



A Capture of Progress and Change

Brent

Care

Journeys



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INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR ACTION

Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) was established in 2019 as one of several 'Strategic Partnerships' - a new venture for Barnardo's who, as a large third sector organisation, were seeking to learn more about the kind of long term, overdue change which could be achieved when investment was made into convening the systems around children and families.

At the time, children in and leaving care was one of three core priority programmes. This acknowledged that these children and young people (arguably society's most vulnerable children, deserving of our most transformative interventions) were in fact facing unacceptably disadvantaged outcomes. They were, and still are, over represented in all the wrong places - such as homeless, prison and substance misuse populations.

The guiding principles for BCJ have been:

- To acknowledge the public administration approach to delivering services for human beings as flawed.
- To shine a light on the bureaucratic processes which come with this administrative approach (such as conventional output, outcome or target measurements) as, to borrow a term from the work of Human Learning Systems, "works of fiction".
- To increase the active collaboration of people and communities in (a) design (b) review and (c) iteration and (d) vision for the services that they interact with; to enable the coexistence of support *and* agency.
- To approach all interactions between services and people as opportunities for pivotal relationships; relationships which have the potential to unlock radical outcomes.
- To operate and strategize through a lens of power, always investigating where power is held, protected, visible or hidden; 'de-robing' ourselves, seeking to disrupt and redistributing this authority so that it is shared to include people with lived expertise.
- To be nimble, minimise risk, 'fail fast' and focus always on what is being learned, as well as how iteration is therefore constantly enabled.

This is most simply described in the operational model 'The BCJ Way'.

The Partnership with People model

01
RADICAL RELATIONSHIPS



Put people first and make priority of the ways in which human beings connect and thrive; don't ever prioritise a demand led by a system over the need of a person or your relationship with them. Be bold and believe that every relationship has radical potential.

03
INTENTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS



Your environment shapes you; our shared spaces significantly impact the quality of what we can achieve together. The factors which constitute where we come to convene are, too often, default. They need to be considered and designed. Getting this right will enable all four of the other principles.

02
RELENTLESS INCLUSION



Barriers to being genuinely inclusive will be relentless. Embrace this fact; build it into your learning and planning cycles. Meet every blocker with a tenacious and gracious demolition team who are astutely tuned into cultural and structural opportunities for change. Support one another and share the load in your pursuit of equity

05
LEARNING AND ITERATION



There is comfort in the constancy of change when you have fidelity and trust in the process. This highly creative culture is soothed by the safety of the 'test and learn' structure. Leave behind any fictional narratives of achieving preordained targets and lean in to the ever present surprises.

04
REDISTRIBUTED POWER



Power can be visible and invisible, sometimes hidden, often assumed, frequently hoarded and seldom redistributed. There is untold potential in the possibility of being permitted to have both support and agency. Working in this space requires integrity, honesty and a little mischief. Expose and redress.



care
journeys

THE
BCJ
WAY

WHAT WE DID

GO LIVE

2020

Relationships and outreach: Founding 'The BCJ Movement'*

**A core cohort of c.40 care experienced young people*

- COVID-19 acute support and provision of essential items (food, data, devices, household goods)
- Check ins and social opportunities including residentials
- Detached youth work in relevant places
- Voice and influence opportunities

Creation of the BCJ website <https://weshinebright.co.uk/>

2021

Co-design phase 1 and building 'The Wider Reach'*

**Continuous detached youth work to offer opportunity to as many care experienced young people (CEYP) as possible; actively identifying barriers and enabling inclusion.*

Creation of an integrated co-design team consisting of:

- 10 CEYP who represent some of our least heard voices, including CEYP with experience of custody and Youth Offending Services, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people (UASC) and young parents facing proceedings for their own children. The designers all had insight into what it means to come into care 'late' (when you are 16 or 17) - the unique strengths and challenges that this brings.
- 4 Barnardo's staff members (1 Service Designer, 1 Service Manager, 2 Project Workers)
- Visiting experts

Co-design phase 2

Developing understanding of power within the system; inviting professionals who maintain the system into a space where they have opportunity to (a) redesign it and (b) become equal collaborators with those who 'use' it.

