

Annual Report 2008

Director's Report

This has been a year of consolidation and growth for Alternatives. After the rapid expansion of the last few years, we are delighted to have the stability of secured three-year funding to establish the We Are Family project to support young and vulnerable parents. This is now funded by a large grant from the Big Lottery Fund, as well as City Bridge Trust and the Drapers' Company. We are also extremely pleased to have funding for a full-time centre manager for three years from the Tudor Trust, building on the initial grant from Church Urban Fund. We employed Barbara Church in November this year.



Chelle Coulton

We record sincere thanks to Chelle Coulton who has held this part-time post since it was created 18 months ago and resigned in the summer to care for her daughter Annis and complete her MA. Always incredibly competent and efficient, as well as overseeing the centre, she updated our policies and

procedures, organised our server and computer network and set up our finances onto computer - these tasks were huge and she did them superbly.

We are very grateful to all our excellent staff and volunteers. The WAF team has dealt with many difficult and stressful situations during the year, and they have made a great difference to many people's lives. The Education Team is having a real influence on our borough and the wider public debate through the development of NewISH, and there is potential for much more in the coming year. Jo has led her team and grown all she does.

One new venture was the launch of PALS, a short series of weekly workshops helping people with life skills. This was very successful, and we thank Dr Chris Andrew for his good teaching. We have



Julia Dexter at Minnis Bay

applied for funding to develop this area of work in the coming year. We also launched a new Deep Release counselling group.

I have had the opportunity to train and speak around the UK - in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales this year - and to be involved with programmes on Premier Radio and Saffron Planet. My most exciting speaking engagement was sharing a platform with Ann Widdecombe MP and David Alton PM at Central Hall Westminster, where an event organised by Care was beset by so many demonstrators from both sides of the abortion argument that the underground station was closed. I had ten minutes to be interviewed about our work and our approach in this sensitive area. Although there had been a lot of heckling, there was total silence in the hall for the time I was interviewed; it is hard to argue with people's true experiences.

We welcomed Dr Andy Pople as a trustee in September. Andy has worked as a GP in Newham for over 20 years and has expertise in medical issues around our specialist areas.

We are hugely grateful for the Natural Harvest project, in partnership with First Fruit, for their enterprising resourcefulness in providing housing, volunteering and work opportunities that give vulnerable mums a hope and a future with their children. Thanks also to the Woodgate Community for their support in many ways: with outings, with painting our building, and supporting our mums by hosting meals and creative events for them. And as ever, we are very grateful to everyone who supported our annual Summer Fair, especially Key Catering.

Many thanks to all our funders:

Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Programme

City Bridge Trust

Drapers' Company

Goldsmiths' Company

Church Urban Fund

Transform Newham

Wates Foundation

Elizabeth Jane Foundation

Westhill Endowment Trust

Tudor Trust

The Besom

London Borough of Newham

City & Metropolitan Welfare Fund

London Catalyst

'Health and Belief'

I would also like to thank donors of baby clothes and equipment, and individuals and churches who give regularly; we are indebted to these as they provide core running costs. We have growing numbers of clients at the centre, many of whom seem to be facing increasingly difficult situations. Although we have good funding for projects and some staff, we have worked out that we need another £10,000 in income for 2009 to keep the centre running. If you, or your church, would like to support the work, perhaps with a regular monthly gift, that would be a huge help to us and make sure we can continue to help women who come to us in need.

Looking to next year, space is now tight at 66 and we hope to expand out into the back yard, producing an extra office and large group room.

Thank you so much for all your interest and your ongoing support for us and our work.

Julia Acott, Director of Alternatives

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SUPPORT TO PARENTS

We Are Family

The We Are Family club has had another busy year. The club aims to provide a safe environment for young vulnerable parents, giving them acceptance, confidence, good self-esteem and a way forward as parents and as unique individuals. It meets every Monday from 11-1pm.

The Team

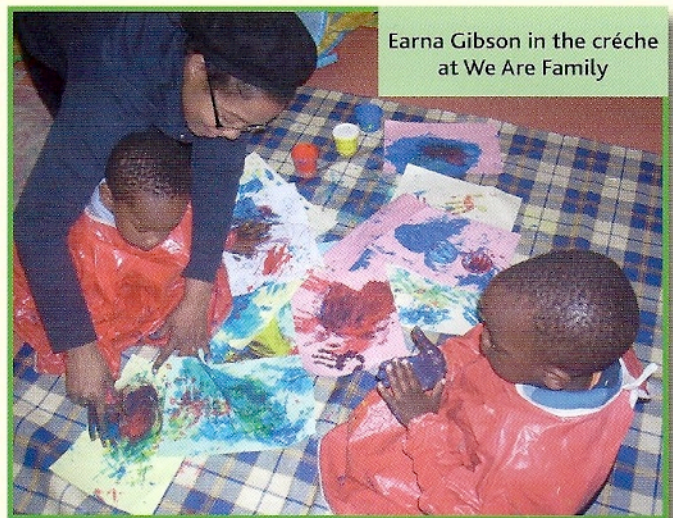
Julia Acott, Chris Andrew, and Julia Dexter facilitate sessions on parenting, play, relationships, anger management and life skills. All the issues that we cover are suggested and/or supported by the parents. Julia Dexter, Earna Gibson and Sarah Moriah are parent support workers for the group; they also provide crèche facilities for the sessions. We have had a number of volunteers over the year, who have provided invaluable support for the crèche team: Judith Acott, Amber Fieldhouse, Kirstie Mommsen and Colleen Bernard. We also extend our thanks to faithful minibus drivers on our outings, Steve Acott, Mark Janes and Yvonne Fletcher.



