

CHAMPIONS BOARDS

Impact and Learning Report

2017-2018

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Foreword

We are delighted to publish this second Learning Report, incorporating learning from Boards who received funding awards in 2017. As the number of Boards has grown, opportunities for everyone – practitioners, young people, managers, politicians, executives – to learn together have become greater.

Champions Boards are the cornerstone of our strategy to create transformational and sustainable change for care experienced young people in Scotland. The Trust now funds Boards in 21 Local Authority areas in Scotland, from north to south – from the Highlands down to Dumfries and Galloway – and east to west – from Edinburgh over to Glasgow – capturing both urban and rural areas in between and reaching a large proportion of our country’s care experienced population. Our total investment in Champions Boards now stands at £4.467m.

The Life Changes Trust made its first funding awards to Champions Boards in the spring of 2016, and published its first Impact and Learning Report early in 2018. This report highlighted impressive early evidence of the positive impact Boards have on the young people who participate. It also demonstrated emerging evidence of the cultural shift which has seen young people take up a much more central role in decisions made about care services.

In this report, we can showcase some of the positive changes that Champions Boards have initiated, which are bringing about welcome improvements in young people’s lives. These concrete outcomes are important, but we believe the most exciting information is drawn from encouraging everyone concerned, including young people, to reflect on their experiences. We ask our Boards questions such as “what did you learn?” and “what will you do differently?” We listen deeply to the answers, and relish the opportunity to challenge our own thinking.

The external environment remains highly challenging. Council budgets are under pressure, and poverty, poor housing, health concerns and lack of employment opportunities are still highly prevalent factors in the lives of care experienced young people. However, this backdrop makes it all the more important to have a protected space where the rights and aspirations of care experienced young people remain at the forefront of our minds.

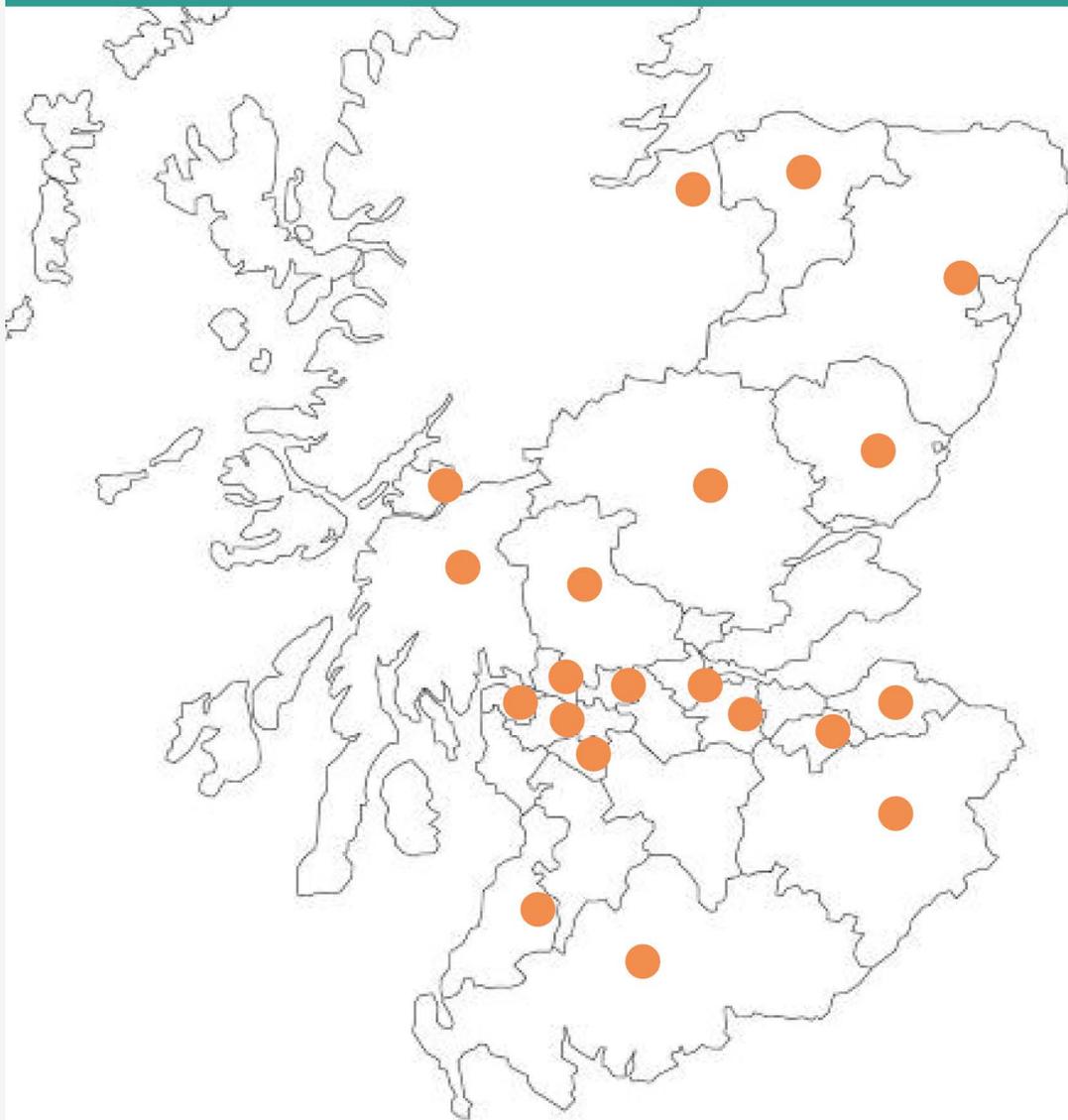
We always believed that putting young people at the heart of decision-making processes would have a profound impact on the lives of young people with care experience. We are now beginning to see just how powerful these young change-makers can be.

Heather Coady
Programme Director, Care Experienced Young People Programme



Map of Life Changes Trust Champions Boards 2016-2018

FUNDING MAP



Local Authority	£	Duration
Aberdeen City	£219,117	2016-2019
Argyll & Bute	£292,500	2017-2020
Dumfries and Galloway	£221,150	2017-2020
Dundee City	£225,674	2016-2019
East Dunbartonshire*	£224,682	2018-2021
East Lothian	£224,870	2016-2019
East Renfrewshire	£224,900	2016-2019
City of Edinburgh**	£60,400	2018-2019
Falkirk	£201,160	2016-2019
Glasgow City	£224,807	2017-2020
Highland	£225,000	2016-2019
Inverclyde	£225,000	2017-2020
Midlothian	£193,380	2016-2019
Moray	£223,707	2017-2020
North Lanarkshire*	£159,481	2018-2021
Perth & Kinross	£225,000	2017-2020
Renfrewshire	£219,600	2016-2019
South Ayrshire	£224,200	2017-2020
Stirling*	£219,217	2018-2021
West Dunbartonshire	£224,167	2017-2020
West Lothian*	£209,043	2017-2020

*funding started in 2018, but as they have not concluded their first year of funding at the time of publication, analysis of their spend, activities and impact are not included in this report.

** development funding – as above

Introduction

Champions Boards support young people with experience of care to work alongside those who make decisions about the care system. Based primarily within Local Authorities, they are a vehicle for young people, Corporate Parents¹, and other professionals to come together with a shared goal. The aim is to ensure that services are tailored and responsive to care experienced young people's needs and take into consideration the kinds of vulnerabilities they may have as a result of their experiences before, during, and after care.

Champions Boards continue to be a fundamental part of the Life Changes Trust's approach to creating transformational and sustainable change. In 2016, the Life Changes Trust invested over £2 million of funding for the first wave of Champions Boards. In 2017, the second wave was launched, bringing the total investment to over £4.4 million.



¹ Corporate Parents are organisations and individuals who are responsible for protecting looked after children and young people's interests. For more information please see CELCIS' [Inform Briefing on Corporate Parenting](#) (2017).

Investing in a Champions Board Approach

The Trust now invests in 21 Champions Boards across Scotland and a national Network to support them. Each Champions Board we fund has different origins and different structures, but all share common features.

To some, the term 'Board' suggests rigid procedures and hierarchies which are, in fact, contrary to the culture of Champions Boards. For this reason, we often use the term **Champions Board approach** to describe the projects. By this, we mean processes that support young people with care experience to have more influence over the services and support they receive. For most of our funded Boards, there is a specific forum called a Champions Board which meets regularly, but the overall approach goes far beyond those meetings.

The Champions Board approach is characterised by genuine relationships being formed between young people, staff, and Corporate Parents. Meals are cooked and eaten together. Trips are taken, songs are written, and employment support is offered. Corporate Parents get to know care experienced young people as individuals with unique needs and aspirations, and young people gain insight into the challenges experienced by their Corporate Parents.

