

# Autscape

**Annual Report**  
**August 2007-August 2008**

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## *Introduction*

Autscape was created by autistic people with the aim of providing an autistic-oriented environment. At Autscape, autistic people are fully included without having to adjust to the expectations of normal society. Presentations do not focus on how autistic people must be fundamentally changed in order to be acceptable. Autscape is a forum for autistic people to meet others, and a positive and accepting environment.

Autscape has been running since 2004, with our first conference in July 2005. Each annual conference has been attended by between 50 and 80 participants and there is always a high demand for the available places. Presentations focus on autistic people's needs and interests and have included such topics as self-advocacy organisations, loneliness, accessing support, autistic identity, relationships, conversation skills and social interaction. Leisure and social activities have also been an essential part of Autscape and these have included Shintaido, meditation, films with an autistic theme, lively discussions (both structured and informal), a music group and a very popular informal rounds singing group.

The first three conference were held at the Ammerdown Centre, near Bath. This year for the first time Autscape is being held at Giggleswick School, Yorkshire. This move has been prompted by the high priority we place on keeping the Autscape fees as low as possible to make Autscape accessible to people on low incomes.

The current event is Autscape 2008: Inertia and Action. This year's conference is taking place from the 29<sup>th</sup> July to the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. About 65 people are expected, the same level of attendance as the 2007 conference. It is encouraging that attendance has not fallen despite the change in venue and in fact the move North appears to have encouraged many first-time attendees this year.

## *Objectives*

As stated in our constitution, Autscape's objectives are to:

- Organize an annual retreat style conference in the UK for autistic people and their supporters.
- Facilitate the widest possible access to the conference
- Promote support and self-advocacy for autistic people, organized by autistic people and their supporters.

Over the past year, a diverse, engaged and all-autistic management committee has helped Autscape to continue to advance each of those objectives. Most importantly, we have succeeded in mounting another Autscape conference at a new venue and with many improvements on previous years. The conference will have presentations which look set to be at least as engaging and relevant as in previous years. Inspired by the twin themes

of inertia and action we have presentations on the neurological basis of inertia and timing, strategies to tackle the practical effects of inertia in day to day life, activism and disability rights, managing support, inertia and action in music and sensorially accessible space. Presentations were accepted on a competitive basis out of a large number of proposals from across Europe and beyond. Integrated with the formal programme will be opportunities for structured and unstructured discussions. Some will build on the presentation topics, while others are organised by participants around themes of interest.

This year's leisure activities include for the first time a luminarium (kindly provided by Architects of Air), a chapel tour and organ recital and an Autscope talent evening. These will supplement the more familiar games, films and television recordings with an autistic theme, rounds singing and music group.

By moving venue we have been able to maintain fee levels from last year (a real terms reduction) and Autscope remains as accessible as possible to those on low incomes. We have also been able, thanks to a grant from the Three Guineas Trust, to begin investing in Autscope's future. The committee has had internal discussions and we have sought out and obtained independent legal advice and hope soon to form a similar relationship with an accountant. On the basis of this advice we have proposed to this year's AGM that Autscope should become a charitable company. If this proposal is accepted by the membership, the new committee will be in a strong position to carry forward these plans and achieve incorporation and charitable registration well before Autscope 2009.

This year has seen the completion of the process of moving the Autscope website and e-mail lists. In addition a reliable, accessible online registration system has been developed (our thanks to Peter Benie and Debbie Finucane for all their hard work). During the year Autscope has developed policies covering several key issues including participant confidentiality and our 'safeguarding' responsibilities. We coped satisfactorily with the difficult but ultimately educational experience of having a lottery grant from 2006 subjected to audit. And for the first time this year Autscope has managed to research and obtain appropriate insurance cover. During the year we obtained endorsement letters from Tony Attwood and Simon Baron-Cohen which we hope will continue to prove useful in demonstrating to potential funders the importance of Autscope to the autistic community. We have run a successful competition for a new Autscope logo which has now been adopted. For the first time we will be selling Autscope merchandise at this year's conference, allowing us to raise some funds internally and we have introduced a (£5) membership fee. Also for the first time this year Autscope issued a press release enhancing our visibility and accessibility.

During this year the committee has seen only one change, the resignation of Michael Ellerman for personal reasons and the co-option of Debbie Finucane to the committee as Registrar. All members of the committee have been fully and deeply involved in the work of Autscope this year. For the first time, in addition to day to day communication through the closed committee email list, formal monthly committee meetings have taken place (online) which have been open to observation by Autscope members. Job descriptions have been written and accepted for the key posts of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and

Venue Co-ordinator. The effectiveness of this year's committee has allowed the development of a number of subcommittees (each chaired by a committee member) whose membership includes non-committee members. This is a key means of involving more people in the running of Autscope and allows those who currently feel that they do not have the skills or are unable to commit to full membership of the management committee to become involved. This has led to a number of people who have been involved in subcommittees during the year feeling ready to stand for the management committee at this year's AGM.

### *The People Involved in Organising Autscope 2008 (August 2007-August 2008)*

Chair: Kalen Molton (Aug '07 – Aug '08)

Secretary: Yo Dunn (Aug '07 – Aug '08)

Treasurer: Robin May (Aug '07 – Aug '08)

General committee members:

Ruth Lavender (formerly known as Genyin) (Aug '07 – Aug '08) [Venue Co-ordinator]

Martijn Dekker (Aug '07 – Aug '08) [Webmaster]

Larry Arnold (Aug '07 – Aug '08) [Vice Chair]

Michael Ellerman (Aug '07 – May '08) [Programme Co-ordinator]

Debbie Finucane (May '08 – Aug '08) [Registrar]

### *The Future*

It is impossible to talk about the future without paying tribute to our outgoing Chair, Kalen. Kalen has been involved in Autscope since the idea was first conceived. She was Autscope's first Chair and resumed that role last year when Autscope faced difficult circumstances. Over the past year she has led Autscope through a period of rapid development and leaves behind a much stronger organisation. She is now leaving the Autscope management committee in order to devote more of her time to her academic work as she enters the final year of her degree. We cannot thank her enough for her extraordinary contribution to Autscope and we wish her every success and happiness in the future.

Despite her departure Autscope is moving into 2008/9 with a great deal of optimism. We feel that Autscope now has a strong and skilled committee to guide it. We have begun to develop robust methods of working which encourage new people to contribute and make Autscope less dependent on just a few people. In 2008/9 our first priority will of course be to secure a suitable venue for Autscope 2009. Beyond that, we hope to secure a mandate from the membership for Autscope to become a charitable company. The necessary steps will take a little time and effort but all the essential building blocks are now in place. We hope that this will allow Autscope to develop a long-term fundraising strategy which will become self-sustaining. Ultimately we hope that it will also allow for the possibility of further development of Autscope.

The Autscope Management Committee