



YOUNG BRENT FOUNDATION
**VALUING LIFE
PROGRAMME**

YEAR TWO EVALUATION
2021



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1.0 Introduction

The Young Brent Foundation acts as an umbrella group to support charities and voluntary sector organisations working with young people in the London Borough of Brent.¹ Their key strategies involve assisting organisations with fundraising and distributing grants to projects; the 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 that were involved in the evaluation of the project this year are as follows:

- Sport at the Heart
Sports, health and wellbeing; youth clubs and community provision.
- Clube Dos Brasileirinhos
Brazilian language school for children and young people; supportive provision for parents, families and caregivers.
- Wembley Football
Sports-based youth provision in Brent.
- Springboard Youth Academy
Support and education provision for newly-arrived young people to the UK.

Two of the above partners (Springboard Youth Academy and Wembley Football) completed projects under Valuing Life within 2021. Clube Dos Brasileirinhos and Sport at the Heart are due to complete their projects in March and April of 2022, respectively.

During the first year of delivery, Valuing Life estimated that around 200 young people engaged with the programme. At the point of writing this report, a total of 364 young people and 41 parents, caregivers and family members have engaged with the projects within Year Two of Valuing Life. It is possible that more young people and parents will come to be involved with the current ongoing projects.

In Year One, it was difficult to form a complete picture of the number of young people involved in the programme as not all of the eight delivery partners collected this data so it is likely that significantly more young people were engaged. Challenges surrounding Covid-19 also seriously contributed to low take-up numbers last year.

Delivery partners involved in Year Two reported that Covid-19 continues to impact on provision and participation, however all projects this year have been able to maintain delivery very well through the use of experiential adaptation and contingency plans. This is reflected in increased engagement numbers.

Our interviews with project leaders highlighted that their organisations have prioritised responding to urgent community needs during and 'post-pandemic.' For many in Brent, the crisis remains ongoing and as one project leader said, *'the lasting effects will be felt for a long time.'*

¹ As stated in the Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths.

Delivery partners reported they had focused on greater outreach within the borough over the past year and have identified gaps in provision and support they have since been working hard to fulfil. For example, one organisation diverted resources into providing a food bank for the young people and families connected to their service. Other organisations adjusted their existing provision to accommodate increased and newly emerging health and wellbeing concerns for their respective recipient communities as a priority.

Since the Year One evaluation, changes have been made to this already adaptive programme. The key aims and indicators of success for Valuing Life remain the same, however project delivery in Year Two has been primarily informed by a strategy consisting of core themes that has been developed to better reflect and adapt to the multifaceted experiences of the individuals, groups and wider communities engaged with the programme - principally in response to the critical and enduring needs in Brent post-2020.

The second year of the Valuing Life programme also coincided with Brent being named the Mayor's London Borough of Culture for 2020, and the programme sought to explore the *'stories, art and emotions that hold life in Brent together; uncovering and celebrating the borough's untold tales and unheard voices.'*²

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.
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.³

Valuing Life set out their own indicators of success for the programme, as below:

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

Outlined below, the new delivery strategy has been designed to achieve the above aims and support the realisation of the success impacts and associated indicators.

The project structure is separated into four key phases:

Phase One: Listening, reflection and creative group work with parents, families and caregivers.

Phase Two: Listening, reflection and creative group work with young people.

² 'Core Themes and Structure' outline provided by management pp.1-3

³ Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths pp. 1-2

Phase Three: Listening and reflection with both young people and parents, families and caregivers.

Phase Four: A showcase and/or celebratory event for all involved in each project.

We have found that each organisation has responded uniquely in their approach to these phases. Some have focused primarily on young people and others on parents, families and caregivers. One organisation has focused on working with individuals in Brent who are engaged in any caring role or responsibility, whether they are connected to the young people involved with the organisation or not. While each organisation has prioritised a different phase, all are integrating the core themes for each phase as detailed in the delivery structure.⁴

These two core themes are as follows:

1. *Creativity, Culture and Wellbeing.*

This theme is underlined by creativity and connection through using narrative storytelling as a powerful tool for youth and community work. The Valuing Life project co-ordinator shared the following summary:

'Valuing Life invites 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.'

2. *Intercultural, therapeutic practice.*

Valuing Life takes a healing-centred, holistic approach to youth and community work. This theme underlines Year Two of Valuing Life's focus on the impact of complex and collective emotional trauma for individuals, families and wider communities in Brent - particularly around the trauma endured due to the repercussive effects of Covid-19 and experiences of marginalisation.

The project co-ordinator shared the following in regards to this theme:

'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 in 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.'

The evaluation will primarily refer to a set of five impacts and associated success indicators as outlined in the Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths. Secondly, the evaluation considers the attainment of these within context of the evolved delivery strategy and overall programme approach. Thirdly, the progress of Valuing Life is measured against previous development recommendations made in the Year One evaluation.

⁴ 'Core Themes and Structure' outline provided by management pp.1-3

2.0 Context

This section provides context to the challenges faced in the delivery of Year Two of Valuing Life. It also presents the broader contextual factors for Valuing Life's strategic approach to achieving its primary aim of holistic youth crime prevention.

