

Acorn Cancer Support Group

We are pleased to report that during FY 2022-23, Acorn continued to make progress with its core role of providing emotional and social support to cancer patients and their carers in the local areas, in and around Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey. We are on the road to operational recovery after the suspension and disruption caused to our services during the Covid-19 lockdown. We were greatly helped financially at the beginning of the year by a donation from the Mayor of St Ives, and in the second half of the year by a Macmillan support grant, and a significant in-memoriam donation. This, together with a variety of other funds, has meant that we were able to sustain our normal monthly support meetings and a good range of free social outings without drawing on reserves. We did not provide a summer lunch in 2022 due to lingering uncertainties relating to Covid-19 and at that time a shortfall in income. An income increase in the second half of the financial year has placed us in a more favourable position. One new challenge emerged in March when we were told that our venue in Ramsey will not be available to us in the coming year. A new venue was used on a trial basis for April 2023.

Following the recent pattern, this report provides a summary of outputs and outcomes. It covers the total attendance at support meetings, the number of therapies delivered at meetings, and the number of individual social outings provided. These are the activities we use to meet our objectives to alleviate anxiety or distress through mutual support, relaxation therapy and seated exercise, and to show members through social interactions with others that despite a diagnosis of cancer, they can still have a good quality of life.

One of our priorities is to attract the many newly diagnosed affected by cancer that we have not been able to help yet. The Macmillan grant includes a target of recruiting 25 new members within the grant 'project year' of 1 Oct 2022 to 30 Sep 2023. In the 6 months to the end of March 2023, 16 new members came to Acorn events.

We hope to reach more as our promotion activity as trustee/ volunteer resourcing and funding resources allow. We have managed to co-opt a new trustee, who is now working in the role of Assistant Secretary, pending formal election as Secretary at the July 2023 AGM. Finding more trustees remains a priority.

Acorn Overall Output Measures

	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	Difference
Total Attendance at Group Meetings	448	685	+237
Patients and carers	275	428	+153
Including -new patients and carers	26	23	-3
Relaxation Therapies			
Individual - massage, reflexology	103	160	+57
Collective Creative Visualisation	0	29	+29
Seated Exercise	207	333	+126
Social Outings with lunch or tea (Film Club)			
All Groups occasions			
Summer Lunch	62		-62
Boat Trips	40	42	+2
Film Club	41	140	+99
Acorn Christmas Lunch	64	74	+10
RAF Wyton Christmas Lunch		10	+10

Attendance and Activity by Venue 2022-23

	Ramsey	Huntingdon	St Ives
Attendance at Group Meetings	158	267	260
New patients and carers	4	5	14
Relaxation Therapies			
Individual - massage, reflexology	28	77	55
Collective Creative Visualisation	29		
Participation in Seated Exercise	77	88	168

The outcomes of our activity, as assessed by evaluation of the feedback we have collected on the support and social outings we offer, continue to be excellent. To an open question on what the main outcomes for individuals were, examples of verbatim comments received during the Christmas lunch were:

- Wonderful to socialise with people you have not met for a long time.
- Relaxing to know that we all have the same problems and are able to share.
- Generally feeling of the fact that there are people who care.
- Meeting friends from other Acorn venues, enjoying good food and chatting.

Our Thanks

We are very grateful for donations received from the St Ives Mayoral Fund, Macmillan Support Fund, Huntingdon Freeman's Trust, St Ives Rotary Club, Ramsey Hospital Charity Shop, and a "Magic Little Grant" from the Postcode Lottery Community Trust Fund. This income, together with the in-memoriam donation, HMRC return of GiftAid, the sponsorship funds raised by our volunteer, James Harding, who completed the London Bridges Trek, donations from Val Zarno former lead therapist, individual donations through localgiving.org, and money raised through the Christmas raffle, reversed the income gap that arose in the previous report year. The deficit expected this year did not occur, and we did not draw on our reserve. Going forward, our activity and provision of support will still need to be balanced against our promotion and funding-raising capacity.

A special thanks is due to the Drs Aggarwal of the Rainbow Surgery Ramsey, who allowed Acorn to use the Resource Centre facility, free of charge, for almost 20 years. This was a real benefit to us, which the team who ran the surgery allowed to continue when they took over from the Drs Aggarwal. This provision has come to an end following the redistribution of NHS staff within the Fenland Group Practice to the surgery.

We are very grateful to RAF Wyton who reinstated their Christmas lunch for local charity members. This was not possible in 2020 and 2021. Ten members were the beneficiaries of a splendid lunch there on 12 December 2022.

We end this report by thanking all those volunteers who have helped Trustees to sustain Acorn over the past year, especially those who have continued to attend or support events after recovery themselves from Covid-19.

To add a personal note. I offer my thanks to all my Acorn friends and colleagues who have supported me in the role of Secretary for the past 15 years. I also offer my best wishes to Alan Ward who is succeeding me. I am sure, like me, he will gain an immense feeling of reward in having that role.

2023 – A Special Year for Acorn

The Trustees have arranged a celebration event on the 24 May 2023 to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Acorn's formation in 1998. A lunchtime reception is planned at St Ives Corn Exchange which will allow members to meet and thank some of those who have made this possible either through direct or indirect financial support.

Gordon Dyer MBE, Secretary, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of The Acorn Cancer Support Group.
Report approved by Trustees at its Zoom Meeting on 19 April 2023.