

Barnet Depression Alliance: 12th Annual General Meeting

Monday 13th November 2017: 7.45 pm Trinity Church Centre,
Livingstone Room

20th Anniversary Year 1997-2017

Group Report for Oct 2016- Oct 2017

We have enjoyed celebrating our 20th anniversary this year. It has been a year of change for us as we have now moved from being a part of Depression Alliance, to a peer support group supported by the national charity Mind. We continue to attract new members and are very pleased to see that the ratio between men and women in the group has improved and we have been delighted to welcome many more men including our first man on the committee since Robert Johnson. For the first time our funders have asked us to collect some demographic details on our members. We have begun this process and hope to be able to share the results in this report next year.

Speakers

This year we have been pleased to welcome five speakers to our meetings. We try to have at least one speaker a term and cover a variety of subjects – from local services to talks exploring ways of coping with depression and its related conditions. We are always interested in hearing about new treatments for depression and current research. We try to respond to what our members say they want using feedback from our annual AGM group survey.

Mindful that this was the most popular request on our group survey last year, we began the year with an interesting and helpful session on **Mindfulness Based Cognitive therapy (MBCT)** led by consultant psychiatrist Dr Hagen Rampes. Dr Rampes discussed the origins of the practice and how it grew out of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the USA. He led the group in a short mindfulness exercise and offered members to attend a free taster session. For more information on Dr Rampes' Barnet mindfulness classes please have a look at his website <http://mindfulness-healing.co.uk>

In February we were very pleased to welcome Tanja Jaekle, a researcher from Kings College London who spoke to us about the **Neuromood study for Depression**. This is a new type of treatment for treatment resistant depression which involves neurofeedback (a bit like biofeedback). The study is looking into the way self-blaming emotions contribute to depression and prevent recovery. Neurofeedback techniques designed to challenge these negative patterns of thinking are taught to participants. This was an extremely interesting talk and we were told how we could join the study if we wanted and the benefits of joining included a free psychological assessment and well as financial recompense! We look forward to finding out the results of the study in due course.

In May we welcomed Daniel Neis from JAMI who spoke about his own struggles with depression and what JAMI has to offer. He spoke about Jami's varied and interesting mental health course programme, **Head Room** which can be found at <http://www.jamiuk.org/get-involved/events/headroom/> He also told us about the new **Head Room café** in Golders Green where some of the courses take place.

At our final summer meeting in July we welcomed Geraldine Gower from **The Disability Foundation (TDF)**. She gave an interesting talk on the role **alternative therapies** can play in mental wellbeing and she discussed the various therapies on offer at TDF and how they work. As TDF is a not for profit charity they are able to offer therapies at about a third of the normal cost. For more information see www.tdf.org.uk . We have since heard that some of our members have accessed TDF's services.

For the start of the autumn term we were pleased to welcome **Helen McKeith** course tutor at Barnet College. Helen talked to us about **Community Link and the Art of Work course** which are aimed at people recovering from mental health conditions including depression and anxiety. She focused particularly on the art course, explaining how creative expression can help people to connect with each other and find a means of expression which can be very therapeutic. She did a short practical exercise with the group which was enjoyable. Since the meeting we have heard that one of our members had joined the art course.

Activities and themed evenings

For our March meeting we focussed on Sharing **Helpful Resources for Mental Health**. Members shared resources they have found locally which have helped them to cope with depression and anxiety. These ranged from local resources such as the Fitness for Life programme to online resources such as the Mindfulness Headspace App and the Black Dog Tribe online community. Helpful books and counselling resources were also shared.

The theme of our April meeting was Growing **Older and Facing the Future**. Members shared how they were coping with growing older, facing ill health and end of life; how this impacts on our depression and how we can view the future more positively. Now we are 20 years old we are very aware that a whole generation has passed since we began, and many of us can truly say we have been growing old together!