Creation of integrated co-design team consisting of:

- Service Managers (Children in Care and Youth Offending), Participation officers, Family Support Worker, Personal Advisor, Social Workers, Semi-independent Accommodation Providers.
- Barnardo's Service Designer and Service Manager
- More than 30 young people with lived experience of the care system who supported research, design and testing stages.
- Visiting experts

Employment of People with Lived Experience:

Introduction of the Assistant Project Worker role

Capacity building in the care experienced community phase 1:

- Communication, expression and campaigns led by people with lived experience: Co-creating the Live Exhibition
- Make Your Own Campaign Film course (4 days)
- Formal training and learning (Safeguarding, Design Thinking and Professional Boundaries)

Designing, testing and facilitating peer to peer support and connection:

The Power Groups (user led spaces with specific focal points e.g. parenting, mental health, physical fitness etc.)

Collaboration with Brent Local Authority to redesign their Local Offer in equal partnership with CEYP.

WHAT'S CHANGED - PART ONE

Discrete, structural systemic changes

Change 1 **The Welcome Pack**

WATCH [Welcome Pack animation](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified: young people feeling “dashed” into placements (far from welcome), without basic essentials (often not even a toothbrush, money for food or adequate footwear) and without a single hopeful relationship to carry them through. We very clearly heard that these young people feel “second rate”, and that they are expected to find a pathway to adult life in an environment of systemic scarcity (often leading to altercation and confrontation).

Structural system change: It is now a contractual requirement in their borough that all late entrants to care are provided with this huge pack of items when they reach their new accommodation, with aspiration to impact cultural change over time. This was according to the informed hypothesis that giving a vulnerable young person a generous and carefully selected starter pack will increase self-esteem, reduce conflict and build essential relationships.

Change 2 **Parent focussed pre-birth assessment tools**

SEE [Baby Goals and Baby Plan](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that care experienced parents often experience a systemic stigma which can prevent strengths based approaches to supporting young, expectant parents. We also heard that these parents feel overwhelmed by systemic demands and expectations but are rarely asked about their own values, vision or hopes for their family.

Structural system change: Brent's social care teams now use newly co-designed resources in many stages of intervention and planning with parents and families. These resources are overseen by their Safeguarding and Quality team who will monitor future iterations of this tool.

Change 3 **Creative memory boxes**

[SEE Creative Memory Pack](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that CEYP experience a repeated and significant series of disconnections and lost relationships in childhood and adolescence, meaning that they too often enter adult life without a consolidated sense of who they are and who is part of their journey.

Structural system change: Brent's Looked After and Permanency Teams are now supporting social workers to provide these boxes containing journals, photographic and creative resources so that children in care have the tools to inspire them to maintain personal journey log, capturing their experiences, development, support and social networks.

Change 4 **Budget for activities**

[SEE Activity Budget](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that the lives and outcomes of CEYP are profoundly impacted by poor staff retention within local authorities, and that CEYP passionately believe that the opportunity to engage in relational practice would enhance the working lives of social workers and contribute positively to their stable employment. CEYP defined 'relational working' as opportunity for professionals and young people to engage together in activities which they both enjoy, enhancing the humanity of their work together.

Structural system change: Brent's Looked After and Permanency Teams now promote and encourage social workers and personal advisors to access funds which will enable them to engage in positive activities with all of their young people.

Change 5 **New local Offer**

[SEE Care leavers | Brent Council](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that (a) the local authority would like to involve CEYP much more deeply in the design and determination of all aspects of their Local Offer to care leavers and (b) when given opportunity, CEYP had a great deal to contribute in terms of user experience, inclusion and accessibility, format and presentation, content (to be removed, added or enhanced).

Structural system change: all recommendations presented to councillors were accepted for the local authority to enact and proceed with. This included two significant enhancements which were (a) free gym membership for all Brent care leavers and (b) a baby pack for all new parents.

Change 6 **Locations and Placements training – embedding V&I in learning and development**

SEE [Ofsted Talks podcast](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that (a) Ofsted would like to work more meaningfully with CEYP to oversee inspection implications following regulation changes to semi-independent accommodation (for 16/17 year olds) and that (b) understanding the unique needs of a 'late entrant' within a previously unregulated and private market are too often failing young people.