2.1 COVID-19 impact on youth and community provision

The years 2020-21 saw significant challenges for youth provision that remain ongoing. Years One and Two of Valuing Life have encountered major interruptions in delivery and critical issues specific to Brent became a priority for delivery partners under the programme in both years.

At the time of the first year evaluation, Brent had one of the highest mortality rates in England and Wales. Although coronavirus cases and deaths associated have since reduced and restrictions lifted, the devastating effect of the pandemic remains cause for intensive, survival focused work by youth and community organisations in the borough. Valuing Life's focus on emotional and mental health this year seeks to deliver support for the severe and collective grief and loss felt within Brent.

Inequality and poverty were two foremost issues cited by Valuing Life projects leaders as having profound consequences for young people and families in Brent, during interviews this year.

An independent commission for Brent Council in 2020 found that more than 1 in 5 children in the area (22%) live in poverty, with this figure doubling after housing costs. Brent Council's 2021-2022 'Borough Plan' reports that over 15% of residents live in income deprived households and over 41 thousand residents are in receipt of Universal Credit.⁵ Families in the UK have experienced serious reductions in financial condition, with 3 in 10 parents and guardians reporting a major cut in household income due to the pandemic. Food scarcity and lack of access to healthcare were some of the central concerns affecting deprived communities throughout the pandemic.⁶

Young people across the UK have been disproportionately affected by the economic fallout of the pandemic. In 2020, employment levels for those in the 16–24 age range had fallen by 7%. Improving and increasing access to employment opportunities and education are among the key aims of the Valuing Life programme. Covid-19 school restrictions and a lack of access to youth provision have prevented young people from engaging with fundamental pathways to these, further contributing to poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

Education restrictions have had an impact for Year Two of the Valuing Life programme, with delivery partners sharing in interviews that schools are still limiting or withholding access to external providers. Youth organisations have thus needed to provide extra support and resources young people otherwise would find at school, alongside previously providing those which they would not. Digital poverty and a lack of access to IT equipment also presented barriers for youth and family access to educational resources and crucial support from organisations.

In interviews, project leaders reported an increased demand for services from both young people and families and the need for responsive adaptation in a rapidly declining situation for youth and community provision.

⁵ Brent Council, 2021. Borough Plan: building a better Brent, London: Brent Council.

⁶ Local Government Association, 2021. *A perfect storm - health inequalities and the impact of COVID-19*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/perfect-storm-health-inequalities-and-impact-covid-19>

Key findings of a March 2021 report by UK Youth showed severe repercussions of the pandemic across the youth work sector⁷:

1. The pandemic has had a substantial impact on young people's wellbeing and mental health. 66% of youth organisations report that they experienced increased demand for their services.
2. 83% of organisations reported that their income had decreased. More than half (57%) stated that the cost of delivery had increased since Covid-19 hit.
3. 64% of youth organisations reported that they were 'financially at risk of closure within 12 months.'

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the youth sector presented a significant challenge to the delivery of Valuing Life in both years One and Two. There has been ongoing disruption to the delivery and monitoring of the work. Despite this, Valuing Life organisations this year have adapted exceptionally well and have maintained delivery in fast-changing and unpredictable environments.

2.2 Marginalisation

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified significant existing inequality in all areas of society in the UK.

The crisis disproportionately impacted the already marginalised, particularly Black, Asian and minoritised racial, ethnic and cultural groups and communities; LGBTQI+ individuals; disabled individuals; women, and those in low socio-economic situations and poverty.⁸ It has been acutely impactful for individuals and groups whose identities and experiences intersect across multiple of the above.⁹

The second most ethnically diverse borough in London, 64% of people living in Brent are from a Black, Asian or minoritised ethnic background; and over half, 55% as of 2011, of those living in the borough were born outside of the UK.¹⁰ As stated in section 2.1, communities in Brent face significantly high proportions of financial deprivation and, across the UK; Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic individuals are much more likely to live in poverty.¹¹

One project lead for an organisation under Valuing Life spoke on marginalisation and coronavirus in Brent:

'Communities in Brent are still recovering from the pandemic. Not just the disease itself, but the social issues that the pandemic pulled out. Brent was one of the worst affected boroughs in the country, in terms of deaths and cases. It related a lot back to the fact that Brent is majority BAME communities, and the correlation between being Black and being Asian isn't necessarily about ethnicity. The correlation is between COVID and inequality. Young people who were in the pandemic had to ask questions about racism and inequality, poverty, poor housing, whatever it might be. There's a lot to unpack there. Our young people are really resilient.'

⁷ UK Youth, 2021. The impact of Covid-19 on England's youth organisations, London: UK Youth.

⁸ Runnymede Trust, 2021. Ethnic inequalities in COVID-19 mortality: A consequence of persistent racism, s.l.: CODE.

⁹ Nazroo, P. J. et al., 2020. Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London, Manchester: University of Sussex; The Ubele Initiative.

¹⁰ Brent Council, 2021. Community profiling: diversity in Brent – evidence pack, London: Brent Council.

¹¹ Institute of Race Relations, 2020. BME statistics on poverty and housing and employment. [Online] Available at: <https://irr.org.uk/research/statistics/poverty/> [Accessed 8 February 2021].

