



# Annual Report 2019

CELEBRATING  
**25**  
YEARS



*Julia Acott  
handing over to  
Simone Thomas,  
the new Director  
of Alternatives*

## Hello from Simone Thomas, Director



I've got the pleasure of writing to you after a crazy and brilliant three months with Alternatives as the newly appointed Director - and what a three months it has been! From learning the differences between a buggy, pram and pushchair, to meeting families that have experienced more trauma than I can imagine, my time working alongside you all at Alternatives has been varied. There have been so many special moments and I am so grateful to the team and the community for embracing me.

On the 25th September it was a joy to meet so many friendly faces at our 25 year celebration especially as it was a chance to hear first-hand just how special the work has been. Thanks so much to everyone who came along to celebrate with us over delicious food provided by the WAF CAF, scrumptious cake baked by our friend Lorraine and a warm friendly environment created by all who were present. Hearing how much love you all have for Julia Acott really shows what she has achieved; there were guests who have known Julia since the beginning who spoke just as warmly of her as those who are newer to the family than me. It's a big task to be taking on the mantle from such a wonderful person but I'm honoured to be working with you all and I really feel that God is with us as we transition into the next stage of our journey.

As I look to the future I'm excited to think about what we can do to love and support our community in a deeper and even more sustainable way. Whether you support us with your time, your prayers, your donations, your encouragement or your money, your contribution makes all the difference. Please can I invite you all to keep partnering with us to continue to love the vulnerable people of East London, because we can't do it alone, we need you! I can't wait to get to know each and every one of you better. The journey has only just begun!

*Simone*

### A Message from the Chair of trustees

As Chair of Trustees I want to say an enormous thank you to Julia, whose vision, passion and hard work started Alternatives and has grown it to the effective and compassionate organisation it is today. The transition from a founding Director to a new generation of leadership can be tricky for a charity, so as trustees we are delighted to have found someone of the calibre of Simone, who embodies Alternatives' caring and positive ethos, to lead it to the next level. Welcome to the family! I am excited to see what the future holds.

*Howard Chapman*



# Looking back on 25 years Julia Acott, outgoing Director

It's been a special year for me as we celebrated 25 years as a charity in September since the time I founded Alternatives in my front room in Plaistow. I have now handed over the directorship to our lovely Simone – and I will take on a different part time role in development and training for Alternatives. Here are my alphabetical reflections on the past 25 years.

**Anniversary** – a lovely time in September as we celebrated 25 years and introduced Simone as our new director.

**Babies** – over the years hundreds of babies have been born to the women we support. I have special memories of those who had a brief stay in my home when homeless, plus the one year old who stayed overnight after her mum gave birth to twins earlier in the day. In the hospital I had the awe of holding the first twin while baby two was being born.

**Counselling** – we are grateful for the placement counsellors who helped us offer 546 hours of free counselling this year to women who need it but could never afford it. In the next year I will be writing and delivering more CPD for counsellors in Alternatives' areas of specialism.

**Donations** – none of this work would have been sustained without the generous and thoughtful donations of all kinds from individuals, churches, schools and other organisations.



**Ethos** - Listen – care – support are the key words we live by as an organisation

**Fundraiser** – Philippa has helped us fantastically in fundraising; big thanks to her. Future sustainability will mean earning more of our own income, which I hope to do through developing Alternatives training courses.

**Grace** – to us this stands for a Generous spirit, Respect, Acceptance, Compassion, Empathy – all qualities we aim



Greyfus the cat

*Handing over the baton of leadership, with Canon Councillor Ann Easter*



to demonstrate. G is also for Greyfus the garden cat who adopted us this year!

**Husbands** – I am hugely grateful for all the encouragement and support from my first husband Steve who sadly died in 2010, and then equally from Peter who since 2015 has jumped in up to his neck in wholeheartedly helping Alternatives.

**Interesting** – in this work there are always new challenges every day that need initiative, imagination, insight and inspiration.

**Joy** - when mums get leave to remain in the UK. I will always remember one mum in particular jumping around the room with joy, after many years of waiting.

**Know how** – as a team we regularly increase our knowledge through training to be better equipped for our roles. Know how (thank you, internet) is also useful when assembling donated buggies!

**Lives** – it is always a privilege to share people's lives and to journey with them through difficult times, and to see them finding hope and a future.

