

# Service Design & Research principles for engaging with Strategic Partnerships

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The following set of principles are intended as a proposition or set of values that can guide the operating behaviours for Service Design and Research teams within the context of working in a strategic partnership setting.

Secondly these principles can also be used as a criterion for internally evaluating how the Service Design and Research capability is functioning with a strategic partnership setting.

Thirdly, these principles can also be used within Barnardo's and externally to communicate the principles that we work to.

Social Research can help us baseline all the current evidence to hand when we start a Strategic Partnership and it's important to be able to surface all available information to give us a foundation for moving into the Service Design and Social Design space. We use design thinking to examine the problem space collaboratively and creatively with our partners.

We use co-design methodologies to work with those most affected by the problem to identify solutions that will work. We are highly collaborative with a specific focus on the relational aspects of the work as we have seen that this produces great results. Working in this way can significantly improve the outcomes and lead to systemic change.

It's important to be able to communicate and situate how we are doing this within the context of strategic partnerships, so that we can develop a shared understanding and enhance our organisational collaborative efforts. It is also important to understand that these principles will need to continually evolve alongside the organisational culture, approaches and understanding of what works to help us design for social change within the context of strategic partnerships.

If you want to hear more about what we do, how we work and the change we're seeking to support, contact our general email: [innovationlabteam@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:innovationlabteam@barnardos.org.uk)

To see what we've worked on to date, visit [blog.barnar.do](http://blog.barnar.do)

## **1. We start by gathering evidence to look at existing and emerging problems in new ways**

We believe the first step to unravelling systemic issues is to take the time to reveal them and attempt to view them from fresh perspectives. We combine social research and design thinking, alongside subject matter expertise to explore challenging subjects with powerful methods.

How we do this:

- We explore multiple types of evidence from multiple sources: existing literature, lived experience, policy data, local contexts, plus Barnardo's and the strategic partners' data.
- We start any engagement with a strategic partner to uncover 'the right problems' as a starting point. This may produce unexpected or conflicting results.
- We challenge ourselves, teammates, and strategic partners to find the best (not easiest) solutions to tricky problems.
- We recognise the constraints in the services and systems we work with and the process of identifying patterns of evidence.

What we won't do:

- We won't seek evidence for a 'right answer' – using research to validate our own opinions or those of strategic partners.
- We won't oversimplify where evidence is complex - we recognise and respect nuance.
- We won't gather more evidence than we need, while recognising the limitations of our evidence gathering or where extensive research already exists.

## **2. We respond to children and young people's needs and amplify their voices at every stage of our design process**

Including young people in our research and design process is non-negotiable. We constantly reflect on and evolve our approach to ensure we are always working safely, ethically, inclusively and meaningfully for all involved.

How we do this:

- We hold the first-hand lived experience of children and young people in the highest regard and balance this with data from professional evaluations and academic literature.
- We meet children and young people where they are – physically, emotionally, and in the language we use – we get their informed consent for every session we plan and do everything we can to make it easy and create a safe space for them to participate.
- We work within an agenda of anti-racism, using gender and sexual identity practice frameworks to understand the intersectional lens needed to ensure all children and young people's voices and their lived experience are amplified.
- When necessary, we also engage with parents and carers to bring through the voice of the family and those that take care of children and young people.
- We follow the evidence and trust the design process – we report and act on what's best for children and young people, even if there is pressure to do otherwise.
- We work alongside the Voice & Influence team to make sure how we work aligns with our research and best-practice informed V&I Strategy.
- When we have done any kind of activity with children and young people, we make sure that we feed back to them afterwards, so they understand the value of their contribution.

#### What we won't do:

- We won't bring children and young people into a session without clear goals, advance planning, and a plan to level the power balance.
- We won't consider it good enough to simply include children and young people in evidence gathering; being there isn't the same as being comfortable, being heard, or having power.
- We won't substitute service user 'testimonials' for evidence – or spin or edit quotes or findings.

### **3. We work creatively and try things out within real-world constraints and risks of the social care sector**

We are ruthlessly pragmatic in seeking change, which means staying flexible, and adjusting to real-world context as we go.