The Valuing Life approach, as outlined in section 1.0, has expanded its delivery strategy in Year Two to engage more inclusively with the lived experiences of all in Brent. The focuses on emotional safety, collective healing and the reclamation of story and identity are important for building and maintaining mutual support and empowerment within marginalised and oppressed communities.

2.3 Approach to preventing youth crime

As evidenced in their core aims, youth crime and violence prevention are key areas 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 methods.

Valuing Life takes a holistic and supportive approach to preventing youth crime. It is widely agreed that the supportive approach is much more effective in reducing reoffending and serious crime.

In the UK, recent increased efforts have been made to integrate trauma-informed, holistic practice into youth crime prevention and youth justice. The trauma-informed approach considers the impact of adverse life experiences on young people and places this emphasis at the core of interventions. It also considers the role of family, community and society in a young person's life; the influence of inter-personal, intergenerational and sociocultural trauma, and trauma stemming from exposure to identity-based prejudice and discrimination.¹² This approach stresses long-term relational support, with a focus on family and community connection, as fundamental to effectual prevention.

Trauma can have a profound impact on a wide range of aspects in a person's life and should be a key consideration in early intervention practices within youth work. Valuing Life's focus on trauma and emotional wellbeing through the development of a therapeutic strategy signifies the important shift in approaches towards effective youth crime prevention that are person-centred, non-stigmatising and non-traumatising.

3.0 Methodology

September 2020 to September 2021 marks the second year of a three-year evaluation of the Valuing Life programme. As with Year One, Year Two has been disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions and these have impacted data collection. For this year, Goldsmiths has gathered information for evaluation using the following methods:

- Interviews with project leaders over video call
- An annual questionnaire completed by the Valuing Life project manager
- A programme summary provided by the Valuing Life project manager
- A questionnaire completed by young people with the intention of measuring change
- Focus groups with young people and parents and family members (one in person, one over video call)
- Impact and outcome reports for projects completed by organisations involved in Valuing Life

The interviews with staff were designed to collect qualitative data. 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, we were unable to do this for the Year One evaluation. We were able to arrange two groups this year, one with young people and one with parents, however logistical issues meant we were unable to arrange multiple groups with young

¹² Skuse, D.T. & Matthew, J. (2015) 'The Trauma Recovery Model: Sequencing Youth Justice Interventions for Young People with Complex Needs'. *Prison Service Journal*, 1(220), pp. 16-25.

people under all organisations and groups with staff. It is anticipated that these will take place in Year Three of the evaluation.

The annual questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from the Valuing Life coordinator on the overall numbers of engagements and the numbers and forms of activities that had taken place. Over the course of three years, it was intended to measure how the programme has developed over time. Changes in programme structure and delivery have meant that several of the measures in this questionnaire are no longer applicable. The Year One evaluation encountered issues in gathering data that would be input into this questionnaire due to an inconsistent information management strategy for the programme.

Views, the management information system intended to be used by Valuing Life was, and remains to be, presenting issues for access and inputting of data for the organisations. Views has been used consistently since Year One by one organisation, Sport at the Heart, who are well-versed in using the system as they had prior experience with it before engaging with Valuing Life. However, they found there were technical difficulties in retrieving information, such as evaluation surveys, from the system. This was an issue reported by another organisation also.

Due to the unreliable usage of the system, we have instead been provided with a summary of numbers of engagement with specific projects. This summary does not provide information regarding new registrations to projects, which is a measure the evaluation used last year. We also requested information from Views on breakdowns of the young people who had taken part in the programme in relation to ethnicity, age, gender, etc. - this was not provided for Year One, nor for this year.

The evaluation team at Goldsmiths designed a questionnaire for young people to complete to measure change through their engagement with Valuing Life. This questionnaire was conceived in line with the impact/indicators of the programme that are defined in the Service Level Agreement with Goldsmiths.

The intention for this questionnaire was for it 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 consistently by projects in Year One so we were unable to gather sufficient data from these.

In Year Two, all projects (bar one that focused on parents, families and caregivers) completed the questionnaire with young people. However, each young person only completed the questionnaire once, or names were not included consistently so it has been difficult to track multiple completions by each young person. As the questionnaire was intended to measure 'distance travelled,' this evaluation is unable to offer analysis of the questionnaire responses as initially planned. Due to the insubstantial data from last year, we are also unable to draw accurate quantitative comparisons between Year One and Year Two of Valuing Life at present.

In conversation, we learned that this questionnaire was only administered the once in Year Two for a couple of reasons. Firstly, delivery partners reported technical difficulties in accessing Valuing Life's management information system, Views, from which they could download and administer the questionnaire. Secondly, some project leaders shared that they felt the questionnaire did not align well with the newly implemented delivery structure (as outlined in 1.0) and that it did not complement their session facilitation.

We are currently working in collaboration with management and delivery partners to re-design the questionnaire to be initially piloted and then administered across all Valuing Life projects for Year Three. These are intended to more accurately assess impact in union with the evolving aims and measures of the programme. These questionnaires will enable us to aggregate comparable data spanning the three years of Valuing Life and form a more complete understanding of the overall impact of the programme.

For Year One, we did not use questionnaires that had only been answered once, as opposed to two or more times by the same young person due to a very small sample size. This year, however, we have significantly more responses to work with and as such can attain some insight into the impact of the programme for young people at the point they responded to the questionnaire.

