

Barnet Depression Alliance: 20th Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 11th November 2025 @ 19:30 at meeting venue

Our 28th Year 1997-2025

Group Report for Oct 2024- Oct 2025

This is our 20th AGM and 28th year and we look back on our progress over the years with some pride that we are almost certainly the longest running and most successful mental health peer support group in Barnet. We know of no other group that has managed to keep going for this long without a single break and not even Covid stopped us! Indeed, during the Covid years we actually ran *more* meetings as we went online for the first time and held weekly meetings for the first time. It therefore came as a huge shock to be told that Barnet Council – who have part-funded us for the past 27 years, have decided to cease funding the group. If we lose our funding our group may have to close. Please have a look at our *Case for Funding* statement which we have submitted to the Council and to the new NHS mental health trust and see more details on page 5 below in the financial section of this report.

This year has been a particularly successful year in terms of achievements. We have finally updated and published on our website, our *Low-Cost Counselling* resource which we hope will prove useful to our members and others working in the mental health field in Barnet: it is the result of many months of painstaking work. We are also publishing several other resources of interest on our website under two new sections: *Barnet Resources* and *Depression Resources*. We have also been fortunate to be able to offer a trial of the Flow Neuroscience headset for depression. Please see more details of this below – and of all our other activities throughout the year.

FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

We began the New Year in January with a session in which we learned a bit about the life of the late Dr Michael Mosely whose popular radio series and book, *Just One Thing*, has helped so many. Members were then invited to share *just one thing* they did which helped their mental health and which might help others.

Then in February, a time of the year that many focus on romantic relationships, we discussed **the importance of friendship** – what it means and the difficulties of making new and lasting friendships in the modern world. We discussed the value of friendships within the group and members shared their memories of significant friendships in their lives.

For our March meeting, we listened to one of the episodes from Dr Mosely's *Just one thing* podcast series, on **the mental health benefits of reading fiction**. Members brought along books they have found inspiring to share with the group. We have also distributed a list of reading groups in Barnet which some members have found beneficial – we were surprised at what a big choice there is! The list is now available on our website.

In April we discussed our newly updated **Low-cost counselling** list and **Group resources list**. Members also shared local services which they had found helpful. Our late April Zoom meeting, we were pleased to welcome Joshua Kule from Flow Neuroscience to tell us about **the Flow headset** and what it can do for depression and answer questions. This is something we are trialling with the group – see more details below.

For our May session this year, we focussed on **sleep and its importance to mental health**. We listened to the first of three podcasts on Sleep by Dr Michael Mosely – they focussed on

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breathing exercises, the importance of morning light, some CBT approaches and the importance of body temperature. We also shared some of our own sleep issues and discussed problems like sleep apnoea, sleep paralysis and we shared tips for coping with insomnia. We also shared a resources handout which we will be putting on our website soon.

In June we watched a TED Talk – Johann Hari giving a much-lauded talk (17 million views) entitled: ***This could be why you are depressed or anxious***. In it he discusses the deeper causes of depression and ways of treating these alongside traditional medical approaches like medication. Hari drew on experiences he'd come across in traditional societies where there is much less depression. He argued that much depression in the West is due to the breakdown of community, and social isolation and he reminded us that human beings are traditionally tribal – we are not meant to live alone isolated from others as so many do now, especially during later life. Hari has written a book based on these views *Lost connections: why you're depressed and how to find hope*.

Our final summer meeting was a session in which we shared memorable moments in our lives through **photographs**. This was a lovely session where we shared some of our childhood memories and enjoyed sharing photos of ourselves as children.

For our September meeting we shared our **interests** – which is something we have not done in this way before. In the past we have shared our hobbies – but interests are broader and can include things which we would like to do or just subjects we find interesting and would like to pursue. Members shared an interesting variety of interests including Tolkien fandom. Word Games, Family Tree research, stargazing and chasing the Northern Lights, making jams and preserves, journalling, and learning about the brain. We discussed how pursuing interests are linked to our alphabetical six ways to wellbeing – in particular, creativity, connection, mindfulness and self-education.

For our October meeting we listened to a short podcast on the science behind and techniques of **deep relaxation and mindful deep calm** and practiced one based on breathing techniques. Other techniques included in the series are visualisation, progressive muscle relaxation, immersion in nature, and music. A resource list was also provided which we will be putting on our website.

