

St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group

Chair of Trustees Report for 2011-2012

I am delighted to report that the Group's progress over the past twelve months has been highly encouraging in all key objective areas: the monthly group meetings, the support and services we offer at them, social outings, sponsorships and sustaining our financial situation, and the dissemination of knowledge about Acorn into the wider community.

Group Meetings

The monthly group meetings at Huntingdon, Ramsey and St. Ives ran extremely well, with increased numbers attending all venues. Huntingdon's average attendance per meeting increased from 31 in 2010, to 44 in 2011; Ramsey increased from 15 to 20^[1], and St Ives from 15 to 21. There is now little doubt over the sustainability of the Ramsey and St Ives venues. The total attendance at our 35 support meetings (Ramsey meeting in February 2012 cancelled due to snow) grew from 770 in FY 2010/11, to 1032 in 2011/12. Of these some 65% were our clients, the remainder being our own volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists. The number of free relaxation therapies - aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology – given at meetings to patients and carers, also increased - from 200 in 2010/11 FY, to 237 in 2011/12.

In addition, the numbers taking part in collective relaxation therapy in the form of seated exercise, increased from 117 to 160 even though the instructor was absent for 3 months on maternity leave.

Current therapist appointment levels at venues are, four at Huntingdon and one each at Ramsey and St Ives. The levels need to be kept under review as demand changes, though facilities at our venues impose constraints on expansion of individual therapy service. The seated exercise instructor is scheduled to attend all venues every other month so that this service is at a common level. We also carried out a trial of creative visualization in 2011 and this is now available as part of our 2012 programme. We also continued with a variety of outside speakers: covering diet, the value of exercise, and topical subjects e.g. fire safety.

Evaluation of support meetings and therapies show that we continue to meet our primary objectives of reducing the physical and emotional stress of our clients.

Relations with Macmillan

Relations with Macmillan remain strong. Judy York, co-founder of Acorn, has given presentations to the group on the 'Macmillan Hope Course' which explores self management techniques as well as the opportunity to share with others experiencing similar problems following a diagnosis and treatment for cancer. This has resulted in a number of our members attending the course which consists of half a day over a period of six weeks. The feedback from the course has been very positive with members reporting increased confidence in their ability to deal with day to day problems and generally an improvement in their quality of life.

¹[1] The Ramsey data is adjusted to remove the attendance of those in an early category of associate members who no longer come to meetings

Social Outings

Due to demand, in each of the months June, July, August and September we ran a Ladybird boat trip down the Ouse followed by a free lunch at the Dolphin Hotel St Ives. This was one trip more than the three we ran last year. The Xmas lunch, also at the Dolphin was also highly successful, with 71 of our members attending. A major new social event, two Xmas concerts held at the Performing Arts centre, Hinchbrooke were attended by some 53 clients, families and friends. The social events are major contributors to our clients' quality of life – the concerts also had other benefits (see Profile below).

Sponsorships and Funding

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

- *Tesco Community Fund: towards therapy costs at Huntingdon*
- *Four sources managed by Cambridgeshire Community Foundation:*
 - *Cambridgeshire County Council Small Grants Fund, for general operating costs*
 - *Cheffins Community Fund, for activities in St Ives*
 - *Elizabeth Coteman Fund, for support to pancreatic cancer patients and carers*
 - *Ridgeons Community Fund, to offset expenses for the 2011 Xmas Concerts*
- *Macmillan: towards therapies and seated exercise, and the Xmas lunch*
- *Huntingdon Freeman's Society: towards rental expenses at Huntingdon venue linked to original Huntingdon area residents*
- *Huntingdon Town Council: towards operating costs at Huntingdon linked to HDC area clients*
- *Luminus Group: for Huntingdon social housing residents who are also affected by cancer*
- *The Penfold Trust*
- *St Ives Ladies Flower Club*
- *RWE Npower Little Barford Power Station*
- *Old Nene Golf Club*
- *Yorkshire Building Society*
- *Ramsey Rotary Club: for support to Ramsey area clients*

I am also pleased to report that our membership of localgiving.com produced some extra valuable income at the end of 2011 and also in March 2012. This was stimulated by their matched-funding for on-line donations made through their website www.localgiving.com given to charities registered with them.

In addition, we received a number of personal donations, both money and in-kind (raffle prizes), which all adds to our sustainability for the future. It is gratifying that donations have also been made by our own clients which is a strong indication that the support we provide is of considerable value to them.

I would like to place on record our sincere gratitude to these grant providers and donors, which means that we can 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.

Acorn Profile

The submissions for grants and donations has served to increase the profile of Acorn over the last year. In addition, the promotion effort and response for the Xmas concerts made a major contribution to widening

knowledge of Acorn in the community. Good contacts have been made with Huntingdon Community Radio, and during the run-up to the concert Acorn featured in 3 radio programmes in which Gordon and Cally had the opportunity to speak about the charity, and to promote the concerts. Articles pre-and post concerts featured in the Hunts Post. Also, the attendance at the concerts themselves, well over 200 on each occasion, was mainly comprised of non-Acorn members from the local community. All of these had a briefing about Acorn at the concerts, as did the 80 strong cast of students, staff, parents and governors.

To these positive points can be added the data that during 2011, some 49 new patients and 27 new carers attended meetings. However, these data would seem to reflect only a relatively small fraction of those who would have been diagnosed with cancer in 2011. This seems to imply that something more needs to be done to ensure that patients at both Woodlands and Addenbrookes are fully aware of the benefit of joining the Acorn group. We also need to ensure that all GPs in the area are fully briefed on the valuable role that Acorn can fulfil for their cancer patients and carers.

Thank You

Our charity depends crucially on the input from our volunteer helpers and I would particularly want to thank Cally Bussetil and Julia Mitchell who jointly manage the coordination of activity at the three venues, so well. I also want to thank my colleague Macmillan nurses, Eileen Murphy who covers Ramsey/Warboys, Sarah Mappledoram who has taken over from me at Huntingdon, and Fortune who stood in at St Ives pending the return of Sian Lewis (who is now in post). 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 the immense amount of their time and support given to the group, particularly in fund raising. 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.

As colleagues will know, now that I have moved to Addenbrooke's it is not possible for me to continue to act as Chair of Trustees, and sadly my 14 year association with Acorn has now come to an end. However, it is with great pleasure that I hand over to Liz Sargeant. As Manager Director of Hunts Health, Liz brings with her a great deal of experience and knowledge of the issues which charities like ours must face, so that I have every confidence that she will bring great strategic thinking for some ways forward for us. It is a delight to me that I can hand over to her when our group is in such a sound position.

Sally Thornton, Chair Trustees St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group.
April 2012

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