



# Side by side: an evaluation of the Life Changes Trust Advisory Group

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Setting the Scene

**The Life Changes Trust** (the Trust) is a charity that was established in 2013 with a £50 million spend out endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund. The Trust invests in people living with dementia, the unpaid carers of people living with dementia and, relevant to this report, young people with care experience (aged 14-30). The Trust aims to get alongside people so that they can be influential, build strong relationships and exercise their rights. It believes that people are experts by unique experience and that the voice of lived experience is the key to transformational change.

**The Life Changes Trust Advisory Group** is a group of people who volunteer their time to provide advice and work on specific projects and initiatives which drive transformational improvements in the lives of young people with care experience and help them to develop their potential. The group has had sustained core membership since its inception in 2016 with some new people subsequently coming on board, and others moving on when the time is right; the group generally sits at around seven to ten young people from 18 to 30+ years of age. The group members all have their own experience of care, but often report that this experience is not their dominant identity. A few members of the group are older now and prefer not to be labelled 'young'. Throughout this report the preferred term '**Advisors**' is used.

Following initial work to co-produce Aspirational Awards (a programme of individual grants for young people with care experience), the group has gone on to support the development of several other grant-making and other initiatives and has undertaken extensive internal and external influencing work. See page 5 for a visual timeline showing key moments and achievements for the Advisory Group.

**This Advisory Group Evaluation** was co-commissioned by Trust staff and the Advisors in early 2020. An independent and largely retrospective evaluation was sought to assess the impact of the Advisory Group and with a view to sharing learning and good practice about co-production, as part of the Trust's and the Advisory Group's legacy. An important chapter in the story of this work is that the Advisors were involved in drafting the brief for this evaluation, in assessing proposals and interviewing for and choosing the successful tender. This set the tone for a collaborative way of working.

**Matter of Focus** was selected to carry out the evaluation. Matter of Focus is a mission-led company that supports organisations to work better with their data, evidence and outcomes. We use a methodology developed from contribution analysis to understand the extent to which and how the actions of organisations really do make a difference for the people and communities they care about.

**This final report** is based on extensive work completed between March 2020 and July 2021 (a period of 17 months) with the Advisory Group, Trust staff, trustees, external stakeholders and young

people receiving an individual grant from the Trust. It also draws on a review of documentation provided by the Trust. It addresses three areas for impact and learning in turn:

- Impact on the Advisors, Trust staff and trustees and on the culture and practices of the Trust (we call this ‘looking in’)
- Impact on the wider community of young people with care experience through influencing work and giving of individual grants (we call this ‘looking out’)
- Learning from this work and in particular from the way that co-production was practised here (we call this ‘lifting up’)

**A suite of outputs** has been produced from this evaluation, with different audiences and interests in mind. This report contains our analysis in full and will be of value to those who have a strong interest in all aspects of this work. The Advisors worked with our partners in this project, media co-op, to produce a set of films communicating the key learning points, providing a different medium for engagement. We have produced a set of six stand-alone case studies of impact, as follows, which would be of use to those with a thematic interest (see page 88 for these). For audiences preferring a lighter touch approach and whose interest is more focused on what learning from this work could be adapted or applied elsewhere, there is a more practical, highlights report.

**The Advisory Group has an inspiring story** that includes several points of distinction as well as many transferable lessons which we believe will be invaluable to others with an interest in developing similar work.

**We would like to thank** first the Advisors, for welcoming us into their work and for the honesty, integrity and fun that they brought to this evaluation – and for trusting us to work with them to tell their story. We would also like to extend our thanks to Trust staff who have answered all our questions with patience, trustees and stakeholders who generously shared their thinking and reflections, and in particular to young people who gave their views via our online survey, and whose perspectives have been so valuable in forming this report. Matter of Focus would also like to acknowledge the role of Christina McMellon who helped in facilitation and in providing expert advice during analysis and ethics conversations – as well as our wider team with a special mention for Charlie Mills and Alex Perry. Last but not least we thank our partners media co-op, Lucinda Broadbent, Jenni Herd, Vilte Vaikute, Cat Robertson, Ann Walker and James Pearson for, together with the Advisors, rendering this material so beautifully into the format of film.



Figure 1: The Advisory Group Timeline

## Structure of this impact report

This chapter begins by setting out the overall evaluation aims and briefly considering the wider relevance of this work. We explain the methodology used, and then how it has been applied to this evaluation of the Advisory Group. The chapter ends with a glossary providing an easy reference point explaining the more specialist language used in this report.

The body of this work is held in the following three chapters:

- **Chapter 2** - tells the story of the Advisory Group's impact on Advisors, staff, trustees, and the Trust ('looking in').
- **Chapter 3** – tells the story of the Advisory Group's impact on the wider community of young people with care experience through its influencing work and grant-making ('looking out').
- **Chapter 4** - explores the approach to co-production taken here, how the approach has developed and works in practice, including areas of distinction, reflection, challenge and transferable learning ('lifting up').

**Chapter 5** provides our summary of overall impact and reflections.

Each of our chapters begins with an overview and some easy reference 'highlight' findings. Each ends with our summary of the impact and reflections on key threads – where relevant these explicitly reach out to points in the literature and what factors help to explain the flow of change. Our 'pathways to impact' (explained below) are provided in full as these are, a) the key visual structuring our assessment and b) the result of a significant amount of collaborative work with the Advisors. We talk through the pathways in Chapter 2 step-by-step to explore in detail the journeys of Advisors, staff and the organisation. Our argument then builds cumulatively, so our further chapters build on this, adding further additional evidence and discussion by theme.



Our body of evidence includes six detailed impact case studies of particular pieces or themed areas of work. These are indicated using the icon shown on the left. One of these case studies supports our picture of the internal impacts of this work, with five focusing on policy and practice influencing.

At times we use coloured boxes to highlight quotations; blue indicates the views of insiders to this work (Advisors, Trust staff and trustees), violet indicates an external stakeholder; and yellow, a grant recipient.

## Evaluation aims

From this evaluation, the Trust sought:

1. An assessment of the impact of the Advisory Group on the Life Changes Trust itself (staff, culture, governance, relationships) and on individual Advisors.
2. A review of what we have learnt about co-production and how this approach could be implemented by others – with the aim of sharing learning and good practice with others in the field, and advancing co-production as a way of working.
3. An assessment of the impact of the Advisory Group's external influencing work (whether others respond better to the needs and wishes of young people with care experience) and the impact of individual grant-making work, notably the Aspirational Awards for young people with care experience.
4. A documentary film or films, with young people with care experience collaborating fully in the filmmaking process.

## Why this work matters

Lots of people involved in UK policy are interested in young people with care experience. Until recently, this interest has often been focused on the challenges these young people face. The focus has begun to shift however to the agency, capacities, capabilities, hopes, dreams, and human rights of young people as a way of promoting more positive futures. The recent [Independent Care Review](#) exemplifies this. The Advisory Group has helped pioneer a more forward-looking and positive agenda, as can be seen in the Trust's work across the priority areas of voice, home, relationships, choices and opportunities and health.

There is also considerable policy interest in co-production. During the last 15 years co-production as an approach has gained in profile in the UK, but there are limited examples of how this actually works in practice and with what concrete outcomes. The Advisory Group's role in co-production of grant-making programmes is something that will be of interest to many people including other funders. There is also still much to learn about how to do co-production well and around the outcomes of co-production. A significant part of the Trust's legacy may be around including the voice of care experience – via the Advisory Group, the local Champions Boards and through so many of the projects it has funded.

We anticipate that there are many people who will want to learn from how the Advisory Group has worked, particularly given the depth and range of involvement that this work shows; from activists and the wider community of young people with care experience, to practitioners who want to support participation, organisations and services who want to develop or enrich this aspect of their work and policymakers.



## The Matter of Focus evaluation approach

Matter of Focus proposed that Contribution Analysis would be used for the evaluation, as a model well-suited to evaluating complex and people-based interventions such as the Advisory Group. This is a ‘theory of change’ approach, which aims to uncover not only if, but also how your intervention or initiative makes a difference. It does this by making explicit the ‘theory’ or thinking behind why you believe the work you do will make a positive contribution to the lives of the people or communities you care about. This approach involves two principal stages:

- The first stage involves working collaboratively with key stakeholders to understand the unique context of your work and then set out or ‘map’ how your work contributes to the intended outcomes.
- In the second stage this logic is tested and if necessary refined through various forms of data collection with participants and other stakeholders, to create a nuanced and well-evidenced account of the impact of the work.

The approach is based on a few key concepts that are used throughout this report. We explain these concepts below before describing how the approach is being used to evaluate the impact of the Advisory Group.

### Understanding your unique context

Because we are working to evaluate the delivery of complex, people-based change, we need to pay close attention to contextual factors that influence how change happens. We work with key stakeholders to better understand how a range of factors help and hinder efforts to improve outcomes for people and have the desired impact.

We use a model called the ‘ISM framework’ to understand context. This framework, created by the Scottish Government, is evidence-based and helps to identify and consider factors that arise in Individual, Social and Material contexts. It is applicable to a range of policy areas and social challenges. The framework stresses that interventions should take account of influences across all three contexts to achieve substantial and long-lasting change. This means thinking about what needs to be in place to effect change and bring about the desired changes in:

- **I**ndividual attitudes, beliefs, motivations, skills or perceived personal costs and benefits
- **S**ocial roles, relationships, networks, norms and group meanings and
- **M**aterial influences such as policies, rules and regulations, infrastructure, technologies, time and other resources

### Risks and assumptions

We express the factors that might help or hinder change as ‘risks and assumptions’. The ‘risks’ are the things that could happen that may compromise the change that is hoped for in this type of intervention. The ‘assumptions’ are those factors that you rely on being in place for the intervention to achieve its outcomes as intended. Making visible both risks and assumptions is key to surfacing the detail of the work which helps us understand why, as well as how far it has, contributed to change. This makes the risks and assumptions an important part of the learning as well as key to our analysis of the contribution made.

Taking time to talk about your context and how this has shaped practice and decision making is a powerful way of emphasising the unique contribution you make to improving outcomes. The understandings gained and any questions raised through contextual analysis are then used to inform the ‘outcome maps’.

## Outcome mapping and outcome maps

To help make explicit or ‘map’ the steps between the activities that you undertake and the outcomes you hope to achieve, we use an interactive approach called outcome mapping. It separates out different types of outcomes at the level of reactions, knowledge, skills and capacities, changes in behaviour, policy or practice, and at the level of longer-term social change.

We use a framework based on six headings:

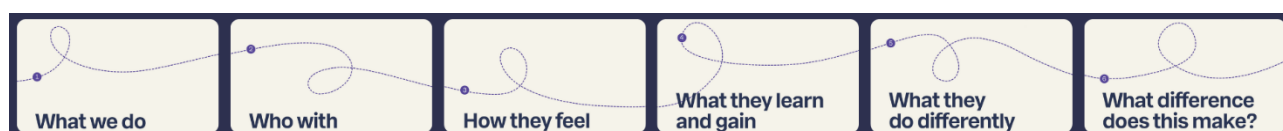


Figure 2: The Matter of Focus headings

Outcome mapping typically takes places during a collaborative workshop, often starting with the sharing of success stories using these headings to create a shared understanding of the key ingredients of successful change in your organisation. Unlike other theory-based logic frameworks that use the language of inputs, activities, outputs and impact, as we are concerned with people-based change, our headings keep the focus firmly on people throughout, including the foundational importance of feelings. Each item that appears on an outcome map can be thought of as a ‘**stepping stone**’ on your change journey, often expressed in a form of words that feels meaningful and true to the work you do. These six step headings are used to structure the findings in this report.

## Pathways









Having created and refined an outcome map that represents your work as whole, we then break down the outcome map by focusing on specific sets of stepping stones that link together to tell a story. We call these sets pathways. Pathways allow you to think about specific aspects of your work in more detail according to your needs. For instance:

- Specific people (such Advisors and Trust staff)
- Specific activities (such as ‘influencing’ and ‘giving’)
- Specific outcome types (such as external policy change or improvements for young people with care experience) or
- Specific audiences (such as internal decision makers, funders, policymakers, the public)

Whereas the outcome map, like a physical map, is a two-dimensional representation of all possible routes to impact, a pathway is one particular route you actually take and bring to life by describing your progress each step of the way.

Each pathway is intended to represent an important story that needs to be told for others to understand the difference you've made in a particular way and in a language that is true to the work you do.

The final distinctive aspect of our approach is that we use a colour-coding system where appropriate to provide a visual representation of the progress made for each stepping stone in the pathway and your confidence in the supporting evidence.

	Great Progress	Some Progress	No Progress
High Confidence			
Some Confidence			
Low Confidence			

The progress rating influences the colour of the stepping stone and uses a simple traffic light system, with green reflecting good progress, orange reflecting some progress and red little or no progress. The confidence in your evidence rating is captured in the depth of colour.

Figure 3: The OutNav colour-coding key

## Tailoring our approach to evaluate the impact of the Advisory Group

Having introduced the core features of our approach, we now describe how they have been applied and adapted to evaluate the impact of the Advisory Group. Figure.4 below shows the key phases of work from March 2020 to July 2021. Although the work contained all these elements, in reality it was more iterative and less linear, so for example our first collective analysis workshop preceded further data collection; and the background formed by the literature and context was revisited throughout.

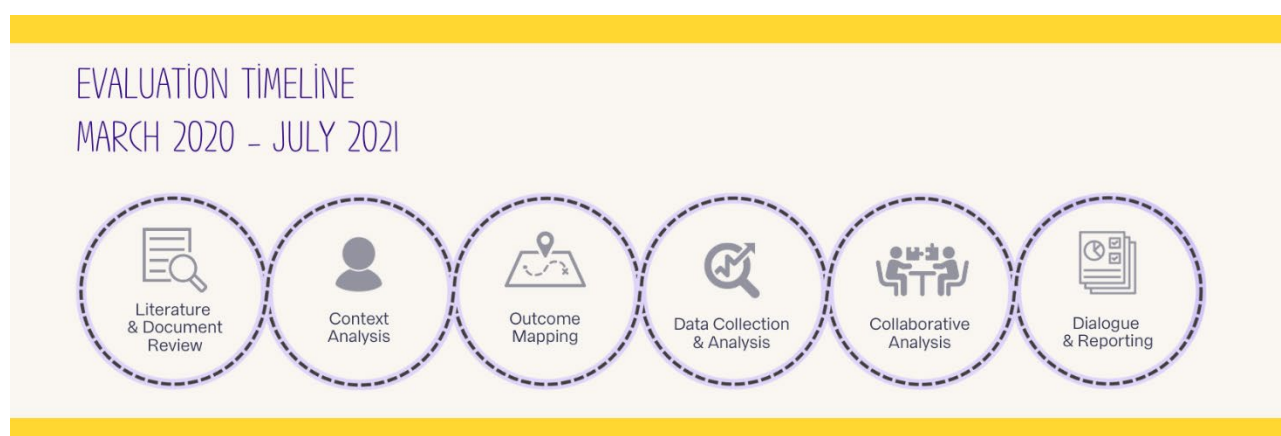


Figure 4: The phases of work in this evaluation

## How current thinking frames this work

The Advisory Group evaluation began by conducting a scan of policy relating to young people with care experience and a very brief literature overview around co-production and youth participation to ensure that our work was cognisant of some of the current thinking in the field. A summary of our overview is provided at **Appendix two**.

While young people with care experience continue to highlight issues such as loss, trauma, stigma, difference (including the use of othering language) and feeling excluded from and treated differently by communities and by society, a more progressive and positive agenda for future action is emerging around their agency, capacities, capabilities, hopes and human rights. Consistent with this, the Trust itself is working across the priority areas of voice, home, relationships, choices and opportunities and health. Perhaps the central message of the recent Independent Care Review is the need to recalibrate calculations of risk in relation to children and young people in or on the edge of care and to challenge ideas of ‘professionalism’ that might serve to undermine the formation of natural, loving and intuitive relationships. Such recalibration and challenge requires considering how acknowledgment of risk can sit alongside hope, rather than eclipsing it. The ethos of the Advisory Group is consistent with this progressive agenda.

Our literature overview was needed to help identify where the work of Advisory Group is consistent with what currently constitutes best practice in co-production, known barriers and expected outcomes, what the evaluation adds that might be shared with others seeking to work in this way and any points of distinction. Definitions of co-production vary widely, and the core principles of co-production more usefully provide a meeting point for the range of practices and settings showing the approach, namely:

- Recognising people as assets and valuing their contributions
- Building on strengths/capabilities
- Promoting reciprocity
- Building social/peer networks
- Breaking down barriers between people in different roles
- Facilitating rather than delivering (Boyle & Harris 2009; New Economics Foundation 2014)

Good practice messages for co-production include bringing in a wide range of voices, fostering trust, being patient, developing authentic relationships, paying attention to the desired benefits and opportunities for participants and being open to different and perhaps unexpected outcomes. In a practical way, doing co-production well means, together with people with lived experience, setting out a clear protocol at the outset including expectations, timescales, support and what influence they will have over the decisions being taken. It is important to strike a balance between clear structures and expectations while also ensuring flexibility and responsiveness. At the level of the organisation, attention may need to be paid to embedding co-production in culture, structures and practices, as well as putting in place regular review. All these themes have strong echoes in this current evaluation.

## How the context frames this work

An online workshop with the Trust's Young People with Care Experience Programme staff was held on 29 June 2020 using the ISM framework. This helped us to understand more fully the circumstances in which the Advisory Group has been working. Using ISM analysis and drawing on all our work with the Advisory Group, we worked up risks and assumptions, which form an important reference point for this work and are shown as **Appendix one**. Key messages from the literature influenced how we framed the risks and assumptions, as well as how we approached building the third of our outcome maps, 'Lifting up'.

Some key aspects of the context for the Advisory Group, including some of the key decisions, are outlined below:

- There is wider movement in the Scottish care sector for whole system change – of which the Life Changes Trust itself forms a part – creating a receptive policy climate and opportunities for collaboration and influence.
- During the last 15 years co-production as an approach has gained in profile in the UK across human services, however co-production in grant-making remains novel and likely to attract wider interest.
- The Trust was a new organisation with the opportunity to define its culture afresh.
- That the Trust is a funder makes it an interesting site for co-production.
- The Trust was able to offer a range of development opportunities both paid and unpaid to young people, including paid internships.
- Advisors were selected in an intentional way through networks and connections.
- The decision to work with a core group (with flexibility and with some new entrants) over an extended period (up to five years) frames our understanding of this work.

Following on from the context analysis and alongside key staff, we identified further key evaluative questions such as:

- What exactly it means for someone to be 'at the right point' in their journey to embrace this kind of opportunity, and what does this mean for accessibility and inclusion?
- How is this work practised safely from the perspectives of all involved?
- What is it really like to support this kind of work as the participation lead - what parts of the role may be hidden? And what does the participation lead need from their organisation to hold them in this role?

We used these questions as a basis for a further, detailed reflection with key supporting staff.

Although much of this evaluation is retrospective, the Advisory Group's current work and indeed this evaluation is framed by Covid-19 and the current need to practice virtually, which is a learning curve for all involved. Some work, such as Conference and Research Grants, have been unable to progress as expected, and other reactive work, such as the Keep Well Fund, have emerged (described later in this report). The Trust's response to Covid-19 and to current

openness to change within the sector, fuelled partly by the Independent Care Review/The Promise, have led to the decision to intensify its current work within a shorter time frame overall. The Covid-19 context frames this evaluation too and has meant practising virtually through nearly all of the timeline for this work. That the Advisors have been able to contribute to this complex work so well during this time is testament to the strength of their relationships and commitment – and to the level at which they operate.

### **Mapping the outcomes of the Advisory Group**

Outcome mapping (and pathway plotting) were conducted as a series of four virtual meetings with the Advisors and key staff from the Trust, rather than a single workshop. This extended period of engagement, coupled with the retrospective nature of the work, presented an opportunity for deeper reflection during and between sessions. By developing the pathways several years into the work, they are particularly rich and reflect a depth of understanding, experience and relationships gained over time. This depth is evident in the careful and relational language used to describe the stepping stones and brings a robustness to the resultant pathways. To help with relationship-building given that we were unable to work in person during this time, the lead evaluator observed several workshops with the group and met some of the Advisors for one-to-one interviews in advance of outcome mapping. This work contributed to the evidence base.

Three outcome maps were created to reflect the three different types of impact being evaluated:

- Making a difference to the Advisors and the Trust
- Making things better for young people with care experience
- Co-producing our work

From these three outcomes maps, five pathways were then created. The following visual shows how the 'lifting up' part of our work draws together the learning from and relies on the evidence supporting the other two. The outcome maps and pathways were further checked and refined both in conversation with the Advisory Group and with the Programme staff team – as well as being refined through our ongoing analysis.

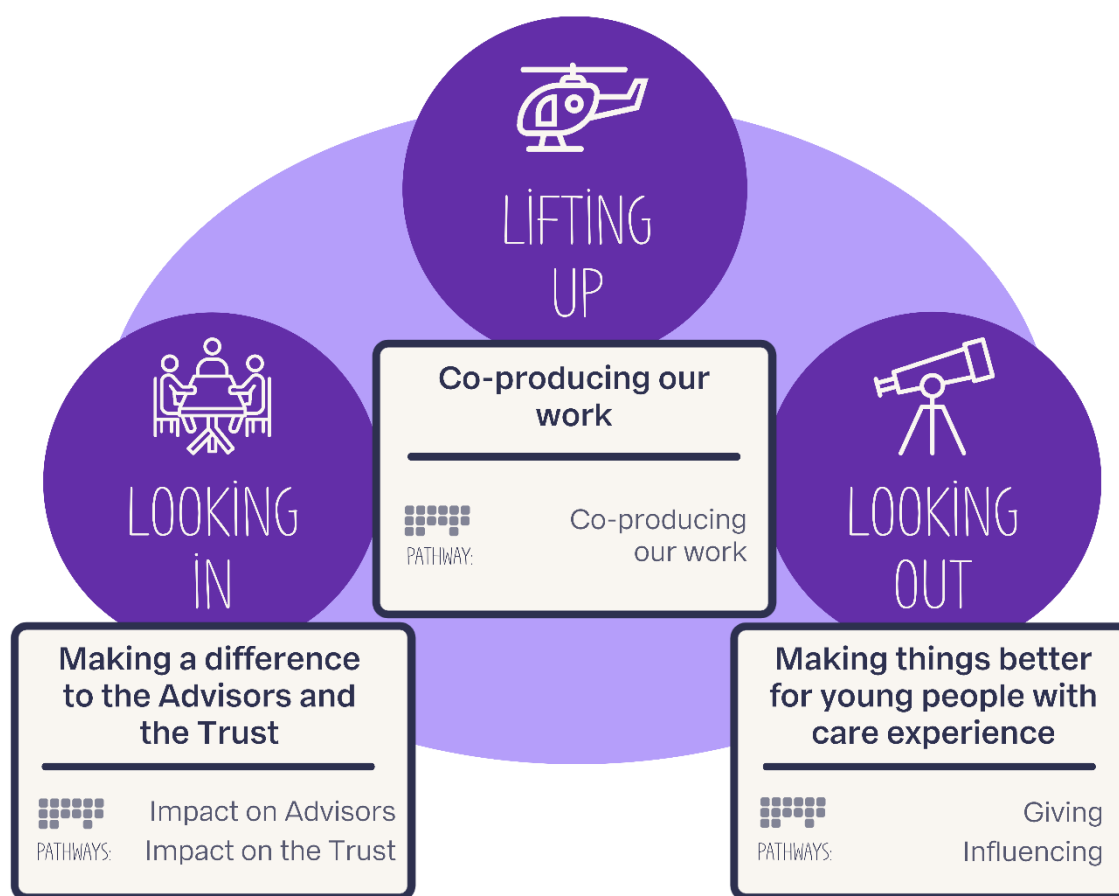


Figure 5: Graphic showing our pathways and how they relate to one another

To ensure that we captured the outcomes well for Advisors themselves, Trust staff and at an organisational level, we separated these into distinct pathways. This helps us to keep the flow of these separate, but intertwined, journeys. The very similar journeys of Trust staff and the Advisors are shown through the mirroring of the two pathways created and it seems important to preserve these nuances.

The 'looking out' pathways are thematic, showing influencing and grant-making work separately; they therefore combine different points of view. The 'lifting up' pathway combines these points of view to tell one single, higher level story. For the pathways that include different points of view, we identify the subject where the statement relates to a particular perspective.



## Our data collection & data analysis

The table below shows who was involved in contributing to this evaluation, as well as evaluation and data collection processes.

### People included

8 Advisors  
 2 former Advisors  
 9 LCT staff members  
 3 LCT trustees  
 9 professionals in the sector (2 of whom had previous direct involvement in the Advisory Group)  
 25 young people who received individual grants

### Processes

Document review  
 Online outcome mapping workshops (4) and collective analysis workshops with the Advisory Group and key staff (2)  
 Reflective workshops with staff (2)  
 Feedback loops with both Advisors and staff on our case studies  
 Dialogue session Advisors and staff

### Data collection

In addition to data gathered throughout the above processes:  
 Observation of grant-making meetings and webinar (3)  
 Interviews with 3 Advisors  
 Interviews with 3 trustees  
 Interviews with 9 stakeholders  
 Survey responses from 1 current and 2 former Advisors  
 Survey responses from 25 young people receiving individual grants

We held one collective analysis workshop with the Advisors to contribute to their skills development and to enrich our analysis by inviting multiple perspectives on the data gathered behind some key stepping stones. For the first pathway, we worked with the Advisors to grade our shared confidence in some of the data and to look at where we could extend this through their own experiences. We held a further collective analysis workshop to work on a selection of our case studies and to invite the Advisors to respond to our survey data from grant recipients. We consider these to have been a strength in adding to our data and understanding and having



a wider conversation about the findings. A dialogue session was held at the end of the project to make some final decisions collaboratively with the Advisors and to focus specifically on key good practice messages emerging from this work.

