

Rolling Base

A History Of

September 2005 – December 2005

In September 2005 Barnet's Mobile Youth Facility was first conceived to address the provision of youth facilities in the borough, as Barnet has the second largest number of young people amongst the London boroughs. North London Connexions had funding which was to be allocated to the voluntary sector in Barnet to address this.

Due to the previous involvement of the Inclusive Play Opportunities Project (IPOP) with Connexions and Barnet Community Transport, Dadia Conti the head of IPOP put forward an initial proposal, that BCT would be the managing agency of the mobile facility. Discussions took place between Dadia and Kathleen Lyons who was then the Director of BCT as to how to best achieve turning this proposal into reality.

It was agreed that BCT would steer the project. The evaluation of the vehicle type that would undertake the task of delivering this complex project was crucial, and a short-term consultant was employed to research this along with consulting on fittings, developing joint working procedures and agree Terms of Reference with BCT for the Steering Group. The project would utilise the excellent tried and tested management systems developed by BCT including secure storage and maintenance of vehicles, MiDAS (Minibus Drivers Awareness Scheme) certification of drivers, booking systems and networking. BCT is based at the Mill Hill Depot and therefore already possessed all of the existing infrastructure necessary to support the operational and maintenance demands that such a vehicle would require.

It was hoped that the facility would meet the aspirations of young people in Hard to Reach Groups, Young People in isolated areas, such as housing estates, or where there were simply no youth facilities, and assist delivery by Statutory Agencies. Possible users would include Voluntary Youth Groups such as faith groups, and crime reduction groups, Barnet Youth Groups and schools, colleges, Health promotions and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Police. The opportunities afforded by this mobile facility, were to be based on the requirements of young people. It was expected to be a highly visible, flexible and dynamic facility.

In November 2005 the Steering Group first met.

Those in the initial membership were:

- Kathleen Lyons – BCT Director & Chair
- Derek Norman - BCT Consultant
- Shane Beniot - Inclusive Youth Club Project IYCP / Children's, Young Persons and Family Network CYPFN
- Abdul Sabban Iftin Network / CYPFN
- Julian Bergin – Finchley Youth Theatre
- Alison Kira – Barnet Action for Youth (BA4Y) / CYPFN
- Dadia Conti – Then Head of IPOP, now Programme Manager of Barnet Children's Fund BCF / Barnet Voluntary Services Council BVSC

The purpose of the Steering Group was to develop and deliver a plan to purchase and kit out a Mobile Youth Facility within agreed timescales and budgets, and to oversee recruitment and training of staff. BCT was to have overall responsibility for the project and the BMYF Steering Group would be a sub-group of the BCT Board of Trustees, at which a representative of BCT would attend and provide feedback to the BCT Managing Committee. Douglas Rumsey a trustee of BCT with many years experience of Youth work was appointed onto BYMF steering group as a link between BCT and BYMF as well as the Chair who as Director of BCT strengthened the link even further.

Regular meetings were held during the winter of 2005 and throughout 2006. BCT became members of the National Playbus Association. This enabled the SG to access their expertise in vehicle conversions and similar projects. An advisor was provided to come to several SG meetings, which provided a valuable insight into how other similar projects succeeded (or otherwise).

January 2006 – May 2006

In January 2006 Gareth Mitchell was employed as a Temporary Development Worker, on an initial short term contract due to end in the April. Gareth held a PCV licence and had previous experience of working with, and teaching young people.

Gareth was tasked with visiting similar youth projects, schools and youth groups within the borough asking young people what they would want from this mobile facility. This process was undertaken straight away, and the project began to gather pace. The members of the Steering Group represented a diverse range of youth requirements and the places Gareth visited mirrored this. All Sorts Club, Finchley Youth Theatre, The Old Barn and Whitefield School were among those that Gareth visited and consulted with the young people to find out what they would like to see.

The consultation results were collected and on the 21st February at a Steering Group meeting Gareth relayed this information back. Ideas that had been suggested included a chill out area, DJ area, Jacuzzi, a sheltered area outside and sports provisions. Highlighted by the young people themselves was the need for safety.

