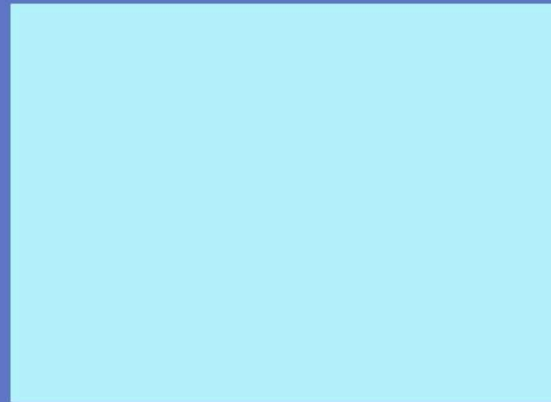




# ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



## PREPARED BY

Jill Hart-Sanderson  
Founding Trustee

# **BLAST - Burntwood and Lichfield Autism Support Together**

## **Trustees' Annual Report**

**For the period 9th June 2023 to 5th April 2024**

**(This report covers our first operating period from June 2023 to April 2024, with an additional update on recent activities)**

### **Reference and Administrative Details**

- Charity name: BLAST - Burntwood and Lichfield Autism Support Together
- Registered charity number: 1203483
- Email: office@blastsupport.org
- Website: www.blastsupport.org

### **Structure, Governance and Management**

- Type of governing document: CIO Constitution
- How is the charity constituted: Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Date of registration: 9th June 2023
- Trustee selection methods: [Insert methods]

## **Objectives and Activities**

### **Operating Context**

BLAST operates primarily in areas where communities experience the greatest levels of inequality with the highest levels of vulnerability. Our beneficiaries face significant challenges:

- Families need an average of £975 more per month than non-disabled households to maintain the same standard of living
- Many families face reduced income due to caring responsibilities
- Long waiting times for assessments (24-30 months for NHS autism assessments)
- Additional costs for specialist products, services and higher energy usage
- Barriers to accessing support and services

## **Charitable Objects**

The objects of the CIO are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit among children and young people over the age of 4 in Staffordshire who are socially excluded from society, or parts of society, as a result of autism, relieving their needs and assisting them to integrate into society, in particular but not exclusively by:

- a) providing information and learning opportunities in a safe, accessible environment designed to support and enable autistic children and young people to maximise their development and potential;
- b) raising public awareness and promoting understanding of the issues affecting autistic children and young people and their families, both generally and in relation to their social exclusion, and addressing the challenges they face by sharing knowledge and experiences;
- c) providing workshops, forums, advocacy and general support designed to promote the involvement of children and young people with autism and their families in the running of their group, in their community, and in society;
- d) providing recreational and leisure time activities for autistic children and young people and their families/people who support them provided in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving their conditions of life and developing their skills, capacities and capabilities.

## **Public Benefit Statement**

The trustees have had regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. BLAST promotes social inclusion for children and young people over the age of 4 in Staffordshire who are socially excluded from society as a result of autism. Our activities directly fulfil our charitable objects by:

### **1. Providing information and learning opportunities in safe, accessible environments:**

- Expert-led sessions with specialist external guest speakers
- Parent workshops on topics around autism and support services
- Sessions at accessible venues e.g. St John's Community Church

***Beneficiary feedback: "I now feel knowledge is one of my best tools" and "I've come home and have been able to put things in place that have already started to make a difference"***

2. Raising public awareness and promoting understanding:

- Community engagement through initiatives e.g. working with Town Council to make local community events more accessible to autistic families
- Partnership working with local organisations and groups
- Sharing knowledge and experiences between families facing similar challenges

**Partner feedback: "I was really glad to see a steady flow of people coming into the sensory tent throughout the day and using the space to escape the main event. I think that engagement proved the need for us to continue to ensure we're making our events more inclusive and accessible for all of our residents." - Burntwood Town Council**

3. Supporting community involvement through workshops and advocacy:

- Fortnightly Saturday clubs fostering peer connections for both young people and parents
- Parent support sessions and online forums creating lasting support networks
- Support sessions reducing isolation

**Parent feedback: "Many thanks for yesterday I feel like a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders" and "I can't thank you enough for all your support with the parent/carer sessions... The session was really useful and because of it I had a follow up email shortly after"**

