



Bristol Belonging Strategy: Belonging in the Community 2021 – 2024



BRISTOL
ONE CITY



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Introduction

As childhood gives way to adolescence, young people reach out beyond their families to find connection with their peers and with the wider world. The age at which children look outwards may be culturally and socially influenced, circumstantial as well as individual, and this means that children begin to seek reference and meaning externally anywhere from the age of eight upwards. However, this strand within the over-arching Belonging Strategy represents a development stage for young people from around 12 years and upwards and, using their views, sets out to describe their opportunities and challenges, and then to establish a set of priorities that helps our young people to feel valued, held and supported in the context of their City.

This is the stage when empathy, a view of fairness, equality and justice or of disparity, inequality and injustice is cast. Within their communities, young people explore their independence and identity; they seek out like-minded people, find belonging through faith, through music, through sexual orientation and through political or social values and beliefs. Their community may be geographically founded, or it may be a community of care, of religion or belief – the significance is in how it supports and holds the young person to create a sense of belonging.

Family is a diverse concept ranging from heterosexual birth families with siblings through to blended families of different faiths and ethnicities, through to life in foster care. In Bristol, there are 642 (Dec 2020) Children in Care whose love, care and resilience depends on the Local Authority and community of Bristol to provide an equal playing field with others and to develop their gifts for a happy and successful life.

Some young people will benefit from a strong platform of family values, care and support which gives them confidence and resilience with which to tackle adversity. Others may have less support; their family life may have been characterised by challenge or by lack of love and care and their resilience will be less developed. However, research tells us that community plays its part in providing the stimulus that may not have been available through family life¹. Positive role models and strong adult advocates can be the rock that is needed for young people to thrive, and a good network of support in the community is vital for all young people.

For young people growing up in Bristol, community can help them to achieve their potential, activating them as citizens with rights and responsibilities, bringing significance and meaning to collective, social life, enabling them to develop safely and strongly as well as contributing to the world around them. The prosperity of the City depends on our enablement of young people as citizens and our sight of them as positive assets. We need to hear from and see young people to learn about their experiences in order to help us to prepare them for their best lives as citizens of Bristol.



¹ Resilience Approaches to Supporting Young People’s Mental Health: Appraising the Evidence Base for Schools and Communities, Professor Angie Hart and Dr Becky Heaver, September 2015

Vision

The Belonging Strategy vision is:

- For our children and young people to have the best possible start in life, gaining the support and skills they need to prosper in adulthood
- For our children and young people to be welcomed into a city with a culture of nurture and care, with opportunities to grow with support from their community
- For our children and young people to have their needs recognised at the earliest point in a system that collaborates to help them thrive
- For our children and young people to have a home which sustains, nourishes and protects them in safe and healthy families
- For our children and young people to have a confident sense of self and identity in a cohesive and diverse city
- For our children and young people to access education that is inclusive and values diversity, where they learn from each other and benefit from an understanding of their different experiences
- For our children and young people to own the whole city and experience and benefit from all that Bristol offers





Principles

We want every child and young person to feel a keen sense of connection to their city and a freedom to be themselves. The work required to help grow a sense of belonging is wide-ranging and will be delivered by a broad range of partners. This is set out across four related strategies that all commit to shared principles and ways of working.

Our focus on belonging is underpinned by the recognition that the quality of our relationships is crucial to ensuring that every child, young person and parent and carer feels themselves to be an integral, valued, and visible part of their community.

Our work on belonging supports our city-wide work to develop and implement a system-wide, **trauma-informed approach**. Trauma Informed approaches recognise the prevalence of trauma in people’s lives and acknowledge the potential effects that this can have on individuals and their families, networks, and communities. They are non-labelling, respectful and hopeful approaches that recognise people’s strengths and resilience and their potential for healing. We will work with partners and communities to deliver this strategy in line with our agreed **‘Principles for Trauma Informed Practice’**.

A trauma informed approach is aligned with our ongoing commitment to ensuring that we **Think Family**; that we ensure we consider and take account of the needs of children and adults in all our work.

