

# Autscape

**Annual Report**  
**August 2008-August 2009**

Autscape  
4 Falcon Street  
London  
E13 8DE  
UK

Phone: 07941 343 026  
(from outside UK: +44 7941 343 026)

Email: [info@autscape.org](mailto:info@autscape.org)  
Website: [www.autscape.org](http://www.autscape.org)

## *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 in the past have included such topics as self-advocacy organisations, loneliness, accessing support, autistic identity, relationships, conversation skills, inertia and social interaction. Leisure and social activities have also been an essential part of Autscape and these have included Shintaido (from 2005-2007), a luminarium (in 2008), meditation, films with an autistic theme, lively discussions (both structured and informal), a music group, art workshops, jewellery making and a very popular informal rounds singing group.

## *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 autistic-majority management committee has helped Autscape to continue to advance each of those objectives. Most importantly, we have succeeded in mounting this year's Autscape conference at another new venue.

## *This year*

Autscape has necessarily shifted venues several times. Each time we have aimed to meet the needs of as many participants as possible (accessibility, single rooms, facilities etc.) and placed a high priority on keeping the Autscape fees as low as possible to make Autscape accessible to people on low incomes. This year's venue is the Emmaus Centre in West Wickham, Nr. London. This choice has allowed residential fees to rise by only £5 this year for the full three-day conference. Autscape remains extraordinarily good value for money. The choice of a venue close to London and one with good physical accessibility has also allowed new groups of participants to attend this year.

This year's theme is 'Effective Living' and the conference is taking place from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2009. Attendance is expected to at least match and quite possibly exceed last year's event. It is particularly encouraging that more than one-third of participants will be

attending Autscope for the first time this year. This means that the unique opportunity provided by Autscope has now touched the lives of at least 150 autistic people.

The conference will have presentations which look set to be at least as engaging and relevant as in previous years, with a majority of autistic presenters. Inspired by the theme of Effective Living we have presentations on managing anxiety, visual processing disorders, police awareness of autism, diet, positive presentations of autistics, family life, self-advocacy and using complaints to improve services. Presentations were accepted on a competitive basis out of a range of proposals and will be delivered by a mixture of established and first-time presenters. Integrated with the formal programme are opportunities for discussions. Some of these will build on the presentation topics, while others are organised by participants around themes of interest. This year's leisure activities include an organ recital, films (including some made by participants) and art and jewellery making workshops. These will supplement the discussions, rounds singing and informal socialising which have become a staple part of the Autscope programme for many.

This year (continuing to benefit from a previous grant from the Three Guineas Trust) we have continued to invest in Autscope's future. The constitution subcommittee has been working on drafting the governing documents for Autscope to become a charitable company. Whilst we have not managed to achieve incorporation and charitable registration as quickly as originally hoped, the process is well under way and steady progress is being made. Autscope expects to complete this process during the next year.

This year has also seen Autscope consolidate the rapid progress we have made over the past 5 years. Changing venues always produces a great deal of additional work. But the committee is hopeful that the experience we have gained across three venues will continue to help us in managing any future moves as well as increasing the range of venues where we already have experience.

Much of our progress this year has been in 'behind the scenes' areas. We have greatly improved the reliability and availability of the website and email lists, through which Autscope is run and communicates, by moving to a new host. At the same time our registration system has undergone further improvements. This has involved many IT challenges but we have navigated them successfully without significant disruption. We have also been engaged in necessary recording efforts to provide better information both to the Autscope membership (such as the new archive section on the website) and to future committees, ensuring Autscope is not too dependent on particular individuals. Also important to our development as an organisation has been the writing of several new policies including an AUP (governing internet access from the venue) and a behaviour policy. The committee are also in the early stages of several new developments including the provision of sensory equipment; and measures to encourage increased submission of feedback forms (which are important for the development of future programmes) including providing an online version and creating a prize draw incentive. We are also working on providing picture signs around the venue to assist people in finding activities. In the longer term the redrafting of our governing documents and the establishment of more robust accounting systems are ongoing.

During this year the committee has seen a couple of changes. Early on in the year Ruth

Lavender resigned as Chair and Larry Arnold took over that role. Also early on in the year André Vilaça resigned from the committee. Later on in the year Ruth also resigned from the committee altogether. In April Debbie Finucane moved to the role of Vice Chair and Peter Benie took over as Secretary. Formal monthly committee meetings have taken place (online) which have been open to observation by Autscope members and the minutes have been made available on the website. Additionally the committee maintains an email list for day to day communication. The work of subcommittees has grown. A number of new committees have developed including childcare and publicity and a broader range of committee members have taken on the role of chairing one or more subcommittees. These have facilitated the involvement of several new people in the work of subcommittees some of whom will be standing for election to the main committee this year. Subcommittees are continuing to fulfil one of their functions of broadening the group of people involved in the management of Autscope.

#### *The People Involved in Organising Autscope 2009 (August 2008-August 2009)*

Chair: Ruth Lavender (Aug '08 – Aug '09) Larry Arnold (Aug '08 – Aug '09)  
Secretary: Debbie Finucane (Aug '08 – April '09) Peter Benie (April '09- Aug '09)  
Treasurer: Robin May (Aug '08 – Aug '09)  
General committee members:  
Ruth Lavender (Aug '08 – Jan '09)  
Martijn Dekker (Aug '08 – Aug '09)  
Peter Benie (Aug '08 - Aug '09)  
Debbie Finucane (Aug '08 - Aug '09)  
Yo (Aug '08 - Aug '09)  
Trish Jubb (Aug '08 - Aug '09)  
Selina Postgate (Aug '08 - Aug '09)

#### *The Future*

While the last year has mainly been one of consolidation, Autscope intends to move forward over the next few years. We intend to build on the progress we have made in documenting Autscope's administration to decrease Autscope's reliance on particular individuals. We are confident that the depth and breadth of skills and the range of people involved in the management of Autscope will continue to increase. In the process Autscope will continue to enhance the skill-base within the autistic community. The venue for Autscope 2010 has already been secured and initial research for venues for 2011 and beyond has begun. Our progress towards becoming a charitable company is gathering pace and it is hoped to complete that process in the coming year. The current financial climate means that the fundraising outlook is challenging across the charitable sector as a whole. However we are confident that Autscope's prudent financial management over the last year combined with hard work and diverse fundraising strategies will allow Autscope to maintain its core activities whilst continuing to seek funding opportunities which support further development of our activities.

The Autscope Management Committee