



ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Chairperson's Address _____	1
Our Aim _____	2
Impact in 2017 _____	4
New in 2017 _____	7
Family Days _____	8
Governance _____	9
Talks _____	10
Public Support _____	11
Challenges Ahead _____	122
Conclusion _____	13
Family Testimonials _____	14
Contact Information _____	17
Financial Information and details of Directors	(see attached documentation)

Chairperson's Address

As chairperson since June 2017, I took on this role from Servaas Dodebier (our Honorary President). As a Board we have worked together throughout the year to formulate and deliver a plan based on our member's needs, while also being mindful of the emerging needs of those impacted by autism in our community.

It has been a pleasure to have been part of this team during the year and on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all those that supported our organisation during 2017. In April, we held our first Gala Ball, which saw fantastic support for CAN evident with the attendance, sponsorship and donations received. As a result of the success of this event, we aim to organize a CAN Ball on a bi – annual basis in the future.

During the year, we were able to expand our weekly activities as well as introduce new programmes, in response to the diverse range of needs of our members. We have attracted a team of volunteers, introduced vetting for all volunteers and facilitators, created numerous policies in line with good governance and best practice, created awareness in our community, built relationships with other organisations, undertaken training as a Board and delivered on the plan that guided our work during the year.

However, despite our many achievements there are challenges that we face. Going forward, we need to consider sustainability as an organisation. CAN is currently in a stable position financially and has a cohort of volunteers. Yet, to continue to deliver and be proactive going forward we need to engage with our membership and create a greater sense of ownership, as well as to continue to build partnerships with other relevant organisations and groups.

Despite the challenges we currently have, we aim to continue to set high standards going forward in terms of the facilitators that we engage and the events that we organise. In the current climate, there are new initiatives coming to fruition such as the AIMS programme in preschools as well as apparent increases in the provision of support to children in school with the recruitment of additional Special Needs Assistants. However, regardless of the apparent implementation of supports by statutory agencies, many families still benefit from the opportunities made available by organisations and charities such as CAN, to connect with other families in similar circumstances. Our charity will need to continue to evolve going forward, so as to respond to emerging needs and remain relevant to both the Autism community and the wider community as a whole.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their energy, commitment and drive this year. Individually they have put in an incredible amount of time and thought into CAN, often behind the scenes, all with the objective of promoting inclusion and creating learning opportunities for our children and young people as well as creating awareness in the wider community. On behalf of CAN, I would like to acknowledge and thank those that are stepping down from their role as directors and express gratitude for their contribution.

Finally, I would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that have supported us during the last year, all our activity facilitators, donors, supporters and members for trusting in us as a Board and being part of CAN.

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG. aims to improve the quality of life of families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder by providing support, promoting equality and inclusion as well as raising awareness in the community by being a voice for our members.



“A child is like a butterfly in the wind. Some can fly higher than others, but each one flies the best it can. Why compare one against the other? Each one is different, each one is special, each one is beautiful.”

Author: Unknown

Impact in 2017

The following is a summary of activities undertaken by the company during 2017.

Coffee Mornings in Kelly's Café @ Meadow and Byrne's, Drinagh Retail Park, Wexford Town.



During the year our fortnightly Coffee mornings have become a well - established get - together for mams (and sometimes dads) to meet up. Attendance can vary from six to sixteen in attendance and these have enabled parents to meet up to share experiences and knowledge.

World Autism Awareness Day 2017



This was marked by our inaugural CAN Ball in the Brandon House Hotel, in New Ross. Over 180 people attended this event and along with raising some much needed funds, we also showcased what CAN does to attendees. This got great media attention in the local press and our patron, Matthew O' Hanlon attended which again helped to raise our profile.

In addition, in April we held a screening of *Life Animated* in Wexford Omiplex. This was a sold - out event and told the true story of a young man, Owen Suskind, who learned to communicate through copying phrases from animation movies. This sometimes emotional and moving film, highlights that having an open mind and a never give up attitude, anything can be possible.



