Evaluation of the Home and Belonging Initiative

Year One Progress Report (October 2020)

Children in Scotland, Staf and Young Evaluation Panel

1. Introduction

Children in Scotland and Staf have been asked by the Life Changes Trust to conduct an evaluation of the Home and Belonging initiative. Home and Belonging is a fund managed by the Life Changes Trust aimed at supporting young people with care experience as they move on from care and into their own home.

We worked with an evaluation panel of young people with care experience to support us with the evaluation. This approach is called co-production. We have used this approach because we think it will make the evaluation better.

This is a progress report looking at Year One of Home and Belonging. The initiative will run until 2022 and we will conduct further evaluation work in Year Two and Year Three.

The Evaluation Panel

Siobhan

Fraser

Chloe

"I wanted to be involved in a project supporting people who have had it just as hard or harder than me"
(Evaluation Panel Member)

"I want to change the community and the care sector so that everyone gets the same help"
(Evaluation Panel Member)

2. Funded projects

Eleven projects have been funded through the Home and Belonging initiative, and 10 of these will run until 2022. One project was only funded for one year and finished in 2020.

The projects are spread across Scotland and do a range of different things. Some are providing houses, others are based around apps and some aim to provide places in the community for young people with experience of care.

3. Methodology and participant information

We did a number of different things to find out how successful the projects had been in their first year. The Evaluation Panel was involved in planning and delivering this evaluation activity.

Unfortunately, our evaluation plans had to change because of coronavirus. We had hoped to visit each of the funded projects but because of restrictions we had to do a lot of our work online instead.

We gathered information on the following three areas:

- **National interviews with decision-makers (April-July 2020)**

We did six interviews with people involved in national decision-making about young people with care experience. The purpose of the national interviews was to find out about the support that is available to young people with care experience and hear about what is working well and what could be improved.

- **Coronavirus focus groups (May 2020)**

We did three focus groups with 11 staff from the funded projects. The aim of these focus groups was to find out how coronavirus had affected the projects and the young people that they worked with.

- **Evaluation of the funded projects (July-September 2020)**

To find out how the projects had been doing we collected information from both the young people who took part in the projects and the staff who worked on them.

We used a creative activity to find out how the young people at the projects felt about them. We received 34 responses to this from eight of the 11 funded projects.

We also conducted a number of interviews with staff from the projects. In total, we did 13 interviews and spoke to 41 staff members at the 11 funded projects.

4. National interviews

We conducted a series of interviews with national stakeholders in the care sector. The organisations interviewed included government bodies, charities and academic groups. We wanted to find out what they thought were the key national issues for young people with care experience and how these might affect the Home and Belonging projects.

Our national interviews told us a bit about what support is available to young people with care experience. We heard about what is working well and what isn't. This helped us look at what things outside the Home and Belonging project might affect its success.

We heard about the following key issues:

- Young people with care experience have poorer outcomes than young people who do not have experience of care.

- Decision-makers are getting better at listening to young people with care experience however, we still need to get better at acting on what young people tell us.

- We need to offer more creative and more young-person led opportunities to engage in decision-making, and make sure we hear from a wide range of young people with care experience.

- Creating positive relationships is important for any projects that are supporting young people with care experience.

- Projects like Home and Belonging can be good as they allow people to try out new ideas.

- There is a range of support options for young people when they leave care, including help with education and employment. However, people said there were still improvements to be made and we need to get better at telling young people about their options.

- People also said we need to make sure young people with care experience have enough money to survive and thrive.

5.   Coronavirus focus groups

Our coronavirus focus groups helped us find out how the projects and the young people had been affected by coronavirus and the restrictions. We heard that projects had issues with delivering their project as intended and that they had made lots of changes to do their work digitally. We also heard that the lockdown had a significant effect on the health and wellbeing of the young people that the projects worked with.
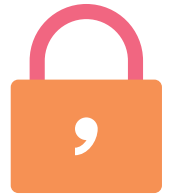
6.   Findings from staff and young people

We grouped our findings against the Home and Belonging evaluation outcomes. We found a number of key themes for each outcome.

