



**Autism**  
**BEDFORDSHIRE**

# Annual Report 2018-2019



Improving the lives of autistic people and their families



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# Chair's Report by Lainey Montgomery

2018-2019 has been a year full of opportunities and challenges. We began the year uncertain as to whether or not we would receive local authority funding towards our Children's Services. Through considerable time and effort spent by our management team in negotiations, we were able to secure the funding we needed but unfortunately, this resulted in a further delay in our progress to launch a community support service. However, we have successfully progressed our plans to open a supported living service in the Bedford area and are set to launch this in 2019-2020. This has been a major achievement and all credit to Chris Stelling who has been inspirational in driving this project forward.



We were delighted to open our second charity shop in Bedford in September. Whilst this incurs additional costs, the income from our charity shops will provide valuable unrestricted funds going forwards. We are extremely grateful to all those who have donated items for us to sell. We have continued to grow our corporate income stream with donations from a variety of businesses, and we forged 15 Charity of the Year partnerships in 2018-19 which, between them, generated over £25,000.

It was a very successful year in terms of grant funding, with incredible support from many past funders and new. We were thrilled to have secured a two year grant totalling £63,600 from Global's Make Some Noise towards the salaries of our Children's Services Team and £25,149 from the Building Better Opportunities fund towards our Employment Support work. The total grant income came to £479,720 - nearly £43,000 more than last year - enabling us to boost our unrestricted reserves at year end to £113,007. I thank all of our wonderful donors and funders for their incredible support.

Our continued success is down to the hard work of our dedicated and multi-talented staff and volunteers, whether they be in the office, at our groups or at our fundraising events, and I thank every single one of these amazing people. I also thank my fellow Trustees who generously volunteer their time and expertise in steering the charity forwards. I look forward to another exciting year ahead.

# The year in numbers

**223**

social activity / leisure sessions  
delivered for autistic children

**308**

autistic children and young  
people supported

**7,378**

hours of short breaks provided  
for the parents / carers

**69**

siblings joined  
in the fun

**157**

social activity / leisure sessions  
delivered for autistic adults

**142**

autistic adults  
supported

**9**

skills development courses  
run for autistic adults

**51**

autistic adults given  
employment support

**587**

contacts to our  
Helpline service

**346**

hours of support and advice given  
through our Helpline service

**297**

parents attended our  
training courses

**161**

professionals received  
our Autism Training

# Membership



Our membership continues to grow and we supported over **1,100** members in 2018-2019. Many others have been in touch and may go on to become members.

*"Year after year Autism Bedfordshire always deliver fantastic services with great staff and excellent organisation, which enables my husband and I to have more time to spend with D's two siblings in the knowledge that D is safe and having fun."*

## Staff

We are so fortunate to have such amazing staff teams working at our groups and we are extremely grateful to them for their level of care and enthusiasm in providing a safe, stimulating and enjoyable time for the children, young people and adults who attend. During the year we had **70** staff and **47** volunteers working at our groups.



And, of course, none of our services would happen without the hard work and dedication of our office team who work tirelessly behind the scenes and make us the successful charity that we are.

## Volunteers

Our grateful thanks go to all the volunteers who have supported us. In 2018-19 they have given us over **1,640** hours of their time and expertise. Looking at the different skills that they bring and how much it would cost to buy these in, we calculate that these voluntary hours have saved us around **£13,600** during the year.

## Board of Trustees

Finally, a huge thank you goes to Autism Bedfordshire's Board of Trustees who volunteer their time to monitor, review and plan the services for our members.

Lainey Montgomery - Chair

Peter Scott - Secretary   Jeff Bulled - Finance Director   Philip Delafield   Pamela Wrest



# Summer Activity Schemes

Our 2018 summer programme provided 10 separate week-long specialist schemes for autistic children and young people. From 23rd July to 10th August, 5 schemes ran in Bedford and 5 in Luton, 9:30am - 3pm Monday to Friday.

On-site the children enjoyed bouncy castles, sensory play, soft play, arts and crafts, playing games and visits from a mobile petting farm. Off-site fun included trampolining, swimming, bowling and sailing, as well as going to indoor and outdoor play centres, animal farms and the cinema.



