

ADVENTURES IN ADVANTAGED THINKING



FOREWORD

Advantaged Thinking isn't about waiting for gifts – it's about creating them. This publication is our Advantaged Thinking gift to you.

It's a present that's been shaped from the lives and experiences of many inspiring individuals and organisations.

From the 30 years of learning from young people and staff across the Foyer network.

From the investment of funders in Advantaged Thinking, including Virgin Unite, the National Lottery Community Fund, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Tudor Trust, John Ellerman Foundation, Garfield Weston, local commissioners, the Foyer Federation's own Investor membership, and Your Housing Group's generous support for this publication.

From those who have innovated with Advantaged Thinking overseas, from the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne, to Movisie in the Netherlands, to Northside Partnership in Ireland.

From those who have done so much to share the vision of Advantaged Thinking with others, including the Foyer Federation's former CEO, the much-loved Jane Slowey, to the patron of Advantaged Thinking, David Gold.

And finally, from the insights and words of founder Colin Falconer, alongside those of Joel Lewis and Andrew Ward, who have worked together to produce this publication.

For all those who share our passion for Advantaged Thinking – now and in the future – we hope this is a gift that will keep on giving. Please add to it, make it your own, and promote its ambition to others.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:

Starting the Journey / An introduction

CHAPTER TWO:

Seeing New Depths / Insights from evidence and impact

CHAPTER THREE:

Climbing the Mountain / Advantaged Thinking fidelity

CHAPTER FOUR:

Sustaining Direction / Insights from Accreditation

CHAPTER FIVE:

Widening Horizons / Learning from work with Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Youth Fund

CHAPTER SIX:

Listening to the Landscape / Leading the way – voices from staff and young people

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Learning Through the Journey / Insights from Foyer Federation programmes, resources and strategic vision

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Experiencing New Paths / An Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework

CHAPTER NINE:

Reaching for the Future / An Advantaged Thinking call to action

CHAPTER TEN:

Useful Tools for Your Backpack / Services from Foyer Federation and InspireChilli

Where you can find Advantaged Thinking tools for your journey through this publication:

	Chapter		Chapter
• Taking steps to prepare for Advantaged Thinking	1	• Questions to help embed and sustain an Advantaged Thinking culture	4
• The 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking	1	• Exploring Advantaged Thinking characteristics that matter most to people	5
• The Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change	2	• Taking action from learning points on asset-based approaches	5
• 26 practice principles to use with the 7 Tests	3	• Impact and evaluation questions for Advantaged Thinking	5
• The Triple A Lens: a framework to develop and assess Advantaged Thinking fidelity	3	• Leadership signposts for Advantaged Thinking	5
• A survey to test Advantaged Thinking fidelity from the viewpoint of service users	3	• Learning domains, competency levels and KPIs for Advantaged Thinking	8
• Activities to encourage people and practitioners to engage in Advantaged Thinking	4		

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH



inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net

Supported by:



ADVANTAGED
THINKING

CHAPTER ONE

STARTING THE JOURNEY

An introduction



CHAPTER ONE

STARTING THE JOURNEY

“Before I had heard the words ‘Advantaged Thinking’, I knew what it was. It was the way I instinctively wanted to work with people. It was also the way that I preferred people to work with me.”

Kate Hitchcock, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

AN INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS

1. Advantaged Thinking’s origins and associations	2
2. Advantaged Thinking as a response to deficit-based models	4
3. The steps needed to prepare for Advantaged Thinking	6
4. Defining Advantaged Thinking as a distinctive approach	10
5. The ‘7 Tests’ of Advantaged Thinking	12
6. Impacts from Advantaged Thinking	21
7. Transferring Advantaged Thinking to other settings.	23

Each section includes two ‘Taking Action’ questions to help you to reflect on insights.

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

1. ORIGINS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Advantaged Thinking was developed by youth homelessness charity the Foyer Federation. It was first introduced at a 2011 TEDx talk by Colin Falconer, the Federation's Director of Innovation at that time, who had modelled the approach from his research into asset-based practice. Since then, Advantaged Thinking has grown in scale, travelling the world from the UK to Australia through the work of the Foyer Federation, Colin Falconer and various allies including Your Housing Group.

Advantaged Thinking is powerful, inspiring and highly effective. But what exactly is it? And how does one do it? This introductory chapter will give the reader a secure grasp of Advantaged Thinking's meaning and potential.

For an official definition of Advantaged Thinking, the Foyer Federation offers this: "Advantaged Thinking is all about taking a positive view through positive action. Understanding ability, recognising qualities, promoting achievements, inspiring what is possible. Using the advantages we possess as humans to create and do new things. In Advantaged Thinking, our needs, deficits and weaknesses are given a different focus by being connected to our goals, assets and strengths. Advantaged Thinking believes that taking positive action allows us to deal more effectively with the negatives in our lives." – Foyer Federation (2012)

In its essence, Advantaged Thinking is a philosophy that promotes an accessible brand, evidence base and set of principles to achieve better outcomes for and with people experiencing disadvantage and injustice. It is a way of thinking and being – a way of seeing and doing – that consciously challenges negative expectations, blind spots and limitations within our social system. Engaging with Advantaged Thinking requires a commitment to undertake a development journey and being ready to embrace questions as well as taking action.

As a positive philosophical framework, Advantaged Thinking can be associated with various approaches in the youth and housing sectors that refer to descriptions of practice being:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Asset-based | 6. Youth-led and person centred |
| 2. Strengths-based | 7. Commitment to co-production |
| 3. Solutions focused | 8. Focused on systemic change |
| 4. Psychologically informed | 9. Invested in mental wellbeing |
| 5. Inspiring positive outcomes | 10. Sustainable livelihoods and capabilities |

These 10 elements all fit within an Advantaged Thinking vision. What makes Advantaged Thinking unique is its capacity to bring these different approaches together into a concrete framework for action. Advantaged Thinking provides a climbing frame for people to expand from these initial entry points into a wider galaxy of possibilities for achieving thriving lives and services.

It is a broad but defined landscape, with seven concrete 'tests' that help to define what success should look like in the unique context of a particular community, organisation or service. Advantaged Thinking can achieve this because it consciously seeks to include and draw from different schools of thinking and practice, starting from the rich, grounding philosophy of asset-based working.

Advantaged Thinking was developed explicitly to apply asset-based concepts in a youth housing context. In doing so, its underpinning principles have illustrated universal truths applicable to working with any person or service context. What this means is that, for those looking to apply an asset-based focus in the commissioning, design, management, training, delivery and/or evaluation of a service, Advantaged Thinking offers a secure foundation to support multiple purposes. It can shape:

- A training curriculum for leaders and practitioners
- A quality assurance framework to evaluate services
- A reflective practice and staff development tool
- A source of guidance for service design and commissioning
- A focus for shaping policies, procedures, and strategy
- Inspiration for future innovation and service transformation
- A stimulus for campaign, policy and influence work

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which popular approaches listed interest you that Advantaged Thinking might help you to advance?
- Q2** What commissioning, design, management, training, delivery and/or evaluation purposes could Advantaged Thinking support you with?

2. A RESPONSE TO DEFICIT-BASED MODELS

The background to Advantaged Thinking begins with an acknowledgment of a more disadvantaged-focused, deficit-based 'status quo' approach. This context exists not just in the youth and housing sectors but in our wider society too, where for some time the prevailing mode of problem solving has been based on a medical model of diagnosis. From homelessness to racism, we get stuck trying to end social challenges without understanding what we need to do to achieve a social order without homelessness or racism in it. We can identify the problem, but we can't eradicate it because we are limited to responding to the problem rather than knowing how to invest in a solution. As a good psychologist might conclude, focusing on problems will normally cause us more problems.

By responding through a problem-focused lens, we naturally limit ourselves to seeing people as problems without recognising their potential strengths. We become experts at assessing problems, stereotyping people under problem-defining labels, and supporting people to function as problems for the long term. This not only has a negative impact on people's sense of wellbeing and self-belief, but it also blunts our capacity to engage with people's wider qualities and motivations. It is hugely ineffective, both in terms of costs and outcomes. Such 'disadvantaged thinking' is reductively self-defining, reaffirming people as problems in need of fixing – problems we can never quite manage to solve. People are hard to engage because we don't know how to engage them; people are disadvantaged because we work with them using a disadvantaged set of tools.

The logic behind all this has a profound impact on and implication for the range of resources deployed to alleviate disadvantage:

1. The tools used for needs assessment are too narrowly focused to properly understand people.
2. Training for staff does not invest in the skills required to work with people's full potential.
3. The language deployed to describe people's disadvantages psychologically limits and harms them.
4. Role titles, such as 'caseworker', frame transactional relationships devoid of the trust and empathy required to be successful in working with people.
5. The focus of charities and enterprises is to fix pre-determined problems rather than create the conditions for personal and social change.

6. We adopt interventions that promote low aspirations for and negative belief in people.
7. We operate ignorant of innovations from other sectors or advances in neuroscience.
8. The type of care we provide is often devoid of care – more likely to harm than to heal.
9. We do not invest in longer-term sustainable outcomes because we are only focused on short-term coping strategies.
10. The lived experience insights of those we work for and with are not used to shape the services they need

These disadvantaging approaches provide a context for Advantaged Thinking to exist.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Can you identify any examples of when a problem-focused lens has impacted on people?
- Q2 Can you identify how deficit-based approaches might have limited your current work?

3. TAKING STEPS TOWARDS ADVANTAGED THINKING

To break through the disadvantaged narrative, and begin Advantaged Thinking, we first need to look at our world from a different perspective.



1



Rather than start with the problem, ask: what is the opportunity to create?

For example, in the homelessness sector, the opportunity might be defined as a community in which people have access to affordable accommodation and support when they need it, with the capability to express their talents and develop sustainable relationships. This already sounds like a more tangible, visual world than simply 'ending the problem'.

The opportunity to create is the 'opportunity spot' for Advantaged Thinking to take seed.

2



Rather than focus on what's currently wrong within the problem, begin with: what might 'good' look like?

For example, what would be needed for the above community vision to be realised? Some of these elements may already be touched on – such as affordable accommodation and support – but here we should begin to detail what success could look like. The more explicit we can be, the better. What type of accommodation and support are we referring to? What range of capabilities and relationships are required? What does a good community have that enables people to benefit from these?

The focus on what a good life looks like begins to shape how Advantaged Thinking can grow.

3



With a clearer vision of 'opportunity' and 'good' in mind, we can begin to ask: what practice already exists in other fields of innovation to learn from?

While this may include examples from our own sector, more frequently we can be inspired by looking in entirely different places. Where else do people get to access such accommodation, support, capability and relationship offers? This may move us to look at high-value models where people pay a premium for these elements. Is there anything we can adopt from these to our own service settings?

Looking outside our sphere of knowledge, we can find fresh Advantaged Thinking to apply.

4



We should then turn to how we can invest in those around us.

For example, what kind of staff are needed to work on the opportunity and good life we have visualised? How are we currently recruiting and equipping teams to work in these ways? What might we need to do to bridge any skills and knowledge gaps? How do we currently draw from the lived experience insights and potential skills of those using our services? What role could they play in building the opportunity and good life vision?

Thinking about the skills and potential of the people working for and with your services will identify other ways to advance Advantaged Thinking.

These four steps help to prepare a shift in narrative and the reframing from disadvantaged to advantaged – the ability to identify what to invest in and how through a positive focus. This shift in narrative leads us to a fifth and final step in our preparatory movement towards Advantaged Thinking:

5



Clarify how our opportunity, good life, knowledge and skills investments will lead to a positive 'shift' from a world in which people can only survive and cope with disadvantages, to a world in which people can adapt to thrive with advantages.

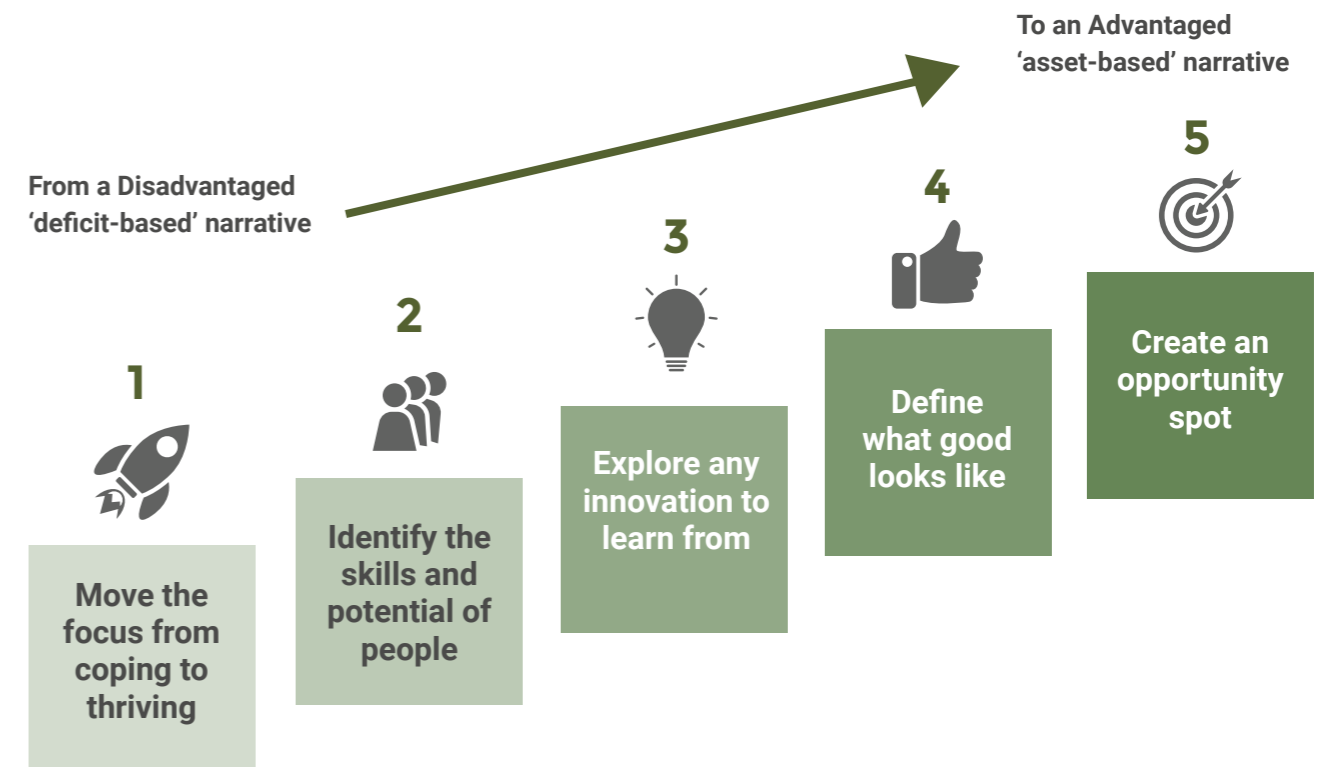
The paradigm shift draws from something called the 'sustainable livelihoods ladder'. This shines a light on the difference in aspiration between supporting people to cope (providing safety through dependency) and inspiring people to take positive risks, build skills and experiences, and adapt towards thriving.

This is a question of what you are designing services to do: to support people to survive and cope, or help them to thrive? Advantaged Thinking provides the technology for people to do the latter.

These introductory five steps clear the path for an asset-based approach to work and are thus part of the early preparation process for Advantaged Thinking.



Steps to prepare for Advantaged Thinking



For the Foyer Federation, these early preparatory steps included:

- 1** Focusing on opportunities for reflective learning spaces, impact collection and story-telling that shifted attention onto how young people can thrive, while also developing partnerships with corporates, funders and other charities to share the IP for Advantaged Thinking and grow its impact to thrive all the way to Australia.
- 2** Promoting Foyer staff training through the introduction of life coaching approaches, and testing asset-based concepts through pilot programmes that invested resources and control directly into young people as well as staff.
- 3** Learning from innovation partners such as Virgin Unite on how advantage and disadvantaged is branded, while exploring thinking from Martin Seligman and Guy Claxton on more positive approaches to human learning and development.
- 4** Looking at positive transitions to adulthood in order to better define what good should look like for young people in Foyers.
- 5** Initiating research into asset-based approaches and making space for ideas by developing a post to focus on innovation opportunity, which drove the development of new programmes and funding.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Can you begin to apply the 5 preparatory steps to reflect on your own work?
- Q2** What inspiration do you take from the Foyer Federation's example?

4. DEFINING ADVANTAGED THINKING AS A DISTINCTIVE APPROACH

Writing in the 'Advantaged Thinking Programme Framework' published by Brotherhood of Saint Laurence (2020), Colin Falconer and Diane Brown describe Advantaged Thinking as follows:

"While Advantaged Thinking acknowledges the complex challenges that people face, and the importance of addressing them, it attempts to 'redress the balance between meeting needs and nurturing the strengths and resources of people and communities' (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, July 2021, 'Putting Asset Based Approaches into Practice', p. 4). By taking a clear and consistent focus on assets we can better understand, grow, and promote the different skills, qualities, resources, opportunities and experiences that determine a thriving life.

"As such, Advantaged Thinking represents a paradigm shift in the way we think about and respond to young people experiencing disadvantage. It is a shift away from deficit, disadvantaged or problem-saturated thinking, towards positive thinking and acting. It is focused on identifying, developing and, most importantly, investing in the skills, capabilities and assets of these young people so that they can establish sustainable lives. While disadvantaged thinking defines people by their problems and subsequently builds services based on managing them, Advantaged Thinking takes a different focus by acknowledging barriers but focusing on the young person's innate skills and talents and investing in these talents appropriately.

"Advantaged Thinking is not simply a strengths-based approach – although it draws from and builds upon this widely used practice. Where strengths-based approaches usually focus on the individual and their strengths, Advantaged Thinking recognises the critical importance of the geographic, systemic and institutional settings within which they must make choices about their lives. It sees people as always situated within place, and the structures which either enable or curtail their ability to build a good life. In doing so, it recognises that any effort to create change for people must attend to both this individual and structural context, making positive investment and influencing change in both – one without the other cannot make lasting change for individuals or communities.

'Advantaged Thinking recognises the critical importance of the geographic, systemic and institutional settings within which they must make choices about their lives.'

"An Advantaged Thinking approach, then, sets as a primary goal a shift in both how the government and community sectors invest in young people, and how the community sees young people and their capacity to contribute.

"Fundamentally, the Advantaged Thinking approach challenges us to re-think:

- the way we see young people
- the activities and approaches to working with them
- the way we develop those diverse groups of people who are or will be engaged in promoting and enabling young people to reach their potential
- how we speak about young people, and the use of positive language rather than the language of disadvantage'.

To explore Advantaged Thinking further requires us to look in detail at the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking, which act as the principle foundation and framework or 'technology' to understand and operationalise Advantaged Thinking as an approach.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Can you describe Advantaged Thinking in your own words?
- Q2 Which Advantaged Thinking challenge inspires you most ?



5. THE 7 TESTS OF ADVANTAGED THINKING

The 7 Tests are named as such to highlight the importance of holding ourselves and our services to account, and to emphasise the ongoing reflection and development they require. The tests are not something you simply pass or fail; they exist to offer constant guidance to your Advantaged Thinking practice. They are written as a set of powerful questions:

1. How do you talk about people?
2. How do you understand people?
3. How do you work with people?
4. How do you invest in people?
5. How do you believe in people?
6. How do you involve people?
7. How do you challenge people (yourself and others)?

Colin Falconer and Diane Brown outline the 7 Tests in comprehensive detail, shared below from the 'Advantaged Thinking Fidelity Framework' (2020).



Test 1 – How you talk about people



What does this test look at?

Test one looks at how an organisation or service uses language and imagery to identify and define the people it works with. It promotes talking about people in ways that respect their individual humanity and potential.

It is relevant to external communications and fundraising, as well as the language and terminology used in everyday practice.

What does this mean?

Test one asks us to consider how people can be talked about, identified and described (whether through language, visual representation or other forms of signification) based on their identity as people first, with any needs or challenges second. This means we work to create a fairer balance in the language we use in two key ways.

Firstly, by portraying people in terms of their experiences of specific challenges rather than defining people by these challenges. For example, 'people experiencing homelessness' is very different to the reductive stereotype of 'homeless people'.

Secondly, through positive descriptions of people's ability and potential alongside their needs and disadvantages. This does not mean that people's needs can never be referred to, but it does mean that our language about disadvantage should not become the only source for identification.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking approach that individuals are not reduced to limiting deficit-based definitions and labels. People are always people first. Test one recognises that the language we use to identify and describe people shapes the perceptions and expectations of others – participants, as well as staff, funders and the wider community. How we talk about and refer to people informs how we see and respond to people. Calling someone a homeless person, or 'at-risk', immediately reinforces a set of stereotypes that can be limiting. Recognising people for their abilities and potential, as well as their challenges and experiences, offers a more empowering and productive narrative.

An attention to language connects with working in a person-centred way (test two). It also forms part of the responsibility to challenge ourselves and others (test seven) by upholding a more positively balanced vocabulary. This reframing moves away from the simplistic tendency to promote and support needs. Reducing people to the language of problems perpetuates the disadvantages our work is meant to address. Talking about people in a rounded and appreciative way is a responsibility for any organisation with a social purpose.

Test 2 – How you understand people



What does this test look at?

Test two looks at how an organisation or service understands people, both in terms of their support needs and challenges, and their abilities, potential and individuality.

The test is relevant to impact measurement, evaluation, research, and service assessment processes.

What does this mean?

The test asks us to consider how people can be identified, assessed – and thus understood – based on who they are and what they can do. Needs and challenges should be recognised as part of that, but not as the sole basis of identity. For example, when working with a person with a disability or someone who is experiencing mental illness, identifying and assessing those challenges are important. However, their experience of that illness is just one part of who they are. A more balanced understanding of the individual will also take into account their abilities, resources and potential, and seek to reflect this in assessment tools and processes, and outcome and impact measurements.

In terms of the measures we use to track impact, this means we should work to understand and report on the growth of people's holistic strengths and capabilities as well as the control or reduction of challenges.

Test two encourages more creative techniques, such as the use of storytelling, as a resource for assessment and impact. Attention to language from test one will also inform our ability to understand people more broadly and positively.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking approach that individuals are not understood in ways that might narrow outcomes and ways of working. Services that understand participants in terms of a limited set of prescribed needs will typically offer fixes that do not fully address the potential of the lives they are working for and with.

An attention to understanding people through holistic measures and asset-based insights connects with the responsibility to challenge ourselves and others (test seven). This forms another part of the way Advantaged Thinking reframes the narratives around people experiencing disadvantage. It moves away from the tendency to identify and track needs reduction only, and looks for different ways to understand the people the organisation or service works with.

Understanding service participants' unique narratives of transition will inform a stronger theory of change to shape provision. A service that takes time to fully understand who people are and what happens to them is likely to prove more innovative and ethical. This is critical to inform current and future Advantaged Thinking practice.

Test 3 – How do you work with people?



What does this test look at?

Test three promotes positive, person-centred working with both participants and staff.

The test is relevant to different types of support and development – from HR processes to participant case management and training.

What does this mean?

The test asks us to consider how we can best work with people through enabling approaches that stimulate trust and belief, grow skills and capabilities, and lead to sustainable outcomes. This can include inspiring and coaching others, reflecting on what happens and why, being resilient when things don't go to plan, and drawing on the talents and resources of people you can collaborate with.

The test invites us to create a sensible balance between supporting problems or managing performance, and the opportunity to develop people's strengths and potential. It emphasises a personalised approach that shapes methodologies and systems to get the best from each individual, rather than shaping the person to fit the system. It also reinforces the importance of mobilising a wider network of partners and opportunities.

This approach encourages practitioners to be conscious of different support, development and training approaches, and a range of tools and methodologies to work with people. It highlights the connection between how an organisation or service works with staff, and how staff are expected to work with participants. An authentic service will equip staff to promote trust, responsibility, talent and development by embedding these expectations through the culture of how staff are managed themselves.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking vision that individuals are supported and developed to achieve positive outcomes, and that this is experienced by staff as well as participants. Test three recognises that for people to be successful, they must be allowed to learn through experiences of responsibility and failure, while developing skills and resources that will equip them to sustain positive outcomes over the longer term.

The attention to understanding growth (test two) is reflected here in finding the best approaches that fit an individual. The test also connects with our responsibility to believe in people (test five) by looking beyond managing problems towards growing ability and potential. Services that can coach growth mindsets alongside supporting coping strategies, with staff experienced at managing their own performance, are better equipped to work with people's challenges and opportunities.

Test 4 – How do you invest in people?



What does this test look at?

Test four looks at how an organisation invests in people to enable them to progress through experiences of surviving and coping towards more sustainable, thriving livelihoods. Investing can refer to financial, human, physical, programme and partner resources.

The test is relevant to risk and resource management, and to approaches associated with providing people with a personalised 'deal' or opportunities offer.

What does this mean?

The test embraces principles from the Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder approach, within which individuals must take positive risks to develop assets that help them adapt out of coping and move towards more flourishing states of identity and growth. This requires a conscious awareness of the balance between investments used to help people cope and those geared towards development.