While the evaluation has been held by Matter of Focus and this report reflects our analysis as an external evaluator on the evidence that has been gathered through this structured process, we have balanced this positioning with a highly collaborative approach with both the Advisory Group and key supporting staff. This is about trying to reach a depth of understanding and speaks to the experiences of those involved – and recognising the evidence in support of the ‘looking in’ pathways is very much grounded in the experiences of those directly involved.

## Glossary of terms

The following glossary explains how we understand the language that is used consistently in this report.

### On subject content

“Advisor”	Advisor is the preferred term for young people who are members of the Life Changes Trust Advisory Group.
“The Trust”	The Life Changes Trust
“Participation lead”	The role of the practitioner within the Trust providing key support to the Advisory Group.
“Care experience”	An experience of care at any stage in life or for any length of time (no matter how short). Care is an umbrella term including being under home supervision, in a children’s house, foster care or kinship care.
“(Young) person with care experience”	We intentionally use ‘young person’ first, with the care experience sitting behind that and only one part of who that young person is, unless other phrasing forms part of a direct quotation.
“Participation”	Creating safe and inclusive spaces whereby young people can express their views and experiences, ensuring that there is a ready audience and that those views and experiences influence action where appropriate. Participation implies shared decision-making.
“Consultation”	Giving space, time, support and information to young people to enable them to express their views and experiences meaningfully on an issue that is pre-set.

“Co-production” Broadly co-production refers to involving communities and people with lived experience alongside professionals in [co-commissioning, co-assessing, co-designing or co-delivering services](https://bit.ly/3BJKiik) (<https://bit.ly/3BJKiik>). It can also mean co-creating research and evaluation that more fully expresses people’s experiences.

## On methodology

“Outcome map(s)”	To help make explicit or ‘map’ the steps between the activities that you undertake and the outcomes you hope to achieve, we use an interactive approach called outcome mapping. It separates out different types of outcomes at the level of reactions/feelings, knowledge, skills and capacities, changes in behaviour, policy or practice, and at the level of longer-term social change.
“Outcome(s)”	The difference that your work makes. We structure these differences into different steps which match the headings of the outcome map, to capture differences at the levels of engagement, reactions/feelings, knowledge, skills and capacities, changes in behaviour, policy or practice, and at the level of longer-term social change.
“Pathway(s)” or “pathway(s) to impact”	Having created and refined an outcome map that represents your work as whole, we then break down the outcome map by focusing on specific sets of stepping stones that link together to tell a story. We call these sets pathways. Pathways are usually brought together around a particular point of view or change mechanism.
“Stepping stone”	Each unit in each column of the pathway is called a stepping stone and forms a reference point for data collection and analysis. We read our pathways vertically, by column, not horizontally; although you will normally see corresponding stepping stones in different columns.
“Assumptions & risks”	Assumptions and risks are factors respectively powering or interrupting the flow of changes as you move through a pathway to impact. Thinking about them helps you to know and show that the logic is working – if you are successfully moving from one step in the pathway to the next, and if so, why this is happening.
“Contribution story”	Narrative and evidence showing how the things that you do are connected by logic to a series of outcomes. We use the word ‘contribution’ because in complex systems we contribute to change amongst a range of other factors.



## LOOKING IN: HOW THE ADVISORY GROUP HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO ADVISORS AND TO THE TRUST

### Looking in: Overview of this chapter

This chapter provides a detailed picture of the internal aspects of this work, that is, the difference it made to Advisors, and to the Trust – to staff members and trustees and to the culture, practices and processes of the organisation. We deal with these in turn.

In each part of the chapter, we first provide the pathway to impact that was developed and refined with the Advisors and with the Young People with Care Experience (YPCE) Programme staff. The pathways have been colour-coded to show progress and confidence in our evidence; with the Advisors' pathway being coded in part during a collective analysis workshop with the group. We then provide narrative and evidence step-by-step. We feel that these journeys merit this detailed approach as they bring together deep and intensive work that has taken place over a period of five years. The pathways are strong and distinctively rich given their retrospective nature, preserving as much as possible the language used by Advisors and staff members themselves. They show how outcome mapping can be a powerful approach in bringing together and structuring what was a largely organic process into a clear contribution story, summarising activities and the key outcomes flowing from them.

We end the chapter with some conclusions and reflections on the themes which thread through our narrative. For a reminder of the chronology of the Advisory Group's work, readers can refer to the timeline provided on page 5, which shows some of the key moments.

### Highlights

- The Trust has involved young people in their work in a sustained way since 2014, co-producing grants programmes, influencing the wider work of the Trust and relevant policy and practice externally.
- Advisors, staff and trustees report the profound impact the work has had on their personal and professional lives, in ways that mirror each other. All give a highly positive account of this work.
- Intention, care and continued attention are important in relationship-building - the relationships developed were often described in terms of lasting or even 'lifelong friendships', 'family' and 'feeling at home'.

- The Trust was open to the Advisory Group's work evolving with young people, rather than having set expectations at the start, which has helped to embed meaningful co-production.
- Culture and values seem key to balancing professional and lived experience in decision-making.
- Relationships form the foundation of this work, with staff and Advisors bringing their 'whole self' to the work and significant time being taken in the beginning to become a group that can work together.
- Many of the former and current Advisors have taken on new professional directions and roles or had an enhanced profile as influencers and leaders in the sector.
- Benefits for the Trust include having an integrated approach to participation that enriches conversation overall and gives cause to "pause and reflect" (trustee) as well as adding to creativity and accessibility.
- Benefits for staff include personal/professional satisfaction, focus, being in flow with their values, energy, creativity and challenge.

## Impact on Advisors: our pathway to impact



Figure 6: Impact on Advisors pathway to impact, as colour-coded in OutNav

## Impact on Advisors: narrative and evidence

### What we do and who with

#### We made connections to form an Advisory Group for the Life Changes Trust

Advisors speak of approaching the opportunity to form the group with a sense of curiosity and possibility. They connected with their own life experiences, which was a strong source of motivation. The Advisors played a pivotal role in forming the Advisory Group with those initially approached by the Trust inviting others from their own networks to expand the membership.

“ I was on the same scholarship program as another member of the group, we discovered we were both care experienced and they asked if it was something I'd be interested in. Starting in the group was intimidating as they had already produced so much work and knew each other and the subject material very well but everyone was friendly.” **Former Advisor**

The theme of ‘making a connection’ is key to understanding how the group was formed, and this relates to contacts made via existing networks and feelings of connection between individuals. For example, one Advisor said she was approached by a worker from the Trust on challenging a professional during a national Champions Boards event. The same individual was significantly and powerfully impacted by seeing two other Advisors speaking.

“ [name of Advisor] and [name] were chairing it – and I just remember watching them and thinking [...]! They were absolutely amazing, they were so passionate, they were very eloquent in their conversation and their dialogue, kind of had the balls to say stuff that maybe I felt [...] wasn't kinda' being said. And I think my jaw hit the deck that day I'll never forget seeing them and thinking 'wow'!” **Advisor**

Two Advisors made the connection by asking the Trust to fund the publication of work that they were doing elsewhere in the sector, and then meeting the key member of staff who was forming the group at a conference. Another, who also came on board at a later stage, made the connection through a Champions Board.

“ [name of former member of staff] basically head-hunted people down.” **Advisor**

Overall, connections were formed through the role of one of the trustees at a Scottish university, through Robertson Trust, and through social and other networks within the Scottish care community. This making of connections appears significant in bringing together a group with individuals who were both at the right point in their own journey but also committed to a core, common goal of changing the lives of young people with care experience. As many Advisors are more mature, it is notable that this core purpose is about improving the lives and experience of younger children and young people rather than being of direct benefit to themselves. This perhaps speaks to a wider point about involving people with lived experience; that people may need time to mature and to move forward in their own lives and to some extent to reflect on their own experiences before being ready to support others. This is perhaps especially true in this case given the extent of the commitment and depth of engagement required from individuals. All the Advisors and former Advisors we heard from had worked through other paid or unpaid roles in the care community or another related sector, and/or had

experience of higher education. Discussion of what it means to be ‘ready’ or ‘at the right point in the journey’ for this kind of opportunity is continued in the ‘co-producing our work’ pathway.

When asked what motivated them to be involved in the group and to continue their involvement, the following are indicative of the responses given:

“A feeling that I had to try and help to improve the representation of other people going through the care system to ensure they had a more positive experience than I did”

“I wanted to be able to meet new people and influence positive change along the way by using my own experiences.”

Further discussion during our collective analysis workshop with four members of the group confirmed our account of an organic process and the concept of ‘making connections’. The organic and informal nature of the early stages of this work was felt to set the tone for how the work then progressed.

### **We came together as a group, got to know each other, and figured out our mission**

Document review shows that finding ways to work together began by taking the time for the Advisors and Trust staff to get to know each other as people. This concept of encountering each other as human beings rather than in role, threads throughout this pathway. The personal stories and motivating factors that brought each person to the group provided the foundations for identifying shared values. These efforts were complemented by devoting time to working through practical matters such as: how often they should meet as a group; how they would keep in touch in between meetings; how the Advisors should be rewarded; how to contain costs; the personal development opportunities they hoped the group itself would offer and other development opportunities they would most welcome; and what their expectations were of each other. These discussions also included consideration of what the perfect Advisory Group would look like and how they would know they had succeeded.

Early connections between group members were formed through the sharing of motivations for becoming involved. These were largely concerned with having a direct input into the services, practices, policies and opportunities that would have a direct impact on care experienced people’s lives.

“I originally got involved with the group as I liked the idea of Aspirational Awards, our longest standing project that awards young people with care experience a grant to help them achieve their aspirations. I love being a part of something that is helping bring happiness to others”. **Advisor**

“[It’s] hard when you know something should be better and you’re not in a position to do anything about it and actually being in a position to do something about it is very, very empowering and it feels great!” **Advisor**

When we began outcome mapping with the Advisors, we started with their personal impact stories and their histories of the group, because these lead into and form the basis for the



others; “we had to get to know each other as a group before we could influence and help other people [...], so we knew what worked with us I would say” (Advisor).

The way that this group has come together, and the particular blend of individuals again frames the rest of the narrative; illustrating this, one former Advisor who joined the group at a later point told us that he was drawn in by how well the group “click”, “like electricity for me”. During our collective analysis, we were able to explore in more detail the journey of the group’s formation, which, as with any group, involves hard work in forming relationships and is not plain sailing. In the early days the group galvanised around the common intention to make a change; however early meetings were described as “absolute chaos”. Working through that “chaos” and in particular the social activities and investment of time in building the relationships, formed a “bonding” experience which one Advisor described as the “difference between role and friendship”.


 ...my fondest memories are back at the start” Advisor

A notable feature of the narrative of this group is that the core group has been remarkably stable over time, so this intense period of group formation was largely confined to the beginning stages. As we explore in ‘co-producing our work’ there has been some movement with group members, including both some friction and some Advisors moving on in a very positive sense in their lives. For individuals who joined later, the group was already in flow, so the experience was different, and possibly a calmer experience for the most part, with a way of working already developed.

We draw attention to the space that was created by the Trust, enabling the group to shape their own understandings of this work, in the next pathway.

### **We have sustained involvement over time and work together productively**

The productivity of the group is shown by the range and intensity of its work over time, which shines through in the documents that we reviewed. Additionally, during our observations of the group at work, we noted the complexity and thoughtfulness of contributions with regard to issues such as risk management, how awards would interface with corporate parenting responsibilities and equalities/reach for example, indicating the development of Advisors’ experience over time, particularly in the area of assessing grant applications. The personal investment of time by individuals is apparent in the range of activities undertaken, shown in the following description by a former Advisor of the work she had been involved in over a period of between one and two years.

 Developing Aspirational Awards, presenting at conferences, developing the HOME initiative and marking subsequent applications”

The range of learning and complexity of tasks undertaken relative to Aspirational Awards over a six-month period is shown in the following (an excerpt from an external presentation given by Advisors). This is corroborated by the trustees we interviewed, who praised the Advisors’

preparation and the depth of their responses to questions. One said that they were ‘exceptional’, ‘incredible stars’.

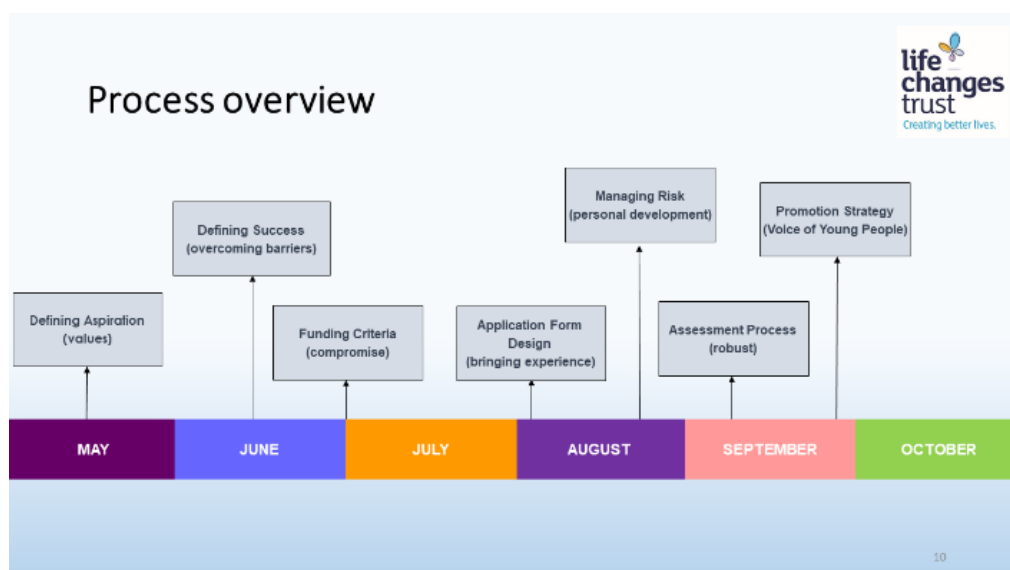


Figure 7: Process overview of Aspirational Awards

In learning to work together as a group, there has been group as well as individual learning. In our observations of the group at work, we noted a range of common behaviours which signal the group’s maturity, such as individuals asking for clarity, feeling comfortable to challenge one another or to disagree, and inviting input from one another. We also observed efficient ways of working such as processing a sample of grant applications to determine reasoning behind assessment across the piece and fast-tracking particular priority areas during assessment. When we observed the group at work, we noted quite free-flowing and critical conversations that were then drawn together skilfully by staff to seek the agreement of the group as a whole. The sophistication of the Advisors’ questioning and their level of preparation were also observed; for example, it was evident that some Advisors had discussed in advance particular applications with staff or researched costs for themselves. In relation to the Keep Well Fund which was processed rapidly as a Covid-19 response, we observed Advisors processing some 40 applications during the course of a week, showing a high level of time investment despite having jobs, studies and caring responsibilities. During observation we noticed that differences were often resolved through reaching a compromise position, and that group members often referred to “going with the consensus/majority” showing a level of trust in the decisions of colleagues and willingness to move forward. In undertaking complex work with the group online such as outcome mapping and data analysis, we as evaluators felt that this would have been difficult if not impossible with a group that was at an earlier stage in its development.

“We have realised when it’s appropriate to work as a group and when to divide into little groups. We have learnt how to work as a group and respect each other in the group even when we might not agree.” Advisor

“I chose a mirror [as an object to describe our work] because we do a lot of reflecting in the group. We always think, what can we do better? What can we improve on?” Advisor



In relation to sustaining involvement in the group over time, the 10 Advisors and former Advisors whose views we sought during this evaluation were all involved for either between one and two years, or between three and four years. Some Advisors contrasted their experiences of volunteering with the Trust to voluntary roles elsewhere, locating the sense of difference in the relationships and the purposeful or structured nature of the work.

During our collaborative analysis with the group, four Advisors pointed to the importance of early formation (“the bumps”) in developing real relationships and becoming “a well-oiled machine”.

Providing space for this process to happen and supporting this with social activities are important learnings for other, similar groups.

### **It didn’t matter what our story was; we drew on our experience but focused on our work moving forward**

Key features of the narrative surrounding the development of the group include being focused on action, and action that has a tangible impact on the lives of other young people. Crucially, it includes being positioned as human beings rather than simply as people with care experience. While lived experience informs the work, relationships are experienced as between people who enjoy being together and encounter each other as whole human beings. This relates to the concept of “bringing our whole selves” to the group, a phrase that was offered by a member of staff and confirmed by the group. In observing the group at work, we noted Advisors drawing on their different identities, as parents, professionals and as a gamer for example, in contributing to the discussion.

The forward-looking orientation of the work is carried into the approach to individual grant-making which again focuses on the future changes that young people want for themselves, as articulated during a Trust webinar by an Advisor (September 2020).

“...something that I can reiterate throughout my time with the Trust and with the Advisory group is, I’ve never been asked my story, I’ve never been asked my experience, I’ve never had to sell my soul” **Advisor**

“A lot of the groups I’m involved with, they all come together because they’ve got care experience, but I think someone had mentioned this on Friday, they all focus on the care experience, whereas in our group you don’t need to concentrate on that. It’s acknowledged we all have some form of experience that ties us together but then we’ve got focused pieces of work to get on with that doesn’t, obviously the work ties into the care experience side, but we don’t need to discuss it, so I think there’s a common thread, a common ground, but we’re all encouraged to just think about our own lives, our own brains, our own aspirations, and how we want to bring that to the table, so I think that’s what it is.” **Former Advisor**

Although this sense of not having to share one’s backstory comes through most strongly from one or two individuals in the group, it perhaps provides the key to understanding why individuals who initially felt less aligned with a care experienced identity were able to work through those initial anxieties and continue their involvement, described below.

## How they feel

### We worked through our feelings about being in a care experienced group

Most Advisors expressed some initial doubts about being part of the group, for some because of a level of discomfort around being part of a care experienced group, and not necessarily seeing their care experience as core to their personal identity.

“ I’ve never really had a problem being in care, like I never really interacted with people in care because I just didn’t see the point of like, hanging about with other kids in care like, ‘cos everyone’s got their own stories like and I felt like people would compare their stories...” **Advisor**

One former Advisor felt “nervous” when she joined the group as she did not know anyone. Another joining later felt it was “intimidating” as the group had already been so productive. However, this was mixed with excitement about meeting new people and an impression that “everyone was friendly”. Another former Advisor initially felt anxious that he was ‘too old’ at the point of joining; however, the group made him feel welcome and comfortable. One Advisor recalls not feeling sure that she could do this, but when entering the room and encountering the people she had been impressed with during a Champions Board event (it was “how they carried themselves, their knowledge”), she felt that she would be in “safe hands”.

A necessary stage in the formation of the group was for individuals to work through any initial uncertainties to a place of feeling positive. This is connected to the sense that this work would be forward-looking, focusing the group’s energy on developing work that matters rather than on past experiences. Other motivating factors were the fun and relationships and the relationships with and encouragement of Trust staff. One Advisor talked about her self-perceived “being bossy” being renamed by a former senior manager as “good leadership skills”. Another talked about a resonant conversation encouraging him to make some good choices and take control over his life. Despite initial uncertainties, Advisors did enjoy meeting one another and in some cases it led to them feeling comfortable with being a little more open about their care experience.

“Then when I got to know people and we got to actually see what difference we were making to people, like building that mission statement, building what we were going to do, it kind of, I kind of opened up a bit more and said stuff about, and spoke about my past and stuff. I don't really talk about my past much. I'd rather talk about other people's pasts!” **Advisor**

### **This feels like a second home and we enjoy working together**

The strength of the relationships within the group and the enjoyment that people feel when they are together, as well as the nurturing and caring for one another, are all clear change mechanisms within the story of the group, without which the work may not have played out in the same way.

During our observations, we noted Advisors voicing support and encouragement for one another, and also the fluidity between the personal and professional aspects of their relationships with one another. These relationships, as well as the core purpose of the group, emerge as key to why individuals have sustained their involvement over time and contributed to the extent that they have. Advisors use words like ‘family’, ‘home’ and ‘love’ to describe their connections. One former Advisor told us how the group celebrated an important birthday for him together. The group has given a space to come together or a “body to be part of when you're kind of shouting for that person's voice” (Advisor).

“We're a family! We might bicker and laugh, get annoyed at each other but we have everyone's back! We're all there for same thing! Regardless of background, etc. we respect, care and love each other. We want to make changes and make sure that the chances, choices and options for YP are better.” **Advisor**

“We do so much work as well as spending time together, having like family meals together and stuff.” **Advisor**

Any more negative experiences shared tended to relate to group dynamics during formation or during expansion - or to the challenging nature of the work at times especially during the development of a new grants programme for example.

During collective analysis with Advisors, we were able to add to our understanding of what makes the group feel like a second home. This was related to the sense of personal support within the group, that people check in with each other and feel that there is someone who is there for them. It also relates to the social activities mentioned earlier in this pathway, so for example memories and bonding experiences; knowing the little things that individuals like, having breakfast in your slippers or making a burrito together without having the right utensils. There is an apparent interaction between what is formal and informal, where the group can “go from really chilled to really serious” (Advisor) in the space of a couple of minutes.

“It was the people that made the environment” **Advisor**

## **We feel cared for, challenged, welcomed and comfortable**

Advisors spoke openly about being supported by the Trust, but very much contextualised in a way that contributed to their learning and ability to carry out the work of the group. Open and honest relationships once again were highlighted. The strong relationships between the staff team and Advisors, and the affinity between the Advisors and Trust appear key to understanding the experiences and the personal significance of the work for the Advisors. Both in our observations and during individual interviews with Advisors, the sense of comfort that Advisors have in the group comes through strongly.

“It’s funny as well because when I go from the group where it’s quite, I feel a lot safer saying something that I feel is controversial, but in a university tutorial I usually feel quite awkward saying something like that in fact [] it feels like people are stuck to their beliefs and I think it’s a really good thing about the group is that we’ve kind of learned to work around difference...” Advisor

“I’ve worked in a few other organisations in the sector and Life Changes Trust definitely stands out as being unique, partly maybe because it’s a little bit smaller, there’s much closer personal relationships with the staff from the top to the bottom of the organisation. Co-production has been such a key part of it. We feel we are part of the Trust, we don’t just work for the Trust or volunteer with the Trust we are part of the Trust, as opposed to working for them or with them, it’s kind of different, it’s quite hard to explain.” Advisor

On the relationships between Advisors and staff members, the feeling of being challenged flowed both ways and we noted evidence of Advisors feeling able to challenge staff to press for an answer, for example during one session we observed. We also noted instances of staff members sharing their internal thought process with the group on complex issues, such as balancing their duty of care towards Advisors and what could reasonably be expected of them and needing to work at speed to process grant applications. There was a mutual tone to the discussion with a lot of humour and warmth.

Frequent checking out and a willingness to call attention to checking out was observed, including from the funding manager for example as well as key supporting staff. While comfortable relationships between staff and Advisors were noted, we also observed in our interactions with staff their awareness of their responsibilities towards Advisors, for example in supporting Advisors appropriately or considering very carefully what Advisors would wish to get from a workshop.

## **We are mindful of each other, and bring our whole selves to the group**

One Advisor commented that as a group they are “mindful of each other and our different experiences”, which chimes with our experiences of observing the group. During a reflective workshop, a member of staff used the term “bring our whole selves” as a way of expressing the personal commitment of Advisors to the aims of the group and the fluidity between their lives both inside and outside of the group. It suggests that the Advisors are bringing themselves as human beings to the process and engaging themselves fully in that process. The other

dimension to this is that they are encountered as whole human beings when they join the group, rather than being defined by their care experiences or called on to share those experiences. One Advisor explained, “we are all there as ourselves”. Not having to “sell our souls” is an important change mechanism within the pathway; it is one of the ‘jewels’ that has enabled the work to develop as it has.

The personal significance of the work felt by some of the individual Advisors is captured in the following:

“...but I would never walk away from the group, I love it honestly, I don't think I could see myself not being involved, it's like my one connection sometimes to the outside world you know”

## What they learn and gain

**We have support and connections - with each other and to other opportunities**

Across all forms of data collection, Advisors consistently drew attention to the value of friendships within the group and also relationships with members of staff. The “dream team” word cloud below, showing the language used by Advisors and key supporting staff to talk about what co-production means to them, calls attention to this collective aspect of the group’s experience, emphasising language such as “dream team”, “collective approach” and “participation”.

