

From the Director

This year was a hive of activity with several new initiatives bringing hope from hopelessness. The whole team has been brilliant in supporting clients in every area. I'm grateful for what's been achieved in so many people's lives, and grateful to all those who have helped make that happen.

Overwhelming need

The We Are Family programme for vulnerable families has seen need grow beyond what we thought possible. The project is running at absolute capacity, with 20-25 families coming each week and over 70 supported across the year. But the seriousness and complexity of their need has grown as well.

In 2013 we supported 50 women and their families during the year, of whom 40% had no recourse to public funds and 40% were homeless. In the past year, to August 2015, we supported 72 clients of whom 79% had no recourse and 79% were homeless. Women may have recently come out from an abusive relationship, suffered rape, witnessed murder, been rescued from trafficking.

With the Calais refugee crisis making news in the Autumn, we were pleased to be invited by Anne Cross to a fundraising event that also wanted to recognise the long-term support we provide locally to women who have ended up alone in the UK after traumatic experiences. I'm also very glad that we are able to offer counselling to any of the women that need and are ready for it, thanks to a team of five counsellors: Coleen, Emily, Etienne, Melanie and Sally. Sally alone has provided 93 hours of free counselling so far this year and is currently seeing four women. I'm grateful to Barbara who continues to provide supervision to some of them as a volunteer.

We are constantly encouraged to see lives transformed by hope, and to see happy children and their parents playing together and enjoying themselves, whether at the beach – we took 99 people in total this year! - in the park, or celebrating a birthday at the Monday We Are Family Club.



**Elizabeth Booker (left)
on one of the beach days**



Jollof rice, chicken and plantain from the WAF CAF

Moving On

Another area of growth is in progression. Two new ways for mums to move on from We are Family have developed this year, providing opportunities for women who have been with us for two or three years to volunteer together, learn new skills and help others. Both will increase the employability of women who have no qualifications or experience on their cv.

The WAF CAF opened in April with six mums and me all learning together how to run a cafe every Tuesday and how to work together in sometimes intense situations. This has proved challenging, and I am so pleased that after our initial six months we have now commissioned The Good Support Company to help the mums to manage their Social Enterprise project. Ella Tarratt and her team are experienced in supporting people with a learning disability to start and develop small businesses. They bring joy and life with them too! Do come along and sample the delicious food.

Partnership

As part of a six-month pilot project for a partnership of local charities, four mums, all current or recent clients, volunteered as 'Community Buddies' to help others in crisis.

They helped 14 women, of whom eight had their situations resolved in that time, and all became more hopeful. An evaluation of the pilot project said: 'The help they gave was significant and life changing and included securing accommodation, accessing public funds or benefits, not being evicted, and finding work'.

Sarah Moriah, who ran the pilot for Alternatives, said, 'The project was very beneficial to the clients but also to the volunteers in terms of confidence, feeling needed and knowing that their work was being appreciated; as all of them are not in comfortable situations themselves'.

We are really pleased to see the investment we – and you - made to help women at their lowest point being multiplied to help other families. As one of the participants said, 'You never know when life puts some difficulties in front of you. You need someone to give you that strength, to hold your hand, to know you can go through this.' We agreed to fund the project for three months after the pilot ended as it was going so well and more women wanted to train as 'Buddies'. The Newham Poverty Partnership, of which Alternatives is a member, has applied for funds to roll out this project across the borough next year as part of a co-ordinated response to worsening family poverty. We are glad to be part of this.

Alternatives benefits greatly from our ongoing partnership with Just Homes, which works alongside us with many of our families, providing supportive housing as well as help with immigration issues. We also value the partnership with the Acorn Midwifery Team who run a clinic in our building for one session a week.



Julia Acott with Lorraine of Cakes by Ellery



Julia and Peter's wedding, with cakes made by Lorraine and Agnes from We Are Family

My Wedding!

I was delighted to get remarried in October and Peter and I celebrated with around 400 guests. It was brilliant to recruit the six mums from the WAF CAF to help with the reception food and serving. They led a team of volunteers and I was very proud to include them as part of my wedding plan. We had two beautiful wedding cakes, made by two of the mums, Agnes and Lorraine, and many others cooked food to share at the reception. I am so delighted that Peter has embraced all the work that we do, supporting in many ways, including helping on outings and fixing things at the centre!

