ADULT SERVICES
A YEAR IN REVIEW
2018
What a year!

2018 has been a year of laughter, opportunities and challenges.

We have been fortunate to witness many of our members making great strides towards their goals and we have been working hard to support that journey with services that are appropriate, proactive and responsive.

A huge thank you goes to the staff team and volunteers who have been endlessly magnificent in supporting our mission to empower autistic adults across Bedfordshire.

At the beginning of the year we published a document that set out our commitment to continue putting you, our members, at the centre of every decision we make. This is crucial to ensure your collective needs remain the compass that guides our way ahead as we continue to grow and develop.

To enable you to see if we are meeting our commitment we set four key objectives that we will report against in this annual review.

We hope you are able to get a real flavour of the work we do and we would love to hear any feedback you have.
2018 highlights

**JANUARY**
Two new skill development courses start in Bedford and Luton. We welcomed 11 learners onto these courses who were looking to improve their financial literacy and independent cooking skills.

**FEBRUARY**
In response to members in Luton wanting to have an interest led evening group we started a monthly cinema group.

**MARCH**
A new skill development course starts in Bedford designed for persons who want to improve their communication skills in the community.

**APRIL**
After 5 weeks of hard work, members unveil their community garden outside our charity shop in Dunstable.

**MAY**
A new fortnightly walking group opens in Biggleswade in an effort to reach out to more members in rural parts of Bedfordshire. This month also see four of our members present a radio show on BBC 3 Counties.

**JUNE**
In collaboration with Carers in Bedfordshire we started a new parent support group for parents of autistic adults.

**JULY**
In collaboration with the Higgins Museum in Bedford we started a six week art course.

**AUGUST**
Members enjoyed a variety of summer trips including the big picnic, a visit to St Albans and Brighton.

**SEPTEMBER**
A course designed for adults who have had a recent diagnosis of autism starts; Understanding my Autism.

**OCTOBER**
We support the Think Autism Partnership board to host a lively meeting on housing for autistic adults.

**NOVEMBER**
We host an event for employers working with autistic adults giving them information, advice and guidance on how best to support their employees.

**DECEMBER**
Groups across Bedfordshire come together to enjoy their Christmas parties to round off another eventful year.
2018 snapshots
2018 in numbers

149 Social groups run across Bedfordshire

79 Skill development sessions run across Bedfordshire

575,599 hours of support delivered across Bedfordshire

20 adults supported into structured volunteering

11 adults supported into paid employment

57 new referrals into our services

182 helplines were supported through the adult services team

27% of individuals who access our services are aged over 35

124 adults supported across our services
Behind the numbers

Behind every number is a unique journey

Lewis was 18 when he started to access our services in 2017. Prior to starting our groups, Lewis had been spending most of his time in his bedroom, playing games on his computer and often staying up most of the night. After his parents contacted our Adult Services team, Lewis met with our staff and stated that his confidence was very low. He started to attend some of our daytime walks in Bedford and then joined our evening Social group for adults aged 18-25.

When Lewis started at the Social group, he always kept his headphones on and focused on his music or games he was playing. When staff spoke to him, he would remove one headset and give a one-word answer, then replace his headset and retreat to the safety of his own, solitary activities. Staff explained to other group members that Lewis would need time to start engaging with them, so that we could avoid placing too many expectations on him before he was ready to engage more.

After a few sessions, Lewis stopped attending for a while and staff worked with Lewis’ family, to encourage him to return when he felt ready. Not only did Lewis come back to the group – he also started to attend our Skills course on Building Confidence in Social Situations.

When he joined the Skills course, Lewis continued to use his headphones and spoke only briefly when approached. Staff and other learners ensured that he had the space and time he needed to adjust to a new setting and start to feel more confident. Meanwhile, Lewis returned to the Social group and slowly began to ‘open up’ - occasionally playing two-player games on a console and starting to give answers in short sentences, when asked. He benefited from the regular, predictable routine within the structured environment of the Social group, which met regularly at the same venue for the first few months.