**124 autistic children and young people were supported**

**2,871 hours of short breaks were enjoyed by the families**

**61 staff and 15 volunteers worked on our schemes**



*"It's a great opportunity for kids to have access to social situations and interaction. It's the highlight of the Summer for M and there is no other opportunity like it in Bedfordshire!"*

*"I make new friends every time and get to do all my favourite things."*

- 77% of parents felt their autistic child had progressed in confidence and self-esteem
- 85% of parents reported improved family life during the rest of the summer holidays

## Loads of Autistic Fun (L.O.A.F.)

Our Saturday morning social activity and family support groups run fortnightly during term time in Bedford, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard and Luton. This inclusive environment provides a wide range of social, educational and physical activities where autistic children aged 0-12 and their siblings can play whilst being supported by our trained staff and volunteers.



**During 2018-19 we ran 67 three hour long sessions**



**81 families were supported, comprising:**

- 86 autistic children
- 129 parents/carers
- 42 siblings

**2,049 hours of short breaks**

**53 staff and 15 volunteers worked at our groups**

*"It is an amazing place for all of us - we laugh, we cry, we chat, we play - it's made a massive difference to our lives."*

*"I really enjoy coming here and seeing everyone."*

- 82% of the parents said that their autistic child had made progress in their social skills
- 92% of parents felt less alone and isolated having met other families at L.O.A.F.

# Wanted Fun

Our evening youth groups run fortnightly during term time in Bedford, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard and Luton and provide social opportunities for young people aged 10-17 years with Asperger's Syndrome or lower support needs. The groups provide a place where these young people are accepted for their differences and not judged for their social difficulties.

**During 2018-19 we ran 74 sessions (2-3 hours each)**



**100 autistic young people were supported**

**2,128 hours of short breaks were enjoyed by the families**

**26 staff and 11 volunteers worked at our groups**



*"He is socialising with other like-minded youngsters and feeling accepted in a safe and non-judgemental environment"*

*"I have made lots of friends here."*

- 83% of the young people said they feel accepted and valued at Wanted Fun
- 94% of parents feel their autistic child is learning skills that will help them when they leave school

## Sport and leisure activities

We provide a variety of community-based sport and leisure activities during term time to offer more supported social opportunities and to promote physical activity. During 2018-19 we ran:



- **2 six week trampolining courses**
- **19 autistic young people attended**
- **8 indoor soft play sessions**
- **57 families attended, comprising 62 autistic children and 36 siblings**
- **2 six week tennis courses**
- **13 autistic young people attended**



*"My son really enjoyed taking part in the 6 week tennis. We have already signed up to the next one."*

*"A lovely atmosphere where I could relax and enjoy watching the children have fun."*

*"He's been so much happier in himself since going to the trampolining sessions."*

**330 hours of short breaks were enjoyed by the families**

# Adult Skills Courses

Our skills courses provide highly structured learning opportunities for autistic adults to develop their confidence, self-esteem and social, communication and life skills. Courses typically run for 3-4 hours a week over the course of 6-8 weeks.

**During 2018-19 we ran 9 skills courses (67 sessions):**



- Money management
- Cooking skills (x2)
- Communication skills
- Understanding my autism

- Building confidence in the community
- Building resilience in the community
- Pre-employment and volunteering (x2)

*"This course has provided me with a "toolbox" of skills that I can take into the wider community."*

**30 adults attended the courses**

**1,356 hours of direct learning delivered**

*"I left the course as a more independent and confident individual."*

*"I gained confidence and found I could talk to people I don't know."*

- All attendees felt that the courses had helped improve their confidence and self-esteem



# Employment Support

Our 1:1 employment support is designed for adults with lower support needs or Asperger's Syndrome who are looking to enter the employment market. The programme is designed to fit around the individual's strengths, needs and aspirations to ensure every person who enters the programme is not only closer to the job market but also more confident and independent to navigate the social demands of the workplace. During 2018-19:



**51 autistic adults accessed this support**

- 15 gained paid employment
- 19 secured a volunteering role

*"I now have part-time voluntary work which allows me to practice my IT skills while doing a worthwhile job."*

*"It has been such a relief to finally get some genuinely helpful employment support."*

- 34% more adults have benefited from our employment support than in 2017-18



*"I'm now more confident and motivated to find work."*

*"I enjoy my job at Hope Church kitchen on Mondays."*



# Adult Social Groups

In response to ever increasing demand we have continued to expand our adult social groups. This year we introduced a new walking group in Biggleswade, a monthly evening social group for adults aged over 35 and launched a quarterly LGBTQ social group. Attendees enjoyed a range of activities including visiting local restaurants, the cinema, bowling or simply cooking for themselves at the groups' main venues. The groups also went on the occasional trip further afield, including outings to London and Brighton.



