

Barnet Depression Alliance: 17th Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 7th November 2022 @ 19:30 at meeting venue

Our 25th Year 1997-2022

Group Report for Oct 2021- Oct 2022

This is our first AGM to be held in person since 2019! The group along with the country, has been through some turbulent times and for the best part of two years (March 2020 to March 2022) had to suspend face-to-face meetings and resort to online (Zoom) contact only. Inevitably we lost many members who were either unable to connect online, or who found the online experience unsatisfactory. And, of course, there were also members whose mental health was so badly affected by the social isolation and the virtual closure of mental health services – that they were simply too unwell to join us. The enforced shut down also meant we had a dramatic reduction in referrals – sadly at a time when people most needed support. It is hard enough attending a face-to-face-meeting for the first time if you are feeling depressed and anxious – but even more daunting attending online for the first time.

We are therefore delighted to report that the group is back up and running – and in a new venue! We are very happy with being back in North Finchley at a more central location – and pleased that we are gradually seeing old faces return and new referrals attending. We are now offering a mix of monthly face-to-face and online meetings in order to cater to everyone's needs. If there is one good thing that has come out of the Covid pandemic, it is the fact that we can now support members online who are unable to attend in person due to health, transport or other reasons.

We also celebrated our 25th anniversary this year and are proud to say that we have been running in Barnet for 25 years without a single break – not even Covid managed to close us down!

FACE TO FACE MEETINGS: MARCH 2022 – NOVEMBER 2022

We were delighted to resume our face-to-face meetings in March 2022 at our new venue. For our first two meetings we focussed on sharing our experiences of the past 2 years of Covid lockdown and restrictions. In March we focussed on **reconnecting after Covid**, sharing how we had coped with the lockdowns. We realised how good it felt being able to meet physically once again and we were quite taken aback at how different it felt to be in the same room together as opposed to seeing each other on a screen. We realised how important real human presence is and how much we had missed it. For our April meeting **reconnection** was again the theme of our discussion, but this time we focussed on looking forward into the future rather than back. This session revealed that it would take time for many of us to get over the damage that had been done in the past 2 years.

Our May meeting was really special. It was a **Creative Evening** with a difference. We asked members to share how creativity had helped them cope with the Covid lockdown period. Several members had taken up new hobbies during the period: one brought along an impressive and beautiful selection of paintings having never painted before – and another brought a long a collection of 14 poetry booklets (pastiche poetry) she had compiled over the period, and which she said had helped her to cope with the social isolation and anxiety that Covid had caused. Other members described doing karaoke (online), making cards, photography, jewellery making, pottery, gardening, journalling and cookery.

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Here is some of the artwork shared by our member who had never painted before lockdown!



In June one of our members who had been hospitalized for depression for 10 weeks during the latter part of the Covid lockdown period, shared his **experience of local mental health in-patient services** and described his recovery. We were encouraged to learn that after initial problems and very poor care, things improved when he was moved to a different ward where his needs were more appropriately addressed. His talk demonstrated to us the importance of good clinical care, peer support and good follow up after discharge. Members were encouraged by this personal account demonstrating that good recovery was possible even after a hospital admission.

In July we met to share experiences of **favourite days out and holidays**. Members brought along photos and other mementos of their recent holidays – which were all the more special due to the fact that many of us had not been away for the two years of Covid restrictions. We enjoyed seeing some lovely photos -- and here are a couple we particularly enjoyed, taken in the Lake District with a phone camera – proof that you don't need to go far to find a world of beauty and experience the healing power of nature.



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In September, we were very pleased to invite our first speaker to address the group since face-to-face meetings had recommenced. We were delighted to welcome **DC** a Barnet mother, who shared with the group her personal experience of coping with severe clinical depression – and how she manages this. She shared how starting a blog charting her depression journey had helped her, and also described how her mental health peer support work has also helped. She now works for a mental health peer support organisation in Barnet. We look forward to maintaining a connection with her and have shared with the group some of the resources she had found helpful.

Our October meeting focussed on group members sharing **resources and techniques helpful in managing depression and anxiety**. This was a really useful session with members sharing a wide variety of ideas including online Tai Chi, using an anxiety workbook, Chi Gong, piano playing and singing, writing poetry and journalling, attending cricket matches, growing vegetables, growing sunflowers, learning the Wim Hof breathing technique for anxiety management ... and many others. Again, we sent out a list of resources to members after the meeting.

