



**50**  
**years**  
supporting  
people with  
autism

2018/19  
**Annual Report**



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Over  
**400**  
people  
supported



## About us

At Autism Together, it is our mission to bring richness and joy into the lives of those on the spectrum. No two people with autism are affected in the same way, so we work with every single individual to help them lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

We started life in 1968, when a group of forward-thinking parents, concerned at the complete lack of services available for their children, decided to stand up and be counted. Since then, we have grown and developed into one of the country's leading providers of services for people on the autism spectrum, offering a wide range of residential options and day services.

As a highly specialist provider, we recognise that each person has a right to live their life as they determine. Being person-centred is one of our core values and we live and breathe it. Our highly-trained staff work with each individual to create a shared understanding of their strengths and needs, and to ensure that their preferred way of communicating is respected and implemented by all staff.

Not only do we care for those on the autistic spectrum, we also engage with our community to highlight understanding and awareness too. Our Autism Champions project trains organisations and employees – from football club stewards to shopping centre staff – in awareness of autism and how they can make small changes to make life a bit easier for the autism community.

Our ethos remains firmly rooted in a belief that we begin with what people can do, not what they can't. There is no glass ceiling here. People with autism can, and do, learn, and our support approaches are focused on developing lifelong learning, with all the gifts it can bring.



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

# Andrew Davies

This summer I was honoured to become just the fourth Chair of Trustees in the 50 year history of our great charity. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Hilary Dobson, who left us after many years as a very dedicated trustee.

We have faced a number of challenges in the past year but can also celebrate numerous successes achieved both by Autism Together as an organisation and by the people with autism that we support.

Autism Together has reached its 50th birthday, an immense achievement and certainly no mid-life crisis, as this annual report shows.

Like anyone celebrating a significant birthday, we have celebrated in style with a Gala Ball for fundraising, the Autism Gold Awards and our Autism's Got Talent roadshow. But this report also highlights numerous other personal achievements that underline the importance of our charity.

The good news includes the significant improvement in our financial position and cash flow over the year. Because of the range of our autism services we are able to effectively subsidise vital sectors like the Children and Family Service, but this depends on our overall viability. Financial stability is the key to all our work.

We have continued to meet with local authorities to attempt to secure full cost recovery for the services we provide and significant progress has been made. Of equal importance is the focus on making sure that we recover all money owing to us. We have immensely improved our ability to do that over the last couple of years, adding to our financial stability.

One of our most valuable services is Supported Living, by which we enable people with autism to remain living in a domestic environment with full support. We have found it

a constant struggle to achieve the fees to ensure the long-term viability of the service. The board asked management to focus closely on this vital service.

A major challenge in the past year has been the provision of our valuable respite service. The board made a decision in 2018 to switch the use of The Ferns and Helen House, with long-term residents to be accommodated in the bespoke and autism-friendly environment of The Ferns. The refurbishment of Helen House has been a longstanding objective. The main part of Helen House has been stripped out and is uninhabitable, pending refurbishment. There are significant cost challenges but we hope, in the year ahead, to reinstate a full respite service, which we recognise is so vital to parents looking after their children at home.

Certainty and continuity is vital to the welfare of those people with autism that we support, so disruption and change is to be avoided, where possible. The turnover of staff within the care sector as a whole is extremely rapid but at Autism Together we have made some inroads into the problem with a package of measures to make our care staff feel valued. We have succeeded in reducing turnover to well below the sector average. We would love to do more to improve the pay of our dedicated staff and will continue to look for opportunities to do so in future.

Linked to the issues of our fee income, financial viability and pay is also the question of whether we should be a specialist provider for autism services for people with complex behaviours or otherwise. That remains a continuing issue for us to consider in the year ahead.

We moved towards the preparation of the proof of concept for the biometric project during the year, which has been submitted to our funders. Beyond this, the board will have a continuing interest in how investment in technology can complement and support the work of our staff.

Away from all these serious issues and challenges we should all celebrate the numerous achievements of our charity over the past year. From the work carried out at our garden centre in Bromborough Pool Village, to Port Sunlight River Park, where we have a significant maintenance footprint in a beautiful outdoor landscape, and through the many achievements of so many of those with whom we work, it's certainly been a significant year for the organisation.

We have a great group of trustees with a valuable range of skills, all of whom have put a great deal of time into Autism Together, not just at board meetings but in a range of involvement in our services, seeking to constructively challenge, while ensuring that our standards remain high. The importance of doing so has been underlined by recent scandals highlighted on Panorama and by the Winterbourne report.

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**"Autism Together has reached its 50th birthday, an immense achievement and certainly no mid-life crisis, as this report shows"**



## 1972

Pictured left to right:  
 Ann Kelly (trustee),  
 Joan Lee (trustee),  
 Bob and Rene  
 McKillop, Keith  
 Benson OBE (chair  
 of trustees), Helen  
 Benson (honorary  
 secretary), Joe Kelly  
 (trustee), Beryl  
 McParlin (trustee) and  
 Rt Hon Lynda  
 Chalker MP

## DEPUTY CEO

# Jane Carolan

Our charity's 50th anniversary year gives us an opportunity to pause for a moment and reflect on how far society has travelled in its understanding of autism.

Undoubtedly, our knowledge of the condition has increased in leaps and bounds. But knowledge is one thing... action (the action we take to support those on the spectrum) is entirely another.

It is more than 50 years since Leo Kanner first described his classic autistic syndrome. He called it early infantile autism and provided no evidence of its prevalence amongst the population, declaring only that it was extremely rare.

Twenty years later, Victor Lotter published the first results of an epidemiological study of children with the behaviour pattern described by Kanner. His evidence pointed to a prevalence rate of 4.5 per 10,000 children.

