



# Annual Review 2022-23 Autism Berkshire

## Transforming support for autistic adults

**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.**

As the challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic finally eased, we were able to focus on further improving our support services.

The Berkshire Adult Autism Support Service was launched in late 2022 after we were awarded a contract by the two NHS integrated care boards that commission services in Berkshire. The aim is to support adults who are on the waiting list for autism assessments and to help autistic adults whose advice and support needs are not met by other NHS-funded services.

The Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service saw continued high demand for help from families in Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire, with the number of families on the mailing list passing 1,000 during the course of the year and most of the service's workshops and courses fully booked well in advance.

While we run fewer activities for autistic children and young people, with trampolining the main focus post-pandemic, we continued to offer occasional special events, including a day of art workshops at the newly-refurbished Prospect Park Pavilion in Reading as part of the celebrations of the late Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in June 2022. The children's creations were incorporated into a mural created by artists from Reading art charity Jelly, to go on permanent display at the pavilion. Some of the children who took part are pictured, above.

And the pavilion provided a new venue for the Autism Berkshire Annual General meeting, which was held in conjunction with a family fun day, when children were able to try out the new Ranger Station indoor and outdoor play facilities created by Reading Borough Council.

*Please read on to find out more about Autism Berkshire's work in 2022-23 and how you can get involved and support our work.*



Talking sense about autism.

☒ Helpline: **01189 594 594**  [www.autismberkshire.org.uk](http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk)

## What people say about Autism Berkshire's services

*"Keep up the good work. I visited you today and so did a friend of mine. You were our central supporting function when our son was in his previous nursery. Thank you for inviting us to your workshop and thank you for having that extremely useful helpline, we don't know what we would have done without it."*

– Parent who visited us in The Oracle shopping centre, Reading, during Autism Acceptance Week 2023

*"It was so lovely to talk to you today. When you speak to someone who understands what it feels like to be in the situation, who offers advice and support, it feels such a relief. I made some notes as we were chatting and already this afternoon I have focused conversations with A on very ordinary things - it felt good to engage without stress."*

– Parent after one-to-one support

*"I really appreciate your time and understanding - I feel I now have something tangible to grip on to and steps we can follow whilst waiting for our daughter's autism assessment."*

– Parent after one-to-one support

*"Thank you so much for this information. I have called dad already and made him aware of the groups available... so far just being listened to is making such a positive difference to him. His behaviour for so many years has been misunderstood and hopefully we have solved the riddle now and he can start accepting himself. So thank you for your time and following up with us."*

– Family member after seeking help for an autistic adult

*"This course has been a life-changer for my son. He's now eating things he wouldn't have six months ago and I also have more knowledge to guide him and understand it all. Would highly recommend to all."*

– Parent who took part in intensive Food Refusal course

*"Thank you for the session today. Again so very helpful... I really look forward to every session. Finally, after two years of struggling, I don't feel alone when I attend your sessions and I wish they could continue for ever."*

– Parent who took part in Teen Life course

## In Numbers 2022-23

<b>£352,969</b>	Benefits awarded to clients of our Benefits Service
<b>5,795</b>	Individual contacts with families by the Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service
<b>5,200</b>	Facebook Followers
<b>1,970</b>	Twitter Followers
<b>1,050</b>	Families supported by the Berkshire West service

## Expanding the reach of our support services

An improved range of services took shape in 2022-23, with the launch of the Berkshire Adult Autism Support Service the key feature.

Transforming support for adults was a long-held ambition but finding funding had proved challenging until we secured a contract with Berkshire's two NHS integrated care boards to provide a new county-wide service – see the panel to the right for more details of this development.

Alongside the new service we supported an initiative at the start of 2023 by Reading-based charity Graft Thames to develop a new Survival Guide Skills for Employment course, tailored for autistic adults, drawing on Graft's expertise in helping to eradicate barriers to employment for disabled people.

The Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service saw increased demand for help from families of autistic children in the Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire areas, reflecting the number of children being added to waiting lists for NHS assessments. More than 1,000 families are now registered for autism support alone.

The service's autism advice workshops for parents and carers were again in high demand. These were all delivered online, as experience during the Covid pandemic and feedback from parents and carers indicated this was more convenient for most than travelling to a venue for a face-to-face session. And a new development saw a trial in March of a set of workshops for the parents of autistic teenagers, developed by our family support team.

