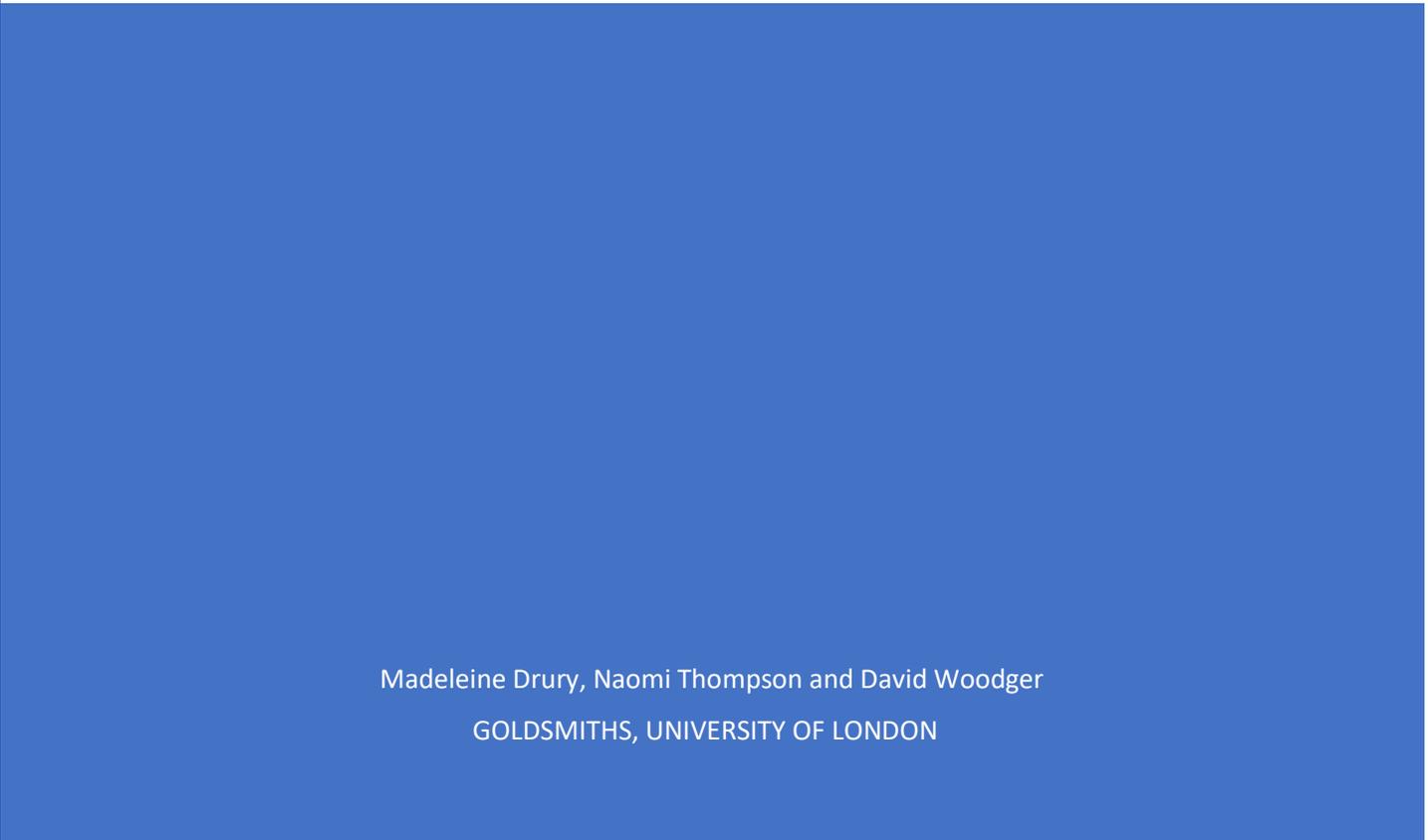




# YOUNG BRENT FOUNDATION VALUING LIFE PROGRAMME

YEAR ONE EVALUATION  
SEPTEMBER 2019 – SEPTEMBER 2020



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## 1.0 Introduction

The Young Brent Foundation act as an umbrella group to support charities and voluntary sector organisations working with young people in the London Borough of Brent.<sup>1</sup> Their key strategies involve assisting organisations with fundraising and distributing grants to projects, promotion of local youth projects, and facilitating capacity building where projects want to expand or adapt their aims and methods.

Supported by the National Lottery Partnerships Fund, Valuing Life is a three-year consortium project led by the Young Brent Foundation which broadly aims to tackle serious youth violence. The Valuing Life programme was designed to involve a number of local youth projects and facilitators to work towards the programme's outcomes. The delivery partners are as follows (not all have implemented their work projects during year one and some changes have been made for year two):

- Sport at the Heart (sports clubs and leadership programmes)
- Connect Stars (youth club provision and community outreach)
- Ultra Education (entrepreneurship camps)
- Stephen Graham (schools programme)
- ESP 18 (schools programme)
- Fatima Serghini (schools programme)
- Directions Project UK (schools programme)
- Rock Solid Media (schools programme)

Valuing Life estimate that in the first year of delivery, 174 young people have been registered with and supported by two Valuing Life projects, Sport at the Heart and Connect Stars, as well as through two sessions delivered through schools. Based on the registration data, there was an average of 120 attendees per month. At least 144 young people accessed services or agencies for the first time this year. The number of young people who have engaged with Valuing Life in year one is likely to be significantly higher than these numbers suggest as not all delivery partners collated and submitted the data required. Embedding consistent use of the management information system is a priority as the Valuing Life programme moves into year two.

