

# **Education, Children and Young People Committee**

## **The Promise – Voice online session**

**Monday 24 March 2025**

### **Note from Breakout Group 1**

#### **How you were recruited:**

Generally, the young people were asked if they wanted to take part on Boards. Sometimes by people they knew, who were already involved, or by staff who were telling young people about the local Champions Board, and inviting people to get involved if they were interested.

The young people believed that their views are being listened to, particularly in the Champions Board group.

Some people have been involved for a long time and others are relatively new. In the case of one group which began in 2017, it has developed and there has been solid progress.

When asked if they would have known about the group if people didn't come out to tell them about it, the young people said that Champions Boards aren't that well known and also, some people don't recognise themselves as care experienced. You might have known that you have been in care but not understand that this would be an opportunity that was open to them.

People can be involved in Champion Boards, as and when they can, getting involved around work, school or college.

They trust the people that they are in the group with.

#### **How much work is it? How much support do you get?**

It is reasonable workload, there is sometimes a lot, but other times not as much. When you have been involved in large projects, that take a lot of time, you can get a break. For instance, we made a film about a day in the life at school of someone who is care experienced. The film was for teachers and school staff. It was a lot of work, with a lot of planning. It helped to show what the reality can be for someone who is care experienced, which can be going from one place where you don't feel safe and secure, to another.

Young people can get but also deliver training to other people, providing information on children's rights, the Promise and corporate parenting so that they have an insight into what they are entitled to and the support they should have.

The training is delivered to 20-30 people at a time, so possibly as many as 600 people in total.

Young people thought that the experience of being on these groups will help in future. For example, as part of one of the projects young people interviewed social workers. They thought that this experience will help when they are being interviewed in the future, when applying for a job or college etc.

Being on the Board has helped some to become more vocal and more used to speaking up. Some used to be very quiet, but now deliver training to large groups.

For some other types of groups, there is a lot more work. For instance, for Education Executive council meetings, there are a lot of papers to work through. The person attending those meetings would read through the papers, picking out the issues and possible options and share those with other young people on the Champions Board group. They talk through what the decisions would mean with the group, in advance of the council meetings, and advocate on their behalf in the meeting. They listen to what Board members want and try to represent them as best they can.

They get support in the form of an external representatives meeting, which takes place ahead of the Council Education Executive meetings. It is provided by the local authority for those who are representing groups or organisations with interests in the work of the Education Executive meetings but are not councillors.

The young person felt that they were listened to by some elected members, but not all. In some cases, they felt that some councillors take the decisions that they were always planning to.

As a member on that group, the person representing care experienced young people doesn't have voting rights in these meetings. Some elected members would like them to, but the young person said that they would be uncomfortable taking those decisions.

## **Challenges**

While generally a positive experience, they were asked if there anything that they had found challenging as part of the group. The young people raised the challenge of getting forms of ID, to help with applications for college etc. They only have birth certificate and the issue of care experienced people not having access to all their records and documentation is well known. The issue has been raised through the Board meetings and they are hoping that a solution will be worked out soon.

Ensuring that all young people who are care experienced, have a formal government piece of ID, e.g. driving licence and passports is key. The young people said that the Board are supportive, but the young people need action.

When asked if they have connections with Champion Boards in other areas, the young people said that they sometimes link up with neighbouring boards.

There are differences and similarities as each Board sets its own priorities, which is a good thing. Also, there aren't Boards in all local authorities. The coverage is patchy. There used

to be more, but some have stopped. People were hopeful that more local authorities would re-establish them.

Some funding, for a staff member, is paid for by the group. This ensures that not all funding is from the local authority, which enhances their independence. That independence is important.

Some felt that the local authority had to be convinced of how useful and meaningful the Champion Board would be but there are a lot of councillors who see the importance, and some other councillors have also now changed their minds.

### **What would you like to see change?**

When asked about potential changes on a broader, national level, the young people said that it would be good if it was easier to find out about Champion Boards. There still isn't a lot of awareness about these groups. And there should be, for young people themselves but also teachers, lecturers etc

Need better language, and for people to use it. Corporate parent doesn't sound great, compared to "council family and friends" etc – the care experienced people have parents. It might be that the people looking after them aren't their parents, but that doesn't take away from the fact that they have parents.

One person said that in their Champions Board group, there are people who you see as family, big brother or sister, but they aren't parents.

