

A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, smiling and looking towards a young child. The child is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a black leopard print pattern. The woman is wearing a grey denim jacket over a white t-shirt with a rainbow graphic. The background shows a window with a brick wall outside.

2025

Impact Report



Welcome to Alternatives



Alternatives is a Newham charity that works with marginalised women and families to provide: free and accessible mental health counselling, practical advocacy and a community of support.

We operate as a compassionate eco-system, recognising that all people are capable of needing and giving support in different ways at different times.

We are proud to be largely lived-experience led and trauma-informed by design.

Our staff in 2025:

Lizi Oni
Caroline Cawson
Effena Wallace
Philippa King
Penny O'Sullivan
Sarah Ward
Yetunde Fatejo
Jade Ford
Taiwo Gibson
Emi Gjoni
Nirupa Kasirajah
Gift Ogene
Shahina Parveen
Fateha Begum
Bunmi Olakunle
Sefera Ellison
Sharon Gordon
Paula Reily
(independent contractor)
Jeremy Acott
(independent contractor)

Regular Volunteers:

Sharon, Andrea,
Camillie, Vanessa,

Trustees:

Natalie Robinson
Funny Aloutade
Cesca Ojefua
Vida Boateng
Ruth Barros
Joan Dallas

Alternatives was founded back in 1994 as a Christian charity providing pregnancy choices support. Over the years it has changed and adapted to meet the needs of our community's most marginalised women and their families. We come from and welcome all faiths and none, sharing core values of respect, inclusion and compassion.

What we do

All our work helps us to fulfil our charitable objectives: We aim to:

- Improve the mental health of marginalised women and their families in Newham
- Address intergenerational cycles of trauma for the benefit of women, their families and the community.
- Establish routes out of destitution that allow women to progress to more hopeful futures.
- Champion good volunteering and work opportunities for women.

Alternatives offers a weekly Family Hub with food, company, parenting support and outings and activities that support children's development and family life. This provides an entry point to other services: counselling, therapeutic groups, parenting support, advocacy, Baby Bank, immigration advice and structured volunteering and skills courses.

Our Final Year

In November 2025 the trustees took the difficult decision to look at winding up Alternatives Trust East London during 2026. They wanted to look at other ways of sustaining its work through partnerships or social enterprise. This decision was formalised, with heavy hearts, in January 2026. All our activities and services will continue in full until the end of the summer term in July.

This 2025 Impact Report celebrates the last full year of Alternatives' great work and transformational impact. The work and the staff team have been going from strength to strength as you can see from the impact figures, photos, quotes and case studies which I'm delighted to share with you.

However, we lost a lot of reserves over the move to new premises in 2023, which has been impossible to make up in the current economic climate. That means we have very little buffer to tide us over any funding gaps – including the end of a major lottery grant that will come in November 2026. With the resignation of our beloved CEO Lizi in November 2025, trustees could not take the risk of trying to recruit with less than a year of funding left and a sizeable funding gap to fill. This decision allows time to end well, finding new sources of help for our service users and supporting staff and volunteers to identify new roles.

To help lead the team through this difficult process, trustees internally recruited Sharon Gordon as interim CEO for one day a week. Sharon has volunteered as a counsellor for Alternatives for the past two years, and stepped up last year to help develop our paid-for counselling enterprise. She has significant past experience as a charity CEO and is ideally qualified for this challenging task.

The trustees would like to say a massive thank you to all the staff, volunteers, funders and partners who made 2025 such an impactful year for Alternatives and the families we work with.

Natalie Robinson
Chair of Trustees



Project Seed : A New Way of Working

Over the past year, as you can read in this report, Alternatives has piloted a paid for counselling service, providing therapeutic support to frontline workers at other local charities. This has had excellent feedback. Caroline and I are working with a consultant to see if this could be scaled up as a viable social enterprise, with profits used to sustain Alternatives' core mission of free or low-cost mental health support for vulnerable women.

We are calling this Project Seed: we've used a branching tree as the logo for Alternatives for many years, and we hope that this might be a little seed from that tree that has the potential to grow again, into something more sustainable.

Sharon Gordon
Interim CEO



Family Hub



Every Wednesday a team of volunteers help set up and run Family Hub, part of Newham's Family Hub Network. Around 40 women and their children come along each week (143 women and 120 children during the year). It provides a safe space for women and families to connect, share their stories, build friendships and have fun.

