

December 2021

Barnet Says, 'No' To Hate Crime!



Shyam and Annalie (two of our office volunteers) with police officers during Hate Crime Awareness Week

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From the Editor

After holding the AGM online last year, it was great to see members in person again when we met at St Paul's. The Project Managers gave reports on what their teams have been doing to maintain services since the start of the pandemic, and some of this is captured in our latest newsletter. Clients have returned to activities and after another difficult year everyone is cautiously looking ahead, with concerns about new Covid variants.

We have made the decision to stay at Hendon Lane but when Sherrick House closes we will be moving into new premises. This will be a base for some of COPs' activities, and short breaks in the school holidays. We will be sharing the space with AgeUK Barnet. This is an exciting development that builds on the fruitful relationships built across the voluntary and community sector in the past 18 months.

We are also working closely with the Carer's Centre to see how we can best support the whole family, people with learning disabilities/autism and their carers. Much of this has been facilitated by Inclusion Barnet and has led us to set up the Learning Disability Strategic Partnership - a forum for bringing together organisations to improve the support in Barnet for adults with learning disabilities.

We ended 2020 thinking that 2021 had to be a better year. On the whole it has been; and we're all hoping the next 12 months will be even better. I wish everybody the best for the holidays, and a peaceful New Year.

Ray Booth

Developing the Barnet Mencap Business Plan

Barnet Mencap is developing a new Business Plan for 2022-25. It will set out what Barnet Mencap wants to achieve over the next three years. It will also describe how we will pay for it, and what the staff and trustees will do to ensure the plan succeeds.

Last year we postponed work on the Business Plan because, due to the Covid pandemic, there was so much uncertainty and we knew that it would be difficult to engage properly with stakeholders and find out what is important to them.

We know that Covid hasn't gone away, but we feel that the time is now right to: 1) see what support children and adults with learning disabilities/autism would like; 2) outline Barnet Mencap's goals, and 3) state what we will do to achieve them.

There are lots of things we know we want to do, and with most of the services and support Barnet Mencap currently providing proving effective and popular, we want them to continue.

We want to hear from people with learning disabilities/autism and their families. We want to hear what you think does and doesn't work well at the moment. We also want to know what you think are the gaps, and what are the priorities when developing new areas of work.

There will be a questionnaire running over the next few weeks and everyone, who has an interest in the work of Barnet Mencap, is encouraged to fill it in and send it to us. This is live at the time of print and can be filled in by heading to <https://www.barnetmencap.org.uk/engagementquestionnaire/>.

The new Business Plan will be finalised and available to view from April 2022.

THE BIG
PICTURE



We'd like to say a massive thank you and well done to Mitesh Hirani, Jeetesh Varsani, Nitesh Siyani, Mukesh Bhudia and Dimal Patel, who raised over £5,000 in the London to Brighton Bike Ride!

Focus on... Fundraising

The past few months have been hugely successful in terms of fundraising. A number of supporters of Barnet Mencap took to the London to Brighton Bike Ride challenge and raised over £5,000 for Barnet Mencap and Royal Mencap (photo above). Thank you so much to all the cyclists and supporters! We have secured a partnership for the London to Brighton Bike Ride September 2022. If you would like to sign up for the next adventure, please get in touch with us!

We have also seen further success with grant applications, receiving funding from the Baily Thomas Charitable Fund to cover the salary of a new Project Support Worker.

We are taking part in the Big Give campaign, following on from last year's success. The Big Give is a match-funding campaign, which means our donations will be doubled until we hit target. The money raised will go towards

our Safe Places project, communications and volunteering. Donations open from 30th November- 7th December (midday) and can be made at:

<https://donate.thebiggive.org.uk/campaign/a056900001txP9sAAE>

Additionally, we have secured several partnerships with organisations that have kindly agreed to pledge or donate to Barnet Mencap for the Big Give Challenge this year. Our Champion Funder is The Hospital Saturday Fund. Our pledgers are: St Mary's-at-Finchley Church; Barnet Mencap trustees; and individual supporters and our donors are: Christchurch Primary School; Mindful Meanders Yoga; and Northway School.

If you are interested in fundraising please do get in touch; and for more details about our **Chair based Zoom yoga - (Monday 6th December, 2-3pm)** which is part of the Big Give.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Return of Open Door!

We are very excited to have secured a grant from John Lyon's Charity to fund our Open Door project for the next three years.

The Open Door project supports families with children under five that have additional needs. The funding means we will be able to continue to support such families with things like applying for Disability Living Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Short Breaks, Blue Badges, signposting to relevant services, and much more including enabling us to attend Stay and Play Groups throughout the borough in order to meet directly with families that attend those groups.

