



Annual Report 2013

From the Director

It's been a year of heartfelt pain, tears, and wordless despair for some of the people we work with at Alternatives. But through sticking with them we have had the delight of seeing hope turn into joy as, step-by-step, circumstances that seemed impossible to endure are survived and transformed. This is our day-to-day reality, this is what makes it worth doing, and this is what makes the achievements we write about in this report so meaningful to people who have come to us at a point of crisis.

How do we do it? Through grace, love and hard work that eventually empowers people to overcome the harsh circumstances, backgrounds and systems they struggle with.

I must give many thanks, as ever, to the wonderful staff in every area of Alternatives' work, both paid and volunteers. Some have had very difficult personal situations this year and we are especially thankful to them for persevering with this work, which can be so unexpected and stressful at times. I'd particularly like to thank Marion May, who is retiring as a volunteer at the end of this year, for her fifteen years of faithful work as an advisor at the Centre. We are pleased to have so many volunteers who really make a difference to what we can achieve overall.

Staff at Alternatives have been pushing forwards with their own qualifications this year, which adds to our professionalism. Congratulations to Jo Sell on gaining a degree in Education. Chris Andrew and I have completed our MAs in Counselling and Psychotherapy, and Barbara Church is nearing completion of a Diploma in Integrative Clinical Supervision. Elizabeth Booker has started a Psychology degree this year - and encouraged mums from We Are Family to take various courses too.

We are also providing placements to three volunteer counsellors who are working towards professional qualifications, and this has strengthened the counselling service we are able to provide. Thanks to Sue Dixon who has completed her placement with us, and to Linette Baker, Sally Craig and Janet Hill who are continuing. Our clients have challenging lives, so it is not necessarily the easiest placement to have, but full of richness and challenge and great experience.



Mums starting a course at Jamie's Ministry of Food

It is great to see some of the families we support moving forwards in different ways - with their parenting, their status, and their personal development. One of the mums who has been part of We Are Family for several years has just started her own cake making business, with a website and business cards. She has donated some of her initial profits back to Alternatives as a thank you for the support and encouragement she has received. Her first five-pound note was handed to me with a beaming smile. Its value to us is far more than five pounds!

Sadly we had to put the 4Dads work on hold for a few months at the end of the pilot project, but we are pleased to have a small grant to continue on a reduced scale. Thanks to Chigozie Eneremadu, Simon Gibson and Chris Andrew for their work in piloting this project. It is valuable work and we want to acknowledge the importance of supporting Dads.

We are very grateful to our committed team of trustees, who hold our vision and have hands-on involvement in our work. Huge thanks to Peter and Hannah Watherston who have moved to Bishop Auckland after 35 years in Newham and been trustees and role models throughout the life of Alternatives. They have supported us financially and practically by housing many women who needed it, and developed the charity Just Homes to provide housing for many more people. Very many thanks also to Vikki Neal who is moving to Teignmouth with her husband Terry. Vikki has been involved as an advisor since 1996, has contributed to the education work, and has been Chair of Trustees since Alternatives registered as a charity. Vikki and Terry have also organised local prayer breakfasts to support Alternatives. Also thanks to Andrew Barnardo who has just decided to step down for practical reasons. We have welcomed as a new trustee retired psychiatrist Chris Andrew, who has been alongside us since 2000, and Christina Baby who partners us with us as the Director of local social enterprise First Fruit.

During the year we have developed good partnerships with other local voluntary organisations, notably working to address family poverty in Newham with Aston-Mansfield, Bonny Downs Community Association and Community Links; and supporting families with no recourse to public funds with Just Homes, Praxis and the local Franciscan Friary.

This next year we are praying for enough funding to sustain and develop what we are doing, so we can continue to give good support to those who need it. The ongoing cuts to public services mean many more referrals to us within the voluntary sector.

We are hopeful that social enterprise work with our mums will develop in this coming year, and benefit those who are moving forwards as they get their leave to remain in the UK and then need to earn an income to support their families.

Julia Acott
Director


alternatives
Alternatives Counselling Centre

Barbara Church, Centre Manager

Alternatives Counselling Centre is open daily, with Barbara the Centre Manager as the main point of contact for those who call in for help and those who ring Alternatives. During 2013 there have been 900+ callers to the centre, some of whom have been meeting regularly with Barbara, and she has personally had 450 regular appointments so far in 2013.

Local people and supporters continue to make donations to Alternatives of second-hand baby equipment, cot bedding, children's clothing and toys. An observation at the end of 2013 is that families who need equipment are looking for small or foldable items, and are not able to take large cots or buggies that don't fold, because they are often living in one room and have nowhere to

store them. This may be a reflection of the cramped and overcrowded living accommodation that many in London face in 2013 and beyond.

