



## Annual Report 2012

### From the Director

London was a good place to be in 2012. Here at Alternatives we got into the spirit of the Jubilee by organising a Street Party for Rowntree Clifford Close in June, in partnership with our neighbours in the church and the sheltered housing. Then I was delighted to be given an "Inspiring People" award – and free tickets to go to see the Olympic swimming finals – as part of a London Borough of Newham scheme to help the local community feel the benefit of being in the Olympic borough. Thanks to my kind staff who nominated me and whose work enables Alternatives to make such a positive impact locally, I had a highly enjoyable day.

The highlight of the year for me has been the fantastic support of volunteers and staff throughout the organisation, which has succeeded in keeping Alternatives strong and growing despite the gloomy economic climate. I am very grateful for the commitment of each one.

One new development this year has been the increase in general counselling. We now have three placement counsellors, Sue, Linette and Sally, who have been able to do some long-term work with clients who have come in initially through the core work of the Centre.

I'd like to thank Tom Sefton, one of the founders and leaders of the 4Dads group, for his excellent voluntary support for this project since it was first thought of. Until moving on to other things this summer, he travelled from Surrey once a fortnight to help. Thanks also to Dr Chris Andrew who teaches life skills to men who come to the 4Dads, as well as the women at We Are Family.

I want to say a special thank you to Pat Wiggins, our invaluable administrative assistant, who has been so faithful in coming to work while enduring a lengthy course of chemotherapy and then radiotherapy following surgery. I am delighted that we finish the year with her being in good health. I'm also deeply indebted to Philippa for continuing to raise our funds in a difficult climate, and to



Julia Acott with the Mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales (left)

Sarah Acott for her careful book-keeping. We continue to be delighted with our premises in Forrest House and very much appreciate the help of gardening volunteers Alice, along with David, Louisa and others from the Woodgate Community, who make it a place that everyone can really enjoy.

As always we couldn't manage at all without the funders, donors and people who support us in so many different ways. We have had some fantastic Harvest deliveries, as well as donations of toys, baby equipment and children's clothes. The generosity of our supporters has really made a difference to those we support.

## Moving Forwards



I have been busy as ever with clients, training and networking. In May it was exciting to run a week-long, international post-abortion training course here in Plaistow, including Joan Faubion from Texas and Elke Greulich working in Barcelona as well as a diverse group from Newham.

You can read in this annual report how the support we give to parents is continuing to grow. Personal highlights of the year are always the two outings to the beach and countryside and again they were great days. It is encouraging to see how the quality of parenting improves so dramatically over time as families are part of the We Are Family Group. This September, several children started nursery who had been part of WAF since their mothers were pregnant, and it is good to see the children thriving and mums moving on to training of different kinds.

As our work grows we are aware of the need to balance expansion with keeping our work healthy and strong. It is a challenge to keep growing our income to meet current and future needs. We value Alternatives' distinctives of unconditional acceptance, bringing people into an extended family environment, restoring identity, and helping them towards achievement, hope, and a future. Stories like Kirsty's (inside) shows the impact of holistic support helping her to turn her life around.

Times are challenging: there is clearly increased need among our clients and it is much harder work for us to get funding. Despite this we are planning to expand, with the dream of providing accommodation for 12-16 families in a much larger building nearby and sharing our family ethos and community with those who for

various reasons lack both.

Once again a huge thank you to everybody who is involved in our work in any way, large or small. Everyone is appreciated. We hope that you will continue to share in our vision.

**Julia Acott**  
*Director*

**alternatives**  
SUPPORT TO PARENTS

## Support to Parents

### Julia Dexter, Support to Parents Team Leader

Another year has passed with rapidity and much activity. We have seen 56 women at the We Are Family club this year; our group has run every Monday except Bank holidays and provided support, teaching, friendship and hope in a safe and caring environment. The number of women we support with no recourse to public funds has risen from 12 last year to 17 this year.

The Support to Parents Team consists of Julia Acott, Julia Dexter, Chris Andrew, Earna and Elizabeth. We were sad to lose Sarah to family commitments in Southampton earlier this year, but pleased to have the help of Jo Brook who has volunteered her expertise as a paediatric physiotherapist one day a week to help our families. We are thrilled to have had a good group of volunteers this year, our thanks to Pat, Megan, Marie, Sam, Kirsty, Charlotte, Sarah, Victoria, Cassandra and Alice.

We once again took around 60 people to the sea side and to Beech Grove in Kent during the summer. These popular events are often the highlight of our year with parents commenting "Great to be out of London, the best day ever." One memory of the Beech Grove day was "seeing grown potatoes for the first time and apples on trees." These are fun days and often emotional for those with us for the first time. We couldn't have managed without our fantastic and faithful minibus and car drivers: Eva, Clive, Mark, Dorothy, Christina, Simon, Barbara and Julia Acott. Thank You!