The project reports provided by organisations also enable this evaluation to examine specific impact in relation to programme aims and indicators.

The findings from the data gathered will be analysed against Valuing Life's core aims and impact/indicators of success, within a context of the reasoning and relevancy behind the newly implemented delivery structure and themes therein - as outlined in sections 1.0 and 2.0.

4.0 Findings

This section will firstly outline findings from interviews with project leaders across the four organisations under Valuing Life in Year Two.

Secondly, this section will cover findings for the young people engaged with the four projects led by these organisations; using questionnaire and focus group data.

Lastly, it will examine questionnaire and focus group data findings for parents, caregivers and family members involved in the various projects.

4.1 Interviews with project leaders

Project leaders in both Year One and Two of the Valuing Life programme faced significant challenges in delivering their youth and community provision. Interviews with leaders this year demonstrated their dedication and passion for improving the lives of young people and families in Brent.

Below are themes that emerged in interviews with the Valuing Life project leaders:

- Health and wellbeing
- Peer support
- Family and community
- Communication and connections between partners and management

4.1.1 Health and Wellbeing

All of the project leaders we interviewed spoke of the crucial health and wellbeing needs amongst young people, their families and wider communities in Brent. They described the emerging spectrum of needs ranging from food inequality to mental health support during and post-pandemic, to which they each adapted dependant on the areas of need for their specific project communities and available resources.

The high levels of poverty and deprivation in Brent contribute to ongoing food scarcity, which has increased during recent times of national economic instability. As mentioned previously, one of the organisations told us they had created a food bank for the families of the young people attending their youth clubs which then expanded to include people within their wider service area. They shared that, during 2020, around 90 families had accessed the food bank.

Indicator 3 in Valuing Life's success measures: improve wellbeing, mental and physical health for young people and families, is of key concern for effective youth and community work. The project leader for this organisation talked of the importance of addressing the impact of food scarcity on mental and emotional health:

'We're working with the young people; they're accessing the food bank with us and what is that doing to their mental health? We're talking a lot about children and young people's mental health. Young people are going to be resilient through this, but resilience comes with some payback at some point later down the line if we're not dealing with the immediate adverse experience.'

Mental health became an even more important focus for delivery partners throughout the second year of Valuing Life. One project, in particular, placed an emphasis on the therapeutic approach outlined in the Valuing Life strategy through building humanistic, psychotherapeutic techniques into reflective group work with their participants. This project worked primarily with parents, caregivers and families. They found that those involved in the project were *'in desperate need'* of emotional connection whilst experiencing loneliness and isolation during lockdowns. These parents and families were additionally sharing that this isolation was negatively affecting their relationships with their children, but with support from the project had since gained tools in the form of communication techniques and healthy coping mechanisms to reconnect with their children and strengthen their bonds. This is a brilliant example of the ways in which this project is attaining *impact 5; indicator 3*: young people and families are able to display a growth in resilience over time. Building resilience can have a markedly positive outcome for mental health, particularly during times of overwhelming social and economic upheaval.

One project leader described their dedication to improving employment and housing outcomes for young people, to the benefit of their overall health and wellbeing and that of their communities. They organised a careers event, geared towards guiding 16–18-year-old Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic Brent-based students into employment that would be otherwise *'traditionally difficult to access.'* 120 young people attended, with the majority sharing very positive views of the event. 75% of students who attended said they had a 'better idea' about career opportunities and many shared ideas and feedback for future events. *Impact 3*: improve economic sustainability for young people and families, is key for health and wellbeing and the above examples highlight that Valuing Life is working hard towards realising this. This example also points to *impact 4:2*: young people feel a sense of purpose, achievement and contribution.

4.1.2 Peer support

Project leaders emphasised peer support and the building of connections as primary aims and outcomes of much of their work under Valuing Life. All shared in their attentiveness to forging a sense of support between provision recipients, both for young people and adults. This peer support is linked to the broader approach of Valuing Life to empower young people and families to take ownership of their narrative by sharing their life stories with others, celebrating similarities and differences and working together towards common goals.

One project leader explained their approach to discouraging 'postcode rivalries' in Brent, through facilitating rapport-building between the young people who attended their sessions. They aimed to do this through ensuring young people residing in rival estates were brought together in sessions. The leader then described the outcome of this approach:

'The estates are all five minutes from each other and they all have the same problems. Poor housing, poverty, unemployment - all of those things you'll find in areas of deprivation. They all suffer it, the young people. But somehow, they think that is some sort of artificial boundary and it makes them different. That is why the [sessions] are so important, they start having conversations, making friends and sharing, 'Oh yeah, I've had no hot water for six weeks,' and 'Oh yeah, I've had that problem as well.' Those shared experiences.'

The same leader explained that they had also ensured young people of differing ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds were joined in sessions together, with the intent of exposing young people to difference and encouraging the learning of teamwork and empathy. This approach, and the outcome of young people sharing in their experiences, align with *impact 2; indicator 3*: young people have the ability to work collaboratively and productively with others, and, *impact 4:3*: young people feel included and have a greater connection with their community. This leader also expressed their hope that young people would leave the sessions as ambassadors for the above learning, sharing this with their peers.