Summer Camps 2017

A number of summer camps were held during August. A soccer camp took place in Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts with FAI coaches. In all, 12 children participated in three days of soccer and games. In addition, we held a Coding Camp with TekCentral (20 children) in Taghmon and a Drama Camp in Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts with Shine Bright Theatre (10 children).

Summer Camps (continued)

In addition CAN subsidized Equine Assisted Therapy during the year in Ragtree in Kilmuckridge and in Duncormick, school holiday times. Forty sessions benefitting 40 children, were held during the year.

Two Surfing Camps were held again in collaboration with the Surf Shack in Curracloe, benefitting 40 children. Parents attended to support their children's participation and enjoy the fun too!

Our Activities

Weekly activities are subsidized by CAN, while parents usually pay a minimal contribution. Members benefit from a slightly reduced rate, while most activities are open to non – members also. All our facilitators and all volunteers that have access to children are vetted by CAN and processed through Carlow Volunteer Centre. Our activities are fully insured and facilitators are recruited that are trained/ experienced in their relevant area. Parents/ Guardians are required to stay on – site during activities to ensure that each child is supported to participate to their individual ability and help to reduce anxiety. Numbers are usually kept small in our groups to maximize participation.



Lego

Our weekly Lego Club takes place in St. Mary's Secondary School in New Ross. On average, ten children benefit on a weekly basis. This activity helps to improve social skills through turn taking, sharing and teamwork as well as an opportunity for kids to use their creativity and have fun.



Kickboxing

During the year, CAN partnered with KBX Kickboxing in New Ross for two terms. Each week, on average eight children participated in kickboxing sessions.

Yoga

Weekly, yoga took place with Kool Kids Yoga in Wexford town. Twenty children benefitted from this activity throughout the year and there was great positive feedback from parents.



Drama

Weekly drama took place in Wexford for two age groups with a maximum of five children in each group. This was a great opportunity for the children involved to engage in using their imaginations and creativity in a small group setting. One child moved on to a mainstream drama class after a period of time.

Soccer

Weekly soccer took place in Wexford with two age groups being catered for, with 18- 20 children participating on a weekly basis. The FAI coaches are supported by volunteers and a former participant of this group is currently volunteering with these groups.



New in 2017



During the year we collaborated with the Cycling Officer in Wexford Co. Council and with a grant made available by the Council, we ran two cycling programmes in New Ross and Wexford. Both programmes were very successful with 22 children participating ranging in age from 4 to 14 years. These programmes resulted in 60% of participants learning to cycle, with the remaining



children making significant progress. This is particularly positive as many children and young people on the autism spectrum can have difficulty with coordination and balance.

Forest School

During the year we partnered with the Forest School and based in the Irish National Heritage Park, 15 children participated on a weekly basis in outdoor physical activity, engaged in nature and had lots of fun, in all weather!

Little Friends

Our fortnightly play group for younger children aged 3-5 yrs began running regularly after initially beginning as a pilot programme. This programme is run by volunteers who have experience in the area of childcare/ additional needs/teaching/ home tuition. This group is limited to six children per session and 12 children engaged in this programme during the year.

Playful Paisti



We held two workshops with Playful Paisti during the year, both aimed at our younger age group and these were particularly popular with children that are non – verbal / pre – verbal. They engaged in lots of sensory play including with sand, water, foam, pasta, leaves, wool etc.

Family Days/ Activities

Summer Party

In June we held our annual members summer party, where over 50 children and their families enjoyed a an end of school year party that included face painting, archery, a puppet show and bouncy castle. This was a lovely autism friendly event for families and the feedback was really positive.

Santa Train



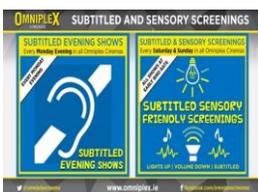
In December, CAN organized a Santa Train Experience for over 30 member families. This was done in conjunction with Wexford Winterland and this ensured that families could experience a festive activity in an autism friendly manner.