We will also continue to focus on identifying risk and vulnerability at **the earliest opportunity**. Children’s needs are usually best met by supporting their parents and carers, and preventative and early help responses are critical to avoid issues from escalating. We will focus on **families’ strengths** and seek to develop the family’s capacity to look after their own needs; we will work to enable parents and carers to access universal and community services wherever possible, and appropriate.

These approaches require us to **listen**, understand and **work together** with children, young people, and their families. Understanding and responding to individuals’ **views and experiences** is essential to this way of working.

We will continue to improve our **partnership** working. As we create joined up systems so that there is **no ‘wrong door’** to services we will also build **social capital** by ensuring our systems and interactions are based on shared values, understanding, and trust.



Challenges and opportunities

What are the issues for young people in Bristol?

Young people face challenges and opportunities for their futures, often impacted by structural decisions over which they have little influence. The environment, equality and access, education, training and employment, mental health, poverty and transport are fundamental to the current and future quality of their lives. Our approach must be to capitalise on the opportunities and to tackle the issues together, head-on, building resilience through a change of culture in our City driven by an understanding of what matters to children and young people and their communities.

Help and support within their communities is important for young people, and in Bristol, we have a strong youth sector with diverse and authentic organisations committed to providing that support.

In Bristol, there is a strong **Youth Council** whose place in the political governance of the City is authentic and established with manifesto links into the One City Plan. The Youth Council sets its mandate for priority action every year, and for 2019-21 these are:

Equal Bristol

Supported mental wellbeing

Environment and transport

Knife crime and holiday hunger

We have seen through the consultation held for our strategy and through sector-led engagement with children and young people that these priorities are widely held and supported, and they are therefore included in our planning. As priorities are revised annually, we will reflect changes within our actions and revisions to the strategy.

Environment

In November 2019, young people in Bristol marched with Greta Thunberg in protest at the dangers of climate change. Air quality is poor in the City and is impacting the current and future health of our children.

Bristol is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, aspiring towards a healthier and more sustainable City. This commitment speaks to the values of our children and young people. With a real awareness of the global and local impact of climate change, children and young people are looking for our leadership in tackling this issue.



Our future plans and ambitions with and on behalf of our children and young people need to create environmental opportunities and prosperity for their leisure, education and employment so that they see the benefit for themselves and the whole City.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Good mental health and wellbeing for young people is fundamental to their sense of identity, resilience to cope with challenges, ambitions for the future, and sense of belonging in their families and communities. However, under-investment in services, pervasive social media, adverse childhood experiences, criminal and sexual exploitation and youth violence and other factors have led to a situation where wellbeing and mental health is a real concern for and by young people.

This is particularly the case for some higher risk groups including Children in Care, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, those involved in the criminal justice system, LGBTQ, Young Carers, those with Special Educational Needs or disability, those impacted by domestic abuse, and those living in income deprived families. Where these children also live within communities that lack cohesion and resilience, their sense of value and self-worth may be lower. The absence of a trauma pathway impacts on our ability to resolve issues with and for young people effectively. For children in the criminal justice system, many have unmet speech, language and communication needs impacting their current and future lives; for children in care, mental health needs can influence the availability of provision, leading to young people residing at a distance from Bristol. This is damaging for family relationships and networks and leads to a greater lack of belonging for themselves and their own families as adults.



It is important that in support of a sense of belonging, we ensure that children and young people have access to mental health and wellbeing support at the earliest opportunity and at a level that they need to thrive. This may be through sports or interest clubs and groups or through youth services who may have good relationships already with young people who are struggling. Schools are in a strong position to identify mental health and wellbeing needs early, and to be the base for many services and we will seek to build on this using the Community Health IThrive model and our roll out of trauma informed practice. School-based initiatives include Bristol's Healthy Schools Programme, new mental health support teams planned for schools and colleges early 2022, and therapeutic work through both Targeted Youth Support and Off the Record's team of Wellbeing Practitioners. Bristol CAMHS pathway also now accepts referrals from school health nurses as well as GPs.