Champions Board staff work every day to ensure people with experience in the care system are heard and valued. This shift in culture from consultation to participation, from 'doing to' to 'doing with' is key in a Champions Board approach.

Wider policy context

Champions Boards do not exist in a silo. They support and are supported by a wider policy context which, since 2014, has seen increased activity around the care system.

June of 2018 saw the release of the Scottish Government's first amalgamated report on Corporate Parenting from Local Authorities, following the legislative changes introduced by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Champions Boards and Champions Boards activity were discussed throughout the report as examples of good practice.

- **Hundreds of care experienced young people have found a voice through their participation in Champions Boards and know they have influenced decision making in areas of real importance to them.** ●
- **Scottish Government report on Corporate Parenting**

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This highlights the key role that Champions Boards have been playing in creating the right conditions for young people to genuinely influence and shape local policy and practice.

The [Scottish Care Leavers Covenant](#) was also pivotal, in that it provided a blueprint for Champions Boards to implement legislative changes, as well as providing an important rallying call to address some of the most obvious gaps in provision for care leavers. The Trust made it a condition of funding that all funded Champions Boards signed up to the Covenant.

Scotland's Independent Care Review is also supported by those involved in Champions Boards, as they have had a significant input into the 'Discovery' and latterly the 'Journey' phases of the Review.

Champions Board Network

A key component of the Trust's Champions Board investment is the Champions Board Network. The structure and activity of the Network has grown considerably throughout year two. These activities create a space for current Champions Boards to share ideas, discuss issues, and celebrate successes of individual Boards.

The Network is so highly valued by Boards that, starting in 2019, the Trust will support all areas with Champions Board activities to attend Network events whether they are funded by the Trust or not. More information on the Champions Board Network can be found in [Part 1.3: Sustainability](#).

Learning Approach

The evidence within this report was collected through a variety of means, including monitoring reports and observational notes from various 'learning meetings' and Network events. The Life Changes Trust Champions Boards also take part in an external 'Scorecard' survey, administered and analysed by the Social Value Lab². The results of this survey are primarily used as a learning tool for the Boards themselves, but also provide independent verification of the self-evaluation evidence provided by the Boards. For more information, see the [supporting methodology document](#). The Social Value Lab scorecard report is also available upon request.

² Social Value Lab is an independent Social Research agency based in Glasgow, Scotland. For more information see <http://www.socialvaluelab.org.uk/>

This Report

This report pulls together evidence from funded Champions Boards that have been operational during the past year, sharing what they have learned and achieved during this second year of Trust funding. It also explores the impact that has been evidenced throughout these first two years.

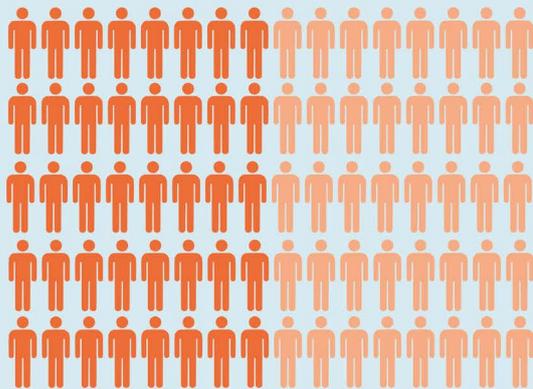
In Part 1 we explore learning across Trust funded Champions Boards. Far more has been learned than could fit into this report, so we have concentrated on three areas in particular; common Champions Board models, supporting care experienced young people in early employment, and planning for sustainability.

In Part 2 we look at the impact that has been made over the first two years of Champions Boards activity in Scotland, including a review of the outcomes from the first year of funding and an exploration of common trends in areas of impact.



Part 1: Key Learning

THE NUMBERS



1086 Care experienced young people participated in activities
▶ 50% attended more than once



1372
Practitioners have received training

81

Changes to policy and practice so far

Total Spend

(years 1 and 2)



1460

Corporate Parents and other Professionals who have engaged with Champions Boards



706

Sessions run to support engagement of care experienced young people

The second year into our journey alongside Champions Boards has re-emphasized the importance of what we learned in the first year. As we reported in our [year one report](#), to be successful and effective, Champions Boards need shared values, strong participation, resources, systems of accountability, and effective partnership working. The evidence we received this year reinforced those conclusions.

In this second report, we will explore the following aspects of Champions Boards:

- ▶ Champions Board Models
- ▶ Supporting Employment
- ▶ Planning for Sustainability

It is important to note one piece of overall learning is that progress is not linear. Year two saw well-established Boards dip at times, and brand new Boards soar. Young people and staff sometimes moved on to new and exciting opportunities, and as such there were periods of not only building, but also re-building. Sometimes what was re-built was stronger than the first attempt, while other times a few trials of different approaches had to be taken prior to settling on one.

Part 1.1 Champions Board Models

Champions Boards are complex and varied. Throughout the first two years of Life Changes Trust funding, Boards used different approaches and processes regarding:

- ▶ engaging with young people with experience of care
- ▶ engaging with Corporate Parents
- ▶ establishing operational patterns of working
- ▶ building formal structures for accountability

Engaging with young people

Most areas use one of the following three models to support the engagement of care experienced young people:

- ▶ One central participation group, plus one-to-one sessions with young people who may not be ready or interested in joining the main group.
- ▶ Multiple participation groups, often including ‘mini-champs’ for younger age groups, care leaver groups, regional groups, and ‘leadership’ or ‘working groups’ for those who want a more focused role and less time socializing.

- A smaller central participation group that makes links with other pre-existing groups such as foster care and kinship care groups, LGBT Youth groups, school-based Champions Boards, etc.

These models are often influenced by the geography of an area and the size of the care experienced population, among other factors. In a rural Local Authority with a smaller care experienced population, having multiple participation groups or Champions Boards in schools might mitigate issues regarding transportation. In a larger Local Authority or an area with a strong culture of participation among young people, forging links to already existing groups may be a way to access a wider group of young people.

Continuous engagement of young people can prove to be challenging at times, however we believe that this has been eased by us having several smaller groups of young people rather than one large group.

– Champions Board Staff



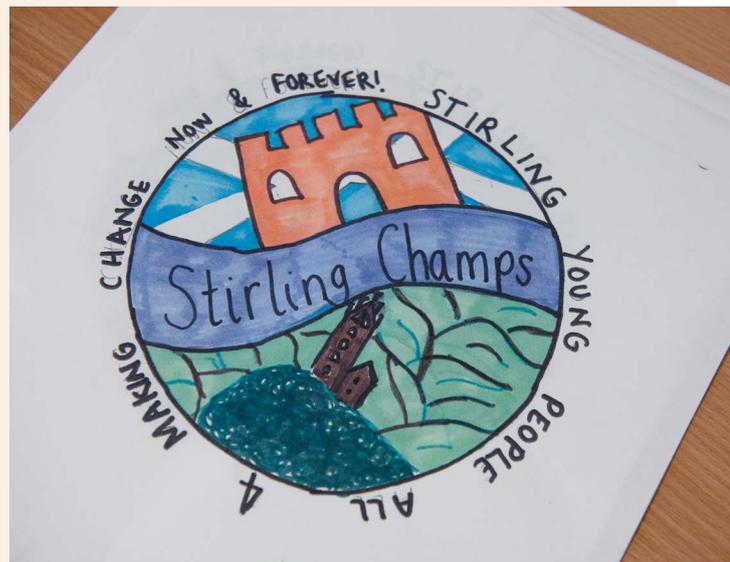
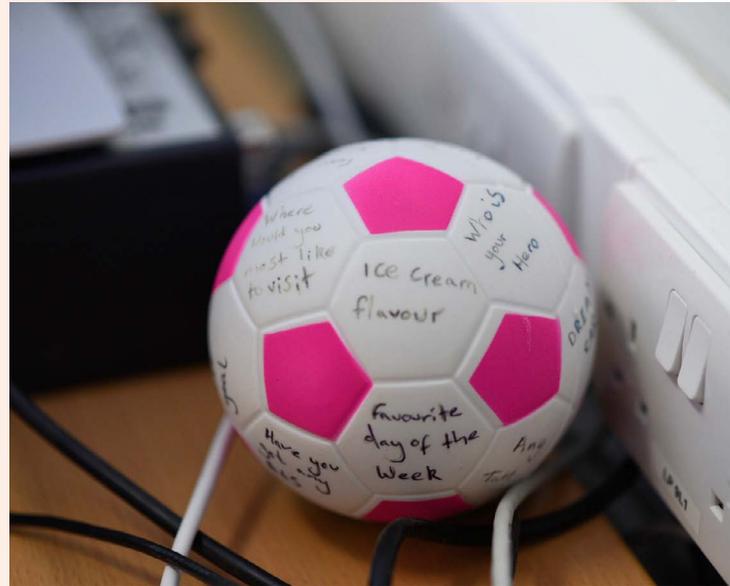
It's some place to go, like you don't get judged or criticised. You can be yourself, everyone gets included and you can share your own opinions, it's a place where you can fit in and make new friends.
– Care experienced young person

Common Challenge: Lack of Engagement

One challenge that was reported – particularly in smaller groups and groups in more rural areas and/or areas with lower population levels – was lack of availability of young people.