Valuing Life describe their core aims as follows:

1. To prevent children and young people aged 8-13 from engaging in activities related to negative peer groups (in particular, 'gangs') and/or violent criminal behaviours.

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<sup>1</sup> As stated in the Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths.

2. To engage young people aged 14-17 who are known to be in the early stages of gang-related activities or on the fringes of criminal activity, and divert them towards positive pathways.<sup>2</sup>

Valuing Life set out their own measures of success using the following indicators:

1. Reduce numbers of young people being excluded from school / or going to Alternative Provision
2. Decrease substance misuse in children and families
3. Improve wellbeing /mental and physical health of young people and families
4. Improve economic sustainability for young people and families
5. Improve housing outcomes for young people and families
6. Increase personal agency and self-worth of young people
7. Deliver social action projects
8. Increase civil action and participation among young people in Brent

In addition to the direct impact on young people, Valuing Life aims to assist grassroots organisations by empowering them with new skills and creating a strong network of voluntary sector youth projects in Brent that are able to work in partnership towards shared outcomes.

In meeting observations and interviews with the evaluators, the Valuing Life project leaders in the various delivery organisations have shown themselves to be caring and committed experts. These grassroots projects have drawn on their personal experiences and community background work to understand the local situation and actively engage with the young people they work with and support them towards positive outcomes, in line with the Valuing Life aims and indicators.

The evaluation of the Valuing Life programme is being conducted by Goldsmiths, University of London. The methods used for evaluation in year one are set out in section 3.2 of this report.

Overall, in year one, the Valuing Life programme engaged around 200 young people (according to the data but not all engagements were recorded). Young people have become more positively engaged with each other, with school, and in their wider community. They have developed their aspirations and been supported to work towards these. These achievements are notable given the challenging context in 2020. As it moves into year two of delivery, the Valuing Life programme needs to consider how it implements all of the planned activities and projects, particularly with schools and families, develops its communication between partners, and ensures all data is collated and managed via evaluation questionnaires and its management information system, Views.

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<sup>2</sup> Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths, pp.1-2.

## 2.0 Context

The Valuing Life programme has made progress towards its outcomes in the first year of delivery, despite some significant challenges. At least 174 young people engaged in projects throughout the year, and this is likely to be significantly higher. The context in which this was achieved is notable. The project faced a number of challenges in year one; coronavirus, staff changes and limited engagement with schools. In this section, the year one evaluation will be situated in this relevant context, as well as broader contextual factors for youth crime prevention interventions.

### 2.1 Coronavirus

In a recent independent commission for Brent Council, researchers found that more than 1 in 5 children in the area (22%) live in poverty, and this figure doubles after housing costs are taken into account.<sup>3</sup> In interviews, the Valuing Life project leaders were acutely aware of how such issues are experienced locally by the families they engage as well as how negative media coverage of the area creates stigma for the local community. In addition, Brent has experienced the devastating impact of coronavirus. With one of the highest mortality rates in England and Wales at the time of writing, poverty in Brent is a significant contributing factor to how health inequalities become more pertinent and pronounced during the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

In April 2020, the national youth work charity UK Youth conducted a review into the potential impact of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The report highlighted the following risk factors for young people during the coronavirus pandemic:

1. Increased mental health or wellbeing concerns
2. Increased loneliness and isolation
3. Lack of safe space – including not being able to access their youth club/ service and lack of safe spaces at home
4. Challenging family relationships
5. Lack of trusted relationships or someone to turn to
6. Increased social media or online pressure
7. Higher risk of engaging in gangs, substance misuse, carrying weapons or other harmful practices
8. Higher risk of sexual exploitation or grooming

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<sup>3</sup> 'A Fairer Future: Ending Poverty in Brent', <https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16416711/brent-poverty-commission-report-2020.pdf> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020].

<sup>4</sup> Aamna Mohdin, 'People were abandoned: injustices of the pandemic laid bare in Brent', *The Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/27/people-were-abandoned-injustices-of-pandemic-laid-bare-in-brent> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020].

<sup>5</sup> UK Youth (2020) Covid-19 Impact Report. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-External-Final-08.04.20.pdf>

The key findings of the report in regard to the impact of the pandemic on youth organisations and the support they offered to young people were as follows:

1. Youth services will be significantly reduced. Most respondents (88%) indicated they were likely or very likely to reduce service provision to young people.
2. Permanent closures will hit small and micro organisations hardest. 22% of respondents from small and 21% from micro organisations said that permanent closures were likely.
3. Youth services will lose funding. 64% of respondents said that they were likely to lose sources of funding. About 69% of respondents from small organisations reported this, followed by medium (68%), large (63%), and micro (46%).
4. Availability and access to youth workers will be reduced. 71% of respondents said that they were likely to reduce staff hours.

