

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.

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SUPPORT TO PARENTS



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.



A happy Christmas at the We Are Family club, thanks to generous donations of gifts



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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 8 1/2 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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Annual Report

2009

Director's Highlights

At 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 Ashted 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.



We Are Family picnic in the park



On the outing to Minnis Bay

"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."



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It was wonderful to see in the end complete acceptance by both families of their beautiful grand-daughter, and of the couple's marriage.

It was a great shock and sadness when Joanna Thompson, my CareConfidential boss and very good friend, died suddenly in July just six weeks after being diagnosed with cancer. I was privileged to speak at her memorial service. My workload at CareConfidential as head of Counselling and Support has increased, but it is great to be part of such a supportive network of similar centres around the UK.

I have spoken about the work of Alternatives and delivered training in many places again this year, and it was a pleasure to welcome visitors from France, Sweden and South Africa as well as the UK. A highlight of the year was speaking at the Appah congress in California about the work of Alternatives, how to support those facing unplanned pregnancy, particularly in difficult situations. I was also the guest with Michael Fanstone's Premier Radio Phone-In Programme, and was interviewed for Patrick Forbes 'Traveller's Tales'. Four of us attended and three of us took part in the CareConfidential national conference in November, where I was a keynote speaker.

Last year's new venture, lifeskills training groups called PALS (People and Life Skills) and TIPS (Training in People Skills) developed through the year with consistent groups of between 12 and 22 people benefiting. S said, "I've been putting it into practice and it really helped me not get too stressed this week."

At the centre we continue to see a large number of women in acute need. Even with the tireless work of Barbara our centre manager and the WAF staff, we have been very stretched, and I'm delighted that we have just been awarded funding to employ an additional part-time member of staff, a Family Outreach Worker. We are now bursting at the seams in our premises in Prince Regent Lane and are thinking about expansion. We are looking at building a meeting room in the back yard, and in the long term we are hopeful of being involved with other Newham charities in a building scheme that would provide supported homes for families as well as office space.

We anticipate growth in all our areas of work in 2010, and are hoping to start a second and possibly a third We Are Family group, see more men getting involved in providing support to fathers, and multiply our faith-sensitive REALationships programme within Newham and beyond. I am excited and challenged for what might happen in the next year!

We are thankful for everyone who so generously supports our work. We have some very good funding for our projects and some salaries, but we still rely on the generosity of individuals to cover our centre's running costs. I am especially grateful for a growing relationship with St Giles' and St George's churches in Ashtead, Surrey. Many thanks also to all who support our work with donations and in prayer. I have been encouraged by the prayer breakfasts organised during the year by our chair of trustees, Vikki Neal.

Please do get in touch if you would like to make a gift or receive regular news from us. Many thanks.

Julia Acott



A happy ending for this young couple who married after having their baby. Barbara Church, Steve and Julia Acott and Julia Dexter were invited to the wedding.

At the centre we continue to see a large number of women referred by social services in acute need, or sometimes about to leave hospital after giving birth with nowhere and nobody to go to.



The Counselling Centre

Our new Centre Manager Barbara Church started at the end of 2008 and was fully occupied from the start. She herself has seen over 100 clients who have dropped in or made an appointment to speak with us during this time and many more have been helped by other staff and volunteer advisors.

Some of these clients have come for a pregnancy test and the opportunity to talk, and others attend on a regular basis to try and understand some of their thoughts and emotions after they have had a termination, but all come with a unique and often difficult set of circumstances influencing their thinking and the choices they make.

Increasingly during 2009, we have been faced with new clients who are being referred to us by other agencies, pregnant, wanting to continue their pregnancy, but with no recourse to public funds. We have been in the privileged position of being able to help all of these clients with immediate practical needs and longer term emotional and parenting support.

For example, in February Social Services called asking if we could help a girl of about 18 who was coming out of hospital that day with a baby but was homeless, had nowhere to go and was not eligible for public funds. We found her a place to stay, and took over a Moses basket for the baby to sleep in and other equipment. She came regularly to We Are Family and received support through the project. She has now moved on, but this intervention gave her the opportunity to bond well with her baby and she was an excellent mother. There have been several others in a similar situation.

