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Context analysis of full circle

I am undertaking my first-year placement with Full Circle (FC) @Docklands. FC has been running since the 1980s and delivers youth services. The FC project is an independent organisation at the heart of St. Pauls that is led and run by the community. In 2015 in partnership with Aspiration, Creation, Elevation Community Interest Company (ACE CIC), FC took over ownership of the Docklands building in the community asset transfer (CAT) (Powell, 2019) and within the agreement made with ACE, FC became largely responsible for the lease and management of Docklands (Newey 2019) .

FC works to promote social inclusion and equality by encouraging all young people in the neighbourhood, community and around Bristol to reach their potential irrespective of their circumstances and social economic, through creating a ‘learning’ environment which is inspirational and nurturing for young people. FC’s vision is “to enable every child to have a healthy, active and creative childhood and to see all members of its community reach their potential regardless of their circumstances” (Newey, 2019). FC operates to achieve this vision by supporting young people through creative arts, media, sports, education and training programmes such as computer coding. FC has a mission to use the space in the community centre to create a positive impact on some of the most vulnerable people in the city. FC strives to build liable business practice where it is able to provide consistent and reliable youth activity to the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Bristol regardless of grants (Ibid). FC values the power of community, and so by supporting the young people, residents and organisations that focus on the community, FC aims to enhance equality in Bristol that creates opportunities for everyone (Newey, 2019).

FC has developed policies to help guide the work they do with young people. Some of the polices include Behavioural Policy Youth Services, Incident Management policy, Child Protection Safeguarding Policy, Data Protection and Confidentiality policy, Drug and Alcohol policy, Lone Working policy, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults from Abuse policy and more. These policies are put in place to protect the young people from risk of harm or abuse, protect the young people when they are in the community building and protect members of staff.

After activities, young people are encouraged to provide feedback about how they found the activities they were involved in and whether they are any recommendations for improvements or change. Further, after every session, staff get the opportunity to debrief, discussing what went well and whether there were any changes in young people such as improvement in their self-esteem and confidence throughout the session. These comments are put down in a monitoring form which are further evaluated and used for some funding applications. Although the monitoring form provides good observation about the young people, I have identified that young people’s voices are not always been heard directly. I believe that if a young person is able to say directly that the sessions have helped increased their confidence, it is more effective than the observations from staff.

FC also runs parents/carers group every first Monday of the month which supports parents in the community and in the city. The parents/carers aim to provide a safe space to share concerns, worries, ideas and support. There is a need for development in this group and at present, FC is finding ways of combining the parents/carers with young people groups.

New business developments and flats build maybe argued to have brought investments and perhaps ‘reduced crime’ in St. Pauls (Palmer, 2019). Even though more investment may be seen as a good thing for St. Pauls, it brings with it other problems to the community such as gentrification. Clark (2005) describes gentrification as ‘a process involving a change in the population of land users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users together with an associated change in the built environment through reinvestment and in fix capital’. The consequences of gentrification in St Pauls is that it may cause displacement of the local people to perhaps move to other unaffordable areas in the city. In 2011, Bell found that 41% of people in St. Pauls are ‘income deprived’ and 81% of children in St. Pauls are living in families that are income deprived as compared to the rest of Bristol. Further, with young people aged 8 - 25 undergoing a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, it may create stress and anxiety (Coleman, 2007) and failure to manage this could result in long term social, economic, psychological and health problems (DfES, 2006; Young Foundation 2009). St Pauls is an area with a high population of BME young people as compared to the rest of Bristol and so it is likely that most of the young people will face racism, directly or institutionalised which may affect their self esteem and in effect decrease their opportunities of education, employment and income (NLT, 2006).

With some of the difficulties young people from BME backgrounds in St Pauls and around the city encounter, FC provides a safe space for young people to meet, advance their education, participate in arts, music and sports. FC runs over 15 hours of Open Access weekly activity which includes a targeted work with Somali girls and a 1 on 1 mentoring for young people at risk of getting involved in youth violence, gangs and serious crime. It also provides 2 mixed gender groups on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, support groups for parents, sports groups, coding club and liaison between youth/social services, police and parents (Newey, 2019). FC’s charitable objectives for young people are to promote their confidence and self-esteem and develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities.

FC is managed and run by a small team of paid and volunteer staff. FC has a full-time Central Manager, a part time Business Development Manager, a part time Youth Development Manager, a part time administrator and a part time Lead Youth Development Worker. The staff that provide activities for young people work 2 – 3 hours once a week and the rest of the staff are volunteers. With the shortage of staff and volunteers, FC depends heavily on its Trustees and Directors to support with some of the operational duties such as HR and finances, staff supervision, policy writing and community engagement (ibid). In order for FC to effectively deliver and support its young people, it needs to significantly invest in its staff.

In 2011, FC lost around 70% of the funding they received from Bristol City Council and as a result, faced some financial hardship. The organisation has had to find other means to generate some income in order to keep FC running through fundraising. As well as being a youth community centre, Docklands Building also provides community space where other organisation can hire parts of the building for events and activities. It also leases and license some of its space and offices which also produce income for the sustainability of FC and the Docklands building. At present, FC @ Docklands is working with the target of moving away from grants base income to have a more independent income by 2026, through hourly hires, licensing and leasing offices and different parts of the building (Newey, 2019). The organisation is in a period of change and accountability, and so there are some tensions between the provision of youth services and commercialising the building, however, I believed that all parties are working to achieve a common goal which is having a safe space for young people and members of the community and the city.

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