



Getting Set for Success

**Our Young People's Involvement Strategy**

**2021 – 2024**

## *Keeping young people at the heart of Brandon Centre*

We've been supporting young people with their sexual and mental health for over 50 years. In a landscape that's continually evolving we adapt our services, and the way in which we deliver them, so that we can respond to the needs of our young people in ways that work for them.

After a period of significant organisational change, and some rapid adjustments to keep us accessible throughout the pandemic, it's now time for us to again consider how well we're answering the needs of the young people in our communities.

Not just in the way we deliver our services, but in the nature of the services themselves.

Any successful organisation is in tune with the needs of its customers. At Brandon Centre, we receive great feedback from our young people, with positive comments about the welcoming and non-judgemental nature of staff, the homely feel of our building, and the specialist knowledge of our team.

There are always areas to improve upon though, and we can't stand still. Young people today are knowledgeable and interested, enthused to stand up for their rights and keen to feel empowered. Characteristics we hope to harness through our young people's involvement activities.

Change can bring about negative pressure though, and as we emerge from lockdowns, young people will need our support more than ever. The online world has been a lifesaver for many during the pandemic, although we know it can also have a detrimental effect on young people's mental health.

Our recent Strategy document *Getting Set for Success*, set out our **mission** and **vision**, and defined the **values** that hold us together. It also identified our **five strategic objectives** up until 2024.

An important part of that strategy is how we plan to keep our young people at the heart of everything we do. Because by doing this, we all benefit. Our young people, their families, and the community as a whole.

*"The young, no doubt, make mistakes; but the old, when they try to think for them, make even greater mistakes." — Bertrand Russell*

## A quick recap

Our **VISION** is to be Here for Young People

*We believe that all young people should be able to access the highest quality sexual and mental health support in a safe and welcoming environment.*

Our **MISSION** is to maintain and develop our accessible, flexible & specialist services

*We aim to respond to the psychological, sexual, and social needs and challenges of young people under 25 years old.*

The **VALUES** that drive us:

### Compassion

We provide a welcoming and non-judgemental environment for young people to access support that helps them live healthy and fulfilled lives.

### Respect

We serve our diverse community, and work with our partners, with a willingness to collaborate, adapt, and recognise the importance of choice.

### Inclusion

We strive to remove barriers to access, and to use our expertise to provide services that our young people can trust to be safe and to meet their individual needs.

The **4th** of our **5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES** is about embedding **diversity, equality, inclusion and opportunity** in our culture:

Within this objective sits our work to bring young people closer to the design and development of our services.

As part of this work, we set ourselves a goal to:

**Develop a co-designed and co-produced Young People's Involvement Strategy and Action Plan**

## Why is it important?

We want to make sure we're focussing our efforts on successful, well-targeted projects that use funds effectively, and are sustainable in the long-term.

To do this we need to listen to our young people to find out what's working and what isn't.

We need to involve those young people familiar with our work, but also make sure we reach out to those that are easiest to ignore. We need to be willing to challenge ourselves to make sure we're doing what's best for all our young people.

At the same time, we can use our activities to provide young people with skills for life and with opportunities that build their confidence and self-worth.

We know that young people are more likely to engage in a project that they've been involved in creating. So, we hope to see the impact of our work slowly increase as our efforts build momentum.

## *Putting together our Young People's Involvement Strategy*

### 2020 Brandon Way survey

Our Brandon Way surveys included workshops and one-to-one sessions that helped us understand the experiences and opinions of over 50 staff members, young people and Trustees.

We looked at how it feels to access Brandon Centre services, and started to identify the work required to keep young people at the heart of what we do.

We considered:

## 2021 Youth Engagement Workshops

In May 2021 we held two 3-hour workshops, led by Angela Newton, a specialist in service user involvement, service user leadership, and co-production.

12 staff and young people attended the online workshops to help us pinpoint the main themes for this strategy.

The workshops included open discussion and polls to make sure everyone's views were valued and appreciated.

We looked at:

- ✓ what we want our services to look like in the future;
- ✓ young people's involvement work being done by other organisations;
- ✓ the most important areas for focus;
- ✓ identifying steps to make progress.

We're already doing a lot of things right. Young people told us they feel:

- ✓ more confident managing their emotions, and seeing patterns in their own behaviour;
- ✓ that Brandon Centre is a safe place for them to talk about sex and contraception;
- ✓ Brandon Centre is a welcoming, non-clinical and non-judgemental environment;
- ✓ being included on recruitment panels is a good way to get involved.

