

# CHAMPIONS BOARDS

## Champions Boards

Impact and Learning Report  
Year One: 2016-2017

**‘We want you to understand how [our group] helps us and could do the same for other care experienced young people. It has helped us gain confidence and talk to others more. We do fun things and we can choose our activities. It helps us to start in small groups so we feel more confident to then talk to people in bigger groups - like at The Champions Board meetings. It’s helpful knowing there’s other people your age that are the same as you. There’s others around you who are the same or have been the same as you. You feel involved and not left out - you don’t feel different anymore.’**

-  
*Care experienced young people in a letter to the First Minister*

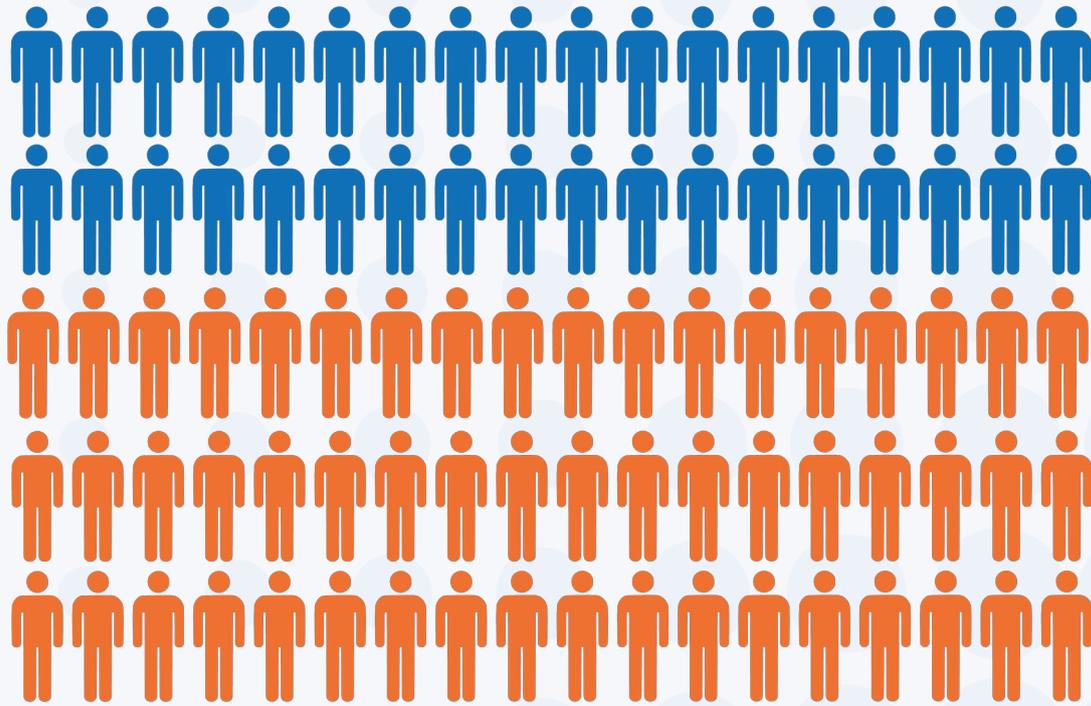
**‘The Champions are our heroes. They have shown such commitment, energy and enthusiasm in making the care system better for other young people. It has been a joy supporting the Champions to develop, gain confidence and a belief in themselves to a point where they are feeling valued as citizens and determined to realise their hopes and dreams for the future.’**

- *Champions Board Staff*

# Contents

<b>Champions Boards: A Year in Numbers .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
What is a Champions Board? .....	6
Background and Context .....	9
This Report.....	9
<b>Foundations of Champions Boards .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Shared Values.....	12
Meaningful Participation.....	13
Resources.....	18
Accountability .....	21
Partnerships .....	22
<b>Impact: The Evidence So Far .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Outcomes for Young People.....	28
Outcomes for Organisations .....	30
Changes to Policy and Practice .....	32
<b>Conclusion and Next Steps.....</b>	<b>38</b>

# Champions Boards: A Year in Numbers



**278** Care Experienced Young  
People participated in  
Champions Boards activities  
60% attended more than once

## Policy and Practice

**30** Changes to policy  
and practice so far  
**£21K** in individual awards  
to care experienced  
young people

## Year 1 Spend



## Corporate Parents, Professionals and Carers

# 253

**CORPORATE PARENTS  
AND OTHER  
PROFESSIONALS ENGAGED**



# 549

**Practitioners and carers  
attended training in  
corporate parenting and  
relationship-based  
practice, including:**



# Introduction

## What is a Champions Board?

A Champions Board is a group of care experienced young people who are supported to come together to engage directly with those who make key decisions about the care system. More than simply a chance to meet and consult, the vision for Champions Boards is one of a cultural shift, whereby Corporate Parents<sup>1</sup> build genuine and trusting relationships with the young people that are in their care.

Investment in Champions Boards is a cornerstone of the Life Changes Trust's [Care Experienced Young People Programme Strategy](#). Champions Boards put care experienced young people at the heart of decision making processes in Local Authority areas, enabling them to have a direct and meaningful impact on the structure, content, and delivery of services that affect their lives.

Champions Boards take a unique approach, allowing young people to hold heads of service, elected members, and other professionals accountable for the level of care they receive from their Corporate Parents.

The Champions Board approach offers an opportunity to address the gap between policy intention and practice reality by giving care experienced young people a platform to use their collective voice at local level.

The Life Changes Trust provided over £2 million funding for the first wave of Care Experienced Champions Boards. The initiative is for three years, from 2016 – 2019, with the intent of creating a system that is sustainable and that continues to operate within Local Authority areas after the end of the project.

The Champions Board initiative is designed to be flexible, and the way that each area structures and runs their Champions Board is dependent on the needs and context of that particular Local Authority area. Despite these local differences, all Champions Boards activities include participation, engagement, and informational sessions, in addition to more official Champions Board Meetings, in which care experienced young people, Corporate Parents, and Champions Board staff meet to collaboratively address issues in their Local Authority area.

