

## Tough start overcome by fighting spirit

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A YOUNGSTER who dreams of joining the Welsh Guards is proving that a tough start in life can be overcome with a fighting spirit.

Seventeen-year-old Christopher Judd from Baglan has spent the past 10 years of his life in a series of foster homes, changing schools countless times.

Yet, despite his difficult early years, Christopher this month received recognition for his personal progress at the Foster Care Associates (FCA) Cymru Children and Young Persons Achievement Awards.

Christopher said he was determined to make the most of what life has dealt him.

"Just because I am in foster care does not make me worth any less than any other person," he said.

"I have a lot to offer, even though I have not had the best of starts in life.

"The support and help I have received from my foster carers, social services and FCA staff has helped me to look forward to a bright future and joining the army would be a massive part of that."

The teenager has applied to join the army once before, but failed the selection process because of a problem with his speech.

"I have been undergoing speech therapy, which is improving my speech, so I am hoping I will be successful this time around," he said.

Christopher was presented with his FCA achievement trophy by former Welsh Guard Simon Weston, who was impressed by the youngster's determination to make something of his life.

He said: "I went into the Welsh Guards at 16 to turn my life around, and it was the best experience.

"Every young person deserves a break — I wish him all the luck in the world and I hope he stays safe and has plenty of stories to tell his family.

"The army is full of opportunities."

Christopher was eight years old when he first went into foster care.

Since then he has lived in a children's home and a number of foster homes.

Since joining FCA nearly five years ago, Chris — with the support of his carers — has managed to turn his life around.

His foster carer Jacqui Hurley — who has looked after 31 children during a decade of fostering — said it can be difficult to shake of the stigma of being in foster care.

"There can sometimes be problems in schools," she said.

"You have got to fight for foster children and when you see someone turn their life around it gives you a real buzz."

Christopher is due to undergo army selection in the near future, and is hoping he will make the grade and be accepted into the Welsh Guards.

Chris Dunstall, Director of FCA Cymru said Christopher's award and his personal drive was testimony to the youngster's efforts, and those of his foster mum Ms Hurley.

Asked to reveal his personal motto, Christopher's reply was short and simple: "Work hard and be happy."

