

Our Strategy From 2025



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Foreword

from our Chair of Trustees



Young people are facing unprecedented challenges, including the lingering impact of the pandemic, a surge in the cost of living, the climate emergency, and increasing conflict and division – at home and abroad. The mental health consequences must not be underestimated, and their impact is not felt equally.

Youth work and timely mental health support are essential for helping young people to navigate these uncertain times. OTR has been showing up for young people for almost 60 years and we have helped hundreds of thousands of young people flourish. Learning from these decades of successes, and shortcomings, gives us confidence to face the daunting challenges ahead.

I am proud to introduce OTR25, our new strategy to respond to the urgent needs of young people and collaborate with partners across the region to build a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable future.

Young people across Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire deserve to receive timely mental health support that is relevant to their needs, gives them meaningful choices, and equips them with tools and skills that will last a lifetime. We want young people to find this support in their communities, schools, workplaces and within their care and peer networks.

To create OTR25, we listened to staff, volunteers, young people, partners and funders. We reviewed the work we have

been doing over the past few years and sought to understand the external landscape that we now operate in. Much has changed.

We have dramatically grown our offer for young people, integrated young people into our workforce, and prioritised partnership and outreach working. We have re-committed ourselves to promoting equity and becoming an anti-racist organisation. However, there is more to do to ensure that we have the necessary infrastructure in place to sustainably support this growth. We must also be tireless in building a more inclusive environment for all young people, partners, staff, and volunteers.

We absolutely cannot stand still. OTR25 builds on what we know works to take us into our next phase of development.

The strategy aims high, but we are confident that we have the experience, expertise and partnerships to achieve our ambition. We draw such energy and hope from our creative and dedicated workforce, our committed set of partners and funders, and the magnificent young people we work alongside.

I hope that after reading our new strategy you feel just as inspired by the change that is coming and will support us to realise our vision.

Jacob Diggle

Young people's mental health in 2023



The number of young people accessing support for their mental health has been rising at a staggering rate and we know this will impact young people's experiences at home, in education, in relationships and within their communities. This is evidenced at a national level.

「 In the last three years, the likelihood of young people having a mental health problem has increased by 50%¹ 」

Our new strategy responds to the escalating need for wellbeing support among young people by scaling and championing our early intervention approach. By increasing young people's resilience through building their knowledge, support networks and self-esteem, we can prevent issues from escalating. The alternative is to treat our way out of the crisis, which neither OTR nor the wider mental health system can resource.

「 In 2022/2023 OTR supported 20,253 young people across our range of programmes 」

The levels of distress that we are seeing among young people are being fuelled by major social and economic forces. Our strategy is built on the premise that, since these external factors will continue to have a profound impact on young lives, we must consider them in our future work.

Inequality

Structural inequalities in our society continue to affect young people, including through poverty, poor housing, racism and discrimination. Young people face discrimination because of their sexuality, gender identity, disability and other protected characteristics - as well as by virtue of being young. Our new strategy seeks to go much further in ensuring that young people from all communities can access support from us and others for their mental health. OTR25 will also empower young people to use social action to challenge structures which perpetuate inequality, while simultaneously improving their mental health and wellbeing.

Global events

We are living in unprecedented times. COVID-19, war and conflict across the world, the cost-of-living crisis, and climate emergency are all very real for young people and impacting them on a daily basis. Their effects include loss of education, youth unemployment, personal debt, poverty and loneliness. Young people are also acutely aware that their futures will be derailed if we fail to tackle these issues, creating a lack of hope, purpose and agency. By rooting our work in a wider social and economic context, OTR25 is a strategy that is relevant for a young person living in the 2020s.