Many times this lack of engagement was due to positive issues in the young person's life. Someone who was initially very committed to the Board may gain enough confidence to go back to school, start a new job, or find new hobbies they enjoy.

At times Corporate Parents have been frustrated with the lack of engagement from young people, which has prompted difficult but productive conversations regarding the role of the young people versus the role of Corporate Parents and other professionals in terms of making changes to the care system.



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In the last year, some of the Champions Boards that have been running the longest have changed the approach of their participation, shifting between, and sometimes combining, the models and approaches listed above.

Many Boards supplement these approaches in order to include more young people – especially those looked after at home – by using social media and use of specialty apps such as ViewPoint or Mind of My Own.

 **We are keen to ensure that all young people are given the opportunity to give their views and to influence the work of the Board even if they don't wish to be directly involved themselves. We are exploring the development of online resources and social media platforms to engage with a wider group of young people who do not wish to attend regular meetings but would like to give their views.** 

– Champions Board Staff

Practical Tips for Participation:

1. Timing is important – consider Care Week, holidays, school and exam schedules. If possible, adjust working hours to allow for evening and weekend meetings.

2. Go to the young people, and invest the time in building relationships with them where they are (example: 'tea time' at local children's houses).

3. Use social media as a way to reach young people and allow young people to engage with each other directly.

4. Balance work and fun: this may be within a single group or it may mean developing smaller working groups with people who are more focused on making change.

5. Open up engagement by partnering with other groups of young people who don't necessarily have experience of care, or by inviting members to bring friends along. This helps young people build broader networks and can also fight stigma.

Common Challenge: **Exclusivity of Groups:**

One issue several Boards reported on was the protectiveness of close-knit participation groups, which can at times lead to difficulty when new members join. At other times, existing members are welcoming and open, but new members may not have the knowledge or understanding of the work to contribute to the same degree. Some Boards reported feeling like they had to 'start over' and re-explain everything each time new people joined, which got in the way of progressing work. Both of these scenarios can lead to established groups seeming intimidating and exclusive to outsiders.

Another challenge that has been experienced with at least two groups is in relation to the group becoming unresponsive to new people joining. This has been something that development workers have been working to address with young people individually and through groups to ensure that groups are not intimidating environments to come into for new young people.

– Champions Board Staff

Groups that avoided this felt that the attitude of their existing, and particularly their founding members, made a difference in how new members experienced coming into the group. Where existing members were excited to have new people join and had a strong desire to meet new people, there seemed to be less issues around protecting the integrity of groups.



The Value of Space

Several Boards have continued to report on the value of having their own place to meet. Those Boards that had access to their own stable location were often able to engage more young people on a regular basis.

Having a place in which young people feel they belong has continued to be an additional positive outcome of the Champions Board approach.

These feelings of ownership can, however, contribute to feelings of protectionism in which established members of the group are hesitant to let new people join.

Young people feel comfortable here and have often asked to use the space for their own meetings with advocacy workers.

– Champions Board Staff



Champions Board Members as ‘Trailblazers’

One theme in a few Champions Boards is that the participants are becoming ‘trailblazers’ for other marginalised groups. Perth and Kinross’s ‘Fun Young Individuals’ group collaborates with other young people through LGBT Youth and the Child Sexual Exploitation Advisory Group, and are working with the Council to expand their approach to participation beyond care experienced young people. In Inverclyde, the Young Champions are keen to begin working with elderly people in care homes, and have expressed an interest in helping them set up a Champions Board of their own to ensure they are aware of their rights and entitlements.

In East Renfrewshire, when asked what the Champions Board should look like two years from now, a participant said she wanted it to be about more than just care experience – she wants everyone who needs support to be listened to, taken seriously, and given appropriate help. All three of these are examples of young people changing the culture of the Councils they are working with, and setting their sights beyond the original scope of Champions Boards.

Engagement with Corporate Parents

Engagement with Corporate Parents is a fundamental part of all Champions Board activities. What this engagement looks like, however, is varied. In general, Champions Boards engage with Corporate Parents through one of three models.

Young people as representatives

The first is one in which specific young people are ‘representatives’ in pre-established Corporate Parenting spaces (for example, quarterly Corporate Parenting Planning meetings).

This is most common among newer Boards and Councils in which there are already structures in place for Corporate Parents. Strengths of this model include:

- ▶ Young people learn how to manage and navigate official structures
- ▶ Reduces duplication for Corporate Parents among groups and subgroup meetings
- ▶ Champions Board representation is widespread throughout multiple areas of the Council

However, this model does call into question the 'ownership' of the Champions Board approach, and it is often reliant on one or two young people, which increases risks of slippage when those young people are ready to move on. It can also be more difficult to challenge Corporate Parents, and limits the level of relationship-building that can take place between Corporate Parents and the general population of the participation group(s).

These risks have been mitigated by increasing social outings between young people and Corporate Parents, and slowly inviting Corporate Parents into young people's spaces once relationships have been solidified.

Strong Relationships

Trust-funded Champions Boards consistently tell us that having strong relationships with Corporate Parents is an enabler for positive Champions Board work. In some Local Authorities individual councillors have taken on a key role acting as a link between young people and the corporate parents involved in the Champions Board.

Groups that are based on a consistent membership of the same Corporate Parents generally build strong relationships between professionals and young people, but are subject to risk of stalling when a particular professional moves jobs or can't make a meeting.

The commitment and capacity of corporate parents across the partnership to engage in relationship-based activities is a key enabler.
– Champions Board Coordinator

[The] Convener of Renfrewshire Council's Education and Children's Services Policy Board has continued to develop his role as a link between young people and the corporate parents involved in the Champions Board. He has met with the young people regularly outwith the formal Board meetings and undertook to contact all corporate parents asking for feedback on how they are progressing with their pledges.
– Champions Board Staff

Corporate Parents as representatives

The second model is one in which Corporate Parents primarily enter into young-person spaces, including attendance at participation groups. This often, but not always, correlates with a **'membership based' model** (discussed below) in which the same Corporate Parents engage on a regular basis. Strengths of this model include:

- Strong relationship building; young people see their Corporate Parents as individual people
- Young-person centred; there is clear ownership by the young people
- High levels of access to people in positions of authority

This model can be challenging for some Corporate Parents, and some areas have experienced push-back when attempting to implement this approach. It often involves professionals giving up their personal time on evenings and weekends, which flags issues around sustainability. Additionally, it runs the risk of creating an 'elite' group of young people who have access to people in positions of power.

Relationship based practice is the only reason that young people are here at this Champions Board meeting. It's about taking time to get to know young people.

– Care experienced employee

These risks have been addressed by having young people attend some more formal, Corporate Parent centered meetings on a quarterly or six-monthly basis. Strong relationships with Corporate Parents – both between young people and Champions Board staff – can also help mitigate these risks.

Common Challenge:

Don't Assume Knowledge of Corporate Parenting

Several of the Wave 2 Champions Boards were surprised by the lack of awareness of Corporate Parenting responsibilities among Corporate Parents. Looking back on the first year, some Champions Boards said that if they could go back and do it again, they would have spent more time getting to understand Corporate Parents' current experiences and understandings of care experienced young people. As such, many Boards have begun investing time to raise awareness among Corporate Parents, through networking, meetings, films, photography, letters/postcards and events.

● We recognised that there wasn't a shared understanding of corporate parenting and care across our Corporate Parents and recognised that we had a responsibility to address this at a local level and support Corporate Parents to understand 'care experience' and respond to young people with compassion and respect. ●

– Corporate Parenting Officer

These issues were addressed by fostering strong relationships and connections with Local Authority agencies and departments. These were at times pre-existing due to the nature of the post (i.e. staff employed or assigned from within Local Authorities) or may be built from scratch by new Champions Board Coordinators. Those who spent the time building these relationships said it was very important.

● This time was invaluable in order to understand the infrastructure and dynamic within South Ayrshire and map the most effective way forward. ●

– Corporate Parenting Officer

Joint ownership

The final model falls between the two presented previously. In this model, Corporate Parents and young people come together for a specific purpose – often for some sort of formal meeting or working group. The participation groups are generally not attended by Corporate Parents.