<sup>1</sup> 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).

# Life Changes Trust Champions Boards 2016 - 2017





## Background and Context

Over the past four years, since the inception of the Trust, there has been an unprecedented shift in the Scottish legislative and policy landscape for care experienced young people. Individually and collectively, young people have spoken out to challenge the poor outcomes that can still limit their potential in relation to education, employment, housing and health.

The Care Experienced Young People Programme made a strategic decision to strengthen the collective voice of young people with a considerable investment in the campaigning and awareness raising work of Who Cares? Scotland. The impact of that investment in terms of influencing legislation was highly significant. This confirmed for the Trust that the voices and expertise of those who have experience of the care system are crucial to improving care experienced young people's quality of life and wellbeing in a sustainable way.

Champions Board approaches were already underway in Dundee and Renfrewshire, but changes in the policy context created ideal conditions for a national network to develop. Trust funding provided an opportunity for young people's voices to influence policy and practice locally, building on national successes.

In October of 2016, there was a further significant development in the context of Champions Boards with the Scottish First Minister's announcement of a 'Root-and-Branch Review' of the care system. The announcement of a review driven by the voices and experiences of care experienced young people put Champions Boards on the political map in a way that was not expected in the design stages of this initiative. At the point of writing, the Review is still in the early exploratory stage, but many Champions Boards have already begun feeding into that process.

## This Report

The purpose of this report is to reflect on and share the learning and impact that has been evidenced during the first year of Life Changes Trust's Champions Board funding.

By combining and analysing Champions Boards' self-evaluations alongside other data sources, the overall learning and outcomes from the first year of funding have been synthesised into this first report. (More information on the data and methodology is available for download on the [Trust website](#).) The Trust plans to share this learning with all those involved in running and supporting Champions Boards, other funders, Third Sector and private partners, and those interested in starting Champions Boards in their own Local Authority areas.

It should be noted that a number of the Champions Boards were operational prior to the start of Trust funding, and all of the funded Boards provide significant match funding<sup>2</sup> and resources. As a result, this report does not focus exclusively on activity and impact funded by the Trust.

To truly put young people at the centre of the system means that they should have the final say as to whether their Local Authority's Champions Board has been a success. Since it is too early for that type of assessment or judgement, we are instead sharing the learning and impact of Trust funded Champions Boards as a whole.

For that reason we rarely refer to individual Champions Boards by name or provide exact local numbers in this report. We recognise that the growth of a successful Champions Board is a complex process, and also understand that not all activity in an area will be reported on. In this first report we wish to ensure we are not confusing a lack of evidence with an evidence of lack.

The aim of this report is therefore to thoughtfully and critically examine the resources, activities, impacts, and learning that have come from the first year of the Trust's funding of Champions Boards in Scotland.



<sup>2</sup> The Trust uses the term match funding to refer to actual cash or in-kind contributions made to the Champions Board work.

# Foundations of Champions Boards



## Values

Build strong relationships

Focus on care experienced young people

Value lived experience

Foundations of Champions Boards



## Participation

Individualised support

Time to build relationships

A balance of work and fun

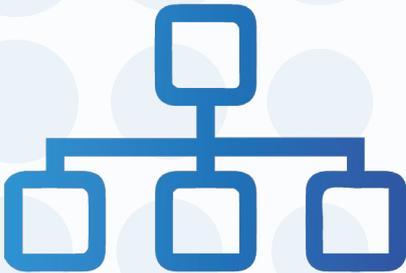


## Resources

Appropriate funding

Dedicated staff

Inclusive spaces



## Accountability

Structure

Clear management process



## Partnerships

Engagement with a variety of partners

Clear roles and responsibilities

Partnerships between Champions Boards

Throughout the first year of Life Changes Trust funding, a great deal was learned about building the foundations of a strong and successful Champions Board.

## Shared Values

Certain shared values underpin every aspect of Champions Boards. The importance of relationships, the necessity of keeping care experienced young people at the heart of all Champions Board activity, and the need to value care experienced young people's lived experience are all values that are essential for the establishment and success of a Champions Board.

### Build strong relationships

Care experienced young people have repeatedly told the Trust that above all else, relationships matter to them. They want caring, supportive relationships with people throughout their time in care and their transition out of care. This is particularly important for care experienced young people who may have had disruptions in their earlier lives, which can make it especially difficult for them to develop and sustain healthy relationships.

Strong, positive, and caring relationships are vital to every aspect of Champions Boards, from activity planning to managing partnership relationships. The learning from the first year of Trust funding shows that relationships must come first.

### Focus on care experienced young people

Champions Boards must also be committed to actively listening to and collaborating with care experienced young people in a way that keeps young people at the heart of all their work. Champions Boards exist for them, and should not be used solely as a vehicle for consultation.

In order to promote genuine inclusion and prevent tokenism, young people should be involved in a way that is meaningful and realistic, allowing them to have real influence in areas that impact their lives and the lives of other care experienced young people.

### Value lived experience

For Champions Boards to be effective, all involved must recognise and value the expertise of young people's lived experiences. Policy makers and practitioners may know what the intent of an action or service was, but care experienced young people are the experts in what it feels like to be in care. Their experiences within the care system, while understandably varied, must be believed and valued.

## Meaningful Participation

Every Champions Board is built on effective and meaningful participation both on the part of care experienced young people and Corporate Parents/other professionals.

### Individualised Support

Champions Boards quickly learned the importance of individualised support in building meaningful participation and engagement. Recruitment and retention of new young people, as well as ensuring that the group included people from a variety of care backgrounds, was a challenge for Boards throughout the first year.

In order to participate, many young people need support in the form of lifts, phone calls, or one-to-one meetings. Young people often face challenges around transportation and access to participation group meetings, particularly in more rural areas. Some Champions Board staff were regularly driving an hour or more to ensure young people could attend meetings.

