

The Acorn Cancer Support Group Annual Report for 2018-19

Summary

In the last FY (Apr 2018 – Mar 2019), a total of 995 members and support team attended the 36 Acorn monthly meetings held in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. Refreshments and lunch were provided to all at no-cost to them. Also provided at no-cost were 265 individual relaxation therapy treatments. Some 219 members participated in seated-exercise.

Acorn celebrated its 20th Anniversary with a lunch-time Reception on the 25th May at the Dolphin Hotel. This was attended by 51 members, along with 38 guests. Including the attendance at the Reception, Acorn provided members with 643 individual free social outings. These ranged from four summer boat trips which together provided 73 with lunch at local riverside establishments. Another 67 attended a Summer lunch at the Dolphin, and 81 a Christmas lunch at Slepe Hall. A total of 251 went to monthly film shows at the Field Lodge Care Home with lunch included, and another 109 to small group outings with tea or lunch. In addition, ten members attended Christmas lunch at the Officers Mess, RAF Wyton at the invitation of the station Charity Committee.

The total of 643 individual outings was an increase of over 50% compared to 2017-18. The additional outings resulted from Committee decisions on how to spend the time -restricted grant from the Freemason's Tercentenary Fund and some restricted funds from the Ramsey Rotary Club. The achievements in the Freemason's project year have been reported separately to them.

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.

We recruited 25 new members during the year. This level of intake was sufficient to make up for members who unfortunately passed away. We continued with efforts to attract more cancer patients and carers to the group as we have the willingness and resource to help them.

The Group continued to raise funds over the year to enhance resilience and to allow future spending on social activities to be as close as possible to that allocated in the year of this report. The allocation to social outings in 2019/20 will be kept under regular review as the level of success in fund-raising emerges. Acorn remains well placed financially to move into the 2019/20 FY.

Our achievements are described in more detail below, along with a summary of on-going plans to improve member recruitment and to find replacements to take on the various roles undertaken by the Secretary.

Acorn Governance

Simon Townend served as Chairman of the governing Committee throughout the year. Colin Hyams resigned as Vice Chairman in May and was not replaced. Colin's other function as webmaster was taken over by Gordon Dyer and Alan Barton. John Windle replaced Janet Pyle after her 11 year as Treasurer, though she remained on hand to support John as required, and continued as a Trustee.

Efforts to find replacement(s) for the various roles undertaken by Gordon Dyer and who wishes to step down after over 10 years of service as Secretary have only been partially successful. It has not yet proved possible to find a volunteer with time and the necessary administrative background to undertake his current co-ordinating role. Completing his replacement as Secretary remains a major issue.

The Group maintained its usual 3- monthly cycle of governance meetings. A Trustee meeting was held in April and was followed in July, by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Dolphin Hotel. The AGM was attended by 37,

including a total of 26 patients/carers, 6 members of the Committee and Trustees, 4 volunteer support staff and a therapist. The Committee met in October and held an e-Exchange meeting in January 2019.

Two members of Trustees resigned in the past year due to other commitments, and we would be very pleased to receive offers and/or suggestions for replacements.

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 nine years is shown in the following Table:

FY Attendance	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Total	770	1032	1079	863	853	879	925	993	995

Table 1- Meetings overall attendance

Table 2 shows the average attendance at each venue from 2012/13. As can be seen from patterns at venues, the average attendance at both Ramsey and Huntingdon was slightly down compared to 2017/18. St Ives continued to grow meaning the overall average attendance was the same.

Venue	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Huntingdon	45	37	43	35	38	37	36
Ramsey	22	16	11	13	13	14	12
St Ives	23	21	17	25	26	32	35
Total	90	74	71	73	77	83	83

Table 2 – Average Venue attendance

Of the total attendance of 995 in 2018/19, 735 were patients and carers (or 73.9%); the remainder were our volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists.

From January, in response to demand, we adjusted our complementary therapist deployment, moving one therapist from Huntingdon to St Ives. The levels are now three at Huntingdon, two at St Ives and one at Ramsey. The number of individual relaxation therapies (aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology) totalled 265. This was 44 more than the number, 221, given in 2017/18.

Seated-exercise numbers decreased very slightly over 2017/18 from 236 to 219. This was due to a cancellation of one session due the instructor needing to attend a funeral. The activity remains popular. Creative visualization, a collective relaxation therapy, was offered at Huntingdon only, and when this could be fitted in. This was generally not possible so very few took part in this in 2018/19. Overall, the total of the various therapies delivered in 2018/19 was 488 compared to 466 in 2017/18.

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. A summary of evaluation over the Freemason's project year is available on the Acorn website.

To assure safety of members, risk assessments have been reviewed and/or updated for all venues/activities. We now also provide notices (1) reminding members to check the content of sandwiches provided for lunch to avoid allergic reactions, and (2) relating to food hygiene requesting members to observe the rule that of "not touching food unless they intend to eat it."

Social Outings

Acorn outings, as confirmed by evaluation, reinforce the social activity at meetings in enhancing members' quality of life, and acting as an antidote to isolation and loneliness. On 25th May we arranged a special occasion to celebrate Acorn's 20th Anniversary. The guests included: Mayors from all three towns where Acorn has meetings plus Godmanchester; along with representatives of the Freemasons, local Rotary clubs and local businesses who sponsor us. It also provided an opportunity for Simon to thank the guests for their past support.

Two other outings offered to all three groups were held. A Summer Lunch, attended by 67 was held in July at the Dolphin. We held the AGM after the Summer lunch. This allowed members to be involved in this important event of the Acorn calendar without requiring attendance on a separate day. A Christmas lunch, attended by 81 members, was held at Slepe Hall on the 6th December. A grant towards the lunch was provided by the Joy Foundation.