Race Equality

Black Lives Matter has highlighted the inequality and disadvantage experienced by non-white citizens in the western world. A new momentum has been seen nationally and visibly in Bristol as the statue of Edward Colston was toppled in protest at his links with the slave trade. Wide-ranging plans are being put in place to tackle this and our Belonging focus will show young people that their faces and their cultures are fully reflected in all parts of our City and that the differences around us are our strengths.

Our strategy needs to strive towards a City where every cultural opportunity embraces every child, helping to develop



knowledge and understanding, and a sense of wider belonging. We know too the impact of racism which can disable the gifts and the talent of BAME children when the prosperity of the City depends on every child being able to reach their potential. We need to do more to prove that we are a city committed to equality of access and opportunity and to allow diversity to be celebrated.

School Inclusion

Inclusive schools protect young people by supporting them within a learning and development community. Exclusion from school prevents access to good education and a foundation for good economic access but also encourages a sense of being on the outside and of failing to fit in and achieve. The rates of exclusion in Bristol are too high, preventing children and young people from belonging in what should be a formative and positive environment. This can also be the trigger for 'belonging' elsewhere in a community of crime and exploitation where success is measured and met with immediate reward - and where belonging can soon become a compulsion rather than a choice. Some children and young people speak of bullying and of not feeling respected in their school and we must work together with our settings to change this perception because even where this is a minority of children, it leads to cynicism and under-achievement, impacting wellbeing, life chances and prosperity.



The feeling of belonging and inclusion in school needs to be within the context of the right school resources to meet need. Bristol has a capital transformation programme focusing on meeting the needs of children with SEND because the right provision is not always available close to home. Children and young people have told us that belonging very often means being able to be alongside friends and being able to access the same things as their peer group. Reducing enduring inequalities for children with SEND depends on ensuring access to schools and colleges within the community and on promoting independence and choice in their daily lives.

Community Assets

Very often, it is the people, the venues and the offer within a child's community that helps them to find their sense of belonging. Parks and green spaces, community and youth centres, not for profit groups offering sport, leisure, skills and just open access give our children and young people somewhere safe to go amidst trusted adults. We know that traffic and cars parked obstructing access and sight make the streets less safe for teenagers whose stage of brain development makes them less able to judge risks and more likely to act with compulsion. We need to consider this within our communities, ensuring that we protect the routes to 'play' and see this as important even as our children seem to be small adults. For the Parks and Green spaces review, young people are telling us just how important a local environment can be, and adventure play parks like Felix Road are the beating heart of family life, providing the foundations of real community belonging in a relatively deprived part of the City. This is 'affordance' in its strongest sense, showing us that what the environment offers the individual is priceless and should be nurtured.



Our review of Youth Services begins now using the strategic intent of the Belonging Strategy and working with the voices of young people and with the wider youth sector to help us all to re-imagine the shape of our youth offer and to build and retain those community assets. A new Youth Work Alliance is developing a strategy to sustain and build on the range of expertise available for young people through the sector. The Local Authority is fully aligned with this and will seek to work with and across the sector so that the help available for young people is joined up and co-developed.

Bristol is committed to developing a Youth Zone in the south of the City which will offer world class, everyday provision to support young people through an expansive offer of leisure and support. Our vision for this is that it will be fully inclusive and will work alongside the web of local support that exists already across our communities. It is our intention that the south Youth Zone will later be replicated in the north of the City.

Violence & Extra familial Harm

The exploitation of children and young people by adults and organised criminal groups is an issue of critical national concern leading to neighbourhoods and communities where young people do not always feel safe. Nationally, knife crime has become a leading cause of death and injury for those under 25. A cycle of fear alongside manipulation means that young people are carrying and using weapons as their lives are perceived as more unsafe and more chaotic. These forms of exploitation are more prevalent for our most vulnerable young people, often appealing and taking hold because of poverty, lack of aspiration and adverse childhood experiences and where they may be excluded from school. Where a need for belonging is not met positively, young people may look to groups and influencers who can offer this albeit with serious conditions and coercion which become apparent when it is too late. Bristol has seen a rise in serious youth violence in line with that of other core



cities, experiencing the most serious impact to communities through life changing injuries and loss of lives, but also a hyped sense of fear by young people and their families for their safety.