Since then, the results of research and clinical work have led to the broadening of the concept of the autism spectrum. And today we know that the actual prevalence of autism in all its complexity – and it is exceptionally complex – is approximately 1.1% of the UK population.

Over the decades, wonderful autism advocates, such as American professor Temple Grandin, have enriched our understanding of the condition. Grandin's message is about 'differently-abled' brains. Rigid academic and social expectation, she says, could stifle a mind that, whilst it may struggle to conjugate a verb, could one day take us to distant stars.

And today, autism is commonplace in the mainstream media, with autistic characters in soaps like Hollyoaks and dramas like The A Word – and celebrity parents like Paddy and Christine McGuinness speaking out about their experiences. Even children's programme Sesame Street has Julie, a four-year-old character with autism.

Thanks to academic research, increased insight and several decades of practical experience of the condition, autism professionals at charities such as ours are now able to provide highly specialist care. Plus, we're designing and building state-of-the-art, autism-friendly environments that we know will actively reduce challenging behaviours. Our Ferns and Willows buildings on our Raby site, with their wide corridors, natural light and calming colours are achieving dramatic reductions in the number of serious incidents with residents.

In the wider community, businesses are increasingly committing to autism awareness training – such as that provided by our in-house Autism Training and Advisory Service – so that those on the spectrum can enjoy everyday life in ways we take for granted.

And yet we have so far to go before those with autism that we love and support can all be said to be living

“It’s for us to try and go into their world. When you manage to go to their world, it surprisingly makes perfect sense”



satisfying, ordinary lives. Our knowledge of this endlessly challenging condition must be matched by the will – society-wide – to push continually for social justice.

Just eight years ago, a BBC Panorama programme uncovered what professionals described as torture at Winterbourne View, a long-stay hospital in Bristol for people with autism and learning disabilities. Six care workers were jailed for slapping, restraining and bullying patients. The governmental response – close down all long-term Assessment and Treatment Units – was worthy but has, to date, proved impossible to achieve.

Our other challenges are many. In our Future 50 survey, published Spring 2018, a thousand respondents highlighted a number of key issues they were desperate to have resolved.

Their top demands for change were:

- Mandatory autism awareness training for all public facing staff, for example, in schools, doctors' surgeries and shops (called for by 76% of respondents)
- Increased spend on special education (57%)
- Better funding of local authority care packages (53%)
- Help to tackle mate crime, by learning how to develop positive friendships (45%)

To achieve all these changes, we'll need to think differently – and one parent who responded to our Future 50 survey hit the nail on the head. Perhaps her words could be a motto for our next fifty years at Autism Together.

She said: "From my perspective as a mum, it isn't for the autistic person to be dragged kicking and screaming into our world, it's for us to try and go into their world. When you manage to go to their world, it surprisingly makes perfect sense and explains so much."

## OUR VALUES



We promote positive communication



Everything we do is person-centred



Autism Together is an organisation that promotes learning



We are respectful



# ATAS

**200**  
staff trained  
this year

This past year has seen the appointment of a new manager for the Autism Training and Advisory Service (ATAS) with Michelle Walklett taking on the lead role.

Michelle, an accredited trainer, brings the benefit of her knowledge and experience from a variety of different positions within Autism Together, having been with the organisation for 25 years.

The ATAS team is made up of Michelle, Yvonne Smith, Hema Fryar and Dawn Kirby, supported by training administration staff, Jo Fitzgerald and Jennifer Perry.

## Induction training

New recruits to Autism Together receive an intensive induction, covering three weeks over a seven-week period, followed by regular refreshers, all conducted by ATAS.

“We will be investigating this using both abstract shapes and pictures of interior design environments (rooms) and it is expected that the results would inform the design of a more autism-friendly environment in the future”

**Dr Letizia Palumbo, Liverpool Hope University**

As this training relates to all the people we support at Autism Together, the ATAS team must keep abreast of current research, legislation and updates in the field of autism, health and social care. Statutory and regulatory standards must also be met and kept current.

The vast induction programme is growing all the time and the team will soon be adding mental health and autism training to the list.

ATAS helps to underpin the organisation's autism methodology by training staff in Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) and the other autism approaches that combine under the PBS umbrella.

Our trainers constantly expand their skills base, meaning each can lead the majority of our courses, giving wider flexibility and productivity. Due to many of the courses being accredited, it also helps to ensure quality and staff development.

## External training

The team also delivers training to a wide range of outside organisations to raise autism awareness, understanding and acceptance. This includes training businesses which have joined our Autism Champions scheme, giving a general introduction about autism and delivering a suite of bespoke courses covering everything from understanding sensory differences, personalised communication, employment and relationships for those with autism.

These courses have proved popular with businesses across the North West, allowing the ATAS team to raise awareness for Autism Together, build positive relationships with partners and bring in revenue.

## Autism Advice sessions

These sessions are in demand and offer individuals

**1977**

Raby Hall opened to first six residents

**1975**

Raby Hall purchased

**1977**

Beverly Rice becomes CEO

# Children and Family Service

Over the past year, the department, under the new leadership of Phil Hatton, has supported many families through parenting courses, weekly stay-and-play Rainbow sessions, activity clubs and direct one-to-one support in the family home.

In March, the team provided and completed the first year of the BBC Children in Need programme, with 40 children and young people accessing the service during this time. The group is predominantly for siblings of children with autism and provides a one-to-one session, followed by a bi-weekly 'Sibling Group' and an alternate 'Chill n' Chat' group for children with autism. The one-to-one sessions are particularly in demand with an eight-week waiting list for an appointment. We have been commissioned to provide this programme for three years and are now in our second year.

Our activity and friendship groups, funded by Wirral Council, continue to be popular. They are well established and receive positive feedback from children, young people and parents alike, with 80 children and young people attending activity clubs and 19 attending the friendship group and our monthly outings.