Outcome 1: **Assessing the effectiveness of the initiative in increasing the wellbeing of young people with experience of care, particularly in relation to:**

   1.1)   **Whether young people with experience of care have positive experiences of their home environment**

   1.2)   **Whether young people with experience of care have feelings of belonging and connection to their communities**

   1.3)   **Whether young people with experience of care have positive experiences transitioning out of their care placements.**

Key themes:

- Building relationships and connections
- Skills and learning
- Health and wellbeing
- Home environment
- Belonging and engaging with the community
- Safety and stability
- Employment opportunities
- Transitioning out of care.

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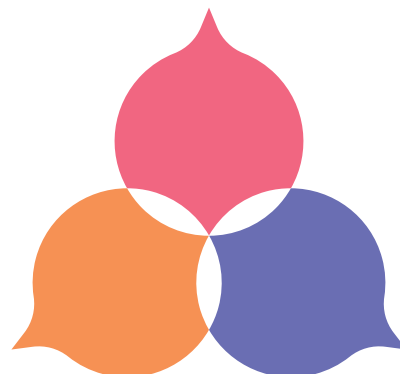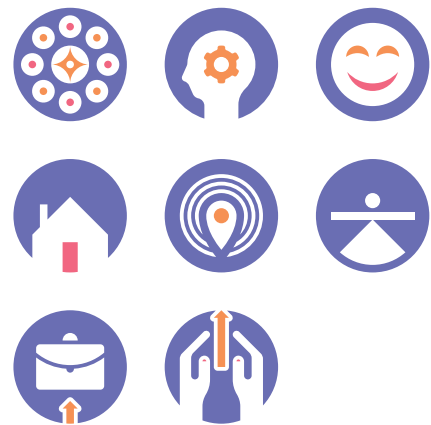
Outcome 2: Assessing the extent to which working in collaboration, using co-design principles, has led to culture change within and across organisations

Key themes:

- Decisions about the development of the projects
- Listening to young people and adapting projects to meet individual needs
- Structured engagement
- Acting on young people's views and providing feedback
- Changes to process, policy and procedure
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Impact of coronavirus and online engagement.

Outcome 3: Determining whether or not there are particularly strong practices that have the potential to be adopted more widely

Practices that could be adopted more widely:

- Relationship-based approaches
- Group opportunities
- Engaging with creative activities and creative professionals
- Providing employment opportunities and support
- Partnership working
- Building relationships with organisations
- Policy changes
- Blended approach to engagement
- Life coaching
- Peer flatmates.

7.   Quotes from staff and project participants

"Amazing and wholesome. It has made me realise that home is not just the place but the people"
(Young Person, creative activity)

"Before starting on the project I found it hard to speak to people in a group setting but now I can lead a consultation"
(Young Person, creative activity)

"My health and wellbeing is improved. Much like everyone, we've all got our bad days…where it's improved for me is the resilience in these bad days"
(Staff Member with experience of care)

"…this has been really informative. I think it's made us dig deeper, focus more, try and be more genuinely effective by how and what we do…I think it's sharpened our pencil"
(Staff Member)

8.   Progress against outcomes

We have measured the progress of the Home and Belonging initiative against its main outcomes. You can read the assessment in Table 1.

Table 1

Outcome	Assessment of progress
1) Assessing the effectiveness of the initiative in increasing the wellbeing of young people with experience of care, particularly in relation to: 1.1) whether young people with experience of care have positive experiences of their home environment 1.2) whether young people with experience of care have feelings of belonging and connection to their communities 1.3) whether young people with experience of care have positive experiences transitioning out of their care placements.	• We found lots of good examples of how the project had improved wellbeing for young people. • We saw that the projects had supported better health and wellbeing, relationships and opportunities to learn and develop skills. All of these will have indirect impact across the three sub-outcomes and support young people with experience of care in the home life. • For Outcomes 1.1 and 1.2 we also found that the projects have had a direct effect. We saw a number of examples of better home environments and people being more connected in their communities. We saw definite examples of people keeping their tenancy for longer than they had before. • Most projects said it was too early to see whether young people were having positive experiences out of care placements (Outcome 1.3). We are confident that some of the things we heard will support young people with this over the next two years. • It would have been good to have been able to engage directly with young people at the projects to find out more detail about their views on how the projects had affected their wellbeing. • Overall, we believe good progress has been made towards Outcome 1 in Year One of the initiative.