Julia Acott at We Are Family

A number of sessions stand out this year:

- *Children's and parents' birthdays: We provide cake and gifts for both parents and children on or around their birthday. It is often a very emotional moment when parents tell us they have never had a birthday cake bought for them, or that they have never received a wrapped present or a bunch of flowers before. This is such a small thing for us to do, but it makes an enormous difference to parents' esteem and self-worth.*
- *'Conflict and change': This local group facilitated four sessions in the spring term, providing us with fun and practical activities on the important issues of dealing with conflict and assertiveness.*
- *Outings to the seaside and to Beech Grove community in Kent were a huge success. Many families come on the trips and the quality and value of these outings are apparent in these quotes from parents' evaluation forms: 'The day was just perfect'; 'Some things you remember for a lifetime and this is one of them'.*



Earna Gibson in the crèche at We Are Family

Challenges and encouragements

The Support to Parents work received a grant from The Big Lottery Fund. This is fantastic, and enables We Are Family crèche and support staff to be paid for the next three years from July 08. This brings with it the challenge of providing evidence of our progress in terms of regular evaluations, assessments and reports.

September brought a large turnover of parents, while still having regular contact with those who attended the first half of the year. More parents have joined and made a new core group for us to work with. This is a fresh challenge for us as a team and especially for the crèche, with lots of new children to settle in.

A 19-year old single mother with a one-year-old and pregnant again, abandoned by her partner, was referred to WAF by Newham young people's services. After three weeks of coming to the Monday sessions she said she would have committed suicide if she hadn't found us. Now, six months, later the baby is due in two months, she is contributing well, very much part of the group, and says we have done more for her than her family ever did.

Supporting Families

We have provided advice, support and advocacy on many issues including accommodation, immigration, miscarriage, stillbirth, schools, illness and attendance at case conferences. We were

encouraged by successes including: a child coming off a Child Protection Plan; helping parents through the bereavement process; a parent setting up and running her own group for single parents; and families attending a holiday in Dorset organised by local church groups.

Networking

We continue to work collaboratively with local charity Natural Harvest; encouraging parents to attend We Are Family, providing sessions on 'Play', encouraging bonding and providing support to mothers. We have strengthened our links with Children's Rights, providing immediate support with equipment, pregnancy testing and counselling for parents, which has led to them coming to We Are Family. And Julia Dexter has attended Newham's quarterly 'Support to Parents Forum', giving a presentation of Alternatives' work at the October session.

Schools work

In September, Julia Dexter and Sarah Moriah joined the Education team going into Plashet School and running a PSHE session on Parenting for year 11. This was a steep learning curve for us, but extremely worthwhile.



Schools work

This year has been very busy and very rewarding for the Education Team. We have worked with Langdon School, Newham Pupil Referral Unit, Cumberland School and, for the first time, Plashet School – an all girls' secondary school in Newham. We have also started working with Newham college at both their East Ham and Stratford campuses. This means that we have delivered over 900 pupil sessions during the year. We have also done some small group work at Plashet School during lunch times with a group of girls who, it was felt by the school, would benefit from the sessions.



Training

We have provided training for faith groups on Relationships and Sexual Health, and also for health and education professionals around issues of faith sensitive-delivery of their services. The latter was funded by Newham Council.

It has been a great asset to have Katie Evans and Andre Brown available more frequently to help deliver both schools lessons and training.

At the NewISH Conference



Jo Sell

NewISH Forum

The Newham Interfaith Sexual Health Forum

Alternatives was instrumental in setting up NewISH and remains one of the main agencies involved. We helped

secure funding for a major conference, 'Faith, Relationships and Young People', held on 1 May, at the Credon Centre. We partnered Healthy Schools, Newham Asian Woman's Project and SHINE (Sexual Health in Newham Education, part of Newham PCT) to put on a day of key speakers and workshops attended by around 100 delegates from all religious and professional backgrounds. Peter Watherston, chair of Transform Newham and a trustee of Alternatives said, 'this conference represents a real sense of breakthrough in crossing statutory/faith and cross-faith boundaries. It promises the really exciting prospect of influencing the public agenda. Unique!' A full report of the day is available from Alternatives.

Stephen Timms MP said, 'I hope that, by working together in the NewISH Forum, it will be possible to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections among young people – and, more importantly help young people make good choices affecting their emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and so colouring their future lives.'