The grant also provided funding for activities during the school holidays; this summer we offered a varied programme of 17 sessions, with 25 families attending one or more activities. The activities offered included sensory drama sessions with Fixation Academy of Performing Arts, Baby Ballet, Sensory Story Telling, Soft Play, a Teddy Bears' Picnic, Bubble Fun with Bonnie the Bubble Lady, visits to Trent Park and Aldenham Country Park (where we got to meet the animals and play in the adventure playground), and tickets for some of our families to visit Willows Activity Farm.

We hope to repeat many of these activities during future holidays as well as adding plenty of new opportunities for our families to have fun.

If you have a child under 5 with additional needs and would like to get involved with the Open Door project, call 020 8349 3842.



AUTISM

New Autism Strategy

In July 2021 the government published its new Autism Strategy for England in which they outlined their plans for the next 5 years to improve services and support for autistic adults and children. It covers mental health, diagnosis, employment, education, public understanding and the justice system. They have committed to investing £10.5 million into finding new ways to reduce diagnosis waiting times for children and young people and £2.5 million into improving the quality of adult diagnostic and post-diagnostic pathways and diagnosis waiting times.

They plan to increase public understanding of autism through a long-term, nationwide initiative, to provide £18.5 million to prevent autistic people from falling into a mental health crisis and £21 million to Local Authorities to help autistic people in mental health hospitals back into the community. They aim to improve understanding by training education professionals, job centre staff, and frontline staff in the justice system (*above taken from NAS website*)

Unlike previous Strategies, there is a funding commitment (£75 million for the first year) and for the first time it includes children and young people.

Each council will be legally bound to implement this strategy, part of which is to look at improving the diagnostic pathway. Diagnosis is key to getting care and support needs recognised and addressed. Reducing the diagnosis waiting time is vital as unmet need can also lead to mental health issues.

Through our Autism Screening service, Barnet Mencap currently provides the first step in the diagnostic pathway for high-functioning adults (18+ years old without an associated learning disability) that are resident in Barnet.

For adults that suspect they may be autistic and would like a diagnosis, contact us on 020 8349 3842 to carry out the initial screening. For 0-7 year olds a GP referral to Barnet Paediatric Services would be needed; and those aged 7-17 would need a CAMHS referral.

Many have welcomed this new strategy, as it goes further than previously. It recognises the disadvantages and inequalities that those with autism face on a daily basis, and the need to address this by improving understanding and awareness of autism at a national level.

So many autistic people experience overwhelming anxiety and struggle with everyday life. We all need to play our part in improving our own understanding of autism and how we interact with our autistic fellows.

PARENTING COURSES

Parenting Course update

As reported in our last newsletter, for several years, Barnet Mencap has been delivering Parenting Courses to parents of children with autism, learning disabilities, and ADHD.

We have always received a large number of referrals to this service, and our courses are always oversubscribed. This year, we're running the Family Links Nurturing Programme. This is a course offered to parents of children with autism, learning disabilities, or ADHD. The course aims to help deal with the challenges and stresses of family life so that families can have a calmer, happier life. It helps parents to think about what they do and why they do it as well as reflecting on their feelings around situations. Previous participants of the Family Links course have said they "felt

hugely supported by the group and that everyone engaged in a positive, open, and vulnerable way" and that this "course has been AMAZING, I'm very sad it is over".

We also offer a course called E-PAtS (Early Positive Approaches to Support) for parents of children aged five and under that have additional needs. The E-PAtS programme provides parents with space to share the joys and challenges they have faced and provides a practical toolkit to support them with new strategies that can reduce challenging behaviour and improve both communication with their child and the family's wellbeing and resilience.

As well as the course content, one of the positive impacts of parenting courses is allowing parents to meet and share with other parents in similar situations. We have found that, families have been able to bond and support each other, even online.

This year our parenting project evolved to include our Parenting Helpline. The usefulness of this became apparent during last year's lockdown. The helpline offers 45-minute telephone appointments followed by an email with any tips, strategies, or signposting to relevant organisations that were discussed during the call.

If you are interested in joining a parenting programme or would like an appointment with our Parenting Helpline, please contact the Barnet Mencap Office on 020 8349 3842.

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

What we've been up to

We've all been through a very difficult time. The face to face services COPs (Community Opportunities Project) usually offer could not go ahead; so online was the way forward! We learnt that we needed to improve the digital skills of clients and staff and that we must increase those skills in order to prevent isolation, to access online sessions and enable people to live in an increasingly digital world. Barnet Mencap received grants to help with digital inclusion - including equipment and delivering training sessions, but this will be a long-term plan.

Going forward, there is some exciting news: COPs will have a new venue in which to deliver sessions. These sessions will include health workshops, nutritional classes, women's and men's groups, computer skills training, and lots more. This new venue will also be a base for meeting before going on day trips and a hub for clients where you can drop in for a coffee. An opening event will be held soon, so watch out for details.

