



What a year 2020 has been, there has been so many difficult times but so many incredible moments shared between ChAPS. From our members interacting like never before, staff massively stepping up to the mark to provide support & activities virtually and a brand-new building - The Ark!

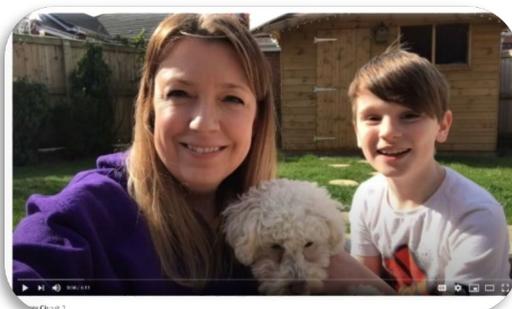
This month we wanted to provide a newsletter that reflected on 2020 and the wonderful things that have come out of it, you will find inputs from the staff, the members and ChAPS as a collective. It's so heartwarming to read the impact our charity has had on everyone.

Have a read, enjoy and thank you all for an unforgettable year.

A message from Emma ChAPS...

I really enjoyed working through lockdown and rising to the challenge of still providing meaningful activities while the world ground to a halt. The Google Classroom was the first mission as I knew there would be lots of parents in the same position as me, desperate to keep their children busy and educated whilst trying to work.

My second mission was to make sure nobody felt isolated during the lockdown, so I wanted to prioritise creating lots of virtual social events that would keep our members connected - we had quizzes, beetle drives, exercise classes, chats, karaoke sessions just to name a few! This programme of virtual activities has evolved and changed according to the interests and needs of our members.



I was surprised and interested to see how much engagement we got from our adult members during this time- the virtual sessions really seemed to appeal. My adults Zooms have been brilliant and it has been an absolute privilege to see lifelong friendships forge and get to know such a wonderful bunch of people- I think they have kept me going just as much as I have helped them. I know there have been a lot of negatives about the pandemic, but working for ChAPS through it has been a fantastic experience and opportunity to get creative and help.

A message from Lucy ChAPS...

My first few weeks at ChAPS have gone by so quickly! Even in such uncertain times, I've really enjoyed learning more about the great things ChAPS do to support our members and settling into working at The Ark. You'll find me in reception or writing a bad joke on someone's whiteboard!

I love that I work somewhere that supports so many people and that I'm part of a team who really care. I've worked in roles from a call centre to planting trees in Australia but there is definitely nowhere like ChAPS! I can't wait to see all the exciting things unfold and to meet more of the ChAPS family. I already can't imagine working anywhere else.

An adult who joined during lockdown...

First of all, as an attendee I want to point out that every week Zoom sessions and other activities were planned sharply, always on time with a tight schedule. The content is always full of entertainment alongside useful tips and information which is very helpful especially during this harsh period we going through. Organisers [I was mostly attending **Emma's** zooms] are in professional shape and motivated in every single activity.

I would like to thank you a lot for doing so much to help to keep us all together - it means a lot for the community! That's outstanding effort and massive influence on making people's mental health better.

An adult who joined before lockdown...

At the start of the year I felt I was in a world which feels awkward and strange. I was living on auto pilot... eat, sleep, work repeat. Searching for a place where I would fit and be accepted. I had a few friends but no one I felt really got me.

Then we went into lockdown I was so alone all the support networks I'd spent a life time to build went over night. I felt trapped in the four walls of my flat. So, I decided give **Emma's** adult zooms a chance.

I never knew anyone but they all seemed sort of awkwardly like me. It started to become the highlight of my week them 30-45-minute blocks where we would chat about life, learn about ourselves, gaining social skills and start to grow into a group of close friends.

I now feel that even though we are living through a pandemic. That the thing I will remember 2020 for will be zoom, accepting myself, and meeting some of the best friends of my life.

A family who joined during lockdown...

We haven't been members of **ChAPS** for very long, but have had some helpful advice and tips from the team.

My daughter is 13 and home educated. We have managed to join in 2 events (I'm sure it would have been more if it wasn't for lockdown!) which she thoroughly enjoyed. Falconry was amazing and Animal therapy she didn't stop talking about!

She is very shy and anxious but has done a couple of Teen Zooms with **Di**. I would recommend being a member to anyone on the spectrum! We both absolutely love it! Thank you all for your help, advice and support.



A family who joined before lockdown...

ChAPS have been a very important part of looking after my family's mental health during lockdown.

They supported my child with online zoom mindfulness and chats with other **ChAPS** children. This meant that not only did she have a space to chat with other children she made friends and formed trusting relationships with them and **Di**.

This also gave us as parents and her siblings time to recharge when she was on the session. It's amazing how a hot cup of coffee and 30 minutes sit down can help us to get through the day.

I was supported as a parent taking part in the parents chat group where I could let off a bit of steam with other parents who understood, listen and support them and have a good belly laugh at some of the funnier parts of our lives.

I took part in the adult relaxation and the head massage which ensured that I had time just for me and to sit down and forget everything around me.

Di was fabulous at offering a listening ear and offering advice whenever needed which some days was the thing that kept us going.

All in all, it was an all-round holistic approach to support us all and I can't thank you all enough.

A message from the ChAPS Team...

This year has been more different than we can ever have imagined, and our delivery has certainly had to be incredibly flexible in approach to activities, support, advice and training. Part way through the year, we started to host face to face sessions again, only to be further restricted in October and November as the second COVID wave hit.

We have decided to keep the many successful Zoom sessions running for December and January, and we are hoping to open up a few activities again throughout this month now that we know what tier we are in. We have taken the Events Diary out of the newsletter for this month, and will be share what activities are going ahead via email shortly. Each Friday the Zoom timetable will be shared by email from **Emily** on operations@cheshireautism.org.uk. Please look out for these, and join in with any that will provide you with support, activities and mental well-being.

The diary of events will resume in the January, when we are hopefully a bit further down our COVID journey and have more venues open. In the meantime, we hope you all get chance to celebrate Christmas and the New year in a way that you want to, and here's to an exciting and busy 2021.

Best wishes from **The ChAPS Team** xx



Need More Help or Information?

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