For our June meeting three members shared their own **personal experience of depression and recovery**. Although these were three very different stories, most of us found something we could identify with in each of them. Themes which emerged from these accounts included coping with difficult childhood experiences, coping with profound anxiety, coping with depression in the workplace, and difficulties in relationships. We also heard how these individuals managed their situations in very different ways. Issues arising included the importance of finding the right medication, "coming out" in the workplace, having the courage to leave an unsuitable job, and finding activities to do which support recovery e.g. gardening, singing and voluntary work.

Remembering Ben

Our October meeting was a very special and poignant one. We welcomed Raymond, the father of one of our members to speak about his son Ben with whom we had been in contact for just over a year and who had come to our group regularly for several months. Sadly Ben lost his battle with depression at the end of last year. Before his death he sent our group a very generous anonymous donation. You can see from our accounts in Appendix 3 that had it not been for his donation our expenditure would have exceeded our income by a significant amount. We did not know until several months later that the donation had come from him. During his time with us Ben shared very openly his difficulties with depression, and with social anxiety, made worse by the fact that he also had Asperger's syndrome. He was always very grateful for the group, and we remember him with great fondness remembering his love of country music, his love of adventure (he fulfilled his

dream of travelling to Nashville not long before he died) and his own very unique sense of humour. At the meeting we learnt from his father a bit more about his life and about what he had achieved – he had many talents and was highly intelligent, however he struggled to find a place in society, and sadly he did not receive the help he needed from mental health services.

Supporting newcomers better

We have thought long and hard about how we might have supported Ben and others like him better. Ben had told us how difficult he found it to pluck up the courage to attend meetings. And as his depression and social anxiety worsened, he found himself unable to come back although he said he wanted to, and we kept in touch by email. We are very aware that many more people contact us than attend our meetings and we know that for some people with depression and anxiety, walking through our meeting doors into a group of strangers is an exceedingly daunting prospect. At least four times as many people contact us about meetings as do come along for the first time. You can see for our 2016 figures that 93 people enquired about the group but only 19 of these ever attended a meeting. We have decided that we would like to try to make newcomers find it easier to attend. While we have always offered to meet newcomers before the meetings start, we have decided to formalise this and offer all newcomers the chance to meet one of us one-to-one 30-45 minutes before the meeting with no pressure to go on to attend if they don't feel ready. We hope this may ease some people's anxiety and make it easier to come along. We also endeavour to keep in touch with people by email, and if possible, in other ways too, if they are too unwell to attend meetings. We are also happy to liaise with mental health services if this would be helpful – and indeed, we have done this on members' behalf in the past.

Finally we have compiled a list of resources which may be helpful for anyone who is feeling suicidal. Please do contact us if you would like a copy. We will put a copy onto our website in due course (updating the page on this subject which used to be on our old website).

“Check-in” meetings

Our “check-in” meetings continue monthly on Thursdays. Numbers which were low last year have picked up. We will therefore 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 enjoyed three very successful **socials** this year beginning with our **20th Anniversary and New Year Meal** which took place at Blueberries Greek restaurant in East Barnet in early January. Eighteen members attended and we celebrated with a wonderful 4 course meal and beautifully decorated cake (pictured opposite) which was made especially for the occasion by one of our members. On it you can see the DA logo – the sun coming out behind the clouds of depression signifying hope.



Later that month, some members also attended Ruby Wax's presentation of Mindfulness **Frazzled** at the Wylliyots theatre in Potters Bar.



Then in the summer we enjoyed our annual bring and share supper party at a member's home. Once again we enjoyed a wide variety of members' home cooking – from stuffed peppers and exotic salads to homemade cheese cake and pastries. It was good to be able to get to know each other better in comfortable surroundings away from the fluorescent lighting and hard chairs at the church centre! You can see some of the main course dishes we enjoyed in the photo opposite.

We also enjoyed a wonderful summer walk over Totteridge fields – stopping midway to enjoy coffee and refreshments at Finchley Nurseries. You can see the view over the fields in the photograph opposite taken from the sunny nurseries' café.



