

Annual Report 2013

During the past year our membership has grown to 312 families. Additionally, we circulate information to a further 70 families and 96 professionals – a total of 478 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 the venue for our two social groups in Southampton.

Parent/carer support group

Our monthly meetings continued with some interesting guests, including: **Dr Tony Brown**, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Autism Diagnostic Research Centre, Southampton; **Linda Burgess**, Commissioning Officer (Care), Hampshire County Council, Adult Services Department; **June Hill**, a Speech and Language Therapist; **Tesni Mason** from Hampshire Parent Partnership; and **Helen Tongue**, an independent ASD consultant. We have also held some meetings without guest speakers which have given parents a chance to have discussions as a group.

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 on a rota basis.

Branch resource library

The Branch library is now well established with 330 items. We now have 142 library members and in the past year, 129 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 the Adults' group continue to meet regularly, having settled well into their Woolston venue. Numbers in the Children's group fluctuate from session to session but it supports eight families regularly and the Adults' group continues to grow, with new faces every session. A regular adult group go sailing and they continue to go bowling, have karaoke sessions and Ringos. Last year they did a trip to Marwell Zoo and had a BBQ at Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley. The groups hope to offer a number of different activities this year, paid for with the grant from Lloyd's bank.

Additional activities

NAS Help! Family seminars

We ran another seminar in Spring 2013. – Supporting Siblings. This was held at Fleming Park Bowling Club and delivered by regional staff from the National Autistic Society. The course was fully subscribed with 30 people attending. Our branch funds were able to subsidise the cost of the seminar.

Social Skills groups

Our social skills programme for children has been running for a number of years (subject to the availability of funding). In April/May 2013 we were able to heavily subsidise a 5-week course (on Saturday mornings) for 9 young people between the ages of 9 and 13. Our thanks, as always, goes to Chris Parsons and her team at *In Touch*, who led these courses in their usual professional manner.



Accept difference. Not indifference.

Branch attendance at events

During the year we have had opportunities to publicise the Branch's work, be represented at various conferences and seminars, and give information about autism to others. These included: Hampshire Special Needs Information Day in Romsey, a youth event in Chandlers Ford, South/South East Autism Network in Guildford, Wendy Lawson seminars in Alton, Eastleigh CAMHS World Mental Health Training Day, The Good Advice Roadshow in Winchester and Redesigning Early Help Services – Eastleigh Pilot event. We have also visited Autism Wessex Southampton Community Support Services and Speaking Space in Ower. The Branch Officer was also a member of the Eastleigh and Winchester Short Breaks Funding Panel.

Grants/Donations

We were delighted to receive another grant from Eastleigh Borough Council (for general running expenses for our Eastleigh-based activities). Also our Southampton groups received a grant from Southampton City Council and were recently awarded £3000 from Lloyds' Community Fund.

Storage support

Much of our equipment is stored, at charity rates, in Eastleigh's Ready Steady Store. Our 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 continue to be heavily involved in the development of the Autism Strategy for Hampshire through Rachel Carter, our representative on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board (HAPB) since its formation. David Carter also joined the Board in June 2013. Rachel and David are members 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. HAV also has the responsibility to ensure Hampshire County Council implement the strategy. Rachel is a member of the Diagnosis and Care Pathways HAPB workstream. David now coordinates HAV and is a member of the Workforce Development HAPB workstream. HAPB work very closely with Southampton, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth councils on many of the workstreams.

Contact with other organisations

We continue to keep in touch with other support groups in the area, notably the other local NAS Branches. We have good links with many local voluntary and statutory organisations which support those with special needs and regularly promote their activities. One special link is with the *Friends of In Touch* with whom we have worked closely for many years. The *Friends* became a registered charity in 2013. Rachel has recently taken on the role of treasurer and David acts as an advisor to them.

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, and to attend compulsory NAS training on Health & Safety, Risk Assessments and Data Protection.

David Carter, the Branch Officer, is responsible for all aspects of running the Branch. He is fully advised on all matters by the NAS Regional Branch Support Officer. Melanie Hickman, the Branch Treasurer, receives support from the NAS Regional team.

Rachel Carter handles many of the enquiries received by the Branch, represents our Branch at events and on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board and maintains the Branch library. 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 looks after our branch mobile phone and answers all enquiries received. Linda Wade runs the resource library at our support meetings. Linda Grover, Sally Polson and Sue Jacobs are responsible for running all aspects of our two social groups in Southampton, along with their team of helpers.

During the year, our former long-standing treasurer, Daniel Owton, had to step down due to increasing work commitments. We are very grateful to Daniel for all the hard work he has put in over the past 5 years and for continuing in post for longer than planned to enable us time to find a new willing volunteer.

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. Most popular topics continue to be diagnosis of children and adults, concerns over the reduction of youth services, strategies for dealing with schools, activities suitable for children with ASD (in particular, teenagers), transition from primary to secondary education and from secondary education to college/university/work, and the lack of support for adults.

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

2014

As we move into 2014, we look forward to starting two new additional monthly activities, both at YZone Youth Centre in Fair Oak:

We will be running a 6-month trial of a Drop-in Centre for teenagers with social communication difficulties. This will be run for us by Chris Parsons and another experienced professional.

In partnership with the *Friends of In Touch*, we are going to run an afternoon parent/carer support group meeting. Two professionals from *In Touch* will be present as well as our Branch Officer. This will be an opportunity to have a chat and get advice. It may be particularly of interest to those who are unable to make our evening support group meetings.

We are also investigating running more NAS Family seminars and Social Skills group(s) later in the year.

The Branch committee welcome ideas and suggestions on how they 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!