

## **Umbrella Autism**

### **Chair's Report**

#### **For the Annual Report 2005-6**

Umbrella Autism is the Cambridgeshire group bringing together all those who live with, work with or have autistic spectrum conditions (ASDs). Its aim is to work and learn side-by-side to enable all children and adults on the spectrum and their families to be better able to fulfil their potential and feel comfortable in the local community.

We are a Registered Charity (No. 1096993) and are managed by a voluntary Committee. This includes Trustees and other co-opted members supporting our various activities. Several are also members of the National Autistic Society, which has supported Umbrella and with whom we continue to work.

Our main activities in the past year included:

- Open meetings with invited speakers
- Social events including coffee mornings, lunches and evenings out and family parties
- Information and informal support provided via telephone and our website
- Maintaining links and input across various statutory and voluntary services work for the autism community
- Supporting our three “chill out” youth clubs for ages 8-18 (now fully managed for us by our long-standing partner, Romsey Mill)
- Supporting our two community-based “chill out” social groups for adults with Asperger Syndrome (together they have supported nearly 20 adults aged 18 and up in the past year)
- Supporting the Aspirations Education Programme (which provides an NOCN accredited part time learning opportunity for 40 adults with ASDs or other social communication difficulties, aged about 16-70; it is managed by Red2Green, who have turned Umbrella ideas into a reality)
- Maintaining a link with the Sunshine Club (a Saturday Club for 30 children aged 4-11 across the autistic spectrum managed by Crossroads for Carers)
- Managing the Cambridge University Umbrella Volunteers scheme and its Coordinator (it recruited and inspired 22 undergraduate and graduate students to support several of the activities listed above)

Umbrella initiated or was a partner in shaping all of the activities listed. The members of our committee all volunteer their time. The number and range of opportunities Umbrella has initiated and continues to support is amazing for a voluntary group and unique among voluntary autism groups in the country. The demand on Umbrella is considerable as the numbers of people affected by ASDs is pushing towards 1 in 150.

This past year it has been a struggle for our small Committee to sustain consistent support for all these activities. In addition to dealing with autism as it impacts in various ways on our own families and/or in our work, various committee members

have also struggled with illness and other unexpected major life challenges. It is astonishing that we have accomplished as much as we have. I want to offer thanks to all the committee members and other Umbrella friends who have helped us through a difficult year, with particular thanks to Umbrella officers, Kathy Pascuzzi, Karen Hosking and Jacqui Radford.

Our main aim over the next year is to increase the number of people supporting our various activities. We need to do this before we can take on any new initiatives. We need more people helping either through regular input (e.g. secretarial tasks, responding to phone inquiries, helping with our financial management, helping to host open meetings) or occasional help (e.g. with particular social events or with stuffing envelopes and/or transporting materials for our occasional bursts of publicity).

If you value what Umbrella does and what it could do we need to say the year ahead is a critical time for Umbrella. We need much more help. It's better, we think, to break our tasks into more, smaller jobs and have more people to help with them. We welcome new Trustees, new Committee members and all offers of regular or occasional help.

Our Committee members for 2005-06 have been:

Robin Wallach	(Chair)
Kathy Pascuzzi	(Vice Chair)
Jacqui Radford	(Treasurer)
Karen Hosking	(Membership Secretary)
Susan Owen	
Sally Bray	
Robin Rule	

We have an active mailing list of over 177 and a large membership which includes affected people, family members, friends, carers and people who work in the field of autism.

To all those who wonder if they might be able to help us: please take action now and let us know. To all those who have supported us (whether through time and effort, gifts or finance), thank you on behalf of the committee and most especially on behalf of all those who benefit from what Umbrella does.

*Robin Wallach (Chair)*