

ABC Autism Group (NIC107748) – Trustees report 01/04/2022 to 31/03/2023.

The group has now been running for seven years, we are a volunteer run, NI registered charity offering various support services to families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder, primarily in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area.

The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to present challenges to the group as things return to normal. Despite these challenges, the group remains strong, we have an excellent dedicated team in our committee and the group remains on a strong financial footing.

At present, lack of manpower makes it difficult for us to expand but despite this, demand for our services is growing year on year.

Our swimming sessions at South Lake Leisure Centre continue to be busy and successful and we intend to maintain these for the foreseeable future.

We have been able to hold more outdoor events which we have enjoyed very much, and we also continue to run events online such as the parent support meetings.

The parent craft sessions continue to run once a month and they have been an overwhelming success.

We have also continued to offer support via Facebook, the phone and email, helping members with advice on the health system, the education system, the benefits system and also, advice on specific issues.

Following a successful trial last year, we finally fully launched our group aimed at the older children and this has been well received, having received significant funding for this back in 2019, it was great to finally get this off the ground and there will be more to come in due course from this.

This year we secured £4000 of funding from the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, who remain our core funder and for whom we are very grateful. We furthermore received a grant for £2000 from the Telecommunity fund managed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

Donations and external fundraisers throughout the year have exceeded £12,000 this year and we are extremely grateful and flattered. These are particularly important to us as money from most funders, like the council come with ties and restrictions as to how we can use it whereas fundraising and donations come without restrictions and allow us to do much more. We continue to run fundraisers, some of our own and some are run on our behalf, and we are also looking into new ways to continue fundraising for the group.

We always welcome fundraising and donations, and we have various channels open to us for this, for example, we are registered with Facebook and Justgiving as a charity which can be selected for a fundraiser. It is especially useful in the current climate to be on the receiving end of such generosity as grant funding has become very difficult to find and obtain.

The continuation of these grants and fundraising is vital to allow us to keep all our services and events free of charge for everyone, which is very important to us.

Going forward, we hope to be able to start more clubs but our biggest focus is still to work towards having a home of our own, a customised space where we can hold our events, store our equipment and to be a community resource.

This will require us to continue to raise significant funds to allow us to begin this process, without risking the financial health, or future of the charity.

Finally, we would like to thank all our members for being part of our group, it is our pleasure to continually meet new families and make new friendships through the group.

Kirsty Wilding, Chairperson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kirsty Wilding', written in a cursive style.

6th October 2023