Events and publicity

As a group we have had a lower profile in the Barnet mental health community than in previous years largely due to members having less free time this year to devote to attending events. We do have a link with Barnet Voice for Mental Health, via one of our committee members, and are grateful to them for helping to distribute our leaflets at World Mental Health day and other borough events. We continue to advertise our group through the Mind Website and through other organisations such as Anxiety UK and the Barnet Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust.

In October two members of the committee were pleased to attend Mind's first day conference for former Depression Alliance group facilitators. It was a useful and interesting day and good to connect with other groups in London and the South East.

Committee and active members update

This year we have lost two valued members of the committee both of whom stood down having been on the committee since 2001 – over 16 years! We were pleased to welcome our first man on the committee since Rob died and we are hopeful of recruiting at least one more committee member. We are also still looking for a second group facilitator. We do try to keep the committee numbers to about 7 or 8 people because, given the unpredictable nature of depression, we do find that at any one time one or two committee members may be unwell.

Apart from 6 committee members, we are also very grateful to our treasurer who keeps our accounts in order meticulously and who compiles our annual accounts statement. This year we are particularly indebted to her for her hard work as she has also been unwell.

Two other members support by overseeing our group library and our Low cost counselling resource which was last updated in August. The resource which is now 18 pages long is available to anyone on request. Any suggestions for additions are always welcomed.

Membership

Our newsletter is sent to between 60 and 70 people three times a year. We regularly weed the mailing list and remove people who have not attended a meeting for 6 months or more. This year website referral numbers are a bit lower than last year, but we have had more new people attending than the same time last year, and meeting attendance is also slightly higher than last year. We are pleased to have more men attending now. Please see Appendix 1 below for a full set of statistics – please note 2017 figures are complete to end October 2017.

Financial report

Our annual accounts are reproduced in Appendix 3. As can be seen from the figures, our biggest expense by far is room rental. This increases by a small percentage every year though the grant which we receive from Barnet Council has remained the same since 2013. Indeed between 2004 and 2012 the grant we received steadily decreased from £1200 in 2004 to £589 in 2012 and it is even lower now. If it had not been for the generosity of members and various donations received from a variety of sources, we would not have been able to continue. We have made some savings by moving to a smaller meeting room (from Carey to Livingstone) however, we are beginning to outgrow the Livingstone room which cannot easily accommodate many more than 15 people comfortably and we are often more than this. We have also made savings by cutting back on library books bought and seeking out speakers who are happy to speak for free.

Member feedback

Complaints

We had two complaints this year. One complaint which was made by email was about our policy of not accepting people from outside the borough. We explained the reasons for this policy which was primarily because the group would become too big if we accepted members from outside of Barnet. The other complaint made verbally was a personal altercation between two members which we tried to mediate. We continue to remind members at every meeting that if they become upset or concerned about anything that is said at meetings to please get in touch with us to discuss or they can contact our groups coordinator at Mind if they prefer. In the above instances neither complainant has wanted to take the complaint further.

Compliments

Compliments are received verbally and by email. We also ask for feedback at our annual group survey. We do not collect verbal comments but we do make note of any comments received by email. Please see Appendix 2 for compliments received.

Suggestions

Members made several suggestions for meetings some of which we have taken up this year. The majority of members wanted more meetings devoted to Mindfulness which is why we began the year with a mindfulness session. Other requests included more TED talks, music sessions, photograph sessions and more walks. We hope to fulfil as many of these requests as possible!

