Barnet Depression Alliance: 21st Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 10th November 2026 @ 19:30 at meeting venue

Our 29th Year 1997-2026

Group Report for 2026

This year has been a very challenging one for us on so many fronts. We have been struggling enormously to keep going due to our funding being cut off (see financial report below). And several of our members have been facing difficult challenges – health issues, hospitalisations, surgeries, and significant life changes. Our biggest sadness was the loss of one of our longstanding members this August – please see our short tribute on page 6 below. However, despite these setbacks, we are determined to keep going. At a time of change and uncertainty for our country – and at a time of unprecedented increase in mental health distress and loneliness among nearly all sections of our society -- community groups like ours have an important role to play.

So, this report also focuses on the positives, especially our regular meetings, both in person and online where members share how they are coping and support and encourage each other. We have had some lovely social meet-ups too … and in between meetings we are aware of so many special friendships that have developed between group members – we cherish these. Having been running this group since its inception in 1997, it is sometimes a shock to realise how many close friends I have made whom I would never have even met had it not been for the curse of suffering from depression! When I consider these friendships I have to say that maybe this curse is perhaps better considered a mixed blessing.

FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

In January, we discussed the effects of weather on mood, focusing on **winter depression**. We learned that winter depression can affect many of us – not just people with a diagnosis of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – and that some of the treatments, including light boxes, can benefit depression sufferers who do not have a SAD diagnosis. If funds permit, we will consider buying a light box for group members to borrow during winter months, just as we have done with the Flow Headset. A handout on the subject will be on our website shortly.

In February we had a session where we looked at how **journalling and creative writing** can help with depression. A member shared her own experience of therapeutic writing and then we listened to a short podcast on the subject, from a therapist who uses writing in working with her clients. We also tried out a short writing exercise: members were asked to write about something that has given them joy recently. It was an enjoyable and uplifting session

In March we discussed **Glimmers** – those small, often mundane things which we tend to overlook, which lift our mood. We listened to a short talk given by the psychotherapist, Deb Dana, who coined the term *glimmers* in her work with people suffering from complex trauma. She explained how we naturally focus more on the things which upset us – triggers – rather than their opposite. It was uplifting to share the very small things which can bring joy to difficult days – from a kind word or a smile, a hug, an unexpected phone call, or just simply the beauty of nature and the devotion of our pets.

For April we shared the ways we can harness **the healing power of music,** and we learned a little bit about how music can affect the brain positively, releasing feel-good neurotransmitters such as dopamine, and reducing the stress-boosting hormone, cortisol. Several members shared pieces of music that meant a lot to them. We enjoyed listening to a variety of music from beautiful plaintive Irish folk music (Donegal, Paul Brady) to Malcolm Arnold's Scottish Dances and Disturbed's very intense heavy metal rendition of *The sound of silence.*

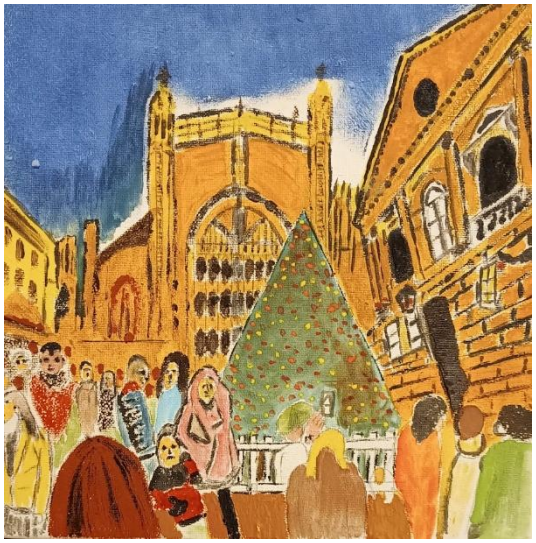
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We began our summer sessions in May with an interesting discussion on **the effects of social media and the new technology on depression**. This is the first time we have tackled this subject, and it soon became clear that we will need to revisit it to do it justice. The subject evoked strong opinions, including from those who felt that we focussed too much on the negative effects of tech and needed to acknowledge the positives. We also realised that the rapid development of AI – and the possibilities it raises in providing more than information – but therapeutic support for isolated people – and the very real dangers this poses – needs further attention.