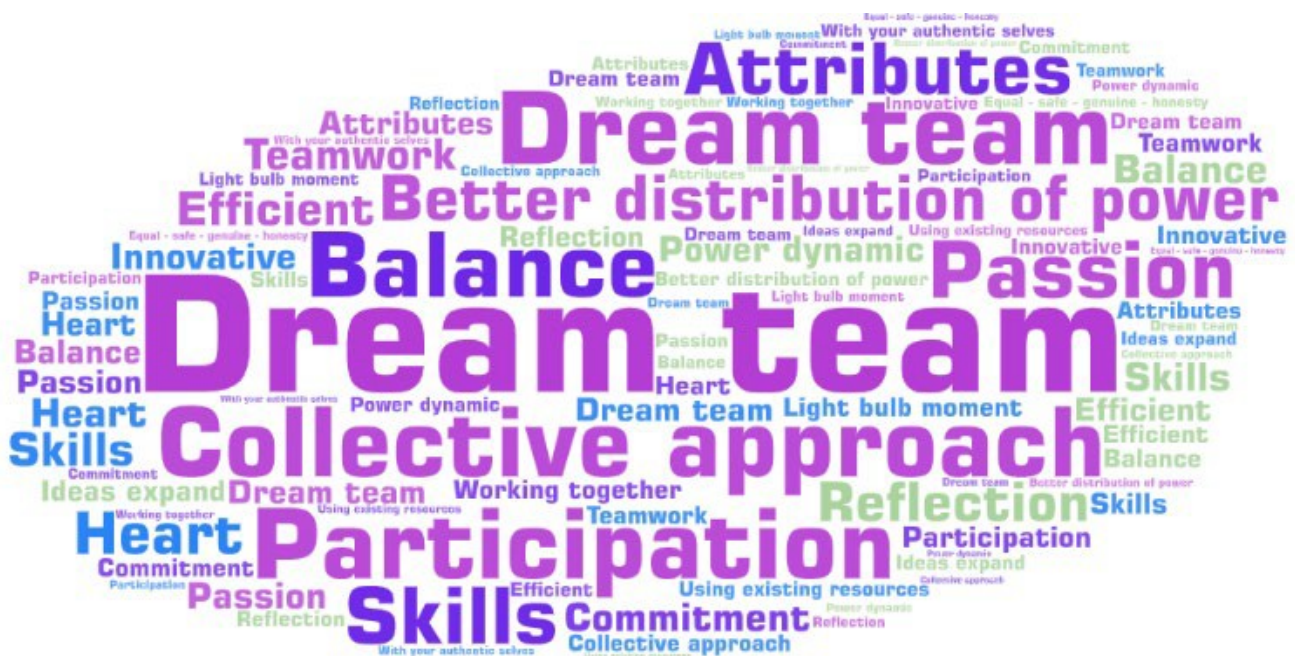


Figure 8: The 'dream team' word cloud, showing the language used by Advisors and key supporting staff

The connections were expected to stand the test of time and, significantly, key supporting staff told us that they continued to have some level of contact with almost all the former Advisors to the Trust.

“My vision for the group for individuals looks very bright, I see each member doing amazing things! I see a community that will always be connected not only by the work we have done but from the relationships formed. Lifelong would sum it up.”  
Advisor

Some Advisors past and present felt that they had gained a better understanding of the care community in Scotland, for example the provision in different geographies or a better understanding of the diversity of individual experiences. One Advisor noted that she was able to link others in her authority to provision given the networks she had accessed through the group.

Through their involvement, Advisors have accessed a range of both paid and unpaid opportunities for development such as paid internships, paid assessing (grant applications) and training alongside Trust staff, for example in public speaking and graphic facilitation. Investment in the Advisors has included a budget for personal and professional development. The Trust has initiated open conversations with Advisors at various points about both when work should be voluntary or paid, and how best to pay people. The nature, volume and demands of the work, as well as any training component are all relevant factors to consider in these conversations. This is a notable feature of the work which has ensured that the benefits are shared between the organisation and the Advisors. Opportunities include having a platform for communicating directly with decision-makers.

“If I looked at myself ten years ago I would never imagine me meeting up with Nicola Sturgeon or meeting up with any of the Housing Ministers to talk to them about changing this certain policy and stuff.” Advisor

Several of the Advisors and former Advisors we spoke with had held internships with the Trust of up to six months and we observed that this provided a real opportunity to deepen relationships between those individuals and the Trust and for professional development. While this is a parallel development to the Advisory Group itself, it is nonetheless a key part of the narrative.

During our collective analysis workshop with the group, Advisors reinforced the sense that giving and building capacity are important in this work. This was contrasted with practices sometimes observed where people with lived experience are put on a platform but not necessarily cared for in their own development or encouraged to move on. It was also felt to be important to talk about what people want from the opportunity, to build shared understandings around this.

### **We have purpose, direction and passion**

The way that the group was brought together through making connections between individuals, made it more likely to form a group with a strong sense of purpose. Advisors' descriptions of



their motivations for being part of the group commonly refer to that core purpose. While purpose was key to forming the work, it was also felt to be mobilised through the work contributing to ongoing momentum. The satisfaction and pride that Advisors feel in relation to Aspirational Awards in particular is tangible.

“ I was really excited at the opportunity to do more work. I don't think I knew how different it would be until we really got into it. These things build up over time – obviously when it first started we didn't really know how great it was going to be, so, as time went on you almost got more excited about the work you were doing because you were seeing the impact first hand and building those great relationships and getting to kind of, go away together...”

Again reflecting the importance of common values, one Advisor explained that while Advisors are quite diverse and may have different opinions, it is in the core purpose that they come together (they are “like-hearted”). It is apparent that this sense of improving the lives of other young people in a tangible and clear way contributes to personal satisfaction for Advisors.

“ ...you could ask us all a question and we might come up with eleven different answers but it's actually, really quite amazing I think with all the differences that we have that we all commit towards a central goal and manage to reconcile all of our opinions into, okay, this is collectively what we're doing.” **Advisor**

### **We develop as leaders and influencers, gaining new skills**

One former Advisor felt she had learned, “that I am able to do public speaking”. Other skills developed are highlighted in the following, again relating to the breadth and complexity of the work that the group has undertaken.

“ Skills in working within a strong group of diverse opinions and how to regulate myself and keep on focus in those settings, confidence in public speaking and confidence in my own knowledge, all of which have helped me massively in my previous jobs which involved lecturing and guiding as a university representative and academically in presenting and defending my own research.”

“ Participation skills, public speaking, co-production and design skills, teamwork, awareness raising, consultation responses”

Another former Advisor pointed to the importance of learning how to be within the group, including giving more space for others in virtue of feeling more confident in oneself. Again, the range of work and the level of responsibility given to the Advisors leads to a range of learning outcomes.

## **What they do differently**

### **The Trust's work is influenced by lived experience**

Through the process of developing Aspirational Awards, the first piece of work that the group owned, a model of working was developed, whereby Advisors developed detailed proposals based on initial, loose parameters. During document review, we noted that images recorded

during the development of the initiative illustrate fidelity between the group's ideas and the funding criteria finally developed. Advisors agreed that they would feel able to challenge the Trust if they felt decisions were being made without them. That confidence was felt to come from a place of having progressed the work together and feeling strong ownership over the group's work, with one Advisor commenting that, "starting with that culture [with Aspirational Awards] is what built the confidence up quite quickly I'd say". Another suggested that the direction is always discussed, in all of their work.

Advisors perceive that trustees now enjoy and look forward to hearing their proposals. Where possible an Advisor attended the former Programme committee meetings.<sup>1</sup> The group has been delegated responsibility for delivering the grants programmes that it co-produces, meaning that staff and Advisors share the process of assessment. One Advisor commented that they had as a group "earned their stripes" with regard to their relationship with trustees. We explore in Chapter 3 the influence and unique character that the group has brought to Aspirational Awards.

During our observation of work on the Keep Well Fund, we noted instances of Advisors drawing on their personal experiences in assessing grant applications and arriving at a rationale for agreeing funds, ranging from for example, the cost of trainers, experiences of parenting, being a video gamer and risks regarding providing funds to individuals. In some cases this indicates that younger people with lived experience may be able to bring a slightly different way of looking at applications, compared with adult professionals. trustees captured this in language such as "pause and reflect" and "grounding".

As explored in our series of impact case studies (see pages 88 - 109), the Trust has also involved the Advisors in other initiatives such as programmes of work to improve experiences of home and belonging for young people with care experience and to foster whole systems change in the sector. They were also involved in commissioning a series of external evaluations of the Trust's work including this one. We provide analysis of our case study material in Chapter 3; however in brief they show examples of where the Advisors' involvement has enriched the conversation, added creativity and helped to ground the work on what matters most to young people.

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<sup>1</sup> The business of the Trust's Young People with Care Experience Programme Committee and the Dementia Programme Committee is now integrated into full Board meetings of the Trust.



## **We are a living organisation; together the Advisors and staff create a culture that is flexible, open, creative and supportive**

The concepts of flexibility, being able to dip in and out, creativity and support were frequently observed in Advisors' comments about the ethos of the group itself. There are strong and clear parallels between the understandings of Advisors and those of staff members, strengthening this account. As evaluators we certainly observed the energy in the room when the group is working and how this might also bring energy to the organisation. An interesting aspect of this work is that staff beyond those closely supporting this work have been encouraged to communicate with the group (having interns may also have progressed this), such that the input percolates through the organisation. Former Advisors tend to be in contact with different members of staff depending on where their relationships lie. Having an explicitly relationship-based approach may help to give staff the permission to form and nurture relationships and the practical support that they need to do this, which we explore further in 'co-producing our work', in particular, drawing out the important role of the participation lead. Our understanding of this and of the support that has been provided to key supporting staff was confirmed in a further reflective conversation.

The totality of our work with staff over this period has helped us to appreciate the personal and professional impact of the group upon them, and this is further explored in the second pathway below. Interestingly some staff members were able to compare the cultural space that they now occupy with other organisations they have worked for. The following quotation draws attention to the way in which the Advisory Group is felt to be woven into the culture of the organisation.

“Having the Advisory Group has not just been a ‘nice thing’ for the Life Changes Trust; it is fundamental to the way we work. The Advisors bring a wealth of knowledge and experience that we just do not have, nor could ever have. They are generous with their time, insights and patience. We have learned so much from them that will impact our ways of working for many years, and hopefully well beyond the lifetime of the Trust.” **CEO**

The phrase 'living organisation' was offered by a member of the staff team, however one Advisor said that she liked this because it showed the 'growing together and working together' that she experienced in her work with the group.

## **We act as leaders/influencers for care experience & co-production**

During document review we reviewed evidence of the range of presentations, coaching and inputs that the group has given to external stakeholders. This body of work is shown within the 'influencing' pathway in Chapter 3. Some of our impact case studies, such as contributing to the Independent Care Review and influencing homelessness policy, show how this work has elevated the profile of the Advisors within the field and created opportunities. During outcome mapping we became aware that the Advisors saw themselves as being part of a movement for change, in particular for the spread of advisory groups and for advancing the voice of lived experience.

“ I would like to see more organisations that deal with funding realise that it’s a good thing to have their clients involved.” **Former Advisor**

“ My vision for this group is for it to expand and for us to be involved in more meaningful changes through the work that we do through our Aspirational Awards, workforce development and other pieces of work we become involved with. I want more people and organisations to know about us and the work that we do and help other Advisory Groups get set up and support them to do this. I want us to continue the co-production approach we have with the Trust but enable other groups to take on this approach.” **Advisor**

During an online workshop, Advisors and key staff provided their own understandings of co-production, with common themes relating to: bringing together a ‘dream team’, the quality of connections and relationships, and creativity. These were further developed by reflecting on a number of quotations defining co-production from varied commentators.

### **We continue our education, move into new roles & develop our professional interests**

During our interactions with the Advisors we heard several examples of the ways in which being part of the group had contributed to their continued education, moving into new roles or developing professional interests. These contributions took the form of the development of confidence and skills, peer support and the opening up of new possibilities through role modelling, new experiences and networking.

One Advisor noted the role that the encouragement of other Advisors had had in keeping her at university; “the group and like other professionals in that sector that I work with like pure keep motivating me to continue ‘cos the amount of times I try to get rid of uni ...[] and they’re like keep doing it!”. Similarly, a former Advisor commented that the “support structure” and “willingness to be caring and loving” but also to “give you a hard talking to” had been key to getting him to university, as well as watching others in the group role-model that experience.

Another Advisor described how her internship with the Trust, which she connected with as a result of her involvement in the group, “opened me up to the research field” leading to her current professional role and future plans for a Masters in this area. Another connection was created for a former Advisor who met a senior leader of the organisation she worked for at that time during a residential for one of the Trust’s initiatives. This led to a professional mentoring relationship and to her nomination to represent that organisation during one phase of the Independent Care Review.

### **What difference does this make?**

#### **We are a group of leaders and influencers, part of a growing movement**

Through observations of and discussion with the Advisors we found evidence of the benefits of being a member of the group, appreciation of the achievements of all group members as

individuals and the significance of and pride in the group itself. Self-evaluation of the group in 2016 highlights the importance of the group itself, a group that was having a positive impact on others and being young person-led. Trust staff refer to the Advisors' voices as 'strong' and this is substantiated by our observations of seeing an Advisor address participants in a webinar facilitated by the Trust in 2020.

The following comments by former Advisors show how the "wealth of experience" gained by Advisors contributes to their influencing skills, and interestingly a sense of optimism and confidence around creating change in response to the question; "Can you tell us about something you have learned from the experience?"

“All of us gained a wealth of experience in public speaking roles and a confidence in using our voices for positive change in formal public settings to push the messages of the group.”

“That I can help change the lives and futures for children! I think having been in the care system for so long you can become a [bit] pessimistic. However, I truly feel like there is a shift in services and I've seen this first hand.”

“A far more hopeful outlook on how the care system can be improved in the future and how society as a whole can sometimes be willing to change its views and policies to better the outcomes of care experienced people, before I was unaware of how many passionate individuals work every day towards this goal.”

One former Advisor connects the growing confidence of individuals within the group specifically with the confidence that they could be powerful in shaping the care sector. There is the sense in a number of accounts that this work has played out with an increasingly receptive audience in the care sector, which is an important contextual factor for this work. During collective analysis with the group in November 2020, Advisors expressed their hopes that their work would contribute to the growing movement of youth advisory groups and felt that they could already see this happening.

Skills learned within the group may have potential to be used in other networks of which the Advisors are part; as one Advisor commented, "it's been a whole spider web of links". During a Trust webinar (September 2020), one Advisor commented on how group members have been supported and encouraged to move on from the group if the time is right for them to do so, creating openness around moving on. The following suggests the way in which Advisors have been able to use the space and the opportunity that the Trust has created with them, to contribute to a wider movement for change.

“They've also, obviously just been part of a growing movement of people with care experience who are increasingly having their voice heard and when I say having their voice heard they've had to push for that, it's not as though that's simply happened, there's been organisations like our own that have really contributed to enabling that and creating the right kind of culture but it's down to people with care experience themselves, that they've been able to step forward and take up those spaces and be quite influential in terms of, firstly highlighting the things that do not work well at the present time but you know also creating a bit of a roadmap for

change and indicating you know what could be much better, and the Advisory Group very much take their place in that movement.” **Staff team member**

### **We improve the lives of people with care experience**

In Chapter 3, we comment in detail on the Advisors’ contribution to improving the lives of young people with care experience through grant-making and influencing work. In relation to grant-making the Advisory Group has contributed to work that has put a significant amount of money directly into the hands of young people with care experience – and although we cannot trace the longer-term impact of this, some of the feedback we have indicates young people’s emotional responses and the new opportunities that have opened up to them. Further evidence of this is included in the personal stories from the My Choice, My Future initiative, [published on the Trust’s website<sup>2</sup>](https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/publications). In relation to influencing, the group has supported collective efforts across the sector that have led to tangible improvements in young people’s situation and contributed to enriching participation in a range of contexts at differing levels.

There are numerous examples of the Advisors’ own appreciation of the support they were providing and difference they were making to the lives of people with care experience throughout the project documentation and our observations. A thread running through the intentions of this work, in particular the individual grants, is the desire to consider the feelings of the young person with care experience and to enhance personal choice and control.

“ If we can replicate that sense of what we’ve done in the group, empowering our own members, in other people, that’s what I’d be proudest of.” **Advisor**

### **We have grown as individuals**

This outcome follows a clear and logical thread through the pathway from connecting with the Advisors and sustaining involvement, the range of opportunities and skills development offered, and support for or enhancement of the Advisors’ professional development and learning. Their experience of the group is therefore interwoven with their individual journeys as young adults and early-stage professionals, and it builds on their existing capabilities, qualities and accomplishments on arriving in the group.

One former Advisor commented on the difference that the group had made to her.

“ I have made lifelong friends and been a part of initiatives that will positively impact young people for many years to come.”

The sense of impact and responsibility are key to both the drive felt by Advisors and, in turn, to their personal growth. Powerfully, one former Advisor refers to his personal confidence and now feeling that he belongs at university.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/publications>

“So on a personal level ...like the group made me grow as a person in my first meeting but I think since then I’ve grown exponentially. And the group has given me enough confidence so now I’m at uni, and proud to be there and don’t feel like I shouldn’t be there ...” **Former Advisor**

Staff observations substantiate the above, with one staff member contributing the following, in response to a question about what she is most proud of in relation to the Advisory Group.

“...the development of the group members. I’ve seen huge shifts in people’s confidence and ability, and I’m not saying that’s just because of the group but I think it does play a role in it for some people.”

### **The Trust’s practices are tailored to young people’s needs and young people have better experiences of the Trust**

The giving pathway will elaborate some of the ways in which the Advisors have influenced the design and delivery of individual grants programmes, and possibly therefore the applicant experience – this influence is filtered through concepts such as simplicity (feeling that it is simple to apply) or choice (feeling able to ask for something that is important to you). The Advisory Group and Trust staff have told us that the Advisors have influenced the parameters of the initiative (for example allowing for wide and subjective definitions of ‘aspiration’), the simplicity of the process and forms, personalised communication and personal gifts. During a Trust webinar on individual grant-making (September 2020), an Advisor elaborated how lived experience has shaped grant-making practices, again showing the theme of personalisation. Examples include telephoning the applicant to tell them about their award, providing a welcome pack and signposting where the application does not meet the criteria.

The small number of trustees interviewed told us that they both hope and expect that the wider community of young people with care experience would have enhanced experiences of the Trust as a result of the Advisors’ involvement.

## Impact on Life Changes Trust and its staff: our pathway to impact



Figure 9: Impact on Life Changes Trust and its staff pathway to impact, as colour-coded in OutNav

## Impact on Life Changes Trust and its staff: narrative and evidence

### What we do and who with

#### We made connections to form an Advisory Group for the Life Changes Trust

Staff members' accounts of the formation of the group echo those of the Advisors, again drawing attention to the organic nature of the growth of the group and the concept of 'making connections'.

The formation of the Advisory Group has drawn upon the Trust's existing connections with young people with experience of care, the Advisors' own networks and the formation of new connections. The Trust initially approached people with recognised potential, many of whom were already making a positive contribution in different ways and invited them to come together to establish the group.

“ When the group was first established the Trust mainly recruited young people through existing networks, including through projects the Trust funds. Once the core group was established, more members were recruited through word of mouth and through the connections of existing group members. When a young person expressed an interest in joining the group the first step would be a conversation with a staff member, followed by a meeting between the young person, an Advisory Group member and a staff member”. [Individual Funding Response Q and A Document]

While this was a pragmatic decision, some staff felt that the informal nature of the connections made were relevant to the creation of a “well gelled” group.

“ Some of the learning from that is – don't over plan it! You know and it also allowed the young people themselves to grow into that space, some have moved on and some have stayed ...” **Staff team member**

During our first reflective workshop with staff, team members were able to clarify the significant role of one, former member of staff in driving this work forward from the grass-roots.

#### We came together as a group, got to know each other, and figured out our mission

“ If we'd gone into it with a really concrete plan of what we were going to do we would have gone totally off the mark and wouldn't have ended up with what we have now.” **Staff member**

Being organic and allowing the group the space to bring definition to the work from an early stage (a “leap of faith” (key supporting staff member)) was felt to be an important factor in the group's success. However, similar to the accounts of the Advisors, the initial stage of work was felt to involve some degree of discomfort at times, with one member of staff describing the group in this stage as “a runaway train”. During a reflective conversation, staff team members involved in the initial stages of work described how the work was initially focused on internal



influence, with the external influencing dimension emerging over time. The group's accomplishments helped to extend perceptions of what was possible.

“ I think in the early days, probably, our thinking was a bit smaller but once the group started to gel and particularly with the experience around Aspirational Awards I suppose you saw what people were really capable of and we started to think ‘wow this has got real potential here’.”

The quality of the relationships and the willingness to trust key areas of work to the Advisory Group are both essential to understanding the narrative.

### **We have sustained involvement over time and work together productively**

As detailed within the previous pathway, there is strong evidence of working together productively, with the participation lead assuming a facilitative role and trusting the instincts of the group as they address complex issues.

In terms of sustained involvement, there was a change in the member of Trust staff working most closely with the group in the early stages of development, with one member moving on and the other taking on the role of participation lead. This she embraced wholeheartedly as “an emotional investment”. Much of the work of the key person takes place outside of the group meetings, sustaining one-to-one connections with and between the Advisors and contributing to the wider work of the Programme and the Trust.

Facilitating the group meetings proved challenging for one person, in terms of the practicalities of setting up a warm, relational environment and welcoming and checking in with the Advisors. The Trust understood the importance of providing support and came to the decision with the participation lead that having two staff members take part in meetings is better practice. There was also a sense that the Advisors were only seeing the one face of the Trust for a period, rather than being fully connected and this was addressed by increasing the number and frequency of different points of contact with Trust staff, many of whom have formed their own relationships with specific Advisors.

The percentage of time that the participation lead has accounted for has also varied, at one point accounting for more than 50% and perhaps as much as 75% of a full-time post. The Trust prioritised this time and viewed it as an investment. As the group has matured, projects have become established and the participation lead has become comfortable and confident in the role, this time has decreased significantly although still with more intensive periods of involvement as the occasion requires. During this evaluation, the participation lead left for maternity leave and another member of staff, who generally worked alongside her, was able to step forward.

Staff reflected upon the impact of changes within the Trust itself and the wider context, and how the group's and Trust's needs have changed over time. As a result of an emergent decision to work for the most part with a sustained core group, albeit with some changes over time, the



functioning of the group felt now very comfortable, natural and embedded. Sustaining relationships with the Advisors was a source of pride for one key member of staff.

“...that most of the group members have been around since the beginning and that with most of those that have left we’ve managed to continue some form of relationship with”

### **We share decision-making with the group and follow through the group’s ideas**

Again Aspirational Awards in particular shows the extent of the Advisors’ influence, and contributed greatly to the working practices that followed. Our document review revealed fidelity between the group’s initial ideas for a piece of work, recorded informally on flipchart, and the shape of the final product.

The participation lead recalled instances where there was a need to consult the group quickly on an issue; however there would always be an honesty around this. Key supporting staff expressed a preference for working in a co-productive way, although elsewhere they noted the importance of considering both the demands on Advisors and making these reasonable in the context of other areas of their lives (a duty of care) and the intention to maximise involvement. In our observations we noted this line being discussed and negotiated openly with Advisors.

“...everything we’ve done has been co-produced to a degree, some things have been more led by the group than others but that’s just down to the resource of time” **Staff member**

When reflecting on some definitions of co-production presented to them by the evaluators, a number of Advisors drew attention to the importance of being involved at an early stage before work is set on a particular path, and involving them in design, through to development and delivery. During our interviews trustees remarked on the value of the Advisors’ contributions to both panel and committee meetings, the substance of their thinking when questioned and how the input enriches the overall conversation (providing a “richer understanding of what our task is and was”). Trustees delegate funding decisions for the individual grants programmes to assessment panels comprised of staff members and the young people – with staff informing trustees on points of discussion.

“I don’t think we as a board, it’s not like we delegate that work to them and they come back and we make a decision, you know it’s very much, that is them leading on that because that’s what they’re the experts in.” **Trustee**

### **We put in place a key person who effectively links Advisors and the Trust**

Although the role of the participation lead remained largely hidden in the understanding of the group formed through the document review, through our primary fieldwork it emerged as key to the success of the work. It was therefore added into the developing pathway and elevated in the overarching ‘co-producing our work’ piece. One Advisor in particular brought to light the amount of work and flexibility needed to support the group, and the way in which the existing

participation lead is willing to work from “bottom-up”, hearing the Advisors’ intentions and helping them to think through “you have to do a, b, and c” to progress an idea.

“she’s a mentor, she’s a counsellor, she’s our biggest cheerleader in our group, she’s always got our back” Advisor

While the participation lead role is key, for the group to be more widely influential across the culture of the organisation, it is important that relationships and connections are encouraged beyond that key link.

## Trustees

We interviewed three trustees as part of this evaluation including the Chair of the former Young People with Care Experience Programme Committee.<sup>3</sup> Trustees were able to bring a different perspective related to what the presence of the group meant to them and to their discussions. Those we interviewed used terms like “grounded” and “pause and reflect” to describe this influence. All three were strongly supportive of this way of working as a principle with the correct “protective-supportive” aspects in place.

