

Autism Bucks Quarterly Bulletin January 2021

The Autism Bucks quarterly bulletin provided to inform our trustees, volunteers and sponsors of the activities, performance and plans of the charity in its aim to support autistic adults living in Buckinghamshire.

Introduction

2020 was a challenging year for so many people and for some especially difficult. We move into 2021 optimistically. Although COVID-19 is unlikely to disappear, we are hopeful of the benefits the vaccine will bring and perhaps in months to come a slow move to a way of life more in keeping with the freedoms we previously enjoyed.

The focus for Autism Bucks in the last few months has been the delivery of the awareness programme. Sessions have been online via Zoom and recordings are available on our YouTube channel. The success of the programme is due to all those involved; thanks to our expert presenters, those organising and facilitating the sessions, the designer of our marketing materials, and of course all those that participated or have since viewed the sessions.

We continue to keep in touch and make sure members remain connected through our regular virtual meetings and our social media platforms, all of which have seen a significant increase in growth in a short time.

The small team at Autism Bucks is excited about 2021; we will continue to adapt to this new reality and look forward to hearing your views about our ideas.

To all our members, volunteers, trustees and those who fund our work we thank you for your continued support and commitment. Keep well and stay safe.

Trustees and Volunteers

Autism Bucks trustees board remains at 6, they are:

- Zita Calkin (chair),
- Martin Hollett (treasurer),
- Sue Keating,
- Paulette Hunn (operations),
- Paula Strawbridge
- Pippa Richardson

We are especially thankful to our 4 volunteers, who facilitate our peer support groups and assist in the administration of the website and social media profile.

Next Steps:

- Continuing the development of the Autism Bucks on-boarding processes to recruit and support trustees and volunteers
- Developing new roles within Autism Bucks to support plans for the future work

Membership and Group Meetings

The move to virtual members' meetings has proved successful and popular; our membership is currently at 63, up 6 this quarter. With no sign of an imminent return to face-to-face meetings, these virtual meetings continue to provide opportunities for socialising and support. In the future, we will certainly retain use of the on-line meetings alongside our face to face to reflect members' preferences.

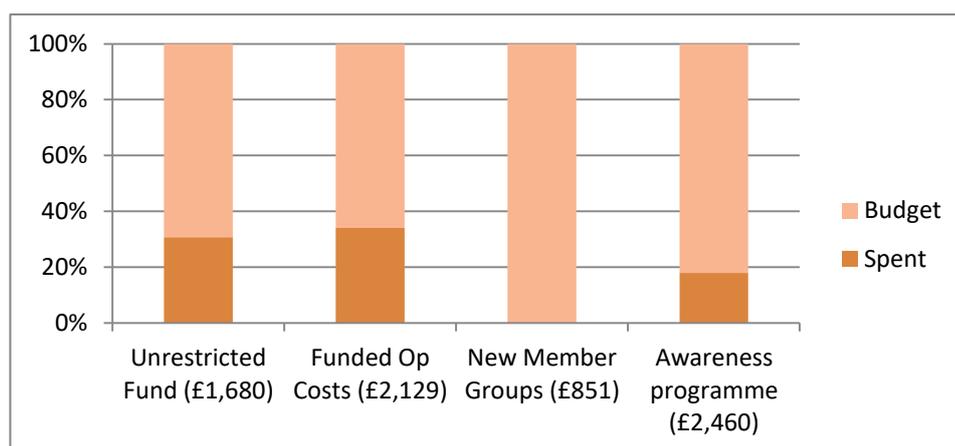
Next Steps:

- We have been listening to autistic people and their families and are developing plans for new groups
- The ability to meet virtually will give us and individuals the opportunity to test out and establish new groups

Finances

Our Finances are in good order:

- Covid continues to impact our operations; reduced income and no costs for hiring meeting venues
- It is highly likely we will not receive donations from two of our regular sponsors (Freemasons and Round Table) this year, but we have had an unexpected personal donation of £500 which has come to us via the Charities Aid Foundation



This bar chart shows how money is split into four funds and how much of total budget has been spent so far this year.

