



Media Release

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£220,000 to champion care experienced young people in Stirling

Stirling's care experienced young people will be able to have more say in the decisions that affect their lives, thanks to £220,000 funding from the Life Changes Trust. The money will be used to set up and support a local 'Champions Board' in the area.

Champions Boards provide a unique platform for young people to draw on their own experiences to act as expert advisors, talking directly with staff and elected members from local authorities, health boards and other public agencies. In this way they can highlight the challenges that being in care can bring and how these challenges can be faced and overcome with the right support.

In 2015, Scottish charity The Life Changes Trust invested an initial £2 million in 10 influential Champions Boards across Scotland. They proved so successful that they went on to pledge a further £2.5 million to double this number by the end of the year.

With the £220,000 funding, the Stirling Champions board aims to engage young people in the decision-making process by inviting them to set the agenda for the Champions Board meetings, where they will be supported to learn leadership, advocacy, negotiation and communication skills.

By involving them at this level, care experienced young people will become full partners in the Champions Board, so that decisions are meaningful to them.

The support structure will also help them to become more engaged and become active citizens in the wider community.

Stirling Council has around 277 young people in the care system. While many care leavers do well despite the challenges they face, as a group, they can experience poorer outcomes such as:

- 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

By developing its Champions Board, Stirling aims to address this cycle of negative outcomes often experienced by looked after children, and to work with young people and local communities to break down the stigma associated with being in care.

Stirling has already done much of the groundwork to get their Champions Board up and running, with weekly meetings between care experienced young people and key members of staff to talk about how services should be developing. This reference group is seen as the first step to developing a full Champions Board.

Important issues have already emerged from these meetings, with young people identifying improved housing, better access to mental health services, access to peer support as well as improvements to educational support as priorities.

Key partners in the development of Stirling's services for children and young people, such as their Champions Board, include Stirling Council, the University of Stirling, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, Who Cares? Scotland and Barnardo's.

Stewart Carruth, Chief Executive of Stirling Council said, "The creation of a Champions Board for Stirling and the support that we are receiving from the Life Changes Trust represents a great opportunity for us to continue the work that we are doing to improve the outcomes and life chances for our care experienced young people.

“Our Champions Board will be a participatory forum where the voices of young people are listened to and heard, shaping practice to evoke positive change. The board will be co-chaired by the Chief Executive and a young person, who will ensure that the views and needs of Stirling's young people are at the heart of service delivery.”

A care experienced member of the Care Reference Group added, ‘I'm glad Stirling can now set up its own Champions board. The £220,000 will help us get our views out there and make a difference in the lives of care experienced young people, like myself, and open up more opportunities to help us in the future.’

Heather Coady, Director of the Trust’s Care Experienced Young People Programme said, “We are pleased to be able to fund Stirling to be part of a growing network of Champions Boards in Scotland. We believe that better outcomes for care experienced young people are more likely to be secured if children and young people are listened to, included and involved in the planning of their support and care. Champions Boards genuinely work in partnership with young people to achieve this, showing young people that they are supported, listened to and respected. This has the potential to truly transform lives.”

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 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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