

Barnet Depression Alliance: 13th Annual General Meeting

Monday 12th November 2018: 7.45 pm Trinity Church Centre,
Livingstone Room

Our 21st Year 1997-2018

Group Report for Oct 2017- Oct 2018

Our group continues to flourish and receive a steady stream of referrals. Most referrals now come via our website and by email, but we do still get some referrals by phone. Although we have been running for 21 years now we are still learning! We now feel that we are able to support newcomers much better by inviting them to come along for a one to one before the meeting starts, and we are looking into altering our meeting times slightly to accommodate this. We have also implemented a new procedure for “check-in” (our small group sharing sessions) whereby we always have two facilitators. We have had challenges this year too: another valued committee member has had to stand down after 21 years’ service, and we sadly said goodbye to a much-loved group member who passed away in March.

EXTERNAL SPEAKERS AND GROUP FACILITATORS

We have welcomed four external speakers/ facilitators this year. In February we invited back **Jonathan Attril** to run another of his very popular **Creative Writing workshops** with us. This was great fun, and we learned a lot through completing two contrasting free writing exercises and then sharing our writing with each other. We do feel that setting up a creative writing group for depression sufferers would be a very worthwhile undertaking and it is perhaps something we could consider in the future.

At our April meeting, we welcomed **Katherine Delargy**, deputy chief pharmacist at Barnet Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust, who answered questions about **medications for depression**. These included whether antidepressants are addictive, their side effects, long term effects e.g. on cognition, and the potential use of new drugs including cannabinoids and psilocybin in addressing treatment resistant depression. There were many questions and members have asked to have another session in the future.

In May we were pleased to welcome **Dr Oliver Bonnington** who gave a talk on **Stigma and mental illness** based on his current research. The talk was well received and led to a lively discussion. Several members have signed up to assist Dr Bonnington in his research and we look forward to hearing more about the results in due course.

Finally, for our October meeting this year we welcomed **Caroline Collier** from **Inclusion Barnet** to tell us about the services they provide for disabled people and people with mental health problems. The organisation now runs **Barnet Voice for Mental Health** which provides a range of peer led services for those suffering mental distress; she also spoke of some exciting new developments including a new service called **Touchpoint** which will provide long term befriending, advocacy and peer support to service users.

ACTIVITIES AND THEMED EVENINGS

Last November, after our AGM we traditionally have a game or activity designed to help us get to know each other better. For this meeting we decided to ask members to bring in an **object of sentimental value** and to share this with the group. Members brought in an

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interesting array of objects. These included a treasured grandmother's music box, a model penguin, an engagement ring, a wall plaque and Malaysian pewter monkeys. It was fascinating to hear the stories behind them.

We started the New Year on "Blue Monday" with a session appropriately entitled **Wellbeing for the New Year**. At this meeting we considered ways we can better look after ourselves. Members contributed an eclectic mixture of ideas ranging from controlled breathing using Wim Hof techniques, to exercise, dance, walking, yoga, meditation and doing crosswords! We also discussed the importance of nutrition and shared 10 copies of Rachel Kelly's new book *The Happy Kitchen* which she had donated to us as a gift.

For our March meeting we focussed on **coping with depression and anxiety at work**. The discussion was led by two members who shared personal stories of these in the workplace. It was interesting to see the different ways each addressed this. One person coped through changes to his own personal approach to work and in helping his employer to understand and address workplace stress. The other coped through finding a different job with better support and less stress. This opened up an interesting discussion in which members shared their own experiences.

For our July meeting we had a session of **sharing memorable photographs**. We have found in the past that this is a very enjoyable way of getting to know each other better. People shared family photos including those from childhood (there was the challenge of guessing who's who!) One member shared a family remembrance book with photos and biographical memories of interesting parents. We also appreciated a slightly different way of seeing the world through a teenager's collection of nature photos, and another member brought a photo album depicting a luxury Mediterranean cruise.

Finally, in September we had a **Books evening**. We shared books we have found useful in coping with depression and anxiety – and a few members donated books they had found helpful to the group. We also had a sale of books donated by members (but not suitable for the library) with the proceeds going towards group funds.

REMEMBERING MATTHEW

Our June meeting was a sad occasion and saw a change to our scheduled programme. We devoted this meeting to **remembering Matthew**, one of our long-standing members, who sadly died unexpectedly in March this year. We devoted this meeting to sharing our memories of Matthew, and celebrating his substantial (but often unseen) contribution to the group over the past 16 years. We recalled his wonderful home baking – especially his ice cream -- and all the hard work he put into compiling and updating our *Low-cost counselling list*. Matthew was also interested in gardening and had been involved in a community allotment project for people with mental health difficulties. We were very pleased that two people from the project were able to join us for the meeting. We have sent our tributes to Karen, his cousin and next of kin, in the United States.

CHECK IN MEETINGS

Thursday "check-in" meetings continue to be attended by about 7-10 people. While this is about half the Monday attendance the meeting format does work well. It is an ideal meeting for newcomers to attend because the entire meeting is devoted to sharing how each person is coping. It is a more relaxed pace than the Monday meetings, and this enables us to give people more time to talk in a quieter and smaller group.