Many care experienced young people deal with a certain level of disruption in their lives, which means that attendance can often be sporadic. Staff had to accept the intermittent nature of some of their young people's attendance, and work to support the attendance of those who were able to engage.

### *Key Learning: Engagement Takes Time*

Most Champions Boards underestimated the amount of time and support care experienced young people needed to be able to participate in Champions Board activities. Many found providing the necessary support was difficult at times, but also found that having strong, supportive relationships with other staff helped them provide effective support to their Young Champions<sup>3</sup>.

Champions Boards also found that this support was an ongoing process. Several noted that when they felt they had succeeded and began lessening the amount of support provided, participation would slide back down again. They would then need to provide extra support to bring participation back up to previous levels.

<sup>3</sup> The Trust uses the phrase Young Champions throughout this report to refer to care experienced young people who are actively involved with Champions Boards.

**‘Meaningful involvement takes time. Things won’t change overnight. If our Champions are going to genuinely participate, they need information, support and space to have their voice heard. This is further delayed by the fact they too have busy lives. Some have college and others have children. It is amazing to see how the Champion’s confidence and view of themselves has improved. The biggest learning is that without proper investment in the Champions themselves, things won’t change at all.’**

**- Champions Board Staff**

**‘We continue to take both young people and their Corporate Parents outside of their comfort zone and this is an ongoing challenge. It is difficult to get Corporate Parents, who do not work with our young people, to understand the lives of our young people and where they are now...Corporate Parents by their role are driven to improve outcomes and are doing this in a formal way on a day to day basis. Most young people work at a different pace.’**

**- Champions Board Staff**

Corporate Parents and professionals may need support as well, as some are very comfortable with working in less formal ways, while others are less so. Champions Board staff often found that building relationships with Corporate Parents ahead of time helped to increase buy-in and helped them understand the importance of moving outside of their comfort zones to engage with care experienced young people in new ways.

## Common Challenges: Professional Engagement

Meaningful participation of Corporate Parents takes a large amount of buy-in at multiple levels. This means building relationships with managerial and frontline staff in addition to service directors, depending on the appropriate level for the change that is needed. Some Local Authorities already had high level buy-in from service directors, but needed to build stronger relationships with managers. Others had strong support from operational and managerial staff, but struggled to gain traction with heads of service and elected members. Each Champions Board had to use their own knowledge of their Local Authority to determine where best to build relationships.

## Balance Work and Fun

Champions Boards found that maintaining engagement was helped by having a good balance between fun activities and more structured working time.

Too much of an emphasis on the activities and the meetings lost their purpose and drive, but too much emphasis on work made it difficult for young people to make the connections that made them want to come back.

**‘I love the fact that [the Champions Board meeting] was laid back but we still managed to have a guest speaker and have updates on the actions. I am really chuffed that it is a year on, and that so many people are still so motivated to be involved.’ - Care Experienced Participation Worker**

Finding the right balance takes time, and is different for each Champions Board. Some groups meet weekly and alternate between a focus on fun and work week by week, while others meet less frequently and build in engaging activities throughout their meetings.



**“The residential was a great idea for young people with the same experiences to all get together and work as a team. We could all relate to everyone and there wasn’t anyone judging our time in care. I also realized that it made a few people speak out and be more confident than they would be at home, being together meant that any issues anyone was facing they could speak out about it. I definitely think that things like this need to happen more for young people in care. I can’t wait for the ball to get rolling and we all work together to make a change!” – Care Experienced Young Person**

## Impact Story:

# The Power of Residentials

The majority of Champions Boards invested time and funds in various types of residential opportunities, whereby young people, staff, and professionals spent time building confidence and relationships.

These took various forms, with some groups going to outdoor centres in their local area, some participating in Columba 1400's leadership programme, and others going on a sailing adventure with Ocean Trust. Feedback about these residentials, from young people, staff and other key professionals, has been overwhelmingly positive.

Part of the power of these residentials is that every individual – young people and professionals alike – is out of their comfort zone. This creates an equal platform for all participants, which sets the tone for the Champions Board approach.

According to Champions Board staff, residential activities 'allowed both the young people and adults the opportunity to work as equals, regardless of life experiences or job title to form a shared sense of value and worth.' It was also noted that 'Columba 1400...support[s] young people in partnership with the key adults at this stage and helps them focus on the promises and commitments they made to themselves during the residential phase.'

Midlothian Champions Board found their Columba 1400 experience particularly fruitful. Champions Board staff invested a significant amount of time developing relationships and determining which key professionals should attend the residential alongside the Young Champions. By the end of this process, representatives from the Police, Housing, Children's Services, Who Cares? Scotland, Lifelong Learning and Employability and Education were all in attendance alongside care experienced young people.

The Columba 1400 Leadership Academy involved three preparation sessions prior to attending the six-day residential. These preparation sessions helped lay the groundwork for young people to increase their levels of confidence, self-motivation, perseverance and resilience. For the professionals, it aided in promoting a sense of vocation, improved leadership skills and an increased understanding of the young people they work with, particularly care experienced young people.

## Resources

Champions Boards require a broad range of resources, and funding from the Trust is only one component. All funded Champions Boards rely on match funding and matched resources in the form of staff time, venues, and equipment. Trust funding supported the acceleration of Champions Board activity, particularly by supporting additional staff capacity and participation costs.

### Appropriate Funding

The Life Changes Trust spent £390,600 across nine Champions Boards in the first year. The total cost of year 1 was approximately 88% of the funding allocation. Most of the underspend in the first year was due to delays in recruitment of new staff posts (see [Key Learning: Recruitment for more information](#)).

### **Key Learning: Additional Resources Through Partnership Working**

While some of the underspend in the first year was due to delays in recruitment, certain Boards also found they had access to extra resources through their partnership working. Partnerships provided additional funds for residential opportunities, free or reduced cost of physical spaces, fulfilment of some individual award requests, and other activity costs.

