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feeling of worthlessness. Mother Candice, who has used the service, explains: "When you lose your children, people make you feel inconsequential. But when you lose them, it doesn't stop you loving them, thinking about them and worrying about them – even if you don't know how to mother them."

Alper agrees: "Parents have had very poor parenting experiences themselves and subsequently often don't understand what it is they are supposed to be doing as a parent – and often can't look after themselves let alone their children."

To tackle this issue, Alper set up a nurture

## **"One client was homeless, a drug user and working as a prostitute"**

day for parents who had lost their children. "We wanted to help them experience healthy nurture," she says. "We had an aromatherapist doing massages. We wanted to help them feel cared about." At the end of the day everyone was given some lavender to take away – partly as a memory of the day and partly to represent the day's message of growth and healing.

Knowing they were not alone was hugely significant for the women who attended. "It was good to be with people in the same situation as me," says Jean. "It felt really supportive. I didn't feel like an outcast." A mums' group has been set up as a result.

The project's impressive success is undoubtedly rooted in the time taken to get to know the parents, value them, and then meet their needs in a way that suits them.

In this, it resembles good old fashioned social work. "That's exactly what it is," says Maddock. Alper agrees: "You feel that you are making a positive difference to people's lives. As the needs become apparent, we are free enough to respond to those needs."

Candice adds: "I feel like I have lived all my life in a coma, and now the window is beginning to open." The service is certainly a breath of fresh air.

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### **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Recognise the long-term mental health of parents who have lost their children to adoption. "Having lost their kids they need some healing. It is crass not to offer something," says Maddock.
- Allow the service to grow organically.
- Use a variety of therapies, including creative therapy. Birthparents have decorated and filled "family boxes". "I gave the box I made to my eldest daughter," says Clare. "I put some family photos in for her; she thought it was brilliant."