

The Acorn Cancer Support Group

Chair of Trustees Report for 2015-2016

Summary

Last year a total of 879 members and support team attended the 36 Acorn meetings. Free refreshments and lunch were provided for all. Also provided at no-cost were: 206 individual relaxation therapy treatments; 173 participated in seated exercise and 27 in creative visualization. Acorn also provided 300 individual free social outings: boat trips for 80 with lunch at the Dolphin, 65 to a Christmas lunch also at the Dolphin, and 144 to monthly film shows at Field Lodge Care Home with lunch included. In addition, nine members attended an event provided by an external sponsor, namely to a Christmas lunch at the Officers Mess RAF Wyton. The combination of mutual support offered at meetings along with therapies and seated exercise, plus social outings is the basis by which we continue to meet our primary objectives, which are to alleviate members' distress and to reduce loneliness and isolation. Evaluation feedback of the services provided to patients and carers has continued to be excellent. Risk assessments have been carried out for all venues/activity.

Recruitment of new members is still not as high as we would wish; numbers recruited in the past year were the same as those for 2014/15. An improving liaison with HCCN and a jointly drafted leaflet which is issued to cancer patients at Hinchingbrooke identifies our distinctive and complementary roles. HCCN are now the main source of medical advice to cancer patients, which means that our efforts will now emphasise the social dimension of support to our patients and carer members.

The Group continued to have success in fund-raising. With donations from individuals, and grants from a range of organisations within the local civic and business communities, Acorn is well placed financially to move into the 2016/17 FY. Our promotion efforts are clearly having effect in the local community. In the last year, we have had unsolicited contact from two organizations who made Acorn their "Charity of the Year".

Our achievements are described in more detail below, along with a summary of on-going plans to improve member recruitment and the concerns around volunteer staffing for key management posts.

Acorn Governance and Patronage

At the April 2015 Trustees meeting, it was agreed that Simon Townend, previously Deputy Chair of the Committee, would assume the role of Chairman. Colin Hyams, previously Chair of the Committee, agreed to serve as Vice Chairman, and to continue as Webmaster for the time being. The July Annual General Meeting (AGM) was attended by 30, including 20 members, the rest support team. The feedback gathered then, and also in October and February, has continued to show that Acorn is meeting members' needs.

Lady Berrill, the Acorn Patron for the past 4 years has now relinquished the role, but we are delighted that Lady Linda Vane Percy of Island Hall, Godmanchester has assumed the position.

Group Meetings

The monthly group meetings at Huntingdon, Ramsey and St. Ives are crucially important as the primary venues for the services we offer, enhanced by the mutual support that they also foster. They continued to run very well. There was a small increase in attendance over 2014/15, but overall numbers were still well below the levels of 2012/13. The overall attendance over the past six years is shown in the Table:

Attendance in FY	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Total	770	1032	1079	863	853	879

The table shows the growth from 2010/11, with falloff in 2013/14 to an approx steady attendance at a lower level. The fall-off in 2013/14 is linked directly to non-availability of Macmillan nurses to come to meetings. As can be seen below, attendance pattern has also varied between venues, with average attendance at Huntingdon decreasing and those for St Ives increasing. The average monthly attendance at venues over recent years is shown below:

Venue	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Huntingdon	45	37	43	35
Ramsey	22	16	11	13
St Ives	23	21	17	25

Of the total attendance of 879 in 2015/16, 61% were our members, the remainder were our own volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists.

Current complementary therapist appointment levels at venues remain as four at Huntingdon and one each at Ramsey and St Ives. The levels are kept under review as demand changes, though facilities at Ramsey and St Ives continue to impose constraints on expansion of individual therapy service. The number of free individual relaxation therapies (aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology) totalled 206. This was somewhat less than 2014/15 i.e. 277. However, with instructor appointments fully filled, seated exercise take-up increased to 173 from 109 in 2014/15. The activity has gained in popularity and the provision has stabilized with sessions every other month at each venue. Creative visualization, a collective relaxation therapy, was offered at Huntingdon when this could be fitted in. This was sometimes not possible when a combination of a talk and seated exercise was on offer. Some 27 took part in this in 2015/16, compared to 39 in 2014/15. Overall, the total of the various therapies delivered in 2015/16 was 409, compared to 422 in 2014/15. Evaluation of the support meetings and therapies show that these activities are major contributors to Acorn meeting its primary objective of alleviating the distress of our members. To assure safety of members, risk assessments have been carried out for all venues/activity.

