



Annual Review 2021-22

Autism Berkshire



Adapting to a new environment

Autism Berkshire is the leading autism charity in Berkshire, with more than 30 years' experience of delivering high-quality services for autistic people of all ages and their families.

The coronavirus pandemic continued to pose challenges for our work for a second year, with restrictions on social contact remaining in place for some months.

Family fun days at Thames Valley Adventure Playground resumed in May 2021 after an 18-month gap, *pictured*, and the 197 Club and Bear With Me social groups for autistic adults held some limited group activities in the summer before returning to normal programmes in the autumn.

Other services, particularly help for families of autistic children and young people from the Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service, remained largely online, with the ease of access to advice appointments, workshops and courses offered by using Zoom and Teams a key factor in this approach.

The Berkshire West service saw high demand for support from families in Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire throughout the year, with the number of contacts on our mailing list increasing from 250 to more than 700 over the year. Most workshops and courses were fully booked well in advance.

Building on the successful relaunch of the Berkshire Autism Alert Card scheme in 2020, it was further expanded in the autumn of 2021, with the support of Thames Valley Police and partners in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, to become a Thames Valley regional alert card, with an average of 100 cards per month issued since October 2021.

Please read on to find out more about Autism Berkshire's work in 2021-22 and how you can get involved and support our work.



Talking sense about autism.

 Helpline: **01189 594 594** 
www.autismberkshire.org.uk

What people say about Autism Berkshire's services

"Autism Berkshire have been the first people to finally give us help and support after years of trying different options. We can't thank them enough and the workshops are just what we need."

– Parent who attended an Understanding More About Autism workshop

"At times I have felt so alone but Amanda and the team have always provided genuine helpful free advice, sessions and support. Thank you for supporting families like mine."

– Parent who used our family support services

"Getting the Thames Valley Autism Alert Card was a brilliant bonus. Super handy for showing it to shops, etc, and also really reassuring that the police now have on their records the best way to communicate with my child if he ever gets lost. Thank you."

– Parent who got an autism alert card for her son

"The Autism in Girls workshop was fantastic. I was really impressed with what we learned and so quickly."

– Parent who attended autism advice workshop

"Thanks so much for yesterday's session. When I walked around school after there was a lot of discussion going on. Lots of teachers really thinking about the children in their class."

– Deputy headteacher at a Berkshire school after a twilight training session for staff

"I wish I had called Autism Berkshire many moons ago. Thank you so much."

– Parent who used our family support services

"I felt very lost before this and now feel like there a pathway ahead for us."

– Parent who attended Understanding More About Autism workshop

In Numbers 2021-22

£158,000	Benefits awarded to clients of our Benefits Service
4,500	Follow our Facebook page
3,973	Individual contacts with families by the Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service
1,800	People follow us on Twitter
600	Thames Valley Autism Alert cards issued since its launch

Flexible approaches to the future

With restrictions imposed as part of the Government's coronavirus control measures posing a continued challenge, most services remained online for another year.

This included family support services provided through the NHS-funded Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service – see the panel on the right for more details about the service's work - with restrictions on social contact and availability of venues key factors in this decision.

In follow-up surveys after workshops and courses we canvassed opinion among participants about online and face-to-face provision. A majority favoured online, with many noting that this approach made it easier for them to take part than needing to travel to a venue, especially among those living in rural West Berkshire.

We ran a series of extra online Teen Life courses for parents of autistic 10 to 16-year-olds, in addition to those funded by the NHS, thanks to a grant from the Postcode Lottery and funds raised through the Co-operative Local Community Fund, helping us to keep on top of a long waiting list for places.

Trampolining sessions at Bracknell Trampoline Centre for children from families using our autism support services continued under an exemption from Covid restrictions, allowing group activities for disabled children, until social distancing rules ended.

Family fun days at the Thames Valley Adventure Playground resumed in the early summer of 2021. However, a decision was taken that the Games Club and Lego Club would not be revived after their suspension at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Instead, the focus in future will be on family fun days and one-off activities during school holidays, which are a regular request from families, or when special grants are available. A grant from British Science Week funded a face-to-face Forensic Science Experience session for children with a former police crime scene investigator, after running a modified version online the previous year.

The limitations of the online format for our social groups for autistic adults, the 197 Club in Reading and Bear With Me in Maidenhead, which affected attendances, saw them move back to face-to-face activities during the summer of 2021.

Initially this was achieved through outdoor activities, including barbecues and walks, before sessions at indoor venues resumed.

Members of both groups were encouraged to get a full set of Covid vaccinations, to minimise the risks of infection with the virus, and we supported vaccination efforts across Berkshire throughout the year, publicising information from the Government and NHS and giving details of local clinics.

