



Annual Review 2019-20 Autism Berkshire

Challenging Times

Autism Berkshire is the leading autism charity in the county, with substantial experience of delivering high-quality services for autistic people of all ages and their families.

2020 marks 30 years since a group of parents of children with autism and challenging behaviours formed the Berkshire Autistic Society.

Plans were in hand to celebrate this milestone in the charity's history, but the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown which began at the end of the 12-month period covered by this review brought preparations for anniversary celebrations to a sudden halt, along with many other activities. Work to adapt as many services as possible for online delivery was in hand as we moved into the 2020-21 period.

Among the events affected by the lockdown was the second All About Autism conference, due to take place in Slough at the end of March 2020, following the success

of the initial event held on World Autism Awareness Day the previous April – Mairi Evans, the clinical director for Children, Young People and Families at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust, is pictured above making a presentation at the 2019 event.

All the support and advice, workshops and courses we provide, our social and leisure activities and our work to raise awareness and understanding of autism in the wider community are driven by a single aim – to make a positive difference to the lives of autistic children, young people and adults in Berkshire and their families.

Please read on to find out more about Autism Berkshire's services and achievements in 2020-21 and how you can get involved and support our work.



Talking sense about autism.

📞 Helpline: 01189 594 594 📧
www.autismberkshire.org.uk



What service users say about Autism Berkshire

"Thank you for all your help and support. I really enjoyed the course and will recommend it to others."

- Parent who took part in our first ever Teen Life course in West Berkshire, March 2020

"We have had to use the benefits service recently, my son was awarded '0' points following his review for PIP... Five weeks later my son's PIP was reinstated, great result. I highly recommend this service."

- Parent whose appeal was supported by our Benefits Service

Loved the fact that there was no 'jargon', just practical ideas to support children."

- Parent who attended a Managing Anger workshop in Thatcham

"Thank you so much for yesterday, it was really refreshing to speak to someone who understands and doesn't always question us. You gave us some really useful things/ideas to try and encouragement to keep pressing on."

- A parent after a Home Visit from one of our family support workers

"Thank you for your quick, detailed and rather warm reply. I don't exactly know what I was expecting but I'm pleasantly surprised."

- A Helpline contact seeking advice about a referral for autism assessment

"Thank you so much for the session today. I found it really interesting and could relate to so much of what you were saying."

- A parent who attended an autism advice workshop

Conference Contrasts

A highlight of 2019-20 came at the start of the year, with the staging of Autism Berkshire's first All About Autism conference on World Autism Awareness Day, April 2.

Held at Slough's showpiece The Curve library and cultural hub, the one-day event attracted 140 parents, carers and professionals to hear presentations from local autism advocates Carly Jones and Conor Eldred-Earl; Mairi Evans, the clinical director for Children, Young People and Families at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust; Dr Fiona Knott and Dr Fang Liu of the University of Reading; and sleep specialist Helen Cattermole, of Parenting Special Children.

You can access video recordings of the presentations from the conference from the Autism Berkshire website.

Sadly, the 2020 conference, due to be held at The Curve at the end of March, was initially postponed due to the coronavirus lockdown and subsequently cancelled, as the venue was being used as overflow accommodation by a nearby school to help it comply with social distancing rules.

A longstanding aim of the charity has been to provide more in-depth support to parents and carers of autistic children and part of this ambition was realised at the start of 2020 with the launch of Teen Life courses for parents and carers of children aged 11 to 16, along with education professionals who support the children.

Three staff members attended a National Autistic Society course to become accredited Teen Life trainers. The course helps participants to understand more about autistic teenagers, discussing strategies and sharing ideas about how to communicate with and support autistic young people during this part of their lives.

Teen Life was launched in West Berkshire, thanks to a grant from the council's community learning service. The first course in took place in Thatcham, fortunately being completed in early March, just ahead of the lockdown period.

Demand for our other autism advice workshops, held in all six unitary council areas in Berkshire, continued at a high level, with 350 parents and carers attending more than 40 sessions.



In Numbers 2019-20

£235,777	benefits awarded to clients of our Benefits Service
3,200	people follow our Facebook page
1,750	Berkshire Autism Alert Cards in use
1,500	people follow us on Twitter
350	people attended our autism advice workshops
140	people attended our first All About Autism Conference

The Benefits Service saw another year-on-year rise in requests for advice about applications and appeals, which led to a decision to recruit a new caseworker, Carrie Steers, to assist the service's manager, Kevin Jackson.

By the end of the 12-month period, they had advised almost 200 clients and helped to secure £235,000 in benefit awards and back payments. Much of this total was a result of Kevin representing clients at mandatory reconsideration and tribunal hearings, which is a growing part of his workload.

A new community education course called Chop & Chat was launched at the end of 2019 in Slough, with the concept proving to be popular with those who took part. It is hoped to run similar courses in the future, open to autistic adults from other parts of the county.

Support for Autism Berkshire's social groups for adults, Bear With Me in Maidenhead and the 197 Club in Reading, remained strong, with high levels of attendance at their regular meetings. Their programmes also included a number of outings including a joint day out at the seaside in Bournemouth. Members of the Bear With Me group got expert advice about staying safe online and posting on social media when they visited Facebook's UK head office in London in April 2019.

Other leisure activities for children and young adults remained popular, with enhancements made to the trampolining service to address high levels of demand for places – see separate panel.