ONLINE MEETINGS

We continue to run monthly online meetings over Zoom. We normally have just 6-8 people attending these, though we got 14 for our special meeting on the Flow Headset. As numbers have fallen off a bit recently, we are considering whether these meetings should always be “check-in” meetings, or whether we should consider having the occasional speaker, theme or discussion. We will be seeking member's opinions on this at this year's AGM.

SOCIALS

We enjoyed our New Year meal this year at La Lluna Spanish restaurant in Whetstone. We have also had three coffee afternoons at members' homes. We do not advertise these on the newsletter as they are arranged ad hoc throughout the year.

In the summer, we once again enjoyed a summer ramble through Totteridge Fields followed by lunch at Finchley Nurseries. It was a glorious summer day as can be seen by some photos taken by one member of the party. Being outdoors in nature in lovely weather is a wonderful tonic for depression!

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Darlands Lake



Ellern Mede Farm



White mansion behind farmland



Colourful graffiti at abandoned barn

FLOW NEUROSCIENCE HEADSET GROUP TRIAL

The Flow Headset is a device which can be bought and trialled at home. It claims to treat depression by stimulating the brain using a very low voltage electric current – about 1/400th the amount of current used in ECT. The technology is called Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (not to be confused with Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation which uses magnets and cannot be done at home). The developers claim that the headset is as effective as antidepressants in alleviating depression symptoms and can also reduce anxiety. In some cases, users claim complete remission of symptoms. The NHS is currently trialling the headset in five NHS trusts. We have been fortunate to have been able to purchase a headset at half price and have been given the opportunity of trialling it within the group. For more information please visit:

<https://www.flowneuroscience.com/> Each person is able to borrow the set for a month, and if they find it effective, will then be able to purchase their own headset at a discount which is being offered to group members.

GROUP RESOURCES NOW AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE

We have now made three of our resources available on our website under *Barnet Local Resources*. They include our *Low-cost counselling* booklet– which is a 24-page comprehensive guide to affordable counselling in and near Barnet. We have also uploaded our *Barnet Local Resources guide* which covers Crisis support, Community Support, Befriending and Peer support in Barnet. Finally, we have also put up our local *Book and Reading Groups* list. We have also added a *Depression Resources* page to our website and over the next year or so, will be updating and putting on many of the depression resources which the group has developed over the years including our *Sleep resources* handout and our *Relaxation and Mindfulness Resources* from this year. We will be adding

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our resources on *Bereavement*, *Coping with suicidal feelings*, and *New depression treatments* in due course.

COMMITTEE UPDATE

We remain a committee of five and continue to look out for new committee members. While we have not had any success so far, we are very grateful to many established members for giving extra help at meetings and offering to host socials. We could not have managed easily without this help as two of our committee have had to go into hospital for operations this year. The committee continues to keep in touch regularly throughout the year, as well as meets formally three times a year to plan meetings. We are especially grateful to Gillian, one of our committee members, for her tireless promotion of the group in Barnet and for her work liaising with our local MP, local council and NHS mental health trust in order to highlight the group's need for continued funding.

REFERRALS AND MEMBERSHIP

Please see Appendix 1 for current membership and referral statistics. We continue to make a slow recovery from the Covid years. Please note, 2023 is an aberration as we were unable to run all our online meetings due to circumstances beyond our control. We continue to find that we have more referrals than new attendees – in other words, people enquire about coming to the group but never make it to a meeting. This has always been the case and is probably because depression and anxiety inhibit motivation.

COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS, CONCERNS AND GROUP SURVEY 2024

Please see Appendix 2 for groups survey 2024 feedback for Q5 *How has the group helped you in the past year?* Feedback has been very positive, overall. We only had two issues raised: one a practical issue of our evening face-to-face meetings ending so late at 9:45 pm, something we cannot do much about except to encourage people to give each other lifts home. The other was to do with some people appearing to ramble during check-in discussing issues which do not appear to be relevant to our purpose which is depression peer support. Again, managing check-in is a fine balance between enabling people to share what they want while having to moderate occasionally and ensure we keep to time – which is why we now use a timer during the online sessions.

We have had no formal complaints this year – though members have raised concerns over certain issues from dogs at meetings to what stance the group should take on issues like medication for depression. We asked members in the last AGM survey for their view on dogs at meetings and we got very differing feedback – from people who welcomed them and found them a positive asset to coping with depression – to those who found them annoying and a distraction. We have therefore decided to discourage lively dogs from meetings but will continue to welcome dogs who are able to sit quietly through most of the meeting.