In this model both young people and Corporate Parents step out of their comfort zones, and the ownership is more shared. In some cases, different Corporate Parents take turns providing the meeting space and refreshments, sharing the workload of hosting. Many Boards that started with one of the above two models have gradually shifted towards this third model.

The first thing I noticed when I began getting support and going to (engagement) events was the massive sense of community, there is ALWAYS a member of the team who wants to help you in any way shape or form be it a conversation or anything more it's never an issue or a hassle.

– Care experienced employee

However, this model does still share the risk of creating a group of young people who become seen as ‘elites’ with exclusive access to people in positions of power. Some Boards have been able to address this by creating a culture of openness in recruiting new members, with a fluid group that can engage when and how they see fit.

Operational patterns of working

Two years into Life Changes Trust funding, what was once seen as the simple idea of ‘Champions Board Meetings’ has morphed into many different ways of operating. Most, however, fall into two groups; membership-based and thematic.

Membership-based models

In this model, the same professionals come together for meetings on a regular basis, whether the young people are attending Corporate Parent spaces or vice-versa. Strong relationships are built between young people and Corporate Parents because they are regularly spending time together. In addition, the consistency of the group increases the opportunity for joined-up working and collaboration between departments. However, several boards that started with this model have moved away from it, as it was often felt that people at the meetings weren't necessarily the best people to have in the discussion, depending on the issue at hand.

Dear Corporate Parent,

You do not know us but we think you should. We are your children and you are our Corporate Parent.

We need you to care for us, look out for us, know us, share our hopes and dreams for the future, teach us and help us learn from our mistakes.

We come into care for many different reasons but more often than not it's not our fault. We often suffer abuse, neglect and mistreatment. Statistics tell us that having such a poor start in life means we're probably going to have a poor future too.

We are more likely to leave school with fewer qualifications than our peers ^{and} are more likely to become involved in crime, ~~and~~ ^{and} more likely to die at a younger age. None of this is because we are not clever, or are 'bad' or because we are trouble makers. We need you to know and believe this.



Please give us more choices than this - you are our parent is this what you want for us your child?

Growing up in care affects our mental health. We need help working through our issues and maintaining happy hearts and healthy minds not to be judged or worse - still put on a waiting list for service.

Please, dear Corporate Parents, you are our parents and we are your child will you help us?

With love and hope from

Champions for Change

South Ayrshire Champions Board on behalf of the looked after children and young people of South Ayrshire.

Common Challenge: **Inconsistent Attendance**

Some Champions Boards found that different individual Corporate Parents were attending each meeting. This meant a lot of time was spent going back over ground that was already covered and therefore stalled the progress of decisions being made. This happened even when there were high numbers of Corporate Parents who were 'bought in' and wanted to support the Champions Board work; however, the lack of consistent attendance made it difficult to make changes.

Some boards have gotten around this barrier by having professional members assign a 'depute' from their organisation who can attend in their absence. Other groups have addressed attendance through managerial structures, and still others have shifted their meetings to a more thematic approach.

The challenge with the [Champions Board] meetings has been in relation to consistent participation from both young people and corporate parents...Due to membership changes, especially in relation to the Elected Member representatives due to Local Government Elections, and changes to members' job roles etc. There has been a relatively consistent number, but not consistent people.

– Champions Board Coordinator

Thematic models

Some Boards decide ahead of time on the theme of the meeting and then choose which Corporate Parents and professionals are best suited to be part of that conversation. Strengths of this model include allowing for more streamlined working and more focused meetings. However, this may have an impact on the opportunity for joined-up working. It is also more difficult to build relationships between young people and corporate parents when the attendees change every time. To resolve this, some Boards that work with this model make time for specific relationship-building activities outwith these meetings.

Structures of accountability

Champions Boards are situated within different official structures. Where Boards are situated within these structures of accountability, reporting has a strong impact on accountability and decision making. If adequate structures are not in place, it can limit young people's ability to escalate issues that have stalled. It can also impact the level of expectation of involvement that falls on Corporate Parents, which has implications for the sustainability of the Boards.

Different Champions Boards tend to fall along a spectrum in terms of where they are situated within official structures. At one end of the spectrum, there are Champions Boards which are run by Third Sector organisations. At the other end are Boards which are embedded within the Council (often in Social Work or Youth Work departments). Each approach has benefits and risks, and many Boards have started on one end or the other and then shifted to somewhere in between.

Third Sector

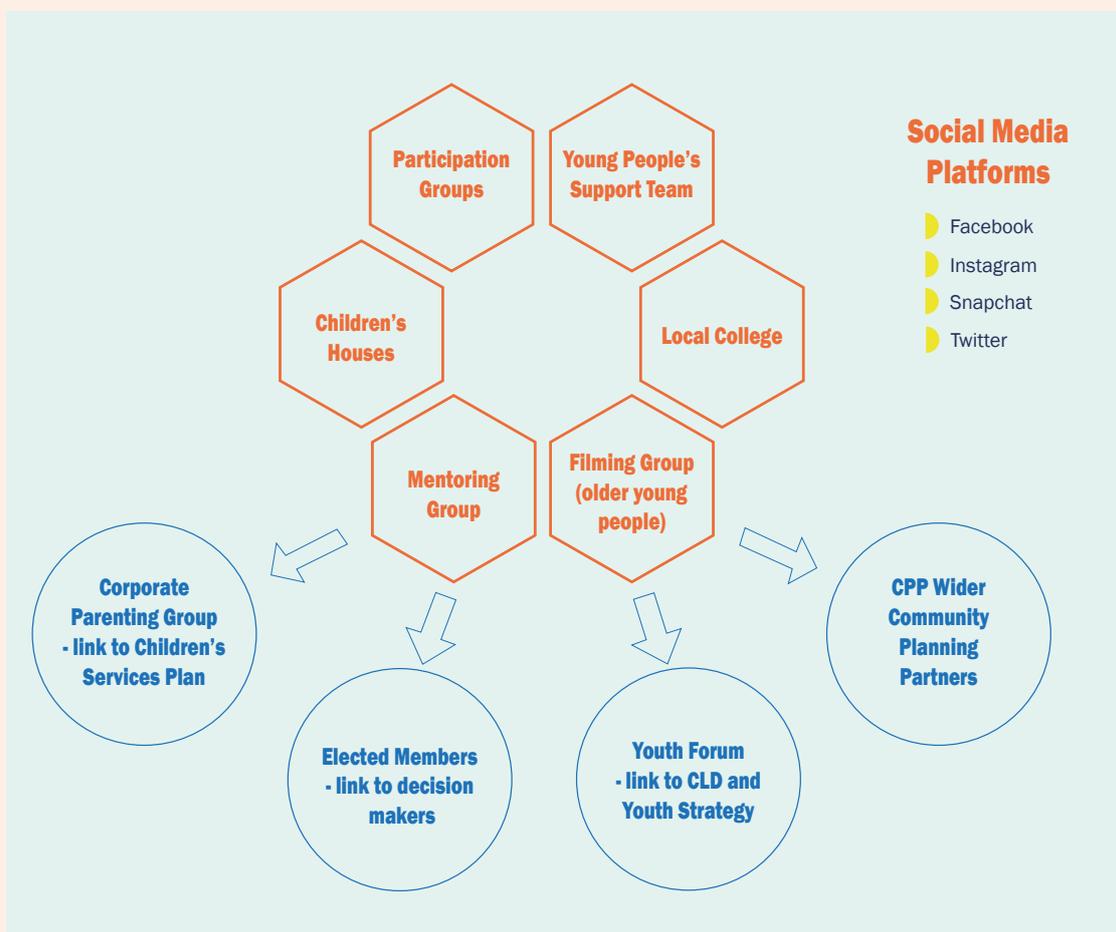
For Boards that are managed by Third Sector organisations, one benefit is that they often have very good pre-existing relationships with young people. As they exist outwith the Council's authority, the role of critiquing and holding services and Corporate Parents to account is fairly straightforward. However, this structure has often led to difficulties engaging Corporate Parents on a regular and consistent basis, since all Corporate Parent involvement is voluntary. This structure has a risk of becoming a dual process, in which Champions Boards work in parallel to, and not with, Corporate Parents. This risk has been somewhat mitigated by deliberate relationship building with key managers within the Council and by building up the public awareness and reputation of the Board.

Embedded within Council Departments

At the other end of the spectrum are Champions Boards which are embedded within existing departments in the Council; most often either Social Work or Youth Work. These Boards have direct access to Corporate Parents and may be more sustainable in the long run, as they are built into pre-existing structures of line management, accountability, and reporting. Boards that are situated high up in reporting structures will have their progress regularly examined and reported on – for example, by the Children’s Services Partnership or the Community Planning Partnership.