ONLINE “CHECK IN” MEETINGS NOVEMBER 2021 TO CURRENT DATE

Our online meetings have continued monthly and are reasonably well attended. We recognize that there are several members who would not be able to attend face-to-face meetings and who value the monthly support. The meetings continue to be “check-in” meetings with members sharing how they are coping and then receiving feedback and support from others. Another advantage of the online meetings is that they are virtually free to run – we do pay a Zoom subscription annually but this is much cheaper than the room rental which has increased and is our biggest expense.

GROUP SOCIALS

We had just two socials in the past year. The first was a leisurely group walk across Totteridge fields in August with lunch at Finchley Nurseries. This was a lovely occasion and we were lucky to have good weather though avoided the summer heatwave! Opposite, the view of Totteridge Fields from Finchley Nurseries.



The second social was our **25th Anniversary Celebration Meal** – which was very enjoyable especially as we had not had a meal out together since January 2020. Sixteen of us met at Alexander’s restaurant in Whetstone – and we had a lovely evening enjoying excellent Greek food and reminiscing about the past 25 years. It was really good too, to reconnect with several past members of the group who had been invited to share this milestone.

VENUE UPDATE

We have settled well into our new venue in North Finchley. We do not publicise the venue address as our meetings are only open to members and are not a drop-in. We are very pleased to be back in North Finchley at a venue we have always coveted but was never available to us until Covid shut down so many community groups. The venue accommodates almost all our needs being excellently located for transport, and offers privacy (we are the only group meeting there at the time), storage for our boxes, and easy access for the disabled being all on one level and having a small car park at the front.

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MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

Please see our attendance figures in Appendix 1. As explained, our overall membership and attendance figures have reduced due to the lockdowns, more frequent meetings during lockdown resulted in higher attendance figures overall. Since recommencing face-to-face meetings, we have had a steadily increased number of referrals, and some past members returning. We are not yet back up to pre-Covid figures but we are getting there! Also please note that while we have fewer meetings than we did during the lockdown we now have longer meetings. Our main meeting is 2 ½ hours long in comparison with the online meetings which are rarely more than 1 ½ hours long.

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS AND GROUP SURVEY

We keep a record of all written compliments and all complaints whether written or verbal. We have had no complaints in the past year. Compliments recorded can be found in Appendix 2.

We normally do an annual group survey as well, to get feedback from members as to how we are doing and to find out what improvements we could make and to get ideas for future meetings and socials. A written response also gives people the opportunity to feedback anonymously if they prefer. We did not do a survey last year because we were still meeting online and the previous year's survey (2020) already covered the group's experience of online meetings. We will be doing a survey this year and the results will be available in next year's AGM report.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see Appendix 3. As can be seen from this report we ran a deficit of £475 last financial year (2021/22) largely due to not having a grant this year and not having any member donations over the last Covid lockdown year. We had just restarted meetings and so had to pay for the new meeting room in advance. We will be applying for a grant in the new financial year (2022/23) and hope that this payment and increased member subscriptions, will ensure that we do not have a deficit next year. We have discussed with LBB, our funders, an increase on the grant which has never covered our expenses in full and has not been increased in line with inflation and cost of living /rent increases. We would certainly need a grant increase if we were to return to two face-to-face meetings a month which we would like to do in future (while keeping the online meetings going, so ideally 3 meetings a month).

We have changed our bankers to Lloyds Group Plc due to HSBC (originally Midland) whom we banked with since 1997, having decided to impose monthly bank charges on all community groups and charities. We simply could not afford this, and have successfully closed the account and moved to Lloyds which happily offers us free banking as a not-for-profit community group.

GROUP STATUS UPDATE

The status of the group has changed. As many people may be aware, the group was begun under the auspices of the national charity Depression Alliance in 1997 and we were officially part of the charity and allowed to use the charity number. In 2016 Depression Alliance was taken over by Mind who also took over its 50+ peer support groups. Mind would not allow former DA groups to use their charity number, but continued to provide free membership, insurance, training and support and we were deemed a group *supported by Mind* and allowed to use their mailing address. In 2022, Mind decided that it could no longer formally support any of the former DA peer support groups and could not longer provide advice, insurance or complaint resolution. We could, however, continue to be a member of their peer support network and access any support provided here. We have accordingly updated our constitution and our documentation and in consultation with Mind have agreed on the following strapline: *Barnet Depression Alliance is an independent not-for-profit voluntary organisation and peer-led self-help group established in 1997. It is a member of Mind's Community and Peer Support Network and is financially assisted by Barnet Council.*

