



Brent

Corporate Parenting Committee

20th July 2021

A Joint Report from London Borough of Brent and Barnardo's

Brent Care Journeys Programme: year one progress update

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Case Study of R
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of activities undertaken by the Brent Care Journeys Programme since its inception in 2020 to date. The report also draws attention to key achievements, challenges within the Covid-19 context as well as areas of priority for 2021/22.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the content of this report. This is in order to ensure that the support provided to Brent's looked after children and care leavers through the strategic alliance with Barnardo's is appropriately monitored.
- 2.2 The Committee is also requested to consider what support could be provided to the strategic alliance by elected members in order to achieve best outcomes for Brent children and young people.

3.0 Background of Brent's Partnership with Barnardo's Charity

- 3.1. Brent has an established history of working in partnership with the Barnardo's charity. For example, the Freeman Family Centre on Longstone Avenue NW10 is a partnership between the Iris and David Freeman Charitable Trust (the "Freeman Family Trust"), Barnardo's and the Council. The Freeman Family Trust agreed to fully fund the building and equipping of a centre for families and children on the site, owned by the Council. The Council agreed to lease the land to Barnardo's under a 100 year lease and to commission, through a Management Agreement, services to be provided by Barnardo's. The Management Agreement commenced in July 2007 and is for a 20 year term, renewable up to 100 years. Currently services for looked after children to have contact with their families are delivered from the site.
- 3.2. Prior to the establishment of Brent Family Wellbeing Centres, Barnardo's managed Brent's 14 children's centres under a 5-year contract between 2015 and 2020.
- 3.3. In 2017 Barnardo's and Brent CYP worked closely together to submit a bid to the Department for Education's Innovation Fund, focusing on improving outcomes for care leavers. Whilst this bid was unsuccessful, positive working relationships were established and a common approach agreed upon the issues that required addressing – namely the emotional health and wellbeing of care leavers and enhancing employment, training and skills opportunities.
- 3.4. In July 2018, Barnardo's approached Brent CYP for exploration of a collaboration under a project called 'Barnardo's Care Journeys Programme'. Then, Barnardo's had a number of strategic partnerships with local authorities in the UK; for example, Plymouth Care Journeys Programme was most similar in focus and collaborative agreement. Barnardo's wished to work with Brent as a potential partner given the positive historic relationship between Brent and Barnardo's, the shared vision to create systemic changes that address national inequalities for children in and leaving care and an ambition to strive for excellence beyond inspection frameworks.
- 3.5. In late 2019, the Council agreed to formally enter a collaboration agreement with Barnardo's with the view to improve outcomes for children in and leaving care, with

a particular focus on 19-21 year-olds. The formal collaboration agreement was signed in June 2020.

- 3.6. With collaboration from young people, Brent staff and partners, the programme began with an Inception phase (desk based research) which was followed with a discovery analysis; from this a number of 'problem' statements were generated. In partnership with young people, a decision was made that the first focus area for co-design and testing would be the experiences of 'late entrants' to care (young people who come into care age 16 and 17). This was partly because Brent has a high population of late entrants and there is also a shortage of nationally available research and data.

4.0 **Care Journeys Programme**

- 4.1 With 100% investment from Barnardo's voluntary funds, Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) is first and foremost a youth led programme which sets its sights on achieving 'positive destinations' for care experienced young people (CEYP). In this context 'positive destinations' is about working beyond statutory definitions of good outcomes and, instead, actively listening to young people about developing a goal which makes them happy. This, for example, could be to do with being a good parent, maintaining good physical and mental health or living independently.
- 4.2 BCJ has a strategic governance structure with six monthly steering group meetings that are attended by the Strategic Director of Children and Young People in Brent, Barnardo's London Regional Director and relevant other senior officers from both agencies to provide strategic steer, support and challenge as required. There are various other operational meetings that take place regularly by practitioners and managers in relation to service delivery.
- 4.3 BCJ works with relatively small numbers of young people in a meaningful, attentive and youth relevant way; with important short term outcomes for this cohort, but with clear ambition to create the conditions for change for large numbers of CEYP in the longer term.
- 4.4 BCJ has two core areas of activity: the first of these is a self-defined movement of approximately 35 CEYP who have been creatively engaged in a myriad of ways over the course of the past year. Some members have previously been involved with Brent's Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action groups but over half of these young people are engaging in this voice and influence work for the first time. BCJ invests significantly in these young people – the investment is in relationships, commitment, empowerment, opportunity and capability. BCJ believes that this approach will empower a self-sustaining network of support for CEYP in Brent with potential to achieve legacy long beyond the partnership itself. BCJ upskills and develops potential in these young people so that they may go on to inspire and develop a peer led network which touches the lives of, as well as decreasing loneliness and isolation for, Brent's growing population of care experienced young people.
- 4.5 The second core area of activity is a co-design workshop space called 'The Alpha Lab'. There are some key characteristics to this collaboration, namely that

'expertise' is redefined to elevate lived experience, hierarchy is de-constructed so that power is shared, and learning (as opposed to success) is key. BCJ therefore share power with these voices because it is understood that only in partnership with young people BJC is able to achieve the change that they want to see.