There's a colourful play area, food - often specialities from different countries prepared by participants - and lots of support. Nutrition Kitchen bring healthy eating workshops, NCT have trained a team of volunteer Infant Feeding Peer Supporters to help new mums, and Newham Family Navigators as well as Alternatives' advocacy staff are on hand to help women find a way forward with problems.

The group had four play sessions in a local park in the summer; enjoyed three great trips to family theatre shows, thanks to tickets provided by partners; and celebrated Eid, Diwali, Easter and Christmas with parties. Thanks to a wonderful partnership with local charity Tindersticks, 18 women boosted their mental health by engaging with nature through the Wander Women programme.



“The trips had a positive impact on my daughter – going to the theatre. This made her explore more in her life. I can’t afford tickets, so this was an opportunity she wouldn’t have.”

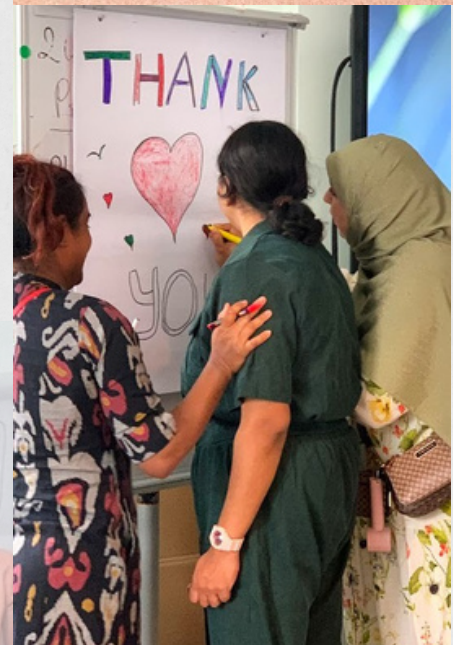
“Before I came. I felt out of place, like I didn’t fit in anywhere. But coming here makes me feel less lonely.”

“They have helped with clothes for my children – everything is expensive. We lost everything when we moved here and I’m a single mum of four.”

Routes out of Destitution

With Volunteer Coordinator Taiwo on maternity leave throughout 2025, our Family Advocate Emi stepped into the role. During the year, 24 women volunteered in a variety of roles that will give them confidence, experience and a reference to help them move on to work. They contributed a massive 1,540 hours of work, which helped Alternatives to provide Family Hub, Baby Bank, childcare and counselling.

- Many volunteers contributed between 60–145 hours, indicating sustained commitment.
- A total of 13 women took at least one specialist course or qualification during the year, to help equip them in their roles and boost their CVs.
- 14 women improved their English language skills through ESOL classes
- And 25 women received tailored guidance from Emi to improve job readiness, gain volunteering experience, and strengthen their employment prospects. This included helping them identify opportunities, develop their CVs and prepare for interviews.



“Volunteering has had a huge impact on me in building my confidence and building myself as a person. I'm so grateful to the wonderful staff at Alternatives.”



Advocacy and Immigration Advice



Alternatives' Family Advocacy service helped 106 women and their families find a way out of destitution in 2025.

Thanks to our Advocates Yetty and Emi, plus immigration advisor Sarah, three families moved into secure housing; five women gained their Leave to Remain status; six were supported to make E-visa applications; 13 made successful housing applications; seven were helped to access different kinds of benefits; seven were successfully referred for legal support; and four women moved into work.

Our advocates are able to distribute vouchers and hardship funds to help families to get essential household items – 131 families received this practical help, along with advice.

Sarah, our qualified immigration advisor says: “Our immigration and advice service has been able to help families secure housing, jobs & start to flourish in all areas of their lives after their status has been regularised”.

Her highlight of the year was helping one asylum-seeking family who had been living in hotel accommodation for two years, because the Home Office lost their files! We were able to get them housed locally, so they are not far away from their support network.

Accredited Training

During 2025 we were delighted to add a new, year-long, volunteer role in Immigration Advice. Four women with experience of the immigration system in the UK started volunteering twice a week to support our Immigration Advisor Sarah, and study for their IAA Level 1 exam. This is quite a commitment! But could lead to paid work providing advice and support to others in an area where there is a shortage of qualified staff but very high need. In 2026 a new group of volunteers are training to support the advocacy team, working towards a qualification in Advice and Guidance with Newham College

“I volunteer three days a week from 10-12. I love coming here. The people here are so good. They are very nice to me. They are humble. They listen. They give respect, they don’t judge. They try to sort issues. Everyone feels equal. They accept everyone. They accept diversity.”

