

year, and we thank Tricia Pank and Sue Davies for all their excellent volunteering of many years, as they retired. We hope to arrange further 'Called to Care' training during 2011. The grant funding for the centre manager position comes to an end next autumn so we will soon be looking for new sources of funds to continue providing this vital help to women at their point of need, which is at the core of what we do.



It has been a very busy and rewarding year for the Education team, which this year has been made up of Jo Sell and Katie Evans, along with work placement students Schamain and Sarah for part of the year, Nakeisha and Victoria since September, and the support of other members of staff and volunteers for different lessons and events.

The team worked in four local secondary schools and two colleges, delivering 1800 pupil sessions in the academic year to September. For half the year they ran a fortnightly after-school drop-in at Eastlea school, where students took part in activities, drama and discussion.

Stalls held at the Freshers' Fairs at the University of East London and Newham Sixth Form College offered a range of interactive activities for new students. It was alarming to find that between one-third and two-thirds of 16-21 years olds believed that condoms give total protection against all sexually transmitted infection (whereas they offer no protection against three common STIs). More positively, we featured a competition for young people to come up with '101 ways to say "I love you" (without having sex)'. The winner, as voted for at a youth event, said, 'Tell her she is beautiful everyday, let her feel she can depend on you, respect her feelings, protect her aspirations and help her to reach her goals.'

The ongoing development of teaching materials that we can train others to use has continued, with the help of designer Nadia Castro. This has taken longer than expected, due to some copyright issues. However, we are delivering a training session in February 2011 for other crisis pregnancy centres that would like to use our modules on 'unplanned pregnancy' and 'parenting' in their local schools.

We have also delivered 'Delay' training for 12 professionals working in Newham, and two accredited 'Speakeasy' courses for parents on how to engage with their teenage children on issues of relationships and sex.

Jo and Katie both worked hard on taking qualifications themselves during the year, completing the Speakeasy training with Family Planning Association and a teaching qualification in PHSE.

As the year comes to an end, the Education team is very busy as it is working on developing a new interactive, multi-faith website called 'Faith, Relationships and Young People' (www.fryps.org.uk).

The Newham Interfaith Sexual Health Forum (NewISH) received a 'Faiths in Action' grant from Communities and Local Government for this, as it aims to provide a confidential and reliable place where young people from all kinds of faith backgrounds growing up in Western culture can find answers to the questions they are asking about relationships – questions they may not feel able to talk about with their family or community. It will do this through a moderated online discussion forum and an 'online advisor' service.

There will also be material to help professionals and faith communities better understand the issues young people are struggling with, as they find their identity as a person of faith growing up amidst the strong pressures from Western media and their peers. We have taken on a new project worker, Sarah Acott, with the specialist skills to develop the website. And we are organising a big launch event at Stratford Circus on 31 March 2011.

As always, the most rewarding part of the year has been going into schools, seeing young people become animated, and being there for those moments when 'the penny drops' for them: when a young person understands that they have the freedom to choose the life they really want, rather than just giving in to the pressures of their peers or the media. Everything else we do leads up to those moments.



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Special thanks to our funders including:

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The Parish of St Giles and St George, Ashted
The Woodgate Community
Plus individual donors – THANK YOU TO ALL
Special thanks to our one-day-a-week fundraiser Philippa King



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From the Director

After an incredibly busy first half of the year, with lots of travelling and training, everything shifted when my husband Steve began an intensive course of chemotherapy in June, and the year for me has been dominated by his sudden and unexpected death, just after the end of his treatment on 14 September.

During the time he was ill, I had two words very much on my mind. The first was 'families'. The year has seen more and more growth in our We Are Family group, with 19 mums taking part last Monday. The group was named by the mothers, who have no family around to support them, and I realise what an important name that is. I have known for myself that over these last couple of months my family have been my most precious strength and comfort, and so important to me. But what of those who have no family?

The We Are Family project has continued to grow and is helping dozens of parents and children. They all enjoy Christmas and birthday presents, Easter Eggs and outings to the seaside with us – thanks to the support of generous donors. Those who attend have truly found a family at this project.

It has been good to have the additional help of a new Family Support Worker during this year, and a new 'Practical Parenting' group has proved to be an ideal next step for mums who are ready to learn more about how to play with their children and support their development.

The other word was 'fathers'. We Are Family is open to all parents, but in practice it has been just mothers who come along. Although some of these mums have had very bad experiences with men, some are in contact with the fathers of their children and would like them to be more involved. We have been aware of the need for a separate group for dads, and during this year we had four men come forward who were interested in working with us. One is a volunteer from one of our funding organisations, another is a former client, now a loving father. We have funding for a one-year pilot project '4Dads' and this is progressing. The aim is to support and encourage young absent fathers to be better parents and more committed partners. One of the mums from We Are Family has seen positive change, with the man she initially called her 'babyfather' being described as her 'fiance' and then her 'husband' even though they are not actually married.