- 4.6 Brent Alpha Lab started at the end of February 2021, via zoom, in the third Covid-19 lockdown. The group is made up of up to ten care-experienced young people from Brent, Barnardo's youth workers and one service designer. Young people are considered as *co-designers* in this space. A 'multi-dimensional' approach to expertise is applied which includes the perspectives of other professionals. Additional voices can be brought into the workshop space in a number of ways, for example through pre-recorded interviews, ad-hoc attendance and even pre-agreed 'phone a friend' arrangements.
- 4.7 Co-designers are a diverse group of young people. Some are studying or working, some are caring for their families, some have experience of the criminal justice system, while others have recently arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). What they share is an experience of coming into care in Brent as adolescents, a passion for improving the children's social care system in Brent and a way of 'participating' that works for them.
- 4.8 In order to further support an understanding of the lived expertise present in the Alpha Lab some basic data regarding the ten co-designers is below:

Brent care leaver and was previously a 'late entrant' to care	10
Currently living in semi-independent accommodation	3
Have previously lived in semi-independent accommodation	7
UASC	5
Historic involvement with YOS/Criminal Justice System (CJS)	2
Current involvement with YOS/CJS	2
Involvement in care proceedings as a parent	1

5.0 Progress to date

5.1. Whilst the work of the partnership is not focused on quantitative outcomes, it may be helpful to contextualise BJC's approach and progress with a range of data. Over the course of the year (from June 2020) BCJ has:

- Engaged 90 care experienced young people in Brent; achieved integration into and trust from the local community. It is with regularity that BCJ project workers receive calls from new young people who have been recommended by a friend or who once received support during a period of hardship
- Established an equitable way of working with young people in which they are equal collaborators.
- Responded quickly and continuously to COVID with emotional support, bundle drops, food parcels, devices (laptops, tablets and phones - approx. 50) and mobile data
- Facilitated opportunities to try new things, build relationships and combat social isolation. These have included horse riding, meals out, go-karting, cinema trips, walks and home visits

- Mobilised The Alpha Lab during lockdown, totalling approximately 30 hours on line and, more recently, 20 hours of 'in person' meetings with CEYP.
- In the words of some of the participants:

"We are the service" we are "a place where your voice and ideas are appreciated".

5.2 The Alpha Lab

5.3 The Alpha Lab has completed a stage where young people are now beginning to develop *two* ideas for prioritisation and testing (with larger numbers of care experienced young people in Brent and relevant professionals)

- 1) A 'Welcome Pack' which gives young people age 16 and 17, who are coming into care, the items that they need when they are placed in semi-independent accommodation
- 2) An enhanced complaints process for getting help when things go wrong

5.4 **A 'Welcome Pack' which gives young people age 16 and 17, who are coming into care, the items that they need when they are placed in semi-independent accommodation**

5.5 This pack is more comprehensive than simply a box of items – co-designers (young people who are participants of the Alpha Lab) describe the gift as:

- An enabler of good relationships with key workers in semi-independent accommodation (SIA) placements
- A way in which conflict in homes can be decreased; co-designers have told us about sparsity of resources, challenges of getting set up on a tight budget and thefts of their personal items in SIAs – all of which can lead to conflict.
- A way to increase a young person's sense of self-esteem and pride; co-designers have told us that when coming into care at the age of 16 and 17 they felt 'second rate' compared to their non-care experienced peers (stigmatised by their disadvantage) and that the giving of a thoughtfully designed package would enhance their sense of self-worth,

5.6 The group has developed their idea in greater detail and, with the help of a Barnardo's visual designer, sketched out a first version paper prototype. Ideas of information to accompany the pack include:

- 1 page summary of the Brent Local Offer,
- Conversation guide to help professionals welcome young people into care
- A guide on what should be in every room.

5.7 The group has considered how they will test their ideas to find out:

- if they appeal to or might help other young people coming into care aged 16+
- professionals' perspectives on the challenges to putting these ideas into practice. The group has a plan to run a focus group and one to one interviews with young people and professionals to get feedback on their ideas.