This positions youth work and youth services in a precarious situation, after a decade of substantial cuts to services.<sup>6</sup> The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the youth sector presented a significant challenge to the delivery of Valuing Life in 2020. There has been disruption to the delivery and monitoring of the work. The government-induced lockdown forced Valuing Life project leaders to adapt, or in most cases, stop their projects entirely for several months.

**Ultra Education**, a set of camps designed to encourage entrepreneurship amongst young people and explore alternative views on success, was unable to run.

**Fit for Life Youth** (replaced Sport of the Heart) a youth sports project, continued to engage with young people via online fitness workouts during lockdown. However, their summer camp and schools programme were unable to run as planned.

**Connect Stars**, a youth club aimed at encouraging young people to have pride in their local community, effectively created an outreach programme over lockdown. Connect Stars reached out to their local council and the police to obtain key worker status and meet up with young people in the area who were breaking lockdown rules. The project leader worked with young people to combat misinformation about coronavirus as well as supporting young people's overall safety and wellbeing. In addition, they tried to engage young people in online FIFA tournaments and quizzes but found that young people could not consistently access technology, so this was abandoned.

The schools programme involving **ESP18, Directions Project UK, Rock Solid, Stephen Graham** and **Fatima Serghini** was interrupted and never fully launched in 2020, although a small number of sessions did run. The Valuing Life schools programme aimed to work with between 360 and 540 pupils per year.

Two courses of **GRIT training** for project leaders from the delivery organisations took place in September 2019 and September 2020, a 3-day workshop focused on personal resilience.

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<sup>6</sup> YMCA England & Wales (2020) 'Out of Service: a report examining local authority expenditure on youth services in England and Wales'. <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>.

The UK Youth report suggests that 81% of youth projects would experience unreliable or no access to IT infrastructure as a barrier to young people engaging with services digitally.<sup>7</sup> Many households in Brent did not have reliable internet or access to multiple devices, so connecting young people in busy homes proved difficult. Attendance at online sessions was inconsistent and Valuing Life project leaders were competing with the young people's online school work for time with young people. However, the project leaders did recognise and signpost young people to a range of services and online help available to young people during lockdown.

## 2.2 Staff changes

Alongside the disruptions to the project caused by the pandemic, there were staff changes during year one of Valuing Life. The Valuing Life project director changed in June 2020 (during lockdown) and the individual projects and staff involved also changed to a varying extent throughout the year, with schools in particular proving a challenge to engage with the project. Together, these disruptions have impacted both on project delivery and achievement of project indicators, as well as on collation and management of data and access to this for the evaluation.

## 2.3 Preventing youth crime: supportive vs punitive interventions

As evidenced in their core aims, youth crime prevention is the key issue of concern for Valuing Life. There have been calls for more supportive approaches to youth crime prevention interventions across the international academic literature, with critiques of more punitive interventions. Valuing Life takes a holistic and supportive approach to preventing youth crime. It is widely agreed that the supportive approach is more effective in reducing reoffending and serious crime. For example, Raymond Arthur argues that England should look to countries that invest in universal welfare systems where penal custody is at its lowest in order to help young offenders.<sup>8</sup> Arthur suggests that young people should be viewed as vulnerable and as shaped by issues of deprivation and poverty, and therefore should be seen as in need of support.<sup>9</sup> This supports that the Valuing Life approach is holistic and supportive, focused on addressing young people's need in relation to education, wellbeing and social support – in order to create positive aspirations and opportunities.

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<sup>7</sup> UK Youth (2020) Covid-19 Impact Report. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-External-Final-08.04.20.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur R (2010) Protecting the best interests of the child: A comparative analysis of the youth justice systems in Ireland, England and Scotland. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 18: 217–231.

Lipsey, M.W., Wilson, S.J., & Noser, K. A. (2007, May). *Linking the most predictive risk factors for antisocial behaviour with the most effective interventions for changing these risk factors*. Paper presented at the Society for Prevention Research, Washington, DC.

Case S (2006) Young people 'At risk' of what? Challenging risk-focused early intervention as crime prevention. *Youth Justice* 6(3): 171–179.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur, p. 229.

## 3.0 Methods

### 3.1 Measuring the impact of youth work

The importance of measuring impact in the youth sector is recognised, with debates centering on whether this should be done in quantitative or qualitative ways. Some voices in the youth sector argue that the impact agenda has focused too much on short-term measurable outcomes at the expense of softer, more longitudinal outcomes.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, others suggest that quantitative measurement which satisfies current political and funding demands is essential in ensuring the future of youth work and services.<sup>11</sup> Tom Wylie, former CEO of the National Youth Agency, argues for a middle ground, which he describes as ‘principled pragmatism’. Wylie describes it as a balance between the ‘romantics’ and their rejection of all outcome measurement and the ‘technocrats’ who bend to the whim of government and media.<sup>12</sup>

This evaluation makes use of the principled and yet pragmatic, middle ground approach which draws upon both qualitative and quantitative analysis to meet funding requirements and to provide a meaningful analysis of the impact of Valuing Life. This section of the report outlines the evaluation methods.