For the Trust, remaining flexible with budgeting and spend in the first year was key, as many Boards' actual activities varied from their original plans. As long as the project focused on the objectives agreed in the funding award, the Trust worked with individual Champions Boards to adjust their budgets as necessary throughout the first year.

### Dedicated Staff

Nearly all of the Trust-funded Champions Boards decided to fund a Development Officer<sup>4</sup> post to coordinate Champions Board activities. Those that had this position fed back regularly that they felt it was essential to ensuring the Board was set up and run efficiently. In addition to this officer post, having a minimum of a 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) Participation Assistant<sup>5</sup> post to support with engagement of young people was also seen as key.

<sup>4</sup> Different Champions Boards used different names for their staff; the Trust uses the term 'Development Officer' to refer to staff who were recruited through the project but working in a more strategic role than Participation Assistants.

<sup>5</sup> The Trust uses the term 'Participation Assistants' to refer to younger employees, usually but not always care experienced, whose main role is to support participation in Champions Boards.

Development Officers tended to be either from a social work or a youth work background. Like many aspects of Champions Boards, the preferred staff background varies from area to area. Most of the Participation Assistant posts were filled by care experienced young people themselves. The Participation Assistant's care experience brought both benefits and challenges, with the benefits outweighing the challenges.

The process of recruiting early-career care experienced young people allowed Champions Board staff to have a first-hand look at how they could build or improve upon their Family Firm<sup>6</sup> approach. Participation Assistants coming from a care experienced background also had a level of authenticity and validity with other care experienced young people which, while not necessary for the post, was often seen as a strong benefit.

<sup>6</sup> 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](#)'.

There has been a good deal of learning from Champions Boards regarding how to best recruit and support early-career care experienced young people. The learning on this is still at an early stage, and more needs to be done before this can be reported on fully. The Trust expects to produce a short Learning Brief on this issue within the year.

### **Key Learning: Recruitment**

Timely recruitment is important at the outset of a funding award for a Champions Board, regardless of whether that Board is new or already operational. Delays in recruitment were common throughout the first year of Trust funded Champions Boards. These delays had significant impacts on participation, activities, and spend. As a funder, we learned that encouraging key staff to have early conversations with HR departments is critical, particularly when aiming to recruit posts which are specifically targeted at care experienced young people. It is also important, if posts are based within Local Authorities, that job specifications have been reviewed by HR departments well in advance of recruitment.

## Common Challenges: Dealing with Staff Turnover

Throughout the first year of funding, many Trust funded Champions Boards dealt with staff turnover for reasons such as moving departments, finding employment outwith the sector, or illness. This caused major delays and disruption for those who did not have a broad range of people jointly holding responsibility for the Board.

When a Champions Board was overly reliant on single person, there was a much higher risk that the Board would lose momentum in that person's absence. This was mitigated in many cases by the creation of some sort of Steering Group in which multiple professionals held responsibility for carrying on the actions and management of the Board.

## Inclusive Spaces

One resource that Champions Boards routinely mentioned as important was having a space that young people felt some sort of ownership over. Being able to decorate, put up posters, and leave physical materials in a protected space was highly valued.

Where this space was situated depended on the specific circumstances of each Local Authority area. Many urban areas felt consistency was key, and ensured that the time and place of participation groups were the same every week. In more rural areas, some Champions Boards found it more effective to have a steady rotation of locations so young people in various areas had the opportunity to attend a group nearby.

All Boards emphasised the need to stay flexible and be responsive to the needs of the individual young people and the group, both in terms of the physical space and the location of meetings.

# Accountability

## Structure

Champions Boards work closely with their Local Authority area's Corporate Parenting Committee or Steering Group. The strategic aspect in which Champions Boards varied the most, however, was their place within the decision-making structures of the Local Authority area. While no two Boards were entirely the same, the general approaches usually fell into either a grassroots approach or a high-level approach. Both structures have their benefits and challenges.

Some Boards took a grassroots approach, with Champions Boards feeding up into a variety of relevant committees across both the Local Authority and the Community Planning Partnership<sup>7</sup>. Early evidence seems to indicate that this approach provides more access to all levels of Corporate Parents, but can make holding professionals accountable more challenging for the young people involved.

Other Boards took time to ensure their Champions Board had a high-level position within the decision-making structure. While it is still early on in the initiative, the hope is that this structure will allow young people to hold Corporate Parents to account more easily and will have greater access to the highest levels of decision-making.

<sup>7</sup> As laid out in the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#), Community Planning Partnerships involve senior representatives from public and Third Sector organisations who work with and alongside communities to develop the services that are needed locally.

Getting these high-level structures in place generally took more time and resource than the grassroots structures.

The key consideration in terms of the place occupied by Champions Boards within local decision-making structures is ensuring that the Board is young person-led and keeps the needs and goals of care experienced young people at their heart. The fact that each Board has a slightly different structure is itself evidence that the Boards have been following that value, as they each designed a structure that their young people felt was most appropriate for their needs.

## Clear Management Processes

A potential challenge with Champions Boards is the risk of them becoming dual processes that run alongside Council and Community Planning Partnership activity instead of being integrated within decision-making processes. Early evidence seems to indicate that one way to mitigate this risk is to have very clear systems around management and accountability.

Many Boards found that having a clear action plan that was owned by the young people was very helpful in maintaining accountability and progressing goals. This plan allowed them to keep track of issues and ensure nothing was dropped, while also keeping a record of all they had accomplished throughout the year.

## Partnerships

### Engagement with a variety of partners

Partnership working is key to all Champions Board activity, as Corporate Parenting responsibilities span multiple Council departments, other statutory organisations such as the NHS, and some Third Sector organisations.

In terms of effective partnership working, developing and maintaining positive relationships is essential. This means building relationships and gaining buy-in with operational and front line staff in addition to service directors.

