

# Dorset Adult Asperger's Support (DAAS)

## Directors' Report 2013 – 2014

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Once again DAAS has had a productive year, developing our core activities and looking to strengthen our position supporting and advocating for our members and the wider autistic community in our area. We have done so under significant constraints of limited financial and personal resources and we continue to seek greater support in both these areas to enable us to maintain and progress our work.

The following is a summary of the key events and activities for the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 which we hope demonstrates how we have tried to work towards achieving our aims and objectives and how DAAS has affected or influenced the lives of people with Asperger's and their carers and supporters.

- 1. Meetings and membership.** One of our priorities this year, and every year, is to “maintain and develop our regular monthly meetings at 2 venues (covering the east and the west of the county) as our primary means of informing and supporting people with Asperger's and their carers” This we have succeeded in doing and our meeting attendances at the Retreat are gradually increasing with average attendance just over 41 and the highest turnout of 52 in February for the talk on Asperger's and Mental Health. Last year the average was 33 with a high of 44. At Dorchester, with a smaller membership base, the average was 16 with a high of 24 in May. We recognise some people come along just once or twice, maybe to get some basic information or to see what we do and then go their own way, or even re-appear a year or more later. But we are increasingly seeing people who attend regularly, on their own or with friends and family, and we really welcome this continuing and sustained level of support. We have tried to provide a mix of topics, continuing last year's Employment theme, dealing with the important issues of safeguarding & personal safety, and holding two popular events featuring personal accounts from some of our group members. These covered views on diagnosis and on friendship and we shall be continuing this type of presentation and discussion in the future. We also held our first quiz. As before we are very grateful to Bournemouth University for providing us with our meeting venue at The Retreat. Membership remains fairly steady with 89 members comprising 21 family groups and 32 singles
- 2. Training** Early in the year we held the second of our LINKs sponsored workshops on Living Well with Mindfulness, run by Robert Gebka. This was attended by 19 people and once again we enjoyed the hospitality of the Bournemouth Indoor Bowls Centre. Martin Hedley, one of our Voluntary Directors took part as a speaker in two highly successful pilot courses, one in Dorchester and one in Poole, organised and run on behalf of the ASC Partnership Board. The courses were attended by Social Workers, Care Managers and Practice Managers and contributed to our aim of helping to raise awareness amongst professional staff. Martin believes that, as well as some myth busting, the courses highlighted the legal obligations which the Autism Act imposes on statutory bodies. Martin also spoke to OT trainees and with Co-Director Brian Cox ran awareness raising sessions for dentists.
- 3. Funding.** The Treasurer's Report contains more detail but we were delighted to receive a Community Fund Award from Tesco which will enable us to buy equipment relating to improving communications within the group and when taking our message to the wider community.
- 4. Facebook page.** In the autumn we started a new venture, the DAAS Facebook page, which is a closed group only open to people who are known to the administrators and who have some connection with DAAS. This is to ensure people feel comfortable and postings are private within the group. Members of the group discuss topics of interest to those on the autistic spectrum and can arrange to meet up for various social activities if they wish. It is still early days for this project but we are encouraging an exchange of views and supporting those who would like to develop the group's social potential. Our thanks are due to Nigel Harris and Polly Ford, both DAAS Ambassadors, who set up the group and act as the main Administrators, as well as being regular contributors.

5. **Website and Contacts.** The number of enquiries received via the website has increased and we are pleased that several people who have written in with queries have been encouraged to join the group and attend meetings. We are grateful to John Waters who acts as webmaster and to Diane Waters who provides much of the content and deals with the webmail. We do need more back up support on the technical side and are looking for volunteers to help maintain the very simple system which we use. Where contacts from the website or from phone enquiries would benefit from a personal approach Martin Hedley has provided one-to-one advice and guidance on several occasions. This is a role we would like Martin to be able to develop but specific funding and support from the statutory authorities would be vital for us to explore this further.
6. **Governance.** We were delighted to welcome Julie Williams as a Voluntary Director during the year and Julie will be taking over the role of Treasurer for the coming year. The Directors have held seven formal Directors Meetings during the year and one special meeting to discuss Strategy and amendments to the Constitution. Sadly both Brian Cox and Martin Hedley announced their resignations with effect from the 2014 AGM; both have contributed greatly to the development and sustainability of DAAS over several years. Brian was a founding member in 2008 and Martin joined the Board shortly after in 2009. We shall be sorry to see them go as Directors but both Brian and Martin fully intend to continue to work with DAAS in the future in different but no less valuable roles.
7. **Volunteers** One of our key priorities has been to encourage and recruit more volunteers to help us achieve our aims and to enable us to extend our range of activities. We have been very pleased to see more people coming forward to help with the various tasks involved in running the meetings but we still need people prepared to host the occasional meeting or to organise some extra-curricular events. In particular we are looking for one or two people willing to become Voluntary Directors, to help share the load and to prevent the remaining Directors suffering from fatigue and DAAS activities having to be curtailed.
8. **ASC Partnership Board & local influence.** We continue to represent people with Asperger's/HFA and their carers and supporters at the pan Dorset Partnership Board quarterly meetings. Brian Cox and Diane Waters have been joined by self-advocates Nigel Harris and Tazmin Beedell (supported by Sue Prescott) so both sides of the county are represented. Through the Board and independently we endeavour to bring about real change and exert a positive influence through constructive dialogue. A major success has been our input and influence in the extension of the CAAS service to the west of the county and we have contributed to autism self evaluation returns to Public Health England. We have supported some of our members on a personal basis when dealing with Social Services and with Employment agencies and we hope this also helps to raise awareness and understanding of issues which affect people on the autistic spectrum and to encourage fair and equal treatment in future.
9. **Ambassadors.** The scheme introduced in 2012 has gained momentum and we welcomed 4 new Ambassadors who have demonstrated particular commitment to the group and who support and promote DAAS Aims and Objectives through their words and actions: Nigel Harris; Julie Williams; Amy Pickford and Polly Ford joined Jason Croasdell who was the first Ambassador. There are no specific requirements or conditions for becoming a DAAS Ambassador but we now have an Ambassador's certificate setting out the type of commitment which these people have all demonstrated.
10. **Priorities** for the next 12 months are to recruit new Voluntary Directors so we can establish a sustainable, committed Board to guide DAAS towards achieving its objectives; to obtain viable funding streams to help us maintain and improve our current activities; and to continue working with statutory authorities and like-minded organisations to champion the provision of support and services which will enable people with Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism to contribute to the best of their abilities and to live fulfilling and rewarding lives.

29<sup>th</sup> June 2014

*Brian Cox, Carole Driver, Martin Hedley, Sandy Teal, Diane Waters, Julie Williams*