

# The Acorn Cancer Support Group

## Annual Report for 2013-2014

*Due to the sudden resignation of the Chairman, this year's Annual report is presented by the Charity's Secretary. The report covers a very eventful period. The past year has seen a mixture of justifiable celebration and many successes in terms of meeting our objectives, but there have also been some concerns arising from the limited capacity of Woodlands Macmillan nurses to support us due to their own staff shortages. The celebration and successes are described below, along with a brief summary of our plans to reduce some concerns. The Group is well placed to move into the 2014/15 FY.*

### 15th Anniversary Reception

*On 23 May 2013, Acorn celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a reception at the Dolphin Hotel St Ives. The reception was attended by 100 people, with half being our own clients and support team, with the other half those local sponsors and supporters who have been so important to our growth and development in recent years. The guest list included the CEO of Cambridgeshire Community Foundation (CCF), a member of Huntingdon Freeman's Trust, past and present Mayors, Mayoresses or their Deputies of St Ives, Huntingdon and Godmanchester, and representatives of local Masons Lodges and Rotary Clubs. The reception and buffet lunch was funded from earmarked donations received from our own members and other external supporters. We are indebted to Lady Berrill, our Patron, who funded a commemorative wooden plaque commissioned from a professional wood carver, and then presented it to our two founder members Sally Thornton and Judy York. The plaque now hangs in the reception area of the Dolphin, thereby serving to promote the group. We are very grateful to the Hotel for the excellent support and facilities they have provided to us over the last year.*

### Group Meetings

*The monthly group meetings at Huntingdon, Ramsey and St. Ives are crucially important as the primary base for the services we offer, enhanced by the mutual support that they also foster. They continued to run well, however, for the first time in four years there was a decrease in overall attendance. In summary, Huntingdon's average attendance per meeting fell from 45 in 2012/13, to 37 in 2013/14; Ramsey decreased from 22 to 16, and St Ives from 23 to 21. The total attendance at our support meetings over the previous three years grew from 770 in FY 2010/11, to 1032 in 2011/12, 1079 in 2012/13, but then fell to 863 in 2013/14.<sup>1</sup> Of the 863 attendance some 62% were our clients, the remainder being our own volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists.*

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<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include those members attending a Tea Club, funded by Macmillan which was held at Huntingdon on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday each month from July 2013 to March 2014. The total attendance at the Tea Club was 75 (47 clients and 28 support team).

Some of the decrease arose because the January meeting in Huntingdon was cancelled due to a burst water tank flooding the venue. In addition, during the run up to Christmas, unfortunately, we lost a number of patients. However, neither of these two factors is seen as the main reason for the fall. The decrease is closely correlated to the withdrawal of Macmillan nurse support to the groups from May 2013 due to their own staff illnesses and shortages. The presence of a Macmillan nurse at our meetings has been an attraction to clients attending as they have been able to seek advice from them outside the formal setting of the hospital. Woodlands has established an Information and Advice Phone line for patients and carers, but this is not an effective substitute for a Macmillan nurse attending Acorn meetings whose role has also been to encourage clients to come to our groups.

The number of free individual relaxation therapies - aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology – given at meetings to patients and carers totalled 283. This was more than in past years i.e. 237 in 2011/12, and then 254 in 2012/13. Creative visualization, a collective relaxation therapy, was offered at Huntingdon on a regular basis and also occasionally at Ramsey. Some 41 took part in this, compared to 32 in 2012/13. Current therapist appointment levels at venues remain as: 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 Ramsey and St Ives continue to impose constraints on expansion of individual therapy service.

The seated exercise instructor, who previously served all three venues, resigned on maternity leave in April. It has proved difficult to find a suitable replacement with the necessary background to work with cancer patients; we were only able to provide a service at St Ives, on four occasions during the year. Thus numbers using this therapy in 2013/14 decreased markedly, whereas it had grown over the 3 previous years: viz., 117 in 2010/11, 160 in 2011/12, 169 in 2012/13, and then 43 in 2013/14. However, the average of 10 participating on each occasion it was available reflects its popularity. An additional seated exercise instructor has been appointed from May 2014.

We also continued with a variety of outside speakers: covering, Fire Safety, Healthy Diet, Healthy Exercise, and Sources of funding for carers.

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

## **Social Outings**

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Acorn social events which are free to our clients are major contributors to their quality of life. Continuing with past practice, in each of the months June, July, August and September we organised a Ladybird boat trip for 20 members on the River Ouse followed by a free lunch at the Dolphin Hotel. The free Xmas lunch, also held at the Dolphin was also very successful, with 70 of our members attending. Eighteen members also attended a pantomime in December at the Commemoration Hall. The pantomime was one of a series of events organized for the Huntingdon Mayor's Charity Fund. Following an invitation from St Peters School Huntingdon their annual Carol Concert was made open to our clients, families and friends. This was at a nominal charge of £3.