In June we had a sharing session focussing on **words which inspire us**. This was an interesting session with lots of very different contributions – from the well-known Persian quote: *This too shall pass* to a discussion of Wabi Sabi by Nobuo Suzuki – how to discern beauty in what is flawed and impermanent. We also listened to one member quote from Keat's exquisitely beautiful *Ode to Melancholy* and discussed Mary Oliver's poem *You do not have to be good.*

Our July session was devoted to looking at **the benefits of volunteering** and sharing with each other the ways volunteering has help us personally. It was interesting hearing about all the different types of volunteering people had engaged in and found helpful: examples included working at charity shops, food banks, allotment gardening - -as well as for specific schemes like Crisis at Christmas, and for particular organisations like the North London Hospice and Healthwatch. We distributed our updated handout on volunteering opportunities in Barnet which is also now available on our website. In it we also include opportunities to contribute towards medical research into depression and anxiety by helping in clinical trials.

In September we had another **Creative evening** with members sharing their creative passions and how these helped them cope with depression and stress. We were amazed at how much talent people had been hiding – and we enjoyed looking at samples of work including painting, black and white still life drawings, pottery – and listening to a member recite poetry she had written. Here are just a few examples of the work we enjoyed!

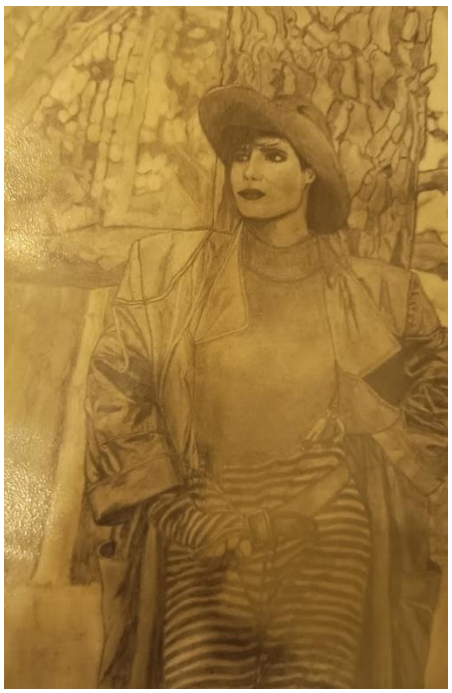


This member, D, had never painted for pleasure in his life until the Covid lockdown. He is entirely self-taught! We thought his paintings were wonderful and loved his use of bold colours. He said painting has helped him cope with the anxiety and social isolation of this period and he has kept it up.



Another member, S, does pottery. She said, "no matter how [bad] I feel, when I go to pottery, I forget everything."

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Kylie Minogue

We never knew that this member, N, was such a talented artist. She brought along several black and white pencil drawings which were exquisite in their attention to detail. She has not drawn for a long time but is considering taking it up again.





And another member shared her talent for photography with two beautiful shots of sunset over the sea while on a recent holiday.



Autumn Mushrooms



Autumn leaves

Another member brought along a photobook of beautiful Autumn photos she'd taken in the local area.

Some of our most helpful and most inspiring meetings are those where members share their personal experience with the group, and this was the case in October where we focussed on **the relationship between physical and mental health**. One of our members shared her distressing story of coping with severe illness and multiple major surgeries during the last 50 years of her life – from her 20s to her 70s. We had no idea of what she had been through – and we felt privileged that she felt comfortable enough with us to share some very personal details of her life. This led to a discussion on the subject – and we considered how physical illness can sometimes be as stigmatizing as mental illness; how the two interconnect; and how many people dismiss mental illness as "all in the mind" and not real – whereas in reality the two are interconnected and cannot be separated.

As this report is being written, our last two meetings of the year are coming up. We hope to devote our November discussion (after our AGM) to the subject of Remembrance, paying tribute to Chris Kassoumeri – a beloved member whom we lost this year (see tribute below.) And with our 30th anniversary coming up, we also hope to reflect on the positives of the past years!

For our final meeting of the year, we will be having our usual Christmas social, festive quiz and reflections on how we will be spending the festive season – what we enjoy about it, what we find difficult and how best to get through it.

ONLINE MEETINGS

These meetings have continued monthly and while small (usually 6 to 8 members attending), have provided an alternative space for members who are not able to get to meetings in person and for those who value the check-in part of meetings. Although attendance at online meetings has declined, feedback has been positive with members valuing the space provided. We have also found that we easily fill up one and a half hours of time – and that with fewer people we don't have to divide into groups, and everyone has sufficient time to talk. Indeed, it is easier for people to share in a smaller group as it feels more intimate and less intimidating.