We asked **young people** and **staff** what's important to them and what could be improved. Based on their ideas, we've grouped the responses into three groups:

1. Service design & delivery
2. Communication
3. Education & opportunity

Here's what **young people** said is important, and could be improved:

Here's what **staff** said is important, and could be improved:

**1. Service design & delivery**

- ✓ Make sure services are designed with young people in mind, not making assumptions
- ✓ Get more young people involved at all levels of service design
- ✓ Stay respectful of boundaries and cultural sensitivities

**2. Communication**

- ✓ Maintain human, friendly vibe, even when developing online services
- ✓ Get involved in more community outreach
- ✓ Increase staff and trustee diversity

### *Our Young People's Involvement Strategy*

With the work described above in mind, the following pages set out our strategy to prioritise genuine and meaningful co-production of services at Brandon Centre.

The purpose of this

- ✓ we involve young people in discussions, what works and what doesn't, and their views are heard;
- ✓ we're including young people that represent our community in terms of race, religion,

**3. Education & opportunity**

- ✓ Stay inclusive. Make training available to stay up to date on topics like LGBTQ+
- ✓ Young Ambassadors to become more involved, and on a more permanent basis

strategy is to make sure:

people at the beginning of ensuring their opinions on what could be better are

young people that represent our community in terms of socio-economic

background, disability, gender, and sexuality, while respecting boundaries and cultural sensitivities (including young people who haven't accessed our services);

- ✓ we're rewarding the young people that get involved with each of the core areas highlighted below, with educational opportunities that engage and excite them.

*The strategy focuses on three core areas, in line with the findings above:*

- **SERVICE DESIGN & DELIVERY**

A mechanism for staff and young people to work together to design and implement changes in services and service delivery.

- **COMMUNICATION**

Channels and forums (online and offline) to make sure young people are being reached, brought together, and their voices and opinions listened to.

- **EDUCATION & OPPORTUNITY**

A range of relevant training, employment and volunteering opportunities for young people engaged with Brandon Centre.

- **THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEADERSHIP BOARD**

**What is it?**

The mechanism we'll create for staff and young people to work together to design and implement changes in services and service delivery.

### *Young People's Leadership Board Action Plan*

**Our Aim**

To create an official forum for young people to support the senior leadership team in making the best decisions for young people using Brandon Centre's services. In exchange, membership of the Board will give the young people involved the chance to learn important business and leadership skills.

**How?**

1. Plan and set out the principles and processes of the Young People's Leadership Board (YPLB), including what areas will be consulted on, how much influence the YPLB will have, how decisions will be made and if (and if so, where) the YPLB might have total decision-making authority;
2. Create a Brandon Centre team to manage membership and the running of the YPLB, with identified Trustee and Ambassador support;
3. Explore and review funding streams to support this work;
4. Identify best way to reach, invite, and select young people to join the YPLB. Invite young people to apply and select members. Consider rotating membership;
5. Establish a timetable of meetings and events to coincide with main board. Invite YPLB members to sit on recruitment panels;
6. Reward members: Establish series of training opportunities and projects for YPLB members based on the skillset of Brandon Centre staff;
7. Review the impact of the YPLB; what works and what could improve. Share progress internally and externally.

#### When?

- ✓ Recruitment to the YPLB to begin in June 2021.
- ✓ Establish Terms of Reference and hold pre-meetings in July/August 2021.
- ✓ First meeting of YPLB to be held in September 2021.

## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

#### What are they?

The ways in which Brandon Centre communicates with the young people using our services, and reaches the young people in need of our services but currently not using them. This includes the development of our digital presence (booking systems, website and social media) and other channels such as publications, face to face meetings and events.

#### *Communication Action Plan*

##### Our Aim

- A. To establish a grass roots communication channel for young people, by young people. It's aim will be to engage more young people within our communities and in particular, groups that



don't yet know about Brandon Centre services. In exchange, young people will gain valuable experience in marketing, communications and other creative skills.

- B. To improve our digital presence to make sure we're communicating with young people in a way that answers their needs, offering the right information in an engaging way. This will focus on making Brandon Centre more digitally accessible and our marketing more effective.

## How?

### A. Grass roots communications channel

1. Explore with young people the best channel (Zine/Podcast/YouTube/social hub/other);
2. Build committee including young people and Brandon Centre staff;
3. Investigate whether we need support from external partners;
4. Devise action plan for outreach activity and content plan for communication channel(s);
5. Ensure this committee communicates with/feeds into Young People's Leadership Board;
6. Review the impact of the project; what works and what could improve. Share progress internally and externally.

### B. Improving our digital presence

1. Establish a review panel, including young people, to identify projects that will improve accessibility to services via digital methods;
2. Research feasibility, cost (vs. long-term cost and time savings), agree priorities and implement digital improvements;
3. Review the messages on our website and social media channels and update in line with what young people want, making sure we're reaching the right audience through the most appropriate media and channels;
4. Review and improve when necessary.

## When?

- ✓ Commence Summer 2021 with development ongoing.

## · YOUNG AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME

### What is it?

The programme that will focus on training, volunteering and employment opportunities for young people engaged with Brandon Centre.