Gareth visited several projects, The Point in Hillingdon, Redbridge Youth Bus and 4YPBUS in Islington. At Richard's suggestion, Gareth finished each visit by asking simply 'What would they do differently if they had their time again?' the feedback from this became the template from which Rolling Base took shape as the main issues centred on vehicle type and space utilisation.

In February 2006 it was decided that a single decker low-floor bus was to be sourced, purchased and converted. Vehicles that had been considered were a double decker bus, which was dismissed due to its operational requirements, which would put it beyond the capacities with regard to disabled access, and a Lorry conversion akin to mobile libraries. However access and space became a problem due to the isolation of the cab. A fully integrated space would be better in terms of safety and usability.

Quotes were sought for conversion costs and on the basis of those it was decided to use Coachbuild Quality, with guidance from the National Playbus Association who had previous experience of them.

In April 2006 all the threads were drawn together. The information gathered from Gareth provided an outline of what was wanted by the young people, and the vehicle could now be sourced having evaluated the type and specification, which would meet the financial and practical needs of the project.

The vehicle needed to match the very specific requirements of space and safety. There needed to be access at the front and back, which did not create safety issues and space that could not be used. A workable plan was formed with a framework to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

It was also agreed to extend Gareth's contract to complete a full year, ending in January 2007.

Gareth at the time was also working for IPOP Inclusive Play Opportunities Project for young people with a spectrum of learning abilities, providing one to one support during football training. A number of funding opportunities were being followed up in order to complete the project with a satisfactory level of equipment on board, one of which was the Youth Opportunities Fund, which required young people to be involved with the funding application process and presentation. Jamie and Myles, both 16-year-old IPOP football players became involved with the project, following the consent and much encouragement from their parents.

On April 25th 2006 a deposit was put down for the purchase of a 1996 P registered Marshall Mini SLF (self lowering floor) 8.5 m, 29 Seat Midibus, from Ventura in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. To ensure cost effective compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, a 1996 vehicle was chosen, as this was the first year that buses had the required facility to lower their floors, it was also fitted with an engine compliant with Euro I Emission Regulations.

The bus had been awaiting re-use for some time and therefore substantial work was required for it to pass the MOT. On June 9th 2006 the bus was given its PCV MOT and after further external work was carried out, in early July Coachbuild Quality collected it. Once at their workshop based near Ongar in Essex, work started to strip out the interior, and prepare it for its conversion.

Gareth and those young people that had been involved with outline proposal of the project made regular visits throughout summer to Coachbuild monitoring the bus's progress.

In May 2006 Kathleen Lyons resigned from BCT to join Westway Community Transport as deputy Director. Richard Healy then Operations Manager officially became Acting Director of BCT and chair of the BMYF Steering Group on July 1st 2006. Due to Kathleen's illness prior to leaving BCT Richard in effect took over before that date.

The BMYF Steering Group were regularly kept informed at to the progress of the project.

June 2006 – October 2006

On June 28th 2006, Lloyd Gee, the Cultural Development Officer in Education Services at Barnet Council, attended a BMYF Steering Group meeting chaired by Richard. Lloyd agreed to match fund a design element to the project, and introduced Jason Kelvin from Studio Seven a freelance design consultant with over 10 years experience of working with young people and establishing new projects.

After discussions it was agreed Jason would accompany Gareth, Jamie, Myles and Douglas to the bus at Coachbuild Quality.

Resulting from this visit, issues of flexibility became apparent and the solution came from a modular layout, guided and then designed by Jason who then provided schematic drawings of the interior of the bus. The decision was also made to ensure the bus was fit for purpose at the initial phase of conversion rather than have to retro fit basic items later on, for example a sound proof generator or air conditioning.

Equipping the vehicle had been adversely affected by the VAT liability incurred on the original Connexions payment. Kathleen had addressed part of this with additional funding from the Youth Inclusion Support Project but there was still a significant shortfall in delivering the original proposal. This was option 1 of £150,000 laid out in Sept 2005. That had not been preceded with, being replaced by option 2 at £104,000, which was still undeliverable at this point being £46,000 less.

