



Trustees' Annual Report - 1st May 2022 to 30th April 2023

Reference and Administrative Information

Charity Name: MyOTAS

Charity registration number: 1184723

Registered Office: 57a Highcliffe Road, Wickford, Essex SS11 8JP

Trustees (during the above period):-

Daniel Ireland - Chair	Karen Cogger - Vice Chair	Chantelle Poulter
Jenne Seibolt	Maria Denton - Treasurer	Vacant - Secretary

About Us

The MyOTAS journey began in 2016 when a group of parents of autistic children came together to provide useful, kind and non-judgemental support to others facing similar challenges.

Since that time, we have learnt so much about the needs of young people and families and how we can best support them, and about the gaps in services and how we can work with service providers to represent the families that we support.

We were registered as a charity in 2019 and our trustees include a children's Occupational Therapist, a primary school teacher and special needs co-ordinator, an FA registered Football Coach and inclusion officer and a variety of other professionals and parents of SEN children.

We are based in Wickford Essex, and support many families from across the Basildon borough, including a number of the most disadvantaged areas. Our aim is to support families and share our knowledge wherever we can help, so we have a strong online offer, including zoom support groups, through which are able to support families across Mid and South Essex, and indeed the whole of Essex and beyond.

Aims and Objectives

Our aim is to support neurodivergent (Autism, ADHD, OCD, Dyslexia etc.) children and young people and their families within Essex, through 3 pillars of activity:

Children's activities

Family Support

Increasing awareness and acceptance within the community

Our Values

- Non-judgemental – valuing people for who they are;
- Inclusive – everyone is welcome, no diagnosis needed;
- Be kind;
- Innovative thinking – exploring new ideas and finding different ways to do things;
- Collaboration – working openly with other voluntary organisations and service providers.

We review our aims, objectives and activities each year.

This review looks at what we achieved and the outcomes of our work in the previous 12 months. The review looks at the success of each key activity and the benefits they have brought to those groups of people we are set up to help.

The review also helps us ensure our aim, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purposes.

We have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aim and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Our beneficiaries

We support neurodivergent children and young people and their families.

Trusted relationships are often difficult to form for neurodivergent young people, so we seek to build ongoing and sustainable relationships, for young people of all ages, through to independence. We have created partnerships with SAFE Essex (Charity for autistic people of all ages) and Exceptional Individuals (Recruitment and employment services for neurodivergent people) to support this pathway.

A diagnosis is not required to access our services. Some of the families requiring the most help have a child who is undiagnosed. For example, a child may be on a waiting list for assessment - waiting times for assessment have increased dramatically and in our area, timescales are currently c.18-24 months rather than the NICE guideline of 18 weeks, so this is often a critical time for support. Neurodivergent conditions are often genetic, so parents may also have their own challenges or may not see the presenting difficulties as anything unusual.

Neurodivergent people face significant health inequalities:

Life expectancy - Autistic people have significantly lower life expectancies than the rest of the population. A statement from the UK government in 2021 quotes the data reported by the British Journal of Psychiatry that autistic people will live 16 years fewer than their non-autistic peers. Another report compares the range of average life expectancy for autistic people from 39.5 years to 58 years, to the global average of 72 years.

ADHD and prison - Approx 25% of offenders have ADHD: [Takeda_ADHD-in-the-CJS-Roundtable-Report_Final.pdf](#) (adhdfoundation.org.uk)

Autism and mental health - 80% of autistic adults experience mental health issues at some point in their lives [Mental-health-autism-E-LEAFLET.pdf](#) (autistica.org.uk)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published new data that shows just 22% of autistic adults are in any kind of employment. New shocking data highlights the autism employment gap

We have:

95 regular service users

351 signed up to receive our newsletter

>1.8K members of our private parent carer support group on Facebook, with
>1.3K active members per month

Our Projects

Children's activities

Inclusive and accessible small group sessions.

Woodland Warriors – c. 20 attendees per week - plus support for accompanying parent carers. 175 children attending from May 22 to April 23.