### **Is the Promise being kept?**

In response, young people highlighted issues such as—

- young people struggling to reach their social workers, or having had multiple social workers in a short space of time
- Support that is required urgently being delivered, but only weeks later
- The unfairness that if you miss a call or a message from a social worker, it is treated as if you have done something really wrong but then it can be really difficult trying to get back in touch with them but that is seen as fine.
- When young people struggle to get in touch with social workers, they are then coming to peers for support, who are struggling to help them.
- At a group for young parents who are care experienced, there was a mum whose child had been on the child protection register but no longer needed to be. However, the mum wanted to keep the child on the register as she is scared that she will lose the support that she needs if they are.

The whole family wellbeing fund (WFWF) is allowing social workers to ask families what they need, what would make the difference, to lighten things and provide something nice – for instance a day out etc and giving them the money to do it.

Applications to the WFWF fund can be made by lots of different people and lots of teams put bids in.

For instance, WFWF paid for a worker who goes into schools and colleges to provide support and advice. That worker offers a space for young people to come together and have their voices heard and it can be passed up through the Champs network. WFWF also pays for a local service which can provide some physical space to families, to give the young person somewhere else to go, to give them and their family an opportunity to cool down, to avoid crisis and keep the family together.

## **Note from Breakout Group 2**

### **How you were recruited:**

On their recruitment to the group, a number of participants stated that their advocacy workers had recommended they become involved.

Participants said they enjoy the meetings and it is their choice to attend. They are told meeting dates at the start of each year and get information about each meeting before it takes place.

A number of participants said their group was a safe space where they feel seen and heard.

### **How do others make sure you are included?**

Participants said they choose the agenda items for champions' board meetings and that they feel able to challenge and get answers from senior local authority figures.

The informal style of the meeting was mentioned as a positive as was everyone being seen as equal.

The participants gave a clear example of how their input had ensured better access to leisure facilities as a result of their participation in board meetings. of council policy they had changed as a result of their participation in board meetings.

Participants said there is a welcome pack designed by young people that helps welcome new members to their participation group.

### **Challenges**

When asked what challenges participants had faced as board members, they stated that local authority funding constraints were an issue, as there was a cost to everything they wanted to change, and money limits the change they can make. Participants said they have no direct involvement in costings.

Participants also highlighted that not every local authority has a champions board, and their own board was an example of how a well-funded board can be successful. Participants said sharing work from their board with others (e.g. guides for care experienced people) could be a way forward.

Concern about the overall number of champions' boards was raised, with participants saying there are now under ten and this is a reduction. Cuts have also meant that network funding has been cut.

Participants said that, in council areas where champions boards are run by the local authority, this impacts their independence and taking requests to them can be met with defensiveness.

On measuring progress, participants said some areas have Promise Leads and Promise Participation Workers, but that these were within existing roles and services.

Participants also spoke of the difference between long-term funded work and projects with time limited funding.

### **What would you like to see change?**

Participants said lifelong rights for care leavers is an area where they want to see change. They said the current cut-off of 26 left many care experienced people without support, and this did not recognise the lifelong impacts of trauma. Participants have been calling for lifelong care through their involvement with Who Cares? Scotland and champions boards. Participants are keen to see support available for care experienced people at all stages of their lives, as well as a move toward a staged transition out of care.

A number of participants said they were on the champions' board in order to fight for change for the next generation of care experienced people, rather than improve life for themselves.

### **What is your message to other care experienced young people?**

Participants encouraged other care experienced young people to put themselves forward for roles such as champions board, stating it is an opportunity.

### **Has your work on the Promise led to you wanting to be involved in other groups?**

Participants generally said they have gone on to consider similar roles within networks. Some said they had an interest in becoming social workers.

### **What would you like the Committee to tell the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise?**

Participants asked for all MSPs to listen to the voices of care experienced children and young people and learn from them. They also wanted to praise the work of staff working to support their membership of champions boards.

Participants wanted to tell the Minister that:

- rights for care leavers should be lifelong
- a Champions' Pledge should be signed by all corporate parents to uphold rights of care experienced people
- care experienced students are having to explain their status time and time again and need more financial support in line with living costs in order to support themselves.
- Care experienced parents also need to be treated fairly and their care experienced status should not be seen as a risk factor.

On Promise progress, participants said while there were moves in the right direction, change was not happening fast enough though there was still time.