Not only did Lewis successfully complete his first Skills course, he then progressed onto our Building Resilience in the Community course. Over time, as he started to feel more comfortable, he joined the Skills group when they went into the town centre and visited places which interested him. On a visit to a local shop which sells second-hand console games and DVDs, Lewis chatted with another learner about games he had played and which ones he preferred. Lewis would still use his headphones when he needed them, but he was clearly venturing out and communicating with others much more than before.

In recent sessions, Lewis has joined in with a lively card game at Social group. He has also attended a few evenings out with the Social group, where staff have ensured he can have his own, precise food choices and has the option of using his headphones when he still needs them. Within the Skills course, as time went on, Lewis started to surprise everyone with his interesting contributions to discussions – even when he hadn’t shown obvious signs of listening-in up to that point! He has started to smile more and has made excellent progress in developing social skills as well as gaining greater confidence.
James has recently attended our course for adults receiving a late Autism diagnosis. The steps taken to help him to feel ‘OK’ in a new environment, with new people, were small and carefully planned to meet his needs. At initial meetings, and very short induction sessions, his anxiety and autism displayed as talking ‘at us’, often using Stereotypic and idiosyncratic phrases and being quite repetitive and fixated about his topics. However despite the huge effort it has taken for him to join the group he has emphasised from the start he ‘wants to learn’….and he has!

As for many people with autism the visual structure of what is going to happen is very important for him, as are our Group rules. After having guidelines about turn taking, he soon became more able to listen to a partner and report back what they had to say. This has now developed to joining in group discussion more appropriately and making valuable contributions.

Whilst even finding his way around a new building has been extremely challenging, he wanted to join us on an outing by bus to Flitwick.

This proved too challenging for him even to turn up. However he was able to share with that although disappointed in himself, he was able to take himself to somewhere familiar where he could calm down.

In spite of this James was determined to be part of our group outing at the end of the course to Bletchley Park. With lots of independent research, ‘practice’ and a visual planning sheet designed on the course, he coped not only with the train journey but with the entire day. One of the highlights for him and the entire group was reading from the ‘Why Bletchley Park Matters’ statement… ‘It was a melting pot of brilliant minds set free by an atmosphere of tolerance. Societal norms were swept aside. What mattered was what a person could do….It’s a role model for the power of diversity that resonates still today.’

James is an example of a person who has received a late diagnosis but has clearly benefitted from our services and we hope that, with further support from us, his future will be more fulfilled and he will be better able to manage his anxiety and challenges.
in 2018 we delivered 9 skill development courses across Bedfordshire. The content of the courses were varied according to the needs of our members. These courses provide an opportunity for up to 6 members to enhance their skills in specific areas through the support of two highly experienced course tutors.

Each and every course that we deliver is measured against four objectives that are relevant to the course topic. Learners self assess themselves against each objective at the beginning and end of the course to measure their progress. Below is an average of these self assessments for each course we have run. If you want a more detailed overview then visit our website for our 2018 evaluation document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooking for yourself in Luton</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Management</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Confidence in the community</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding my Autism</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building resilience in the community</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre employment and volunteering in Luton</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre employment and volunteering in Bedford</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking for yourself in Bedford</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New services in 2018

In response to member feedback we have developed four new services this year:

1. A monthly evening social group for adults over the age of 35
2. A monthly evening cinema group in Luton
3. A fortnightly daytime walking group in Biggleswade
4. A monthly support group for parents and carers of autistic adults

Peter Scott, trustee at Autism Bedfordshire...

As a Trustee to the Board I have had the opportunity to meet and observe a number of adults who have accessed our Adult Services over the last 12 months at several events including the quarterly TAP meetings in Flitwick, an 18-25 Social Group in Bedford, our AGM in October and the Xmas Fayre in Bedford.

