



ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007

Chairman's Report



06/07 has been a particularly challenging year for SoLO and I am pleased to report that we have been able to maintain the high quality and choice of services that we are absolutely committed to despite losing a key part of our funding.

We have continued to invest in building the capability of our Service User group to ensure our services continue to meet our user's needs. Bidding for funds is a lottery and there is enormous competition for available funding. Despite best efforts, we were unable to get replacement lottery funding. Recognising the constraints placed by the reduction in funding we focussed on continuing to build the organisation and we have a solid foundation to take us forward. We are fortunate to continue to enjoy a passionate and professional team of staff and volunteers led by our General Manager who are absolutely committed to our users.

We have worked and continue to work with the various stakeholders Solihull Council, the Childrens Trust and the Learning Disability Board to ensure we are aligned with the changes that are taking place in this sector.

Our strategy going forward is to develop some independent financial sustainability through methods such as the delivery of disability training. This provides a dual opportunity to improve the lives of our users by growing awareness of their needs in our communities while generating a source of revenue that we can invest in more services. We are also following closely the changes in day care provision and carer services. We believe that SoLO has a lot to offer and we are looking forward to 07/08 as a year of growth and opportunity.

Marina McGoldrick

General Manager's Report

Welcome to our 7th annual report. This time last year, I was reporting to you on the loss of our Lottery Funding, so this year has been one of re-structuring, review and redesign whilst ensuring that we continued the same level of actual services delivered.

I can report that the approach we took was largely successful due to the dedication of our staff and volunteers in efficiencies, flexibility and a massive fundraising effort. We predicted a potential shortfall of £100,000, but we actually ended with an overall deficit of £14,450.00. It has to be stressed, however, that we cannot rest on our laurels – we need to maintain the impetus that has been started. In 2007, we are working hard to ensure that our books balance and we increase our leisure services which add quality to the lives of children and adults with learning disabilities, their parents and carers.

This year, in addition to providing social and leisure services through 12 different projects, we have developed our training arm, delivering disability awareness training across the borough and in surrounding areas. We have sustained our service user involvement and they have been supporting us with a subscriptions review and working on making information in the borough accessible. This has been through funding from the Realise Programme which is supporting some of our organisational development.

We also underwent external validation of our services, being judged as a "Good" provider of services to children with special needs by Ofsted.

In addition to this, we have ensured that the needs of our members are not forgotten when planning services within the borough, and SoLO has represented the voluntary sector on the Learning Disability Partnership Board and on the Children's Trust Board.

It has been a busy year, but the test of it is whether our members have enjoyed what we have provided, and if we really do add quality to their lives. Well read on - this year our members have written our annual report so they can tell you what SoLO has meant to them.



Janet Down

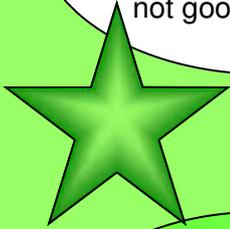


The South Arts is a group enabling young people aged 14—24 years of age, with and without disabilities, to work with professionals in the performing arts. This year they worked hard on a variety show. Here is what Ruth and Becky thought about it:

Ruth: "I enjoyed doing the show and the girls aloud dance. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed my bit, tapping to the beat." **Becky:** "You were funky at that."

Ruth: "The drumming too, I liked the beats and dancing to it." **Becky:** "I liked it when we did our performance, and we were planning it – we

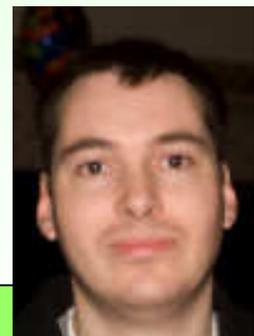
were thinking about which person was doing what – because people are good at different things, like I was good at doing the programme. I liked the street dancing, when Ruth brought her song in and we did some street dancing to it. I loved when we were playing clowning, and we were pretending to be clay." **Ruth:** "I liked Jane's song – we made up the words and wrote them down, and sung a song for Jane [in our show]. We used the tune from a song we saw in a show." **Ruth:** [about the show] "I was really confident. It was amazing. Afterwards we had a disco at the end. I danced with my friends." **Becky:** "I felt confident and a little bit butterflies. I'm not good at being in front of other people. It was a good turnout."