The test appreciates that, to achieve breakthroughs, people need to learn through failures and responsibilities, and benefit from varied experiences. This requires organisations to balance control over negative, 'unsafe' risks with the means to harness positive opportunities for growth. As such, the test is as much about how an organisation develops a culture that supports positive risk taking as it is about how staff can access and apply resources to invest in people's needs and goals. This requires adopting systems of control that free staff to make intelligent use of resources. It also means keeping focused on what a budget, however limited, can achieve, rather than how much it lacks.

The test recognises that a person-centred approach means being able to offer holistic investments

accessible to and valued by an individual. This includes the application of conditionality through the idea of a personalised deal that the participant and service can formally commit to, take responsibility for, and adapt over time.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking vision that we invest in people in ways that are most likely to bring about growth and sustainable outcomes. A focus on making smart investments highlights the importance of developing systems, mindsets and approaches that keep asking what, where and how to use resources, manage risks and opportunities, and involve people in their own investment decisions.

Test 5 – How do you believe in people?



What does this test look at?

Test five looks at an organisation's aspirations for its people – both participants and staff. This includes unconditional regard for who people are, a strong belief in what people can achieve with the right opportunities and support, and the determination to trust in people's potential.

The test is relevant to how an organisation expresses a positive vision and values through its communications, HR, quality standards, management and support approaches.

What does this mean?

The test asks us to consider how we believe in other people the same way a good parent might believe in their child: with an unflinching recognition of value and humanity. It highlights the importance of distinguishing between someone's behaviour and their identity, and emphasises our ability to sustain high expectations and aspirations for the people we work with during challenging periods. It questions whether the standards we hold for others match those we hold for ourselves – from the upkeep of places for people to live and work in, to the quality of the support and provision we offer. Believing in people means not giving up on them, even when they are deemed to have failed or broken the rules, or if they need to be removed from a service. An emphasis on trust goes hand-in-hand with this belief. Do we trust in people's capacity to learn through responsibility and experience – especially those associated with risk and failure?

The test appreciates that, to maintain high levels of belief, it is important to take time to identify breakthroughs and showcase the potential of what people can achieve. This might range from keeping an achievements wall, to celebrating positives in staff meetings, to formal tracking systems for past participant outcomes. It also includes cultivating a culture of belief and trust through the way that

staff work and are managed, and promoting positive outcomes externally to advance the belief in participants held by wider society.

While attention to belief tends to focus on the belief ourselves and others have in participants, it should not neglect the levels of belief held by participants. From negative past experiences to ongoing pressures from social media, there are various influences that can affect belief levels. Offering different opportunities to grow people's belief in themselves and others might be vital to the success of a programme or service.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking vision that we hold and promote high aspirations for people's potential. This strength of belief is likely to be reflected in how people are talked about (test one), understood (test two) and invested in (test four), as well as how services work with (test three) their participants and staff. Organisations that deal with experiences of disadvantage will always find positive beliefs challenged. It is the role of Advantaged Thinking to develop and sustain them in these contexts.



Test 6 – How do you involve people?



What does this test look at?

Test six looks at how an organisation or service involves people as active agents in their lives and the service. This includes harnessing individual experiences and insights to shape approaches, collaborate on solutions, and ensure authenticity and accountability.

The test is relevant to service delivery approaches, as well as systems for review, quality, management and governance decisions.

What does this mean?

The test asks us to consider how we can involve people by putting participants at the heart of an organisation or service. It recognises that involving people requires investing in the capacity of participants to shape how processes work, and in developing the appropriate skills and resources for staff to support participants. Given likely limits on the length of engagement, an organisation or service must embed an active culture of involvement that can constantly renew itself through new participants.

Involvement can mean listening and responding to participant views on a variety of levels, including individual support needs and goals, the quality and effectiveness of the service, the development of new programmes and approaches, acquiring new staff, partners and resources, and overseeing the management of outcomes and decisions. In some organisations or services, involvement may be through advisory groups, ambassador programmes, co-production approaches, and the use of peer roles in aspects of delivery.

While involvement may not be possible at all levels – for example, not everyone can have a participant as a trustee or in a formal representative role – organisations and services should share a common Advantaged Thinking value that they work with individuals rather than do to them.

Why is this important?

It is essential to an Advantaged Thinking vision that participants are fully involved in how they receive support, and that organisations and services are accountable to them. Rather than treating individuals as passive recipients of support, Advantaged Thinking seeks to engage participants as active agents. Starting with the voice and insights of the person is fundamental to an Advantaged Thinking approach, as is growing people's capacity to take greater responsibility in decision-making opportunities.

This person-centred approach recognises the power of collaborative relationships that allow for the exchange of ideas and insights. It creates the necessary space and time for meaningful involvement and harnesses strong, active communication loops to ensure that participant feedback is always sought and responded to. The test also appreciates that participants have unique 'lived experience' that is vital to the ongoing development of effective services.



Test 7 – How do you challenge yourself and others?



What does this Test look at?

Test seven looks at how an organisation challenges itself and others – in the service, local community, sector and society – to talk about, understand, work with, invest in, believe in and involve people in a positive, asset-based way. It brings together all the tests of Advantaged Thinking through a focus on shaping change at an individual, system and social level.

The test is relevant to advocacy, campaigning and influence work, as well as the ongoing professional and personal development of staff.

What does this mean?

The test asks us to consider how Advantaged Thinking requires us to take responsibility for shaping the world around us. It recognises that an asset-based approach should start with the beliefs, systems, policies and distribution of power that impacts on what and how we do things. Rather than just provide asset-based services in response to problems, Advantaged Thinking points us to take action to influence those things that contribute to the problems.

If people are struggling with housing, health, education, employment, finance and other areas of life, in what way do current attitudes, systems, policies and services contribute to those problems?

What opportunities exist to challenge any of these?

What longer term benefits might be achieved through specific changes in belief and approach?

How can rational alternatives be proposed to make a difference?

Where might advocates, supporters and

collaborators be found to help?

What role can participants play to influence and promote?

Are there existing campaigns or movements to collaborate with?

To challenge means to identify what influences our world, how to influence in return, and the first steps to take in action.

Part of the challenge is to include ourselves – at a personal, service or organisational level – within the change process. To embed a sustainable way to be Advantaged Thinking, we must overcome approaches that impose limited outcome indicators, that stereotype perceptions of disadvantage to gain funding, or that restrict resources and tools to work in an asset-based way. Being Advantaged Thinking means accepting the responsibility to lead.





Why is this important?

It is essential to Advantaged Thinking that we try to shape the world around us to be Advantaged Thinking. That means proactive involvement in influencing policy, funding, commissioning, and partner and public perceptions. This final test is about everyone's responsibility to take action. It includes reflecting on our own expression of Advantaged Thinking so we can better learn how to develop Advantaged Thinking in others.

Training on the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking and their operational application forms part of the Foyer Federation's service offer, which is detailed in the Appendix of resources and services purchasable at the end of this guide.

TAKING ACTION:

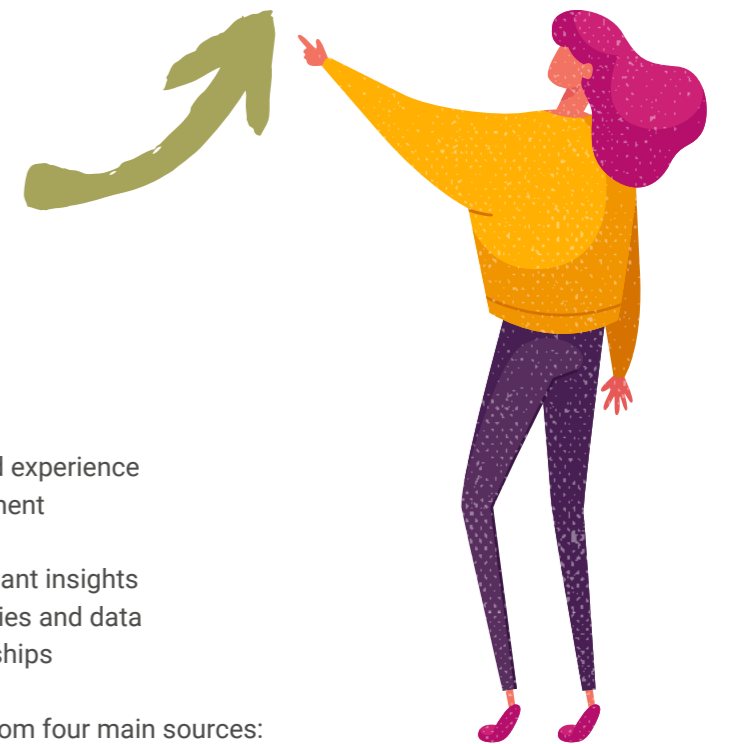
- Q1** Can you begin to apply the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking as lenses to reflect on your own work?
- Q2** Which test do you find most inspiring to take action on?

6. IMPACTS

The topic of impact will be explored further in Chapters Two and Eight, but by way of introduction it is important to emphasise that Advantaged Thinking's intentions to create better outcomes do translate into tangible examples of positive impacts at a person and service level.

At a person level, impacts include increases in:

- Personal development
- Financial capability skills
- Social skills and connection
- Health and wellbeing
- Progression into work
- Progression through education
- Progression into housing options



At a service level, impacts include increases in:

- Involvement of people and activation of lived experience
- Staff satisfaction and professional development
- Service reputation and quality recognition
- Service innovation through staff and participant insights
- Ability to influence through inspirational stories and data
- Creative approaches to funding and partnerships

Evidence for these impact areas can be drawn from four main sources:

1. National Foyer Federation programmes that applied Advantaged Thinking approaches to social action, health and wellbeing, and employment pathways.

These programmes highlighted positive impacts on young people's health and wellbeing, growth of social networks, identification and progress of goals, and increases in staff satisfaction.

For example, in Pop Up Talent (2014-15), over 2,000 young people were able to connect with a work or education opportunity – 241% higher than the project target. In Healthy Conversations (2012-14), almost 3,000 young people were able to make healthy living connections and progress health goals, identifying over 11,000 goals between them – 126% higher than the project target. Over a thousand of these young people also participated in health action projects to improve their community – 141% over target.

The ability of these programmes to achieve positive outcomes far beyond their targets demonstrates the power of Advantaged Thinking to engage people, even in times of austerity which characterised the 2012-15 period.

2. The Foyer Federation's national Foyer Accreditation quality assurance programme, which provides a source for benchmarking performance data and reviewing service impacts.

Annual reports from the Foyer Federation have continued to highlight increases in progression outcomes, quality and profile of services, involvement examples, service innovations, development, and wider influence. Reports also indicate various examples of distance travelled among outcomes for young people and service quality, as illustrated in the Chapter Six case studies from Your Housing Group. All services certificated and reviewed through the Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking FOR Youth quality assurance scheme demonstrate consistent improvements in outcomes and quality over time.

3. Longitudinal research from Australia on the Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer model, which was explicitly designed to follow an Advantaged Thinking approach.

The research Starting a Future that Means Something for You, published in 2019 by Brotherhood of Saint Laurence and Launch Housing, identified that 85% of young people were in work or education a year after exit from their Foyer. The strongest performance was on the learning side, with 70% achieving or enrolling onto a higher qualification a year after exit from the Foyer. Nearly all those leaving progressed to housing where they felt safe. 43% were in their own tenancy on exit, rising to 51% a year later, and there was a consequent decline in those experiencing homelessness and crisis accommodation – down from 32% on Foyer entry to only 2% on exit.

A separate KPMG evaluation, released alongside the main research, concluded that the EFY Foyer services produced an additional \$10 million in social benefits compared to traditional housing management services for young people over a 20-year timescale. These cost savings are based on Foyers' Advantaged Thinking impact on young people's employment outcomes and increased educational attainment as a contributor to income, along with independence from supported housing need, health benefits from reduced emergency and hospital admissions, and avoided police expenditure through reduced offending rates. In terms of value, the financial benefits achieved from the EFY Foyer are almost double its running costs. Such findings clearly signpost the benefits that an Advantaged Thinking approach to homelessness can bring.

4. A literature review on general findings from asset-based approaches.

Research from the University of Cumbria (Stuart, K. and Hillman, S., 'An Asset-Based Approach to Theory of Change: A Case Study') identifies evidence for asset-based impact. In particular, the research demonstrated a strong international evidence base (quantitative and qualitative) for asset-based institutional responses to young people in transition. This included a longitudinal randomised control trial on asset-based housing support for young people in the Netherlands (Krabbenborg, Boersma & Wolf, The European Journal of Homelessness (2013) 'Progress Report of On-going Research: A Strengths Based Intervention for Homeless Youths: The Effectiveness and Fidelity of Houvast', pp. 397-407). Other findings from this study are referenced in Chapter Two, including an Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change that explains the impacts noted above at a person level.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which potential Advantaged Thinking impact area inspires you most?
- Q2 Which evidence source resonates the most for your work?



7. TRANSFERRING ADVANTAGED THINKING TO OTHER SETTINGS

Colin Falconer and Diane Brown describe the scope of Advantaged Thinking in the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence's 'Advantaged Thinking Programme Framework' (2020), p.14, through five principal characteristics:

The scope of Advantaged Thinking

1. Advantaged Thinking is not a model; it is a way of thinking that guides practice.
2. Advantaged Thinking is a flexible approach; it can and should be implemented in different ways and in different contexts.
3. Advantaged Thinking is not simply a strengths-based approach; it combines individuals with structural approaches to change.
4. Advantaged Thinking is not only designed for young people; it has the potential to be used for all age groups.
5. Advantaged Thinking is not just relevant to the service delivery area of an organisation; it relies on a whole-of-organisation approach to the delivery of services, including staff skills and training, finance and information technology processes, research and policy, marketing and fundraising.



The fourth characteristic on wider application has seen most progress in Australia, where Launch Housing and Colony 47 have evidenced examples outside of youth service settings – particularly at Colony 47, which has applied Advantaged Thinking on an organisation-wide basis to include a variety of service contexts working with both adults and young people.

Every Test of Advantaged Thinking can be applied to any person or service context. The only reason why someone might not wish to do this is contained within test five – believe. An organisation is likely to decide it cannot talk about, understand, work with, invest in or involve in an Advantaged Thinking way if it does not believe in the people it serves. This is why test five is so important. Without positive belief in people's ability and potential, the other tests cease to have relevance.

If you believe in the people you work with, then Advantaged Thinking is 100% applicable for you. As leading asset-based thinker Dennis Saleebey notes, "Change can only happen when you collaborate with clients' aspirations, perceptions, and strengths and when you firmly believe in them." (D Saleebey (ed.) 'Introduction: Beginnings of a Strengths Approach to Practice', in Longman (1992) 'The strengths perspective in social work practice' p.42). Arguments that Advantaged Thinking may not be transferable outside of a youth context only emphasise the poverty of aspiration held in other fields, and consequently the importance for using test five to address this.

For those looking to apply Advantaged Thinking beyond a youth setting, it is recommended that the initial steps to prepare for Advantaged Thinking outlined in the third section of this chapter are directly connected with the fifth test – for example, by questioning:

- When we define what good looks like in step two, do we genuinely believe that it is possible?
- When we identify the skills and potential of people in step four, do staff have sufficient belief in the potential of people using their service?
- When moving the focus from coping to thriving in step five, do we have the required level of belief in thriving outcomes to achieve them?

Ultimately, Advantaged Thinking is all about having a passion for the possible. If you share that passion, you can take Advantaged Thinking with you anywhere in the world.

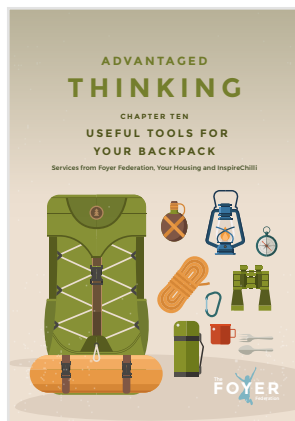
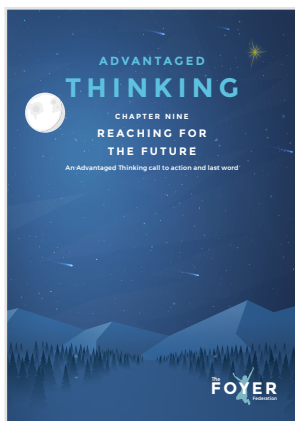
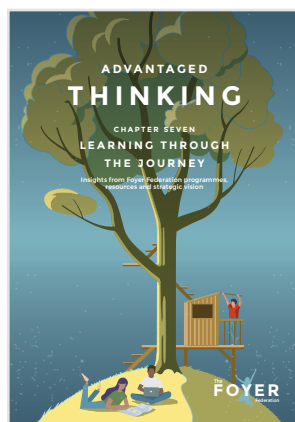
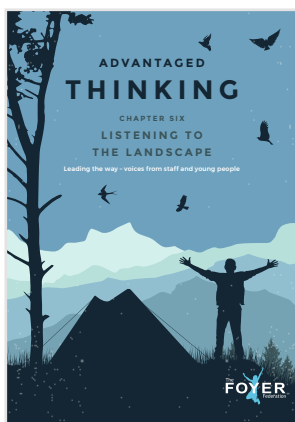
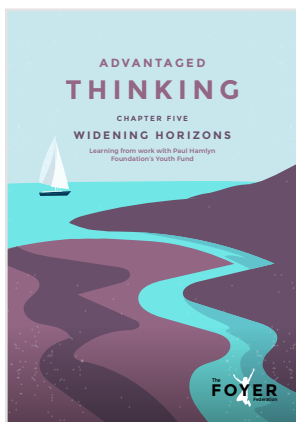
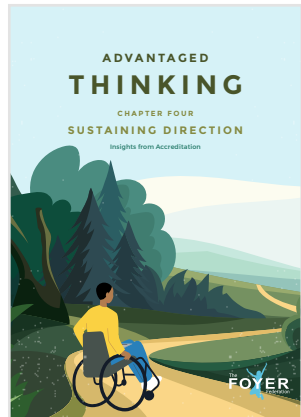
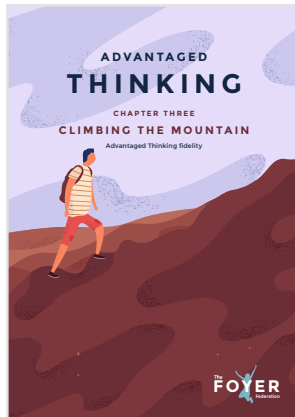
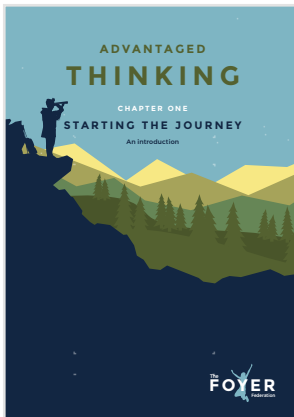


TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 What contexts would you like to apply Advantaged Thinking in?
- Q2 How might you ensure that your organisation shares a passion for the possible?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by:

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER TWO SEEING NEW DEPTHS

Insights from evidence and impact



CHAPTER TWO SEEING NEW DEPTHS

“I see young people who are positive and engaged in their goals. I see them inspired and achieving in goals, education, employment and community connections. I hear young people talk about achieving, trying and succeeding. I see workers being challenged to work in different ways to support young people towards independence.”

Katie Hooper, Foyer Foundation Australia

A collaborative
project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and
be recognised as a sector leading landlord

INSIGHTS FROM EVIDENCE AND IMPACT

CONTENTS

1. Background insights	2
2. Evidence sources to promote Advantaged Thinking	4
3. Impact areas to focus on Advantaged Thinking	8
4. The Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change	12
5. Applying the Theory of Change in practice	16

Each section includes two 'Taking Action' questions to help you to reflect on insights.

1. BACKGROUND INSIGHTS

In January 2016, Dr Kaz Stuart and Ruth Browning produced a literature review for the Foyer Federation, published under the title 'The Evidence Base for an Asset-Based Approach to Youth Housing'. The University of Cumbria was commissioned to lead this research as part of the Foyer Federation's emerging work on developing a revitalised Youth Offer to fully express an Advantaged Thinking vision. The literature review also helped Foyer Federation create an evidence-based Theory of Change for Advantaged Thinking. These two sources form the main basis for this chapter, which will highlight key learning points for funders, commissioners and leaders to apply in developing future Advantaged Thinking services.

Before inspecting these sources, it is important to begin with two foundational insights:

1. To recognise that the evidence base for the current 'status quo' in how we help people deal with personal and social challenges is extremely poor. Consider the rising numbers of people struggling with mental wellbeing, the consistently high numbers distanced from secure employment, or the poor levels of attainment for those leaving the care system. This indicates that there is compelling evidence of costly failure from applying problem-focused approaches.

The poor outcomes our society achieves for people facing systemic injustice and disadvantage is comparable to a plane that is burning around us and beginning to plummet out of the sky. When reaching for a parachute in response, it would be natural to ask ourselves: does it make sense to apply the positive approaches that I would wish to experience and/or that I already use in my personal life to deal with this challenge?

Reaching for a positive parachute through Advantaged Thinking feels like a common-sense action. It is encouraging to know that there is also a scientific evidence base for Advantaged Thinking as a choice. This chapter supports both the common-sense and evidence-based arguments for Advantaged Thinking.



2. To recognise that traditional approaches for capturing evidence may not always be fit for purpose in an asset-based context, which weakens the range of available evidence to support our understanding of Advantaged Thinking.

Rather than seeing this as a weakness of Advantaged Thinking, it is more appropriate for us to accept that asset-based approaches directly challenge how we collect evidence and demand a different approach to measure outcomes. We cannot expect to capture the positive, holistic and personal growth impacts from Advantaged Thinking through a narrowly imposed, compliance-focused data set that simply responds to needs.

As Stuart and Browning note, "Target-driven services mean that the focus of the service is on the target rather than the person the service is designed to help. And 'targeting' people by their deficits – as unemployed; as an offender; as a teenage parent, etc, is itself part of the problem." What data we collect and how we do it, therefore, must reflect our own ethos to work alongside people and invest in their development. This means that we should try to capture evidence more from people's assets rather than their deficits, to see the whole person rather than a narrowly defined service area, and to track progression towards thriving aspirations rather than just short-term outputs.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Is there a compelling evidence base of negative outcomes for people you wish to support that already suggests an Advantaged Thinking approach is urgently needed?
- Q2 What might you need to do differently to ensure you can capture more person-focused evidence that reflects growth in people's strengths and abilities?

2. EVIDENCE SOURCES TO PROMOTE ADVANTAGED THINKING

The University of Cumbria literature review identifies 12 strong examples that form a secure qualitative and quantitative evidence base for taking an Advantaged Thinking approach, utilising the impact of associated asset-based practices. The review discovered 112 research papers evidencing asset-based work with young people from the last 10 years, demonstrating various positive impacts in the fields of youth work, housing support, education, employability, health support, asset-based community development, looked-after children and criminal justice.

The 12 strongest areas of impact are listed below in order of reference in the review. They are grouped by thematic focus to show how Advantaged Thinking can prove particularly effective as a response to young people's needs and goals in personal development, housing, education, employment and health.

THEMATIC FOCUS: Youth work and personal development.

“There is evidence from a range of countries that supports an asset-based approach to youth work, and further [...] strong evidence that proves it has an impact on outcomes for young people.” (p26)

Three evidence sources are shared below. Examples in the first are based on the Positive Youth Development model (PYD) which is strongly informed by asset-based principles, and thus is a good indicator of impact relevance for Advantaged Thinking.

EVIDENCE SOURCE ONE: a review of research papers on PYD in the USA. Travis and Leech (2014) found that this research indicated that there is ‘reliable and valid data for [...] competence, confidence, connection, caring and character [...] [the five Cs inherent in the PYD model]’ (p22). The reliable data that supports a PYD approach helps to validate the strong asset-based principles that underpin it.

A further review into the PYD model considered four other research papers from 2005, in which Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Lerner (2005) proved “the usefulness of applying this strengths-based view of adolescent development within diverse youth and communities” (p24). Finally, a review

of the PYD model in 27 settings in the UK by Schuman and Davies (2007) concluded that the success of the PYD approach was enhanced when programmes were “long term, featured trusting adult relationships, and opportunities mentoring and bonding”, which are all common aspects in an Advantaged Thinking approach.



EVIDENCE SOURCE TWO: qualitative research in the UK on the impact of asset-based approaches for people deemed to have ‘complex needs’ by Boelman and Russell (2013) concludes “it is evident that asset-based approaches could significantly transform lives” (p.25). This can be connected with further research in the USA specific to young people from care (Graham, Schellinger and Vaughn (2015) and Watt, Norton and Jones (2013)), noting that both asset-building and strengths-based programmes of support increase personal outcomes for this group.

EVIDENCE SOURCE THREE: policy sources from Australia, including The Government of South Australia’s (2011) Office for Youth good practice guidelines and Australia’s Youth Affairs Coalition (2013) detail the fundamental aspects of youth work, which together “suggests that asset-based approaches are fundamental to youth work and that it can reduce risky behaviours” (p.25).

THEMATIC FOCUS: Housing or homelessness

“Empirical evidence supports the use of asset-based approaches to housing... [and] found that it led to positive outcomes.” (p.31)

Three evidence sources are noted below from asset-based support examples in the USA and Netherlands along with research into strengths-based practice from Australia.