Social Outings

Acorn social events, which are free to our members, continue to be major contributors to their quality of life, and an antidote to isolation and loneliness. Continuing with past practice, in each of the months June, July, August and September we organised a Ladybird boat trip. Each trip lasted 5 hours and carried 20 members on the River Ouse from Hartford Marina to St Ives and back, including a stop for lunch at the Dolphin Hotel. The Xmas lunch on 11 December, held at the Dolphin was also very successful, with some 70 of our members attending. Donations towards the lunch were kindly provided by Soil Property Testing (SPT) Huntingdon, St Ives Rotary Club and two individual donations, one in memoriam.

RAF Wyton were the generous hosts of a Christmas lunch in the Officers Mess on 1 December for nine Acorn members. Our trials of Film Club, which is held at a twelve-seat private cinema at Field Lodge Care Home, St Ives, on the 1st Wednesday each month, proved to be a very popular. On some months the numbers wishing to attend exceed the 12 armchair seats available. But we can go to maximum of 15 with 3 more ordinary seat. The outing includes a sandwich lunch with cake, tea or coffee. As one member wrote "If it doesn't seem I am greedy? Put me down for all of them. I consider the meetings not only for the films, but the social gathering, a place to meet and chat." The total attendance between May 2015 and March 2016 was 144. A protocol has been written to cover expectations of our hosts when Acorn members make regular visits to external sites. This currently applies only to Field Lodge, so the active version of the protocol is focussed on this.

Sponsorships and Funding

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

- *Huntingdon Freeman's Trust*
- *Godmanchester Town Council (Mayor's Charity Fund)*
- *Ramsey Town Council (Mayor's Charity Fund)*
- *Tesco Charity Fund*
- *St Ives Community Choir – the donation of ticket and raffle sales at their December Christmas Concert*
- *Soil Property Testing Ltd Huntingdon*
- *Norwich and Peterborough Building Society*
- *Huntingdon Rotary Cromwell*
- *St Ives Rotary Club*
- *Carolyn Parker School of Ballet – Acorn was one of four local charities to be chosen by them to benefit from ticket, programme and raffle ticket sales at a ballet and contemporary show held at the Performing Arts Centre, Huntingdon on 5 March.*

along with help in kind, from:

- *Parrot Printing – for very favourable terms in their printing services*
- *Hinchingbrooke School- for an invitation to their Christmas concert and permission to have raffle and tombola*
- *Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM) – for invitations to feature in radio programmes and free advertisement of Acorn*
- *Waitrose, Tesco Express, East Midlands Co-operative, and Tom's Cakes for donating mince pies for the St Ives Community Choir Concert*
- *Fenstanton Butchers, Stephens St Ives Butchers and the Golden Lion for raffle prizes for the St Ives Community Choir Concert*

Our own fund raising, through having a stall at the Godmanchester and Huntingdon Galas, produced £307.

Membership of localgiving.com was a major channel for income approaching £3500. This was first stimulated by a matched-funding period for regular on-line donations by direct debit made through the website

www.localgiving.com . We had 7 donors sign up for the £10 a month scheme, which led to the doubling of their donations for three months. But the largest single source of funds through localgiving.com was from the effort of Angie Lambert who ran in the Cambridge Half Marathon on 28 February. Her sponsorship, including money donated off-line, after matched funds of £500 given by her employers, ARM holdings, raised over £1700 for Acorn. In addition one of our members, Wendy Richmond, is planned to do a zip-wire descent in North Wales on 10 April. The money raised from this will be over £700 but some will show in the accounts for 2016/17.

In addition, we have benefitted greatly from donations from individuals in the local community. These personal donations of both gifts of money and in-kind gifts (cakes and refreshments), have all added to our sustainability for the future. It is gratifying that donations have also been made by our own members 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 enables us to continue providing support to those affected by cancer without worrying about funds unduly. This appreciation is also highlighted on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/siacsg and website www.acornsupportgroup.org.uk .