Regarding the group's stance on depression treatments – we have always taken the position of encouraging members to speak freely about their own experiences of various treatments and are open to the discussion of the evidence and risks associated with all approaches. We take a keen interest in new and alternative treatments when backed by evidence as seen by our taking part in the Flow Neuroscience trial. We are aware that medication does carry risks and negative side-effects for some people and that their use should be monitored closely and ideally used in conjunction with counselling, psychotherapy and for some, lifestyle changes. However, we recognize that until better treatments are found, medication does have a role in treating depression in some patients and many people do respond well to them. We are also very aware that none of us are medically trained and in a position to advise people on what choices they should make here.

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PUBLICITY

We continue to get most of our referrals through our website. Website statistics are good and even better than 2023 the previous year. For 2024 we had a total of 691 visitors for the year who made 1.5K page views. Our most viewed month was April with 104 site visitors and December was the month we had the most page views. 241 page views. We have not got full statistics for 2025 yet, but the upward trend is continuing. We are hoping too, that with the addition of group resources to our website that it will attract even more visitors in the months to come.

We continue to feature on the *Hub of Hope Website*, the Barnet Council Website and on the NHS service directory. We are also regularly featured in the *Barnet Voice for Mental Health E-Newsletter* and by the N20 local magazine for the Whetstone area. We have reminded the new North London Mental Health Trust of our existence but so far have not had any response. We are also hoping that Barnet's Social Prescribing Team would consider making referrals to our service considering that depression and anxiety are the top concern among their referrals.

FUNDING UPDATE AND FINANCIAL REPORT

We have been struggling to make ends meet as all costs are rising, most notably our room rent. Our annual grant was steadily reduced from 2010 when the council ceased fully funding us, and by 2012 it was less than half of what we needed and has remained at £454 per annum since then despite the steady increase in costs. We managed to keep going through member donations, fundraising, and by reducing our costs – for example, by going online for our second meeting. Still, we run with a deficit each year and eventually will be unable to meet all our costs. We therefore asked Barnet Council for a small increase in our grant this year, and were extremely disappointed when they responded that they would be ceasing the grant altogether. The reasons given were twofold: they said they needed to reduce their expenditure – which given the tiny amounts involved really do not make sense, but they also claimed that they only funded projects which are “evidence based”. The latter reason is difficult to substantiate given the very detailed reports we have provided to the Council every year, which clearly show that the group's work is extremely successful and much valued by its members.

We have set out our case for funding to the council in a document which is available for anyone to read upon request. Suffice to say here that we feel we have a very strong case to argue for funding to be maintained. We note that depression and anxiety are currently the number one issue cited by service users who are referred to Barnet's Social Prescribing Service. And with the cutting of support services like Community Network, we believe we are more important than ever. Furthermore, we would argue that we provide a net financial benefit to the council in reducing members' reliance on the heavily oversubscribed and clearly struggling NHS mental health services.

We have in response to the removal of our funding, sought help from our MP and submitted an appeal for reconsideration to the council. We have also applied to the NHS mental health trust for funding. We have not yet had a response from either. We will keep everyone informed of the outcome of our search for ongoing funding. In the meantime, we can assure members that we can afford to keep the group going for another year which gives us time to fully explore this and other options. Anyone with any ideas or offer of help please let us know!

Please see our statement of accounts below, Appendix 3. As you can see, from the growing deficit – over £640 this year, we will not be able to continue providing our service if we do not find an alternative source of income.

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APPENDIX I: MEMBERSHIP AND MEETING STATISTICS MEMBERSHIP AND MEETING STATISTICS