Structural system change: The coproduced training course 'Locations and Placements' has now been delivered to hundreds of professionals, including HMIs (Ofsted) and CYPs staff.

Change 7 **New recruitment and employment processes for people with lived experience**

SEE [vacancy flyer](#) and [lived expertise blogs](#)

We heard and ideated from an evidence base which identified that recruitment and employment processes often demonstrate a bias towards professional people.

Structural system change: Barnardo's and Brent now use these new ways of advertising, recruiting and employing people with lived experience based on this learning. Between 2019 and 2023 BCJ appointed six staff with lived experience to their project team and Brent has appointed three as accommodation inspectors. Further, Barnardo's are using BCJ's model to appoint people to a national partnership with the Co-Op.

75% of staff with lived experience who were employed by BCJ in this way have gone on into full time, permanent relevant roles with health and third sector support agencies. The remaining 25% have secured flexible work around other responsibilities which include parenting and engagement with trauma therapy.

Change 8 **Relational resources for foster carers**

SEE [Prepared to Care](#)

We heard and ideated from a research base which identified that foster carers are required to undertake a lot of training and preparation but currently none of this is devised by or with care experienced young people.

Structural system change: Brent have welcomed data from testing which identifies this resource as impactful for foster families and are considering implementation for other family groups (such as those in early help or S47 proceedings). Brent are developing a larger pilot phase to support roll out and continuous iteration.

WHAT'S CHANGED - PART TWO

Opportunity and capability to be heard, campaign and create change

The test, iterate and learn approach to 'voice and influence' – embedding V&I in communications

Giving people the capability and opportunity to speak authentically, as themselves

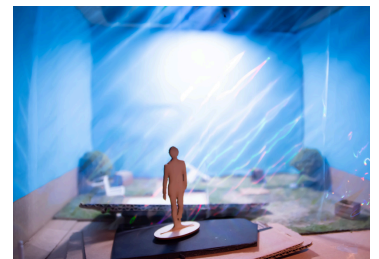
Change 1 The Live Exhibition

SEE [films and poetry](#) and [photos from the event](#).

The Live Exhibition was developed over five months by a newly formed Young Company of care experienced young people in a collaboration between Brent Care Journeys and [Kiln Theatre](#). The Young Company came together to experiment with a range of expressive art forms and to find meaningful ways to speak to the people around them.

Opportunities included **poetry, set design, monologue, movement, sound and visual art**. The programme was open to all care experienced young people accommodated in the borough. The purpose of the programme was:

- To promote a better understanding of life in and leaving care.
- To enable a vision for a society where all children are cared for and where communities are strong places of hope and support.
- To acknowledge that we can only do more if we work together to create safe, positive places to live and grow.
- To address the fact that young people tell us they feel “second rate” and like they are “hiding in plain sight”.

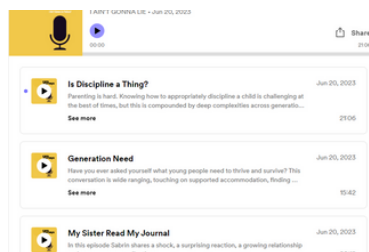
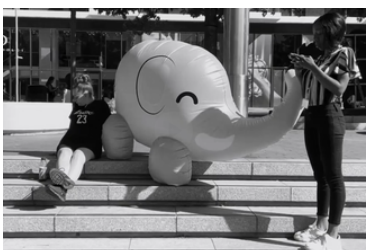


Change 2 We make films

Change 3 We make podcasts

Change 4 We write blogs

See the [BCJ Legacy Library](#)



Change 5 The Fun Affair

A live codesign conference, convening the system around people with lived experience.

SEE the [film and resource pack](#)

The Fun Affair was coproduced to learn more about how challenging it is to bring people with lived experience into design and collaborative spaces with the professionals, in order to enhance approaches to creating systemic change.

Over 150 people attended and half of those were young people with lived experience of the care system. A key success of this event was achieving our goal to engage ‘the least heard’ young people.