Champions Boards found many benefits from engaging with a wide variety of partners. For example: football clubs and other organisations paired up with Champions Boards to provide meeting spaces and activities for young people; Local Authority Heads of Service offered their time to mentor some of the Young Champions; and Education services began supporting Champions Boards in schools (see [Impact Story: Champions Boards in Schools](#) for more information).



## Practice Story:

# Who Cares? Scotland and Champions Boards



The Life Changes Trust, where possible, tries to fund projects that complement each other as a way of maximising the positive impact of our funding.

Who Cares? Scotland, an independent advocacy agency and membership organisation for care experienced young people, is an organisation that Life Changes Trust has funded since 2013. Their expertise, particularly around participation, has played a significant role in supporting Champions Boards during their first year of Trust funding.

The nature of this role varies significantly from Board to Board, with some Boards having more direct involvement and others having more indirect support.

However, all Boards have some form of partnership working with Who Cares? Scotland, as they can be a major source of support for care experienced young people.

In some Board areas, this relationship has been very direct, with Council staff working with care experienced Participation Assistants employed by the Local Authority but recruited through Who Cares? Scotland.

Others have taken advantage of Who Cares? Scotland's 'Reaching Higher' employment programme to offer local care experienced young people employment as Participation Assistants. For Local Authority areas that are still working to develop their Family Firm approach, access to this employment support has been key in enabling more care experienced young people to gain employment through Champions Boards.

In terms of supporting the participation of care experienced young people in Champions Boards, Who Cares? Scotland's contribution and impact has likewise been both direct and indirect. Some areas draw directly from Who Cares? Scotland participation groups. Other participation groups have been established independently but draw on Who Cares? Scotland's participation support techniques and other resources.

All Champions Boards are actively working to ensure that care experienced young people, whatever their care background, have the opportunity to join in Champions Board activities. On the whole, through both their direct and indirect involvement, Who Cares? Scotland's support has been instrumental in what the Champions Boards have achieved in their first year of funding.



## Clear roles and responsibilities

Managers who were proactive in clarifying roles and boundaries for staff, partners, and young people generally had more positive experiences with partnership working. Champions Boards reported that having regular development days in which all partners came together for planning sessions were very useful and helped keep both relationships and output consistent.

Many Champions Boards have also found that having some sort of ‘steering group’ leading activities helped establish buy-in from multiple partners. As mentioned previously, an additional benefit to the steering group approach is that it protects from significant delay or disruption should the lead worker change jobs or fall ill.



# Practice Story: Managing Partnership Working

From the outset, Falkirk Champions Board chose a partnership delivery model which included two separate Third Sector organisations (Who Cares? Scotland and Quarriers) working alongside the Local Authority. While it took time to develop a robust approach to partnership working, by the end of the first year of Life Changes Trust funding, their partnership was strong and productive, despite early 'teething issues'. From their perspective, several things have contributed to their positive working relationships.

Quarriers has been delivering the independent advocacy service for Falkirk Council for some time, so they already had experience of negotiating that working relationship. Additionally, managers were very proactive in addressing small issues early on. The project lead estimated that for the first three quarters of the funding year she spent approximately 10 hours per week addressing management issues, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and smoothing out bumps that arose along the way.

Finally, when structural changes were being made in the Council, careful consideration was given to the long-term structure and sustainability of the Champions Board. In this case, the decision was made to ensure that staff involved in Champions Board activities were in close physical proximity, with the hope of ensuring joined-up working in the longer-term.

The result is a partnership that is collaborative instead of territorial, in which workers from different organisations strive towards shared goals and work through shared processes. After the initial push, there is still a good bit of time per week dedicated to proactively developing the partnership relationship and checking in. The work is cyclical, with some weeks needing less attention and others needing more, but in their opinion, any working towards smoother partnership relationships is time well spent.



## Partnerships between Champions Boards

As part of Life Changes Trust's investment in Champions Boards, the Trust has also funded and facilitated a Learning and Improvement Network. There were three Network events between April 2016 and June 2017. The aim of these Network events was to enable Champions Boards across Scotland to come together, create relationships, and share learning and ideas.

Feedback was collected after each event, and the evidence thus far shows that Champions Board members find having access to the Network extremely useful. The sharing of ideas and good practice, particularly around creative approaches to youth engagement, was highlighted as the most important part of Network activity. Relationships were also a strong recurring theme, with several participants highlighting the value of building relationships with other Champions Boards, other young people, and the Life Changes Trust.

Establishing and operating a Champions Board is a considerable undertaking that can feel daunting at times. The Network allowed those involved to have the time and space to reflect, hear other people's stories, and share ideas. The sharing of stories, particularly success stories, was noted as being motivational and inspirational for Board members.

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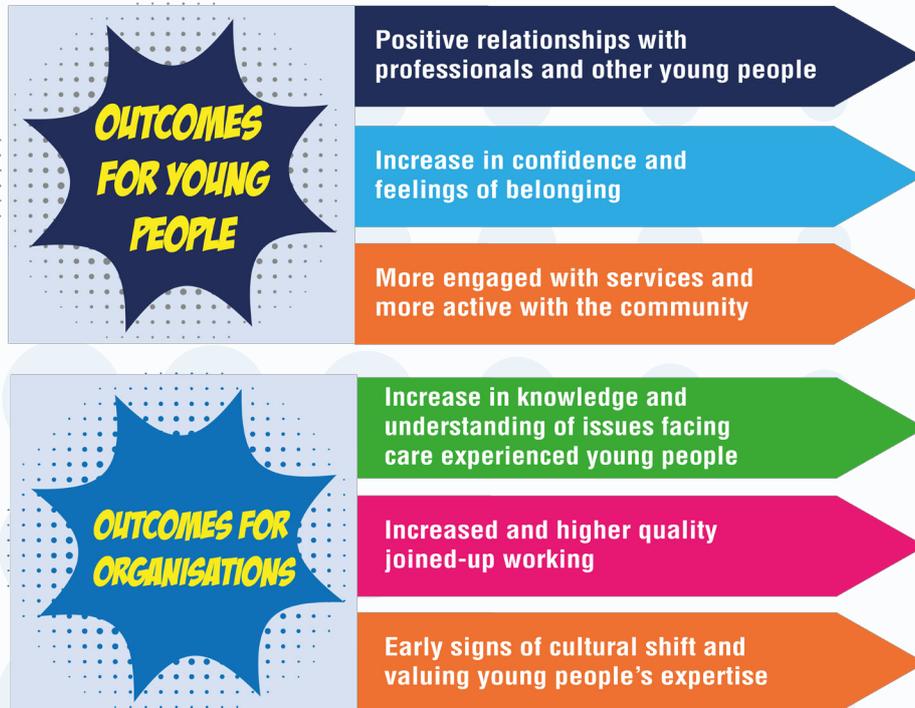
**'I find the meetings really helpful and motivational. Hearing young people's feedback is always great and a great bench mark for pitching the Board at the correct level.'** - Champions Board Network Survey Respondent