Lorraine said, 'Making your cake was such a good confidence booster for me. It was the first wedding cake I did and now the fear of taking on bigger cake challenges is not there anymore.' This September

marked a year since Lorraine started her own business and I am delighted for her achievements. See her website at www.cakesbyjellery.com

Thank you

Although the funding situation for charities gets only more difficult, we are grateful for all who support us, particularly for the two- and three-year grants we have in place that give some security, along with regular donations. We are also thankful to all the individuals, schools, churches and organisations who give, generously, in money, food, toys, baby clothes, frozen chicken and other donations. I have enjoyed visiting various groups this year, including the WI at St Giles and St Georges Ashtead, and would like to thank their church especially for the year-round support as well as gifts at Christmas.

The We Are Family team have met increased need with 20% less funding this year, with the team of staff and volunteers working way beyond what I could ask of them, and I'm thankful for their skill, commitment and perseverance. It has been wonderful to have new staff members, Anisa Wright strengthening the Education team and Jenny Jones playing a vital role as Centre Manager. At least 30 volunteers have helped in different ways to make the work possible, and we are very grateful to them all. I appreciate the way that when we are presented with someone in crisis, the team has responded together sensitively, unselfishly and professionally to do whatever is needed.

Julia Acott

Director

From the Centre Manager

Well, I'm almost at the end of my first year as Centre Manager and what an insightful and rewarding year it's been.

I've been astounded by the generosity of all those who partner with Alternatives through donations of finances, clothing, equipment, expertise and their time.

I've watched women go from constant tears to constant smiles, from constantly fearful for their future to starting to have hope.

I'm amazed at the variety of things that I've been involved in, from We Are Family every week, trying to get a knitting group for the mums up and running, a day trip to the beach, moving furniture and even picking apples off a tree.

I've written letters of support to various agencies such as the Home Office or the housing department. I've counselled women experiencing unintended pregnancy and those that have needed support after abortions. I've done pregnancy tests for those who have wanted them. I've gone to appointments with some women, either as an advocate or purely because they couldn't face it alone. I've given out toys, clothing or groceries to others. I've helped women write CVs and use the internet.

A lot of women are scared of phoning agencies because their spoken English isn't great or they simply find it too overwhelming, so I often make these calls for them.

The team has been supportive, friendly and helpful from the start. They have constantly encouraged me and the office environment very much reflects the 'We Are Family' way of thinking.

Jenny Jones

Centre Manager



Jenny Jones (left) on the half term outing to the Museum of Childhood

Hannah's story (told by Jenny)

Hannah (not her real name) came to Alternatives when she was 14 weeks pregnant, had been fired from her job, and her husband was talking about leaving if she continued with the pregnancy. She was the main earner, and with two children already he felt their finances wouldn't stretch. She was depressed and felt that there was no-one for her to turn to or offer her any emotional support. After our initial meeting she decided to continue the pregnancy, went for counselling and started going to We Are Family, where she made friends. This combination helped her feel far more hopeful and able to successfully look for a new job. She also addressed her husband's lack of support and he is now in a full time permanent job. Their baby was born in September 2015 and everyone is happy.

Sally Craig, Counsellor

As a counsellor I offer clients a weekly hour of safe space which they can use as they choose: to reflect on present difficulties, past pain or worries for the future; to identify patterns and consider new choices; to creatively explore underlying themes... whatever they need. Working with women at Alternatives is a particular privilege with its own rewards and challenges.

The downside comes when a client fails to attend without notice. Earna, our gentle, patient childminder arrives and arranges suitable toys and activities and meanwhile I've read through my notes, prayed, warmed the room, boiled the kettle and plumped the cushions. Then we wait... But we have learned to be understanding. Often the client has been kept waiting or let down by health, legal or housing professionals and perhaps they have run out of phone credit. So we taste for ourselves some of their powerlessness and frustration.

Many of the clients here carry brutal abusive memories, often live in isolation with their child/ren and face very uncertain futures. Each deserves honour for her courage in facing her past, addressing her responsibilities and learning to show herself respect and kindness despite her external circumstances and internal pain: poverty, anxiety, loneliness, shame, fear and frustration. Watching these clients grow and dare, overcome fear or shame, blossom and take good care of themselves causes me to rejoice and give thanks to God for each one.