### 3.2 Methods used in the evaluation

September 2019 to September 2020 marks the first year of a three-year evaluation of the Valuing Life programme. In year one, Goldsmiths gathered information for evaluation using the following methods:

- Interviews with project leaders over video call
- An annual questionnaire completed by Valuing Life project manager
- A questionnaire completed by young people with the intention of measuring change
- Attending and observing Valuing Life meetings

The interviews with staff were designed to collect qualitative data. The following staff members agreed to be interviewed:

- Abdi Farah, Connect Stars.

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, T. (2017) ‘Treasuring, but not measuring: personal and social development’ in *Youth and Policy*, (27<sup>th</sup> July 2017) available at: <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/treasuring-not-measuring/>

See also: Tania de St Croix (2018) Youth work, performativity and the new youth impact agenda: getting paid for numbers?, *Journal of Education Policy*, 33:3, 414-438, DOI: [10.1080/02680939.2017.1372637](https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1372637)

<sup>11</sup> Franks, K. (2018) ‘Making impact measurement work for funders and providers of youth services’, *Centre for Youth Impact*, (9<sup>th</sup> April 2018) available at: <https://www.youthimpact.uk/blogs/making-impact-measurement-work-for-funders-and-providers-of-youth-services>.

<sup>12</sup> Wylie, T. (2010) ‘Youth Work in a Cold Climate’ in *Youth and Policy*, No. 105, pp.1-8.

- Christopher Herbert, Fit for Life Youth.
- Diamond Nee, school's leadership project.
- Fatima Serghini, school's drama project.
- Ghino Parker, former Valuing Life project manager.

Their responses have been anonymised in the findings section of this report. The original plan for gathering qualitative data was for several focus groups with staff and young people but these were not possible due to Covid-19. It is anticipated that these will take place as planned in years two and three.

The annual questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from the Valuing Life coordinator on the overall numbers of engagements and numbers and form of activities that had taken place. Over the course of three years, it will measure how the programme has developed over time. The year one data set is limited as a consistent information management strategy has not been implemented throughout the year. Views, the management information system intended to be used by Valuing Life, had only been used by two projects, Connect Stars and Sport at the Heart, as well as having data from two one-off school sessions. This means that the data available on young people's attendance and engagement for this evaluation is only partial and does not represent the programme as a whole. We also requested information from Views on breakdowns of the young people who had taken part in the project in relation to ethnicity, age, gender, etc – but this was not provided.

The evaluation team at Goldsmiths also designed a questionnaire for young people to complete to measure change through their engagement with Valuing Life. The intention was for this to be completed by each young person when they started their time with a Valuing Life project, and again at the end of their engagement or after 6 months of engagement (if their engagement was long-term). The questionnaire was not embedded by projects in year one. Therefore, there is not enough data from the young people's questionnaire to form a credible quantitative analysis. As such, we have treated the questionnaire as a pilot in year one. The questionnaire needed to be filled out twice by each participant as a metric for change. Out of 31 responses to the questionnaire, 12 had only been completed once and therefore could not be used to measure change. The other 19 responses represented 7 young people (some of them completed it more than twice). In addition, only participants from Sport at the Heart and another unnamed project completed the questionnaire. In year two, the young people's questionnaire will need to be fully embedded into all projects in order to measure change in the young people.

As stated earlier, the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020 had a significant impact on both project delivery including for their collation of survey responses as engagement with projects was very suddenly disrupted. In addition, communication with delivery partners was affected due to remote working guidelines and some staff (including the programme director at the Young Brent Foundation) being furloughed. There was also a change to the Young Brent Foundation programme director during the lockdown months making handover difficult.

By attending a number of Valuing Life meetings, Goldsmiths were able to gain an insider perspective of the programme and its challenges this year. It also allowed space for us to emphasise the importance of the evaluation. Goldsmiths were able to prompt further survey responses and invite project leaders for interviews.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Interviews with project leaders

The interviews with Valuing Life project leaders demonstrated that they are a dedicated group of caring professionals, passionate about improving the lives of young people in Brent. They all possessed excellent local knowledge through their own personal experiences and active engagement with the young people they work with. Due to this, they were acutely aware of the nuances Brent faces with the coronavirus pandemic, as well as more broadly. Some groups have adapted their work to address the unique needs of young people in Brent during this time. Below are themes that emerged in the interviews with the Valuing Life project leaders.

- Combatting young people's negative perceptions of Brent and of themselves
- Communication and guidance
- Partnerships between services
- Relationships with families, police and schools
- Mental wellbeing
- Peer mentoring and empowerment
- An informal and collaborative, preventative approach
- Impact of coronavirus and digital delivery

#### 4.1.1 Combatting young people's negative perceptions of Brent and of themselves

The project leaders were keen to encourage the young people to take pride in their local area and to be ambassadors for their community. One of them stated: 'we want them to take pride in where they live... and be a better citizen and a better representation of their community'. They encouraged the young people to contribute to their community through social action and peer mentoring schemes. This is evidence of Valuing Life indicator 3, impact 3: young people take on roles and obligations within activities. This is key to encouraging positive behaviours among young people by creating a sense of leadership and responsibility.

