

Brandon *Bulletin*

Spring 2025

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Hello and
Welcome

to our Spring newsletter!

The latest edition of our newsletter is here, and it's filled with the incredible energy, creativity and optimism we've cultivated over the past 6 months at Brandon Centre.

Despite the wider challenges on local, national and global levels, what has stood out to me most is the spirit of collaboration and the lasting impact we've had and continue to build together.

From cheering on our incredible Santa Runners before Christmas to watching in awe as Pete took on his Ice Challenge in February, I've been blown away by the resilience, determination and kindness of others in raising significant funds to help expand our services for young people.

These moments highlight the power of connection and the strength of our community, with running in particular, becoming a core theme that links nicely with our other initiatives of sustainability, connectivity and partnerships.

More than just an activity, running / walking at the right pace reconnects us with nature, encourages mindfulness and a sense of togetherness. Whether undertaken solo or as part of a team, it creates a shared sense of purpose and motivation to help us keep moving forwards, despite the challenges that may arise.

So, you might see that running pops up frequently throughout this issue - we've also secured our first London Marathon spots for 2026 which is very exciting - but this is just one of the many ways that we receive support from our staff, young ambassadors, trustees, volunteers, corporate sponsors, partners, funders and local communities.

In particular, Dr. Helen Montgomery, our dear friend and colleague who made a lasting impact on those who were fortunate enough to meet, work and be cared for by her. We open this issue by remembering Helen and the remarkable contributions she made during her time at Brandon Centre.

As I write this introduction and reflect on what we've achieved, I feel a strong sense of optimism, renewal and legacy.

Perhaps this stemmed from our recent strategic Board Away Day, in which we reinforced the importance of working together, sharing ideas and shaping a future that aligns with our mission so we can provide high quality services for our young people and families.

And also maybe it comes from the installation of our new double-glazed windows throughout the Centre, a significant transformation that not only enhanced our space but also is a tangible, sustainable investment in our future and for the community.

One thing is certain as we look ahead to Spring. This season will be filled with connection, collaboration and meaningful change.

Whether you're a longtime supporter or a new reader, thank you for being here, supporting us and being a part of our journey.

Happy reading!



Julia Brown
Chief Executive

Julia

In memory of Dr Helen

We open this newsletter to remember our dear friend and colleague, Dr Helen Montgomery.

Helen was an extremely kind, passionate and vibrant person who supported so many vulnerable young people in so many ways during her time at Brandon Centre.

As our Clinical Lead for Sexual Health for over 15 years, Helen was a thoughtful and compassionate clinician who always put the needs of her patients first. She was well known for her wonderful care and attention - so much so that many young people came in specifically to see the 'blonde lady'.

A truly special person and a wonderful colleague, Helen will be deeply missed by us all.



Dr. Helen Montgomery

25th January 1962 – 17th January 2025

Thank you, Paul!

We can't believe the time has come for our Paul King to enjoy his well-earned retirement!

Entering Brandon Centre as a volunteer but then staying for over 7 years as our head of finance, Paul has been amazing at helping us stay within budget, preparing funding for bids and keeping an eye on the horizon for challenges and opportunities.

We know he can't wait to do nothing, but his plan to get a rescue dog might scupper those dreams...

From all of us at BC, we wish him lots of happiness and lots of luck with the new pup!



Paul King
Head of Finance

Enjoy your well-earned retirement!

And hello to Sue!

We're delighted to welcome Sue McGonigal to our team.

Sue started with us in January as our new head of finance, but before joining us, she worked in the public sector for many years. Working her way from trainee accountant with Kent County Council to head of finance for Kent Fire & Rescue Service before culminating her government career as chief executive and chief financial officer at Thanet District Council.

With all this experience under her belt, Sue took a short career break and turned her hand to writing crime novels under the pseudonym Susan Handley. She's now authored 7 books, contributed to several short story anthologies and has appeared at many literary festivals.

When not working (or writing crime!) Sue can be found in her garden, tending to her vegetables, feeding her chickens or walking her 2 rescue dogs.



Sue McGonigal
Head of Finance

We're excited to have you on the team, Sue!

Comic Relief, EastEnders and us!

Red Nose Day turned 40 years on the 21st of March with another spectacular night of TV fun and fundraising, including a very special episode of our favourite soap, EastEnders.