Mindful Crafts c. 8 attendees every 2-weeks – plus support for parents and carers

Yoga – 1:1 therapy sessions offered as needed

Principles

- Low pressure – Accessible
- Support for the wider family
- Small groups for that children do not become overwhelmed
- A nominal charge is requested for some activities, but finance should never be a barrier to accessing our services, so we offer sessions for free in cases of financial hardship

Achievements

- 1104 + places offered in 2022
- Fantastic community engagement and response
- Family feedback:-
 - o 'Inclusive and really fun'
 - o 'Love that educational elements are offered but not forced'

- o 'Loved being able to participate with my child'
- o 'Calm and gentle'

Family support

Empowering parents to better understand and support their children through 1:1 support, training, face to face and online support groups, signposting to other relevant services and provision of useful resources.

- Face to face support groups - 3-25 attendees, 3 sessions per month
- Online support groups - 2-8 attendees, one session per month,
- Guest speakers - currently ad-hoc, seeking to make this a monthly programme
- Wellbeing walks -2-10 attendees, every 2 events per month
- 1:1 support - 103 families supported during May 22 to Apr 23.
- Training events - the events we have run have been fantastically well attended; 35 people signed up to most recent face to face event (charge to attend) and 100 people signed up to our last zoom event (free). We are seeking to make this a regular monthly programme.

Principles

- Providing information and support
- Every family feels informed and validated
- Encourage connection to peers
- Outreach where needed

Achievements

- 25 support meetings
- 1:1 support provided to 103 parents/carers
- Referrals from Family solutions, ECFWS, schools, GPs, Paediatricians etc.
- 5 training events - 195 places booked

Family feedback

- o 'A nice respite from daily life out in nature' (wellbeing walk)

- o 'Love being able to type questions rather than having to speak' (zoom support)
- o 'Friendly, knowledgeable and caring people who make you feel less alone'
- o 'It's nice to meet other parents/carers who totally understand what you're dealing with'.
- o 'I'm so glad I came. I always feel so much better after talking to you guys. I can feel myself relax a bit.' (parent support group)

Increasing awareness and acceptance within the community.

Supporting your Neurodiverse Child Book - we are co-authors of the 'Supporting your Neurodiverse Child' Support pack.

Commissioned by the Essex Joint Commissioning Board

C.6k copies delivered to families and professionals in Essex

National interest - 2 health and local authorities also using pack with interest from more.

Family feedback

'I have been a parent for 12 years, have hundreds of books on neurodiversity and have never seen anything of the depth and quality of this resource'

'This is answering questions that I didn't even know I needed to ask'

'I want everyone i know to read this so they can understand my son better'

Representing our charity and the needs of neurodivergent young people at a range of forums

Local in the Basildon District – carnivals, council events, Wickford voices, BasildON creative, parish and town council meetings, with our local MP etc.

Essex wide – inputting to start-well and live well strategies, members of the Essex all age autism partnership board. Close links to Essex Family Forum.

National – we are active members of:

The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition and by drawing on the lived experiences of our families, are helping to advise on national policy e.g. Mental Health Bill.

The Council for Disabled Children

The Charlie Waller Trust

Joint projects with local services and voluntary groups:

Increasing inclusivity in mainstream sporting groups

Joint training and family support events organised with SAFE charity, Send The Right Message charity, SEND in the Dengie support group, Men's Sheds (in progress)

Initiating an increased range of therapeutic activities for children through building relationships with the groups above and Peaceful Pony, Basildon Mind, Friends of Wickford Memorial Park etc.

Principles

Not apportioning blame for the current gaps and creating positive relationships

Relentlessly representing the needs of our young people and families – at a local and national level

Achievements

Joint project with Essex FA – CPD ‘Exploring Neurodiversity’ – Objective to improve inclusion within mainstream grassroots sporting groups. To be expanded to other Essex based sports groups in collaboration with Public Health and Active Essex and offered to national FA.

