

Barnet Depression Alliance: 11th Annual General Meeting

Monday 14th November 2016: 7.45 pm Trinity Church Centre,
Livingstone Room

Our 19th Year 1997-2016

Group Report for Oct 2015- Oct 2016

The group has continued to grow and welcome new members. So far this year we have had 84 referrals which is 35 more than the same time last year! We believe this reflects the pressure of funding cuts on local services. We are also aware that increasingly GPs and psychiatrists are referring people to us. Our only concern is being able to accommodate larger numbers as our Monday meetings are at almost full capacity. After a slow start, our Thursday meeting numbers have trebled over the course of the year and we are also delighted to report that we have more men and more young people attending than we have had for a long time. Member feedback remains very positive and we have included a section in the report this year on member feedback from our last AGM as well as compliments received throughout the year.

Speakers

We have been fortunate to have had some excellent speakers this year. In January, we welcomed Danielle and Liz from the **North London Samaritans** who spoke to us about their services, emphasising that they are not just there for suicidal people but to support anyone who is in mental distress. They also offer a service through email and text.

In May, we welcomed Melanie Bloch, well-being practitioner and holistic laughter coach to speak about and do a practical exercise with the group in **Laughter Yoga**. Laughter yoga is based on the belief that voluntary laughter provides the same physiological and psychological benefits as spontaneous laughter. It is done in groups with eye contact and playfulness between participants. The idea is that forced laughter soon turns into real and contagious laughter. It was certainly something different – several members really enjoyed it and at least three have signed up to do a further session with Melanie.

Our final speaker for the year was Rachel Kelly, author, journalist and mental health campaigner. Rachel did a workshop with the group on **Building resilience** drawing on her own experience of clinical depression. It was a very interesting and interactive session in which members were able to participate as we went along. At the end Rachel very kindly gave each member a copy of her book *Walking on sunshine: 52 small steps to happiness*. We are hoping to invite Rachel back in the future to speak about her current research into the links between nutrition and mental health.

Activities and themed evenings

We ran a variety of group activities and themed evenings throughout the year, making use, as ever, of the diverse talents of our members. In February, we had a session on **keeping physically active** -- exploring how physical activity can help to prevent and alleviate depression and anxiety. We had a brief talk on the benefits of exercise and shared with each other the things we found

helpful. These included yoga, cycling, swimming, going to the gym and walking. We then enjoyed a lively and energetic **salsa session** led by one of our members from Colombia who teaches salsa. Both the lively Latin music as well as the movement raised our spirits!

In March, we had a **sharing our interests evening** where members brought along examples of creative pastimes and other interests to share with the group. Past times shared included photography, art, metal work, cake making, gardening, choral singing, rock choir singing, creative writing and dancing. One theme which emerged from the evening was the way creativity can help alleviate depression – as well as how depression can stifle creativity.

We also had another of our **Desert Island Discs** evenings in June in which members brought along a favourite piece of music to share with the group – this year favourites included Bob Dylan, Louis Armstrong, Abba and Sting! We shared **writings which have inspired us** in September where members brought along poetry and prose they loved to share with the group. We enjoyed listening to a diverse range of literature including Philip Larkin, Kahil Gibran, Tolkien, and Borges to name but a few of the writers discussed.

We also had a session in April which we watched a short video on **Why we sleep** presented by Richard Foster an Oxford neuroscientist. Foster's research on the relationship between light perception, circadian rhythms and the effect of aging on sleep is fascinating. He shows how disrupted sleep can affect our cognitive abilities, as well as causing depression and anxiety. He also looks at sleep as a therapy. After the talk, we discussed our own sleep problems, swapping tips on how best to overcome them. As there were so many questions we thought that for a future meeting it might be helpful to invite a sleep specialist to talk to the group.

Finally, in June we focussed on the subject of **Loneliness**, recognising its increasing prevalence in our urban society and its continuing stigma. We learnt about the huge toll loneliness can take on one's physical and mental health and new research, which links loneliness with cognitive decline and with a wide range of diseases. We reflected on how depression increases one's isolation, and the role our group plays in bringing people together enabling us to share openly our experience of loneliness.

“Check-in” meetings

Our “check-in” meetings continue monthly on Thursdays. At the beginning of the year these became less well attended and we reminded the group that they would not be sustainable financially if people did not come along. Fortunately, numbers picked up towards the middle of the year and our last two Thursdays were approaching Monday numbers! We will continue to offer the Thursday meetings as we recognise that newcomers, in particular, appreciate the smaller meeting and the fact that the whole meeting is dedicated to sharing and self-help.

