

Cottage Autism Network - Annual Report 2022



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### Chairperson's Address

2022 has been another amazing year in the CAN calendar. The activities we have organized or have been involved in have raised both the awareness of autism and our value as an organisation in Co. Wexford. We are very grateful to each and every one of the children and families within CAN who put their trust in us to provide meaningful and beneficial activities for their families. We are also extremely grateful for our member's constant support and encouragement.

CAN has always, and still is centred on its members and we are delighted that we maintained our membership throughout 2022 and gained new members. We are extremely grateful and thankful to have you and your family involved in our organisation and we will strive throughout 2023 and beyond to create and promote a more inclusive society for all as well as helping to make new memories and experiences for you and your families. Our membership has grown from 196 last year to 296 this year.

With such a large membership and a projection that this will grow going into 2023, we need to increase our volunteer base going forward. Our activities are increasing and we would like to keep it at the present level, but also increase them. This will not be possible without help from our volunteers.

The highlight of the year was our conference that was held in May in the Talbot hotel. It took planning, persuasion and a lot of messages to organise! But we got there. I would like to personally thank our subcommittee that came on board to help us organise the event, and the time they gave was really appreciated. The conference was a huge success and as a board we are very proud to have delivered it to CAN members and Co. Wexford

Wexford as a county has become more informed about Neurodiversity. With inclusion and awareness, we have become a much more open community. It is a positive step forward for inclusion and hopefully that momentum continues throughout 2023 and beyond.

I would like to personally thank my fellow board members and their incredible dedication to CAN. It has been such a busy year and we have achieved so much. Thank you to our volunteers that have helped throughout the year, our facilitators without whom our activities would not be possible and to all of you that have been involved in CAN during 2022.

**Louise Fitzpatrick - Chairperson**

### Governance

Our Board met approximately every six weeks.

Our designated child liaison and welfare person for 2022 was Joanne Barry.

During 2022 C.A.N has implemented and complied with the charity governance code.

### Activities

While our weekly activities are paid for by parents they are subsidised by C.A.N at a rate of 50% of the cost of the event, allowing parents to make a nominal contribution.

All of our facilitators and volunteers that have access to children are Garda vetted by C.A.N through the Carlow Volunteer Centre.

Our activities are fully insured and we recruit facilitators 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. This is a huge benefit for parents/guardians too as they are given the opportunity to chat and develop friendships with other parents. Numbers are usually kept small in our groups to maximise participation and keep the environment as sensory friendly and calm as possible.



## Children & Teen Activities

### Swimming

We were delighted to hold 44 sessions in Wexford swimming pool with 395 members attending. The parents and children's feedback on this activity has always been so positive.

### The Railway Yard – Duncormick

A regular activity that's always popular amongst our members, 2022 saw a total of 427 children and teens attending 58 sessions of horse riding with Martina in the Railway Yard in Duncormick.



### Therapeutic Horse Riding

Our sessions with Olive and Dave have been a huge success. The children have really enjoyed the relaxed and calming atmosphere around the yard with Blossom and Daisy, resident pigs, chickens, Marley and Cooper; Olive's faithful dogs and the resident cats Tilly, Hunter and Blue. We have run 42 sessions with 433 children.



### Soccer 4 Fun

Soccer 4 fun wasn't as popular in 2022 as it was in previous years with only 6 sessions being held over the year. 53 children enjoyed these sessions but unfortunately we couldn't keep facilitating these as the coach needed more people to efficiently run the session.

## Activities at Leisure Max

Leisure Max is a local business who facilitates CAN regularly. During 2022 our younger age group had 4 Bowling and Lego play sessions which 60 children enjoyed, and also 6 sessions of play and Laser tag where 97 members came along for fun evenings.

There were also some sessions solely for the Teen Group with 12 teens enjoying the Laser Tag session, and 90 teens competing for top spot during the 9 Teen Bowling evenings.



## CAN Youth Club

February 2022 saw the beginning of youth club for CAN's teen group. Held on Monday evenings in Rosslare Community & Sports Centre the youth club sessions allows up to 15 teenagers to come together, kick back and unwind. The resources at the centre both inside and outside give the teens plenty of activities to do. Birthdays are celebrated with cake, summer sees water fights with parents, winter evenings host movie nights and arts, crafts and baking feature in the club regularly. It's a great outlet for the teens to meet up and friendships have been formed and bonded since the club began.



