

The Acorn Cancer Support Group

Chair of Trustees Report for 2017-2018

Summary

In the last FY (Apr 2017 – Mar 2018), a total of 993 members and support team attended the 36 Acorn monthly meetings held in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. Free refreshments and lunch were provided for all. Also provided at no-cost were 221 individual relaxation therapy treatments. Some 236 members participated in seated exercise and 9 in creative visualization. Acorn also provided 411 individual free social outings, including: boat trips for 80 with lunch at the Dolphin, 75 to a Spring lunch and 76 to a Christmas lunch both at Slepe Hall, 150 came to monthly film shows at the Field Lodge Care Home with lunch included, and 25 to two outings with tea or lunch. In addition, eight members attended an event at the invitation of an external sponsor, namely a Christmas lunch at the Officers Mess RAF Wyton.

The opportunity for mutual support available at meetings, along with the offer of therapies and seated exercise, plus social outings, is the basis by which we continue to meet our primary objectives. These are to alleviate members' distress, to reduce loneliness and isolation and enhance their quality of life. Members' feedback of the provision has continued to be excellent. Risk assessments continue to be reviewed, and where necessary updated for all venues/and major activity.

Recruitment of new members (31) was lower than in 2016/17 (45). For 2017/18 we originally fixed a target for recruitment of 60 but following the successful bid to the Mason's Tercentenary Fund this was redefined as the upper limit for a target range of 30-60. We recruited 21 new members in the first six months of the Oct 2017/ Sep 2018 Mason's project

The Group had major success in fund-raising. A Freemason's grant of £15,000 was clearly exceptional and paves the way for further developments in social activity and also assures resilience. It has also brought some management challenge as the funding is restricted and has to be spent in a Project Year (Oct 2017 – Sep 2018). This overlaps two of our normal FYs. Grants were also received from a wide range of groups and organisations within the local civic and business communities. Donations also came from individuals. Some donations were unsolicited, indicating our promotion efforts continue to have effect in the local community. Income over the year greatly exceeded expectations and Acorn is exceptionally well placed financially to move into the 2018/19 FY and beyond.

Our achievements are described in more detail below, along with a summary of on-going plans to improve member recruitment and with the success in finding a replacement Treasurer.

Acorn Governance

Simon Townend served as Chairman of the governing Committee throughout the year, with Colin Hyams as Vice Chairman, Janet Pyle as Treasurer, and Gordon Dyer as Secretary. The usual Trustee meeting was held in April and was followed in July, by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Slepe Hall Hotel. The AGM was attended by 31, including 18 members, and 13 members of the Committee, a Trustee and support team. The Committee met in October and held an e-Exchange meeting in January 2018.

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. The overall attendance over the past eight years is shown in the following Table:

The total of 991 in 2017/18 was a 7 % increase in attendance over 2016/17, but overall numbers are still below the peak level of 2012/13. There was a 20% drop in attendance in 2013/14 which was directly to non-availability of Macmillan nurses to come to meetings. Attendance has grown back steadily over the last five years so that in 2017/18 over 60% of the fall was recovered.

FY Attendance	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18
Total	770	1032	1079	863	853	879	925	993

The table shows the average attendance at each venue from 2012/13. As can be seen below from pattern at venues, the average attendance at both Ramsey and Huntingdon was the same St Ives increased over 2016/17.

Venue	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Huntingdon	45	37	43	35	38	37
Ramsey	22	16	11	13	13	14
St Ives	23	21	17	25	26	32
Total	90	74	71	73	77	83

Of the total attendance of 993 in 2017/18, 678 were patients and carers (or 68%), the remainder were our 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 individual relaxation therapies (aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology) totalled 221. This was very close to the number, 223, given in 2016/17. The slight fall in therapies delivered was due to the loss of one therapist for 3 months who fell and broke her wrist. Seated-exercise take-up increased very slightly over 2016/17 from 226 to 236. The activity is popular and the provision has stabilized with sessions planned every other month at each venue. Creative visualization, a collective relaxation therapy, was offered at Huntingdon only, when this could be fitted in. This was generally not possible. Only 9 took part in this in 2017/18, compared to 27 in 2016/17.

