

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland · Charity number 106799

Details

Known as	SWAG Previously called Spectrum Centre Women's Group
Status	Received
Registered	2017-11-16
Register	View on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland register

Contact

Address	Co Spectrum Centre 14 Northland Row Dungannon Bt71 6ap BT71 6AP
Phone	02887729810
Email	swagwomensgroup1@gmail.com
Website	https://womensautism.wordpress.com/

Activities

Purposes: Spectrum Women's Autism Group is established to promote the relief of Autistic women and their Family and Carers resident in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through the following: (i) to promote acceptance and awareness of female presentations of Autism within the general public, relevant professionals and organisations in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors. (ii) the provision of help, guidance and information to Autistic women members and the promotion of a network of support among such women with the aim of improving their quality of life and increasing their social networks. (iii) provision of recreational activities and the promotion of the provision of appropriate recreational facilities to overcome isolation.

What the charity does: The relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage

How the charity works: Advice/advocacy/information, Counselling/support, Disability, Gender

Who the charity helps: Learning disabilities, Mental health, Sensory disabilities, Women

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees	
2024-08-31		£450	£1,112	£0	0

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Dr Margaret Elizabeth Copeland		
Mrs Clare Amanda Mccleary		
Mrs Donna Weiniger		
Ms Hayley Louise Campbell		

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Accounts

Statement of Receipts and Payments – Year Ending 30 August 2024

Sept 23-Aug 24

Previous year balance £1293.26

Reason for funds	Money in	money out		Subtotal
			C/F previous year	£1293.26
Yearly membership	140			1433.26
Outing – grand opera house	310			1743.26
Member paid for booking tickets for grand opera house		247.50		1495.76
Member paid for payment of tickets for previous year 'big day out' and gospel choir Christmas event		865.28		630.48
Governance Costs	0			
Grants & Donations	0			
Cost of Charitable Activities	0			
Cost of Fundraising	0			
Donations & Gift Aid	0			
Bank Interest	0			
Volunteer training	0			
	£450	£1112.78	Total balance end of year	£630.48

Chairperson Donna Weiniger



Treasurer Clare McCleary

Secretary Hayley Campbell

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Accounts

SWAG Account – year ending 30th June 2022-2023

Carried forward from previous year £808.50.

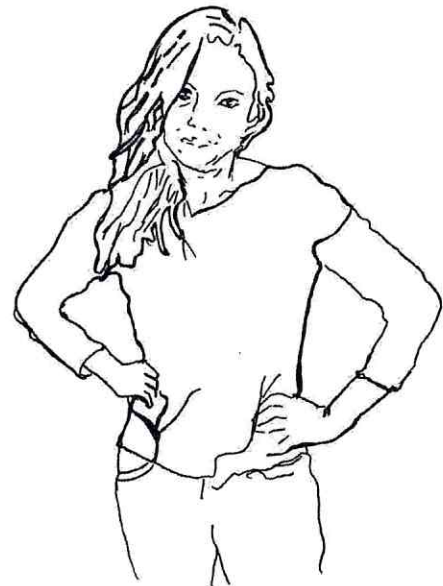
INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
Date	details	Lodged amount	Date	Details	balance
20/02/2023	membership	£168.60	26/4/23	Jewellery craft items	£24.64
20/5/2023	Ladies' day	£195.80			
20/5/2023	Choir evening out	£145.00			
	TOTAL	£1317.90		BALANCE	£1293.26

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Annual report

Spectrum Women's Autism Group



Annual Report

For the year ending
June 2023

Spectrum Women's Autism Group – Registered Charity in Northern Ireland NIC106799

C/O Spectrum Centre, 14 Northland Row, Dungannon, BT71 6AP

www.womensautism.wordpress.com

Our Purposes and Beneficiaries

Our governing document is our constitution which outlines the purposes and beneficiaries of Spectrum Women's Autism Group.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group is established to promote the relief of Autistic women, and their Family and Carers resident in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through the following:

- i. to promote acceptance and awareness of female presentations of Autism within the general public, relevant professionals and organisations in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors,
- ii. the provision of help, guidance and information to Autistic women members and the promotion of a network of support among such women, with the aim of improving their quality of life and increasing their social networks,
- iii. provision of recreational activities and the promotion of the provision of appropriate recreational facilities to overcome isolation.