**During 2018-19 we organised 157 sessions (2-3 hours each)**

**110 autistic adults accessed our social groups**

**4,698 hours of social activities and support were provided**



*"I have loved getting out with nice people, it makes me feel much happier."*

*"It gives me something worthwhile to do every other Thursday evening."*

- 95% of the adults said that the groups made them feel less isolated
- 93% felt that their self-esteem had improved through attending the groups
- 90% reported that their stress levels had reduced

## Interest-led sessions

Our interest-led sessions are a great way of reaching autistic adults who do not usually access our services and they enable us to support people who are often most isolated. We were delighted to see many new people joining us in 2018-19 through taking part in the following activities:

- **A five week gardening project in Dunstable**
- **A trip to a comic convention**
- **A filming project**



- **Hosting a show on BBC radio**
- **A monthly cinema group in Luton**
- **A six week art course in Bedford**

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

# Parent Training

We have continued to work in partnership with the CAMHs Neurodevelopmental Team to deliver parent training across the county.

During 2018-19 we delivered 3 six-week long courses, 2 in Bedford and 1 in Luton. Topics covered in each 3 hour session were:

- What is ASC?
- Anxiety
- Managing Challenging Behaviour
- Communication
- Sensory Needs
- Sleep Problems & Local Information

**297 parents/carers accessed our training**

**89% of parents felt that their knowledge and understanding had improved as a result of attending our courses**

*"The course tutor was fantastic. Knowledgeable, confident. Easy to listen to. Could have listened to her all day!!"*

*"Really learnt a lot - it's been an eye opener."*



Our in-house trainer has also delivered workshops and lectures across the county on the following topics:

- Social Communication Disorder
- Autism & Behaviour
- Diet & Sensory Issues
- Social Stories

We launched a new course, 'First Steps', for newly diagnosed families, and ran 4 two hour sessions, 3 in Luton and 1 in Bedford. With HCB Solicitors we ran a seminar on the 2014 SEND Reforms and Education, Health and Care Plans.

## Training for Professionals

We have developed and run training packages for practitioners to meet the demand from the Education, Health, Social Services and Voluntary sectors, as well as private organisations that have requested bespoke training. During 2018-19, we ran courses on:

- Introduction to Autism
- Level 1 and Level 2 Autism Training
- Autism & Behaviour
- Autism & Demand Avoidance
- Autism & Mental Health
- Autism & Relationships
- Autism in the Classroom
- Autism in the Early Years
- Autism, Diet & Sensory Issues
- Using Social Stories
- Autism, Women & Girls
- Working with Children/Young People

**616 training places were booked by professionals**

- All delegates rated the trainer as knowledgeable about the subject
- 98% would recommend the training to others

*"All parts of the course were useful. Can't wait to get started with the tool kit."*

*"Hugely insightful trainer."*

# Luton VCS Short Breaks Consortium

Autism Bedfordshire acts as the Lead Body for the Consortium of VCS short break providers for children and young people with disabilities in Luton. We have an Operations Manager to oversee the management and administration of the Consortium. In 2018-19 there were 6 members:

- Autism Bedfordshire
- Centre for Youth and Community Development (CYCD)
- CHUMS
- Friends of Bright Eyes (FOBE)
- Families United Network (FUN)
- Special Needs Out of School Club (SNOOSC)



Consortium members provided a wide range of short breaks services including after school clubs, weekend clubs, holiday playschemes, and trips and outings. The Consortium also worked in partnership with Luton Parent Carer Forum who were commissioned to provide services for its members.