Half term fun in the Forrest House garden

We have attended over 30 meetings with Children's Services around Child Protection or Child in Need issues, providing real hope and a way forward for eight families. We have also seen some tragic and difficult situations which have challenged and saddened us.

The Thursday Practical Parenting Group has continued during term time, providing parent-led teaching and more personalised support for a smaller group of families than Mondays. This has proved profitable for parents who respond more confidently in a small group setting, with one mum saying "I feel more free to talk on Thursdays but also learn a lot from the others". In addition to the Thursday group, Elizabeth and Julia have done some one-to-one sessions with a small number of parents over the year, which has been challenging and encouraging; some around toddler issues and one around parenting teenagers.

Elizabeth, Earna and Julia D have also attended over 30 appointments with families to Child Development Clinics, speech therapists, dentists, maternity, mental health and other medical services. It is a real privilege to work alongside parents and witness a positive change in the young children over the year.

During the Olympics this summer, Alternatives worked with other community initiatives in Newham to run a cafe at Memorial Community Church, with a large screen showing the Games. Several parents from We Are Family volunteered for this, and three were involved with a Community Food Project called NOSH at the same venue earlier in the year. Parents visibly grew in confidence, enjoying the work experience and making new friends.

We have worked with other community groups and forums, attending and sometimes chairing Newham's Community Initiative Network which meets every six weeks and is a source of encouragement and support as well as information gathering and sharing.

We have also had good working partnership with Just Homes, Survivors Together, Patiko Bakers, The Acorn Midwifery Team, Perinatal services (Mental Health Team), Newham Sexual Health and Teenage Pregnancy Group, and Aston Mansfield. We appreciate all they do in the borough and look forward to continued inspiration and mutual support.

It is somewhat overwhelming to look back and realise all we have done this year. It couldn't have happened without such a fantastic team – thank you to everyone.



## Why I love my job

### Elizabeth Booker, Family Support Worker

As a family support worker my tasks are quite varied depending on the specific needs of the people that access our services. These can include emotional support, practical support of food, baby equipment or clothing, attending meetings, helping to look for housing etc. However the part of my work that I have enjoyed the most has been the expanding role of advocacy within Family Support.

As more and more new clients are coming through Social Services and the NHS Vulnerable Adults Midwifery Team, the level of advocacy work has increased. When a risk to a child is identified and a protection plan is put into place, parents often feel everyone is against them working to take their

children away from their care. This is not necessarily the case, but it is a great help to any struggling parent to have advocacy work that they can rely on, and a friendly person to support them through the process. The social workers are there for the protection of the child and although a child's welfare is always paramount it is also important to support the parent.

Because of the nature of some of the claims against the parent(s) it is easy to write them off as incapable or unworthy carers of their children. For me it is a privilege and an honour to be part of the support network around parents like this, so that the decisions made by Social Services are based on the fullest of knowledge and have given the parent the best possible opportunity to keep their child(ren). Through involvement with this process we have supported a number of parents from having their child(ren) on the 'At Risk' register to having no or little involvement with Social Services. This is a great testament to the hard work of the parents involved and I look forward to being a part of this process in the coming year.

## Kirsty's Story

I have had support from Julia Acott and the rest of the staff at Alternatives for almost two years and they have helped me through a very tough time in my life. The first time I met Julia was like having a second mum and I felt at home at Forrest House. I suffer with depression and anxiety and it is a daily battle for me. When I go to Forrest House it makes me feel safe and secure; it is my safe place. Alternatives has helped me come to terms with my abortion and has helped me to build my trust and confidence back up.

I am currently volunteering at the crèche that Alternatives runs on Mondays. I enjoy it so much and have met such lovely people, I will continue to help them and volunteer for as long as they need. They are my family and I want to personally say thank you to all of the team at Forrest House. You've changed my life and I thank you so much for what you have done and still do for me. I will never ever forget the time I just wanted to give up and you pushed me and gave me the fight that I needed to keep going. It means so much to me and it will stay with me forever.



A WAF session decorating biscuits together, with Elizabeth (centre)



Fun at the beach, on a We Are Family summer outing



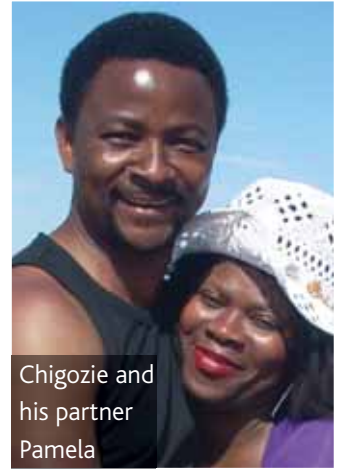
## 4Dads

### Chigozie Eneremadu and Simon Gibson, 4Dads Support Workers

Chigozie writes: I work for Alternatives as one of the leaders of 4Dads, which was started by Alternatives to cater for the needs of fathers, most of whom are partners of the WAF mothers. My work as part of the 4Dads team centres around providing much needed support for fathers in the area of good parenting skills and encouraging them to stay active and relevant in the life of their children. We also strive to provide a positive role model for fathers to become more considerate and accommodating to their partners. In other words, we create an atmosphere that helps fathers to focus on their relationships with their partners and children with the aim of making them more workable and improved.