Another example of peer support and leadership is evident in one organisation's development of trajectory paths for their youth club alumni. The project leader for this organisation explained that many of their project participants go on to become volunteers with them and later onto creating provision for others. All of the staff within this organisation live in the service's beneficiary areas, as do the volunteers. This is a very positive example of the meeting of a few measures of Valuing Life, but most notably *indicator 8*: increase civil action and participation, and, *impact 4:3*. Supporting young people's interest and investment in their local area and community is of critical importance for improving outcomes for all within Brent.

4.1.3 Family and community in Brent

Year Two of Valuing Life has seen a more intensive focus on supporting parents, caregivers and families related to the young people involved in the programme. Project leaders expressed that they felt this focus is of deep importance and that they shared in the vision outlined within the new delivery strategy - especially in facilitating intergenerational healing and connection, and the value of this for supporting community wellbeing and the prevention of youth crime.

Some of the organisations ran project for parents, carers and family members during the 2021-22 period, while some are currently in development stages to increase connection with these recipients. A primary goal for these organisations is to centre their support on parents, carers and family members with the consequential result of improving outcomes for young people.

One organisation arranged an event specifically for mothers and female carers in Brent, with the aim of helping participants to unpack the impact of the pandemic and gain tools to support their personal mental and emotional health and that of the people they care for. The event received very positive feedback, and the project leader shared they had hope for facilitating further events. Participants who attended the event voiced the important need for self-care to be able to better support those they care for. One person said, *'Parents and carers often do not take time for themselves, remembering their own well-being is an important factor enabling us to provide the best love and care for our children.'*

A project leader from another organisation said this about the importance of healthy family relationships for young people:

'I noticed a lot of parents were turning up to support the kids. Which is also good, because another part of the thing around gangs and Valuing Life is [that] I wanted the kids to do things with their parents and have a shared experience; which has a positive impact on them and will hopefully divert them away from gang and knife crime, if they have a positive relationship at home.'

This same project leader went on to explain the importance of family connections beyond the parent-child relationship:

'Intergenerational also means amongst the children too. We're seeing the older brothers come with their younger brothers, or the younger with their older brothers.'

The focus on intergenerational connection within Year Two is echoed in another project leader's reflection on Valuing Life's therapeutic approach to facilitating improved outcomes for families and young people:

'There are some mothers saying that they realised they are sharing stories about their childhood and adolescence with their children - understanding that this is an important tool to connect, and also validating their own experiences.'

Project leaders for one organisation shared that participants engaged with their Valuing Life project overwhelmingly reported improved wellbeing and connection within their family dynamics. They also found that participants were coming together outside of the project to build support systems, which has been crucially important for maintaining their emotional health and wellbeing and role-modelling for their children. This is evidence of the strive of Valuing Life to attain *impact 4:3*: young people feel included and have a greater connection within their community.

'We are witnessing the creation of a community. Which is something that we consider very important. It is also something a lot of the mothers were missing during the pandemic, having this sense of community; being with people you can count on and share deeper feelings, emotions and experiences with without feeling like you're being judged.'

The high priority given to peer support and community building exemplify the dedicated work by all of the project organisations to achieving the specific aims of the Valuing Life programme.

4.1.4 Communication and connections between partners and management

One of the key recommendations of the Year One evaluation was to improve avenues of communication between delivery partners under Valuing Life and between partners and management at the Young Brent Foundation.

In Year One, delivery partners reported inconsistent and ineffective communication with YBF, in significant part due to early difficulties around the outbreak of Covid-19 and mid-year staff changes.

In interviews this year, project leaders praised the support and resources they received from management. They described highly collaborative and engaged communication and interest, feeling that their work, viewpoints and suggestions were valued. They shared that they felt their specific

work and unique approaches to the Valuing Life strategy were appreciated and recognised, without feeling as though they needed to 'tick-boxes.'

One project leader described the support they received as 'very flexible' and not 'micro-managing,' allowing them and their organisation to build from the provided platform with space whilst equally aware that co-ordinated support was always present and helpful when needed.

From interviews, we found that delivery partners were unaware that other organisations were engaged under the Valuing Life umbrella, or had little to no contact with others. Project leaders shared that they felt it would be of *'immense benefit'* to have the opportunity to collaborate and network with one another. In Year One, project leaders felt similarly and some shared constructive ideas for moving forwards in communication with other projects. This year, one suggestion was to develop a directory for organisations under Valuing Life; to allow facilitators to connect with other services for referrals or signposting. Another was to convene regular meetings between the organisations to discuss approaches to the Valuing Life mission. It was felt that supporting this communication would enable greater collaboration and more opportunity to build on the already strong sense of community in Brent.

Developing robust mutual aid and reliable connections will be indispensable moving forwards as youth and community services continue to face uncertain futures following the impact of Covid-19. Increasing opportunities of connection between partners will better reflect the Young Brent Foundation's aim to maintain co-ordinated youth provision in the borough.

4.2 Young People

This section will examine data findings from questionnaires that were completed by young people, and from a focus group. This section will also feature the work of one organisation under Valuing Life, Sport at the Heart, and an exploration of their engagement with the programme and their striving to achieve Valuing Life's main aims.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The Year One evaluation was unable to accurately assess quantitative data from young people due to a low take-up of surveys across projects, with 19 useable responses. This year, we have a significantly higher number of questionnaires to work with at a total of 165 unique responses across three of four organisations under Valuing Life. We do not have survey data for all four as one centres parents, caregivers and families in their work under the programme. This data will be explored in a later section.