Their input highlighted both their support for this work at the start with few barriers to progress, and their sense that the work of the Advisors was “integral” to the Trust (“it was so much part of it”) and to their specific discussions or to panels which they attended. They were able to contrast this work with tokenism or other situations they had experienced where there were cultural barriers to the involvement of people with lived experience. Trustees found it more difficult to comment definitively on whether young people’s involvement had led to different decisions; however it had perhaps led to richer and more fully informed decisions. They found the input “refreshing”, and “reassuring” (that their work reflects what young people actually want) and helpful in providing clear focus.

“I hope we’ve learned as a group of trustees that, certainly it’s reinforced my view that it’s not an easy thing to do, it’s not a straightforward thing to do, but it’s a definitely worthwhile aspect to invest in and to give time to develop.”

The extent of the group’s personal influence was highlighted in the individual stories of one trustee in particular, who gave detailed accounts of memories of the group that had stayed with her.

“I can still see them there up front” [at an event that they had organised]

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<sup>3</sup> The business of the Trust’s Young People with Care Experience Programme Committee and the Dementia Programme Committee is now integrated into full Board meetings of the Trust.

## How they feel

### We worked through our initial uncertainties or anxieties

Staff members drew attention to the looseness of the space when one begins co-production and how this may feel “scary” or “uncomfortable” for staff. One member of staff used the phrase “being happy in the messy space” to capture this particular challenge. Other initial anxieties expressed by the staff team referred both to this being a new and unknown way of working for some, and also the time and thoughtfulness that it would take to do the work safely and well.

“...honestly, ‘cos I was a manager at the time, I was thinking ‘how are we going to do this properly?’ because I knew, I had done some face-to-face work in the past and I’d worked, I’d run some volunteering programmes with some quite vulnerable people and things so I had a pretty good sense of you know the amount of staff time that was probably going to be needed to do that well, so in the context of our workload at the time I had some worries about just how we were going to do that exactly..”

Staff members spoke about working through these anxieties through regular meetings to reflect and sense check decision-making. They also came to appreciate the benefits of maintaining a looseness and flexibility when working with the group, finding this more conducive to authentic engagement, rather than an over-reliance on policies and procedures - although these were also developed over time, for example a volunteer handbook and code of conduct. This was combined with recurrent conversations about boundaries and expectations on both sides. Our observations of the group showed many instances of staff members ‘checking out’ explicitly their thought processes and expectations, for example around the Trust’s responsibilities as a funder, or demands being made of individuals in the group.

### We are mindful of each other, and bring our whole selves to the group

In our discussions with staff, they spoke passionately about connecting with the Advisors as whole human beings with full and varied lives and who just so happened to have personal experience of the care system rather than being defined by it. The richness and fullness of the different life experiences – studying, working, forming friendships, looking out for siblings – were all drawn upon in the work of the group.

“There is no separation between who they are in their private lives and who they are as an Advisory Group member and who they are as a professional, you see all of them, you know, they bring everything to it. And I think they make you bring your whole self to whatever’s going on in a group meeting or any conversation you have with them, there’s just an openness there...[] you just kind of feel that you have to be fully invested in it because they are completely invested in it and they don’t really hide anything from you d’you know.” **Staff team member**

As with the Advisors, staff too showed a willingness to bring their whole selves to the group, relating to the Advisors as they would to other trusted colleagues. Communication was open

and it would not be unusual for the participation lead to receive a phone call or Facebook message from young people even after they had left the group.

The mindfulness of each included recognising that everyone has a life outside of the group, different commitments and pressures as reflected by careful consideration of the timing of meetings and the commitment expected of each other. This discussion of mutual expectations was felt to be a recurrent thread in work of this kind.

### **We feel excited, creative, intrigued and challenged - this is refreshing!**

During reflection the staff team used a range of reaction words to describe their initial feelings about the group or the idea of the group; excited, energised, intrigued, potential, pioneering and good practice. This was combined with some anxieties as described above, framed as feeling “a wee bit worried” or “terrified”. One trustee described in detail a highly memorable experience of first meeting the group during a residential trip and being so impressed with how they worked together and their level of input. Interestingly two trustees both chose the word “refreshing” to describe how they experienced their contact with the Advisors, with one in particular valuing the way they can quickly bring a focus to discussion by talking simply about what is most important.

“ I think the learning that we get out of this is going to be really important to get people out of that mindset I suppose d’you know, that it’s not terrifying ...”

### **What they learn and gain**

#### **This work gets attention from people in the field**

This stepping stone reaches out to the ‘influencing’ pathway, discussed in Chapter 3. It is included here to express the way in which this work is felt by staff to draw interest from within the field, providing an opportunity for further conversations. This relates naturally to the growth of practices and interest in co-production/ including the voice of lived experience across the sector, noted in our context analysis. In addition to the perspectives of staff, some evidence of this external interest is provided by our observation of a Trust webinar which was well-attended and with good engagement around the group’s work. It is also referenced by the list of external engagements undertaken by the group, attached to the ‘influencing’ pathway, and some of our impact case studies. Here one staff member drew attention to not just that the Advisors take up these opportunities, but also to how they do so and their strength of influence in these settings.

“ There’s a lot internally within the Trust where the group have been very influential – but I think their influence has gone beyond that so they have had opportunities, they’ve been invited to conferences, events that have been convened by CELCIS (Centre for Excellence in Children’s Care and Protection), by others, they’ve been down in London doing influencing work. Obviously I think the timing’s been good because I think generally there’s an interest in co-production and how do you kind

of engage with people in a meaningful kind of way but I think also as people have kind of said already, they're just very strong..."

### **The group gives us focus and encourages us to work quickly and efficiently**

Interestingly, staff members and trustees alike felt that the Advisors were particularly good at simplifying issues or providing a strong focus on what matters most. One member of staff in particular felt that this sense of focus extended to situations when the Advisors are not in the room; so the group is providing an imagined reference point for thinking and conversation ("when we're looking at something we'll quite often think, I wonder what the group would think about this"). As a funder, this is key to becoming a different kind of organisation culturally.

“Keeping the values up front and always in mind make the Trust much more of a living organisation, actively working towards change and helps us resist becoming a more ‘traditional funder’ driven by processes and bureaucracy.”

In the early stages of the Trust's attempts to involve young people, two young people were initially included at Committee; the group was later developed as a more meaningful model of involvement. Two Advisors attended the Young People with Care Experience Programme Committee in addition to Advisors participating alongside trustees in funding panels and presenting their proposals to trustees. The CEO captures their contribution as follows.

“I think it's incredibly helpful in two ways. The first one is everyone's aware there's a young person at the committee and that's helpful, because it just helps how you discuss issues sometimes and what's said, so that's helpful. But also – they can just be incredibly sensible and can sometimes just cut through a whole load of nonsense and just ‘well actually, this is how it is’ and I think we've all on occasion found that quite helpful...”

All three trustees we spoke with were highly “impressed” by the depth of work and the depth of the responses they would receive from Advisors (they respond ‘with depth and reason’). One trustee alluded to how they might see ‘the tip of the iceberg’, but that they could sense the depth of work underneath. Similar to staff, they felt that either the input was such that it could not be gained in any other way and that it helped to “cut to the chase” of what was most important. All three trustees we spoke with would recommend this way of working to other boards although it is not easy work and it is work that requires to be intentional and fully integrated.

### **We gain personal fulfilment**

This stepping stone was added into the pathway at a later stage by key supporting staff, who felt that their personal satisfaction was worthy of inclusion as an outcome in itself. In parallel with the Advisors, this relates to the simple enjoyment of working together and qualities in those relationships, but also the sense of purpose that the work carries.

“Just for me personally, I’ve got an incredible amount from being part of the group and I just want to say thank you to everyone for accepting me into it...” **Participation lead**

## What they do differently

### We put our values into action by involving young people in this way (we walk the walk)

This stepping stone calls attention to the normative aspect of this work. Our reflective conversation with staff showed that it was important to them to “walk the walk” when expecting beneficiary organisations also to work in this way. Our interviews with trustees suggest that the value of involvement was very much woven into the fabric of the organisation from the outset.

### The Trust’s work is influenced by lived experience

Internally the group have had an impact on the following areas of the work of the Trust (as documented through Advisory Group meeting notes, Programme and Committee meeting notes, programme strategy development and as expanded upon through discussions with staff):

- All elements of the Trust’s approach to individual grants
- The development of an internship programme and wider learning around recruitment/employment of young people
- Supported the development of Programme strategy, including attending a residential with staff and trustees
- Governance (contributing to Programme, Board and Committee decisions)
- How events are run, with events now including more interactive and creative elements
- Approach to funding (staff have a greater understanding of what working with a participation group entails, and what resource is needed to do it properly so this helps staff assess applications from elsewhere)

Document review and outcome mapping have highlighted the extent of the group’s involvement in producing Aspirational Awards, which then formed the model of working moving forward into Conference and Research Grants and more recently, the Keep Well Fund and My Choice, My Future. Although it has been difficult to isolate the young people’s influence because it has been so integral, staff members often relate the importance that the Advisors attach to how the process feels, and also to choice, control and trust for applicants. Advisors are felt to bring a strong perspective on how the wider population of young people with care experience will view the Trust.

The three trustees we interviewed also drew attention to the way in which Advisors’ input caused them to “pause and reflect”. Specific examples of influence include the personalised feedback to grant applicants and the personal way in which the ‘good news’ is communicated, as well as in extending eligibility for grants to an older age group reflecting the point at which

young people may be ready to make a change in their lives. One trustee also felt that the Advisors had made them think about the importance of connection and the extent of social isolation for young people with care experience, around initiatives on the theme of home. One made the case that it is important to hold onto points made from the view of lived experience even if it is difficult to understand them at first; that it is important to hold them until you understand.

### **We are a living organisation; together the Advisors and staff create a culture that is flexible, open, creative and supportive**

‘Culture change’ is a slippery concept, hard to get a firm handle on and is perhaps something that has to be ‘felt’. It goes beyond developing different ways of working and altered work practices to encompass ways of being and relating to each other. Aspects of culture to which participants have drawn attention include flexibility and mutuality. As evaluators we have come to observe that this work has both relied on a particular, cultural space but also seems to have been influential in generating that space.

“ There’s quite a lot for me about how mutual it is, the way the Trust is with the group and recognising that we get so much from them but that we also give quite a lot back and that we are flexible with things so you know, through the sort of internships, how like, I definitely changed as a manager, d’you know, just with coming from somewhere that was quite heavy on process and various things and actually d’you know what if you’re going to work with people that come with all sorts of experiences then you’re going to have to adjust as well and I think that feeds through all sorts of things not just management practice but how you do funding and HR policies and all these sorts of things. So there’s quite a lot of give and take on both sides...” **Staff member**

The ripple effects are captured eloquently in a blog by the Programme Director, in which she describes the system change resulting from the Systems Leadership programme and the contribution of the Advisory Group as learning “to build[] open relationships with other human beings, without judgement or assumption”. Indeed, she reflects that the personal growth for Trust staff has resulted in different ways of being and relating not only in work but also in life.

### **Using this platform, we share our learning**

Sharing learning and encouraging other stakeholders to be more young person-focused has involved the Trust at various levels of the organisation sharing insights about the work of the group, through social media, blogs and guest blogs.

The Trust has also actively supported the group in the following (described in more detail in the next chapter of this report and our series of case studies):

- Presenting at local and national, external conferences and events, including events for UK funders



- Holding the ‘Festival of Voices’ event in 2019 for key stakeholders and projects funded by the Trust
- Taking forward their interest in youth housing/homelessness issues by responding to an open government consultation and attending a [Local Government and Communities Committee](#)<sup>4</sup> meeting, as well as meeting the former Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning
- Influencing the practices of several organisations through the ‘Home and Belonging’ initiative
- Issuing a provocative and impactful prompt to consider, “what would it take to put relationships at the heart of the Scottish care system?” during a development programme for system leaders



Figure 10: Examples of influencing, drawn from our document review

## What difference does this make?

### The Trust’s practices are tailored to young people’s needs and young people have better experiences of the Trust

The tailoring of practices to young people’s needs has been a key concern since the inception of the group and we found evidence of steps taken to achieve this across the pathway.

These practices include the approach taken to establishing the group, including the timing and frequency of meetings, and to welcoming new members to the group. Staff have shared insights as to how learning about taking time to understand the readiness of candidate members, the level of support needed and being honest about capacity to provide this support has been incorporated into ways of working as a group.

Within the Aspirational Awards, tailoring has included the early adoption of a more individualised understanding of ‘aspiration’ within the application process, responding to successful applicants with personal gifts and providing tailored advice to unsuccessful applicants to help them pursue other avenues.

<sup>4</sup> <https://bit.ly/3zU0NIr>

“I second the Champions Boards, Individual Grants, and Home and Belonging. None of those would look the way they do if not for the Advisors.” **Member of staff**

More broadly, the Trust has shown how it now uses more creative and engaging activities in its programme of events with young people, with the Festival of Voices event being a particular example offered.

Young people's own experiences of the Trust are considered through the 'Giving' pathway in Chapter 3, but in brief many of the tweets, personal stories and films gathered by the Trust rightly focus on the personal learning and life gains for the award winners. A willingness to fund opportunities that would otherwise have been denied is illustrated in this film with a successful applicant made during the launch event for Aspirational Awards. Ryan applied for an award to build on three years' work experience and to help start his own landscape business.



Figure 11: Film screenshot

Trustee interviews reveal hopes that the Advisors' involvement in the generation of grants programmes positively impact on young applicants both through role modelling and in features of the application process including personalisation. We provide further reflection on the feedback that we gained from award recipients as part of this evaluation, and the limitations of this feedback, in Chapter 3.

### **The Trust is seen as successful and credible with a legacy of putting people at the heart of its work**

The context for this work is distinctive, particularly in view of the ending of the Trust. The importance of 'legacy' is a recurring theme in documentation about the work of the group and during our interviews.

Trustees and the small number of external stakeholders that we interviewed agreed in general that the Advisory Group and the approach to participation overall including the Champions Boards will be a key part of the Trust's legacy. Here this evaluation leans into the wider range of external evaluations commissioned alongside this one. Our ability to balance internal and external perspectives here is limited by the scope of our work.

### **We are part of a growing movement, we have a way of working with lived experience that we take with us into the future**

For individual staff involved, the participation lead felt that this experience had 'transformed' her career and would do so moving forward. Another close worker felt 'blown away' by what the group could accomplish and felt that this experience would influence her work into the future.

“ I definitely wouldn't ever go back to the way that I maybe used to work, 'cos I think I used to work in a way you looked at timelines and you would try to figure out when to involve people, you know, when's a good time to actually involve people and hear people's voices and stuff whereas now I'm like, unless you're at the starting line with those people and you're going alongside them all the way through right to the very end and ideally handing it over at some point, there's not really much point in doing this kind of work, so it's completely impacted me from that perspective.”

The contributions of staff around their personal and professional learning carry common threads such as, the extent of the impact, having a different way of seeing, and balancing professional and lived experience in decision-making.

“ It will just frame how I see how other organisations work”

“ I like to think that I am quite creative and that I do push things a bit but since I've been at the Trust that's grown immensely and working with the group's been a big factor in that”

These contributions led us as evaluators to seeing the parallel between the impact on Advisors and staff; and that both would exit their journeys to become part of a “growing movement” for co-production and lived experience.

## **Supporting case study**

The following case study provides an holistic picture of a particular piece of work including the thread through to impact, showing how the approach has been applied. This case study provides evidence across both of our 'looking in' pathways, and learning from the case study is brought into our overall assessment at 'Key impacts and our reflections' below. It shows some of the common threads across the pathway such as how the Advisors have brought creativity and a wider and richer conversation to the Trust's work. The case study is summarised as follows and can be accessed in full by clicking on the link.



### CASE STUDY

## ENABLING CO-COMMISSIONING

In 2020 the Trust commissioned a series of external evaluations to communicate the learning over its lifetime, including this one – looking at the impact of the Trust’s Advisory Group.

In commissioning the other evaluations, Advisors were involved in the assessment panels and interviewing bidders. However, in ‘co-commissioning’ this evaluation of the Group’s impact, the Advisors shaped the process from end to end, from shaping the brief to the final recommendations.

Our case study shows how this integrated involvement enriched the process adding creativity and new ideas and setting expectations for the ongoing involvement of the Advisors in this work.



**This case study can be read in full starting on page 88**

## Looking in: Key impacts and our reflections

It is our assessment that we have good evidence in support of the first two of our five pathways, ‘impact on Advisors’ and ‘impact on the Trust and its staff’, with these reflecting largely the internal perspectives on this work. Overall, Advisors, staff members and trustees were extremely positive about their experiences of the group, often in ways that extended to a personal as well as professional experience. A high degree of congruence is notable between evidence gathered across participants and using different evaluation methods, for example across observation, interview, online workshops and document review. This is perhaps reflective of the shared experiences of those involved and the extent of the dialogue that has already taken place. Interestingly the Advisors were less well aware initially of the perspectives of members of staff and the Trust, and were keen to hear these perspectives.

Key impacts for Advisors include friendship and enjoyment, contribution to their personal and professional development, skills and experience, access to networks and to opportunities to have influence over the issues that matter very deeply to them. Key impacts for the Trust relate to gaining fresh ideas and a wider conversation internally, having more creative and lively processes and finding congruence with their organisational values. We as evaluators observed that the involvement of the Advisory Group appeared to be both integral and enriching. Staff working closely with the group share in these benefits, but perhaps the most notable impact for them is how rewarding they find this work and their obvious pride in it. Some of these key impacts are brought to life in our case study, which shows the integrated approach taken, the additional creativity it brings, the wider conversation which took place; as well as how the Advisor involved experienced new learning.

We can make a number of observations across these pathways, including key characteristics of the particular approach taken by the Trust and the Advisors. The staff/Trust and Advisor pathways mirror one another to a striking degree, showing how for example, people may enter this kind of journey having to work through some initial anxieties, and committing themselves as human beings to the process. Similarly, on exiting the journey, both staff and Advisors feel part of a movement for change, having been strongly influenced by this way of working and the profound effect it has, on their personal sense of being as well as in their role as a professional or volunteer Advisor.

Near to the outset of this evaluation, we identified assumptions and risks that could drive or interrupt the flow of change (these are shown in full as Appendix one). There is good evidence in this chapter that some the assumptions of this work have been met, such as:

- People believe that this work is valuable and ethical
- We understand the time this work takes and have a key person in place to support it
- Young people gel as a group around the voluntary nature of the relationship and around a common purpose that is deeply held
- Young people are connected with both paid and unpaid opportunities and ways of documenting their personal learning
- We communicate in a transparent way our responsibilities and boundaries to voluntary advisors
- Staff are willing to work flexibly including flexible hours, and provide support when advisors need it

We do not judge that the risks identified came to pass; however some of the trickier issues involved in co-production and the learning points from this work are considered in 'Lifting up'.

When considering the development of the group as a journey over time, two decisions emerge as being key. The first is the way the group was constructed by making intentional connections with particular individuals through existing networks. The second is that, while there were some debates around involving individuals on a rolling basis, the group has had a stable core over time. Although people have moved on and there has been some turbulence with new members, the 'forming' stage was largely confined to the beginning, which again helps to explain the productivity and experience of the group, and just how well-formed the relationships are.

Another significant observation relates to the largely retrospective nature of this work. By developing the pathways several years into the work, they are particularly rich and reflect a depth of understanding and experience that has been gained over time. Staff participants reflected that they could not have described the outcomes of the work at the outset given the organic way that this has developed. Similarly, Advisors drew attention to the importance of giving them a relatively blank sheet, for example for the development of Aspirational Awards, which, by allowing them to shape the work before it became 'fixed' in a path, set the tone for a particular culture of working. Involving young people at the earliest stage demands that staff members tolerate or even embrace a degree of uncertainty, and clear and open communication

about boundaries and responsibilities which is ongoing. This communication is key to the concept of creating a safe space for participation, another core theme in this report; both for Advisors to ensure that they are supportively prepared for their role, and for the organisation in meeting its responsibilities to those individuals and relative to its public role. There is a policy element to defining and holding boundaries; however key supporting staff felt that having regular team reflection and support for staff were the most important factors.

There are some limitations to our evidence in support of these two pathways, mostly confined to the higher-level or more external-facing stepping stones, e.g. related to how the legacy of the Trust will be understood by wider stakeholders.



## LOOKING OUT: HOW THE ADVISORY GROUP HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE

### Looking out: Overview of this chapter

This chapter considers how and the extent to which the Advisory Group has made a difference to the wider population of young people with care experience. There have been key two mechanisms for this, which we will consider in turn: the Group's external influencing work, and the three individual grant-making programmes which Advisors have co-designed and co-delivered.

We first present our colour-coded pathway to impact for Influencing. The evidence supporting this pathway is provided largely through a series of impact case studies on the Advisory Group's contribution to:

1. The Independent Care Review
2. The Trust's Home & Belonging initiative
3. Homelessness policy discussion and development
4. The Trust's systems leadership programmes
5. Influencing and informing the work of other funders in respect of co-production

These case studies use our headings so that they thread through from what the Group did, to the impacts that we can evidence at every step. We then provide some discussion of the narrative threads running across the case studies, relating these to points in our pathway to impact:

- Overview of the Advisory Group's external influencing work
- Leadership and advocacy
- Movement and collaboration in the care sector
- A leading example

We turn to the pathway to impact for giving (grant-making). After presenting our pathway, we provide an infographic which sets out the scale and parameters of the individual grant programmes. We again provide further narrative sections reaching out to key points in our pathway to impact:

- "Our baby" – on the work of developing Aspirational Awards
- How the grants programmes were tailored to young people's needs
- How applicants experience applying for an award
- The perspectives of supporters



Importantly this section includes evidence from a wider group of young people with care experience; those who participated in our online survey around their experiences of applying for an individual grant from the Life Changes Trust.

We conclude this chapter with our assessment of the key impacts and some concluding reflections across the ‘looking out’ aspect of this work.

## Highlights

- This chapter presents five impact case studies which show how the approach has been put into practice in varied examples of influencing. Together they exemplify the strength, complexity, range and quality of work that the Advisory Group has achieved.
- There are some common threads across the case studies; they underline the standing of the Advisors as sector leaders and advocates, they show the importance of movement and collaboration within the sector, and they show how the work has contributed to the voice of lived experience in a range of different ways and places.
- The work of the Advisory Group was well-regarded by those external stakeholders we interviewed.
- In total, the Trust and Advisors have awarded £629k direct to young people in the form of 896 individual grants, across the vast majority of local authority areas in Scotland. This funding has been both substantial and proactive, enabling young people to take significant steps towards achieving their aspirations, and small-scale and reactive, providing simple materials and equipment to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on young people with care experience.
- The experience of developing Aspirational Awards in particular was pivotal in the story of the Advisory Group. Subsequent funding programmes embody the learning from previous work – with lessons being learned around age range and inclusion and accessibility in particular.
- The funding streams come from a progressive and forward-looking perspective, working from the strengths and individuality of young people with care experience – and focused on taking steps towards their personal aspirations.
- This chapter includes the reported experiences of 25 young people who received individual grants from the Trust. Key findings are that they mostly felt able to define what was important to them in making their application and felt trusted with the funding. They found the process accessible.
- Recipients reported wide-ranging benefits of having received an award which can be broadly categorised into: how this contributed to their personal growth, and how this advanced their career, substantive interest, or learning.
- Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of these young people did not know that other people with care experience had co-produced these grants programmes; however once they realised this, some of them could see this influence in the process, and most believed that it was very important and could explain why.

## Influencing: our pathway to impact



Figure 12: Influencing pathway to impact, as colour-coded in OutNav

## Our five impact case studies in brief



### CASE STUDY

## TRANSFORMING CARE

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The First Minister commissioned the Independent Care Review in 2016, with the aim of transforming care in Scotland to give children with care experience the childhood that they deserve.

The Care Review had a wide reach, hearing 5500 experiences of those living and working in and around the 'care system'. With cross-party support and a very high profile both nationally and internationally, the Independent Care Review was a unique opportunity to influence change in policy and practice.

Advisors made a significant contribution of time to the Review, both as a group and as individuals, with some present and past group members moving on to paid roles within the Review, taking their skills and experiences with them.

Our case study shows how investment the development of the Advisors, as emergent leaders in the sector, has in turn made a contribution to the Care Review, in particular to how lived experience has been included. The Review and now The Promise have already contributed to positive changes that make a difference to young people, however realising The Promise is envisaged as a ten-year programme of change.

 **This case study can be read in full starting on page 91**



#### CASE STUDY

## SHAPING PRACTICE

The 'Home and Belonging' initiative offered organisations the opportunity to apply for funding from the Trust to design projects offering young people who are moving on from formal care a better feeling of home and belonging. The challenge for Advisors was to help shape and improve prospective applicants' ideas and also to encourage applicants to work more deeply and more meaningfully with their young people in designing project proposals. This approach was new to some of those working in the sector, creating some initial barriers and anxieties.

Through supporting a service design event marking the programme's launch point, participating in assessment and mentoring projects, the Advisors encouraged the meaningful involvement of young people in project design. Our case study shows that for some organisations this has contributed to their ongoing practices and made concrete changes to the design of their projects.

➔ **This case study can be read in full starting on page 95**



#### CASE STUDY

## INFLUENCING NATIONAL POLICY

In 2017 the Scottish Government held an open consultation on homelessness to which Advisors responded. This was followed up by further meetings and media appearances.