Night Owl provides an opportunity for adults with learning disabilities to come at any time they want between 6.30pm and 9.00pm every Monday at the Ivy Leaf Social Club where they can mix together in a friendly, safe environment. Many friendships have been made and because of it being a joint project with Solihull Action through Advocacy, lots of issues are discussed and hopefully resolved. Here is what Biagio, Brett and Katy think about it:

Biagio: "I started coming to Night Owls because I wanted to play snooker. Jan, the Project leader, sorted it out so I could play, which was really good, but now I just come to chill out"

Katy: "I started coming to Night Owls because I wanted to make friends. I get on really well with everybody there and have made loads of new friends. I really enjoy the karaoke nights." **Brett:** "Over the last 12 months we have played darts, games, and karaoke. It is such a good laugh, good atmosphere, and nice and friendly staff and volunteers. We have made new friends. It is good to talk with the staff about any concerns. Some members get there by bus, or Ring and Ride, or are brought by their parents/carers. Night Owl is fun!"



Icebreakers provides adults with learning disabilities the opportunity to meet up with their friends and access community based activities.

Dawn says: "I have enjoyed bowling at Acocks Green, attending SoLO's discos, and having meals at the Coach and Horses in Coleshill. I enjoy Icebreakers and the places we go, I love Tracey picking me up. By joining Icebreakers it has enabled me to go out with my friends I have made as usually it is my parents who I go out with. I just love it!" **Gemma adds:** "I like Icebreakers because I can mix with other people. I enjoy that I can make my own choice about what I do and where to go. I also like meeting up with other members at the discos.

Anna commented: "Icebreakers is great because it gets me out of the house and I can make new friends. All the staff and volunteers are lovely and kind. We also do lots of different things and don't go to the same places. It also gives my mum and dad a rest from me!"



Open Door enables adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities the opportunity to spend some time away from home and meet up with their friends as well as taking part in lots of different activities. Members come on transport directly from their day centre, have their evening meal together then access a range of quality leisure activities.

Anita Kent, Project Leader, reported on behalf of the project and shared with us:

"Helen has been a member of Open Door for many years. Like most of us ladies, Helen enjoys having her nails painted and her hair done. Simon never misses an opportunity with our reflexologist Anne, he enjoys the benefits of having his hands and feet massaged, usually followed by a chocolate mousse – his favourite! Luke is really into music and instruments and spends a lot of time playing the guitar or listening to the beat box whilst Sarah, who is *the* dancing queen, likes to be by the cd player dancing to her favourite songs, only taking a break for a sip of tea! Every week a different arts and craft or cookery activity takes place, drawing all the members together. They are each supported to take part in these activities as independently as they are able to. During the summer, members were

given the choice of going for a walk outside, exploring the grounds and having fun. Each year Open Door puts on a production and this year was no exception – Sleeping Beauty. The members, volunteers and staff spent many weeks creating props, costumes and rehearsing. Family members and carers attended the performance, followed by a lovely buffet – the evening was a huge success! Open Door also went to SoLO's discos and boogied the night away! They have been planning an action packed programme for the next 12 months including more community based activities so watch this space!"



The Thursday Crew is a Drop in project enabling adults with learning disabilities to meet up with their friends. It takes place at the Chelmsley Wood Football Club.

Lindsey and Gemma write: “ Over the last year we have played games, bingo, snooker and pool. We have enjoyed playing the games with the friends we have made at The Thursday Crew. It is good talking to my new friends inside and outside of the club. The first birthday party was good and the picture taken of us was in the paper! Some members use Ring and Ride to get to and from the club. We enjoy going to The Thursday Crew as it is fun and the staff and volunteers are great!”



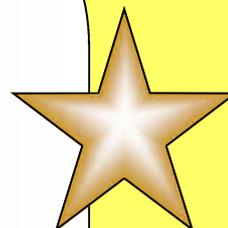
Get Active is a sports based project which encourages young people with learning disabilities to take an active part in their local community, and stay healthy.