Surfing



In partnership with the Surf Shack in Curracloe, CAN organized three group surfing sessions for members as well as a very successful surf camp in August. In all, over 40 children benefitted.

Sensory Friendly Cinema Screenings



In partnership with Wexford Omniplex, CAN subsidizes a monthly sensory friendly screening of a children's film. This helps ease anxiety for children with ASD and helps to encourage our members to engage in this activity.

Sibshop

We held a sibshop which focused on siblings on children with ASD. Eight siblings attended this workshop and there was very positive feedback from attendees.

Governance

Our Board met approximately every six weeks (with nine week break over the summer). Between Board meetings, our sub groups met. Our sub groups included:

- Finance and Fundraising Sub - group
- Gala Ball Organising Sub- group
- Governance Sub – group
- Activities Sub-group
- Parent Training Sub - Group

Our Designated Child Liaison and Welfare Person during 2017 was Board member Katie Murphy. Four representatives completed training regarding the role of a Designated Liaison Person. A representative also attended training on Safeguarding in Sport, with Sports Active Wexford.

During 2017, CAN successfully recruited numerous volunteers both from our membership



and from the wider community. Volunteers were invited to an induction training session about CAN and their role as a volunteer. In addition volunteers attending Child Protection Training with Ferns Diocesan Youth Service and eight volunteers successfully completed a First Aid – First Responder Course, funded by WWETB Community Education Programme.

Also, CAN has strived to build our capacity and knowledge in areas such as best practice and policy development.

Individual Board members attended training in areas such as Board roles and responsibilities and also training on the upcoming changes to Data Protection taking place in 2018.

CAN registered with the local Public Participation Network (PPN) and attended training on financial procedures for community groups, run by Wexford Local Development.

Talks

We delivered a talk on Autism to staff at Ferns Diocesan Youth Service in Wexford.

CAN organized numerous talks for parents and members of the public and invited speakers on the following topics:

- Anxiety and how to support someone with ASD with Diarmuid Heffernan & Kirsten Hurley
- How to talk to your child about their diagnosis with Psychologist Davida Hartman
- Autism and Girls with Diarmuid Heffernan & Kirsten Hurley
- Information on entitlements when your son or daughter has a disability



- RPM Talk – Rapid Prompting Method
- Empowering Children with Autism through Technology



Public Support

Many thanks to all the organisations and individuals that have supported us in any way during the year.



These include:

Emma Carr, who organized a Craft Fair and raised money for CAN

Ferns Diocesan Youth Service

Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board
Community Education Programme

Wexford ICA

Wexford County Council

Wexford Local Development

Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts in Wexford

Templscooby Playschool, Enniscorthy

Challenges Ahead

The last year has seen CAN grow and develop as an organisation. We have increased our membership, built relationships with schools and other organisations.

The challenges ahead include continuing to build on these relationships with other organisations. To continue to create more awareness of our organisation in the wider community and to continue to deliver to our members through responding to needs as they arise.

In addition, the charity sector in general has come under increased scrutiny and CAN like other charities must continue to deliver according to best practice. The workload for our Board is increasing as we implement policies and practices in accordance with the Governance Code. This work is important to deliver on, so as to ensure the long – term sustainability of our organisation and will require continued investment in training of our Board members so as to ensure that they feel confident and competent in their respective roles.

An additional challenge is to be able to continue to retain our current volunteers while also attracting new volunteers, to help to expand our programmes and initiatives. It has also emerged that there is a need to offer support to parents of those who are diagnosed with ASD and are adults.

We also have no office base and all management and organization within our organization is done by volunteers. Going forward, CAN needs to acquire an office base to be able to work more efficiently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 2017 has seen our membership grow to 128 families. Our activities have developed and expanded and this report gives a flavor of the range of initiatives that have occurred during the year. In addition, our secretary continues to respond to queries on a daily basis from parents and other organisations. Our social media presence has increased on both Facebook and Twitter and all these developments were acknowledged during the year when we were nominated for an award at the New Ross District Chamber of Commerce Awards in the Community Category.