As detailed in section 3.0, the questionnaires were designed originally to be administered twice over each young person's individual journey with a project, to measure the long-term impacts and outcomes of Valuing Life delivery. At the point of submitting this report, each questionnaire has only been administered once for each young person as opposed to the intended two or more times. As the questionnaire was intended to measure long-term impact, this evaluation is unable to offer analysis of these survey responses as initially planned.

The responses for Year Two, however, still offer some important insights into the young people's personal contexts and their experience of the projects they were involved with at the time of responding to the survey and how these align with the key indicators of success for the Valuing Life programme.

Overall, the responses reflected generally positive experiences of Valuing Life projects.

One of the most prominent examples of this are the responses to the questions designed to measure for *impact 1, indicator 1*: increased personal agency and self-worth; young people believe in their ability to create personal change. 82% of young people reported they felt able to make changes to the things in their life they would like to be different.

Respondents were given options of areas in their life in which they believed they were able to make change. The top three most chosen options, in order, were: *future career and success; personal wellbeing; and family, friends and other relationships*. These are three key areas in which personal agency can be actualised and are also areas identified through interviews with project leaders as high priorities for the organisations under Valuing Life.

There is room for improvement, however, as the majority of young people (48%) said they only felt able to make change in 1 out of 5 given options. The most chosen option for ability to make change, *future career and success*, shows promising evidence for the meeting of *indicator 4*: improve economic sustainability for young people and families, and consequently *indicator 5*: improve housing outcomes for young people and families.

The second to least chosen option, *experience of school/education*, may indicate the decreased connections between Valuing Life and schools and other educational facilities due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, despite the lack of stability and inconsistency in school access for students during the pandemic, the majority of respondents (60%) reported that their grades had improved over the past year (2021). The lifting of restrictions for schools may be a contributory factor to this.

Impact 2: reduce numbers of young people being excluded from school/going to alternative provision, has been difficult for this evaluation to measure for over year's One and Two. The evaluation has not had access to numbers regarding how many young people have or have not been excluded from school or who have attended alternative provision. However, improving grades could indicate continuing positive engagement with school education.

The young people's encouraging responses regarding the ability to make change regarding family, friends and other relationships could be attributed to the increased focus on parents, family members and caregivers in Year Two of the programme. This focus aligns with *indicator 3*: improved wellbeing, mental and physical health. Supportive and healthy relationships are greatly important for individual wellbeing and in the prevention of youth crime, as highlighted in section 2.3.

Young people also reported high levels of confidence, trust and feelings of safety; aligning with *impact 4:1*: young people feel safe and secure and *impact 1:2*: young people feel they can trust themselves, can trust others and be trusted - all of which support ongoing relational health. Young people also rated highly their ability to listen other people's points of view and feelings which further meets *impact 2:3*: young people have the ability to work collaboratively and productively with others.

Many of the young people reported engagement with one or more activities external to Valuing Life that can support increased personal agency and self-worth. Of the given options, 26 young people were involved in an unspecified community activity; 24 with a school council; 15 acted as a peer mentor or educator to other young people; 9 were involved in social action, charity projects and/or fundraising activities and 8 with Youth Parliament. These responses are positive evidence of both *indicator 6* and *indicator 8*: increased civil action and participation.

4.2.2 Focus group - Sport at the Heart

Due to logistical difficulties arising this year we were only able to meet with one group of 10 young people involved with one of the projects under Valuing Life, Sport at the Heart, for a focus group. The beginning of the Year Two evaluation was disrupted, as with last year, by Covid-19 restrictions. With the lifting of restrictions from this point onward, the evaluation team at Goldsmiths will be able to engage with ongoing projects for Year Three.

This section will outline the findings from this focus group but also hone-in on the work by Sport at the Heart, spotlighting their approach to achieving the aims of the Valuing Life programme.

Overall, this group of young people reported positive experiences within the project. They shared that they felt very safe and secure when attending the project and felt they could trust others whilst they were there. Some shared they felt they could trust people more outside of the project and had built more friendships since attending - particularly at school. One young person said, *'I got better in social skills, to talk more and help me talk to people I don't know. It helps me to involve [myself] more in teamwork in sports,'* a couple of young people also shared that they *'felt at home'* while attending the project.

This sense of safety and trust demonstrates the organisation's work towards supporting young people's emotional wellbeing while they attend, evidently achieving *impact 4: indicator 1*: young people feel safe and secure. It is also an example of *1:2*: young people feel they can trust themselves and others. The importance of creating and maintaining safe spaces for young people to exist and be enriched in their personal development and growth cannot be understated.