EVIDENCE SOURCE FOUR: a literature review of positive approaches for working with young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness published by the Australian Government concludes, “Research suggests that homeless young people responded better to client-centred approaches that were strengths-based, flexible and forgiving and encouraged them to strive towards positive goals despite any setbacks (Cauce et al., 1994; Cauce et al., 2000) (date unknown: 22-23). The review identified “a notable shift towards working with young people using a strengths-based approach (Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006; McLaren, 2002)”. Strengths-based practice principles are fully reflected in the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking, so their evidence in research is a reliable indicator for Advantaged Thinking impact.

and the alleviation of loneliness” and stressing the importance for young people to have access to resources. Both these findings support the focus on social connections within the Foyer Federation’s Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change.

EVIDENCE SOURCE SIX: the significant studies on a youth homelessness programme in the Netherlands, called Houvast, which was founded on strength-based principles. The study is described as significant due to its size and timescale, reaching more than 251 young people over nine months. The research identified 10 positive impacts on young people’s quality of life, satisfaction with family relations, finances, health, employment or education, depression, care needs, autonomy, competence and resilience. As a random controlled trial longitudinal study, this research is described by Stuart and Browning as “the best evidence of the impact of ... [an asset-based] approach” (p.32).

EVIDENCE SOURCE FIVE: qualitative data from USA research into youth homelessness supports (Rew and Horner, 2003) include a five-year longitudinal study that concludes by noting “an attribution between positive youth development

THEMATIC FOCUS: Educational opportunities.

“There is a strong evidence base supporting the benefits of asset-based approaches to education.” (p.35).

A focus on education forms part of the Foyer Federation’s Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change, so it is significant to emphasise that asset-based approaches to education do support young people’s achievement. The three evidence sources noted below come from studies in the USA and UK.

EVIDENCE SOURCE SEVEN: a study from Michigan State University (1999) into 250,000 young people in USA schools over one year, which found “young people with a high level of assets engaged in fewer risky behaviours and had more thriving indicators than those with a lower level of assets.” Stuart and Browning importantly conclude that “Assets were therefore said to mediate the impact of deficits” (p.34). This fully supports the rationale for an Advantaged Thinking investment.

EVIDENCE SOURCE EIGHT: a study for another PYD programme at a youth leadership institute in Minnesota (Bloomberg, Ganey, Alba, Quintero, Alvarez-Alcantara, 2003) found that young people benefited from various positive impacts including increased levels of community engagement, peer relationships, rates of enrolment in post-secondary education or job attainment, and reduced rates of

alcohol, tobacco or drug use/abuse. This connects with some of the evidence produced from health and employment-focused Advantaged Thinking programmes introduced by Foyer Federation in the UK Foyer network.

EVIDENCE SOURCE NINE: a quantitative study (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Fox Eades, and Linley, 2011) into a UK strengths-based model called the Strengths Gym. From a range of validated research measures, it identified that “adolescents who participated in Strengths Gym had significantly increased life satisfaction compared to adolescents who did not” (2011:377) (p.35). Increased life satisfaction through engagement with positive learning opportunities is often referenced by young people during Foyer Federation Accreditation assessment visits of Advantaged Thinking services.

THEMATIC FOCUS: Employability.

“There was very limited evidence of asset-based approaches being used ... [but] strong support for an asset-based approach to employability training” (p.36).

Despite the general lack of research in this area, there is some significant evidence for an asset-based approach producing positive impacts for employability, which is noted in the single evidence source from Canada below.

EVIDENCE SOURCE TEN: research from Canada’s Homeless Hub (date unknown) looked at the impact of an asset-based Train the Trades employment programme for people experiencing homelessness. It found that 69% of participants either progressed their education or secured

employment as a result of the programme. This connects with some of the positive outcomes from Advantaged Thinking employment programmes introduced by the Foyer Federation.

THEMATIC FOCUS: Health.

“...asset-based approaches are successfully used to address specific health issues ... there is a well-documented and well-evidenced asset-based approach to health.” (p.43)

Of all 10 thematic areas, health appears to provide the strongest UK indicators for positive uses of asset-based approaches, with both examples referenced below from the UK.

EVIDENCE SOURCE ELEVEN: an evidence-based briefing paper on asset-based approaches by the University of Glasgow (2011) reviews four examples in Scotland to conclude that “asset-based approaches may help tackle the underlying causes of health inequalities through capacity building, are in place in many health and mental health settings, and can be measured using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.” (p.39)

delivery because “it helps people to address their problems more effectively and sustainably by working with them rather than doing to them.” A report in the same year also considered the evidence for adults in ‘Resilient and Resourceful Adults: An Asset Based Approach’, which similarly showed how the protective and promotional aspects of a focus on health assets “support people to be responsible for their own health.” (p.40)

EVIDENCE SOURCE TWELVE: a 2014 report from Executive Director Public Health Wales, ‘Children and Young People are Our Future: An Asset-based Approach’, explored five asset-based projects in Wales. It showed that asset-based approaches offer an effective model for health service

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which evidence examples and thematic areas connect most with your interests?
- Q2** Can you use the examples offered to illustrate that there is a secure evidence base to support you to apply an Advantaged Thinking approach in your work?

3. IMPACT AREAS TO FOCUS ON ADVANTAGED THINKING

It is helpful for organisations introducing Advantaged Thinking to be mindful of how and where they seek to capture their own evidence base by looking for specific impact areas. The research conducted by Stuart and Browning aids this process by identifying impact areas most aligned with an asset-based approach.

One strong source of inspiration for this is the Youth Thrive Framework: “established in 2011 by The Center for the Study of Social Policy [CSSP] in the USA [this] is a strengths-based initiative used to identify how all youth (i.e. 9- 26 year olds) can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood or impact of negative life experiences (CSSP, 2015)” (p.64). The framework has particular relevance for Advantaged Thinking impact given its focus on thriving and its underpinning application of both strengths-based and PYD perspectives. Stuart and Browning note (p.69) that the core principles of thriving, defined by Bundick, Yeager, King and Damon (2010, pp. 891-892), are utilised in the framework – of which, the following three have most relevance to Advantaged Thinking outcomes:

THRIVING focuses on aspects of development beyond merely the absence of the negative.

Thus, the importance Advantaged Thinking gives to evidencing what people can do.



THRIVING refers to the functioning of the integrated, whole person across all life domains.

Thus, the importance Advantaged Thinking gives to evidencing holistic performance.

THRIVING entails the engagement of one's unique talents, interests, and/or aspirations.

Thus, the importance Advantaged Thinking gives to evidencing talents and personal goals.

Learning from this is reflected in the Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change, evident in its strong focus on thriving aspirations and consideration for holistic development areas.

A second source of inspiration is offered by Stuart and Browning's collation of different asset-based outcome frameworks into a 'master list' of potential outcome areas to draw from. As Stuart and Browning note: "These are sorted into three types of outcomes:

- The intrapersonal outcomes that young people need (within themselves)
- The interpersonal assets or outcomes that are needed when young people interact with others in the world
- The external family, community and societal assets that would enable development to occur." (p.82)

The table is printed in full below:

INDIVIDUAL PROXIMAL OUTCOMES				EXTERNAL SOCIETAL ASSETS	
Cluster	Outcome	Cluster	Outcome	Cluster	Assets
Internal positive values	Caring Equality and social justice Integrity Honesty Responsibility Restraint Gratitude Learned optimism Learned hopefulness Quality of life	Internal communication	Explaining Expressing Presenting Listening Questioning Using different ways of communicating	External support	Family support Positive family communication Other adult relationships Caring neighbourhood Caring school climate Parent involvement in schooling
Internal management of feelings	Reviewing Self-awareness Reflecting Self-accepting Emotional intelligence	Internal social competence and relationships	Negotiating Interpersonal competence Cultural competence Resistance skills Peaceful conflict resolution Working with others Establishing positive relationships Interpreting others Managing conflict Empathising Leading others Attachment Connection	External empowerment	Community values youth as Resources Service to others Safety
Internal resilience and determination	Self-disciplined Self-management Self-motivated Concentrating Having a sense of purpose Persistent Self-controlled Hardiness Coping Thriving	Internal creativity	Imagining alternative ways of doing things Applying learning in new contexts Enterprising Innovating Remaining open to new ideas Learned resourcefulness	External boundaries and expectations	Family boundaries School boundaries Neighbourhood boundaries Adult role models Learned peer influence High expectations
Internal planning and problem solving	Navigating resources Organising Setting and achieving goals Decision making Researching Analysing Critical thinking Questioning and challenging Evaluating risks Reliability	Internal empowerment / confidence / agency	Self-reliance Self-esteem Self-efficacy Self-belief Locus of control Sense of coherence Action competence Positive view of future	External opportunities for constructive use of time	Creative Activities Youth programmes Religious community Time at home
Internal commitment to learning / development / work	Achievement Motivation School / work Engagement Homework / work Bonding to school / workplace Reading / studying for pleasure				

This table may provide a starting place for organisations to identify potential outcome areas of interest. However, even more usefully, Stuart and Browning also considered the frequency of outcomes referenced in different research in order to zone in on the outcomes asset-based approaches are most likely to produce.

The top softer outcome areas were noted as follows in order of frequency:

1. Communication skills: "improved interpersonal skills / communication skills / social skills"
2. Social competence and relationships: "increased community networks"
3. Empowerment and confidence: "more secure identity/character" and "improved confidence"
4. Resilience and determination: "increased coping skills / resilience"

Services applying an Advantaged Thinking methodology should therefore expect to see positive distance travelled in people's social skills, networks, identity, confidence, and resilience, based on the frequency with which these outcomes have been identified in research on asset-based provision.

The top harder outcome areas were noted as follows:

1. Improved physical and mental health
2. Improved educational attainment
3. Increased citizenship
4. Increased housing stability
5. Increased employment

Importantly, it was noted that achievements in the softer outcomes helped to drive the harder outcome areas. This illustrates the importance of producing a broad, holistic set of outcomes that reflect the interconnected relationships between different asset impact areas. Asset-based investments in communication skills, social networks, identity, confidence and resilience will all be important determinants for programmes seeking better health, education, citizenship, housing and employment outcomes. These are best described as positive promotive factors to achieve thriving outcomes.

For funders and commissioners, the above provides a strong rationale to invest in Advantaged Thinking as an effective evidence-based approach to support positive outcomes for people's health, education, citizenship, housing and employment.

TAKING ACTION:

Q1 How do the three principles of thriving quoted above connect with aspirations in your work?

Q2 Can you collect data in any of the listed outcome areas to evidence your asset-based impact?

4. THE FOYER FEDERATION'S ADVANTAGED THINKING THEORY OF CHANGE

Dr Kaz Stuart of the University of Cumbria worked with Steve Hillman of the Foyer Federation to produce an Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change. The text below is taken from a case study they produced from this work, published under Stuart, K. and Hillman, S., The Centre for Youth Impact (2017):

“An asset-based approach to theory of change”

“A theory of change is a logical map of all the things that need to happen in order for people to change. It shows what may otherwise be a mysterious black box of practice with young people. We know that positive work with young people leads to outcomes, but we (as a sector) are not always good at unpacking this mysterious process or being specific enough about the gains made. Two issues with theories of change are that they are often based in deficit approaches and may be planned by adults on behalf of young people. At the Foyer Federation, we sought to do this in a participative and asset-based way.

“In order to make the theory of change participative, the Foyer Federation considered how to best engage young people. Rather than developing a theory of change to impose on young people, the Foyer Federation wanted to create this through young people's direct experiences. A list of all the possible activities a young person might want from a Foyer was created from a range of documents. A list of potential outcomes from the research previously quoted was also created. Armed with a pack of index cards, the Federation then spoke with 20 young people who were residents at Foyers to find out how these activities and outcomes reflected their lived experiences.

“The young people refined and shaped the emerging theory of change. They added and took away activity cards, building a sense of what helped them develop and grow. They added and took away outcome cards, building a list of appropriate possible outcomes.

They also linked them into causal chains – activities leading to short, medium and long-term outcomes. Young people built the final theory of change.

“Addressing the deficit approach took careful consideration. Theory of change maps usually start with an identification of the needs of a group of service users. This is a deficit approach as it identifies what they cannot do and what gaps are to be filled by the theory of change. The Foyer Federation adopted the opposite approach. We considered what strengths or assets a young person might arrive with. We concluded that this would include young people aged 16-25 with a wide variety of assets. The key starting point for any interaction with young people was therefore a discussion and identification of what they can do and what they are good at – rather than a discussion of what they cannot do. The list of outcomes (assets) developed is a good way to consider a full range of assets that the young person might have. The young people said that this was a really important aspect of Foyers' work, something that made them different to other services they accessed.

“The next step is for theories of change to list the activities that an organisation or service might provide. We turned this approach on its head and considered what a young person might want – this is asset-based, focusing on what they want, not what they need. This is the cornerstone of the Foyer's 'offer'; it is not a pre-defined list of structured activities, but a range of things on offer that a young person can choose to engage with.

“The young people pointed out that fundamental to effective asset-based working was the quality of the staff. This was therefore the first aspect of the offer:

Staff who are: respectful, professional, trusting, open, positive, role models.

Staff who offer: a 'something for something' deal.

Staff who can skilfully: teach, give information, advice, guidance, mentoring, coaching, and moral support.

“Second to this was a broad range of different activities that a young person might want to access, each asset-based. Fundamental to the asset-based theory of change was the assumption that the young person will choose what they want to do, what is important to them, rather than the staff telling them what to engage in.

Having developed a theory of change that represented the reality of young people in Foyers, the literature review from Stuart and Browning was then used to check that there was evidence to support each link in the theory of change. A total of 120 papers were used to underpin the links between the different sections of the theory of change. This dual process of participatory design with underpinning literature produced a robust theory of change for an Advantaged Thinking approach. The final theory of change is printed over page.

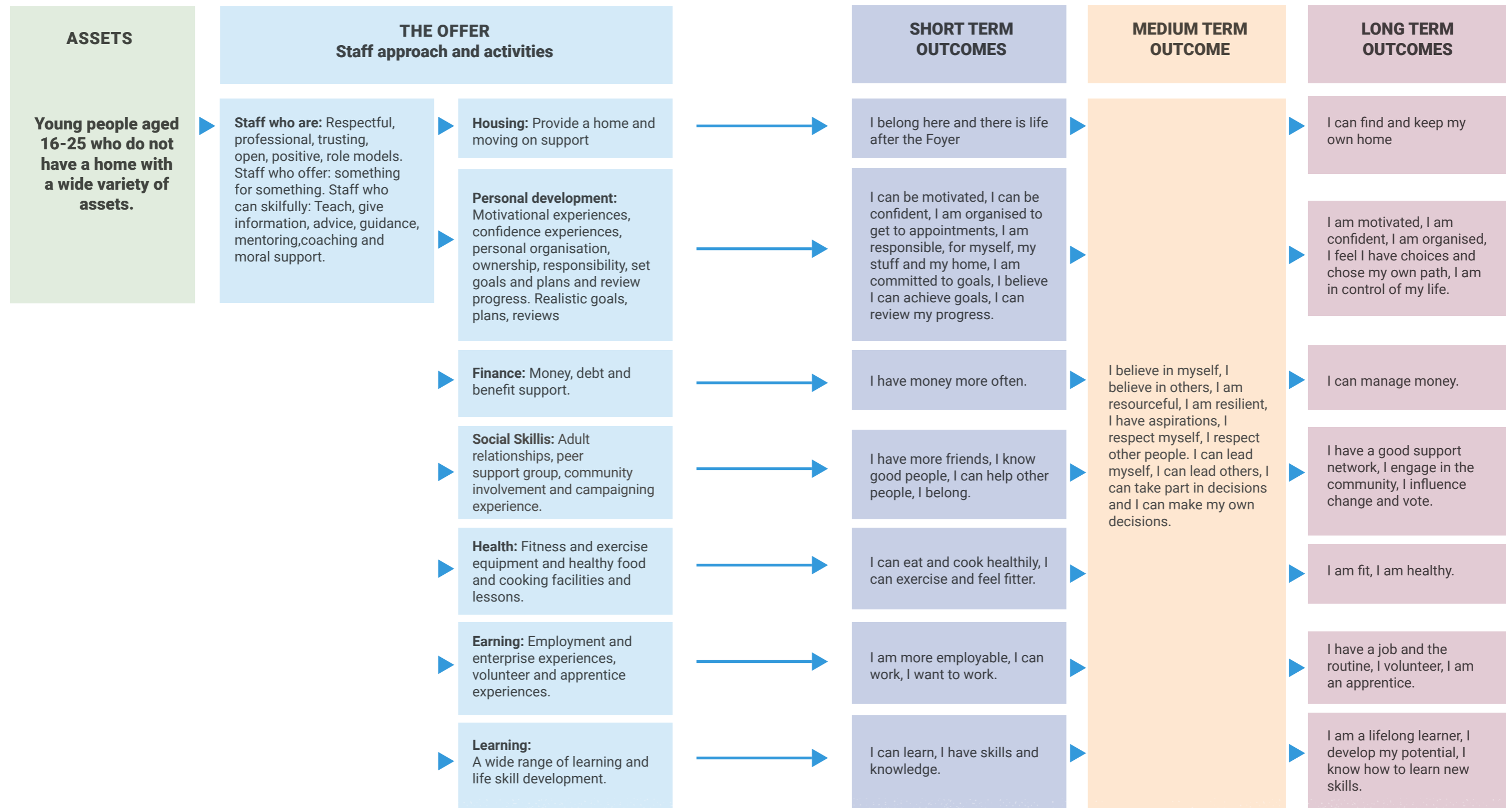
“Next was the range of outcomes that the young people might achieve. An asset-based assumption here was that young people would achieve the outcomes rather than the staff or organisation. The outcomes are the assets that young people develop through their engagement with the Foyer's activities. They are owned by young people, not the staff.

“This development of asset-based assessments, identification of supportive staff capabilities, supportive activities, and a range of short, medium and long-term outcomes led to an asset-based rather than deficit-based theory of change. The young people who developed the process were crucial in its design. They pointed out areas of implicit practice that needed to be made explicit and removed aspects of the offer that we thought were important but they did not value. The participatory nature of the theory of change and its asset-based design has given its strength and we advocate for this approach when planning a theory of change.”

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 How might you apply the Foyer Federation's participatory design process to develop your own approach to impact data?
- Q2 How does the final Theory of Change fit the experience of people in your services?

THEORY OF CHANGE



5. APPLYING THE THEORY OF CHANGE IN PRACTICE

The Foyer Federation has used the Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change as part of its Foyer FOR Youth Accreditation process. It utilises it to gather evidence that Foyer services are effective and deliver the immediate outcomes (sense of belonging, financial capability, healthy eating, etc) that can reasonably predict that longer-term outcomes (tenancy sustainment, employment, health, etc) will follow.

As part of this Accreditation scheme, Foyers are required to collect performance data to show how young people leaving the Foyer progress distance travelled measures under each seven thematic areas from the theory of change. Insights from this are considered in more detail in Chapter Four and contribute to the evidence base for Advantaged Thinking outlined here. Experience of operating the scheme's data requirements clearly identifies that services can take steps to collect this data, and that the process of reflecting on this gives services a better understanding of their performance and development opportunities.

In 'An Asset-based Approach to Theory of Change' (2017) (p.5), Stuart and Hillman note:

"Foyers are frequently part of Housing Associations, and as such are measured on housing management key performance indicators such as voids and arrears. Even those Foyers who are independent of Housing Associations still have a housing management task. But Foyers are also youth development organisations and need a set of measures that reflect this. By measuring the right outcomes – the ones that we know make a difference and that we know young people value – there is more likelihood that Foyers will deliver the right things to enable young people to make a successful transition into adulthood.

"It is a truism within our sector that 'what gets measured gets done'. This is frequently used as a criticism: that due to pressures from funders, government and elsewhere we spend too much time measuring the wrong things and that therefore we end up doing the wrong things. Our approach to the theory of change is our way of ensuring that we are measuring the things that we, and young people, truly value about our work."

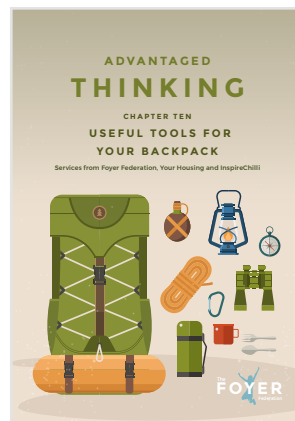
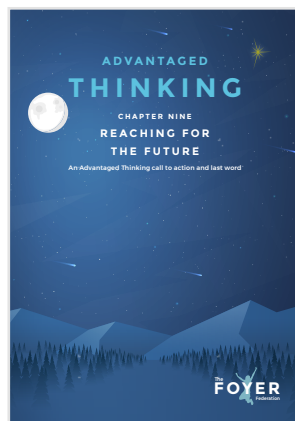
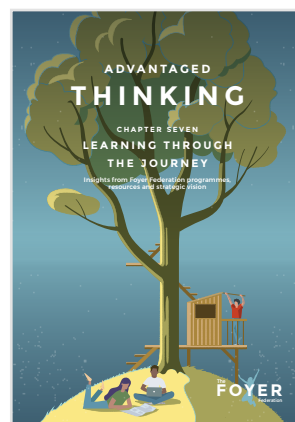
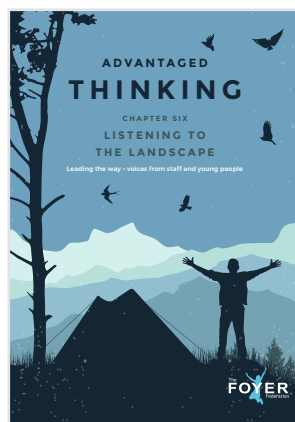
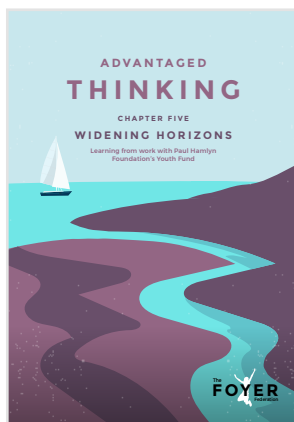
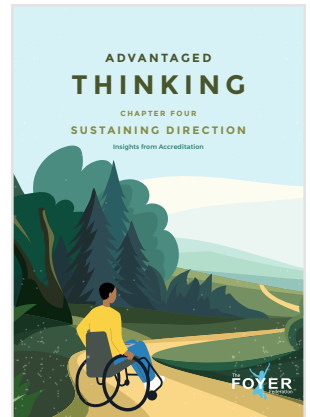
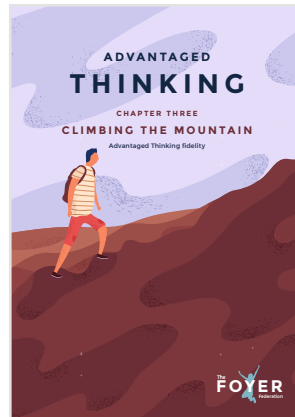
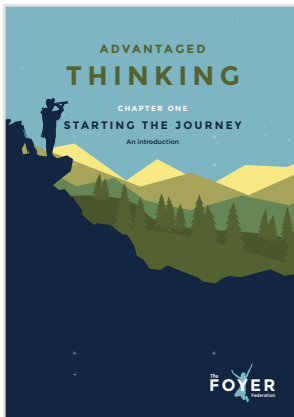
The approach to the theory of change described is an Advantaged Thinking one.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Do you agree that, in measuring the right outcomes, there is more likelihood your services will deliver the right things to enable people to achieve?
- Q2** How might you use the Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change to ensure you are measuring the things of most value for people from your work?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by:

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER THREE

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

Advantaged Thinking fidelity



CHAPTER THREE

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

“Advantaged Thinking is like climbing a mountain range. The 7 Tests offer us guide ropes for the climb; to which the practice principles developed with the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence offer secure footholds for ascent. At the summit lies the opportunity to reflect on learning and future destinations, which Fidelity Standards support.”

Colin Falconer, InspireChilli

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

ADVANTAGED THINKING FIDELITY

CONTENTS

1. Background insights	2
2. Practice principles to the 7 Tests	4
3. Fidelity standards for assessment	13
4. Fidelity for young people	16

Each section includes two 'Taking Action' questions to help you to reflect on insights.

1. BACKGROUND INSIGHTS

The Foyer Federation realised that there was often a difference between the ambition to be Advantaged Thinking and the actual practice of organisations that sometimes remained stuck in deficit-based policies and systems. The Federation's experience of safeguarding the Foyer ethos naturally lent itself to developing safeguards to differentiate between what was Advantaged and Disadvantaged Thinking, with a focus on promoting development of the skills, behaviours and practices that ensure the former.

This can be described as an emphasis on 'fidelity' – to ensure Advantaged Thinking is being fully actualised in the context of a service's leadership or delivery. Fidelity, as the Cambridge Dictionary describes, refers to "the degree to which a copy of something shows the true character of the original." This can be understood in terms of being true to the spirit and intentions of Advantaged Thinking and evidencing how Advantaged Thinking is actualised.

