

## **OASIS AGM January 8<sup>th</sup> 2008**

Report of Chair: Voirrey Carr

*The minutes of last year's AGM appeared in the March 2007 Newsletter. The guest speaker was Glenys Jones (lecturer and researcher in the Autism Team of Studies at the University of Birmingham)*

It has been another busy year for OASIS - lots more library books ordered and catalogued by Verity, many great Playdays organised by Josey and well attended despite awful weather throughout most of the summer, new leaflets produced in time for the Nuts and Bolts Conference for Parents of Children with SEN in May, web training undertaken by several members of the committee led by Anne and Carolyn and website up and running by Christmas – a fantastic achievement. A very well attended and happy day out to Legoland with a coach paid for by OASIS and also a concert for children with ASD and their families was a sell out at the Jacqueline du Pre buildings in Oxford. We are in a sound financial position – an excellent base on which to build.

Tonight is a significant night in that 3 very valuable members are leaving the committee. In order to put it into context, I thought I would look back at the history of OASIS. A trawl through the archives shows that OASIS was originally called MIDAS, but changed its name to reflect its desire to be independent. The society began in September 1991 with an opening balance of £54 and this was supplemented by donations from the Manor School in Didcot, Didcot Brownies and Caroline Simmonds. There were 34 members. The aim was then, as now, to disseminate information and provide broad support to families affected by ASD. The committee of 5 comprised Julie Fisher, Bronwen Hocking, Jane Kitchen, Caroline Worth and Caroline Simmonds, four of the five were parents of children with ASD. Meetings were held in people's houses and at various play venues and then finally in rented halls. All of the early minutes are in Caroline's handwriting as she was secretary for most of her years with OASIS. She was at that time Advisory HT for ASD and could therefore sometimes use her influence to get some typing and copying done for the society and even drive a minibus to playdays! What strikes me now in reading these old minutes is how labour intensive it all was in those days: no home pcs. Caroline is noted in June 1993 as having volunteered to address the envelopes: no sticky labels. There was a £150 grant from OCC for library books and Caroline raised more money by talking to the Rotary Club, holding a dinner dance in Shilton and then a crafts for Christmas event...and so it has gone on. Caroline has continued to be one of our chief fundraisers and the organiser of so many wonderful playdays: in recent years the Sunningwell School of Art day at Easter and the Shilton playday are high spots on the OASIS calendar. Caroline is the only member of that first committee still to be on the committee – now in her 16<sup>th</sup> year – and although standing down she has typically said she will go on organising some of those key playdays and helping us with fundraising. I shall really miss Caroline's support

on the Committee: she always has an idea of what we should do next and always has a pragmatic and practical way of describing how to get there. Her professional experience has been of immense value to the committee and many parents who were involved in OASIS in those early days remember with enormous warmth the way in which Caroline came into school and helped teachers to understand how to help CYPP with ASD. Caroline retains that sense of humour and interest in people which makes her a natural with CYPP with ASD. She has been utterly committed to supporting OASIS since those very earliest days and I am convinced it would not have got off the ground and stayed in existence without her support. It was certainly Caroline who voted me onto the Committee as Vice Chair in 1996 and I became Chair a year later so it has been my privilege to work with Caroline on the Committee for 12 years. She has been a true friend to me and to OASIS.

The two other Committee members who are stepping down tonight have played a really key role in helping OASIS to become more organised and to reach its membership more easily. Karen Seymour began to be proactive in her support when she felt that the mail outs to members were not very efficient. She had the ICT skills to create a database and sticky labels... and overnight we were able to make sure that all members received communications when they should. Behind that simple statement lie hours of work in putting together a database and maintaining it, becoming expert in data protection law and printing out labels when they are needed urgently (which is always the case). Thanks must also go to Karen's husband Des, who has also often provided technical backup! Karen has also given individual members and groups at meetings and conferences a good deal of support in understanding how to introduce children to a restricted diet.

Anne Brookes joined the committee more recently but she too has had a huge impact on OASIS. Anne felt that she could improve our newsletter - and she did - creating a very full and readable document which has been much appreciated. We had long wanted to try and get a website going again and it is thanks to Anne that this has been achieved. Anne found the right person to help us, organised training and advised on the design and this has led to the successful launch of the website, now very ably managed by Carolyn Kendrick. It is a big step up from those early days in 1992 when it was difficult to get things typed and, again, OASIS was reliant on Caroline Simmonds to edit a newsletter.

So ... OASIS has moved a long way since 1992. It has become more professional in that it has been able to harness new technology, but many of the things which need doing now are the same as they were then. We need people with ideas of what is needed, people who can spare a bit of time to talk to others who have just had a child diagnosed, book a speaker for one of our monthly meetings, be host at a playday, put information on the website or help to raise some money... OASIS has gone from strength to strength since 1992 because there have always been people willing to step in and help out a bit. It's always

understood that we are all under stress and that there will be times when people can't attend, BUT by some miracle, we have kept going. Tonight I'm hoping that we can ensure another good year for OASIS by putting together a team of people to help to run the society for another year ... whilst saying a big thank you to Caroline, Karen and Anne for all that they have done for us.