A couple of the young people reported improvements in relationships at home and an increased ability to take personal action through helpfulness and independence. The above examples match indicators *3*: improve wellbeing (through relational health and connection) and *6*: increase personal agency and self-worth. Several of the young people also said that their leadership and teamwork skills had improved, both of which are reflected in questionnaire responses - with a high proportion of the young people reporting that they often took on leadership roles at school, home and in other activities and 79% of young people saying they enjoyed the challenge of working with other people to achieve a task. One young person in the focus group said, *'Since I have come here, I have taken on leadership roles. I help with younger kids at school and I lead on activities with them.'*

The young people's reflections during the focus group on the learning they have gained is evidence of *impact 3, indicator 2*: young people reflect on how outcomes of their activities can verify and build their skills. The taking-on of leadership roles by the young people also positively supports the attainment of *2:3*: young people have the ability to work collaboratively and productively with others, and, *3:3*: young people take on roles and obligations within activities.

Sport at the Heart (SATH) provided the evaluation with an impact report which was completed following a summer scheme in 2020. Their internal surveying showed considerably positive outcomes for both young people and PCF who engaged with the scheme - with meaningful increases in friendship building; self-confidence; physical and mental health. The organisation stated that they had previously not engaged with Valuing Life due to its hyper-focus on knife and gang related crime, and they felt that other organisations were better positioned to address this. With the expansion of the delivery approach to include early intervention and an increasingly holistic, community-based emphasis, SATH were able to bring forward their extensive knowledge and experience to support young people and families under Valuing Life.

As stated previously in section 1.0, the newly implemented delivery strategy for Valuing Life has been developed through outreach and conversation within the Brent community. This strategy and impact measures for the programme feature the importance of community action and participation, particularly within marginalised communities. The project leader for SATH spoke to this, saying the following:

'We know our areas of disadvantage and high violence, but these are all symptoms of a bigger problem. A lot of the time, our young people haven't contributed to why this is now the situation. But they can contribute to thinking about organising society in a different way so that it is more equal. Having youth clubs and spaces of consistent provision for young people - these are the conversations we can have with them and these are the things we can set in motion.'

4.3 Parents, Caregivers and Families

One of our recommendations following the evaluation of Year One of Valuing Life was the continuing development and implementation of a more intensive focus on parents, caregivers and families involved with the projects under the programme.

This was always a principal goal of the project and we have found that this has been incorporated into Year Two successfully.

One of the organisations stated they are currently working on creating a project with parents and families to build into their existing provision for next year. Following trial and conversation, they have identified areas for development and the plans look to be very promising; and, as with the other projects, align well with the Valuing Life approach.

Valuing Life's approach is defined by holistic, healing-centred youth work that encompasses the entirety of a young person's lived experiences and how these influence their past, present and future. This approach in practice looks to and beyond just the individual and integrates a core consideration of the role and impact of family, community and society for each young person.

One project leader spoke to their reasoning behind engaging family members within this approach:

'When you work in the community and providing services, you have to look holistically at that young person and their family and the context of what is going on for them. Otherwise, that young person who is coming to a youth club twice a week is not getting the benefit of full support, a village.'

As referenced to in section 2.3, long-term relational support and healthy community connections are essential for youth crime prevention and effective provision. This focus lies at the heart of Valuing Life's aims and delivery methods, with two of the key impacts and indicators for the programme focusing on family engagement.

This section will outline findings from family questionnaires and focus groups.

The term 'parents, caregivers and families (and/or family members)' will be abbreviated to PCF.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

We received 32 unique questionnaire responses from two organisations. We learned that delivery partners encountered similar issues in administering the PCF survey as with the young people's questionnaire.

Project leads from these two organisations stated intent to re-deliver this survey as intended to measure long term impact towards the end of their respective family centred projects. These will end after the submission of this report and we therefore do not have access to this data for this year's evaluation. This data will, however, form part of our analysis for the Year Three overall impact report.

The questionnaire primarily focuses on the respondent's relationships to their young person or persons. We examine findings relating to personal impact for parents, caregivers and family members in section 4.3.2.

Overall, the questionnaires reflected medium to highly positive experiences of the projects that respondents were involved with.

On average, respondents reported good to fairly good relationship(s) with their child(ren) and young person or people at the time of completing the questionnaire. The vast majority felt able to support their young person(s) to make changes in their life at 75%.

This, similar to the high proportion of young people who felt able to make change in their own lives, evidences a positive achievement of *impact 1; indicator 1*: young people believe in their ability to create personal and social change. Support from their family members can enable and motivate young people to generate change.

Together with this, most of the respondents felt they were 'very able' to motivate their young people to set and achieve long-term goals. Most respondents also felt 'very able' to encourage their young person when they are under pressure and support them towards positive action.

This is indicative of Valuing Life's work towards *impact 2:2*: increase ability to resist short-term impulses in order to prioritise longer-term goals, and, *impact 5:1*: young people are able to understand and develop self-control.

Largely, respondents felt confident with regards to engagement with their young person's education. There does appear to be room for improvement, however, with 28% answering 'not sure' about their young person's experience of school, and a low-medium response to the question '*how engaged do you feel with your young person's education?*'

47% of respondents said their child's grades had 'stayed the same,' and 28% 'improved' over the previous six months, in comparison to the young people of whom 60% said their grades had 'improved.' Improving educational outcomes is a key aim of the Valuing Life programme, and family engagement is a vital component for supporting young people in their educational goal-setting and attainment. Implementation of the planned schools programme in Year Three may see an improvement in family member's overall awareness of their young person's educational experience.

