



Domestic violence campaign

By Janet Maitland

One in four violent crimes in Barnet happens in the home, behind closed doors. This is the stark message of a poster campaign to tackle domestic violence launched at the end of last year by Barnet Council and the police.

Domestic violence offences reported to police in Barnet in 2009/10 were down to 1,415, a drop of 10.2% on the previous 12 months. However, many victims do not report offences for fear of reprisals from the perpetrator.

Figures from the British Crime Survey 2008/09 show that six per cent of women will be a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime.

Barnet Sanctuary Scheme provides security measures for the homes of victims, should the perpetrator live elsewhere, and the council provides a range of advice and advocacy services.

Chief Superintendent Neil Basu, head of Barnet Borough police, said that the police are committed to supporting the victims of domestic violence. As well as having a dedicated domestic violence team, the police work closely with the Domestic Violence Support Service, an independent charity that helps high-risk victims.

Getting help

The posters encourage victims of domestic abuse, or anyone who knows of someone suffering, to contact the

National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247, which provides confidential support to women and children, including access to a place of safety in a refuge. Calls are free and interpreters are available for non-English speaking callers.

For information about the Sanctuary Scheme, call Barnet Homeseekers on 020 8359 4797.

Questions

A poem for Valentine's Day by Dennis Evans

Will you walk with me,
talk with me?

Will you plant with me,
chant with me?

Will you work with me,
shirk with me?

Will you play with me,
lie with me?

Will you climb with me,
rhyme with me?

Will you...
will you be my Valentine?

First published in Bubbles for Peace by Celebration Press 2005

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From hedge funds to hedges

Continuing our occasional series on career changes, Catherine Johnson of Ashburnham Designs tells how she left a well-paid job in financial IT to become a garden designer.

After 20 years in an increasingly "dog eat dog" environment, with frequent trips abroad working 12 hour days, I dreaded going into the office. I spent hours trying to unwind at the end of each day, and was constantly angry about anything and everything. Enough was enough when internal politics prevented me from doing the job I'd been employed to do.

My parents are enthusiastic gardeners and as a child I grew my own apple tree from a pip. Later, as a flat-dweller I was roped in to help with my church garden, and some years ago I did a short taster course in garden design at the English Gardening School. So, in August 2009 I left the City and spent a year studying for a professional diploma at the Pickard School of Garden Design.

Reactions from friends and family ranged from encouraging, congratulatory, even envious, to concern from those who thought me totally mad. Surprising how many thought me brave. I didn't feel it!

Challenging and creative

I've now set up my own practice in East Finchley, using new skills and those acquired in my former career as a business analyst and project manager. I love the creative aspect, and the challenge of producing designs to complement my client's

lifestyles, needs and dreams. A design doesn't have to start from scratch, it doesn't have to incorporate the whole garden, and it doesn't have to be done all at once. A designer simply helps their client to understand what they are trying to create and why, eliminating costly impulse buys along the way.

No regrets

Was I brave? Yes and no. Ultimately the decision was easy, but at times my self-belief wavered, particularly when mastering technical drawing, and when my brain seemed incapable of absorbing yet more information. The journey has been a huge learning curve, but do I regret it? Absolutely not. Friends now remark on how much more relaxed I am, and I'm excited about the future.

Catherine can be contacted on 020 8444 3484 or at catherinejohnson9@gmail.com



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The day I tried a car club

By Adam Justice-Mills

Many drivers are realising there is a greener alternative to owning their own car: opt into a car club, and save loads of money while saving the planet. Car owners could save more than £300 a month by renting a new, low CO₂ emission car (or van) just for the time they need it.

StreetCar is one of several commercial schemes in London. I'm writing about them because they have a car on Twyford Avenue and because they offered me a free trial. The annual joining fee includes fully comprehensive insurance and national recovery, servicing and regular cleaning, as well as a smart card that opens the car. It covers the congestion charge but *not* parking fines. City Car is similar. WhipCar uses people's own cars, which they hire out to "steady drivers".

Getting StreetCar wise

I got my ID and password emailed to me and checked online for cars nearby. I booked the BMW from Pages Lane for an hour, getting an immediate text confirmation. The hire rate includes free fuel up to a reasonable mileage allowance (30 miles for up to a day, rising to 200 miles per day). After that, fuel is 23p per mile.

When I arrived at the bay, the car wasn't there! I rang customer services who contacted the driver immediately, confirming a 15-minute delay. I was entitled to £40 credit (to be paid by the late driver), but waived it as my hire was free.

The car arrived and the driver turned out to be a new neighbour. Kevin works in the city so uses StreetCar just for short, local journeys. He locked the car with his smart card and I promptly re-opened it with mine.

There was a guide to the car in the glove compartment and I'd checked the car for damage. I did some shopping, extended my booking by text with "Extend 0.5" for another half hour, returned to the bay in time, then walked home.

Verdict

It was quite like any hire car, but closer to home and I *really* liked not having to worry about the car once I'd left it in the bay. Would I buy another car if mine was written off? I'd certainly consider using a car club. It makes sense.

StreetCar can be contacted through www.streetcar.co.uk. Here are links to other car clubs operating in London: www.citycarclub.co.uk, www.zipcar.com, www.connectbyhertz.com; www.quadrigacars.com; and www.carplus.org.uk