Our case study shows that Advisors were powerful advocates for care experience with the ability to contextualise their experiences to make generalisable and strong points, and also how their input complemented collective movements for change around Council Tax exemption for care leavers and better and more supportive housing options for young people.

➔ **This case study can be read in full starting on page 99**



#### CASE STUDY

## CHALLENGING LEADERS

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The Trust invested in two programmes for system leaders in 2017 and 2018. Advisors were involved in the design of the programme and in setting an initial challenge for delegates: ‘what would a care system based on love and relationships look like?’.

Delegate feedback showed their appreciation of the Advisors’ input and staff said that they felt inspired by the Advisory Group in their approach to this work. Our case study shows that the programme influenced the Care Inspectorate’s proposals for their new methodology for inspection (including assessing the quality of relationships available to young people in care settings), the development of new collaborative projects to bring forward young people’s voices and that good connections were made.

➔ **This case study can be read in full starting on page 102**



#### CASE STUDY

## INSPIRING FUNDERS

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The Advisory Group together with the Trust have pioneered the co-production of individual grants programmes, challenging the expectations of some funders around what degree of involvement is possible and providing a model that can inspire others.

Advisors and the Trust have taken several steps to communicate their learning to the wider community of funders in the UK, through events and deeper engagement with particular funders. Our case study shows positive feedback from some of these events and how some funders, also on their own journey towards lifting the voices of people with lived experience, have enjoyed the opportunity to exchange learning with the Trust and how this has shaped their thinking. This case study provides evidence that this work has been supportive and helpful for other funders in their own journeys towards embedding co-production and has contributed to the movement.

➔ **This case study can be read in full starting on page 106**

## Influencing: narrative across our five case studies

### Overview of the Advisory Group's external influencing work

The external influencing work of the Advisory Group was less anticipated by Trust staff at the beginning of this work, where people were initially more focused on what the Group would bring to internal processes and discussion. Influencing developed organically and in response to levels of external interest in the Group, which at times had to be managed to maintain the Group's focus.

Our document review shows that Advisors presented their work to external audiences at 11 conferences/meetings including: stakeholders in the care sector (e.g. Scottish Institute of Residential Childcare); funders (e.g. Association of Charitable Foundations); and stakeholders with a specific interest in co-production and participation (e.g. Scottish Coproduction Network). One of these meetings led to a learning exchange with colleagues in Jersey, and subsequently to two individual Advisors visiting Jersey to share their learning because of their links with CELCIS; and as part of a joint CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland project funded by the Trust. Below, we give examples of social media posts showing audience engagement in some of these events.



Figure 13: Tweets by audiences of Advisory Group presentations

One trustee who we interviewed spoke of the Festival of Voices event in 2019 for key stakeholders and projects funded by the Trust. This included performance, activities, showcases and participatory grant-making in action, and was chaired by two of the Advisors. She drew attention to the creativity of this event, how memorable it was for her and also the extent to which the Advisors were very much the “driving force”.

“ Again these are very impressive events, these are not easy to do, and yet, I can still see them up front. We heard and indeed saw some of the ideas, you’ve probably been told about all these, you know, pink flamingos and things like that on the stage, you know it’s just totally refreshing.” **Trustee**

We as evaluators observed the confidence and strength of voice with which one Advisor presented during a webinar held by the Trust in 2020, introducing their briefing on [Aspirational Awards](#).

Together with our five thematic case studies, this represents a substantial and diverse body of influencing work. Our case studies are complemented by the short films, Home and Belonging and Create Space for Magic, produced alongside of this evaluation, which provide reflections on the Advisors’ influence on practice and on the funding community.

## Leadership and advocacy

Chapter 2 of this report highlights the processes through which the Advisors were able to further develop their initial talents, skills and leadership potential through this work; relating to the stepping stone, ‘Advisors gain experience, connections & opportunities for influence’. The case studies certainly exemplify the extent of what can be achieved through involving people deeply in the process.

“ It’s something I feel quite strongly and quite passionately about in regards to being part of Life Changes Trust, the respect and the trust that we’ve got is definitely a two-way element so although we all came on board with this for volunteering and to make a change, that was our aim, and d’you know the capacity building, the skills and qualities, the knowledge that we’ve now gained, the employment opportunities, the further education opportunities, the funding opportunities, you know the ability to platform ourselves as professionals with regard to getting out and networking is really, really big ...” **Advisor**

While we initially looked for perhaps more straightforward or mechanical examples of influence, such as policy change, this work encouraged us to reflect also on the more personal or affective aspects of influence. Staff, trustees and external stakeholders were frequently able to express memories and examples of where interactions with the Advisors had made their mark. We observed that the Advisors appeared to be impactful on a personal and relational level.

One stakeholder in particular remarked on what he felt to be distinctive about this group which was about being able to encounter people in powerful positions as equals (going “toe-to-toe”) and being able to move beyond their own experience, to contextualise this in demands for structural change.

“ This was the interesting thing and one of the powerful things about this group compared with other groups I’ve had engagement with is that they were able to take their own narrative and their own story and their own experience but contextualise it into the broader policy and legislative arena that needed to change ...”

This provides greater insights into how the Advisors ‘act as sector leaders and influencers’ and how they are felt to be ‘personally impactful in their interactions with others’.



## Movement and collaboration in the care sector

One of the contextual factors that we noted for this work was the way in which individuals move around in a small community of people advocating for the voice of care experience in Scotland. As in our case study focused on the Independent Care Review, this creates opportunities for individuals to move into new posts or paid roles, taking with them and applying their learning from the Advisory Group. This is also seen in the example of an Advisor who has taken their experience into a funding panel for another funder. As we noted in Chapter 2, providing further access to a range of opportunities and networks has been one part in the benefits of this work for Advisors.

Changes in wider policy and practice are usually achieved collaboratively and, in this case, the Advisory Group has added weight to the work of specific, cross-sector campaigns and efforts for whole system change mobilised via the Independent Care Review/The Promise. The Independent Care Review is national and legislative, as well as being well-recognised in the care world, and having contributed some learning and capacity to that process, as well as directly feeding into the evidence base, are important outcomes. The way in which the Advisors were able to offer a quick check-in point, and a combination of experience alongside wider analysis and understanding, relates to the points about leadership, above. Advisors who were involved in the deeper, themed work, made a generous contribution of time to the Review.

‘Work towards positive system change’ so that ‘young people with care experience are better off and they receive better care and support’ is highlighted through the group’s contribution to collective campaigns and conversations, around better supported housing options for young people, relationship-based care, and material differences such as the council tax exemption and removal of the age cap for the care experienced bursary. The case studies provide good evidence of a contribution in these specific areas.

## A leading example

The theme of having enriched in some way the participation of people with lived experience is at the heart of all of our five case studies, ranging from project design to grant-making. The importance of this to work being well-respected and authoritative is explored in the quotation below, relative to the Independent Care Review.

“ I don’t think we would have had the same support in government if it wasn’t for that voice being central to the process.” **Former manager within the Independent Care Review**

The level of interest in the group – relevant to its ‘reach and recognition’ – is indicated by the list of external events at which the group has presented. We have evidence of positive reactions to this work, although less on following this through into changed behaviours or practices. Our case studies show the engagement of a variety of relevant groups such as funders, sector leaders and influencers, with a notable example being the Minister who cancelled his next appointment to give the Advisors more time. Our case study on the community of funders does shows how two larger funders have engaged in ‘shared learning around co-production’ with the Trust and reflecting and building on their co-production practices.

The external stakeholders that we interviewed generally agreed that the journey of the Advisory Group provides a leading example of work of this kind, commenting on features such as the extent of the involvement, the integration of the approach and the personal and leadership qualities of the Advisors themselves. The extent to which this work has contributed to what one former Advisor termed ‘the cultural confidence of young people with care experience’ is difficult to specify; however as one manager within the Trust describes, the work clearly sits within a growing movement of youth advisory groups and for change centred on lived experience, across the sector.

“ They’ve also, obviously just been part of a growing movement of people with care experience who are increasingly having their voice heard and when I say having their voice heard they’ve had to push for that, it’s not as though that’s simply happened, there’s been organisations like our own that have really contributed to enabling that and creating the right kind of culture but it’s down to people with care experience themselves, that they’ve been able to step forward and take up those spaces and be quite influential in terms of, firstly highlighting the things that do not work well at the present time but you know also creating a bit of a roadmap for change and indicating you know what could be much better, and the Advisory Group very much take their place in that movement.”

## Giving: our pathway to impact



Figure 14: Giving pathway to impact, as colour-coded in OutNav

## Giving: narrative and evidence

### Visual overview of the three award programmes

The Advisory Group and the Trust have co-produced three individual award programmes:

**Aspirational Awards:** awards for 21 to 26 year-olds with care experience who currently live in Scotland of up to £5000 to take steps towards their personal aspirations (this was linked to the idea of a long-term goal or impact)

**Keep Well Fund:** small individual grants of up to £250 for 18 to 30 year-olds with care experience to support physical and/or mental wellbeing during Covid-19 lockdown

**My Choice, My Future:** individual grants for 18 to 30 year-olds with care experience who currently live in Scotland of between £500 and £4000 to take steps towards a long-term aspiration

Further programmes, Conference and Research Grants, which addressed the gap in professional development support for older young people with care experience, were developed; however, these did not progress as planned due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The infographic on the following page shows the scope of these programmes. An important principle of grant-making has been to find and respond to the gaps in support; and so, care has been taken not to fund items that should be provided by the corporate parent or can otherwise be provided. Data gained through the grant-making process has provided insights into the needs of young people with care experience, and the Trust has been able to mobilise these in its influencing work, for example in a [themed report about the impact of Covid-19](#) <sup>5</sup>.

The way in which new award programmes have been developed to meet needs speaks to particular stepping stones in our pathway above; Advisors are ‘excited to reach new recipients’ and ‘continue using and reviewing the processes they first developed for Aspirational Awards, they build on this to meet wider need’. Advisors have frequently revisited the question of age criteria for applications, understanding that young people with past trauma may be older before they feel ready to form and take steps towards their personal aspirations. The reactive Keep Well Fund is a good example of adaptation, where these reached a wider group of young people who might not have been in a place to apply for one of the larger individual grants and for whom a small amount of money could have an immediate, positive impact. The Keep Well Fund was felt to be successful in reaching out to young people with a range of experiences including young people who may also have experience of disability, single parenting, the justice system, and seeking asylum.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/2X0yb1T>



Figure 15: Infographic highlighting the three award programmes co-produced by The Advisory Group and the Trust

My Choice, My Future was launched in November 2020, providing larger individual grants again focused on aspiration. The programme extended the age range of Aspirational Awards at both ends, building on the learning from the Keep Well Fund, where there was good engagement from younger, young people, and continuing to address the gap in support for young people over 26. There was also discussion between Advisors and staff about how the new fund could be made more accessible to a wider range of young people, building on the experience of Keep Well Fund, and comparing patterns of application here with those for Aspirational Awards. In addition to making use of networks and partners to reach new, potential applicants, efforts were made to give more inclusive examples both visually and in the language used during information sessions and to make the application process even more accessible by for example explicitly welcoming video and telephone applications. For the first time the Trust offered online information sessions, specifically targeting support organisations. This was also the first time that the Trust offered applicants the opportunity to make telephone applications, supported by members of the Funding Team. The uptake of the telephone support offer was good.

The Trust recognises that patterns of application across the country can be influenced by existing networks of support. Our two interviews with workers who support young people to apply underlined the time this takes and how important this support can be in making the grants accessible. As with many youth interventions, there are obvious concerns about reaching young people who are sitting outside of any formal support.

Finally, the theme of risk and assessing risk should be noted as a key concern for the Advisors and the Trust. In the case of the larger individual grants, the Assessors (which includes the Advisors) recommend conditions of grant for each individual case to ensure that risks are managed and funding has maximum impact. It is important to the Advisors that receiving an award is an act of trust; so, they have aimed for a proportionate approach to risk that ensured funding is used as intended and young people do not have a devastating experience of making a mistake, but without creating excessive barriers. This is complex work involving real responsibility for the wellbeing of others. Where applications have been unsuccessful the Panel has tried to offer feedback for future applications or signposting to other opportunities.

### “Our baby” – on the work of developing Aspirational Awards

The satisfaction and pride that Advisors feel in relation to Aspirational Awards is tangible, and from having first met the group, it was apparent that this work was very much the anchor for everything that followed.



[Can you tell us about your proudest moment with the group? What happened?]  
The moment we launched Aspirational Awards.” **Former Advisor**



Aspirational Awards our baby, and legacy so much blood, sweat and tears has gone into this!” **Advisor**

Advisors and key staff described how at the beginning of what became Aspirational Awards, trustees were invited to agree an overall funding pot with “super-loose parameters” (member



of staff), so that the group could respond to this by developing a detailed plan and presenting this to trustees, requesting delegated authority for deciding the grants. Interestingly, delegated authority is not a common practice within the Trust. In practice this means that Assessment Panels comprising Advisors and staff make funding decisions, provide feedback/signposting as needed and state the conditions of grant. Advisors co-produced Aspirational Awards in their capacity as volunteers and they are trained and paid in their role as Assessors.

The organic nature of how the work was moulded into shape is described in the first two of our pathways. What is important to note here is the breadth of the Advisors' role, how it extended across all aspects of this work and from beginning to end, and the fact that their involvement began before the work took shape, so there was a genuine opportunity for power-sharing. This narrative sits behind our stepping stones, 'we led all aspects of this work' and 'we undertook a lengthy, intensive, complex process to design individual grant programmes'.

This work was not easy or straightforward, and relied on how the Advisors and the Trust has 'invested in forming this group'. One Advisor described this process as "our biggest slog" and how it, "kind of built the platform" for how they developed and risk-assessed everything thereafter. Defining 'aspiration' given its subjective nature and making decisions around risk were picked out as two of the most complex, ongoing conversations.

“...there was some intense conversations in the Edinburgh office” **Advisor**

That the Advisors felt 'pioneering, passionate and fearless' comes from how they described presenting their proposal to trustees during our outcome mapping workshop. One Advisor described how important it was to them that young people were trusted with the money, rather than being offered vouchers which was an alternative suggestion made at one point.

By 'using and reviewing the processes they first developed for Aspirational Awards', the Advisors and the Trust have made some innovations to the process, such as developing top tips for applicants and a traffic light system for assessment scores to improve consistency.

How these processes were adapted at speed for the much smaller and lighter touch grants made under the Keep Well Fund, and with all of the challenges of working remotely, provides an interesting case. Here the Trust tried to maximise the ability of the Advisory Group to 'lead all aspects of this work', while processing a much larger number of applications very quickly. Evaluators observed that a 'sample panel' approach was used to reduce the burden of work on Advisors while keeping their thought processes to the fore during application assessment. This was a way of working suggested by an Advisor. A smaller number of applications were assessed by the group at speed, with the threads of their thinking noted and then applied by staff to the remainder of the applications. Again this shows a dedication to a way of working that is seeking to be as young person-led as possible in the circumstances. The Keep Well Fund also demonstrates how the grants were 'tailored to the needs and experiences of young people with care experience' during this really vulnerable time.



## How the grants programmes were tailored to young people's needs

As indicated above, the Advisors had influence over every stage in the development of the award programmes. In particular, it was felt that their influence led to:

- A stronger focus on how the process would feel to the applicant
- Looser parameters giving the applicant more space to define what they wanted
- Personalising it – the key example being giving a ‘welcome pack’ with a personal gift related to the award (Early rounds of Aspirational Awards)
- Simpler forms

All of the above speak to how the ‘Trust’s grant-making processes are more open, accessible, personalised’ and where ‘the Trust gains ideas and insights’ from working with the Advisors. The following member of staff draws attention to how the Advisors helped to ground everyone’s thinking on the emotional experience of applicants.

“...from the Trust’s perspective, having the group design and develop Aspirational Awards, it just reminded us of the human element because you guys were so strong on that stuff, what does it feel like to receive this grant, what does it feel like to go through the process, and we’ve taken that in everything we’ve done.”

We noted that the Advisors and the Trust staff shared clear intentions for the award programmes, in particular that young people would feel able to define what was important to them individually and feel trusted, perhaps for the first time. In the following section we explore the extent to which applicant experiences line up with these intentions.

## How applicants experience applying for an award

The key piece of evidence that we refer to in this section is our online survey of award recipients. The Trust sent out the invitation to participate in the survey to 80 young people who had either received payment of an Aspirational Award or been responsive to communication in relation to the Keep Well Fund or My Choice, My Future – they were not selected on the basis of either positive or negative communication. It was also pushed by contacting 60 workers connected to projects funded by the Trust and who might know young people who had applied. An incentive was used to promote participation.

We received 25 quality responses, a response rate of over 30%, which is good for a survey of this kind. 23 applicants were successful, one was not, and one had had both experiences, and so our results are mostly more informative of the experience of receiving an award. Showing the importance of network connections, most of the young people heard about the individual grants from friends or workers, although a small number mentioned social media or finding out online. 16 of the young people had never applied for an individual award before. The following quotation shows the lack in support that one young person had experienced.

“

I was sitting at a loss as to how i can achieve my vision with such little resources or support.. as a care leaver i had never asked for help, it wasn't even very accessible to me 10 years ago and it never got me anywhere for a long time. I googled some questions and found out about lifechanges trust. It was so exciting what an incredible opportunity for someone who is READY to receive this second chance in life, i applied right away!

Award applicant

Responses provided a reasonable spread of experience across the three award programmes.

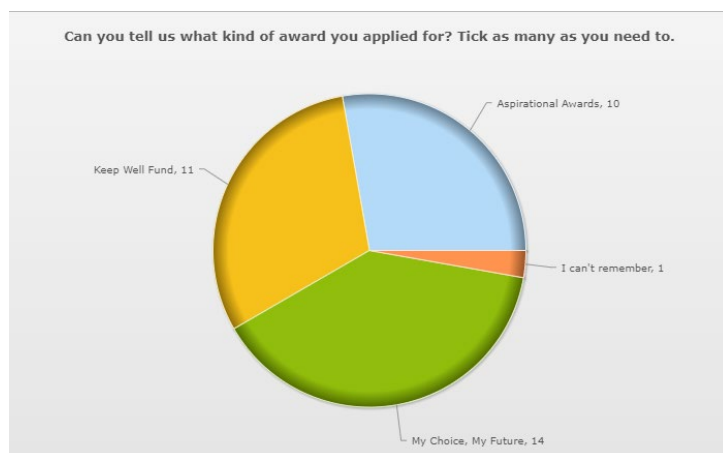


Figure 16: Responses from online survey of award recipients

Supporting the stepping stone, ‘The Trust’s grant-making processes are more open, accessible and personalised’, nearly all the young people found it ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ easy to apply. Qualitative responses underlined the simplicity and accessibility, with one young person appreciating the direct help they got with the form from the Trust.

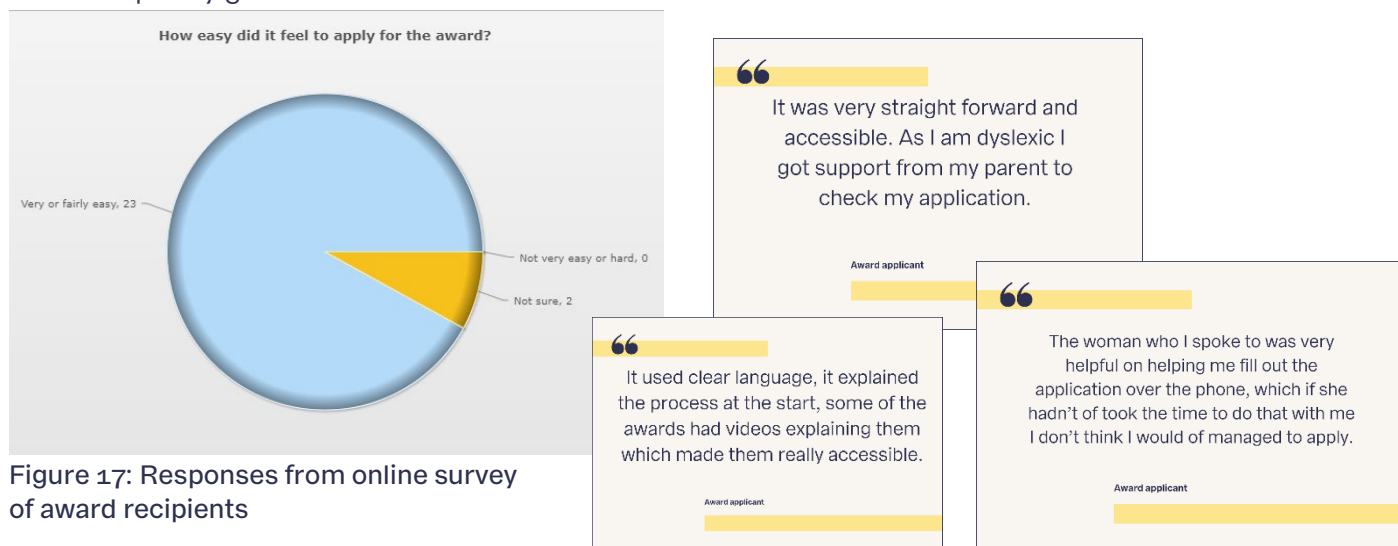
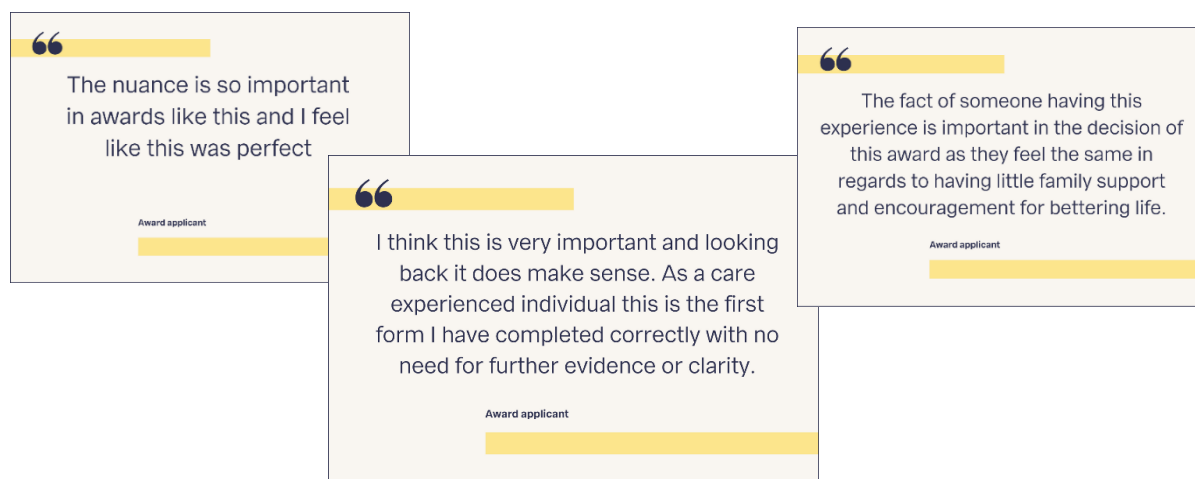


Figure 17: Responses from online survey of award recipients

Related to stepping stones, ‘recipients gain opportunities to define & move towards their personal aspirations’ and ‘recipients gain an experience of being trusted’, 23 of the 25 young people felt that they could say what was important to them as an individual and 17 felt trusted to spend the award as they needed it. One applicant felt the loose boundaries of the Aspirational Awards to be confusing and had some issues over what was and was not covered. While the minority of the young people (11) knew that people with care experience had created the funding initiatives, all but one thought this was important.



Award recipients described how they felt on hearing that they had received their award using language such as “excited”, “happy”, “grateful”, “delighted”, “ecstatic” and “over the moon”. Most felt that the award had made a big difference to their life now, with some of the examples provided showing how they were ‘making new choices and having new experiences’ and ‘enjoying greater personal and professional development’.

### 18 said a big difference

“It will allow me to create so much more that I couldn’t have afforded to do before”

“My AA was for therapy - it’s been life changing and so needed”

“This opportunity had led to me being able to afford the products and training needed to hopefully become a successful nail technician leading onto further beauty opportunities in the future.”

“It’s given me access to an education that serves my needs so I can better serve others.”

<b>4 said a small difference</b>	<p>“I was really happy to receive the Keep Well Fund. It helped towards the cost of buying a playhouse for my son that has been really useful to have during lockdown.”</p> <p>“I am awaiting my 2nd award and it will provide more equipment to record my EP/Album and this will be the greatest difference to my life.”</p>
<b>1 said not much difference</b>	<p>“Not much difference as of yet as the funding just came through but will make a big difference in the future”</p>

## The perspectives of supporters

Recognising their significant role, we interviewed two workers with experience of providing support to young people to apply. In both cases, this underlined the extent of the work that this can involve. One worker was supporting non-verbal young people with complex needs to apply by documenting what the young people were expressing through their behaviour. This was a complex process involving liaison with the workers who lived alongside and cared for the young people. In the other case, the worker knew only one young person who had applied without support and had in some cases constructed applications via text messaging, breaking the application form down into small parts. Again this calls attention to the likely unmet needs of young people who are not in contact with formal support, and the challenge of reaching front-line workers across the country to create awareness of the award programmes.