**Messy** – we do messy! Lives are messy, families are messy, and it's all fine with us!

**Nurture** – the We Are Family group helps mothers bond with their babies and develop loving relationships with their children so they can all fulfil their potential.

**Outings** – create lifelong memories for mums and children, and are so worth doing, although it can be challenging to travel as a group of 100+ to the countryside or seaside. Huge thanks to our helpers and hosts.



**Parties** – Life can be tough but at We Are Family we love to celebrate: birthdays, life events, Christmas, Easter, and achievements at the end of each year at our Summer Certificate parties.

**Quantitative and Qualitative data for our grant reporting** – to show how the grants we are given are making a difference to families.

**Re-use** – The We Are Family Charity Shop does its bit for sustainability by providing clothes and equipment free for our families, and selling other donated goods to local people who appreciate the bargains. It also helps the WAF mums who volunteer at the shop in increasing their employability.



**Simone** – our new director. I am confident and delighted that she embodies our ethos and can take the charity forwards into its stage of growth. She leads a fantastic staff team that has

grown and developed with the work.

**Trustees** – thanks to past and present trustees for the valuable role they have played over the last 25 years. And 'Thank you' to everyone who has been part of Alternatives in any way.

**Upshot** – our new online monitoring system, which is helping us record and evidence the impact of our work.

**Volunteers** – Alternatives was run entirely by volunteers for its first decade, and still relies on people giving their time in many different roles from counsellor to Christmas present wrapper; crèche worker to gardener.

**We Are Family** – started in 2005 with four women, and grew! In 2019 we worked with 121 women and their 209 children.

**eXtraordinary lives of bravery and courage** – The

women we work with deserve to be admired, supported and given a second chance, especially those who have escaped abuse, trafficking, prostitution, or domestic slavery.

**Youth** – our education and youth work is hugely important. It enables young people growing up in a challenging environment to make important life choices with confidence.

**Zzzzz** – I am taking time for a rest and reflection before embarking on my new role here.



## We Are Family

The holistic support of We Are Family improves the lives of families by supporting parenting and life skills and reducing isolation, with a great impact on the wellbeing and happiness of children.

Families can benefit from a weekly group, lots of fun in the holidays, counselling, practical help and one-to-one parenting support and advocacy to help them resolve issues they are struggling with. This year we added basic English lessons and an informal exercise group for mums. Outings are always a highlight of the year. The community at Darvell welcomed 100 of us in May with food, farm animals and games for the children. This year we had perfect weather for our trip to the seaside in August. We went in the sea, played rounders on the grass, everyone shared food and Agnes used the public barbeque to cook up a feast for us!

We Are Family had a craft session together in the Easter holidays:

*"Dear everyone, today's session was super fun. We got to do activities. It was good and fun"*

*"I've really enjoyed it. It refreshed my mind. It made me think"*

*"It's wonderful to focus and breathe and smile"*



*"It makes me feel all tingly on the inside like I'm flying to another world"*

**Case study:** *"When I first contacted Alternatives I was in a crisis. My daughter was not being responsible on social media and putting herself at risk. I as a single parent was trying to deal with it and was in denial about getting help on how to cope. My friend had told me months before about Alternatives but I never had the courage to make the call. Following another incident with my daughter and her phone use, I made the call and it was the best thing I ever did. By looking into my own behaviours and what makes a teenager behave like they do helped me loads. I can now say that my daughter and I have a much better relationship due to better communication and putting into practice what I have learned. It's not perfect but I can see light at the end of that long tunnel."* J

## Centre

Our Centre is always a busy place with women coming for appointments, food, baby clothes, counselling, or to get help. Staff wrote 8,360 letters or emails to

support clients with addressing the causes of poverty, and made 275 phone calls as well as meeting with clients and going with them to appointments. The problems families face



certificate, and can find work immediately.

In the past year the back room of the WAF Charity Shop has provided a supportive and social space for women to learn or develop craft skills. The friendly staff and volunteers at the shop have also referred customers shopping for low-cost baby things to the We Are Family group for support.

are complex, and issues like immigration can take a long time to resolve, but in the last 12 months with our support, 17 homeless families achieved stable housing, 13 women started to obtain income through work or benefits, 18 women moved into training, work or volunteering and 13 families made progress towards gaining legal status in the UK.