Barbara works with Pat and Christina to organise items given to Alternatives so that they can be passed on to the families who need them. Our clients are really grateful to have the clothing and equipment that they need, and the generous quantity of donations also allows us to work with other local agencies and Social Workers to offer practical support where requested for other families in Newham too. We are always pleased to be able to help local people in this way.

The Acorn Midwife, who works with young and vulnerable clients in Newham, continues to use a room at Alternatives each week for appointments, and regularly refers clients to Alternatives for practical support and advocacy. Some of these families also get support from Alternatives' We Are Family group meetings each week.

During the last two years Alternatives has been grateful to receive donated non-perishable food items from Harvest Festivals at local schools and churches, and we have been pleased to be able to pass this food on to families who have very little.

Barbara capably manages the practical day-to-day issues relating to the building, use of rooms and computers, and we have been pleased to be able to replace some of the ageing computer server equipment this year, thanks to a grant from Awards for All. Barbara also oversees the volunteers (Vikki, Marion, Eva, Debbie, Linda and Christina) who assist with tasks in the Centre and covering the CareConfidential helpline, and she has continued to visit local secondary schools in Newham with the Education Team to deliver lessons to Year 10 and Year 11 students.

Barbara is nearing completion of a Diploma in Integrative Clinical Supervision training course started earlier this year, and is now responsible at the Centre for oversight and supervision of the volunteers and placement counsellors in their client work for Alternatives.

Some comments:

Client N is 36, experienced a pregnancy loss and has been attending regularly for six months. *"It feels better to talk about what I am feeling rather than hold it all in. Things are better at home because I talk here and then I can find words to talk at home too."*

Client O is 22, is a student and discovered she was unexpectedly pregnant. She wanted to consider her options and came to several appointments over five weeks to talk through what she wanted to do. *"Thanks for being there and letting me talk about what I was feeling. I know things are going to change, but I think I've made the right decision for me".*

Client P is 15 and experienced pregnancy loss. She came regularly to try and to understand the different emotions she has been feeling following this experience. *"It feels better to talk. I feel lighter, and I'm glad I can come here."*

Client Q, has recently ended regular meetings following pregnancy loss. *"I'm really not sure where I would be now if I'd not had the chance to come to Alternatives. I feel that my past has integrated into my present, and I didn't think that would ever be possible."*



August fun in the park

Julia Dexter, Support to Parents Team Leader

The We Are Family group, aptly named by the first four mums in 2005, continues to meet week by week, providing teaching on parenting and life skills and a safe place for parents to be and to share - along with food, baby wipes (a luxury) and birthday celebrations. Team facilitators are Julia A, Chris, Elizabeth and Julia D. The crèche is managed by Earna; staff member Pat, and volunteers Kirsty, Samantha, Marie, Alice, Megan, Shaina, Harriet, Leah, and Jo have all been excellent crèche workers throughout the year. One former member of We Are Family was thrilled to be asked to volunteer, saying she appreciated being trusted to look after other people's children (when there was a time when nobody trusted her to care for her own).

Jo Brook, a paediatric physiotherapist by profession, continued to volunteer her time with us this year offering support and one-to-one advice to the parents. This has provided much reassurance for some parents and is an excellent addition to what we do. We also had recently-qualified nutritionist Kerry Riches volunteer her time to attend and facilitate regular sessions on nutrition which were very popular, refreshing and fun. Many thanks to both for their professionalism and freely given time.



Enjoying the beach at Herne Bay in July 2013

We have run 42 We Are Family sessions, 20 mid-week Parenting group sessions, and have had 50 families attending throughout the year. We received many referrals from midwives and social workers this year, and we continue to build good relationships with Newham health and childcare services. We also attend regular networking meetings with other community groups; Earna visits Newham Children's Centres each term to share information and introduce mums, and we have good connections with major local charity Community Links.

Outstanding memories of 2013 include our summer outing to the seaside at Herne Bay, on a day of perfect weather. Many parents, children and staff went in the sea and a lovely time was had by all, even those whose car broke down on the way. Many thanks once again to our faithful volunteers who drove minibuses and cars: Eva, Mark J, Julia A, Yvonne, Helen, Barbara, Dorothy, Brian, Simon, Jo, Peter and Mark P. We numbered 73 this year, our biggest group to date. The responsibility for such a disparate group, most of whom never leave the borough, is enormous and everyone works very hard to show what a good

time you can have with children at the seaside, even with no money for ice-cream.

It's been good to see parents moving forward with training, as described below. Staff members Elizabeth and Pat trained to deliver the CAP Money Course this year and ran it in a local community venue. Some mums have been supporting each other, with three organising the catering for the funeral of another mum's relative, which was much appreciated amid the emotional and practical complexities of her situation.

