



# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG

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## Chairperson's Address

2018 has been another busy and successful year for CAN as an organisation. The activities we have organized and/or have been involved in have raised both the awareness of autism and our value as an organisation in the Co. Wexford. The board has been working very well and has achieved a large percentage of their targets set out at the beginning of 2018. We have been very lucky to get the help and support from our volunteers and there is a great improvement in the participation of our members in the activities.

I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all those that supported our organisation during 2018. Our facilitators, sponsors, volunteers and members have given us the opportunity to increase our activities again this year. The activities subcommittee have been extraordinary busy and their work is getting great appreciation with our members and creating a real buzz within the organisation.

Within board level we have made good progress with regard to compliance with both the charities regulator and the company regulator. Also the Good Governance code, the health and safety regulations and data protection rules have been updated but require a vigilance from the board of management to keep up to date. This puts an extra workload on the board and this sometimes creates pressure on the board members. It can be very difficult to find the right balance between work and family commitments and find time for voluntary organisations like CAN.

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

Servaas Dodebier,

Chairperson

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.



They say that I have 'special needs'  
And while that's partly true,  
The needs that matter most to me,  
Are the same ones you have too.  
I need to be accepted,  
I need friends that make me smile,  
I need a chance to learn and grow,  
Feeling valued all the while,  
Sure, I need some extra help,  
And some things I can't do,  
But I hope you'll see beyond all that,  
Inside, I'm just like you.

.....  
*April Vernon, Living by Faith*



**FEARLESS HOMESCHOOL**

## Impact in 2018

The following is a summary of activities undertaken by our organisation during 2018.



### **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 Month 2018**

This was marked by displaying a sign to raise awareness of Autism on Wexford County Council's Welcome Wall on the quay in Wexford town from April 1<sup>st</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>.



Rowe St. Church in Wexford town was lit up blue for the duration of April as well as the Dunbrody Famine Ship in New Ross. Both are very prominent features in their respective towns and we hope that it ignited a conversation within the general public.

April 24<sup>th</sup> – We facilitated a “What is Autism” Talk in New Ross Library. And repeated the same talk in Wexford Library on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Both talks were really well attended and served as an introduction to Autism.



April 27<sup>th</sup> – we held a Nutrition & Autism in the Ferrycarrig Hotel in Wexford. This talk was facilitated by Orla McLaughlin from Health by Orla and we discussed the sensory issues surrounding the diet of a child on the spectrum as well as practical tips on how to include vitamin and mineral rich food into their diet.



### Summer Camps 2018

A number of summer camps were held during August.

*CAN Summer Soccer camp* took place in Scoil Mhuire Coolcotts in Wexford with 2 x FAI coaches. 12 children participated in three days of soccer and games and great fun was had. We sourced “CAN Soccer Star” t-shirts from another community group – The Cornmarket Project in Wexford.



*CAN Rugby Summer Camp* took place also in Scoil Mhuire Coolcotts, Wexford where the kids were delighted to be coached by Leinster's Disability Officer Corey Carthy and received a stunning medal and t-shirt on completion.



**CAN Surf Camp 2018** took place over 2 days in August where we had 40 kids participating on each day. The Surf Shack in Curracloe plays a really special role in encouraging our kids to challenge their fears and achieve their potential and the Summer Camp was a firm favourite for a lot of our families.



## **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.

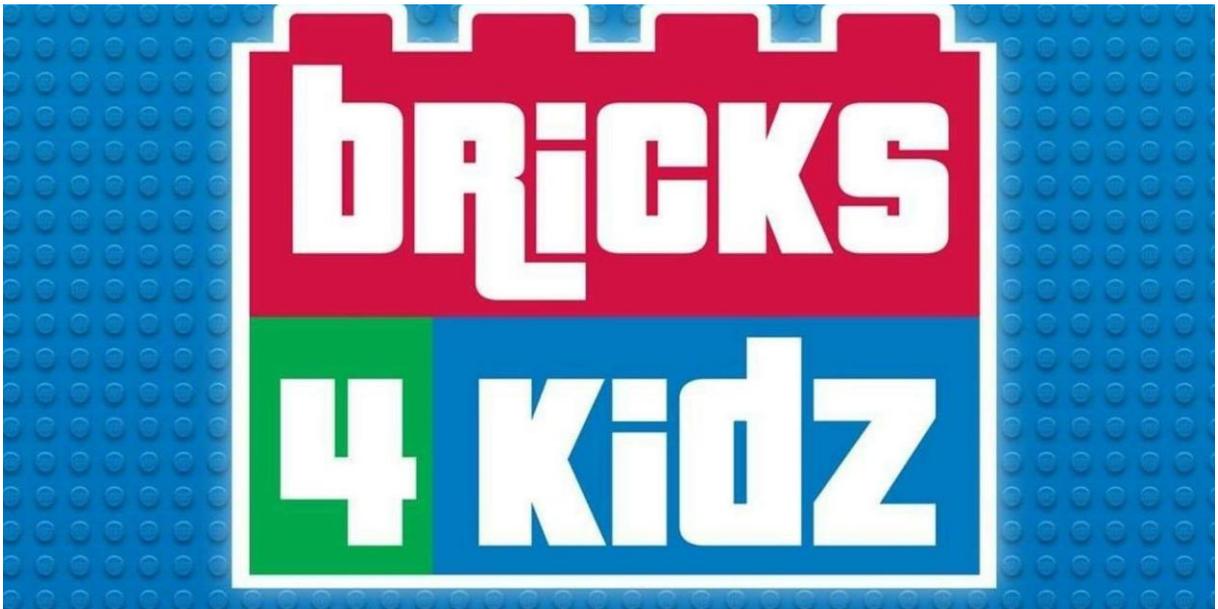
## **Horse Riding**

CAN Members enjoyed no less than 80 equine assisted therapy sessions during 2018 at the Railway Yard in Duncormick. Again, thanks to funding we were able to facilitate so much more sessions this year and all 80 kids really enjoyed the experience.



### **Lego/Bricks 4 Kids**

Our weekly Lego Club took place in St. Mary's Secondary School in New Ross up until Summer 2018 and then in Bricks 4 Kids, Wexford from Sep 2018. Between 10-12 children benefited 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 serves as an introduction to STEM. We had approx. 28 sessions of Lego in 2018.



### **Rugby**

As well as the CAN Rugby Camp we partnered with Wexford Wanderers Rugby Club and Leinster Rugby to run a 4 week term in March/April 2018.

### **Yoga**

The kids enjoyed weekly Yoga sessions with Kool Kidz Yoga in Wexford for 2 x terms (12 sessions) throughout 2018.

## **Drama**

Weekly drama classes with Shine Bright Theatre took place in Wexford with a younger and older group. There was a max of 6 in each class and the kids thoroughly enjoyed the imaginative and make believe aspect of drama. 2 terms = 12 sessions took place in 2018.

## **Soccer**

Weekly soccer took place in Wexford with 2 and then 4 groups being catered for. Soccer is for kids on the spectrum and their siblings aged 5+ years right up to 15 years old at the minute. Later in 2018, 2 groups became 4 with the addition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> group in Wexford and a starter group in New Ross on Friday evenings. There are 2 FAI coaches involved along with 6 volunteers and as always parent participation is welcomed and encouraged. 32 soccer sessions took place in 2018.

## **Cycling Programme**

During 2018, CAN collaborated with the Cycling Officer in Wexford County Council and once again secured a grant to run a 6 week cycling programme in Wexford town. 13 of the 16 kids involved over the 6 week programme were successful in learning to cycle and the remaining kids made great progress. Cycling is a life skill that has really boosted the confidence, particularly of the older kids, and is improving kid's physical fitness.

## **Forest School**



CAN ran a Family Forest School in 2018 and again it was based in the Irish National Heritage Park. 20 people attended the one day session where they foraged, built camp fires, toasted marshmallows and learned about insects and bugs.

## Little Friends

Our fortnightly play group for younger children aged 3-5 yrs continued throughout 2018. 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 is open to kids newly diagnosed or awaiting a diagnosis. 12 sessions took place in 2018.

## 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.

## Tekcentral

Tekcentral in Taghmon became a firm favourite with our members again this year. Thanks to funding we received from the National Lottery we were able to continue with weekly Coding classes over the course of 27 weeks with 10 kids attending weekly as well as 3 Gaming Days which were held over the year.



### 3D Archery

3D Archery in New Ross facilitated a family session for CAN and 40 people thoroughly enjoyed it.



### IOAC

The International Outdoor Adventure Centre in Taggart was home to 5 events in 2018. The kids got to try their hand at Archery, Kayaking, High Ropes, and Team Challenges. 50 kids benefitted from these activities and it was a great opportunity to try out new activities and develop new interests.





## 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. This year we even incorporated a quiet space if the kids felt overwhelmed. We had Shine Bright Theatre providing a puppet show and face painting, a bouncy castle and an inflatable archery game.



## Easter Egg Hunt



CAN Annual Easter Egg Hunt took place at the Irish National Heritage Park on Easter Sunday 2018. 40 children and their families thoroughly enjoyed this tailor made Easter Egg Hunt which is facilitated solely for CAN members by the fabulous staff at the Heritage Park.

## Santa Train



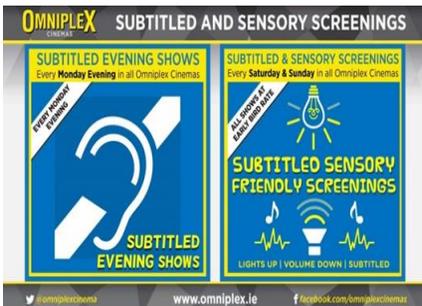
In December, CAN organized a Santa Train Experience for over 40 member families. This was done in conjunction with Wexford Winterland and this ensured that families could experience a festive activity in an autism friendly manner. It was a lovely event and every child received a selection box when they departed the train.

## Surfing

In partnership with the Surf Shack in Curracloe, CAN organized 4 days of surfing sessions for members as well as a very successful 2 day surf camp in August. In all, over 50 children benefitted and the parents enjoyed it too.

## 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. CAN subsidized 12 sensory screenings in 2018.



## Sibshop

We held a sibshop with Shannon Eidman from Scope Therapy Services which focused on siblings on children with ASD. 6 siblings attended this workshop and there was very positive feedback from attendees. It was a great opportunity for siblings of children on the spectrum to learn a little more about Autism and speak about their own experiences.



## Claymazing

CAN held 2 Claymazing workshops. A Peter Rabbit themed one and a Spongebob themed one. Claymazing provide an art and creative class working with quick drying clay. 24 kids benefitted from these sessions.



## **Golf**

CAN kids enjoyed a Golf taster session at Rosslare Golf Club in County Wexford and it was a particular hit with the older kids.

## **Wells House Celebration Day**

CAN was delighted to be invited by Wells House to their Celebration Day in June 2018. This day was complementary and 80 people from CAN attended and enjoyed a wide range of activities including a tasty BBQ.

## **Cupcake Decorating**

Award-winning Jenny's Cupcakes in Wexford town facilitated 2 x cupcake decorating workshops for CAN members and they were a great success.



## Governance

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

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

Our Designated Child Liaison and Welfare Person during 2018 was Board member Chantel Johnson.

During 2018, 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.

CAN has strived to build our capacity and knowledge in areas such as best practice and policy development. CAN is also on the journey to complying with the Governance Code.

The Board undertook training with the Carmichael Centre and individual board members also underwent training on the new GDPR regulations. CAN registered with the local Public Participation Network (PPN).

CAN was also represented at an information session run by the Charity Regulator in Waterford.

## Talks

As previously stated CAN delivered a talk on Autism to the general public in New Ross and Wexford Libraries.

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

- Nutrition & Autism
- Managing Challenging Behaviour x 2 workshops.
- Toilet Training with Step by Step Consulting.

In addition, CAN also paid the room rental for Autism Irelands parenting course in St. Michael's Hall, Green St., Wexford. This course ran over a period of 8 weeks.



## Parent/Carer Activities

- CAN successfully attained funding from the WWETB Adult & Community Education programme to run a Photography course for parents/carers in CAN and it was so successful, they put together a photography exhibition called “Images of Autism” which was launched in Wexford Library in August 2018 by local photographer Jim Campbell and was attended by the Mayor of Wexford – Tony Dempsey.



The photographs were so well received that the exhibition was produced as a 2019 calendar and were in turn all sold out.



- WWETB funding also provided a Health & Wellbeing course for parents/carers over a period of 8 weeks and a Christmas Crafts course which was a lovely creative activity for parents to share in the run up to Christmas.

## Achievements in 2018

*Social & Community Enterprise Award Winners 2018* – Cottage Autism Network were delighted to be nominated for this prestigious award but were absolutely thrilled to win on the night.



*Nominee in South East Radio Sports Star Awards* – CAN's Soccer 4 Fun group has been in operation for over 4 years and we were delighted to have been shortlisted for this major award. Being nominated in itself served as great awareness building with lots of other sports clubs in attendance on the night.



*Crossabeg AFC -*



Crossabeg AFC have always been a huge supporter of CAN and we were absolutely delighted when they included our logo to the front of their new soccer jerseys for 2018. Such a fabulous way to highlight Autism across the sporting community.

*Wexford vs Galway* – CAN were lucky enough to receive a permit for a bucket collection outside Innovate Wexford Park for the Wexford vs Galway SHC game in Summer 2018. We had great help from parents, volunteers and board members alike and received a wonderful welcome from everyone as well as raising some funds for CAN.

## Public Support

Many thanks to all the organisations that have supported us in any way during the year.  
These include:

Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board Community Education Programme

Wexford ICA

Wexford Local Development

Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts in Wexford

T.E Laboratories

Celtic Linen

Plein Air Committee – Arts in the Open

Sports Active Wexford

## Challenges Ahead

The last year has seen CAN grow and develop as an organisation. We have increased our membership, built relationships with schools and liased with other organisations in the hope that we can better or ability to support families.

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. Also to maintain the levels of quality of our activities and supports when the need can sometimes outweigh the provided.

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.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, 2018 has seen our membership stabilise to about 130 families. Our activities have developed and expanded and our aim is to build on this success in 2019 so that more families can feel part of the network, have a voice and build the capacity of our members. During 2019, we hope to develop our activities particularly for older children/young adults on the Autism Spectrum including a mentorship programme whereby the older kids can come and volunteer with us. We hope to set Wexford on the path of becoming an Autism Friendly town and we also hope to develop an awards scheme for local businesses and organisations who go above and beyond to make their places more inclusive.

## Contact Information

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG  
Taghmon Action Group,  
Taghmon,  
Co. Wexford

**Tel** 087-1035355

Website: [www.cottageautismnetwork.com](http://www.cottageautismnetwork.com)

Email: [info@cottageautismnetwork.com](mailto:info@cottageautismnetwork.com)

Or [cottageautism@gmail.com](mailto:cottageautism@gmail.com)

Facebook: Cottage Autism Network (CAN)

