'll say 'is the answer A or B?', whereas the answer is C – neither A nor B. Say so!

I felt I had done badly in the interview. My problem is that I have a rare medical problem that is not visible externally – I look OK. Qualified doctors understand, but the interviewers have minimal medical knowledge. After the interview I decided, if necessary, I would appeal (two out of three appeals 'win', but you normally need 'added information' or 'corrections' to win an appeal).

However, surprise, when the result arrived I was awarded 'enhanced' mobility and 'enhanced' care-help; and was told I would not be reassessed for at least 10 years. Given their rules, this was the right decision, but I thought I'd be marked down for trivial reasons. I am very rare in that my benefit was increased. Writing this article I nearly said that I was lucky; I am not, I was just assessed correctly by their rules. Problem is that very many disabled people are unlucky; they are under-assessed.

It helps if you understand the government's rationale. Previously (e.g. DLA) decisions were based on your medical condition, and used qualified doctors to decide. However, PIP is based purely on what you cannot do (irrespective of your illness/disability), and what help you need. In this way, non-medics can assess disabled people. Anyone can see if you can walk, or not. PIP is designed to 'claw-back' on DLA, but also cheap to administer.

If you are claiming, good luck, keep your wits about you, and get help.



There is a lot of useful information on the Scope website about PIP and other benefits including a good video on preparing for your PIP assessment and tips on attending your assessment interview.

www.scope.org.uk/support/disabled-people/benefits/PIP

Tel: 0808 800 3333

Employing a PA

Understand Assistance is an e-book guide for people who employ Personal Assistants, written by Simon Stevens, a disability trainer and activist with Cerebral Palsy. It is a comprehensive guide exploring every aspect of the employment and management of personal assistants, as well as the qualities and skills a personal assistant may need. The guide covers the preparation needed to successfully employ personal assistants, the recruitment process, employment law, disciplinary and grievances processes, managing finances, interpersonal skills, active safeguarding, guidance on specific issues, and much more.



Says Simon:

"I have used my experiences (over 25 years) to produce a comprehensive guide on employing personal assistants ... This goes through all the tasks involved in employing a personal assistant and provides straight-forward advice on how that task can be managed."

To order see www.understand.tips Price £15.00
Email: simon@simonstevens.com
Tel: 0333 355 4902

A monthly role for Unlimited?

Do you live near the Cowley Road, or know someone who does? Every month the Unlimited committee meets to discuss what Unlimited is up to and decide on actions that need to be taken on behalf of members. Because we are a charity we need someone to take minutes of our meetings and so we are looking for someone for about 6 hours once a month. In recognition that this is an important commitment we will reimburse expenses and time with a one off monthly honorarium of £40.00. We can provide a laptop.

You will need access to email and be able to get to Richard Benson Hall (near Divinity Road) which is an accessible venue (we can offer lifts).

To find out more email Rosie on info@unltdox.org.uk
Tel: 0800 044 8192

You are invited to **The Annual Tea Party** for Unlimited Oxfordshire which will take place on
Saturday October 28th
from 2.30 - 4.40 p.m. at
The Oxford Quaker Meeting House,
43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW Tel: 01865 55737
www.oxfordquakers.org



This will be a chance to share your grumbles and issues with Councillors who represent disabled people and celebrate what you and Unlimited have achieved this year.

The venue is accessible with ramped access, accessible toilet and parking nearby. The house has a red door and is a few houses away from the Eagle & Child pub and opposite the Lamb & Flag pub. It is close to bus stops on the Woodstock and Banbury Roads (including park and ride stops from Redbridge, Pear Tree and Water Eaton) and there is some street parking (free for blue badge holders) nearby on St Giles, Woodstock Road (next to the Radcliffe Observatory), and on Keble Road. The disabled parking bays on St Giles are not next to the kerb and for the bays on Keble Road there is plenty of space and time for unloading (it is a dead-end street). From central Oxford (e.g. Cornmarket Street) a slow walker will take 10 minutes. Assistance dogs welcome (venue garden for business).

Places are limited so do let us know you are coming. First come, first served. RSVP by email to Rosie on info@unltdox.org.uk or ring 0800 044 8192 to book a place; to find out about transport or let us know about dietary requirements. We want to make sure we have tea and cakes for everyone.

A tiny part of the tea party will be taken up with our Annual General Meeting. We have to have this formal meeting once a year but it won't take long we promise!

Layout by Bob Hundley, Mailing by Lilian Sherwood
Contact details: www.unltdox.org.uk email: info@unltdox.org.uk
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Unlimited Oxfordshire is a registered charity no. 1156718
c/o Joanna Matthews, Cherry Cottage, Noke, OX3 9TX