CEO invited to address local medical centre including GPs to improve their understanding.

Cost of living project with local estate agent to distribute £7k of funding to local low income SEND families. Undertaking training with office staff and developing resources including information sheets and social stories.

Feedback from Dr Sue Truman (NHS Manager and Primary Care Adviser) 'We recognise the importance of MyOTAS representing the needs of neurodivergent young people and their families at our strategic planning meetings and to help address health inequalities within our community by striving continuously to create and maintain powerful working relationships with all partners across the Health and Social Care system.'

Feedback from Kim Collins Children with Disabilities Lead at Family Solutions: 'I wanted to feedback from a meeting with my colleagues, we discussed the services MyOTAS is able to provide for neurodivergent young people as well as their families. Family solutions recognise the importance of the work MyOTAS do to support neurodivergent young people and their families and wanted you and your colleagues to be aware of this.'

Paula Farrow our CEO updating services, voluntary partners and families

Our offering has evolved in response to what we hear from children and their families. Formally we undertake an annual survey, and informally, everyone involved with the charity regularly attends events to hear feedback directly and plan future activities in line with these needs.

We are the only charity locally which focuses on the unique needs of neurodivergent people with no associated learning difficulties, and the particular challenges that this group face, especially with regard to mental health challenges. Rather than a disability pathway, they require support and adjustments to be able to access and be included in mainstream activities.

Financial Review

Principal Funding Sources

The principal funding sources for the charity during this year were grants from a variety of sources.

- National Lottery
- Essex Community Foundation

- Co-Op
- Arnold Clark
- BasildON Creative
- Tesco
- Essex Association Micro Tech Grant
- Tudwick Foundation
- Local Giving
- Arrun Estates via Douglas Allen Estate Agents and ECF
- Community 360
- Active Essex

In addition, we received funding towards the co-production of the Supporting Your Neurodiverse Child family support pack from the Essex Joint Commissioning Board.

Our total income in money terms was £57,742. However, although not included in our Receipts & Payments Accounts, we have calculated that the donations of services, equipment, office/storage space and volunteer time was in excess of £6,500.

Investment Policy

Aside from retaining a prudent amount in reserves each year most of the charity's funds are to be spent in the short term so there are few funds for long term investment. A review of investment policies will be taken if our income stream significantly increases.

Reserves Policy

The Management Committee has examined the charity's requirements for reserves in light of the main risks to the organisation. It has established a policy whereby the unrestricted funds not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets held by the charity should be approximately 3 months of the annual expenditure. Budgeted expenditure for 2022/23 is £55,000 and therefore the target is £14,000 in general funds. The reserves are needed to meet the working capital requirements of the charity and the Management Committee are confident that at this level they would be able to continue the current activities of the charity in the event of a significant drop in funding.

The level of reserves available to the charity as at May 2023 was £10,000 therefore falls short of this target level. Although the strategy is to continue to build reserves through planned operating surpluses, the Management Committee is well aware that it is unlikely that the target range can be reached for at least five years. In the short term the Management Committee has also considered the extent to which existing activities and expenditure could be curtailed, should such circumstances arise.

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

The organisation is a foundation CIO and was set up in May 2019 and was formally registered as a charity in August 2019. The charity was established under a constitution which established its objects and powers.

In the event of the charity being wound up trustees are not required to financially contribute.

Recruitment and Appointment of Trustees

The trustees of the charity for the purposes of charity law and under the charity's Constitution are known as members of the Management Committee. Under the requirements of the Constitution the members of the Management Committee are elected to serve for a period of three years, after which they must be re-elected at the next Annual General Meeting. All Trustees give their time voluntarily and received no benefits from the charity for work undertaken as trustees. Due to the nature of neurodiversity support much of the charity's work inevitably focuses upon parents and children. The Management Committee seeks to ensure that the needs of this group are appropriately reflected through the diversity of the trustee body. The more traditional business, educational and medical skills are well represented on the Management Committee. In an effort to maintain this broad skill mix, members of the Management Committee are requested to provide a list of their skills (and update it each year) and in the event of particular skills being lost due to retirements, individuals are approached to offer themselves for election to the Management Committee.