4. Providing recreational and leisure activities:

- Inclusive swimming sessions: **"First time we've been able to go swimming as a family - great session thank you!"**
- Adapted cinema screenings **where "children don't have to stay in their seat and not make a sound which meant he was way more relaxed! He's wanted to go to the cinema for ages, it was so great to be able to take him with no stress"**
- Holiday activities program including outdoor activities at Chasewater: **"XX literally had a BLAST! I quite enjoyed myself too. XX is still jumping around and retelling stories of paddleboarding"**
- Creating environments where children feel **"comfortable and unjudged"**

This approach has demonstrably improved conditions of life for our beneficiaries, evidenced by consistent positive feedback across all activities. Parents report reduced isolation, children making new friends, and families accessing activities together for the first time. As one volunteer noted: **"What you have created is truly amazing"** and this is reflected in comments like **"Really well organised session. Great fun"** and **"Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to volunteer. I will always help wherever possible."**

## **Achievements and Performance**

**Formal Reporting Period (9th June 2023 - 5th April 2024)**

### **Core Programs Established**

The charity delivered a comprehensive program of activities throughout the year, including an intensive summer program of 12 events during Summer 2023. Our commitment to removing barriers to access means we were able to offer all activities free or at low cost to families, ensuring cost was not a barrier to accessing help for vulnerable children. Our regular services included:

#### **1. Regular Support Services:**

- Fortnightly Saturday clubs
- Parent Support sessions
- Specialist workshops
- Expert-led sessions with external specialists

#### **2. Holiday Activities Program:**

- Inclusive swimming sessions
- Cinema screenings
- Outdoor activities at Chasewater Country Park and Reservoir
- Girls Club
- Soft Play sessions

#### **3. Community Partnerships:**

- St John's Community Church (regular venue partner)
- Tesco community space
- Local authority engagement (Quiet spaces at Town Council community events)

## **Impact Evidence**

### **1. Participant Feedback:**

Family Impact:

**"This was amazing... My children were able to go to the cinema together for the first time successfully and my youngest was so happy because he didn't have to stay in his seat and not make a sound which meant he was way more relaxed!"**

**"Think he's found a best mate, I loved that it was relaxing and didn't have to worry about judgement! What you do is amazing!"**

Parent Support:

***"I can't thank you enough for all your support with the parent/carer sessions"***

Professional Development:

***"I now feel knowledge is one of my best tools"***

### **2. Key Outcomes:**

- Families reporting first-time access to activities e.g., ***"First time we've been able to go swimming as a family"***
- Parents implementing positive changes at home
- Reduced isolation for families
- Knowledge and confidence building among parents
- Creation of peer support networks

### **3. Program Highlights:**

- Summer 2023 Program delivered 6 major events and 12 events in total
- Consistent positive feedback across all activities
- Growing demand for age-specific programming
- Successfully established regular monthly activities

## Recent Activities Update (April 2024 - Present)

### 1. Program Expansion:

- New Lichfield parent sessions launched
- Additional expert speaker engagements
- Enhanced holiday program including Christmas celebration and pantomime
- Expanded community partnerships

### 2. Geographic Growth:

- Services now operating in multiple locations
- Increased accessibility for families across the region

## Financial Review

### Interim Financial Summary

#### Income Streams

- Regular donations and supporter contributions
- Grant funding
- Payment for community support at Town Council Events

### Key Financial Information for the period June 2023 - April 2024:

- **Opening balance: £24,384.44**
- **Total income during period: £3,836.27**
- **Total expenditure: £17,315.66**
- **Closing bank balance as of 5th April 2024: £10,905.05**

**Financial Summary statement:** At the beginning of the operating period the opening balance included three significant grants. Most of the expenditure during this reporting period was expected in line with the ongoing delivery of funded projects. \*An additional grant made from the Co-Op of £1087.60 was paid in March 2024 for future project delivery outside of this reporting period.

### Financial Management Principles

1. Cost should not be a barrier to accessing help for vulnerable children

2. Activities are offered free or at low cost to families in areas of high inequality
3. Sustainable financial model balancing accessibility with operational costs
4. Efficient use of resources to maximize impact for beneficiaries

### **Financial Controls**

The charity has appropriate financial controls in place including:

- Regular financial monitoring by trustees
- Dual authorization for significant expenditure
- Clear segregation of duties
- Transparent reporting of income and expenditure

### **Reserves Policy**

The charity has appropriate reserves policy to offer continuity of services in the short to medium term.