Barnet Safer Communities Partnership Fund was approached for additional funding. The project was given a grant of £23,460. However at a meeting between Richard Healy and Brian Simmonds the BSCPF project manager on 29th June, the full implications of the grant became apparent. The money would only be paid on production of receipts for the equipment, which posed a significant challenge for full cost recovery requirements.

The cost implications of items, which have been purchased, requiring transporting, testing and integrating into wiring and control systems were substantial. The demands and realities of this impacted considerably on the delivery schedule of the project. Discussions continued as to how best resolve the situation. Eventually Coachbuild Quality were persuaded to restructure the payment schedule into four 25% tranches, in order to assist the BCT cash flow.

Richard, Jason, Gareth, Douglas and Dadia continued meetings and dialogue exchanging and updating ideas throughout the summer in order to maintain the momentum of the conversion.

In July 2006 the Mayor of London confirmed revised proposals for a Low Emission Zone, now affecting the whole of Greater London including Barnet. This would have a major implication for the BMYF vehicle as of July 2008, when its engine will be required to meet Euro III standards with regard to PM10 fine particulates.

Throughout August 2006, funding was still being sought to address gaps. Coachbuild for reasons of commercial confidentiality were reluctant to release the receipts for equipment such as the generator, air conditioning etc purchased, which would have enabled the BSCPF funding of £23,460 to be accessed. Gradually funding issues resolved once a wide range of equipment was agreed as suitable for BSCPF funding and Coachbuild Quality was set up on the computer system as an approved supplier. Studio Seven was also approved as the design element of the conversion as well as the producer of brochures and other publicity material, which was to proceed in tandem with the physical conversion. Rolling Base was the name chosen for the Barnet Mobile Youth Facility by the Steering Group after feedback from the young people. Studio Seven carried out the branding to be identifiable throughout all items associated with RB, leaflets membership flyers and cards, headed notepaper and pens.

The Metropolitan Police Property Action Fund was also approached and Inspector Phillip Halsey granted £7,550 towards multi-media equipment for Rolling Base.

As a result of a site visit by Douglas Rumsey along with Gareth, Douglas was convinced by the benefits of the addition of an electric awning, which would create an outside space and an area for additional facilities to be offered. Given Douglas's background in youth work, full weight was given to his input so the sourcing, purchase and fitting of the awning was agreed. It was also confirmed by Richard that air conditioning was a pre-requisite on the vehicle, after feedback from several CT's that young people would not set foot on their vehicles because of the overwhelming heat due to the summer temperatures and that given off by screens and computers.

October 2006 saw the registering of www.Rollingbase.co.uk where a page displayed 'Coming Soon' in anticipation of future developments.

Jamie and Myles, after working with Gareth did a presentation for their peers at Barnet Youth Bank. They secured £45,640 funding for an initial 6 months operational running for 3 days a week of Rolling Base along with equipment and training for sessional workers. This again carried a VAT implication, which Richard managed to reduce to around £3,000 by splitting the allocation between the three sections.

The registering of Rolling Base for insurance brought about the issue of fitting CCTV to the interior of the vehicle. After discussing insurance requirements with a broker, the high value of the bus in comparison to the rest of the BCT fleet and its equipment meant that insurance quotes varied from £2,500 - £3,500. The fitting of CCTV enabled this to be reduced to £1,500 with £750 excess, making this a worthwhile investment on an operational and safety basis.

November 2006 – April 2007

On November 9th 2006 Rolling Base rolled into the Mill Hill Depot to rapturous applause and much delight. On a crisp and clear day, as the sun shone, Rolling Base stood proudly; a dynamic and exciting project ready to deliver a range of fantastic opportunities to the young people of Barnet. Its highly visual exterior and its thoughtful design and modular layout, provides a solid and extremely usable base for this mobile facility to reach out and engage with many young people covering a wide range of social groups.

In December 2006 the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services presented Rolling Base with the Young Partners Award as commendable runners up.

