

Chairperson's report – Laura Daley Monday 25 July 2022.

Has it really been 12 months?? Where has the year gone.

I would just like to acknowledge our committee.

Hayley – who knows everyone one and everything worth knowing in Coffs Harbour. And juggles it all beautifully while mothering her 3 beautiful kids.

Michelle – who is the voice of reason and has been the stalwart of the committee since the very beginning. She also keeps our fb presence ticking along. Thank you for staying with us, despite your baby now being 21.

Chantal – our long-suffering treasurer who has spent hours on the phone to ACNC getting us organized and ready to roll. Juggling it all with her beautiful two kids, and her hubby who travels.

Sharon – our numbers genius – who fits us in her busy life with grown up Nelson, her hubby and other family caring commitments.

Narelle – who is our zoom champion, and gives valuable advice from the sidelines, and fits us in with her family and SES commitments.

And I'd like to acknowledge my family, my Henry, my Spencer and Greg, who acknowledge my passion for Autism and helping people.

This year we've had to change the way we worked, partly due to COVID, partly due to volunteer burn out. We've had our own challenges and transitions with our own families which is meant we've had to work smarter, not harder.

A resurgence of Covid meant that we couldn't plan our annual Xmas party for families. So we developed a pizza meal deal with the Support of Nathan from Domino's Pizzas, and were able to give families a night off, and a bit of Christmas Cheer. We encouraged our families to reach out to us via email, to tell us what supports and interests their families had, so that we could try and help support them better. This led to us receiving some, at times, heartbreaking emails about people being socially isolated, with school kids not being invited to birthday parties or sleep overs, and young adults and adults feeling disconnected, with no friends, or for some, no reason to leave the house.

This led to us starting an ASD Adult social group, with the dynamic sister duo of Oonagh and Tullia Connor, who are both experienced support workers. This decision to have two support workers was about ensuring they were supported, and able to feel safe, and provide focus to the individuals in the group. This has been running successfully since approx. March, and is every second Thursday.

Last week, we were invited to participate in a live panel, at the Sawtell RSL. Titled, I can do this, it was about sharing supports, building connections and it was attended by approx. 80 people – a fantastic turn out.

We were invited to meet with the Independent candidate Carolyn Heise, who was running for the Federal election. She was keen to hear and speak with families about their challenges, and way to work things out. While her campaign was unsuccessful, it was wonderful to be invited, to be listened to, and we hope to share some of this feedback with the current local member.

We also worked with North Coast AFL to create a ‘Come and Try Day’ for our Autism Awareness Day event. Unfortunately after torrential rain over a number of weeks, we have had to postpone this event, but hope to hold it again in the future.

But it has been a busy year, sensory movies have continued (thanks Michelle!) and we also ran a movie night to try and encourage Adults with ASD who were unable to attend the day time social group to come along.

We also started the ball on a few exciting things:

- Autism camp – looking at holiday funding through Regional NSW to run something.
- Bus stop films- met with Bus Stop Films about how we could get them to come to Coffs Harbour.
- Advocacy movie – examined making a video about the Assisted School Travel Program to try and make the program more inclusive for regional kids with disabilities.
- Wills and Disability Trusts – put this on the agenda for future.
- Aspect High School – started discussions with Coffs Council about whether they have a suitable site for this to happen.
- Tech Addicts workshop – spoke to them about running a workshop for parents to keep teens safe online.

Plus we’ve been busy sharing information and linking people together:

- Aspect started up its playgroup in response to us advising we’d had a number of enquiries, especially through our Pizza meal deal exchange.
- Bennett support services – shared their exciting holidays that they’ve been doing.
- NDIS workshops - shared information so people could attend.

I’m so excited to see a new group and new energy keen to join the committee this year. Let’s make it another great year, and find plenty of reasons to laugh, learn and grow together.