Fidelity for Advantaged Thinking is interested in ensuring that organisations:

1. Understand how to apply the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking in practice
2. Can express and promote Advantaged Thinking to others
3. Identify both strengths and areas for ongoing development
4. Take action to sustain and progress Advantaged Thinking impact
5. Embed a high-quality, aspirational service culture to lead Advantaged Thinking

Typically, the focus has been on training staff to understand and reflect on the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking and develop Advantaged Thinking action plans for their services. These are core Foyer Federation products for training, reflective practice and staff recruitment. They are also part of the Foyer FOR Youth quality assurance programme, which additionally includes a process for services to audit Advantaged Thinking in their practice, identify development goals, begin to apply Advantaged Thinking to policies and procedures, and collect appropriate performance data through the Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change.

Advances in fidelity work include a stronger focus on Advantaged Thinking quality as a distinct standard within the new Australian Foyer Foundation Accreditation Framework, devised by the Foyer Foundation Australia with Colin Falconer in 2020. The framework identifies Advantaged Thinking as its first quality standard area. In terms of fidelity, services are asked to evidence the application of Advantaged Thinking across their delivery offer, with staff able to reflect on and express the philosophy in their practice. A strong service is expected to show active youth involvement and ongoing development of Advantaged Thinking in future service plans. The standard includes expectations that young people feel trusted and believed in, and that their talents, goals and aspirations are fully invested in. Alongside this, it is expected that policies and procedures are in place that promote Advantaged Thinking, and that supporting performance data is evidenced.

Falconer also worked with Diane Brown through the Brotherhood of St Laurence to produce the 'Advantaged Thinking Programme Framework' (2020), which offered an additional set of practice principles to help segment each of the 7 Tests into more detailed signposts. These principles are shared in full below. Falconer has continued to work with the Foyer Federation and other interested parties in Ireland and Australia on a higher set of fidelity questions to assess how far services have reached in their Advantaged Thinking journey. These are explained further in section 3.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Why might you be interested in reflecting on your Advantaged Thinking fidelity?
- Q2 What do you see as the main challenges to achieve fidelity across your services?

2. PRACTICE PRINCIPLES TO THE 7 TESTS

The practice principles are shared below from pages 23-33 of the 'Advantaged Thinking Programme Framework' (2020). The publication includes signposts to recommended policies and procedures where these principles could be evidenced for further fidelity assessment.

Test 1 – How you talk about people

Practical Principles



1. Amplify strengths

Use positive language to describe and amplify people's abilities, potential and value. Positive language should be at least in balance with descriptions of need and challenge. If you are more used to describing needs, invest in growing the other side of your vocabulary.

Use opportunities to reinforce people's strengths. Do you talk enough about what people can do?

2. Use affirmative language

Make conscious use of words, imagery, titles and signage that reinforce positive identity, belief and wellbeing in connection with service participants. Avoid using descriptions with negative connotations, e.g. 'basic skills lessons', 'remedial bootcamp', 'tenancy compliance manager', etc. Harness insights from positive psychology and advertising about the impact of language and imagery on how we think and feel. Services with bare walls and warning signs do not reinforce positive aspirations. Those that use affirmative statements and images are more likely to encourage beneficial responses.

Look at how your organisation presents itself and describes things. Does it match an Advantaged Thinking approach? Do job titles for staff reflect what they positively offer to participants?

3. Disrupt labels

Be careful not to stereotype people under a descriptive label, however well-meaning and 'useful' the label is deemed. People might have experienced or be experiencing forms of disadvantage, but that does not mean they should be labelled through a 'disadvantaged person' stereotype. It is better to identify people as experiencing things such as homelessness rather than branding them as 'homeless people'. This approach also applies to stigmatising people under acronyms such as NEETs. Either spell out the phrase in full or subvert it, such as turning NEETs into 'people with talent but not the right options'.

Similarly, limit the 'tagging' of people with negative associations. People might need to be referred to in terms of their vulnerability or risk at times, but that does not mean they should always be tagged as 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' whenever you describe them. Watch out for how many times descriptors of the people you work with use a negative tag and try to limit them or offer other positive tags to keep a balanced perspective. Be mindful of where and when you need to tag, and the potential power of shifting the tag's position, e.g. 'we work with young people aged 15-24, who are talented but at risk'.



Test 2 – How you understand people

Practical Principles



1. Identify strengths

Use approaches to assessment – from entry to the service and ongoing progress to exit from the service – that balance an understanding of deficits and challenges together with current and potential assets. The longer a person is in a service, the more assessments should be able to support an understanding of how people are harnessing and growing their different abilities and resources. It is important that a service has a set of appropriate tools and processes for people to identify strengths.

2. Harness storytelling

Maximise opportunities and mechanisms to record people's first-hand stories. While capturing stories for 'case studies' (or better still, 'star stories') can be useful for service promotion, personal narratives also offer a powerful tool for understanding individuals and reflecting on service impact. They are a rich source for understanding people's lived experience. Stories should be encouraged to offer balanced Advantaged Thinking insights in terms of their language and understanding, alongside more quantitative measures.

3. Track growth

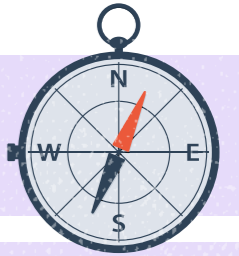
Ensure outcome and impact measures do more than just preventing or responding to needs and challenges. Referencing the identification, development and achievement of specific qualities, abilities, experiences and resources will reflect an asset-based service offer. Key performance indicators should always include at least one measure explicitly focused on the growth of relevant strengths.

Similarly, impact narratives and reports should include a positive focus on growth alongside attention to overcoming needs and challenges. This includes looking for ways to learn from longer-term impacts on growth, where possible.

If a service has a theory of change (or other logic impact model) it should be shaped through an Advantaged Thinking focus to understand the highly personalised and variable transitions that characterise participant journeys.

Test 3 – How do you work with people?

Practical Principles



1. Develop strengths

Encourage people to develop their interests, talents and ambitions. This means encouraging staff and participants to recognise, utilise and progress their own skills and interests as a tool for support and development. Staff should be able to promote personal development through their own engagement with learning. Taking this approach can help stimulate people's activity and aspirations.

2. Asset-proof processes

Develop the internal 'know-how' to work with people in an Advantaged Thinking way through organisational approaches to people management. This means that staff should be supported and developed through positive person-centred supervision, appraisal and management systems. This will enable them to live out Advantaged Thinking in their everyday practice, and utilise appropriate training to build their expertise, and processes that reflect an Advantaged Thinking approach.

3. Collaborate

Harness wider networks of partners, services and support to offer additional expertise and resources. Organisations should be connected locally (and nationally) to collaborate with partners who can assist people's support and development goals. Establishing strong collaborative relationships is the natural style of an asset-based organisation. Encouraging participants to grow their own collaborative networks is also an important route to sustaining outcomes.

4. Be person-centred

Tailor support and development to the context, preferences, needs and goals of individuals. Staff should be able to work with an individual to find the right approach that will help them cope with challenges, make progress, and grow opportunities. Staff should be equipped to apply tools informed from coaching growth as well as supporting needs. This can mean an investment in coaching, youth engagement and strengths-based practice approaches, as much as trauma informed, psychologically informed and other models of support.

Being person-centred also means building strong relationships that nurture confidence and trust. This may refer to ensuring physical space is designed to encourage social contact, being aware of how language, rules and processes can boost or hinder relationships, or simply providing sufficient time and access for people to connect.

Test 4 – How do you invest in people?



Practical Principles

1. Validate strengths

Validate people's achievements and experiences in ways that they and others will understand and value. Provide opportunities for external recognition, life experience, the acquisition of useful skills and awards, and systems to record and reflect on achievements. Validation includes the use of formal and informal awards, the development of skill and experience profiles, as well as boosting the confidence of individuals to recognise and promote their own value to others.

2. Personalise opportunities

Promote personalised investments that are shaped to and by the individual. This includes the use of personal budgets, access to finance, opportunities, and other resources; the flexibility to tailor offers; and other approaches that fit the needs and goals of the individual. Opportunities should always be holistic in nature, or at the least aware of the connections between people's housing, health, finances, social networks, personal skills, attitudes, education, training and employment.

3. Embrace risks

In addition to systems for identifying and minimising negative risks, be able to assess and harness risks as development opportunities. This includes formal governance and management approaches to risk, as well as encouragement for the intelligent use of available resources to achieve impact. Staff should be encouraged to manage risk processes and service budgets with a degree of creative flexibility.

4. Focus towards thriving

Ensure a balance between investments that help people cope with challenges, and investments in the skills and resources that will enable individuals to adapt and progress towards a more flourishing and sustainable life. This is based on an understanding of the Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder and the need for experiences that will help people adapt through periods of transition and change. Even when people are in stages where they are coping with problems, the support approach should also invest ahead to the future goal where they will one day thrive.

Test 5 – How do you believe in people?



Practical Principles

1. Promote aspirations

Promote aspirations through a focus on positive goals, small achievements, and opportunities to increase social mobility. This should be reflected in the use of assessment tools, support, guidance and provision with different types of outcomes and destinations; the use of coaching and other approaches that progress aspirations to achieve; and the positive attitudes and values that staff express through their practice. Opportunities to help promote aspirations can vary between informal conversations, rewards schemes, newsletters, posters and displays, meeting agendas, systems to share outcomes, and external communications or events.

2. Ensure high standards

Use quality standards and systems to ensure that high aspirations are reflected in the presentation and upkeep of the physical environment, the professional training and resources afforded to staff, the inspiring nature and value of opportunities offered, as well as through the quality of any partners and/or resources accessible to participants. Operationally, this means making sure that details such as building maintenance meet the same expectations for quality as the rest of the service (see Places in the 5 Key Practice Areas resources).

3. Nurture trust

Emphasis on positive identity and potential should be matched by levels of trust invested in individuals. This includes offering opportunities (e.g. through learning, involvement and support activities) for participants to take positive risks, have increased responsibility, learn through failure as well as success, and experience being trusted and trusting others. A strong currency of trust also stems from the organisational culture through which staff operate, including their own experiences of being trusted within systems of management and control.

4. Sustain consistency

Expressing positive belief in the face of challenges and conflict requires strong levels of resilience among staff as much as participants. Staff investments in their own confidence building, support networks and, in particular, wellbeing, are essential to sustain a positive approach over time. Supervision and peer support can be used to safeguard staff belief levels, while leave days, external events and spaces for team reflection provide valuable opportunities to re-energise belief.

Test 6 – How do you involve people?

Practical Principles



1. Do with, not to

Build and maintain a culture in which participants' voice and experience matters – doing with people, not doing to people. This means that assessment, support and training provision should all be delivered in ways that encourage relational experiences and exchange, enabling power to be shared in ways that grow individual confidence, agency and control. Staff should be skilled at working in ways that encourage and challenge, allowing space for the individual to be involved in their own support.

2. Encourage engagement

Enable participants to engage in active co-design, collaboration, communication, peer support and service delivery opportunities. This includes investing in the additional resources and specialist expertise required to develop approaches in which participants have greater influence and responsibility. These approaches might be embedded into how programmes are shaped as well as their delivery. Social interaction and participation can also be stimulated through the design and presentation of places to encourage informal engagement activities, feedback and exchange (see Places in the 5 Key Practice Areas resources).

3. Develop representation

Create diverse opportunities for participants to be represented meaningfully at different levels of a programme, service, organisation, community and beyond. This includes informal roles, participation in activities and panels influencing service decisions, and more formal positions associated with an ambassador, representative, or trustee position. Invest in the resources required to sustain representation levels that keep up with changes and transitions.

4. Actively listen

Develop ways to capture participant insights and feelings through formal and informal feedback channels which are respected, recorded and acted on transparently. Feedback should not be left just to a suggestions box or annual review but embedded into various approaches so that decisions at different levels always include the voice of participants. This includes the use of creative activities to encourage different voices, along with spaces in team meetings and service processes to both reflect on what has been heard and to report back on actions taken.

Test 7 – How do you challenge yourself and others?

Practical Principles



1. Celebrate success

Be conscious about celebrating examples of understanding, belief, investment and involvement that promote Advantaged Thinking messages and voices. Use communication channels as a way to advance positive influence and embody the principles that underpin the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking.

2. Mobilise networks

Mobilise links with related campaigns, movements, advocates and supporters. This includes mapping potential asset sources within a network or community and developing the means to reach out, add to and involve these as part of a campaign to advance Advantaged Thinking. It also means collaborating with existing campaigns and getting involved in local or national opportunities to build connections and support.

3. Build capacity

Support the capacity of staff, participants and partners to reflect on and promote Advantaged Thinking in ways that challenge themselves and others. This means a focus on bringing the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking to life and keeping them in the foreground of daily activity, offering appropriate training to express and develop Advantaged Thinking insights and behaviours, and encouraging space for reflection and action to advance Advantaged Thinking.

4. Influence change

Target activity to help shape systems, policies and approaches that could positively impact on the lives of participants and the quality of their services. This includes identifying areas of greatest influence on participants and seeking ways to shape these, such as access to specific services, discrimination, or impacts on wellbeing and employability.

Get involved in policy consultations and external groups as part of a coherent influencing strategy. Include a potential campaign/influence focus in any relevant opportunities for participants – particularly those opportunities that feature communication and promotional activity, bring people and communities together, and/or encourage participants to develop projects in the community.

The 7 Tests and practice principles offer an initial map for reflecting on and progressing Advantaged Thinking fidelity, as presented in the table below from 'The Advantaged Thinking Programme Framework' (2020).

	1	2	3	4
Test 1 How you TALK	Amplify strengths	Use affirmative language	Disrupt labels	
Test 2 How you UNDERSTAND	Identify strengths	Harness storytelling	Track growth	
Test 3 How you WORK	Develop strengths	Asset-proof processes	Collaborate	Be person-centred
Test 4 How you INVEST	Validate strengths	Personalise opportunities	Embrace risks	Focus towards
Test 5 How you BELIEVE	Promote aspirations	Ensure high standards	Nurture trust	Encourage engagement
Test 6 How you INVOLVE	Do with, not to	Encourage engagement	Develop representation	Actively listen
Test 7 How you CHALLENGE	Celebrate success	Mobilise networks	Build capacity	Influence change

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1. Which practice principles excite and challenge you most?
- Q2. How could you make use of the practice principles to improve Advantaged Thinking fidelity in your services?

3. FIDELITY STANDARDS FOR ASSESSMENT

Based on 10 years of working with services seeking to progress Advantaged Thinking approaches in the UK, Netherlands and Australia, InspireChilli has sought to draw from learning on what works to introduce a sophisticated fidelity model called the Triple A Lens.

The lens is focused on how and where to review Advantaged Thinking, exploring how the Ambition and Awareness of organisations connect with their Activity. This is presented as a model based on three powerful quality questions, with a series of 30 evidence indicators to help organisations to reflect on their answers. The logic presented in the model is based on the following learning points:

1. The relationship between ambition and activity is important to understanding.

The ambition of an organisation to be Advantaged Thinking does not necessarily mean that the practical activity of the organisation will always reflect this – yet the activity is also unlikely to be able to progress Advantaged Thinking without that ambition first being in place.

2. Ambition depends on a deeper awareness that develops through activity.

The awareness an organisation has of how to develop Advantaged Thinking is the strongest indicator that it will be able to sustain current practices and achieve its ambition in the longer-term. This awareness is only likely to be gained though through practical engagement in activity opportunities.

3. Advantaged Thinking leadership requires balance between all three lenses.

The elements of ambition, activity and awareness require an organisation to be finely balanced between the present and the future; the internal and the external; the cultural, operational and strategic; and the investment in both staff and service participants. This balance is fundamental to Advantaged Thinking leadership.

4. Fidelity forms part of an organisation's drive to learn and develop.

The lens is likely to prove most useful as a tool to encourage organisations to learn about and invest in their ongoing development. Fidelity is reflected in an organisation's ambition and ability to do so, and the evidence of this in practice.

5. Advantaged Thinking consistency and sustainability requires all three lenses.

The ultimate logic of the model is that the consistency and sustainability needed to achieve Advantaged Thinking impact is dependent on an organisation demonstrating that the ambition, activity and awareness to be Advantaged Thinking is part of their DNA. While all three lenses are mutually dependent, awareness has the highest value.

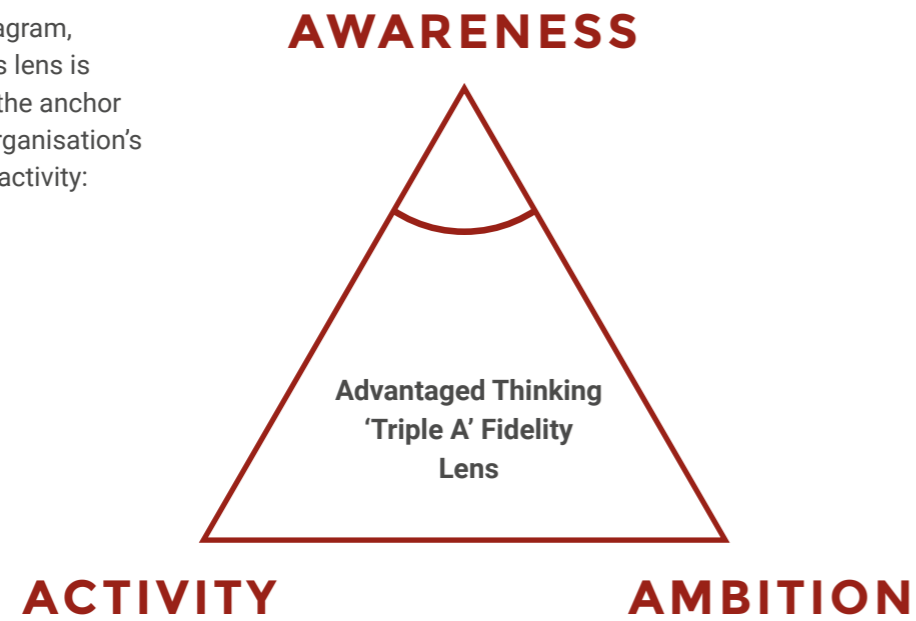
6. Any assessment systems should be weighted towards awareness.

For funders and commissioners: contract approaches, including performance and quality assessment, should be weighted towards a focus on the awareness lens, both in terms of expectations for compliance and organisational behaviours. This is the strongest indicator of an organisation's ability to achieve and sustain fidelity.

7. Assessment is best undertaken through a community of practice.

Assessment of fidelity is best undertaken through a self-inspection process – which should be moderated through guided peer conversations and evidence sharing as part of an Advantaged Thinking community of practice – rather than through a set of formal compliance measures. Such conversations are more likely to increase an organisation's quality of ambition and awareness. This lends itself to the 'Home for Advantaged Thinking' strategy established by the Foyer Federation.

As a visual diagram, the awareness lens is presented as the anchor point for an organisation's ambition and activity:



The Triple A Lens fidelity questions and evidence indicators

The following set of three questions and 30 evidence indicators provide the foundations for a framework to reflect on, develop and learn from Advantaged Thinking fidelity.



AWARENESS

Does the organisation show an awareness of how to 'be' Advantaged Thinking?

This should be reflected in evidence that the organisation has:

1. Put in place a quality development plan to advance Advantaged Thinking
2. Continued to involve the people it works with to develop this plan
3. Undertaken reflective practice and evaluative impact research to inform this plan
4. Involved external stakeholder feedback in shaping this plan
5. Established how to monitor and track the plan as a living process
6. Identified concrete opportunities to celebrate Advantaged Thinking
7. Identified concrete opportunities to strengthen Advantaged Thinking
8. Identified concrete opportunities to partner with other Advantaged Thinkers
9. Identified concrete opportunities to influence others to be Advantaged Thinking
10. Ensured the plan fully supports the organisation's ambition and activity

ACTIVITY

Does the organisation show authentic examples of Advantaged Thinking in practice?

This should be reflected in evidence that the organisation has:

1. Equipped staff as Advantaged Thinking champions and practitioners
2. Embraced the development of Advantaged Thinking leadership
3. Embedded Advantaged Thinking into policies and procedures
4. Introduced practice tools that promote an Advantaged Thinking approach
5. Developed programmes that work with people in an Advantaged Thinking way
6. Involved the people it works with to shape how activity is developed and run
7. Enabled the people it works with to apply Advantaged Thinking in their own lives
8. Been able to introduce and test new Advantaged Thinking activity
9. Been able to grow and sustain Advantaged Thinking activity
10. Collected Advantaged Thinking outcomes and stories from activity

AMBITION

Does the organisation show authentic ambition to be Advantaged Thinking?

This should be reflected in evidence that the organisation has:

1. Aligned its vision and values with Advantaged Thinking
2. Integrated Advantaged Thinking within its strategic planning processes
3. Demonstrated genuine commitment to Advantaged Thinking, from trustees to staff
4. Created a culture which fully believes in people's strengths and potential
5. Promoted Advantaged Thinking internally and externally with consistent language
6. Been prepared to influence and challenge others to be Advantaged Thinking
7. Involved the people it works with to shape how its ambition is realised
8. Matched its ambition with appropriate investment of available resources
9. Begun to create an evidence base for Advantaged Thinking impact
10. Embraced quality development processes to advance Advantaged Thinking

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1. Do the seven logic points that underpin the lens reflect your experience?
- Q2. Can you see how you could develop Advantaged Thinking fidelity through the lens?

4. FIDELITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The above sections consider fidelity from the perspective of a decision maker or practitioner. But how does a service participant experience fidelity? What fidelity questions should we focus on to involve people using services to assess their effectiveness?

InspireChilli identified a set of 12 questions with young people to encourage Foyers in Australia to seek feedback as part of the Foyer Foundation Accreditation Framework (2020). An updated, more generic version of these questions and basic assessment measures are shared below. They follow key evidence areas for an Advantaged Thinking approach that range from feelings of trust to the positivity of the environment, the ability to achieve meaningful goals, relationships with staff, and influencing how the service works.

Question 12 acts as a form of net promoter score, which offers a simple way of comparing services for potential benchmarking. An Advantaged Thinking service should aspire to have a net promoter score of 70 – 100 (the score being the total % who recommended the service minus the numbers who did not recommend the service).

Commissioners, funders and service leaders should always seek to involve service participants in any measure of service fidelity. This is reflected in indicators seven (ambition), six (activity) and two (awareness) of the Triple A Lens model above.

Survey for people using an Advantaged Thinking service

Q1: Do staff trust, believe in and encourage your potential?

Agree Disagree Unsure

Q2: Does the service help you to develop yourself?

Yes No Unsure

Q3: Do you feel safe and at home in the service?

Yes No Unsure

Q4: Does the service offer a positive, friendly environment?

Yes No Unsure

Q5: Can you choose and work on the goals that matter most to you?

Yes No Unsure

Q6: Do you understand and value what the service offers you?

Yes No Unsure

Q7: Do staff give you the right information and support when you need it?

Yes No Unsure

Q8: Are staff available at times that suit you?

Yes No Unsure

Q9: Does the service do enough to encourage you to get involved in any external opportunities?

Yes No Unsure

Q10: Can you influence how the service works with you?

Yes No Unsure

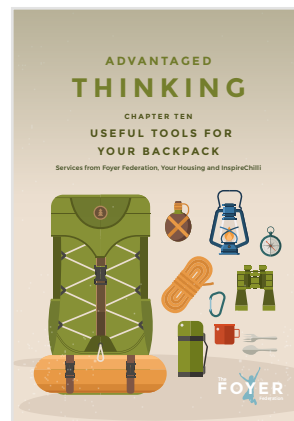
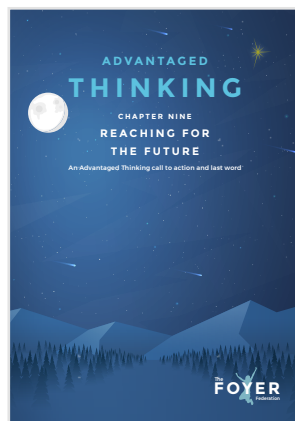
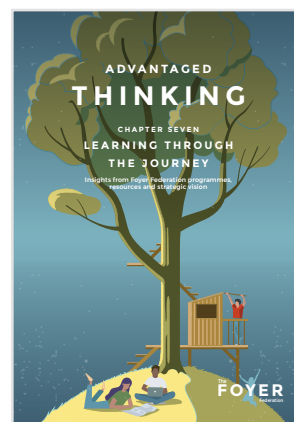
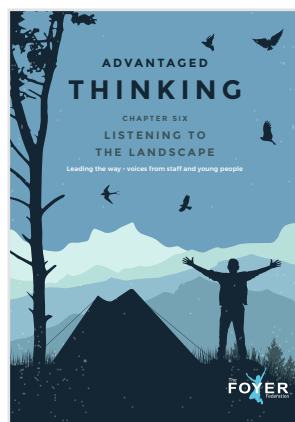
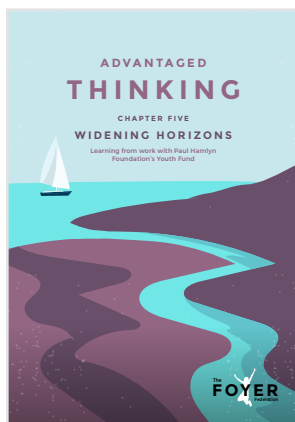
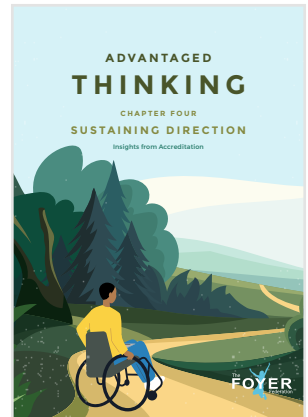
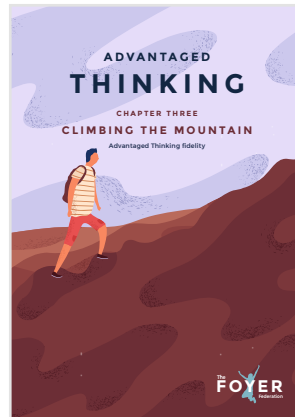
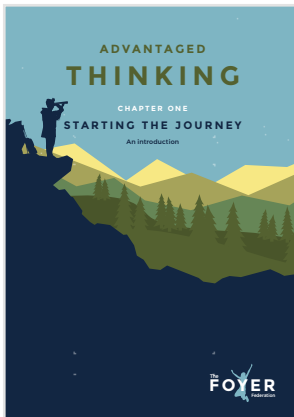
Q11: Do you think the service always listens to young people and tries to achieve the right things for you?

