

# Sasha Bruce Youthwork: Theory of Change

## Part I: Contextual Analysis

### ***Our youth and families are at risk.***

At-risk can mean many things, but for us, it means that the youth and families we work with in the District are facing conditions that make it more difficult for them to succeed.

### ***Youth and families in our community are marginalized by race, ethnicity, sexual preference, gender or involvement in the justice or child welfare systems.***

Research has repeatedly shown that youth and families who are born into a specific set of conditions or who face specific life experiences are at higher risk for homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse and school failure.

### ***Our youth and families experience stigmatization and disempowerment.***

These youth and their families are labeled by schools, society, peers, and service providers who may delay care or provide insufficient care based on what they interpret or believe.

### ***Youth and families in our community are resilient.***

Many of the youth and families we serve have experienced violence, abuse or neglect. Most have experienced multiple traumas. Many have been rejected by their families. Despite the challenges and barriers facing them, they rise above.

### ***Sasha Bruce Youthwork supports youth and families.***

Youth and families can develop protective factors to counter the risk factors they face. SBY works among youth and families to build up these protective factors, providing individual and family counseling, educational supports, and vocational training, and building caring relationships within our community.

## Mission and Vision

Our **mission** is to enhance the lives of runaway, homeless, abused, and neglected youth along with their families in the Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County. Our **objectives** are to transform the systems that these young people are part of, to promote community, to foster connections and to nurture healthy relationships. Our **vision** is a community in which young people and families have access to opportunities and services they need to succeed.

## Part II: Theory of Change

### The Sasha Bruce Way: Our Philosophy of Care

At Sasha Bruce Youthwork, we call our philosophy of care the Sasha Bruce Way. This approach is rooted in the family therapy methodologies of the late Marianne Walters, a distinguished clinician, author, and feminist. Walters directly trained some of our staff, and her influence continues to shape the foundational tenets of our work. Additionally, our philosophy draws on trauma theory, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, and the principles of Positive Youth Development.

### The Three Pillars of the Sasha Bruce Way

#### 1. How We Think About Clients

Our philosophy begins with the fundamental assumptions we hold about the young people we serve. These beliefs shape our programs and interactions, guiding us toward approaches rooted in empathy, understanding, and empowerment.

- **Trauma has impacted our clients and their families.** The youth, families, and communities we serve have often been deeply affected by trauma—whether historical, generational, or personal. These experiences negatively influence their sense of safety, trust, and well-being, as well as how they engage with the world.
- **Systemic oppression creates barriers.** Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression limit opportunities for many young people. These structural inequities disproportionately affect the communities we serve, making it more difficult for our youth to thrive.
- **Every young person has inherent strengths.** No matter their circumstances, there is always something within them that is working and can be built upon. Even challenging behaviors are attempts to meet needs and cope with adversity.
- **Youth thrive in relationships where they feel valued and connected.** Respectful, positive relationships are essential for personal growth and change.

#### 2. What We Provide in Our Programs

The **Sasha Bruce Way** empowers youth through positive experiences, relationships, and environments. Our programs are designed to be youth-centered, allowing young people to take the lead in their own growth. When you walk into any Sasha Bruce program, you will see:

- **Strong, trusting relationships between youth and adults.** Our staff are attuned to each young person's strengths, providing both support and guidance in reciprocal relationships.

- **Youth voice and choice at the center.** Many of our young people have experienced systems that diminish their autonomy. We prioritize shared power and decision-making, helping youth reclaim agency and self-determination.
- **Environments that prioritize safety and stability.** For many youth with histories of trauma, feeling safe is not a given. We provide stability and predictability to help them rebuild trust and a sense of security.
- **Healthy routines and activities that foster development.** We create environments that build youth capacity and confidence through engaging and developmentally appropriate programming.
- **Intentional community-building and peer connections.** Our programs prioritize belonging and connection among participants, recognizing that supportive peer relationships are critical to success.
- **A celebration of all identities.** We foster inclusive spaces where youth can embrace their identities and histories. We intentionally honor cultural diversity and celebrate events like Juneteenth, Black History Month, and Pride Month. We engage in conversations that help youth build a **positive sense of cultural identity and connectedness.**

### 3. A Culture of Continuous Learning and Growth

At Sasha Bruce, we are a learning organization. We recognize that the ability to reflect, adapt, and grow is essential for maintaining high-quality services and a healthy organizational culture. We foster a commitment to learning at all levels through:

- **Professional development.** We provide clinical training, skills development, and crisis intervention training to ensure that staff continue learning and improving.
- **Supportive supervisory relationships.** Regular one-on-one supervision ensures that staff feel supported and can develop their skills.
- **Debriefing critical incidents.** Staff engage in structured reflections following challenging situations, allowing for learning, adaptation, and emotional support.
- **Ongoing self-reflection.** Staff are encouraged to examine their values, beliefs, and limitations, using this awareness to improve their practice.
- **A culture of giving and receiving feedback.** Open communication and constructive feedback are key to professional growth and program success.
- **Consistent team meetings.** Regular program staff meetings foster collaboration and alignment with our philosophy.
- **Data-informed decision-making.** We evaluate program outcomes, staff feedback, and client experiences to continuously improve our services.

By embracing a culture of learning and reflection, we empower staff to grow alongside the young people we serve. We recognize that organizational learning leads to better client outcomes, and we model for youth the ability to self-reflect, adapt, and strive for continuous improvement.

The Sasha Bruce Way is more than a philosophy—it is a living practice that informs every aspect of our work. By embracing these core beliefs and principles, we create an environment where young people feel safe, valued, and empowered to build strong, meaningful futures.

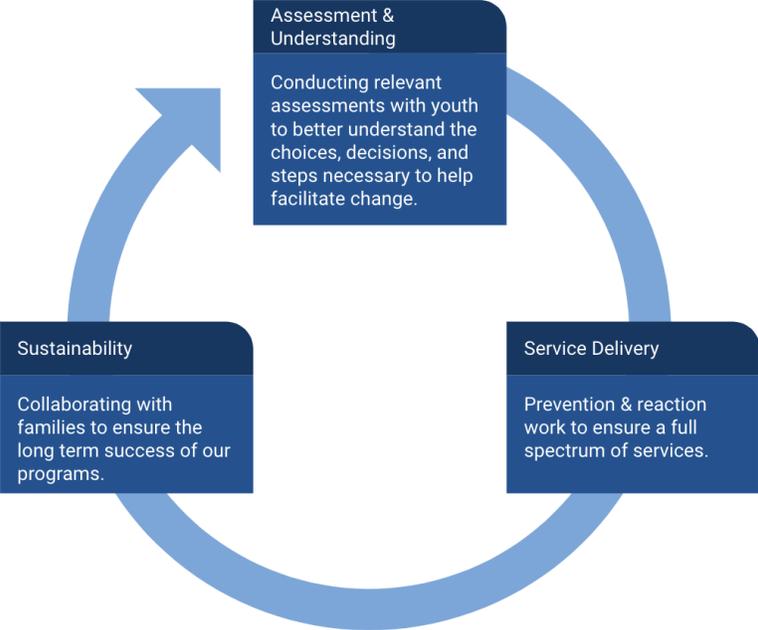
## **Our Service Delivery Process**

The Sasha Bruce Way involves assessment, service delivery, and sustainability phases:

- During the **assessment and understanding phase**, staff conducts relevant and necessary assessments with youth to understand the story of the client’s past. Assessments can include the SPDAT, CANS assessment, CAFAS, and our own internal assessment that helps to supplement information. These assessments allow us to understand what brought the client to SBY. The assessment phase ends with considerable clarity on the choices, decisions, and steps that are necessary to help facilitate change.
- The **service delivery phase** includes both prevention and reaction work to ensure a full spectrum of services are achieved. During the service delivery phase, staff use youth development approaches to help youth set their own goals. Each youth has a service plan that is individual and tailored for their goals and needs. Staff help facilitate and provide youth tools to be able to achieve those goals. For example, some programs provide specialized help to ensure that youth find jobs, increase their income, or increase their education. Other programs can include a clinical component and provide mental health services or healthcare referrals. Staff are present-focused, and their core intervention is to help the client become aware of their power to achieve their goals.
- The final phase is the **sustainability phase**. Because change is more successful when it can be sustained after SBY’s work with the youth has ceased, we believe that collaboration with families is important to ensure the long term success of our programs. When working with a young person, it is best practice to connect early on with their parents, guardians, and other significant family members, if any are identified, so we can fill in gaps in their story, understand different perspectives on the problem and readiness to make change, and contextualize the youth in their family constellation. Whenever possible, we endeavor to repair fractured family relationships, even if the youth returning to live with their family is not a practical goal.