Next year we are planning holidays, more day trips and sporting activities, and the promotion of health, wellbeing, cultural, and social opportunities for all. We will continue to deliver online sessions as well. If you know someone who might be interested in joining COPs, please contact the office.

CANCER SCREENING PROJECT

Screenings for people with Learning Disabilities

Over the summer, a local campaign was launched in Barnet to encourage individuals that have symptoms suggestive of cancer to contact their GP practice. Delivered by the North Central London

Cancer Alliance in collaboration with the NCL Clinical Commissioning Group and the council's public health team, the campaign aimed to increase the number of people taking part in screening when invited.

If you have any of the following symptoms you should contact your GP practice to arrange a check:

- Unexpected bleeding, like blood in your poo, pee, or spit
- Unexplained lump
- Unexplained pain that lasts three weeks or more
- Persistent cough that lasts three weeks or more
- Unexplained weight loss

It may be nothing serious – over 90% of people are found not to have cancer. But, if cancer is detected, finding it early makes it more treatable. That's why it's also important to take part in routine cancer screenings when invited.

The way to make an appointment may have changed, but your GP practice is open for check-ups and screenings and healthcare professionals are available to see you safely!



Being... Shyam Chandarana



I was born in Whittington Hospital at 2:55 in the morning. My parents' youngest child, I have one real sister, and one cousin-sister – but I treat her like a real sister. It wasn't too bad growing up as the only boy with two sisters. It was nice to grow up together. We've had a lot of fun together. The same as watching WWE wrestling, EastEnders, and drinking pina colodas, I like seeing my niece, nephew, aunt, and uncle. I used to stay at my aunt's every weekend and see them all but stopped seeing them as often because of Covid. I did miss going to my aunt and uncle's though, because I was brought up with them when we used to live together.

Other than that, Covid hasn't negatively affected me as such because I've had lots of nice activities through COPs [Community Opportunities Project providing leisure and learning activities] with Barnet Mencap. When it was lockdown, it was online and then, as the lockdown lifted, in person. It was good being online. It gave me something to do. The events are quite good. I've enjoyed and like all of them really. At the moment, I'm just on Fit2gether and I do enjoy it. But I really like coming to work at

Barnet Mencap – so much so that even if I'm booked on an activity and I'm called in, I try to cancel my activity because I just enjoy working here. I'm always ready by 8:30 am so I'm prepared that if I'm called in, I can just leave straight away. I'm not that sort of person where if I get a phone call then I would have to go and shower and have breakfast. I like to be ready so I'm not wasting any time; and even if I don't get called in, I like to just be ready.

On the days when I come to work, I wake up at 5:30-6am. I like what I do; it's quite nice and relaxing. There's no pressure. I think all the team are nice and helpful, they're really kind. And even though some people have left, and new people have joined, it still has the same environment. It feels like my second family. I don't have to worry about how people are going to react if I don't do it right, or if I'm slow or anything. That's how it should be really, so you don't feel awkward. And I'm that sort of person that if I've been given a task, I need to make sure I've finished it before I leave – even though the team don't mind if I don't. They've given me my own space to settle in, no pressure whatsoever.

I've been a volunteer with Barnet Mencap for more than 2 years now. I've learnt different skills like taking calls, sending emails, booking and cancelling people for events. I've helped with shredding, mail-outs, and interviews. I've achieved quite a bit and gained a lot of experience. Before I used to be really, really shy, but I feel like I've opened up. In the future, I would like to have a paid part-time office job. I'm not sure if I'll find anything like Barnet Mencap anywhere else, but I just have to think positively. And if there's a part-time receptionist job going for Barnet Mencap, I would happily go for it because I know what I'm doing, don't need any sort of training, and I just like the people.

Photo Finish



One of our Springboard members dressed to impress at a Spooky Halloween session



General Information

You can also view this newsletter on your computer! It's on our website in the 'Newsletters' section, or please email james.wheatley@barnetmencap.org.uk to be added to the emailing list, so you'll save paper and never miss an issue!



How to find us

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Tel: 020 8349 3842 Fax: 020 8349 2192

Email:

projectsupport@barnetmencap.org.uk

Website: www.barnetmencap.org.uk



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Diary Dates

Big Give Christmas Challenge

30th November - 7th December 2021

The match-funded fundraising campaign returns and donations will be doubled if made between the above dates through the Big Give portal:

<https://donate.thebiggive.org.uk/campaign/a056900001txP9sAAE>

See p3 for more details on the Big Give including a fundraising chair yoga session.

Barnet Mencap Christmas Office Closure

24th December 2021 - 4th January 2022

Barnet Mencap's office will close from 2pm on Christmas Eve (Friday 24th December 2021) and re-open again on Tuesday 4th January 2022

The next newsletter, with all the latest news and features, will appear in Spring 2022

Barnet Mencap Registered Charity No. 1089388 Company Registration No. 04274621

