Co-Design Crew's Research Findings

Care leavers and corporate parents' research into experiences' of maintaining relationships as young people leave care in Falkirk

Relationships First

Contents

Foreword

As One Council we have ambitions to develop the knowledge and skills of our whole workforce so we are better able to meet the needs and aspirations of our most disadvantaged citizens*.

External funding has been secured to deliver an innovative workforce initiative called 'Relationships First'. The project purpose is to bring Council staff and young people together in a shared working environment. They will be supported to create opportunities to transform culture and practice in how we care for young people leaving care. This is an exciting staff development opportunity designed to improve outcomes for our young people leaving care. The Corporate Management Team fully supports this initiative and welcomes the findings from the first stage of the project.

Kenneth Lawrie
(Chief Executive, Falkirk Council)

*Young people who are leaving care, through no fault of their own, are one of the most disadvantaged teenage communities in our society.

Executive Summary

One of the most important things in life is our relationships: they can enhance and change our lives.

The Life Changes Trust and Scotland's Independent Care Review have identified relational barriers faced by Corporate Parents when supporting young people as they leave care. Falkirk Council has made the decision to explore what these barriers look like in their organisation and what they could do differently.

Relationships First is a project collaboratively designed and developed with Designed by Society to enable Care Leavers and Falkirk's Corporate Parents to co-design services that put love and relationships at the heart of service provision. Like other Local Authorities Falkirk Council is in the process of raising awareness about the workforce's role and responsibility as Corporate Parents. This document shares findings that seek to support and enable this transformation.

The project's vision is Falkirk's Corporate Parents care for Care Leavers would their own children. The challenge is to translate this vision into sustainable practice. To support this translation this project shares the values and behaviours our research has indicated Corporate Parents can engage in and a range of ways Care Leavers interpret love (https://bit.ly/2NAeUPV). This provides this project with evaluation criteria and offers a framework to Corporate Parents as they review their practices (https://bit.ly/2NFFM0Z).

This document shares systems, relational and personal barriers and enablers to developing and sustaining relationships that support Care Leavers. Underpinning messages from these findings are that, for different reasons, Care Leavers and Corporate Parents can be fearful of one another, and understandably Care Leavers can find it difficult to trust adults. These key messages draw our attention to core emotions we need to meaningfully connect with and collaboratively challenge if we are to transform our culture and practices.

To aid this transformation we have created Corporate Parenting Service Design Principles (https://bit.ly/3iVkc4d) to guide our future practices. They can also be used by all Corporate Parenting services to review their service design and delivery.

Sara Lacie
(Chief Social Work Officer)

What we did

Between April and October 2019 seven care leavers and ten public servants from Falkirk Council met in two separate teams. Part of their work involved conducting experience-based interviews with 37 people. This research has been supported by 8 interviews with staff from Falkirk's leaving care service, and this document presents the findings of this work.

Our experience researchers were: Arek Kwapis, Anthony Grundy, Barry Sheridan, Charlotte Silvers, Christine Thomson, David Gibson, Gayle Rice, Gemma Ferrie, Hollie Ann Norwood, Janet McPherson, Kirsty Wilsdon, Laura Mullarkey, Liam Slaven, Linda Scott, Lindsay Watson, Lisa Ryan, Marie Fraser and Morgan Sweeny. If you'd like to learn more about everyone you can at: https://bit.ly/3opSduJ.

Our care leavers focused on telling each other about their most important relationships as they left care. After analysing their transcripts they each identified what they thought acted as a barriers and enablers in these relationships, and as a group, synthesised their findings (https://bit.ly/36qwdK2).

The corporate parents work in a wide range of roles including: teacher, performance and information officer for housing services, residential child care worker, early years officer, resource manager, home care provider, library assistant, analyst programmer and technical assistant in asset management.

They interviewed 30 corporate parents from Falkirk Council. They split this group into two. Fifteen people were interviewed who had experience of caring for young people as they left care, and 15 were colleagues and managers who may or may not know they are corporate parents and what this role means.

