

Barnet Depression Alliance: 14th Annual General Meeting

Monday 11th November 2019 @ 7.30 pm High Barnet Venue

Our 22nd Year 1997-2019

Group Report for Oct 2018- Oct 2019

The past year has been challenging for our group and we have at times struggled to keep going. The major change has been having to move our venue from our previous location in North Finchley to a less central one in High Barnet. After 22 years at Trinity Church Centre this was a major wrench. We are also very sad that we have lost some long-standing and valued members who are no longer able to make the journey. More details on the venue change further on in this report. Despite this setback we have continued to attract new members and have enjoyed an interesting and varied programme throughout the year as described below.

EXTERNAL SPEAKERS

We welcomed three speakers this year. In January we invited back the multi-talented **Jonathan Attril**, this time explain **the benefits of Tai Chi** and do a short practical session with the group. He explained the origins of this fascinating Chinese martial art and how the combination of flowing movements and deep breathing can benefit our mental health. Jon runs Tai Chi Classes in Barnet and anyone is welcome to join.

In March we welcomed back **Rachel Kelly** who is a best-selling author, and mental health campaigner. Rachel gave an illustrated presentation **Ten Golden rules for good mood food** based on her research for her cookery book *The Happy Kitchen*. It was a interesting presentation which gave us plenty of food for thought. We had a record attendance as well – 21 members came along. We will be keeping in touch with Rachel and hope to invite her back in the near future to talk about her latest book. More information can be found on her website www.rachel-kelly.net

Our summer sessions began in May with welcoming marathon walker and multi-faith minister, **Rev John Merrill**. John gave us an interesting talk about his life and his **love of walking**. He described the traumas of being adopted, fitting into his adoptive family, difficulties at school (he suffered exclusion) and how, when he finally discovered his passion – marathon walking – things gradually changed for the better. John has beaten world records by walking nearly 230,000 miles and has written over 400 walking guide books including *Walks in the London borough of Barnet and Enfield*. We look forward to trying out some of his walks with the group. His walks website can be found at <https://www.johnmerrillwalkguides.co.uk/>

ACTIVITIES AND THEMED EVENINGS

At our last AGM members were invited to share with the group a **memorable experience** they have had. Members shared some wonderful “mindful” moments -- from the joys of growing Mexican sunflowers (tithonia) to the surprise appearance of goldfish in a home garden pond.

Then in February three members shared aspects of their own **personal experiences of depression**. We really appreciated their honesty and openness in sharing very personal details of their lives and the different ways they coped with depression – from existential psychotherapy to stroking the cat! It was great to get to know them better and I think everyone found something in these accounts that resonated with their own experience.

We enjoyed another **hobbies and interests evening** in April. It was wonderful seeing how much hidden talent there is in the group and the variety of things people enjoy doing in their spare time. Several members spoke of how getting totally absorbed in an activity or craft helped to relieve anxiety and depression. Members shared their art work, homemade jewellery, pottery, and we saw some exquisite photography. Other members shared their passion for blogging, tennis, dancing and gardening. And there were some more unusual interests

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too – one member shared a passion for astrophysics, and another enjoyed writing cryptic crossword clues for the Tolkien society!

Our June meeting was devoted to looking at **developments in depression treatment in the news**. We focussed on developments which could be accessed by group members. We watched two videos – one on the use of ketamine for depression (this service is now available in Oxford) and one on the benefits of cold-water therapy for depression. We had a look at 23 medical trials taking place in London which are actively recruiting participants with depression. We also discussed recent reports warning about the side effects of antidepressant withdrawal and advising how to withdraw safely.

The July meeting was our final meeting at Trinity Church Centre. For this meeting we focussed on the **benefits of volunteering**. Members described the voluntary work they had done and how it has helped their mental health. We heard from one member who volunteered with the RSPCA looking after cats and found this tremendously therapeutic. This led to her adopting one of her own. Another member had found working with refugees rewarding including supporting them in court. Others volunteered with Advocacy in Barnet, North London Hospice, Barnet College, Friend in Need and Mind befriending. One member raised money for a school by teaching Latin American Dance and donating the fees. Most people found voluntary work beneficial. We reminded everyone that there are often opportunities to help out in our group as well and we distributed a hand out on volunteering opportunities available in Barnet.

At our September meeting -- the first in our new venue we had a very interesting discussion on **Body image and mental health** -- several members shared the way they have coped with concerns around body image including physical appearance, disfigurement and ageing. Body image was the theme of this year's Mental Health Foundation campaign and a report on this subject can be found on their website.

At our October meeting we watched and then discussed a short TED video -- **Depression is a disease of civilization** delivered by clinical psychology professor Dr Stephen Ilardi and author of the bestselling book **The depression cure**. Dr Ilardi suggests that depression is a feature of highly stressed, and socially isolated western lifestyles and suggests six practical ways people can address this. Dr Ilardi's book is now available to borrow from our group library.

“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. We continue to remind members that it is important that they arrive on time and that they stay for the whole meeting unless there are exceptional circumstances. This is because the check-in time is a protected space where we do each other the respect of listening with our full attention and without interruption – just as we would want others to do for us.

