

Annual Report 2012

During the past year our membership has grown to 288 families. Additionally, we circulate information to a further 95 families and 97 professionals – a total of 480 families and professionals. Information about our Branch is being circulated by other local support groups and health professionals on a regular basis.

We continue to be very grateful to Bishopstoke Evangelical Church and Chandlers Ford Methodist Church for their continued support by providing venues for our parent/carer support group meetings and family youth club respectively, and to St Patrick's Church, Woolston, for providing a new venue during the year for our two social groups in Southampton.

Parent/carer support group

Our monthly meetings continued with some interesting guests, including: **Dr Stefan Gleeson**, Consultant Psychiatrist, Winchester Community Mental Health Team, **Helen Alport**, Hampshire's Parent Partnership Service, **Kaz White**, Hampshire County Council's Recreational Activities Inclusion Officer (Disabled Children & Young People), **Carolyn Elliott**, a speech and language therapist, **Linda Burgess**, Commissioning Officer (Care), Hampshire County Council, Adult Services Department, **Leanne Cooper**, an Occupational Therapist, **Richard Uren**, ParentVoice and **Luke Syddall**, a young man with Asperger syndrome.

Family Youth Club

Our monthly family youth club continues to regularly attract up to 20+ children and their families. Our thanks, again, to Jane, Tim and Ann for making arrangements, to other committee members and our parent volunteers for helping out throughout the year on a rota basis. Our playworker, April, has enthusiastically organised additional activities until the Autumn when she left to visit India (we look forward to welcoming her again in 2013).

Branch resource library

The Branch library is now well established with 330 items. We now have 124 library members and in the past year, over 140 individual loans of items have been made. Unfortunately we have had a number of items not returned on time and have had to do quite a lot of chasing to get these returned. The library is open at our Parent/carer support group meetings and we have offered a limited library service at our Family Youth Club. Bishopstoke Evangelical Church kindly continue to allow us to store the library on their premises.

Southampton social groups

Both the Children's group and Adult group continue to meet regularly, though they changed venue from Sholing to Woolston in September 2012. This has proved to be a positive move for both groups. The children's group currently supports six regular families, the adult group supports up to 35 members, going from strength to strength, with new faces appearing every session. Some activities have taken place, such as sailing, Ringos, bowling, a visit to the pantomime and karaoke nights for the adults. Unfortunately, their playworker, Anna, had to leave at the end of the summer, but her place has been very ably taken by Daisy.

Teenage youth clubs

There continues to be great concern regarding the future of the clubs at Fair Oak's Yzone youth centre, the Hype youth centre in Hamble and *The Friday Night Project* in Hedge End, due to recent major cutbacks in the Youth Service. We have continued to vigorously campaign against these threats, met with local council officials, had a meeting with the Local Children's Partnership and have spoken to local councillors. Unfortunately, we still have no clearer view of how the clubs will be able to get sustainable funding beyond April 2013.



Accept difference. Not indifference.

Additional activities

NAS Help! Family seminars

We were able to run four *Help!* Seminars during 2012. – Managing Anger, Understanding Autism, Teen Life and Sensory Needs. All these were held at Fleming Park Bowling Club and delivered by regional staff from the National Autistic Society. Each course was fully subscribed with 30 people attending each. Our branch funds were able to subsidise the cost of the seminars, charging £5 (instead of £15) per person.

Social Skills groups

Our social skills programme, for children between the ages of 7 and 13, has been running for a number of years (subject to the availability of funding). In Autumn 2012 we were able to fund a 5-week course (on Saturday mornings) for 8 teenagers. Our thanks, as always, goes to Chris Parsons and her team at the *In touch project*, who led these courses in their usual professional manner.

Branch attendance at events

During the year we have had opportunities to publicise the Branch's work and give information about autism to other groups. We gave a presentation at St Andrew's Methodist Church, Eastleigh and Rachel Carter was a speaker at an Autism event held in Fareham. Rachel visited an adult support group in Basingstoke. We also had a stand at a World Mental Health Day event organised by Eastleigh CAMHS.

In May, Branch Officer, David Carter, represented the branch at a reception at 10 Downing Street, hosted by Samantha Cameron, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Autistic Society.

