



The Acorn Cancer Support Group

25th Anniversary Celebration Reception

*St Ives Corn Exchange The Pavement
The Old Riverport PE27 5AD*

1200 Noon – 2.00pm 24th May 2023



*Scan for more information or visit
www.acornsupportgroup.org.uk*

Order of Events¹

<i>Time</i>	
<i>1200-1230</i>	<i>Arrival – welcome drink* – opportunity for guests to mingle with Acorn members.</i>
<i>1230</i>	<i>Welcome by Acorn Chairman Simon Townend</i>
<i>Followed by</i>	<i>Finger Buffet Open</i>
	<i>Free choice seating</i>
<i>c.1320</i>	<i>Addresses- Munashe Munyukwe Macmillan Engagement Lead The Worshipful the Mayor of St Ives Councillor Philip Pope</i>
<i>1330</i>	<i>Presentation -Special Community Award to Acorn by President St Ives Rotary Club – Sally Heffer-Martin</i>
<i>Followed by</i>	<i>Response</i>
	<i>Gordon Dyer MBE Acorn Secretary</i>
<i>Followed by</i>	<i>Farewells Simon Townend</i>
<i>2.00 -2.15</i>	<i>Close</i>
<i>* Complimentary non-alcoholic sparkling drink or fruit juice provided.</i>	
<i>*Bar available</i>	

Acorn – the first ten years to 2008

¹ *This reception celebrates the success of The Acorn Cancer Support Group over the past 25 years in its mission to alleviate the physical and emotional distress of cancer, by providing an antidote to loneliness and isolation through opportunity to share experiences and coping strategies and enhancing quality of life by social activity as a key part of a full recovery from cancer.*

Our story begins through an initiative of the Macmillan, physiotherapy and district nursing team at St Ives, who recognised a gap in the support both for a patient suffering from life challenging illness and for their carer. Cancer was becoming more prevalent and soon became the focus. Diagnosis of cancer often gives a shockwave of uncertainty to the whole family. At that time while the NHS provided improving, yet non-guaranteed treatment through surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy, in between these sessions patients and carers were on their own, facing doubts and fears about their future, thinking e.g., is it terminal? or do I face a long, lonely, battle against my illness? A patient and carer may find it difficult to talk to one another, or to friends.

A pilot patient/carer support group called The Acorn Group met monthly at St Ives Clinic from April 1998. These early meetings were also open to residents of St Neots Huntingdon Ramsey Warboys and Somersham areas. The early vision was for a drop-in centre, with attendance small and with ad hoc fund-raising.

Benefits of aromatherapy and massage, opportunity to share strategies for coping with the daily physical and psychological demands of the illness were shown to encourage a feeling of well-being and improve the life of patients and carers. In 2002 this led to application for formal charity status and registration as St Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group. 'The' has now replaced 'St Ives' in our title, with branch meetings in St Ives, Huntingdon' and Ramsey on different days of the month. A St Neots team decided to establish their own group. It too now has formal charity status.

The proof of concept of a support group had been established but there was a need for a more robust level of charity management and objectives, with more promotion and fund-raising, and broader volunteer base to achieve the group's potential.

Acorn – 2009 to today

Acorn growth, as a charity outside of the NHS, depends on a capability to fund raise. The level needed was influenced by a key ambition of the founding trustees - it was bad enough for someone to have a diagnosis of cancer, so it was important not to have financial barriers to accessing support that Acorn offered. Support to members should be at no-cost to them.

More focussed fund raising, enhanced promotion and clear policies led to a rise in attendance at monthly meetings, and increase in individual relaxation therapy, and seated exercises sessions and social outings provided. The Macmillan nurse team referred a regular supply of new members to the group.

In 2013 Acorn faced a new challenge. The pressures on Macmillan nurses became so great that they no longer had time to visit Acorn meetings. Our monthly meetings could no longer be a source of medical advice. This is now provided by a new nursing unit, HCCN, Woodlands Centre Hinchingbrooke Hospital to which we signpost. Our role of alleviating distress remains as important as ever, as is the provision of social outings to enhance quality of life by building a sense of an alternative family.

Acorn experienced a drop-off in attendance post 2013, but within 3 years was back to its previous level of c.1000 a year. Then like all groups who relied on face-to-face activity, we were affected by the Covid-19 lockdown. Re-opening cautiously in autumn 2021 we are in a period of recovery, with the good news that during the last FY meeting attendance was 685. We have the capacity and willingness to help more, so the key message to those attending today. is "Please be our ambassador." If you know of someone affected by cancer then tell them Acorn is here, ready to support them. There is no need to feel lonely or isolated. Come as you are, we are used to chemotherapy bandanas, oxygen bottles and wheelchairs at our

meetings. Have a day out with us. Be yourself. We ask no questions.

