



Inspire,
Inform,
Involve

In support of autism, autistic adults and carers in Buckinghamshire

Registered Charity No: 1182603

Autism Bucks Bulletin November 2021

Issue 6

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

From the Chair

This is the first bulletin we've sent out since I became a Trustee of this admirable Charity and was subsequently appointed as Chair. Before I introduce myself, I would like to say a few words about my predecessor, Zita Calkin.

Zita has been a driving force in establishing and running Autism Bucks. Her energy was boundless, and she gave freely of her time despite her many other commitments. I speak for all the Trustees and Members when I express my gratitude for everything she has done, and wish her every success and happiness in the future.

About myself, my career started in the military and then into the telecommunications industry. In the last 30 years I have worked for several companies, and in many parts of the world, leading large delivery programmes. I'm still employed, currently for the US company Salesforce.

With nothing more than a layman's knowledge of Autism, I'm extremely fortunate that my fellow Trustees bring such a wealth of knowledge and experience in this area. In the last 3 months I have learned so much from them about this complex condition and I suspect that learning will never end.

At the time of writing, we have no idea what the next phase of Covid will bring. However, we have proved beyond doubt that we will continue to weather this storm as we've done for the last year and a half. Lockdown has inspired us to look for ever more innovative ways to stay engaged with our membership and I'm happy to say we have succeeded. Face-to-face meetings are back on the agenda, now combined with Zoom access which has helped create a hybrid that works well for our members.

About our Members I cannot say enough good things. So many of them have trodden a difficult path to get where they are today and yet they remain positive, engaged and ready to help others. They are ambassadors for our Charity, helping to meet our vision of raising awareness about Autism in the community.

Much of that awareness comes from our presence on our website and social media. The website has had a major overhaul, described in another part of this bulletin. There is still much to do and this remains a Sisyphean task but, by making use of every channel available, Autism Bucks is meeting the terms of its Constitution.

The lockdown has seen a fall in our income from contributions, but also a reduction in our costs thanks to the careful stewardship of our Trustee Treasurer, Martin Hollett. The Charity remains comfortably solvent as you will see further on in this bulletin. We are always on the look-out for new funding opportunities and will be pursuing these in the

coming months.

Going forward, I see our focus being on the following:

- Growing our membership
- Utilising our funds to provide more opportunities to engage directly with our Members
- Making best use of our website and social media presence, keeping the information therein fresh, interesting and relevant
- Finding new Trustees to join our Board, each bringing with them skills and experience that will help us to succeed
- Expanding our Volunteer programme by tapping into that reserve of generosity and kindness that exists in our Society.

Autism Bucks is a small charity when compared with some of the behemoths out there, and with no employees it calls upon our Trustees to fill both governing and operational roles. Despite that its influence far exceeds its size, and we look to the future with confidence and hope.

Neil Cary (Chair of Autism Bucks)

Trustees and Volunteers

- Since our last bulletin we have been joined by Neil Cary as a new trustee and Digital Lead. His impact on our website projects has been excellent and we look forward to further developments in this area.
- Zita Calkin has resigned for personal reasons, both from the board and as a trustee. We very much thank Zita for her direction and stewardship and wish her well for the future.
- We advertised for a new Chair and in the end interviewed two candidates. It was a difficult decision but in the end it was decided that of the two, Neil Cary was best suited to take us into the next phase of our development.
- We also welcome Denise Leonard, who has recently joined us as a Trustee and is already contributing to our plans and website content.
- During this time we have also reviewed and updated our on-boarding and induction process.

Membership and Group Meetings

- Awareness Training sessions via zoom continued until May 2021 and have been uploaded to YouTube
- Zoom member sessions continued during the Covid lockdown – the sessions were well attended.
- For Autism Awareness Week we worked with the members to produce an information poster for supermarket staff about Autism and how they could be more accommodating for anyone having difficulties while shopping. This was distributed to 88 supermarkets across Bucks. This project came about after a member reported a very distressing trip to a local supermarket, which resulted in them being 'banned' from the store, highlighting the need for greater information/education about Autism.
- In July we held our first face to face meeting, for over 12 months, at the Discover Bucks Museum Aylesbury. The Museum had asked if some members could bring

along a personal item that was important to them and explain why. This information was recorded and added to a display.

- Our second face to face meeting took place again at the Discover Bucks Museum Aylesbury – where the museum commissioned a local artist – Dee Riley to work in collaboration with the members to produce a poster for visitors to the museum informing them about autism. This was in part inspired by our supermarket poster! We are currently looking forward to seeing Dee Riley's finished poster.
- Sept and Oct (quiz night) meetings were held at Aylesbury Quakers Meeting Room and were very popular
- Since the re launch of the Autism Bucks website we have received 14 new member applications and our member numbers now stand at 52.