The five minute storyline focused on the mental health of EastEnders' Phil Mitchell, where after the character reached a crisis point and attempted to take his own life, he subsequently joined a mental health unit and made friends with a patient called Andy.

After sharing details of his time at a homeless youth hostel, Andy and Phil discovered that they had more in common than first anticipated, creating an emotional and supportive bond between the pair.

To produce this exclusive episode, EastEnders and Comic Relief consulted us to make sure that the storyline highlighted youth mental health and homelessness in a sensitive, accurate and authentic way. They were inspired by and referenced our homeless hostel outreach programme (also funded by Comic Relief) in the story too.

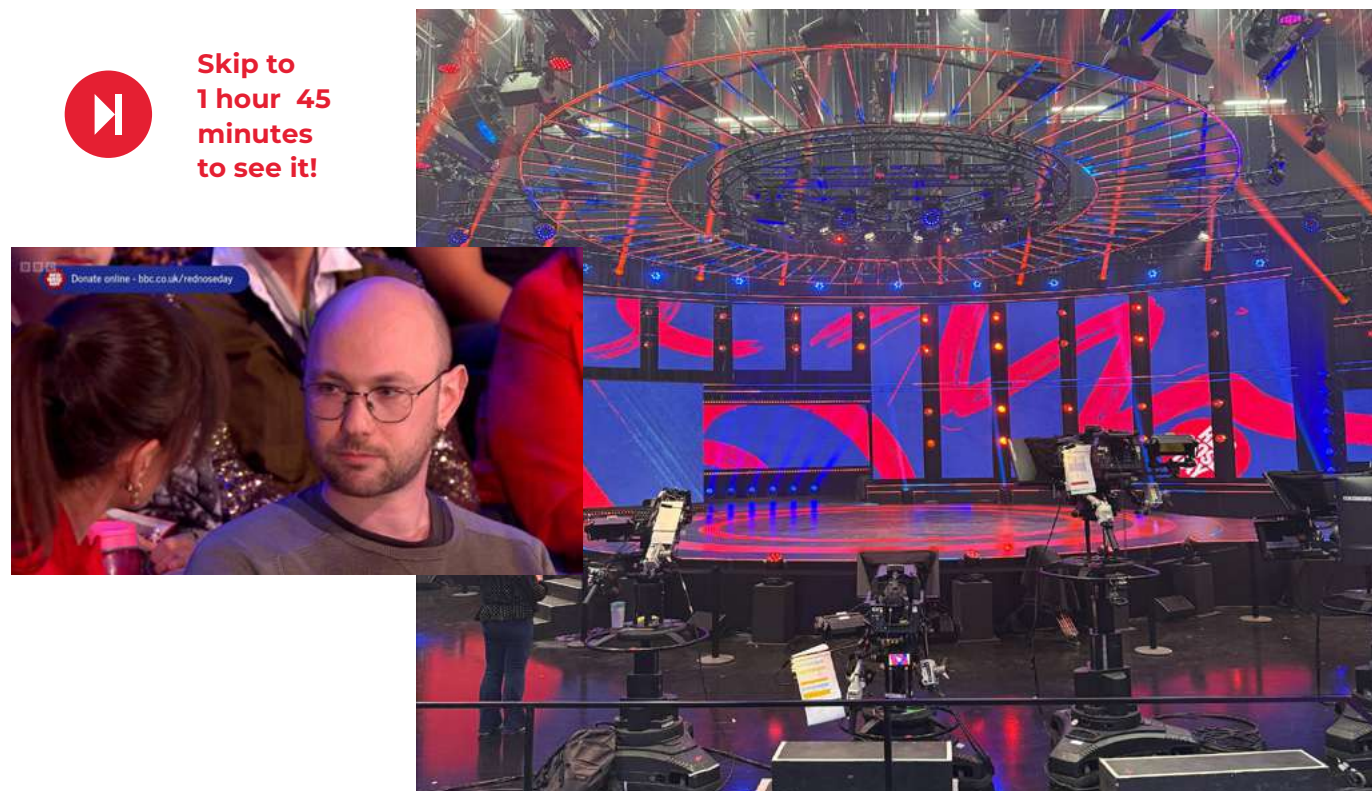
We were actually invited by Comic Relief as one of their charity partners to Manchester to watch the show live! And Aaron, our amazing Brandon Centre therapist who delivers the homeless hostel outreach work, was interviewed by none other than Davina McCall after the episode aired.