Our Services

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a public benefit to the beneficiaries. We also listen to the feedback from our beneficiaries and try to plan activities that provide a public benefit to them.

I confirm that all the trustees have complied with their duty under charity law to have regard to the Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

One of the main purposes of Spectrum Women's Autism Group, as outlined above is the reduction of social isolation. This is targeted through both a WhatsApp group and face to face meetings. The WhatsApp group is only open to registered members of the charity that attend the face-to-face meetings. This has the advantage of being a small group in which everyone knows each other, which means that members are happy to share things and get support and a way for people to keep in touch and to arrange online meetings. Occasionally we have zoom online meetings during the winter months to accommodate the weather and where travel from all over Northern Ireland is restricted.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group – Registered Charity in Northern Ireland NIC106799

The Spectrum Women's Autism Group's monthly meetings are the core activity of the group. We currently have 115 on our register. Monthly attendance at meetings are around between 12-15 members. Those members registered to attend the monthly meetings have been asked to pay an annual fee of £20, which is payable from end June each year. During Covid we waived this payment. There is no pressure for anyone to pay and we would never turn someone away if they could not afford to attend. These meetings provide members the opportunity to meet with other autistic women in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. For many of the members this is the only time that they feel that they can relax and be themselves and not have to 'mask' (which is often the case socialising with the neurotypical community). The group meetings are about providing peer support, advice, learning from our own experiences to help each other, having group discussions on topics related to all areas of living with Autism and providing an environment where friendships can be formulated. We also have a facilitator from the Spectrum Centre, Dungannon (Jo Douglas) who helps us to navigate our meetings and open discussions about our worries and difficulties we face, during our day to day lives. This is a vital contribution to our group.

A range of activities are covered in these meetings which in the last year have included:

- A discussion session on 'Autism in The Workplace' facilitated by Joanne Douglas, Consultant Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. The session considered the many positive contributions individuals with autism can bring to the workplace as well as some of the challenges imposed as the result of open plan workplaces, sensory issues, communication difficulties, group activities and meetings, organisational skills and planning etc. The group was able to share personal experiences in a non-judgemental environment and to discuss a range of strategies to promote positive experiences in the workplace.
- 'Songs that mean something to me' – In this session, group members were encouraged to choose and play a song/ songs that have a special meaning to them and to share their stories around this with others in the group. This fun session encouraged the group to develop their communication skills, to talk about feelings and emotions etc.
- Our annual Christmas party provided an opportunity for fun and games, which pushed members out of their comfort zone but in a supportive environment. This get together also involved some arts and crafts activities facilitated by one of our group members who lead the session in making 3D Christmas Cards.
- A discussion session on identifying individual strengths and challenges was facilitated by Joanne Douglas, Consultant Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. This session encouraged group members to discuss the positive aspects of their autism diagnosis along with the aspects which they find most challenging. Within the non-judgemental, supportive group setting members were encouraged to share their personal experiences and discuss similarities and differences in individual presentations.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group – Registered Charity in Northern Ireland NIC106799

- On International Women's Day the group celebrated their neurodiversity as women on the spectrum and got together to enjoy a jewellery making session led by one of the group members. The session encouraged members to celebrate their differences while providing an opportunity to develop their creativity and imagination in designing and making a personal piece of jewellery which they could take home.
- A discussion session on 'ASD and Trauma' was facilitated by Joanne Douglas, Consultant Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. This session explored what causes trauma, signs and symptoms, the impact on daily life, diagnosis and assessment and different types of treatment and support. There was a focus on trauma within the context of having an autistic spectrum disorder. Within the non-judgemental, supportive group setting members were encouraged to share their personal experiences and ask questions to develop their knowledge about this very important and relevant topic.
- A discussion session on 'ASD – The Female Perspective' was facilitated by Joanne Douglas, Consultant Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. This session encouraged discussion about the female presentation of autism and included topics such as masking, regulating emotions, navigating relationships etc.
- Questions in a fishbowl, which allowed members to ask anonymous questions about anything related to their autism. This format allowed members to ask questions that they would be too embarrassed to ask in person. The discussion often helped others as the issues were often common to many in the group.
- A discussion session on 'Being Kind to Your ~Mind' was facilitated by Joanne Douglas, Consultant Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. This session encouraged discussion around the promotion of positive mental health, positive thinking, and the law of attraction.