My best example of a dad is my Steve. He was a great father to his four children. He supported me fully in all I did, and especially in this work. He accepted many different people to live with us in our home when they needed a place to stay, and was a wonderful host and father figure for them.



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During the past year, with Steve's financial support, we addressed our need for more room at the Alternatives centre by adding a small conservatory and entrance lobby to our building.

Just recently we heard that another nearby counselling service, run by a charity called WHCM, is moving out of its building. This would be an ideal centre for us. We are currently in discussion with WHCM about ways we could work in partnership, and are planning to move there in January 2011. We are planning too that our current building (owned by a company set up by Steve and me to provide a low cost base for Alternatives) will be transferred to local charity Just Homes to provide accommodation for mums with no recourse to public funds.

This is very exciting, and is the next step forward as Alternatives becomes increasingly established and professional. It will mean a significant increase in our running costs at a time when funding generally is tight and some of our three-year grants come to an end, so a big challenge for this year is to increase our core of regular supporters.

We are very grateful to the grant makers, churches, businesses and individuals that support us with funding, gifts in kind and good quality baby equipment that gets passed on to those in need. If you would like to make a regular donation to this work, please use the form enclosed.

I want to especially thank everyone for their love and support of me through a difficult year. My family, staff, friends and colleagues have all been wonderful. I am grateful to have colleagues at Alternatives who are passionate about what they do and even in uncertain times, are reliable and committed. I do appreciate how hard this is to find. And I look forward to our next exciting developments, aware of the risks as we step into the unknown.

Julia Acott

Steve Acott

The unexpected death of Steve Acott in September is a great loss to Alternatives. As well as supporting Julia throughout the development and growth of the charity, Steve helped in many practical ways. He shared the vision and served initially as a trustee, helped with finances, drove a minibus on We Are Family outings and carried out DIY jobs at the centre. Along with Julia, he provided an emergency home for families in need and remortgaged their house to buy a building for Alternatives to use at very low cost. He will be very much missed.



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SUPPORT TO PARENTS

During the year the We Are Family club held 42 Monday morning sessions in the Children's Centre at the back of the Memorial Community Church building, plus five get-togethers in the park in August. The two outings, to Minnis Bay and the Beechgrove Community farm in Kent were highlights of the year again, and all the children were delighted to receive donated chocolate eggs at Easter, as well as Christmas and birthday presents during the year, along with their parents.

One mum said: 'Thank you for the gifts you gave to J and also for the support you have given to our family. We really appreciate it and it has helped us a lot. When all hopes were gone and when we were down, you came into our lives and gave us a reason for living again. I am very grateful. We have a lot of friends but nobody called to say "Happy Birthday" to her. But you remembered her birthday and you gave her presents, which means a lot because I knew that I wouldn't be able to give her anything and it makes me happy as a mother. She likes all the presents and I just want to say thank you for being a pillar in our lives and for being an encouragement and support to our family'.

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We Are Family has helped a total of 47 young women and 61 children during 2010, with 22 women and 36 children attending regularly – an increase on last year. We had five new clients start in September all with housing, finance and health issues. The team during the year has included psychiatrist Chris Andrew, counsellor Julia Acott, project manager Julia Dexter, Family Outreach Worker Elizabeth Booker, support workers Sarah Moriah, Earna Gibson and Margaret Bankole, crèche staff Rosa St Rosaire and Rose Nakalema, and work placement students Schamain Butcher and Sarah Humphreys. We have two new work placement students this academic year; Nakeisha Williams and Victoria Chibueze.

Our ethos of We are Family has been reflected in the openness and caring as issues are shared together in the group. The weekly sessions covered life skills such as relationships and achieving goals for the future; parenting topics such as setting loving limits, talking and playing with your child; and sessions with parents and children together such as learning action songs or preparing healthy food.

We had popular mornings led by Conflict and Change, and visits from a speech therapist, a community midwife and a librarian, who talked about their summer programme. We also held a pamper session where a hairdresser and beauty consultant came and made some remarkable differences to looks and confidence.

The group had a really encouraging visit from one of the mums who was part of the We Are Family pilot project, who has just finished a law degree. She is now married and raising four children, including twins that came with the marriage. She encouraged everyone to work hard and keep persevering, and talked eloquently about the support she had received from We are Family. As well as staff member Sarah Moriah, two other former clients are involved with the project as crèche workers.

Project staff also provided support to families during the week, additionally visiting women who cannot come to the group, including two in residential units. Staff have attended case conferences and the family court process in support of these parents. Support workers have also taken mums out on visits to places like the library, baby cinema and healthy eating workshops.

Again this year we had a large number of women and girls referred to us in extremely difficult circumstances. Our ongoing link with local charity Just Homes enabled us to help some find accommodation, and our supplies of donated baby equipment have been a vital help to mothers who had absolutely nothing for their baby. At the moment we are supporting 12 families with young children who have no recourse to public funds.