What we have achieved over the years

Records are incomplete for the early years. Since 2010:

10,600 people attended our 421 support meetings – 65% of these were patients and carers – the balance made up of our volunteers, therapists, NHS specialists and other visiting speakers. All were provided with coffee/tea and biscuits, and a light lunch.

At the support meetings Acorn provided:

2600 with individual relaxation therapies and massage.

2330 with seated exercise.

3740 Individual social outings with meal were provided:

860 enjoyed a river Ouse trip on the Ladybird (from 2010)

1200 enjoyed our monthly film club (from 2014)

1290 enjoyed a lunch for all three groups at Christmas or in the Summer (from 2011)

390 enjoyed lunch outings for their local group (from 2017)²

Testimonials – what members say

We evaluate our meetings twice a year and the specific events that we provide: Here is a selection of comments:

“After diagnosis with cancer and successful surgery for cancer I was left with peripheral damage which limited my mobility and left me feeling isolated. I was sceptical about such a group being able to help me. Eventually I was so desperate I decided to try. What I found was a lively friendly group of cancer sufferers and survivors who understood and shared my problems. The support team, therapists and refreshment providers are friendly and helpful. I came away greatly cheered by my experience and now look forward to our meetings and events. Loss of mobility limits my lifestyle; the Acorn Support Group provide a lifeline to the outside world. The meetings and events have become a highlight of my month. I cannot praise them highly enough.”

“Upon reaching retirement I was taken ill with cancer, living alone, support from family and friends is so valuable but sometimes they can be too close to the problem. The Acorn group have been invaluable in the support with therapies, a chat and an opportunity to meet others in a similar situation. This can put life into perspective and provide support when your emotions get the better of you during setbacks, which inevitably occur. “

“After an operation for cancer at Addenbrookes I felt a little confused, very scared, and isolated. I knew only one or two people with or recovering from Cancer. and more people who had died, and I thought I would be next. I discovered the group ...

² Text and Statistics Gordon Dyer

and soon found many friends, information, alternative therapies on offer, courses to help deal with life after Cancer, and other people who were sharing the same experiences as me. I cannot praise the group enough for the support that is there for each one of us... “

Acorn's value and impact in the local community

In addition to support to individuals, Acorn has a beneficial impact on the local community. This arises as follows:

The worries of own family members e.g., members' children, are reduced when they know that their parents are getting free support and have access to social activity which is an antidote to loneliness and isolation. This is a clear indication that they are living in a supportive and caring community , especially if the family is financially disadvantaged.

We have evidence that opportunity for carers to get support leads to reduction in the numbers of visits they might make to their doctors for dealing with distress, saving GP time and prescription costs.

The opportunity to give support to others makes people feel good by “giving something back”. Members often say that this is such an important aspect of support meetings. They have been on the receiving end – of treatment and advice from medical professionals – for so long, that it is a relief to do something for others.

Those who volunteer will learn new skills and gain confidence in many areas: particularly inter-personal skills in how to relate to those affected by cancer and the need to respect client confidentiality. With experience some may progress to take on, or share, an administrative or leadership role. This could be as

*coordinator for meetings, events, or outings. Some patients in remission and carers occasionally can take on a volunteer task, demonstrating that despite their disease their life skills are still valuable to others, and bolsters self-esteem.*³

The Acorn Cancer Support Group – Who we are

Acorn's support to members depends on several groups of people. Firstly, a team of 20 dedicated volunteers – trustees for governance (we need more), those who organize and help at the monthly meetings and on social outings, make patients and carers feel welcome, provide refreshments and give general assistance to those less able. Some provide a collection service to take clients to support meetings. Several of these volunteers are previous carers who want to continue to remain associated with Acorn after the loss of their loved one. This confirms the value of our support.

The professional team include a group of complementary therapists who can offer a variety of relaxation therapies to individuals to help reduce their stress. We also contract seated exercise instructors. Their sessions are delivered collectively to generate fun and laughter, and are very important for our members who are typically seniors and may have mobility problems as well as cancer. The therapists provide their services at a reduced rate to Acorn so that we in turn can more easily offer them at no-cost to members.

Our base number of patients and carers is variable, but in the past year has been around 80. We are in a strong position to offer our services to more. In total of 700 members attended our support meetings in the last year – almost 500 of these were cancer patients and carers. You can read more about us at:

<http://www.acornsupportgroup.org.uk>

or by ringing 07739 934524



Online donations can be made to Acorn at localgiving.org ⁴

⁴ *The Acorn Cancer Support Group acknowledges with gratitude the grant provided By Macmillan UK towards the costs of this reception including the printing of this booklet.*