2025 in Numbers

**143 women and
120 children
attended
Family Hub**

**106 women were
supported with
advocacy or
immigration advice**

**24 dedicated
volunteers gave
1540 hours of
their time**

**32 women
benefitted
from free
counselling**

**25 women
benefitted from
careers advice
and support**

**86 women took
part in parenting
support groups**

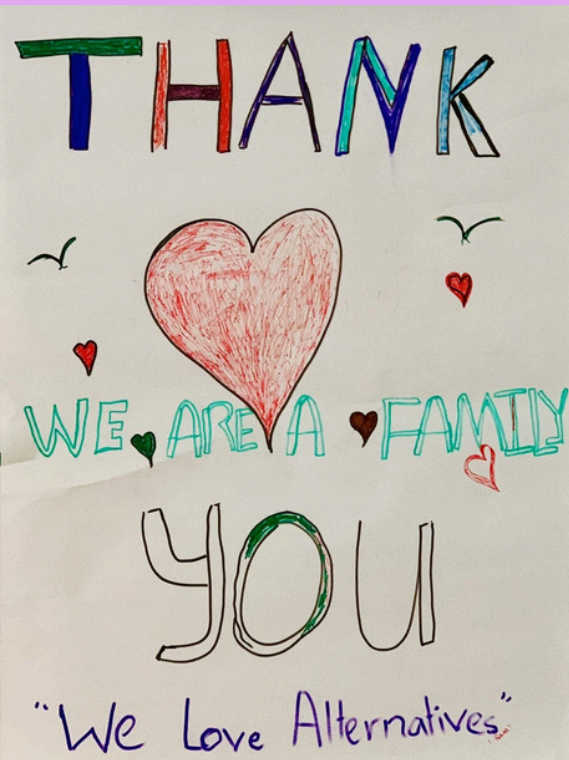
**81 families used
the Baby Bank**

**47 children were
cared for in the
creche**

**27 women
attended
training and
skills courses**



Counselling



"I know I can come here, do my counselling, and there is support for [my child]. Knowing that he's being looked after is really important. I would not be able to do it if there wasn't a creche."

Free mental health support for vulnerable women is at the core of Alternatives' work. In 2025 we were fortunate to have two staff counsellors, Nirupa and Caroline, along with volunteers Penny, Andrea and Sharon. These qualified counsellors offered their services for free in order to build up their experience.

Penny says: "Volunteering as a counsellor at Alternatives has been a personal highlight of 2025. I have experienced many heart-warming moments, particularly when clients express gratitude for having a safe space to share burdens they have carried for years. One client, reflecting on her opportunity to share openly during counselling, said: 'This is heaven'."

Nirupa adds, "The work we do here directly contributes to improving the women and their children's quality of life. By engaging in transformative work as a therapist with my clients I have noticed the ripple effect of these actions extends beyond the individual; it reaches their families, instilling hope and providing a sense of normalcy and belonging."

Case study

Client A came for counselling with Nirupa, facing complex challenges, including being a single parent to a baby, with no family support. Counselling helped her move from a place of helplessness to one of agency. She says she now feels able to make her own choices to improve her child's life – and she has made a concrete plan to pursue employment once they start nursery. This is something she says would have been unimaginable and impossible just a year before.

This transition from despair to hope and planning for the future is a testament to the client's engagement and the therapeutic process. It shows the remarkable improvement in mental health and outlook that can be achieved through counselling.

Project Seed

In 2025 we took the first steps towards growing a mental health Social Enterprise that should generate income from paid-for services to provide free counselling for trauma-experienced women who could never afford it. We hope this will be the way forward for our counselling service in a future without grants.

Caroline developed an offer of one-to-one counselling/supervision for frontline workers at other local charities, and piloted it at two local organisations. This is providing much-needed support to colleagues in Newham's voluntary sector, giving them additional skills and resources to deal with stress and burnout.

Research with 140 London charities found that “75 per cent of respondents have either personally experienced burnout or witnessed colleagues struggling with it in the last 12 months”.

