

Recruitment campaign to find 500 volunteers for Children's Panel

Scots urged to be the missing piece in a child's life in new recruitment campaign

A man whose teenage life was changed for the better thanks to the Children's Panel has backed the annual drive for new recruits.

Alex Horne was just 13 and living in foster care when he went before the panel requesting a move to residential care closer to his home in Aberdeen. Alex, now 20, was moved within weeks and believes the decisions made by the Children's Panel that day helped give him a more stable, happier childhood.

As the search for the 500 people needed to help neglected, troubled and abused children living in Scotland gets underway, Alex spoke out to show the huge impact that volunteer panel members can have on the lives of children and young people.

Scotland has a new single national Children's Panel, made up of 2,500 volunteer panel members who regularly attend hearings to address the needs and behaviour of children and young people who face serious problems in their lives.

To ensure the system offers the best support, new volunteers are needed every year. This year's month-long recruitment drive, led by Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS), aims to attract people from all walks of life to this unique role.

Speaking at the launch and explaining how a panel member can provide the missing piece in a young person's life, Alex said:

"I'd been in the care system most of my life, but at 13 I was moved into foster care which I found difficult. In the space

of three months I was in four different foster placements, living far from home and I found it really difficult to bond with my carers and live in different settings.

“I just wanted to be moved to residential care near where I lived in Aberdeen.

“I’d been in front of numerous panels, but the panel that day changed my care experience for the better. I went in thinking I would have to stay in foster care and nothing would change, but the panel members were nice. They listened and acted on it and soon after I was moved to a residential school in Aberdeen which made a huge difference to my quality of life.

“The panel is important to kids in care. They don’t choose their lives but they have to live with the decisions made around it. That’s why it’s really important to get the right people on the panel, they simply make a big difference.”

Alex now works as a Campaign and Training Assistant with Who Cares? Scotland, using his experiences to help deliver training on corporate parenting.

Bernadette Monaghan, National Convener, Children’s Hearings Scotland, said:-“The Children’s Hearings System has the best interests of Scotland’s children and young people at heart. We’re appealing to those who want to help improve the lives of vulnerable children and young people to consider becoming a panel member.

“Having served on the Children’s Panel for nine years, I know from experience the valuable role the 2,500 volunteers play in helping children at risk out of dark places. It’s a unique role, and a unique system which ensures children in need or at risk are heard, respected, valued, cared for and, above all, protected.

“Although it can be complex and challenging, being involved can be hugely rewarding, as Alex’s story illustrates.

Applicants need to be 18 or over and no qualifications are needed as full training is given and panel members are supported throughout the process to help them prepare for the role.

“It won’t just change a child’s life, it’ll change yours too.”

The deadline for applications is Friday 27 September 2013. To find out more about becoming a panel member, call 0844 848 3407, text CHILD to 61611 or visit www.childrenspanelscotland.org.