Socials

We had four socials this year – five if we include the December 2015 meeting which is a **Christmas social with quiz** and seasonal refreshments brought by members. Our **Annual New Year Meal** in January was well attended – 14 of us enjoyed a meal at the cosy Red Lion Pub in High Barnet.

In May 8 of us attended the Wylyot's theatre in Potters Bar to have tea together and then see **Professor Robert Winston's** fascinating presentation on **What makes us happy: reading the human mind**. In August we had a most enjoyable summer walk over Totteridge Fields ending with a drink at the Orange Tree Pub – we were lucky to have perfect weather! We ended the summer with our annual **Bring and share supper party** where 16 of us enjoyed a fantastic and varied selection of home cooked main dishes and desserts some of which can be seen in the photo opposite!



Events and publicity

Marsh Award commended project for excellence in peer support

We are proud to report that we were one of four shortlisted projects this year (out of a total of 57) and we received a commendation for *excellence in peer support* from the Marsh Christian Trust which is supported by Mind. The award was received by Anne and Sue (pictured below) who started Barnet Depression Alliance in 1997. We were pleased to have the opportunity of giving a short address in which we tried to convey to our audience something of the fear, suffering and isolation which depression sufferers experience and the value of meeting others who can understand and support non-judgmentally and in complete confidence.



In July this year we were very pleased to assist Queen Elizabeth's Girls School with a project they were doing on local charities. We invited them to visit DA's head office, showed them round and explained the nature and prevalence of depression, and answered many questions. We continue to maintain links with Barnet Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust who receive our newsletter as well and a wide range of local voluntary organisations such as Mind in Barnet, the Eclipse Project and Barnet Voice for Mental Health. We are grateful for the support given to us by Community

Barnet who have agreed to photocopy our newsletter for us at cost price. We regularly attend the Barnet Voluntary Sector Forums and through one of our committee members, continue to input into local events such as World Mental Health Day.

Committee and active members update

We continue as a committee of seven women and among us represent a variety of talents and backgrounds: three teachers (two retired), a retired social worker, a nurse, a retired government statistician and a librarian! Many of our members too have extensive experience working in the charity sector, in particular the mental health sector. We are also very grateful to our group treasurer and to two of our male members who oversee the library and regularly update our **Low Cost Counselling** resource. We are very grateful to everyone for what they contribute to the group including several members who attend meetings early and help set up the room and to those who help to wash and clear up after meetings, and to those who give people lifts.

We are always on the lookout for new committee members and would very much welcome a man on the committee. We are also hopeful of eventually finding a 2nd group facilitator to replace Robert who sadly passed away in 2014.

Membership

Our newsletter is sent to approximately 67 people. We regularly weed the mailing list and remove people who have not attended a meeting for 6 months or more. We keep on our mailing list a small number of members who are not able to attend meetings – sometimes due to severe clinical depression – but who nevertheless want to keep in touch. We have had more referrals this year than normal – on average 8 people a month. Please see Appendix 1 below for a full set of statistics – please note 2016 figures are complete to end October 2016.

Financial report

Please see Appendix 3 for our annual statement of accounts. We are very aware that our grant next year is not assured and this may be the final year we get a grant from Barnet. As can be seen from the accounts we did return a small surplus this year of £104. We have cut back on expenses as far as possible – for example, we have not bought any new library books this year. We have also had several speakers who have very kindly agreed not to take any payment towards their expenses. However, we do not raise enough ourselves to cover the room rental and other expenses. We will therefore need to secure alternative funding if the group is to continue.

Depression Alliance's Merger with Mind

On August 1st this year Depression Alliance merged with Mind. It is still early days and we will be exploring the effect this may have on our group and our funding. We hope to continue under the same name and we are looking forward to welcoming Laura Sacha – groups support officer from Depression Alliance, now supporting groups through Mind at our AGM this year. We will be discussing with Mind the implications of the merger for us, in particular, any change to our status as a registered charity.

Member feedback: compliments, suggestions and complaints

We are pleased to report that there were no complaints this year. Please see Appendix 2 for the 2015 report which includes the November 2015 survey.