## **Sponsorships and Funding**

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Our success in the last year would not have been possible without the generous support that we have received through organisational donations and grants, including from:

- *Huntingdon Freeman's Trust*
- *Huntingdon Town Council*
- *Macmillan (Supporting you to help others fund)*
- *St Ives Town Council (Mayor's Charity Fund)*
- *Hinchingbrooke School*
- *St Ivo School Year 9 PSHE*
- *Soil Property Testing Ltd, Huntingdon*
- *Hilton Ladies Flower Club*
- *Kimbolton Flower Club*
- *Norwich and Peterborough Building Society*
- *RAF Wyton Charity Fund*
- *St Ives Rotary Club*
- *St Ivo Lodge and their Provincial Headquarters*

*We also benefitted from our own fund-raising, including £300 raised on a stall at the Huntingdon Christmas lights switch-on event. A Rock Concert organized in October by one of our members, and held at the Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon raised some £400. At this three local bands performed free of charge. The St Peter's School Carol Concert raised £260. Membership of localgiving.com continued to produce extra valuable income of £2100 in 2013/14. This was again stimulated by matched-funding for regular on-line donations by direct debit made through the website [www.localgiving.com](http://www.localgiving.com). We had 5 donors sign up for the £10 a month direct debit scheme, which led to the doubling of their donations for one year.*

*Another major source of donations was from the efforts of members and friends who participated in the Peterborough half-marathon, and the Somersham 10Km fun-run. Sponsorship on these challenges raised over £2000 for Acorn.*

*In addition, we have benefitted greatly from: two memorial donations and a number of personal donations including one anonymous gift for £2000. These gifts both of money and in-kind (raffle prizes), have all added to our sustainability for the future. It is gratifying that donations have also been made by our own clients which are 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 enables us to continue providing support to those affected by cancer without worrying about funds unduly. This appreciation is also highlighted on our website.*

## **Acorn Profile**

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*The submissions for grants and donations have served to increase the profile of Acorn over the last year. In addition, the two concerts and our own fund-raising activities, made a major contribution to widening knowledge of Acorn in the community. The attendance at the concerts, some 150 at the school and 50 at the rock concert, was mainly comprised of non-Acorn members from the local community. All of these, students, staff, parents, and general public had a short briefing about Acorn. Many Huntingdon residents visited the Christmas lights switch-on stall. Good relations continue with Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR). I had the opportunity, with Richard Ruston (past Chairman), to speak on HCR about Acorn. Colin Hyams and I have also had the opportunity to feature in several other programmes. Articles, pre-and post concerts, and testimonials about Acorn's value to those affected by cancer have featured in the Hunts Post, and the News and Crier.*

*To these positive points can be added the worrying data that during 2013/14, only 22 new patients and 6 new carers came to our meetings (compared to 49 new patients and 24 new carers in 2012/13). As mentioned*

*above the drop-off in referrals is closely correlated with the Macmillan nurse staff shortage at Hinchingsbrooke and withdrawal of their routine attendance at Acorn meetings.*

*However, these data would seem to reflect a relatively small fraction of those who would have been diagnosed with cancer in the last year. We are concerned therefore that numbers attending our group should fall. We plan to liaise with Woodlands who are a main source and focus for referrals to Acorn so that sight of how we can help families affected by cancer is not lost. We are delighted to report that Dr Simon Russell, Consultant Oncologist from the Woodlands has now joined the Trustee group. Promotion in other sectors of our referral pipeline – including with GP surgeries - will also be stepped up. The design of the Acorn website has been improved by Colin Hyams, so that we now have a more visually appealing and informative Internet presence.*

## **Acorn Governance**

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*Last year we completed a review of how our operating practice of having two governance bodies (Committee and Trustees) reflected the requirements of our Constitution. Given the Constitution's specification of The Committee as the senior group, this led to a change in the Terms of Reference of the Trustees to better reflect their role as a specialist advisory group with devolved responsibility for strategy and direction on behalf of the Committee. This also led to the Chair of Committee becoming Chair of Trustees. Similarly, this also regularizes the position of the Secretary (Gordon) and Treasurer (Jan) who also serve both groups. The rest of the Trustees reflect key knowledge and experience of our operating environment.*

*The review also concluded that a change of name of the Group was now appropriate. The Group was originally given the name "St Ives Acorn..." as this was where it was founded. However, as we now also serve the communities in, and around, Huntingdon and Ramsey, the name was proving to have disadvantages, particularly for marketing. Hence our decision at the 2013 AGM to change the name to "The Acorn Cancer Support Group". The name change and the minor alteration to the Constitution has been agreed by the Charity Commission, HMRC and bank. Our entries on external websites have been amended.*

## **Thank You**

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*Our charity continues to depend crucially on the input from our volunteer team without whom our group would not be able to function. I particularly want to thank Cally Bussetil and Julia Mitchell who jointly manage the coordination of activity at the three venues. I also want to thank our therapists for the relaxation treatments they provide; the excellent evaluation reviews that we get from our clients are testimony to the value of their sessions. The withdrawal of Macmillan nurses from routine attendance at our support meetings is very unfortunate, however it is important that my report recognizes the great help they have given us over the previous 15 years, and we very much hope that they will be able to return to our meetings when their staffing problems lessen.*

*Finally, I would like to thank all members of the governance team for their contributions during the year, including Richard Ruston for chairing the Committee and Trustees group, even though for a relatively short time. I would particularly like to thank Jan Pyle, my colleague administrator and Treasurer, for the immense amount of time and input she gives to the group. The success of the group has benefitted enormously by the smooth way we have been able to work and together run the charity. Given our relatively long time running the group, the need to succession plan to ensure that the charity will be as successful in the years to come, remains as important as ever.*

*Gordon Dyer MBE, Secretary St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group.*  
26 April 2014 v3

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