



**care
journeys** *

**BRENT CARE JOURNEYS *
BULLETIN 11**

MARCH 2023

KA McKercher wrote a book ([Beyond Sticky Notes](#)) that I always have at hand these days. It is both thoughtful and practical, identifying the right mindsets, methods and movements when doing codesign 'for real'. They also wrote a fantastic blog a while ago, titled [Co-design is What Happens Behind the Curtains](#) which I think about often because that sentiment rings so true. Reviewing our planning, quarterly reporting (to at least two different Boards), sharing news in this monthly briefing or even just bumping into a young person and being asked by them about what we have been up to, are all experiences that can induce momentary panic.

I cannot, with any predictable regularity write a quantitative report that makes traditional accountability mindsets feel more at ease or reassured. We are working – intentionally – without preconceived outcome targets or delivery based on professional assumptions. Moving co-design from a buzzword into its potential for creating social change requires, as KA points out:

“.. the need to step away from performance and into the quiet, slow and often painful work of changing ourselves, our organisations and banal business processes.”

So, I have decided to dedicate this bulletin to some people we would like to thank and, in the process illustrate the painstaking, sometimes infuriating, and often banal things that our partners are willing to do for us. I will organise this around some of the key principles of codesign: Environment, Power, Relationships and Building Capacity.

Environment (Places and Spaces)

Initially I found it frustrating, but increasingly reflect with curiosity, that some of the most wearing obstacles in the path towards change can be very basic. For example, BCJ staff are employed by Barnardo's but are based in Brent's Civic Centre and thus perpetually caught in a labyrinth around the periphery of Brent's infrastructure. Every single meeting – incidental or monumental in size, scale or potency – needs a room booking, according to a process and access. Further, some sort of otherworldly cataclysm occurs if my organisation's IT tries to present using Brent's which risks a major flipchart revival.

We're engaging our 'least heard' young people as equal partners, so on a practical level the need to work flexibly, do something differently and often spontaneously, occurs as the norm. The friction between the system's boulders and the essence of our work have, I'm ready to admit, reduced me to crying in the toilet on at least one occasion (I'm still sorry, Aimilia). So anyway, my heartfelt thanks go out to **Linda Noel** (Business Support Officer) who is saintly in her patience, **Aimilia**

Vasilikou (Sales and Marketing manager) whose humility is inspiring and the anonymous person in L&D, for responding to an untold number of room booking requests. Additionally, our thanks go out to **Juan Murillo** (AV Manager) who has twice facilitated the loan of an indigenous laptop during some high-profile presentation opportunities.

Power (Employment)

Creating successful recruitment pathways for young people who have minimal previous experiences of employment is energising and truly fulfilling. However, it certainly is a journey which requires resilience and perseverance. I have written and talked about it before, but traditional recruitment journeys (from advertisement to starting on day one) present a stream of professional biases which disempower the talented people that we are so eager to engage. I'm proud of BCJ's dogged approach to the deconstruction of each systemic barrier that we meet, meaning that we have made offers of employment to eleven young people and are soon to be actively employing four. I am therefore very grateful for to **Kathryn Higham** (Barnardo's Recruitment Centre) and **Gurchie Singh** (BCJ Administrator) who have tirelessly unpicked administrative complexities and problem solved unforeseen challenges without losing any momentum. They have been noble in ensuring that the system interface for people with lived expertise is as simple as possible, even though that adds load at their end. This last point is notable in fact; its not always or immediately possible to design complexity or dysfunction out of the system – instead we sometimes need to redistribute who will shoulder and navigate it.

As I am sure most people agree, the real hard work of a new role begins when you are presented with a range of new devices, data security processes and software to get to grips with. For a tiny team like BCJ, the IT set up for a large number of sessional staff is a significant resource implication. **Tim Stodell** (Barnardo's Digital and Technology Service Support) went out of his way to meet us in person and spend a morning making sure that our new starters could use their kit and feel confident with all the new systems that they were going to have to navigate within their roles. We joked about grey hairs at the time, but his willingness to be available in person (something he almost certainly does not have capacity to offer more widely!) alleviated the 'professional' team (me and Appia) of so much additional burden and stress. I'm reflective about this - the significant benefit to wellbeing that a specialist can bring into complex work environments like ours.

Relationships

We are lucky to have developed lots of good relationships with our closest collaborators at Brent but we just wanted to take a minute to give especial thanks to **Zach Hinkson** (Leaving Care Team Manager) and **Afzal Ahmed** (Service Manager for CiC and Permanency). It's not always easy being an 'outside insider', but Zach and Afzal offer us transparent, honest and aligned partnership working. These kinds of stakeholder relationships are at the essence of everything and the locus of stability in a (deliberately) disordered way of working. Together we are engaged both in the here and now, and the changes that we iterate. BCJ make an effort to be intentional and measured in our asks, but in return Zach and Afzal meet us openly and with willingness to collaborate.

Building Capacity

The crux of it all may be about positive change on macro levels, but day to day we stay focussed on ensuring that the experience of taking part is enabling and positive in itself. We design every opportunity to embed this, formally and informally. We are already visioning the time and place

after, and beyond, BCJ. We are working strategically to embed and sustain greater capacity in the system overall, but what I want to focus on here is our people.

One of our Assistant Project Workers has been in post for nearly a year now. We have ensured that he has been able to work according to his strengths and interests, designing opportunity and training accordingly. I've also stayed minded that although these staff might land in BCJ, they should have enhanced opportunity to explore the wealth of other opportunities offered by Brent and Barnardo's as employers; their 'family firm'.

As it turns out our longest serving Assistant Project Worker is really interested in a career in Marketing so I went knocking on the doors of **Esme Jones** (Head of Brand and Marketing, Barnardo's UK) and her colleague **Joe Supple-Turnham**. Esme didn't hesitate to make this possible and Joe has since mentored and supported our young man with such skill and kindness. The result is a new national campaign that went live on Friday.

To everyone working behind the curtain with us, THANK YOU.