

# Annual Report 2016–17

We have again had a busy and varied year. During the past year our branch membership grew by 62 to 505 families and individuals. Additionally, we circulate information to a further 43 families and 241 professionals (including 135 SENCOs) – a total of 789 families, individuals and professionals receive mailings from us, at least once a month. Information about our Branch is being further circulated by other local support groups and health/social care professionals on a regular basis.

## Award for Diversity and Inclusion

In January our branch won The Farooqi Award for Diversity and Inclusion 2016, awarded to those who have made a positive contribution to diversity and inclusion in the Borough of Eastleigh. This was presented to us by the Chief Executive of Eastleigh Borough Council, the Chief Executive of One Community and the Asian Welfare and Cultural Association (AWCA).

## Parent/carer support group

Our monthly meetings continued with interesting guests, including: Dr Beatriz Lopez (Associate Head for Innovation, Department of Psychology, University of Portsmouth), Henry Barnes (Area Policy and Participation Officer – South West for The National Autistic Society), Joe Broughton (a young man with Asperger syndrome), Amy Green (a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist), Kathryn Cornish (Community Access Project Officer, Autism Hampshire) and Dr Emma Wells (talking about employment). We have also held some meetings without guest speakers which have given everyone a chance to have discussions as a group. Attendance has ranged from 47 to 8 with an average attendance of 20.

## Family Youth Club

Our monthly family youth club attracted an average of 10 children and their families. Our thanks, as always, to Ann for making arrangements, to other committee members, parent and student volunteers for helping run this popular activity on a rota basis.

## LEGO club

Our monthly LEGO club has been running very successfully on the same Saturdays as our Family Youth Clubs. We are most grateful to Speech and Language Therapists Jo (club leader) and Carolyn who were ably assisted by students Leanne and Ian, from the University of Winchester, and Charlie. All are volunteers and, without their time and enthusiasm, the club would not function. Sadly we have lost our three students recently due to their studies ending.

## Branch resource library

The Branch library now contains over 400 items. We have 203 library members and since April 2016, 189 individual loans of items have been made. Unfortunately we have had a small number of items not returned on time and it has been very time-consuming to chase these – some are still outstanding. Also some books have been lost. The library is open at our support group meetings and a limited selection available at our Family Youth Club.

## Southampton social groups

The Children's group and the Adults' group continue to meet on alternate Tuesdays in Woolston. Numbers for both groups have seen a slight increase.

Parents of our Children's group have set up a closed Facebook page and this works as a great way to communicate what's happening locally as well as being a source of huge support for each other. Feedback from the page over the past year includes 'the group has changed dramatically over the last year with varied activities catering to the majority'. Commendably, children have been raising money from sponsored events for the group. A local trampoline facility offers autism-friendly evenings and parents have taken advantage of this and organised separately via the group page.

We receive a steady stream of enquiries via the web page on adult group activities bringing in new members on a regular basis. Often an enquiry is for information rather than social support and we point people in the right direction as far as we can!

Activities for both groups comprise a summer picnic in the park, Xmas meal/party, pantomime, bowling, cinema visits, visit to Solent air museum, Halloween celebrations, St George's day celebrations. Children have enjoyed a visit from Sublime Science, a Scalextrics evening, Lego block party, face painting and other craft activities, pizza and film night to name a few. Adults meet separately at a local Wetherspoon fortnightly on an informal basis. All-in-all another good year for both groups.

## CAMHS ASC support group

Our two years of jointly hosting a monthly ASC support group with Eastleigh Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), specifically for families who are on the waiting list for an autism assessment in Eastleigh CAMHS, ended in July. This was because ASC support groups, based on our original model, are now commissioned across the whole county, run by Autism Hampshire, as part of the Hampshire CAMHS service. We continue to attend the Eastleigh group and all the groups have now been opened up to any parents with children undergoing an assessment or who already have a diagnosis.

## Social Skills groups

In April and May 2016, 8 children, aged 7 to 11, attended a 6-session social skills programme. This was run by Chris Parsons and her team at *Friends of In Touch*. The programme has been running for a number of years (subject to the availability of funding) and we hope to run another course later this financial year.

## Consultation on autism and mental health

In October and November 2016, our branch received funding from Healthwatch Hampshire to carry out a consultation, aimed at children, young people and adults with autism, their families/carers and professionals who work with them, about the way mental health affects children and adults with autism, and accessing services in Hampshire in the last 3 years. We worked in partnership with Hampshire Autism Voice (HAV) and Autism Hampshire facilitated focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

146 people responded to an online survey, there were two focus groups for parents and carers, seven 1:1 telephone interviews and a focus group with professionals. The report can be downloaded at [www.shantsnas.org.uk/News/Newsarchive#060317\\_01](http://www.shantsnas.org.uk/News/Newsarchive#060317_01) and a short film is currently being produced. We look forward to the recommendations being taken on board by autism and mental health organisations to ensure an improvement to services.