It was fantastic to see the episode share the real issues that impact so many young people on such a massive platform. A real pinch-me moment for us at Brandon Centre!

In case you missed it, you can catch the five minute special and our interview on [BBC iPlayer here](#).



**Skip to
1 hour 45
minutes
to see it!**



A Christmas recap

We know this is our spring edition, and whilst we are looking to fresh new beginnings, we also wanted to reflect on our fun festivities. And what a busy season it was!

On the 4th of December, we had 5 amazing volunteers who took part in a Santa themed charity run. Wearing fluffy white beards and pointy red hats, they joined thousands of others as they ran around London in aid of raising money for their local community.

Their festive energy meant that we received a wondrous **£760** in donations, allowing us to continue to do what we do best; supporting young people's mental health.

A massive thank you to those who ran for us, you definitely earned your body weight in mince pies.

Ho! Ho! Ho!



A Christmas recap

A couple of days later, all of us at Brandon Centre got together to have our own Christmas celebrations. Gathering at our local pub to eat turkey and drink mulled wine, we put our knowledge to the test with a quiz (it wouldn't be a BC social if we didn't have one!).

This edition had us guessing sounds from around the office, from those recognisable team call jingles to the swoosh of a sash window and a distinctive yet simultaneously hard-to-place 'hello', we have to credit the quiz master for thinking out of the box.

And throughout all of December, we were playing Last Christmas on repeat. Not just because we really love this song but because we received funding from the George Michael Fund.

This very exciting donation was made possible by a portion of George's record royalties from sales of Last Christmas going to organisations supporting young people across the UK. George, you will always have our hearts



Well done team!

We're turning up at the London Marathon

Calling all runners, joggers or 'here for a good time'-ers

Is running a part of your New Year's resolutions? Has the London Marathon been on your bucket list for a while? Or debating on who to run for?

Well, look no further.

For the first time ever, Brandon Centre has received charity places for the London Marathon! This is a really exciting opportunity for those looking to run in support of a local mental health charity with a difference. Starting in 2026, we're looking for keen runners who want to raise funds for us so that we can continue bringing the highest quality of mental health and wellbeing support to young people. Details on how to apply will be coming soon, but if you're interested and want to find out more, please email Emma emmasainsbury@brandoncentre.org.uk



See you at the starting line!

Join our free yoga sessions

Calm your mind and move your body

Therapeutic yoga has so many mental and physical benefits, from boosting energy levels to relieving stress. So we're very excited to be offering free yoga classes for 16-24 year olds at the Castlehaven Community centre.

Our 6-week yoga programme has been carefully designed by an experienced clinical psychologist and is delivered by a qualified yoga instructor to ensure that those attending will improve their wellbeing and physical fitness as well as learn therapeutic tips that can be taken off the mat and into their daily lives.

These sessions are kindly and generously supported by the London Marathon Foundation's Active Spaces Fund.

If you'd like to refer a young person or yourself, please email yoga@brandoncentre.org.uk to find out about classes and check when the next session is running.

*We hope you join us
on the mat.*



Conquering the cold

Pete's icy marathon

In February, one of Roche's volunteers Pete Johnson, embarked on quite possibly the coolest fundraiser ever, running the Ice Ultra marathon.

An epic race that covers **230km** across the Arctic Circle in just 5 days, it's notorious for being an extreme test of both physical and mental endurance in the most freezing, hostile yet beautiful environments on the planet.

Running through temperatures ranging from -5°C to -40°C across snow powdered fields and icy lakes, it takes a real dedication and determination to tackle this challenging run, something that Pete has always wanted to do.

He journeyed over the Arctic Tundra in 6 layers of running gear whilst wearing special shoes that could grip onto the snow, drank hot water from a thermal bottle, carried special equipment and at one point, covered a mindblowing 65km in just one day.



With a mantra of "it's far, not fast" and a playlist to keep him company (his go-to song was Wake Me Up by Avicii), Pete ran across this cold, frozen and naturally stunning landscape to not only "give it a crack" but to also raise money for us.