However, this approach can bring challenges due to pre-existing relationships between young people and professionals – particularly for those embedded within Social Work departments. These pre-existing power dynamics can also make it more difficult for practice to be challenged. These challenges can be mitigated by carefully considering pre-existing relationships when developing line management responsibilities, and by shifting some responsibilities for the Champions Board to different departments.

Example of a Champion Board’s structure:



Connections with Senior Staff

● [Our work is] supported in part by the close working relationship between the Executive Director of Education, the Chief Social Worker, and the FYI group. ●

– Champions Board Coordinator

An enabling factor for Champions Boards seems to be having a strong connection with Councillors, Heads of Service, and/ or the Chief Executive. Boards who have close working relationships with people in these positions – by which we mean regular meetings and conversations, official line management, mentoring, etc. – often cite those relationships as being key to their success.

Participation Assistants and the Corporate Parenting officer have regular meetings with the leader of South Ayrshire Council – to discuss their experiences, raise issues and emerging themes and monitor progress made on the pledges identified at Champions Board meetings. Outwith these meetings we have open access to the leader and portfolio holder for Health and Social Care. This has marked a real shift in how care experienced young people connected to the Champions Board now see elected members authority and leadership and how they view the power they themselves have as agents of change.

– Champions Board Staff

Evolving Structures

Most Boards lie somewhere in the middle, existing within Local Authority structures but often acting as a separate body that is linked to Health and Social Partnership, Corporate Parenting, or Children's Rights structures. Some Boards exist in their own right within official Council reporting structures, while others exist outwith the reporting structure, with Champions Board activity a standing item on multiple steering and planning groups in order to ensure progress and accountability.



Flexible Staff Support

Most Boards have some sort of steering group, made up entirely of professionals, that exists to support the running of the Champions Board. Several Boards have found that the remits of practitioner support and steering groups have needed to be flexible and have changed over time.

When a Champions Board is starting, building, or re-building, there is often a need for more support. At times, however, various support groups can lead to duplication and lack of clarity. The roles and remits of these groups should therefore remain flexible and able to change over time.

- There were elements of duplication between the steering group and practitioners group and at times the steering group would unintentionally undermine by overturning the decisions of the practitioners group. We decided to disband the steering group but meet as a sub set of the strategic group if there was need to do so for matters that were more than operational but which were not entirely strategic board items.

– Champions Board Coordinator

Part 1.2 Employment

It has given me and other young people so many opportunities in terms of employment, training and various different groups. They have made me realise we all now have a family that we can rely on. They can say to us that you are doing that wrong or don't give up. They motivate us to achieve what we can achieve.

– Care experienced employee

Providing direct employment support for young people with care experience is an important part of Champions Board activity. As such, Champions Boards throughout Scotland have been employing young people with care experience to support participation and engagement.

Structures in place to support these 'trainee' posts³, are varied, but raise common enablers and barriers to success. In this section, we will examine:

- ▶ Flexible policies
- ▶ Clarity of roles
- ▶ Navigating Transitions

³ We will use the term 'trainee post' to refer to young people with care experience in a role that is meant to support them into further employment. In some cases, these trainee posts are their first experience with employment.

Flexible Policies

A common challenge in employing young people with care experience is navigating the HR practices within Local Authority Areas. Boards have often found that current HR practices can be quite rigid and inflexible, due to both internal policies and legislative constraints.

One way that several Champions Boards worked around HR requirements was to instead employ young people through Who Cares? Scotland's Reaching Higher programme. Working closely with Who Cares? Scotland meant that young people had the support and expertise of that organisation, particularly when it came to participation techniques. In addition, trainees who are already associated with Who Cares? Scotland were connected to a network of young people with whom they could start engaging.

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This, in turn, led to its own challenges, as young people were often managed by someone other than the individual in charge of their workload. At the time of writing, some Local Authorities that had originally opted for this decided to employ within the Local Authority for their next contract.

Other areas have managed to forge relationships with key staff within the Council who helped them navigate, and in some places, simplify, the complex HR processes. For example, in West Dunbartonshire, the Chief Executive worked directly with the head of HR to streamline the starting process for the new employees. In East Renfrewshire, a decision was made at a senior level to include candidates who may have had some involvement with criminal justice, as these issues may surface in Disclosure checks and could be a barrier to employment. East Renfrewshire's trainee programme has been very successful, and some of the trainees may not have had the opportunity to participate were it not for this decision. The support of Chief Executives and Heads of Service were therefore vital for those who managed to shift some of the existing employment requirements.

Clarity of Roles

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Champions Boards have embraced their commitment to employing care experienced young people in trainee posts, despite this being a new way of working for nearly all of the areas. As with any new post, there were at times some struggles with a lack of clarity around roles and support.

Many Boards found that people in trainee posts struggled when they weren't entirely sure of their purpose, goals, or remit. Posts that lacked clarity often broke down, with trainees feeling they didn't have a clear purpose, and managers getting frustrated with the lack of progress.

As a means of addressing this, some Boards ended up employing fewer people for more hours (some of the original posts were 3 – 6 hours per week), while others began providing a written document explaining management structures, roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the post. Having a clearly defined role with well understood objectives has made a significant difference, particularly to those trainees who are in their first employment.

Managers and staff also found that having clear expectations around what support was on offer was beneficial. Likewise, trainees needed to understand what support was available, including when to reach out and who had responsibility for different types of support.



Navigating Transitions

In the first two years of Champions Board funding, potential trainees have often been specifically identified by staff members, either through participation groups or other support structures (i.e. Throughcare and Aftercare Services or Social Work). As such, there were often pre-existing relationships between the applicant and the support staff or between the applicant and other young people in the participation group. For the successful applicant, these relationships needed to be re-negotiated and adjusted to fit their new role.

This transition has proved to be challenging to manage, for both the young person in the post and those supporting their employment. Young people may find themselves in positions of authority over members of their own friend groups. Staff may find that someone they previously supported as part of their job is now a co-worker. When not acknowledged and addressed explicitly, these shifting roles can create issues for both the employee and the manager.

In some cases the employee may need support negotiating these boundaries. Support staff for the Champions Boards may find it useful to have a discussion at the outset with members of the participation group regarding how to best support their colleague during this transition.

The appropriate support at the right times has been shown to ease the transition of care experienced young people into Champions Board trainee posts. Most Champions Boards found that more support was needed than planned for – particularly in the first few months of employment. Having supervision weekly or bi-weekly was found to be helpful to assist in managing workload and planning for the upcoming week(s).

In addition, Boards have found that supporting the whole person is key – housing, transport, mental and physical health, family dynamics and pressures have a huge impact on a young person's ability to do well at work. Support cannot be only about the job itself.



Part 1.3 Sustainability

While consideration of sustainability began at the beginning of the Trust's investment in Champions Boards, the successful continuation of projects is taking a more prominent role in the conversations Boards are having – both with us as a Trust and with each other.

As a time-limited Trust, we have built sustainability into all of our funding plans. However, the past two years have taught us a great deal about what it takes to make a Champions Board approach sustainable. We have always envisioned that the sustainability of Boards would stem from culture change within Local Authority areas, and this belief has been backed up by statements and evidence by Champions Boards over the past two years. The Boards that have the most evidence of culture change are the Boards that are most confident about their ability to be sustainable beyond Trust funding.

The main thing we have learned, however, is that building a sustainable Champions Board approach takes longer than we initially anticipated; three years is simply not enough time.

Therefore, in the autumn of 2018, the Trust decided to invite Champions Boards to apply for up to two years of additional funding. This funding was offered at a reduced amount with a requirement of matched funding to ensure no Board is overly-reliant on Trust funding at the end of 2021/22. The next 3-4 years will therefore provide important information regarding what works best in sustaining a Champions Board approach.

In discussions regarding sustainability, some themes have already begun to emerge, including:

- ▶ Planning in uncertainty
- ▶ 'Doing things differently'
- ▶ Employment and staff
- ▶ The Champions Board Network



Planning in uncertainty

All of the original eight funded Champions Boards from Wave 1 have faced changes; staff have moved on to new positions, gone on maternity leave, and fallen ill. Corporate Parents have switched positions or changed posts. Some young people have moved on, while other Boards have grown their participation to include many new young people. All of these changes have meant taking time to re-build relationships and re-establish roles, responsibilities, and goals. Planning for sustainability in the midst of this shifting environment is particularly challenging.