**Case study:** *M came to us in January after having been abandoned with an 18-month old child. She had been sofa-surfing between friends who eventually asked her to move on. One Monday a tearful, cold and tired M came to us having spent the night at the home of a friend of a friend, who she didn't know. She didn't want to go to Social Services because she had been told that they would take her baby from her, but after some persuasion she went with Jenny, the Centre Manager. By the end of the day Social Services agreed to house mum and baby – but not until the following day, so we found someone to take them in for the night. The next day M was offered a place in another town, miles away from anyone that she knows. Jenny had a conversation with the social worker about the isolation that M would face and M is now living in Barking & Dagenham, our neighbouring borough. We see her regularly and both she and her child are happy and healthy.*

*The WAF CAF team celebrate manager Yetunde's birthday*



### Alt-Ed Talks

Throughout the year we have been working with Plashet, Cumberland and Eastlea schools as well as two new ones; LDEUTC and St Angela's. It's truly a privilege to work with such engaging students within all five of the schools.

Our first regular lunch time drop-in took place every Wednesday at Eastlea school where we saw a variety of young people coming to discuss issues they were facing ranging from friendship quarrels and internet safety to relationships and consent.

The pilot for our workshops that we designed to be delivered to young women who are at risk of gang involvement, sexual

*Some WAF mums celebrating success at Certificate Day*



### WAF Enterprises

The WAF Charity Shop and WAF CAF are small social enterprises designed to increase the employability of women through supported volunteering. They have a big impact: when women finally get the right to work in the UK they have experience, a reference, in some cases a food hygiene



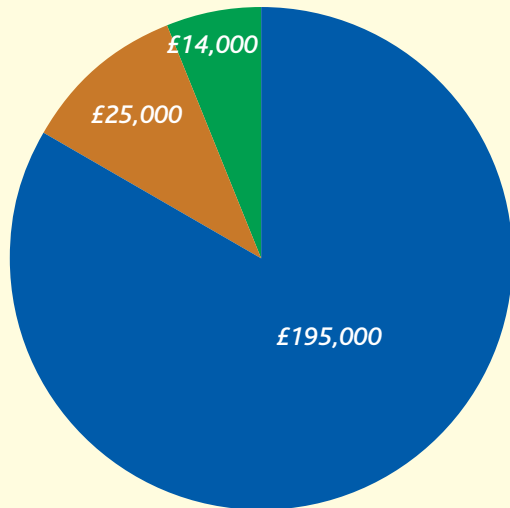
exploitation and criminal behaviour went extremely well and we are using some of the content to help two other charities.

Since August, we have been working hard to develop good relationships with and between the teenagers of the mums that we work with at We Are Family. We would like to use the workshops that were created to support real discussions with them around a range of topics that they think about as young people.

### Finances

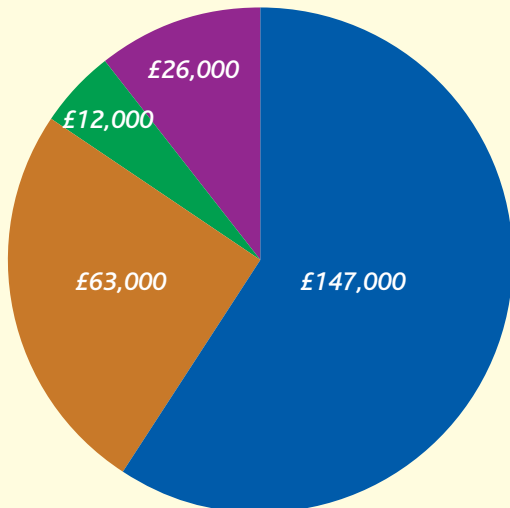
It has been another year of expansion. Thanks to several three-year grants, most recently from the Trusthouse Charitable Foundation, Alternatives has some secured income for the next two years. In 2019 we invested some of our reserves in strengthening the organisation through staff training, subscribing to a monitoring and evaluation system, and appointing new staff including a bookkeeper. We also upgraded our IT system to a cloud-based platform. The general building fund has been used to improve the garden and add more storage for donations of toys and equipment, but the project for building a new meeting room has been deferred to 2020 although plans have been developed.