Rainbow groups continue to be very popular for parents and carers of children aged eight and under. The sessions are run each week at Bromborough and Birkenhead, with both settings providing excellent facilities for stay and play provision for families.

Around 100 children and 70 parents attended Rainbow groups in the past year, with parental feedback confirming these groups provide valuable peer support and a safe, relaxing and understanding environment for the whole family, helping reduce the social isolation experienced by many parents.

We continue to provide a direct payment service which provides one-to-one support for families. The service is available for individuals aged up to 18, and potentially up to 25 for young people with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) in place. This service has recently been developed into the Children and Family Outreach Service with a support plan pathway providing an enhanced, person-centred and outcome-led provision for every child and young person accessing it.

The parenting course has been attended by 150 families this year. We continue to be a part of the Paediatric Autism Pathway in Wirral and are funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide regular courses for parents of children, post-diagnosis, during the year. Referrals are received via Wirral Paediatricians and from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

100  
kids came to  
Rainbows

24  
business  
champions

with autism a chance to talk in a confidential and safe environment. Available for people with autism, their families or advocates outside of our organisation, it is a unique service in terms of 'bridging the gap' for individuals who may access other services that lack an autism approach. We are currently looking for these sessions to be funded as individuals pay after the first free, initial session. Employees with autism at Autism Together are allowed three free sessions if they wish.

## Co-production

We are working with individuals to encourage better feedback and discussion of how Autism Together operates. Co-production allows people who access the service to have a real say in shaping it. Everyone who participates in training can help inform the development of the charity's services, including having their input shared through meetings with the Senior Leadership Team.

## Research

Two of our staff members are research gatekeepers, involved in projects identified by the Access Review Committee (ARG). Their role is to safeguard individuals we support who may be involved in those projects, once the projects have been agreed upon by the ARC.

Recently, Dr Leitzia Palumbo of Liverpool Hope University conducted research on our behalf to examine building design and what appeals visually, in terms of architecture and layout, to people with autism. It is hoped that the results can inform the design of more autism-friendly environments in future.



1979

Princess Anne officially  
opens Raby Hall



SUPPORTING PEOPLE  
WITH AUTISM

# Supported Living

After some changes within management structure, the team welcomed back Dave Morrow as registered manager while John Benson became manager of Cheshire services

We are preparing to open up a new service in Cheshire in the autumn and have started transitions for the three young men who will be living there. This is the first new service we have opened in recent years and we continue to work with various housing providers when seeking new housing options.

Demand for supported living services continues to be steady, and a number of our existing services are moving towards a core-hours model, which is a more flexible approach to support and enables people to further develop their independence.

We have been implementing Positive Behaviour Support plans across the department with great success and this has resulted in a number of people we support being discharged from community health professionals. One professional said: "The staff team are obviously dedicated to the people they support," while another said: "Your enthusiasm, plus your proactive and collaborative working was commendable."

Some of the recent successes for our individuals include Annabel and John becoming part of the Special Olympics' horse riding team, Mandy achieving her dream of moving into her own flat, and Nigel winning a snooker tournament. Well done everyone.



**Joe:** "It's nice to have a chat with staff."



**Nigel:** "I like talking with the other tenants."



**Chris:** "I started going out independently."



**1980**

John Mortlock becomes CEO

**1980**

Our name changes to Wirral Autistic Society



18  
residential  
houses



## Residential



“I like  
my quiet  
flat”  
**Kenneth**

Raby Hall was opened in  
1977. Here is Dr Keith Benson  
with his son and friends



**1977**

**1984**

Mike Hatton becomes CEO

**1982**

Beryl Brookman  
becomes CEO

**1987**

Helen House opens



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## Creative Arts & Technology

The team has settled into Gallagher House and made important improvements to work rooms



12  
art  
exhibitions



**1994** | Laurel Cottage opens

**1993** | The Green opens in Bromborough Pool

**1994** | 'Raby Enterprise' is donated by Cammell Laird (built by the shipworkers' apprentices). Our narrowboat allows clients to experience life on the canals of Cheshire



Both the people we support and our staff say they like it in our new Gallagher House premises... the rooms are larger and brighter and there is more space for people to work.

We've enjoyed many highlights over the past year, particularly our art exhibition for World Autism Awareness Day. Held in New Brighton's Floral Pavilion, the event saw some truly fantastic paintings, ceramics and fabric work on display created by the people we support. The exhibition, which ran for two weeks, received lots of praise and compliments.

We also enjoyed sharing artwork created by our talented individuals with visitors to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Liverpool. We took over an apse and left a book for people to leave their thoughts on the displays. The exhibition ran for a month and saw thousands of visitors. The comments were extremely positive and moving.

In our arts workshops we saw much development and progress with our amazing artists. We are supporting many new individuals and they are settling in and integrating well. Recently we have been trying new forms of art, making creations out of pom-poms and using Lego.

To celebrate the 'Mexican Day of the Dead' in October our artists designed and created their own masks. They all looked very bright and colourful and a bit scary...

Our Ceramics department have been very busy creating personal artwork and pottery items to sell in

**Maureen Berry, parent:** "My son is very proud of the artwork he produces. I've seen him displaying challenging behaviour and watched staff calm him down. It's not an art class where you sit someone down and they just do it. The staff are incredible. They make sure service users are involved and understand what they are doing"

our Bromborough Pool garden centre, including toad/frog houses, bird baths and feeders. They also created lots of seasonal items such as spooky candle holders for Halloween, while their Koi carp pond ended up brightening a corner of the garden centre.

In our Media department, Stephanie Fawcett, activity leader, has been taking groups out on location to take some amazing photos of local landmarks.

Other Media clients have created some fantastic animations. This is a very slow process and requires lots of patience and concentration, from building backgrounds and setting up the camera, to actually animating the scene. One of our animators, Dan, sent pictures of his models to Aardman Animations in Bristol and received a lovely book, signed by Nick Park.