Claire said:

“I like going on the bus to get to Get Active, its good. My favourite activities have been going to Drayton Manor and Bowling. We have been dry slope skiing, I think skiing is mint! I want to try it on proper snow so that it flips up when you skid!

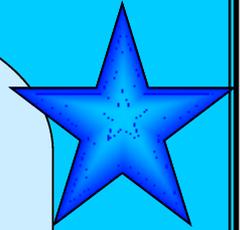
I have been going to Get Active for about 2 years. I get on with everyone there and I look forward to meeting them. I think it's a good idea for us to do a planning session with everyone because everyone has an opinion and everyone can get a turn of what to do”

Claire was able to work as a supported volunteer in the summer enabling mainstream young people and those with disability to take part in Inclusive Play Opportunities—this was as a direct result of her involvement in Get Active—well done! She is also being considered to take part in a Prince's Trust programme.





Leisure Links Leisure Links is a 1-2-1 befriending project. It aims to link people of a similar age with similar interests so that friendships can naturally blossom. SoLO currently supports 11 people on leisure links across the borough and they all do different things! **Jacqui (a volunteer)** said "I really look forward to meeting my friend on Leisure Links, I find myself doing activities that I've really enjoyed that I wouldn't necessarily



have done without my friend." **Vicki (a member)** said "I like having my own friend and choosing what to do. I get to do things with my friend instead of my mum and dad. We've been shopping at the Bullring, Hatton Country Park, Billy Smarts Circus, Pizza Hut and to all the SoLO discos." **Paul (a volunteer)** who leisure links with Graeme reports "We have really hit it off together and have found out that we both love going on the internet, searching for memorabilia, anything to do with Def Leppard and bidding on Ebay."



Teen Open Door is a social club for children with severe and profound learning disabilities to get together after school.

David said "I like the tea especially the chips, I love the swing except when it's cold. I enjoy cooking, but I like eating it most. I love coming home on the bus."

David's mum added "He was thrilled with the disco last week and yesterday morning hoped it was a disco again at TOD!"

Time Out is a social group for teenagers with severe learning disabilities. Time Out is an independent charity and SoLO supports the group with staffing, volunteers, training and managerial support.

Corey writes:

"I like watching films and I feel happy when I go to Timeout. I get to meet my friends and have a party."

Vicki adds:

"Time Out are going from strength to strength. Our teenage members decide what they want to do and are offered choices each week. It not only gives them the opportunity to chill out with their mates, but helps them on the road to independence"



Holiday Activities give children and young people with severe learning disabilities the opportunity to have some fun times with their friends during the easter and summer holidays, and provides their mums and dads with a break. Here is what the young people and parents thought of the scheme.

Parents

“ The staff were excellent, well organised, competent carers. We felt very comfortable and knew that our child would be well cared for. We greatly valued the respite it offered. The activities on offer were varied and interactive for children and there was enough flexibility to suit the wide range of abilities of those attending”.



Children and Young People

“When asked if he had tried stilt walking he said yes, when asked if he had tried juggling he said yes, finally when asked if he had tried lion taming he said yes!!!! Thank you all so much, not only for the benefit for the children but also for the time out that you allow us parents to have – absolutely priceless”.

North Arts is a group enabling young people aged 14—24 years of age with and without disabilities, to work with professionals in the performing arts. This year they worked hard on a production of **Grease**.

