

Feedback and actions from the National Leadership Network Host Workshops 16-18 March and 12 April 2021

Facilitated by Lisa Thomson and Gary Brown



FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

*To host a new national
LEADERSHIP network for
young people with
care experience*

→ Online workshops for information and discussion

- 16th March: 10 - 11.30am
- 17th March: 1 - 2.30pm
- 18th March: 6 - 7.30pm

→ To book a place contact:
lisa.thomson@lifechangestrust.org.uk
M: 07922 071403

Working collectively to define leadership, combat isolation, listen to quiet voices and be aspirational. Working together for transformational change.

Total no of attendees: **36**

Total no of organisations represented: **28**

Representatives from national organisations including Articulate, National Development Team for Inclusion, CELCIS, Columba 1400, MCR Pathways, The Promise, Who Cares? Scotland, Sure Start, Quarriers and Staf.

In addition to this, regional representatives were also present from organisations including Hame, Career Matters, Johnny Walker Bond, Move On, Resilience Learning Partnership, West Lothian Council as well as Champions Board representatives from Falkirk, West Dunbarton, Midlothian and East Renfrewshire.

We asked and you said

How do you think young people view leadership?

It was agreed by all that leadership is a huge term with many different facets and interpretations that young people need to be supported to explore and one which can have both positive and negative connotations.

The majority of delegates who attended the workshop felt that young people do not see themselves as leaders with one saying: *'Young people in our country are notorious for not wanting to big themselves up and 'leader' is quite an ambitious label to put on themselves. A huge number of young people have leadership qualities that they don't recognise. Young people need to be supported to draw these qualities out and develop them.'*

A sense of change in how leadership is viewed was also voiced by delegates as being important noting: *'Leadership is not necessarily someone who stands on a podium. It is about the ability to have control over the decisions that impact and affect others.'*

In order for change to be effective it was highlighted that *'Professionals need to work alongside young people and listen to their voices as this is much more effective. Some services continue to use 'old' models of leadership but this is not working often resulting in young people feeling dictated to as opposed to supported'*.

Some success in this area was noted within schools with one delegate stating *'things are beginning to evolve in schools, for example, how young people and staff engage in classrooms. I am hopeful this will lead to a more mature view of leadership moving forward.'*

While there are small glimmers of change it was further highlighted that young people need a sense of independence and to recognise that despite there being some young people in the care sector who are very 'visible' other young people should also have the opportunity to share their thoughts and be supported to do this in a way that is inclusive. It was noted that being a leader should not be all encompassing and that young people should have the opportunity to lead from the back. *'It's ok to come in, say your piece and step away. Not everyone wants to lead from the front.'* It was felt that the National Leadership Network should subsequently offer a range of opportunities across various timeframes that young people can choose to dip in and out of as well as engaging in a more long-term way.

Despite the challenges associated with the term leadership it was also described as an aspirational term showing people what they can achieve with the right support and opportunities. It was felt that *'if the network can support young people to understand and accept that they can be leaders in many different environments then this would be positive.'*

The advantages of partnership working and involving young people in this was also clearly highlighted particularly in relation to work undertaken as part of The Promise and champions boards where young people can be employed as Participation officers.

'Leadership is a good term. This is what we are trying to achieve so why white wash it. Young people don't see themselves as leaders at the start of projects but not that long into co production and autonomy they start to see themselves as leaders. We should be doing more to support this instead of doing the work for young people.'

ACTION - The National Leadership Network will continue to engage with services around the concept of leadership; how this is viewed by young people, their allies and supporters specifically focusing on areas of overlap and difference.

What should the key aims/focus of the network be?

It was felt that the name National Leadership Network could be seen as an umbrella term, one that gave a suggestion of what the network aims to do, but the overriding sense was that the network should ultimately be shaped by young people:

'Young people should be guided by leadership to determine where the network should go and should be consulted as to what they see working. They may go off on tangents but this is ok.'

There was a strong sense from workshop delegates that the network should be *'something with high expectations. Something that is impactful, effective, provides opportunities that are positive, showcases the brilliant work being done across the country and links this all up.'*

'There are so many amazing organisations that support young people across Scotland and so many people with amazing skill sets. The network must adopt a joined-up approach across Scotland ensuring that someone in Dingwall gets the same opportunities as someone in the central belt. This will require mapping the landscape to gain greater awareness/knowledge/understanding of services in order to support young people effectively.'

With this in mind it was noted that the Network needs to have distinction, avoiding any sense of toe stepping with other organisations, networks or approaches. The challenges of being young people led were recognised in this but clarity around who providers are and what they do in order to ensure young people get the support they require was highlighted. It was noted that a need for clarity around aims and focus would also reduce the risk of the network losing focus potentially *'chasing opportunities as opposed to real goals'*.