#### Income – £234,000



■ Grants ■ Donations ■ Other Income

#### Expenditure – £248,000



■ Support ■ Centre ■ Education ■ Building

Unaudited estimated figures

### Special thanks to our funders during 2019 including:

- Aspers Good Causes Fund
- Augustine Courtauld Trust
- BBC Children in Need
- Big Lottery Awards for All
- Charles Hayward Foundation
- Charles S French Charitable Trust
- City Bridge Trust
- Henry Smith Charity
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- London Borough of Newham
- London Catalyst
- London Over the Border Fund
- Magic Little Grants
- Plaistow South Big Local
- SEGRO Community Fund
- Tampon Tax Community Fund
- The Childhood Trust
- Transform Newham
- Trusthouse Charitable Foundation
- Tudor Trust
- Valerie Barber

Nando's, City Harvest and Community Food Enterprise for regular food donations. InKind Direct for great value items

Churches and schools that gave gifts of food and other donations including CEM Church, Central Park Primary School, Custom House Baptist Church, Memorial Community Church, Ascension Church, St Oswald's Croxley Green, Plaistow Christian Fellowship, St George's and Ethelbert's East Ham, Calverton School, Scott Wilkie School.

Christmas present donations from Community Links, Icen Chapter, Widows Sons Masonic Bikers Association & Coburn Lodge, Petts Wood Christ Church, Kingswood House School Ashtead, and Parish of St Giles and St George, Ashtead who also gave generous financial donations.

*Many other churches and individuals – thank you!*

We are truly grateful for each one of you and would like you to know that your contribution makes a difference to individual lives – THANK YOU.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

#### Stay in touch

Please do sign up to our exciting bi-monthly 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/mailling-list](http://www.altel.org.uk/mailling-list)

Follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/AlternativesTrustEastLondon](http://www.facebook.com/AlternativesTrustEastLondon)

or Twitter [twitter.com/alternativesTEL](https://twitter.com/alternativesTEL)





*Thanks to friends and supporters who joined in our 25th Anniversary celebration*

## Give

- You can make a donation to Alternatives Trust East London via [localgiving.org](http://localgiving.org), where they will claim Gift Aid for us and at certain times of year they will double your donation!
- 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 numbe: 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 charity shop is interested in any good-quality items.

## Volunteer

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

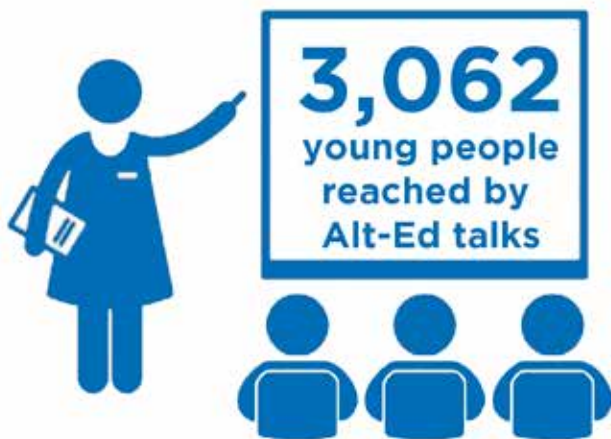
## Trustees of Alternatives Trust East London:

- Chris Andrew – retired psychiatrist
- Christina Baby – finance director of partner charity Just Homes
- Howard Chapman (chair) – businessman
- John Coombs – local bank manager and charity mentor
- Mark Janes – minister of Memorial Community Church (retired 2019)
- Sarah Moriah – one of the first members of We Are Family
- Francesca Ojefua – trainee nursery nurse, member of We Are Family
- Andy Pople – local GP
- Eva Price – a volunteer with Alternatives for many years, from when it began in 1994

## The Team

Thanks to all the magnificent staff and volunteers who make everything possible. Agnes, Arinola, Bimbo, Camille, Chantelle, Chris, Coleen, Earna, Emily, Francesca, Funmi, Jade, Jamilia, Jasmin, Jenny, Jeremy, Joke, Julia A, Julia D, Kate, Latisha, Lauren, Matt, Mavis, Maybelle, Megan, Melissa, Mya, Naomi H, Naomi O, Natalie, Nicole, Nordia, Nirupa, Pat, Peter, Philippa, Sally, Sandra, Sheron, Simone, Wendy, Yetunde A, Yetunde F.





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