The IT Department has been introducing lots of new software and the results have been amazing. People have been creating comics, presentations and some super computer-generated artwork.



**1995**

Manor Place opens

**1995**

The Bungalow opens



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## Performing Arts

From Together FM to big Beathovens gigs and a quest for The Holy Grail... it's been a rather exciting year

Our Community Dance group have been working extremely hard, exploring a variety of different dance styles and introducing some new dance activities into sessions. Everyone is enjoying these and having fun. They have also enjoyed several days out to Delamere Forest, West Kirby, New Brighton and Birkenhead Park.

In terms of music, over the last year we have seen numerous fantastic achievements from people who attend our timetabled sessions. We have seen several new individuals join our groups, making immediate impacts on the sessions with their talents, while there's huge amounts of progress from service users we've known for a while.

Our resident band, The Beathovens, have continued to write, perform and develop, playing two high-profile Merseyside gigs at Abbot's Lea School in Liverpool and in a packed-out Birkenhead Park concert. The guys have been writing new material and are planning to hit the studio soon.

Our radio group members have been learning to use the studio equipment properly to ensure the best sound

recordings are made. Every week we practice introducing listeners to the station, which we called 'Together FM', while teaching hosting skills, including for a quiz show, news round-up and even a comedy section.

The drama group enjoyed a wonderful production of The Wizard of Oz, brought to us by a visiting theatre company and, at Christmas, took a trip to New Brighton to see the panto, Aladdin.

The group are currently working on a new production for later in the year, and have begun the process of gathering ideas for settings and characters.

Lastly, the film-making group has quickly become very productive having completed an epic tale in search of The Holy Grail, a film about Dracula taking over Christmas, produced a supporting video for MAPA training courses and begun filming a silent film around a train robbery.

The group are heavily involved in every aspect of production, from initial ideas through to planning scenes, writing plot, creating characters, choosing locations and the acting itself.



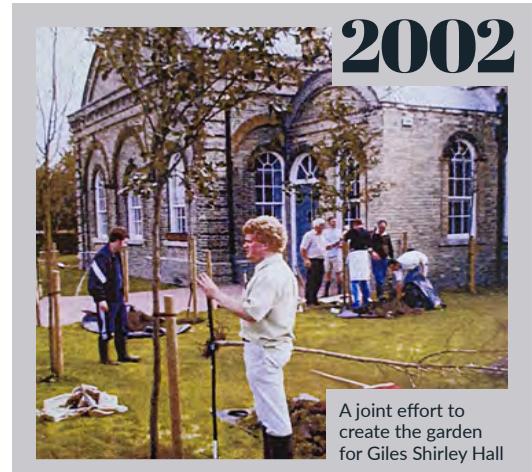
22  
music  
sessions  
a week





# Community Health & Wellbeing

1  
Guinness  
World  
Record



2002

A joint effort to  
create the garden  
for Giles Shirley Hall

It's been a challenging but successful twelve months for Community Health and Wellbeing.

“ The team has shown a genuine commitment to further developing inclusive practices ”

We have enjoyed a challenging but successful 12 months, with a significant increase in the personal achievements of the individuals who access our facilities.

This is not only recognisable in the awards and qualifications they have earned – 50 people we support were successfully accredited by ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) – but also in the individual progressions and achievements recorded daily by our support staff.

The engagement and enthusiasm of those we support in our groups is evident every day. Among many highlights from the year, some of our individuals travelled to Liverpool on the Mersey Ferry and handed out Autism Together leaflets to promote World Autism Day.

Other activities included volunteering with the Wirral Coastal Rangers and taking part in new conservation

projects with the Canal & River Trust, along with visits to Moel Famau, Snowdon, Hilbre Island and the Giants spectacular in New Brighton. Also, one individual we support is working towards his RYA Helmsman award, which will give him the competence to steer our narrowboat.

Other highlights include the development of our canoeing program, with a range of inflatable boats offered and the opportunity to work towards personal performance awards from the organisation British Canoeing.

Throughout, our staff displayed real dedication to teamwork and belief in the ethos of the department in furthering the independence of the people we support. The team has shown a genuine commitment to further developing inclusive practices onsite, while helping bring about the total refit of the Raby Pool facilities, new equipment in the gymnasium and greater social inclusion in community activities.

1999

York Street  
opens

2002

Allport Road  
opens



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WITH AUTISM



## Raby CVS



"Those who attend enjoy our sessions and contribute to help shape what the area has become, and will hopefully continue to do so for years to come"

Looking back, the standout moment of the year was our Christmas market. After a massive effort from all involved, with months of getting items ready for sale and creating a woodland stall to impress, we raised over £400. It was a very proud day for the entire team.

The horticulture department enjoyed a bumper crop from the last harvest. The pride people we support took in propagating their own produce and taking it home was great to see.

The new potting shed has proved invaluable in allowing individuals of all abilities to take part in the first stages of vegetable development, with seating and wheelchair access to the area.

The kitchen staff have been very keen to use as much fresh produce from the kitchen gardens as possible and, as a result, used more of our own vegetables this year than any other.

We purchased a ride-on mower at the start of last season and this year has seen the machine used by many more individuals we support, as they build the confidence to operate it independently. The pride and sense of accomplishment our individuals get from this task and the independence it brings, has made it one of the most sought-after jobs in the area.

Those who attend enjoy our sessions and contribute to help shape what the area has become, and will hopefully continue to do so for years to come.

In terms of animal husbandry, one of the biggest projects has been the barn where the smaller animals are housed.

The barn now has several enclosures that are at hip height. The enclosures were designed this way to allow individuals that do not like bending to groom or stroke the animals. Within the barn there is a seating area where people can sit and hold or watch the animals.