The Safer Options Strategy 2020-30 consulted with young people and stakeholders to develop a set of priorities for tackling serious youth violence and many of these priorities would build resilience and improve futures generally and are included within our actions. The priorities are for places to go and things to do, positive role models as well as raising awareness, disrupting organised crime, education, targeted help and more support for struggling families.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has changed the way we all live our lives. For young people, stepping out into the world should be transformative. With schools and colleges closed and social distancing in place, critical parts of their emotional, physical, mental and creative developmental pathway have been interrupted. Not only that, but it is young adults who are most likely to be adversely impacted by the economic recession caused by the virus. Do young people have a future worth working towards and what will their early adult lives look like?



The Babbasa Changes research project² evidenced these concerns held by young people as the first lock-down took hold. We must develop strong recovery plans for young people and create the environment in which they can test and learn, build their characters and reach for a bright future because without this, they have a hill to climb.

² https://babbasa.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Bridge_to_Equality_Summary_2020-PDF-4.7KB.pdf



What does the community look like for young people?

Bristol is a city of different realities from north to south and east to west.

Neighbourhoods hold their own identities with a big variance in wealth or poverty which is starkly mirrored by opportunity, access, safety, health and wellbeing. These differences are important in determining how young people define themselves and where they feel they 'belong'.

Headline data:

- The youth population of 8-19 year olds account for 61,831 young people in Bristol with 48% female, 50% male and 2% of young people not recorded.
- 23% live in E-Central, 40% in North and 37% in South of the City.
- Consideration of our City's cultures is increasingly important. 24% of 8-19 year olds are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and this rises to 29% of 0-7 year olds.
- The uptake of free school meals (an indicator of poverty) ranges from 6% to 40%; areas of high deprivation can be found in each of the three areas but are more concentrated in the South.
- Rates of anti-social behaviour and youth offending are high in pockets of the City in the South and East Central
- Rates of young people aged 16-19 not in Education Training and Employment mirrors this geography, high in South and East Central.



What do young people tell us about their communities in Bristol?

Community was described as having people around you who get on well together, care about each other, are trustworthy and kind. Children and young people told us that family, friends, school, neighbours and home play an important role in ensuring their sense of belonging within their community – being ‘part of a group’ seemed to be the essential element for belonging.

A minority of young people described ‘community’ in a negative way including words such as unsafe, trashy, kind but sometimes mean, angry, sad, unfriendly, and intimidating. This highlights that not all young people can currently feel a sense of belonging in their communities.

41% of survey respondents³ said that they feel represented and valued in their community, and 9% did not. Just 27% of children living in care felt that they are represented and valued in their community (lowest of all groups) and this seems to show a lack of self-worth and esteem for children who are unable to live with and amongst family and networks.

Gay and bisexual young people were also less likely to feel represented and valued in their community than those of a heterosexual orientation. And within our Quality of Life Survey⁴, young people aged 16+ were asked about belonging to their neighbourhood: City-wide, 63% (all age) and 56% aged 16-24 felt that they did belong, but this figure drops to 39% (all age) in the most deprived areas of the City evidencing a significant change in perception relative to prosperity.

³ Belonging Strategy, Children and Young People Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020

⁴ Missing reference

The most common theme raised by children and young people enabling them to feel like they belong in Bristol was to ensure that the city is inclusive. Everyone should feel welcome and able to be themselves, we were told, and no one should be discriminated against due to their race, religion, sexuality, or anything else. We should accept all as they are and make sure we share and learn other cultures. A large number of respondents told us how important a wide variety of youth groups and clubs are for young people, helping them to meet others safely and to develop confidence.