Yes No Unsure

Q12: Would you recommend the service to other young people?

Yes No Unsure

Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by:

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER FOUR SUSTAINING DIRECTION

Insights from Accreditation



CHAPTER FOUR

SUSTAINING DIRECTION

“Taking this time to reflect ... as a team has been a real positive as it allowed us to recognise that we still have achieved a lot and have some real success stories when it comes to young people’s achievements. We have not merely ‘survived’ through COVID as a service.”

Coops Foyer FOR Youth review, 2021

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

INSIGHTS FROM ACCREDITATION

CONTENTS

1. Using Advantaged Thinking in service Accreditation	2
2. Encouraging young people and staff to respond together to Advantaged Thinking	4
3. Insights from the Foyer Federation’s FOR Youth experience	7
4. Impact trends from Advantaged Thinking data	12

Each section includes two ‘Taking Action’ questions to help you to reflect on insights.

1. USING ADVANTAGED THINKING IN SERVICE ACCREDITATION

The Foyer Federation redeveloped its existing Foyer Accreditation Scheme into the current FOR Youth framework over 2015-16, with the new scheme piloted in both Australia and the UK in 2016-17. It was essential for Advantaged Thinking to be cemented as the core ethos from which services reflect on and assess the quality of their provision. Thus, rather than Advantaged Thinking being a separate module in the scheme, it was integrated throughout FOR Youth in terms of the expectations for a service's vision, values, resources, support approach, holistic offer, impact and data collection processes.

To support services to understand these expectations, the scheme introduced an initial audit tool in the first three months of the process. This enables services to explore and reflect on the relevant Advantaged Thinking Test areas and show commitment to progress priorities in these over the Accreditation timescale.

The audit is based around encouraging services to:

- Select Advantaged Thinking test areas that have most relevance to the context of the service
- Identify positive examples in each test area, along with actions to be taken to promote these positives internally or externally
- Identify challenges that require further investment, along with any actions to be taken to progress these over the course of the Accreditation process

Based on these findings, services are asked to prioritise up to three key actions to achieve the greatest impact, explaining the rationale for their choice and what they hope to have achieved by their final validation visit at the end of the Accreditation process.

The pilot of the FOR Youth process showed that services benefited from the audit tool as a way to re-energise their Advantaged Thinking intent, improve consistency in knowledge and approach, and embed Advantaged Thinking more sustainably for the future. The audit brought staff together and, through its focus on Test Six, encouraged meaningful conversations with young people over their involvement in the service and understanding of the offer available to them. While some services found the online assessment and written materials adequate to complete the audit process, others required more detailed Advantaged Thinking training sessions to ensure a consistent level of understanding across staff teams involved.



The three top findings from the audit tool were as follows:

1. The audit was designed to be completed in a short period of 12 weeks. However, several services quickly began to act on themes emerging from their audit – which in some cases prevented them from submitting the actual documentation until much later than intended. This demonstrated how a focus on Advantaged Thinking produces increased energy and interest to progress service improvement.
2. There was often an inclination in services to begin their audit conversation with what was going wrong rather than what was going right. This shift to the positive was an important nudge in the audit tool to encourage services to approach their improvement from a more balanced perspective. It is particularly important given that some of the solutions to challenges can lie in promoting and scaling practice elements that are more Advantaged Thinking than others. The most Advantaged Thinking services typically prove to be those that are better able to identify a balanced range of positives to celebrate and challenges to address.
3. Services found the audit a useful tool to stimulate conversations between different staff roles and teams, and to begin to challenge any management assumptions by exploring deeper feedback from young people and staff on practice areas associated with the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking. This often resulted in Advantaged Thinking becoming a regular conversation item in team and resident meetings.

It is important to note that the intention of the audit tool is to engage services in reflecting on themselves in an Advantaged Thinking way – not to promote use of the phrase as just another label without any meaning. Advantaged Thinking resides in the quality of service reflection and action taken to develop a service offer for and with young people. What matters in Advantaged Thinking is not whether people can identify its benefits as a phrase, but whether they believe staff are working with, not doing to, people; whether people feel their goals are invested in; whether people feel their strengths, identity and experiences are fully understood by staff; whether people are involved in how the service works and have the ability to shape it. While the Accreditation process expects people to understand Advantaged Thinking, it is rarely asked about directly in assessment interviews – rather, it is indirectly referenced and identified through evidence that expresses the 7 Tests in practice.

The Advantaged Thinking audit tool may be accessed through the Foyer Federation's FOR Youth framework product.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** How would you introduce an Advantaged Thinking audit of your service?
- Q2** Are there any positive areas of Advantaged Thinking practice in your service that could be promoted and scaled further to have a wider impact?

2. ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAFF TO ENGAGE IN ADVANTAGED THINKING

As part of the FOR Youth Accreditation process, services are encouraged to engage young people and staff in exploring and expressing Advantaged Thinking through their shared talents and experiences. In 2017, Colin Falconer of InspireChilli designed an activity tool to help services stimulate initial ideas for engagement by identifying a project and/or discussion area that could involve young people and staff in the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking.

To get started, it was recommended that a service undertaking FOR Youth Accreditation should produce a visual display for Advantaged Thinking featuring relevant experiences, words and images that illustrate the 7 Tests. Ideally this would be a shared activity with staff and young people. The aim of the display was to bring Advantaged Thinking to life, inspire shared understanding and spark future discussion and project ideas.



TEST ONE (TALK)

Services were encouraged to review their use of language through information, referral leaflets, posters and images to note how they express a positive message – both to and about young people. They were asked questions like ‘How much positive vs negative language is there?’, ‘What would young people change or add?’, ‘If young people had a section of a service wall or noticeboard, what would they put on it to talk about something important to them?’, ‘Is there anything positive young people wish they had known about the service in a referral leaflet before they moved in?’, and ‘Do staff make enough statements that promote young people’s positives?’.

TEST TWO (UNDERSTAND)

Services were encouraged to explore and promote the use of storytelling as a way to understand life experiences, achievement and identity. This could include poetry, music, public speaking, art, diaries, scrapbooks and mood boards, blogs and vlogs, photography, short films, conversations and interviews, or any other form of expression that helps young people articulate an aspect of their story in a positive way that can be shared (at least internally) through a publication, story wall or celebration event.

TEST THREE (WORK WITH)

Services were encouraged to explore the qualities that young people value most in staff by considering the following questions:

- What skills and approaches matter most to young people?
- What does the ideal staff member and team look like for young people?
- What should staff be like and be able to do on a regular basis?

Services were also prompted to work with young people to create a list of best-practice pointers to be used in staff recruitment, induction and training, and to consider how 1-1 support work approaches and plans could be improved from a young person’s perspective.

TEST FOUR (INVEST IN)

Services were encouraged to explore how young people would like to invest any available resources to improve the offer within the service, including considering what young people and staff could do together to develop the service offer using their collective skills and interests.

TEST FIVE (BELIEVE IN)

Services were encouraged to explore how young people’s dreams, hopes, goals and achievements can be captured and expressed through art, writing, music, photography, mood boards, an achievement board, tree or display in a way that helps to promote and share that young people have aspirations that the service believes in.

TEST SIX (INVOLVE)

Services were encouraged to explore the types of involvement young people actually want. They did this by considering how the service can involve young people in decisions and developments through different forms of representation in house meetings, staff meetings, management meetings, a youth advisory group, or more interactive digital forms of communication. If an effective form of representation did not already exist, services were prompted to think how it could be established. If it did exist, services were challenged to think how it could be developed to achieve greater impact.

TEST SEVEN (CHALLENGE)

Services were encouraged to explore what campaign issues inspire young people most, and to ask young people to choose a social issue that matters to them – either influenced by the Tests or other areas of interest. From this, they were prompted to develop a simple way to promote this as a positive campaign in the service, housing association and/or community, connecting with any existing local or national campaigns to help shape the project where appropriate.

Any of these exploration activities can be used to help capture insights for the FOR Youth Accreditation Advantaged Thinking audit, related areas in the deeper Accreditation assessment process, or simply to bring Advantaged Thinking to life in a way that adds value to a service's culture and relationships.

Young people's interests in the topics that define the Test areas often differ widely between services depending on what is current in their lives – whether that is a particular challenge young people are experiencing in the service or local community, or a broader social theme. The important thing is to invest in opening up channels of conversation and building relationships of trust, as well as ensuring that any promises to listen are acted on quickly.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which test area do you think is most likely to engage people in your service?
- Q2 How might you develop the suggested idea for that test area into a positive activity?

3. INSIGHTS ON EMBEDDING ADVANTAGED THINKING

The Foyer experience suggests that asset-based working is best achieved through a whole-system approach, whereby organisations offer the culture and support that equips staff to work in an asset-based way. The following 10 examples have been identified from Foyers progressing through FOR Youth Accreditation as the top practical ways to help embed and sustain a consistent Advantaged Thinking system and culture for staff to operate within.

1. RECRUITMENT

Are your recruitment processes set up to find talented staff with the commitment and passion to work in an Advantaged Thinking way?

Ensuring a service has the right staff, fully committed to working in an Advantaged Thinking way, is essential to building a consistent foundation for practice to grow. However, services must often introduce Advantaged Thinking into teams containing some staff who are comfortable working in traditional, deficit-based ways. This means there may be a period of adjustment for any staff less committed to move on from the service.

It is essential to ensure that any future recruitment practices use an Advantaged Thinking approach, from the advertisement and role description through to the interview process. This helps to attract the best talent into the service – and those most equipped to work in an Advantaged Thinking way. HR practices should be a focus for early investment to make sure that Advantaged Thinking is built into future recruitment processes.

2. TRAINING AND INDUCTION

Do your training and induction processes invest in equipping staff with the skills they need to work in an Advantaged Thinking way?

In line with recruitment, the next critical phase for any new staff will be their experience of induction, which is the logical place for people to begin to deepen their appreciation for Advantaged Thinking if the induction process foregrounds this and makes it as key an expectation for knowledge as safeguarding will naturally be.

Advantaged Thinking should be a core component in the organisation's training offer for staff, enabling staff to refresh and challenge their practice. This might mean a combination of trainings to introduce the concept and 7 Tests, alongside training in specialist areas of coaching and co-production.



3. STAFF TITLES

Do your staff roles have titles that promote an Advantaged Thinking approach?

When recruiting for new staff and developing an Advantaged Thinking team, some purposeful thought should be given to the use of role titles. This can be an opportunity to signal a break in convention from transactional roles such as Case Managers to more relational titles such as Coaches. Wherever possible, job titles should consider how the people accessing support from those roles will experience the choice of language, keeping in mind any barriers from negative association or the impact of the title on a positive, trusting relationship. This should be just as important a factor as considering how the role title will be understood and valued by external stakeholders.

4. TEAM MEETINGS AND STAFF SUPERVISION PROCESSES

Do team meetings and supervision processes encourage Advantaged Thinking conversations?

Team meetings and staff supervision offer a regular space for Advantaged Thinking conversations to be stimulated and kept alive. This can be achieved by ensuring that every agenda and supervision session includes an item to reflect on, identify and celebrate Advantaged Thinking. Some teams encourage meetings to begin with a formal Advantaged Thinking sharing item, and others end with this as an opportunity to celebrate positive achievements and wins. Supervisions might include a question that explicitly challenges staff to reflect on Advantaged Thinking learning using the 7 Tests as a frame of reference.

5. STAFF AND LEADERSHIP CHAMPIONS

Do you have a team that champions Advantaged Thinking across all areas of the organisation, breaking through silos and power hierarchies?

Developing a team of champions for Advantaged Thinking is an excellent way to embed and sustain its presence across an organisation – particularly if champions are selected from different role levels and areas of responsibility. Champions offer an important driver to encourage and celebrate Advantaged Thinking, bringing together collective resources and expertise to lead progress. They help to ensure Advantaged Thinking resides in the fabric of the organisation, from the boardroom to the front desk. Champions come together to share learning experiences over the year, recognise impact and challenge each other using the framework of the 7 Tests as a guide for reflection.

6. BUILDING REFURBISHMENTS

Does the physical environment of your service express its Advantaged Thinking ambition?

It is a lot easier to deliver an Advantaged Thinking offer in a service where a positive environment expresses its vision. Staff working in ill-equipped cramped offices, young people in run-down communal lounges with broken equipment, or maintenance jobs left uncompleted for months on end does not provide a setting that shows authentic belief and investment in people. Investing in the look and feel of the building is likely to have a significant impact on the experience of the people who use it each day. The physical environment is where people see Advantaged Thinking come to life. The building has an important role to play in establishing a culture of Advantaged Thinking that people can see growing around them, whether this means the introduction of a psychologically informed environment plan, the redesign of functional space to increase positive engagement and social interaction, or simply increased attention to standards of presentation.



7. SUPPORT APPROACH

Do the tools you use to manage 1-1 support promote Advantaged Thinking conversations and relationships?

The best support documentation offers a framework that stimulates powerful conversations, facilitates ongoing learning, signposts practical actions, captures reflections, and features a process that fits the needs and goals of the person receiving support in a way they can influence. The worst models get in the way of the conversation, promote a transactional process over a personal relationship, and leave the person receiving it with limited say over their own words.

Checking that your support approach is right is just as important as investing in the building. It is, after all, the main tool by which people will be engaged in progressing their lives. Paperwork that is mostly negative and overformal can be used in an Advantaged Thinking way, but it is like walking in shoes that don't really fit your feet. It will slow everyone down. It is much better to ensure the support approach reflects an Advantaged Thinking focus on the key fundamentals of understanding, working with, investing, believing in and involving people. Services that take time to innovate in this area will secure a strong foundation to accelerate Advantaged Thinking growth.

8. SERVICE REVIEW

Do you have an annual process to learn from your experiences with Advantaged Thinking?

Introducing an annual review process has proven to be the most consistent recommendation made to new services going through Foyer Accreditation. By putting this in place, services can ensure there is dedicated space to reflect on and learn from Advantaged Thinking – picking up challenges before they become longer-term problems, celebrating achievements to promote good practice, and recognising pressures without letting them dictate service purpose. Too often, reviews are processes conducted by external forces that do not engage the whole service. But an Advantaged Thinking review seeks to involve everyone – both young people and staff – and provide another opportunity to engage and value every voice that has a stake in the service. Most importantly, it evidences a leadership that embraces learning. Self-learning is the most reliable way to sustain Advantaged Thinking.

9. SERVICE AUDIT

Are you able to review how far you meet the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking?

Services beginning Foyer Accreditation are supported to undertake an Advantaged Thinking audit to gauge themselves against the 7 Tests and begin to explore how these are, or can be, expressed through their practice. There is every reason to continue this audit conversation in ongoing years, particularly as staff teams change and operating environments adapt to external policy. The audit process provides an easy way to refresh perspectives and generate renewed energy for leading Advantaged Thinking.

10. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND CELEBRATION

Do you have a space for staff to reflect on and celebrate their experiences?

Time to reflect and celebrate can be seen as a luxury stretched services can't afford. But reflective practice sessions and opportunities to recognise and promote Advantaged Thinking stories help services withstand the pressures of operating within systems that demand deficit-based compliance. Those services that plan in sessions for reflection and celebration end up saving time through the positive energy and insight they generate. Tips for reflective practice include asking what good looks like for any topic or issue, identifying current energy levels to discuss what might increase them, treasuring insights from performance data and feedback stories, and using the 7 Tests to share inspiration examples. Foyers accredited through the Foyer Federation undertake an annual Accreditation review which encourages them to reflect on and celebrate achievements.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1. What areas might you need to prioritise to ensure Advantaged Thinking can be sustained in your service?
- Q2. How might you begin to implement any of the 10 examples above to support your priority areas?

4. IMPACT TRENDS FROM ADVANTAGED THINKING DATA

The following insights were generated from average scores taken from two years of benchmarking Accredited Foyers between 2019-2021, which includes one year working within the restrictions of the pandemic.

Positive progress impacts on 1,000 young people leaving Foyers after an average stay of 62 weeks across 2019-2021 were as follows:

Positive Progress	92%	86.5%	81.5%
	Personal Development	Financial Capability	Housing
	88%	82%	
	Social Skills	Health and Wellbeing	

Education

- 70%** of young people were not in education on entry
- 61.5%** progressed their education in Foyers
- 41%** started a new qualification, traineeship or apprenticeship
- 23.5%** were in education on exit (though many young people are likely to 'age out' of formal education during their time at the Foyer)
- 4%** progressed onto university or college

Employment

- 88%** of young people were not in employment on entry
- 48.5%** progressed their employability skills in Foyers
- 41%** took up work during their stay
- 15%** took up volunteering
- 26%** were in work on exit

Advantaged Thinking Foyers appear to have the most impact on young people's personal development – their ability to set and achieve goals, and to grow in confidence and agency – along with the social skills to connect with others and participate in a community.

Foyers have a bigger impact on educational progression than employability, though the total numbers in work are more than double on exit from a Foyer than on entry. This reflects both the stronger attention paid to learning opportunities and life skills in the Foyer offer, and the challenges posed by the impact of employment income on the affordability of rent without housing benefit. Some Foyers offer rental subsidy programmes to offset this challenge, which enables them to achieve 30% more young people taking up work during their stay.

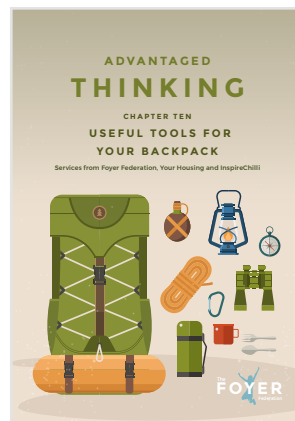
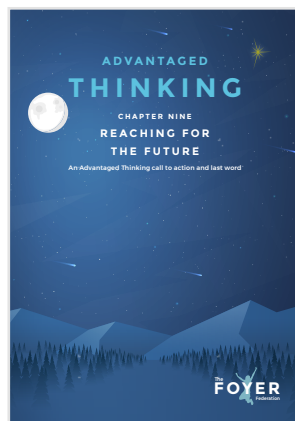
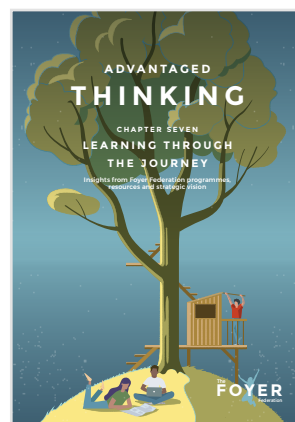
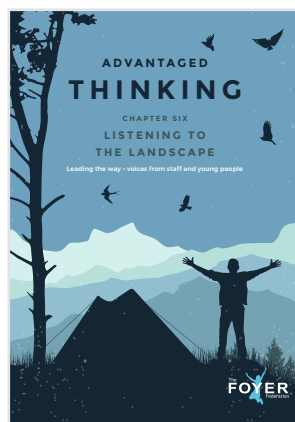
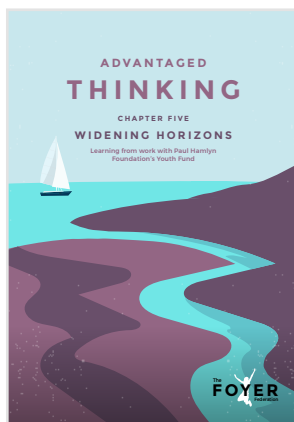
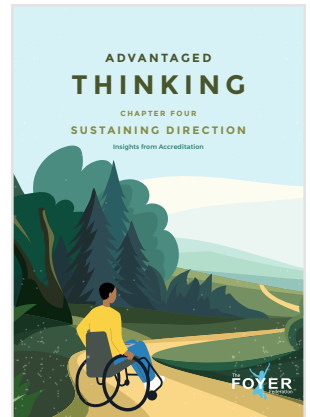
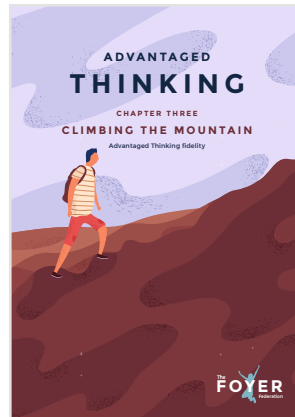
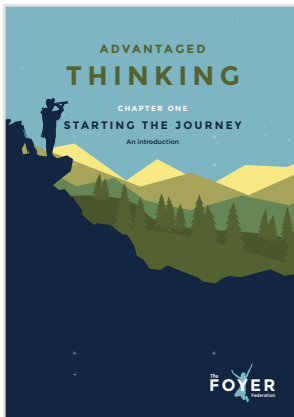
Taken together, these impacts support the view that Advantaged Thinking Foyers offer thriving places for young people to live, learn and work.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which areas would you like to achieve higher rates of impact in?
- Q2** Are there any investments you could introduce to help support young people's potential achievements?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by:

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER FIVE

WIDENING HORIZONS

Learning from work with Paul Hamlyn
Foundation's Youth Fund



CHAPTER FIVE WIDENING HORIZONS

“Sometimes the vision of our horizon has been set by our family, teachers, community or peers. Just like the real horizon, it is an imaginary line and not the limit of our potential – but it can be if we don’t know or believe that there is a world beyond the horizon.”

Paul Rogers, Northside Partnership

“We want people, not posters.
Meaning, not means-testing.
More love and trust instead of rules.”

Young people from InspireChilli research workshops

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

LEARNING FROM WORK WITH THE PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION’S YOUTH FUND

CONTENTS

1. Introducing asset-based approaches with people	2
2. What matters most for people using asset-based services	3
3. What matters for impact and evaluation	7
4. Taking action from asset-based learning	8
5. Relentless leadership for Advantaged Thinking	11

Each section includes two ‘Taking Action’ questions to help you to reflect on insights.

In this chapter, we share learning from Colin Falconer’s InspireChilli consultancy work supporting Paul Hamlyn Foundation’s Youth Fund between 2016-2019.

1. INTRODUCING ASSET-BASED APPROACHES WITH PEOPLE

In order to engage with asset-based approaches, people should ideally be introduced to, and experience the significance of, the following background concepts:

- A positive focus on creating opportunity and good
- Working with and promoting people's personal strengths
- Giving people greater control and influence over their life
- Growing community strengths, networks and relationships
- Bringing about changes that increase positive potential and perception
- Balancing understanding, language and approach between 'needs' and 'abilities'

InspireChilli designed workshops to explore these concepts by encouraging participants to respond to specific asset-based statements. Activities that produced the most responses from the young people involved in these workshops included:

- Prioritising asset-based statements in order of importance.
- Differentiating between statements an organisation performs strongly in, and those it performs less well in.
- Producing personal statements and explaining how these add to or improve any of the statements already provided for them to choose from.
- Advising a decision maker which three statement areas they should focus on in order to achieve the greatest benefit for young people.
- Scoring each statement for an organisation in terms of whether they agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or disagree, noting where and how the organisation can improve.
- Illustrating a statement using any creative form of expression that captures ideas, feelings and experiences in response.

Such asset-based statements can easily be produced by using the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking. In these workshops, the statements were devised from a new framework called 'AssetSpots', which is based on insights from organisations in Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Youth Fund. The 10 AssetSpots can be aligned with the Advantaged Thinking Tests, as illustrated in the findings in the next section.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Do you think it is worthwhile helping the people your service(s) work with to understand the asset-based concepts you are using to benefit them?
- Q2** What activities from the above examples could be adapted to your service context?

2. WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR PEOPLE USING ASSET-BASED SERVICES

InspireChilli's workshop session with young people initially identified three top insights on asset-based working. These were followed by a more detailed set of questions and signposts for what good practice might look like from a young person's perspective.

Insight area	Analysis
<p>People stand out – not posters or policies (Advantaged Thinking Test Two: Work with)</p>	<p>The quality and character of staff is more important to people using a service than any specific tools, policies or strategies. Direct interaction with staff is more valued and appreciated than any other channel of communication or support.</p>
<p>Life should be more than just coping (Advantaged Thinking Test Four: Invest)</p>	<p>People can feel trapped in the work of 'coping' with problems if their support offer does not go the extra mile to invest in opportunities and resources for personal growth.</p>
<p>Power comes through belief (Advantaged Thinking Test 3: Work with and Test 5: Belief)</p>	<p>Helping people to experience increased levels of self-belief is essential for them to recognise their own achievements and abilities, which is a first step to feeling a sense of empowerment.</p>

Ten asset-based questions from the AssetSpots framework were shaped through the voices and insights of different groups of young people in the UK and Netherlands. These are detailed below with new signposts to relevant Advantaged Thinking Tests. They offer a powerful source of inquiry and analysis that emphasise which asset-based – and thus Advantaged Thinking – characteristics matter most to people using services.