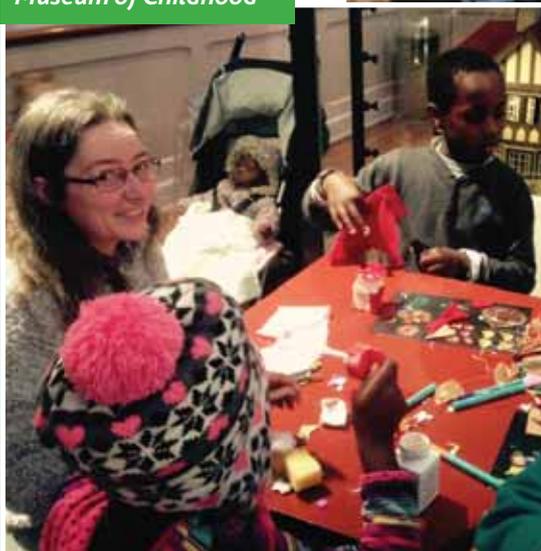
alternatives

SUPPORT TO PARENTS

We Are Family celebrating Funny's graduation on a Monday



Julia Dexter (left) at the Museum of Childhood



We Are Family

I will start with a big 'thank you' to the We Are Family team: Julia Acott, Chris Andrew, Elizabeth Booker, Earna Gibson, Pat Wiggins, Jenny Jones, and our wonderful volunteers: Jo, Mary, Melissa, Megan, Brenda, Elana, Harriet, Carys and Stefani. We couldn't manage without you.

We Are Family has grown substantially this year in several ways: in numbers attending the Monday sessions; in numbers of clients getting their 'leave to remain' in the UK; and in developing new ways of helping clients to move on.

The average number of parents attending We Are Family each week grew from 13 mums in Autumn 2014 to 20 mums in Autumn 2015. If all the families who have attended this year (and are still around) come to our Christmas party, we will have over 50 mums and over 75 children! This presents some practical challenges for us and a sense of being overwhelmed. But it also encourages us that our holistic approach is making a difference.

Through the weekly group and support in between from our part-time staff, We Are Family successfully builds the self-esteem of women who have had it destroyed by abuse. It equips them to cope with life and parenting, and gives practical help both with urgent needs like food and with resolving big problems like housing or immigration. It also enables women to move beyond their crisis and start to earn income and make a happy, stable life for themselves and their children. This can take two or three years, but we are constantly encouraged to see lives transformed by hope.

A smaller number of women attend the Practical Parenting Group. Topics are based on parents' individual needs with the opportunity for sharing experiences, practical activities and developing personal strategies and plans for their families.

Highlights this year were:

- *Visiting the Museum of Childhood in February; some parents were not aware that museums provided such engaging activities for their young children and have since returned to the museum during the school holidays.*
- *We had our certificate giving session with our friends at the Woodgate Community. They have a fantastic garden with a sand pit, water play, climbing frame and trikes for the children, and provided wonderful food for us all.*
- *We organised two trips to the beach this year because we had so many people. A group of 27 went to Leigh-on-Sea in July, for families with just pre-school children. Then in August 72 of us travelled by train to Shoeburyness. Both days were full of sunshine, paddling, boats and sand castles. Parents, children and team had a wonderful time. One mum said "It was the best day of my life."*

Support work

Earna's role has changed this year as more of our families take up the offer of free counselling at the centre. Earna has taken on looking after the children while parents attend their counselling session, a vital and essential part of our work. She also continues to manage the crèche which has faced the challenges of growing numbers. Earna regularly visits Newham Children's Centres, giving and collecting information about services for families. We have found that many centres are closing or cutting back hours they are open.

Healthy living

This year Alternatives has provided additional healthy lifestyle support through two targeted activities. Support worker Elizabeth took one or two mums and their children along to a family swimming session once a month for six months. These families now go swimming by themselves at a pool local to them. And during the summer a group of mums took part in a six-week exercise club to improve their fitness. 'It was fun and a great opportunity to do something for ourselves and our own physical wellbeing' says Elizabeth. In addition staff have had useful training on domestic violence and Female Genital Mutilation, so they can better support women who have experienced trauma because of these situations, or who are at risk.

The 4Dads group has met a few times this year, but it has been challenging to get men together when they have difficult lives and housing pressures. We will persevere with this.

I am encouraged that parents who first come to us tearful, sad and with little hope, have smiles on their faces and a purpose in their steps after being with us a small number of weeks. At first they are quiet and engage very little in discussion; but six weeks on are able to share personal challenges and triumphs.

'When I came, I felt so down, so depressed. They made me feel not alone.'

'Some problem arises – both children are crying, wanting me at the same time. I used to panic. By talking here I learn to think, who needs me the most, what's important for their safety, and I go with it. I used to panic, now I keep the balance.'

'Before I am always indoor, on my own. Last week they took us to Southend. We met other people with children. I've never done anything like that since I came to England. My son asked me "where did you meet all these people?" I said "did you like it?" He said "Mum I didn't like it - I loved it!"'

Julia Dexter and Elizabeth Booker



Babies on the beach



Funmy from the WAF Co-op has started a party food business offering candy floss, popcorn, chocolate fountain, hot dogs and milkshakes.