Funding was still constantly being sought and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Strategic Development Unit was approached, to allocate funding to fit a satellite dish. This would enable Internet access from the wireless laptops, for use in job searching and CV up dating. Funding of £9,000 was secured and would be split into two tranches, dependent on satisfactorily completing a 3-month usage target. There was a cost over-run due to severe weather conditions necessitating an additional visit to fit the dish.

Richard Healy was confirmed as Director of BCT and had secured sufficient funding to see out the rest of the financial year.

In late December the Rolling Base Web site went live, using pictures of the bus on the day of its arrival.

Free training courses began to run in December and continue to date, for youth workers, volunteers, and Police officers in connection with Safer Communities Teams.

An Operations and Health & Safety manual was developed and produced by Studio Seven to complement the hands on training. This highlighted the importance of how the design of the bus works together with the facilities on board. The sessional workers are trained practically with how to use the equipment but are also made aware of the specific needs of the user groups and how they can interact with Rolling Base to provide a safe, beneficial and enjoyable session.

The period up to early January 2007 was used to evaluate capabilities and identify any shortcomings (to all intents and purposes a shakedown cruises prior to a maiden voyage). Over 330 young people accessed Rolling Base, most of whom came from the original interested groups, utilising funding from the Barnet Youth Bank.

The long-term sustainability of the project is being addressed in consultation with user groups and their specific requirements. If the project is to continue to flourish and even expand it's reach, funding needs to be channelled into operational costs, maintenance and staffing for both Rolling Base and BCT.

In January 2007, the satellite dish was fitted, with the second tranche of money from the NRF due in May.

A Barnet Civic Network Meeting took place on 8th January at which Jamie and Myles did their presentation featuring Rolling Base in front of the assembled voluntary groups. This resulted in the leader of the council, Mike Freer indicating a positive response in regard to future funding from Council Administered Charitable Trusts.

Gareth's initial contract was due to expire. BCT stepped in to provide 2 days funding for office and administration work while the Youth Bank supported the other three days.

The maintenance of the vehicle is an ongoing challenge as all systems bed into an improved operating procedure. Recently there have been issues with battery power, wiring linkages, satellite dish deployment and water leaks, all but latter having been completely solved.

Tess Glenday from the Youth and Connexions Service in Barnet, nominated Rolling Base for a national competition, sponsored by the Youth Challenge Fund, called 'actions speak louder...'

From last year as a result of being Acting Director and then Director of BCT, Richard attends the London Group of the Community Transport Association Board. It was at these meetings in September and November 2006 at which presentations by Transport For London regarding the proposed Low Emission Zone were given and the implications for Rolling Base became clearer. As a result of discussions with TfL he contacted the TfL Community Transport Manager with a view to Barnet CT becoming a case study of the unintentional negative side affects of the new Low Emission Zone proposals.

This was accepted in December and a case study report for TfL was completed following a site visit to inspect Rolling Base, and the information contained has been taken on board at the highest level at TFL. It is hoped that input from Barnet CT about Rolling Base having to either fit additional emission equipment to comply or if that does not prove feasible, complete engine replacement.

Clearly with such a major expenditure hanging over the project, the ideal scenario would be an exemption from the charge (likely to be set at £150 – £200 per day 365 days per year), and lobbying continues to that end.

Just in case, preliminary discussions have taken place with BSCPF as to capital funding to fit additional traps or cover engine replacement. Further discussion will be needed to ascertain whether any funding would cover the labour charges to remove and fit the engine.

In February 2007, Richard met with Councillor Lynne Hillan who has the community services portfolio with responsibility for organisations such as BCT. As a result Lynne said that Barnet Council was keen to support the infrastructure of BCT and therefore Rolling Base indirectly. As a result of that meeting also attended by the head of BVSC Ruth Mulandi, direct support may be coming for core positions from the Council as Barnet until now has been only one of two boroughs in London not to provide such direct support for it's Community Transport. Indirect support has been received for the last 3 years by allowing BCT use of office facilities and parking spaces as well as access to fuel and maintenance facilities at the same rate the Council charges internally. An application has been made to the youth section of the Edward Harvist Trust, which will hopefully result in more funding.

