

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

Welcome to our first Bulletin of 2022. As Autism Bucks goes from strength to strength I feel privileged to be a small part of this excellent charity.

- Our team of Trustees continues to deliver even under challenging circumstances and has been strengthened by the addition of Denise Leonard last Autumn. Denise has brought with her a whirlwind of ideas which we are delighted to take on-board. However we continue to look for more people to join us as Trustees and have recently started an advertising campaign on social media.
- Financially our position remains strong and we are fortunate to have different streams of income to keep us going and obtain additional funding for new projects to further our objectives.
- On the subject of the face-to-face meetings, in the last bulletin I was quietly optimistic that we would be increasing these as we moved out of the pandemic. Sadly Omicron was to prove me wrong but we've been saved by technology, with Zoom allowing us to maintain our twice-monthly meetings.

At the risk of repeating myself, I'd like to call out the same 5 focus items I did in the last bulletin as our commitment to these remains unchanged:

- Growing our membership (our new website offers a facility for new members to apply)
- Utilising our funds to provide more opportunities to engage directly with our Members (we are investigating a wider variety of activities)
- Making best use of our website and social media presence, keeping the information therein fresh, interesting and relevant (the new website is updated almost every day and we are looking at ways to improve it further)
- Finding new Trustees to join our Board, each bringing with them skills and experience that will help us to succeed (we have begun a more targeted recruitment campaign)
- Expanding our Volunteer programme by tapping into that reserve of generosity and kindness that exists in our Society (we have taken on some new volunteers and are still on the lookout for more).

I'll end as I started, by saying how proud I am to be a part of this charity and how grateful I am to all the people - Trustees, Volunteers, Supporters and Members - who have given

so freely to make us successful.

- Late breaking news! We have just been awarded a significant grant by the Rothschild Foundation which will make a big difference to our plans for the coming two years, seeing us through into early 2025! More news on this will emerge at our AGM, if not before.

Neil Cary (Chair of Autism Bucks)

Trustees and Volunteers

Trustees

A quick introduction to our most recent Trustee – Denise Leonard who joined us last Autumn.

- By day Denise is a renowned Optometrist (she was awarded Macular Society Optometrist of the Year) and her spare time is given over to charitable works. Having a child with autism, she is very well aware of the challenges families and individuals face when they first get their diagnosis.
- Since joining us Denise has been active in several areas and most recently has been the driving force behind our March in March campaign to raise funds.

National Conference

Two of our trustees will be attending the National Autistic Society "Autism and Mental Health" conference 2022 in March.

Recruitment

We currently have 6 trustees and 2 volunteers.

We continue to look for more people to join us as Trustees and have recently started an advertising campaign on social media. We're doing this for 3 reasons:

- With no employees to call on our Trustees are hands-on when it comes to delivering the objectives of Autism Bucks, and they need help;
- As proven by Denise, newcomers to our team bring with them new ideas together with the drive and motivation to turn those ideas into reality;
- To ensure the continuity of our charity well into the future.

Alongside this we are seeing an increase in the number of volunteers, including a young man of 17 from a well-known UK school who is planning to become a Doctor with a specialism in Autism. More than anything else, these volunteers will help us to expand our membership and hold regular face-to-face meetings in yet more Buckinghamshire towns.

Membership and Group Meetings

Our current membership stands at 62 (at 16/2/2022).

- We got clever in October & November and combined face to face with a zoom meeting. However, it was very difficult for those attending in person to interact with the zoom members. It became very overwhelming for some. We did have a good quiz though!
- Turn out for our Zoom meetings has generally been good though and we are pleased that they continue to be popular. We must thank Paulette Hunn who runs these with the same respect for our member's needs as she does for the in-person meetings, even encouraging some Members to open up more than they normally would.
- Due to the increase in the spread of Covid 19, we decided to cancel our face to face Christmas party. We have returned to Zoom meetings until the present time
- All our daytime group meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of every month and continue to be online for the time being.
- We have recruited 2 new volunteers to help support at the groups.
- Here are the dates for our Wednesday meetings in Aylesbury at the Quakers building going forward:

27th April 6-8.30 pm	24th August 6.8.30pm
25th May 6-8.30pm	28th September 6-8.30pm
22nd June 6-8.30pm	26th October 6-8.30 pm
27th July 6-8.30pm	23rd November 6-8.30pm
- With face-to-face meetings hopefully returning in the Spring we are looking at other opportunities we could offer our members – currently investigating potential dedicated sessions for swimming and yoga.
- We are hoping to have one of our members represent us (subject to check) on Thames Valley Police Independent Advisory group.