Both workers we spoke to gave examples of the enormous difference that individual grants had or would make to the young people they work with. As formative feedback, one questioned some of the parameters of the funding initiative (age for example, where maturity rather than age can dictate who is ‘ready’, and what is and is not eligible for funding). The worker supporting young people with complex needs praised the Trust’s responsiveness and willingness to work to include their young people; however, they felt that having more inclusive examples in the application pack would provide important signifiers that the funding is ‘for them’.

## Looking out: Key impacts and our reflections

Our five impact case studies are the backbone of the evidence for our ‘influencing’ pathway. Together these show the depth and range of the Advisory Group’s achievements. They highlight themes of effective leadership and advocacy and how, by investing in the Advisors, the Trust has contributed to collective effort towards change, such as the Independent Care Review/the Promise, or more specifically the campaign for Council Tax exemption. A thread

running through all the case studies is the contribution of this work to enriching participation – from Advisors directly speaking with an MSP, to contributing individually and collectively to the Independent Care Review and bringing learning to that process, to strengthening the voice of lived experience in project design. External stakeholders who we interviewed in depth (seven, two of whom had previous, direct involvement in the Advisory Group), consistently referred to the work as being both integral and a leading example of its kind. This was frequently juxtaposed with tokenism or platforming young people in ways that were more limited to their personal care experience rather than extending beyond it.

During our work, we found that participants at times struggled to isolate the impact of the Advisors in particular or struggled to provide specific examples of where the Advisors' input had led to a change. This reflects their integral role in a collective conversation, captured well by one trustee: "it wasn't as if they were people apart". Of secondary importance is the fact that internship schemes were run alongside the group, with overlap between the two, and that some Advisors have moved on to other roles in the sector but continued to have professional links with aspects of the work; and so again there is fluidity. All of this points to a key finding that this work has been embedded and integral – and to a key contextual factor, that the sector in Scotland is small and that people tend to move around. The benefit of this is that capacity and learning can move also, for example in the case of the Care Review having benefited from the experiences of the Advisory Group, or an Advisor taking up a role on a panel for another funder.

The colour-coding of our influencing pathway shows a tailing off of progress and confidence as you move through the steps towards the higher-level outcomes. This is typical in our experience of evaluating work of this kind; reflecting the difficulties of providing meaningful evidence to support claims around longer-term social change, and the complexity and length of time it takes to create changes in people's lives through the mechanism of changing policy and practices.

It is our assessment that the Advisors have been strong advocates for their work and for care experience, ambassadors for the Trust and have been personally impactful in their interactions with others. The volume of influencing work undertaken has been impressive and there is evidence of good engagement in this. Contributing towards the leadership skills of the Advisors has emerged as a thread through this pathway. We have been able to provide evidence of contributions towards specific policy changes and sector-wide initiatives and conversations – some of which will certainly be of direct benefit to young people with care experience either now or into the future. It is an exciting time for the care sector in Scotland with the agenda of the Independent Care Review/The Promise attracting global attention. Wider stakeholders we interviewed had mixed views on the profile of the Advisory Group, but generally believed that the Trust's work around participation would be a key part in its legacy.

Our assessment of the 'giving' pathway shows good progress and confidence in our data across most of the outcomes at every step. Where we have moderate confidence in our data, this reflects the limitations of the feedback that we have direct from award recipients, via our survey and document review. The response rate was good for a survey of this kind; however the findings cannot speak for everyone's experience – in particular for unsuccessful applicants and

for young people with care experience who did not apply at all. The stepping stone, ‘Young people with care experience enjoy greater personal & professional development and can follow their aspirations’ addresses the population of young people with care experience in Scotland and is more aspirational. The infographic we provide showing the scale of grant-making in combination with recipient and supporter feedback shows that the work of the Advisory Group has made a solid and clear contribution towards this for grant recipients. This is further supported by a small number of longer testimonials gathered by the Trust around Aspirational Awards<sup>6</sup> and the publication of personal stories drawn from the My Choice, My Future funding programme ([available on the Trust’s website<sup>7</sup>](#)). While there are difficulties in following up with applicants, especially over a longer timeframe, and gathering feedback, doing this more regularly might have allowed this feedback to have a formative effect on the programmes.

Referring to some of the assumptions and risks we developed to help us to think about this work, we observed that the strength of this group has allowed it to continue achieving during Covid-19. The volume of policy activity in the care sector and the natural alignment with the principles of the Independent Care Review have been enabling factors for the Advisory Group’s influencing work. The strong, individual voices within the group are very much at the heart of its achievements.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://bit.ly/3DVI8Qc> pp35-39

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/publications>



## LIFTING UP: UNDERSTANDING THE 'CO-PRODUCTION' THAT HAPPENED HERE

### Lifting up: Overview of this chapter

In our fifth pathway, 'co-producing our work' we lift some of the findings here to tell the narrative of the work collectively, combining the perspectives of Advisors and the Trust. This chapter is a learning piece and would be of interest to others who wish to review, enhance or develop their co-production. Drawing on our initial, brief literature overview, and on activities that we took forward with the Advisory Group based on some of the key concepts in the literature, we present a 'co-producing our work' pathway to impact. This is designed to show the way of working of this group, but also as a key visual to communicate their learning to others. We do not colour-code or evidence this pathway as it relies on the body of work discussed in this report to this point.

We also consider some of the recurrent threads in work like:

- how to make co-production a safe space for all involved
- what it means for a young person to be at the 'right point' in their journey to embrace an opportunity at this level
- reflections on balancing consistency and stability within a participation group with extending the opportunity to new people
- moving on from the Advisory Group
- the role of the participation lead between group and Trust, and how this is held by the organisation in order to work effectively.

The latter emerged through our analysis and our experience of working with the group over time as a key assumption for this work; however it is a role that is often hidden from view. We conclude with some overall reflections and by relating some of our learning to key points in the literature.

### Highlights

- In this chapter we 'lift up' the learning across this evaluation to provide a pathway to impact for co-production that is focused on communicating the learning. This draws on the literature, on the views and experiences of the Advisors, and on the evaluation as a body of work. We and the Advisors created our pathway here together in 2020, which has subsequently been refined, and this acts as the key communication tool for our learning.



- The group itself and the key supporting staff were felt to be important in making the participation space feel safe. Ongoing, open and honest communication about boundaries and responsibilities, as well as space for staff reflection and support for key staff, were also crucial. Trust in the group has been important and has allowed individuals to dip in and out according to need.
- The role of the Advisor here carries significant responsibility for the wellbeing of other young people, and it was felt that Advisors needed to be 'in a good enough place' or 'on the precipice of the right place' to take this on. Having the right induction, training and continued support are also so important.
- Relative consistency and stability have been a key feature of this work and help to explain how far the group has come.
- Great care and attention are needed when bringing new members into an established group.
- The role of the participation lead and trust in the participation lead are absolutely key to making this work.
- A notable aspect of this work has been the way in which Advisors have been able to move between voluntary and paid roles when appropriate (e.g. for assessment of tenders or grant applications, decision-making panels or consultancy). This is one amongst a range of wider opportunities contributing to feelings that this work has been mutually beneficial.

## Co-producing our work: our pathway to impact

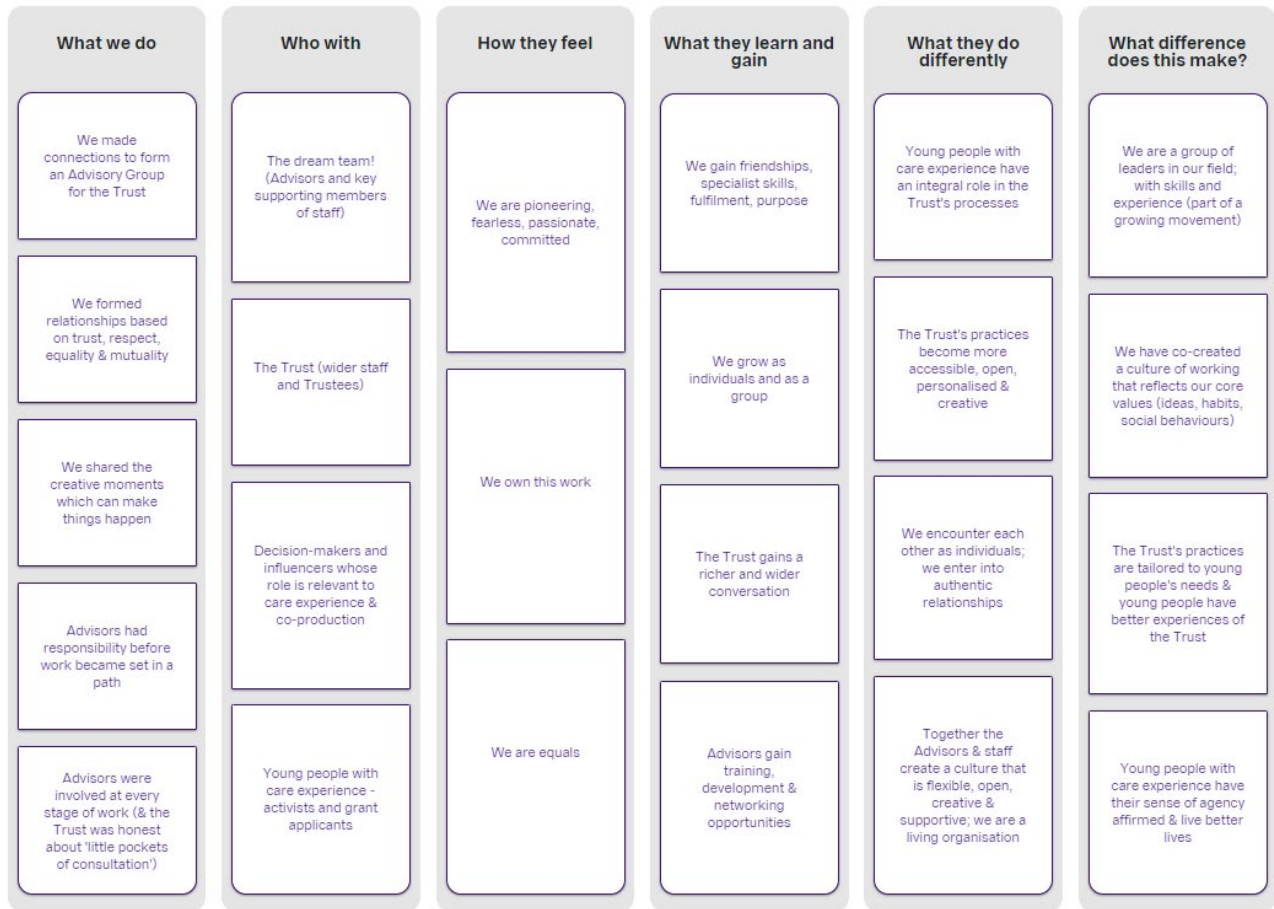


Figure 18: Screenshot of 'Co-producing our work' pathway in OutNav

## Co-producing our work: narrative reflections

This chapter draws heavily on one online workshop with the Advisors in July 2020 and a subsequent meeting with two Advisors where we explored in more detail some of the more difficult issues raised by co-production, such as readiness and inclusion. We also held one further reflective workshop with two key supporting staff including the participation lead.

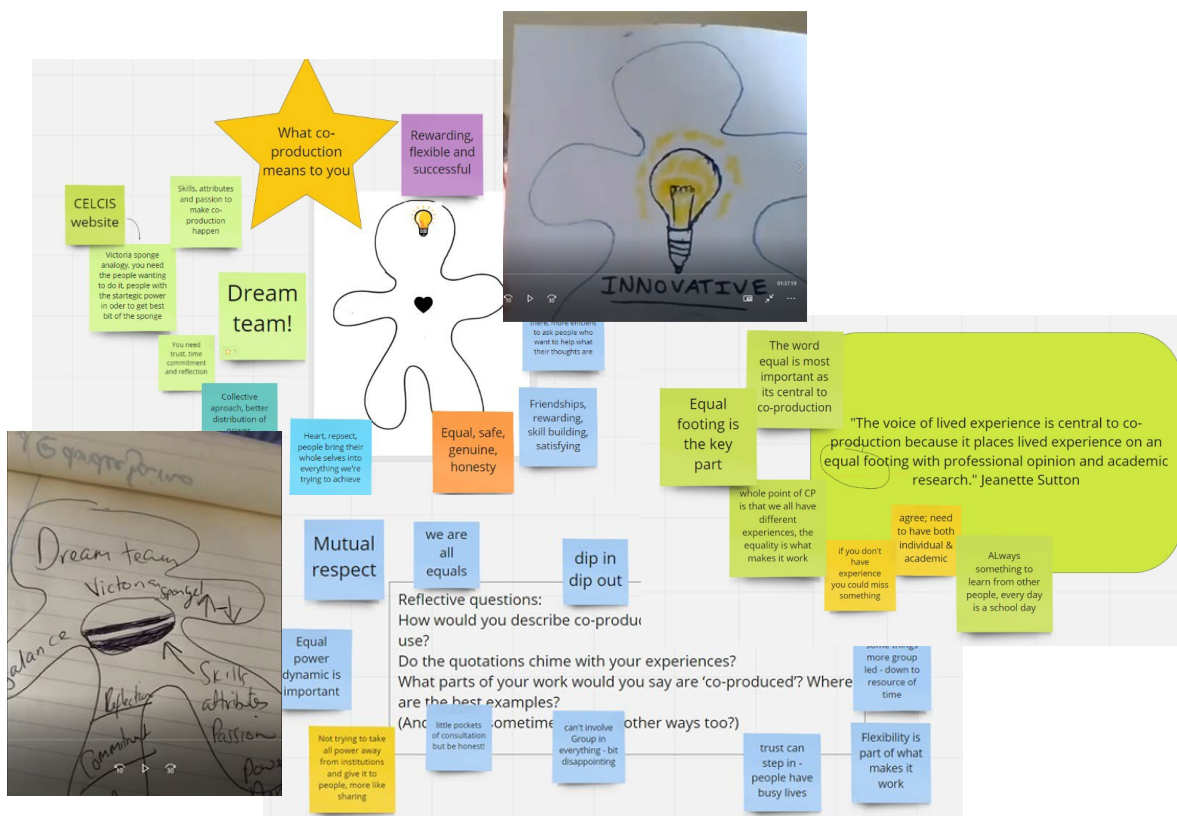


Figure 19: Images from our workshop with Advisors on co-production, 2020

## How to make co-production a safe space for all involved

A consistent thread in this pathway relates to how to maximise opportunities for involvement and group ownership while also being clear on boundaries and ensuring that the process is a 'safe space' for all parties involved. Staff contributions below call attention to the ongoing nature of communication related to responsibilities and boundaries.

“..those boundaries are not hard and fast, you need to keep having a conversation about it”

“being really transparent about what our role is as the employer and as the supporter of them without stepping into their ownership”

One of our key questions for thematic analysis relates to how co-production can be a safe space for both people with lived experience and for the organisation (ensuring that it can meet its duties and responsibilities - including to the volunteers involved and to the wider group of

beneficiaries). Broadly this has been felt to work well in this case. One trustee called attention to the journey of the work seen here, explaining that the Advisors gained trust and responsibility in tandem with their growing experience. We heard one or two examples of where a very small number of individuals may have found it difficult to manage the responsibility involved. However, as our first pathway shows, the sense of safety within the group and between the group and Trust was largely held by the trusting relationships developed and positive ways of being within the group.

Communication about boundaries and responsibilities was felt to be a constant of this work, including where Advisors are moving between paid and unpaid roles. A good example of this was that during discussion of Keep Well Fund applications, a staff member openly discussed with the group how to balance the emotional impact of reading the applications on Advisors (some were a 'tough read') and preserving the ethos of co-production. Although there is a policy dimension to this, support for staff and reflection were felt to be the most important aspects. A key point of learning is that the relationships needed to hold this kind of work safely require intentional work.

Interestingly one trustee observed that although the Trust's practices especially in individual grant-making could be seen to be quite radical, they felt in fact safer to her than she might have expected, partly because of her increasing distance from her former, statutory, professional role with young people.

Advisors reflected from their perspective on the concept of safety within the group, highlighting the role of the group itself and of key supporting staff in creating a place of safety. This issue of safety also reaches out to the issue of readiness, considered below, as young people operating at this level of responsibility need to be in a place where they can meet those expectations with the right support.

## **What it means for a young person to be ready**

The Advisors we met during this evaluation often had wide-ranging experiences of both paid and unpaid roles in the care sector or other sectors and present or past experiences of higher education. As an example, one Advisor had moved through the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum doing participation/research on the subject of staying put, Who cares? Scotland as a participation worker and supported facilitation of a Champions Board in one local authority area. There was therefore a level of interaction between their wider experiences and experiences within the group.

How young people were selected to be Advisors and what it means to be 'ready' for this kind of opportunity has been a key part of the narrative of this work to surface during the evaluation. Advisors were keen to recognise the responsibilities of this work and the maturity that it demands to think beyond yourself. One Advisor coined the expression, 'the precipice of the right place' to describe when people might be 'ready' for this kind of opportunity, while another referred to 'being in a good enough place'.

“...the right people are people who care, people who actually want to do it, people who are committed to the work and to the group and I think being ready is just being at a point in your life where if you are the kind of person who wants to do that and this is something you're passionate about, being just in a good enough place. Obviously if you're struggling in your own life you can't support others as well and that's why when people go through different things and when people study people step back, and I think it's really important that you're able to do that because I think like for example when you're doing Aspirational Awards, these people deserve, these applicants deserve, like 100 per cent of your focus and the decisions you make when you go into panels, yeah, you have to be in the right place in your head to be able to do that for other people I think.” **Advisor**

“D'you know like a year or two ago I'd have been like, nah, they could be developed, but I think massively they need to be at least on the precipice of the right place, because you're, not necessarily the function that we do with the grants and awards, but if you're doing anything in an advisory capacity you've got to be in a headspace where you can handle giving out that advice, and you've also got to be in a headspace where you remember that advice is gonna impact people's lives. There's been a lot of times I've been quite petty when I've been consulted with, I've just had a dig at social workers and stuff 'cos of my past and that's not been appropriate in the least 'cos it's advice that's gonna impact other people and I'm having a bitch about a social worker. So there's a time and a place, and that's a development I've gone through. But I think it's important with groups to be mostly in the right place because not only can it impact that person's life it can also impact your own head if you're not dealing with it.” **Former Advisor**

Given the heavy demands of this work and that this kind of opportunity might not be right for someone at an earlier stage in their own personal and volunteering journey, we discussed with the group the implications for the inclusion of multiple voices. One member of staff was able to point to examples where the group had linked in to the wider community and network of young people with care experience, through the Champions Board network for example, to cast the net a little wider.

Similarly, our case studies highlight examples of Advisors using their connections across the care experienced community, also commented on by two Advisors.

“It's kind of helped that a lot of people in the group are connected to other care experienced people in different ways”

“Through the Champions Board network itself and the network events I think we've managed to bring in a lot of other voices like from other local authorities, different sort of geographical areas ...”

The below illustrates some Advisors' responses to the theme of 'readiness' uncovered during an online workshop, showing the theme of being in 'a good enough place' to help others, but also having the flexibility to drop in and out of the group according to need. Further discussions with the Trust staff team on this theme suggested that, had the Trust had a longer lifespan, they might have looked to creating a wider range of short-term opportunities to draw in more people, rather than always integrating new people into the group which can become more difficult. The relative stability of the core group is a feature of this work, without which formation would have been more cyclical and ongoing.

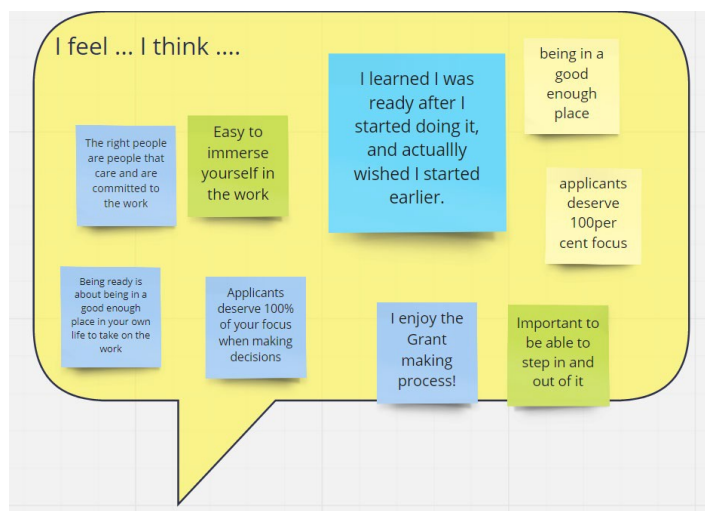


Figure 20: Advisors' responses to the theme of 'readiness' uncovered during an online workshop

## Reflections on balancing consistency and stability with wider opportunity

This work has concentrated on the deep engagement of a small number of Advisors, the perspectives of ten of whom were included in this evaluation. Flexibility with regard to dipping in and out, and openness to young people moving on when the time is right have been important features of the work; however it is significant that a core group has sustained involvement over time.

Staff observed that at one point in time the demands on the group, coming from outside of the organisation, became unmanageable and had to be contained to keep the group's focus. Meeting wider demand for input might require a wider range of models or opportunities. The decision for the Trust to stay with this one core group in some part reflects that it is a time-bound programme.

“It's not always about expanding that core group, it's about taking what we've learned and applying that in lots of different ways” **Staff member**

During a Trust webinar on co-production we observed audience questions surrounding inclusion and how to include the voices of a wider range of young people including those not able to manage this level or kind of commitment. Some of the stakeholders we interviewed



would have liked to see a larger role for new voice. Discussion with the Advisors suggested that in part this is achieved through their wider networks across the care community including linkages with the Champions Boards. Of course wider engagement is also achieved through the varied grants programmes, which in the case of the Keep Well Fund in particular addressed very immediate needs and drew in another layer of knowledge and understanding.

One trustee highlighted that this work has perhaps increased the visibility of talented and successful young adults with past experiences of care, and for her this sits alongside other work around the concept of alumni, in changing perceptions and expectations around care experience. Another suggested that 'representation' cannot be achieved in a group such as this any more than it can be amongst a board of trustees.

One significant aspect of the approach that this calls attention to is the need for flexibility and group ownership when working with Advisors, such that individuals can 'dip in and out' depending on their circumstances while trusting in others to progress the work. This relates to sharing a clear purpose and value base and therefore trusting in the intentions of others in the group and the Trust itself.

## Moving on from the Advisory Group

Reflective discussion with staff revealed that there were perhaps three categories of people leaving the group; some who dropped off rapidly deciding that it was 'not for them', Advisors who had left quite naturally because either the work had moved on or their own lives had moved on, and a small number of occasions where the connection with the group was felt not be successful. In the case of the latter, the evaluators did not speak with any individual involved due to the historical nature of the involvement, and as such the perspective that we can provide is only partial. Discussion with key staff highlighted several points for learning and reflection:

- The need to consider the 'pathway' into the work for new members, especially where work is well-progressed (this may involve setting a range of opportunities rather than necessarily expecting new members immediately to be able to pick up with the established group).
- Working from the young person's needs or wishes first may help to direct the involvement, rather than staff bringing a view that the involvement in a particular opportunity will be beneficial.
- The need to explore more fully individuals' support needs when they come into the group which could include a more thorough referral process or obtaining of references.
- The need for early and open discussions about what the group member can expect and what they do expect, and clarifying expectations in both directions explicitly.
- When facilitating a group like this, the need to reflect on the role of staff members and what process will be followed should issues arise; this may be guided by a written code of conduct and by staff communicating together while keeping the group informed.



Staff, Advisors and one trustee pointed to discord within the group as being one of the hardest points in the lifetime of the group, requiring a recovery process thereafter, a process underpinned by the values of the group and their resilience as a collective. The code of conduct was revisited as a result. As noted elsewhere, staff have told us that in the main, different staff do stay in touch with different Advisors and communication has been sustained with most past members. Two former Advisors were included in this evaluation.

## The role of the participation lead

The crucial role of the participation lead between the Trust and group, introduced in the first of our pathways, is further elaborated here. Again the continuity of the group has implications for this role, as a group in a continual cycle of new people and formation would likely require additional support. The participation lead's time on this work, also combined with varied group-held award programmes, has varied between 25 and 75 per cent of a full-time role. Both the group's and the Trust's needs have fluctuated over time. Two key learning points are: that this work needs to be broadened out across the staff team to feel 'more embedded'; and that it is important that this work is co-facilitated by two workers to manage the personal, reactive and practical nature of the role adequately, for example in a very basic way, making tea and setting out the space while listening to one person's concerns. The organic nature of this work while allowing the space for genuine co-production can 'leave you in this kind of grey area', which creates the challenge of 'bringing it all together' at certain points (staff member). Again this requires a strong staff team and support for the participation to reflect.

One of the key areas for support for the participation lead is around the continual negotiation of boundaries, including understanding where people need outside support. In this case there have been monthly meetings to hold this work, and dedicated support and supervision with a line manager. Because staff are being asked to 'emotionally invest', feeling supported is extremely important. The current participation lead describes her relationship with the Advisors as one of 'colleagues with boundaries', and it takes a significant amount of understanding from everyone to navigate those boundaries. As evaluators, we have observed mutual and equal discussion 'in the room' while being aware of the structural inequalities outside of the room.