Appendix I: Membership and Meeting Statistics

	2013	2014	2015	2016 to Oct
Total referrals	42	59	49	84
Website referrals	29	45	36	70
Answerphone referrals	13	13	11	14
Other referrals	0	1	2	0
Total membership (Dec each year)	93	60	63	67
New attendees (first meeting)	15	16	22	12
Meeting attendance max and (min)	21 (7)	21 (7)	21(6)	18 (4)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	235	253	253	179
Meeting attendance total including socials	268	287	301	223
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	12	13	13	11
Socials attendance average	17	11	12	11
Meeting attendance average Monday meetings	15	16	15	14
Meeting attendance average Tuesday meetings	8	9	9	7
Meeting number	20	20	20	17
Socials number	2	3	4	4
Committee meetings	3	3	3	2
Total events excluding committee meetings	22	23	24	21
Total events	25	26	27	23

Appendix 2

BARNET DEPRESSION ALLIANCE – COMPLIMENTS AND FEEDBACK 2015

Most of our feedback is verbal – after meetings. However, sometimes members do take the trouble to email us their feedback and thanks. Here are a few extracts from emails received in the last year.

From emails:

Thank you for inviting me – I was really overwhelmed by your group's graciousness and kindness to me. I think what you have set up is really valuable.

Dr Cathy Wield – author of *Life after darkness* who spoke at our February meeting. Sent by email 11/2/2015

Thank you for being so supportive to me on Monday

From a new member. Sent by email 11/3/15

The DA session on Monday was great...thank you. Just what I needed.

Sent by email on 15/4/15

I am very grateful for how welcoming and understanding I have found everyone at DA. Thank you very much.

Sent by email from a new member 28/8/15

I had such a nice evening! Thank you for organising this.

Sent by email 30/8/15 with regard to bring and share supper

Thanks to you and everyone who helped organise the evening on Friday. It was a lovely evening.

Sent by email 1/9/15 with regard to bring and share supper

I am looking forward to Thursday. I was away for the last meeting and missed not being there.

From a new member. Sent by email 23/9/15

Thank you so much ... for your dedication and professionalism throughout all those years. You are incredible!!

Sent by email on 22/11/15

Just to say that yesterday's session was fab! M and D were such a welcome addition to the group. So many people said that they didn't have many friends and that they felt lonely. I thought it was very brave of them to admit to it. I know I'm not the only one! It was just so touching to be part of the group. Seeing S so positive and confident was brilliant too!

Sent by email on 27/11/15

From November 2015 group survey

- *I am very grateful to committee members and DA for making such a huge difference*
- *I enjoy coming to meetings sharing with other people issues [so] I do not feel so isolated*
- *I feel the group is really needed because it is somewhere where you can go straight away*
- *The meetings seem to run very well in the format they are in. The meetings provide a good space to meet and talk to like-minded people. Very useful for helping with ideas to manage.*

Appendix 3: Annual Statement of Accounts 2015-2016

DEPRESSION ALLIANCE SELF HELP GROUP
Income and Expenditure Accounts
Year Ended 31st March 2016

<u>Income</u>	2015/2016	2014/2015	Cash flow statement	2015/2016	2014/2015
Subscriptions from members	£ 387.57	£ 422.95	Cash balance at start of year	1394.44	£1,559.97
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£ 454.26	£ 454.26	Surplus for the year	104.87	-£ 165.53
Grant from Barnet Centre for Independent Living	.....	.....	Cash balance at end of year	1499.31	£1,394.44
Other donations	.....	.....	Balance sheet as at 31st March 2016		
Total Income	£ 841.83	£ 877.21			2015
<u>Expenditure</u>			Library books	£50.00	£ 50.00
			Cash at bank	1491.21	1328.08
Hire of room for meetings	£ 521.00	£ 806.50			
			Cash in hand	24.16	82.42
Refreshments for meetings	£ 80.24	£ 51.71			
			Total assets	£1,565.37	£ 1,460.50
Contribution to social events	.....	.....	Represented by		
Library / training expenditure /Speakers	£ 35.93	.....	Accumulated fund		
Expenses paid to speakers	.....	£ 25.00	Balance at beginning of year	1394.44	£1,559.97
Postage, stationery, telephone & website	£ 99.79	£ 88.82	Movement in year	104.87	-£ 165.53
Total Expenditure	£ 736.96	£ 972.03	Balance at end of year	1499.31	£1,394.44

Barnet Depression Alliance is a voluntary peer led self-help group which is supported by the national charity MIND;
 Charity No. 219830 Registration no 424348 Registered Office: 15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London, E15 4BQ