The current political and economic environment also makes it difficult for Local Authority areas. Boards have spoken to us about the challenges of Local Authority budget cuts, as well as fears of losing European funding – particularly around funds for housing and employment support.

Common Challenge: Limited Resources

A common challenge mentioned by Champions Boards in year two were limits to staff time and resources, particularly in terms of supporting engagement. A common issue was that an increase in awareness also brought an increase in demand, which put additional pressure on staff and already limited resources.

As the [Champions Board] service grows and becomes better known, there has been an increase in need for this form of engagement but no increased capacity to be able to effectively meet this.

– Champions Board Coordinator

In the current external environment, adding additional staff or resources is unlikely, so Local Authorities have begun considering other ways of supporting this increased demand. Participatory Budgeting has been successful in at least one area, and other areas have implemented or are considering the use of mentoring and peer mentoring as a way to gain additional support.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting⁴ is a way for members of local communities to directly vote on how relatively small amounts of local money should be spent. South Ayrshire was aware early on that Participatory Budgeting could give them access to additional funds with which to support the Champions Boards. In their first year of Trust Funding, the use of participatory budgeting enabled them to raise over £8,000 for additional Champions Board groupwork activities.

In addition, attending and presenting to local communities helped increase awareness and fight stigma. The group received feedback from local committee members and residents saying how much they had learned and how their opinions had shifted because of the groups' presentations.

'Doing Things Differently'

Many Champions Board staff have reported on how valuable having external funding is – not just for the additional funds, but also because it allows them to take more risks than otherwise would be politically feasible in today's environment of uncertainty. External funding has given them permission to do things differently without the level of scrutiny which might otherwise be expected.

⁴ For more information, see <https://pbscotland.scot/>

I had no real understanding of care or how young people are looked after until I heard your presentation.

– Local resident, South Carrick

Your presentation opened my heart and my eyes. I had no idea what being in care felt like and the challenges it could bring.

– Local resident, Girvan

The participatory budgeting opportunity has allowed us to secure additional funding, develop paid sessional opportunities for care experienced young people, raise awareness and challenge many of the stigmas surrounding care with over 1,100 community members across South Ayrshire.

– Corporate Parenting Officer

Employment and staff

There is strong evidence of the benefits of the dedicated ‘coordinator’ posts within Champions Boards. The benefits of the dedicated Champions Board post are clear; Trust funded Champions Boards consistently report the centrality and necessity of the coordinator post. Progress would continue without them, but would slow dramatically. Without these dedicated posts going forward, there are serious concerns about the successful sustainability of the Champions Boards.

Funding via the Life Changes Trust for three years has enabled dedicated staffing to focus on the development of care experienced young people and to help plan and support meaningful engagement of corporate parents with young people. This is now allowing progress to be achieved at a much faster pace.

– Champions board staff

As mentioned above, the external environment makes the sustainability of these posts challenging. This is one reason why the structures of accountability are so vital.

If Local Authority Areas are reporting on the activity and outcomes of Champions Boards, they are more likely to continue to fund staff positions to support that activity. Regardless of the structure of the Champions Board, part of planning for sustainability must involve consideration of how posts will be embedded going forward.

The Champions Board Network

The Life Changes Trust recognised from the beginning the importance of creating a Network in which Boards could share learning and support the voice of those with experience of the care system. This has grown over the past few years and will now include other forms of Boards keen to make change in their areas, not necessarily in receipt of Trust funding but invested in the larger change movement.

With the Network expanding to 21 Boards across a large geographical spread, the support offered by the Network also needed to expand. In addition to annual national events, the Network now includes overnight development programmes that bring together Boards at a similar stage to share learning and support. In addition, regional hub events have allowed for joined-up, local planning.

Feedback received so far suggests that the more varied programme of events has been beneficial for the Network. There is good evidence that many of the newer Boards have accelerated their development, in part due to the learning they have been able to gather from more established Champions Boards.

Having the opportunity to regularly meet with other Champions Boards appears to develop supportive relationships, positive energy and a sense of collective purpose that are hard to create and sustain via more remote contact. Attendees have noted that they ‘don’t feel so alone’, ‘don’t have to explain themselves’, ‘feel re-energised by the enthusiasm of others’ and ‘realise that they are part of something bigger’ when they meet together.

Future of the Network

The long-term goal is to have the Network become self-sustaining. This year for the first time, Boards agreed to host regional Network meetings, and to set the agenda for these themselves.

However, it is clear that we are still at the very early stages of this work. Boards still look to the Trust for guidance and support, and it is important that we do not try to withdraw too rapidly and risk undermining the momentum which is beginning to develop. As such, it has been decided that the Trust will continue to support the Champions Board Network for the remainder of the life of the Trust, until 2023.



Part 2: The Impact So Far

Our vision for Champions Boards has always been to provide an effective vehicle to support systemic, transformational and sustainable improvements in the lives of young people with experience of care. We are delighted to see that evidence from the first two years of Champions Boards⁵ consistently demonstrates positive impacts.

In such a collaborative environment, it is not always possible to say what can be entirely attributed to Champions Board activity. All of the impacts below are a result of the collaboration between Councils, Third Sector organisations, young people, and Champions Boards.



⁵ Please note that only Boards who have completed their first year of funding are reported on in this section. This means that this section does not include impact from the following Champions Boards: East Dunbartonshire, Edinburgh, Stirling, West Lothian, and North Lanarkshire.

Part 2.1 Reinforcing Learning

Two primary impacts revealed in our year one report were outcomes for young people and outcomes for organisations. A second year of evidence has reinforced both of these findings.

Outcomes for Young People

One result that has been clearly evidenced is the role of Champions Boards in supporting young people to have a strong voice and influence decision making.

The team is flexible and willing to work out of office hours and do anything for young people that ordinarily in Social Work would not be seen as normal and they are very approachable in every way. They are constantly involved with young people in making decisions, not just individual decisions but decisions involving outings, events even things involving the service.

– Care experienced employee

Involvement in decision making has increased, with most Boards now including young people in the interviewing processes for new staff. This is not only true for Champions Boards positions, but for other posts as well, such as housing, social work, and youth work. In some areas, plans are in place to roll this practice out across all positions that have front-line engagement with children and young people.

Taking part in the interviewing was a positive experience. I felt part of the interview team and listened to.

– Care experienced employee

The young people had a chance to get a feel for the candidate and see if they would be a good Practitioner. This was a great opportunity and definitely something that needs to be recognised as good practice and continue.

– Care experienced employee

We also continued to find robust evidence of positive relationships between young people and their peers, and also between young people and professionals. There continues to be increases in participants' confidence and sense of belonging, as well as increased engagement in the community. For some areas, there are now opportunities for participation and community building where there previously were extremely limited options.

We describe ourselves as a 'family', where we look out for each other in many different situations. To many of us the group means a lot; it's a safe place where we can all be open and express our feelings.

– Care experienced young person

Young people report feeling respected and listened to, having a sense of belonging, and feeling they have people they are close to and can talk to.

Having a Champions Board makes us feel that we are valued and welcome because we are around others in the same situation as us.

– Care experienced young person

I've learned how to be myself around others, even when I am nervous.

– Care experienced young person

Impact on Young People in Renfrewshire

In 2016, Renfrewshire Council commissioned an independent evaluation of their Champions Board in partnership with the University of Huddersfield. The findings from this evaluation showed that as a result of participating in Champions Boards, young people experienced increases in skills and experience, including:

- ▶ working together and learning about cooperation with their peers and with corporate parents
- ▶ learning about the systems of Renfrewshire Council
- ▶ learning about how different organisations operate and impact on their lives
- ▶ a sense of empowerment
- ▶ able to hold people accountable in an appropriate way

- ▶ being able to report back
- ▶ networking
- ▶ communication
- ▶ preparing for meetings
- ▶ developing the discipline of attending a group / activity regularly

The evaluation also found significant beneficial impacts in terms of young people's self-confidence and sense of control of their lives.

Evidence thus far suggests that similar learning and impact is true across most Champions Boards.

In addition to these general positive outcomes for young people, Boards can point to improvements that have supported young people in local children's houses or residential homes, for instance increases to pocket money, changes to physical space like gardening projects or the ability to decorate bedrooms, access to Wi-Fi, and increased integration and interaction with the community. While these may seem small, they have huge impacts on the young people in those places.

Outcomes for Organisations

I am hugely impressed with the corporate parenting work you all are doing. The session... was a great evening and let us all see how able our young people are.

– Chief Social Work Officer

Increased collaboration

Reporting in year two continued to show significant increases in collaboration and joined up working within Councils, with other Champions Boards, and with other organisations and networks.