¹<https://www.childreissociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/well-being/mental-health-statistics>

Who we are



WHY WE EXIST

We are a mental health social movement mobilised to support, promote and defend the mental health, rights and social position of young people



WHO WE SUPPORT

Young people aged 11 to 25



WHERE WE WORK

Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire



WHAT WE DO

Deliver a varied mental health and wellbeing offer for young people | Build a network of support around young people | Influence the mental health system



OUR IMPACT IN 2022/23

20,253 young people supported | **80%** reported positive outcomes at the end of their treatment | **2,563 young people** attended our Resilience labs, **93%** fed back that their overall experience was positive and **75%** that they now felt they had the tools to manage life's challenges



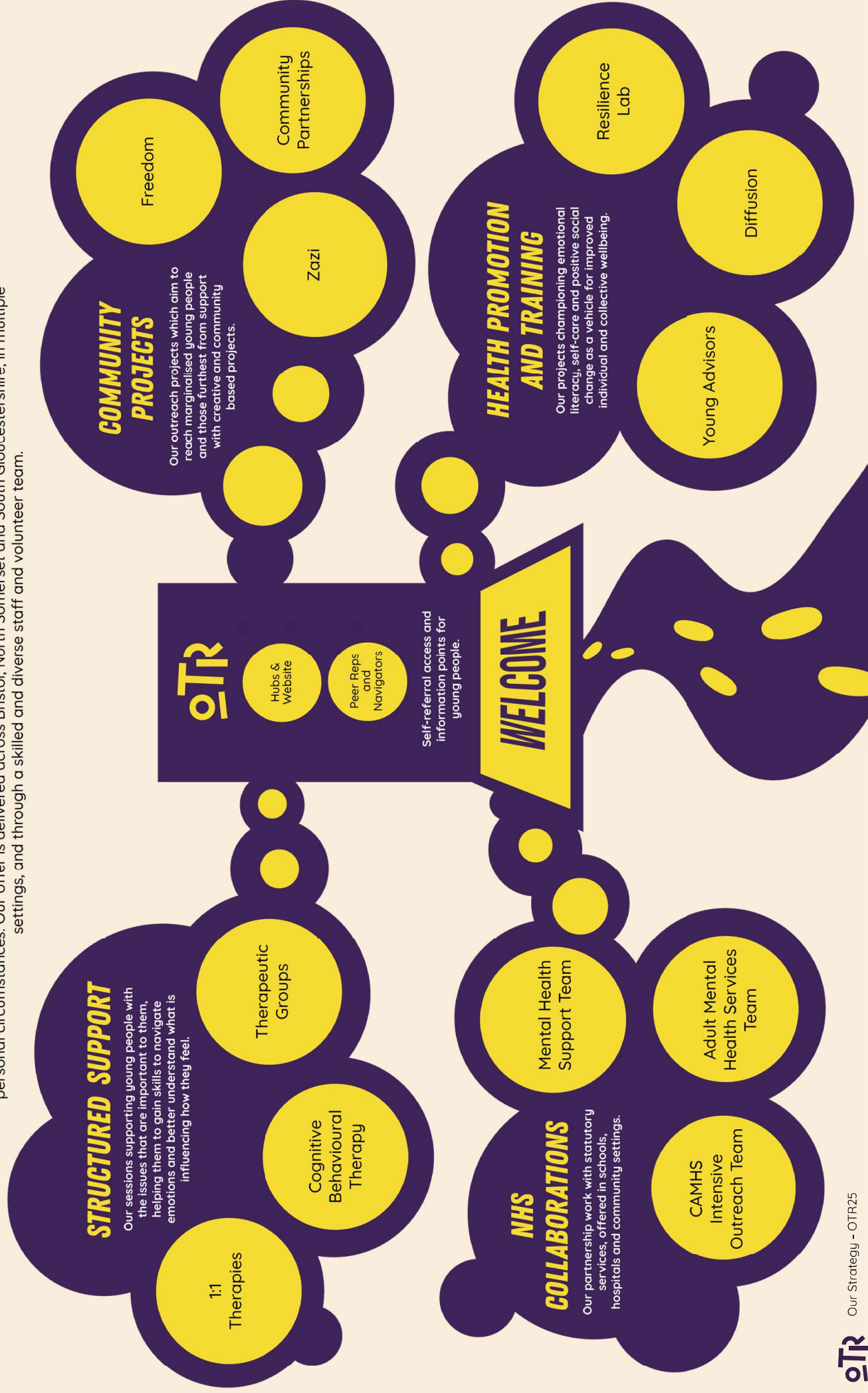
OUR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

We have created multiple services to give young people a broad choice of mental health support. A diagram of OTR's services is on the following page.