We achieve this through outreach work, phoning, and meeting with our Dads every fortnight to catch up on issues relating to our partners, children, work, and general wellbeing and to socialise.

Simon adds: The highlights of the 4Dads group this year for me have been the relationships that have grown between us as a group. A particular highlight has been some of the Dads being involved with one man's wedding to his long-term partner. We have been able to support two other members of the group through serious relationships difficulties; one has seen possible reconciliation, the other is grateful to have another dad to talk to through the 4Dads connection. Another dad is now regularly taking his kids roller-skating since he was introduced to this activity through the group. And we helped one member of the group to move house and do some decorating.



Chigozie and  
his partner  
Pamela



## Pregnancy Choices Centre

Alternatives Pregnancy Choices Centre is open for drop-in by clients each morning during the week, with additional appointments arranged to suit client availability at other times during the week or in the evenings. The centre remains consistently busy, although we continue to see fewer people seeking help in a pregnancy choices circumstance, and more seeking help following pregnancy loss.

As well as qualified counsellors Julia Acott and Barbara, we also have three trainee counsellors on placement with us at the moment. The centre has continued to offer time and space to those who have often felt like they have had nowhere else to go as they consider their options and feelings in difficult and sometimes challenging personal circumstances.

In the last twelve months Barbara Church, the centre manager, alone has had over 300 one-to-one client appointments, and many have said how they have appreciated the support they have received.

*"Thanks ... for being there. You have helped my sanity so much :) Forever indebted to you".*

*"Being able to talk to someone has helped me so much. I never would have believed it would, but I know different now".*

*"You have helped me so much, words can't describe."*

Nine hours each week in the centre are covered by a small team of committed and reliable volunteers, who see clients, assist in helping to organise equipment and clothing and provide

regular cover for the CareConfidential helpline telephones, a national helpline which Alternatives takes a turn in covering on a weekly rota basis offering a listening ear, information and advice around pregnancy choices and following pregnancy loss.

Between November 2011 and April 2012, ten participants completed an 18-week training course for new advisors, delivered by Julia A and Barbara who shared facilitation. Two of these participants have been available to help on occasions as volunteers at the centre.

Barbara takes responsibility for liaising with volunteers and resolving the day to day issues that arise at the centre. This includes dealing with existing and new client enquiries, answering telephone calls, organising equipment and child's clothing donations and resolving the practical day-to-day issues relating to the building, the computers and use of rooms – as well as regular appointments with a number of clients and helping to deliver lessons prepared by the education team in local secondary schools.

Alternatives continue to see many women with young families who are legally able to remain in the UK but have no recourse to public funds. We are very grateful for donations of baby equipment, children's clothing and non-perishable food which we pass on regularly to families who need it. As well as providing practical and emotional support, we also work hard to network with other organisations and charities in the local area and signpost to other sources of support where we can. We are pleased to have the Acorn midwives' clinic in Forrest House on a Monday, which is very accessible to the mums who come to We Are Family on a Monday morning and in a good position to refer to us any pregnant women who would benefit from our support.

We are grateful for a three-year grant from the Henry Smith charity which has been funding this post since last year. Barbara, who was a regular volunteer at Alternatives before her appointment as centre manager, writes "I still feel it is a huge privilege for me to work for Alternatives in the centre manager position. There is a lot of need in this local area, and I hope to remain well trained and humble hearted as I work with clients in Newham. Thank you for the opportunity to do this."

## Volunteering at the Centre

### Christina Marcos-Gleeson

As a volunteer, I have seen the help offered by Alternatives to be a lifeline to women facing an unplanned pregnancy or who feel sadness after pregnancy loss. I have seen women find a safe place they can turn to in confidence and receive the support, counsel, listening ear and hope they need at a critical time in their lives. I have seen the appreciation of women as they receive generous practical help and find encouragement in their interactions with staff and other young mothers facing the challenge of motherhood without any other support. Alternatives is touching and helping to transform and rebuild lives and I am so grateful to be a part of it.



## Alternatives Education Team

### Jo Sell, Education Team Leader

In the past year the Education Team has provided 1,380 pupil sessions to around 690 individual pupils in Newham schools, plus training to 16 sixth-form students and ten teaching staff.

