

The Acorn Cancer Support Group Annual Report for 2019-20

Summary

In the last FY (Apr 2019 – Mar 2020), a total of 1040 members and support team attended the 35 Acorn monthly branch meetings held in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. This was the first time an attendance of 1000 was exceeded since 2012. The number would have been even higher if the coronavirus outbreak had not prevented the last meeting of the year, in St Ives, from taking place. The attendance marks a considerable milestone following Acorn's refocus on the social aspects of recovery from cancer, leaving the HCCN team at Woodlands to provide medical advice to cancer patients.

Refreshments and a light lunch were provided to all meeting attendees at no-cost to them. Also provided at no-cost were 250 individual relaxation therapy treatments. Some 284 members participated in seated-exercise. Again, these numbers would have been higher if the St Ives meeting had been possible

Acorn provided 655 individual free social outings. These reinforced the social aspects of the branch meetings. Those organized for all three branches included four summer boat trips which altogether provided 76 with lunch at local riverside establishments. Another 74 attended a Summer lunch at the Dolphin, and 91 a Christmas lunch at The Pike and Eel at Needingworth. A total of 209 went to film shows at the Field Lodge Care Home with lunch included. In addition, 206 individual outings with tea or lunch were organized by the three branches, as follows: Ramsey 89, St Ives 82, and Huntingdon 35. The Huntingdon figure was low due to the cancellation of an outing planned for late March. The overall total of 655 individual outings was still an increase compared to the 620 in 2018-19 which was itself a record. The achievement resulted from a grant from the Ramsey Million Partnership to fund outings for the local branch, and Committee decisions to allocate Huntingdon and St Ives branches with funds to organize their own outings.

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 and mobility. 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 31 new members during the year. This level of intake was within our target range and more than sufficient to make up for members who unfortunately passed away.

The Group continued to raise funds over the year to enhance resilience and to plan for future spending on social activities in 2020/21 to be as close as possible to that allocated in 2019/20. However, the coronavirus pandemic necessitated a complete stop on our social activities from 17 March. We have placed an initial 12 weeks embargo on support meetings and social outings. We aim to be ready to restart our support programme as soon as Government advice suggests it is reasonable to do so, and we have confirmation that venues are available. In the meantime, we are investigating the provision of seated exercise via on-line videos and live Zoom meetings. We have also set up a system of friendship calls to members during this current difficult period. This "buddy" arrangement will be extended to the newly diagnosed if they would like this form of support. Acorn remains well placed financially to restart its normal support as soon as we receive the appropriate Government advice.

This report details our achievements in 2019/20. It also indicates the success to date in finding replacements to take on some of the various roles undertaken by the current Secretary from the next Committee year beginning July. One gap – a serious one - is to find someone to raise funds for the Charity including making bids to funding sources.

Acorn Governance

Simon Townend served as Chairman of the governing Committee of Trustees throughout the year, along with John Windle as Treasurer and Gordon Dyer as Secretary. The Group maintained its usual 3- monthly cycle of governance meetings. A Meeting was held in April and was followed in July, by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the Free

Church Committee Room in St Ives. The AGM was attended by 15, including a total of 10 patients/carers. The Committee met again in October and also held a meeting on 25 January to welcome 3 new admin volunteers. These new volunteers will replace some of the various roles undertaken by Gordon Dyer, with the remainder being absorbed by other Committee members. Gordon hopes to step down in July after 12 years of service as Secretary. Some new procedures to ensure coordination between specific task holders have been introduced. The number of Trustees available to help with Acorn governance is under review and we would welcome offers from people with interest, time and experience to take on this role.

Group Meetings

The monthly branch 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 until the final meeting of the financial year was cancelled due to the coronavirus. The overall attendance over the past 10 years is shown in the following Table:

FY	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	770	1032	1079	863	853	879	925	993	995	1040

Table 1- Meetings overall attendance -from 1 Apr- 31 Mar

Table 2 shows the average FY attendance at each venue from 2012. Overall, the average attendance compared to last year was up by 6 to 89. As can be seen from patterns at venues, the main increase was at Ramsey, while Huntingdon and St Ives maintained their previous 2018 level.

Venue	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Huntingdon	45	37	43	35	38	37	36	37
Ramsey	22	16	11	13	13	14	12	17
St Ives	23	21	17	25	26	32	35	34
Total	90	74	71	73	77	83	83	88

Table 2 – Average Venue attendance FY

Of the total attendance of 1040 in 2019, 753 were patients and carers (or 72.4%); the remainder were our volunteer helpers, health professionals, and therapists.

Our complementary therapist deployment levels remain three at Huntingdon, two at St Ives and one at Ramsey. The number of individual relaxation therapies (aromatherapy, massage, reiki and reflexology) totalled 250. This was 15 less than the number, 265, given in 2018. The difference would have been reduced had the St Ives meeting taken place

Seated-exercise numbers continued to be very popular and increased over 2018 from 219 to 284. It is an important contribution to maintaining our members physical health and mobility. Overall, the total of the various therapies delivered in 2019 was 534 compared to 488 in 2018.

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/activities. We continue to display 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, confirmed by evaluation, reinforce the social activity at meetings in enhancing members' quality of life, and acting as an antidote to isolation and loneliness.