The OTR Offer

OTR offers a wide range of projects and services which seek to ensure that young people have a choice in what will best support their mental health and emotional wellbeing. This choice is informed by their strengths, interests and personal circumstances. Our offer is delivered across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, in multiple settings, and through a skilled and diverse staff and volunteer team.



Our Beliefs

OTR's beliefs, collectively developed across the organisation, underpin our work as a mental health social movement. At all times, OTR strives to give a choice and a voice to young people:

We believe that our offer should be inclusive of all cultures and identities.

OTR's work not only recognises but actively celebrates diversity.

We believe that young people have unique strengths, interests and circumstances.

OTR will continue to develop creative and diverse services to give young people choice.

We believe that the world around us impacts our wellbeing.

We all have mental health. OTR places our wellbeing in a social, political and environmental context.

We believe in placing young people at the heart of our work.

OTR's work is guided by young people's voices; empowering and mobilising young people to make change, both individually and collectively.

We believe in innovating and evolving to improve our offer for young people.

Throughout our long history we have adapted to an ever-changing world and we will continue to do so to ensure our work remains relevant for young people.

We believe that relationships are what make the difference.

OTR's approach centres around relationships between individuals, peers and communities.

We believe in the power of partnerships.

OTR emphasises peer relationships and organisational collaboration to improve young people's mental health.

What we have learned

We learned a considerable amount during the lifetime of our previous strategy and through continuously listening to young people. We have used this learning to both refresh OTR's seven **beliefs** and create OTR25. Below we share the key insights that will shape our work over the next three years:

LEARNING

#1

Some groups of young people experiencing economic and social inequality are not accessing OTR's mental health services. Looking forward, we must tailor our offer so that it speaks to different groups of young people and brings our knowledge into the trusted relationships they already hold in their communities.

LEARNING

#2

OTR works best when young people are listened to and empowered to shape and deliver our work. Looking forward, we must put young people at the centre of everything we do, including the design and delivery of our mental health services, wider development of our organisation and the conversations we are having externally.

LEARNING

#3

Young people engage in our mental health services because they have made an active decision to participate and can choose what is the best fit for them. Looking forward, we must continue to be a self-referral service and offer choice, and promote the value of this approach to others.

LEARNING

#4

We can achieve a far greater impact on the lives of young people when we work in partnership with others. Looking forward, we must increase collaboration with organisations and communities in order to reach and influence young people and co-deliver services.

LEARNING

#5

The local mental health ecosystem is not currently able to meet the needs of all young people. Looking forward, we must help to create an ecosystem that offers a greater choice of mental health support for young people and has a greater focus on early intervention.

LEARNING

#6

Our recent growth in commissioned income has led to us starting to become too reliant on this source. Looking forward, we must step up our efforts to diversify our income to ensure our future financial sustainability.

LEARNING

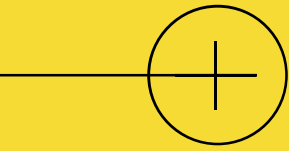
#7

OTR's position as an NHS commissioned mental health provider creates a tension between our efforts to positively disrupt the mental health system and our desire to continue to be a respected local delivery partner. Looking forward, we must make greater use of our unique position to collaborate with decision makers and young people to improve our local mental health ecosystem.

LEARNING

#8

OTR is deeply committed to our belief in Inclusion but the progress to become an anti-racist organisation has been too slow. We are working with expert partners, like **brap**, to create different types of spaces for learning, contribution, discussion, and disagreement.



Our Goal

Over the next few years OTR will play a leading role in positively disrupting our local mental health ecosystem so that it better serves young people in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Our goal is for all young people to have a choice of timely and meaningful opportunities to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and for their communities to help them to flourish.

OTR25 sets out a number of specific commitments to young people, staff, and our partners. If we successfully deliver this strategy, we expect to see:

- A major increase in young people's influence on the local mental health ecosystem
- The number and diversity of young people supported by OTR increases
- Waiting lists for support reduce
- Funding for community and preventative mental health support increases
- OTR becomes an employer of choice, with excellent experience of staff and volunteers from all backgrounds

MAKING
POSITIVE
CHANGE

Our Strategic Priorities

We have set **five broad priorities** that will guide all of our work over the next few years. For each priority, we have made five commitments to young people that will help us to achieve it. We have named our strategy OTR25 to represent the 25 commitments that we have made and expect to achieve by the end of our plan.

