

## Letter from a Parent

I guess that, if you are reading this you are probably thinking that your child, or a child in your family has an autism spectrum disorder or autism spectrum condition as it is now sometimes more realistically called. You may or may not yet have a formal diagnosis but you want to know more. You are probably worried about what the future may hold for your child and you have begun to think about what this will mean for you and your family. It is impossible to generalise: each child is different and so it is not surprising that professionals are not able to give us answers to the questions we most want to ask. It can seem very lonely: people try to cheer you up with comments about how their own (normal) children developed in very similar ways and you desperately need to talk to people who understand that what you are experiencing is not 'normal'.

For the past fifteen or so years, I have been Chairperson of OASIS: Oxfordshire Autistic Society for Information and Support, because it was there for me when I needed it and because it seems to me vital that, once families know that they have a child with ASD, they are enabled to make contact with others locally who understand what they are going through.

OASIS is run by parents for parents. It started because a group of parents of children with autism decided that it would be good to be able to meet and share their worries and tips with each other. Over the years, OASIS has got more professional, organising regular meetings and conferences, building up a big library of books for members to borrow, planning play opportunities for our children in the holidays, but essentially it is a society which responds to what parents want.

I can remember being quite nervous about going to my first meeting - not sure if my son's Asperger's syndrome would be in any way similar to the experiences of other families - would our needs be too slight? Too great? I immediately found that this really was not an issue. I learnt such a lot from attending meetings and always took away something which was useful. We attended every playday and had opportunities to go to all sorts of places which I would not have found without OASIS. It was always a comfort, too, to know that however difficult my child's behaviour, everyone else had experienced something similar –or worse!-so it was actually possible to relax and make friends.

I've stayed involved as Chair of OASIS for over fifteen years because I do believe very strongly that we all cope better with ASD if we are able to pool our knowledge and support each other. I do urge you to get in touch with OASIS if you would like to chat about how things are for you and your family. There is no necessity to attend meetings but you will, I am sure, find that *it's good to talk!*

**Voirrey Carr, Chair, OASIS 07900144493**