

BUILDING
BRI X **TON** YOUNG

Building Young Brixton Partnership Review 2021

An Independent Evaluation Report
reflecting on the impact of
partnership working for BYB
partners over the past three years



Laura Johnson Consultancy

Building Young Brixton Partnership Review 2021



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OVERVIEW

Building Young Brixton (BYB) is a Lambeth based partnership of 9 local youth, community and education specialists, working together to provide a multifaceted service for young people affected by social and financial disadvantages, risk of exclusion and gang involvement across Brixton and Tulse Hill.

The vision of BYB is for young people in Lambeth to thrive through the achievement of five major outcomes:

- Increase in school involvement
- Increase in community involvement
- Increase in employability and employment
- Improvement in personal relationships
- Increase in emotional and physical wellbeing

The partnership is made up of The Advocacy Academy, The Baytree Centre, Ebony Horse Club, Grove Adventure Playground, High Trees, Indoamerican Refugee & Migrant Organisation (IRMO), Juvenis, Marcus Lipton Community Enterprise (MLCE), and Spiral Skills.

Laura Johnson, of Clear impact Consulting, was asked to undertake a review of the BYB Partnership in order to review how the partner organisations have benefited from the partnership, how well the partnership has been working and what could be improved in future. The review included interviews with the BYB Youth Worker and Partnership Officer and staff at different levels from each of the partner organisations.



FORMING THE PARTNERSHIP



Building Young Brixton came about in 2016, in response to Lambeth Council asking for partnership bids for funding. After a fairly lengthy process, five organisations came together to form the partnership – High Trees, IRMO, The Baytree Centre, MLCE and Spiral Skills – and High Trees was selected to be the lead organisation. A gap around sports activity and advocacy was identified, so Ebony Horse Club and the Advocacy Academy were invited to join.

In 2018, the partnership (excluding the Advocacy Academy) was successful in winning a bid for three year funding from the GLA and at the same time, further funding from Lambeth Council. At this point, Grove Adventure Playground and Juvenis were added to the partnership, to ensure a variety of expertise and services across the partnership.

Given the way the partnership first started, it's not surprising that one of the main factors for getting involved was funding. Most interviewees noted that ultimately, funding was a key driver, but that most partners recognised that there would be other benefits too, and that there was an opportunity to provide a wider range of services to young people, and to share good practice and learning among the partner organisations. Some interviewees, at both the leadership and operational levels, did note that it took some time – around two years – for the enthusiasm for the partnership and what it meant to filter down to the practitioner level.

“WHEN YOU FORM A PARTNERSHIP LIKE THIS, IT'S BECAUSE OF NECESSITY. BUT THERE ARE BENEFITS. WE WERE LOOKING FOR SKILL SHARING, RESOURCE SHARING, REFERRAL ROUTES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE MAIN MOTIVATING FACTORS.”

Senior Staff

THE PARTNERSHIP'S AIMS, GOALS AND VALUES

On the whole, there was a shared understanding of the main aims and goals of the partnership, with priority placed on improving the offer for local young people while having the opportunity to work more closely with other organisations in the area and share learning, resources and good practice. A shared value across the partner organisations is also the desire to give young people a voice, to put them at the heart of what the partnership is trying to achieve and do what is best for them and not for their organisations.

Interviewees, certainly at the leadership level, really felt that the BYB operates as a true partnership and that all the organisations share similar values, such as trust, openness and respect, and the desire for true collaboration rather than competition.

“FOR US, OUR PHILOSOPHY IS THAT THE WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE CAN'T BE DONE BY ONE TYPE OF INTERVENTION OR ORG, SO IT IS ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A NETWORK OR ECOSYSTEM THAT HAS THE FULL RANGE OF SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENTS.” Senior Staff

IMPACT: ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that the local offer for young people has greatly improved as a result of the partnership, with young people now having access to a wider range of services and opportunities. Some also noted that the quality of youth work has improved as partners have been able to learn from each other and improve what they do.