Baby equipment and clothing bank

Our baby equipment and clothing bank has been used on almost a daily basis this year, and there has been a fast turnaround of items coming through the centre and going out almost straight away to someone to needs them. During challenging economic times we are enormously thankful for the generosity of those who donate second-hand items.

The centre team has had ten volunteers faithfully doing their shifts during the year. We are thankful for their reliability and commitment to Alternatives, and for those who regularly cover the CareConfidential freephone telephone helpline 0800 0282228 offering a listening ear and advice in crisis pregnancy and post abortion circumstances. The telephone line is covered by the centre four times a week. An accredited Called to Care training course for new advisors has recently completed. We are delighted that some have joined our team, and we hope others will be in a position to offer a commitment of time to help at Alternatives in the future too. We will be arranging further Called to Care training dates, so if you are interested in training as an advisor, please get in touch.



This year seems to have presented even more opportunities and challenges than last. The range of lessons and the scope for using them has grown.

Schools work

At the end of last year Jo was joined by Katie Evans as a part-time schools worker, with funding from the London Borough of Newham. Her support and her skills in the class room have been a wonderful addition to the Education Team and it has meant that our capacity has grown. As well as our great volunteers, Barbara, Julia A and Julia D have also been in the classroom when needed.

We have delivered around 1,803 pupil sessions* including work at Langdon School, Plashet School, the Pupil Referral Unit, Cumberland School and Stratford College, delivering in a number of settings: SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) classes, RE classes, drop-ins, targeted work, GCSE Health and Social Care, and also working on the new borough-wide Diploma course.

Wellbeing Suites

Alternatives has been instrumental in the development and setting up of the two new Wellbeing Suites in Newham. We enjoyed being at the launch for the Eastlea School and Rokeby School Wellbeing Suites, and we hope to be involved on a regular basis at Eastlea.

Events

The Education Team have been involved in a number of different events. We attended Freshers' Fairs around the borough, where we publicised the services of the centre, as well as giving sexual health advice and asking students to come up with ideas of "How to tell someone you love them without having sex." You can see a list of 101 of their ideas on the NewISH website, www.newish.org.uk.

We also helped out at Stratford Circus with an evening event called 'Recognize,' funded by our borough and run by SHiNE, one of our partners in NewISH. Katie and Jo hosted a workshop around relationships education at the CareConfidential Conference in November.

Training

We have provided more training for faith groups around the issues of relationships and sex. One course was for a church's young people's group, another was for youth workers from faith settings. We have especially been encouraged by the uptake of the course by those from African Christian backgrounds.

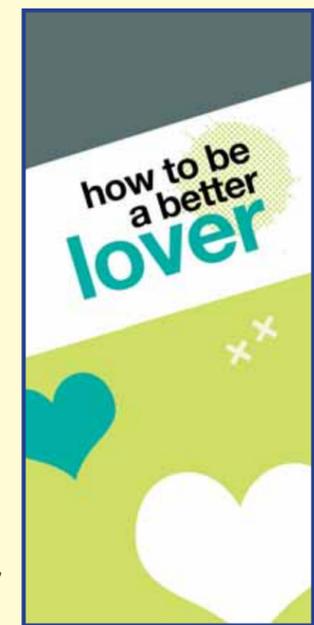
Continuing Professional Development

Katie and Jo have undertaken a number of training courses, which we feel are important to enhance the quality of delivery and content of the lessons we deliver, as well as an acknowledgment of our abilities. Katie took the SHiNE course for professionals, Jo took a Delay course that equips her to deliver their training, and both undertook Speakeasy training with the Family Planning Association and further training in PHSE.

Newham Interfaith Sexual Health (NewISH) Forum

We have set up the NewISH website thanks to a Health and Belief grant obtained by Alternatives, and have been awarded a Faiths in Action grant for its further development as from April 2010. The two events run this year went well although we would like to see more involvement of people from other faiths.

'Relating the lesson to biology gave the girls confidence to engage with the subject more fully.'
School with high number of Muslim girls.



Special thanks to all our funders:		Plus donations from:
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City Bridge Trust	Tudor Trust	
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