1. Does the organisation stand for something positive?

Connected to Tests One (Talk) and Five (Believe in), young people want to see an organisation that has positive belief in, takes action with, and aspires for people they can associate with. For young people, this is likely to be explored through the organisation:

- Having a brand that connects with people
- Explaining how it benefits and believes in people
- Promoting a strong focus on what people can do and achieve
- Describing people's challenges and needs without negatively stereotyping them

2. Does the organisation listen to, involve and work with people?

Young people want to see evidence that an organisation values their voice and involvement, in line with Test Six (Involve). For young people, this is likely to be shown through experiences such as:

- Being listened to and asked for an opinion on things that matter
- Being told what action is taken in response to any feedback or involvement
- Having influence over what the organisation does, how it works and who it recruits
- Having opportunities to lead the design and delivery of services and programmes

3. Does the organisation build positive relationships with people?

As captured in Tests Two (Understand) and Three (Work with), young people want an organisation to be relational rather than transactional in how it seeks to understand and work with them. For young people, this will mean evidence of an organisation:

- Communicating what it does in a way that engages people
- Ensuring people feel safe and experience trust
- Enabling people to gain the skills, confidence or resources required to access services
- Offering a place where it's easy to feel a homely connection and sense of belonging



4. Does the organisation help people to explore and develop?

Thinking about Test Four (Invest in), young people want an organisation to invest in the time, space, resources and experiences through which they can properly explore and develop their potential. For young people, this will be defined by having:

- Support to find and grow personal strengths
- Encouragement to communicate strengths and potential to others
- Positive challenges to explore and develop in new ways
- Services and support shaped to fit personal interests, needs and goals

5. Does the organisation give people greater value and recognition?

With Tests Four (Invest in) and Five (Believe in), young people want an organisation to offer tangible things that have real-life exchange value – whether that's skills and experiences, or specific qualifications. For young people, such value comes in the shape of:

- Experiences, awards or qualifications that will strengthen a CV
- Feeling encouraged to grow and express self-belief
- Evidence that associating with the organisation can increase life chances
- Knowing that what is on offer will be recognised by others outside the organisation

6. Does the organisation connect people as part of a community or network?

In terms of Tests Three (Work with) and Four (Invest in), young people want an organisation to facilitate positive social connections. For young people, the most valued connections enable opportunities to:

- Meet, learn and work with other young people from different backgrounds
- Meet, learn and work with other groups and services locally, nationally or internationally
- Volunteer time and skills to experience having a positive impact on others
- Grow a personal network to support future goals and aspirations

7. Does the organisation work in a positive way with and for people?

Connected to Tests Three (Work with) and Four (Invest in), young people want an organisation that can be trusted to 'do the right thing' with and for them – both in times of need and opportunity. For young people, such trust will depend on whether:

- All staff are knowledgeable, friendly and encouraging
- Staff have the time, skills and resources to offer the right support when it is needed
- Decisions and rules are made to benefit people's quality of life
- The organisation is committed to and skilled at getting the best for people

8. Does the organisation know and show that it is making a positive impact?

Young people want organisations that create an environment for them to tell their own story on their terms and in a way they feel in control of. This captures principles from Tests Two (Understand) and Seven (Challenge). For young people, this requires practices that allow them to:

- Tell their story and talk about impact in their own language
- Use their own words to set goals and reflect on progress
- See their experiences reflected in the impact the organisation promotes to others
- Be involved in helping the organisation to measure and understand its impact

9. Does the organisation positively promote people?

Connected to Tests One (Talk), Two (Understand) and Seven (Challenge), young people want organisations to amplify positive narratives of who young people are and what they can achieve. For young people, this means having evidence that an organisation will:

- Actively communicate positive messages about people
- Involve young people in how and where the organisation chooses to promote people
- Encourage young people to share their story and abilities with others
- Support young people to communicate a positive image

10. Does the organisation try to create a better world with and for people?

In terms of Test Seven (Challenge), young people want an organisation to be active in the campaign areas and social issues that have most relevance to their lives. For young people, this means they should benefit from:

- Staff who are knowledgeable about and take action on relevant issues
- Opportunities to be involved in campaigns of importance to them
- Experiences of being able to talk with and influence decision makers
- Support to develop their own ideas for improving people's lives

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which of these 10 questions resonated most with you?
- Q2 How could you strengthen your service in any areas that matter to young people?

3. WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR IMPACT AND EVALUATION

Impact and evaluation work should always be in line with an organisation's vision and values. For Advantaged Thinking, this means taking approaches that clearly promote an asset-based focus. These are likely to follow some or all of the following characteristics, which are drawn from 'Asset-Based Considerations for Impact and Evaluation Approaches', a paper produced by Colin Falconer of InspireChilli with Steve Hillman at Centre for Youth Impact for Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2019:

- Stressing what matters to people more than what is the matter with people
- Starting from a positive vision of what good looks like before beginning to understand experiences of disadvantage.
- Identifying what strengths and capabilities people and communities have, and what they are able to develop.
- Being person-centred and working with the direct impact insights of those participating in a programme being evaluated.
- Considering affirmative research approaches such as appreciative inquiry or Most Significant Change.
- Encouraging services to reflect on how they can progress and improve impact.

There are various practical steps that can advance impact approaches through an Advantaged Thinking methodology. The following Advantaged Thinking areas draw from some of the questions shared in 'Asset-Based Considerations for Impact and Evaluation Approaches':

1. TALK:

Consider what the data you are collecting says about your values as an organisation. How do you describe the young people you work with?

2. UNDERSTAND:

Consult young people on the assets they consider important and begin to use their language to describe the young people you work with in terms of these assets.

3. WORK WITH:

How can you be sure that delivery is of a consistent quality and that staff are properly equipped with asset-based knowledge and skills to work with people effectively?

4. INVEST IN:

Consider what it would mean to thrive rather than simply cope with the absence of a particular asset. Identify protective factors to develop as well as risks to safeguard against.

5. BELIEVE IN:

Do you have a vision for the assets that all young people should have, say why you work with those who don't have these, and know how your work impacts on gaining those assets?

6. INVOLVE:

Does the way you collect feedback reflect the young people you work with? Does your feedback include asking whether young people feel listened to and have their thoughts acted upon?

7. CHALLENGE:

Where there is a campaigning element to your mission, does the outcomes data you collect facilitate this?

TAKING ACTION:

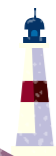
- Q1 Do your impact approaches align with an Advantaged Thinking vision?
- Q2 In which Advantaged Thinking Test areas could you strengthen your impact approach?

4. TAKING ACTION FROM LEARNING ON ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

The learning and action points in the table below bring together all the findings that Colin Falconer identified through his work to support asset-based approaches with the Foyer Federation network, Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Youth Fund, and organisations in different countries from mainland Europe to Australia.

LEARNING INSIGHT	ACTION POINT
1. It is hard to sustain asset-based working inside an organisation or system which takes a deficit-based approach.	We cannot afford to focus on the use of strengths-based practice by front line staff without embracing the need to influence the culture and operating structures through which an organisation or system functions. We must think about both the practice itself, and the things that shape the practice and how. That is why Advantaged Thinking is an important force to help us consider a breadth of development areas.
2. To achieve and sustain an asset-based approach you need a strong culture of ongoing service reflection and development.	Making time for reflective practice and ongoing review throughout a staff structure is critical to help asset-based approaches thrive and develop into the future. Space for reflection should be factored into every opportunity. It is not a luxury item.
3. Staff, services and systems can be 'addicted' to deficit-based behaviour.	Some individuals and organisations might need to undergo a 'truth and reconciliation' experience that enables them to come to terms with their use of – and potential dependency on – deficit-based approaches. Doing this enables them to move beyond a deficit-focus in a safe and meaningful way. Applying insights from theories on addiction and attachment might help us appreciate the time and experiential space some individuals and organisations may require to make progress with asset-based working.
4. It's never too soon to begin involving people in a meaningful way to co-design and shape approaches with their insights. In people, systems connect.	We shouldn't overcomplicate people's involvement to the point that it doesn't happen. Taking a practical step to involve people is always the right thing to do and is worth whatever challenges it poses for additional resource needs. The insights and voices of people using services are a powerful source for challenging and connecting the systems that impact on their lives. Different people's unique energy, creativity and grounded reflections on reality can be game changers in bringing asset-based work to life.

LEARNING INSIGHT	ACTION POINT
5. Influencing an asset-based approach to staff recruitment, training and management is a sustainable route to change inside organisations.	A 'start here' step for organisations wishing to embed asset-based working is to update HR approaches. This can ensure that everything from staff recruitment to supervision, training and personal development are all strengthening the potential for asset-based impact through the best staff liberated to work in the best way.
6. Approaches like Outcomes Star, Strengths-Based and Trauma Informed Practice and Psychologically Informed Environments all depend on the staff using them and should never be the only tools in our bag for asset-based working.	An organisation that thinks thriving practice can be created just by adopting a trauma informed response or using an outcomes star or PIE is missing the more important need to invest in a wider set of approaches and the strength of staff to adopt and apply them. Specific tools can be helpful components in asset-based working, but they are not a replacement or shortcut to achieving a thriving asset-based culture.
7. It is helpful to use performance measures that support asset-based approaches – and to embrace data insights to inform ongoing practice.	An asset-based service should not be monitored through a deficit-based lens. An asset-based approach to the collection and use of performance measures goes hand-in-hand with developing an asset-based identity. Whatever the data approach, the key for asset-based working is that data should be used to help practitioners celebrate what is good now and help them know how to create good tomorrow.
8. The energy required to bring about asset-based change requires a different style of leadership – a relentlessness in focus, collaboration and challenge.	Asset-based approaches are best led by teams that can generate the energy to sustain focus, keep connecting with people and push forward the campaign to influence others. An emphasis on the skills required to appreciate, fuel and protect this relentless energy is an important component for future leaders.

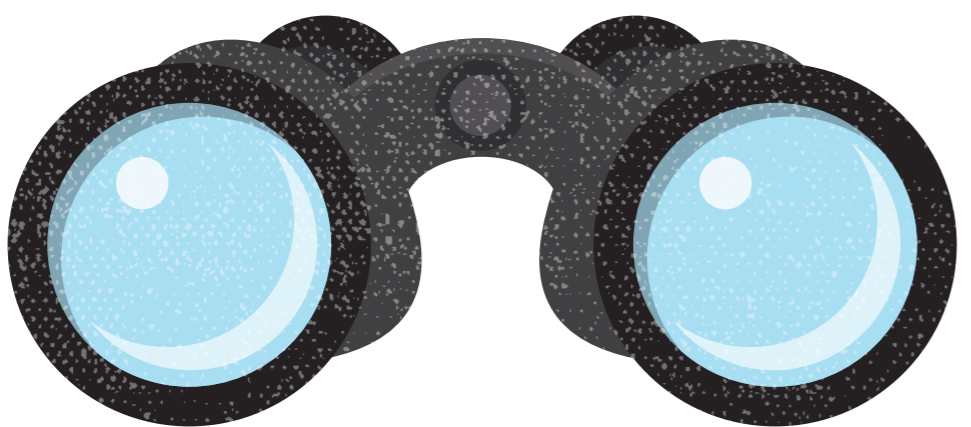


LEARNING INSIGHT	ACTION POINT
9. All of these learning points are best explored through a strong Community of Practice in which different services and people can collaborate and learn together.	Forming or being part of a Community of Practice can create a powerful mechanism to invest in reflection, energy, shared voice and collaboration. A Community of Practice offers an opportunity to facilitate an active space to encourage ongoing learning. The Foyer Federation's Community of Practice for Advantaged Thinking offers a powerful resource to support asset-based practice over the longer term.
10. Frameworks such as Advantaged Thinking offer a practical enabler to help support asset-based fidelity and accountability.	Embracing an Advantaged Thinking framework can give services and stakeholders a common language and frame of reference to use on their journey. This helps organisations understand how different asset-based approaches and expressions can connect around shared concepts with a clear vision of what good should look like.

TAKING ACTION:

Q1 Which of these 10 learning points resonated most with you?

Q2 What actions should you prioritise to take in response to these learning points?



5. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP

Relentless means being 'unceasingly intense' and 'persistent' in pursuit of a goal. Using the context of services supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Youth Fund, InspireChilli identified that 'relentless leadership' characterises how some individuals stay focused on being asset-based, cultivate an asset-based service culture and drive positive change. A form of relentlessness defined how leaders demonstrated their asset-based commitment to others and the culture they generated through and with others, purposefully mirroring the work of the organisation in how things were done, as well as what was done. This important quality translates into similar expectations for leading Advantaged Thinking.

The phrase 'relentless' also recognises the high levels of positive energy and focus required to sustain an asset-based approach. This reminds us of the importance for good leadership to invest in self-care, nurturing relationships and effective systems. It means that an Advantaged Thinking leader must have dynamic energy, consistent focus and the drive to inspire. To help define these ingredients further, the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking are reinterpreted below as signposts for specific characteristics and behaviours drawn from InspireChilli's final work for Paul Hamlyn Foundation on relentless leadership.

ADVANTAGED THINKING TESTS	RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP SIGNPOSTS
ONE: Talk How a leader expresses an Advantaged Thinking ethos	RELENTLESS IN communicating the organisation's vision and role modelling its values through positive, person-centred language and action
TWO: Understand How a leader promotes and uses an Advantaged Thinking evidence base	RELENTLESS IN demanding a positive evidence base that authentically proves and improves what an Advantaged Thinking organisation can achieve based on understanding who it works with and for
THREE: Work with How a leader engages with people, builds relationships, and develops expertise in Advantaged Thinking practices	RELENTLESS IN building engaging relationships to reach the people the organisation serves, and making Advantaged Thinking approaches embedded and sustainable through policies, procedures, systems and cultures of working
FOUR: Invest (Practice) How a leader directs resources for people to find and develop their assets	RELENTLESS IN innovating and prioritising approaches to identify and develop assets

ADVANTAGED THINKING TESTS	RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP SIGNPOSTS
<p>FIVE: Believe in people (Practice) How a leader develops a culture that values people through high aspirations, quality and trust</p>	<p>RELENTLESS IN giving recognition and value to others, promoting the strengths and potential of people</p>
<p>SIX: Involve How a leader involves people as active participants and collaborators</p>	<p>RELENTLESS in sharing power and decision making with others, developing a culture in which the voice of people using services is always present</p>
<p>SEVEN: Challenge How a leader seeks to influence policies and systems</p>	<p>RELENTLESS IN being courageous to stand up for Advantaged Thinking values and prepared to challenge deficit-based examples</p>

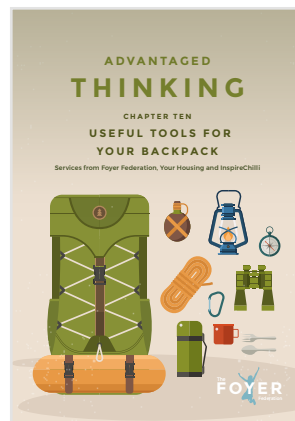
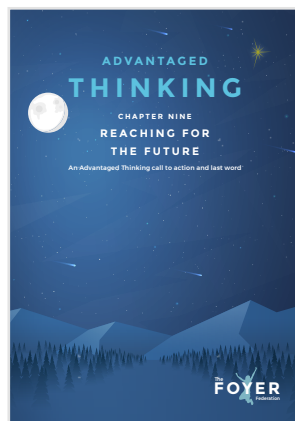
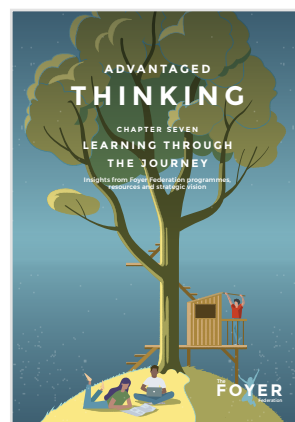
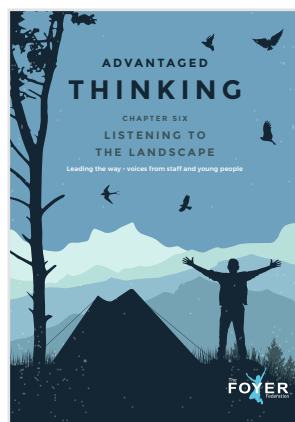
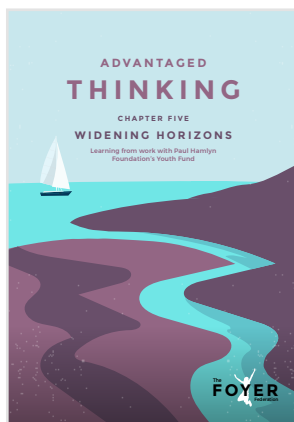
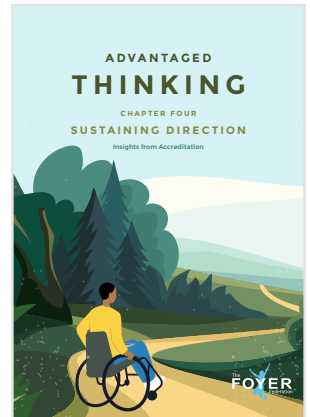
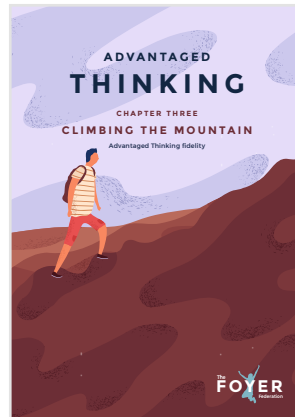
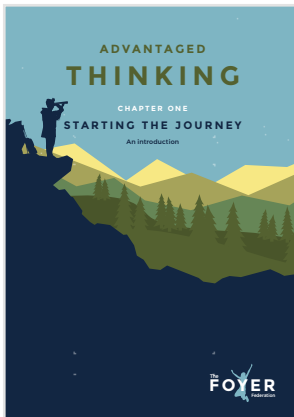
TAKING ACTION:

Q1 Which signposts are you or your staff most passionate about, and which do you find most challenging?

Q2 What would help you and/or your staff develop more 'relentless leadership' qualities in any of the 7 Test areas?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH



inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net

Supported by:





ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER SIX LISTENING TO THE LANDSCAPE

Leading the way - voices from staff and young people

CHAPTER SIX LISTENING TO THE LANDSCAPE

“It [Advantaged Thinking] was a life-changing experience and from now on we will be using it in all our work and contact with professionals and young people. We will never forget how important the language is and how it opens or closes contact with young people. We want to share our experiences with other people who work with young people and we hope to inspire them and that they inspire us again.”

Erna Roelfsema and Charlotte Schippers, Groningen

A collaborative
project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and
be recognised as a sector leading landlord

LEADING THE WAY - VOICES FROM STAFF AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CONTENTS

1. Responses from Foyer Managers at Your Housing Group on:	2
a. What Advantaged Thinking looks like and brings to a service	2
b. How practice develops through Advantaged Thinking	4
c. How Advantaged Thinking makes a difference to people	6
d. Story highlights from Advantaged Thinking	8
e. Top tips for leading Advantaged Thinking	11
f. Future hopes	14
2. Responses from young people on what Advantaged Thinking means	15

Each section includes two 'Taking Action' questions to help you reflect on insights.

The Foyer Federation and its national network of Foyers champion an Advantaged Thinking approach in the youth-supported housing sector. Your Housing Group's Foyers are an outstanding example of how Advantaged Thinking can grow through an organisation from the work staff and young people do every day, to impacting strategic decisions within a housing association, influencing local commissioners to back the approach. In this chapter, we will hear from staff and young people from Your Housing Group services as they share the difference Advantaged Thinking has made to them during their time within the Foyers.

1. RESPONSES FROM FOYER MANAGERS AT YOUR HOUSING GROUP

The quotations below are taken from interviews with staff responsible for Your Housing Group's Foyer services in Chester, St Helens, Wigan and Warrington.

a. What Advantaged Thinking looks like and brings to a service

Having worked with young people in an Advantaged Thinking way for many years, Your Housing Group's Foyer Managers have developed their own ways of **visualising** what it means to them and how it is woven into the fabric of their services:



"If Advantaged Thinking was the sea, the rivers and streams would be the Advantaged Thinking journey feeding all the villages with its beauty and flow. As the villages become towns and cities, the clouds would be the reflections created by the mindsets of all the people living there which would pour back into the Advantaged Thinking sea ready to restart its journey."

Advantaged Thinking is...

"... a solution-based approach to challenges, issues, problems ... a reminder of what we want to achieve ... a 'can do' attitude that respects others."

"... an intrinsic culture rather than a prescribed set of rules."

"... looking through a positive lens."

"... about consistency in the way we deliver services, approach and speak to others, and even challenge each other. A way to overcome challenges and support others to do the same. A set of approaches that can easily be embedded into any working practices and processes that instantly makes them authentic, credible and positive. A badge of honour visible to others."

Through their consistent efforts and mindfulness of the approach, it has shaped the way they **think** about their work:

"It is a positive shift in mentality moving from a support model that focuses on need/issues/negatives and instead looks at talent/opportunities/ambition."

"Advantaged Thinking is the internal sort of 'due diligence' I do in my head when I am going through my daily work, making decisions or changes on scheme. It makes me question if what I am doing or agreeing to is for the right reasons – will it have a positive impact on our young people? Asking reflective questions that get you to the heart of the mission and purpose."

This consistent reflective practice and Advantaged Thinking decision-making is then reflected in how they **work** with young people:

Advantaged Thinking is...

"It is about working with [people] and helping them on their journey in life, rather than passively having our service doing something 'to' them and then them moving on."

"... recognising qualities and aspects in a person and utilising these to progress."

"... tailoring programmes to capture individual passions – seeing people come to life through new opportunities."

The **impact** this daily practice and active awareness of Advantaged Thinking has is clear to those who work in this way:

"Many people will have experienced working with professionals in a disadvantaged way. This can cause anxiety resulting in a reduction in their self-confidence which may cloud their vision and prevent them from seeing their strengths. By focusing on [someone's] attributes and qualities, this improves their confidence and makes tackling their challenges seem more of a possibility than before."

"Where there is Advantaged Thinking there is hope."

b. How practice develops through Advantaged Thinking

The **language** we choose has the power to impact the way we think – which has the power to affect the way we act, and the way we work with others:



“When I first started working in Foyers 25 years ago, we talked about young people as being ‘disadvantaged’, ‘ex-offenders’, ‘young homeless’, ‘care leavers’ – to name but a few. Despite our best intentions, we categorised, pigeon-holed and defined our young people every day with terms that tried to make the outside world make sense of the work we were trying to do. We never once stopped to reflect on the ways in which our language was buying into the scepticism held up by the media and society of the day. Advantaged Thinking has enabled us to break that cycle of viewing young people as a collection of faults, a flawed and broken mechanism that must be fixed. Instead, it has gifted us with a new mindset coupled with a revised glossary of terms such as ‘talent’, ‘worth’, ‘positivity’, ‘value’, ‘aspiration’ and ‘skill.’”

“I now find it uncomfortable to ‘tag’ young people, e.g., NEET, homeless, etc., whereas years ago I would do quite easily. I try to contemplate my language when speaking about people, which is a challenge for me! But for all the right reasons, so it acts as a temperature gauge. The listening element is a big next step for me. Really listening.”

Developing a **relationship of trust** empowers young people to take positive risks and overcome challenges they might face:



“Empowering a young person to take part in the Foyer Federation’s ‘Power Up’ programme presented them with opportunities to excel and overcome their challenges. They were not thinking about their inability to read or write. This created an improvement in their wellbeing and confidence and made tackling their support needs easier as a level of trust and respect had been created. The young person felt less embarrassed to ask or receive support. This person has now moved on and understands much more basic English and maths than before, having felt able to ask for support from staff members they know they can trust.”

Positive approaches to challenging behaviour and restorative justice create an environment in which it feels safe for young people to make mistakes, learn, grow and feel valued:

“Our tenancy sustainment model is based on Improvement Notices rather than Warnings. There will always be incidents and risks that require some kind of consequence to show the seriousness and possible impact – but a lot of young people who come and live at the Foyer already have experienced a lot of punitive measures in their life and are numb to another authority figure in their life telling them that they have done something wrong. The real importance of an Improvement Notice isn’t the paperwork or mark on their file – it is the conversation that happens with a young person when they are issued it. Yes, potential consequences and negative impacts are discussed and made clear, but there is then an opportunity for a young person to change direction and divert to something with conversations around aspirations and goals included in the conversation.”



c. How Advantaged Thinking makes a difference to people's lives

Young people often arrive at a Foyer after a difficult experience and with low levels of self-confidence, self-belief and self-esteem. Believing in young people has the power to help them **believe** in themselves and, from there, to thrive:

"It is sometimes a difficult paradigm to break when a person does not feel worthy to experience praise or success due to whatever has gone before in their life before coming to a Foyer. However, Advantaged Thinking provides us with the landscape to not only start a fresh chapter in the lives of our young people but also gives them 'permission' to be confident, to be proud, to be successful and – if they are daring enough – to dream."