We're astounded by Pete's incredible generosity and unbelievably proud of his achievement. Through his amazing perseverance and steady pace, he managed to raise an epic **£4,000** for Brandon Centre.

*"it's far,
not fast"*

Conquering the cold

Here's what Pete had to say about his Ice Ultra experience:

"The Ice Ultra was not merely a race, it was an unyielding examination of my spirit, pushing me to the edge of my mental and physical limits. It cast me into an unforgiving wilderness, an otherworldly landscape of ice and solitude that demanded answers to questions I never knew existed.

Every step was a testament to the uncharted depths of human resilience. It was not just about finishing the race; it was about survival.

"Look after your kit, look after yourself and look after each other" were not just words, they were lifelines.

In this race, I discovered that my body and mind are capable of far more than I ever imagined."

Whilst Pete might think he's "been stitched up in being called a hero", we certainly think he is one.



Whilst we recognise that not all of us are as brave to tackle a -40°C run like Pete, we believe that everyone can offer something of impact.

Which is why we want to extend our immense gratitude to all of our Roche volunteers.

Their tireless dedication, time and support have been and continue to be so valuable to us. Whether that's hosting a raffle, auctioning off artwork, whipping up a cake for a bake-off, taking part in book swaps or crocheting tops for letterboxes, the Roche team have been incredible.

This past year alone, they have successfully raised a massive £20k for us. Without their small acts of kindness, we wouldn't be able to keep bridging that gap between child and adult services and provide young people with the help they need.

Thank you, Thank
you, Thank you!



The art of wellbeing

Boosting winter wellness with the River of Hope

Across Kentish Town, events and activities have been popping up throughout the cooler months, all with the intention to nurture, support and improve wellbeing.

Called the River of Hope, it aims to link residents with local services and projects that are going on, bringing the neighbourhood together even in the quieter winter months.

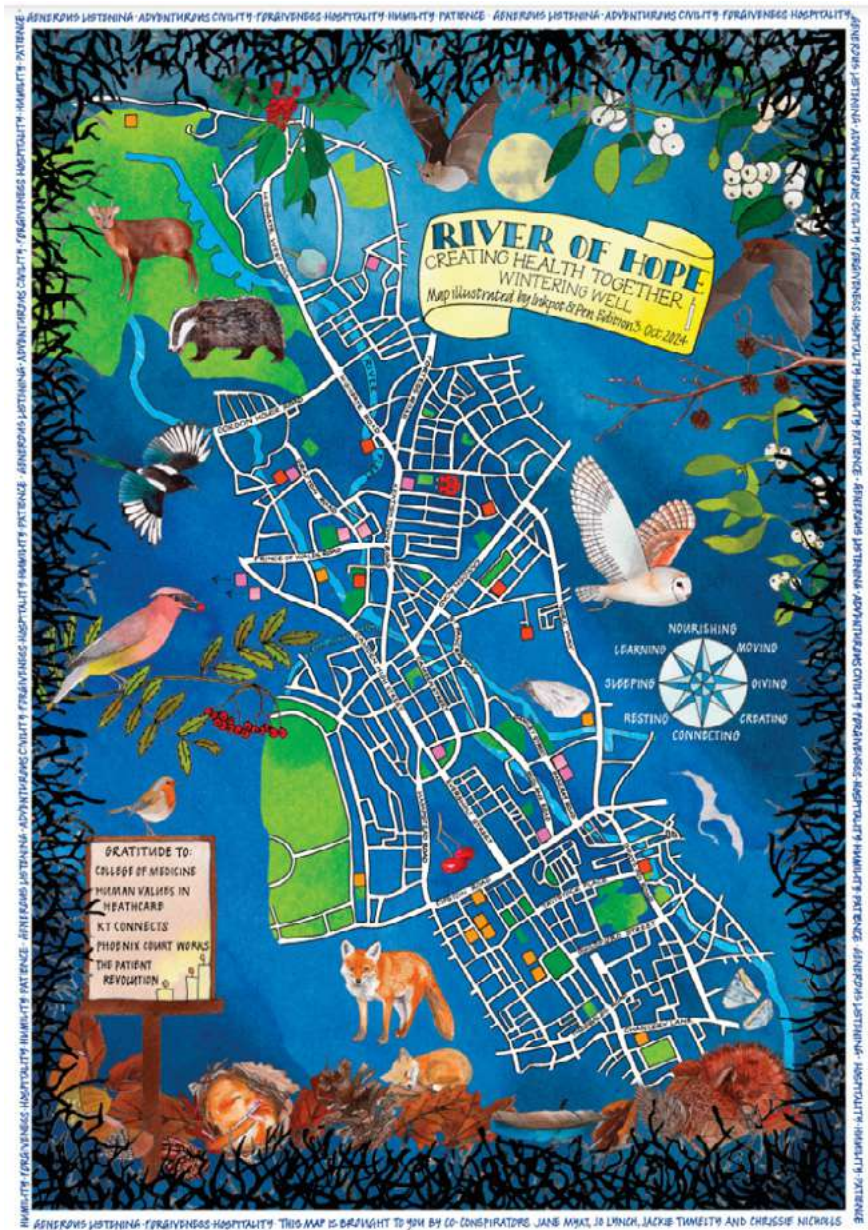
Selecting only 9 projects to fund, we were so pleased to have won backing to deliver one of these wellbeing activities. We hosted a workshop that leaned into art therapy after being inspired by the beautifully illustrated map by artist Chrissie Nicholls for River of Hope.