Accessing different services in different parts of Brixton and the surrounding areas has also meant that young people have been encouraged to leave their postcode and mix with other groups of young people, leading to greater community cohesion and connection to their local community.

There are still some barriers for some young people accessing different events and services, relating to either the location of the centres/services or the demographics of their young people. It was clear that organisations had some core partners that they felt it was more natural to refer to, but that there were other partners they didn't often see a need to refer to because of the different types of young people they were working with (but still respected their role and input to the partnership). Some felt that referrals should ultimately be led by the young person's needs and wishes rather than referring them to meet a particular aim or target, which they agreed the partnership had got better at. Interviewees also highlighted the fact that the partnership gives young people a voice, through the Youth Steering Group and the fact that all partners are committed to working with young people to understand their needs and be responsive to those.

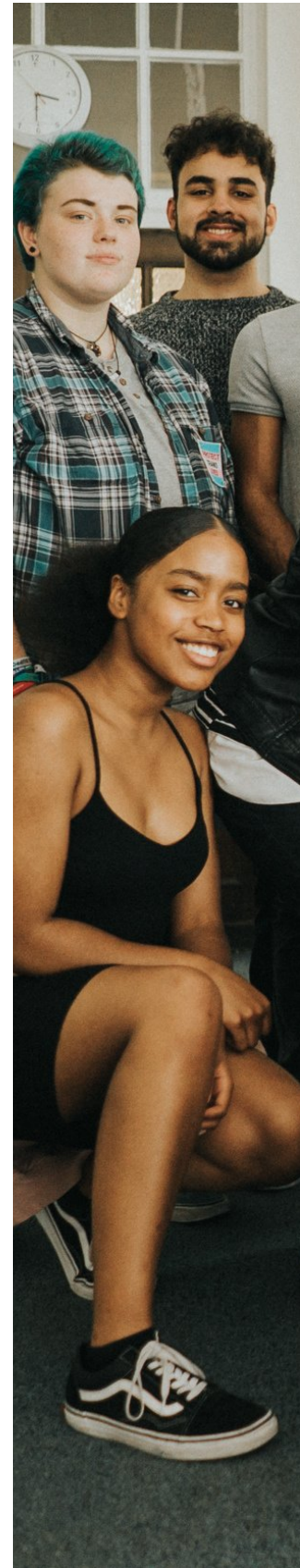
“WHEN WE HAVE DONE SUMMER AND CHRISTMAS EVENTS, IT'S BEEN REALLY NICE FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACTUALLY SEE CENTRES THAT ARE QUITE CLOSE BY. IT'S A NICE KIND OF COMMUNITY FEEL THAT'S BEYOND JUST THE ORGANISATION YOU'RE WORKING IN. I THINK THAT IT ACTUALLY BOOSTS MORALE, WHEN YOU REALLY SEE THE IMPACT THAT BOTH YOU AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS ARE HAVING.”

Youth worker

DE, 16, MLCE

"I've been coming to Marcus Lipton since I was in primary school, when I was around 11 years old. I was new to the area at the time and I didn't really know anywhere like that. I made some friends at primary school and they told me about the youth club so I went there and I saw there were other kids, some older, and it was fun. You could just come here and chill, and sometimes you'd be given food. The staff would sign us up for activities and take us on outings. If MLCE didn't exist I'd be fine but I would have to find somewhere else to hang out and meet my friends. I think I've benefited because it's given me the opportunity to do new things.

I've done work experience with Spiral POP Brixton at the Pizza Place. I heard about Spiral from the youth workers and I wasn't expecting much so it was alright because it was something to do. It's good to take any work experience you can get and add it to your CV."





NB, 17, BAYTREE CENTRE



"I went to a primary school 5 minutes from Baytree and that's when I first heard about it. About three years ago, my neighbour told me she was going away with Spark, so I told my mum I want to go to Baytree to join Spark. I didn't really have any expectations of Baytree as I hadn't really asked anything about it. I was just a bit nervous as it was a new environment. I didn't even know it was a girls only space, I was just excited about the trips. Baytree is a really safe space.