The Benefits Service continued to support autistic people and their families across the county with advice about new applications and representation at appeal stages. Benefit awards and back payments to clients supported by service manager Kevin Jackson in 2022-23 totalled almost £353,000, including several large back payments of Personal Independence Payment to adults whose appeals to tribunals were settled after long delays, linked in part to a backlog of hearings caused by the Covid pandemic.

The Bear With Me and 197 Club social groups for autistic adults continued to be well supported and their members were able to enjoy a day out at the seaside at Bournemouth in August 2022 for the first time since 2019.







Further funding was secured for the fortnightly Walk & Talk activity group for autistic adults at the start of 2022. The group walked routes across the east of Berkshire, with one of the highlights being a guided tour of the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham as part a walk centred on the artist's home village, *pictured below*.

Autism Berkshire staff devised and delivered a programme of autism training for all 2,000 Thames Valley Police frontline officers in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes, running 176 workshop sessions over eight months, assisted by trainers from Buckinghamshire charity Talkback.

Feedback from officers who attended sessions was excellent, with several getting in touch to say they had since been much more confident when dealing with situations involving autistic people.

Reading Football Club Community Trust's coaching team took part in a tailored training session to help them understand the needs of autistic children and young people they work with.

And both Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire Council benefited from our expertise as they prepared new all-age autism strategies for the communities they serve.

We also worked with the charity Autism in Racing to promote their visits to Ascot and Newbury racecourses in the summer of 2022, bringing a mobile sensory room to race meetings and offering families with autistic children to enjoy a day at the races free of charge. Members of our team attended both events to talk to racegoers about our services.

Traffic to the website and social media pages remained strong, with the number of Facebook followers climbing past 5,000 during the year. On Twitter the number of page impressions and engagement with tweets remained strong, despite the site's recent policy shifts.

The year concluded with a successful series of Autism Acceptance Week events in Reading and Maidenhead.

We took over an empty shop at The Oracle in Reading from Monday, March 27, to Friday, March 31, to talk to passing shoppers, and held workshops and a speaker event with autistic advocate and author Sarah O'Brien – a former Autism Berkshire volunteer – ahead of the publication of her book *So, I'm Autistic: An Introduction to Autism for Young Adults and Late Teens*. Sarah is pictured, *above left*, with adult autism support mentor Anika Kanani.

Our team in Maidenhead wrapped up the week by running an information stand and craft activities at Nicholson's Shopping Centre on Saturday, April 1.

## New help for adults



The Berkshire Adult Autism Support Service was launched in late 2022 to transform help for autistic adults throughout the county.

Autism Berkshire was selected to deliver the service by the Frimley Health and Care NHS Integrated Care Board and the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire West NHS Integrated Care Board in a competitive tender process.

The service provides advice and support to autistic adults who do not meet criteria for support from specialist services, such as NHS mental health and learning disability teams, and those who are on the waiting list for adult autism assessments.

While we already supported autistic adults through the Bear With Me and 197 Club social groups, and our Helpline service, the new contract allowed a range of new practical advice and support to be provided.

These drew on our experience of providing the Berkshire West Autism & ADHD Support Service for families with autistic children since early 2021, the findings from surveys of autistic adults asking what kinds of help they wanted and two consultation events held at Maidenhead Library.

The parents and carers of autistic adults can also get advice to help them support their relatives.

Existing Helpline support was backed up with one-to-one extended advice sessions and regular face-to-face meet-up sessions, to get instant advice, at locations around the county, including Reading and Maidenhead.

Other new features included online meet-ups for autistic women and for autistic young adults, offering opportunities to meet in a friendly and supportive setting to chat, share issues and ideas and get advice in a relaxed atmosphere, with those taking part encouraged to set the agenda.

And a series of autism advice workshops was developed, tailored for the needs of adults and covering key topics, with sessions for their parents and carers planned for 2023-24.

**More information about the Berkshire Adult Autism Support Service and all our other services is available on the Autism Berkshire website at [www.autismberkshire.org.uk](http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk)**

# Fundraising

The year saw a return to fundraising activity in the community after two years when the Covid pandemic meant little income was generated from events and fundraising challenges.

