

# Valuing Life

Young Brent Foundation's Consortium Project Valuing Life programme that aims to raise young people's attainment, aspiration, and routes into employment and positive life choices.

## Valuing Life has two core aims

- To prevent children and young people aged 8-13 from involvement in activities related to negative peer groups (in particular, 'gangs') and/or violent criminal behaviours.
- To engage young people aged 14-17 who are known to be in the early stages of gang-related activities, or on the cusp of criminal behaviours, to direct them towards positive pathways.

Valuing Life provides dedicated time and space for young people and parents to reflect on how the behaviours that are established in the home and family settings could lead to the disharmony seen within education, and with wider community.

Inviting reflection, and opportunities to hear from the experiences of others allows for both parents and young people to think critically, while reflecting deeply on past themes and life events with compassion, thus allowing for the development of new strategies and possibilities for healing and personal growth. Valuing Life encourages and welcomes young people to participate in intergenerational dialogue, creating new and exciting spaces for exchange and understanding where they are valued, and thereby able to realise their self-worth and reframe their contribution to their communities and wider society. In the past year, the Brent's profile was magnified nationally for being one of the worst affected in the country due to the rise and spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Through well-documented accounts in the national press and broadcast media, the borough's long-standing socio-economic challenges and disparities were brought sharply into focus, further highlighted by the disproportionate impact of infection, illness and mortality experienced by African, Caribbean and Asian communities. Given the aforementioned, and persistent challenges around mental health, systemic and structural racism, employment, healthcare and general disparity faced by many communities within the borough, the core of Valuing Life became more expansive in year two, in an attempt to respond quickly, while working at depth.

Taking the learnings from the first year of the programme, combined with the increased awareness around the historic psychological trauma, and related mental health issues experienced by marginalised communities facing discrimination across all aspects of life, the briefing to all organisations participating on the second year of the programme focused on the following core areas:

- Intercultural, therapeutic practice
- Creativity, Culture, and Wellbeing

The brief for all delivery partners focused on intergenerational dialogue as being central to establishing a platform for enhanced relationships between parents and their children, and both audiences being empowered to dialogue more openly and confidently amongst their peer and friendship groups, creating new spaces for continued learning, reflection, and personal development across all areas of community life.

Valuing Life invited participants to use narrative storytelling as a means for participants to make sense of their surroundings, culture and identity, such that they are better able to manage withheld emotions. Autobiographical storytelling can lead to owning your story, as well as helping others to understand their own journeys. In listening to the stories of others, both children and adults may see that they share similar, yet unique experiences. Through story, participants will be able to engage with others, finding common ground so that we can connect and communicate with them, expressing meaning from unique perspectives that help us understand ourselves to appreciate what we have in common, but to also celebrate our differences. A primary goal of Valuing Life, is to dismantle the negative framing of the lived experiences of young people, such that they are able to reclaim a positive self-image and sense of worth.

To do this effectively, we must safeguard both their physical, and emotional wellbeing. Whether in the home, in school or employment, young people must feel that these environments are safe spaces for them in which to exist, navigate, and above all, thrive in their chosen endeavours. Traditional counselling approaches and therapeutic modalities fall short when it comes to identifying and treating the long-term impact of trauma within marginalised communities, as many of these are rooted in a Eurocentric, therapeutic underpinning that is at the very least problematic, and at worst hugely damaging, and counter-productive to ensuring the safety and healing for people to navigate their inner and outer realities.

By integrating creative, and culturally informed approaches to understanding complex trauma, programme sessions provide safe spaces for participants to explore areas of their lived realities, while also building resilience and gaining confidence in their interaction with young people.