

# Dorset Adult Asperger's Support (DAAS)

## Directors' Report 2011 – 2012

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Once again this has been a busy year for DAAS but one which has seen our organisation grow and develop. Initiatives which were begun in the previous year have now become established and help to provide a stable foundation from which we can continue to expand our core activities.

The following is a summary of key events and activities which have taken place in the year from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, together with some additional information and comment..

1. The most significant change has been the introduction of a wider formal membership base which strengthens our status as a recognised body and allows us to engage officially with the statutory services. In our first year we are pleased to report that DAAS has a membership of 60 people, made up of 22 single memberships and 16 family memberships, comprising another 38 people. This is a significant level of support for a relatively young organisation with limited resources. It helps those of us who represent DAAS in an official capacity to be able to speak with the necessary authority and to have our views and opinions listened to and respected. Of the membership - 60% are carers, 28% are people diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome 7% are people undiagnosed but with AS symptoms and 7% are people who are not directly affected but support us in our work. We look forward to a high level of renewals in the year to come and to encouraging more of our regular meeting attendees to sign up.
2. The Registered Office for DAAS was changed towards the end of 2011 to the offices of our Accountant in Dorchester, which makes certain administrative functions easier to combine under one roof. The Annual Report and Annual Accounts were both filed in good time.
3. Once again the Board of Voluntary Directors has been operating without a Chairman and Brian Cox continued to act as Deputy Chairman as well as Treasurer throughout the year. Pat Cave remained a Voluntary Director but chose to relinquish the role of Joint Secretary last Autumn because of personal commitments and has now decided not to stand for re-election. Pat has played a significant role in the founding days of DAAS and we are very sorry to see her go, although we still hope to meet up with her at regular meetings. Diane Waters took over the role of Company Secretary in September. We were very pleased that Carole Driver agreed to be co-opted as a Voluntary Director, also in September, and with Martin Hedley as the remaining Voluntary Director, and the only one of us who is on the spectrum and currently representing service users, this brings our number to four. So it's clear we operate with very limited, and sometimes over-stretched, human resources. We would greatly value input from more people prepared to take on the role of Voluntary Director, especially from the Bournemouth & Poole end of the county and from others on the autistic spectrum. This would enable us to achieve more of our aims more quickly and put into practice some of the excellent ideas and suggestions which have been made by the members.
4. An analysis of the attendance register demonstrates that we have been able to increase regular attendance at our Bournemouth and Poole meetings from an average of 20.2 in 2009/10 to 32.1 in 2011/12 and we have had at least 3 meetings this year with well over 40 attendees. The record number of 47 people signed in to hear Kate Cartwright of the CAAS team (Community Adult Asperger Service) talk about a day in her life as an Occupational Therapist. We have been pleased to see a number of former group members return for our latest series of talks and to discover that several of our new attendees have been recommended by the CAAS team. Our website is also a useful means of directing people to our meetings. Attendance at Dorchester meetings remains relatively stable at 20 – 30. Another positive aspect of our monthly meetings is the increasing involvement of our group members in the development of ideas for programme subjects and in their participation in our "home grown" events of short topics and discussion. By inviting people to identify issues of personal importance to them we are aiming to structure our programmes to cover these key issues and to develop relevant themes. These issues also inform our representation at consultative meetings. We are very grateful to those people who

regularly help out at meetings with refreshments, the library and with meeting and greeting. Thanks are also due to Jason Croasdell for taking on the task of postal distribution, for printing many of our stationery items and for his input into our IT and equipment decisions, and to John Waters for his role in developing and maintaining the website.

5. Our aim to set up more meetings solely for carers began to take shape with the introduction of quarterly drop-in sessions in Poole and with a joint carers support initiative with Rethink and Wessex Autistic Society in the west of the county. We hope to develop these further in the coming year.
6. One of our goals for 2011 was to provide targeted training to enable adults with Asperger's Syndrome to be able to lead independent lives. As a first step, in July and September we organised a 2 part pilot training workshop on Organisation & Time Management, held at the Retreat at Bournemouth University and run by Sandy Teal of SJ Teal Consultancy Ltd. These were interesting and informative events which also provided helpful feedback about the structure and content of potential future training events. Unfortunately we were not able to organise the Socialeyes Training as we had hoped but that is now being re-scheduled for 2012. An on-line questionnaire was set-up in November 2011 to establish the most relevant training needs for the Socialeyes programme. An additional benefit of this is that the development of an on-line questionnaire facility enables us to carry out future research this way, to make sure we are reflecting the needs & wishes of the group, including those unable to attend meetings.
7. Three of the Voluntary Directors (Brian, Martin and Diane) have been involved in the development of the Pan-Dorset Autistic Spectrum Condition Strategy which will be formally launched in June 2012. The Strategy explains how the statutory organisations in Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset are responding to the requirements of the Autism Act 2009. DAAS features in the strategy as a 4<sup>th</sup> sector, social enterprise, provider of support services.
8. An important aspect of DAAS's function is the provision of Information, Advice and Guidance. The email facility provided on the website, as well as giving information about DAAS and our meetings, has also received an increasing number of personal queries relating to people with Asperger's and the problems they are encountering. In several instances email advice has been backed up by one-to-one counselling, either by phone or face-to-face. We are hoping that Martin will be able to develop this aspect of his role as a Voluntary Director and that funding may become available to enable this service to expand.
9. Throughout the year we have continued and developed our links with statutory agencies. We maintain positive contact with members of the CAAS team and fully support the work they are doing. Our consultations with the Monitoring Board have been curtailed because of changes in Social Services management but we hope this will be back on track shortly. Brian and Martin have run 2 awareness training sessions at Dorset County Hospital, one for nutritionists and one for general staff. Dental services are next on the list. DAAS has also been consulted on the content and format of training programmes being produced for on-line training by Dorset County Council and has fed in to the consultative process for the provision of training to NHS Dorset. The Voluntary Directors have attended meetings and Conferences in London and the South West which have addressed various aspects of Autism Spectrum Conditions.
10. In general we believe DAAS is perceived as carrying out its function in the wider community in a professional, competent and helpful way and feedback from individuals and organisations is largely positive. We look forward to continuing our work in the coming year and look to an increasing membership to provide some additional resources to help the present team not only to carry out our current duties but also to put into practice the ideas we have for future development. We continue to promote and champion the belief that people with Asperger's Syndrome should be able to live independent and fulfilling lives and we strive to make that happen.

April 2012

Pat Cave, Brian Cox, Carole Driver, Martin Hedley & Diane Waters