5.8 The group's next steps are:

- Create prototypes in order to begin testing

- Organise the logistics of a focus group and interviews with other young people and Brent professionals.
- 5.9 The timeline for this work is for engagement work to be conducted with SIAs in early July with a view to beginning testing in mid/end of July. The timeliness of work has been impacted by ongoing impacts of COVID (lab members having to isolate and mental health impacts), court dates for some co-designers, work and parenting commitments for others.
- 5.10 **An enhanced complaints process for getting help when things go wrong**
- 5.11 It is important to note the fact that young people did not tell the group's facilitator that they wanted to be able to complain more, but that they wanted effective, youth relevant and transparent ways to communicate when they have a difficulty or when things 'aren't right'. After sketching out this idea in greater detail, the team decided that they needed to know more about how the process works now and created a list of questions that needed answers to. Several Brent staff agreed to be interviewed; these interviews were recorded and played back during the second workshop.
- 5.12 The group felt that, on paper, the process at the moment is exactly as they would want it to be. So attention was turned instead to understanding why, in practice, this experience had been different for the group members (see 4.8 for a breakdown of lived expertise in the lab and indication of which young people may be experiencing barriers when hoping to access advocacy or pursue resolution of a problem).
- 5.13 The biggest challenge identified by the group was lack of information about (a) how the system is meant to work for young people moving into semi-independent accommodations and (b) what support they are entitled to. As a result, the group are initially focussing on an awareness campaign, the first step of which is to prototype a poster to go in every room in semi-independent accommodations - to test if this would help overcome the barriers to increasing awareness. The next step is to create a first version paper prototype of the poster and a plan of how to test it.
- 5.14 **Employment of young people with lived expertise:**
- 5.15 As articulated earlier in this report, BCJ is built on the collaboration of 10 co-designers with lived expertise in our systems change lab and 35 young people with lived expertise within the BCJ Movement.
- 5.16 Recognition and reward schemes are in place to acknowledge the contribution of these young people. In addition to this, BCJ has long standing aspiration to formally employ people with lived expertise. The following milestones are important to report:
- New appointment of full time, waged Junior Project Worker with lived expertise (Brent care leaver)
 - Live advert for up to 10 paid BCJ Assistant Project Workers with lived expertise (Brent care leavers), employed on a flexible basis (London living wage).
 - 1 position (via Kick-start Employment Scheme) which goes live mid-July; targeted to Brent YP with lived expertise of the care system
- 5.17 **Additional investment for care experienced young people in Brent**

- 5.18 The Corporate Parenting Committee was provided with an update in April 2021 in relation to a quality assurance framework for young people in semi-independent provision. As referenced in that report, Barnardo's made additional, including financial, investment into the Commissioning and Resources Team within Brent CYP to assist developing a quality assurance framework for semi-independent provisions (currently unregulated).
- 5.19 This work was developed and enhanced by young people in the Alpha Lab, who were vocal and motivated to create positive changes in unregulated accommodation. Most recently BCJ funded development of a training package for key workers in unregulated housing. This training has been designed by Brent care leavers, based on their core belief that a 'placement' should be a home. It has just completed a pilot delivery stage; it was co-delivered with 4 Brent care leavers and has received feedback which included participants saying they have learned:

"About the importance of active listening"

"It's the little things that count"

"We need to ask questions less and listen more"

"We need to make our house into a home"

"We follow too much process and don't focus on the individual enough"

6.0 Evaluation and Impact

BCJ is externally evaluated by the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations. The annual report is due in July 2021.

7.0. Future areas for Development and Priorities for 2021/2022

Priorities for the year ahead are determined through a consolidation of direct youth voice and learning, professional observations, strategic vision, feedback from the Barnardo's Foundation (who award and govern the funding) and external evaluation. Although not an exhaustive list of planned operational activity, future development includes:

- Testing of the work that has been designed in the Lab and the 'Beta' phase - in which successful ideas are integrated or introduced into systemic processes for care experienced young people.
- Scanning of the wider funding environment to secure future support – the financial implications of COVID have had direct implications for BCJ who will be looking for additional investment to enable impactful change.
- Development of additional partnerships and engagement of relevant grassroots organisations.
- Continued development opportunities for young people within the 'Movement'.
- Wider collaboration with teams across the local authority so that the mission of the partnership is engaging and accessible.

- Explore ways in which Barnardo's and Brent staff can deepen and synthesise their work – to include opportunities to engage in learning together.
- Continue to develop BCJ communication plans e.g. introduction of a social media presence to engage more care experienced young people and further investment into the We Shine Bright Together website (with information which is supportive and enabling to young people) and mechanisms to utilise the social value posed by BCJ. For example, BCJ will be testing a 'Makers' page in which visitors to the website will be able to support the commercial enterprises of Brent care leavers.
- Tailored and informed induction packages for new staff who are transitioning from their identity as Brent care leavers into youth work professionals employed by Barnardo's. Learning and evaluation has been taken from other Barnardo's projects where 'experts by experience' have struggled with conventional induction processes.
- Review piloted training for unregulated housing providers and formulate delivery plan.
- Increase ways in which learning for professionals in Brent can be led by young people.

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