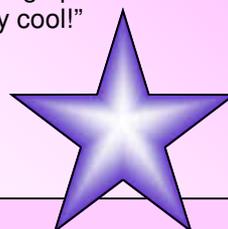
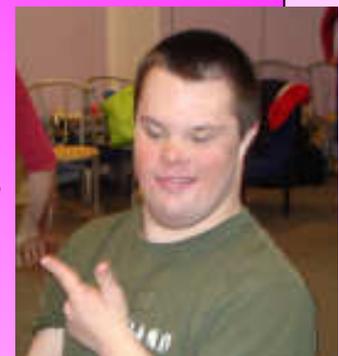
Emma likes: “doing drama, dancing and singing and when people come to North Arts to teach us things, like when Josie and Julie are there, and seeing my friends and I love doing performances when my mum and my sister can come and see”

Kurtis thinks: “North Arts is great fun for all of us. It is good exercise especially the warm up games and it’s a great opportunity to meet new people and interact with people who you wouldn’t normally meet. It’s great that there is good integration and communication within the group even though we all have different levels of ability. It has helped me to understand more about people with disabilities.

Jessica says: “I enjoy being with my friends and making new friends. I like playing the games. Everyone helps me and plays with me I thought that doing Grease was really, really good because I liked being Jan



Ian adds: “I like having fun with my friends, I like going to the pantomimes and other theatre trips. I like singing with everyone and on my own. I like dressing up in costumes. Being Danny was really cool!”



Service User Reference Group gives our members the opportunity to have a say in how we run the organisation. They are elected by the members of their groups and meet every six weeks to talk about issues that affect them. This year they have been reviewing the subscriptions and how they are used. **Lynn and Jacqui report:** "SURG started the year with a residential trip funded by the Youth Council. The purpose of the residential was a team building weekend, and the group had a very useful time in Minehead. The SURG have sub groups which work continually throughout the year. The Website Sub Group designed web pages and content for SURG, the Presentation and Recruitment sub group worked with the Youth Council and Birmingham Medical University. The Newsletter Sub Group worked hard on producing newsletter articles throughout the year informing members of the work they were doing. A couple of SURG members attended SoLO's Team Day."

Ruth and Dominic said "We really enjoyed having the opportunity to meet lots of staff from different projects". Other exciting activities have involved, SURG representative Becky Haslewood being interviewed and filmed by the Russell Commission and going to London to see the launch of their

DVD. SoLO also secured funding from the Partnership Board to appoint someone with a learning disability as a SURG Facilitator & Disability Awareness Trainer. Scott and Dom were successful and have taken a lead role in planning and facilitating the meetings. At the October 2006 AGM 20 members were voted in to represent SoLO's 17 projects. In December 2006 SURG supported Shirley Lions with their Santa Sleigh fundraising. All in all its being a very busy and rewarding year for SURG.



Disability Awareness Training.

As part of the Balsall Heath Cluster, SoLO has been funded to develop training in Disability Awareness and other related subjects. In December 2006 SoLO were invited back to Birmingham Medical University to run another Disability Awareness Session. Trainer **Scott Embley said:** "It was great to be invited back because we must have done a good job the first time round." On presenting to 250 medical students Scott said "I love it, I didn't feel nervous. I shared both my good and bad experiences of the Health Services and hope the students will see people with learning disabilities as people first, not just see their disabilities. The session inspired two students to volunteer with SoLO!"

In February 2007 we were asked to run a session with students at Archbishop Grimshaw School. Some of the students wanted to join our integrated performing arts project in the North. Trainer **Dominic Wardle said:** "This was the first training session I had run. I felt well prepared for it and had a folder with all my work in it. I met the students, spoke about my life and answered their questions." 6 students then went on to join North Arts, fully trained in Disability Awareness!

Both Scott and Dominic have great respect for each other as colleagues and feel that they are both developing their confidence with each training session they run. They are both looking forward to working with Jacqui and Lynn in the future running more training sessions across the borough.