- Our second instalment of the Grant from Bucks CC Community Prevention fund has been received and goes towards funding the Awareness Project
- Our two main projects are still running significantly under budget:
 - Awareness Project - no hiring of venue costs and no marketing expenditure in the

form of leaflets etc

- Planned new Social Groups have not been started due to COVID-19
- Both sponsors have supported the need for projects to overrun their expected duration
- We have submitted a formal update to Bucks CC re grant funding

- Autism Bucks Quarterly Finance Report (for Quarter 3) has been completed and is available on request
- We have an application into Bucks CC Community Prevention Funding for the next Financial Year, linked to a future Website project

Next Steps:

- Rework budgets to release unused funding from venues, marketing etc. for the website project
- Update finance policy to reflect recent changes
- Report to grant sponsors on progress to date

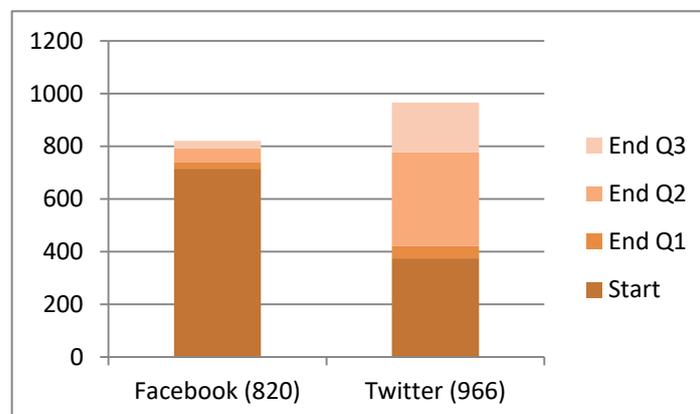
Digital Communication Channels

Autism Bucks Website – Plans for reworking have been progressing and some costs provided. For the immediate, we are considering a temporary closure of the website in order to review the content and make some improvements. Trustees, volunteers and members will be working together on ideas for a future redesign.

Virtual Meetings – The benefits of being able to meet virtually at this time are clear and we plan to continue making this option available; offering a blended approach when we are able to return to face to face meetings.

Shared cloud based area – Adopting the use of Microsoft Office 365 for Autism Bucks continues to be slower than anticipated. However, trustees have a better understanding of what is required and are seeking to recruit some welcome expertise to progress at pace and help provide effective administration to the organisation.

Facebook and Twitter – Continue to grow in following. Our Twitter following has now overtaken our Facebook following!



Next Steps:

Although still finding our way, we are growing in knowledge and understanding from the experience. We are very grateful to those volunteers and members who have helped in bringing us to our current position:

- Identify the support necessary to understand and direct our digital communication channels
- Develop an effective plan of action for the use of Office 365
- Resolve some of our more immediate website issues and develop a plan of continual improvement
- Plan an approach to make more effective use of our Facebook and Twitter presence; especially important whilst the Autism Bucks website is temporarily closed

The Awareness Project

The Autism Bucks Awareness Project has proved successful in its first few months. Experts by experience present sessions on a range of topics. Originally aimed at Autism Bucks members, we have had a welcomed response from professionals and family members. Delivering the sessions via Zoom and making recordings available via our YouTube channel has meant we have reached significantly more people than originally anticipated.

Presentation	Date	Number attended	YouTube views as of 31/12/20
What is Autism? With Paul Isaacs	16/09/20	51	309
Autism as a Fruit Salad with Paul Isaacs	19/10/20	27	125
Autism and Sensory Issues with Paul Isaacs	19/11/20	34	54
Autism Parents and Parenting Issues with Georgina Watts	2/12/20	20	31

One attendee said:

"I have really enjoyed and find helpful all sessions so far. I look forward to the future sessions"

Topics next on the programme:

19/01/21	Autism and Exposure Anxiety	Paul Isaacs
03/02/21	Awkward Demographic	Kristianne Drake
01/03/21	Autism coping with death & loss	Paul Isaacs
17/03/21	Autism and Mental Health	Georgina Watts
06/04/21	Neuro developmental Delay and Autism	Paul Isaacs
23/04/21	Asperger's Covid-19 and My Coping Strategies	Alex Manners
12/04/21	The Double Empathy Problem	Damian Milton
14/05/21	How it Felt Finding Out I was Autistic and Making Sense of it	Dean Beadle

Partners and Sponsors

We have received the second half of the grant from Buckinghamshire Council Community Prevention Fund, towards our awareness project; we have submitted a report on activity, spending and progress to date. Buckinghamshire Council commissioners have agreed for

the project to run on into the next financial year, given the impacts of Covid.

In December, we applied for a second grant, this time towards next years' project to review the functionality and design of our website. We hope to hear the outcome of that application later in the spring.

Under current circumstances, we are unable to progress with the new member meetings. Following discussions with our sponsors, Heart of Bucks, we have agreed to carry funds forward.

We have temporarily lost funding for this year from the Beaconsfield Freemasons and Amersham Round Table, as they meet their own fundraising challenges, but we remain in contact for when the situation improves for us all.

Feedback

If you have any comments on this bulletin or any other aspects of our communications, we would value your feedback. We want to develop and improve the way we engage and inform our members, trustees, volunteers and sponsors.

Speak to a trustee directly or email us on autismbucks18@gmail.com