We were also able to launch a new activity group for adults at the start of 2022, called Walk & Talk. Like Bear With Me, it is co-ordinated by Helen Harris, who is supported by Helen Brookes,





a retired speech and language therapist. Both have many years' experience working with autistic people. Members of the group are *pictured below* with its leaders Helen Harris and Helen Brookes at Hambleden in the Chiltern hills.

The group offers members an opportunity to get together fortnightly on Tuesday mornings for a walk and time to chat at locations around the east of Berkshire. Routes in the first few months included country parks, parts of the River Thames path and Windsor Great Park.

The Thames Valley Autism Alert Card was launched at an event at Aylesbury College in September 2021, with the support of Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire Council and the charity Talkback. BBC1's South Today regional news programme featured the event, helping to drive applications from autistic people across Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire, as well as Berkshire.

The success of this initiative, and moves by the NHS to create a new regional management organisation, led to a motion at the charity's annual general meeting, asking members to endorse a move to amend the area of benefit from Berkshire to the wider Thames Valley. If the Charity Commission approves the change, members will be asked to confirm it at a subsequent general meeting.

After an online AGM in 2020, the 2021 meeting was the first hybrid one in the charity's history, with some members attending in person at the Thames Valley Adventure Playground, while others joined online.

Sandra Stubbs and Margaret Collum both stood down as trustees at the meeting and were thanked by CEO Jane Stanford-Beale for their work on behalf of the charity. During the year, Conor O'Connor succeeded Richard Flemming as the chair of trustees, while Darren Browne joined the board.

We have also given our support to initiatives by other organisations to offer autism-friendly events.

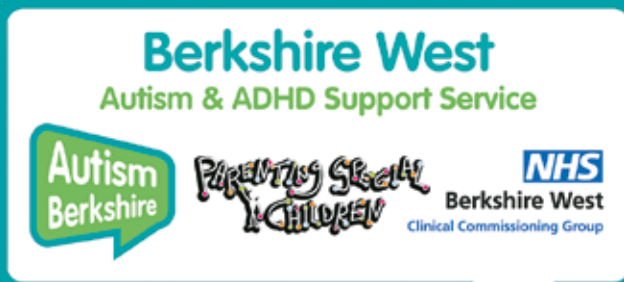
The Museum of English Rural Life, part of the University of Reading, and Reading Museum were keen to revive activities for autistic people after the Covid pandemic and sought our advice. We arranged for them to talk to parents and carers during a Friday Lunch Break session about activities their children enjoyed. This led to the launch of the new Museums, My Way programme, with events alternating between the museums.

The first was held at The MERL and provided an opportunity for us to promote the Thames Valley Autism Alert Card in Berkshire. Members of Thames Valley Police's autism network joined us and brought along a patrol car for children to inspect, *pictured above*. Several families attending took the opportunity to apply for cards.

Autism in Racing is a project launched by racecourse commentator and broadcaster Bobby Beevers, who is autistic and has an autistic daughter, to encourage autistic people to attend race meetings and educate people involved in horseracing about autism.

After a series of successful trial events in the North and Scotland in 2021, offering free tickets to families with autistic children and providing a mobile sensory room at race meetings, Autism in Racing came south for the first time in February 2022, with a visit to Ascot racecourse. Most of the families attending had heard about the event through Autism Berkshire. Further visits to Ascot, and to Newbury racecourse, were planned for later in the year.

Reaching more families



The Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service was launched at the start of 2021, days before the third national Covid lockdown, to help autistic children & young people and their families in Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire.

We work with another Berkshire charity, Parenting Special Children, to provide the service on behalf of the Berkshire West NHS Clinical Commissioning Group.

The initial surge in demand from families for support in the last quarter of the 2020-21 year was maintained throughout the next 12 months running far ahead of levels seen under previous NHS contracts we held from 2016 to 2020. The number of contacts on the mailing list grew from 250 parents and carers at the end of March 2021 to 710 a year later.

Each entry on the list represents a family that has benefited from support from the service, including advice and signposting from the Helpline, virtual home visits, autism advice workshops and follow-on workshops focusing on topics including autism & girls and emotional regulation, or Teen Life courses, plus follow-up contacts in many cases to offer ongoing advice or address specific issues.

Originally introduced as a short-term measure to help parents and carers across Berkshire get together to chat and get information during the third national lockdown at the start of the 2021, the Friday Lunch Break proved popular, so extra funding was secured to run sessions through until the summer of 2022.

Extra funding from the NHS allowed us to add a tailored two-part workshop to the programme in March 2022 for parents and carers of autistic pre-school children. It took an in-depth look at autism in the early years, including behaviour communication, sensory needs and play, and strategies to support young autistic children.

