

Dorset Adult Asperger's Support (DAAS) Directors' Report 2010 – 2011

This last year has been a busy one for DAAS and has seen some significant changes, which we hope will strengthen the foundations of our organisation and enable us to continue to grow and develop.

The following is a summary of key events and activities which have taken place in the year from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011 and it also provides some additional background information.

1. On the legal front our official Company address has been changed to The Old Town Hall, High West Street, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8JH. This is also the headquarters of the Guardians of the Old Town Hall, a not for profit Community Interest Company which was set up to renovate the Old Town Hall and to develop it as an arts and heritage centre. DAAS Voluntary Director, Martin Hedley, is closely involved with this project which provides opportunities for voluntary work and skills enhancement for several people with Asperger's Syndrome. We hope that the two organisations will be able to work more closely together in future to our mutual benefit.
2. The DAAS website which had been set up originally by our webmaster, Sam Cave, and Will Coussell, has been up-dated and extended, with the assistance of Diane and John Waters, although further work on this is still on-going. We have introduced an email enquiry facility and this has resulted in several new contacts, some asking for help and advice and some offering support and useful information. We are pleased that the website has introduced new people to our meetings and we continue to welcome ideas and suggestions for further development.
3. We have designed and developed DAAS publicity in various forms. We are very grateful for the support of CAAS (Community Adult Asperger Syndrome Service) in producing our first two batches of information leaflets and also thank Jason Croasdell for help in designing and printing DAAS bookmarks and posters.
4. In the west of the County our two Voluntary Directors, Brian Cox and Martin Hedley, have been closely involved in discussions leading to the Pan Dorset Adult Autistic Spectrum Condition Commissioning Strategy. Efforts will now continue in monitoring and evaluating how well the strategy develops into meaningful plans and positive action.
5. At the eastern side of the County a group of DAAS representatives from the Bournemouth & Poole branch now meets quarterly for CAAS/DAAS Consultations with the Liaison Manager for the CAAS Monitoring Board. Voluntary Director, Diane Waters, helped establish the groups following the results of an on-line questionnaire to assess people's views. The Aims are set out as twofold:
 - a. to help to develop and progress the provision of clinical, diagnostic and social care services for adults with Asperger's and their carers, within the boroughs of Bournemouth & Poole and the catchment area of the CAAS team, through discussion, enquiry and support.
 - b. to provide a vehicle for the local authorities and NHS Foundation Trust to take into account the views and needs of adults with Asperger's and their carers in developing and commissioning services and in complying with the statutory requirements and guidelines supporting implementation of the national autism strategy. These are set out in "Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives"
6. In June 2010 and January 2011 two important Conferences on Understanding Adults with Asperger's were held in Blandford Forum and at Merley House near Wimborne. Martin Hedley

spoke at both conferences and Brian Cox ran a workshop jointly with the National Autistic Society and Wessex Autistic Society at the second conference. DAAS had a stand at Merley House, run by several of our volunteers and we were able to introduce our group more widely to professional staff, carers and people with Asperger's.

7. On a more domestic level we have developed new styles of programmes and programme reviews for Bournemouth & Poole. We have also introduced a system of meeting hosts, to spread the load a little more, and have explored different styles of meeting format – magazine style (mix of content and speakers), formal talks and cafe style venue. Thanks to our team of volunteers, headed by Voluntary Director, Pat Cave, and the ever resourceful Carole Driver, we also provide refreshments and a welcome table as well as continuing the valued library service.
8. During the year Diane Waters initiated a series of occasional Newsletters to help keep everyone up-to-date and to try and make sure that DAAS supporters who are unable to get to the meetings can still feel involved in our activities and have a way of making us aware of their views and the priorities they would like us to champion on their behalf.
9. In addition to the two Conferences mentioned above and the Strategy and Consultation meetings, the Voluntary Directors and some of our supporters have also attended other relevant meetings eg. relating to carers rights, personalisation & direct payments, The Autism Act as well as to aspects of running voluntary organisations.
10. In September 2010 our first Chairman, Will Coussell, resigned and we are very grateful for all the work Will has done, together with John Downing, in establishing DAAS and helping the organisation develop a secure foundation. Unfortunately no volunteers came forward to fill the vacant position but the remaining four Voluntary Directors have soldiered on regardless. We would, however, greatly welcome an increase in our numbers and would be happy to provide information about what is involved to anyone who thinks he or she could play a part in helping DAAS to continue its work and to move forward in achieving its aims and objectives.
11. As part of our desire to help people with Asperger's Syndrome live independent, fulfilling lives and be better able to communicate and cope socially and emotionally, we have been actively exploring the possibilities of providing training. Much of the groundwork for this has now been done and we look forward to running DAAS supported pilot courses in two different subject areas, one at either side of the county during 2011/12. We are also beginning to be consulted now by local authorities about autism related training needs.
12. Finally, last year saw the Voluntary Directors develop their ideas for extending membership of DAAS to a wider group and we were able to introduce a membership scheme from early April 2011. To quote from our website - 2011 Plans & Priorities - "We believe that people with Asperger's Syndrome have many positive qualities, attributes and skills and have much to offer to their communities, to society and to their families and friends. We want to celebrate the differences which spring from thinking in a different way, recognise the challenges which are frequently met with courage and perseverance, and raise awareness of the benefits of an all-inclusive society which can better appreciate and understand this perplexing and multi-faceted condition."

Brian Cox
Pat Cave
Martin Hedley
Diane Waters
April 2011