

# The Acorn Cancer Support Group

## Annual Report for 2014-2015

*This Annual report was presented by the Charity's Secretary and approved by the Trustees group at their April 2015 meeting.*

### Summary

*Last year a total of 851 clients and support team members attended the 36 designated support meetings. Refreshments and lunch were provided for all. Individual relaxation therapies were given to 209; 39 participated in creative visualisation and 118 in seated exercise sessions.*

*We also provided nearly 300 individual social outings, comprising: boat trips for 80 including lunch at the Dolphin, 75 to a Christmas lunch and 104 to cinema outings; in addition, 18 members attended events provided directly by sponsors, ten to a Christmas lunch at RAF Wyton and six to a Christmas Cracker Concert sponsored by St Ives Rotary Club.*

*Evaluation feedback of the services provided has continued to be excellent. However, while we have had success in meeting our current client satisfaction objectives, recruitment of new clients has not met our target, though some progress has been made. Shortfall in having regular new client referrals began to in May 2013 when Woodlands decided that Macmillan nurses could no longer support Acorn meetings due to their own staff shortages. Our achievements are described below, along with a summary of on-going plans to reduce our concerns over client recruitment and volunteer staffing for key management posts. The Group continued to have success in fund-raising, supplemented by grants from a range of organisations within the local civic and business communities and is well placed financially to move into the 2015/16 FY.*

### Acorn Name and Governance

*All necessary actions relating to the change of name to "The Acorn Cancer Support Group" are now complete. The change was initiated to facilitate promotion in a focused way in all three areas of operation, by referring to a specific group within Acorn.*

*Colin Hyams attended the April 2014 Trustee meeting prior to his election as Chair of the Committee at the July Annual General Meeting (AGM). Also Dr Simon Russell, a consultant oncologist at Woodlands and Addenbrookes, joined the Trustees as part of an on-going activity to recruit more clients. The AGM was also the opportunity to welcome Simon Townend as Deputy Chair of the Committee. Simon acted as Chair during Colin's absence between 13 Nov 2014 and 5 Mar 2015.*

## 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. However, there was a small decrease in attendance over 2013/14, and overall numbers were still well below the levels of 2012/13. Overall attendance over the past five years was:

Attendance in FY	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total	770	1032	1079	863	851

The table shows the growth with Macmillan nurse attendance at meetings, the fall off in 2013/14 and a small further decline in 2014/15. As can be seen below, attendance pattern has varied between venues, with numbers at Huntingdon holding up well. The average attendance at venues over recent years has varied as follows:

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

Of the total attendance of 851 in 2014/15 some 61% were our clients, the remainder were our own volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists.

In response to a request from a patient and in an attempt to improve service, a special Facebook page for patients, AcornForum, has been established. This page enables potential for patients to contact each other between meetings. Access is only via approval by myself as Administrator for Facebook. The page is of a "secret" category and only shows up for those whose have clearance.

Current complementary 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 number of free individual relaxation therapies - aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology – given at meetings to clients totalled 209. This was somewhat less than in past years i.e. 237 in 2011/12, 254 in 2012/13, and 283 in 2013/14. However, seated exercise take-up increased by 75, even with a gap which occurred when one of two instructors appointed resigned to join the Fire Service. The activity is popular and the provision has now stabilized with sessions every other month

at each venue. The overall participation over the last 5 years was as follows: 117 in 2010/11, 160 in 2011/12, 169 in 2012/13, 43 in 2013/14, and then 118 in 2014/15. Creative visualization, a collective relaxation therapy, was offered at Huntingdon on a regular basis. Some 39 took part in this in 2014/15, compared to 41 in 2013/14 and 32 in 2012/13. Overall, the total of the various therapies delivered in 2014/15 was 366, compared to 367 in 2013/14.

Evaluation of the support meetings and therapies show that these activities are major contributors to Acorn meeting its primary objective 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, continue to be 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. 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 free Xmas lunch on 5 December, held at the Dolphin was also very successful, with 75 of our members attending. Grants towards the lunch were kindly provided by RAF Wyton, Soil Property Testing (SPT) Huntingdon and St Ives Rotary Club.

RAF Wyton were also the generous hosts of a Christmas lunch in the Officers Mess on 1 December for ten Acorn members. St Ives Rotary also provided free tickets for six Acorn members to attend a Christmas Cracker Concert at the Free Church St Ives on 14 December.

Also from May we started a Film Club, which was held at twelve-seat private cinema at Field Lodge Care Home, St Ives, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday each month. The outing includes a sandwich lunch with cake, tea or coffee. The club was funded by a grant from Huntingdon District Council. Because of its popularity the Club will continue into next year. The total attendance between May 2014 and March 2015 was 104. The facility was not available in February and March, but should be usable from April 2015 onwards.