### *Young Ambassador Programme Action Plan*

#### Our Aim

To continue to grow the Young Ambassador (YA) membership, and establish a programme of training, volunteer and employment opportunities for members, with the aim of developing their skills, knowledge, experience and confidence.

#### How?

1. Plan and set out the principles and processes of the Young Ambassador Programme;
2. Clarify what the reimbursement will be for Young Ambassadors at the time of applying;
3. Identify best routes to reach and recruit Young Ambassadors. Invite young people to apply, and select members of the Young Ambassador Programme;
4. With young people, establish priorities for projects and training (consider a peer-support programme);
5. Devise the programme of projects and training for Young Ambassadors;
6. Ensure this committee communicates with/feeds into Young People's Leadership Board;
7. Review the impact of the project; what works and what could improve. Share progress internally and externally.

#### When?

- ✓ Ongoing.

## *Requirements and potential challenges to achieving our aims:*

In order for this strategy to be successful we'll need to consider how to:

- ✓ resource the management of this work by Brandon Centre staff;
- ✓ make time to ensure the work happens;
- ✓ make sure young people are rewarded in a way that keeps them involved;
- ✓ measure the success of our efforts.

And how to deal with the potential challenges of:

- ✓ keeping young people involved and interested (we expect it to be a struggle at first);
- ✓ balancing risk and safeguarding issues with the changing dynamics between staff and young people;
- ✓ keeping projects connected and not operating in silos;
- ✓ being willing to take risks and to learn from mistakes.

## Engaging with young people is vital to the success of our services

We talked to Clara McDade, one of the young people who took part in our workshops, about her experience at Brandon Centre and about why involving young people in the design of our services is critical.

### *Clara's Story*

Clara's been visiting Brandon Centre since she was 15. She's now 23, and in her final year at UCL. She's been an active member of our young people's workshops and is an advocate for better sexual health services. Clara has also volunteered her time with other organisations, running workshops focussing on consent and the prevention of domestic violence.

We talked to Clara about how her attitude to sexual health has developed as she's grown up, and how Brandon Centre has been a positive influence in the background during those years.

At 15, Clara was a pupil at a nearby secondary school and Brandon Centre staff had been in to talk about sexual health. Clara and two of her friends were impressed and took the initiative to visit Brandon Centre to ask about contraception.

*"I wasn't even having sex at the time, but it felt exciting and pretty grown up visiting a sexual health clinic. The staff at Brandon Centre were really friendly and welcoming."*

*"I've been back over the years for contraceptive advice and STI tests. Some of my friends have also used the counselling services."*

**Q. What do you think makes Brandon Centre different?**

*"There's such a welcoming vibe at Brandon Centre. The building itself feels like a home, not like a hospital or clinic."*

*"They've always been so sex-positive, it never felt like a big deal. There's no judgement, just a safe space to chat. They handle you with care, whether you're in a long-term relationship or having casual sex."*

**Q. Why are sexual health services like Brandon Centre important for young people?**

*"I think some young people would fall through the cracks without the support of places like Brandon Centre. It means they can get help without having to ask their parents or GP. It puts the young person in control."*

*"I'm bisexual and Brandon Centre always feels like a safe place to me. Our society is still very heteronormative, but Brandon Centre is open and accepting of all kinds of relationships. You can fancy anyone and that's fine."*

**Q. What made you want to get involved in our young people's involvement workshops?**

*"I feel like I've grown up with Brandon Centre and they've influenced the way I talk about sex. They really want to keep young people involved and the ethos is so warm and inclusive."*

*"The service is right at the forefront of sexual and mental health care for young people, and it's really exciting to be involved, and have the opportunity to volunteer and find out about careers I didn't know much about."*

**Q. What more do you think can be done to improve our sexual health services?**

*"I think there's still work to be done around not presuming gender and sexuality, and around talking about the joyful side of sex and positive body image - not just about the dangers of unprotected sex."*

*"There is a national conversation emerging from lad culture through to femicide and it's important we continue that. We need to make sure we're talking to young men too, helping them be allies and get support if they need it."*

Clara is passionate about young people's sexual health, and her enthusiasm, insights and positivity have been invaluable in our workshops. Thank you, Clara!

## Brandon Centre's commitment to our young people:

This will be important work for us at Brandon Centre. But it's a challenge we're keen to embrace. Since Faith Spicer began her work over 50 years ago, the needs of our young people have driven and shaped our work, and we know that it's helped us earn our reputation as a leader in our field.

We're dedicated to keeping our young people involved in our work, and with this in mind, we make this commitment to them. We will:

- ✓ work collaboratively and encourage cooperation between staff and young people;
- ✓ empower young people to make recommendations and decisions;
- ✓ be open-minded and respectful of all young people's opinions;
- ✓ always consider where young people can become involved in our work;
- ✓ take action based on young people's needs and commit to continual improvement.

*"Rather than standing or speaking for children, we need to stand with children speaking for themselves." — Sandra Meucci*