



## **Media Release**

### **For Immediate Release**

### **New 'Champions for Change' pledge for care experienced young people in South Ayrshire**

A group of young people in South Ayrshire are on a mission to influence decisions that affect their everyday lives by joining their local 'Champions Board'.

The South Ayrshire Champions Board, called 'Champions for Change', was set up at the end of 2017 after securing £224,000 from Scottish charity the Life Changes Trust.

Champions Boards provide platforms for young people to talk directly to Council staff, elected members and service providers to discuss the challenges that being in care can bring, and how these challenges can be faced and overcome with the right support.

Marking a major milestone, 18 young people aged between 8 and 25 now sit on the new 'Champions for Change' Board, and last week they met for the first time with senior figures at South Ayrshire Council to secure a host of new pledges for enhanced services.

At the meeting, members agreed that:

- looked after and accommodated children will have free access to South Ayrshire sport and leisure facilities through the Access for Leisure scheme

- care experienced young people will not have to apply for housing through the homeless system
- all staff will receive induction training on their role as a corporate parent
- the Council will adopt a 'Family Firm' Approach to ensure every care experienced young person in South Ayrshire is given support to access a wide range of vocational learning opportunities, including apprenticeships

**Councillor Julie Dettbarn, Chair of the South Ayrshire Integration Joint Board**, said the platform was already driving change. Following last week's inaugural meeting of the Champions Board with South Ayrshire Council, she said: "In just a few short months, the South Ayrshire Champions Board has already influenced the way we work, engaged with people from all walks of life, and importantly got that message to those with experience of living in care. It's easy to forget that not everyone has equal access to opportunities, but by closing the gap and empowering young people who have been in care we're taking steps to give young people an active voice. Today's event was a fun way to officially mark the start of our work, and while there's still much to do, I'm confident that the enthusiasm of all those involved will deliver positive change in the years ahead."

Behind the scenes members had already started to build momentum, with achievements including:

- engaging directly with forty care experienced young people through activities including housing conversations, meals, group work, filming and photo shoots
- providing awareness raising sessions to 469 corporate parents across South Ayrshire from elected members to Head Teachers, Police Scotland and community representatives
- identifying and supporting a young care leaver to sit on South Ayrshire foster care panel
- appointing its first Modern Apprentice to help drive forward the work and maintain the momentum

Champions Boards support care experienced young people to develop positive relationships and become active in their communities. They encourage young people to influence change themselves, by listening to their lived experiences and giving them a space to grow their confidence, abilities and potential.

While many care leavers do well despite the challenges they face, as a group, they often experience poorer outcomes such as:

- much higher rates of early death, including higher rates of suicide
- worse mental health and physical well-being
- poorer access to continuing education or training
- greater unemployment and homelessness

**Heather Coady, Director of the Trust's Care Experienced Young People Programme said,**

"It is such a privilege to witness and support this fantastic network of Champions Boards in Scotland to grow.

Working alongside young people and learning from their lived experience can really affect positive change. Champions Boards show care experienced young people that they are valued, supported, and listened to as the experts when it comes to their own lives. Our goal is to see policy and practice in the care system changing to reflect that."

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.

**ENDS**

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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 2016, there were 15,317 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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