## **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/grants, and help in kind, including from:

- Huntingdon Freeman's Trust
- Huntingdon District Council
- Huntingdon Town Council (Mayor's Charity Fund)<sup>1</sup>
- Hinchingsbrooke School

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<sup>1</sup> We were also nominated by the Mayors of Godmanchester and Ramsey to be one of their charities in their 2014/15 civic year. The funds from these decisions will not be available till after May 2015 coincident with the timetable for changeover in mayoral appointments.

- *Nationwide Building Society*
- *Step by Step Latin and Ballroom Dancing School*
- *Soil Property Testing Ltd Huntingdon*
- **RAF Wyton Charity Fund**
- **St Ives Rotary Club**
- **Euston Masonic Lodge**
- *Northern Soul Against Cancer*
- *Huntingdon Community radio (HCR104FM)*

*We also benefitted from our own fund-raising. A Rock Concert organized in May by Rodney Hooker, one of our members, raised over £860. At this three local bands performed free of charge. Membership of localgiving.com continued to produce extra valuable income of £1116 in 2014/15. 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 6 donors sign up for the £10 a month direct debit scheme, which led to the doubling of their donations for six months. Another major source of donations was from efforts of two individuals who participated in sponsored events. Beverley Barlow undertook a Marathon walk. Timothy Hyde, a relative of a past client, ran five Marathons over five successive weekends. Sponsorship on these challenges raised £985 for Acorn.*

*In addition, we have benefitted greatly from the efforts of individual volunteers who have held in-garden and in-house sales of handbags and other items, and run raffles and quiz nights. These sales, plus a number of 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 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 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/siacsq](http://www.facebook.com/siacsq) and website [www.acornsupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.acornsupportgroup.org.uk).*

## **Acorn Profile**

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*Our strategy for increasing awareness as a means to attract new clients has included the following elements:*

- *submissions for grants to local funding sources, including civic bodies and leaders, lodges and rotary clubs.*
- *in thanking donors by 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.*
- *the organization of a Rock Concert and other fund-raising activities, which provided opportunities to speak directly to members of the public who attended the events.*
- *maintaining good relations with Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM). They twice ran a six-week free Advert for Acorn. Also Colin, Simon and I took part in several HCR programmes on Acorn. Recent participations were, just before Christmas, and in February.*
- *two articles thanking sponsors and stressing Acorn’s value to those affected by cancer have featured in the Hunts Post.*

- *printing of a new leaflet and placing these in every surgery 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.*
- *making contact with HCCN, a new support group set up by Woodlands for patients currently undergoing chemotherapy. HCCN, with a stated emphasis on patients of working age, appears to be a new focus for the Macmillan team. The contact led to a peripheral opportunity to have a stand at an HCCN conference and speak to some of their current client group. The hope is that HCCN will encourage appropriate clients to transfer to Acorn at some point in their recovery journey.*
- *making contact with the new Macmillan Information Service in the Oncology Department at Addenbrookes. They have been very enthusiastic in helping us find new clients and they receive a regular supply of leaflets. This also led to an invitation to attend the launch of the service on 28 January.*
- *Dr Simon Russell, Consultant Oncologist, joined the Trustee group*
- *continuous improvement on both our website and Facebook page. The Facebook page has extended its reach considerably in the last year; the postings of 22-29 December (which included the news of the five marathon achievement) had a reach of 223.*

*All these attempts to promote Acorn will inevitably take time to have full effect. Progress in recruiting new clients has been limited in 2014/15, when only 23 new patients and 7 new carers came to our meetings (compared to 22 and 6 respectively in 2013/14, and 49 and 24 respectively in 2012/13). Our drive to find new clients 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 area<sup>2</sup>. Acorn has the willingness, finance and capacity to help more people affected by cancer.*

## **Thank You**

*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 for her outstanding contribution, who, after some 5 years as Centre Coordinator and team leader at Huntingdon, resigned in December. Julia Mitchell is also deserving of our thanks for her sterling work at Ramsey and St Ives, and in many other capacities. She has continued to act as team leader at Ramsey and St Ives, while temporary arrangements (Shirley Hand and Simon Townend) are in place at Huntingdon. I also want to thank our therapists for the relaxation treatments they provide; the excellent evaluation*

<sup>2</sup> 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 current target to recruit 50 new clients is a conservative one.

*reviews that we get from our clients are testimony to the value of their sessions. Finally, I would like to thank all members of the governance team for their contributions during the year, including: Colin Hyams for chairing the Committee and Trustees group, and acting as webmaster over the past year, and to Simon Townend for acting as Chairman during Colin's absence. 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 two have been able to work and together run the charity. It had been our intention to retire at the end of March 2015. However, given the resignation of Cally Bussetil and other staffing uncertainties we have agreed to serve as Secretary and Treasurer till October 2015. The need to plan for our succession remains crucial.*

*Gordon Dyer MBE, Secretary St. Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group.  
31 March 2015 v3*

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