The Valuing Life project leaders were keen to offer a relationship or experience to the young people that is different from their relationship with other institutions such as school or the police. One project leader explained how they built the confidence of the young people through their role as an external visitor in their school, as well as being a relatable role model due to shared experiences as a person of colour. This demonstrates that Valuing Life is working towards impact 1, indicator 1: young people feel they trust themselves, can trust others and feel trusted by others. Valuing Life project leaders have worked exceptionally hard to build trust and a sense of community with the young people during a challenging year. This enabled them to go some way towards tackling negative perceptions of adults in the community, particularly where project leaders went out of their way to continue engagement either digitally or on the streets while lockdown was in place and schools were closed.

They also attempted to combat young people's negative perceptions of their home life and culture, and to build their aspiration for themselves and their communities. One project leader explained: 'the environment they live in might not exactly nurture that so really it is sustaining that belief that you can achieve what you want'. Their engagements appeared to be effective in allowing pupils to express themselves in ways other school lessons may not allow. The project leaders identified how they were able to work with young people who were not engaging well at school, to work in groups and to build a sense of community. This highlights impact 2, indicator 3: young people have the ability to work collaboratively and productively with others.

#### 4.1.2 Communication and guidance

This was the area in which project leaders offered the most constructive recommendations for how the Young Brent Foundation (YBF) might improve their overall project management of Valuing Life. The project leaders all emphasised YBF's success in having a collaborative approach to the programmes but felt that consistent and effective communication had been an issue in year one, not least because of coronavirus and the staff changes that had occurred mid-year.

One project leader had their work cancelled due to the pandemic. They suggested there was not sufficient support in identifying next steps or alternative models of delivery for the project in this time, noting that the Valuing Life project manager had been furloughed at the start of lockdown and later, replaced. They explained that communication between all project leaders had suffered: 'the collaboration needs fine-tuning, the communication needs fine-tuning'. They suggested that a consistent tool for group communication that all leaders could use to communicate with YBF and each other would be helpful moving forwards

Another project leader also explained how they would have benefited from more structured guidance and advocacy from YBF during the times of uncertainty for their organisation's survival beyond the Valuing Life programme. They stated that 'I follow the lead of organisations like [YBF]' and felt that guidance and assistance from YBF as the borough's umbrella organization for youth services had been lacking throughout the year. They suggested that assistance with funding applications and other support would be valued. This project leader expressed the need for help with finding further funding for their work and another project leader mentioned the need for support in campaigning for more funding and recognition from the local authority for youth work in the area: 'the council said it [youth services] was no longer a priority.' YBF's knowledge and oversight would be appreciated in these areas, particularly during times of crisis.

#### 4.1.3 Partnerships between services

In the absence of a substantial local authority youth service, there are multiple providers of youth work delivering a patchwork of services in Brent. The Valuing Life project leaders demonstrate they are collaborative but try and avoid stepping on each other's toes: 'so as not to duplicate things cos particularly in the Stonebridge area, there is a lot of youth provisions.' Projects leaders explained that they take their cue from the young people, and the needs they present with, as to what services they are missing. Some explained that they also have good relationships with statutory services such as housing and other local authority services. One project leader explained they are engaged with 'family surgeries' – joint service meetings set up

for information-sharing and multi-agency responses. Through this, they are able to refer families for appropriate assistance when needs emerge to the youth project. YBF was also commended in interviews for the work it has done to set up a project leaders' network, as well as broader networks with youth projects across London which included, for example, 'other teams from South London, part of our wider network'.

The project leaders rely on a range of other voluntary sector services in the area for shared use of facilities and advice. One explained the benefits of different providers sharing space and facilities: 'they provide a place where they would still come and do sports activities, arts and crafts try and do some trips and what not, and go with the community'.

Project leaders felt the networks of service providers and opportunities for partnership working were useful to their organisation. One project leader explained the benefits of interactions that have been built between schools and Pupil Referral Units and the opportunities to take their work into both, stating that it was 'massively beneficial to really like [work] cross the spectrum'. Another project leader engaging students in alternative education into their youth work sessions, explained that working with these providers to engage their young people into youth work helped to provide a positive mainstream environment for young people who feel disenfranchised from their school experience: 'They didn't like education, they had a bad experience'.

#### 4.1.4 Relationships with families, police and schools

All Valuing Life organisations have forged meaningful relationships with schools, families and/or the police. At the same time, many facilitators wished to establish a different relationship with young people than teachers and parents do, to empower young people and offer new perspectives. One of them commented: 'they have that sort of outside school relationship with us'. One project leader had a strong relationship with schools in the area and was reliant on their judgement to create class groups for their sessions, '[groups are] targeted and been identified by the school.'

Over the lockdown Abdi created an outreach programme which targeted young people who were breaking lockdown rules. He created a relationship with the police and local council to obtain key worker status and interact with the young people. A case study of his work is featured at the end of section 4 of this report.

One project leader who works within schools enables young people to develop their own alternative aspirations, beyond those presented to them by school and family: 'the paths they want to take in life are very much influenced by their school or academic career or their family business or what they felt was appropriate'. Whilst contact with young people has not been as consistent as hoped this year, project leaders believed their actions have meaningful effects on the young people in the short time they have had with them.

#### 4.1.5 Mental wellbeing

Emerging from the lockdown, the mental wellbeing of the young people was a main concern for most project leaders. All organisations identified stress and anxiety as prevalent amongst young people throughout the past year and recognised that coronavirus has exacerbated this in regard to both their aspirations and daily life.