Sue Keating (For the Operations team)

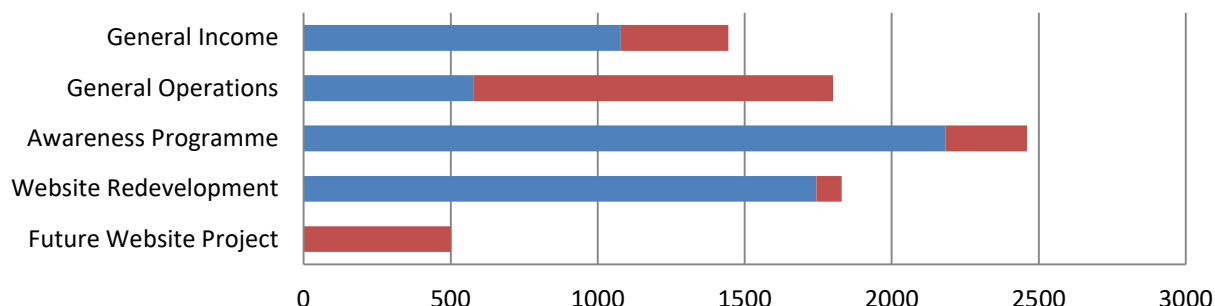


Finances

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

- Covid continues to shape our activities, with a corresponding impact on our planned projects and budgets for the year:
 - Additional fundraising activities through Amersham Round Table Santa collection, Amersham Town Christmas Market and currently our March in March campaign.
 - Continued income from Bucks Lottery, Amazon Smile and our collecting tins in shops and businesses, for which we are very grateful.
 - A reduction in some expenses, such as venues for our member meetings.
- We continue to reap the benefits of our new website – this has enabled us to make a significant saving on our operating costs.
- Bucks CC Prevention Grant funding of £500 secured for a study into further website development is a project which we have now decided not to proceed with, however we are currently seeking permission to redirect these funds to an alternative project.
- As a result of our reduced spend and our current fundraising, we can now expect to finish the financial year in April having replenished our reserve funds and with a small surplus towards the coming year.
- We continue to look for new sources of future funding and are currently in dialogue with several potential partners for this.
- Late breaking news – please see Neil Cary's report from the Chair, above, but I must note here that the successful grant application is primarily as a result of Neil's sterling work, which has been deservedly highlighted by the Rothschild Foundation as being exemplary in its presentation. Well done Neil – thanks from all of us!

Spend vs Budget 2021/22 at 1/2/22



	Future Website Project	Website Redevelopment	Awareness Programme	General Operations	General Income
Actual YTD	0	1744	2183	577	1078
Unspent Budget	500	86	277	1223	366

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

Martin Hollett (Treasurer)

Fundraising

Since our last bulletin we have been busy in raising funds to support our general activities.

We have emptied our collection tins located in shops and local business and this has raised over £50. Particular thanks to our members David, who raised 26.37 from the tin in his shop and Adele who raised £4.44.

Other regular sources of fundraising continue to bring in small but useful funds, such as Bucks Lottery (£105 year to date) and Amazon Smile (£22 year to date)

General donations are a significant source of income for which we are also very grateful, and so far we have received £270 (year to date)

We have been out with Santa's float with Amersham Round Table and are optimistic we will receive a donation from that at some point.

We had a stall at Amersham's Christmas Market (see picture) and ran what can only be described as a lucky dip for adults, with bottles of wine as prizes. This was a great opportunity to promote the charity to the public and we had some new flyers printed (see Awareness) for the occasion. On the day we raised an impressive £520 and would like to thank Simon and Neil for their help in bringing in the customers, Denise for getting wine and vouchers from local stores, other trustees for donations of wine, Martin for organising the whole thing, and his wife Loraine for wrapping and re-wrapping the wine bottles. We were well received by the public, with quite a few taking



a flyer and all that were involved had a great time on a very windy day!

Coming up

Coming up – we are supporting World Autism Acceptance Week, 28 March - 3 April with our own fundraising event - March in March. Details are in our poster and on our website. You can run, ride, swim, walk or whatever you want. March in March has been organised by Denise and has already started to boost our fundraising.



Website and Social Media

After the major overhaul of the website and associated social media in Q3 2021, Q4 has been a period of stability with occasional tweaks. Usage is steadily rising, and the new presence on LinkedIn is now being used to attract people to join our Trustee Board. It's also contributed to a jump in the number of new Members.



All the Trustees have access to a simple portal that allows them, in real time, to update the website with the latest news, articles and general information about Autism that will be helpful to both our Members and the wider public. A few new pages have been added including FAQs, a reading list and a blog. Prospective volunteers can use the online form to register their interest, and the Contact page is in regular use by people wanting more information about Autism support.

Our plan to introduce an exclusive chatroom has been shelved following consultation with our Members, who pointed to the plethora of chatrooms already existing on the Web. However, and subject to the strict requirements of GDPR, our Members have indicated they are willing to receive email "updates" drawing attention to recent news items and other information that has been added. This is now work in progress.

Key learnings from the last 3 months have all been around the sheer volume of information and news there is out there, and the need to filter and summarise it if it's to become valuable to our Members. Over the next 6 months the website will be enhanced to make this more accessible. More work will also be done on SEO ("Search Engine Optimisation") in order to drive more traffic to our website, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Neil Carey (Digital Lead)

The Awareness Project

Not much to report in this issue, but in December we created a new flyer for the charity and had a few professionally printed – they look much better than we could have printed ourselves. We had these on our stall at the Christmas market, and a lot of people took them away with them. Going forward we have identified several opportunities to use the flyers.

Following our previous Awareness project we are currently putting together plans for a future programme of presentations and also looking at other ways of raising understanding of Autism and awareness of the autistic community within Buckinghamshire.

Partners and Sponsors

COVID-19 has caused 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.

We are in dialogue with Buckinghamshire Council regarding our Community Prevention Grant – with plans to redirect this money to a new project.

Not to mention our breaking news that we have also been awarded a grant from the Rothschild Foundation.

Our presence in the wider community seems to be growing as more groups and organisations are seeking us out for partnership opportunities.

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