I continue to be impressed with the improved levels of confidence which the adults have attained through accessing our services, whether it is our social, skill or employment support sessions e.g. chairing the TAP meetings, starting to set up own bakery business, co-presenting at training courses etc. In conversation with some of the adults, they have also commented on the invaluable support which is provided by our staff who have established a good working relationship with each member to clearly understand their needs and thus be able to help them move forward with their lives.
WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS TO FEEDBACK ON OUR SERVICES

90% agreed that services improved their self esteem

95% agreed that services reduced a sense of isolation

85% noticed a reduction in their stress levels

'The services have helped me come to terms with my autism'

'I have a lot more confidence in college due to the experience of being around people in the social group'

'I now believe in myself'

'I have loved getting out with nice people, it makes me feel much happier'

'I feel less isolated and my life feels easier at work and at home with my family'

I have been living in Bedford for 7 years now. During this time I have tried many different groups: MIND/mental health, church, arts, work socials but I have always felt excluded and not welcomed. People are unwilling to talk to me or include me in their conversations. I am always an 'outsider'.

I, therefore, find it ironic that a group of people who are "diagnosed" based on their social and communication issues are the one group who make me feel welcomed and included. They are happy to talk to me and include me in their conversations. I can talk or I can just listen. I don't feel excluded or if I don't belong.

This makes me feel very grateful to all involved.
Our objectives for 2022

WE WANT TO BE A LEADING REGIONAL PROVIDER OF SERVICES FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS

At the beginning of 2018 we set out for key objectives that we would be working towards until 2022. We believe this will help us drive up standards of services and care across Bedfordshire and our neighboring counties.

We also set out how we would measure if we were being successful and below you can read how we have progressed against these measurements alongside our plans for coming year.

OBJECTIVE 1
We will increase capacity within our services so we can reach more autistic adults in Bedfordshire

OBJECTIVE 2
We will increase and advocate the service choices that individuals with autism and an associated learning disability have

OBJECTIVE 3
We will increase the number of autistic individuals who are in employment

OBJECTIVE 4
We will continue to deliver services that make a difference
## Objective 1

We will increase capacity within our services so we can reach more autistic adults in Bedfordshire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we said we would do by 2022</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>What we have achieved in 2018</th>
<th>Our plans for 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide two regular services in rural parts of Bedfordshire</td>
<td>To reach individuals who cannot access services in Bedford or Luton</td>
<td>We have opened a fortnightly daytime walking group in Biggleswade</td>
<td>Continue to monitor the location of members who are requesting support to help identify a second appropriate rural location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve an average attendance rate of 85% across all services</td>
<td>To maximise the opportunities we already provide</td>
<td>Currently our average attendance rate is 65%</td>
<td>Review the information we provide on our services to ensure it is accessible and showcases the fantastic services that they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow overall capacity to support up to 250 members by 2022</td>
<td>In response to increasing demand we need to grow our service offering to ensure we can meet the need</td>
<td>We have grown capacity by 35 places through three new services. We can now meet the need of up to 189 members.</td>
<td>After a period of strong and rapid growth in 2018 we plan to focus on maximising the impact of existing services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Provide 3 interest led opportunities outside of our core services | Interest led opportunities are a great way of reaching adults who do not usually access our services and enable us to support those who are often most isolated. | In response to members interests we delivered 4 opportunities outside of our core offering;  
- A gardening project  
- A trip to a comic convention  
- A filming project  
- A radio show on BBC radio | We will continue to advertise these opportunities to all stakeholders. |
## Objective 2
We will increase and advocate the service choices that individuals with autism and an associated learning disability have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we said we would do by 2022</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>What we have achieved in 2018</th>
<th>Our plans for 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a supported living service for autistic adults in line with demand and nationally recognised best practice</td>
<td>Our members have told us that there are not enough supported living choices and standards within existing services are not high enough</td>
<td>We have identified several properties that would be suitable and will soon have agreement on a plan to purchase and re-develop them in accordance with autism friendly building design principles</td>
<td>Agree a financial plan that will ensure the service is financially sustainable and begin raising funds to support our vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor opportunities to sustainably develop services for autistic adults with an associated learning disability</td>
<td>To ensure that if an opportunity becomes available then we are able to act upon it</td>
<td>We have engaged with local authority consultations and carried out a detailed assessment of services available</td>
<td>We will approach care providers of adults with learning disabilities and autism to see if they identify a need for services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage with key stakeholder meetings to advocate for better services in line with our member’s feedback</td>
<td>To ensure that the autistic voice is heard when important decisions are being made about service provision</td>
<td>We have represented our members at the Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton learning disability partnership boards. We have provided trends of helpline support topics and content to Local authorities so they are aware of the common or systematic issues that adults with learning disabilities are dealing facing</td>
<td>Continue to represent our members voice at key regional meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

