

# alternatives

## Annual Report

### 2009

#### Director's Highlights

**A**t the end of another busy and productive year, I am thankful for the excellent team of staff, volunteers and supporters Alternatives has, and hope you will look forward with us to the challenges and exciting prospects of the year to come.

The year 2009 had some amazing moments. The two We Are Family Club outings, to the seaside and to Beech Grove in Kent were highlights of the year for me – and for some of the mums too. One sent a text to say "I am so grateful for our day out in July. It was the best thing that we done this year. Me and the kids really enjoyed it." In December our offices turned into a kind of Santa's grotto as supporters from St Giles' and St George's churches in Ashtead delivered an abundance of beautiful Christmas gifts for all the children who come to the We Are Family Club (WAF).

It has been good to see positive change in some of the mums who come to WAF. Several have started training courses, three families have indefinite leave to remain in the UK so can start building their lives. Two children have been removed from the children at risk register to the children in need register, and one removed completely from the children in need register as their mums have benefited from our support.

#### Highlights and challenges

But there are some mums we are working closely with who are still struggling overcome their own poor experiences of parenting and low self-esteem, or to cope with their problems with housing and children. Another highlight was when Barbara, Julia D, Steve and I took part in the wedding of a young client who had initially had to leave her family's home when they found she was pregnant. She lived with us for a few months while receiving support from We Are Family.



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#### Challenges and vision for the future

Following on from the growth and success we have seen this year, it is hoped that the work will increase both in quality and quantity. We want to work more closely with our partner organisations and see a better understanding of the quality of the work we do. We plan to run a number of courses in the first few months of next year:

**12 February:** Delay training for third sector organisations.

**April:** REALationships course for faith groups on how to engage with young people about relationships and sex in a way that is sensitive to their faith background.

**Later in the year:** Speakeasy for parents wanting to know how to talk to their children and teenagers about relationships and sex.

The education team would like to thank the centre staff who both support the education team, and whose experience informs and enriches the work we do in the classroom.

\*Pupil sessions = the number of sessions delivered X the number of students in the class. In some schools we may only see students once. In others we see them a number of times for different subjects.



The Support to Parents work continues to expand and develop.

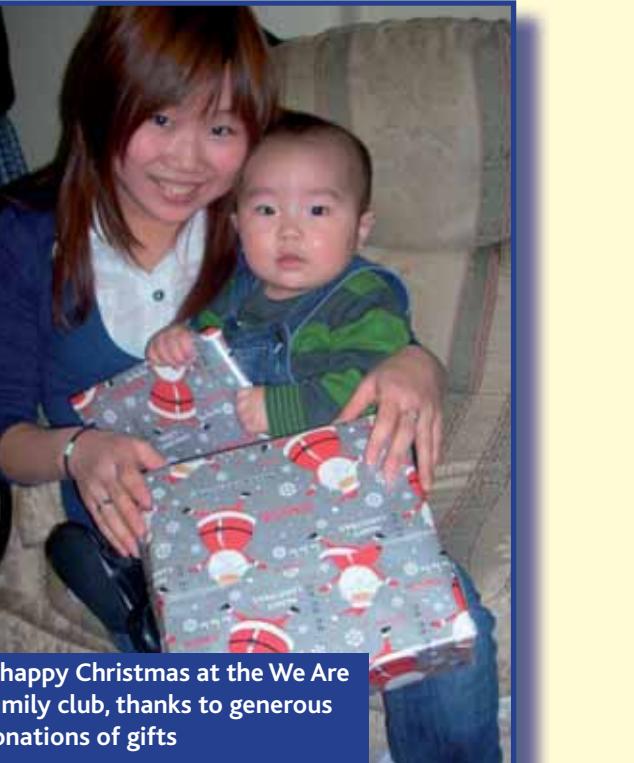
#### Mondays

The We Are Family project has helped a total of 30 young women and 42 children over the past year, with 22 women and 28 children attending regularly. Numbers of parents attending on Mondays grew from 4-8 parents to 8-14 parents, almost doubling the size of regular attendees.

The club aims to provide a safe environment for young and vulnerable parents, giving them acceptance, confidence, good self-esteem and a way forward as parents and as unique individuals. It meets every Monday from 11 am-1 pm. T with one-year old son said, "So many come here, English, African, Asian, everyone comes here and discuss things, our situations, our inside feelings. It's good for us, good for our babies. In here, I almost feel like it's home."

The club is having a positive effect on most of the parents who come: they grow in self-esteem, find friends, make positive changes to their lifestyles and become more confident and capable parents. There is a noticeable difference in the behaviour of children who have been coming to WAF for some time, and the newly arrived – a sign of improved parenting that will benefit the children as they start school and throughout life.

Highlights of the year have again been the outings and picnic in the park in the summer – after one mum said she had never had a picnic. The group really enjoyed a session led by a visiting speech therapist who taught us songs to sing with children. One mum said, "I sing to her when she's upset, the same song you taught us, and it calms her down, it really helps." We are now incorporating a song into more sessions. And of course there was Christmas ... We had around 60 people at our party on the Monday before Christmas, and were able to give all the children several lovely gifts, and a present for each mum too, thanks to incredibly generous donations.



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#### During the week

We have been busy in the centre and visiting families in their homes, providing equipment, counsel, time on the internet and writing letters of support or getting involved in advocacy about housing, immigration status or passports. We continue to provide counselling, and attend case conferences and occasional court cases, with some success.

Recently Julia D and work-experience student Schamain took some baby clothes over to an 8½ month pregnant asylum seeker, thrown out by her partner when she was pregnant, who was housed in a B&B. We were shocked to see the room she would soon be sharing with a baby: no wider than a single bed, filthy and infested with bugs. The next day she sent a message to say, "I am loving everything you brought for my baby. There are good stuffs and cute too. I am in tears now and full of joy. Thank you so much and God bless you, from me and baby." Happily, after a case conference attended by Julia D the mum was moved to better accommodation.

In hearing of and dealing with more homeless parents and those with no recourse to public funds, we particularly value our links with the Woodgate Community and with Just Homes, a project providing housing and support. These are integral to the service we provide to especially vulnerable mums.

#### The Team

Julia Dexter, the team leader, facilitates WAF sessions on parenting, manages the crèche and parent support staff, supports parents in the week and attends networking events and meetings. Working with her are support workers Earna Gibson and Sarah Moriah, and the Monday sessions are also facilitated by director and counsellor Julia Acott and psychiatrist Chris Andrew. We are grateful to those who have worked or volunteered in the crèche over the year, including Kirstie, Ida, Katie, Noranna, Koby, Hannah B, Hannah N, Victoria and Cassandra. At the moment we are enjoying having Schamain Butcher with us on a work experience placement from UEL.

We have worked with the Education Team to deliver modules on parenting in local secondary schools. Julia A and Julia D liaised with NCY (New Choices for Youth) and tutored a session of their accredited course on pregnancy and childbirth.

The increased numbers of families have really stretched our resources this year, and we are glad that Alternatives has secured funding for a new centre-based Family Outreach Worker, who can support families during the week particularly with the time-consuming practical issues around housing, immigration and children considered by Social Services as being at risk.

Thank you so much for your interest and support. For more information or to make a donation, please do get in touch.



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