Alongside the monthly meetings a range of social outings have been arranged. These social events facilitate group members to attend meet ups, conferences, social events, and cultural experiences that they would perhaps not be able to attend alone. They enrich the social opportunities for group members and help to build confidence, as well as opportunities to develop social and communication skills in a range of settings and people. These included:

- Meetings in a coffee shop to provide an opportunity for chat in a relaxed environment. After this some members would have gone shopping, something which can be challenging for autistic people due to sensory issues, but with the support provided they were able to do so.
- Meals out which can pose challenges for many members, but we provide support to try to overcome these issues. We all understand the issues and accept that we tend to want to eat in the same places and have the same food each time, which other people may perceive as odd.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group – Registered Charity in Northern Ireland NIC106799

- Several members attended the Middletown Autism Conference at the ICC Belfast – hosted by a range of professionals in the field of autism. Topics included 'Pathological Demand Avoidance', Neurodiversity, Social and Communication Skills.
- Several members attended a Christmas by Candlelight at St Ann's Cathedral – a night of musical entertainment featuring the soundtracks from a range of popular Christmas movies – Home Alone, Love Actually etc.
- A group of members also attended the Belfast Community Concert in the Waterfront.
- Some members also attended the christening of a group member's twin daughters and celebrated with refreshments afterwards.
- A group of members also attended the Big Day Out Women's empowerment day at the Armagh City Hotel.
- We continue to meet our aim which is to formally educate others on the female presentation of autism. The trustees and members of SWAG are fully committed to educating others on the female presentation of autism and will do so in their day to lives when the opportunities arise. We believe that through educating on autism that the lives of all autistic women can be improved, beyond those involved with Spectrum Women's Autism Group. Clare Thompson, one of our online members through her work with creative therapies has shared her personal experience of having autism on her blog.

Risk of harm and private benefit

By the nature of the charity being based on peer support there is a private benefit in terms of support and social benefits, not financial, to the trustees, but this is incidental to the public benefit.

The trustees recognise that there may be a risk of psychological harm from the issues that may come up for discussion. We have the support of a Consultant Chartered Psychologist who provides support to the charity. As part of our membership registration form, we have next of kin details that we can contact if there is a significant concern. Included on the form is a code of conduct, which includes treating every member with respect and dignity and to respect the confidentiality of the group. Attendees at the groups are made aware of the main topic of discussion in advance and can choose not to attend if it is something that they cannot deal with at that time. Every effort is made in the planning of the group activities to minimise the risk of harm.

I confirm that there are no serious incidents or other matters that the trustees should have brought to the Commission's attention.

Charity Trustees as of end June 2023

Chair: Dr Margaret Copeland

Treasurer: Mrs Clare Amanda McCleary

Secretary: Ms Fiona Monaghan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Copeland', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Margaret Copeland, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. McCleary', written over a horizontal line.

Treasurer.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Annual return

Independent examiner's report to the charity trustees of Spectrum Women's Autism Group RIC106799

Independent examiner's report to the charity trustees of Spectrum Women's Autism Group
I report on the accounts of the Trust for the year ending 30th June 2023, which are set out on pages 01 to 01.

Respective responsibilities of charity trustees and examiner

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 65 of the Charities Act
- follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Commission under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

I have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.

My examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as charity trustees concerning any such matters.