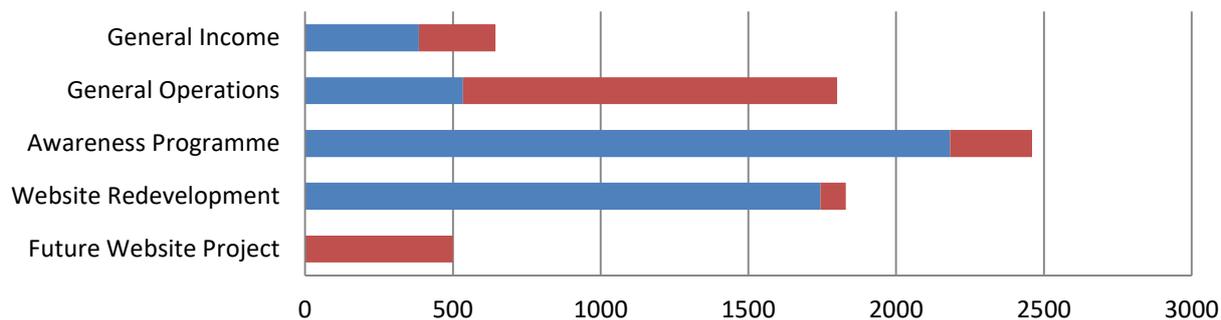
Sue Keating (For the Operations team)

Finances

Our Finances are in good order and generally there are no immediate concerns

- A number of changes have led to a review our planned projects and budgets for the year:
 - The impacts of Covid have lowered our predicted income for the year
 - Our overall activity has been lower than anticipated over the first half of the year (April – October) with the impact of reducing expenditure in General Operations.
 - Redirection of funding and the opportunity to capitalise on Neil Cary's knowledge and connections have enabled us to change our strategy in the website redevelopment project and achieve far more, for less outlay with the added benefit of reducing our running costs now and in the future.
 - Delays to the start of a project that is a study into website development mean that we have yet to spend grant money reserved for this purpose.
- We have completed our spend on the Awareness Project with money left in the pot which funded the Supermarket poster campaign and still leaves £277 to seed our next Awareness Project, planned for 2022/23.
- We have revisited budgets for existing projects and with permission from the Heart of Bucks, been able to redirect £1,830 of funding towards our website redevelopment work, which has now been completed. We are extremely grateful to Neil Cary for his work in this project, which enabled us to achieve and exceed our objectives for the redevelopment. Not only have we got great improvements in the presentation and usability of our website, but changes in software and service provider have also enabled us to achieve significant savings in our running costs both now and for the future!
- Additional Bucks CC Prevention Grant funding of £500 has been secured for a study into further website development which we expect to run through to March 2022, and this money has now been paid to us.

Spend vs Budget 2021/22 at 1/11/21



	Future Website Project	Website Redevelopment	Awareness Programme	General Operations	General Income
Actual YTD	0	1744	2183	534	385
Unspent Budget	500	86	277	1266	259

The bar chart above shows how much of our money budgeted for 2021/22 has been spent so far.

Martin Hollett (Treasurer)

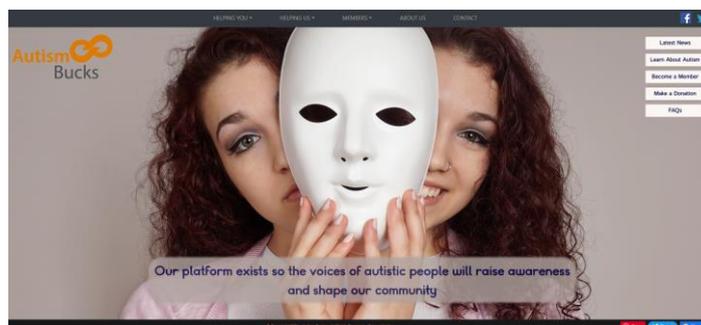
Website and Social Media

It's no secret that we've had a few problems with our website in the past (see previous Bulletins). The good news is that's all behind us now. The website has been rebuilt in a way that makes it better structured and considerably easier to update with all the news, research and events connected with Autism.

