



Media Release

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Creative arts helping care experienced young people in Polmont

A new project to support care experienced young people in Polmont young offenders institute has been launched, thanks to a £142,000 grant from Scottish charity the Life Changes Trust. The project is being run by Impact Arts.

Impact Arts' mission is to help people transform their lives through creative and arts based activities. Working in partnership with Barnardo's and the Scottish Prison Service, their new project is called the Care and Opportunity, Celebration and Outcomes project (COCO). The project will provide care experienced young people in Polmont access to creative and artistic activities to help them improve their confidence and self-esteem, develop new skills and improve their life chances.

Care-experienced young people are often more at risk of poor mental health, homelessness, higher rates of early death, including suicide, and are at greater risk of offending behaviour.

Those who will benefit from the project in Polmont have also, in the majority of cases, experienced multiple disadvantage, often coming from communities affected by high levels of deprivation.

Impact Arts aim to work with young people and the local community to provide opportunities for change, and allow young people who have been in the care system to learn new skills and share their experiences in a way they may not have been able to do so before.

COCO project activities will focus on story-telling, including song-writing, DJ-ing, creative writing, visual arts and design.

Those completing multiple activity blocks will then have the opportunity to become peer mentors, giving them an opportunity to model positive behaviours and to build more positive relationships with staff, corporate parents and other support agencies.

Additionally, the project will improve the life chances of young people through offering accredited qualifications (for example ASDAN Creative Arts Award) which will support the transition back in to the community.

The COCO project funding award is one of fourteen awards made by the Life Changes Trust under the banner of 'Creative and Active Lives', with a funding total of £1.75 million.

Creative and Active lives funding awards aim to improve the physical and mental well-being of care experienced young people by increasing their participation in creative and physical activities. Each of the fourteen funded projects will focus on growing opportunities across a broad range of creative and active pursuits, so that care experienced young people can engage with their peers and increase their skills, wellbeing and social connections.

Jamie Proudfoot, Impact Arts Programme Manager, said: "We're delighted to be bringing a quality arts programme to care-experienced young people in Polmont. The nature of musical performance and writing means the Coco Project will be hugely valuable for the young men involved, offering a medium to express themselves and explore challenging ideas and emotions. The skills and abilities developed as part of that process will equip young people with the life skills and creative skills they will take with them on release."

Heather Coady, Director of the Trust's Care Experienced Young People Programme said, "The difficulties that care-experienced young people can face are well-documented, from experiencing neglect and deprivation to coping with poor mental and physical health.

“This can have a major effect on their overall well-being, which is compounded by the experience of being in prison. However, as we have seen time and again, with the right support, care experienced young people can – and do – flourish and achieve just as much as any other young person. The COCO project will give these young people skills - and hope - for the future, allowing them to express and explore their own experiences and aspirations.”

The Life Changes Trust was set up with a Big Lottery Fund endowment of £50 million to improve the lives of two key groups in Scotland: people affected by dementia and care experienced young people.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Life Changes Trust was established by the Big Lottery in April 2013 with a ten year endowment of £50 million to support transformational improvements in the quality of life, well-being, empowerment and inclusion of people affected by dementia and young people with experience of being in care.

As of 31 July 2017, there were 14,897 looked after children and young people in Scotland.

There are several types of placements that looked after children or young people could be in, including being at home (subject to a Supervision Requirement), or away from home - in foster care, in residential care or in a kinship placement, where they are placed with friends or relatives.

We are committed to working with care experienced young people, care leavers, practitioners and other professionals in Scotland so that when young people leave care, they have positive life chances and outcomes just like other young people.

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