Named 'The Art of Wellbeing', we invited 16-25 year olds to design their own 2025 mood boards to showcase their aspirations and goals as well as a chance to reflect on the previous year. We also provided plenty of pizza to fuel their artistic creativity.

Feeling good throughout winter can be tough, but through community projects like River of Hope, we can all stay connected and support one another in difficult times, and we were so glad to be a part of it.

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The great window restoration

Our building has gotten a refresh just in time for Spring

As part of the government's energy efficient scheme, we've managed to secure funding to revive our windows with double glazing and improve our space.

Because we are based in an original Georgian townhouse, as well as being in a conservation area, we needed to preserve the look and feel of the building by ensuring that all of our windows were in the style of the period.

Our beautiful Georgian sash windows have been carefully upgraded to not only save some pounds on our energy bills but also to help regulate the building's temperature, making it a more comfortable environment for us and our visitors!



Nadia's journey*

How Brandon Centre helped Nadia

Change is hard. We all come across it and we all know how challenging it can be.

But sometimes, these challenges and feelings can spiral. They can turn into something more complex.

This is what Nadia was experiencing when she came to us.

Living at home with her mum, dad and two sisters, Nadia was a positive, thoughtful teenager who enjoyed running and dreamed of studying drama at uni.

However, since coming out as queer last year, her relationship with her dad became tense and strained. With the added stress of being in sixth form, Nadia struggled with the intense pressure to succeed and had fears of letting everyone down.

The knock-on effect of these challenges created feelings of isolation, anxiety and low mood. And at times, Nadia was having thoughts of self-harm which she was finding harder to manage.

To help Nadia, we agreed on exploratory psychotherapy to work on three main goals unique to her situation:

1. Learn to quiet her negative thoughts
2. Manage a healthy relationship with her dad
3. Find a balance between school responsibilities and her passions

And so, Nadia's therapy journey began.

From day one, the focus was on managing Nadia's intrusive thoughts of self-harm. To reduce their intensity, we explored coping methods for processing difficult emotions, while encouraging Nadia to practice more self-compassion. We also drafted a safety plan together, one that she felt comfortable enough to share with her sister.

Once Nadia started to feel a little more confident in managing her thoughts, we turned our attention to her relationship with her dad. Giving Nadia the space to feel in control of her privacy and time, we worked on setting some considered, healthy boundaries.

During her sessions, Nadia reconnected with her love of drama and running, rediscovering the things that made her happy. And at the same time, we worked on letting go of perfectionism, especially when it came to academic achievement. We wanted her to remove that added pressure and learn that it's totally ok to make mistakes.

Slowly but surely, things started to improve.

Nadia's habitual negative thought spiral diminished, the tensions with her dad had loosened, and she found new confidence in a romantic relationship that added to her happiness.

Every now and then, Nadia worried that her low mood might return. So we used our final sessions to equip her with skills and techniques she might need to combat these feelings, as well as connecting her with a local LGBTQ+ group to meet those with shared experiences.

Nadia's journey of discovery, growth and resilience enabled her to tackle life changes. Breaking them down to be less scary and more manageable, whatever they might be.