| Outcome	Assessment of progress
2) Assessing the extent to which working in collaboration, using co-design principles, has led to culture change within and across organisations	• We have seen a range of positive examples of engaging young people in decisions about their support and their home environment. There is a willingness to engage young people in more strategic decision-making, but more work needs to be done in this area to ensure co-design principles are embedded in all projects. • More could be done over Year Two and Year Three to provide more structured opportunities for engagement in decision making. It might be useful to provide practical support in this area. • We saw some very positive examples of partnership working and collaboration. There were good signs of skills being transferred between practitioners and people learning from each other. • We did not hear much from young people on their views about co-design. The changes to how data was collected affected this. We are looking forward to finding out more in Year Two and Year Three. • Coronavirus has definitely affected the ability to focus as much on co-design as projects have been supporting more basic needs. • It has been hard to measure culture change for organisations in Year One. The organisations working on the projects are very diverse and some are very large. Culture change will take time and coronavirus has impacted how all organisations have been operating. • Overall, we believe good progress has been made towards Outcome 2 in Year One of the initiative. We also see a lot of positive early signs that suggest more progress will be made in Year Two and Year Three.
3) Determining whether or not there are particularly strong practices that have the potential to be adopted more widely	• We have highlighted good practice that could be shared more widely. In the main, these are broad ideas than specific examples. • Similar to Outcome 2, we did not hear as much on this outcome from young people as we would have liked. • We have seen some progress on Outcome 3 with a range of good practice. We expect to see more evidence in this area in Year Two and Year Three.

9.   Challenges and learning

Coronavirus

The impact of coronavirus has been a major challenge in Year One of the Home and Belonging initiative. Projects have been less able to deliver aspects of their work and this has affected the progress towards outcomes. It has also limited aspects of this evaluation.

Projects have demonstrated flexibility and creativity in how they have delivered their work. Flexible approaches are likely to be required throughout Year Two and possibly into Year Three.

Digital engagement

All projects are now delivering some form of digital engagement activity with young people. Whilst this has had some positive impacts, it has also presented challenges in terms of maintaining young people's interest in the projects and developing project plans. We recommend that projects identify and share positive strategies to support longer-term digital engagement activity.
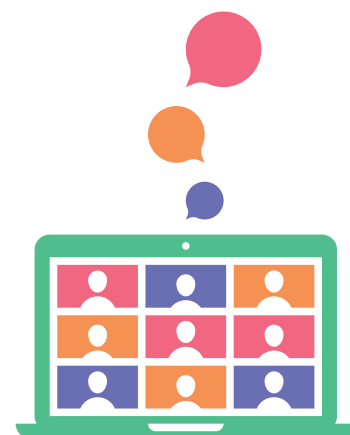
Getting space and housing

A number of projects highlighted issues with securing spaces for housing or to deliver group work. Others had issues being able to provide houses to meet demand. This has limited what some projects have been able to achieve in Year One.

Work on these sites has often been delayed due to coronavirus. If there continue to be delays in these projects, there is a risk that they will struggle to carry out their project work and it could affect progress against all outcomes.

Maintaining project momentum

Issues relating to getting a space or developing building projects has the potential to affect the wider delivery of the projects. We heard how delays could leave big gaps in project activity and affect project momentum. It is important that projects manage the expectations of young people involved and identify opportunities to keep young people engaged.

Working with local authorities

The structures and systems in place in local authorities have presented challenges and meant that progress with some of the projects has been slower than hoped. These issues could continue to affect the Home and Belonging initiative over the coming years. The Life Changes Trust should consider how it can support projects to build these relationships in Year Two and Year Three.

Referrals and engagement

We heard from several projects that were struggling with the number of referrals or to get engagement from young people. Additional work to promote a number of the Home and Belonging funded projects may be required in Year Two and Year Three. This includes

promoting opportunities directly to young people with care experience and raising awareness and building relationships with social workers and other organisations.