To cope with increased numbers, at the end of last year we employed a centre-based Family Outreach Worker, Elizabeth Booker. She has been helping on Mondays and is gradually taking over some of the time-consuming support work for the We Are Family mums in the week, such as attending case conferences and core group meetings with Social Services.

Elizabeth is also co-facilitating, with Support to Parents manager Julia Dexter, a new Practical Parenting group that meets on Thursdays. This focuses on activities where parents and children spend quality time together, alongside a little theory of the importance of play and child development. We have seen much evidence of growth and change in parents' confidence and attitude to parenting.

Another extension from the We Are Family club is our '4Dads' pilot project, run by four dads – Chigozie Eneremadu, Tom Sefton, Simon Gibson and Emeka Ejinkonye - who are in contact with eight more since its launch in April. They have had a barbeque, a bowling evening and a sports evening and are holding some parenting and life skills sessions with Chris Andrew, the psychiatrist who works with We Are Family.

We are very grateful for all those who have helped the We Are Family project during the year: staff, many volunteers, people who have donated Christmas gifts and Easter Eggs, the Woodgate Community who welcome us on our outing to the Kent countryside, and all those who help to fund this project. Our lottery grant comes to an end in summer 2011 so we are currently looking for new sources of funds to continue providing help that vulnerable women just can't get anywhere else.

'Y' came to us when she was seven months pregnant, left by her partner, evicted from her flat and with no recourse to public funds. Her unborn child was on the 'Children in Need' register, and she was living in emergency short-term accommodation. She was frightened for the future and intensely sad about her circumstances. Alternatives gave her emotional and practical support, and she has since said that she was very thankful for the opportunity to talk with someone who didn't judge her, to be accepted and offered her support when she needed it. Since the birth of her baby she has regularly attended the We Are Family club and Practical Parenting group and is much happier in every way.

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CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTRE

The centre is open each morning during the week, and at other times for appointments. During the past year there has been a marked increase in those seeking help, and during 2010 the centre manager Barbara alone has met with over 200 clients – twice as many as last year. Some of these clients have come for a pregnancy test and the opportunity to talk, some have come on a regular basis to try and understand their feelings after they have experienced a termination or miscarriage, and others have tried to work out a way forward through difficult personal circumstances that overpower their thinking.

All seem to appreciate the chance to come to a quiet space and receive some uninterrupted time with someone who will listen. A further 150 clients have called in at the centre during the year to request or pick up items of equipment, to get help completing forms, or seek advice and referral to other organisations for specific help.

A selection of quotes from 2010

"I have moved now and live with my husband. My baby is due in ten weeks time and it's going to be a boy. I wanted to take this chance to thank you. It really helped to have someone to talk to when everything was hopeless. I'm grateful and thank you."

"I wish I'd known about Alternatives before I had my abortion. I don't think I would have gone ahead if I'd had a chance to talk everything through with someone. Thank you for accepting me and for your support. I'm not sure I'd be here today without it".

"Thanks for listening today. It feels good to talk things through without having to hurry".

"I really appreciate help in providing me this equipment. I just can't afford to buy these things, everything is so expensive and I need to charge my electricity key. Thank you."

In July Barbara completed a Diploma in Integrative Counselling which has enabled her to see more clients who would previously have been referred to Julia Acott, and she is in the final year of a degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. Julia became a UKCP registered psychotherapeutic counsellor during the year, and is working on a diploma in supervision as well as an MA.

During 2010, we have continued to help many new clients, sometimes referred to us by other agencies who are unable to help them, pregnant or with young or newborn children, who have no recourse to public funds – meaning that they are not entitled to claim any financial or other support in the UK.

Alternatives continues to remain thankful for the generosity of local people and supporters who donate new and second-hand items throughout the year, which we are glad to pass on to those who need them. We are particularly grateful to the Woodgate Community who have knitted many colourful blankets, the warmth of which has been really appreciated by the children in our young families as the weather has chilled so dramatically in recent weeks. We also have a small 'hardship fund', which means we can buy essentials when people are in urgent need, and we are very thankful for food items donated to us in the Autumn to pass on too. During the year we have given practical help to around 200 families, and are delighted to have had a new Family Outreach Worker since March to help provide this.

We continue to work with other voluntary agencies in Newham, and appreciate our relationship with Just Homes and Newham Foodbank, which has enabled Alternatives to issue food vouchers to some of our families. Alternatives has continued to be involved with a forum bringing together various local agencies working with those who have no recourse to public funds, which is trying to improve the way families in this situation are dealt with.

The Centre Team

During the year we employed Olapeju Omibiyi as part-time book keeper to manage the finances.

The centre manger has been responsible for co-ordinating and supervising the counselling team of four volunteer trained advisors working within the centre during the year. We welcomed Christina Marcos Gleeson to the team in 2010 following the 'Called to Care' training course in the previous



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