In addition, many of the respondents mentioned regular contact with other Champions Boards through various communication methods such as emails, telephone calls, visits to events, and meetings. This contact provided very useful support and motivation throughout the year.

A green speech bubble with a white background and a green border. It contains a quote from a survey respondent.

**'I have communicated quite extensively with other areas, mostly via email at the moment. We are keen to visit other [Champions Board] areas and make more solid connections and are hoping that, following the national event, this will be easier.'** – Champions Board Network Survey Respondent

# Impact: The Evidence So Far



## Changes to Policy and Practice

Over **30** changes to policy and practice throughout Scotland, for example:

-  **SERVICES**  
Creation of dedicated staff positions in housing, education, and youth intensive services
-  **EMPLOYMENT**  
The expansion of Family Firm approaches
-  **FINANCES**  
Individual Awards totalling £21,000 being granted to 77 care experienced young people
-  **STRUCTURE**  
Corporate Parenting Plans reflecting Champions Board agendas

The first year of Trust funding shows evidence of positive outcomes for the young people and organisations who participated in Champions Board activities. In addition to these positive outcomes, there were some concrete changes made to policy and practice, and early signs of culture shifts within Local Authority areas.

## Outcomes for Young People

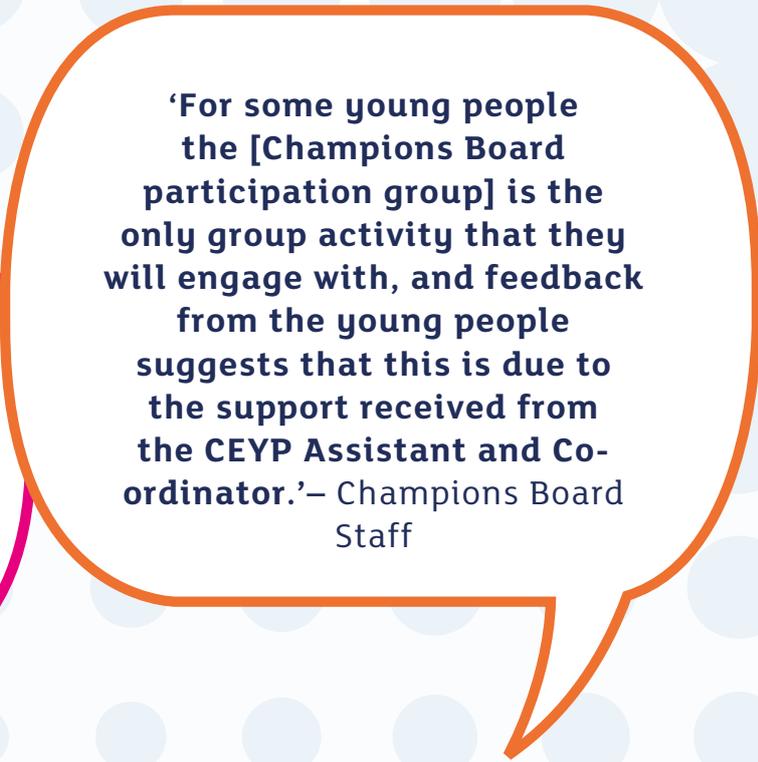
The first year of Champions Boards showed evidence of many positive outcomes for young people involved in the Boards, particularly around building positive relationships, an increased sense of belonging, becoming more active in their communities, a growing sense of their own voice, and an increase in skills.

Throughout the self-evaluation reports there has been strong evidence that young people have developed positive relationships through their involvement in Champions Boards. Champions Board participation groups have become a go-to place of support for many young people, with feedback expressing that they are friendly with the staff and can reach out to them to talk or if they need support.

Feedback from young people consistently shows that participants have also found a sense of belonging in the group. Many have reported the value of having shared experiences and backgrounds, and others have expressed that the group is 'like a family'.

A large, pink speech bubble with a white background and a pink border. It contains a quote from a care-experienced young person.

**'[Our Champions Board] helps us as care experienced young people to feel better about ourselves, knowing we're surrounded by people that can help and other young people who have been through the same stuff.'** – Care Experienced Young Person

A large, orange speech bubble with a white background and an orange border. It contains a quote from Champions Board staff.

**'For some young people the [Champions Board participation group] is the only group activity that they will engage with, and feedback from the young people suggests that this is due to the support received from the CEYP Assistant and Co-ordinator.'** – Champions Board Staff

There is evidence of young people engaging with services and workers in a way that they would not have done before. In a few cases, the Champions Board participation group is the only support the young person is accessing.

Evidence also points to the fact that participation in Champions Boards may serve as a stepping-stone to involvement in other activities, such as sport, employment, volunteering, and further and higher education. For example, in addition to the 14 care experienced young people directly employed by Champions Boards in the first year of funding, other participants have also secured employment outwith the Champions Boards. Even more care experienced young people have accessed employment support.