To successfully deliver our five priorities set out in OTR25 we must harness the experience, strengths and voices of young people and collaborate and unite with those that care for and work with them.

Priority 1

MAGNIFY YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND VOICE

What we will work towards

Young people will experience an organisation shaped by and for them. We will enhance our culture of participation. We will listen more intently to young people and increase their involvement in delivery and decision-making. By doing so, OTR will become a clearer expression of young people's ideas, hopes and circumstances and a place where they have agency. Their voices will also be amplified outside of OTR - to their peers, our partners and those that we seek to influence. By channelling the strengths of young people, we will become a more relevant and credible organisation and one that is better placed to serve them.

Our commitment to young people

We commit to:

- 1** Ensure that each of our mental health services is a true representation of what young people want through co-production, co-delivery and acting upon their feedback.
- 2** Make youth social action central to our work, offering young people opportunities to create changes in their communities and to systems and structures that will lead to improved mental health and wellbeing.
- 3** Expand and embed opportunities for young people to support their peers across our mental health services through our 'Peer Representative/Navigator' volunteer programmes.
- 4** Recruit a group of young people - our Young Advisors - to play a leading role in the development of OTR, including generating ideas to successfully implement this strategy.
- 5** Increase the number of young people in our workforce so that we are better placed to relate to and support our target population.

Priority 1

CREATE A RICH AND WIDE MENTAL HEALTH OFFER

What we will work towards

Young people across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire will have a bountiful choice of opportunities to improve their mental health. We aim to offer something meaningful for every individual that recognises and builds on their strengths, interests, identities and circumstances. The breadth and richness of our offer will come from collaboration with young people and partners and retain the spirit of OTR as a collaborative mental health social movement. We will draw upon the many assets across our local area, including a vibrant voluntary sector and the talents of youth workers, sports coaches and others who work with young people.

Our commitment to young people

We commit to:

- 6** Reach more young people with information, advice and guidance about mental health by taking our youth-led Hubs into different places.
- 7** Offer young people opportunities to improve their mental health through activities that are enjoyable and promote wellbeing, such as the arts, sport and nature.
- 8** Create a targeted and sustainable offer for 18 to 25 year olds that is reflective of the interests and circumstances of young adults.
- 9** Embed our offer of mental health support for young people in South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, ensuring that it is appropriate for rural and semi-rural settings.
- 10** Evolve our partnership working to improve the integration of OTR's support offer with other providers and communities to avoid services becoming fragmented.

Priority 3

REACH YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING INEQUALITY

What we will work towards

OTR will increase its reach to marginalised young people and those experiencing disadvantage. We will provide dedicated support to young Black people and people of colour and those who are care experienced, disabled, neuro-diverse, LGBTQ+, working class and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These groups are among those most likely to struggle with their mental health but are often furthest from support. We will collaborate with organisations and communities who can skilfully engage these groups of young people and bring relevant mental health support into their lives.

Our commitment to young people

We commit to:

- 11** Bring our mental health services into communities, and to settings where young people experiencing inequality can easily access, feel safe and where trusted relationships have already been built.
- 12** Adapt all of our mental health services so that OTR is always relevant in different contexts and can meet the needs of different groups of young people.
- 13** Invest in the skills and support for our workforce so that we can offer all groups of young people relevant and culturally appropriate support to improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- 14** Improve our data and ability to understand whether our mental health services are reaching and working for different groups of young people.
- 15** Expand our sector-leading **Freedom** and **Zazi** projects for LGBTQ+ young people, young Black people and people of colour to explore their identity and frame their personal experiences within a wider social context.