SoLO's Disability Awareness Training Team

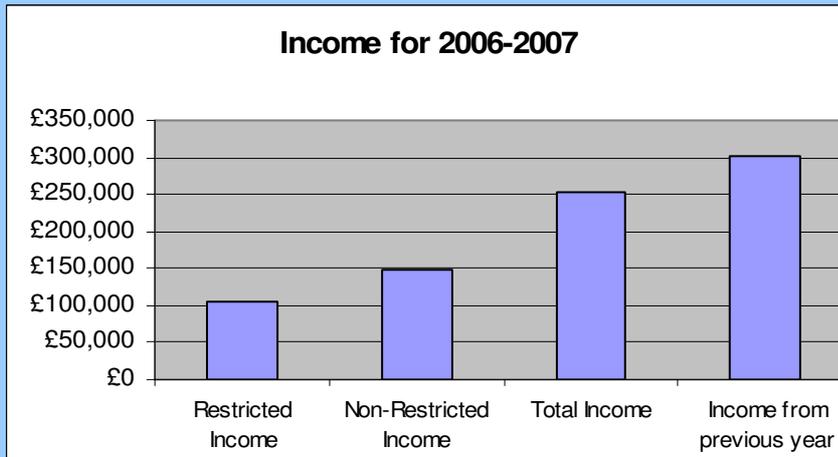
Our Directors

SoLO has been supported by our Directors who have a wide range of skills and experience which they have used during the past year. The following people have served as Directors:

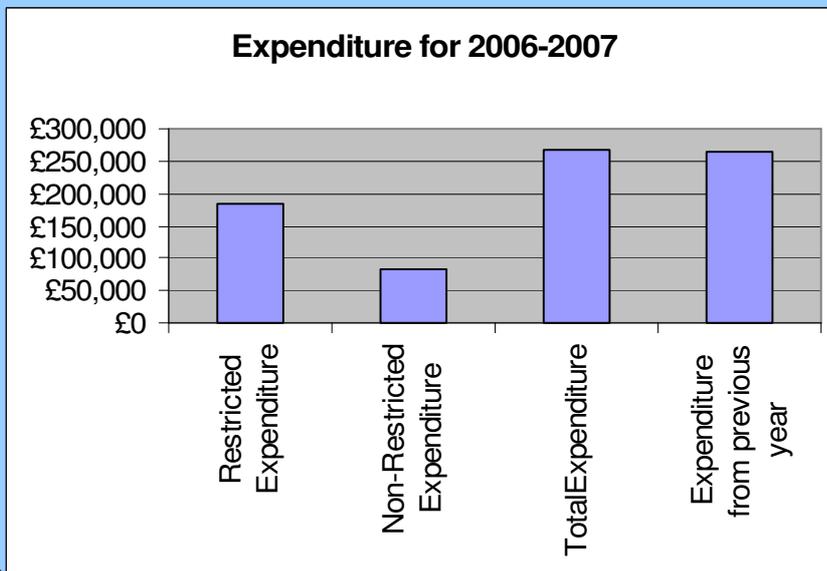
Marina McGoldrick (Chair) Geoffrey Durrant, Susan Jobbins, Wendy Magee (Secretary), Nicola Miles, Jan Prior, Martin Wright (Treasurer). Keith Roberts retired in June 2006 and Gillian Penny joined us in February 2007.

We have also had the support of Co-opted Directors with special interests— Paul Beech (Youth Service) and Pat Nickerson (Health) who retired in October 2006 and Stephen Phillips (Finance) who supported our move to a new finance system until January 2007.

How we have funded our work



At the beginning of this financial year, we were faced with the prospect of keeping our existing services whilst managing the end of a significant funding stream (the Big Lottery). We embarked on a massive fundraising programme and also reviewed our ways of working to look at more efficient ways of managing our projects. With the help of a dedicated volunteer fundraising team and a very positive response to our requests for help, we have managed not only to protect our existing services, but develop new (The Thursday Crew). We have also taken part in a European Regional Development Funded Programme which has helped us begin to develop some sustainable fundraising through the delivery of training in Disability Awareness and Person Centred Planning. This new venture offers us the opportunity to draw in additional funding, but also to pass on the significant skills that we have gained through working with our members—a complete win/win!



The future

Despite our successes over the past year, we still have to repeat the fundraising efforts of the past year and need to develop our training to see it become a cost effective way of attracting sustainable funding. We should also not forget that whilst our services have reached over 300 families, there are still many more who do not receive any leisure or respite services other than a day time statutory provision which, whilst of value, does not offer the variety of social and leisure opportunities that the majority of us take for granted as part of our everyday life. Our learning disabled members deserve an equal chance—together we can make the difference!