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SOCIALS

We began the year with our New Year lunch which was held at the Spanish La Lluna restaurant in Whetstone. Seven members attended and feedback was very positive … delicious food and good company!

We then had two socials in August, the only month in the year where we do not meet formally. The first was a great success … we have brought back the annual bring and share supper party which we had stopped due to Covid and not restarted because we needed a new venue. Ten people attended, and we enjoyed a wonderful buffet supper of different dishes and desserts brought by those attending. As ever, the combination of dishes worked very well, and we enjoyed a variety of dishes from stuffed peppers, apple curry, fried chicken, falafels, spiced rice, roasted vegetables, and vegan patties – to name just a few of the contributions. Although it was one of the hottest nights of the year … we were in the middle of another heatwave ...which unfortunately deterred some from attending … a great time was still had by all, and we hope to do it again next year!

Finally – we had our annual Darlands Walk in late August – four members enjoyed a leisurely ramble and delicious lunch at the Finchley Nurseries Café. The newly filled Darlands Lake and neighbouring farm with cows- -- pictured below in the scorched grass, were highlights of the walk. Hoping these photos will encourage more to attend next year!



Finchley Nurseries





Cows on Folly Farm



Darlands Lake

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COMMITTEE UPDATE

Our committee consists of five members, all of whom have served on the committee for well over ten years. We very much need to attract new committee members and would like to encourage long standing members to consider joining. Being part of the committee is a commitment – but there are also benefits to joining: becoming part of a supportive inner circle, and the sense of achievement and purpose in working voluntarily for a good cause that is close to our hearts! Ideally, we would like a couple of new members on the committee – seven is an ideal number. This is because we find the group works best when run by a group of people. It means we can cover for each other, should one or two of us become unwell.

We are also very grateful to members who, while not on the committee, have agreed to support in other ways: in helping to run check-in, for example. And we continue to thank Ian, our accountant member, for his help with the accounts.

We are also very grateful to Gillian for helping to promote the group at local events, most recently the Barnet Voluntary Community Sector Forum, hosted at St Barnabas Church by Barnet Council.
She has also helped by liaising with contacts at Barnet Council with regards to our funding crisis.

REFERRALS AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Please refer to Appendix 1 for our latest statistics. Please note we have decided to no longer include the incomplete figures for the latest year – which would be this year up to October. Instead, we will include the latest complete year which is 2025 and full 2026 figures will be included in next year's report. We are pleased to say, however, that numbers are slowly but steadily increasing. We have more referrals and are larger meeting attendance than in the recent post-Covid years where numbers dropped off sharply. We are also up on last year's figures (2025).

IN LOVING MEMORY: CHRIS KASSOUMERI (1978-2026)

It is with great sadness that we report the recent death of Chris Kassoumeri who attended our group since January 2017. Chris had a huge presence – he was funny, charismatic, very warm with a heart of gold. We remember with gratitude him helping to lead a session on anxiety in March 2018 which included some very useful insights based on the DARE method – he had contacted the books author! He always had new and interesting perspectives on things and so much to contribute. We shall miss him greatly. Several of us attended his funeral both in person and online and we send our deepest condolences to his family. His family have asked for contributions in his memory to be made to the *Charlie Waller Foundation*. This is a UK mental health charity that works to improve young people's mental health through education, training, and suicide prevention. The charity was set up in memory of Charlie Waller, a young man who sadly lost his life to suicide in 1997 after suffering from depression.



Taken and shared by G. in memory of Chris who loved walking in nature. (Scotland)

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HOW THE GROUP SUPPORTS MEMBERS WHO ARE IN CRISIS

As a group we recognize that probably the greatest risk factor for suicide is depression. We have been considering whether we should have a written procedure to better support members who are feeling suicidal and to ensure that everyone knows what we can offer. Our committee will be meeting to discuss this in the New Year. In the meantime, we remind everyone that while we are not a crisis service and that none of us are medically qualified to give advice, we can, if needed, sometimes assist members to liaise with mental health services if they are finding this difficult. We are aware that too often, our overstretched mental health services fail to give appropriate, timely support, and that it can be difficult to communicate with them when in distress. Services can also be difficult to navigate especially with recent changes that have come with restructuring. We are therefore planning to update our information resource on *Coping with suicidal feelings: some useful resources* and make this available on our website. We also hope to devote a meeting next year to explaining to members how to navigate the various services provided by the new mental health trust and explain exactly who to turn to in a crisis – hopefully this will lead to us producing a short written guide on *Navigating Barnet's mental health services.*