Priority 4

CREATE SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

What we will work towards

Young people will improve their mental health through the people and places that they interact with in their daily lives. We will equip parents/carers, schools, GPs, youth clubs and companies with mental health knowledge so that they can improve the support they offer young people and create environments in which they can thrive. Among other things, we will encourage communities to recognise that mental health is something that we all have and that there are many things we can do to stay mentally healthy. By embedding expertise within communities, young people will gain knowledge, networks and confidence to cope with the future challenges.

Our commitment to young people

We commit to:

- 16** Embed a holistic approach within our mental health services by working alongside and influencing the various people and institutions that shape young people's lives.
- 17** Explore what support is needed by parents and carers that will equip them with knowledge to understand young people's wellbeing and provide them with quality support.
- 18** Place relationships at the heart of our offer for young people, using our services to build social networks for young people and demonstrate the power of peer support to them.
- 19** Scale our mental health training through **Diffusion** to equip individuals and organisations with confidence, knowledge and skills to improve young people's mental health.
- 20** Ensure our services develop young people's relationship building skills so that they can leave OTR able to develop and maintain a personal network of support.

Priority 5

POSITIVELY DISRUPT THE LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH ECOSYSTEM

What we will work towards

We will continue to play a leading role in reshaping how young people in our area gain mental health support. Our local mental health ecosystem is heavily focused on clinical interventions for those in crisis. We recognise that while this is essential in the immediate term, this uniform mental health offer does not reflect the diversity of young people and often arrives too late. Through working alongside our local partners and young people, we aim to shift resources from crisis to prevention and from clinics to communities. By doing so, young people will have access to the right support at the right time.

Our commitment to young people

We commit to:

- 21** Champion the importance of prevention, choice, and trusted relationships as central pillars of an effective mental health ecosystem through our work with policy makers and commissioners.
- 22** Advocate for change through young people and their lived experiences, using social action campaigns and platforms to share their ideas with decision makers and influencers.
- 23** Demonstrate the efficacy of preventative, non-clinical mental health interventions using our growing evidence base for our services, including collaborations with local universities.
- 24** Work alongside our key partners to reimagine our local mental health ecosystem and inspire changes within it, including with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (**CAMHS**) and the regional Integrated Care Board (**ICB**).
- 25** Support our Young Advisors to identify, design, and implement solutions to the problems in the local mental health ecosystem – and OTR's services – that they believe are most urgent.

Internal developments to achieve OTR25

We recognise that we must continue to evolve as an organisation, both to deliver OTR25 and respond to our recent rapid growth. Since 2018, we have doubled in size – both in terms of our team and income. This has helped the charity respond to a surge in young people's needs and we are proud of the extraordinary achievements of staff and volunteers. However, this change has also placed strains on the organisation's infrastructure, workload, and wellbeing.

We have comprehensively reviewed the culture and experience of staff and volunteers – with a particular focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. In response, we are improving workload management approaches; increasing leadership capacity; strengthening people management skills and policies; providing allyship training; and further investing in support for people of colour in the workforce.

This work is being supported by brap, a charity specialising in supporting organisations to become more equitable and collaborative. We will regularly share what we have learnt during this process to keep ourselves accountable and, hopefully, help other organisations who are committed to the same aims.

Over the next few years, improvements to our infrastructure and ways of working will ensure that they are efficient, equitable, and future proof for OTR's on-going development.

We will:

- ◆ **Build a more inclusive organisation; becoming anti-racist and disability confident**
- ◆ **Produce powerful communications that inform, inspire, and influence**
- ◆ **Create accessible and welcoming spaces for young people across our geographical areas**
- ◆ **Embed robust monitoring and evaluation to understand and improve our impact**
- ◆ **Secure long-term funding from diverse sources to create future financial sustainability**

Note from Joe, one of our Peer Mentors

“My involvement with OTR has been a personally enriching experience. I feel like it has really taught me to listen closely to people, something which I’ve carried over to my life outside of volunteering, and has increased my sense of compassion and care for others. What’s more, I have gained really important skills that will help me in a range of professional settings, working with young people’s mental health.”



Thank you for reading our new strategy. We hope that you will work alongside us to make OTR25 a reality so that all young people in our local area have timely and meaningful opportunities to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

To find out more, and keep up to date with OTR's work, visit otrbristol.org.uk and [@otrbristol](https://twitter.com/otrbristol)