	2020 Covid year lockdown	2021 Covid year lockdown	2022 Slow recovery	2023 Fewer meetings due to special circumstances	2024 Jan - Oct 2024	2025 (to Oct 2025)
Total referrals	10	9	25	20	26	16 (to Oct 2025)
Total membership (end of year)	39	28	32	29	32	28
New attendees (first meeting)	5	4	8	5	4	3
Meeting attendance max and (min)	13 (7)	13(5)	16 (5)	14 (5)	13(5)	14 (3)
Meeting attendance total excluding socials	302	232	191	116	158	113
Meeting attendance total including socials	329	237	213	129	199	136
Meeting attendance average (excluding socials)	10	9	9	8	8	7
Socials attendance average	9	5	11	9	6	5
Meeting attendance average Main meetings (excl Zoom)	11	N/A	9	9	9	8
Meeting attendance average Thursday meetings (excl Zoom)	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total number of Zoom meetings	29	25	13	4	9	7
Zoom meeting total attendance	254	232	114	28	58	41
Zoom meeting average attendance	9	9	9	7	6+	6
Meeting number	35	25	22	14	27	16
Socials number	3	1	2	2	7	5
Committee meetings	7	2	3	2	3	3
Total events excluding committee meetings	38	26	24	16	27	21
Total events	45	28	27	18	30	24

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APPENDIX 2: 2024 GROUP SURVEY FEEDBACK

Question 5: How has the group helped you in the last year?

Helps me to know that if things get difficult then I have something to fall back onto. Very good supportive friendships formed over the years

The group has provided valuable peer support and encouragement that I have been able to access even when very depressed. It has reduced loneliness and social isolation and given me the opportunity to contribute to the group giving me a sense of purpose that has helped to keep me out of secondary mental health services.

I have always found the group to be very supportive and count many of the members as friends. It is so good to know that others understand how depression feels, and we don't have to put on an act at the meetings.

Sheer interaction with others and a chance to voice my issues

[Group is] vital to the Barnet area which is poorly served for mental health

I found the Depression Alliance [group] very supportive when my mother died

I've been attending the group for many years, and I find it very helpful. Everyone is supportive and friendly, and it really helps to be able to discuss different topics that relate to dealing with depression. I also find [group facilitator's] knowledge and support invaluable. She has a wealth of knowledge on various topics and is always very helpful when I need support.

Yes, the group has been absolutely wonderful - truly embodying what a peer-to-peer support group should be. It has provided a space where I can connect with others who share similar experiences, which has been invaluable in reducing feelings of loneliness, isolation, and judgement. Knowing that others understand what depression feels like and can relate to my struggles has made me feel less alone in my journey.

The group has been a source of constant emotional support and shared knowledge, which has been incredibly helpful. It's reassuring to know that others have walked similar paths and are willing to offer their insights and strategies for coping. These shared experiences have fostered a sense of community and trust, which has allowed me to open up more about my own mental health challenges.

The benefits I've experienced from the group include:

- Reducing distress and anxiety – Regular participation in the group has helped me manage and alleviate these feelings, making me feel more balanced and grounded.*
- Talking openly and honestly about my feelings – The group provides a safe, non-judgemental environment where I feel comfortable discussing difficult emotions without fear of stigma.*
- Building meaningful connections – Through the group, I have developed valuable friendships and support networks that extend beyond meetings. The opportunity to learn from others' coping strategies and experiences has been empowering and has helped me grow in my own personal journey.*

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APPENDIX 3: ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024-2025

Barnet Depression Alliance: Accounts for Year Ending 31st March 2025

<u>Income</u>	2024-25	2023-24
Subscriptions from members	£202.15	£157.81
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£454.00	£454.00
Donations	£0.00	£0.00
Fundraising	£0.00	£0.00
Total Income	£656.15	£611.81
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Meeting room rental /Zoom charges	£869.88	£694.38
Meeting refreshments	£49.25	£48.27
Social events	£10.00	£6.25
Speakers	£40.00	£0.00
Library	£7.99	£0.00
Transport	£12.00	£0.00
Administration (postage, website, phone)	£78.16	£25.20
Other (Flow Trial)	£230.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£1,297.28	£774.10
Deficit for the Year	£641.13	£162.29

<u>Cashflow Statement</u>	2024-25	2023-24
Cash balance at start of Year	£1,621.79	£1,784.08
Deficit for the Year	£641.13	£162.29
Cash balance at end of Year	£980.66	£1,621.79
<u>Balance sheet</u>		
Library books & equipment	£50.00	£50.00
Cash at Bank	£921.60	£1,428.39
Cash in hand	£59.06	£193.40
Total cash	£980.66	£1,621.79
Total assets	£1,030.66	£1,671.79
Represented by Accumulated Fund		
Balance at start of Year	£1,671.79	£1,834.08
Movement in Year	£641.13	£162.29
Balance at end of Year	£1,030.66	£1,671.79