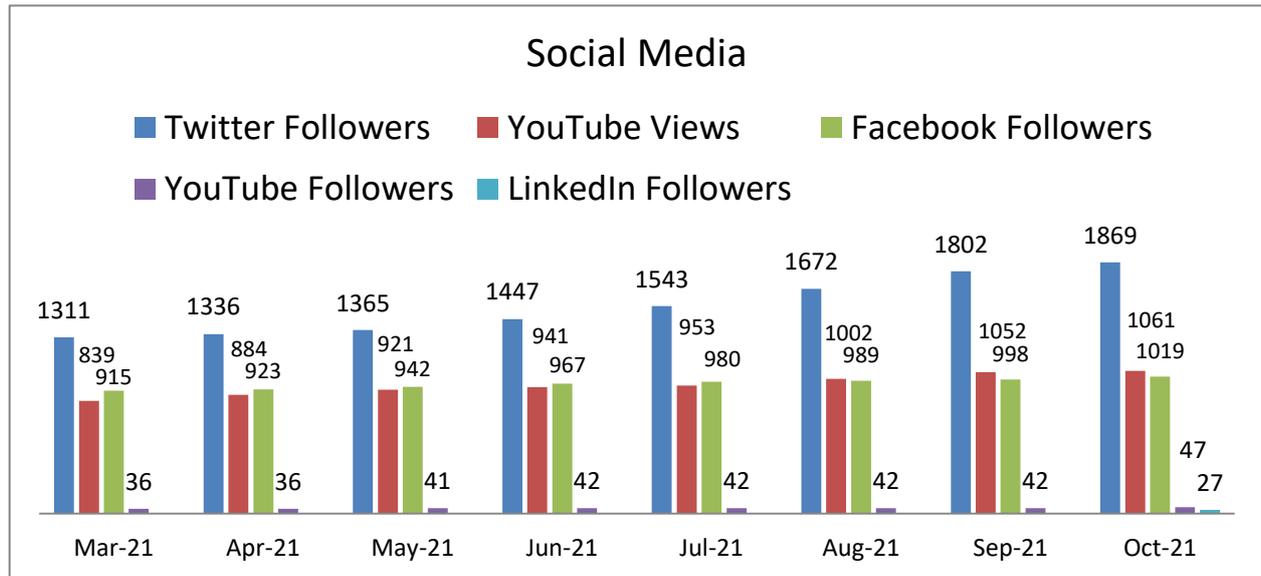
We also have a new, more descriptive, website address (www.autism-bucks.charity) although the old address (www.autismbucks.org.uk) remains functional at least for the time being. The website is now hosted with a different company bringing with it considerable cost savings.

Success in this digital age comes from the ability to link together all our channels (website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube) with a commonality of branding, message, and topicality. Visitors to our website can, at the click of a button, share our details with their own groups on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest thereby driving traffic to our website.

Via the online form in the new website we have had 14 new Members join us since September which is something of a record.



Statistically, things are looking good. Here are some of our figures as at 25 Oct 2021:



Our new website has been moving quickly up the Google rankings as the table on the right shows:	Top search terms (last 3 months)	
	Top Queries	Position
	Autism bucks	1
	Autism friendly activities in bucks	22
	Autism charity	84
	Local autism charities	44
	Bucks for charity	37
	CAF form Buckinghamshire	65
	Charity for autism	69

We remain indebted to one of our Members, Simon Stiel, who has single-handedly driven our Charity's presence on Twitter and raised our number of followers to 1,870.

New developments planned for the website include:

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page
- Blog
- Volunteer section.

We can also now provide access to this and all past / future issues of this bulletin are available on the website (via the 'About Us' page).

We have also created a new set of email addresses (see Feedback, below), however we will continue to operate our old email address for a while longer yet.

Neil Cary (as Digital Lead)

The Awareness Project

The Awareness Project 20/21 came to completion in May 2021 and we are very happy with the outcomes – it has exceeded all our expectations.

- The project was 50% grant funded, the remainder coming from some specific fund-raising. Good experience gained from our first ever grant application.
- Over 12 sessions delivered, using 8 presenters have resulted in over 1060 views on our YouTube channel
- Positive feedback on presenters and presentations
- Spare funds covered the cost of our supermarket poster campaign for Autism Awareness Week (see right)
- Lots learned from the experiences that will help future programmes
- We will run another programme building on the experience gained, but not before 22/23
- Residual funds will be put towards the next awareness programme.



Partners and Sponsors

COVID-19 continues to cause disruption to plans and the delivery of projects; however, we are grateful to our sponsors, Heart of Bucks and Buckinghamshire Council who have been both supportive and flexible in their support for us.

Buckinghamshire Council have awarded us a second Community Prevention Grant – with money to fund a study into the feasibility of development of our online services.

We are currently working to secure funding towards another awareness project, to commence next summer.

Feedback

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

Speak to a trustee directly or email us on admin@autism-bucks.charity