FLOW HEADSET UPDATE

In our last AGM report, we described the Flow Headset which the group has been able to loan out to members to trial. 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 can be as effective as antidepressants in alleviating depression symptoms and can also reduce anxiety. It is still available to anyone who would like to try it at home to see if it helpful before purchasing their own unit. Please note that this device is being trialled by the NHS in five of its trusts and evidence supports it being a very safe intervention with minimal side effects. It may be worth giving it a try if you have found antidepressants and talking therapies unhelpful. For more information please visit: https://www.flowneuroscience.com/ Each person can 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 UPDATE

We continue to upload our group resources to our website so they can be easily viewed and downloaded. We are also doing our very best to keep them up to date. We have also decided to rename our low-cost counselling resource as we realised that some people have been misled by the name, equating low cost with lower quality. We would like to emphasise that nearly all the resources listed are from counselling services which provide a normal full cost service but also provide a low-cost option such as sliding scale fees based on income, or reduced fees for booking with a trainee counsellor. The resource is being updated and renamed: *Barnet Depression Alliance: counselling and psychotherapy resources in North London including services offering reduced fee options*.

GROUP SURVEY, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

Our focus in last year's survey was to gauge how members felt about the possibility of the group closing due to our funding being cut off. Please see Appendix 2 page 10, for group members' responses here. The overwhelming response was that the group was much valued and members were very keen for it to continue.

We have had many compliments and just one complaint this year which is currently being addressed as this report is being produced.

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PUBLICITY



We would love to do more publicity – but with a very small team of volunteer members who all have busy private lives – it is difficult. Nevertheless, whenever we can we do attend local events such as this health fair in Mill Hill earlier this year … and we endeavour to distribute our flyers to GP surgeries, libraries and other community venues. We also attend online events wherever possible.

We maintain our membership of organisations like the Hub of Hope and Barnet Voice for Mental Health which publicise our meetings. And this year we have been added to resources like The Waiting Room. And we are encouraged by our monthly website statistics which show how many people discover us online. Indeed, most referrals now come through our website, and we are heartened to see that if you do a google search on Barnet and Depression, our group comes up first!

FUNDING CRISIS AND FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see Appendix 3, page 11, for our annual statement of accounts.

This last financial year was the last one where we were in receipt of a grant from the London Borough of Barnet, Adult Social Care, which part covers our annual expenses. We have been financially supported by Barnet for the past 28 years and the sudden cutting off of our small grant has had a very negative effect on the group. For full details please refer to our *Case for funding* documents on our website here: https://barnetdepressionalliance.org/an-introduction-to-barnet-depression-alliance-self-help-group/barnet-da-the-case-for-funding/

We have reached out to Barnet Adult Social Care, the new North London NHS Foundation Trust, and to our local MP – to put our case and ask for financial support but so far to no avail. We did not even get a reply from the mental health trust. In the meantime, we are extremely grateful to one of our founder members who has very kindly given the group a long-term loan which will allow us to continue for the next 18 months. This gives us more time to secure alternative funding.

We are a very small voluntary-led organisation, and it has been difficult having to spend so much time trying to obtain funding – time we would much prefer to spend supporting our members. We have also had to cut back on many things so we can afford to continue to meet. For example, we have not been able to purchase new items for our library or pay for speakers to address the group as we did in the past. We also planned to purchase a Light Box to loan out to members in addition to the Flow headset, but we have put this on hold. Reinstating our second in-person meeting (stopped due to Covid) is also a financial impossibility, though we have replaced this with an online meeting which caters to a different client group.

We would like to reassure our members that we are doing all we can to secure the group's future and, in the meantime, the best way members can help is to continue to attend meetings and give a voluntary donation at meetings. Members' attendance at meetings is probably the single most compelling reason for continued funding. We believe our record of nearly 30 years of unbroken support to depression sufferers in Barnet … comprising over 600 meetings and contact with almost 900 people during this time, speaks for itself.