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We have also made a change in the way we run the “check-in” part of Monday meetings. We decided that each “check-in” small group needs to be facilitated by two committee members, not one. This was because some committee members were struggling to cope with difficult situations and did not feel supported. We have also invited long standing members and ex-committee members to support committee members at check-in if needed. So far this has worked well and we now wonder why we did not do this sooner!

SOCIALS

We have had five socials in the last year including our annual 2017 Christmas meeting with festive quiz and seasonal refreshments. In January fifteen of us enjoyed our annual New Year restaurant meal at Al Fresco in Whetstone.

In May a group of us enjoyed an outing to the Chickenshed Theatre in Southgate. We met for pre-theatre refreshments at the theatre café and then saw the acclaimed stage adaptation of *One flew over the cuckoo’s nest*. It was an enjoyable evening.

In late July, taking full advantage of the heatwave, a small group of us enjoyed a 2 hour walk over Totteridge fields, stopping by at the wonderful Finchley Nurseries for refreshments in their outdoor café.



July walk over Totteridge fields with tea at Finchley Nurseries

And finally, 18 of us met up at a member’s home for our annual bring and share supper party. Again, the weather was kind to us and we were able to sit outside and enjoy the summer warmth. As ever we enjoyed a fantastic and varied selection of main dishes and desserts. We also enjoyed homemade raspberry ice cream – made as a tribute to Matthew by one of our members using his recipe. Matthew often brought his home-made ice cream to the supper parties in the past.

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SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS – FEEDBACK

In our last AGM report we mentioned that we were trialling offering a pre-meeting one-to-one to newcomers half an hour before the meeting starts. We are pleased to say that this is working very well and that this offer is taken up at about half the meetings. Several people have said that they have found this helpful so we intend to continue to offer this space to newcomers.

EVENTS AND PUBLICITY

We continue to network with many organisations in Barnet though we regret we are unable at present to attend as many community events as we would like. We continue to keep in touch with Mind, who now support all former Depression Alliance groups. We met up informally in October for a meet-up with other group facilitators.

COMMITTEE UPDATE

The committee continues to meet three times a year to plan meetings and to share out the responsibility of running meetings. We were sorry to say good bye to Sue, one of our two founder members, who had helped on the committee for 21 years – ever since the group began in 1997. We are very grateful to Sue for all she has contributed (and continues to contribute to the group). Apart from helping to found the group, Sue has taken on many other roles in the group including managing the group phone, facilitating meetings, giving lifts to members, and opening her home most years to the summer supper party. Sue celebrates her 80th birthday this year – and we all send her our heartfelt thanks, congratulations and good wishes on this occasion.

We have, unfortunately, had difficulty recruiting new committee members. We realise it is a big commitment and that many members do not yet feel they are sufficiently recovered to take it on. We always remind members that all committee members suffer from depression periodically, which is why we do need at least 7 or 8 members, so we can cover for those who are not well.

In the interim while the committee is small (currently 5 members) we have sought out about 5 volunteers – ex committee members and other longstanding group members – who have agreed to support with check-in with a committee member if needed. This can be a bit hit and miss as this cannot be planned in advance and is dependent on who turns up.

We continue to look out for a group co-facilitator. It has been 4 years since we lost Robert our previous co-facilitator, and we very much hope that we can find a successor to Robert soon. In our experience groups flourish best when responsibility for leading it is shared especially as the group has no access to external support or supervision.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Our membership numbers remain fairly stable at around 60 active members and we continue to weed the mailing list three times a year removing anyone who has not been to a meeting for 6 months or more. We have had slightly fewer referrals this year but the numbers attending meetings are about the same as in previous years. We continue to accept new members from Barnet only and signpost enquirers from outside the borough to other groups. One change we have implemented in the last year, is to be a lot stricter with the screening process we use for new members. We realised that we were getting referrals who were not suitable for the group and this was having a negative effect on the majority. The group is for depression sufferers only and cannot normally support people with other

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mental health diagnoses e.g. schizophrenia. It is far better to screen properly in the first place than to have to ask people to leave. We have updated our group literature to explain this more fully and have ensured that those of us screening new referrals ensure that we are, as far as possible, accepting people who would benefit from the group. We very rarely have to turn people away, but if we do we always signpost them to a more appropriate organisation, for example, Barnet Voice's peer support groups.

Appendix 1 gives group statistics for the past 4 years though please note figures for this year are up to the end of October 2018.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see Appendix 3 for this year's accounts. Apart from member contributions which are slightly lower than last year's, we were very touched to receive two generous donations from relatives of members we have supported. We also applied for and received a grant from Waitrose which will appear in next year's accounts. As can be seen our income and expenditure this year is very similar to last year. Our room rental is lower because the centre has very kindly stopped charging us for cupboard storage. As in previous years our income is only marginally greater than our expenditure – there is less than £100 difference between the two figures. We therefore operate within quite tight margins. We are very grateful to our accountant, Pat, who manages our accounts meticulously.

MEMBER FEEDBACK

COMPLAINTS

We are pleased to report that there were no complaints this year!