The 2019 Annual General Meeting of Berkshire Autistic Society was held for the first time in conjunction with one of our regular Family Fun Days for members at the Thames Valley Adventure Playground in Taplow in September. Two new trustees were elected at the meeting, increasing the board's membership to five people. Adam Bermange took on the post of treasurer, and Conor O'Connor became a trustee.

On a sad note, Nancey England, an assistant tutor on our community education course for autistic adults, died suddenly in January.

A former teacher, Nancey joined Autism Berkshire after retiring from the classroom to work on our SocialEyes social skills courses for autistic adults. Her family have raised money in her memory to help us to support children and young people in a creative way, by running art workshops for children during school holidays.

Trampolining

Trampolining is among the most popular leisure activities provided by Autism Berkshire, with sessions funded by BBC Children in Need oversubscribed since they were launched in 2014.

As well as offering the opportunity to get together and have fun with other children and young people, trampolining has physical and mental health benefits. It can help to improve motor skills, including co-ordination and balance, along core stability and overall fitness. Physical activity has also been shown in a series of studies to be an effective tool to manage anxiety and stress and to release tension.

In May 2019 we received the news that we had been awarded a further three-year grant by Children in Need, securing the future of the sessions for children and young people aged five to 17 at Crosfields School and Meadway Sports Centre in Reading and at Bracknell Trampoline Centre until 2022.

However, with many children still on the waiting list for places and a number of requests from older teenagers to continue trampolining after they became too old for the existing sessions, it was decided to explore avenues for additional funding.

Plans were drawn up for extra sessions for young people aged 14 to 25, which would allow some teenagers to transfer from existing sessions and for young adults who had previously benefited from trampolining to continue taking part.

An application to Sport England for a two-year grant was successful and sessions for the older age group began at Crosfields School and Bracknell Trampoline Centre began in January 2020.

As a result, from January to March 2020, before the coronavirus lockdown forced the suspension of sessions, 110 children and young people were regularly attending trampolining sessions at our three venues.



Fundraising

Kay Syed, who raised £1,400 for us during Autism Awareness Week 2018, supported us again at the start of April 2019 and collected almost twice as much.

This time Kay set herself a target of raising £2,000 but when she added up the proceeds of raffles she ran at her workplace - BT's central London offices - and donations from family and friends, she had collected an amazing £2,787.

She decided to raise funds to thank us for our support after her daughter Zarah received an autism diagnosis in 2017.

Another fundraiser who got 2019-20 off to a flying start was Alicia McAloon, who took part in the London Marathon at the end of April, raising £1,400.

Alicia ran to support us in memory of Steve McCreight, a member of our 197 Club and Bear With Me social groups for autistic adults, who died in 2016. She is a friend of Steve's sister Caroline.

Our ever-popular Winter Ball, held in conjunction with other local charities at the Hilton Hotel in Reading, was another highlight of the fundraising calendar, with £3,100 raised.

A charity of the year partnership with the Sainsbury's supermarket at Winnersh, which ran until August 2019, raised a total of £2,377.

PRA Life Sciences' UK office, at Green Park in Reading, donated £1,000 to help us pay for Lego workshops events during school holidays. We were nominated for support by PRA employee Nick Tibbels, whose son Oscar is a member of our Lego Club at Woolhampton, in West Berkshire. Nick is pictured below with club member Lily Punter.

This was followed by a further donation from PRA of £825 at the start of 2020, from a Christmas raffle, along with some new Lego building kits for the Lego Club.

And for the second year running, the Women's Asperger Circle donated a surplus from a conference they organised in Reading, giving £580 to help pay for the running costs of the Being Us group for people who have received an autism diagnosis as adults, which we support.

- Information about how to get involved with fundraising for Autism Berkshire is available on our website or from our office.



Thank you

To our funders and supporters

- Abbvie Ltd
- Barbara Ward Children's Foundation
- Boshier Hinton Foundation
- Bracknell Town Council
- Clothworkers' Foundation
- Compassionate Loaf, Springwater Church, Peppard Common
- Crowthorne Parish Council
- Denefield School, Tilehurst
- Earley Charity
- Edward Gostling Foundation
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Gerald Palmer Eling Trust
- Greenham Trust
- Grocers' Charity
- Heathrow Community Trust
- Henley Choir Festival
- Henry Denman and Agneta Mary Cook Charity
- Kennet Care, Reading
- Legal & General Homes
- Louis Baylis Trust (Maidenhead Advertiser)
- Newbury Building Society
- Paypal Charity Fund
- Penn Wood School, Slough
- Peter Brett Associates, Reading
- PRA Life Sciences, Reading
- Reading Lions Club
- Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation
- Thames Valley Police Property Act Fund
- Women's Asperger Circle
- Zurich Community Trust

To our key partners

- East Berkshire NHS Clinical Commissioning Group
- Berkshire West NHS Clinical Commissioning Group
- Slough Council for Voluntary Service SPACE project
- BBC Children in Need
- Sport England
- Reading Borough Council
- Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Council
- West Berkshire Council
- Employment & Skills Funding Agency/European Social Fund
- University of Reading internship scheme

Financial Summary for 2019-20

Total Income	£198,000
Grants and Subscriptions	£160,000
Donations and Fundraising	£38,000
Expenditure on Charitable Activities	£140,600
Fundraising costs	£7,000
Governance costs	£2,000
Excess costs drawn from reserves	£49,000
Reserves carried forward to 2020-21	£77,800

For 2020-2021 we are forecasting our expenditure to again exceed our income, although the deficit should be contained following the receipt of some coronavirus support grant payments.



Talking sense about autism.

Autism Berkshire – the working name for Berkshire Autistic Society

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