4.3.2 Focus group

This year, we were only able to engage with one group of parents and family members from one organisation, again due to logistical issues as with the young people's focus groups.

This section will outline findings from this focus group with parents, caregivers and family members who were engaged with a Valuing Life organisation. This was the only organisation in Year Two to solely focus their Valuing Life work on families.

Overall, this group of parents, caregivers and family members reported exceptionally positive experiences of the project. All shared in a sense of peer support and community and stressed how important it had been to experience a safe and trusting space in which to share their emotional experiences with others in similar positions.

'I feel that fear I was having, that I thought I had, about expressing myself, has totally disappeared because I've been talking non-stop, I'm sharing my whole life with these people! You know, we were basically strangers.'

The majority of participants were migrants and shared a common cultural connection. They conveyed that this made the safe space all the more important for their wellbeing, when they are facing cultural conflicts and a lack of understanding from others of their experiences in their day-to-day lives - particularly with respect to raising their children.

'Every parent needs this. We need to come to talk about our problems with respect to culture, cultural differences; even with our children, because they are coming back from school and they are of a different culture to what we were.'

Many of the parents expressed how the support they had received from this project, and other participants, had had a profoundly positive influence on their relationships to their children.

'I think every family should be able to do this, it is so nice to realise we are not the only people going through hell. Because sometimes it is hell. There are other families going through the same situation, it is nice to talk to others and say, 'oh you can help me and I can help you!'

Participants shared that the therapeutic tools and coping mechanisms they had learned within the reflective group sessions had enabled more constructive communication within their families. The project had facilitated artistic workshops for each participant to create a scrapbook containing their personal life story, to be shared with their children and families. This was described by participants as very empowering, in that it had supported them to reflect on their history and begin to heal from adverse and painful experiences individually and collectively with the group. Some participants shared that this healing had enabled them to approach their children with greater empathy, compassion and curiosity for their unique narratives.

These participant's experiences of this project reflect the deeply impactful work by this organisation to reproduce the Valuing Life approach in practice. The holistic, healing-centred focus on storytelling and therapeutic trauma-informed emphasis have clearly had profound outcomes for these parents. The testimonies of their journeys through the project show the meaningful knock-on effect for young people by placing a high priority on parents and families wellbeing.

5.0 Recommendations

As in Year One, Year Two of the Valuing Life programme faced a challenging context. The repercussive impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic engendered the development of an evolved delivery strategy and for the Valuing Life consortium to adapt within highly uncertain conditions. With respect to these challenges, the achievements of the Valuing Life programme in Year Two are exceptional. Below are key recommendations from the second year of evaluation of the programme that should be considered for sustainability and the continuing achievement of Valuing Life as it moves into its third year.

5.1 Consistent use of the programme's management information system

The Year One evaluation recommended improving the usage of the Valuing Life management information system, Views. Inconsistent usage has contributed to challenges in accurately assessing impact of the programme due to unreliable data returns regarding demographics; and entry, registration and engagement numbers. We learned this year that the system has presented technical issues, preventing delivery partners from accessing and recording information such as questionnaires for the evaluation. We recommend an appraisal of Views for its usability and/or training for delivery partners on how to access and record data on the system.

Delivery partners should be required to input all relevant data regarding their project and participants, as it is imperative for effective programme management and for providing the data required for a thorough final year evaluation of Valuing Life.

5.2 Embed use of the new young people's questionnaire

After receiving feedback regarding Year's One and Two evaluative questionnaires, we are working in collaboration with delivery partners and management to re-design the young people's questionnaire to more effectively gather data to support a comprehensive final year evaluation.

This new questionnaire should be administered consistently across all projects under Year Three of Valuing Life. The re-design will allow for the questionnaire to only be administered once, therefore all questionnaires must be completed by young people near-to or at the end of their engagement with a project. If delivery partners encounter issues with the new questionnaire, this should be communicated to management and directly to the evaluation team to ensure prompt changes.

5.3 Continue to build a communication and collaboration approach

Communication between delivery partners was a recommendation following the Year One evaluation that could continue to benefit from improvements. Some project leaders this year were unaware that other organisations were working within the Valuing Life consortium. They felt that communication between delivery partners would be highly beneficial and offered suggestions for how this may be achieved.

This communication could be facilitated through convening regular meetings, or the development of a directory accessible to all partners. This networking could increase collaboration and support the delivery of a consistent approach to the Valuing Life strategy.

5.4 Develop the schools programme

The Year One evaluation recommended continuing development of the schools programme, as it is intended to engage over 500 young people per year and is crucial to the Valuing Life programme meeting its outcomes. As with Year One, Year Two has encountered significant disruptions, with ongoing difficulties accessing schools and alternative educational environments due to Covid-19 restrictions. As restrictions are lifted and external providers are again granted access, we recommend that the schools programme be implemented in Year Three as a priority.

5.5 Maintain the new delivery strategy

In interviews with project leaders, we learned that the newly implemented delivery strategy was deemed more pertinent, appropriate and supportive for their respective projects and organisation recipients. This strategy has evidently supported the achievement of key aims and objectives of the

Valuing Life programme for both young people and families. We therefore recommend the maintenance of this strategy and its continuing reflexive development as needs emerge within service communities.