COMPLIMENTS

We receive plenty of positive verbal feedback which we do not record. However, we do ask for written feedback for our annual group survey at the AGM and we do sometimes receive written communications thanking us for our work. These include feedback from relatives. Please see Appendix 2 for written feedback from our November survey and other written compliments.

SUGGESTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM SESSIONS

We had several suggestions for meetings taken at the last AGM and from the annual survey of members. We are pleased to have been able to follow up several of them. One member asked for a session on antidepressant medications and their side effects – and we were able to address this in April with the pharmacist's visit. Another asked for writing therapy which we were able to address with our creative writing workshop in February. Members also wanted to discuss coping with depression in the work place which we addressed in our March meeting.

We were also pleased to find out that some of the services which we have highlighted at Monday meetings have been accessed. For example, one member has attended Barnet College's Art course for mental health after their course tutor spoke to our group. A couple of members have also used The Disability Foundation following their session with us last year.

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APPENDIX I : Membership and meeting statistics

	2015	2016	2017	2018 (to October)
Total referrals	49	93	69	49
Website referrals	36	77	52	34
Answerphone referrals	11	16	17	15
Other referrals	2	0	0	0
Total membership (Dec each year)	63	67	65	51
New attendees (first meeting)	22	19	19	13
Meeting attendance max and (min)	21(6)	22 (4)	23(5)	19 (6)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	253	233	255	186
Meeting attendance total including socials	301	277	298	229
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	13	12	13	12
Socials attendance average	12	11	11	11
Meeting attendance average Monday meetings	15	15	17	15
Meeting attendance average Thursday meetings	9	7	8	7
Meeting number	20	20	20	17
Socials number	4	4	4	4
Committee meetings	3	3	3	3
Total events excluding committee meetings	24	24	24	21
Total events	27	27	27	24

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APPENDIX 2: COMPLIMENTS AND FEEDBACK 2017-2018

FROM 2017 GROUP SURVEY

- I have just started coming to the group, I find it very helpful to be listened to and being with other people who understand what you are going through
- Helped me to return to work and let me know I am not alone
- It's very good group. It has helped me and gives me space to talk
- The group is always very supportive. I find it a great help
- One of last year's speakers offered mindfulness and radical forgiveness sessions. Without coming to BDA I would not have known about this useful local resource. I was also introduced to the Disability Foundation which is very useful for me. So the BDA is a useful resource for local support
- Group has served as a safety valve for me over many years helping me to self-monitor and avoid falling back into depression
- Being able to talk through problems
- This group has been a lifesaver for me! I have continued to feel better since I been coming here. It gives me an opportunity to talk to people about things that I can't talk to my family or friends about. This is really important!
- The group benefits me a lot because I have mobility problems as well as depression and anxiety and getting out for a couple of hours benefits my mental health and puts me in a better space. I feel better when I can get out and meet new people.
- Group has helped through support of other group members in check in; feeling that [I'm] not alone, others suffering from depression gives you hope when you are feeling very low; meetings where people have given life stories can be inspiring; social events good if have withdrawn from other areas of social life [sic]

SENT BY EMAIL

I'd like to take this opportunity to also share with you how worthwhile I found coming to the group was. Honestly having a safe space to share what I was going through made a real difference - and made me realise I was not alone. The work you do is so important and valuable - and hugely appreciated, I just hope you know that and people tell you. I found the group welcoming, friendly and sharing experiences hugely helped me learn about mental health issues. [November 2017]

The group really helped me and I feel a lot better now .. thanks for all the hard work you do [Aug 2018]

FROM RELATIVES

With so many thanks for accompanying us on this difficult journey. Where would we be without you? [March 2018 sent with donation]

Thank you so much ... I simply do not know what we would do without you and your group [April 2018]

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APPENDIX 3

DEPRESSION ALLIANCE SELF HELP GROUP		Income and Expenditure Accounts Year Ended 31st March 2018			
<u>Income</u>	2017/2018	2016/2017	Cash flow statement	2017/2018	2016/2017
Subscriptions from members	£339.52	£399.68	Cash balance at start of year	£1,598.37	£1,499.31
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£454.00	£454.00	Surplus for the year	£96.71	£99.06
			Cash balance at end of year	£1,695.08	£1,598.37
Other donations	£241.00	£200.00	Balance sheet as at 31st March 2018		
Total Income	£1,034.52	£1,053.68	Library books	£50.00	£50.00
<u>Expenditure</u>			Cash at bank	£1,662.06	£1,501.58
Hire of room for meetings	£670.00	£730.00	Cash in hand	£248.00	£112.85
Refreshments for meetings	£112.58	£70.54	Total assets	£1,960.06	£1,664.43
Contribution to social events			Represented by		
Library / training expenditure / Special	£51.85		Accumulated fund		
Expenses paid to speakers		£50.00	Balance at beginning of year	£1,598.37	£1,499.31
Postage, stationary, telephone & welfare	104.38	£104.08	Movement in year	£96.71	£99.06
Total Expenditure	£938.81	£954.62	Balance at end of year	£1,695.08	£1,598.37