Interviewees came from a range of services in Falkirk Council including: library managers, foster carers, housing officers, residential supervisors, estate caretakers, social workers, additional support needs learning advisors, information technology staff, leaving care workers, teachers and researchers.

After analysing their interview data the public servants also identified what acted as barriers and enabled relationships between corporate parents and care leavers (https://bit.ly/3r1DSWT).

Thanks go again to everyone who took part.

enablers

Each group identified what they thought enabled the workforce to care for care leavers like their own children.

Corporate parents

- People realising things need to change
- Permission to show love and kindness
- Getting the right people in the right role
- Young people feel in charge of their life
- See the person not the problem
- Claiming young people as if they are our own
- Level of support not linked to need not age
- Using an approach that shows an understanding of a developmental age
- Time to establish relationships
- Support available when young person needs it (flexibility)
- Not giving up when things are difficult
- Training about corporate parenting
- Single point of contact in each service
- Being supported by workplace to go 'extra mile'
- Innovative ideas are supported and rewarded

Care leavers

- Spending time with people
- Having a role model
- People going the 'extra mile'
- Being able to keep in contact

Leaving Care Service team

- Conflicting organisational agendas, values and practices
- Lack of understanding of impact of trauma on young people's behaviour
- Lack of resource (staff, time, money)

These enablers were clustered together, re-named and categorised as barriers that originate from the system the council operates in, between two people, or from a personal perspective.

System

Clear and supported parental role

Similar organisational agendas, values and practices + Getting the right people in the right roles + Having a role model + Permission to show love and kindness + Being supported by workplace to go extra mile

Time and timing

Spending time with people + Time to establish relationships + Resource (staff, time money) + Support available when young person needs it (flexibility)

Starting where people are at

Level of support not linked to need not age

Control and flexibility

Young people feel in charge of their life

Support and celebration

Innovative ideas are supported and rewarded

Relational

Understanding and empathy

Knowledge about the impact of trauma on young people's behaviour
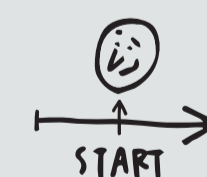
Claiming and being consistent

Claiming young people as if they are our own + Being able to keep in contact + Not giving up when things are difficult
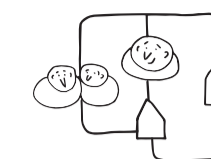
Breaking rules (perceived/explicit)

People going the 'extra mile'

Starting where people are at

Using an approach that shows understanding of a developmental age

Personal

Opportunities to connect as people

See the person not the problem + Claiming young people as if they are our own

Opportunities to learn and reflect

People realising things need to change

Breaking rules (perceived/explicit)

People going the 'extra mile'

barriers

Each group identified what they thought acted as a barriers to the workforce caring for care leavers like their own children.

Care leavers

- Self-prophesizing, e.g. they've left in the past so they'll leave again
- No one showing you how to have a 'good relationship'
- The systems 'unwritten rules'
- Not being listened to

Leaving Care Service team

- Conflicting organisational agendas, values and practices
- Lack of understanding of impact of trauma on young people's behaviour
- Lack of resource (staff, time, money)

Corporate parents

- Not understanding developmental stages of person who has experienced trauma
- Not seeing mistakes as part of learning
- Risk averse (lack of flexibility)
- Stereotyping young people
- Culture of fear in society
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of empathy
- Silo working

Personal

Stereotyping

Stereotyping young people and members of the workforce

Lack of knowledge and understanding

Lack of knowledge and empathy + Not understanding developmental stages of young person who has experienced trauma + Lack of understanding of impact of trauma on young people's behaviour

Unhelpful thinking patterns

Self-prophesizing, they have left in the past so 'they'll leave again'

Relational

Culture of fear and blame

Risk averse (lack of flexibility) + Not seeing mistakes as part of learning

Lack of knowledge and understanding

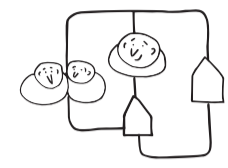Knowledge about the impact of trauma on young people's behaviour