It's been lovely as ever to see real changes, with some parents achieving their leave to remain in the UK, several moving to better housing, some children coming off the At Risk register and several mums either starting small-scale employment or considering what they can do to support their families through micro-enterprise.

The mid week parenting group has been very successful this year, with between four and eight parents attending each week during term time. The teaching at this smaller group is personal and practical for those attending. We have had times where a parent has wept throughout the session and other times when we have all laughed heartily. Particularly memorable is a session where we taught five parents how to play Snap; we had lots of fun, laughing until we cried. We gave each parent a pack of cards to take home and they all reported back on successful fun times spent with their children playing games in a way they had never done before.

We also went to the Woodgate Community in July, where the children had lots of fun playing with sand, water, climbing frame and boxes. We gave out certificates to parents for their attendance at We Are Family and interviewed them asking how they experienced the group. I will leave the last words to our wonderful parents....

"It's brilliant they've helped me so much, in so many ways. It's fantastic"

"Come rain or snow I was going to come today. It's like missing your family"

"It is very good. They teach you many things, how to live your life, how to do things for your family. Every week, it helps me a lot. I did a Jamie Oliver course and got a certificate. I was very happy and proud!"

"For me the thing I like best is the benefit for children – the crèche for the children, the clothing for children, they make friends."

"It's absolutely brilliant. I really look forward to it. It's one and a half hours just for me. Personally it's helped me: anger, nutrition, dealing with people, dealing with emotions, budgeting. I've made lots of friendships and this year I have got close to a few people, that's good."

"It has impacted a lot on our lives. You can't look after a child without knowing what to do. When I had my first child I didn't know anything. Coming to WAF every day taught me how to deal with issues. It's been like another part of our family. When I come I feel relieved, I feel comfortable. It's something I would miss if there was no group."

"Being part of Alternatives is a big privilege for me. I'm proud to be part of WAF – it's like a family. Because of WAF I've made lots of friends, so many mums, they've encouraged me."

Moving on

Elizabeth Booker, Family Support Worker

Through a generous grant we were able to offer ten women the chance to participate in a cookery course at Jamie's Ministry of Food in Stratford. This gave a good basis of healthy, easy and importantly cheap recipes, and many of the women that took part have said that they learnt new skills and still make the meals they were taught. It was also valuable as an enjoyable communal activity, which helped foster a good feeling amongst the participants and provided a well-needed stress release for some.

In partnership with children's services at the Abraham Centre in E16 we were able to provide two courses, a seven-week course in Money Management and a four-week course on Introduction to the Care system, which was particularly aimed at new residents in the country who may not know how the NHS works. Six mums took these courses and were very pleased to be given certificates at the end. It is clear that the confidence levels of many mums have been raised by taking these courses, and that money management in particular struck a chord and will hopefully provide a good basis for individuals to make good financial decisions in the future.

Catering for Royalty

In April some of the mums from We Are Family had the pleasure of catering for HRH the Duke of Gloucester on a visit to Memorial Community Church, the venue where the We Are Family group is held. Four women provided a wide range of savoury and sweet things, including some traditional dishes from their home countries. The food was a great success and the WAF women were presented to the Duke. They showed not only their great talent but also their confidence and ability to impress even royalty. Well done to them.



Mums taking a money management course



Chigozie Eneremadu, 4Dads Support Worker



The work of the 4Dads group, launched in 2010, continued until March 2013 when its funding came to an end, but has just been able to re-start. This group consists of local men (fathers, male carers and partners of the women from WAF) who come together to discuss issues that are relevant to family life over a meal in a friendly and risk free environment.

On average we had six to seven regular fathers from diverse backgrounds who attended this meetings from January-March. It was always very fun and over the years we developed a real bond and close friendship.

The group usually invited external facilitators to come and run courses or workshops on parenting skills which impacted on the group members and fine tuned our parenting styles.

During this time Simon Gibson and myself would stay in touch through visits and phone calls to support, motivate and encourage our members. Carrying out this role for me was always uplifting and inexplicably satisfying as I knew that the positive words that I spoke to a member of our group brightened his day and thus made my own day.

Eight months after the group had been on break, a new lease of life was given to 4Dads through funding from Santander Community Plus to enable it to operate in the community for another year. We as members of the 4Dads are excited about this opportunity and we are thankful for this chance to continue the much needed support work of the 4Dads even if it is just for another year.