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APPENDIX 1: 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	2025
Total referrals	10	9	25	20	26	19
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	133
Meeting attendance total including socials	329	237	213	129	199	156
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	8
Zoom meeting total attendance	254	232	114	28	58	46
Zoom meeting average attendance	9	9	9	7	6+	6
Meeting number	35	25	22	14	27	24
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	24
Total events	45	28	27	18	30	27

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APPENDIX 2: 2025 GROUP SURVEY FEEDBACK

MEMBERS' COMMENTS ON THE FUTURE OF BARNET DEPRESSION ALLIANCE

How has the group helped you in the past year and what difference if any would it make to you if the group had to close?
(From our 2025 Annual Group Survey, November 2025). The below are a selection of comments from ten current members.

The group has been a lifeline with support and advice when I was very depressed. I feel privileged to be able to help as and when I am better. I feel it is an important group to support to help the wider community.

I feel I would loose [sic] my right hand if the meetings stopped. I know the support I can rely on. No one judged me.

The group has become a valuable source of support to me, both when I am depressed and recently when I was hospitalised and needed surgery. The group feel like friends, and we all support each other.

I was and am completely accepted by the group and have always felt supported by it. It would be devastating to me if the group were forced to close. It is the only place I have ever found that took mild depression now called persistent depressive disorder seriously.

The group is in the background in support if I need it. Even if I'm not well, I always know it will be there and I can go back to it when I'm feeling better.

I'm enormously pleased that the group exists in its online form. The chance to meet up with my fellow DA (as was) associates is huge and extremely important to me. The opportunity to share with people who will offer guaranteed non- judgemental support is extremely meaningful and relevant. [The group facilitator's] input is crucial, steadying, reassuring always supportive, I don't know what we would do if she felt she had to hand over the reins. I can't emphasise enough the value of the group. I have no doubt it's being there has helped me cope during depressive episodes, reduced the isolation and emotional pain of depression, provided à pathway out of depression ànd allowed me to give back to others some of the care and support I have received. This model of mutual support self-help is very much part of the coping whole that, along with professional help, medical treatment and psychological therapy can and does push back and counter the worst impact of this serious condition.

I enjoyed the meeting I attended, which I could feel the warmth and care from the peers. It's ridiculous that the Barnet council decided to stop funding numerous charities which support mental health. It's not a single case. Mental health issues can be even more serious than physical health. When ICB and NHS got less funding and decided to push patients "back" to the community/VCSE, how can they and the council not support them including Barnet Depression Alliance? To be frank, I couldn't understand how it can make any sense.

It's very supportive and connects people in mental distress to each other and offers resources that can be helpful

On losing my parents [Barnet] Depression Alliance had been very supportive to me

Check ins are helpful. Face to face meetings are meaningful. I personally love the socials.

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APPENDIX 3: ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2025-2026

Barnet Depression Alliance: Accounts for Year Ending 31st March 2026

Income	**2025-26**	**2024-25**
Subscription from members	£143.03	£202.15
Grant from London Borough of Barnet	£454.00	£454.00
Donations	£5.00	£0.00
Other*	£130.00	£0.00
Total Income	**£732.03**	**£656.15**
Expenditure		
Meeting room rental /Zoom charges	£665.88	£869.88
Meeting refreshments	£47.75	£49.25
Social events	£11.15	£10.00
Speakers	£0.00	£40.00
Library	£3.00	£7.99
Transport	£22.64	£12.00
Administration (postage, website, phone)	£101.70	£78.16
Other (inc. Flow Trial)	£61.99	£230.00
Total Expenditure	**£914.11**	**£1,297.28**
Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	**£182.08**	**£641.13**

Cashflow Statement	**2025-26**	**2024-25**
Cash balance at start of Year	£980.66	£1,621.79
Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	£182.08	£641.13
Cash balance at end of Year	**£798.58**	**£980.66**
Balance sheet		
Library books & equipment	£50.00	£50.00
Cash at Bank	£710.28	£921.60
Cash in hand	£88.30	£59.06
Total cash	**£798.58**	**£980.66**
Total assets	**£848.58**	**£1,030.66**
Represented by Accumulated Fund		
Balance at start of Year	£1,030.66	£1,671.79
Movement in Year	£182.08	£641.13
Balance at end of Year	**£848.58**	**£1,030.66**

*** Other -- bank compensation award £100 and member Flow Pads refund £30**