## **Tony Attwood conference**

A great deal of work has been undertaken by our small team of volunteers during the year to plan our sell-out conference with Professor Tony Attwood at Winchester Guildhall in May 2017 and coordinate all 400 bookings. We look forward to this event.

## **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: 5 Hampshire SENCo conferences, 2 Newly Qualified Teacher conferences, Crofton School, CAMHS Parent/Carer event in Winchester, Hampshire Special Needs Information Day in Yateley, Aspergers Adventures-Minecraft and Meltdowns event in Southampton and a South East England Autism Leads meeting.

## **Autism awareness**

We have given autism awareness talks to Itchen Scouts, IBM staff, Mental Health councillors in Eastleigh, Wyvern Connect Group in Fair Oak, *Friends of In Touch* staff, Testwood Baptist Church support group, Hampshire County Councillors at a briefing session, HCC Children's Services disability team managers in Eastleigh, Alton, Totton and Aldershot, Testwood Pre-School staff, Test Valley Borough Council staff and councillors (2 talks), Nursery staff in Sholing, staff at a primary school in Emsworth and volunteers from No Limits in Southampton.

## **Autism-friendly performances**

We were pleased to join our friends from Autism Hampshire to help steward at the autism-friendly performance of *Robin Hood* at the Mayflower Theatre.

## **Grants/Donations**

We were delighted to receive another grant from Eastleigh Borough Council (for general running expenses for our Eastleigh-based activities) and Healthwatch Hampshire to enable us to carry out our mental health consultation. Also, we have been fortunate to receive a number of private donations from members and others interested in supporting our work – for which we are extremely grateful. We continue to benefit from two regular fund-raising initiatives: Terracycle recycling scheme (thanks to committee member, Gillian) and Easyfundraising.

## **Working with local authorities and public bodies**

We continue to be heavily involved in the implementation of Hampshire's Autism Strategies. Rachel and David are members of Hampshire Autism Voice (HAV), the parent, carers and people-with-autism group on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board, which ensures the full participation of service-users and carers in its work. HAV actively participates in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services for children, young people and adults with autism living in Hampshire. During the past year they have been involved in many initiatives including the running of the HAV Network and the Autism Ambassador Scheme (in which we also help to deliver the training). Our branch, on behalf of HAV, manages the contract and work of the HAV Network Coordinator.

Additionally we are working with Southampton City Council and Southampton City Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) on the development of their children's and adults' autism diagnostic pathway.

## **Contact with other organisations**

We continue to keep in touch with other support groups in the area, notably with Autism Hampshire. 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, particularly since it became a registered charity in 2013. Rachel is currently Treasurer and David is Chair.

## **Branch administration**

The Branch is run entirely by volunteers and the committee meet regularly to discuss the running of the group, look at funding issues and new ideas.

David, 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, the Branch Treasurer, receives support from the NAS Regional team. Rachel jointly runs the branch with David, handling many of the enquiries received, represents our Branch at events and maintains the library.

Our other committee members undertake a variety of support roles including manning our branch mobile phone and answering all enquiries received, liaison with the media, liaison with the churches we use, running the resource library at our support meetings and helping to staff and organise events.

Our thanks to Gillian, Claire, Linda and Ian for our Eastleigh-based activities, and to Tracey, Sue and Emma who are responsible for running all aspects of our two social groups in Southampton, along with their team of helpers. In the past year we have received offers of help from a number of parents, local students and professionals. We are most grateful to them for their support. We would not be able to run any events without the assistance of the whole team – thank you all.

We continue to be very grateful to Bishopstoke Evangelical Church and Chandlers Ford Methodist Church for their continued support by providing venues for our support group meetings and family youth club/LEGO club respectively, at very low cost. Thanks to St Patrick's Church, Woolston, for enabling us to hire their hall for our groups in Southampton. All three allow us to store some equipment on their premises. Most of our equipment is stored, at charity rates, at Eastleigh's Ready Steady Store.

Throughout the year we received numerous email and telephone enquiries each week requesting advice on many aspects of autism. Some we have been able to answer and others have been referred to the NAS Autism Helpline or other services. The most common 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 autism (in particular, teenagers), transition from primary to secondary education and from secondary education to college/university/work, DLA, PIP and the general 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.

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