

Dorset Adult Asperger's Support (DAAS)

Directors' Report 2012 – 2013

This past year has been one in which we have built upon our earlier achievements and DAAS has become more established and recognised within the community. We still have more good ideas than we have the resources to act upon them but we are gradually finding ways to surmount some of the hurdles and introduce new or different ways of meeting some of the challenges we face.

The following is a summary of the key events and activities for the year 1st April 2012 – 31st March 2013 with comment and observations on relevant issues.

1. Firstly we have been successful in maintaining and developing our regular monthly meetings and numbers of attendances have been growing, particularly in Bournemouth & Poole. We have benefitted from some interesting and informative speakers and we have balanced the more formal events with well-received in-house discussions and opportunities for group members to present their own accounts and experiences of life with Asperger's or High Functioning Autism. Numbers at The Retreat have averaged around 33 with the highest attendance being 44 for "What my Asperger's means to me". "Benefit Reforms" and "Socialising with others" both reached 40. In Dorchester average numbers are 16 with a high of 24. The CAAS team and other agencies in the area now recognise DAAS as a supportive organisation and regularly refer people who are newly or recently diagnosed to our meetings.
2. Significant progress was made towards our goal of providing relevant training opportunities for both carers and people with AS. Thanks to a generous funding donation from LINKs Community Cash Award we were able to run two workshops, the first falling within 2012 -13. This was a workshop on Sensory Integration which is a topic receiving much current attention as its impact on autistic sensitivities is becoming more widely recognised. Practical sessions enabled those of us lucky enough to attend to learn more about how our senses influence our behaviour and how developing a sensory profile can help determine sensory strategies. These can then provide coping mechanisms for the challenges of everyday living. There was a full-house of 20 attendees and the workshop was videoed so that a DVD/blu-ray of the event could be made available to participants. The second workshop "Living Well with Mindfulness" was also well received but fell within the current year. It's hoped to write an article for publication about both workshops. Also on the training front we have contributed to the development of an on-line Autism Awareness module produced by the pan Dorset ASC Partnership Board, available on the dorset.nhs.uk web-site, and Martin Hedley has provided input into NHS Awareness training for front line staff.
3. DAAS tries to be a democratic and consultative organisation and we are keen to involve members in determining the direction the group takes and in shaping our priorities. In November 2012 we held meetings to discuss a series of questions relevant to the future of DAAS. There were some excellent ideas put forward and some interesting and thought provoking suggestions. It was rewarding to learn that many people appreciate "the relaxing atmosphere and sense of belonging and inclusion" created at our meetings. We addressed the questions of why people do or do not come to meetings, what other activities we could do, what would make things better, how we could improve or develop; and what is good about DAAS. As a result we hope to introduce some new ideas into the programme over the next year. Two members of the group have also volunteered to help establish a DAAS Facebook page which is now being developed.
4. After several attempts to get informal quarterly Carers meetings off the ground we seem to have hit on a winning formula and these are now held in a home setting rather than a public place. Thanks to Voluntary Director Carole Driver for hosting these events. If other members would like to act as an occasional host this would be very welcome.

5. The DAAS website and phone lines continue to receive a wide variety of enquiries and requests for help which are answered by the Voluntary Directors and can involve one-to-one support.
6. The DAAS Board of Voluntary Directors is still operating without a chairman but the system of rotating meeting hosts removes some of the burden from having just one person taking on the role permanently. We would like to encourage other DAAS members to have a go at hosting the occasional meeting. There would be lots of help and support. We were very pleased to welcome Sandy Teal to the Board during the year and her experience of working with people with Asperger's and HFA over many years significantly strengthens our position and adds another dimension to our skills and knowledge base. During the year we have had 3 regular Voluntary Directors meetings and 2 meetings specifically to consider our strategies and plans for the future. As a result we have reviewed and revised DAAS's Aims and Objectives and up-dated our plans and priorities for the current year. These can all be seen on our website.
7. At the beginning of 2012 the pan Dorset Autistic Spectrum Condition Partnership Board came into being and 3 of the Voluntary Directors (Brian, Martin & Diane) represent the views of DAAS members and take part in reviewing progress of the Strategy and Implementation Plan. The statutory agencies, the NHS and Social Services for each authority in the county are responsible for implementing the provisions of the Autism Act 2009 and are also represented on the Board. We are very pleased that one of our members, Nigel Harris has now also joined the Board as an additional DAAS member able to represent the perspective of someone on the autistic spectrum.
8. As further involvement in our consultation with the statutory agencies we have re-opened our discussions with the Chairman of the CAAS monitoring Board, Elaine Hurl, who also chairs the Partnership Board in 2013. We are concentrating on exploring Employment Issues this year and are backing up the discussions with employment themed events at our meetings. DAAS Secretary Diane Waters takes the lead in this initiative and arranges meetings of an Asperger group and a Carers group to address and discuss the various challenges and opportunities that they experience.
9. On a lighter note, we held the second Bournemouth & Poole Christmas dinner at the Grasshopper in Parkstone and in Dorchester the group enjoyed a Christmas party. We'd like to extend our social activities and proposals were made at our November discussions for events such as film nights, quizzes and various outings. We want to make these events happen but are dependent on group members being willing and available to organise some of these, with every assistance. The current Voluntary Directors are very stretched in carrying out the roles they currently have and would welcome and appreciate support, particularly in extending the social side of things.
10. In March we were very pleased to award the first of our DAAS Ambassadors badges to Jason Croasdell, a DAAS member who has made regular contributions to the work of the group by carrying out a range of different tasks. He does our printing, provides technical advice, takes photos, talks informally to people about Asperger's and represents and promotes DAAS at various conferences and meetings. He also produced the Sensory integration DVD mentioned above. We hope to be able to award more Ambassadors badges in the future to people who regularly support us in our work, in whatever capacity they feel able to do so. Performing voluntary tasks not only helps DAAS but can also provide evidence to employers and others of the person's willingness and ability to contribute.
11. For the future we have an exciting new pilot project in the pipeline and are actively pursuing ideas for promoting meaningful activities for people with Asperger's Syndrome, both on our own and in co-operation with other like-minded organisations. We look forward to being able to develop innovative and creative ideas, at low cost, to build upon the foundation we have established so far.

30 June 2013

Brian Cox, Carole Driver, Martin Hedley, Sandy Teal, Diane Waters