Within Councils

Increased collaboration between Council departments and among Corporate Parents is regularly flagged as an outcome of a Champions Board approach. Boards reported engagement from a wide variety of agencies, including Finance, Social Work, Education, Fire and Rescue, Police, Housing, Employment Services, and the NHS.

One result of this increase in joined-up working has been an increase in funding to support care experienced young people. In Renfrewshire, for example, increases in joined-up working – largely due to Champions Board activity – led to £190,000 additional funding. £90,000 of funding was allocated from the Tackling Poverty Strategy to develop the pilot of a family firm⁶ model, and £100,000 was allocated by elected members for investment in individual awards.

In conversations about sustainability, some Boards also flagged a reduction in joined up working as a possible risk were the Champions Board to lose funding. One Board in particular flagged the risk of 'going back to working in silos'.

⁶ A Family Firm approach is one in which Local Authorities offer care experienced young people a range of supports to help them secure employment, often including employing care experienced young people within the Council itself. For more information see CELCIS' 2011 paper ['Our Family Firm'](#).

With Other Champions Boards

The Trust's expanded approach to the Champions Board Network allowed for Boards to meet more regularly with a greater variety of people in attendance.

The ability to meet, discuss, and share learning between Boards has led to most of our second wave Boards overcoming or avoiding many challenges faced by the first wave.

Champions Boards are also regularly meeting up and exchanging ideas with other areas outwith official Network events, arranging visits to each other's meetings and even acting as support for Local Authority areas not funded by the Trust who are interested in developing their own Champions Board approach.

With Other Organisations and Networks

Year two also saw increased interaction between Champions Boards and other organisations and networks. Increased activity alongside the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS), the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (SCLC), the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF), the Independent Care Review, and various foster care networks proved to be fruitful and offered Boards additional sources of information and support.

In addition to investment in Champions Boards, the Trust funds other initiatives to enable the empowerment of care experienced young people and help them be more creative and active. In the past year we have also seen a number of Boards collaborate with these and other Third Sector organizations to offer art sessions, dance lessons, life coaching, and more.

Changes in culture

One of the primary goals of the Champions Board initiative has always been to shift the culture surrounding the relationships between Corporate Parents and the young people in their care. While there is still much work to be done, the past year has shown increased evidence of culture shift throughout several Local Authority areas.

We have had some notable successes: one of the big messages we got through was that we are just normal people like every other kids. A lot of people have the preconception that it's your fault that you're in care, but it's just not the case – Care experienced employee⁷

⁷ Excerpt from CELCIS' Blog: <https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/search-bank/blog/2018/03/champs-changing/>

The launch event and ongoing engagement with the Champions Board has led to more genuine relationships being formed between young people and corporate parents and ensuring that young people's voices are at the forefront of corporate parents minds when attending meetings and making decisions to help influence these. It was acknowledged that this has not happened overnight but that it has been a worthwhile process and they refer to this as being 'the norm' and embedded within the structures and planning.

– Champions Board Staff

While Elected Members are often considered the most difficult to engage with the Champions Board approach (according to results of both the 2016 and 2018 Scorecard Survey), those who are involved tend to place a high value on the Board and their involvement in it.

Looked after children was not my number one priority, and now it is

– Councillor

One of the most worthwhile and informative uses of my time.

– Councillor

It was a pleasure to speak to you and your colleagues, very moving and it absolutely drives home the point of your project, that listening to young people and allowing them the space to talk is critical to actually understanding the challenges they are facing and helping them solve them.

– Councillor

Having relationships directly with young people who either are or have been in care has commonly been noted by elected members and senior staff as having had an impact on how they approach policy and practice issues. People often referred to the fact that they now had specific people in mind when they considered the implications of policy and practice decisions, which caused them to think concretely about how changes would impact those in care or care leavers.

Several Local Authority areas reported improved relationships as a vehicle for keeping young people at the centre of the decision-making process – even when they were not physically in the room. These approaches to decision making were often noted as increasingly becoming ‘the norm’.

Now we see how our decisions impact looked-after children.

– Family Firm staff

Consultations are now conversations and happen over a meal rather than over a flipchart or in an office based environment.

– Champions Board Coordinator

Workers don't do nine-to-five; they changed my views on being 'looked after'.

– Care experienced young person



Part 2.2 Common Areas of Impact

Champions Boards generally have a series of ‘priority areas’ that they focus their energy and activities on. These priorities are developed by the young people with the support of Champions Board staff, and then brought forward to Corporate Parents and professionals to address. As each Champions Board structure and area are diverse, so too are their priorities and approaches to addressing them.

In this section of the report, we have chosen to focus on common areas of impact⁸. By this we mean themes among work that has been reported to us as having been signed off, implemented, or completed. These areas are:

- ▶ Films and Multimedia Productions
- ▶ Council Tax Exemption
- ▶ Leisure Access
- ▶ Individual Awards
- ▶ Children’s Hearing Centres
- ▶ Changes to Education
- ▶ Changes to Housing

The above is by no means an exhaustive list of the types of impact Champions Boards have made in their Local Authority areas, nor is it a list of what Champions Boards value most. It is, rather, an examination of the areas that multiple Boards were able to progress.

⁸ Please note that these items do not include times that young people were asked to consult. Consultation is an important and powerful tool; however, in this section we are focusing on more tangible results.

In addition, there are some areas of work that, despite being a priority for many Champions Boards, have proven particularly difficult to move forward on a local level. These ‘sticky’ issues include:

- ▶ Access to Transportation
- ▶ Mental Health and NHS Collaboration

Films / Multimedia Productions

One of the most popular projects for Champions Boards has been the creation and use of films and other multimedia productions. For many Champions Boards, these were what they were most proud of in the past year. They are an engaging activity and have proven to be a powerful means of raising awareness.

Films and presentations are also a creative way of enabling young people to find and express their voice, on their terms. They allow individuals to engage in a variety of ways: some write scripts, some act, and others learn how to use film and sound equipment.

While some productions have included individual young people speaking to their own personal stories, many Boards have opted instead to create fictional composite characters based on common experiences. This approach has the added benefit of allowing young people to maintain a certain level of privacy in regards to their own history.

Over half of our funded Boards have created these productions, which have been used as educational tools for Corporate Parents such as elected officials, police, teachers, foster carers, and housing officers. Topics include overall experience of care, aspirations for after care, experiences in education, housing challenges, and the impact of stigma. Several Boards are in the process of creating films regarding mental health as well.

The impact of these films has been captured in individual responses, such as Champions Board staff reporting on the presentation being a 'turning point' in their relationship with housing officers. The impact is also evident in the number of times they have been viewed and the increasing number of requests to use these films and productions in training.

The highlight for us in year two was the 'We are the Champions' event. It really showed the great work the Champs had done. The Champs were praised for their role as human rights defenders and it won the hearts of the Minister ... and the council Chief Executive.

– Champions Board Staff

In one Local Authority area, a film on education was at first only shown to Head Teachers, but has subsequently been used in training to the majority of the area's secondary school staff. In another area, having provided training to all community police officers, they have now been invited to engage with response teams as well.

Council Tax Exemption

In 2017, the Scottish Government announced a Council Tax exemption for all care leavers up to the age of 26 years old. This was an issue identified by the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant and the exemption came on the heels of a meeting with young people involved in the Dundee Champions Board, who provided a demonstration of how much of an impact Council Tax has on their budget.

While this is an undeniably positive move, the implementation and uptake of this policy remains variable depending on the Local Authority Area. As such, many Champions Boards have worked to increase awareness and understanding of this exemption, both among care experienced young people and among Corporate Parents.

Champions Boards have informed local communication plans, provided information to frontline workers, and held stalls at local events to ensure young people who are eligible for this exemption are aware of it.

Our Communities, Housing and Infrastructure team [CHI] worked closely with Children's Services to develop information and identify the care leaver population that would be eligible to apply. CHI have developed a Council Tax information leaflet that included information on the Council Tax exemption for care leavers and how to apply. This leaflet was distributed to every household in Aberdeen City along with their Annual Council Tax Statement.

– Champions Board Staff



Unexpected Ally – Fire and Rescue

Nationally, Scottish Fire & Rescue are taking an asset-based approach to supporting communities, including care experienced young people.

Our commitments [are] to improve community safety, response, and resilience, whilst addressing inequality and enhancing the wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

– Scottish Fire and Rescue
2016-2019 Strategic Plan

Rather than bringing their expertise straight into communities, they are asking what support communities need and adapting their offers to what is appropriate for different Local Authority Areas. As such, representatives are often active members in Boards, offering support such as providing meeting spaces for groups and providing fire safety checks for care experienced young people moving into new tenancies.