Acorn Profile

Our strategy for increasing awareness as a means to attract new members has continued to include the following elements:

- *submissions for grants to local funding sources, including civic bodies and leaders, lodges and rotary clubs.*
- *in thanking donors, inviting them to act as “ambassadors”, in the sense of telling others they know who are affected by cancer, about Acorn and what we can offer.*
- *attending Concerts and other fund-raising events, which provided opportunities to speak directly to members of the public who attend.*
- *maintaining good relations with Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM) and responding to any opportunity they offer to speak about Acorn on the radio. Last year this included three “Over to You” programmes and a Christmas message.*
- *articles in the Hunts Post, thanking sponsors and stressing Acorn’s value to those affected by cancer.*
- *printing of a new leaflet and placing these in surgeries in the area. In several cases surgeries have agreed to include PowerPoint-type pages relating to Acorn on their moving screens.*
- *stressing in promotion activity that Acorn is not like some other support groups, e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, where the image prevails of a newcomer needing to speak up and say why they have come. We counter this by saying that we ask no questions of a newcomer but simply welcome them, offer tea or coffee and then introduce them to one other person. What they share is up to them.*
- *improving relationship and contact with HCCN. Community Cancer nurses from HCCN attended Huntingdon meetings to talk on Exercise, Diet and Nutrition. Two referrals have occurred through the nurses. A leaflet setting out the distinctive and complementary natures of HCCN and Acorn has been written. This is held and distributed through the HCCN area of Woodlands.*
- *regular updating news on both our website and Facebook page. The Facebook page continues to extend its reach.*
- *responding to any opportunity to promote Acorn locally. In addition to the Hunts Post, articles have appeared in two local Ramsey papers and one in the March Edition of Ramsey Neighbourhood News. Councillor Ian Curtis, immediate past Mayor, is now acting as an Acorn “ambassador” in Ramsey. It is hoped that he will be elected to the Committee at the AGM in July.*

The efforts we continue to make to enhance our profile in the community at large are showing signs of positive effect. Both the sponsorships by the St Ives Community Choir and the Carolyn Parker School of Ballet were unsolicited. All the attempts to promote Acorn are on-going. Progress in recruiting new members continues to

be gradual. It has been limited in 2015/16, when only 21 new patients and 10 new carers joined us (compared to 23 and 7 respectively in 2014/15, 22 and 6 in 2013/14, and 49 and 24 in 2012/13). At the moment we are just maintaining a level of new members to make up for those who sadly we have lost. Our drive to find new members is reinforced by the recent Macmillan estimate that 2.5 million people will be living with cancer in the UK in 2015. Our recruitment is a very small fraction of those who will be affected by cancer in our local area¹. Acorn has the willingness, finance and capacity to help more families affected by cancer, and this is where our efforts are concentrated.

Thank You

Our charity continues to depend crucially on the input from our volunteer team, especially those cheerful and friendly helpers who make drinks and get lunches ready at our group meetings. Without this sterling effort our group would be much less of a family. I particularly want to thank Simon Townend and Shirley Hand for running the Huntingdon Group and the organizational improvements that they have made. Julia Mitchell remains the cornerstone of our activity at Ramsey and St Ives, and in many other capacities, including brilliant organization of the boat trips. I also want to thank Val Zarno and her team of therapists for the relaxation treatments they provide. Our seated exercise instructors bring fun to everything they do. The excellent evaluation reviews that we get from our members are testimony to the value of all these sessions. Finally, I would like to thank all members of the governance team for their contributions during the year: Simon Townend for chairing the Committee and Trustees group, and Colin Hyams for acting as Vice Chairman and webmaster over the past. I would also 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 efficient way we two have been able to work together to manage the day-to-day activity of the charity. Our replacement is long overdue and putting succession arrangements in place remains crucial.

Gordon Dyer MBE, Secretary, The Acorn Cancer Support Group.

24 April 2016 v3

Report approved by the Charity's Trustees at their meeting on 20 April 2016.

[BACK TO WEBSITE](#)