**This case study is for illustrative purposes only. The names, identifying details and certain circumstances have been altered to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of individuals and organisations involved. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.*

Book a room at Brandon Centre

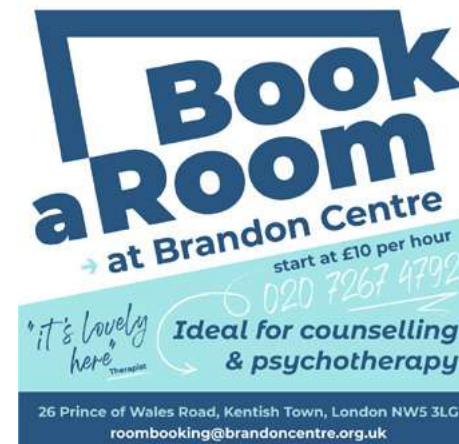
With new windows comes a cosier, calmer environment for talking therapy.

The Brandon building makes for a perfect, comfortable space for qualified therapists who provide talking therapy to people of all ages. Especially now it's been given a little upgrade!

We're offering a choice of **10 rooms** for hire, each designed to be a private yet welcoming, warm space for therapists to connect with our community.

Along with our individual rooms we also have a peaceful waiting area and a team member on-site to provide access to the building. And if any extra support is required, we can easily and effectively signpost to our other services in the mental health space.

Our rooms range from a cost of **£10 - £15 per hour** - to check availability or if you'd like more information, please contact roombooking@brandoncentre.org.uk



The PINS project

Otherwise known as the Partnership for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools

We chatted with Tania and Afsha about the essential work that they're doing to support and strengthen the relationship between parents, carers and schools when it comes to assisting neurodivergent children.

But before we dive in, let's start by giving an overview of what PINS is.

PINS is part of a national project by the Department of Education and NHS England, and Brandon Centre were commissioned to deliver this 9 month pilot service because of all the successful work we've done with parents and carers in the past.

The aim was to engage with parents of neurodivergent children who attend schools within the Camden and Barnet area, understand what was working and what wasn't, and then feedback to schools to identify the skills and provisions they require to best support these students.

So how did we begin?

Starting in October (making the project closer to a tighter 6 months!), we launched a survey by inviting parents to take part via school letters, posters, QR codes and social media.

We had a total of 360 parents and carers respond, from which we collected and summarised the results to go through in detail at engagement sessions. These workshops allowed parents to ask questions to education specialists and therapists, as well as give them the space to express their feelings.

One of the themes from the survey was some general confusion on where and how to access information, advice and support. So our first point of action was to conduct our own research on what services were already out there and collate them all together to bring along to these sessions.

Other themes included how behavioural language was used to describe neurodivergent children and concerns about how to navigate parents of neurotypical children, but what these workshops really provided was a sense of connection and collaboration.

Hearing from others, parents could gain an understanding of other neurodivergent conditions as well as a chance to share insights, while also taking the time to recognise what they've achieved with their child.

