

Annual General Meeting
NAS Cambridge Branch
9 January 2019
Chitra Sethia Centre
Fulbourn Road
7.30-9.00pm

Attendees: Alex Murphy, Liz Day, Cari-lène Mul, Terri Johnston, Alan Cross, Emma Gerrard, Andy Stroud, Joseph Simon

Welcome

The acting chair (Terri Johnston) welcomes everyone and presents the agenda for the meeting.

Report on branch activities and future plans

TJ gives a report on the activities the branch has undertaken in the last 3 years:

- 1. Helpline:** part from the NAS National Helpline, our Branch operates a helpline and as we are volunteers, we share this and try to respond to calls each evening, given that most of us are in full time work. Over the year the average number of calls to our Helpline is 7 to 10 enquiries per month. We often share information within the group of Committee Members when specific information about a particular issue is required, so that we can offer an appropriate response to the caller.
- 2. Email support:** Similarly, we offer the same facility in email and try to keep our website updated. Both email and website are maintained and managed by two of our Committee Members, Alex and Emma. The number of email enquiries received in the past year has been approximately 5 to 10 per month. We wish to recruit volunteers to offer help specifically with our media work; managing the website, the e-newsletter (a monthly production) and our Branch Facebook Site, which currently has around 250 members. We have been very fortunate recently to have volunteers, Samir, Mat and Rachel join us to assist with this.
Please email us if you wish to sign up to our e-newsletter and our Facebook site can be accessed from the Branch website.
- 3. NAS Cambridge website and e-Newsletter**
We would welcome volunteers to the committee to keep the website up-to-date and help compile the Newsletter, which we send out around 10-12 times every year.
- 4. Parent/carers support meeting:** This is a monthly evening meeting run by Committee Members Alex and Liz, held the first Monday each month 7.30 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. We refer to this group as Parent/Carer Support Group to include family members, friends and/or others as well as parents who all give support to people with ASC. So we want people to feel included and to attend if they wish to, to get information/advice and support on a range of issues. Numbers attending this group have increased during the Autumn.

- 5. Adult Social Club:** This Club has been run for many years by volunteers and was set up by Joseph Simon and Mark and BS, all previous Committee Members. It continues to be held twice monthly on Sunday evenings and is run by Cari-lene who is also our Branch Secretary, and Oliver Cross, one of the members. Details are on our website, but the Club runs every second and fourth Sunday in the month, except August and over the Christmas period. The actual attendance varies monthly, but does average 20 and the Club membership now stands at over 70.
- 6. Drop In Sessions:** These sessions have now been running for two and half years in Huntingdon and for the past eighteen months in March, Fenland. Alan and Terri run the March Sessions and also the Huntingdon Drop In with support from volunteer, Andy. The contribution that is really valued at these sessions is the support offered by Anna and Joseph, our two full time Adult Support Officers for Cambridgeshire, employed by NAS. They can offer advice and individual and family support to those with a diagnosis of ASC for a limited period of time. Details of venue and time for these sessions are on our website and the posters on the table, so please take one if you wish. On average we have between seven and ten people attending each of these sessions, sometimes many more at the Huntingdon one.
- 7. Gardening Club:** The Branch has started a gardening club at the Chitra Sethia Centre, Saturdays 2.30-4.30pm. A few sessions have been held in 2017 and the club will restart again in spring 2018. It offers gardening activities in the lovely garden designed by Alan Gardner, "the Autistic Gardener" from Channel 4. The gardening club received a grant from the NAS in 2017 for a new greenhouse. This allows us to offer financial support for travel cost for attendees. We welcome new members and volunteers.
- 8. Peterborough NAS Branch:** While it is a separate Branch, we are planning some joint activities with the Peterborough NAS, fundraising events and some social events. That Branch had been closed for some time but has been re-established by one of the attendees of our Drop In sessions and he is being helped by Alan, who volunteers with him. Our two Branches ran joint fundraising and awareness-raising events during the year and these were mainly organised by people who regularly attend our Drop In sessions. They managed to raise £100 between the two Branches. More of these kind of events are planned for this year. Our website has a link to the Peterborough Branch site and posters with details of Peterborough Branch activities are available on the table, please take one.
- 9. Campaigns**

 - 1. Employment & Autism:** This issue is being actively campaigned on by the National Autistic Society because only twenty-eight percent of Autistic Adults in the UK are in full time employment. Locally, this theme arose in discussions in the Drop In sessions which resulted in the groups wanting to raise awareness with the local Jobcentre staff. Our aim is to improve access to services at the Jobcentres for people with ASC; in relation to sensory difficulties in unfamiliar environments, to the difficulties in being

able to express oneself, as required, when being interviewed by Jobcentre Staff. To this end, we have had the Disability Employment Adviser from Huntingdon Jobcentre attend our Drop In session there, to meet the group and to offer advice in general and to explain the introduction of the new benefit, Universal Credit. We have written to the Huntingdon Jobcentre Manager, local Councillors and to our local M.P.s to make them aware of some of the difficulties encountered by those on the Autism Spectrum.