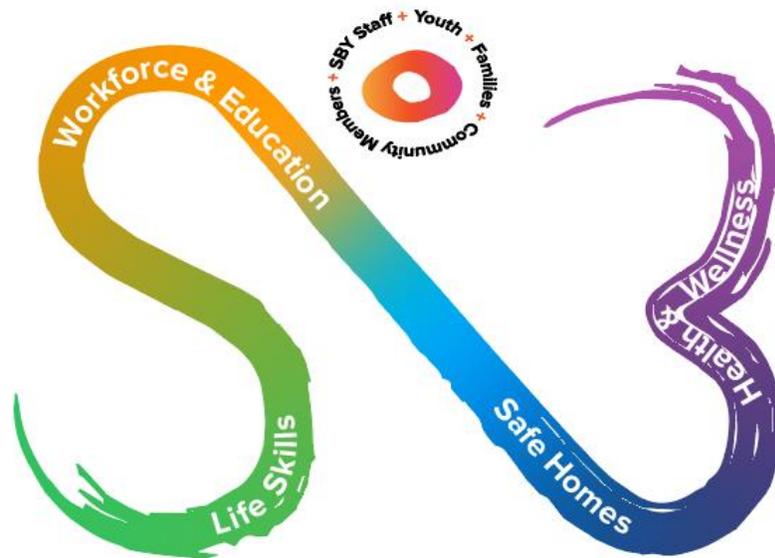
Essential to SBY programming is our continuous follow up with clients after they have completed our programs. SBY takes pride in ensuring that youth continue to be successful after they have participated in our programs. SBY builds a community that ensures lifelong connections where youth can find help and guidance. Building relationships and forming

authentic connections ensure that our programs don't only work to end youth homelessness but also build a safe community.



## Our Outputs

Sasha Bruce Youthwork provides innovative, evidence-informed programs that promote SBY's **Four Pillars of Opportunity**: safe homes; life skills; workforce and education; and health and wellness.



Life Skills	Workforce & Education	Safe Homes	Health & Wellness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting Family Communication</li><li>• Self-Sufficiency</li><li>• Educational Engagement</li><li>• Employability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School Completion</li><li>• GED Preparation</li><li>• Workforce Training</li><li>• Postsecondary Education</li><li>• Career Development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Safe &amp; Stable Housing</li><li>• Emergency Shelters</li><li>• Transitional Housing</li><li>• Family Reunification</li><li>• Family Support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental Health Counseling</li><li>• Improved Community Connections</li><li>• Physical Healthcare</li></ul>

## **Our Outcomes**

Using our approach and philosophy, we can change the youth homelessness system. Partners and providers in the District look to Sasha Bruce for leadership, and Sasha Bruce continually steps up to lead. As we move forward with our programming and service delivery, we envision specific changes aiming to impact five key outcomes categories: (1) stable housing, (2) permanent connections, (3) education, (4) employment, and (5) well-being.

### **Stable Housing**

#### **All youth will:**

- exit our program to safe and permanent living situations.
- maintain safe and permanent living situations
- not experience housing instability
- not return to homelessness

### **Permanent Connections:**

#### **All youth will:**

- feel connected to people and society
- have meaningful relationships with others
- accept referrals to services, as needed
- access community resources, as needed

### **Education**

#### **All youth will:**

- be enrolled in and attending school or
- have completed high school or GED

### **Employment**

#### **All youth will:**

- have increased their income from program entry
- be employed or looking for employment

### **Well-being**

#### **All youth will:**

- report improved mental health
- report improved resilience
- participate in life skills training
- report increased life skills
- meet short-term case plan goals
- obtain public benefits, as needed

## **Our Impact**

Sasha Bruce sets youth on pathways to achieve self-sufficiency and lead fulfilling lives. We empower youth to address challenges, cultivate resilience and self-efficacy, and choose healthy lives. By investing in their well-being, and that of their families and communities, we can build a stronger, more equitable society where all youth, and all individuals, can thrive.

## **Our Goal**

Our ultimate goal is to strengthen the capacity and resilience of every youth, allowing them to realize their full potential and build strong families, supports and communities.