Two major outings, open to all three branches were held. These were a Summer lunch, attended by 67 members at the Dolphin in July, and a Christmas lunch for 91 members, at the Pike and Eel on the 12th December. Continuing with past practice, a Ladybird boat trip open to all branches was arranged in each of the months June, July, August and September. Each trip lasted 5 hours on the River Ouse to and from Hartford Marina, including a stop for lunch at either the Dolphin Hotel, Hartford Marina Restaurant, or the Godmanchester Fish and Chip shop. Each trip catered for up to 20 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 level of interest led to two showings in some months. The total attendance between April 2019 and March 2020 was 209. Since the film club started in May 2014 the total attendance has reached 993.

A new emphasis was placed on our three branches having their own outings. The Ramsey Million Community Fund grant provided funding for some 89 individual outings for Ramsey members. Central funds provided 84 individual local outings for St Ives members and 35 for Huntingdon members. Overall, some 206 individual outings were provided by the three branches

The overall number of individual outings provided over the year was 655. 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:

- Cala Homes Bursary
- Huntingdon Freeman's Trust
- Janet Churchill Interiors, St Ives
- King of the Belgians (Beer Fest)
- Postcode Lottery Community Fund/Localgiving.org (Magic Little Grant)
- Ramsey Hospital Charity Shop
- Ramsey Million Community Fund
- Soil Property Testing Ltd Huntingdon
- St Ives Coffee Helpers Club
- St Ives Rotary Club (Fashion show jointly with Acorn)
- The Poacher Inn, money raised by two Quiz Nights and an on-going collection box.
- Yorkshire Building Society

along with help in kind, from:

- Huntingdon Community Radio (HCR104FM) – for invitations to feature in “Over to You” and for free advertisement of Acorn
- Parrot Printing – for very favourable terms in their printing services

Our own fund raising, through a Raffle at Christmas Lunch raised £291. Also, a Poacher Inn Collection Box and Quizzes raised £797, a collection box at Janet Churchill along with “Donations to Acorn rather than presents at her birthday party” also raised funds well over £300 (with Giftaid to come on both of these in 2020/21). HMRC repayment of Giftaid from FY 2018/19 amounted £396. Donations via smile.amazon.co.uk which result from Amazon buyers selecting Acorn as their preferred charity raised over £20.

Localgiving.org was again a useful channel for income.. 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.

Acorn had two supporters who ran Marathons. Tim Hyde ran the London Marathon on 28 April and Abigail Turner ran the Amsterdam Marathon on 20 October. The balance of funds from Tim’s efforts in this FY (to add to the £465 in 2018/19) was £310, while Abigail’s run provided £419.

We 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 continued and 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.
- arranging a major fund-raising event, this year a fashion-show, which provided an opportunity 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.
- 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. A completely new design for the website went live on 22 February designed by our new volunteer Webmaster, Dinkar Sabnis. The Facebook page continues to extend its reach.
- Acorn now has a presence on Twitter which is run by a new volunteer IT specialist, James Harding
- responding to opportunities to promote Acorn in local news outlets. In addition to articles in the Hunts Post, adverts have appeared in the Ramsey Informer and the Fen Magazine. The Ramsey adverts did not have an evident direct effect in increasing numbers in the past year, but a long-term effect may yet emerge.

We continued to use all the above to enhance our profile in the community. In 2019/20, 31 new members (20 patients and 11 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. 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. At Ramsey as part of the project with the Ramsey Million Partnership, recruitment of new members was set as a specific target of 8 and we achieved 12.

New Members	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Patients	22	23	21	28	16	18	20
Carers	6	7	10	17	15	7	11
Total	28	30	31	45	31	25	31

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, and to Julia Mitchell who continued to run St Ives and also organised the boat trips. 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 local social outings outside of the monthly Acorn meetings.

We also thank 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.

Thanks are due to all members of the governance team – Committee of Trustees - for their contributions during the year,.

Finally, as this is my last report as I expect to step down from my role as Acorn Secretarial role at the July AGM, I offer personal thanks to all colleagues who have given me great support in helping me carry out my task over the last 12 years. In looking forward, I wish my replacement, whoever that will be, the same sense of reward as I have had when they takes over from me as Acorn Secretary for the next Committee year. I also thank, and wish the same sense of reward, to Dinkar Sabnis, as Webmaster and James Harding, as social media lead. in promoting Acorn to the community as a crucially important local charity. Another gap in arrangements to replace me– a serious one - is to find someone else to raise funds for the Charity including making bids to funding sources. I hope that this gap will be soon filled.

Disruption to Normal Support Activity

Clearly the year ahead will present a major disruption to what we have been able to do in supporting carer patients and carers over the past 22 years. We are particularly concerned for some current members, i.e. those for whom Acorn is a very important part of their life and, other than shopping and visiting their GP or hospital, is the only other motive they have to go leave the house. We are encouraging members to keep in touch with their Acorn family via telephone, or Skype, Facetime, or our private Facebook forum.

We are also very conscious that cancer diagnoses will continue to occur in the coming months and we will not be in a position to help patients and carers in our normal way. However, we would encourage our normal referral channels to point them in our direction by telephone or via the website email so that we can at least offer some form of contact, including via our Facebook forum. This would also enable us to be able to bring new patients and carer into our support programme as soon as we are in a position to do so. We are also planning to carry out trials to provide seated exercise to our members though YouTube videos, and website, and on-line using Zoom.

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

Approved by the Trustees at Zoom Meeting 23 April 2020 (editorial amendments in version11 June)