

Grampian Autistic Society

Annual General Meeting

Monday 6th November 2017

Chairman's Report

30 years ago, there were no autism-specific services available for people in the Grampian region. This organisation was founded then as a parent support group and has been a member driven organisation ever since.

Over the years, the organisation has grown and developed and currently offers a range of services, including weekend and holiday Playschemes, individual Outreach services, employment support, sibling support and parent training.

We are always looking for ways to develop the services and support we provide, keeping in mind our vision that all those living with an Autistic Spectrum Condition in the Grampian region should be supported and encouraged to fulfil their potential within their community and society.

We want to base our priorities for developing firmly on the needs of the people we are serving. To do this effectively it is imperative that we hear and respond to the input of our members.

As a Board, we have agreed to increase our focus on member engagement, and this AGM is a step in that process. We look forward to hearing your views.

Board structure

The Board of Directors is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the charity in conjunction with the General Manager.

We currently have a full complement of 11 people on the Board. Seven are Member directors and 4 are directors appointed by the members based on their specific professional skills(which include finance, legal, human resources and general business management). We were happy to welcome Nicolle Housden-Lambert to the Board during the last year.

Since our previous AGM in November 2016, 5 ordinary Board meetings have taken place and have been well attended. In early 2017, we agreed goals for the Society for the upcoming year (April to March), and also agreed a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be tracked regularly, to give us clear visibility of ongoing progress towards goals.

Our committees dealing with Staff & Services, Finance & Governance, Marketing & Fundraising and Employment Support have continued to meet between Board meetings to provide specific input to these areas as required.

Some key points:

Staff and Services

- Recruiting and retaining staff continues to be our most significant challenge, with demand in the sector outstripping available supply.
- We are working to maintain and increase our Outreach service provision. In particular, we are developing outreach services for youngsters needing support to access education.
- A full refurbishment of our Sensory room was completed earlier this year, we will be happy to show you the results, and hope to have a video about this to share more widely in the near future.
- Aberdeen City Council advised their intention to issue a tender for all children's services. However, this has been delayed and we await an update later this month.
- Following the success of last year's social event for Staff and Board, we are holding a similar event again this year later in the month.

Finance and Governance

- Financial results for the budget year ending March 2017 were better than originally planned, with revenue and costs more or less breaking even. This was achieved by more fundraising, increased Outreach hours and lower variable wages than had been budgeted. The Society's cash reserves remain healthy being invested in several bank deposits in amounts to be protected by the Financial Service Compensation Scheme.
- Timely payment of invoices by Aberdeen City Council has improved, but we continue in discussion with the council about the issue of having consistent rates for our services.
- We are aware of a risk associated with Aberdeen City Council's announced tender of children's services. There may be a significant reduction in demand for the Playscheme and other children's services provided by GAS. We are considering options to address this.
- We have continued to give attention throughout the year to identifying, reviewing and mitigating key risks in the finance and governance areas. The Induction pack for new directors to the Board has been updated.

Marketing and Fundraising

- We had Board approval to offer free membership subscriptions for 2017 and 2018, in support of our drive for membership engagement. As a result, our total membership has more than doubled, and our aim is to seek more active dialogue with members over coming months.
- We participated in several radio broadcasts for World Autism Awareness Day, and intend to ramp up our efforts in this area for April 2018.
- With our website and Facebook presences well established, our marketing efforts are currently focussed on development of "fundraiser packs", including GAS

branded promotional items. Our new T-shirts were put to good use by two supporters running for us, raising close to £1,000 in total.

- Successful afternoon tea fundraisers were held in February and September, with a total of over £5,000 being raised.
- Several grant applications were submitted, with successes resulting in awards totalling over £20,000. We plan to streamline our process by creation of standardised templates.

Employment Support

- Our Employment Support Service has been making steady progress and getting very good results.
- Although the 3-year funding for this service from Aberdeen Harbour Board has come to an end this year, the Board agree to fund the service from reserves for a further year, based on the success and value of the service.
- Meanwhile, the Board would value member input as we explore ways to develop this work into a broader, full-time role, perhaps including training responsibilities and look at ways to secure funding for this.
- Your input would be very welcome by members of the Board and Leadership team.

General

More details on the services and the training provided will be provided by the Leadership Team. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our staff and Leadership Team for all they have done in the last year to further the aims of the Society. In particular, this year Pearl Begbie, our Service Manager had her 5 year service anniversary, so the Board want to record a special vote of thanks for her commitment and positive contributions.

Dorothy Daldry, Chair
November 2017