I'd heard about Grove APG as my little cousins used to go there to play on the structures. I've also had face painting done by IRMO as I lived near Angell Town and they were having some kind of party outside. I was involved in planning the summer party at Tulse Hill Adventure Playground, it was pretty fun as everything was the way we wanted it and we had control so it was a pretty good outcome. I also helped to plan the Christmas party at Marcus Lipton. Juvenis has helped me to get a provisional licence, paid for the theory test app and will be paying for my theory test which is really good. About two years ago in summer I did a CV workshop with Spiral Skills and it helped me to get work experience at Natwest. I'd also got a placement at Lewisham Hospital but it was cancelled due to covid. I did manage to do one at Charing Cross Hospital though. I still use that CV we made to this day.

The BYB partnership has definitely given me a wider access to things in my area and opportunities that I think most people don't know about. On top of that I've been able to meet a lot of new people. I don't think I would have accessed these if it hadn't been for the youth workers telling me about it. We should have more access to work experience and apprenticeships. We should also have more YSG meetings."

TA, 11, HIGH TREES

"I've been coming here since before some of the youth workers. I first heard about it because my uncle used to come here when he was young and he told us about it. I first came here about 3 years ago. It's really fun and I like the cooking sessions. My favourite thing to make here is cakes. I also helped to build the treehouse.

I've done horse riding at Ebony Horse Club and they taught us how to look after the horses like the ways to brush them and which side of the horse to go on so they don't get scared. I learnt how to gallop and make the horse stop which you do by kicking it gently. There was a competition for who could clean their stable the quickest and obviously my team won. I got to meet other young people and if we go again I'd like to be able to spend more time with the young people that go there as it was more focused on horse riding. I already knew about EHC before we got to go there because my aunt lives nearby. I'd always wanted to go there but I'd never had the chance, so I don't think I would have been able to if High Trees didn't take us.

I think we should have more things that bring different young people together, like maybe a dance workshop where we learn tik tok dances. I'd like to go to other adventure playgrounds and speak to the young people to see how it is over there and how we can make our playground better. I'd like to see how they do things differently and meet other young people."

IMPACT: ON PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

One of the most common benefits talked about by interviewees was the peer support and learning from other organisations, at both leadership and operational levels. Being able to bounce ideas off each other and learn about different approaches to youth work was seen as very valuable, and created a supportive and collaborative environment. This peer support was particularly important during times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, where the sharing of resources, processes and ideas was invaluable.

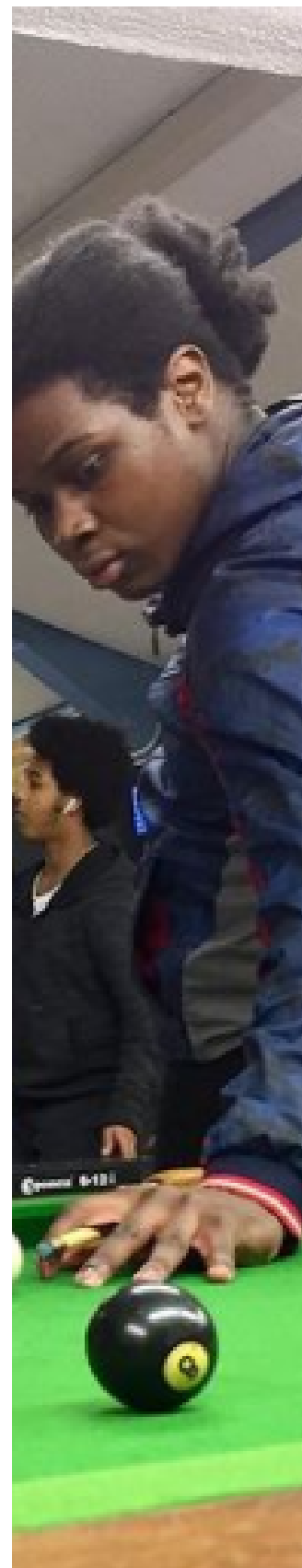
The ability to support each other in a collaborative environment has led to improved peer learning and capacity building among partner organisations. Sharing expertise, ideas and different approaches has helped to improve knowledge and practices, and has been facilitated by a high degree of trust, openness and collaboration among partner organisations.