In February Richard and Gareth were informed that Rolling Base had been short listed for the next stage of the award for the national youth competition 'actions speak louder...', which could result in additional funding of over £10,000 for equipment purchases and training.

Following on discussions at the meeting with Lynne Hillan and Ruth Mulandi, an out-line proposal was prepared, submitted, has been accepted, and has been acknowledged as being under consideration, for funding from the John Lyons Charity.

The Somali Family Support Group have been long-term members of BCT and were excited by the prospects presented by Rolling Base. Their leader Hanan Ibrahim is a member of the National Community Forum as well as the newly formed youth sub-group, which met for the first time at the Department of Communities and Local Governments in London on the 26th February 2007.

Rolling Base was the nominated project of Hanan to be presented to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Andrews. Jamie and Myles had been awarded with Duke of Edinburgh certificates for their work on Rolling Base and at this meeting were presented with them by the Baroness. They were also able to do their presentation in front of Senior Civil Servants from a variety of departments.

During breaks in the proceedings all those present were able to board the bus and view its facilities in action. Baroness Andrews came on board and said 'This is brilliant. I have never seen anything like it!'

This opportunity gave Rolling Base a voice at the very highest level of policy and decision-making within the government.

Leslie Silverstone, the Neighbourhood Renewal Co-Coordinator for the country, has also requested further information from Hanan.

In March 2007 Rolling Base was granted £1,000 from Help a London Child, for sports equipment including Table Tennis Table and cover, Snooker Table, Half-Court Basket Ball Systems and funding towards Football Goals.

On March 28th 2007, the Steering Group met to confirm the successful delivery of the project and to review its terms of reference. It was unanimously agreed, that now having completed its original remit, the group would be wound up and replaced with an Advisory Group, the membership of which would be by invitation to user groups and funders.

On March 29th 2007, confirmation was received that Rolling Base was a runner-up in the 'actions speak louder...' national competition, and as a result was awarded £13,500. This money will be used for additional equipment and staff training.

During the Easter holidays, over the first two weeks in April, Rolling Base visited two local parks, Clitterhouse Park and Stoneyfields Park as part of a tidy up campaign. This was supported by London Borough of Barnet Grounds Maintenance Department, by supplying litter pickers, gloves, bags, and staff who assisted in the clearance. Also being launched was 'Mural Mania' a mobile art screen that was set up under the awning, providing a space that young people could use to express themselves with paints. The young people were encouraged to help pick up litter in the parks and could then come onto Rolling Base to relax, make music or have their nails done. The event was a huge success, engaging over 40 young people, many of whom returned to Rolling Base when it visited again later that week, some even travelling from Brent Cross to Edgware, to join in the second week of fun. Safer Neighbourhood Teams from both wards attended the venues, supporting our work and getting involved with all the activities that were on offer. Starbucks Coffee from Brent Cross Shopping Centre provided welcomed refreshments, and proved extremely popular with our visitors.

A reporter from the Barnet Press, in response to the 'actions speak louder...' award, interviewed Gareth about Rolling Base and a photographer then came to Clitterhouse Park during the event to take some pictures. An article was then featured in the paper on the 5th April 2007.

Rolling Base attended the BVSC event GROW 07 on April 19th 2007, held at the RAF Museum in Hendon. Many organisations climbed on board and were very interested in the possibilities Rolling Base had to offer and the projects that are being developed. Many local Councillors including Lynne Hillan, Alison Moore and Mayor Eva Greenspan also visited Rolling Base.

The Low Emission Zone case study, has now progressed to the point where Barnet Community Transport is one of only four projects in the whole of London to be selected for involvement with the manufacturers of emission and abatement equipment, to seek satisfactory solutions to the impending more stringent requirements for engine emissions.

What Rolling Base Offers

Rolling Base delivers a unique experience in a creative and relaxed environment for the young people of Barnet. Rolling Base has been converted to our bespoke specification.