We were also told about the importance of supporting those who need help so that they can feel a sense of belonging. Many comments highlighted the importance of children and young people having a support network and to know where they can go to get help. Children and young people need the feeling that someone is supporting them.

The following is a snapshot of the views of children and young people responding to our survey either through questionnaires or through focus groups:

Be open and supportive of change and welcome other groups of people e.g. ethnicity and sexuality.

Belonging for me is feeling comfortable with where you are.

I think for me belonging is just having a place where you don't have to change yourself or hide something about yourself to feel accepted or anything. Or you can just kind of be a very like a genuine version of yourself and still feel that you're loved and you've still got a place in that space.

Belonging is a community supportive of who you are.

I think Bristol needs to have more community clubs and maybe reduces the price or make it free for the children and young people who may not be able to afford it. Also this will give children and young people the opportunity to make friends and feel like they are a part of something.

For me the Somalian community is a family, like you know people in it, you help people out.

The values and beliefs that we have create a bond between people and that bond makes you feel like you belong.

Respect young people and give as much support as needed. Young people feel misunderstood by adults and the media. Bristol needs to reach out and give mental health support to the younger generation.

You shouldn't categorise people into different parts of the city.



What will be our priorities in response to what young people are telling us

Central to our priorities is the determination to change the community to fit our young people rather than expecting our young people to change to fit in. We will reach out to include and we will enable access to widen the opportunities and experiences for everyone.

To do this, we need to alter mind-sets and environmental planning around boundaries and neighbourhoods for inclusion and safety and we also need to give effective help at the earliest point to build a platform for children to be able to take these opportunities. Good Public Health approaches must be in place to build on the principles of healthy, happy and safe to improve outcomes; a systematic approach is needed to manage the transition between life as a child and as an adult which can be sudden and unsupported.

We need to build a whole system understanding of complex and compound needs through evidence-based analysis (NHSEI Framework for Integrated Care for example), using this to shape services and approaches; for young people who will use services as adults, we need improved transitional arrangements that see their lives over the life-course.

We must lobby for sustainable funding to effectively plan for extra-familial harm; we need to work more effectively in partnership, exploring how young people could benefit from drop-in centres to support both health and welfare issues – for example NHS Health in the City paper; and we must source safe housing for families and for young people who find themselves adrift when they are looking to live in and return to their home City. In short, we should take a ‘health in all policies’ approach which considers the health outcomes for children and young people within all of our policy decisions and recommendations [What-Good-Children-and-Young-Peoples-Public-Health-Looks-Like.pdf \(adph.org.uk\)](#)

Re-visioning of youth services

Themes	Outcomes	Priorities for action
<p>1 Physical Access</p>	<p>Young people of all faiths, genders, sexual orientation, disability, and ethnicities are safe to be out in their City.</p> <p>Transport is affordable and inclusive, linking young people to services, leisure and opportunities.</p> <p>Young people are not excluded from their educational setting.</p>	<p>Develop a flag-ship youth centre (Youth Zone) with an aspirational offer for young people in the South of Bristol.</p> <p>Work with the wider youth sector to develop and commission a youth offer with skilled workers able to meet the needs of young people from all parts of the City.</p> <p>Work across the sector to ensure that facilities and events are inclusive with particular emphasis on protected characteristics.</p> <p>Introduce travel initiatives for all children and young people linking with the post-16 Education and skills access strategy.</p> <p>Fully engage with our Education leaders to support them to support children and to commission provision that meets academic and wellbeing needs.</p> <p>Ensure we are commissioning local specialist education provision to meet the needs of children with SEND.</p>
<p>2 Cultural Access</p>	<p>Multi-cultural events are a visible part of the City's offer.</p> <p>Youth Services deliver culturally relevant services.</p> <p>Bristol is a City recognised for difference and diversity.</p>	<p>Work with civic partners across all sectors to consider how we use the city centre to bring in food festivals, pop up space for cultural activities to encourage young people and their families to access the city centre and to experience a diverse range of music, food, art and culture reflective of the diversity of our population.</p> <p>Provide education through play and youth services of difference, diversity and value which represents our population.</p> <p>Publicly celebrate diversity through support of events representing our citizens with protected characteristics.</p>