**During 2018-19 Consortium members organised over 670 short break sessions:**



**luton  
short breaks**

*'More than just a break...'*

**285 disabled children were supported**

**79 siblings joined in the fun**

**30,711 hours of social activities and support were provided**



## Charity Shops

On 28th September 2018 Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Judith Howard, cut the ribbon to open our second charity shop on the High Street in Bedford. The shop has developed a healthy footfall and is generating a steady income. As with the launch of our Dunstable shop in 2017, there were initial set up costs that resulted in a net loss at year end but these costs were significantly reduced through local trades people and businesses donating their time, expertise, facilities and equipment to help us open the shop. We expect the Bedford shop to make a surplus next year.



Our Dunstable shop has a regular customer base and continues to attract new visitors. By the end of 2018-19, the shop had generated a small net profit.



# Helpline

In 2018-2019 we dealt with 587 calls to our helpline:

- 397 related to children
- 190 related to adults



**346 hours of information, guidance and support were given**



The top helpline issues for children, apart from requesting information about our services, were:

- social (25%)
- education (23%)
- behaviour (21%)

The top helpline issues for adults were:

- social (18%)
- employment (12%)
- benefits (11%)

*"Many thanks for your quick response and action taken to support us at our hour of need."*

## Communication



**20,061 people accessed our website [www.autismbedfordshire.net](http://www.autismbedfordshire.net)**

**Total number of page views: 84,956.**

**3,369 likes on our Facebook page: [autismbedfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/autismbedfordshire)**



**1,214 followers on Twitter: [@AutismBeds](https://twitter.com/AutismBeds)**

Our newsletter, **Pathway**, is emailed to our members and all schools in Bedfordshire. It is available to download from our website. We also issue 3 more e-newsletters: '**Grapevine**' about our Children's Services, '**The Orchard**' for users of our Adults' Services, and our **Staff and Volunteers'** e-newsletter.



## Annual General Meeting 2018

We held our 27th A.G.M. on 17th October 2018 at the Rufus Centre.

**72 stakeholders attended: members, professionals and AB staff and Trustees**

Our guest speaker, Elvira Doghem-Rashid, gave an interesting and informative insight into what it is like to be a parent of two autistic children, whilst being diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome herself as an adult.



# Grants, Fundraising and Donations

We are extremely grateful to Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council and London Luton Airport Ltd for their ongoing financial support for all our services.

We are also indebted to the many independent trusts and organisations who have kindly supported us with grants in 2018-19. In total we received **£479,720** in grants from:



and the many town and parish councils that supported us ....

*Thank you*

# Corporate and Community Fundraising

We were delighted to have been chosen as Charity of the Year in 2018-19 by the following organisations:



**Kempston  
Constitutional Club**



**Sainsbury's  
Kempston**

**morestaff & AllenDay  
Recruitment Agencies  
Dunstable**

**Kempston East  
Methodist Church**



**BEDFORD FESTIVAL  
Fringe**



THE OUTSTANDING  
WEBSITE COMPANY

Channel  
Babes  
2019 Channel Swim

**wibn**  
WOMEN IN BUSINESS NETWORK

**Kempston Mayor**

Ampthill & Flitwick

We gratefully thank all our **community fundraisers**, including schools, businesses and individuals who, between them have raised an incredible **£59,441**. We really do appreciate your wonderful support

## Autism Bedfordshire Fundraising

Throughout 2018-19, we organised a number of fundraising activities and events which brought in a further **£10,580**. This would not have been possible without the amazing support of our **volunteers** who kindly gave up their time to help with our collections



**BARN  
DANCE**

**£1,899**



Other events, activities and merchandise

**£5,102**

# Summary Financial Report

by Jeff Bulled, Finance Director

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	This Year Total £	Last Year Total £
Income	250,927	471,345	722,272	598,553
Expenditure	223,252	469,764	693,016	602,625
Net movement in funds	27,675	1,581	29,256	-4,072
Funds carried forward	113,007	2,739	115,746	86,490