With help from the team at Gallagher House, we designed information boards that are dotted around the animal enclosure, telling people what the animals like to eat, fun facts and how they like to be housed.

The Woodlands team have had a very creative year, building pens for our pigs and making bird boxes, hedgehog houses and box planters to sell at the Garden Centre.

We've also begun supplying bespoke beer caddies to Wirral-based Brimstage Brewery which have proved perfect for their bottled beers.

**2007**

Dianne Asher becomes CEO

**2002**

Giles Shirley Hall is named after entrepreneur Dame Stephanie Shirley's son after her donation to refurbish the property



“The pride our people took in propagating their own produce and taking it home was great to see”



1978



Thanks to Vauxhall Motors workers, money was raised for garden furniture at Raby Hall

2008

Nelson's Croft opens

2008

First supported living scheme opens



SUPPORTING PEOPLE  
WITH AUTISM

# Garden Centre



## Port Sunlight River Park

28  
hectare  
wildlife  
park

It has been an exciting year at the River Park with many new developments...

Our groups have continued to run smoothly, working hard on maintaining the park and keeping it clean, tidy and welcoming to the public. While doing our work we take the opportunity to actively promote and raise awareness of autism and Autism Together as an organisation. The feedback we've received has been overwhelmingly positive.

We have started to incorporate new ideas and sessions, with a view to expanding our River Park role, going forward. Plans include using the natural resources at the park to make woodland crafts and homemade bird food. We also hope to photograph much of the park and create photo trails with a view to making our own calendars.

Together with our partners, the Land Trust and Big Heritage, we have received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for £446,000 as part of the Discovering Bromborough 3 Project. This continues for two years



**600**  
afternoon  
teas sold  
this year



## We've been kept really busy at the garden centre with lots of customers visiting looking for plants, flowers and gifts, or just enjoying the café.

Our staff and volunteers pulled together to keep everything looking nice and the plants well cared for. Several of those we support have even completed their ASDAN awards in horticulture this year.

The garden centre has had a makeover, with service users helping by painting the potting shed, fences and gates a lovely shade of blue. We have also made walled gardens by painting up pallets and planting herbs and strawberry plants in them.

The supported individuals' area, behind the garden centre, has transformed too. We've been growing corn, broccoli, herbs, onions, beetroot and are planning to grow onions and rhubarb too. We have also added four new hens: Roast, Doris, Russell and Hulk Hogan who have

and so far has helped fund a Heritage Centre in the waterfront area of the park.

The Heritage Centre's grand opening took place on World Autism Awareness Day earlier this year, with Wirral Civic Mayor Cllr Geoffrey Watt, cutting the blue ribbon in front of around 100 guests and visitors. The centre includes a café and educational centre for families to enjoy.

We now have a community education officer who has worked with over 240 local pupils this year. Our volunteer sessions have been well supported, with all volunteers having the opportunity to take part in autism awareness training.

Also as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund grant, we have been tasked with organising an exciting archaeological dig at an adjacent site, involving the people we support and the public. The site is of genuine historic interest, offering the potential to identify and record a high-status medieval building, thought to be a court house referenced in a number of medieval works. This would be an incredible discovery, with significant long-term research potential for the site and surrounding area.

settled in well. They have provided some animal care tasks and, in return, we get delicious eggs. We have also been able to enjoy our new sensory garden in the warmer weather.

In the past year, our onsite coffee shop has been renamed Cherry Blossom Café. This has given the area a new identity with a bespoke logo designed and donated to us by a fantastic artist. We are all sporting new aprons and t-shirts to give us a professional and smart image.

Recently, the café has become much busier, enabling the people we support to become very involved in the smooth running of the eatery. We have many regular customers who first visited due to positive word of mouth recommendations, while demand has seen us nearly double the amount of tables in our seating area.

Our afternoon teas are very popular and we have also introduced a meal deal for customers. Those we support are able to develop their communication and social skills and are becoming adept at using the electronic tills and card machine.



“ I've seen swans, I've seen swallows, I've seen seagulls, crows, magpies and pigeons ”

**Keen River Park birdwatcher,  
Luke, (with dad Phil)**



**2015**

We change our name to  
Autism Together

**2014**

Port Sunlight River Park opens



SUPPORTING PEOPLE  
WITH AUTISM



**39**  
events  
this year

## Fundraising

At the start of our anniversary year we launched our Future 50 Appeal at 30 James Street in Liverpool, the beautifully-refurbished former home of the White Star Line shipping company.

Supporters from all corners of the region and all facets of the business and community sector attended to hear our five-year plan for fundraising to mark the charity's first 50 years.

Soon after came World Autism Awareness Day and we undertook a range of events, including our annual golf day at Eastham Lodge Golf Club and an art exhibition at the Floral Pavilion, along with visits to a number of local schools.

May was a busy month and our next event was the annual Big Quiz, held at Heswall Hall and organised by parent and long-time supporter Julie Ellsmoor, with great help from others including Adam and James Kenrick. It raised a fabulous £3,092.

During the year, we hosted two pop-up charity shops in Wallasey and were inundated with items to sell. Each time we set up for just a week and enjoyed sorting and running our very busy shop, well supported by local people and run by volunteers. Here we raised just under £2,000.

In June we held an art auction at the Corke Gallery in Aigburth. Gallery owner Nic Corke gave us the wall space for free and charged no commission on sales. Local artists from across Merseyside and beyond donated work which we then auctioned, raising a fantastic £18,000. This fabulous night was the brainchild of Sue Poole who worked tirelessly to make the event a great success.

During the summer, after a few years' break, we brought back our summer fun day, relocating to Thornton Hough Village Hall. It was a fantastic event and very well attended. Inside were a number of local artisan sellers, an inflatable assault course, traditional fairground games, a big summer raffle, birds from the Moonshine Owl Sanctuary and plenty more. This event was kindly sponsored by Argyle Taxis.