SOCIALS

We have had four socials this year including our **Christmas Social** in December with a fun quiz and some lovely festive refreshments brought in by everyone. In January 14 members came along for our **New Year restaurant meal** which this year was celebrated at the Panorama Greek Restaurant.

Then in early August we enjoyed our annual **bring-and-share supper party** at a member's home. This was once again a lovely occasion where we shared some wonderful home cooking and had time to relax and chat in comfortable surroundings – very different from the meeting room!

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In late August we had our **Totteridge fields group walk** which was well attended this year – 9 people came and we paused in the middle of the walk to enjoy tea and cake at the delightful Finchley Nurseries Café where we also enjoyed the lovely displays of potted plants, flowers and garden ornaments. Some photos of our walk can be seen below.



NEW VENUE

We have had just a couple of months at our new venue in High Barnet. Although in the north of the borough we are pleased that the venue is well served by over 12 bus routes -- more than our North Finchley venue. The venue is also very quiet and affords much more privacy for members than the North Finchley one. As you can see from this report, now that we have moved we are endeavouring for the sake of confidentiality not to publicise the meeting venue name and address and we ask all our members to keep this information confidential. This is because we are not a drop-in group and we need prospective members to contact us first.

We are very grateful to our new venue for all the efforts they have made to accommodate us: the new venue would have been significantly more expensive (this partly reflects that fact that the surroundings are nicer), but we have been given a discounted rate without which we could not have afforded the room. We have also been given a concession on our timings as the venue has agreed to stay open an extra half hour on our meeting dates to accommodate our end time of 10 pm. We have also been allocated a locked cupboard in the meeting room for the storage of our library.

EVENTS AND PUBLICITY

We continue to network with many organisations in Barnet although we are unable at present to attend as many community events as we would like. We continue to keep in touch with national Mind, who now support all former Depression Alliance groups. We have members who have links to Barnet Voice for Mental Health and we are grateful to them for publicising our group in their weekly updates. We also keep in touch with other voluntary and community groups including Community Barnet (who do all our photocopying for us), the Barnet Wellbeing Hub (who refer people to us) and the Barnet Community and Voluntary Sector Forum which we attend regularly. We also receive newsletters and updates from many of the organisations which have visited the group including JAMI, Barnet College (the Community Link programme), and Barnet Mind. We are listed on numerous community websites as well, and joined the online Barnet Community Directory in April.

COMMITTEE UPDATE AND URGENT REQUEST FOR HELP

We regret we have lost several members due to our meeting venue move and we want to make special mention of our treasurer, Pat, who has worked hard keeping our accounts in order for the past nearly 10 years for which we are very grateful. We are actively looking for a new treasurer and would also welcome offers to help on the committee and for more informal helpers at meetings: help with the library, with setting up the room, assisting

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with using the stair-lift, washing up and clearing away at the end of meetings. It would also be great to find someone willing to take on and update our *Low-cost counselling list*. Due to the nature of our shared condition (depression) there will always be committee members who have to stand down for periods of time and it is therefore vital that others who are well come forward to help fill the gaps. We are much more flexible now and accept offers of help for short periods and for specific tasks if you feel you are not up to the commitment of joining the committee. It would be a great shame for the group to close after 22 years so please do offer your support, however small, it really makes a difference.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Please see the Appendix 1 for meeting statistics. Our membership number remains fairly stable at just over 60 members. The number comprises our regular members (35) and recent enquirers who have signed up to attend meetings in the last 6 months (27). However, as with last year we have noticed our membership has slightly reduced and our Monday meetings now average about 12 members and our Thursdays about 7 which is lower than previously. We are not too worried because we know why this is: our last few months at Trinity were difficult as the new regulations there made it impossible for us to maintain group cohesiveness and confidentiality as we were no longer allowed to have our refreshment breaks in our meeting room. Added to this, the move to High Barnet has meant that many of our regular attenders now have difficulty travelling to the new venue which is in the north of the borough. We are also aware that we have not been able to offer as many socials and informal contacts as previously due to the loss of committee members and to committee members becoming ill. We are hopeful that things will improve in the New Year. In the meantime, many members quite like the smaller meetings – it gives everyone more time to talk, and a smaller group is often less intimidating for newcomers. The very big meetings of the past (20+) were always a bit challenging and we often feared quieter and newer members may have felt overlooked.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see Appendix 3 for our end of year accounts. As can be seen membership subscriptions are slightly down due to the reduced membership. We were however very grateful to receive a generous donation of £150 from a relative of one of our members. Added to this we received a grant from Waitrose (£335) and fundraised over £80 from book sales. We applied for and received a grant from the London Borough of Barnet of £454. We are therefore happy to report a small surplus this financial year which is due mainly to the additional income afforded by the Waitrose grant. This surplus will stand us in good stead in the current financial year where due to the costs of moving venue and the reduction in membership subscriptions our expenditure so far is outstripping our income by a significant amount.