Many partners said that they had built skills and expertise around partnership working, which in turn had improved their confidence to either be involved in or lead other partnerships beyond the BYB Partnership. Further partnerships have been formed among several of the BYB partners, showing that the BYB Partnership has proved to be a successful way of working.

All interviewees talked about how well regarded the partnership is, and that the level of interest in it and the fact that it is held up as a beacon of good practice, has helped to increase the reputation and credibility of the partnership and of the partner organisations. Being associated with the partnership and having an increased profile has in turn helped to give partner organisations an increased presence and an increased voice. Interviewees talked about the benefits of having the backing of the partnership, and being able to use that to help raise the level of influence that their own organisation has, particularly for newer or smaller organisations. The increased profile and ability to evidence successful partnership working has also allowed the partner organisations to access other funding more easily, either individually or collaboratively. It has also meant that partner organisations have had access to larger pots of funding that they wouldn't previously have been able to bid for, strengthened by the relationships and partnerships they have established through BYB.

'AS AN ORGANISATION, IT HAS OPENED US UP. IT IS TAKING US OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY MUCH BETTER NOW. WE STILL NEED TO GET BETTER AT IT, BUT IT'S OPENED THE EYES OF OUR YOUTH TEAM TO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO YOUTH WORK. AND ALSO, I STILL THINK THIS IS KEEPING IN MIND THAT OUR CLIENTS DON'T BELONG TO US... IT HAS MADE US MORE RECEPTIVE TO OTHER PROVISION AND OTHER PROGRESSION ROUTES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS... THE STAFF THAT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED ARE NOW MORE OUTWARD LOOKING AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED, RATHER THAN JUST THINKING ABOUT OURSELVES – THAT HAS A BIG IMPACT AS IT REALLY CHANGES THE WAY YOU WORK. WE NOW THINK ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY.' (LEADER)

Youth worker



IMPACT: ON THE WIDER SECTOR



Some interviewees felt that as BYB was so well regarded and respected in the sector, it had demonstrated how well partnerships can work and encouraged others to work in partnership. However, others were unsure how much impact the partnership had had on the wider sector, and talked about some tension and distrust, resulting from the way the initial funding was handled. Some of this distrust was thought to be a result of the funding landscape, and the preference of funders for partnership working, which can make some organisations feel that it is being 'forced' upon them.

Partners agreed that there should be an opportunity to support the wider sector in future (and room for other partnerships in the borough), but that this should be handled sensitively. Some partners also pointed out that while the BYB partnership has lots of learning to share, people need to be receptive to that learning for it to be useful. These challenges aside, there was a sense that there was a real opportunity for other community organisations in the borough to work in partnership in a similar way.

"WE ONLY WORK IN A SMALL CATCHMENT AREA, WE CAN'T SERVICE THE WHOLE OF LAMBETH, SO OTHER CONSORTIUMS NEED TO COME TOGETHER TO MAKE SURE WE ARE UNIFIED ACROSS THE BOROUGH. EVERYONE KNOWS WORKING IN SILOS IS NOT THE WAY FORWARD. IT'S A TWO WAY STREET – WE HAVE TO MOVE AWAY FROM A SPIRIT OF COMPETITION AND REPLACE IT WITH A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, COPRODUCTION, SO EVERYONE HAS THAT SYNERGY."

Leader

One interviewee pointed out that BYB only works in a small catchment area of the borough, and there is scope for many more partnerships to ensure better services across the borough. One interviewee also suggested that the partnership was well placed to support grassroots organisations, given its profile, success and possible influence over the local council or funders, possibly acting as a 'trading post' or conduit between the two.

Interviewees acknowledged that having an impact on the wider sector was something that would take time, especially given the fact that the focus of the last year or so has been on Covid-19 and supporting young people in new ways through the pandemic.