Alternatives has also secured funding to let NewISH hold three events this year in partnership with others, and is hoping to be successful in our bid to secure more funding for a website for NewISH.

Challenges and vision for the future

We already have bookings for next year and hope that more schools and faith groups will choose to use our services, as the profile of Alternatives Education team develops. We hope to work more closely with churches, supporting and training them to be able to help their young people more effectively with issues of relationships

and sexual health. Through churches we would like to also equip and encourage parents to engage with their children and teenagers around these sensitive issues.

We are aiming to finish developing the teaching materials we have been working on, so that they can be used by other groups and agencies. We are hoping to employ someone to help us complete our professional lesson presentations as part of this.

It is very interesting that the Government, in its recent review of SRE, said that self esteem and relationships should take a much higher priority in SRE lessons. Young people have been saying this for years and Alternatives has always included these topics as the framework of our whole education programme. We hope to encourage others to use the phrase 'Relationships and sex education' instead of the current 'Sex and relationships education,' as this may help educators and parents look more seriously at issues of self-esteem and relationships, as well as the sexual health issues young people face.

Crisis Pregnancy and Post Abortion Counselling

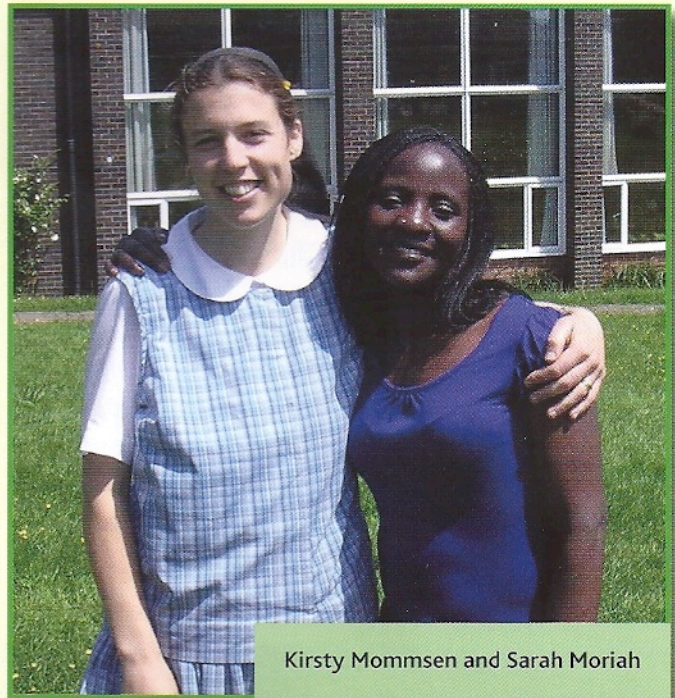
The Centre in Prince Regent Lane has been consistently busy again this year, seeing clients from a variety of different cultural backgrounds and offering them the opportunity to talk through options and receive support in varying, and often very complex, circumstances. At the moment we are helping a 20-year old, 7½ months pregnant, who is sleeping on the floor of a neighbour who took her in when she was evicted from her flat. She is not registered with a doctor and has never been to one, and is not eligible for public funding. The building is always open in the mornings each week for drop in and appointments, and at other times during the afternoon, evening and weekend according to clients' needs.

We also have a 'baby equipment bank' consisting of good quality second hand items and clothes that are given to us to pass on to those who need them. We are hugely thankful for the generosity shown by so many who pass items to us for this purpose and are always happy to receive donations. The equipment is rarely on site for very long before someone visits with us who needs support in this way, and it is a privilege to be able to assist them in these circumstances.

The Counselling Team has six volunteer Trained Advisors working with it at the moment. It is vitally important to note that we would not be sustainable as a Centre at this current level without their reliable and faithful service and the commitment of all our volunteers. We are extremely thankful to and for each of them.

The CareConfidential telephone line, a national freephone helpline offering telephone advice in crisis pregnancy and post abortion circumstances, is covered by the Centre on three occasions during the week, and once again all members of the team involved in providing this service are appreciated greatly for their faithfulness and commitment to this work.

A number of us had the opportunity to attend the CareConfidential Conference at Swanwick in November this year. Alternatives representatives consisted of Trustees, paid staff, volunteers, friends and some partners – nine of us in total. The conference was very informative and also very challenging for a work that has been running for nearly twenty years.



Kirsty Mommsen and Sarah Moriah



I am the newest member to join the 'paid staff' category of the Alternatives Team, and began work at the Centre in November this year as 'Client Advisory and Operational Manager.' I have been a volunteer for the last ten years assisting with both face-to-face crisis pregnancy and post abortion counselling, CareConfidential telephone advice, and

presentations in schools with the Education Team.

I am looking forward to challenges of developing this role further, continuing to support clients and ensuring the centre runs as smoothly and efficiently as it can.

A new 'Called to Care' training course, covering material used when speaking with crisis pregnancy clients will be starting early in 2009. If you are interested in possibly training as an advisor at the centre, please do get in touch.

If you would like to support us, please make cheques payable to Alternatives Trust East London, or contact the office for a standing order form.

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