2. **Health & Social Care Concerns:** When issues arise that impact directly on the Autistic Population, we have given our support and aim to continue to offer support to campaigns, or campaign ourselves. Recent examples have been; our support to parents concerned about a new policy initiative, that they believe would have had a detrimental impact on their family member and a second policy – change of local health provision for those with Learning Disability and Autism – which we raised objection to with the Clinical Commissioners and that group is reviewing its proposals. Copies of our response on this latter issue to the Clinical Commissioning Group are available if anyone wishes to see it, as are copies of our letter to local M.P.s regarding the facilities at Huntingdon Jobcentre.
3. **National Autism Hour:** Another National event to raise public awareness of the difficulties people with ASC have, also their families, when trying to go shopping – a simple, daily task for some people who may enjoy it, but a task that presents enormous challenges to parents with children on the Autism Spectrum and to Adults on the Spectrum. This event occurs in October and last October, many more retail outlets participated by lowering their lights and sound levels to be more Autism friendly and Morrisons Supermarket has introduced a regular ‘Autism Hour’ shopping time which was Saturday mornings, but varies from store to store. So, we will be engaging with Autism Hour again this coming Autumn and we invite offers of help with this.

10. Talks/Workshops and Future Plans

1. **‘Women & Girls on the Spectrum’:** Sarah-Jane Critchley delivered this talk to a public meeting we organised in the Autumn and due to demand and very positive response, we plan to run a similar event (hopefully) with Sarah-Jane later this year, especially as more is being recognised about how girls manage or mask their autistic traits. There are some handouts with information about useful websites that Sarah-Jane left with us, so again, please do take a copy if you wish.
2. **Communication Cambridge:** We are currently arranging a further workshop for later this year with Communication Cambridge, two Speech & Language Specialists who offer training courses and events for parents and young people with ASC. The

workshops we have run in the past proved to be very helpful and successful.

3. **Challenging Behaviour:** Currently we are looking into possibilities of holding a workshop for parents, probably in the summer, so if we can arrange this then details will be on our website.
4. **A Magazine:** This is a project that evolved from the Huntingdon and March Drop In sessions and we have been very fortunate to have Andy as a volunteer with Huntingdon Drop In, who has compiled a draft magazine of contributions from those attending the Drop Ins. Andy has been in contact with a publisher who is working on a draft publication to show us and we hope the finished product will materialise and be distributed widely throughout the County. Our aim is to advertise our activities, raise public awareness about national and local events and to show what Autistic people can achieve. The distribution will go to local communities and GP surgeries with the aim of reaching families or adults with Autism who are isolated within their communities and who may not necessarily access the internet for information.
5. **Fundraising:** Our first fundraising event this year will be run jointly with Peterborough Branch and will be held to coincide with World Autism Awareness Week, April 1st to 7th. High Street collections will be held in Peterborough, March, Huntingdon, Cambridge - volunteers for this event will be very welcome!
6. **Pinpoint:** This is a local parent-led charity that is contracted by the County to provide support for families of disabled children and is contacted frequently by families with autistic children. We have good liaison with Pinpoint and aim to do more joint work this year on common themes, especially as the role of Pinpoint extends to support those aged eighteen to twenty-five.
7. **Our Branch** continues to enjoy the services of our two Adult Support Officers, Joseph and Anna and we hope that beyond April this year their services will continue to be contracted. Like most services now, funding is always reviewed each year, but theirs is such a vital service, it should be continued.

11. Finance The treasurer, Alan, gives a report on the finances of the Branch. In summary, our financial situation is healthy. Full reports can be available on request.

12. Nomination and vote for Chair. Terri thanks the committee members of the past years for all their efforts, and especially mentions those who have now retired from the Branch, BS and Mark Stephen, for their tireless efforts in the committee and the Adult Social Club. Cari-lene invites the AGM to vote for a new chair. For Chair – Terri Johnston. Nomination by Cari-lene seconded by Emma. The nominations received a supporting vote by the AGM (8 votes for, 1 abstention).