---
# Objective 3
We will increase the number of autistic individuals who are in employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we said we would do by 2022</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>What we have achieved in 2018</th>
<th>Our plans for 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publish bi annual employment updates with employment pathway information</td>
<td>We want to inform parents of routes into employment so they are better prepared to make decisions when they need to</td>
<td>We have engaged with parents at a range of events to better understand what information would be most useful</td>
<td>Publish a guide for parents on how to access career paths in specialist fields such as technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage with specialist employers to better understand employment requirements</td>
<td>Many of our members have interests in very specific areas and we want to be able to better inform members on how this knowledge can be used in a career</td>
<td>Due to a range of other commitments we have not been able to make progress with this</td>
<td>We will engage with employers in the technology sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the employment programme to support 16 and 17 year olds</td>
<td>To support members who are looking for part time work or want to enter full time employment at a younger age</td>
<td>We have been unable to identify suitable funding to develop this</td>
<td>Continue to seek funding to run a pilot version programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Objective 4

We will continue to deliver services that make a difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we said we would do by 2022</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>What we have achieved in 2018</th>
<th>Our plans for 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services will score above 85% of our key quality indicators</td>
<td>To ensure that as we expand services we maintain our high level of standards</td>
<td>Key quality indicators are at 90%</td>
<td>Continue monitoring the impact of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual service evaluation results will be published to our members.</td>
<td>To ensure we are transparent and accountable to our members</td>
<td>We will publish our evaluation results on our website and send a link to our members in our e-newsletter.</td>
<td>Continue to publish our evaluation data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development courses report collective improvement against course objectives</td>
<td>We want to make sure that courses continue to be a powerful tool in changing peoples lives</td>
<td>Each course has demonstrated continued improvements against course objectives as set out in this document</td>
<td>Continue to monitor members needs and deliver relevant courses in line with best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior members of staff report a positive response after visiting services</td>
<td>Having someone observe our services and report back their experience allows us to have a critical friend who inspires innovation and safeguards our delivery model from becoming stale</td>
<td>We have welcomed senior staff members from across the organisation alongside social workers and health professionals. One of our trustees, Peter Scott, has provided some insight into his perspective earlier in this document</td>
<td>Continue to invite persons external to our service to observe and comment on their experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have your say

If you want to share your experiences or have an idea of what we should be focusing on then get in touch

Email us
enquiries@autismbeds.org

Speak to our staff team
Speak to our team leaders or call us in the office on:
01234 350 704

Chief Executive Officer
Emma Reade

Lorraine Endersby
Sally Cripsey  Sharna Raine  Ian Baguley  Chris Stelling

Adult Services field staff team:
Pat Knight
Clare Shuffill
Greg Howe
Karen Birch
Chris Johnson
Jane Britton

Adult Services volunteers:
Debbie Ward
Owen Craddock
Stephen Crole-Rees
Alex Leeson
Jenny Higgs
Helen Charnock