This event was a blueprint for the future of collaboration between ‘users’ and ‘providers’ and could be used to explore a range of issues and interactions with corporate teams which, as an example, include participatory budget making, trustee engagement and empowered fundraising.



WHAT'S CHANGED - PART THREE

Evidenced Cultural Changes

Change 1 Environment



- An unequivocal commitment to ensuring that opportunities for and collaboration with CEYP happen in 'youth relevant' places and spaces; re-ordering priority away from professional convenience and highlighting how environments impact power allocation and maintain hierarchies.
- Creation of the first and only space dedicated to working in equal collaboration with people with lived experience in Brent's Civic Centre

Change 2 Empowering, user led and detached youth work

- No referral pathway; a dynamic and engaging approach to engagement; engaging CEYP through a contextual understanding of their places, spaces and people.
- The creation and sustained action of a movement for change.
- A test, iterate and learn approach to delivery, resulting in the engagement model: Wider reach (all), Movement (Core) and Power Groups (User Led)
- The provision of independent and autonomous collaboration.

Change 3 Engagement and growth through a relational approach to stakeholder management

- Making youth led systemic change 'everybody's business' through relational work with a breadth of corporate parents.
- Offering integrated learning and development opportunities to professionals so that they can learn alongside those with lived experience
- The introduction of dedicated champions from across CYPs

Appendix 1

Project	Goal
1. Codesign: Workshops	Effective cycles of codesign which engage and empower those with the least power to change, but the highest interaction with, the care system; Collaborative working which seeks to challenge and disrupt the public administration approach to the provision of care; A holistic, systems thinking approach to 'care journeys' which is unbound by systemic definitions and thresholds.
2. Coproduction: Testing and Recommendations	Impactful episodes of coproduction in which designs are meaningfully tested, and integrated panels are supported to present compelling recommendations to the Local Authority; recommendations which will identify integration, introduction or replacement of functions which have been codesigned.
3. Codelivery: Implementation	Continuous partnership working in which accepted, co-produced recommendations are adopted by the Local Authority, with support and oversight from BCJ, to implement operational changes to systems, policies and processes.
4. Partnership working with the least powerful	Codesign/production/delivery which enhances understanding, develops skills, fosters positive relationships and improves confidence for those who participate. A space which is inclusive and accessible, where power is redistributed, relationships are radical and personal goals are enhanced. For CEYP specifically: Investment in a Movement which is capable, skilled, confident and sustainable.
5. Partnership working with the local authority	A viable partnership with Brent Local Authority which is effective and resourceful, influential and impactful. A relationship in which partners take a strengths based approach to achieve targeted changes within the care system; in which the Local Authority uphold accountability for recommendations which have been accepted; where there is ambition to bring service design closer to the everyday service delivery processes.
6. Partnership working with other agencies (e.g. policy makers, statutory organisations, universal services, private providers, VCS etc)	Development of additional local and national partnerships which will support, add resource to, embed and elevate the work and ambitions of BCJ. To include attempts to influence government policy and exploration of ways in which sustainability of BCJ's mission and impact can be sustained beyond 2025.
7. Messaging and communications	Delivery of communications for a range of key audiences which are effective and accessible; communications which share the mission, vision, ambition and systemic impact of BCJ.
8. The BCJ Movement: Here and Now	An active and successful BCJ Movement offering social connection, networking and capacity building opportunities for a core group of CEYP; a collective of CEYP who grow in momentum to create a change for other CEYP in Brent; a space which challenges loneliness and isolation through the development of youth led pilots and groups for others to attend. A Movement which increases in strength and sustainability to challenge the passive nature of common participatory practice.
9. Community Engagement and safe contexts	A refreshed approach to 'corporate parenting' which inspires a community response to children in and leaving care. An approach which is founded upon and informed by contextual safeguarding, and which seeks to engage community resources as assets. A context which is changing from a narrative offer of scarcity to one of abundance for CEYP.
10. Reciprocal and continuous learning for all	A partnership where deconstructed approaches to power elicit insightful and incisive learning; an approach to learning which is both formal and informal, and where learning creates demonstrable attitudinal shifts to professional structures, culture and practice.