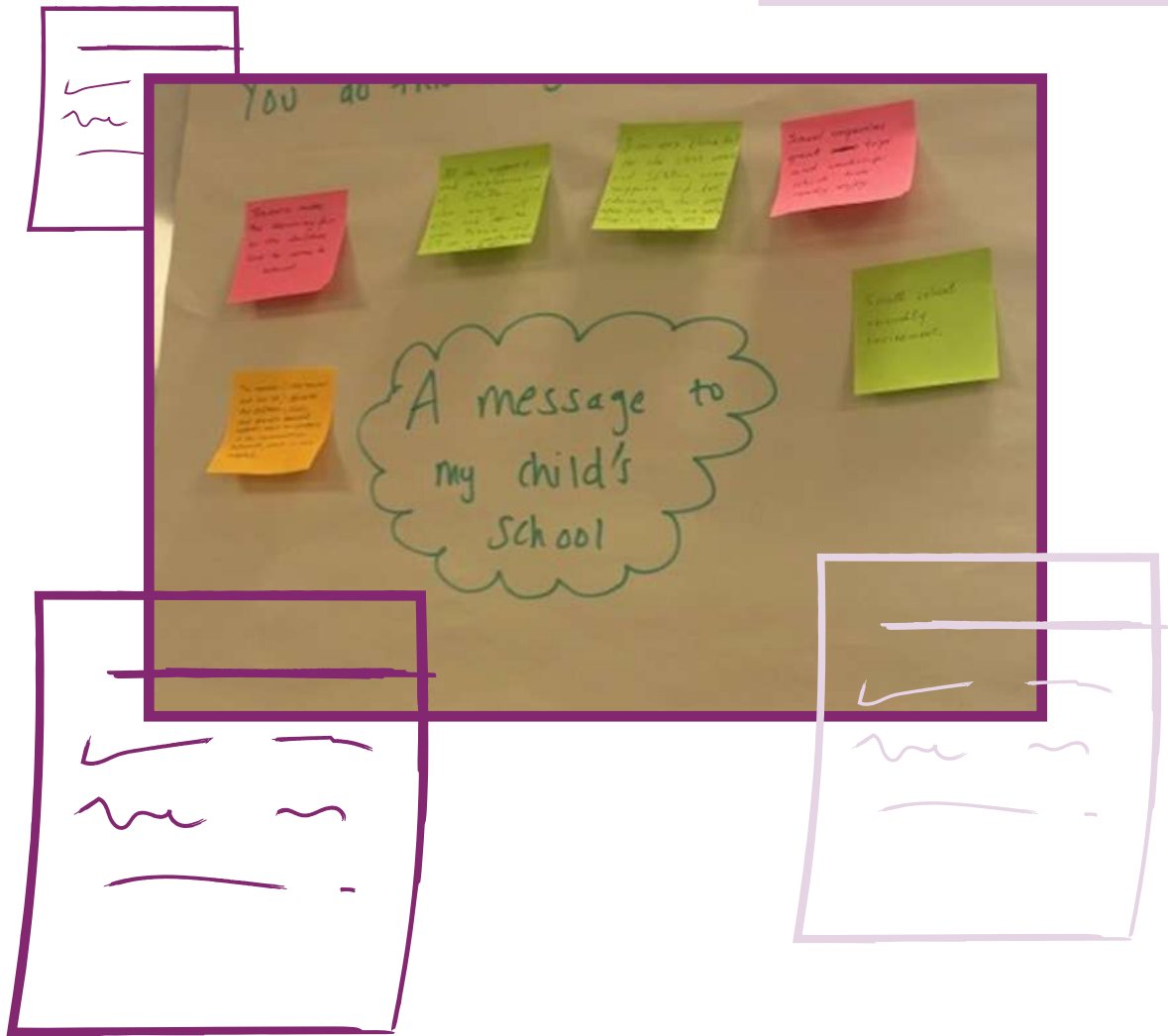


The outcome was so positive, enlightening and inspiring.

From schools hosting regular coffee mornings and inviting parents to include their views on staff policies, to setting up informal parent groups and sharing sensory toys or book packs, these small wins had a powerful impact.

But on a larger scale, a neurodiversity conference allowed parents to meet and chat with educational psychologists and speech therapists, as well as a chance to celebrate all the work that's been going on in schools. To continue the conversation beyond the project, we proposed a series of next steps that included the recommendations made by parents to ensure that their (and their child's) voice is heard and recognised.

This transformative project not only gave us the chance to meet the parents but to give them the tools and support that they and their child needed.



Blue sky thinking

Looking ahead for Brandon Centre at our Board away day

We finish this edition of our newsletter with an optimistic outlook for Brandon Centre’s future, something that came out of our Board away day on the 17th of January.

Held at Linklaters’ law firm, we reviewed our strategy, brainstormed fresh opportunities, focused on the importance of developing partnerships, and reviewed our plans for equality and diversity.

We were fortunate to have two commissioners join our session to set the scene around the commissioning landscape, provoking a good and constructive discussion.

We left feeling a renewed sense of positivity and excitement for this year at Brandon Centre, and we hope you stay along for the ride!

Keep updated on what’s going on with us on our website: brandon-centre.org.uk

Or follow us on our socials!