"Tenacity – there is no substitute for it. Having your team 100% behind people and believing in them. **Advantaged Thinking starts like a seed and the belief can grow.** Those small things make a difference – giving the opportunity to try something new and still believing despite any falls. You can make your mistakes here and learn."

"Advantaged Thinking allows people the opportunity to feel proud of themselves again having engaged in conversations or opportunities that result in an improved self-esteem. Once their confidence is higher, tackling their challenges now seems more possible."

As young people grow with Advantaged Thinking and **transform** their own lives and futures, the harder impacts can be captured along the way:

"A Foyer service truly striving to deliver an Advantaged Thinking offer will be able to demonstrate and showcase the impacts through its vibrancy, ethos, community. Key Performance Indicators will be able to demonstrate impact such as positive planned progressions, action plan goals met etc. but the significant impact is that of the Foyer Offer."

"I think **Advantaged Thinking can be such a change in mindset and environment** to the young people who come to the Foyer, that they don't always see the benefits of it before they leave us. There might be some outcomes like fewer evictions, more entering education etc., but the work in a Foyer is just the foundation. It can quite often be the first time that they have been told that they have talent or value and be the first time that someone has told them they believe in them."

When you reflect on your own life, you might see the **impact** of Advantaged Thinking on you – whether you knew it at the time or not:

"For me personally, it's seeing what we do when utilising young people's (or anyone's, for that matter) strengths, passions, interests to get buy-in, engagement, motivation, happiness, structure, self-discipline – then seeing people thrive, achieve, move forward positively, or simply just understand something."

"It's in my DNA, even though I never knew it was Advantaged Thinking. I relate to being a 12-year-old kid, scrawny, shoulder-length hair, leaving for the track twice a week to pursue my new-found talent (I was 1st in the school P.E. run and the P.E. teacher became my coach and mentor). Passing my mates as I left the estate to get the bus after a quick stop to the corner shop to collect my can of coke and Mars bar my Mum had pre-paid for, with my spikes bag under my arm and national badges sewn on the back of my tracksuit, gave me moments of embarrassment, modesty, but also of pride, a confidence – I was a somebody. My mates, or kids on the estate I knew from growing up, sat on their BMX bikes or hand-made go-karts all looking at me like I had betrayed them. Even at secondary school, I wasn't just Wardy – I was Wardy the Runner, the school champion, the county champion. Teachers would say if I put as much effort into my maths as my running, I'd be better!"

"It's that sentiment I consider when I see the young people we work with. What they can do – not what they can't. Show people they can be proud, that they need to work hard, show aspiration (that some may not even know what it looks like). It's this that really gives me belief in what we do, and Advantaged Thinking compliments that by giving us a channel to feed it."



d. Story Highlights from Advantaged Thinking

Providing opportunities to help a young person overcoming grief to achieve his goals and ambitions:

"It was having the opportunity to send a young man to Hawaii for a three-month sports coaching summer camp which was a dream that he had written off as never going to happen.

"The young man had lived for all things sports related – in particular Rugby League. However, his dream and whole outlook on life started to evaporate shortly before coming to live at Ravenhead due to the very sudden and untimely death of his father. By his own admission, he had given up on his goals, his life and himself. His role model in life was now gone and his mother started to suffer from bouts of deep depression. He had fallen into a quite destructive mindset and had settled into a lifestyle that was becoming very harmful to his health. He was not interested in anyone or anything and his stock response to most suggestions was either "So what?" or "What's the point?"

"To cut a very long story short, we managed to re-engage him by arranging a work placement with Saints Community Foundation, which is part of our local Rugby League club that delivers health promotion and coaching programmes to the young people of our local schools and youth groups. During this time, I spoke to him about the work we were doing as part of our Healthy Conversations programme and discussed the possibility of sending him to a sports summer camp. I can honestly say that was a pivotal moment in his development and I saw him start to shine from that day forward.

"He eventually realised his dream of going abroad to undertake his Sports Coaching course and vowed he would not let that be an end to his dreams. During his final months at Ravenhead, he worked tirelessly to gain as much experience and as many qualifications as possible. This, in turn, led to him being accepted onto a Sports Science degree course at University of Central Lancashire which he successfully completed. He is now not only the coach of a local rugby youth team where he lives but also works as a personal trainer and is in the process of going back to university to train as a teacher."

Enabling a young person to grow in confidence and self-esteem through showcasing their talents:

"Supporting a resident to showcase their skills and perform at a Foyer Federation awards evening despite the multiple attempts she had taken to end her life in the months running up to the event.

"Presenting her with an opportunity to showcase her talent and prove to others how good she was ended up being a beacon of light for her to look forward to. It gave her something positive to focus on rather than reflecting on negative experiences from the past. This person was desperate to showcase her musical talents and by presenting her with an opportunity to do this it really enhanced the working relationship between

the Foyer staff and the residents.

"She could see how much the team supported her, having attended the event in person to be there cheering her on. The positive feedback she received from attendees really boosted this girl's self-esteem. It was brilliant to see someone who had every chance to say no or to miss this opportunity actually grasp it with both hands.

"She often refers to it as one of the best days of her life and the gratitude she shows to staff for giving her this opportunity was amazing. It shows how much we trusted her and believed in her as a person. This means so much more than working with someone in a classroom on a 1-2-1 basis. It helped her to believe in herself at a time when she needed this more than anything else."

Influencing and investing in Advantaged Thinking practices to create an environment that encourages young people to thrive:

"Influencing our own organisation to embrace an Advantaged Thinking methodology using its assets to benefit a young person within the Foyer on their journey. Examples of this include:

- Internal nominations: young people can be nominated for properties, investing in them as a 'customer' longer-term than just their Foyer experience. This also provides young people with additional options when moving on from the Foyer.

- 25% rent reduction: is invested in enabling young people to financially manage entering employment. Any employed young person is granted 25% reduction to their rent to counterbalance the support cost element of licence fees and encourage employment opportunities.

- Galactic Awards: an event recognising and celebrating the talents and achievements of young people.

- Financial commitment: for standalone events/opportunities benefiting young people i.e., residentials, Wi-Fi, Fellowship for Leaders programmes etc.

Taking a person-centred approach to help a young person manage their mental health and grow into a thriving future:

“RC was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, depression and anxiety, and was a care leaver who had been in lots of different placements. They had previously stayed in mental health facilities as a child.

“When she moved into Coops Foyer her mental health was poor and she was engaging in a lot of self-harm, often presenting at A&E with numerous injuries. This quickly culminated in RC attempting suicide, and over a four-day period, similar incidents led to both the police and ambulance services being called to her as an emergency. After a short stay in hospital, RC returned to Coops Foyer where referrals were made to the appropriate agencies to help support her in the community.

“While working with RC it became apparent that she was very unhappy at the apparent lack of control in her life. She felt that since being a child and having social care involvement, she had always been told what to do and could not make choices for herself. I encouraged her to take the lead on her own support plans using the online Outcome Star system, empowering her to set her own goals and allowing her to see improvements on reflection.

“We established that RC felt isolated and vulnerable and that she was very self-conscious

about the labels and preconceptions that people had about her, particularly in relation to her diagnosis. We supported her in finding voluntary placements at a local amateur sports team which was identified as an interest of hers and provided her with a meaningful use of spare time. She was linked with a local young women’s group to socialise with others and developed coping strategies for when she was struggling with her mental health.

“RC expressed a great interest in being creative and supplies were purchased as part of her ‘toolbox’ that meant she could explore these activities and her artwork was displayed around the building. She had ambitions to attend university and was encouraged to complete her studies with support to ensure she achieved the necessary results. As she was very self-conscious of her self-harm scars, funding was sourced to purchase make-up to cover these which boosted her self-esteem and meant she became a lot more confident.

“RC was able to manage her mental health independently and sought staff support when needed rather than relying on the emergency services as she had done previously. This negated the need for continued crisis intervention and involvement with other statutory agencies and services.

“RC was successful in obtaining a place at University and left us to study a BA in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Chichester.”

e. Top tips for leading Advantaged Thinking

Advantaged Thinking is flourishing in the four Your Housing Group Foyers and continues to be a central part of the positive outcomes young people achieve. Here, Foyer Managers share their tips on how this is done.



Ways to work

“Getting young people to begin to trust an Advantaged Thinking approach can be a challenge. One way to overcome this is to present them with opportunities to do something fun and engaging. Almost like a ‘throw them in the deep end’ approach. Or by creating a positive feeling amongst other residents on site which makes them feel like they want to engage in the next opportunity presented.”

“You are there to help, support and guide. It seems like a simple point but one that is sometimes forgotten, especially when you have challenges in your own life.”

“Present as many opportunities as possible for positive engagement and to evidence you are a different service than all the others they will have experienced. You have that cutting edge and that something different that shows you are willing to invest in them. The young person needs to understand that you can’t do it all and that they need to keep up their side of the deal. They need to trust you and you need to help them to feel like an excited child without a care in the world. Help them to remember to be happy and positive first – everything else will fall into place.”

“Everything begins with positive communication, both in terms of how we talk to our young people as well as how we talk about them.”





"Listen – especially to your young people. You will be amazed at what you can learn."

"One of the most important aspects of managing a Foyer to me is creating an environment where young people are given the opportunities and space to try, experiment and discover who they are and what they want to do in life. It is providing a safe space for them to try something outside of what is safe and supposedly 'realistically achievable' – and for them to know they will still be safe if they fail. But this environment and mindset can't be created just by offering info on college courses or traineeships – this needs to be at the core of the support offer."

"There is no better way to build trust and show you believe in [people] than by investing time, or money, into supporting them. They can see you are willing to go above and beyond for them. This helps to build a relationship and shows residents you are more than just words or talk. You are evidencing to them that you are with them."

"Advantaged Thinking needs to be the mindset of the service, not just the manager."

"Invest in others. Embed it into culture both in practice and policy."

"Keep asking 'Why?' Why do we do this? Why do we have this policy? Why do we make this decision? Why does this look like this?"

Ways to be



"Always be open to new ideas and possibilities. As managers we do not know everything, and you are only as strong as the team you work with."

"Be a role model. Always look for the opportunities, seek out the positive aspects of every situation and don't be afraid to fail... that's how we learn."

"Be happy in what you do. Try to keep a good sense of humour, don't take yourself too seriously, be open to scrutiny and feedback and remember to smile occasionally. If you are not approachable and happy in your job, what chance do you think you will have?"

"Be positive, have energy and encourage people to do something outside their comfort zone that can be daunting or feel uncomfortable."

"Be confident to challenge others and systems. Be bold in talking about Advantaged Thinking. Reframe the picture – give situations and people the opportunity to flourish."

"Be authentic. Don't just pay lip service to what you do. Young people may not have the life experience that you have but they can spot a phoney from a mile away. Always be honest and truthful in all that you do."

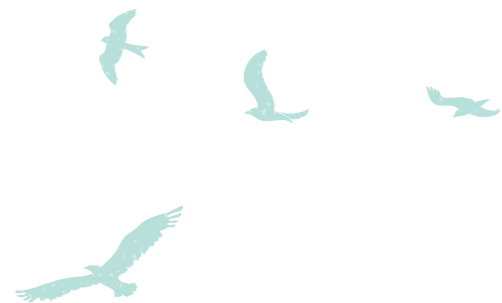
"Never give up. There will always be challenges and obstacles. Your job is to find the best and most effective way around them."

Ways to influence others



"Working in a broader environment where other agencies are still working in a deficit way or just paying lip service to an asset-based approach – they might claim to be using similar models like 'PIE' or asset-based working but have a real hard time understanding how and why we work how we do. This can be apparent in multi-agency meetings or even when new staff who have experience working for other services expect that young people will be given their notice for being arrested or admitting to substance misuse. For some, an explanation of our service and Advantaged Thinking can work. For others, using practice examples where we have used Advantaged Thinking then pinpointing what we have done and why can work. For others, the use of language in emails and templates. At times being honest and saying, "We don't tend to use language about people like that, but I know what you mean."

"Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo, even if it feels uncomfortable. It's likely that if you think it, others will too."



f. Future Hopes

In the future, Foyer Managers would like to see the wider culture embrace an Advantaged Thinking mindset and way of living in all aspects of life:

“Society has progressed in wellness regarding mental health and addressing stigma. The same movement could happen in the way that we invest in one another and the viewpoint we take regarding situations, bringing an Advantaged Thinking methodology into everyday lives.”

They would like to see more good news stories about young people and how they thrive through Advantaged Thinking:

“More successful stories about how a positive approach has helped people to overcome their challenges.”

They want young people to take the lead in owning Advantaged Thinking and the ways it works for them:

“Equip and enable young people to become Advantaged Thinking advocates rather than staff ‘owning the rights’ to the ethos on our schemes. I want a young person to say, ‘they had this thing called Advantaged Thinking there and we learnt to turn negatives into positives.’”



They want the Advantaged Thinking approach to gain greater recognition and become a mark of excellence for the staff, the service and – most of all – the young people they work with:

“Advantaged Thinking becomes a beacon of excellence that others want and approach us for.”

“I want our services to have such a reputation that everyone else believes in our young people so that I can easily source high quality apprenticeship or employment opportunities, or high-quality housing, without the mindset being that there is no point giving them a chance as they will fail.”

TAKING ACTION:

Q1 Which insights resonated most with you?

Q2 How might you challenge your staff team and/or self to take action from any of the insights shared, or add to them with your own?

2. RESPONSES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE ON WHAT ADVANTAGED THINKING MEANS

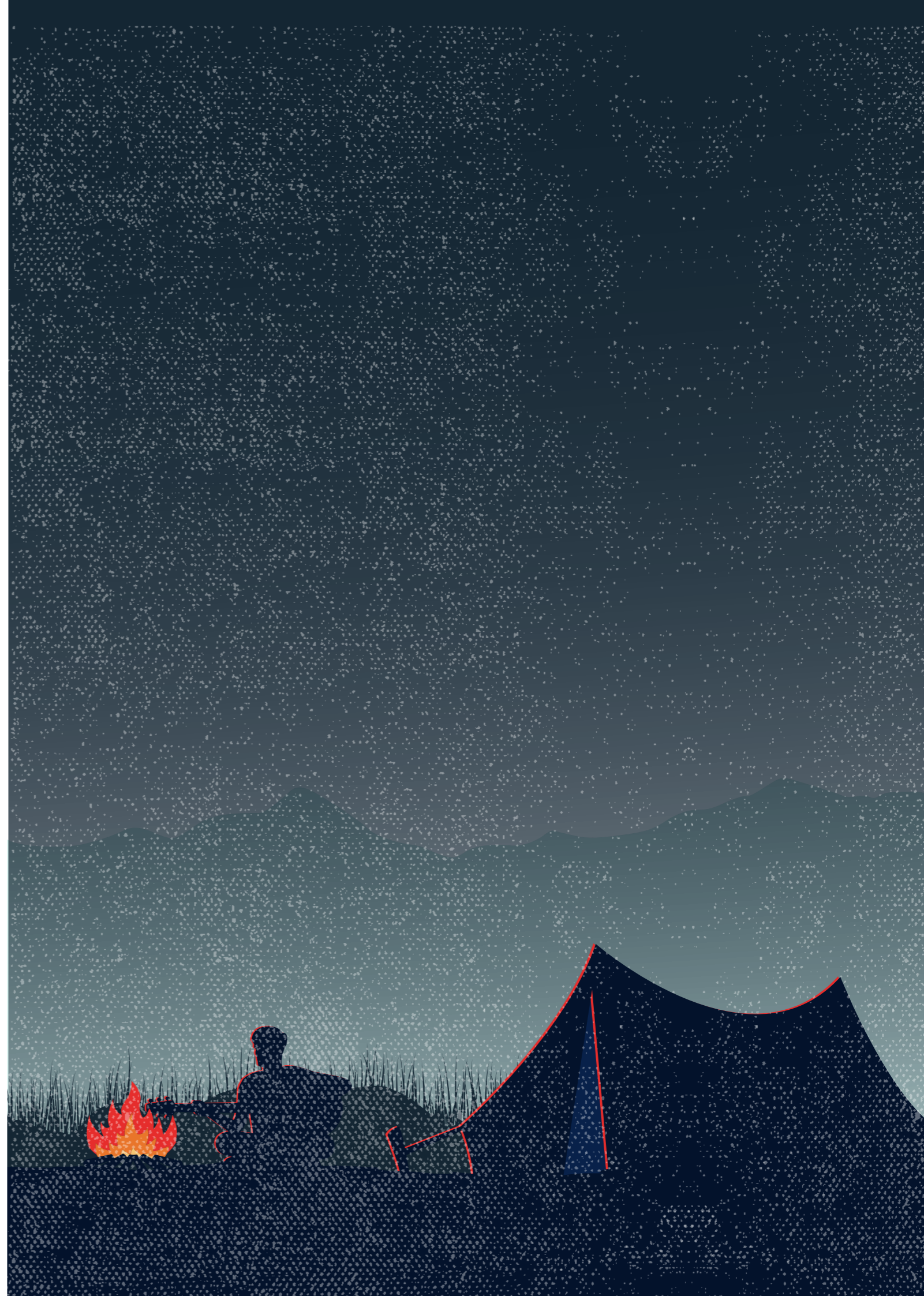
We asked young people from Foyers in Your Housing Group along with young people from other youth housing services to reflect on and respond to the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking. While most responses were directed to Test Three, all of the Tests provoked powerful insights which are shared below:

Test One – Talk:	<p>“Labels I’ve been put under... I find it very negative in general. Words I would like people to use about me... Open-minded. Optimistic. Friendly.”</p> <p>“When people use positive words to describe you rather than negative, it gives you a more positive outlook.”</p>
Test Two – Understand:	<p>“Someone who understands me, and other people would approach you for a conversation, would engage with you, would be social.”</p> <p>“Understand me for the real me – not what the paperwork says.”</p>
Test Three – Work With:	<p>“I prefer to be coached. Staff here do a mix of both – focus on rules and paperwork, and also mentor and coach us. The staff work with me the same across all services. I like it. It’s positive. They focus on positives rather than negatives.”</p> <p>“Someone who can listen and talk equally. Someone who is very open to my ideas – who you can work with easily and there’s not a lot of friction. Someone who is okay with you as a person.”</p> <p>“The title of a job – ‘Project Officer’ – makes me feel like maybe I’m not a person, I’m a project.”</p> <p>“Ask a young person ‘how was your day?’ even if it’s just a five-minute chat. This is for all staff.”</p> <p>“Be accessible, even if you are busy or have stuff to do. That’s okay with young people – just have structure and say, ‘I can chat in half an hour or an hour’.”</p> <p>“Don’t tell someone off for spilling milk – ask them how you can help clean it up.”</p>

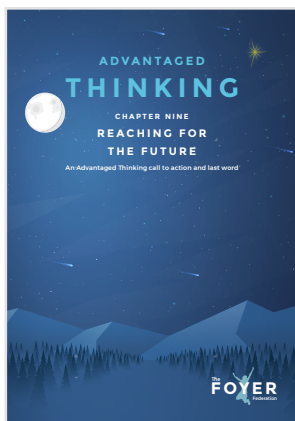
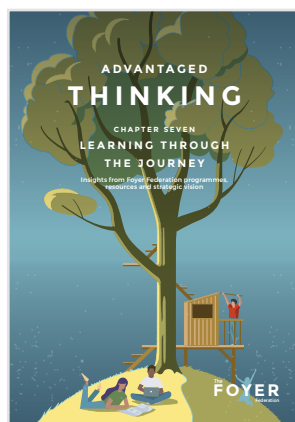
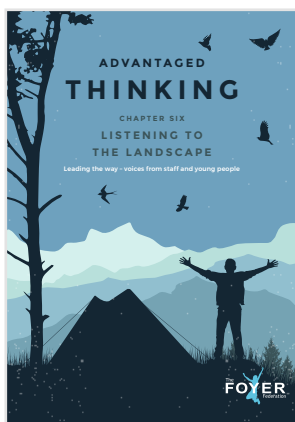
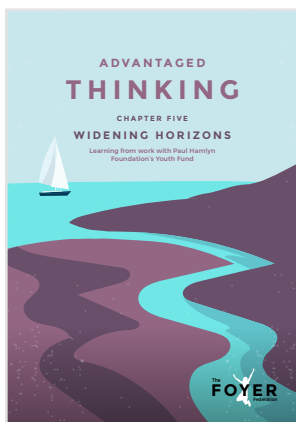
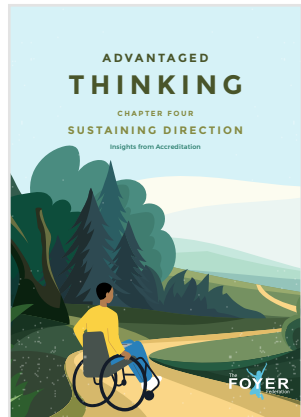
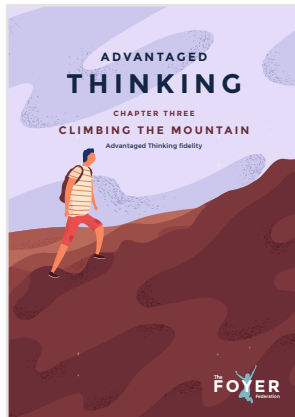
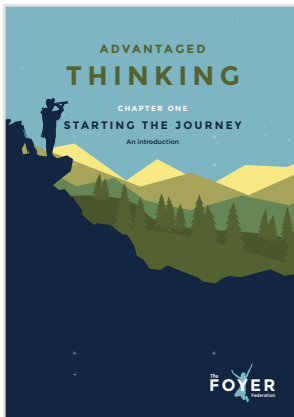
<p>Test Four – Invest:</p>	<p>“I want people to invest time and effort into me more so than money. Effort the most. When someone spends effort on me, when they’re present, it’s more important.”</p> <p>“When I think about investment, it’s time and energy, but money is great too. Time and energy are important.”</p>
<p>Test Five – Believe:</p>	<p>“Have a thought for who I can become, not just where I came from.”</p> <p>“I want people around me who trust me now – and for my future.”</p> <p>“It can be a struggle for us to believe in ourselves. That’s where things need to start.”</p>
<p>Test Six – Involve:</p>	<p>“Give us a voice on things that really matter – how we live in our homes, how we can live in our lives.”</p> <p>“Prove that you’re listening to people by what you do.”</p> <p>“We all want to be part of something. But that something has got to mean something.”</p>
<p>Test Seven – Challenge:</p>	<p>“Do you stand up for all young people?”</p> <p>“Keep pushing for the positive on all the little things that might be opportunities to us.”</p> <p>“Show up for us, don’t give up on us.”</p>

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which Advantaged Thinking responses from young people resonated most for you?
- Q2 How might you take action in your service to learn from these responses or add to them?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by:



ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER SEVEN LEARNING THROUGH THE JOURNEY

Insights from Foyer Federation programmes,
resources and strategic vision

The
FOYER
Federation



CHAPTER SEVEN

LEARNING THROUGH THE JOURNEY

“Empowering a young person to take part in the Foyer Federation’s programme presented them with opportunities to excel and overcome their challenges. They were not thinking about their inability to read or write.”

Rob Dean, Bridge Foyer

“The Foyer Federation has inspired fresh approaches to empower young people experiencing disadvantage for 30 years, leading the UK Foyer network as a flagship for innovation.”

Foyer Federation

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

INSIGHTS FROM THE FOYER FEDERATION’S PROGRAMMES, RESOURCES AND STRATEGIC VISION

CONTENTS

1. The Foyer Federation’s role in leading Advantaged Thinking	2
2. Advantaged Thinking for young people	3
3. Advantaged Thinking for practitioners	6
4. Advantaged Thinking for services and service leaders	8
5. Advantaged Thinking for the youth and homelessness sector	9
6. The Home for Advantaged Thinking vision	11
Room A: Advantaged Thinking through youth leadership and activism	12
Room B: Advantaged Thinking through better services and inspirational staff	12
Room C: Advantaged Thinking to influence change	13
Room D: A community of Advantaged Thinkers	13

Each section includes two ‘Taking Action’ questions to help you to reflect on insights.

1. THE FOYER FEDERATION'S ROLE IN LEADING ADVANTAGED THINKING



Advantaged Thinking celebrated its 10th birthday in 2021. Throughout its decade of existence, Advantaged Thinking has played a number of key roles for the Foyer Federation. It has been an anchor during stormy external challenges, a foundation on which to build new programmes and opportunities, and a mentor and teacher helping the organisation reflect, learn and stay focused on the aspirations and strengths of young people.

The Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking track record is extensive and includes:

- Introducing the sector's first national learning qualifications and quality assurance programme
- Developing national projects innovating approaches to health and wellbeing, employability and social action
- Amplifying positive, person-centred, strength-based models of working

These activities all offer a source of knowledge aimed at rewiring mindsets from an asset-based perspective. They have enabled the Advantaged Thinking ethos to influence more positive ways of working with and understanding young people across the youth sector, such as through the development of Paul Hamlyn Foundation's (PHF) Youth Fund.