Trustee Induction and Training

Most trustees are already familiar with the practical work of the charity having been encouraged to attend some of our activities. Additionally, new trustees are invited and encouraged to read our book Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child to familiarise themselves with the ethos of the charity, the context within which it operates and most importantly provide them with an overview of neurodiversity and its comorbid conditions.

Trustees are also provided with the following documents:- MyOTAS' governing document (Constitution), the latest published accounts, Code of Conduct for Trustees/Volunteers/Staff and the Charity Commission's guide "the Essential Trustee". Trustees are also signposted to review all of the charity's current policies, including Safeguarding, GDPR, Health & Safety, Financial Management, etc.

Risk Management

The Management Committee has conducted a review of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. A risk register has been established and is updated at least annually. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Significant external risks to funding have led to the development of a strategic plan which will allow for the diversification of funding and activities. Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation of procedures for authorisation of all transactions and projects. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health and safety of

volunteers and service users. The charity follows the Institute of Fundraising Practise guidelines. All procedures are periodically reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the charity. We ensure that all trustees/volunteers have the relevant DBS checks and safe-guarding training.

Organisational Structure

MyOTAS has a Management Committee of up to 12 members who meet quarterly and are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the charity. During the year 2022-2023 the Committee had 8 members (5 trustees and 2 part-time management staff) from a variety of professional backgrounds, relevant to the work of the charity. A scheme of delegation is in place and day to day responsibility for the provision of the services rest with the Chair along with the rest of the committee. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the charity delivers the services specified and that key performance indicators are met. The Secretary has responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of the charity, individual supervision of the team and also ensuring that the team continue to develop their skills and working practices in line with good practice.

Related Parties

In so far as it is complementary to the charity's objects, the charity is guided by both local and national policy. Three of the management committee are also Family Champions for Essex Family Forum. This is a multiagency group with Essex SEND as its focus. The representation of local organisations within this group has proved invaluable to the charity in establishing improved links within the community and identifying relevant gaps in support, policy developments and prospective funding.

Equity Diversity and Inclusion

As per the stats above, neurodivergent people, particularly those without learning difficulties, face multiple inequalities throughout their lives.

We support a number of families who only require a light touch of support; information and signposting to help. However, there are a significant number of families who are 'off-grid' with service providers, for example if their young person is unable to attend school for reasons of exclusion or emotionally based school avoidance; or they are experiencing complex mental health challenges for which there is little, or no support available. We are committed to working patiently and supportively with these young people and their families to find an access point to help.

We support families from some of the most deprived postcodes in the Basildon Borough and offer outreach sessions to communities in traditionally hard to reach areas. We have had notable successes helping many families with complex needs. (e.g. liaising with assessment services to triage an urgent appointment for

a child whose details had dropped off the system, liaising with family solutions to find appropriate help, helping families to access support for their child at school).

Recent research suggests that autistic people are three times more likely to identify as trans, and eight times more likely to be asexual.

(www.theraincharity.org.uk). We recognise these trends in young people that we support and are keen to expand our offering of training and support groups to provide dedicated help for LGBTQ young people and their families.

Safeguarding

MyOTAS have a safeguarding policy and two trustees (NHS and education experience) with safeguarding responsibilities.

We understand that safeguarding is a significant risk in supporting our young people and we have visited a number of independent schools and other voluntary groups to learn from their experiences.

We have taken a cautious approach to launching and expanding our activities, piloting in small groups first, and maintaining open and honest communication with families. Our approach and principles have developed with safeguarding as a key consideration. For example, we ask parents to attend all of our children's activities and to remain responsible for their child. We also have a family support worker in attendance to be available in case of need and to role model appropriate ways to support children and to help facilitate support and build relationships between parents.