**‘I’m a part of a voice that is taken into consideration. They actually listen! But they also aren’t afraid to challenge us and are not afraid of conflict. I know they really have my best interests at heart.’ – Care Experienced Young Person**

There are good signs of young people beginning to feel that their voice makes a difference, with young people acknowledging the value of being listened to, even if the end result wasn’t what they had hoped.

Every Champions Board reported increases in young people’s confidence and abilities, including team working skills, responsibility, and improving conflict resolution abilities. In addition to increased confidence, young people gained practical skills including public speaking, facilitation, planning, and, in the areas that have run an Individual Award Programme, assessment of grant applications

## Outcomes for Organisations

In addition to positive outcomes for the young people involved, there is also evidence of positive outcomes for Local Authority areas in which Champions Boards are located. According to feedback, Corporate Parents and other professionals say their knowledge and understanding of the life experiences of care experienced young people has increased because of their involvement in Champions Boards.

**‘I think that Councillors are much more aware of the issues of care experienced young people and use this when scrutinising and developing policy’ – Elected Council Member**

Several Local Authorities have also had departments proactively secure Corporate Parenting training after meeting with care experienced young people, which indicates not only an increased awareness, but an increased desire to continue learning more.

### Joined-up working

There is early evidence of increased and higher quality joint-working between departments within Local Authorities, as well as partnership working with other organisations (including Third Sector, other statutory bodies such as the NHS, Further and Higher Education, and private organisations). Champions Boards meetings and activities were regularly attended by Heads of Service, Health Boards, Further/Higher Education, Police Scotland, Fire and Rescue, Skills Development Scotland<sup>8</sup> (SDS), and Elected Members, among others.

**‘I have used the opportunity to take learning from the Board and highlighted to my colleagues within SDS [Skills Development Scotland] and within members of my team’ – Corporate Parent**

<sup>8</sup> Skills Development Scotland is Scotland’s national skills development agency.

# Impact Story: Individual Awards in Aberdeen

Aberdeen City Council had a unique approach to the implementation of their individual grant awards for care experienced young people, in which they worked closely with ACVO (Aberdeen's Third Sector Interface<sup>9</sup>) to design and administer the award programme.

Through existing relationships and knowledge of organisations and services, an expert panel was put together consisting of professionals from the Local Authority area, including Third Sector organisations and care experienced young people. Each of the professionals sitting on the panel were carefully chosen for their expertise in identifying potential sources of support for young people in Aberdeen.

This joined-up approach had two powerful results - not only were more organisations and services made aware of gaps in their own provision, but more young people were able to have their needs met through alternate funding streams, freeing up individual award funds for those whose needs could not be met elsewhere.

For example, applications for laptops and educational needs were explored by the Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children, and applications for gym membership and sporting activities were first examined by Sport Aberdeen's<sup>10</sup> Looked After Children Development Worker. The Children's Rights Officer followed up on needs related to Social Work, and the Third Sector Liaison Officer followed up with financial inclusion and charitable support organisations.

As a result, in addition to the 43 care experienced young people who received funding directly from the first round of awards, approximately 20 more were supported through other organisations or services, both within and outwith the Local Authority.

**9** Third Sector Interfaces are a single point of access for support and advice for the Third Sector within specific Local Authority Areas. They aim to provide the Third Sector with clear links to Local Authorities, particularly Community Planning Partnerships.

**10** Sport Aberdeen is a registered Charity, which was established in 2010 to manage and operate a range of Leisure and Sports services on behalf of Aberdeen City Council.

There have also been some early signs of culture shift within Local Authorities, with evidence of Corporate Parents and other professionals proactively asking Champions Board members for their views, support, or ability to influence Heads of Service and Chief Executives to effect change.

## Changes to Policy and Practice

Despite being only a year into the Trust's funding, Champions Boards have already reported a total of 30 changes and improvements that have been made to policy and practice throughout 2016-2017. Overall, the changes fell into the broad categories of services, employment, finances, structure and culture.

These changes, while positive, were not without their own struggles and learning. Some young people felt their voices were heard, even when the final decision was not what they had suggested. Others felt that politics were a barrier, and that they hadn't been able to contribute to or effect the change they wanted.

It should be noted that none of these changes happened in a vacuum. Champions Boards staff and young people worked alongside many Local Authority and Third Sector staff to enable the changes below.

### Changes to Services

#### Training

Throughout all of the Trust Funded Champions Boards, training in relationship-based practice and Corporate Parenting responsibilities was delivered to over 500 professionals. The feedback that was available from those training sessions showed evidence that professionals valued hearing directly from care experienced young people.

#### Child Hearings

Two Champions Boards worked on improving Children's Hearings' Services and Centres. They created resources in the form of posters and cards that promoted young people's rights and reminded professionals to maintain a child-centred approach. They also worked alongside the Children's Hearing Services team to redesign the physical space, in order to make it more welcoming.

#### Personal Support

In addition to the personal support described in the section on [Meaningful Participation](#), there were also increased opportunities for care experienced young people to participate in group activities. In addition to overall Champions Board Participation groups, several areas started 'Mini-Champs' for younger ages, and dedicated groups for slightly older Care Leavers<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Care leavers are a particular legal subset of care experienced young people who are aged 25 and under and who were in care at or after the point when they old enough to leave school.

These groups often had their own dedicated and young person-controlled budgets.

A few Champions Boards established mentoring programmes, including peer mentoring and mentoring of care experienced young people by Corporate Parents. Additionally, one board began offering free counselling to young people participating in Champions Board activities.

### Education

In addition to the creation of Champions Boards in schools (see [Impact Story: Champions Boards in Schools](#)), additional changes in education included awareness campaigns for teachers and staff.

Some Champions Boards supported young people in creating films and facilitating workshops with the aim of increasing educational staff's understanding of the issues facing care experienced young people. In one Local Authority, Champions Board activity led to the creation of a new Education position, funded outwith the Champions Board budget, dedicated to supporting care experienced young people.