Themes	Outcomes	Priorities for action
<p>3 Economic Access</p>	<p>Every young person can afford to access services, leisure and opportunities.</p> <p>Every young person is in good quality education, training, and employment.</p> <p>Every young person lives in good quality accommodation with the level of support that they need.</p>	<p>Work with all partners to develop an access initiative for those with less resources.</p> <p>Strengthen our EET offer to include diverse programmes to support engagement. Strengthen careers advice, implement apprenticeship schemes across the Local Authority and partners. Look for funding to increase the Care Experienced ‘Commitment therapy approach’ to support other disadvantaged young people to stick with apprenticeships, training or employment when it gets uncomfortable for them.</p> <p>Create new homes across the City to meet the shortfall for families.</p> <p>Re-commission the 16+ accommodation pathway for sufficient housing and support to meet need Including supported housing and shared housing for young people with complex or additional needs.</p>
<p>4 Emotional & Psychological Access</p>	<p>Young people have early access to help with worries and mental health and ongoing additional help where this is needed.</p> <p>Children and young people in Care are supported to maintain their support networks.</p> <p>The mental health benefits of green spaces are maximised.</p> <p>A better joined up approach to working with children and young people who have experienced trauma and adversity.</p>	<p>Preventive approaches to be embedded at every tier of services through our ACE informed schools and an Ithrive approach.</p> <p>Develop a trauma pathway to support our identification of need and treatment through evidence-based stages.</p> <p>Expand our provision for children looked after to live in and around the City close to their family and networks.</p> <p>Develop our Parks and Green spaces strategy as assets for connection with place, identity and belonging.</p> <p>Co-develop the Framework for Integrated Care which will help us to understand and support children and young people with complex needs.</p> <p>Develop a trauma pathway to signpost the right help for children and young people based on their life experiences and presentation.</p>

Themes	Outcomes	Priorities for action
<p>5 Health & Wellbeing Access</p>	<p>Young people have access to good and sufficient food.</p> <p>Young people have access to safe leisure and sports provision.</p>	<p>Develop our network of provision to meet holiday hunger.</p> <p>Develop a food and nutrition work stream within our strategic priorities.</p> <p>Ensure that our Parks and Green Spaces strategy gives access to safe spaces for children in all neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Support the delivery of a sector-wide strategy for youth work, co-designing our priorities, aims and ambitions with third sector partners so that our energy and direction is clear and investable.</p> <p>Commission our youth services provision to ensure a focus on promoting healthy lifestyles.</p>
<p>6 Access to a Safe Community</p>	<p>Help and support for young people is not interrupted and is tailored for their needs as they turn 18 and become adults.</p> <p>The environment in which children live is healthy.</p> <p>Children and young people are able to traverse and access the City without fear of harm.</p> <p>Children and young people are protected from exploitation.</p>	<p>Develop the Youth Zone in the south of the City to enable young people from the most deprived areas to have access to sport and leisure opportunities as well as help and support.</p> <p>Develop a Transition pathway with resources to support with health and social care needs. Embedding a life-course approach to services so that young people are helped to envisage a happy, healthy and prosperous future.</p> <p>Implement the Clean Air Zone to reduce harmful pollution.</p> <p>Strategies through KBSP to 'clean up' and target crime and hot spot areas without delay.</p> <p>Safe and visible cycle and transport routes to and between areas of the City.</p> <p>Raise awareness in all communities of child exploitation and encourage police reporting.</p> <p>Develop out-reach and in-reach youth work within key communities to discourage perpetrators and to build resilience within the whole community.</p>



I want a city that respects
everyone and everything,

That's accepts people with
open arms

I want a city that has dreams,

A city that will be spoken of in
common years,

I want a city that's has great
personalities and people that's
don't give up

I want a city that has democracy
and listens to everyone's point
of view

I want a city that is caring and
doesn't bring u down

I want a city that is the future

Ruwada Dahir, 13 years