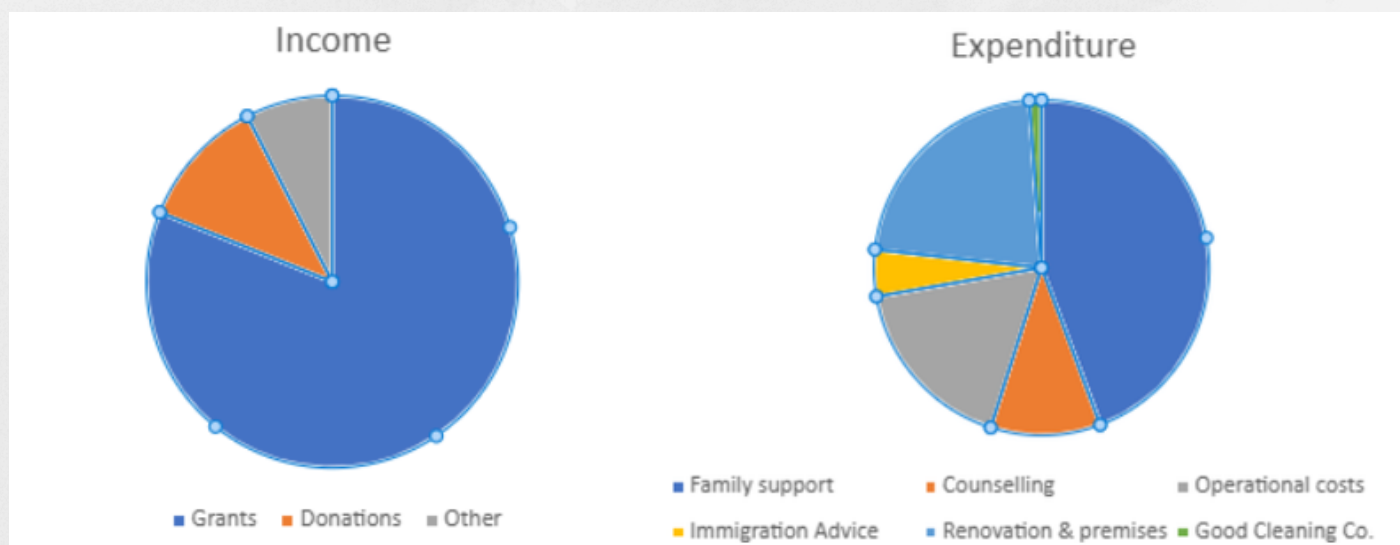
Feedback from our offer has been extremely positive. Sharon has joined the team, and we are working on market research with the help of a consultant. If this idea proves viable, we are considering starting a CIC to continue the core purpose of Alternatives in a small – but more sustainable – way beyond the end of 2026.

“Caroline provided a very safe and judgment-free space that allowed me to share openly and honestly. The insights provided were excellent and really helped me to reflect on things and shift my perspective. I came away with a better understanding of my thoughts and feelings and with some helpful practical strategies for moving forward.”



Finances and Fundraising

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE 2025-2026 FINANCIAL YEAR



TOTAL INCOME £311,296

TOTAL EXPENDITURE £354,900

These charts represent the figures behind the amazing work outlined in this report.

Alternatives has continued to do much with less, providing people and activities which have had a real impact on people's lives. However, this year has continued to be difficult, with no improvement in the financial landscape for charities or their beneficiaries. Despite having multi-year project funding in place, Alternatives has not yet secured a replacement for the core grant currently funding back office costs, including the part-time CEO, until November 2026. Any funding gap carries a significant risk of insolvency to the charity, as reserves have already taken a hammering in prior years.

With this risk in mind the Trustees have taken the prudent decision to wind up the charity by the end of July 2026. This decision will ensure that the charity can be wound up in an orderly fashion, fulfilling any financial obligations to staff, suppliers and stakeholders. Alternatives has continued to demonstrate excellent financial resilience, with trustees ensuring they have all the knowledge needed to make timely decisions. This has ensured that they have provided first rate services and will continue to do so for as long as financially possible.

Our Annual Report with a full breakdown of our accounts is available to view via the Charity Commission website

On the positive side, Alternatives is thankful to have had grant funding for all our staff in 2025, continuing to 2028 for three of them. Successful applications to Children in Need and the Garfield Weston Foundation during this year kept us going, along with some small grants for counselling, training immigration volunteers, and a Hardship Fund – and of course generous donations from individuals.

The only way forward for charities is to diversity income. Alternatives has tried a number of income-generating ideas over the years, but we hope that the paid-for counselling service piloted in 2025 might be the seed that will continue our core work into the future.

Sincere Thanks to all our Supporters in 2025

We are grateful to the many individuals, churches and organisations that have supported us in many different ways throughout this year.



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION



Stef & Philips
Foundation



Lyle's Local Fund



East End
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



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St Edmund's Church & Community Centre
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