The first part of 2012 was particularly busy, delivering lessons and organising the national launch of the Faith Relationships and Young People (FRYP) website [www.fryp.org.uk](http://www.fryp.org.uk) Stephen and Leng Timms were our special visitors for the afternoon event, which was held at Newham Sixth Form

College (NewVlc). Students involved said the event was 'informative, gives great explanations into what teenage life is all about' and 'very good, engaging, provided young people with information that we haven't come across before'. Professionals and faith leaders declared, 'very important and very challenging, excellent' and 'really informative and interesting event, especially enjoyed the cross-cultural discussion/young people's panel.'

Around 80 people joined us, with representatives from Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian backgrounds as well as people who wouldn't identify with any faith. Young people took part in discussions alongside professionals and faith group leaders. We would like to thank NewVlc for the use of their building and Langdon and Plashet Schools for their participation in the launch, even though it meant bringing their students to Plaistow on the bus in the pouring rain.



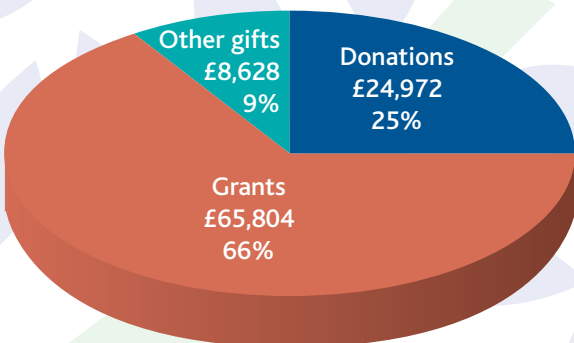
Stephen Timms MP and young people at the national launch of the Faith, Relationships and Young People website, [www.fryp.org.uk](http://www.fryp.org.uk)

In partnership with 'Eden Plaistow' it was a real pleasure to deliver a sexual health mentoring course at NewVlc this year, training around 12 young people to talk to their peers or take part in the delivery of sessions to do with relationships and sexual health.

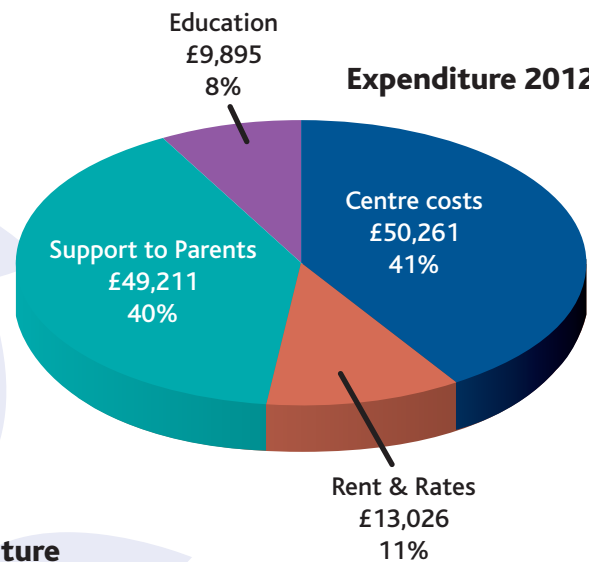
There are so many possibilities for next year, however much will depend on funding. We have been working to generate more income from providing lessons and training in schools and colleges this year. We'd like to continue to run training courses to develop the education team further and to make our lessons more available to other agencies. We would also like to produce some video clips to enhance the content of the FRYP website.

## Financial Summary

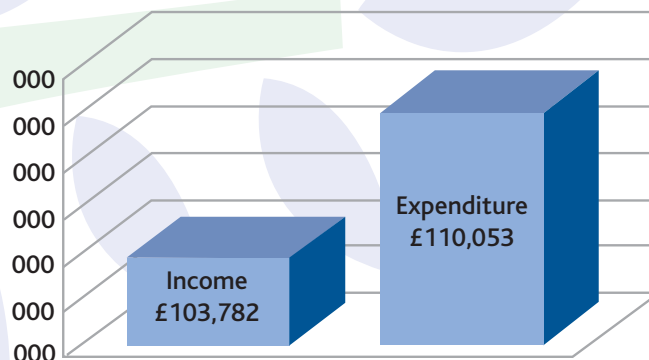
### Income 2012



### Expenditure 2012



### Income & Expenditure



## Thank you to all our funders during 2012 including:

Awards for All

Goldsmiths Company

Help a London Child

Henry Smith Charity

Lloyds TSB Foundation

London Borough of Newham Go For It Grant

London Catalyst

London Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund

The Parish of St Giles and St George, Asstead

The Souter Charitable Trust

Trust for London

*Many churches and individuals – thank you!*



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