Overall, the total of the various therapies delivered in 2017/18 was 466, compared to 476 in 2016/17. 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 reviewed and/or updated for all venues/activity.

Freemasons Community Fund Grant

The award of a £15,000 grant from the Freemason's Tercentenary Fund following an initial bid for £6,000, was an unexpected and spectacular outcome. The award followed a count of on-line public votes for six previously selected charities in the Mason's Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire Province. Exploitation of our Facebook page and members' email distribution lists to invite votes was a key factor in Acorn receiving the larger grant. The grant adds a year's resilience and the opportunity to add extra social activities to our programme. Mechanisms have now been set up to meet the requirement to spend the grant within the year defined for the grant (Oct 2017-Sep 2018) which straddles two of our normal FYs. These mechanisms also cover the requirement to evaluate activity and spend to ensure that the objectives of the project have been met.

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. The Spring Lunch, was held in May at Slepe Hall for 75, including 3 Mayorial guests from St Ives and Huntingdon. This event received good reviews and we plan to repeat this in future years. We held the AGM after the lunch. This allowed members to be involved in this important event in the Acorn calendar without requiring attendance on a separate day.

Continuing with past practice, a Ladybird boat trip was arranged in each of the months June, July, August and September. 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 Christmas lunch on 14 Dec, held at Slepe Hall was also successful, with some 76 of our members attending. A grant towards the lunch was provided by Macmillan.

RAF Wyton were again the generous hosts of a Christmas lunch in the Officers Mess on 22 November for 8 Acorn members. The Film Club, which is held at a 14-seat private cinema at Field Lodge Care Home, St Ives, on the 1st Wednesday each month, continued to be a very popular. The total attendance between April 2017 and March 2018 was 150. Unfortunately, the Film Club had to be cancelled in December due to a sudden out-break of illness at the Care Home, otherwise numbers would have been higher.

The additional social activity which we have provided in this FY because of the extra resource available through the Mason's grant included: tour and tea at for 14 at Jordan's Mill Biggleswade, and a fish and chip lunch for 11 in Godmanchester. More are planned over the coming summer months.

No-shows on social events have presented some problems. It can be expected that from time to time individuals need last minute medical appointments or become ill which prevent them from going on an outing, or to attend an event that they had previously booked. Some have not told us of the change in their circumstances which has led to their no-show. This has had knock-on effects for Acorn, in terms of cost, and others members, who missed an opportunity to be included in that social event. We are reviewing how best to deal with the issue.

Sponsorships and Funding

Our success in the last year would not have been possible without the generosity of the following local/national groups or organizations, who provided either grants, or donations, or funds raised through events they organised:

- Black Bull Godmanchester Cabaret
- Bluntisham Ukelele Group
- Buckfest Music Festival
- Buckworth Parish Council
- Catholic Womens League, Southall Branch
- Freemasons Tercentenary Fund (Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire Province)
- Freemasons Ailwyn Lodge Ramsey
- Freemasons Toseland Lodge St Neots
- Hemingford Grey Ladies Choir Concert
- Hilton Joint Churches
- Houghton and Wyton Golfers
- Huntingdon Freeman's Trust
- Macmillan "Supporting You to Help Others Fund"
- Pots and Shots Godmanchester
- Ramsey Hospital Charity Shop
- Ramsey Rotary Club
- Soil Property Testing Ltd Huntingdon
- St Ives Mayor's Charity Fund
- St Ives Rotary Club
- The Poacher Inn, two Quiz Nights and collection box
- 543 Squadron Aircrew Association

along with help in kind, from:

- The Aragon Singers for performing at the Christmas Lunch
- Parrot Printing – for very favourable terms in their printing services
- Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM) – for invitations to feature in radio programmes and free advertisement of Acorn

Our own fund raising, through stalls at Hemingford Grey Village Sale, Huntingdon Gala, Huntingdon Carnival, and Buckfest produced £800. HMRC repayment of Giftaid for the previous year amounted to £408.

