

# THE COMMON

A new project from Caring in Bristol dedicated to supporting  
young people in vulnerable circumstances

**At The Common we believe in young people.  
We have a relentless commitment to them and a  
belief in their creativity, capacity for change and  
unique contribution to the world.**







## WHAT WE DO

We know that strong relationships between young people in vulnerable circumstances and those who work with them are one of the most powerful tools for change. We help young people who feel at rock bottom to untangle their situations, towards an understanding that a downward spiral is not inevitable.

We work with 16 to 25 year olds in Bristol who find themselves in complex circumstances – such as homelessness, acute poverty, family breakdown, mental health crisis and social isolation. We link young people to other key services in the city which they otherwise might not find alone.

**“I believe that hope is grown through struggle and perseverance, and is therefore intensely personal.....but I do also think that hope is a collective state – it is completely tied to the product of our interactions with others and our place.”**

Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City of Hope, 2018

At The Common we use the strong relationships of trust we build with young people to add value to what other services are offering in the city. Our drop-in centre works at the collective level, creating a welcoming, nurturing and hopeful environment, re-creating a sense of community and belonging.

Our 1:1 key worker support works at the personal level and looks and feels very different to more traditional needs-led services by doing away with formal helper/helped ways of working. Instead, we work with young people encouraging them to find their own solutions, manage their own relationships, and build their own supportive, healthy social networks in Bristol.

## WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US

In 2016, Caring in Bristol conducted a consultation with young people and the professionals who work with them: "See Me - exploring unmet need through the eyes of young adults and professionals in Bristol."

What we heard was that traditional care structures designed to advise and support young people who need help the most are often designed around a single issue, for example homelessness, poverty, or mental health. Interactions between young people and workers are often brief and transactional. Young people repeatedly told us that this is not what they need when they are at their most vulnerable.

They told us that often, more than anything, they want someone to talk to, to get to know their complexities and their talents and to help sort things out, someone who they can trust and who will help them think hopefully about the future.

**“They just knew everything about me and remembered everything I’d said, the conversations we’d have meant something. That’s a relationship built on remembered conversations.”**

Young Person speaking in the Caring in Bristol See Me Report 2016,  
*(funded by the Raby Trust)*

## HOW OUR APPROACH IS DISTINCTIVE

We work with young people over time in order to create lasting change. At our new drop-in centre in the heart of the city, young people can find us without an appointment, have a hot meal, keep safe during the day and build strong relationships of trust alongside workers and other young people. Through this we make sure that young people experiencing multiple difficulties don't fall through the gaps, that they find the help they need from other specialist services in the city and that they connect with people and places in the community to re-discover a sense of purpose.



## HOW WE DO IT

Our skilled and dedicated staff team have the expertise and relational skills to work with young people who have failed to engage with – or have been rejected from – other services. Our key workers support them to reflect on their decisions, navigate the system, advocate on their behalf, empower them to know their rights, motivate them to attend appointments and give the right information in order to receive the right help.

We work with a strong focus on the relational. We celebrate with young people when things go well and commiserate when things go wrong. We remember birthdays.

We resolve urgent practical and social problems, whilst remembering our shared human need for emotional warmth, humour and creative expression. For example, in partnership with Basement Studio, music is a strong part of our drop-in sessions, with young people showcasing their singing and lyric-writing skills.

**“Someone may have traumas in their life, some may just feel sad for no reason, some may have problems at home, some have to grow up too fast, it could be anything but they all share one thing: they need someone to talk to that they believe cares about them. If they had someone they could turn to, someone they could trust, who they feel cares about them as an individual, someone they could relate to, they would feel much more comfortable and on the same level, and therefore [would] be likely to engage and build a positive relationship.”**

(Young Person speaking in the Caring in Bristol See Me Report, 2016)

# WHY WE DO IT

- Bristol has 42 areas in the most deprived 10% in England, including 6 in the most deprived 1%.
- 16,500 children live in poverty in Bristol, which at 20.1% is significantly higher than national 16.8% (2015).
- In 2017/18 a third of Bristol pupils (16,700 children) were disadvantaged, and over half in Filwood (52%), Lawrence Hill (56%) and Hartcliffe & Withywood (61%).
- 7.4% of 16-17 year olds (2016/17) were “not in education, employment or training” (NEET), worse than the national average (6.0%).
- Rates of young people admitted to hospital due to self-harm (512 per 100,000) are still significantly worse than the England average (430 per 100,000).

Bristol City Council State of Bristol update 2018



# THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

In conjunction with our other Caring in Bristol projects for young people (Bristol Nightstop and Room 45), The Common is now part of our day and night 24 hour safety net for young people at risk of homelessness and associated risks. The impact of our drop-in, key working and emergency accommodation work includes:

- Minimising the risk of rough sleeping
- Minimising risks associated with sudden homelessness (poor health, poor mental health, disengagement from employment or training, estrangement from family and community)
- Minimising the risk of young people disappearing from services in to the adult homelessness community
- Increasing young people's involvement in their community
- Increasing the likelihood of successful encounters with statutory services
- Increasing the range of other services young people have access to
- Decreasing social isolation
- Increased safety during the day/night



## OUR PARTNERSHIPS

We know we don't serve young people well if we work in isolation. We work hard to build strong relationships with our partner agencies in Bristol and beyond. Partners include Bristol City Council, 1625 Independent People, Basement Studio, YMCA, Paper Arts, Bristol Law Clinic and the Youth Education Service. We have an active Advisory Board made up of local practitioners, academics and creatives who help us to think deeply about our work.

Our most important partners are the young people we work with.

We are actively seeking partnerships with a diverse range of local businesses and organisations who would like to support our work, and who share our mission to change the systems around young people in vulnerable situations for the better.

**Here are some of the key messages from our See Me consultation, which have shaped The Common..**

**“It’s about starting where they’re at and not where you think they should be. For several of the young people I have worked with it has been evident that their key worker, quite literally, has been the first and only adult in their lives who they have been able to trust and rely upon. In my experience those workers have supported and enabled young people with chaotic and volatile lives to attend appointments for legal advice, to understand, question and challenge their rights and responsibilities, to build successful and meaningful relationships with school and social work professionals and to engage positively with other agencies.”**

Messages from professionals in Bristol working with young people

**“Many services are not equipped to do relationship based work, but young people with chaotic lifestyles and complex support needs would often benefit from pre-engagement work to sort out practical problems and bring some stability to lives, without which they often fail in a specific service.”**

Messages from professionals in Bristol working with young people



**“Just wanted to say thank you so much for arranging this for me. It puts a smile on my face knowing I’m doing something and having something important to do which I feel I’m good at.” Young person who is now volunteering at The Common and supporting other young people.**

Key Messages from young people