Lack of role models

No one showing you how to have a 'good relationship'

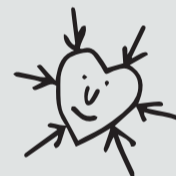**Lack of active listening**

Not being listened to

System

Culture of fear and blame

Culture of fear in society + Risk averse (lack of flexibility) + Not seeing mistakes as part of learning

Lack of resources

Lack of resource (staff, time, money)

Different approaches to caring for care leavers

Conflicting organisational agendas, values and practices + Silo working

Perceived and explicit rules

The systems 'unwritten rules'

These barriers were clustered together, re-named and categorised as barriers that originate from the system the council operates in, between two people, or from a personal perspective.

Key messages

The majority of barriers are the responsibility of corporate parents
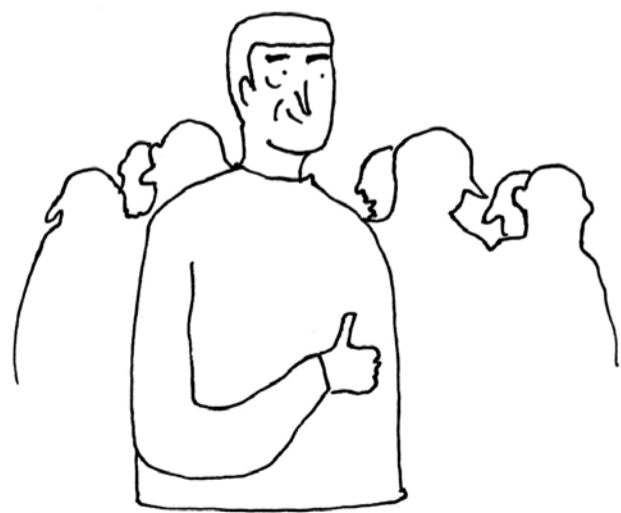
and

all the barriers are surmountable.

Continued support from one person is perceived as enough to make a meaningful difference.

however we need to bear in mind

Some care leavers find it difficult to trust adults. Some people test adults to see how meaningful the relationship is to them.

Some people shared there could be an underlying feeling of fear when they were engaging with one another.