Appendix I: Membership and Meeting Statistics

	2014	2015	2016	2017 to Oct
Total referrals	59	49	93	57
Website referrals	45	36	77	40
Answerphone referrals	13	11	16	17
Other referrals	1	2	0	0
Total membership (Dec each year)	60	63	67	60 (Oct)
New attendees (first meeting)	16	22	19	18
Meeting attendance max and (min)	21 (7)	21(6)	22 (4)	23(5)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	253	253	233	222
Meeting attendance total including socials	287	301	277	265
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	13	13	12	13
Socials attendance average	11	12	11	11
Meeting attendance average Monday meetings	16	15	15	17
Meeting attendance average Thursday meetings	9	9	7	8
Meeting number	20	20	20	17
Socials number	3	4	4	4
Committee meetings	3	3	3	2
Total events excluding committee meetings	23	24	24	21
Total events	26	27	27	23

Appendix 2

BARNET DA – COMPLIMENTS AND FEEDBACK 2016-2017

From 2016 group survey

- The group helps reduce the stigma of depression. Being able to talk about it to other members is so refreshing and honest. It has helped me in terms of loneliness/isolation. The group has become a family.
- I find the group a safe space where I can be myself. Value what other members say. Have made new friends.
- The group gives me somewhere to talk about how I feel.
- The group has become very important for me as a way to share with others (to speak and to listen) and to feel less isolated and part of a community as well as to hear knowledgeable speakers.
- The group has helped me to interact with the outside world. This is the only group I would like to attend. Life would not be the same without Depression Alliance.
- The group has helped me to talk to other people as I have no family... it helps me to have friends and come out of my home.
- The group is a safe space for us to meet and share about coping with depression. People with depression find it difficult to socialise sometimes and the group helps us do that in a safe place. Group facilitator and committee do a superb job of keeping this group going.
- DA is great for me to use now that I'm back at work and it is comforting to know I can talk to someone in an emergency.
- It is helpful to have interaction with people.
- The group has helped me with confidence. It has helped me learn how to cope with depression.

From emails

I had no idea how the session would go and I was pleasantly surprised to see how many people took part and joined in despite feeling a bit awkward. It takes a bit of time to get used to being this way and letting go of our inhibitions and judgements. It was nice to see people laugh and smile.
12/7/16 Laughter yoga session

Loved the walk today with our small group. It was perfect weather and I enjoyed being sociable which is lovely to experience again. Thank you for organising it.

7/8/16

I do my best to attend [meetings] as this is a special group with a special place in my heart.

6/8/16

THANK YOU and to the committee for all your hard work and dedication. I know it's not easy running the group, but you make it look effortless. We are truly honoured to have [people] as caring, knowledgeable and generous as yourselves heading us up!

18/1/17

A big thank you for your hard work year after year. You have made a huge difference to me.

6/8/17

Appendix 3: Annual Statement of Accounts 2016-2017

DEPRESSION ALLIANCE SELF HELP GROUP
Income and Expenditure Accounts
Year Ended 31st March 2017

<u>Income</u>	2016/2017	2015/2016	Cash flow statement	2016/2017	2015/2016
Subscriptions from members	£399.68	£ 387.57	Cash balance at start of year	£1,499.31	1394.44
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£454.00	£ 454.26	Surplus for the year	£99.06	104.87
Grant from Barnet Centre for Independent Living	.....	.....	Cash balance at end of year	£1,598.37	1499.31
Other donations	£200.00	.....	Balance sheet as at 31st March 2016		
Total Income	£1,053.68	£ 841.83	Library books	£50.00	£50.00
<u>Expenditure</u>			Cash at bank	£1,501.58	1491.21
Hire of room for meetings	£730.00	£ 521.00	Cash in hand	£112.85	24.16
Refreshments for meetings	£70.54	£ 80.24	Total assets	£1,664.43	£1,565.37
Contribution to social events		.....	Represented by		
Library / training expenditure /Speakers		£ 35.93	Accumulated fund		
Expenses paid to speakers	£50.00	.....	Balance at beginning of year	£1,499.31	1394.44
Postage, stationary, telephone & website	£104.08	£ 99.79	Movement in year	£99.06	104.87
Total Expenditure	£954.62	£ 736.96	Balance at end of year	£1,598.37	1499.31

Barnet Depression Alliance is a voluntary peer led self-help group which is supported by the national charity MIND;
Registered Office: 15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London, E15 4BQ