My role is to state whether any material matters have come to my attention giving me cause to believe:

1. That accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 63 of the Charities Act
2. That the accounts do not accord with those accounting records
3. That the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act
4. That there is further information needed for a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above and, in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have found no matters that require drawing to your attention.

Name: James Norman McCleary

Signature: 

Relevant professional qualification or body: Retired Accountant

Address: 12 McCormack Gardens Lurgan

Date: 11/3/24

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Accounts

SWAG Account – year ending 30th June 2020

Carried forward from previous year £200.

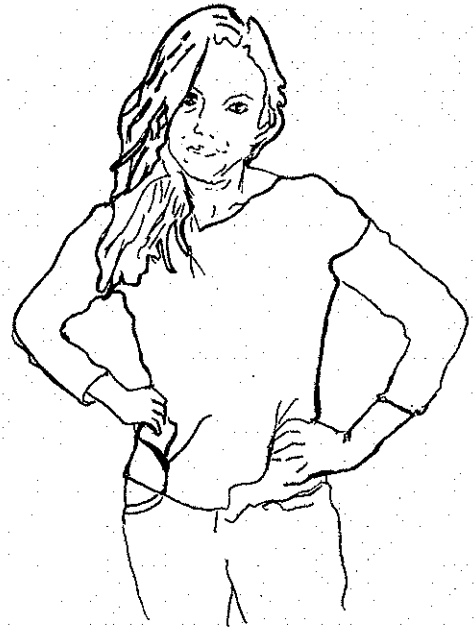
INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
Date	details	Lodged amount	Date	Details	balance
30-6-2020	membership	£298.50	30-6-2020	0	£498.50

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Annual report

Spectrum Women's Autism Group



Annual Report

For the year ending
June 2019

Spectrum Women's Autism Group – Registered Charity in Northern Ireland NIC106799

C/O Spectrum Centre, 14 Northland Row, Dungannon, BT71 6AP

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Our Services

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a public benefit to the beneficiaries. We also listen to the feedback from our beneficiaries and try to plan activities that provide a public benefit to them.

I confirm that all the trustees have complied with their duty under charity law to have regard to the Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

One of the main purposes of Spectrum Women's Autism Group, as outlined above is the reduction of social isolation. This is targeted through both a secret Facebook group and face to face meetings. The Facebook group is secret so that only the membership is known to the members, as some members do not feel comfortable with groups where other people can see that they are a member of it. We also have a public Facebook page and website that people can use to link in with the charity. Currently there are 92 members of this group and this number continues rise, with new members being added each month. It aims to provide a safe and supportive space to discuss issues affecting members and to arrange social events. For some members this is the only way they can connect with other members and provides some social interaction.

Spectrum Women's Autism Group's monthly meetings are the core activity of the group. We currently have 18 members registered to attend these meetings and normally have between 10 and 15 in attendance each time. Those members registered to attend the monthly meetings have been asked to pay an annual fee of £20, which can be paid as they can through the year. There is no pressure for anyone to pay and we would never turn someone away if they could not afford to attend. These meetings provide members the opportunity to meet with other autistic women in a relaxed and comfortable fashion. For many of the members this is the only time that they feel that can relax and be themselves and not have to wear a 'mask'. The group meetings are about peer support as we can all use our own experiences to help each other.

C said "I have found my tribe, its a save place for me to be myself and not pretend to be what others want me to be".

A range of activities are covered in these meetings which in the last year have included:

- Wendy Porter was invited to the group to give advice on clothing colours and styling, which is an area of difficulty for many members.
- A talk on autism provided by Joanne Douglas, Consultant and Chartered Psychologist, The Spectrum Diagnostic, Assessment and Therapy Centre. This provided an opportunity to educate ourselves on autism and provide strategies to help ourselves manage the condition.
- A creative writing workshop with Finn Monahan, author of Know Your Spectrum, with the aim of helping members to express themselves. Difficulty with self expression is a common difficulty in autistic people.
- Craft activities including origami, jewellery making and card making. During an activity members are often more comfortable to talk as the expectation of eye contact is removed and provides a starter for conversation. These are difficulties that are common in autism.
- Our annual Christmas party which is opportunity for fun and games, which push members out of their comfort zone but in a supportive environment.
- Talks on mental health issues and ways in which to stay mentally well. Mental health problems, in particular anxiety and depression, are common issues for many autistic women so it is important for members to develop skills to manage the conditions and help prevention of them. The aim is to improve their quality of life.

