

The Acorn Cancer Support Group Annual Report for 2020-21

Like many charities whose activity is based on bringing individual and collective face-to-face support to those who need help, Acorn was severely affected by Covid-19 in the past year. As a result, only a brief summary report is possible.

Due to lockdown, we were unable to carry out any of our normal social outings for members. Also, the usual monthly meetings were severely curtailed. They were only possible on an occasional basis at Ramsey and Huntingdon. These were from August, when release of lockdown from the first wave first allowed, to November, when government restrictions were reimposed. The six (out of the normal 36) meetings which did occur were themselves much restricted. This was due to the need to follow social distancing guidelines applying to organized health related groups like Acorn, and strict risk assessments. In all at these six meetings, there was only a total attendance of 77 (compared to the typical 1000), of whom 56 were clients (compared to the typical 750). Only 10 individual therapies (compared to the normal 250) could be delivered, and only 27 took part in seated exercise (compared to the normal 250). We held a Zoom quiz for members on 25 March and plan for others as a collective means of keeping in touch.

From the outset of the first lockdown, we were keen to keep contact with our members to maintain their morale. We set up a system of friendship calls. This “buddy” arrangement was carried out a team of volunteers who contacted a group of 6-8 every 2-3 weeks offering help. Several of our members have mobility issues as well as cancer. To help them particularly but not exclusively, we developed a series of seated exercise videos and made these available on Youtube with access from our website (acornsupportgroup.org.uk). In the first wave of the virus these videos were accessed over 200 times.

In the absence of much activity the Group made little effort to raise funds, but did benefit from payment of a grant from Huntingdon Freeman’s Trust of £840 for our activity in FY 2019/20, a “Magic Little Grant” of £500 from the Postcode Lottery for members seated exercise, HMRC return of Gift aid (£438), the Ramsey Hospital Charity Shop (£300), and continued individual donations through localgiving.org. The total income in the year has left a small deficit, but Acorn remains well placed financially to restart its normal support as soon as we receive the appropriate Government advice.

Meanwhile, the Group is at virtual standstill until the general Covid-19 circulation in the community meets the targets of the Government “road map”. Assuming continuation of the current success of the vaccination programme, this may be possible by June/July 2021. Our ability to restart our meetings is also dependent on finding suitable venues which allow practicable operation within any such guidelines then in place.

Following a 6 January decision by the Charity Commission to allow Zoom meetings for governance, a Special Meeting of members was held to formalize this with a change to the Acorn Constitution. The change, with other minor amendments, are now lodged with the Charity Commission.

We end this report by thanking all those who have helped Trustees to sustain Acorn in the trying past year.

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

Approved by the Trustees at Zoom Meeting 21 April 2021