The WAF CAF

The WAF CAF opened on 21 April 2015, growing out of the enterprise group with Sarah Moriah. It was officially opened by Cllr Clive Furness and Rev Mark Janes. The café has been open every Tuesday since then, from 11 am – 2 pm in a large room at the front of Memorial Community Church in Plaistow.

The WAF CAF is part of our social enterprise initiative and is run by a group of mothers who have come through the We Are Family group. The main purpose of the café is to empower these mums, give them skills and experience in the work place.

The café serves different meals from around the world which include Tasty Cheesy Pasta, Lamb Curry served with Rice, Jollof Rice served with Fried Chicken, and Special Fried Rice. The food is cooked by the mothers on site. Customers are local people including those who work in nearby offices and in the church buildings. Takings have risen gradually and mums take

home a small amount each week, but its main value is helping mums develop skills of working together as a group and become more employable.

Our regular customers say: 'good tasty food in generous proportions, much appreciated'; 'good food, good prices, value for your money, a lovely sense of community'.

Sarah Moriah

Moving On: Davina's Story (told by Elizabeth)

Davina (not her real name) lost her husband and two children in her own country, came to the UK, and was left with nothing when she was pregnant. Friends she was staying with kicked her out, and she became pregnant again by a man she slept with to get a room. It was after this birth that Alternatives became involved.

We have worked with Davina for five years: support workers visited her in the room she and her children shared in a dangerously overcrowded house, helped her get a hostel place with Just Homes, and helped her with the long and difficult process of sorting out immigration status, which included moving into emergency accommodation while the application finally went through. For a long time she found it hard to form relationships and got very angry. Through We Are Family, counselling and living in the supported house, she has changed and is now in a stable place, forming good relationships with other mums.

Once she received her immigration status, Davina had to find work in order to rent her own accommodation. To gain some experience she volunteered with the WAF CAF for a short time. Now she has secured part-time work and is renting private accommodation for her family. She has moved on entirely from our support. I'm delighted to be able to say that the work that Alternatives has done has seen her go from a dejected and fearful woman to an independent woman supporting her family.

Jo and Anisa



2015 has been a year of consolidation, creation and expansion for the REALationships Education Team. At the beginning of the year, Jo Sell our Education Team Manager, participated in a webinar in conjunction with Inter Faith Explorers, designed to promote the importance of faith sensitive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in schools.

In April, Anisa Wright joined the team and together with Jo, Bianca Ferreira Da Silva and Pat Wiggins, ran a volunteer

training course at Tollgate Primary school. From that course we welcomed Jason-Alexander Addison-Francis, Shani-Marie Addison, Martha McNeil-Botros, Isobelle Loughrey and Carmel Widdowson to the REALationships Education Team.

The following month, Jo delivered a paper at the International Centre for Education and Democratic Citizenship Annual Conference, which took place at the Institute of Education (IOE), UCL. The title of her paper was 'Relationships and Sex Education in multicultural and multi religious settings; the struggle for human rights'.

Anisa has been busy promoting the work of the REALationships team and creating a new website www.REALationships.co.uk to support the training courses that they have been delivering and intend to deliver in the future. We want to be the first port of call for schools who are interested in developing their RSE policy with a view to being sensitive to the cultural and religious backgrounds of their students. This is, of course, challenging, but worthwhile, and many of those attending our most recent course can attest to this.

Our October Professional Training was run in conjunction with Claire Clinton of RE Matters and also took place at Tollgate Primary School. The course was attended by both primary and secondary schools in Newham with amazing feedback. All the participants stated that the course met or exceeded their expectations. A Deputy Head Teacher commented; 'An excellent day, thank you and I feel better prepared to support staff with teaching SRE faith sensitively and engaging parents too'.

Jo will be delivering a further training for teachers at the IOE in December and the team intends to run more courses for teachers in the spring term.

With all of this happening the team are still going into schools and teaching a series of Relationships and Unintended Pregnancy Lessons, as well as planning and facilitating a day's training for a new prefects of a mentoring programme in one of the schools.

Jo has collected more than half the data for her thesis and is grateful to all who have taken part in the research. The findings are already informing our training and delivery of lessons. Eighty four percent of students taking part wanted to learn about Relationships and Sex Education from their school, showing the importance of quality delivery of RSE in schools.

