



Media Release

24th January 2018

£224,000 to champion care experienced young people in West Dunbartonshire

Care experienced young people across West Dunbartonshire will be able to have more say in the decisions that affect their lives thanks to £224,000 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 trail blazing Champions Boards across Scotland and have pledged a further £2.5 million to double the number of Champions Boards over the next year.

West Dunbartonshire will use the Champions Board approach as a way of working with their care experienced young people, to provide them with an informal forum to meet with the people responsible for their care, well-being and future life chances. It will also give them an opportunity to engage in a participatory decision-making process, so that they can have a say in local service design and delivery.

Many care leavers do well despite the challenges they face, but as a group, they can 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

By establishing a Champions Board, West Dunbartonshire 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.

West Dunbartonshire has already established a Youth Forum for looked after and accommodated children, and the new Champions Board aims to engage with even more care experienced young people across the region. These young people will be fully supported to engage with people who they may not normally meet, so that they can inform changes and improvements to policy and practice.

The formation of a Champions Board in West Dunbartonshire is supported by Who Cares? Scotland, Y Sort It, West College Scotland, All 4 Youth and West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership.

Convenor of West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Councillor Marie McNair said,

“West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership is delighted to receive this funding which will help provide a platform for our young people to engage and build positive relationships with their many Corporate parents within West Dunbartonshire. The funding to introduce our Champions Board will help us ensure the voices of our children and young people are heard, their opinions respected, and we act on their ideas for change. As Corporate parents we are committed to ensuring every child in our care receives the same care, attention and personal development to make sure they thrive from young children to mature adults and play an active part in society.”

Heather Coady, Director of the Trust's Care Experienced Young People Programme said, "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 do this. We are pleased to be able to fund West Dunbartonshire to be part of a growing network of Champions Boards in Scotland, showing care experienced young people that they are supported, listened to and respected, the impact of which can be transformational"

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:

For more information on Life Change Trust funding for Champions Boards, see the Trust website: <http://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/projects/champions-boards>

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.