In October we held our very first Curry & Comedy Night at the excellent Magic Spices Restaurant in New Brighton. The event was a real success with live entertainment from three comedians and an authentic Indian banquet.

In November, close to our actual 50th birthday, we held the Rose Gold Gala Ball, our flagship event, at the Shankly Hotel in Liverpool. It was a night of fine food, champagne and wonderful entertainment hosted by radio legend, Janice Long. The event included our Autism Gold Awards which acknowledged the commitment of both our own staff and our Autism Champions from across the region.

For the first time we held our Christmas Grotto at our own garden centre in Bromborough Pool village and we hope to establish it as a regular event which will also help bring more custom into the shop and café. The grotto was on an appointment-only basis for people with autism and their families and we hope that this will grow in popularity over time.



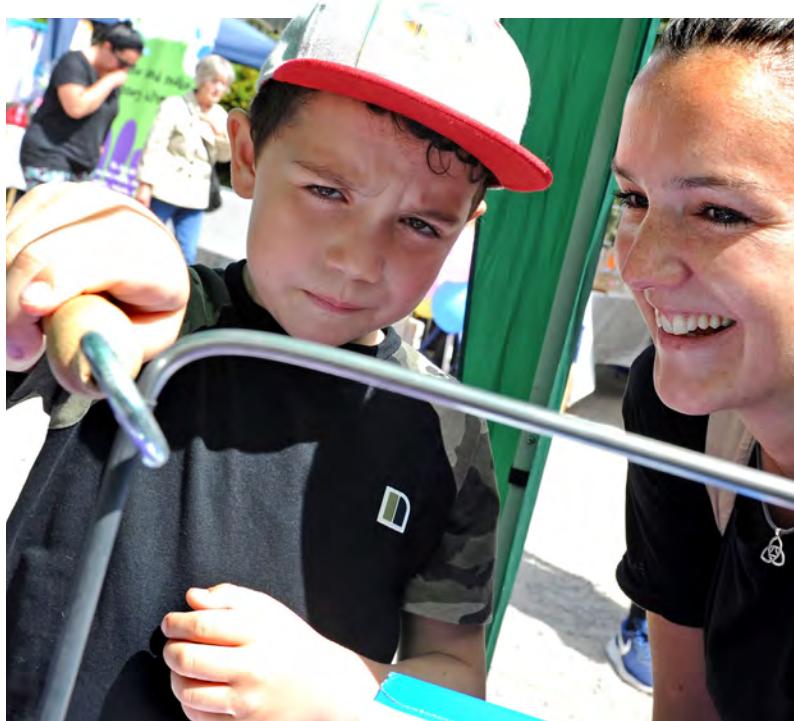
“ We see the real difference our fundraisers make every day in the faces of the people we care for ”

**Rick Myers,  
Fundraising**

**2016** | We open  
The Vicarage

**2015** | The Willows opens

**2017** | Gallagher House  
opened 2017



We were also very pleased to be the chosen charity at the Cheshire Oaks Christmas tree, which raised £7,120 from bucket collections by some amazing volunteers.

Also in December, a Christmas concert was held in the chapel at Eaton Hall, by kind permission of His Grace, The Duke of Westminster.

This was a fantastic event featuring the Luminelles, Birkenhead High School Academy's senior vocal group; the Wirral Ringers and the Riversign Choir. Ginny and Steve from Autism Together's Finance Department also performed, teaming up with Georgie Walker to form the Three ATs, a brass and piano combo. The event finished with hot mulled wine and warm mince pies in the Long Room.

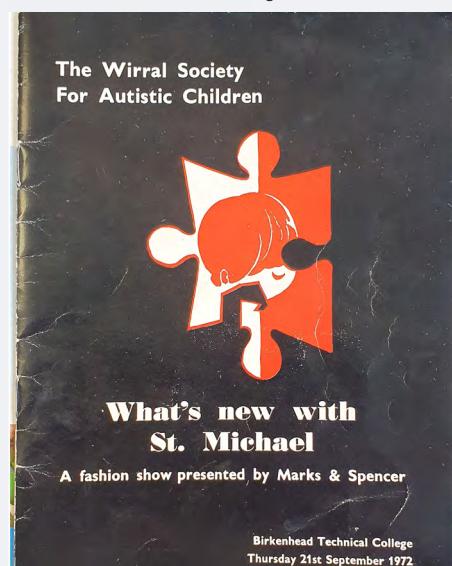
We also hosted our first ever Christmas Market event in Thornton Hough Village Hall at the beginning of December, with over 20 local artisans showcasing gift ideas, pamper products and sweet treats. Visitors enjoyed a children's craft area, an autism-friendly Santa Claus and face painting. This very popular event raised over £1,000.

Throughout the year we had fantastic support from a group of hirsute gentlemen from across the country calling themselves the Bearded Villains. We were also thankful for corporate adoptions from Argyle Taxis, Bidston Marks & Spencer and the Bromborough Co-ops, along with the continued support of West Wallasey Van Hire. The Trustees of the Abbeyfield (Oxton and Prenton) Society, through their chair person, Sue Nicholls, made two donations from the sale of their nursing home, totalling a marvellous £25,000.



# 1972

This is the brochure from our first ever fundraising event with the help of M&S, who are still fundraising for us



# Human Resources

This year, Autism Together has committed itself to becoming a PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) organisation. To help us achieve this we recruited a clinical PBS specialist to lead the programme and embed it, both culturally and in practice, throughout the organisation. We are already seeing very positive results.

The HR team continues to offer a full range of services to all managers and staff, with the most significant function being recruitment. In the 12 months to March 2019 we recruited and trained just under 200 permanent and relief staff, all the more remarkable in the current climate of staff shortages in the health and social care sector.