"I WOULD LIKE THE PARTNERSHIP TO HAVE MORE CONNECTION AND INFLUENCE ON THE GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS IN LAMBETH, SUPPORTING THEM TO STAY AFLOAT. I THINK WE'RE THE TRADING POST BETWEEN THEM AND THE COUNCIL OR FUNDERS. THE SECOND STRAND IS LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION, PERHAPS IF THEY HAVE EXPERTISE WE DON'T HAVE, OR ARE IN A PARTICULAR LOCATION."

Leader

THE SUCCESSES



As well as the many benefits of the partnership outlined above, many of the interviewees were very keen to point out that one of the aspects that has worked very well in the partnership is the good leadership from High Trees.

High Trees have purposefully tried to act as a leader or facilitator of the partnership and of collaborative working, rather than being seen as a dominant partner. This was recognised by many of the interviewees, who saw all the partners, including High Trees, as equal. They also expressed their appreciation and gratitude that High Trees took on that role, recognising that it did require a lot of work.

Many interviewees said that the BYB Youth Worker and Partnership Officer has been a real asset to the partnership, helping to make the partnership more effective. In particular, they valued her presence across the partner organisations, providing a familiar face to the young people. They also commented on the success of that role being able to coordinate activities across the partner organisations, maintaining momentum on partnership activity, and promoting the partnership (and subsequently their organisations) through social media. Essentially, this was seen as a critical role in the partnership.

Many interviewees also commented on the ability to undertake joint training within the partnership, which was thought to have worked really well. Not only had it helped to share resources and offer training in a more cost effective way, but also helped to build relationships across the partner organisations. Interviewees said they would like to see more of this in the future.

The ability to support each other in a collaborative environment has led to improved peer learning and capacity building among partner organisations. Sharing expertise, ideas and different approaches has helped to improve knowledge and practices, and has been facilitated by a high degree of trust, openness and collaboration among partner organisations.

Many partners said that they had built skills and expertise around partnership working, which in turn had improved their confidence to either be involved in or lead other partnerships beyond the BYB Partnership. Further partnerships have been formed among several of the BYB partners, showing that the BYB Partnership has proved to be a successful way of working.

"WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT WE HAD A VERY STRONG LEAD PARTNER IN HIGH TREES, AND GRACE IN PARTICULAR WITH HER LEADERSHIP. HIGH TREES' ABILITY TO TAKE A LEAD ON SOME OF THE TOUGHER THINGS LIKE PULLING TOGETHER BIDS, MANAGING THE PARTNERSHIP, MEANS IT HASN'T BEEN SO ONEROUS ON SMALLER ORGANISATIONS.

Leader



THE CHALLENGES



Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a very challenging period, which inevitably shifted focus away from partnership activity. Partners felt that it would take some time to get the partnership back to where it was before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Most interviewees mentioned that some partners are more engaged than others, but that they didn't really know why and that it hadn't been clarified within the partnership. Some queried whether different levels of engagement was actually a problem or something to be expected of a partnership like this, and it was evident that smaller organisations lack capacity to fully engage at times, particularly where there are only one or two members of staff.

'EVERYBODY HAS BEEN IN SORT OF SURVIVAL MODE WORKING REALLY HARD TO SUPPORT THEIR CLIENTS WHO ARE OFTEN VERY VULNERABLE. AND IT'S JUST TAKEN A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY. AND I THINK THE PARTNERSHIP, WHILE IT HAS CONTINUED AND THERE HAS BEEN SHARING OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT, SOME OF THE COOL, INTERESTING STUFF WE WERE DOING PRIOR TO 2020 HAD TO TAKE A BACKSEAT JUST BECAUSE IT JUST WASN'T APPROPRIATE DURING LOCKDOWN.'

Youth Worker

The lack of transparency around certain aspects of the partnership and the circumstances of different partners was causing some issues, particularly at the operational level, where there was a sense that discussions from the leadership group don't always filter down. Interviewees at this level also said they would like more clarity over decision making powers and processes within the different levels of governance in the partnership. Some practitioners suggested that the structure and content of meetings could be improved, with more opportunities to discuss partnership matters and encourage more sharing of ideas and experiences. It was suggested that this could be a separate forum for youth workers.