One project leader highlighted the high levels of anxiety in Brent about and among young people as a result of the lockdown: 'I think there has been a bit of apprehension that has kicked in with a lot of the parties that has been happening in the area'. On one occasion, young people who were going out and breaking rules, expressed to a project leader that this was because they were feeling the pressure of being locked into their homes, 'I am just stressed, I need some fresh air'. Project leaders stressed the impact on young people of not being able to come together has been a strain on their wellbeing and suggested that opportunities to come together will be crucial in rebuilding the young people's sense of collective identity and wellbeing once the virus has slowed. One project leader explained that young people had expressed interest in organising a party themselves post-coronavirus. This enthusiasm demonstrated impact 3, indicator 3: 'young people take on roles and obligations within activities' which is important for a sense of ownership within their community.

This project leader regularly communicates with families as a whole. Families have also expressed high levels of stress relating to the virus: 'the parents were anxious'. This project is working hard on their relationship with families to address impact 5, indicator 3: young people and families are able to display a growth in resilience over time. They have made significant progress in working on family relationships in year one, despite the lockdown, by making regular contact to check-in on their wellbeing and that of the young people.

One of the schools project leaders highlighted that students are bringing stress from their home life into the classroom: 'there was one student in particular who said he was really lonely, he was really sad, had no friends and he didn't want to go to school and then he described kind of very concerning stuff, so we raised it to the teacher and she said, "Oh yeah this is what is going on in his home". He was a recent refugee'. This was just one example of many students who had unique and stressful home lives, but were positively impacted by discussing and reflecting upon their experiences through extra-curricular activities with the Valuing Life projects: 'they are just sort of having a better day than they thought they were going to start with, because their bodies opened up and their imagination is unlocked and they have worked with their classmates in a way that a math's lesson wouldn't let you'. This is evidence that Valuing Life have achieved impact 3, indicator 2: young people reflect on how outcomes of their activities can verify and build their skills. This also feeds into raising confidence and aspirations.

#### 4.1.6 Peer mentoring and empowerment

The organisations all aim to empower young people through sport, drama and social activities. This empowerment is linked to tackling the negative image of Brent and its young people in the media and in the community's own perceptions as well as in young people's view of themselves; young people are encouraged to take part in their community and society.

The organisations have a big impact on raising the aspirations of young people. This is partly because they have a different relationship to the ones built with teachers and families, one in which they can be 'real' with the young person, engage with them at their level and starting point. One project described their approach as: 'being as realistic as possible with them or telling them you always have to set yourself boundaries, put your objectives in place and then reach as far as you can'. Valuing Life is evidently working to achieve impact 2, indicator 2:

young people increase ability to resist short term impulses in order to prioritise longer term goals.

One project leader hoped to empower young people through cultural experiences, stating that 'the kids that can't go on holiday, it kind of gives them still a way to have a good experience of having some holidays'. Their sessions are inclusive and bring a sense of normality to those who cannot afford holiday activities, thus empowering them to communicate with their peers in school. This is evidence of impact 4, indicator 1: young people feel safe and secure - which was an obvious priority across the Valuing Life projects. This example is also evidence of impact 4, indicator 1: young people feel a sense of purpose, achievement and contribution. As this gap between experiences grows wider with coronavirus, Valuing Life is working tirelessly to give young people a sense of purpose.

Many of the sessions allow young people to take ownership of their life experiences. The facilitators have excellent local knowledge which they tailor to raising the aspirations of the young people. One project leader stated that they empower young people as a person of colour: 'I think when they see someone like themselves and can assume they have similar lived experiences there is that lovely really nice ground that you can both sit on'.

Another project leader explained how they make consistent use of peer mentoring, by identifying young people with leadership skills: 'we always try to identify early, you know the ones we call the young leaders, the one in ten... they can have a huge impact in the rest of the group'. They also employ consistent staff members with a range of skills and life experiences: 'some of the workers are like 5 or 6 years older than them as well so they are relatable'. They are keen to realistically manage young people's expectations. They draw on one example of their young people expressing the desire to become professional footballers. The project leader handed the conversation to one of the youth workers, a former professional football player, to discuss the steps they took and the challenges they faced to manage the young people's expectations, as well as to consider alternative aspirations and steps towards them. This is an example of impact 1, indicator 3: young people are setting SMART goals and are motivated and interested in achieving their goals. This Valuing Life project is assisting young people to realise their ambition by putting formal steps in place.

One project leader used their past experiences to encourage young people to join institutional peer mentoring schemes, such as a school council. Their youth sessions were designed around themes of good leadership: 'different types of leaders...what makes a good leader...leaders in schools'. This sense of leadership is evidence of impact 1, indicator 1: young people believe in their ability to create personal and social change. A personal sense of agency will be crucial in young people achieving the indicators surrounding goals and aspirations.

#### 4.1.7 An informal and collaborative, preventative approach

The Valuing Life projects create an encouraging atmosphere which aims to prevent anti-social behaviour among young people. They operate on the principle that the young people have ultimate control over their own decisions. On the whole, the organisations take the lead from the young people and have fairly informal and adaptable session plans: they explained that 'it is not overly structured' and 'we don't push them into anything' such as narrowly defined activities and

outcomes because 'there is a fine line between encouragement and consent'. Taking part in additional supportive activities like peer mentoring and working towards long-term plans and goals was not compulsory for young people. This is another example of impact 2, indicator 2, where by making their own choices: young people increase ability to resist short term impulses in order to prioritise longer term goals. This is part of Valuing Life's mission to raise aspirations.