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 17-20 members on the River Ouse to and from Hartford Marina, including a stop for lunch at either the Dolphin Hotel, the Oliver Cromwell Inn, or the Hartford Mill.

RAF Wyton were again the generous hosts of a Christmas lunch in the Officers Mess on 28 November for 10 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 2018 and March 2019 was 251 (this was 100 more than in 2017/18). The level of interest led to two showings in some months.

The Freemason's grant in the first half of the FY, together with the Ramsey Rotary grant for the second half of the year, allowed us to provide some 109 places on new small group outings. This included Indian and Chinese meals in Ramsey, and three lunches at a pub in Doddington, a coach trip for 15 to Cromer, a lunch for 23 at Hemingford Parish Centre and a tea for 19 at Johnson's Farm in Old Hurst.

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 other members, who missed an opportunity to be included in that social event. We remind members of this issue at every relevant opportunity.

Sponsorships and Fundraising

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 offered:

- Catholic Women's League, Southall Section
- Freemasons Tercentenary Fund (Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire Province)
- Hemingford Ladies Choir (Concert proceeds)
- Huntingdon Freeman's Trust
- Macmillan "Supporting You to Help Others Fund"
- Ramsey Hospital Charity Shop
- Royal Air Force Wyton Charities Fund
- Soil Property Testing Ltd Huntingdon
- St Ives Coffee Helpers Club
- St Ives Mayor's Charity Fund
- St Ives Rotary Club
- St Ives Snowman Committee (following donation of prize winning to charity by Optimum Beauty)
- The Joy Foundation
- The Poacher Inn, money raised by two Quiz Nights and an on-going collection box.
- Tesco Bags of Help
- Waitrose Community Fund (green token scheme)

along with help in kind, from:

- BBC Radio Cambridgeshire for their invitations to feature in “Out and about with Sue”
- Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM) – for invitations to feature in “Over to You” and for free advertisement of Acorn
- Everitt Training – for waiving training and certification fees for had a First Aid course for nine Acorn volunteers and therapists
- Parrot Printing – for very favourable terms in their printing services

Our own fund raising, through a stall at the Huntingdon Gala, raised £100; a Raffle at Christmas Lunch raised £291. Also, a Poacher Inn Collection Box and Quizzes raised £797, a collection box at Janet Churchill also raised funds (with Giftaid to come on both of these in 2019/20). HMRC repayment of Giftaid for the 2017/18 amounted to £521.

Localgiving.org was again a useful channel for income, providing £747.90. This included regular on-line donations made by direct debit through the website www.localgiving.org. We had 5 donors continuing a £10 per month scheme through localgiving.org throughout the year.

Another on-line donation facility is now set up at www.wonderful.org. This has allowed on-line sponsorship of Tim Hyde who is running the London Marathon on 28 April to raise funds for Acorn. Funds through this channel amounting to £465 have already been received in this FY, with more expected in 2019/20

We have also benefitted greatly from other donations from individuals in the local community. These personal donations of both gifts of money, and in-kind gifts (pizzas, cooked ham at Christmas, 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.

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 two opportunities to speak on BBC Radio Cambridge
- articles in the Hunts Post, thanking sponsors and stressing Acorn’s value to those affected by cancer.
- a volunteer maintains leaflets and posters supplies in surgeries, libraries and some pharmacies in the area. In a few 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.

- responding to opportunities to promote Acorn in local literature. In addition to the Hunts Post, adverts have appeared in the Godmanchester “Bridge” magazine, and equivalents in the St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey equivalents. These have not proved to be particularly effective and we plan to use them exceptionally.

We continued to use all the above to enhance our profile in the community. One sign of success was the unsolicited decision by the Mountain Warehouse shop in St Ives to support Acorn by the sale of special shopping bags.¹ In 2018/19, 25 new members (18 patients and 7 carers) joined Acorn. This level of intake was sufficient to make up for members who unfortunately passed away. Analysis shows that the major source of recruitment is by word of mouth, followed by leaflet distribution through the Woodlands. So far, paid advertisements have been least effective. We continue with our efforts to attract more cancer patients and carers to the group as we have the willingness and resource to help them.

For the coming year, we plan to invite our patient and carer members to consider taking a positive role with the media in saying how they have benefitted from Acorn’s support, e.g. letters to the Editor of Hunts Post. Also, at Ramsey as part of an upcoming project with the Ramsey Million Partnership, recruitment of new members is set as a specific target.

New Members	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Patients	22	23	21	28	16	18
Carers	6	7	10	17	15	7
Total	28	30	31	45	31	25

Table 3 – Annual Recruitment of new members

Thank You to Colleagues

Our charity continues to depend crucially on the input from our volunteer team, especially the hardworking 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 capacities, including brilliant organization of the boat trips and the Christmas and Spring lunches.

The group at Ramsey is largely managed by members who are sufficiently well to act in a volunteering role. This team is showing considerable initiative in arranging additional self-funded social activities outside of the monthly Acorn meetings.

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, including two patients and three carers who are members of the Committee.

We are pleased to report that John Windle has now fully taken over the role of Treasurer from Janet Pyle. This means that, pending finding a full replacement(s) for me, she is able to help me reduce some aspects of my load.

Gordon Dyer MBE, Secretary, on behalf of The Acorn Cancer Support Group.

April 2019 v2

Report approval by the Acorn Trustees at their meeting on 24 April 2019.

¹ At the end of the 2018/19 FY a total of 156 bags had been sold which will provide £156 for Acorn. This project continues to run till the end of June, and funds will be transferred to Acorn sometime after then.