

Autism Berkshire

supporting people living with autism

Providing Support
for over

25
years



Families who live with autism have played a leading role in pressing for change in the way people with autism are supported in the UK and further afield.

Autism Berkshire's own origins reflect this grassroots movement, with a group of parents and relatives of people with autism and challenging behaviour coming together in 1990 to create a support network, raise awareness of autism spectrum conditions and to campaign for improved education, health and social care services.

At the time, recognition of autism and provision of NHS services in Berkshire was patchy, with a limited diagnostic service in place in the west of the county, but nothing in the east.

Initially, the group formed links with the Mid Counties Autistic Society, but after a year decided to go it

alone and form the Berkshire Autistic Society, which remained the organisation's name until its silver anniversary year in 2015, when it was changed to Autism Berkshire.

Leslie Macdonald was one of the five founder members, becoming involved due to having an autistic relative and later became a trustee and co-chair of Berkshire Autistic Society. She played a leading role in supporting families and would often refer parents to the CHAZC (Community Home Advisory Service) diagnostic service in the west of Berkshire.

Links were also forged with the staff of Berkshire's Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities and Leslie was often asked to give talks about autism to NHS paediatricians.

A quarterly newsletter called the Challenger and a monthly events Noticeboard kept members in touch with the organisation's activities.

Many of the services developed in the early years remain part of Autism Berkshire's work to this day, including regular support group meetings with visiting speakers and leisure activities such as autism-friendly trampolining and family swimming sessions.

Over the years, the organisation has moved from offices in London Road to 197 Oxford Road - recalled in the name of the 197 Club social group for young autistic adults in Reading - to its present home in Richfield Place.

From this base, Autism Berkshire now delivers a

growing range of support and leisure services for families and individuals living with autism throughout the county. Many are provided through contracts with the Berkshire East and Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group federations, as part of their CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) Local Transformation Plan following the *Future in Mind Report*.

Support services include a helpline, home visits, benefits advice, tailored help for families waiting for autism diagnostic assessments, workshops delivering a wide range of advice for parents and carers and community learning courses for autistic adults, such as independent living and social skills. The charity also manages the Berkshire Autism Alert Card scheme.

Alongside the longstanding trampolining and swimming sessions, leisure activities include youth groups for children and young people with autism and their siblings, games clubs and family fun days, as well as social groups for autistic adults.

There are also relaxation classes for children with autism and their parents and carers, reflecting a recognition of the demands that autism can place on all members of a family, with many children's activities designed to give parents a short break from these pressures and some time for themselves.



For more information about Autism Berkshire and its services, visit www.autismberkshire.org.uk, email contact@autismberkshire.org.uk or call 01189 594 594.