One project leader explained that they encourage the young people to contribute to community, society and to making changes in their own lives by enabling the young people to offer suggestions rather than giving them the answers and pre-planning all their activities and projects: 'it facilitates it in an environment where we won't move on until a contribution is made'. This creates a feeling of shared responsibility which is evidence of impact 2, indicator 3: young people have the ability to work collaboratively and productively with others.

#### 4.1.8 Impact of coronavirus and digital delivery

The lockdown forced all Valuing Life programmes to pause and then adapt or stop their plans entirely. Those who were able to adapt faced significant challenges in engaging young people through the use of technology.

Project leaders demonstrated awareness of how Brent's experience of the coronavirus was different compared to other parts of London: 'they have got the highest cases of Covid and they have loads of overcrowding'. They frequently made connections between coronavirus and poverty.

They also recognised that during lockdown, school work had initially been the main focus of the pandemic in terms of young people's services but that for young people: 'boredom has kicked in'. The organisations working within schools were taking their cue from schools in regard to safety once schools returned in September but recognised that their partnerships, funding models and way of working with schools could look very different: 'schools are a challenge at the moment with Covid and social development classes are probably like low priority'. Project leaders that relied on work in schools recognised a need to adapt their plans significantly for the new academic year as schools returned.

One project leader who adapted his activities and delivered online sports sessions received positive feedback overall from those who attended but felt that working virtually and relying on technology hindered the effectiveness and reach of their engagement: 'our normal number - we didn't hit a big number'. Working online became a barrier to consistent attendance and engagement. The impact of the pandemic was by far the biggest challenge faced by the Valuing Life project leaders in year one and had a massive impact on their delivery and outcomes.

#### Case Study: Connect Stars

*One stellar example of a project leader's ability to adapt to the coronavirus is evidenced in Abdi Farah's exceptional outreach programme during lockdown. Abdi Farah, the Connect Stars project leader, recognised that young people were disobeying lockdown rules due to overcrowded, stressful homes, boredom or general misinformation. He experimented with using different technology to deliver their programmes to varying degrees of success. He reflected 'Being on the phone and Zoom you know it wasn't great to be honest'. Abdi found that the phone was not very accessible, and, in some cases, there weren't enough devices in the house. After abandoning organising online social groups through FIFA games and quizzes, Abdi formed a relationship with the local council and police service and was granted key worker status. This allowed him to deliver outreach in areas where young people were avoiding the rules. Abdi focused on working with them to ensure they were keeping to rules as far as possible while outside of the home, were social distancing and not demonstrating anti-social behaviour. This is a strong example of the supportive, restorative approach to crime prevention in practice. During this time, Abdi was able to dispel misconceptions and conspiracies about coronavirus which were a common excuse amongst the young people for not following the rules.*

## 4.2 Young People's Questionnaire

Due to low take-up of the young people's questionnaire across the projects in year one, there is a lack of credible data, meaning we have been unable to develop robust quantitative analysis of the young people's achievement of the Valuing Life outcomes and indicators. 19 out of 31 responses to the questionnaire were usable. The 19 workable responses represented only seven young people (some of the young people responded multiple times). Due to the short time frame between each questionnaire being carried out, most responses recorded little change across the indicators set out in the agreement between Goldsmiths and Valuing Life.

There did appear to be some areas of improvement for the young people. Nearly half of young people recorded an improvement in their ability to control negative reactions. This is evidence of impact 2, indicator 2: young people increase ability to resist short term impulses in order to prioritise longer term goals. Over time, it is hoped this will inspire young people to remain in mainstream education.

Two thirds of young people suggested their ability to listen had improved as well as stating that there had been an improvement in their school grades. In these categories, young people typically recorded a change by one point which suggests that their confidence in their own abilities had improved. Both the ability to listen and the improvement in grades recorded by most of the 7 young people suggests Valuing Life is having an impact on the young people's school life and beyond. With further engagement with Valuing Life, these young people could extend and sustain these improvements in the long term.

In addition, after taking part in the projects, the young people reported taking part in more activities in their community and that they had taken part in leadership roles in school, home or community more frequently. Here, Valuing Life are working towards impact 3, indicator 3: young

people take on roles and obligations within activities. Valuing Life is encouraging young people to take an active role in their community.

This sense of community is further evidenced in that more than half of the young people reported engaging with their school council, a positive and empowering position in an institution. Here, Valuing Life have demonstrated again impact 3, indicator 3: young people take on roles and obligations within activities. Approximately one third of participants also engaged in social action, charity projects and/or fundraising activities, suggesting that they are a positive force in their communities. These positive results suggest that some of the young people were able to make beneficial change in their lives and communities as a result of their experience with the Valuing Life programme, which suggests that Valuing Life has improved the young people's sense of agency, impact 1, indicator 1: young people believe in their ability to create personal and social change.

Three young people detected no changes in any of the questions. This may be due to a combination of factors including the limited time spent with the project and the confidence and self-awareness of the participant.