Thanks to our donors

We’d like to say a big **THANK YOU** to the following organisations and individuals for continuing to support us and the young people we work with:

NHS and Local Authorities

- ♥ Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust
- ♥ London Borough of Camden
- ♥ London Borough of Islington
- ♥ NHS North Central London Integrated Care Board – Barnet/Camden/Enfield/Haringey/Islington
- ♥ Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
- ♥ London Borough of Enfield
- ♥ London Borough of Barnet
- ♥ Camden and Islington Mental Health Trust
- ♥ NCEL CAMHS Provider Collaborative

Trusts, Foundations and Individuals

- ♥ Catch 22
- ♥ Comic Relief
- ♥ Compass Wellbeing
- ♥ The City Bridge Trust
- ♥ The Greater London Authority Groundwork London
- ♥ The Hampstead Wells and Campden Trust
- ♥ The Henry Smith Charity
- ♥ Islington Giving
- ♥ The Lambert Charitable Trust
- ♥ Linklaters
- ♥ London Marathon Foundation
- ♥ London Youth
- ♥ Mind in Enfield and Barnet
- ♥ The Mayor of London
- ♥ National Lottery Community Fund
- ♥ The Oakdale Trust
- ♥ The Portal Trust
- ♥ Propel
- ♥ River of Hope
- ♥ The Rhododendron Trust
- ♥ The Sir Mark and Lady Turner Charitable Settlement
- ♥ The Talent Fund
- ♥ Tavistock and Portman
- ♥ University College London
- ♥ University of East London
- ♥ University of Hertfordshire
- ♥ The Vandervell Foundation

We’d also like to thank our anonymous donor who supported our young people’s counselling services with a very generous donation.



Help make a difference in your community

A high percentage of lifetime mental illness is first experienced before the age of 20.

Support from our donors means we can tackle poor mental health as soon as it appears, giving young people every chance of a life free from mental illness.

By keeping young people in education, building their resilience, and keeping families together, we're helping to build a positive future for our community.

Get involved and help change a young person's life.

- ◆ Make a one-off or regular donation
- ◆ Donate to a specific project
- ◆ Support us through Payroll Giving
- ◆ Volunteer with us for a day
- ◆ Choose us as your 'Charity of the Year'
- ◆ Take on a challenge and donate your sponsorship
- ◆ Donate as a gift



Donate via our website: <https://brandon-centre.org.uk/donate-now>

Call us to find out more on **020 7267 4792** or email us at admin@brandoncentre.org.uk

A big thanks to all our supporters who are helping us give more young people a promising future.

Come Correct (C-Card) scheme to 13-24-year-olds in Camden.

Get **free condoms** and lubricant, as well as **confidential sex and relationship advice**.

Drop in to Brandon Centre, NW5 3LG, anytime during working hours.

To register for your first C-Card drop in on a Friday between 13.00 and 16.45.

For more information about the scheme visit: www.comecorrect.org.uk



How to get in touch

General Enquiries: **020 7267 4792**

Mental Health services

Email: counselling@brandoncentre.org.uk | Telephone: **020 7267 1321** | Text: **07520 633477**

Systemic Integrative Treatment

Email for professionals: deancharlery@brandoncentre.org.uk or familyservice@brandoncentre.org.uk

Telephone: **020 7424 9935 (option 2)**

Parenting Groups

Love and Limits group and ADHD parent support group

Email for parents: familyservice@brandoncentre.org.uk

Email for professionals: deancharlery@brandoncentre.org.uk

Families, Food and Feelings

Email for parents and professionals: brandoncentre.healthyliving@nhs.net

Parent support group for CAMHS waiting list

Email for parents and professionals: parentsupport@brandoncentre.org.uk

Training for professionals

Email: training@brandoncentre.org.uk

C-Card Scheme

Free condoms for 13-24 year olds in Camden (C-Card Scheme)

Online registration: <https://comecorrect.org.uk/camden/>

Telephone: **020 7267 4792**

Email: reception@brandoncentre.org.uk

Follow us on:



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www.brandon-centre.org.uk | Registered Charity No.: 290118 | A company limited by guarantee.

*Thank you for your interest
in our special charity*

The logo for Brandon Centre is a dark blue, irregular shape resembling a speech bubble or a stylized heart. It contains the text "Brandon Centre" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, with "Here for Young People" in a smaller, white sans-serif font below it.

**Brandon
Centre**
Here for Young People

Get our newsletter delivered straight to your inbox.

Sign up here: brandon-centre.org.uk/newsletter-sign-up