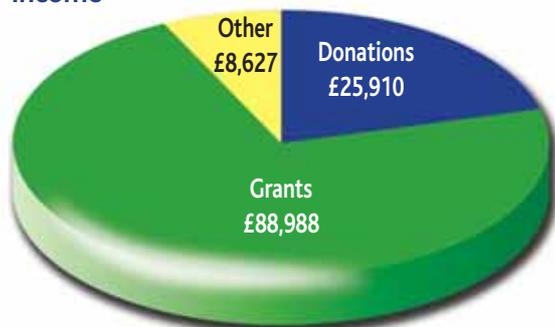
Supporting young people to engage with their faith perspectives, while negotiating the influence of culture, peers and the media is incredibly rewarding and we thank all those who have supported us, especially Sir Halley Stewart Trust for funding Anisa's post, Claire Clinton of RE Matters, Margaret Patient of Tollgate Primary School, staff and students at Plashet Secondary School and all the volunteers who have been with us in classrooms this year.

Jo Sell and Anisa Wright

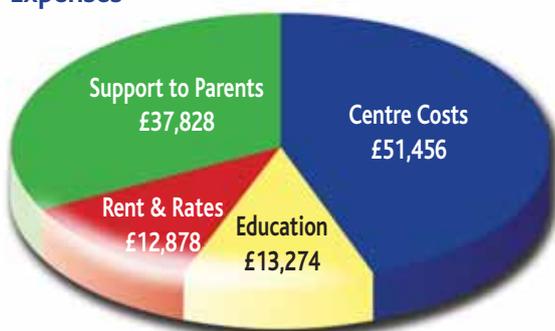
Financial Report

Thanks again to Philippa our fundraiser for all her excellent work during the year. We are relieved and thankful to have continued income from grants and donations in these austere times for charities when many are facing cuts or closure.

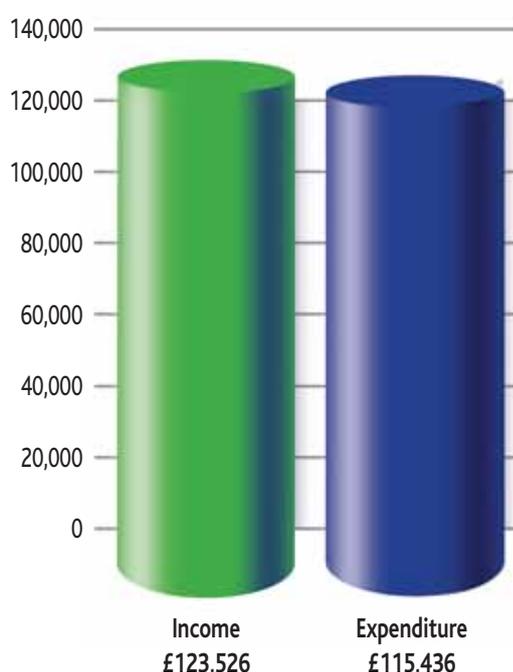
Income



Expenses



Income vs Expenditure



Thank you to all our funders during 2015 including:

Big Lottery Fund Awards for All
Diocese of Chelmsford
(London Over the Border Council)
Ford Britain Trust
Henry Smith Charity
Lloyds Bank Foundation
London Borough of Newham
Let's Get the Party Started
London Catalyst
Plaistow South Big Local Social Action Fund
Halley Stewart Trust
Souter Charitable Trust
Transform Newham
Trusthouse Charitable Fund
Woodgate Community
Woodward Charitable Trust

Churches and schools that gave gifts of food including Ascension Church, Calverton Primary School, CEM Church, Custom House Baptist Church, Memorial Community Church, Plaistow Christian Fellowship, Plaistow Seventh Day Adventist Church, St George's East Ham, Tollgate School

Christmas present donations from Community Links, In-Kind Direct, Petts Wood Christ Church and Parish of St Giles and St George, Ashted who also give generous financial donations.

Many other churches and individuals – thank you!



Julia Acott with some of the many toys donated for children's Christmas presents. The Tiggers are thanks to Disney Store's partnership with In Kind Direct.



Alternatives Trust East London

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Registered charity number 1103724

How can I respond?

We are funded entirely by grants and voluntary donations. Please give generously so that we can keep making a life-changing difference to women who have nothing and no hope:

- *By cheque made payable to "Alternatives Trust East London" to: Alternatives Trust East London, Forrest House, 63 Rowntree Clifford Close, Liddon Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AB.*
- *By bank transfer to Barclays, 737 Barking Road, London E13 9PL, sort code 20-67-88, account number 90268666, account name Alternatives Trust East London.*

If you pay tax and would like us to claim Gift Aid, please write or email with your name and address stating, "I want Alternatives Trust East London to treat my donations as Gift Aid donations."

For more information please contact alternatives@altel.org.uk or 020 7476 8215 or see www.altel.org.uk