There were some areas in which no change was detected across the participants but in which they had answered positively to some of these questions each time they completed the questionnaire. This may reflect that questionnaires were completed partway through rather than at the start of engagement, and that some young people had already been working with Valuing Life project organisations before the Valuing Life programme began.

The young people unanimously suggested they were able to make change to their personal wellbeing. Most young people felt able to make changes to their experience of school/education. They suggested the area in which they felt they were least able to make change was with family, friends and other relationships.

All young people felt that they were a trustworthy person. All but one young person stated they would stay in school if given the choice to leave or stay, with only one participant consistently suggesting they would leave. All young people stated that they enjoy working with others to achieve a task.

Another significant area in which some of the participants reported no change was their ability to trust others, probed from the question 'Overall, do you feel you can trust other people who are not in your friendship group?' Only one participant suggested their ability to trust others had improved. Secondly, a significant number of the young people reported feeling less confident about their safety in their local area and their safety travelling outside their local area since finishing the project. Coronavirus will have had a clear impact on their responses to this.

### 4.3 Attending and observing Valuing Life meetings

From the data collected from the Valuing Life coordinator via the annual questionnaire, 0 young people were engaged via Pupil, Referral Units (PRUs) in year one. However, it emerged during interviews with project leaders that some of the young people attending their projects were engaged with PRUs. In year two, Valuing Life will be conducting direct work with young people

in PRUs. It is significant that Valuing Life projects engaged young people from PRUs in year one despite direct engagement with PRUs not yet being in place. This demonstrates their ability to engage young people from the target groups through their work within the community.

Despite the incredible challenges Valuing Life faced in year one, the project leaders demonstrated an impressive willingness to adapt. It was clear every team member had the young people's wellbeing at the heart of their decision making in meetings.

With a significant staff change, the Valuing Life coordinator had a challenging job of integrating into the team and inducting herself to the programme during lockdown. Coronavirus posed a significant communication challenge which limited the project leaders' ability to collaborate, but with improved communication strategies through regular meetings some headway was made. This work will be continued into year two.

## 5.0 Recommendations

The Valuing Life programme has faced a challenging context in year one, with its first year of operation during a global pandemic, and the disruptions and changes this brought to the work as well as staff changes during the year. In particular, the new project coordinator was inducted remotely during lockdown with no real opportunity for handover. A number of projects and activities were unable to run and these will need attention and adaptation for year two. In light of these challenges, the achievements made by the Valuing Life Programme in year one are notable. What follows are a number of recommendations from the year one evaluation that should be considered in year two.

### 5.1 Consistent use of the programme's management information system

The Valuing Life programme was not able to meet its engagement targets in year one due to the challenges outlined. However, more young people were engaged than has been recorded on their management information system, Views. This means that the evaluation was unable to develop a full picture of who was engaged in terms of both numbers and characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, etc. It is imperative for the consortium to embed consistent use of this system in year two in order to both manage the programme effectively and to provide data required for the evaluation.

### 5.2 Embed use of the young people's questionnaire

We have not been able to effectively measure change against project outcomes and indicators for year one of the programme because the questionnaire we developed for use with young people was not embedded into the work of the projects. It is essential that projects encourage all young people to complete the questionnaire in year two. It should be completed at the start of their engagement with a Valuing Life project, again at the end of engagement with that project, or every 6 months for long-term engagements.

### 5.3 Continue to build a communication and collaboration approach

It emerged in interviews that developing effective communication between projects and with the Young Brent Foundation has posed a challenge in year one, not least because of projects being paused and staff furloughed and changed (at different times for different organisations), and the shift to virtual meetings. More effective and consistent communication will be supported by the continuation of regular meetings and the use of the management information system by all partners. This will also help combat discrepancies in information and data from different partners (e.g. YBF stating no young people from PRUs were reached in year one, project leaders stating otherwise).

#### 5.4 Develop the schools programme

Development of the schools programme was disrupted by the pandemic in year one. Even before this, the projects were having some challenges getting buy-in from schools and were reflecting on whether to work more with PRUs and alternative education providers. This programme needs to be implemented in year two as it is intended to engage over 500 young people per year and is crucial to the Valuing Life programme meeting its outcomes.

#### 5.5 Develop work with families

The Valuing Life programme needs to implement its work with families in year two and consider with the Goldsmiths evaluation team how best to gather data on impact from parents. A meeting is needed between the evaluators and the project partner with responsibility for this work, once appointed, to consider the use of questionnaires, focus groups or other means of evaluation with this cohort.

#### 5.6 Assess how the overall programme can be implemented to meet its outcomes

YBF needs to relook at the overall Valuing Life delivery and outcomes plan and develop a clear strategy for the programme as it moves into year two. Much of the work was not able to be implemented in year one and some adaptation is needed to partners, ways of working, and achievement of outcomes. Consider how the schools and families programmes will be implemented, and by who and where, as well as the 'youth for youth' events and other activities not yet set up.

#### 5.7 Expand the project coordinator role or employ support staff

It was clear from meeting observations that the Valuing Life project coordination role is substantial and challenging. At present this is a part-time role that does not appear to allow time for all that is required. YBF should consider whether this role can be expanded, or other roles created to support the coordinator.