- Fully air-conditioned
- 5KW onboard generator
- Flexible interior
- Folding desk areas
- Storage compartments
- Display space
- 'Mini' Lighting grid
- Electric awning with side and front enclosures
- Satellite Ethernet creating a WIFI hotspot
- Wheelchair access via a telescopic ramp

The modular layout enables a vast range of equipment to be accessed, which includes:

- 4 LCD Screens (2 x 26" and 2 x 15")
- PA System for outside shows
- DVD and video playback
- Power Mac PC and 5 laptops
- Mixing desks
- Gaming consoles
- Video camera and lights
- Portable Theatre lighting
- Satellite Ethernet
- Mobile art space

Rolling Base operates on many levels; mixing, meeting, producing, chilling out and performing. The relaxed and informal layout can act as a space for educational and information sessions, with the aid of the LCD screens, which can be linked, displaying videos DVD's or PowerPoint presentations. The desks, which can be folded, up or down ensure that whatever the use, the space can facilitate it for all users.

To date Rolling Base has not only addressed but has achieved the defined outputs stated at the very beginning of this project in September 2005. The outcomes in the developmental stage and once operational were to involve the young people, to enjoy, to achieve and to make a positive contribution. Jamie and Myles are shining examples of the impact that Rolling Base has had. They are now receiving training to work on the bus and are performing tasks with confidence and relishing this experience. They have flourished with the support and encouragement of Rolling Base and its team.

Rolling Base on the Road

Over 900 young people have stepped on board Rolling Base since it started operating in November 2006. It makes a regular appearance at Whitefield School offering DJ skills, film making, fashion design and nail art workshops. Rolling base hosts activities and advice sessions at the Multi-Agency Centre in East Finchley at The Old Barn, as well as attending World Aid's Day at the North London Business Park, where over 150 young people came through the doors for leaflets and discussions. From Northgate School in Edgware to 'Pitstop' a Friday night hot chocolate and chat in Barnet High Street, Rolling Base has travelled far and wide.

Rolling Base supported the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy at the Arts Depot, where Finchley Youth Theatre put on a performance of The Ordinary Prince and after show discussions, information and advice were available on the bus. Rolling Base will continue to develop new projects creating opportunities across the borough as a place to relax, have fun, be creative and gain new skills. Links with a sexual health advisor as well as other health professionals have been established to work closely with Gareth in delivering educational sessions. The Safer Neighbourhood Teams from several wards have made contact to work together with Rolling Base. This enables young people to interact with Police officers in a relaxed environment, playing games, listening to music and using computer programmes together to hopefully build bridges and create respectful relationships. Sessions on Job searching, interview techniques and how to construct a CV have also been held using the wireless Internet access on the bus. The informal and friendly atmosphere compares favourably with the perceptions or experiences many young people had of their local Job centres.

Rolling Base has also conducted a clean up of two local parks Stoneyfields Park and Clitterhouse Park, during the Easter holidays. This highlights and teaches young people the importance of protecting their environment and makes them more aware of maintaining their own surroundings, in a community minded spirit. The project was huge success, involving over 40 young people.

Another project launched during the clean –up campaign is Mural Mania. This is a mobile art space that gives young people the chance to show off their artistic talents, either using computer graphics to project it or by hand directly on to the portable screens.

The Rolling Base project has transformed, despite numerous challenges, into a valuable resource for young people in the borough. Our priority now must be to ensure sustainability for the project. In order to be able to continue delivery of the extensive range of activities and opportunities, funding must be secured from previously untapped sources as well as those long-term supporters already involved. Rolling Base provides the best means of access to young people, the borough currently has.

It is hoped that recognition of this by all those involved in youth provision will enable us to build upon the secure foundation already in place.

Rolling Base is now planning its next event 'FRESH' *Freedom to Relax, Express yourself, Share ideas and Have fun*, in the May half term. We will be visiting another two local Parks, offering 'Mural Mania', Sports equipment, Vox Box and Rolling Base's unique space to enjoy. Starbucks Coffee will again be providing tasty refreshments.