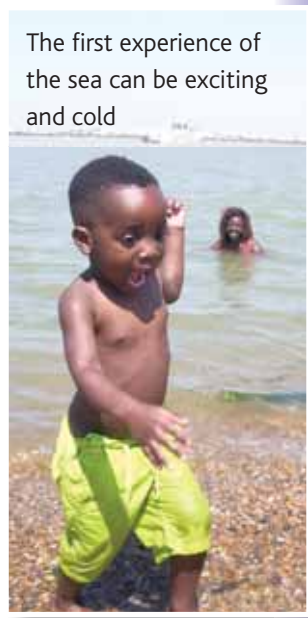
Jo Sell, Education Team Leader

2013 has been a quieter year for the Education team, but we have still delivered 1,140 pupil sessions in Newham schools and carried on running the Faith, Relationships and Young People website – www.fryp.org.uk. Jo, Barbara and Bianca have been joined in teaching sessions by Thai Cromer, who has also done some great work for us around social media.

In schools we deliver lessons on all aspects of relationships and sexual health, including unplanned pregnancy choices and HIV/AIDS. Staff feedback from the sessions includes statements like: "the topic was well focused on pupils at this time in their life"; "All faiths and values are respected and all viewpoints considered"; "Fantastic lesson"; "Spot on, thank you".

Much of Jo's time has been taken up with study at the Institute of Education, where she gained a first class honours degree in Education.

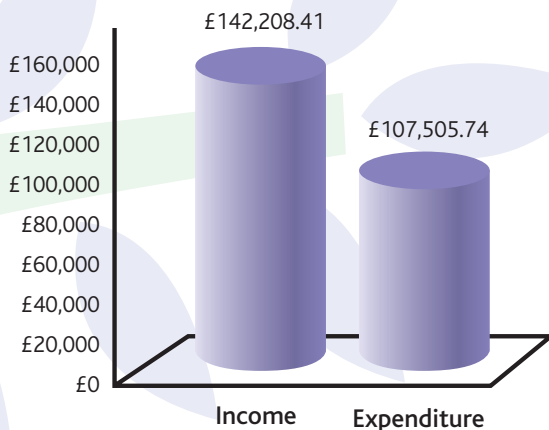
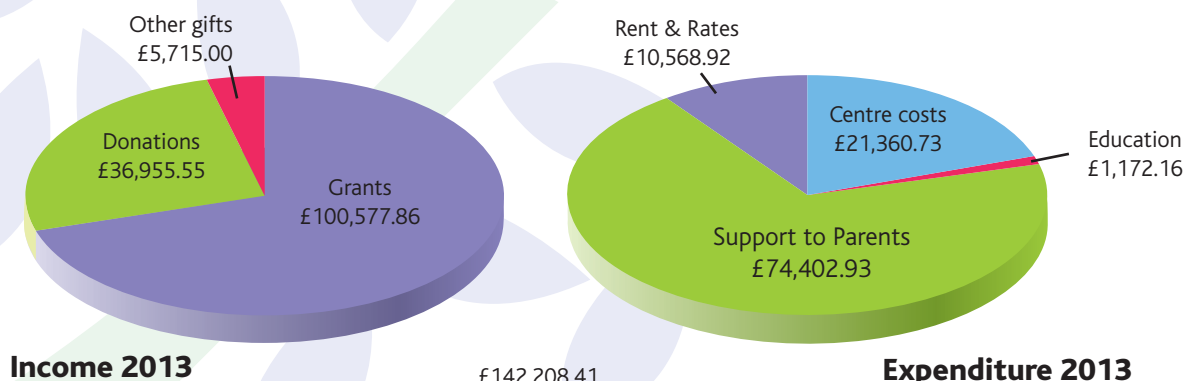
It is hoped that next year will be different again, as Jo has a chance to do some full time research work at the IOE as from January. Her start date will depend on funding and on grant bids that are being explored to fund a part-time Education Team Leader to develop the Education work and start new projects.



The first experience of the sea can be exciting and cold

Financial Statement

Thank you to Philippa our fundraiser and Sarah Acott our book keeper for their excellent work again this year. We are grateful to have sustained income from grants and donations in these difficult times when funding is much harder to secure. We have received several small grants at the very end of 2013 to be spent in the first part of the coming year, and have one more year of funding for our centre manager's salary, but nothing yet secured beyond that.



**Thank you to all our funders
during 2013 including:**

- Big Lottery Fund Awards for All
- Community First Canning Town North
- Co-operative Community Fund
- Drapers' Company
- Goldsmiths' Company
- Help a Capital Child
- Henry Smith Charity
- London Borough of Newham
Let's Get the Party Started
- London Catalyst
- Mercers' Company
- Parish of St Giles and St George,
Ashtead
- Santander Community Plus
- Transform Newham
- Trust for London
- Worshipful Company of Weavers

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



Alternatives Trust East London

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

020 7476 8215
alternatives@altel.org.uk

www.altel.org.uk

Registered charity number 1103724



Certificates awarded to
'We Are Family' members
after the course