## Lifting up: Our reflections

This final pathway to impact lifts the analysis across all prior pathways, to create a slightly more generalised account. We intend it to be general and simple enough to function as a learning and sharing piece but nuanced enough to surface those key attributes of this work that influenced its success. Because this outcome map lifts and distils the learning from the previous pathways, it is not colour-coded for progress.

During this work, Advisors and key staff provided their own understandings of co-production, with common themes relating to: bringing together a 'dream team', the quality of connections and relationships, and creativity. Our pathway to impact calls attention to factors such as reciprocity and mutuality (what was put in place to make the work feel mutually beneficial), how Advisors were found and how the group was brought together and formed, the timing of involvement, and the cultural space within which the group and Trust worked together. It communicates well the advice given by one trustee to 'be aware that it [this kind of work] is a journey', that requires commitment and support over time to work well. In terms of the benefits of this work, it captures key outcomes such as how lived experience can cause others to 'pause and reflect' (Trustee), how it can create richer conversations, and how the Advisors, staff and trustees hope it creates better and different experiences of the Trust for the wider community of young people with care experience who apply for funding. It also suggests that through the development of Advisors, staff and trustees, it will leave behind a group of ambassadors for co-production who will take these experiences forward in their different ways.

The staff team was able to offer a range of learning points that may be of benefit to other organisations looking to navigate similar work. This draws from some of the key narrative threads within the first two of our pathways: the organic and emergent approach that was taken here including sharing the decision-making at an early stage in the work, supporting relationships with resources including support for staff, and clear and ongoing conversations around boundaries and roles. Again, the way in which the group was constructed and that, with some changes, a core group was allowed to develop over time rather than a rolling programme, is key to understanding the depth and complexity of the work that was undertaken. Notably, there appeared to be few cultural barriers to developing this work, perhaps linked to the core role of the Trust and the sort of person who would be drawn to becoming a member of staff or trustee, and also that a new organisation has the opportunity to create its own culture. One trustee observed that the practices here are perhaps notable and 'pioneering' in their focus on developing work moving forward, where some of the other high-quality work in the field is more about experiences of care. That this group and the work around them have coalesced around a common purpose or value, "people who care about a thing" [staff member], again is really key.

## Good practice messages

The following are practical, key points of learning that have emerged through this evaluation. We think they provide a useful starting point for reflection for others seeking to navigate similar journeys – whether with people with different needs and circumstances or in another context.

- Make sure that your policies will hold this work and refresh them as needed, e.g. volunteer handbook and behaviour/positive relationships policy
- Consider how you will record the personal learning of volunteers as you go – so they have an up-to-date record regardless of when they feel it's right to move on
- When grant-making, ensure you build in feedback loops with grant recipients and those supporting them
- Consider the practical and ethical aspects of how to pay people for their time appropriately
- Give people the equipment you think they need without them having to ask or say they need it
- Use diaries or other methods to record the personal journeys of volunteers to add to your learning and understanding of the impact
- If you bring new people into an established group, think carefully about how you will check the fit, remembering the power of having a common mission, and how you will tailor their pathway into the work

The Trust acknowledges that these learning points would have been very useful to know as they were developing this work. Further reflections on working in this way are communicated in the set of films accompanying this highlights report (see Outputs from this evaluation on page 87).

Our final reflections in this section relate to key points in the literature. What we have observed in this work clearly chimes with commonly held principles of co-production, such as: facilitating rather than delivering; building on people's strengths; reciprocity and mutuality; building social networks; and blurring the boundaries between roles.<sup>8 9</sup> Advisors here have clearly been involved in designing, planning, assessing and delivering support.<sup>10</sup> We see a “meeting of minds”, in how people relate to one another, which has threaded from the beginning to the end of the work.<sup>11</sup> Key messages from the literature, for example related to balancing clear structures and expectations but also flexibility, developing authentic relationships, the values base, and the need to bring forward a range of voices, have informed our analysis.

There are clearly different costs and benefits attached to working with the same group over time or having a rolling programme of membership or a lighter touch approach with wider

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<sup>8</sup> [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the\\_challenge\\_of\\_co-production.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the_challenge_of_co-production.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd\\_j2m6b04bs.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd_j2m6b04bs.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd\\_j2m6b04bs.pdf](https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd_j2m6b04bs.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Co-production/National\\_Co-production\\_Advisory\\_Group/](https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Co-production/National_Co-production_Advisory_Group/)

groups, decisions which all participation projects have to navigate (with one of the key challenges in co-production being how to achieve diversity and accessibility);<sup>12</sup> choices here may be influenced by the intentions and context of the work and the motivations, wishes and circumstances of people involved. Any one group cannot represent everyone, and our evaluation team reflected that it may not be the job of any youth advisor to represent, rather to advocate for better representation. What we can say is that this particular work shows the depth and complexity of work that can be done by young people with care experience by investing in that long-term relationship and allowing a core group held together by a common mission to develop and grow over time.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/CUPI%20Report%20Final.pdf>

## SUMMARY OF OVERALL IMPACT AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This report brings together our evidence and analysis related to three intentions:

- To tell the story of the difference made by the Advisory Group to Advisors, staff and the Trust (looking in)
- To tell the story of the difference made by the Advisory Group to other young people with care experience via influencing and grant-making (looking out)
- To lift up general points of learning related to co-production to provide a fuller understanding of what worked well here and why (lifting up)

Our approach to evaluation has involved two principal stages:

1. Working collaboratively with Advisors and key staff to understand the unique context of the work and then ‘mapping’ out how the work of the Advisory Group contributes to change.
2. Testing and refining this logic through various forms of data collection with participants and other stakeholders, to create a nuanced and well-evidenced account of the impact of the work.

The collaborative development of the outcome maps and pathways ensures that the language used feels meaningful and truthful to the work that has been done. The pathways and a selection of the evidence have also been revisited by the Advisory Group during collective analysis and feedback opportunities. The looking in pathways, highlighting the respective journeys of Advisors and staff members are indicative of the depth of understanding, experience and relationships developed by those involved over time and are distinctively rich. We therefore consider the change pathways to be an important and somewhat unique source of evidence in themselves.

Looking out pathways are supported by our series of case studies, balancing the internal picture with some external perspectives, and our survey of grant recipients, bringing in the voices of a wider group of young people. On influencing, key impacts relate to contributing to participation effort across a range of settings, contributing to policy discourse and development and informing cross-sector collaborations and discussion on system change. On grant-making, there are process impacts – relative to the simplicity and young person centredness of the grants programmes – as well as the impact of receiving the grant on the individual.

These two dimensions of the work, the looking in and the looking out, are clearly interlinked. The looking out aspects are key to providing young volunteers with real opportunity and power to effect meaningful change. It is only with the cultural and relational aspects of the internal work, that this external work could be delivered in the way that it has been. That the Trust is a relatively new organisation and a funder are important contextual factors for understanding this work. The wider drive for whole system change in care has also been enabling and forms the backdrop to why the Trust itself and this work have come into being. Key decisions related to how young people were brought into the group organically, and in particular the willingness to

nurture the group over time with some flex, are key to understanding just how far the group has come and what they have been able to achieve collectively. The way in which young people have been greeted as whole human beings with a variety of identities and experiences, and not been asked to retell their stories, feels distinctive for youth advisors, and feels significant in how they have been able to contribute well beyond their own personal experiences of care.

Some of the drivers carrying the changes forward are expressed in the assumptions and risks we initially identified (see Appendix one), such as sharing a common passion and mission for this work, friendship and support, individuals feeling valued as whole human beings, giving time and careful attention, feeling close to the change, and ensuring that people are developed, supported and connected with opportunities. These are the ‘jewels’ that help to explain why this work has been successful and why the group has been sustained.

We at Matter of Focus have been delighted to accompany the Advisors and the Trust in their evaluation journey and share in their hope that this work can inspire and inform wider effort for co-production. The lifting up dimension of this work is especially key to understanding the approach and the sharable learning. Our final pathway to impact, ‘co-producing our work’ aims to present some of the learning in an accessible and visual format while maintaining a depth of understanding.

## Outputs from this evaluation

This work forms part of a suite of outputs communicating the learning from this evaluation as follows:

- The case studies embedded in this report are also published as stand-alone versions
- There is a highlights report focusing on key messages from the evaluation and highlights of the approach to co-production taken here that may have relevance to other settings
- Our partners in this work, media co-op have worked with the Advisors to make one main film and five chapter films communicating some of the highlight findings

# CASE STUDIES IN FULL



## CASE STUDY

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### Enabling co-commissioning

In 2020 the Trust commissioned a series of external evaluations to communicate the learning over its lifetime, including this one – looking at the impact of the Trust’s Advisory Group.

In the commissioning of other evaluations, Advisors were involved in the assessment panels and interviewing bidders. However in ‘co-commissioning’ this evaluation of the Group’s impact, the Advisors shaped the process from end to end, from shaping the brief to the final recommendations.



#### Define the challenge

Commissioning an evaluation is a technical process that requires an understanding of different approaches and methods, and how they fit to what is needed, as well as one defined by clear rules and responsibilities. The challenge was to engage and involve young people meaningfully in this complex work.



#### What the Advisory Group did and who with

The Advisory Group co-produced the brief for the evaluation, coming up with initial ideas and then shaping up a more fully formed brief. One Advisor worked in a paid capacity alongside two staff members to score and shortlist the proposals, with an equal vote to staff members. As a group, the Advisors designed the interview process, set tasks for bidders and interviewed those shortlisted. The participation lead facilitated collective reflection and scoring against the different criteria, and finally the recommendation coming from this collaborative process was approved by trustees.





## How people felt and what they learned and gained

The Advisor who assessed the bids was paid in this role and gained knowledge and skills related to evaluation commissioning. Analysing lengthy proposals was a new experience for the Advisor, and he enjoyed comparing the qualities in the different proposals and gaining that insight into what the staff involved were looking for. Different

‘professional’ and ‘lived’ experiences bring value to an overall, rounded discussion. While the work was understood to be highly important and serious, it was done in a relaxed style.

Comment from a trustee on the Advisors’ role in procurement more generally highlights, “...the care and commitment that they showed in their coming to decisions if you like, forming their views, [which] was really exemplary”.

We, as the evaluators appointed, gained an early understanding of how we would be working with the Advisory Group and of the ethos of the work.



...you can make it feel professional and stuffy but it doesn't ever have to be that level of, you know, sitting in a boardroom with suits and ties on!

Advisor



In terms of our experience of 'pitching' to a group of young people with care experience... I have to say that the main difference was that there was a really lovely energy in the room. Their passion for this project shone through.

Director of Matter of Focus (evaluator)



## What they did differently

Practices at every step in this commissioning process were done differently due to the integrated involvement of Advisors.

Looking at the documentation it is clear how the group’s input had shaped the brief for this evaluation. This meant the Advisory Group played an active role in how its legacy would be understood and communicated through the evaluation. Having all of the Advisors attend the interviews made everyone feel invested in the evaluation process.

Trust staff believe that they received more creative proposals because of the co-production of the evaluation brief and that the interviews of shortlisted bidders followed a more creative design. Examples include requesting that bidders submit a poster describing their approach and provide a ‘taster’ of an evaluation tool or method during interview. One member of staff reflected how she felt that the tenders received “connected with young people more” and felt more accessible as a result of co-commissioning, setting the work off on the “right footing”.

“

The Advisory Group pushed us to be more inventive and much clearer in our expectations of bidders. They asked interesting questions and brought more diversity of opinion to every discussion.

Extract from Trust's blog, see data sources below



### What difference this made

The involvement of the Advisors set the tone for ongoing participation in the evaluation itself and had a symbolic as well as practical value.

This case study shows the potential for involving young people with lived experience in even complex and rule-heavy areas of work, from which others could learn.



### Data sources for this short case study:

Document review

Interviews with trustees

Blog by Mhairi Reid,

<https://lifechangetrustblog.wordpress.com/2020/12/16/procurement-and-all-the-fun-of-the-fair/>



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# CASE STUDY

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## Transforming care

The First Minister commissioned the Independent Care Review in 2016, with the aim of transforming care in Scotland to give children with care experience the childhood that they deserve. The Care Review had a wide reach, hearing 5500 experiences of those living and working in and around the ‘care system’.

Advisory Group members participated in and supported the Care Review both directly and indirectly, via parallel work and conversations that were fed into the evidence gathered. They participated both as a group and as individuals, with some present and past group members moving on to paid roles within the Review, taking their skills and experiences with them and putting them to good use.

Investment in the development of the Advisors, as emergent leaders in the sector, has contributed to the Care Review, in particular to how lived experience has been included.



### Define the challenge

With cross-party support and a very high profile both nationally and internationally, the Independent Care Review was a unique opportunity to influence change in policy and practice.



### What the Advisory Group did and who with

There was cross-fertilisation between the work and conversations of the Advisory Group and the Care Review, including movement of people between the two. Both shared similar values in foregrounding lived experience.

Both the former Director of the Young People’s Programme of Life Changes Trust and the former Funding Manager who supported the Advisory Group around its inception went on to work for the Care Review, as did five Advisors/former Advisors in varying roles – including as participation lead for those with seldom heard voices.

The whole group were consulted by the Care Review on two occasions, and most were involved in the early stages when the review looked to scope the issues. Several Advisors were later involved in a longer-term commitment within themed work groups, the longer-term nature of this meaning that their development within the Group and conversations within the work group interacted. There were ten work groups, each meeting for a day per month over 18 months. Two of these groups, ‘Components of Care’ and ‘Love’, were co-chaired by Advisors/former Advisors.



## How people felt and what they learned and gained

One Advisor talked about how she felt encouraged by her direct conversation with the Chair of the Independent Care Review.

“

Giving my opinion on the outcomes planned for the care review to Fiona Duncan personally and feeling like that was taken on board by her, traditionally the people shaping the care system have very little direct input from care experienced people and even fewer actually take that on board. Our group meeting with Fiona gave me far more confidence that the care review was going in the right direction than any statement or published pledge ever did.

Advisor

Their experience within the Care Review may have raised the profile of Advisory Group members past and present as leaders within the care sector in Scotland. There were many examples of Advisors being positioned to make good and productive connections across the sector, adding to their networks. One Advisor felt that, without their experiences within the Group, individual Advisors would not have been able to contribute as fully as they did. A lead member of staff of the Care Review described the strengths and talents that the process gained from having those individual Advisors involved.

“

They're all just immensely talented and caring, compassionate, reflective people, so they were amazing skills to have...

(Former) Participation, policy and influencing manager of the Care Review

The ethos of the Care Review was to value all voices equally. As a mature group however, the Advisory Group could make a very helpful contribution “almost like a sense check or a sounding board” ((Former) Participation lead for those with seldom heard voices, Independent Care Review).



## What they did differently

Two of our interviews showed how individuals who had worked in or with the Advisory Group had taken their learning into the Care Review, and how this shaped their approach to participation particularly. This approach was described as forward-looking and rooted in an equal relationship, ‘[asking] for their ideas, not for their stories’ (former Participation, policy and influencing manager of the Independent Care Review).

“

The way I approached the facilitation and participation of the love work was hugely impacted by the skills I learned at the Life Changes Trust and I think they were a great help! Having prior knowledge about meaningful participation, as well as working alongside [name] who led on participation at both the Advisory Group and at the Review really helped me to contribute in the best way to the participation approach, which has been internationally recognised for how well it was done.

(Former) Participation lead for those with seldom heard voices, Care Review; also former Advisor



## What difference this made

The strong voice of lived experience is central to the credibility and standing of the Care Review. The Review and now The Promise have brought international attention to Scotland and we are seen as leading the way in putting lived experience at the heart of reimagining care. This has been made possible due to the commitment and generosity of those who contributed.

[Seven reports including The Promise](#) together set out the transformational changes that the Care Review is seeking to achieve.

Realising The Promise is envisaged as a ten-year programme of work and so longer-term social change will take time to unfold; however our interviews with Advisors suggest that it has already played a part in developments such as removing the age cap from the care experienced bursary for students and the council tax exemption for care leavers. Many policy conversations have been advanced, e.g. debates on physical

“

...the Care Review did bring around a whole bunch of change, it was one of the primary reasons we got the age cap lifted from the care experienced bursary through discussions young people were having with the care review, that happened

(Former) Advisor



restraint, the right of access to records and the future of children's homes, and overarchingly, changing attitudes towards calculating 'risks' and the role of love and relationships in care.



#### **Data sources for this short case study:**

Virtual outcome mapping workshop with the Advisory Group

Individual interview with one Advisory Group member

Survey completed by one former Advisor

Interviews with two former members of staff of the Independent Care Review (one of whom is a former Advisor, and one a former staff member of the Trust)



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# CASE STUDY

## Shaping practice

The 'Home and Belonging' initiative offered organisations the opportunity to apply for funding from the Trust to design projects offering young people who are moving on from formal care a better feeling of home and belonging. Applicants had to demonstrate three principles in their proposals: co-design with young people, collaboration across the sector or across sectors, and system impact. Home and Belonging was allocated £4 million.



### Define the challenge

The challenge for Advisors was to help shape and improve prospective applicants' ideas and to encourage applicants to work more deeply and more meaningfully with their young people in designing project proposals. The Advisors had strong recollections of the complex, emotional content of the programme launch event and that this approach to working was new for a lot of people in the sector, creating some initial anxieties.



### What the Advisory Group did and who with

The Advisors played a key role in a two-day service design event which took place at the programme's launch point in 2018 – supporting the participation of other young people in the event and taking part in using creative methods to explore project ideas. There was an Advisor positioned at each table. The event was attended by 200 people and included training in service design tools such as prototyping, journey mapping and personas. The facilitators encouraged participants to surface any worries or anxieties about this way of working, and the creative methods were intended to help people to break out of their existing thinking, to 'allow participants to dream' (Advisor).



“

...there was a lot more plasticine and prototyping than would normally take place

Applicant & attendee of the two-day event



Applicants then spent time co-designing their projects with and consulting with young people. In the second stage, applicants were each appointed an Advisor to meet with them and inform the project design.

The Advisory Group formed a panel, which also included one trustee, to consider all expressions of interest and make decisions about which proposals should proceed to the second stage. As part of this process, they also offered reflections to applicants designed to strengthen their final proposals.



### How people felt and what they learned and gained

The Advisors had very strong memories of the programme's launch event, remembering the emotional impact of some of the young people's stories on some participants – and reflecting on how important it is that practitioners can connect emotionally with young people and with their own passion for improvement. They also remembered how some participants felt a level of discomfort with the creative methods and in letting go of the cultural and financial constraints on their thinking. Advisors themselves were 'buzzing' with the intensity of the event, feeling passionate about the core idea of the young people 'coming first' with services 'coming around them'.

Documentary evidence shows that a number of applicants appreciated both the service design event and the input of their matched Advisors. One applicant interviewed described how personally and professionally impactful the process had been. He praised the facilitation, support and training. He worked with young people with care experience across Scotland using the design tools and has continued to use them regularly in his work. He felt the organisation had gained "a lot more insight into the experiences and thoughts of care experienced young people, I think we created new partnerships and gained more knowledge of that as a sector..."

“

I can't tell you how sincere, how sincere I'm being when I tell you that the Life Changes Trust particularly the Home and Belonging programme has been one of the best experiences of my career as a fundraiser and development worker.

Applicant

“

Having our “own” locally based and experienced adviser however was unique and really meant a great deal to us.

Applicant

One Advisor described how during prototyping, she had challenged a professional to reconsider their use of the language 'staff room' within their design, reflecting how young people may then feel excluded from that space and how it creates an institutional feel. An alternative might be to include a 'chill out' room for example. She described how the professional seemed struck by that as they had not considered or questioned this language before. This suggests the possible impact of a 'lightbulb moment when you ask the question' (Advisor).

The Advisors involved gained learning and skills in the service design approach that have complemented their work in other settings, with one Advisor commenting that “the ability to support and mentor people in their projects and ideas has been great learning for me and us a group.”



### What they did differently

Trust staff felt that starting off the Home and Belonging initiative in this way signalled a clear expectation of the meaningful involvement of young people by applicants.

One interviewee described how the expectations of this programme went beyond the norm, by



I believe this has changed the way our organisation will design its services in the future. We have always put people at the heart of what we do, but this approach really strengthens that work.

Applicant

looking for a robust quality in the co-design work; he did between 20 and 30 hours of engagement with young people to prepare the proposal. This led to some differences in the design, for example including a groupwork offer which emerged as being important to young people although initially some professionals had doubted this. For this interviewee, the experience contributed to the development of new and ongoing practices.



### What difference this made

How this programme was delivered particularly using the service design tools has influenced the practices of some applicant organisations moving forward. One successful applicant commented that whilst projects often have a period of refinement in the early stages, this one ‘was effective with the first young people through the door’ because of the robust development process.



Funding applicants to Home and Belonging changed the way they design projects after being paired up with Advisors

Staff member of the Trust



### Data sources for this short case study:

The short film, Home and Belonging, accompanying this evaluation, helps to communicate the impact and resonance of this work (see Outputs from this evaluation)

Documentary evidence

Staff reflections

Survey completed by an Advisor

Collective analysis workshop with the Advisors

Interview with Impact Arts – who applied for funding

Video of the launch event in Dundee, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaQuBHUzOUk>



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# CASE STUDY

## Influencing national policy

In 2017 the Scottish Government held an open consultation on homelessness. The Advisors brought together their own experiences as well as those of young people involved in Champions Boards and relevant research in making their response.



### Define the challenge

This was an opportunity for the Advisory Group to directly address decision-makers and the media around issues of care experience. A key challenge was to use their own experiences but to be able to present these powerfully and confidently and in context – so that the points raised made clear demands for the structural changes that were needed.



### What the Advisory Group did and who with

In 2017, the Advisory Group submitted a consultation response to the Scottish Government call for evidence on homelessness, drawn together by three of the Advisors. The response was based on the Group's collective experiences which were situated within the bigger picture of homelessness amongst care leavers. The submission resulted in two members being invited to contribute to the Local Government and Communities Committee meeting on the perspective of care experience, and from this, a subsequent invitation to meet the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning.

One Advisor was also invited to BBC Women's Hour and a number of other media opportunities.



Through collaborating with CELCIS and the Scottish Care Leavers' Covenant in relation to the above, other work developed organically to help push the Council Tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 26. Some Advisors were involved in local efforts via the Champions Boards, and with other hats on, to support this campaign.



### How people felt and what they learned and gained

On attending committee, one Advisor said, 'it was good, it was quite intimidating'. She felt the audience was 'very receptive'.

One interviewee who attended the meetings with the Minister, as a guide to the policy and legislative landscape around housing and homelessness, described how the Advisors were able to be 'toe-to-toe' with the Minister in their conversation, participating as equals. They were able to contextualise their experiences to make generalisable and powerful points, and in fact were able to demand a much longer time slot than they were initially given. He recalled how the Minister cancelled another meeting and spent another 40 minutes in the lobby with the young people, due to 'their ability to put forward an agenda that couldn't be squeezed into a half an hour meeting'. Related to this, one Advisor located her confidence in these meetings with the "group support" around her.



We kind of posed the question [to the Minister] saying, have you read the corporate parenting guidance because it said x, y, z, it said no care experienced person should be homeless, however yet when you look at the statistics, young people are still being homeless and getting put in hostels and B&Bs which results in suicide and he kind of then said that nobody in the care experienced community will be homeless...

Advisor



This was the interesting thing and one of the powerful things about this group compared with other groups I've had engagement with is that they were able to take their own narrative and their own story and their own experience but contextualise it into the broader policy and legislative arena that needed to change ...

Thoughtcare & Aftercare Lead, CELCIS



### What they did differently

The contribution informed the [final report on homelessness by the Local Government and Communities Committee](#) within which the Advisory Group's input was mentioned. The recommendations in this report are intended to support and inform the work of the Scottish Government, the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group and other relevant groups in realising their ambitions.

The Committee's report (2018) recommends that Scottish Government investigate where Corporate Parenting duties are not being met with regard to supporting care leavers and requested that Scottish Government provide information on how they will; ensure good housing options and support for care leavers and stop young people from experiencing unsuitable accommodation for more than seven days. A programme for government commitment to

extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to all homeless people was brought forward during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Group's submission was also fed into the Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway which aims to improve the housing journey for young people leaving care. The Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway demands that young people under the age of 26 for whom corporate parenting duties apply should receive a response within the Corporate Parenting framework if they have housing needs, and not be given emergency housing options for older adults.

One Advisor shared her hope for the future, that other organisations will pass on opportunities to contribute to consultations to people with lived experience.



### What difference this made

Advisory Group members hope that their work on homelessness helped to elevate the perspective of care experience in national policymaking and thinking, and the confidence of people with care experience to assert themselves and to make demands of decision-makers. In this work the Advisors acted as strong and effective advocates for change.

Moves towards better housing options and support for young people with care experience including moves to prevent unsuitable housing stand to benefit many young people (around 400 of 6000 young people eligible for aftercare in Scotland have been homeless as cited in the Prevention Pathway, see below).

Changes in policy such as the Council Tax exemption have contributed to young people with care experience being materially better off in this respect.



I think our involvement in all of these levels has been part of a step change in cultural confidence for care experienced people, at least from my vantage point there's a lot more care experienced people coming out quite confident and willing to challenge local authorities and stuff.