Coupled with strong recruitment has been an improvement in our staff retention. This has involved several engagement initiatives and often is just down to making sure we do the simple things well. Retention improved throughout the year. Staff turnover is now 15%, significantly below the regional and national averages of around 30%.

Our induction and general training for staff has seen a number of developments, including the introduction of mental health training, and we have been working collaboratively with other organisations including Wirral Mind.

There had been initial concerns regarding the criteria for accessing the new apprenticeship levy. Although our contribution to the levy is around £60k per annum, the QCF Health & Social Care awards moved from a 'framework' approach to a 'standards' approach, which initially precluded the majority of staff. This has now been resolved and our many learners are now making progress towards achieving a variety of work-based qualifications.

**200**  
staff  
recruited  
this year



# Financial Review

The strategies put in place to improve the financial health of the organisation continue to pay dividends resulting in net expenditure for the year of £16k (2018: £271k).

## Income

Income increased 3% compared to last year from £21,208k to £21,857k.

Vacancies and limited fee increases have contributed to a 2% decrease in Residential Services income. We continue to put pressure on Local Authorities to pay fees that reflect the full cost of providing services

The opening of two new CVS sites last year, in addition to standardising and increasing our fee rates with our two largest commissioning authorities, contributed to an increase in fees of 9% against last year.

This year our Supported Living Service has continued to concentrate on improving quality and autism practice within existing services, as opposed to growth. With no new services opening during the year fee income rose by 3% representing increases in fee rates. Supported Living continues to be financially challenging as Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups look to make savings within adult social care/health budgets.

Income from donations and legacies increased from £217k to £353k as a result of the good start to the Future 50 fundraising appeal.

## Expenditure

In line with the increase in fees, total expenditure increased by 2% from £21,479k to £21,873k. Payroll costs represent over 80% of our income and have increased over 3% against last year. This was due to cost of living and National Living Wage salary increases awarded during the year. A major impact on the payroll charge in the accounts has been the cost of funding the pension contributions for those staff in the Merseyside Pension Scheme. We again incurred an additional in-year pension charge (£335k compared with £385k in 2017/18) as a result of our current year contribution being less than the actuary's assessment of the current year's cost of running the scheme.

Other costs have fallen by 8% from £4,461k to £4,106k.

## Capital Expenditure

This year we spent £143k (2018: £431k) on property improvements and equipment.

## Cash Flow

An overview of the cash movements during the year is given in the statement on page 22 of the audited accounts. After adjusting for non-cash items, such as movements on the pension deficit and depreciation, operations during the year generated positive cash flow of £834k, (2018: £1,101k). The other major contributors to cash outflow in the year have been investment in property and facilities of £143k (2018: £431k) and net cash used in financing activities of £164k (2018: £137k).

## Future issues

The announcement of the new Living Wage from April 2016 and the subsequent increases to 2020 continue to have a major impact on Autism Together going forward. The increase to £7.83 an hour in April 2018 yet again had knock-on effects in terms of the need to lift the pay of staff that were previously paid at or just above this rate. It also impacts further on the cost of providing sleeping-in support which is “topped up” so average pay is at new Living Wage rates. This, and the need to attract and retain staff, resulted in a review of salary levels with a 2% pay increase awarded in July 2018. This opportunity to increase pay rates is, of course, welcome, but it will only be sustainable if Local Authority social services departments are funded adequately.

We will continue to work with our Local Authority commissioners to negotiate fees for the existing people we support ensuring full cost recovery. This is a long and slow process; but has resulted in some success and enabled Autism Together to continue to provide services for all our current individuals we support. This process will need to be repeated again each year as the Living Wage increases each year.

## Pension Liability

The charity participates in the Merseyside Pension Fund, a defined benefit scheme, as an admitted body. The scheme is managed in accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013. Access to this scheme by new Autism Together employees ended with effect from 4 April 2011. In accordance with FRS102 reporting requirements, our pension scheme reported a deficit of £2,009k at 31 March 2019. This compared with a deficit of £826k at the previous year-end. This increase in the deficit represented a £848k actuarial loss (2018: £967k gain), absorbed in part by a current year charge of £335k against operating expenses (2018: £385k). The reason for the increase in deficit has been as a result of changes in assumptions that are used in the calculations. Full details of the FRS102 pension valuation and assumptions used are given in note 24 to these accounts.

The trustees are mindful of the exposure of the

organisation to fluctuations in the valuation of the pension fund and are in discussions with the Fund about ways in which the exposure of the company to variations in valuation could be reduced in future.

Since the closure of the opportunity to participate in the Merseyside Pension Fund, new staff members have been able to join a money purchase pension scheme, where there is no recourse to the assets of the organisation. Since 1 November 2013 Autism Together has become subject to the regulations surrounding Automatic Enrolment and is using the National Employment Savings Trust for this purpose.

## Investment powers and policy

Under the Articles of Association, the charity has the power to invest in any way the trustees think fit. Cash that is not immediately needed for day to day expenditure or that is being held for a future project is invested prudently in interest earning deposits with approved Bank of England UK institutions.

## Reserves Policy

The trustees reviewed and agreed an updated reserves policy in 2018. This aims to have general reserve of £1.5m of which £600,000 is to be held in cash with the remaining £900,000 held to cover regular day-to-day working capital. The £600,000 cash reserve would be held to fund unforeseen incidents and initial start-up costs for the development of new services which help the organisation further its work for the benefit of people with autism.

In setting this level of reserve, the trustees have considered the risks around income streams, the continuing need to fund the pension schemes, the ongoing maintenance requirements of properties, and the extent to which risks can be covered by insurance or have been provided for in the annual budget.

Free reserves are defined as unrestricted funds, excluding amounts held in the form of fixed assets, loans to purchase those assets and the pension deficit. As at 31 March 2019 free reserves were £771k compared to £367k at 31 March 2018. The proportion of this held in cash has improved with better control over outstanding debtors.