In May 2022, Dom Coombes - who attended our trampolining sessions for autistic children and young people at Bracknell Trampoline Centre - and his mother Jo Richardson raised almost £700 for us by taking part in a 5k Tough Mudder cross-country and obstacle challenge event held in Henley.

A visit to Ascot Racecourse by the horseracing charity Autism in Racing's mobile sensory room, which was attended by members of our team, provided a £1,000 boost to our funds in July 2022, thanks to a donation from the racecourse and a bucket collection at the event. We had just one day's notice that we could make the collection, after another charity dropped out. A team of volunteers responded to an urgent request for help so we could make the most of the opportunity.

And the year's community fundraising activity ended on a high note, thanks to the members of the *Chorate Chamber Choir* in Reading, *pictured*, who supported us through a concert of choral music for Lent and Easter held at the town's St John & St Stephen's Church, on Saturday, March 25. They raised almost £900 with a collection at the church, an online fundraising page and a match funding donation from Mondelez International, the employer of one of the singers. We had provided advice and support to Mary Chambers, one of the members of the choir, and her family.

With the national focus switching from dealing with the pandemic to coping with the surge in the cost of living, there were fewer opportunities to seek grants to provide support to families and individuals, because many charitable trusts and foundations adjusted the type of activities they wanted to fund.

However, support from Berkshire-based funders remained strong, with a grant from Berkshire Community Foundation's Vital for Berkshire fund helping to pay for Helpline support for autistic adults and the Earley Charity funding the 197 Club social group for autistic adults in Reading.

The Shanly Foundation gave a further grant to the Bear With Me social group for adults in Maidenhead, while the Prince Philip Trust Fund made a grant to fund the Walk & Talk activity group in the east of Berkshire.

The Helpline also benefited from grants from the Edward Gostling Foundation, which is based in Windsor, and from community grants made by Bracknell Town Council and the Crowthorne and Wokingham Without parish councils.

A grant was also secured from Reading Borough Council to run some family fun days at the new play and activity facilities at the Ranger Station at Prospect Park Pavilion, and this was topped up by a donation from the John Sykes Foundation, based in Reading.

• 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](mailto:contact@autismberkshire.org.uk)

# Thank you

## To our funders and supporters

- Alpkitt Foundation
- Amazon Smile
- Arnold Clark Community Fund
- Ascot Racecourse
- Baylis Media Cracker Fund
- Berkshire Women's Aid
- Bracknell Town Council
- Chorate Chamber Choir
- Community Impact Berkshire
- Crowthorne Parish Council
- Dom Coombes & Jo Richardson
- Edward Gostling Foundation
- Get Berkshire Active
- John Sykes Foundation
- PayPal Giving Fund
- Reading Football Club Community Trust
- Rory Smyth
- Shanly Foundation
- Sir Jules Thorn Trust - Ann Rylands Small Grants
- South Hill Park Arts Centre
- The Earley Charity
- The Headley Trust
- The Louis Baylis (Maidenhead Advertiser) Charitable Trust
- The Prince Philip Trust Fund
- Visa Europe
- Volant Charitable Trust
- Wokingham Without Parish Council
- Wooden Hill School, Bracknell

## To our key partners

- Arts Council England
- Berkshire Community Foundation
- BBC Children in Need
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire NHS Integrated Care Board
- Frimley Health & Care NHS Integrated Care Board
- Reading Borough Council
- Slough CVS #OneSlough project
- Thames Valley Police
- The Henry Smith Charity

# Financial Summary for 2022-23

Total Income	£272,000
Grants and Subscriptions	£260,000
Donations and Fundraising	£12,000
Expenditure on Charitable Activities	£261,000
Fundraising costs	£0
Governance costs	£2,000
Surplus taken to reserves	£9,000
Reserves carried forward to 2022-23	£93,000

The completion of a number of substantial contracts during the financial year generated a modest surplus, enhancing our reserve position for the future. We are anticipating a challenge in replicating surplus income in the current financial year, given the ever-increasing demand being seen for both family and adult support services.



Talking sense about autism.

Autism Berkshire – the working name for Berkshire Autistic Society

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