There was a further sense that the network should focus on personal and social development, providing opportunities for individuals as well as being representative and inclusive and having strong links with The Promise.

'Network should support young people to examine the experiences they have had and how this 'connects' with leadership. It should explore what would have helped young people to manage difficult transitions and support them to set up peer support programmes ie champs boards which help with unlocking potential in self and others.'

The need for further opportunities for young people was also highlighted with one delegate noting *'As you build confidence and leadership it needs to be plugged into something for example the Scottish Youth Parliament'*.

Lastly, the benefits of having young people involved in leadership roles as part of the governance of the network was also highlighted as being important whether as members of subgroups or oversight boards. Governance is the traditional example of leadership opportunities currently available within organisations. This helps us to share what leadership looks like in the initial set up of organisations.

ACTION – The National Leadership Network will undertake extensive mapping, exploring the leadership landscape across Scotland. In consultation with young people the network will provide signposting and establish connections across Scotland to ensure young people have access to leadership opportunities best fitting their age, stage and aspiration regardless of postcode or geographical location.

How do we engage with young people, particularly those with seldom heard or quiet voices?

While digital engagement has provided positive opportunities during lockdown, including the ability to connect individuals across various geographical locations, workshop delegates described the past year as difficult in terms of engagement *'not only for those young people that we 'rely on' but also those with quieter voices.'*

'Traditionally engagement has always been community based. It needs to be where people are.'

During the past year a number of organisations reported moving away from traditional 'group work' toward more individual 1-1 support for young people alongside other methods such as questionnaires with incentives included.

It was felt by individual's attending the workshops that young people in kinship care and looked after at home remain the hardest group of young people to engage with suggesting particular attention should be paid to these young people in the development of the network.

ACTION – The National Leadership Network will develop an engagement strategy to connect with young people – particularly those identified as having quieter voices. This will be done in consultation with young people with care experience with a focus on creating a safe space for individuals to engage with others as part of 'Connecting Conversations.'



What barriers might we face in this work?

Young people's readiness to engage in services was raised as a potential barrier to the work of the network with various organisations describing their individual approaches for supporting this.

Peer support appeared to be the most common approach provided with the advantages of this for all involved being highlighted.

'At every stage there seems to be great opportunity for proper relationships to grow and develop with peer support and this has proven to be a powerful way to access services.'

'One of the things I have experienced in studies around leadership is it can be quite isolating. Peer support and being able to come together helps this. Having a space to share ideas and celebrate what has gone well helps people to grow in confidence when they start to see the similarities they have with others.'

The advantages of using creative methods of engagement were also noted across the workshops providing Young people with various choices and opportunities for development as well as keeping the work fresh and exciting.

ACTION – The National Leadership will develop an engagement strategy that provides young people with leadership opportunities specific to their needs with adequate support, including peer support, running in tandem to this. It will further work to harness creative skills, developing partnerships with services that offer creative experiences and opportunities to young people with care experience.



Recognition

Professionals attending the workshops recognised that young people are expert by experience noting that *'Knowledge of young people is knowledge we do not have.'*

It was strongly felt by all attendees that knowledge has a value and any input from young people must be recognised either via financial reward or in lieu of support to engage in employment or educational opportunities.

'The network must support young people to feel that what they do is going to create impact and create change in the widest sense. It should be inclusive, reflective and devoid of tokenism.'

ACTION – The National Leadership Network will work in partnership with young people ensuring that they are recompensed for any work that they do. This may take the form of payment in cash, incentives or training opportunities.

NB –Following interviews with over 20 individuals, eleven young people with care experience have been recruited to engage in the host selection process with all due to attend training for this paid opportunity in early April.

The Network as an Independent Entity

The importance of the network being viewed by young people as independent was raised by attendees who assimilated this with the benefits of the work undertaken at The Promise. It was felt that as an independent entity, Young people would be more likely to engage due to the absence of previous negative experiences with any one service provider as well as increasing young people's sense of ownership over the work.

ACTION – The National Leadership Network aims to function, as much as possible, as an independent entity continuing to engage with as many young people with care experience, their allies and supporters as possible in the coming year.

Throughout Year One the National Leadership Network plans to share regular updates on its engagement, progress and plans and will work in partnership with young people to design a process for this which supports accessibility, transparency and relatable content.

POST WORKSHOPS

To link in with actions raised in these workshops and in informal consultations two young people with care experience have been offered some paid hours with Life Changes Trust. They will be involved in shaping the strategic focus of the National Leadership Network as well as guiding the development of the group of young people (currently unnamed) who will voluntarily play an integral role in the evolution of the Network.

Since the workshops eleven young people have also been offered paid hours to support the process of a host or hosts being identified to take over the Network.