Localgiving.org was again a major channel for income, providing £1384. This included some regular on-line donations made by direct debit through the website www.localgiving.org. We had 5 donors continuing a £10 per month scheme. The total also included the balance of funds received for Rhyse Plummer-coles' run in the London marathon on 23 April in sponsorship of Acorn.

One unexpected source of income was through the kind action of a young couple who arranged for a table collection for Acorn at their wedding breakfast. This raised £200. We have also benefitted greatly from other donations from individuals in the local community. These personal donations of both gifts of money, including some in memoriam, 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 confirm that the support we provide is of considerable value to them. We 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.

We are thanking representatives of sponsors in a more explicit way by inviting them to a celebration of Acorn's 20th Anniversary (planned for 10th May). Fund-raising for their participation in this event has been a separate process with donations provided by some members of the Committee and some patient and carer members, who have each given written instructions to restrict the money for this purpose.

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.
- taking up opportunities to speak on BBC Radio Cambridge
- articles in the Hunts Post, thanking sponsors and stressing Acorn’s value to those affected by cancer.
- we now have a volunteer carer who is maintaining leaflets and posters supplies in surgeries, libraries and some pharmacies in the area. In several cases surgeries carry 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.
- maintaining relationship and contact with Woodlands/HCCN and with the Macmillan Information Centre in Addenbrookes.
- regular updating news on both our website and Facebook page. The Facebook page continues to extend its reach and was a crucial factor in the vote for the Mason’s grant.
- responding to opportunities to promote Acorn in local literature. In addition to the Hunts Post, adverts have appeared and in the Godmanchester “Bridge” magazine, in the St Ives “Now” and Suggestives magazines and the Huntingdon and Ramsey equivalent.

The efforts we continue to make to enhance our profile in the community at large are showing signs of positive effect. All the attempts to promote Acorn are on-going. Recruitment of new members continues at an acceptable pace and we achieved the middle of our target range of 30-60. In 2017/18, 31 new members (16 patients and 15 carers) joined Acorn. This compared to 45 new members (28 patients and 17 carers) in 2016/17, 31 new members (21 and 10) in 2015/16, 30 new members (23 and 7) in 2014/15, and 28 new members (22 and 6) in 2013/14.

Our continuing drive to find new members is reinforced by the Macmillan estimate that 2.5 million people were 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 remain 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. Thanks are due to Simon Townend and Shirley Hand for running the Huntingdon Group. Julia Mitchell remains the cornerstone of activity at St Ives, and in many other

¹ Given the Hunts DC 2013 estimate of 172,000 population, and the latest UK population estimate of 64.5 million, this equates to 6,800 in Hunts DC area. Separating out the area covered by St Neots Acorn reduces the estimate to 4,000. Further reductions to allow for our remit of adults only (say to 3,000), and then to cater for the “position in the recovery journey or degree of appropriateness” for any given cancer patient to attend our groups (say 10% only), would seem to suggest that 300 cancer patients in our catchment area could benefit from our service. If, say, one third of these have carers who are willing/able/can be convinced of the value of the group, then we arrive at 400 as a long term target for support arrangements. Given this estimate our on-going target to recruit c.50 new members per year is a conservative one.

capacities, including brilliant organization of the boat trips and the Christmas and Spring lunches. Julia has now partly handed over the reins at Ramsey to ex-carers who are now moving into a volunteering role

We also want to give an enormous vote of thanks to our lead therapist Beverley Barlow and the whole team of therapists for the very welcome 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 therapy sessions.

Finally, thanks are due to 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 being Vice Chairman and webmaster over the past year. I would also particularly like to thank my wife, Jan Pyle, colleague administrator and Treasurer, for the immense amount of time and input she has given 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 for the past 10 years.

We are pleased to report that John Windle has volunteered to replace Jan as Treasurer. She has served over 10 years in the role. Shirley Hand has also volunteered to take over the Personnel function. This means that Jan will be able to help me reduce my load until a full replacement(s) can be found for me. A plan is in place to reduce our overall responsibility over the next 12 months.

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

22 April 2018 v3

Report approved by the Acorn Trustees at their meeting on 18 April 2018.

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