## Impact Story: Champions Boards in Schools

The majority of Life Changes Trust funded Champions Boards have chosen educational outcomes as a priority for their work in the first year of funding. Some of these Boards have supported extensive training and workshops with head teachers, others have made films and worked to challenge stigma, and others have worked towards the establishment of school-based Champions Boards.

Dundee City's Champions Board works closely with Morgan Academy, a local secondary school that started its own school-based Champions Board in 2015. In the past year, Morgan Academy has invested in their Champions Board, allowing students up to two periods a week for Champions Board activity, and ensuring one-on-one time with staff if needed.

Given the current policy focus on closing the attainment gap in Scotland, the context is favourable for schools-based Champions Boards as one means of improving educational outcomes for care experienced young people.

Highland Local Authority is close to launching a Champions Board within Dingwall Academy, and other Champions Boards are beginning to have their own discussions around this issue.

The young people in the Champions Board at Morgan Academy are enthusiastic and clear about how positive their involvement has been.

**'Because there are others in the group with similar backgrounds it's easier to talk to each other – we just get it. We don't need to explain ourselves.'**

**'Some of our teachers now have a better understanding of what is going on for us.'**

**'We have been able to get involved in opportunities with CELCIS where we shared learning from how our school based [Champions Board] works and its benefits.'**

There are early signs that Champions Board activity may support a reduction in exclusions for young people in care, with the number of exclusion incidents for this group dropping to 11 in 2016/2017 (down from 22 in 2014/15 and 27 in 2015/16).

In addition, Champions Boards in schools are showing signs of being a good way to sustain participation in broader Champions Board activities, as well as raising awareness for both care experienced young people and the general public.

For example, young people from the Morgan Academy Board recently took part in delivering a national Champions Board event in Dundee, acting as speakers and delivering input to the entire audience. It was clear that their confidence and skills have been significantly boosted by the Champions Board activity.

## **Home and Belonging**

Nearly all of the Champions Boards focused on improving access to safe and appropriate accommodation in their first year of Trust funding. In one Local Authority area, these efforts led to the creation of a new position in the Housing Service dedicated to supporting care experienced young people, which was joint-funded by their Health and Social Care Partnership. Two Champions Boards also worked with housing staff to create new housing and accommodation options for young people leaving care.

Other Champions Boards focused on changing attitudes among carers and residential staff, and evidence showed early signs of shifting expectations regarding young people's ability to go back and visit former homes. One Local Authority also changed their public service agreements to ensure that young people in privately run residential homes would be able to return home for visits.

## **Changes to Employment**

In addition to directly employing care experienced young people as Participation Assistants, Champions Boards also led to changes in employment practice.

Several Boards are designing, implementing, or expanding their Family Firm approach, which means more young people are getting employment support and employment opportunities within their Local Authority areas. Several

Champions Boards have ensured that each young person who applied for a Participation Assistant post received both pre- and post-interview support, including follow-up sessions to explore next steps in their path to employment. In addition, most of the Local Authority areas with Trust funded Champions Boards have begun including care experienced young people during the recruitment of new residential staff, social workers, and other Corporate Parenting positions.

### Changes to Finances

Several Champions Boards have begun piloting projects around providing financial support for care experienced young people. Three Champions Boards ran pilots of Individual Award programmes, whereby care experienced young people apply to receive funding directly from the Board.

The first year of these programmes saw over £21,000 awarded to 77 care experienced young people, funding a range of needs including laptops, gym passes, home furniture, and professional equipment. Many applications for Individual Awards also served as a way to highlight gaps in services and support.

One Local Authority area is currently running a pilot on the impact of allowing care experienced young people to control their own personal budget, and many Local Authority areas have reduced costs for care experienced young people by creating agreements with leisure centres to waive entry fees.

There has been mixed success with ensuring young people have access to reduced transportation costs. Several Champions Boards pursued this option, with one resulting in a successful collaboration between Young Scot, Renfrewshire Council, Transport Scotland and McGills Buses that gives young people accessing throughcare and aftercare services access to bus passes<sup>12</sup>. Other Boards found their efforts stalled at the end of the first year.

### Changes to Structure

A major impact of Champions Boards has been the creation of a structure within Local Authorities that allows for the voice of care experienced young people to be heard and valued. In two Champions Boards, meetings are either chaired or co-chaired by care experienced young people themselves.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.paisley.org.uk/2017/06/new-travel-scheme-care-leavers-just-ticket/>

All Champions Boards have worked closely with Corporate Parents, and in the first year many Local Authority areas had Corporate Parenting Plans that were explicitly linked to the needs and goals laid out by care experienced young people.

Additionally, several Champions Boards have helped support changes to Continuing Care and Staying Put structures, including one Local Authority area which has shifted its entire structure to ensure that care experienced young people are able to keep the same key worker from age 12 onwards.

A few Champions Boards have been able to increase the legal protection and positive discrimination of care experienced young people.

One Local Authority has granted them priority access to modern apprenticeships, and has also added Care Leavers as a protected group in the Equality and Poverty Impact Assessments process. This means that prior to any legislative change – including budgetary changes – the potential impact on Care Leavers must be explicitly assessed.



# Conclusion and Next Steps

Although it is still early in the life of this initiative, evidence shows very promising signs for the future impact of Champions Boards on improving the lives of care experienced young people in Scotland.

At the time of publication, the Life Changes Trust had approved a second wave of funding for Champions Boards, bringing the total number of Trust funded Boards to twenty. For more information on Trust funded Champions Boards, please visit <http://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/projects/champions-boards>.

The learning in this report has been shared in planning meetings and Network events with the new wave of Champions Boards, and we are already beginning to see them benefiting from this learning. Recruitment has moved more quickly, and a broader range of professionals are taking ownership of the Board at an earlier stage.

The Trust will be publishing annual Impact and Learning reports until the end of the Champions Board initiative in 2020, at which point an overall evaluation report will be published and actively promoted and shared.

If you have any questions or would like more information about the content of this report, please contact:

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