Grants/Donations

We were delighted to receive another grant from Eastleigh Borough Council (for general running expenses). We are grateful to member Val James who organised an NAS Train Walk in Winchester in July, where we were delighted to be joined by the Mayor and Mayoress of Winchester. Over £400 was raised for our funds. Eastleigh Railway Institute held a Bingo evening and raised £100 for our funds (and the winning prize went to one of our members!).

Storage support

Over the years, we have accumulated quite a lot of equipment for use by the branch, even more so with the donations recently received from Eastleigh Carnival. Much of this has been stored in various garages, lofts, conservatories and even lounges of committee members! We now store much of our equipment, thanks to reduced rates from Ready Steady Store in Eastleigh. Also thanks to Chandlers Ford Methodist Church, Bishopstoke Evangelical Church and St Patrick's Church, Woolston who allow us to store some equipment on their premises.

Hampshire Autism Strategy and the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board

We have been heavily involved in the development of the Autism Strategy for Hampshire through Rachel Carter, our representative on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board (HAPB). We assisted with the consultation events during the year throughout Hampshire. Rachel is a member of Hampshire Autism Voice (HAV), the parent, carers and service user group established from within HAPB to ensure the full participation of service users and carers in its work. She also is a member of the Diagnosis and Care Pathways HAPB workstream. Our NAS Area Development Officer, Tracey Sellers, is also a member of the Board.

We also attended a Southampton Autism Support event in preparation for Southampton's Autism Strategy.

Contact with other organisations

We continue to keep in touch with other support groups in the area, notably the other local NAS Branches (Hart and Rushmoor, Isle of Wight, Alton and Bordon, Basingstoke and Surrey). We have good links with many other groups and regularly promote their activities, these include the Portsmouth Autism Support Network, Waterside Autistic Syndrome Support for Parents (WASSP), Hampshire Autistic Society, Fareham Autistic Spectrum Support (FASS), Winchester Autism Group (WAG) and the newly formed Wavelength women's and girls' support group. We are also in contact with other local voluntary and statutory organisations which support those with special needs.

Branch administration

The Branch committee met on a number of occasions to discuss the running of the group, look at funding issues and new ideas.

The National Autistic Society keeps David Carter, the Branch Officer, fully advised on all developments, mainly by email, and supports the Branch through its Regional Branch Support Officer, Alessia Mitchell. Daniel Owton, the Branch Treasurer, receives support from Jamie Mitchell, the NAS Branches Manager. Additionally, Daniel ran the resource library at our support meetings until the Autumn when Linda Wade took on this responsibility.

Rachel Carter handles many of the enquiries received by the Branch and selects the latest items for the library. She also represents our Branch at events and is a parent representative on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board. Jane Padley makes all the bookings for our family youth club, including all liaison with the church, and Claire Hale's work includes liaison with the media and overseeing the running of some of our family youth clubs. Gillian Buxton now looks after our branch mobile phone and answers all enquiries received. Linda Grover, Sally Polson and Sue Jacobs have been responsible for running all aspects of our two social groups in Southampton, along with their team of helpers. We have been very pleased to welcome Linda Wade and Val James who have recently joined the committee.

Throughout the year, we received numerous email and telephone enquiries each week requesting advice on many aspects of ASD. Some we have been able to answer and others have been referred to the NAS Autism Helpline or the Autism Services Directory. The most popular topics continue to be diagnosis for both children and adults, concerns over the reduction of youth services in the area, strategies for dealing with schools, activities suitable for children with ASD (in particular, teenagers),

transition from both primary to secondary education and from secondary education to college/university/work, and support for adults.

We continue to keep our website as up-to-date as possible and are always pleased to receive feedback on its layout and usefulness.

2013

As we move into 2013, we look forward to another NAS *Help!* seminar on Supporting Siblings in March and another Social Skills group of ten 7 to 13 year-olds in April/May. We hope to run further seminars throughout the year. Sadly, after initial positive feedback from members, we were very disappointed to have to cancel our planned Quiz Night in February due to lack of support – we now have to consider what type of social activities/fund raising events the branch could successfully run in the future.

The Branch committee welcome ideas and suggestions on how it can continue to make this Branch a helpful resource for those affected by ASD. Please contact us with your comments – it is your Branch and we want to make it work for you!

David Carter, Branch Officer

18 February 2013