M said "The support, safe space and companionship that the women's group has offered to me has been incredible, I've been able to learn so much about living with Asperger's. Being able to discuss different aspects of my life with Asperger's while also hearing how it affects others has given me confidence to embrace my differences, not hide them."

Alongside the monthly meetings a range of social outings have been arranged. These include:

- Meetings in a coffee shop to provide and opportunity for chat in a relaxed environment. After this some members would have gone shopping, something which can be challenging for autistic people due to sensory issues, but with the support provided they were able to do so.
- Trips to shows at the Waterfront Hall and Grand Opera House in Belfast, and cinema trips. These can be difficult for autistic people due to sensory issues or simply social isolation and having no one to go with them. We provide support and an opportunity to have others to with them.
- Meals out which can pose challenges for many members, but we provide support to try to overcome these issues. We all understand the issues and accept that we tend to want to eat in the same places and have the same food each time, which other people may perceive as odd.
- We have had trips to the Ulster Museum which provide a social opportunity in an environment that many of the members are comfortable with and can pursue their interests.

B said “since my daughter has been involved in the group she has really grown in confidence and maturity. Previously she only had one friend, but through the group she now has a whole group of friends and an active social calendar. Her knowledge and understanding of autism has grown and she now shares and uses her experiences to help others.”

In terms of our aim to educate others on the female presentation of autism, a small group of the trustees and members met with Marie McCloy from the Empower Project. The Empower Project have had increasing numbers of autistic girls in their service and we were able to provide strategies and ideas of how they could best support them. The trustees are fully committed to educating others on the female presentation of autism and will do so in their day to lives when the opportunities arise. We believe that through educating on autism that the lives of all autistic women can be improved, beyond those involved with Spectrum Women's Autism Group.

Risk of harm and private benefit

By the nature of the charity being based on peer support there is a private benefit in terms of support and social benefits, not financial, to the trustees, but this is incidental to the public benefit.

The trustees recognise that there may be a risk of psychological harm from the issues that may come up for discussion. We have the support of a Consultant and Chartered Psychologist who

provides support to the charity. As part of our membership registration form we have next of kin details that we can contact if there is a significant concern. Attendees at the groups are made aware of the main topic of discussion in advance and can choose not to attend if it is something that they can not deal with at that time. Every effort is made in the planning of the group activities to minimise the risk of harm.

I confirm that there are no serious incidents or other matters that the trustees should have brought to the Commission's attention.

Charity Trustees as of end June 2019

Miss Deborah Anne Bond	Chair
Mrs Amanda Wales	Treasurer
Mrs Karen Elizabeth Tighe	Secretary
Mrs Clare Amanda McCleary	Membership Secretary
Dr Margaret Elizabeth Copeland	Ordinary member
Mrs Jennifer Lorraine Matchett	Ordinary member

Other Charity Trustees in the year to June 2019

Miss Kathryn Helen McArdle	Had to stand down in January 2019 for personal reasons
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Deborah Bond, Chair



Amanda Wales, Treasurer

Spectrum Women's Autism Group

Northern Ireland - Charity number 106799

Annual return

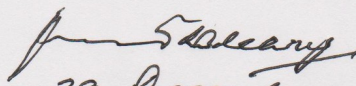
SWAG Account - Year ended 30 June 2019 .

Revenue Account .

<u>INCOME</u>		<u>Lodged</u>	<u>EXPENDITURE</u>		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Total</u>
30/06/2019	Membership	200.00			NIL
		=====			=====

I hereby certify the above figures as correct .

J N McCleary
HON AUDITOR .


29 December, 2019.