After some expenditure, the Respite Extension Fund has a designated funds balance of £121k at 31 March 2019. This is towards the cost refurbishing Helen House which will house our Respite unit sometime in 2019/20 and will be able to accommodate 9 beds compared with the current 7. To mark our 50th anniversary in 2018 we launched our Future 50 appeal during the year to fundraise for an Assessment and Diagnostic Centre on the site of our original building, Old Raby Hall. We need to modify our plans for our appeal because the Care Quality Commission, the body that regulates our services, are unlikely to register services with more

# Financial Report 2018/19

than six beds (our proposed inpatient unit had 12 beds) or in campus style settings such as our Raby site. We are therefore currently revisiting our project plans. The trustees have designated £260k of unrestricted donations and fundraised income in the year to this fund which after a small amount of development expenditure has a balance of £309k at 31 March 2019. Finally, we hold Restricted Funds which have been donated for specific projects, details of which are given in note 19 to the accounts.

In addition to the funds designated to a particular

project, the trustees hold a designated fund representing fixed assets, less any specific funding for that purpose. This reflects the fact that these funds cannot be readily used for any other purpose. At 31 March 2019 this fixed asset fund amounted to £3,825k (2018 - £4,045k).

Details of designated funds and of restricted funds may be found in note 19 to the accounts. The pension fund deficit of £2,009k is calculated in accordance with FRS102 and is excluded from the calculation of free reserves as this amount is not a current liability, but will be paid through future earnings.

## Staff expenditure



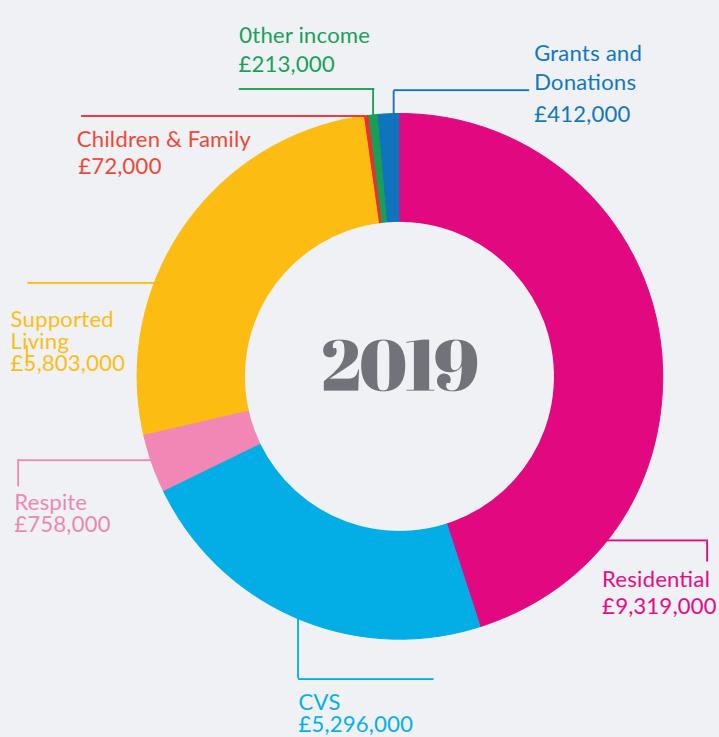
	<b>2019</b> £'000	<b>2018</b> £'000
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Total staff costs	17,676	17,228
Other expenditure	4,197	4,461
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,873</b>	<b>21,479</b>
Capital expenditure	143	431

## Cash Flows

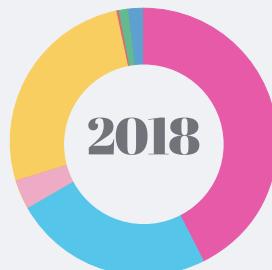
	<b>2019</b> £'000	<b>2018</b> £'000
Net cash from operating activities	834	1,101
Net cash used in investing activities	(143)	(431)
	691	670
Net cash used in financing activities	(164)	(137)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	527	533
Cash and cash equivalents at 1st April 2017	321	(212)
Cash and cash equivalents at 31st March 2018	848	321

<b>Funds</b>	<b>2019</b> £'000	<b>2018</b> £'000
General funds	771	367
Restricted funds	7	39
Fixed asset fund	3,825	4,045
Other designated funds	430	263
Pension (deficit) surplus	(2,009)	(826)
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>3,024</b>	<b>3,888</b>

Full audited accounts and financial statements will be filed with the Charity Commission and Companies House. Copies may be obtained from the Registered Office, Oak House, 6 Tebay Road, Bromborough, CH62 3PA



Income	2019 £'000	2018 £'000
Residential	9,319	9,601
CVS	5,296	4,794
Respite	758	772
Supported Living	5,803	5,603
Children & Family	72	64
Other income	213	94
Grants & donations	412	280
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,873</b>	<b>20,208</b>



## Patrons, Trustees & Senior Leadership Team

as at September 2019

### Patrons:

Mrs Trish Chapman  
Dr John Kennedy  
*CBE, KSG, KMCO, DL*

### Trustees:

Andrew Davies (Chair from 19.6.19)	Iain Cadman
Catherine Ames (Vice-chair from 19.6.19)	John Callcott
Carole Battersby	Anthony Cragg
Edward Behan	John Kennedy
	Helen Winrow

### Company Secretary:

Iain Cadman

### Senior Leadership Team:

#### Chief Executive:

Sue Stubbs (from 24.9.19)

#### Operations/Deputy CEO

Jane Carolan

#### HR & Organisational Development

Jim Strain



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[www.autismtogether.co.uk](http://www.autismtogether.co.uk)

**Twitter: [@autism\\_together](#) Facebook: [AutismtogetherUK](#)**

Regd. Charity Number: 1007878

Regd. Company Number: 2658268