Our objective is to build on this success in 2018 so that more families can feel part of the network, and that as a company we can evolve to become more responsive to needs, efficient and transparent. To this end, we hope to devise and implement policies that will inform our practice and to begin our journey on the Governance Code.

Testimonials from Families 2017

The Rice Family

The variety of events and skills for kids and their siblings has increased massively in 2017 and especially the exercise events are so important for health and quality of life for kids. The introduction of rugby worked great and was fun for us as a family. The volume of exercise they got at this sport was really pleasing to see.

The CAN ball was fantastically organised and was definitely one of the best nights out of 2017.

The facebook updates re upcoming education events and conferences have been timely and massively updating and educational.

It has also come to our attention how much the siblings are linked in. A lot of the events mean that parents have time to chat and link in and give helpful comments.

For all the support and education that CAN have given to us as a family in 2017, we are sincerely thankful .

Sean & Claire

In June 2017 our son Reece was diagnosed with ASD. As first time parents this came as a huge shock to us both. With little in the form of guidance or direction in relation to how to help aid our son Reece with his new challenge in his life we felt alone & to be honest a little useless.

A chance conversation with a family member who arranged a chat with a couple they knew whose son also had Autism led us in the direction of CAN. On speaking with them they quickly advised that we should contact CAN as they would be a great source of help/knowledge to both Reece & us as parents

After an initial couple of emails where a wealth of experience, knowledge & direction was given by both Catherine & Maria, we were quickly included on the activities emails that are circulated. On seeing the first of these we spotted the "Little Friends " play group for 3-5 yr old children who have been recently diagnosed. We contacted Catherine to enquire could Reece attend. We were warmly welcomed.

After a settling in period of one or two Saturday Little Friends groups, where Reece found his new surroundings strange, we now look forward both Reece & I to a Saturday morning spin to Wexford for Little Friends. To watch Reece play & interact with such joy with other children & the excellent volunteers has been brilliant. For us as parents to meet & learn from other parents who have children with the same challenges ahead as Reece has been brilliant also.

Overall from where we were as parents when Reece was first diagnosed, where we felt alone & to be honest a little useless of what route we needed to follow with Reece, been part of CAN has been huge help in relieving these feelings & fears.

Paulene & Bobby

When we finally got our Autism diagnosis for our son it had been a long 2 years. We thought then all the services and help would come but what was there was more waiting lists. As a parent there was nothing available straight away to advise of us of what to do and how to help our son. Joining Cottage Autism Network helped us and our son in so many ways. As parents we were able to avail of the many talks, speak to other parents and watch our son for the first time enjoy sports. Our son now plays and gets involved in so many activities. He goes to drama, plays soccer and rugby. At Easter he went horse riding and went on an easter egg hunt. CAN has given our son a safe place to enjoy and be involved and as parents be part of a community of parents joining together to help our kids be the best they can be.

Anonymous

Since being a member of CAN the last few years I can only say how fantastic it has been for me, as a parent of a boy with asd and to the rest of my family. I find the committee very friendly, approachable, easy to communicate with, open and professional. The activities that are put on each year are fantastic. There is always something new and seems to be something for all ages available too. Each activity is run brilliantly, with friendly CAN members and in a professional way from a CAN committee member attending. Each one

of my children have a greater understanding of people with autism and the talks that are held always help me as a parent to understand more about my child's diagnosis. So well done to the committee of CAN for how this charity is run so well and the amount of work that is put in to keep such a worthy organisation run in Wexford. I hope all the members keep attending the activities organised for the kids of Wexford. Thank you!

Contact Information

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG

c/o Artramon Farm,

Crossabeg,

Co. Wexford

Tel 087-1035355

Website: www.cottageautismnetwork.com

Email: info@cottageautismnetwork.com

Facebook: Cottage Autism Network