Joint events and activities had worked well, but some said that they would like to see a more coordinated schedule of events and activities, and that the partnership would benefit from a jointly delivered programme with a clearer set of outputs and outcomes. Some also commented that there could be a better referral process, as the current process relies heavily on personal relationships. A better understanding of each partner would enable better referrals.

"I THINK THERE'S MAYBE LIKE A CORE GROUP THAT WE FEEL LIKE WE HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH. AND THEN THERE ARE OTHERS WHO IT DOES STILL FEEL MORE LIKE A PARTNERSHIP ON PAPER. BUT AGAIN, THAT'S BECAUSE THEY MIGHT BE NEWER TO THE PARTNERSHIP, OR THEIR WORK IS JUST QUITE SPECIFIC."

Youth Worker

LOOKING FORWARD



Financial sustainability was a concern for some, who commented that the partnership would need new ways of generating income and shared concerns about what would happen to the partnership if they were unable to get further funding.

Many felt that the dedicated partnership roles would need to continue going forwards, but also that more resource was needed at the management/leadership level, with concerns that too much pressure was put on High Trees as the lead partner organisation. More resources to support High Trees would be beneficial and would remove any risk to the partnership if it was unable to fulfil that role.

I THINK ANOTHER AREA WE SHOULD CONSIDER IS FORMALISING THE PARTNERSHIP ONE WAY OR ANOTHER BECAUSE THAT MAKES IT EASIER WITH FUNDING. I THINK THE BOARD WOULD HAVE REPS FROM EACH ORGANISATION ON IT, BUT YOU WOULD ACTUALLY EMPLOY A CEO. PERHAPS IT WOULD BE A CIO IN ITS OWN RIGHT, WITH SENIOR MEMBERS OF STAFF FROM EACH MEMBER ORGANISATION ON THE BOARD, WITH AN INDEPENDENT CEO. I THINK IT WOULD BRING BENEFITS FROM A FUNDING PERSPECTIVE. IT WOULD GIVE US A MORE POWERFUL VOICE BEYOND LAMBETH. IT WOULD HELP WITH THE SHARING OF LEADERSHIP TOO.'

Leader

Some also commented that the other partner organisations ought to take more of a shared responsibility towards leadership. Most interviewees hadn't thought too much about the structure of the partnership, and on the whole, felt that the current structure worked well. There was a reluctance to formalise the partnership too much, pointing out that the current structure is democratic and equal, and allows the organisations to bring their own individual identities to the partnership. Others pointed out that currently the partnership is very much based on personal relationships, and that a more formal structure would have benefits, particularly around funding, having a more powerful voice, more support at the leadership level and strengthening the governance structures.

Some said that at the least, a clearer and more focused shared agreement of the values and commitments of the partnership could be put in place, that all partners sign up to. Some thought it would be beneficial to review the strategy, and that they would like the partnership to be forward looking, anticipating issues and needs that could arise in the future. This could include amore sophisticated strategy around skills and career development, possibly having a role in training and developing a youth workforce for the future.

'PRE THE PANDEMIC, THERE WAS THIS STRATEGY, HOW SHOULD WE BE DEVELOPING THE NEXT FEW YEARS? I TWAS REALLY EXTENSIVE, BUT MAYBE BECAUSE WE'VE JUST GONE THROUGH A PANDEMIC, IT JUST FEELS LIKE MAYBE THERE'S A NEED FOR A BIT OF A STRATEGY REVIEW, OR RATHER THAN IT BEING EVERY THREE YEARS AND A MASSIVE THING, A BIT OF A TOUCH IN EVERY YEAR TO SEE IF PRIORITIES HAVE SHIFTED? DO WE NEED TO CHANGE ANYTHING IN TERMS OF THE STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS OR THE NEXT FEW YEAR?'

Youth Worker