Where children have found sessions difficult, we have found ways to support them without impacting on the wider group. For example, when a child was struggling to play with other children at woodland warriors, we arranged 1:1 sessions, and then re-integrated her back to the group by joining for short but increasing sections of the group session. Another child was unable to access group sessions of mindful crafts because of anxiety about the other children present, and we offered 1:1 yoga sessions which she was able to access.

Environment

As a charity seeking to improve outcomes and wellbeing for the people that we support, we recognise our responsibility to role model good practice in the way that we impact the environment.

We do not currently have our own premises, but the environment is a consideration in all that we do.

All of our children's activities are environmentally aware and we seek opportunities to reinforce best practice. For example, we ran a reduce/re-use/recycle project at Woodland Warriors, in line with the Basildon District Council programme. Our mindful crafts re-use old CDs and often use natural materials.

Dated this 17th day of December 2023

Daniel Ireland - Chairperson

Signe 

Maria Denton - Treasurer



Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	Period start date 01-May-22	To	Period end date 30-Apr-23
----------------------------	--------------------------------	-----------	------------------------------

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Donations and legacies	4,782		-	4,782	3,578
Grants and Trusts	4,658		-	4,658	41,795
Fundraising Events	1,097	-	-	1,097	1,889
Donations - Yoga	122	-	-	122	141
Donations - Crafts	1,198	-	-	1,198	101
Donations - Woodland Warriors	6,174	-	-	6,174	7,094
Family Support and Training events	304	-	-	304	3,640
Grants and Trusts - Core Costs		7,080		7,080	
Grants and Trusts - Child Activities		9,614		9,614	
Grants and Trusts - Family Supp/Train		20,996		20,996	
Grants and Trusts - Raising Awareness		500		500	
Gift Aid	-			-	212
Refunds	218	-	-	218	576
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	18,552	38,190	-	56,742	59,026
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
N/A	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	18,552	38,190	-	56,742	59,026
A3 Payments					
Cost of fundraising	501		-	501	742
Cost of Woodland Warriors	3,280	8,988	-	12,268	14,019
Cost of Mindful Crafts	278	2,668	-	2,946	488
Cost of Yoga	-	1,761	-	1,761	803
Cost of Board Game Club	-	-	-	-	493
Parent Support and Training events	2,763	14,498	-	17,261	9,270
Raising Awareness	3,640	500	-	4,140	57
Admin/Management Salaries	8,659	9,984		18,643	7,222
Travel/Petrol/Parking	227			227	17
Insurance	628			628	1,776
Tel/Web/Email/Zoom/IT	787		-	787	521
Print/Post/Stationery	531		-	531	261
Venue Hire	132			132	
Office/General Admin expenses	60			60	281
Memberships/Subs	283		-	283	166
Sub total	21,769	38,398	-	60,168	36,116
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
Printer and Shredder	195	-	-	195	
	-	-	-	-	322
Sub total	195	-	-	195	322
Total payments	21,964	38,398	-	60,363	36,438
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 3,412	- 208	-	- 3,621	22,588
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	17,209	13,819	-	31,028	-
Cash funds this year end	13,797	13,611	-	27,407	22,588

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Metro Account	2,516	1,900	-
	NatWest Account	11,170	11,711	-
	Petty Cash	111		-
	Total cash funds	13,797	13,611	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets			-	-
				-
		-	-	-
				-
				-
				-

Categories	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

Categories	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

Categories	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval
	Maria Denton Joanne Butcher	17/12/2023
		29/01/2024 <small>29/01/2024</small>



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

MyOTAS My Own Time and Space

On accounts for the year
ended

30th April 2023

Charity no
(if any)

1184723

Set out on pages

1-2

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended **30/04/2023**.

Responsibilities and
basis of report

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent
examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Date:

29/1/2024

Name:

Joanne Butcher

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA)

Address:

40 Arundell Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 2QQ

Empty rectangular box at the top of the page.

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight material matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

N/A