**Please see Appendix 1 for further details on Grant Funding and Alignment with Charitable Objects**

## **Future Plans & Challengers**

### **Challenges:**

Recently we have experienced challenges recruiting new trustees to replace those who had committed for 12 months. All trustees are also parents of children with autism which whilst gives a rich understanding of stakeholders needs, also comes with challenges when trustees are experiencing their own family's difficulties and work commitments. During this time all operations continued and planned projects delivered and all reporting completed on time. Moving forward we would like to expand the number of trustees and volunteers to spread out workload. We are also hoping to submit funding bids to cover costs including purchasing timesaving technical support as well as looking towards employing 2 part time staff and using freelance workers to support.

Recently we have fully updated our website which was very basic, and we feel it is now easier to use and now reflects what we do as well as supporting a more professional approach to our work as we expand.

### **Based on feedback and growing demand, we plan to:**

1. Expand age-specific programming
2. Increase frequency of popular activities



3. Continue developing professional partnerships
4. Extend geographical reach of services
5. Secure long term premises to include space for activities, office working space and storage
6. Secure funding in order for BLAST to have sufficient resources to run effectively giving longer term security to the families we support.

**Declaration**

This report was approved by the trustees on 9 Jan 2025 and signed on their behalf by:

Jill Hart-Sanderson

Trustee & Founder

## **Appendix 1**

### **Grant Funding and Alignment with Charitable Objects**

#### **Reporting period 9 June 2023 – 5 April 2024**

The opening balance included three significant grants (total £23,708) that transferred to the CIO with funders' permission. Each grant directly supports our charitable objects:

#### **1. National Lottery - Awards for All (£9,969)**

Supporting Objects A, B, and C through:

- Information and Learning (Object A):
  - \* Monthly expert-led parent/carer workshops
  - \* One-to-one support meetings with signposting
- Public Awareness (Object B):
  - \* Regular community updates reaching over 100 families
  - \* Sharing experiences through parent/carer sessions
- Community Involvement (Object C):
  - \* Fortnightly youth club sessions
  - \* BOOST Support program responding to cost-of-living challenges

#### **2. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB) Small Grants:**

##### **a) ICB Community Award (£8,939) - BLASTOut Project**

Supporting Objects A and D through:

- Recreational Activities (Object D):
  - \* 10 supported events including cinema, trips, and outdoor adventures
  - \* Autism-trained staff ensuring safe, supported participation
- Learning Opportunities (Object A):
  - \* Skill development through structured activities
  - \* Building confidence in community settings

##### **b) ICB Community Engagement & Collaboration Project (£4,800)**

Supporting Objects B and C through:

- Public Understanding (Object B):
  - \* Cross-organizational working
  - \* Community integration initiatives
- Community Involvement (Object C):
  - \* Developing independence skills
  - \* Supporting participation across age groups
  - \* Building sustainable community connections

All funders supported the transition to CIO status, recognizing our proven track record in delivering impactful services that promote social inclusion and support autistic children, young people, and their families. All projects were delivered on time and within budget.

BLAST 2023-2024			BLAST - Burntwood & Lichfield Autism Support Together
	Fund / Project names	£s c/f from previous year	Accounts Year Start Jun
	Bank Balance BF	£ 24,384.44	
	Donation	£ 1,655.93	
	Co op	£ 1,087.60	
	Donation other	£ 330.80	
	Cash Donation (tin)	£ 761.94	
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£ 3,836.27</b>	
	<b>BF Bank Balance + Income</b>	<b>£ 28,220.71</b>	

	Expenditure Analysis	
	Governance	£ 77.90
	Office costs inc phone & web	£ 982.91
	IT equipment	£ 1,478.80
	Stationery, materials and equipmen	£ 6,689.85
	Training	
	Professional fees	£ 6,223.00
	Expenses	
	Activities	
	Venue hire	£ 1,863.20
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£ 17,315.66</b>

Bank Balance 05/04/2024	<b>£ 10,905.05</b>
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