## Looking at the headline performance in round numbers:

**We spent over  
£693,000 in  
total, about  
£90,000 more  
than in 2017-18**

**We received  
over £722,000  
in total,  
£123,000 more  
than last year**

**We made a  
surplus of  
£29,000 at the  
end of this  
financial year**

**We have over  
£113,000 in  
unrestricted funds  
to take forward to  
2019-20**

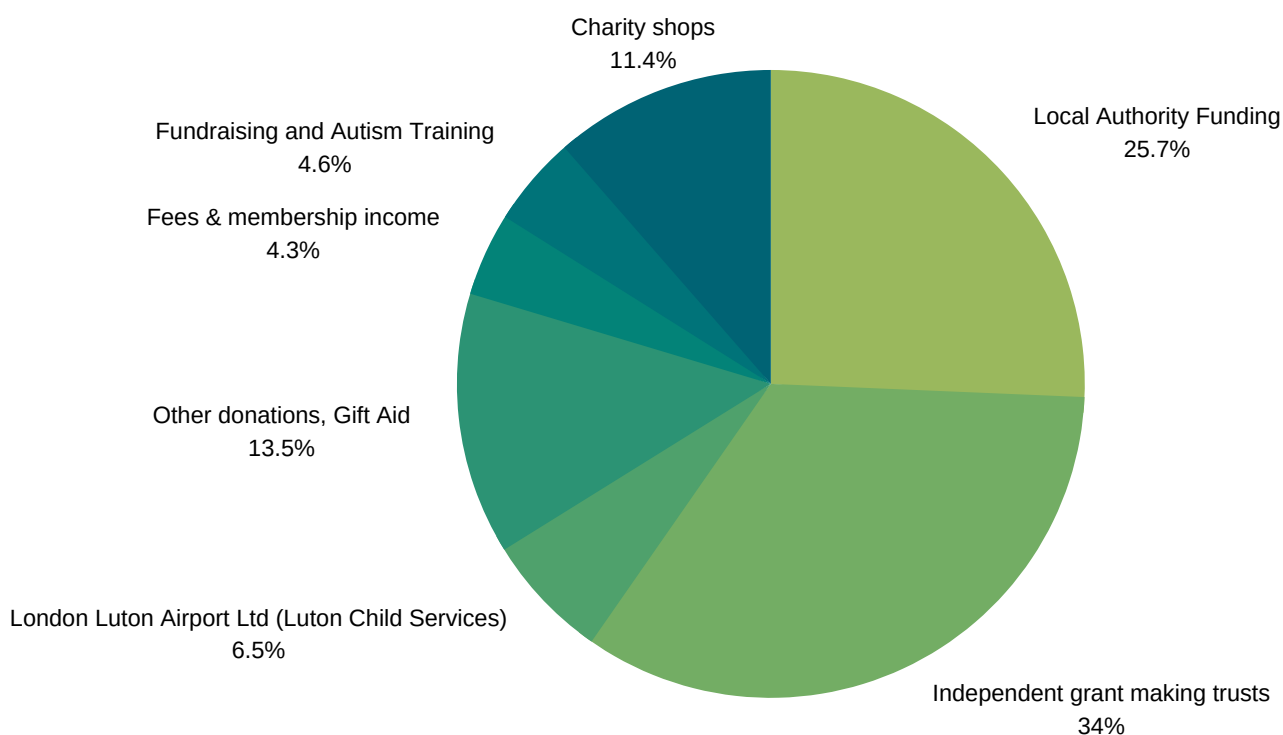
We have continued our rapid growth, increasing our turnover by 20%. The activity (expenditure) growth this year has mostly come from retail (shops) and new projects, and to a lesser extent adult skills and training.

The accounts show a surplus, driven by increased fundraising, that brings our reserves to £113,000. This is near the reserves policy target to have available unrestricted reserves of around 20% of the annual expenditure (£138,654 for 2018-2019). We are in a much better position than we were at the same time last year and I am comfortable that our reserves are sufficient to cover any eventuality.

Thanks as ever to everyone who has contributed through our fundraising team, donations and legacies, and particularly to our Finance Team who have done an excellent job.

# Summary Financial Report

## Income breakdown 2018-2019



We are grateful to Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council and also London Luton Airport Ltd for their ongoing financial support. We are indebted to the many independent trusts and businesses who have supported us this year and, of course, all the amazing individuals who have fundraised for us or simply given us donations. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



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