Leisure access

One of the most common changes made by Champions Boards has been to initiate free or reduced rate access to gyms and leisure centres to those with care experience. These projects have been a result of conversations with young people who realise what a large role being active can have on their mental health and wellbeing. While recognising the importance of remaining active, young people involved in Champions Boards also understood that there are common barriers many care experienced young people face when attempting to access leisure centres or gyms – one of which is cost.

The vast majority of Boards have either achieved free entry or reduced costs or were working on implementation at the time this report was written. Most areas have negotiated a reduced price, although some Boards then pay the remaining cost out of their own funds. Others have managed to negotiate free entry.

The most common barriers to this achievement were often to do with infrastructure and process; deciding how young people will find out about the opportunity, clarifying the application process and identifying who makes the payments and when.

Once negotiated and implemented, several Boards found another barrier was supporting young people to actually attend. Some Boards have responded to this by allowing young people to bring a friend or family member with them at the same cost. Other Boards have begun supporting young people to attend directly, accompanied either by a Champions Boards staff member or a member of the Social Work or Throughcare and Aftercare team. Some leisure centres have also begun having their own staff support young people as well.

The Life Changes Trust's [Creative and Active Lives](#) initiative is also funding two programmes (one in [Glasgow](#) and one in [Edinburgh](#)) focusing on supporting young people to take advantage of reduced/free leisure schemes. These groups are working with their local Champions Boards, and the Trust looks forward to sharing the learning from those projects more widely in the next year.

Individual Awards

A condition of Life Changes Trust funding of Champions Boards is that part of their budget is used for Individual Awards. These awards are made to support individual young people with experience of care, and are usually but not always small pots of money.

This approach to funding was piloted in 2015 and [evaluated strongly](#), and was then adapted into the Trust's [Aspirational Awards](#) initiative in 2016. We have found that in addition to the value gained by the actual award amount, young people hugely appreciated being trusted to apply for what they consider to be important to them, instead of being given specific amounts of money for specific purposes. All Champions Boards are required to create and run their own Individual Awards scheme, but the way in which that is designed and carried out is up to the individual Boards.

Themes and learning from these awards will be examined more closely in future reports. Early evidence however, continues to show that funding for driving licenses (including fees and lessons) is one of the main areas for which young people apply, as very few Local Authorities fund this themselves. Other emerging themes include IDs (both new and renewal fees), home items, and items for supporting hobbies, employment training, or education.



Children's Hearing Centres

Champions Board participants come from a variety of backgrounds and care experiences. Each care journey is unique, but one experience that is shared between many is the experience of attending a Children's Hearing. This common ground was often a starting place for work to begin in the early stages of Champions Board approaches.

Many Champions Boards have been facilitating improvements to Children's Hearing Centres. Some Boards have provided training and physical reminders of rights (such as Renfrewshire's [Q-Cards](#) project), while others have worked with centres to make physical changes to the space. Some changes include: making it feel less formal by adding more colours and different types of seating, ensuring use of a different entrance and exit so young people don't have to walk back through the waiting room after the meeting, and the establishment of more private areas for young people to meet with advocates or social workers without everyone in the meeting being present.

Several Boards have established an ongoing, continuous improvement model relationship with their local centres, in which staff re-engage with young people after changes have been made to ensure they are being implemented properly and ask what else can be done.

Changes to Education

Education staff have proven to be key partners for many Champions Boards within the first two years of Trust funding. In addition to hosting some Champions Boards and participation groups within schools, Boards have often been involved in providing training to teachers, supporting the development of new policies, and developing additional learning supplies distributed throughout the school.

While providing training is not a guarantee of impact, evidence thus far shows teachers and educational staff tend to feed back to Boards that they are more aware of the experiences and challenges facing care experienced young people having completed these trainings.

Gave real insight into what life is like for care experienced young people. Made me think about what I do in my daily practice. Made me want to do more and better

– Feedback from a Head Teacher

In addition to training, many Boards have collaborated with secondary schools to address specific issues (such as West Dunbartonshire's [BeeSmart](#) campaign, which is now being rolled out to all S1 and S2 students in the region) and to lobby changes to policy (such as East Lothian's change to educational policy regarding inclusion and exclusion of care experienced young people). Many Boards have also partnered with local Further and Higher Education bodies to enable young people to take advantage of free services.

Changes to Housing

Changes to housing have been a priority area for nearly all Champions Boards, particularly regarding supporting care leavers and avoiding care experienced young people having to present as homeless. For some Boards this has meant the creation of new internal housing protocols. In Highland, this protocol means that people with experience of care no longer have to present as homeless to receive housing support. In Falkirk the new protocol gives priority housing to care leavers.

In other areas, changes in housing involve the establishment of new dedicated positions, such as Housing Support Workers, who have a specific remit to support care experienced young people through housing transitions.

In East Renfrewshire, this post is co-located within the Youth Intensive Support Service, while in Perth and Kinross a post has been created within a local higher education facility to support housing for care experienced young people pursuing their education.

Another common change in housing has been the acquisition or construction of new flats that have then been made available for use by care experienced young people. Moray Champions Board supported a ['scatter flats'](#) scheme in which care leavers can apply for supported accommodation. In Inverclyde, Registered Social Landlords made some of their new flats available to the Local Authority. The responsibility for the cost of these flats was initially debated, but are now being covered by the Scottish Government since it was deemed to fall under 'Corporate Parenting' duties.

'Sticky' Issues

As mentioned previously, there are many areas of work in which Champions Boards have been focusing, but have had difficulty progressing to completion. Some of these issues, such as access to transport and mental health support, are national in nature, and as such Champions Boards may be running up against the limits of what is reasonable to achieve at a local level.

Access to Transport

Consistent access to affordable transportation has been an issue for many Champions Boards, but particularly so for more rural Local Authority areas. Access to transportation impacts nearly every other issue Champions Boards are addressing, from mental health and employment, to leisure access and individual awards.

This has been an area that has proved most difficult for Boards to move forward. Two Champions Boards, Highland and Renfrewshire, have secured reduced costs to public transport for care experienced young people. Other areas have worked with local transport providers to secure agreements in principle, while still more Boards are attempting to establish those collaborative relationships with transport providers.

Cost, however, is only part of the problem. In many rural areas, the availability of public transport is incredibly limited, which often impacts on young peoples' ability to engage with the community, access employment or education, or make use of some of the improvements mentioned above. With many private providers spanning multiple Local Authority areas, some Boards have argued that this is an issue that needs to be addressed on a national level instead of a local one.

Mental Health and NHS Collaboration

Health, and particularly mental health, is a priority area for nearly every Champions Board. However, the national nature of the issues, particularly regarding the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), has made this difficult to progress locally.



Many Boards have engaged in awareness raising and training opportunities, but a few Boards have created strong working relationships with their local NHS teams, which have resulted in some concrete changes. Moray Champions Board has been involved in the creation of a 'flagging system' within NHS Grampian, in which young people can opt-in to be 'flagged' as care experienced. This was developed after young people spoke about how frustrating it can be to have to explain their situation over and over again to different health professionals. The service is currently up and running among acute services, with the hope of rolling the service out to some local GPs as well.

In East Renfrewshire, collaboration with the NHS and discussions around mental health have led to the creation of a new Mental Health Nurse post working within Youth Intensive Support Services. This post will afford care experienced young people earlier access to mental health support whilst allowing them to establish and maintain relationships with a single worker within a service they may already be familiar with.

Other work is underway in other Local Authority areas, but this issue may be another example of the limits of trying to implement local solutions to national issues.



Conclusion

The Trust continues to believe that Champions Boards are an effective vehicle for systemic, transformational and sustainable improvements to the lives of young people with experience of care. The past two years have shown evidence of exciting progress and have reinforced this belief. Young people involved in Champions Boards consistently tell us what a difference it has made to their lives, and for the second year in a row we have seen evidence of a culture shift among Corporate Parents and other key decision makers. Looking back over the past two years, it is inspiring to see the changes and impacts that have already begun to take shape.

The road has not been without its challenges. As we have gained an increased understanding of what it takes to support effective Champions Boards, we have also begun to see more of the barriers to their success. In spite of this, many Boards report the confidence they have in these relatively small amounts of money creating potentially large savings for Local Authorities further down the line.

While we've seen strong evidence of impact, we have also seen some of the limits that local solutions can have in the face of national issues. In the coming year, the Trust will focus on how to best support Champions Boards to be strategic leaders and influencers around national issues such as transportation, mental health, and more.

Despite these challenges, Champions Boards are progressing well, forming the backbone of a movement to listen to young people with experience of care and make use of their expertise to create positive changes for others. We are excited to see what else these 'trailblazers' do in the coming months and years.



Getting in touch

If you have any queries or wish to share your views and ideas, you can contact us in a number of ways:

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