For care leavers there is a fear of adults rejecting them and being let down.
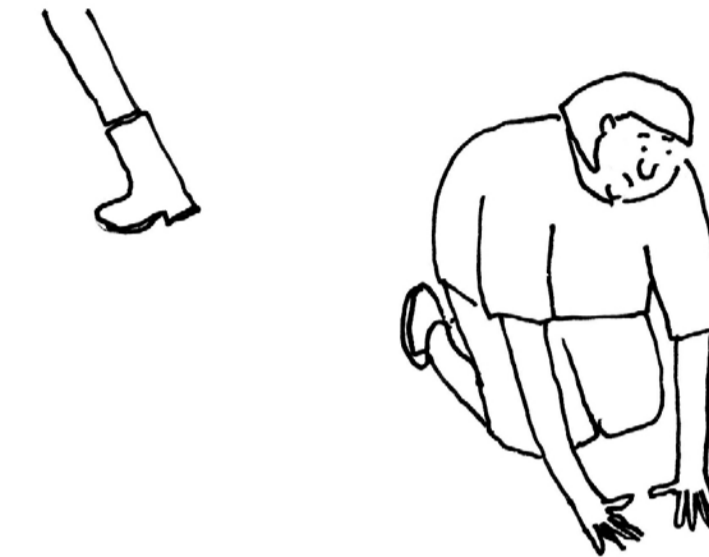
Corporate parents described fear in two ways. A fear of allegations - described as 'actions of love and kindness being misinterpreted as inappropriate' - as well as being fearful to 'take on change that involves more emotion'.
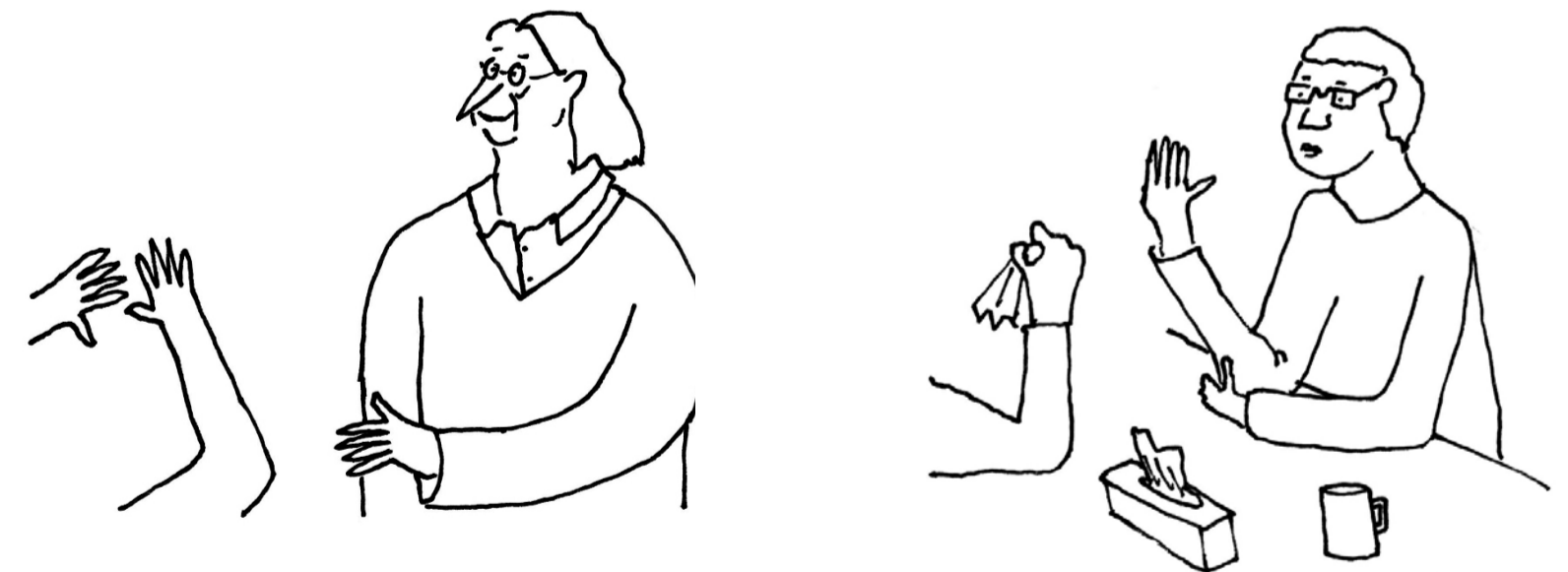
If fear underpins some people's relationships, how possible is it they will make and form connections with one another?

Conclusion

In October 2019 our seven care leavers and ten public servants spent two days together to share their research findings with one another. After discussing the similarities and differences in their findings, they clustered their views and voted on which clusters they thought were most important to address (https://bit.ly/3iYThoj).

The top three clusters were:

1) Behaviour: better supporting the ways people relate to one another
2) Systems change: the system Falkirk Council is part of becoming more human
3) Barriers: addressing the range of everyday barriers people experience

In later work these clusters developed to become:

1) Being your self at work
   Ways in which corporate parents are supported to bring their personal characteristics and approaches to their professional role.

2) Humanising the System
   Understand the barriers Falkirk Council staff have to creating a relationship-centred culture and to providing the right resources, support and education that enables care-experienced people to grow and thrive.

3) Nurturing the workforce
   Nurturing Corporate Parents at Falkirk Council so they can engage in more of these types of approaches when supporting young people.

Learn more about how these participants developed service designs in response to these themes - www.relationshipsfirst.net

Some Questions

These findings prompt questions corporate parents can engage with when thinking about their practice and the service they provide to our care .

→ Do you experience any of these barriers and enablers?

→ How do you think the barriers you experience could be addressed and the enablers shared more widely?

→ What can you do to support this change?

www.relationshipsfirst.net