How we do this:

- We use clear Discovery, Define, Design and Test/Iterate project cycles.
- We break down challenging problems into smaller steps to make them more manageable and allow us to change direction to where the evidence points.
- We aim to test and learn quickly using prototypes, pilots and feedback cycles so that we can reduce risk to the work, by not committing to assumptions or unevidenced solutions.
- We know that no systems change work can be done in a vacuum, so we work flexibly and adaptably to achieve better outcomes.
- We keep things moving – we sometimes do things in a different way to manage risk, but we still get the work done, keeping to the integral nature of the work.
- We know that many statutory services are under considerable pressure to deliver, so we will be flexible, understanding and responsive in working with them to develop research insights.

#### What we won't do:

- We won't stop moving things forward because the conditions aren't perfect.
- We won't let difficulties (in processes, relationships, resourcing, capacity) stop progress – we'll always look for creative solutions.
- We won't get discouraged when things get hard, don't work, or need a rethink.

## **4. We work collaboratively, transparently and with humility**

Designing for change in children's health and social care works best when we collaborate widely and openly with our partners, value diversity in thinking, and keep trying to do what we do better.

#### How we do this:

- We respect the expertise, experience and skill sets of Barnardo's and strategic partner colleagues who work with children and young people – so we can learn together.
- We keep records of how we make our decisions, what evidence they're based on, and why we think we're on the right path. We use an Insights Library to store research, develop themes and insights we uncover.
- We share our draft thinking and outputs frequently, inviting comment and we welcome challenge and constructive criticism from stakeholders and strategic partner colleagues.

- We tell the story of the evidence, process and nuance that we uncover and actively look to describe complexity through visual and recorded artefacts. We also use these to activate and encourage collaborative conversations.
- We make sure that we have a communications strategy in place that is agreed with the strategic partner.
- We look for collaborative ways to engage children, young people, strategic partner staff, Barnardo's services staff and any other people that play a role in the work we're doing.
- We make sure that we start the relationship with our strategic partner and maintain it well, by agreeing ways of working, roles and responsibilities and revisiting these shared values throughout the project cycle.

### What we won't do:

- We won't wait until things are perfect before sharing, or only share the stuff that works, not the hard learnings, fails and draft thinking.
- We won't make big design decisions without checking our thinking with others – reflecting on our own bias.

## **5. We treat data with the utmost respect**

We ensure positive, respectful, safe and ethical treatment of all participants' data – based on participants' rights and best interests – not just what's legally required.

### How we do this:

- We commit to safe, ethical, respectful and GDPR-compliant data collection, storage, use and reporting.
- We make time to plan for effective data management well before we ever run any research activity.
- We commit to reporting any mistakes quickly and openly.
- We make sure that we have a data sharing agreement in place, that is agreed with the strategic partner before we start research activities.

## What we won't do:

- We won't assume safe and ethical data security is someone else's job.
- We won't put our participants' data at risk (physical, emotional, reputational, or otherwise) in any way during our design work or reporting.
- We won't hide data problems or blame others; mistakes are a chance to learn.

## **6. We focus on sustainability for all systems change strategies**

We aim for any outcomes to which we make a commitment to be deliverable, sustainable and scalable.

### How we do this:

- We enable others working within the strategic partnership to develop design thinking mindsets and to understand how to understand the process of uncovering evidence and insight.
- We make sure the focus of the work always explains how potential solutions will effect positive change over time and will be maintained and supported.
- We focus on building an evidence base that can be repurposed and developed further for when that becomes necessary.
- We are scrupulous about any intervention or proposed solution needing to be costed and have the backing of the strategic partner, to ensure that the proposition is realistic, deliverable and can maintain over an extended time-period.
- We are flexible and responsive to the realities of our strategic partner and will work to focus on the best outcomes, tailored to the environment that they are designed for.
- We focus on scalable solutions for local contexts, but that can also be potentially applied in a broader sense in other locations.

## What we won't do:

- We won't leave the work hanging with an unrealistic and undeliverable solution.
- We won't throw a solution 'over the wall' to the strategic partners and run away.
- We won't make convenient decisions not based on evidence and data.