

Autism Families Community Support Group

Chairperson Report

Good evening. You are all welcome to our 2025, slightly delayed AGM.

2023-24 was a slightly more "settled" year for Autism Families as a lot of us got to grips with the more day to day administrative issues that we struggled with in the previous year. And I would like to thank the committee and volunteers for all their hard work during the last 13 or 14 months since our last AGM.

I'd like to thank our previous committee members, Joseph, Brenda and Sinead, who stepped down during the year for their hard work and commitment also.

During the year we ran our monthly kids club in the Brain Injury Foundation in Camlough. Each month we'd bring in some outside entertainment, such as drumming, animals, dancing, visits from the PSNI and the Fire Service, among others and these were always well attended at each club. There were other months where we created our own entertainment such as arts and crafts and gaming and these were also successful clubs. Our Halloween, Easter and Christmas parties were huge successes and we created our own Santa's grotto once again which was a big hit, and a huge thank you must go to Rathore's very own Santa Claus and his Elves and their magnificent grotto which definitely saved our Christmas party as our previous Grotto/sensory room is now sadly unavailable for our club. I believe we only missed one month during the year as the manpower wasn't available but it does highlight how important it is that as many of the committee gets stuck into each and every club. Ideally we would like to have a club every two weeks as it was generally in pre covid times but with our committee struggling with numbers this simply isn't an option right now.

In January 2024 we had another visit to the Grand Opera House in Belfast to see a relaxed viewing of the Panto Snow White which was a huge hit, which has since been followed by another visit only two weeks ago to see Peter Pan. 2024 saw another successful summer scheme which included a trip to Dublin Zoo, Seaford Butterfly House, Streamvale Farm and Emerald Park to name a few. I know its a huge job to organise these events so well done to the events team.

Regular Sunday morning relaxed Cinema viewings and also Bowling for the Over 10's once again proved very popular. I'd hope to include another cookery course for our over 10's but a promise of outside funding never materialised so it had to be skipped last year sadly. The possibility of a 6 weeks swimming program was also investigated, but at almost £5000 it is probably just too large of an expense for us to fund ourselves, and also not having a functioning local swimming pool didn't help either.

In April we had our second annual Gosford Autism walk which was once again very well attended so hopefully this will carry on being a huge success. We also had a few outings at St Colman's running

track where we availed of their disability bicycles and this seemed to go very well each time, and again with a larger committee I'd love to see this happen at least once a month.

I'd like once again to extend our gratitude to "The Brain Injury Foundation" for allowing us the use of their excellent premises in Camlough, without which would not be enjoying the success we currently have so a huge thank you to them and long may this last.

I'd also like to thank the fundraising group for their excellent work with fundraising throughout the year without which the charity would not be able to continue . We had several street collections, spin a thon's and a charity dip in Warrenpoint to name just a few so well done.

Also huge thanks to Rita for compiling our Financial Report and for her valuable advice all through the year.

Going forward into 2025 and beyond I've no doubt Autism Families will have continued success and hopefully with a growing number of committee members and volunteers we will provide an even better help to our local children and a valuable resource for parents of children with Autism.

I'd like to thank you for allowing me another year as Chair which again has been a very very rewarding experience ,and even though it doesn't seem like it to most of you , I've enjoyed immensely. I may not fulfill or carry out my duties as Chair, Treasurer or Club officer with absolutely 100% correct protocol or exactly by the book but one way or another everything gets done and getting the job done for the betterment of Autism Families should be the top priority of being a committee member.

Colin Boyle