Former Advisor



### Data sources for this short case study:

Individual interview with Advisory Group member

Outcome mapping workshops with the Advisory Group

Documentation

Interview with one external stakeholder who supported the Group when meeting the Minister

[Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway https://bit.ly/3n7GTGp](https://bit.ly/3n7GTGp)



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# CASE STUDY

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## Challenging leaders

The Trust invested in two systems leadership programmes in 2017 and 2018 in recognition that many of the challenges young people with care experience face are the result of wider systemic factors, for example policy frameworks, how resources are allocated and public attitudes.

The first systems leadership programme kick-started the Trust's Workforce Development initiative. It brought together sector leaders from 11 organisations representing different parts of the workforce, including voluntary, statutory and academic sectors and the Care Inspectorate. Delegates committed to five days together, including a three-day residential. Following the systems leadership programme, the Trust invited collaborative funding applications from participants.



### Define the challenge

The challenge to delegates was to explore the concepts and ideas of 'systems leadership' to create proposals for improving the system long-term – while keeping the perspective of the young person with care experience firmly in view.

Advisors set an initial challenge for delegates; 'what would a care system based on love and relationships look like?'. The challenge here was to identify what long-term system developments would be needed to create the space for loving and caring relationships with children and young people to develop or to be sustained.



### What the Advisory Group did and who with

The Advisors were involved in the design of the systems leadership programme and in creating and presenting their vision statement to focus the delegates' work:

"Relationships should be the heart of the Scottish Care System"

The Advisors then broke this vision statement down to form a list of success criteria that would help delegates to reflect on where they were making progress towards achieving the vision. These criteria are subtle and careful, reflecting the complexity of the challenge of allowing and encouraging something personal and real within a structure, as shown in the following examples. This relies on staff feeling supported and having the space and autonomy to act.



- Empowerment: that young people are empowered to understand what a healthy relationship looks like and to develop the skills to make such relationships
- Dignity: engage with approaches which promote positive relationships between young people with care experience and local and wider society
- Softer boundaries: enable professionals to spend more time with young people in ways that build deeper and more meaningful relationships

Advisors were present at a progress event at the end of the programme so that delegates could report back to them.

A similar approach was taken to the later systems leadership event in 2018 related to the Trust's work on Champions Boards.

“

...a whole pile of workers sitting in a room having a conversation's one thing but actually on a face to face level doing that with a group of young people with lived experience is, like you can't, you can't replace that

Delegate



### How people felt and what they learned and gained

One delegate said she felt 'curious' about the opportunity and noted the way in which the 'true task' was set by the Advisors. The learning and the gains relate to the connections made and networking within the systems leadership group, and to the training content. The delegates we interviewed were very positive about the opportunity and the Advisors' input ('nailing it').

Trust staff feel that the ethos of the Group and how they work is uniquely honest, open and authentic, and observe how this impacts on their effectiveness. This inspired staff in their approach to the systems leadership programme.

“

Their [the Group's] honesty and openness in sharing their experiences and perspectives has constantly inspired us as staff members to open up and connect as human beings as well as people with a job to do.

We took this ethos into the leadership programme and challenged participants to ask some searching questions of themselves.

Staff member of the Trust

One interviewee felt that the structure of the programme could have involved the Advisors in a more integrated way, as they missed some of the conversation along the way. This meant that the final, progress session was experienced by some as slightly more oppositional than it might otherwise have been. A report summarising the experience of the programme included reflections from delegates about the value of systems leadership thinking and techniques.



Systems leadership encourages curiosity and people to actively notice what is happening around them. This was a welcome reminder from my perspective to consciously practice those techniques and reflect on how I can normalise them in my daily work. This experience will prove, I am sure, to be a transformative one for many of us.

Delegate



### What they did differently

On the final, progress day of the programme, one delegate from the Care Inspectorate was able to report that this work had influenced their proposals for their new methodology for inspections – so that inspectors would assess the quality of relationships available to young people in care settings. Another delegate observed the changing practices and language of the Inspectorate on relationships; ‘it’s been a real kernel for change I think’.

The connections made during the programme meant that one member of the Advisory Group at that time was nominated by a delegate to take part in the Journey phase of the Independent Care Review. She subsequently became a Co-Chair of one of the work streams and thereafter a staff member supporting participation in the Review.

A number of project ideas were formed during the systems leadership programme and subsequently funded by the Trust through its Workforce Development initiative. This included the Youth Justice Voices Project and Project Return (STAF and the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice). Participation is not a usual practice for the youth justice workforce in the way that it is in other settings such as youth work for example, and Youth Justice Voices aims to enable people in that workforce to hear the voices of young people with both care and justice experience. A key outcome has been the inclusion of a participation strand in the Youth Justice Standards in Scotland. Project Return facilitates conversations around trauma and relationships using workshop kits, e.g. pottery, screen-printing and planting and reflective conversations, so provides direct benefit for young people and supports person-centred practices.

Both project ideas existed before the programme; however the programme ‘really galvanised our ideas’ (delegate).



“

If this [proposal] is accepted, it means we will organise inspections to look at how different parts of the system support sincere human contact and enduring relationships, staff who work in in the care and protection system are valued, supported and equipped for their task, and the care and protection system is open, transparent and embeds learning. At the most senior level, it would lead us to ask questions about how leaders are planning and commissioning services with the need for long-term relationships in mind ...

Programme delegate



### What difference this made

The Independent Care Review, which forms the focus of another in this series of case studies, places emphasis on meaningful relationships and relationship-based practice.

This work contributes to this body of thought, and to steps towards making these changes concrete for children and young people. Steps include ensuring that the content of inspections lines up with what matters most. Another example is beginning to bring forward the views of young people with both care and justice experience and embedding this expectation of inclusion.

This case study provides evidence of a contribution to progress in both areas.



### Data sources for this short case study:

Documentary evidence provided by the Trust

Interviews with two delegates

Blog by Carole Patrick, Director of Evidence and Influencing at the Trust,

<https://lifechangestrustblog.wordpress.com/2019/10/21/systems-change-relationships-and-love/>

Progress report 2017 (<https://bit.ly/38Mcrtc>)

<https://www.staf.scot/Listing/Category/project-return>

<https://www.staf.scot/Listing/Category/youth-justice-voices>



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# CASE STUDY

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## Inspiring funders

The Advisory Group together with the Trust have pioneered the co-production of individual grants programmes, challenging the expectations of some funders around what degree of involvement is possible and providing a model that can inspire others.

Advisors and the Trust have co-produced both proactive and reactive grant programmes for individual young people, such as Aspirational Awards and the Keep Well Fund, intentionally placing strong emphasis on personalisation, trusting beneficiaries, and considering how the applicant feels at each stage of the process.



### Define the challenge

People with lived experience are uniquely positioned to understand what is needed and to sense how beneficiaries may feel. Although co-production is gaining currency and profile as a way of working, the practice of co-producing grant programmes is at a relatively early stage within the community of larger funders. This work is novel and as such has provided significant learning which is important to share.



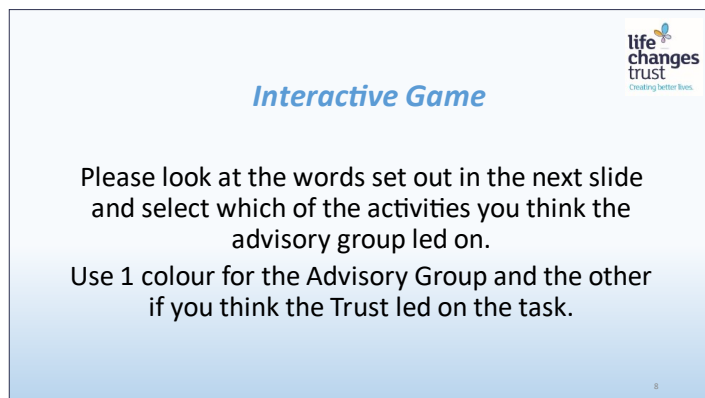
### What the Advisory Group did and who with

This exploratory work has drawn the attention of funders and both the Trust and Advisors have communicated their learning in a range of both formal and informal ways. Depending on where those funders are in their own journey, this has been to give inspiration and pause for reflection, or to offer very concrete advice drawn from the experience of supporting an advisory group.

Advisors and the Trust have taken several steps to communicate their learning to the wider community of funders:

- Advisors have presented their work on grant-making to two events of the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF), the membership body for UK foundations and grant-making charities, and at Co-Production Week events with funders and third sector organisations.
- In 2020, the Trust produced a briefing paper and held a webinar about their experiences of co-producing individual grant programmes which was attended by a number of key funders in Scotland.
- The Trust has engaged individually with funders who are working in this space, openly sharing what they have learned and sharing materials and presentations developed with the Advisors. Numerous sessions have taken place with the National Lottery Community Fund.

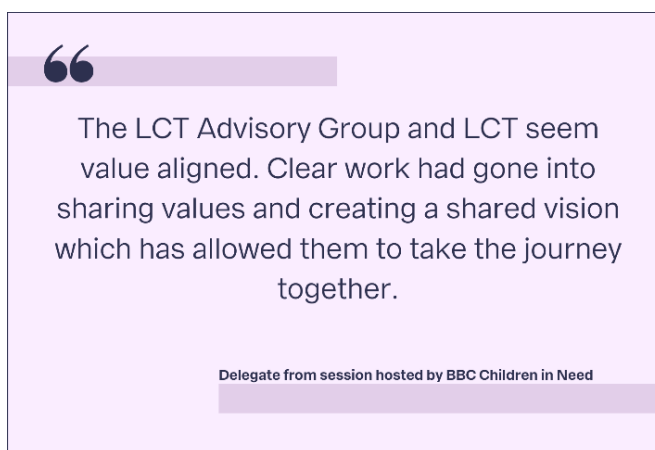
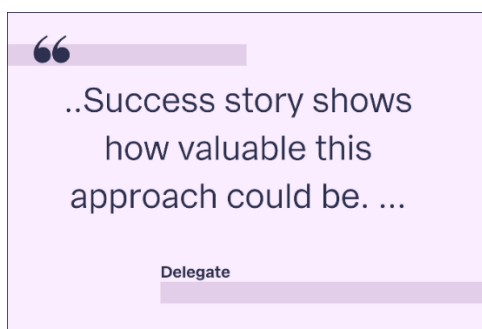
- Later in 2020, building on the earlier work, the Trust engaged more deeply with Corra Foundation as it developed its process for assessing and making decisions on the Promise Partnership Fund, grant funding made available by Scottish Government to support the roll-out of The Promise.
- The Trust has also shared learning via a funders' forum convened by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.
- In 2021, the Advisory Group presented to members of a UK-wide funders collaborative focusing on children and young people.



Slide from presentation to the ACF, 2017

## ♥ How people felt and what they learned and gained

Delegates' responses to a workshop facilitated by the Group at the ACF events show how it had helped them to think about co-production in grant-making both practically and in terms of the value attached to this work.



Advisors perceived that some funders were 'shocked' by the 'pure bold step' of delegating funding to young people, and the true extent of their involvement in programme design. This was noticeable at other events too, where delegates often used terms such as 'inspiring' and 'refreshing' to describe their responses.

We interviewed two funders who had engaged in shared learning with the Trust through an event and ongoing, informal discussion. Both shared the Trust's perspective that transformational change comes from people making the change for themselves, and that this is the most appropriate response to the complex, structural problems they are tackling. They

were both on their own journeys towards lifting and integrating the voice of lived experience, but saw their work as being at a slightly earlier stage than that of the Advisory Group.

Learning exchange has included topics such as the “real practicalities” of providing support and flexibility, timing, payment for people’s time, the role of the support worker, “the kind of skills that you need to create the right atmosphere for discussion”, and documenting individuals’ learning through participation at each step (funders). One funder had reflected carefully on the costs and benefits of keeping consistency in the group or having a rolling programme or open group model.

One of these funders had also recruited a member of the Advisory Group to a paid role on one of their decision-making panels and noted the skills that she was able to bring; “it’s clear that she has an expertise because of the experience that she’s gone through with the Advisory Group”.



### What they did differently

Four of seven delegates participating in the Advisory Group’s workshop during one ACF conference and who completed feedback indicated that, as a result, they would consider enhancing their approach to involving people with lived experience in grant-making. Of the 18 representatives attending the funders’ collaborative, four made specific commitments to follow-up actions regarding strengthening the voice of young people within their work.

Learning exchange within the community of funders includes a range of experiences, not just those of the Trust and the Advisors; however the two funders we interviewed agreed that the Trust’s work is a leading example of “integrated” practice and had influenced them, for example with regard to paying people with lived experience for their time and the practical detail of how to do so. One interviewee highlighted that work within her organisation had gained momentum from having heard about the work of the Advisory Group.

“

It’s definitely influencing the way that we work with our group for sure because of the learnings that Life Changes Trust have already gone through [...] and I think we’ll look to make sure that we are doing the flexibility that was stressed...

**Advisor, funding organisation**

A separate influence, identified by staff members within the Trust, was that the particular ethos of the Aspirational Awards may have filtered through to the individual grant programmes developed by some of the local Champions Boards also funded by the Trust.



## What difference this made

The Advisory Group hopes to inspire other funders to try or further develop their co-production and that this in turn will lead to a step change in organisational processes and practices, putting young people with lived experience at the centre. The influence of participatory grant-making, inclusion and diversity within the community of larger funders suggests that there is a receptive climate for this message.

The community of funders in Scotland is small and internally quite fluid which may be an enabling factor in allowing the learning to be spread. This relates to the way in which staff from the Trust have indicated that, as they exit their journey through this work, they will take forward a changed way of working and become part of the movement for co-production.

This case study provides evidence that this work has been supportive and helpful for other funders in their own journeys

towards embedding co-production and has contributed to the movement. As well as expressing a values position, the case for co-production rests on the logic that programmes can be improved by integrating lived experience into decision-making. One interviewee reflected on how their programme of youth mentoring had and could continue to be enhanced in this way, with common threads being the focus on the feelings of the beneficiary and what is important to them.

This external evaluation forms the last step in this co-production journey, bringing together the learning and findings so that they can be shared and built on into the future.

“

..we've certainly been on a journey across our 35 years, but particularly accelerated perhaps over the last five years quite strongly towards very much a kind of supporting, a ceding of power kind of role as a funder ...

Senior manager of a funding organisation



### Data sources for this short case study:

Outcome mapping workshops with Advisors

Trust staff team reflection facilitated by Matter of Focus

Document review

[Life Changes Trust Aspirational Awards Briefing Paper \(https://bit.ly/3zP8DTX\)](https://bit.ly/3zP8DTX) and observation of associated webinar in autumn 2020

Interviews with two funders in Scotland



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# APPENDIX ONE: OUR RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

## RISKS

- ⚠ It is challenging to practice co-production in its fullest way when contact is limited to being virtual
- ⚠ People underestimate young people's capacity and willingness to contribute, in spite of their sometimes difficult, personal circumstances
- ⚠ Some voices are not heard
- ⚠ Fragmentation within the sector limits ability to move forward with a collective voice
- ⚠ Advisors do not sustain their involvement for long enough to achieve
- ⚠ The benefits of the work are felt to flow in one direction
- ⚠ Young people are involved in ways which are superficial and tokenistic
- ⚠ Volunteers don't see a real change for other young people with care experience, or tangible outcomes from their work
- ⚠ People do not understand how much time this work actually takes to do it well
- ⚠ Boundaries and responsibilities are neither clear nor transparent
- ⚠ We do not have time that voluntary advisors need from us or when they need it
- ⚠ The work sits on top of an approach or a culture that is not values-based

## ASSUMPTIONS

- ⚠ Willingness to act as a group means that work can be progressed even when people with lived experience 'dip in and dip out'
- ⚠ A people- and relationships-based culture is created through and alongside this work
- ⚠ The policy landscape is receptive to this work; there is a policy window
- ⚠ We have the attributes and passion to make co-production happen
- ⚠ People believe that this work is valuable and ethical
- ⚠ Organisational policies are developed to reflect and hold this way of working
- ⚠ Young people are given the equipment that they need for their role
- ⚠ Young people are connected with both paid and unpaid opportunities and ways of documenting their personal learning
- ⚠ The Group is powerful! Voices are strong
- ⚠ Young people gel as a group around the voluntary nature of the relationship and around a common purpose that is deeply held
- ⚠ We make that connection with young advisors, who are at a certain point in their own journey
- ⚠ We communicate in a transparent way our responsibilities and boundaries to voluntary advisors
- ⚠ At least some staff have experience of working with people with lived experience and understand what this work takes
- ⚠ We practice this work safely, so neither organisation nor voluntary advisors are or feel exposed
- ⚠ We have trusting relationships with each other - the Trust and voluntary advisors, both within and across these groups
- ⚠ The key link person is absolutely trusted and felt to advocate for the aspirations of the Group
- ⚠ We are prepared to put in the time and effort and have a genuine belief and commitment to this work (shared by advisors, staff and leaders)
- ⚠ Staff are willing to work flexibly including flexible hours, and provide support when advisors need it
- ⚠ Staff are happy to 'get in the messy space' when they share responsibility with voluntary advisors
- ⚠ We understand the time that this work will take and we have a key person in place to support it

# APPENDIX TWO: BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Co-production

The term co-production was originally used to describe the mutually dependent or reciprocal relationship between police and communities in the US and was later used to describe similar dynamics in both health and criminal justice settings. During the last 15 years co-production as an approach has gained in profile in the UK across human services, although the growth in practices on the ground may yet be more limited.<sup>1,2</sup>

Definitions offered vary in detail and scope, although they retain this sense of mutuality. Although some descriptions would allow for co-production working at different levels, ranging from more basic observations of reciprocity, the term is now generally used to mean involvement at its most intensive, as well as more equal social relationships. Think Local Act Personal offer a detailed description, considering both the duration and character of people's involvement:

'Co-production is not just a word, it is not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find shared solutions. In practice, co-production involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them. When co-production works best, people who use services and carers are valued by organisations as equal partners, can share power and have influence over decisions made'.<sup>3</sup>

New Economics Foundation is frequently cited with regard to co-production, and similarly they emphasise power-sharing and the value and valuing of people's contribution.

'The relationship where professionals and citizens share power to design, plan, assess and deliver support together. It recognises that everyone has a vital contribution to make in order to improve quality of life for people and communities.'<sup>4</sup>

The core principles underpinning co-production may more usefully provide a meeting point for the range of practices and settings showing the approach:

- Recognising people as assets
- Building on strengths/capabilities
- Promoting reciprocity
- Building social/peer networks
- Breaking down barriers between people in different roles
- Facilitating rather than delivering (Boyle & Harris 2009;<sup>5</sup> New Economics Foundation 2014)<sup>6</sup>

In the field of adult social care, Jeanette Sutton<sup>7</sup> relates co-production, applying to decision-making about how services overall should be, to personalisation, choice and control for individuals over their own, individual care and support. Here, both are outcomes rather than service led. She makes a further connection with strengths-based approaches, which although often related to achieving personal outcomes, have obvious resonance with the starting point that people with lived experience have much to offer when trying to improve services. Alternately, the Care Act definition blends together these two levels of outcomes, personal/individual and strategic/collective, so co-production 'is when you as an individual

influence the support and services you receive, or when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered'.<sup>8</sup> The value of co-production here is related to personal qualities such as self-reliance and independence, and also to ensuring that services reflect what people really want. Other commentators have considered what it means to extend co-production to the research process: "to ensure young people are active and equal agents in the production of services designed to address their needs and research designed to reflect their experiences of those services."<sup>9</sup>

A range of benefits have been offered in favour of co-production: direct benefits in confidence and wellbeing and community networks; enhancing relationships and valuing different forms of wisdom; more appropriate and tailored service provision. However, there are also barriers to working in this way, for example perceptions of risk, issues related to power-sharing, and the investment and time involved in doing it well.<sup>10</sup> Key challenges given attention within research are diversity and accessibility of co- production, given that a range of people may be using the service about which decisions will be made, and given structural barriers to participation of all kinds for communities with protected characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Good practice messages for co-production include: bringing in a wide range of voices, fostering trust, being patient, and being open to different and perhaps unexpected outcomes.<sup>12</sup> In a practical way, practising co-production well means, together with people with lived experience, setting out a clear protocol at the outset including expectations, timescales, support and what influence they will have over the decisions being taken. At the level of the organisation, attention may need to be paid to embedding co-production in culture, structures and practices, and well as putting in place regular review. In the spirit of mutuality, it is important that participants in co-production feel that they benefit and access opportunities; however direct payment needs to be thought about carefully in its interaction with benefits and any debt issues.<sup>13</sup>

Key messages from the literature, for example related to balancing clear structures and expectations but also flexibility, developing authentic relationships, the values base, and the need to bring forward a range of voices, informed our analysis. We also brought some of the theory and definitions of co-production found within the literature to the group when constructing their 'co-producing our work' outcome map, providing a different starting point for discussion which we could then relate to their experiences.

## Children's and young people's participation

Hart's 'Ladder of participation',<sup>14</sup> adapted from Arnstein (1969), provides the classic model of youth participation, showing eight rungs with varying degrees of participation or agency. The model draws attention to inauthentic approaches, with the bottom three rungs, manipulation, decoration and tokenism, failing to qualify as participation at all. This sort of model has been critiqued for implying a hierarchy of value, and for neglecting the socio-cultural contexts in which participation takes place, as well as individual needs. Attempts at remodelling are offered by, for example: Treseder, who suggests a flatter model ('five degrees of participation') where methods are chosen to suit the situation and individuals;<sup>15</sup> and Shier, who considers the orientation of adult decision-makers and the impact of participation (a commitment to empowerment ranges from an opening to an obligation).<sup>16</sup> While Shier's model focuses attention usefully on impact or effect, it is focused on the adult position and therefore perhaps neglects young person-led participation activity. Others have attempted to integrate both child or young person and adult empowerment and control in their modelling.<sup>17</sup>

Young people can be valued for what they will become (futuraity) rather than what they are able to contribute as young people. In response to this some commentators have emphasised the importance of the spaces and social relationships of everyday participation, therefore emphasising the situated and relational nature of these social practices.<sup>18, 19</sup> Cahill and Dadvand (2018) offer perhaps a more complex, fluid and reflective model, with seven interconnected domains: purpose; positioning; perspective; power relations; protection; place; and process.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of safety and protection is a notable addition to previous thinking; as is the understanding that participation can reproduce existing patterns of inequality.

Debates about youth participation are often positioned within a rights discourse (see Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).<sup>21</sup> The 'wheel of participation' adapted from Treseder's work (above) helps the Office of the Children's Commissioner in England to consider where they are involving children and young people at an inform, consult or involve stage.<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein Lundy's model of participation, included in Ireland's strategy for children's and young people's participation in decision-making, breaks down Article 12 on the UNCRC into four related elements: space, voice, audience and influence. An associated checklist has been produced, helping organisations to consider whether they are in fact meeting the requirements of Article 12.<sup>23</sup>

Again, key messages from the literature related to the different levels of involvement dependent upon context and needs, clarity about what form of involvement is sought, and the need to take account of impact/influence as well as process, were taken into our analysis and how we framed the risks and assumptions that we set out for this project.

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/co-production-in-commissioning-tool/co-production/In-more-detail/where-did-co-production-come-from/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/week/attitudes>
- <sup>3</sup> [https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Co-production/National\\_Co-production\\_Advisory\\_Group/](https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Co-production/National_Co-production_Advisory_Group/)
- <sup>4</sup> [https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd\\_j2m6b04bs.pdf](https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd_j2m6b04bs.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the\\_challenge\\_of\\_co-production.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the_challenge_of_co-production.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> [https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd\\_j2m6b04bs.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd_j2m6b04bs.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/news-views/2020/july/supporting-co-production-and-strengths-based-working/>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance>
- <sup>9</sup> Dixon, J, Ward, J. & Blower, S. 2018, 'They sat and actually listened to what we think about the care system': the use of participation, consultation, peer research and co-production to raise the voices of young people in and leaving care in England', *Child Care in Practice*.
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/adults/publications/2020/july/co-production-and-strengths-based-practice-leaders-briefing-2020/>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/CUPI%20Report%20Final.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265215591\\_Co-production\\_in\\_social\\_care\\_What\\_it\\_is\\_and\\_how\\_to\\_do\\_it](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265215591_Co-production_in_social_care_What_it_is_and_how_to_do_it)
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/paying-people-who-receive-benefits>
- <sup>14</sup> Hart, R A (1992) *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- <sup>15</sup> Treseder, P (1997) *Empowering children and young people*. London: Save the Children.
- <sup>16</sup> Shier, H (2001) Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15 (2), 107–117.
- <sup>17</sup> Wong, NT, Zimmerman, MA, & Parker, EA (2010) A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46 (1–2), 100–114.
- <sup>18</sup> Lister, R (2007) Why citizenship: Where, when and how children? *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 8, 693–718.
- <sup>19</sup> Biesta GJJ, Lawy R & Kelly N (2009) Understanding young people's citizenship learning in everyday life: The role of contexts, relationships and dispositions, *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 4 (1), pp. 5–24.
- <sup>20</sup> Cahill, H & Dadvand, B (2018), 'Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95, 243–253.
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>
- <sup>22</sup> [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20552/1/participation\\_strategy\\_2014\\_2015.pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20552/1/participation_strategy_2014_2015.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/lundy\\_model\\_of\\_participation.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf)