

# Annual Report 2017



**32**  
moved into  
volunteering,  
training or work



**114**  
families  
we have  
worked with



**122**  
birthdays  
celebrated

# Letter from the Director



**Julia Acott,  
Director**

2017 has been the busiest year ever! I seem to say this every year, but just look at the numbers in our infogram. I'm grateful for all the hard work put in by staff, volunteers and trustees, and am really hoping that our team can grow in the next year.

For this report we asked members of staff and volunteers to tell us a highlight of their year. These are mine.

- *Outings are always a highlight. We Are Family had a fabulous day out with over 100 people at the seaside in August.*
- *I have heard some amazing stories from the women we work with, like M who had never ever had a birthday present in her life until she came to We Are Family. When we first celebrated her birthday with a cake at We Are Family, she couldn't believe it was for her. It's always a highlight when we hear good news of immigration paperwork being accepted and people's lives able to move forwards.*
- *In February I went to Vilnius to deliver three days of training in counselling for unintended pregnancy and post abortion counselling. This inspired me to renew some of the training materials I have used in the past, and made me determined to develop training at Alternatives so we can become more sustainable and pass on what we have learned.*
- *This year we finally created a training manual for 'We Are Family Too'. Over 200 pages of session plans and resources form a structured one year curriculum for new We Are Family groups, comprised of content taken from the combined experience and practical application of our excellent team. This is a big step forward that we hope to build on the next year, training other people to start We Are Family groups in different locations.*
- *During the year I trained to become a Barnardo's LINK counsellor and learned their Attachment Focussed Therapy and 'My Family' Programme. I then was able to put it into practice with a particular family.*
- *It was lovely to see the buildings start to become 'ours', with rewiring taking place over the summer, and rooms being re-arranged as we continue to expand.*

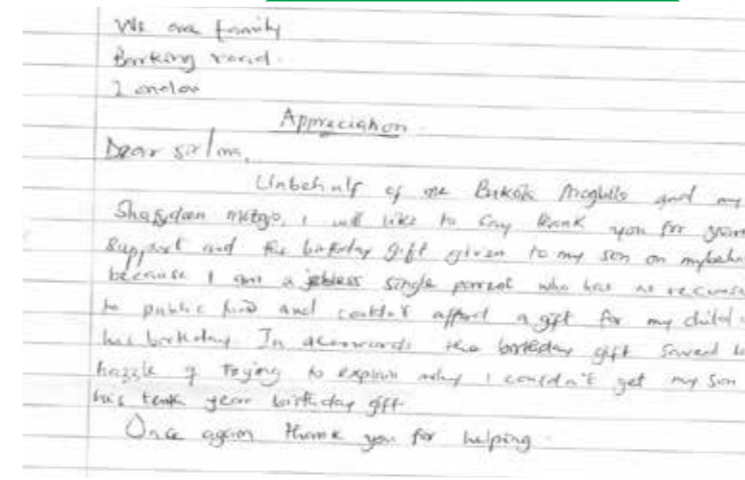
- *I personally saw many more counselling clients than usual, about 300 hours in total over the year.*
- *We were delighted to welcome some excellent people to our team.*

We said goodbye to Elizabeth Booker in March, who moved on to pursue academic research following her degree, and were glad to welcome Jade Ford as We Are Family Support worker after Easter. We welcomed Philippa King back as Fundraiser in July, and Jeremy Acott as Development Worker from June. We said thanks and farewell to Matt Neal for his work with the Education Team but are glad he is staying on to manage the FRYP website. Kate Neal continues as Education Manager, and we welcome her to new responsibilities with We Are Family and the WAF social enterprises. Farewell and thanks to We Are Family volunteer Cheryl Titmus, and thanks to Melissa King and Stefanie McRoy, who both helped us at WAF on their college placements. Many thanks to the Woodgate Community, who have now moved from Forest Gate, for their many hours of volunteering help over the years, especially in the garden and the crèche, and for generously hosting We Are Family visits.

Our strengthened trustee board is invaluable at leading Alternatives through this time of change, challenge and growth. And as always we are very grateful to everyone from the local community and beyond who partners with us or supports us in different ways.



*Some children's clothes donated to our shop recently*



## Forrest House

Our Centre at Forrest House was busy with around 3,000 client visits. Women come in for counselling appointments, to pick up donated food or baby things, and to seek help with very difficult situations. Thanks to generous food donations, including regular provision from City Harvest, Community Food Enterprise and Nando's, we are able to give regular food to families who live on no income. And donated baby equipment like buggies and cots, as well as clothes, are passed on time and time again to families that need them, and are very much appreciated. This is ably managed by Centre Manager Jenny Jones and administrator Pat Wiggins, who also help out with We Are Family.

*"A woman called M came to the Centre with her two-year-old having been told she could no longer stay with her friend as they'd been evicted. After a cup of tea and a chat, I gave her a letter of support and advised her to go straight to the local housing office. She returned the next day, after having paid to spend the night in a B&B, and I advised her to go back to housing. The following day she came back grinning from ear-to-ear to tell me that the housing office had provided temporary accommodation in a hostel, and had also helped her access some benefits. This has had a massive impact on her sense of security and she has visibly relaxed."*



**Jenny Jones,  
Centre Manager**

*"We are very grateful to have many new toys donated to us. When one of our We Are Family children has a birthday, we wrap up presents for them, and give them to the mother to pass them on to their child. B's son's birthday was imminent so I wrapped a few items up for him, and gave her the package when she came to collect some food from Forrest House. She was really taken aback and could not believe that we would remember her son in this way or that we were even aware of his birthday. She was so thankful to us, she wrote us this lovely letter afterwards."*



**Pat Wiggins  
and donated food**

## Counselling

At least 1,000 hours of counselling were provided by Julia Acott and six volunteer counsellors, some of whom are counsellors on placement. They are a huge benefit to Alternatives. It means mums from We Are Family, who could never afford counselling, can get professional and sensitive help to deal with some incredibly traumatic situations, and this makes a real difference to their lives. Many thanks to Masuma, Melanie, Sally, Coleen, Simone, and Ann, plus Barbara for supervision, and Earna who has provided the childcare that enables mums to attend.

*"This year I have been challenged by the profound powerlessness of my clients here. Some are waiting to hear whether they can continue to raise their own children or have them removed in custody battles; others, whether they can remain in this country where support is available or be deported to the very place they fled in fear. Yet they show extraordinary courage and self-restraint as they go about their lives. It is a privilege to work with each one."*

**Sally Craig**





The weekly We Are Family Club has continued to grow, with an average of 30 families taking part each Monday since September and a smaller group meeting for Practical Parenting classes. We Are Family relies on some wonderful volunteers, particularly in the crèche, which offers fun activities for a lot of young children while their mums learn about parenting and life skills. Staff provide holistic support with parenting, practical needs and advocacy. Counselling is available at our Centre. And there is lots of fun and social activity too, with the annual seaside outing always a highlight. You can see more on our new website [www.wafcommunity.com](http://www.wafcommunity.com)

The We Are Family Club on a Monday morning is staffed by Support to Parents Manager Julia D, Director Julia A and retired psychiatrist Chris Andrew, with Earna Gibson as Crèche Manager. Because the group is now so large, Jade, Jenny and Pat are invaluable to support the session, and all play practical roles during the week as well. Many thanks to volunteers Cheryl, Jo, Stefanie, Elizabeth, Josephine, Agnes, Wendy, Chantelle, Melissa and drivers on outings Mark, Yvonne, Peter and Brian.



Half-term craft session



A half-term craft session for the whole family was enjoyed by 20 parents and 37 children, with only five babies in the crèche. It was great to see mums getting just as involved as their children. They reported afterwards that their children didn't stop talking about the fun they had, and they enjoyed using the remaining craft materials that we gave them to take home.



*"In June I attended the birth of a baby girl. I have a strong bond with this family having been present at the birth of two previous children. This labour was special because the day marked the beginning of Eid celebrations a very important day for the family and a privilege to have a child on this day. The maternity unit sent us away at around 7 pm because mum was in the early stages of labour. So mum and I walked around*

*Plaistow and talked together for about two hours, stopping every few minutes as the contractions came. When we returned to the hospital, dad had arranged child care for the siblings and was there too. This was a long hard labour, and baby was born safe and well around 3 am. The sense of awe and wonder at being present at the birth of a child is incredible and will always stay with me. Mum said "I very much appreciate the journey of life we have shared together, and being part of Alternatives has made a real difference to me."*

**Julia Dexter**

*"I joined Alternatives Trust in April 2017 as a family support worker and help to run our Practical Parenting group. My journey so far with Alternatives has been an inspiring experience; I thoroughly enjoy working with all our parents that come through our door. Our aim is to support mums to build a strong and secure relationship with their child. Already this term we are seeing more regular mums attending Practical Parenting every week with their children, and really engaging with our topics, which are chosen organically to meet each of our parents' current situations and needs."*

*"The WAF staff and mums are amazing people to be around, I personally feel. It's a very homely and family environment which is nurturing for mums and children alike."*

**Johura**

Some names have been changed to protect confidentiality



Jade Ford with Mateo



Funmi with her son Mayowa at Shoeburyness



Earina in the creche

**We Are Family Too**

*"This year we had the challenge of creating a WAF manual and extending what we do to other groups. To test out the new materials, Julia Acott and I ran two pilot sessions of six weeks each with two groups, one in Newham and one in West London.*

*The group in West London were geographically close to Grenfell Tower and we were running the pilot's second session a few days after the devastating fire occurred. Our session that week was an emotional one; we listened to parents' own experiences; what they did, where they were, how they were managing and the struggles of speaking with their children, many of whom had lost school friends and best friends who at that stage were simply missing; no one knew if they were alive, in hospital or caught up in the fire.*

*We gave time for everyone to share their story; there were many tears. After this, everyone wanted to talk about something else so we continued with the planned teaching on parenting styles. Everyone went away saying they felt affirmed and encouraged. Many said this was just the sort of group they were looking for and attended the ongoing sessions with enthusiasm. This group decided to continue the WAF programme after we had left and are up and running independently, using our material and ethos."*



Julia Dexter

**Partnership Working**

We are very glad to still have the Acorn Midwifery Team running clinics in Forrest House on Mondays, giving other pregnant and vulnerable mums a safe place for their maternity care as well as introducing them to We Are Family. We also value our partnership with Just Homes, who provide housing for some of the vulnerable families we work with.

Aston Mansfield's Community Involvement Unit has introduced us to a six-month Evaluation Exchange, where we are working with University College London students to improve our monitoring and evaluation. We are delighted to have the help of this project to strengthen our skills in this area, and through it to have met The Magpie Project, a local charity working with families in unsuitable housing.

The WAF staff take part in Newham's Early Help Network meetings and we also network with the Children's Centres in the borough. We value the support of Foodbanks and many other like-minded agencies in Newham to achieve the best outcomes for families.

We have enjoyed meeting Gladys from WAND UK (Women's Association for African Networking and Development) in West London and are looking forward to developing some partnership working with this small charity in the coming year.

**WAF Co-operative**



Agnes and Sherifat catering for the WAF CAF

The WAF Co-operative, started by a group of mums to increase confidence and employability, ran a successful pop-up café for the first half of the year. Now it is focussing on local catering and on re-launching the Creations charity shop in Prince Regent Lane as the We Are Family Charity Shop. Sarah is now Charity Shop Manager with Kate, and Yetunde has become WAF Catering Manager.

The shop is gearing up for a launch event in the New Year, but it is currently open 10 am – 3 pm, Tuesday to Friday, while preparation is in progress. Donations are very welcome, so bear us in mind if you are having a clear out. And we are looking for people from the local community to volunteer



Yetunde, the new WAF CAF Manager

alongside the mums, so please do get in touch if you can help.

Members of the WAF community also volunteer as 'Buddies' to get alongside other women in crisis and help them find the solutions to their problems. WAF Angels are looking for more customers in the local area who would like their houses cleaned or their ironing done. Do get in touch if this sounds tempting! One mum has been able to use the money she has earned from cleaning to pay for a teacher assistant training course.

## Education

From September to April last year, the Education Team was made up of Liz Booker, Matthew Neal and Kate Neal. Over the course of the year the team were assisted by seven wonderful volunteers who helped them deliver 81 lessons in three secondary schools across the borough, teaching over 2,000 students. From September 2017, Kate Neal took over as Education Manager. During the year the Faith, Relationship and Young People (FRYP) website had much-needed revamp and relaunch.



Visit our We Are Family website [www.wafcommunity.com](http://www.wafcommunity.com)

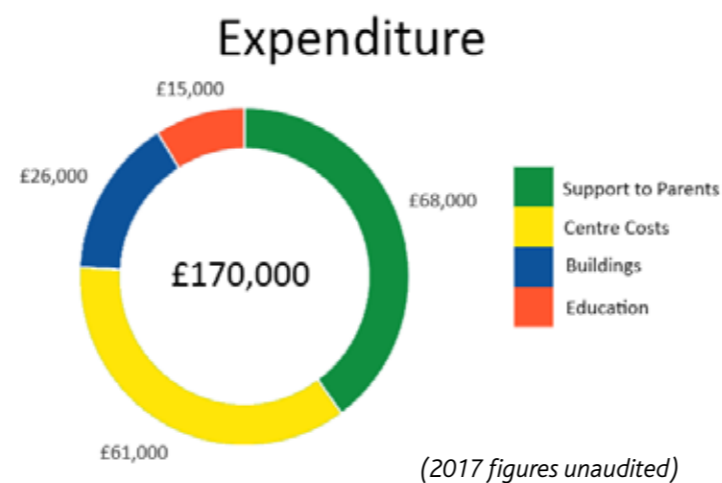
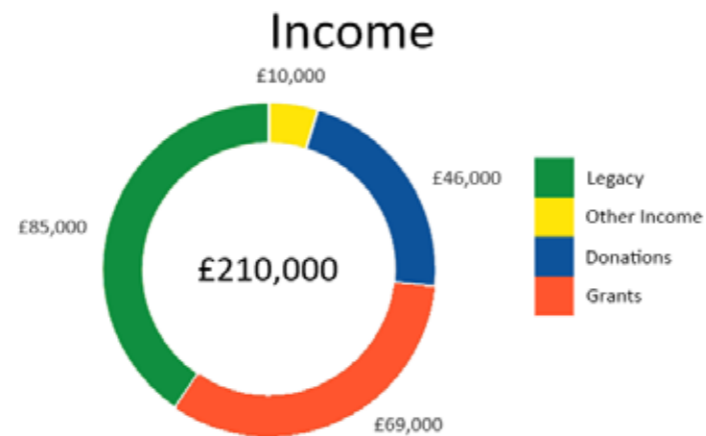
*"The highlight of my year has been meeting so many different young people and getting a chance to positively impact the way they think about their relationships with other people.*

*One young person in a Relationships lesson felt very strongly that violence was an important part of any relationship due to the need for control over the other person to be established before 'they think they can control you'. After a detailed discussion, I was able to establish that this child was involved in gang culture outside of school and that they in fact felt trapped by his situation. I was then able to flag this up to the school who then assured me that they would work towards monitoring and supporting that child."*



Kate Neal

## Finances and Development



(2017 figures unaudited)

While we are trying to increase our earned income, Alternatives is always grateful for grants from trusts, foundations and donations, as well as in-kind and voluntary support. In 2017 we were fortunate to receive a significant legacy of £85,000 and we are developing plans how best to use it in 2018. Thank you to the operations team at Alternatives who support us; Jenny Jones and Peter Bailey (administering the finances); Philippa King (back again as our fundraiser); and Jeremy Acott (online giving, appeals and events).



## Our funders during 2017 include:

- Aston-Mansfield
- Big Lottery Awards for All
- Charles Hayward Foundation
- BBC Children in Need
- Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund
- Henry Smith Charity
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- London Borough of Newham (LGTPS)
- London Catalyst
- London Over the Border Fund
- SEGRO Community Fund for London
- Trusthouse Charitable Foundation
- Valerie Barber
- Waitrose Community Matters

Nando's, City Harvest and Community Food Enterprise for regular food donations

InKind Direct for great value items and donated soft toys at Christmas

Churches and schools that gave gifts of food and other donations including CEM Church, Custom House Baptist Church, Memorial Community Church, St Oswald's Croyley Green, Plaistow Christian Fellowship, Plaistow Seventh Day Adventist Church, St George's and Ethelbert's East Ham,

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

**Many other churches and individuals – thank you!**

## Development

Jeremy Acott started working at Alternatives six months ago as a part-time Development Officer. His creative IT skills have been just what we needed. Take a look at the beautiful new website he has created for the We Are Family Community: [www.wafcommunity.com](http://www.wafcommunity.com)

He has also updated our main Alternatives website, launched a digital bi-monthly newsletter, organised a sponsored swim and a Christmas appeal with The Big Give [www.thebiggive.org.uk](http://www.thebiggive.org.uk), produced the WAF training manual and created some short films to promote the work of our charity and celebrate some of our successes. They are coming shortly to our website!

*"In some ways I have always been connected to Alternatives, since its birth in 1994. I would have been 12 years old when my mum, Julia Acott, first started our fantastic charity. However during these last six months I feel I have understood and learnt much more deeply about the transforming work that we do here. I have loved contributing to our overall aims."*



Jeremy Acott

## How you can help: Stay in touch

Please do sign up to our new and exciting newsletters. They will keep you in touch with what we are doing, and with events and opportunities to help. Just email [alternatives@altel.org.uk](mailto:alternatives@altel.org.uk) Or sign up via our website, [www.altel.org.uk/](http://www.altel.org.uk/) mailing-list

## Give

- We now have two ways to give online. You can make a donation to Alternatives Trust East London via [www.thebiggive.org.uk](http://www.thebiggive.org.uk), where at certain times of year they will double your donation! You can also make one-off or regular donations to Alternatives Trust East London via [www.mydonate.bt.com](http://www.mydonate.bt.com) Both of these websites handle Gift Aid for us.
- By cheque made payable to "Alternatives Trust East London" to: Alternatives Trust East London, Forrest House, 63 Rowntree Clifford Close, 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](mailto:alternatives@altel.org.uk) or 020 7476 8215 or see [www.altel.org.uk](http://www.altel.org.uk)

## In Kind donations

We rely on donations of new children's toys, Christmas gifts, food, baby equipment, toiletries and clothes to pass on to people who really appreciate them. Would your school, church or club like to help out by collecting for Alternatives at Harvest or another occasion? The new charity shop is interested in any good-quality items.

## Volunteers

New volunteers are always welcome in a variety of roles, regular or occasional, from driving to gardening to wrapping presents! We would love your support; please do get in touch if you'd like to join the team.

## Trustees of Alternatives Trust East London:

**Chris Andrew** – retired psychiatrist

**Christina Baby** – finance director of partner charity Just Homes

**Carol Baynes** – local parent with a special interest in education

**Howard Chapman (chair)** - businessman

**John Coombs** – local bank manager and charity mentor

**Mark Janes** – minister of Memorial Community Church

**Sarah Moriah** – one of the first members of We Are Family

**Andy Pople** – local GP

**Eva Price** – volunteer with Alternatives since it began in 1994



*WAF Charity Shop located at 66 Prince Regent Lane E13 8QQ*



### Alternatives Trust East London

Forrest House, 63 Rowntree Clifford Close, Liddon Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AB

020 7476 8215

[alternatives@altel.org.uk](mailto:alternatives@altel.org.uk)

[www.altel.org.uk](http://www.altel.org.uk)

[www.wafcommunity.com](http://www.wafcommunity.com)

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