The number of virtual home visits delivered was well above the service specification of 15 per quarter throughout the year, with 276 taking place during the 12 months.

Data about the service's work and how many people are being supported is reported regularly to the NHS Mental Health Services Data Set, which gathers information about the work of NHS-funded services in England for autism and learning disabilities, as well as mental health, to inform planning and development of services.

More information about the Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service and all out other services is available on the Autism Berkshire website at www.autismberkshire.org.uk

Fundraising

For the second financial year running, the Covid pandemic affected our ability to raise funds, with many summer community events cancelled for a second year.

Grants from local and national Covid emergency funding schemes again provided a vital source of income to pay for our services, especially with continued high demand for support from individuals and families.

Corporate donations and grants were another valuable source of support, such as a £500 donation from Amazon UK's community fund, after we were nominated by Natalia Oliva Gamo, a shift manager at the company's depot in Theale.

The Shanly Foundation, the charitable arm of housing developer the Shanly Group, made a grant to help us launch the Walk & Talk activity group for autistic adults, fund our Bear With Me social group in Maidenhead and pay for a summer coach trip to the seaside for members of Bear With Me and the 197 Club in Reading for the first time since 2019.

Support from staff at the two Co-operative Group convenience shops in Caversham and Co-operative Funeralcare in Church Street, Caversham, and donations generated by people shopping at Co-op businesses helped us to raise a total of £3,411 to fund Teen Life courses for the parents and carers of autistic teenagers. The Southern Co-operative gave us a £500 grant towards the costs of running our Helpline service.

Individual supporters also persevered with their efforts to support us, including Matt Giles, who was set to run in the 2020 Reading Half-Marathon to support us. He had to wait until November 2021 before he could tackle the 13-mile route when the 2020 event was cancelled and the 2021 event was postponed until November, due to remaining Covid restrictions in the spring. Over the two years he collected more than £1,300 in sponsorship for us.

Jordanne Hayward, from Slough, made a donation to our funds after she collected more than £3,000, which she shared among four local good causes, via a fundraising page and running several fundraising evenings. She also paid for packages to help the homeless and families in need.

Students who are members of Sulham House at Denefield School in Tilehurst continued to raise funds for us as one of their chosen charities, donating another £169 to our funds during the year.

Although it was not possible to run a joint charity Winter Ball with other Berkshire charities at the end of 2021, the Winter Draw raffle went ahead, raising £300 for our funds and a total of £7,283 for the 11 charities taking part.

We took advantage of the first National Thank You Day, held in July 2021, to thank all our funders and donors, with help from some of the children who attend our trampolining classes at Bracknell Trampoline Centre, pictured below.

• Information about how to get involved with fundraising for Autism Berkshire is available on our website or you can get in touch with us at contact@autismberkshire.org.uk



Thank you

To our funders and supporters

- Agri-Food Ltd
- Amazon Community Fund
- Amazon Smile
- Baylis Media Christmas Cracker Appeal
- Bracknell Town Council
- British Science Week
- Co-operative Local Community Fund
- Crowthorne Parish Council
- Ecclesiastical Insurance Movement for Good
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Involve Bracknell Covid-19 Recovery Fund
- Jordanne Hayward
- London Marathon (fundraising sponsorships)
- O2 Together Fund
- Reading Dispensary Trust
- Rory Smyth
- RS Brownless Charitable Trust
- Schroder Charity Trust
- Shanly Foundation
- Sir Jules Thorn Trust/Ann Rylands Small Grants
- Slough Community Wellbeing Fund
- Southern Co-operative Healthier Neighbourhoods Fund
- TK Maxx & Homesense Community Fund Foundation
- Wokingham Without Parish Council

To our key partners

- Berkshire West NHS Clinical Commissioning Group
- BBC Children in Need
- Slough CVS
- #OneSlough project
- Slough CVS SPACE Project
- Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner's Community Fund
- The Henry Smith Charity
- Bracknell Forest Council
- Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Council

Financial Summary for 2021-22

Total Income	£208,000
Grants and Subscriptions	£189,000
Donations and Fundraising	£19,000
Expenditure on Charitable Activities	£199,500
Fundraising costs	£0
Governance costs	£2,000
Surplus taken to reserves	£6,500
Reserves carried forward to 2022-23	£84,300

2022-2023 will require increased focus towards our fundraising activities as restoring this income stream will be essential to reducing the currently projected deficit between our income and expenditure, as high demand for our services shows no signs of easing.



Talking sense about autism.

Autism Berkshire – the working name for Berkshire Autistic Society

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