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APPENDIX I: MEMBERSHIP AND MEETING STATISTICS MEMBERSHIP AND MEETING STATISTICS

	2019	2020	2021	2022 (to Oct 2022)
Total referrals	32	10	9	20
Website referrals	26	8	9	15
Answerphone referrals	6	2	0	5
Total membership (Dec each year)	62	39	28	32
New attendees (first meeting)	9	5	4	8
Meeting attendance max and (min)	21 (5)	13 (7)	13(5)	16 (5)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	201	302	232	
Meeting attendance total including socials	247	329	237	179
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	11	10	9	
Socials attendance average	9	9	5	11
Meeting attendance average Main meetings (excl Zoom)	13	11	N/A	11
Meeting attendance average Thursday meetings (excl Zoom)	7	8	N/A	N/A
Total number of Zoom meetings		29	25	11
Zoom meeting total attendance		254	232	80
Zoom meeting average attendance		9	9	7
Meeting number	20	35	25	18
Socials number	3	3	1	2
Committee meetings	3	7	2	2
Total events excluding committee meetings	20	38	26	20
Total events	23	45	28	22

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APPENDIX 2: 2021-2022 COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

*Note: We only record written compliments but complaints are recorded whether written or verbal.
We had no complaints for the year October 2021 to October 2022.*

General comments

I do hope that some DA meetings will continue online as I find them very helpful and supportive and would feel at a loss without them. *(Sept 2021 by email)*

I am still feeling very low ... but I really value the support I get through DA meetings and contact with you. *(Feb 2022 by email)*

We are such a supportive group. I think the members are showing their experience by containing some really difficult 'stuff' but it's all because of [good] leadership and steerage. *(June 2022 by email)*

I just wanted to say a huge Thank you again for going above and beyond to help me, I felt very let down by the crisis team when we last spoke but now I can see an avenue forward, thanks to you. *(Aug 2022 by email)*

Comments on socials

Thank you so much for the beautiful walk yesterday. It was lovely to see everyone after so long. I really enjoyed it...just what I needed! *(Aug 2022 by email)*.

I had a lovely time yesterday and hope you did too. Thank you again for organising it. *(Aug 2022 by email)*

Thank you for our lovely walk last week. *(Aug 2022 by email)*

Happy 25th again! Thank you for all that you do for me and the countless number of people that have been through [the group]! *(October 2022 by email)*

Many thanks for organising today's 25th anniversary reunion of the group. It was good that so many former members attended and of course the current members. It went very well and is the sort of event that gives the group identity and will help keep it going maybe for another 25 years ... *(October 2022 by email)*

Thank you for inviting me last night and many congratulations on running DA for so many years. [The group] must have supported so many people with their depression over this time. It was good to see everyone again ... Alexander's was a great choice. A very happy occasion I thought. Many thanks. *(October 2022 by email)*

It was an enjoyable night ... we should do it more often. Congratulations on 25 years of achievement *(Oct 2022 by text)*

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APPENDIX 3: ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2021/2022

Barnet Depression Alliance: Accounts for Year Ending 31st March 2022

<u>Income</u>	2021-22	2020-21	<u>Cashflow Statement</u>	2021-22	2020-21
Subscription from members	£28.00	£0.00	Cash balance at start of Year	£2,313.61	£2,031.03
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£0.00	£454.00	Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	£475.86	£282.58
Donations	£0.00	£0.00	Cash balance at end of Year	£1,837.75	£2,313.61
Fundraising	£0.00	£0.00			
Total Income	£28.00	£454.00	<u>Balance sheet</u>		
			Library books & equipment	£50.00	£50.00
<u>Expenditure</u>			Cash at Bank	£1,748.85	£2,252.71
Meeting room rental /Zoom charges	£341.88	£156.42	Cash in hand	£88.90	£60.90
Meeting refreshments	£14.60	£0.00	Total cash	£1,837.75	£2,313.61
Social events	£0.00	£0.00			
Speakers	£50.00	£0.00	Total assets	£1,887.75	£2,363.61
Library	£0.00	£0.00			
Transport	£0.00	£0.00	<u>Represented by Accumulated Fund</u>		
Administration (postage, website, phone)	£97.38	£15.00	Balance at start of Year	£2,363.61	£2,081.03
Total Expenditure	£503.86	£171.42	Movement in Year	£475.86	£282.58
			Balance at end of Year	£1,887.75	£2,363.61
Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	£475.86	£282.58			