

St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group

Chair of Trustees report 2010-2011

The monthly group meetings at Huntingdon, Ramsey and St. Ives continue to run well, and the numbers attending show increase. The total attendance at our 36 support meetings in the year to March 2011 was over 800. Of these over 60% were our clients, the remainder being our own volunteer helpers and health professionals, and therapists.

In particular, attendance at Huntingdon has shown spectacular growth, with attendances averaging 45 for the last 6 months, and with 54 recorded in December 2010. In 2010 we provided 185 free-to-the-individual relaxation therapies - aromatherapy massage, reiki and reflexology. In addition, 135 took part in collective relaxation therapy in the form of Tai-chi style seated exercise.

The increase in numbers attending support meetings has meant the appointment of two extra therapists from January 2011. Therapist appointments have been mapped to current demand so that three are now operating at Huntingdon, two at Ramsey and one at St Ives.

This growth, plus the good evaluation that our support meetings and therapy received over the year, show that we continue to meet our primary objectives of reducing the physical and emotional stress of our clients.

A number of members of the group have attended the Macmillan New Perspectives Course. This is a free six week course for people living with cancer, by people living with cancer. During the course participants meet each week for two and a half hours to learn new skills and techniques to help manage their diagnosis. Participants are able to identify ways of managing symptoms and side effects of treatment including relaxation techniques and visualisation exercises. The course was found to be invaluable by members of the Acorn Groups and helped them regain their confidence and enjoy a better quality of life. At the Group we have had a number of speakers who have given short talks on topics of interest for example complementary therapies and the New Perspectives Course. This year we have arranged for a dietician to discuss the importance of nutrition, a physiotherapist to talk about the value of exercise and a session on benefits.

Our success in the last year would not have been possible without the generous support that we have received from a number of grant providers including:

- *Cambridgeshire County Council Small Grants Fund, managed by Cambridgeshire Community Fund, who provided a grant for operating and running costs, and also grants to offset our expenses for the Island Hall Carol Concert and the Xmas lunch*
- *Macmillan, towards therapy treatments, volunteer travel and costs of the boat trips/lunch*
- *The Cooperative Community Fund, towards rental and insurance costs*
- *Huntingdon Freeman's Society, towards rental expenses at Huntingdon*

- *St Ives Town Council, towards running costs at St Ives*

I would like to place on record our sincere gratitude to these grant providers, which meant that we could continue to provide our support to those affected by cancer without worrying about funds unduly or diverting major effort to raise money. This appreciation is also highlighted on our website.

Our charity is highly dependent on the input from our volunteer helpers and I would particularly want to thank Cally Bussetil for the highly effective way that she has stepped into the role of centre coordinator. We were very sorry that Donna Schuenemann has had to leave us and want to thank her for her sterling work over the last 8 years as a helper and latterly as team leader at St Ives. We welcome Julia Mitchell, past Secretary, back into the fold in a new role as helper at Ramsey/St Ives.

I also want to thank my colleague Macmillan nurses, Eileen Murphy who covers Ramsey/Warboys, Donna Atkin who covered part-year at St. Ives, and Sarah Mappedoram who has taken over from her. Thus a Macmillan Nurse has been available at each session to give information on cancer, treatments, financial/social advice and bereavement support.

Finally I would like to thank Gordon and Jan, our secretary and treasurer, for their time and support given to the group, particularly for fund raising and organizing the Island Hall Carol Concert which was such a success in raising our profile and over £2000 for Acorn in donations/ticket sales. Thanks also go to Karen (Chair), other health professionals, our therapists and to all the volunteers without which our group would not be able to function.

Sally Thornton, Chair Trustees St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group.

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