MEMBER FEEDBACK GROUP SURVEY

For the first time last year, we included a “multiple choice” type question where members were asked to tick all the ways they felt the group has helped them. We used the same categories Barnet Council had used in a group survey done in 2010 – though we never got the results of that survey! Interestingly the top three ways the group helped was in reducing social isolation, helping members to manage their mental health and improving members’ self-confidence. Quite a number also said that the group helped them access other services which we make a point of highlighting when we invite speakers from other services.

COMPLAINTS

There were several complaints from members over the meeting venue change and several members have decided to stop attending the group as a result. We have emphasised to these members that every effort was made to find an alternative venue in North Finchley or nearby but this was not possible. We decided on High Barnet because of the good transport links, and also because the venue was able to accommodate all our other needs – including cupboard storage for our library, and disabled access (stair lift and car park).

There were no other formal complaints in the last year.

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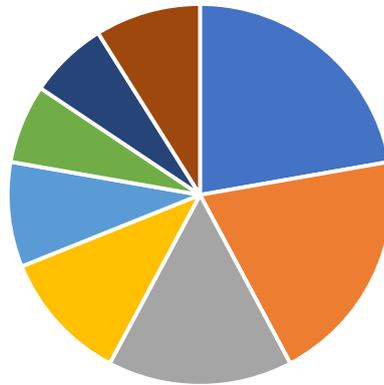
APPENDIX I : Membership and meeting statistics

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (to October)
Total referrals	93	69	56	28
Website referrals	77	52	37	24
Answerphone referrals	16	17	19	4
Total membership (Dec each year)	67	65	51	62
New attendees (first meeting)	19	19	17	9
Meeting attendance max and (min)	22 (4)	23(5)	19 (6)	21 (6)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	233	255	186	164
Meeting attendance total including socials	277	298	229	191
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	12	13	12	11
Socials attendance average	11	11	11	9
Meeting attendance average Monday meetings	15	17	15	13
Meeting attendance average Thursday meetings	7	8	7	7
Meeting number	20	20	20	17
Socials number	4	4	4	3
Committee meetings	3	3	3	3
Total events excluding committee meetings	24	24	24	20
Total events	27	27	27	23

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APPENDIX 2: 2018 SURVEY FEEDBACK

How has the group helped you?



- Helped me feel less socially isolated
- Improved my self confidence
- Helped improve the quality of my life
- Helped me manage my physical health
- Helped me manage my mental health
- Helped me access other services
- Helped me be more independent
- Other

SURVEY COMMENTS

The group is welcoming and friendly. Feel like I am with people who understand what I'm going through. Supportive atmosphere. Learning from our speakers. Have made new friends here.

It is empowering and satisfying to be able to help/support others by helping with the group (Committee member)

I feel welcome in the group not an outsider. It's interesting and helpful to listen to other people's experiences. Making new friends and connections. Keeping in touch with my old friends. I've been a member for about 12 years.

The group has helped me process my depression by sharing my story and has offered support and suggestions.

My friendships made in the group bring me pleasure and support. When I have been feeling low it always helps to come to a meeting.

The group is a very supportive place where one can speak freely.

Group helped me to access a course (the Art of Work) and provides some social activities

Without this group things would have been difficult for me. In particular having external speakers has been beneficial

EMAIL FEEDBACK

Just to say a massive thank you for last night - I absolutely loved your group and you should be very proud with what you have set up! Everyone was so lovely and welcoming and I felt so relaxed to be in a room full of people like me. I will definitely be a regular attendee!

I still very much appreciate the existence of the group as it was very useful for me when I needed it. (Note with donation)

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APPENDIX 3: ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2018/2019

Barnet Depression Alliance: Income and Expenditure Accounts Year Ending 31st March 2019

<u>Income</u>	2018/2019	2017/2018	Cash flow statement	2018/2019	2017/2018
Subscription from members	£307.17	£339.52	Cash balance at start of year	£1,694.08	£1,598.37
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£454.00	£454.00	Surplus for the year	£364.88	£95.71
Donations	£150.00	£241.00	Cash balance at end of year	£2,058.96	£1,694.08
Fundraising	£80.50	£0.00			
Waitrose grant	£335.28				
Total Income	£1,326.95	£1,034.52	Balance sheet as at 31 March 2019		
			Library books & equipment	£50.00	£50.00
<u>Expenditure</u>			Cash at Bank	£2,007.33	£1,662.06
Meeting room rental	£674.40	£670.00	Cash in hand	£51.63	£32.02
Meeting refreshments	£48.96	£87.58	Total cash	£2,058.96	£1,694.08
Social events	£17.10		Total assets	£2,108.96	£1,744.08
Speakers	£55.00	£50.00	Represented by accumulated fund		
Library	£16.13	£26.85	Balance at beginning of year	£1,694.08	£1,598.37
Transport	£11.00		Movement in year	£364.88	£95.71
Administration (postage, website, phone)	£139.48	£104.38			
Total Expenditure	£962.07	£938.81	Cash balance at end of year	£2,058.96	£1,694.08