Partnership working and collaboration

Despite the fact that some projects had found it difficult to work with some parts of the local authority, we did see some good examples of people working with housing teams and also how projects had increased engagement between young people and social workers.

Over the next phase of the project it would be good to consider how the experience of these projects can be shared to support others to also have positive engagements. It would also be good to consider how all projects can be supported to work in collaboration to make sure they are able to maximise the benefits of this that we saw throughout this evaluation.

Data collection

We saw a range of anecdotal and more systematic evidence across our evaluation. It would be useful to explore how the projects gather data on some of the softer outcomes that do not relate directly to the initiative but will help in making it successful. This includes things like supporting young people to develop employment skills and measuring the impact on young people's confidence.

Co-design

There has been a range of good work to engage young people in decision-making however, we felt this could become more structured. It would be useful to provide support and guidance on participation and engagement in decision-making to all projects. This should focus on using creative and engaging methods and could learn from some of the projects that have delivered this successfully in Year One.
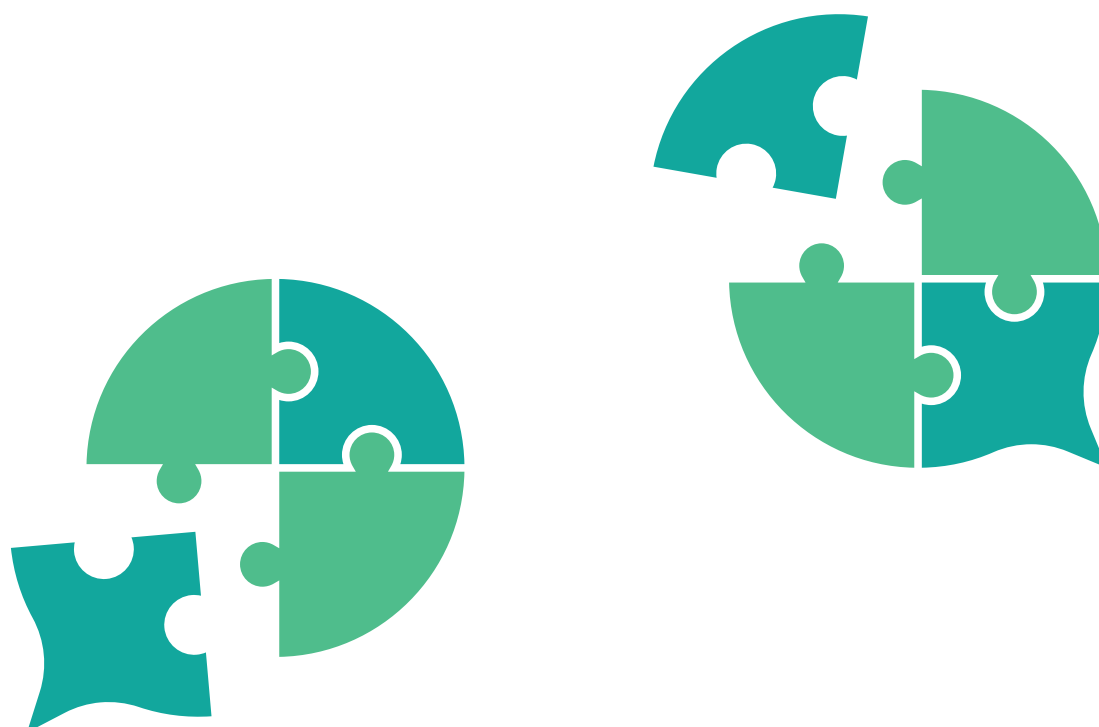
10. Next steps

We are looking forward to working on Year Two and Year Three of the evaluation of the Home and Belonging initiative. Our next steps will include:

- Sharing the findings of our Year One evaluation with the projects at the Home and Belonging networking event

- Supporting the Life Changes Trust and the funded projects to implement learning from Year One

- Setting up photo diaries for Year Two evaluation with the funded sites

- Collecting and focusing on monitoring data in Year Two

- Conducting focus groups with young people in Spring 2021. These will take place face-to-face, if restrictions allow.