### First Aid

5 of CAN's teenagers took part in a basic First Aid course held in the Order of Malta's base in Wexford. This was held over four weeks and consisted of learning about slings and bandages, CPR, Choking and recovery. At the end of the course the teens received a certificate of completion.



### Easter Egg Hunt

The National Heritage Park facilitated us once again with the annual Easter egg hunt held on Easter Sunday. 56 members took to the park to find all the clues and come away with their chocolate egg.



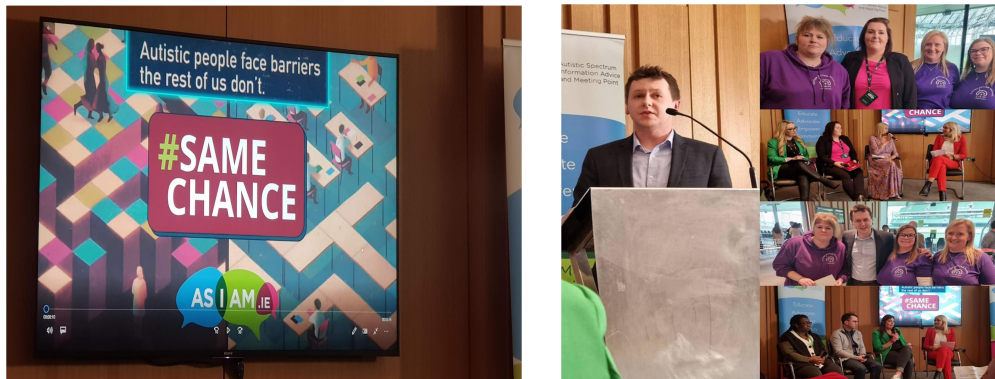
### Summer Surfing

2022 was another great season for our surfing sessions. Jack-Tim and the guys in the “Surf Shack” had an amazing 16 weeks of sessions with 105 children.



### Aslam Same Chance Report

We were invited to Dublin by Aslam to listen to their findings on the same chance report. We met Adam Harris and Amanda McGuinness which was great so close to the conference and it has remained a positive relationship.





### Sib Shop

Sibshop is a workshop for siblings of children with special needs. It's important to recognise the importance of siblings as well, so this workshop which was held in July, gave the children an opportunity to get together and chat about some of the difficulties and some positives of having a brother or sister with additional needs. We were delighted to run this with SibShop Ireland for 6 of our member's amazing siblings.



### Kayaking

It was a glorious sunny Sunday that saw 20 CAN members descend on IOAC for an hours' worth of Kayaking. The children were given their safety instructions before heading off on their kayaks and taking to the lake. The little island in the middle of the lake proved very popular for some jumping into the water, and it was heart-warming to see some of the children help some others out when they got stuck in the reeds.



### Cúl Camp 2022

A popular activity in the CAN Diary, Cul Camp ran from August 2<sup>nd</sup> through to August 4<sup>th</sup> in Chadwicks Wexford Park.

This year for the first time, some of our older members were on hand to assist with coaching the younger groups. As always, it was a jam packed three days with lots of coaches and volunteers spending time putting everyone through their paces in an inclusive and fun way. 180 children left Wexford Park tired and happy with their drinks and cones of sweets from Mag's Jelly Heaven.



### FAI Inclusion Soccer Camp

2022 saw CAN team up with Wexford FAI to bring the first inclusion soccer camp to Ferrycarrig Park. 80 of our members and their siblings attended this 3-day camp which, while somewhat hindered by weather, proved to be popular with each child coming away from the camp with their kit, bag and soccer ball.

The older members helped out with coaching again with this camp which we hope would build their confidence and keep them involved with the CAN activities.





### Summer Party 2022

78 members attended our summer party held in St Mary's GAA grounds in Maudlintown. There were lots of fun activities inside the building with the inflatable obstacle course, games, and ground obstacle course. The children enjoyed the puppet show, balloon models and tattoos from Shine Bright, and devoured the finger food brought in from Sharky's. Before the day finished up, Big Noisy 99 Ice cream van popped by to provide the members with some lovely, whipped cones or slushies. A successful day was had, and everyone enjoyed themselves before getting back into the school routine.



### Build A Bear

During the Halloween break our members had an afternoon with Dawn from Craft Central where they got to pick a bear, stuff it, and design some clothes for their bear of choice. Much fun was had by all.



### Sow it to Grow It

The brainchild of board member Paulene, this programme aimed at teens, seen 8 of the aged 11+ members come together in a fashion similar to a transition year mini company whereby they went to the garden centre, picked their own vegetables and headed to the community allotment in Enniscorthy to plant their seeds. Over the course of 6 months the teens tended to their vegetables to ensure they grew, harvested them when they were ready and set up a stall at Enniscorthy's Farmers Market to sell them. Any profits made were divided amongst the 8 green-fingered 'lot'.

The initiative made it onto RTE's Nationwide, and we were delighted to see our members, parents and volunteers showing their great work on national television.







We are delighted that our "Sow it to Grow it program" was chosen as one of the lucky recipients of the [#rtetoyshowappeal](#) 💕💕. The money from the Toy show helped with equipment, seeds, plants and the general upkeep of whatever the teens needed for the allotment.



### Make your own Sensory Dough

In October, Amy from Little Kneaders ran a "make your own sensory dough" class for our members in Barntown Community Centre. 13 children attended this session.



### CLAYMAZING

Claymazing classes have always been a popular activity, and so during the Halloween break, Helen was back with us to facilitate 18 children in Barntown community Centre where Halloween gonks and fairy doors were made.



### Designer Minds

In November, 14 of our 5-11 year olds and 6 Teens took part in a Robotics camp in Barntown Community Centre. The idea was to work in pairs to engineer and build a chariot for sphere robots which were then raced which resulted in a successful and fun camp.

### Little Minds

We worked with Lydia from Little Minds to bring a 4-week mindfulness programme to Barntown Community Centre where topics included learning what feelings and emotions were, some tips for self-care, meditation and storytelling and also included some creative art and games. 19 of our younger members and 5 teens took part in the programme and we hope that they got something meaningful from it.



### Cookery Classes

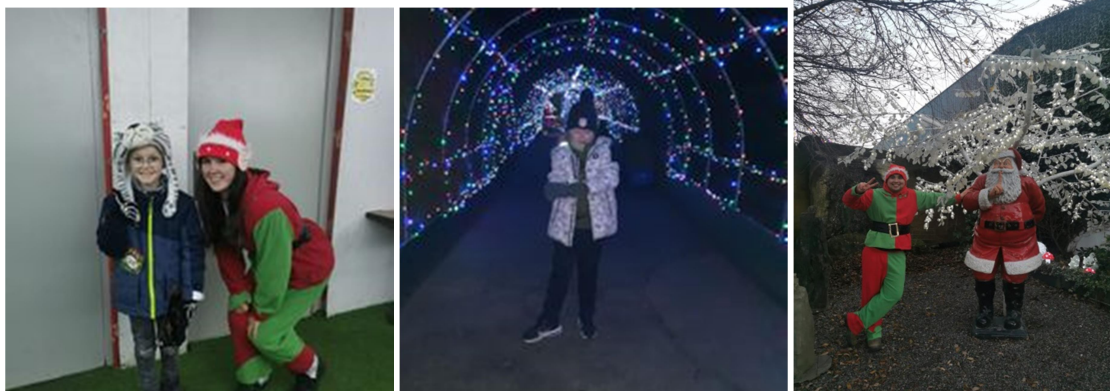
Tara from Bella's Kitchen facilitated two 4-week sessions with CAN in the TAG Centre in Taghmon. The sessions saw 31 of our 5-7 year olds, 8-11 year olds and 12+ year olds learn how to bake buns, make pizzas, cookies, pancakes, crispy chicken, and decorate cakes. The sow it to grow it group also learned how to cook using the vegetables they grew themselves on the allotment.





### Santa Claus Kia Ora

Our families had an amazing night at Kia Ora Mini Farm winter wonderland experience. Thank you to Pdraig and his team who made the evening so special. 64 families went and 149 children received a present from Santa.



### Santa Claus Leisuremax

We had an absolutely fantastic evening visiting Santa and playing laser tag. We had 22 families attend Leisure Max. Thanks as always to all the staff for making it such a great evening.



Parent / Carer activities

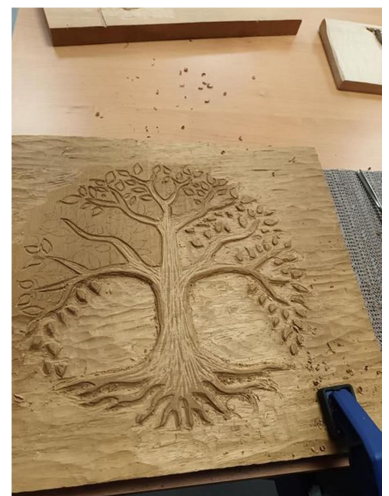
Coffee Morning

Coffee Mornings are held fortnightly in Kelly's Café Drinagh. The coffee mornings are open to everyone to attend and we encourage parents, carers, grandparents and anyone who is seeking information or support to come along.



Parents Woodworking course

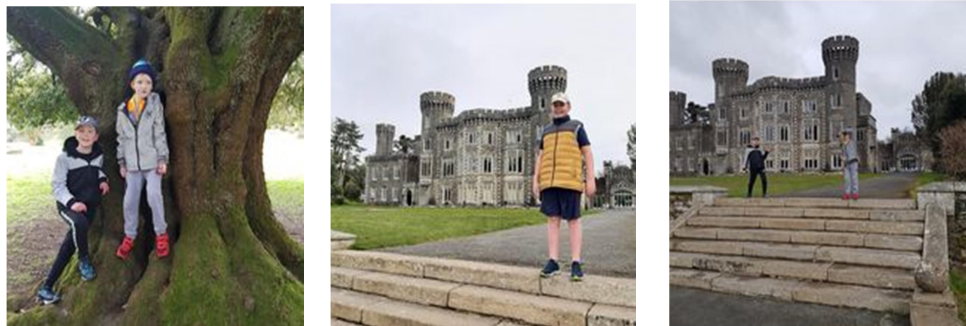
Our CAN Parents/Carers finished a woodcarving course in December. Amazing pieces were carved out by the parents. Huge thanks to WWETB for their support and thank you to Paddy, their tutor. Well done everyone.





### Family Days

We held family days out in Johnstown Castle, The heritage park and Secret Valley Wildlife park. These are a great opportunity for our parents to meet each other in social settings but also a way for us to give back to the members.



### Chocolate Making

A dark November's evening was made brighter for 8 parents as they made their way to Zaeire in Bridgetown for chocolate making with Leigh. The hot chocolate and coffee that was provided was very welcome as they set upon making truffles and tasting the different chocolates. While the presentation of the finished result may be questionable, the taste most certainly wasn't as they all left with some yummy treats at the end.





## Achievements

### New Office

We moved into our new office in Redmond Square at the beginning of February 2022. The space compared to our old office is amazing and it's also brilliant to have the office located in the heart of Wexford town.

### CAN Conference

In 2021 Cottage Autism Network received a generous sum from the Keane family as their charity of choice after raffling their home. The board wanted to do something special with this money, and so it was decided that we would host the South East's first ever Autism Conference. On May 15<sup>th</sup> 2022, 150 delegates attended on the day, many of these being members of CAN.

We managed to secure a fantastic line-up of speakers with Adam Harris talking about growing up autistic and founding AsIAm, Amanda McGuinness speaking as a mother of 3 autistic children who was also diagnosed with autism in adulthood, James Northridge demonstrated how assistive technology can help those with additional needs, Marie Byrne gave an inspiring talk on empowering and educating parents and enabling them to build bridges of understanding between Autistic and Neurotypical perspectives. Dolores, David and Allan from Financial Wellbeing advised on setting up a trust for a child with additional needs.

There were vendors on the day selling their products or speaking about services they provide. Main sponsors on the day were Celtic Linen, Adam Boyce Carpentry and McCauleys. Feedback on the event was amazing from speakers, vendors and attendees. It was a lot of hard work to bring this to the people of the South-East, but we are delighted that we were able to do so and that it was a huge success.







## My Kids Time

December 2022 saw MyKidsTime choosing CAN as the winning charity for April. Thanks to everyone who voted for us. In April 2023 MyKidsTime featured Cottage Autism Network across their social network sites. It was fantastic to get the exposure from such a great organisation.



## Volunteer of the Year nomination

In October we received the news that our very own Paulene Devereux had been shortlisted in the Children & Youth category of 2022 Volunteer Ireland award. Paulene gave up so much of her time getting CAN's Teen Programme up and running along with working full time and being mum and wife. Earlier we mentioned the Sow it to Grow it programme which would not have been possible without Paulene securing the allotment and guiding the teens along the way, helping them to gain the confidence to grow and sell their produce. Paulene is also the driving force behind the youth club and the many activities that are planned each month.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> the Board attended the Volunteer Ireland award ceremony in Dublin. Although Paulene didn't win the award, it is an honour that she was nominated and we're delighted that the work she does didn't go unrecognised. We at Cottage Autism Network are extremely proud of Paulene and grateful for what she has done for our teenagers.



## First Aid

Some of our Fabulous Volunteers who received their First Aid Responder certificates. Thank you to everyone that gave up 3 Saturdays in a row to complete this course.



## Fundraising

We are always so thankful for all the organisations and local businesses that think of us when doing fundraisers. We rely heavily on fundraisers throughout the year, to keep CAN going and we would like to thank the following for their donations :

Staff of Wexford Council Council - €500

South East Radio- 12 days of Christmas - €1,000

Bridget's Sweet shop - €100

Deceased Estate of Moira Browne who kindly donated her estate to local Wexford charities. This is such an amazing gesture and we are so grateful that Moira thought of CAN - €26,560.23

South East Bikers Jumble sale - €1,908

Kent Stainless held a Christmas jumper day in work - €1,350

B-Prepared combined fundraiser. We raised €6,677.59 with each organisation receiving €2,225.86



### Challenges Ahead

2022 has once again seen CAN grow and develop. Membership numbers have increased again this year and as we continue to grow, we are also putting ourselves out in the wider community in terms of giving talks in schools and colleges and attending Autism fairs.

A challenge for CAN as we grow is that the workload for the board continues to increase. Therefore we encourage parents to consider a role on the board to spread this workload and ensure that we continue to deliver our great service to members.

An additional challenge is to be able to continue to retain our current volunteers while also attracting new ones to help expand our programmes and initiatives.



### Conclusion

2022 was a hugely successful year for CAN. We introduced some new activities, and kept the regular ones that are proving to be popular. As an organisation we have received fantastic support from our members and from the public, and we're looking forward to building on these relationships through 2023 and beyond. Future plans include;

- Continuing to encourage the older children / young adults on the autism spectrum to volunteer at events in a mentorship programme.
- Implement a mental health and wellbeing programme for 10-19 year olds as they navigate life and emotions from puberty onwards
- Continue with existing activities for children and parents.
- Increase our volunteer numbers.
- Build our profile and promote awareness.

C.A.N



**THANK YOU**

There is a long list of people who without their dedication C.A.N could not continue to offer so many activities:

- Kelly's café for hosting our coffee mornings.
- Our facilitators for all the activities who understand that our sessions are different from regular sessions and accommodate us so well.
- Michelle Cogley for giving up her time to take photographs for our social media pages.
- Aileen in Leisuremax that goes above and beyond for us every month
- Our volunteers that come every week to activities
- Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board Community Education Programme
- Thank you to each and every one of you. Members and non-members who have given your time to C.A.N and our families.

**Contact Information**

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Facebook: Cottage Autism Network (CAN)

Twitter: @Wexford\_CAN

Instagram: cottageautism

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



**Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG**  
(A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

**Detailed profit and loss account**  
**Financial year ended 31st December 2022**

	2022	2021
	€	€
<b>Turnover</b>		
Donations & fundraisers	17,460	48,537
ICB GRANT	3,622	-
Membership	5,802	3,883
Can conference income	10,169	-
HSE Grants	3,030	-
WWETB grant	-	1,500
Wexford County Council Grant	1,250	-
Toy Show Appeal	5,060	-
Donation Moira Browne (deceased estate)	26,560	-
Members contributions	18,787	15,903
	91,740	69,823
<b>Administrative expenses</b>		
Meeting, travel and event expenses	4,513	3,640
Insurance	2,898	1,392
Can conference expenses	9,543	-
Trips and activities for kids	50,955	42,212
Stationery and advertising	3,700	2,363
Telephone	646	1,002
Workshops and seminars	791	5,789
Accountancy fees	1,538	1,538
Bank charges	92	76
Sundry expenses	726	711
Depreciation of tangible assets	909	656
	76,311	59,379
<b>Profit for the financial year</b>	15,429	10,444