The Foyer Federation has led Advantaged Thinking's pioneering solution to youth disadvantage – the 'Foyer Model' – through a network of quality-assured UK Foyers, which are able to work in this way with thousands of young people each year. The charity's unique position, closely connected to services and the young people who live in them, but a step away from frontline pressures, makes it well placed to challenge practitioners, funders and service providers to transform their approach to working with young people.

It would be fair to say that Advantaged Thinking has existed and permeated the Foyer Federation's philosophy and work since its inception in 1992 – long before the concept was crystallised in 2011. The Foyer approach itself was developed as an asset-based alternative to a hostel, integrating housing, education, training, employment and health support with personal development for young people aged 16-25 who could not live at home. Prior to 2011, the Foyer Federation was leading on initiatives, programmes and projects that had an Advantaged Thinking heart but without the fully developed language, structure and ethos that has since been introduced. This chapter explores in more depth the ways the Foyer Federation has embedded Advantaged Thinking within its work since it was first named, with a particular focus on the vision and activities from the organisation's 2021 Home for Advantaged Thinking strategy.

All of the Foyer Federation's work has an end focus on creating long-lasting, positive impact for young people who experience homelessness. However, other key stakeholders are often the primary audience for programmes and opportunities – either young people directly, practitioners, service managers or the wider sector. A focus on each stakeholder is explored in the following three sections of this chapter.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 What can you learn from the Foyer Federation's role and track record?
- Q2 Which stakeholder focus is most important to you?



2. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Open Talent

In 2011, Open Talent was introduced as a pilot programme to five Foyers in the North West region, funded by Virgin Unite. It was the precursor to Advantaged Thinking – the testing ground and experiment lab from which the Foyer Federation created Advantaged Thinking's genetic code. All future programmes and initiatives were fuelled by the positive experience that the Open Talent programme had on the initial five Foyers and young people that took part.

Foyers, staff and young people that engaged in Open Talent explored a new approach that emphasised talent spotting, coaching and talent building. Inspired by the life coaching model, Open Talent called on those who work with young people to consider talent in the broadest possible sense; not as an elitist word, but as any positive characteristic or ability. By identifying and investing in these positives, Open Talent set out to show how we can make a difference for young people and enable them to successfully transition to adult independence.

Open Talent worked by giving young people access to:

1. Places to open their talent
2. People to open their talent
3. Opportunities to spot, develop and promote talent
4. A personalised deal between a young person and those who work with them to invest in their talents
5. A campaign to end disadvantaged thinking by promoting an asset-based focus on young people's potential



In 2012, a further 16 Foyers engaged in an Open Talent Service Development package which was devised to develop Advantaged Thinking cultures and working practices in services to open talent in all young people.

Between the years 2012-2016, the Foyer Federation embedded Advantaged Thinking into a series of nationally significant programmes focusing on health and employment.

Healthy Conversations

In May 2013, the Foyer Federation was awarded £3.6 million from the National Lottery Community Fund to begin a two-year programme entitled Healthy Conversations, which was aimed at creating a different positive conversation about health with young people.

76 services across the UK were involved and 4500 young people were coached with 85% achieving the goals they set. 1200 staff received training and/or resources to support them to have healthier conversations with young people.



Healthy Conversations provided young people with the understanding, opportunities and networks to improve the health and wellbeing of themselves, their peers and their communities.

The Foyer Federation worked alongside Youth at Risk and the Mental Health Foundation to ensure young people's voices were at the centre of conversations about health. Healthy Conversations aimed to transform the health and well-being offer for young people by:

- Coaching a Healthy Conversation, creating health goals and making personal health action plans.
- Developing a network to support and sustain positive health and wellbeing through Healthy Conversation groups, and extending young people's health footprint by connecting them to the right health groups and services.
- Offering activities and services for young people to experience through Health Taster Days that promoted health messages into the wider local community.

Healthy Conversations created an Advantaged Thinking milestone by establishing the importance of coaching when delivering an Advantaged Thinking service. It enabled staff to think more holistically about the impact and importance of health and wellbeing for young people in Foyers.

Pop Up Talent and Working Assets

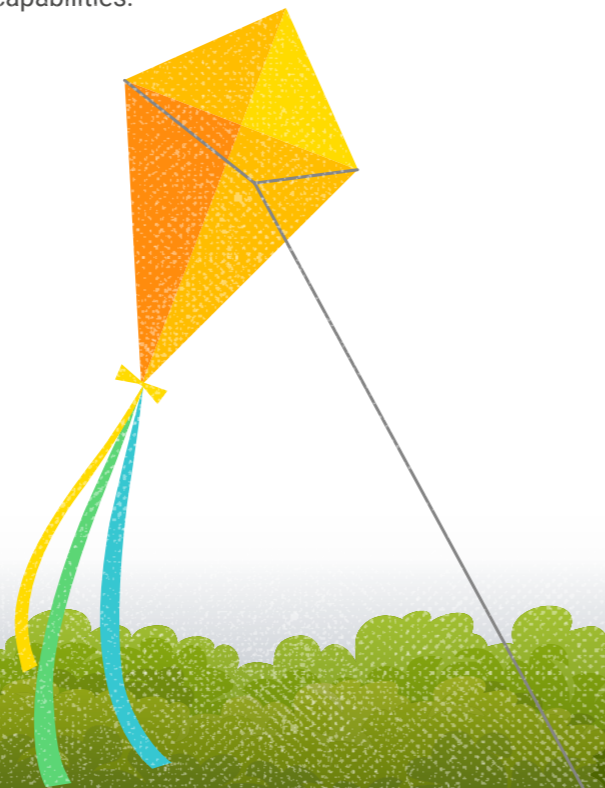
Over a similar period, the Foyer Federation delivered two programmes that drilled down into the systemic barriers that young people in supported accommodation face when trying to find employment.

Pop Up Talent took place in Birmingham, London and South Wales and was all about creating a different conversation between young people and the world of work. The Foyer Federation did this by popping up where young people are, creating dialogue and interaction with working people and offering a variety of skills development opportunities that play to different talents and interests.

Working Assets took a different approach, testing out early forms of social action projects across Foyers before working in partnership with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and connecting young people to the motor industry to learn the assets needed to work in this sector.

The young people involved gained hands-on experience in activities such as production experience, plant visits, social action projects, branding challenges and environmental sustainability projects. Wrapped around these experiences were opportunities for personal development such as mentoring and coaching, training schemes, courses leading to recognised qualifications, financial investment in individuals' talents and work-readiness conversation groups.

Both programmes opened up an Advantaged Thinking approach to understanding and investing in work capabilities.



Power Up

The Power Up programme is a youth leadership and influence development programme funded in two phases by The Listening Fund between 2018-2020, and then from 2021-2024. The programme was designed to tackle the imbalance of power that young people who have experienced homelessness face. The initial exploration work aimed to hear what young people have to say, to amplify their voices, and to act on their suggestions for making the services they interact with truly youth led.

In phase one, the Foyer Federation took two groups of young people (representing 17 Foyers) away on action-adventure residentials, packed with exciting activities and challenging workshops that pushed everyone outside their comfort zone. Young people received training in public speaking, communication and leadership. The Foyer Federation also started unpacking how to create national voice opportunities for young people in Foyers.

Phase two was designed to embed youth leadership and involvement into local Foyer practices and to ensure young people are represented in positions of power across the Foyer Federation.

Talent Bonds

Talent bonds were initially introduced in Open Talent and the Pop Up Talent programmes as a direct financial investment in a young person to help build the resources they need to develop an employment goal, career choice or wider personal interest. They have since been a mainstay of many Foyer Federation programmes with regular rounds of funding for young people in Foyers to apply for.

The money for a Talent Bond might be for starting up a project, paying for classes or a course, an initial cash injection for an enterprise, or equipment needed to further their abilities. Young people are asked to be creative with their ideas, as well as brave, thoughtful and organised as they start up the project, run with it and make it happen.

Talent Bonds have made the concepts of Advantaged Thinking accessible to young people by trusting in their ideas, investing in their futures and allowing young people to access that investment directly rather than via their service provider.

Pass It On

Pass It On is a digital platform that was created with support from the Berkeley Foundation to allow young people to share their skills, experiences and reflections with their peers across the national network of Foyers. It was built to encourage young people in Foyers to recognise that the skills and strengths they possess have exchange value and to challenge the notion that only staff have useful things to pass on to young people.

The platform continues to evolve as the Foyer Federation learns what works and how to properly engage young people online. As a result, local networks have been set up within the platform and Foyers use these to communicate opportunities specific to their service.

Pass It On has built the beginnings of a new infrastructure within the Foyers that can allow Advantaged Thinking to grow and develop at a grassroots level led by young people. The next challenge is how to support young people to take the lead and facilitate this growth.

Future focus

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foyer Federation deepened its listening with young people by launching a regular survey. This enabled the organisation to hear from a wide group of young people all around the country, and to find out what their priorities are now and when looking forward into the future. From this, and based on conversations with professionals from the Foyer network, the Foyer Federation identified three priority areas of focus:

1. Youth employment – providing ways for young people to explore the world of work and develop the skills and experiences needed to succeed in employment or enterprise.
2. Health and wellbeing – addressing the increase in the levels of isolation, depression and anxiety young people have reported since the start of the pandemic.
3. Youth leadership – tackling systemic barriers to young people having real power to lead and influence change in the areas that affect their lives.

3. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR PRACTITIONERS

The Foyer Federation has always taken the time to listen, understand and explore the challenges that staff in Foyers and youth services experience on a day-to-day basis – including those that limit or challenge an Advantaged Thinking approach. Drawing on intelligence from regional meetings, innovation days, FOR Youth quality assurance visits and development work done with the Investor member group, the Foyer Federation has created resources, training, events and toolkits to help practitioners reflect and develop their practice.

As a result of these explorations, two pieces of co-creation work were established from 2019:

The first, called **Advantaged Thinking People**, tackles the need to embed Advantaged Thinking into the policies, procedures and processes that relate to human resources. This co-created resource is being developed with the Foyer Federation's Investor member group and, so far, has focused on recruitment processes and how to attract and sustain an Advantaged Thinking workforce. Future work will include looking at Advantaged Thinking competency, communication and investment.

The second, called **Advantaged Thinking Practice**, looks in more depth at the methodologies, practices and paperwork used by practitioners when they interact directly with young people. The design team is made up of young people and local Foyer staff who have identified a need to change the working practices in their service to become more Advantaged Thinking. Modules within the handbook have already been developed to improve the referral, interview and action planning processes and future work will focus on engagement, youth involvement and outcomes.

The Foyer Federation also delivers training on Advantaged Thinking to help staff in services reflect on how asset-based their organisation's culture is and to take action to become more Advantaged Thinking. The training enables participants to:

- Understand asset-based approaches and the related theory
- Identify Advantaged Thinking as opposed to Disadvantaged Thinking
- Understand and explore the vision, values and impact of Advantaged Thinking
- Explore the concept and currency of trust and its importance to Advantaged Thinking
- Understand and explore the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking
- Apply Advantaged Thinking principles to their role and organisation
- Create an Advantaged Thinking action plan to sustain a commitment to Advantaged Thinking and innovation

The Foyer Federation continues to develop a suite of training that is underpinned by Advantaged Thinking and unpacks how the principles can be embedded in practice. Coaching Training develops Test 3 – work with – and provides practical guidance on how to coach in a youth supported housing setting. Powering Up Youth training explores Test 6 – involve – by understanding the power dynamics within organisations and how to create a culture of youth leadership and activism.

Future work will focus on detailed training to explore the other Tests and on co-creating new content on Advantaged Thinking with and for young people.

In addition to training, the Foyer Federation has developed several toolkits that are free to access for members. The toolkits build on learning from past programmes and focus on different areas of practice. Each toolkit provides practical tips, exercises and examples for staff to use to embed Advantaged Thinking in their work. Current toolkits available are:

- Healthy Conversations (health focused)
- Pop up Talent and Employability Escape Room (employability focused)
- Working Assets (social action focused)
- Taking the Lead (youth leadership focused)

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Of the Foyer Federation's work with practitioners, what resonates most with your interests and experiences?
- Q2** How might you apply one of these examples to benefit your services?



4. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR SERVICES AND SERVICE LEADERS

The foundation to delivering an Advantaged Thinking service is not the practical tools, training, or programmes for young people – although they are all great building blocks! Instead, it's the culture, values and ethos of the organisation that creates the environment for young people to flourish.

The Foyer Federation's **FOR Youth** quality development programme and accreditation provides the best vehicle to coach, challenge and promote the establishment of an Advantaged Thinking culture in the heart of any organisation. The insights, impact and value of FOR Youth are covered in Chapter Four.

In addition to the FOR Youth programme, the Foyer Federation runs a leadership programme for managers and team members in the Foyer network and beyond. **Fellowship for Leaders** was originally funded by the John Ellerman Foundation to provide a year-long personal development journey which builds the capacity of existing and emerging leaders in the youth sector and supported housing.

Advantaged Thinking runs through the entire programme, which has a focus on encouraging innovation, creating space for reflection and, through an action learning approach, enabling staff to develop their skills and ideas. Fellows have several opportunities throughout the nine-month programme to network and share experiences with peers. This investment in staff development, in turn, leads to better outcomes for young people in Foyer services.

The Foyer Federation's **Investor** member offer takes a bespoke, deep-dive approach to service development with a smaller group of pioneering housing associations. The Investor group is involved in shaping the future of the Advantaged Thinking offer that the Foyer Federation delivers. It co-creates and tests solutions to common challenges facing the wider network of services. As part of the Investor offer, the Foyer Federation works closely with leaders of leaders – those who are responsible for multiple service managers. They have access to inspirational events, a network of fellow leaders and one-to-one support.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Of the Foyer Federation's work with services and service leaders, what resonates most with your interests and experiences?
- Q2** How might you apply one of these examples to benefit your services?

5. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR THE YOUTH AND HOMELESSNESS SECTOR

On 14 May 2021, the Foyer Federation celebrated the **10-year anniversary of Advantaged Thinking** alongside past and present friends and supporters of the organisation. The gathering showed the level of influence and impact Advantaged Thinking has had on the third sector – particularly within youth and homelessness organisations. Staff from services in Australia, Ireland, France, Netherlands, and various sectors including media, housing, youth and adult social care, united around an Advantaged Thinking vision demonstrating that Advantaged Thinking is not just a philosophy but a genuine movement.

Advantaged Thinking has spread far and wide – both in terms of geography and sector. Example references include Danny Kruger's essay on the need for a bolder charity sector in 'Making Good: The Future of the Voluntary Sector' (2014); Movisie's '100% Talent' Inspiration Manual in the Netherlands (2015); the Australian 'Education First Youth Foyer' practice frameworks published by Launch Housing and Brotherhood of St Laurence (2015); A Better Way's 2018 publication 'Insights for a Better Way'; Community Links' 2020 report on 'Deep-value Relationships'; and, in 2021, an article in the Irish Times on the launch of Northside Partnership's Strategy, along with a blog on learning from Advantaged Thinking as part of Homeless Link's work to promote strengths-based practice.

The Foyer Federation's **Trust Youth campaign** was developed in 2016 as a way of uniting like-minded organisations in the youth sector around Test Five of Advantaged Thinking – believing in young people. The campaign brought together media outlets with young people from Foyers and other youth organisations to share positive stories about young people and counter the negative stereotypes that are frequently portrayed in the media. The Foyer Federation has kept the legacy of the Trust Youth campaign alive by dedicating a page on its website to stories of young people thriving. Future work will focus on amplifying the united voice of young people around the issues that affect their lives as part of Room A of the Foyer Federation's new Home for Advantaged Thinking strategy.

The Foyer Federation and InspireChilli worked with Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) as part of the first Youth Fund cohorts in 2015-17, helping to embed an Advantaged Thinking and asset-based philosophy into the Foundation's funding activity – which continues to this day. By introducing Advantaged Thinking-style expectations, training and networking opportunities into their grant-making activities, PHF has become a leader in the field for supporting asset-based youth services and projects. It rightly believes that this focus will better help young people to thrive and 'become successful adults and members of society'.



Other examples of Advantaged Thinking concepts being more widely adopted include:

1. The promotion of strengths-based approaches in Danny Kruger's 2020 report for the Government, 'Levelling Up Our Communities'. It notes that "the principle of self-efficacy – that people have the capacity, with the right help, to effect positive changes in their own lives and lives of others – should be at the heart of our social system" with the call for "a more positive approach" that sees people and places as "opportunities to be realised" (pp.15-16).
2. Increased focus at Homeless Link on supporting organisations to be more strengths-based, with work to develop a resource for services and commissioners.
3. A spotlight on the importance of a person-centred, asset-based ethos in the successful work of youth organisations supported by the Listening Fund to meet increased demands during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating how a strong asset-based culture enables organisations to adapt more effectively to external challenges.
4. The work of organisations who have learned from Advantaged Thinking to develop their own asset-based models, such as MayDay Trust's Personal Transitions Service with its strong campaign for systems change.
5. The explicit requirement in applications to the National Lottery Community Fund to evidence both a 'people-led' and 'strengths-based' approach, ensuring that organisations are 'making the most of, and building on, the skills and experiences of people'.

There are numerous examples within the Foyer network of local authority commissioners recognising the powerful impact of Advantaged Thinking service provision and, as a result, commissioning a Foyer model. Recent examples are:

- Long-term support contracts awarded to Newhaven and Doncaster Foyers, reflecting the quality and impact of their services proved by their FOR Youth accreditation scores.
- The collaborative relationship between Your Housing Group and Wigan commissioners that helped shape an asset-based approach for commissioning called the Wigan Deal.

The Foyer Federation's **SPARK awards** in 2017 and 2018 promoted the concepts of Advantaged Thinking and belief in young people by celebrating the successes, commitment and creativity of young people in the Foyer network. This was later expanded to a wider group of young people living in social housing through the **Room for Young People** conference and awards from 2018 onwards. These annual events are run in partnership with five organisations who are committed to asset-based working: Livewest, Clarion Housing, InspireChilli, HAYN and the Foyer Federation.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which examples and references resonate most with your interests and experiences across the wider youth and/or homelessness sectors?
- Q2** How might you apply one of these examples to benefit your services?

6. THE HOME FOR ADVANTAGED THINKING VISION

What is the future for Advantaged Thinking? There are so many things that need to change for young people and within the systems and paradigm we all work in as professionals. The Foyer Federation believes that there is more need than ever to create a strong community and movement of Advantaged Thinkers to ensure young people get the best offer possible.

The Foyer Federation wants to help grow a community of young people, funders, youth workers and service managers, while embracing the need to go deeper into social care, probation, commissioning and other fields in the social sector that have to navigate so many deficit-based systems, cultures and training programmes.

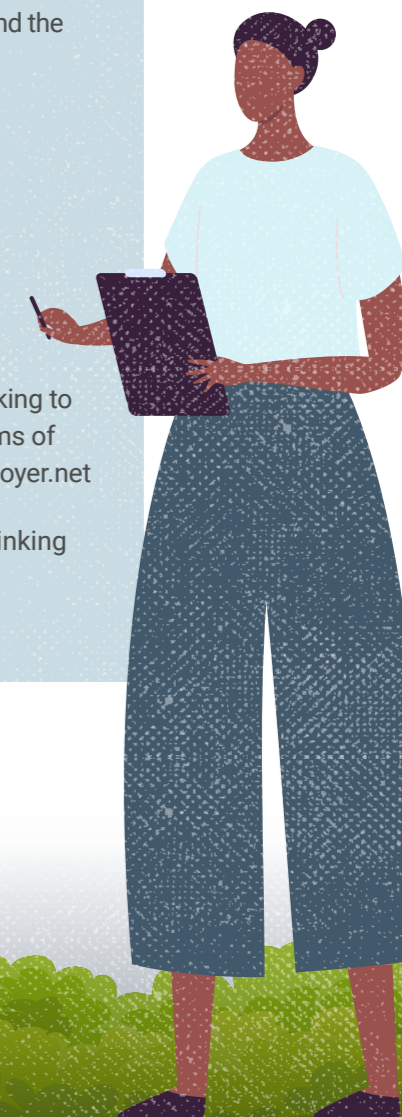
The Foyer Federation is building a Home for Advantaged Thinking where we can all unite around the strengths, talents, experiences and energy of young people. The Foyer Federation's vision for this future focuses on the concept of the home.

What are the elements that make a good home?

- Space to think and reflect – a window ledge, reading nook or cosy snug
- A place to explore – it's important to be able to have fun and be yourself at home
- Good views – providing perspective and being able to see beyond the immediate
- A place that connects and responds to its environment
- A welcoming and comfortable space
- A feeling that you belong
- Being secure and safe

The Foyer Federation intends for the Home for Advantaged thinking to have all of these and more. The four main rooms contain the aims of the Foyer Federation's strategic plan that can be found at www.foyer.net

These rooms provide the right environment for Advantaged Thinking to grow.



Room A: Advantaged Thinking through youth leadership and activism

The Foyer Federation wants young people and the services that support them to have greater knowledge, skills and opportunities to develop sustainable youth leadership, and to collaborate with us to create networks for young people. This room is about rebalancing power and providing new opportunities for young people to lead the way.

With support from the Listening Fund, Blgrave Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Dulverton Trust and John Ellerman Foundation, the Foyer Federation is already gathering a group of young people to help explore what needs to change and the best way to take action. The Foyer Federation wants to partner with like-minded youth sector partners that have broken similar ground in other areas and can contribute their expertise to help crack the unique challenges of youth supported housing.

Key activities in this room:

- A new Youth Influence and Involvement strategy to help drive youth-led change within the Foyer Federation as a charity.
- An online platform created with and for young people to enable them to share their skills, experiences and passions with their peers.
- Direct investments in young people's talents and strengths through the Talent Bond fund to enable young people to take ownership of their future.
- Exploring new ways to give more young people in supported accommodation better access to youth leadership resources and programmes.

Room B: Advantaged Thinking through better services and inspirational staff

Most services want to work with young people's strengths and talents despite pressure from funding cuts and the focus on quick outcomes. However, we often notice they haven't set out a clear criterion for what effective asset-based working looks like, and therefore are not held to account or able to articulate how to grow and improve.

This room is all about building the capacity and quality of services to deliver an Advantaged Thinking offer that increases positive impact for young people.

The Foyer Federation's training and accreditation offer enables a quality conversation to happen over time and helps build a genuine, mission-based relationship to develop. The Foyer Federation wants to use this knowledge and experience to help commissioners and decision makers to understand the benefits and concrete outcomes of investing in an Advantaged Thinking approach.

Key activities in this room:

- To spread the good news about Advantaged Thinking to others and influence future decision making and commissioning.
- Developing an Advantaged Thinking learning framework with and for young people that gives them more ownership over their development and provides a better impact dataset grounded in young people's goals rather than the organisation's KPIs.
- To connect and widen a network of like-minded youth services by finding ways to accredit and develop quality with Advantaged Thinking services outside of the current Foyer network.

Room C: Advantaged Thinking to influence change

The Foyer Federation wants young people with experience of disadvantage to be meaningfully involved in shaping policy decisions and the services that they interact with. It wants to put more power into young people's hands. This does not mean building a staff team to do this work, but instead empowering young people at a grassroots level to have a greater voice.

The Foyer Federation will do this by investing directly in the ideas, insights and energy of young people and build a campaign that shows the power of trusting youth. By connecting and collaborating with youth organisations, the Foyer Federation hopes to design and unite under an asset-based brand to influence positive change.

Key activities in this room:

- Sharing stories of young people through the Foyer Federation's website, social media and digital platform.
- Collaborating with like-minded organisations to celebrate and promote the talents and skills of young people.
- Building a campaign with young people that creates a united movement for Advantaged Thinking and asset-based working.

Room D: A community of Advantaged Thinkers

There is a tendency towards individualism in the youth sector. As organisations each try to achieve their own mission, it's easy to become overprotective and competitive for the limited resources available to sustain charities. We have more in common than we often realise, yet it is hard to carve out time to work together and help each other out. However, true collaboration, generous leadership and building collective strengths are critical for an Advantaged Thinking future for young people and for a thriving, fair society.

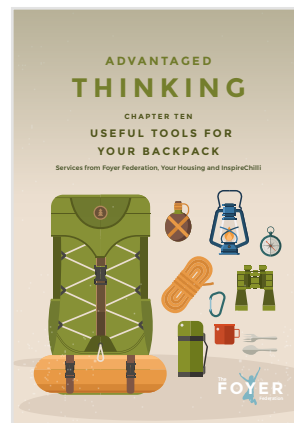
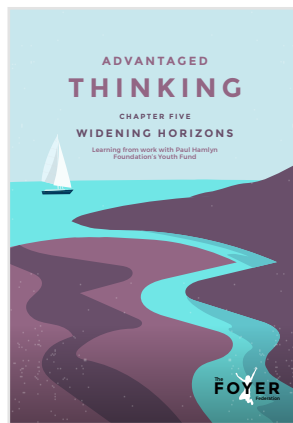
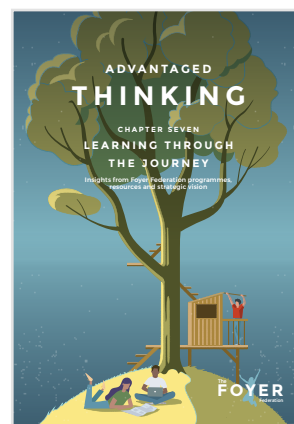
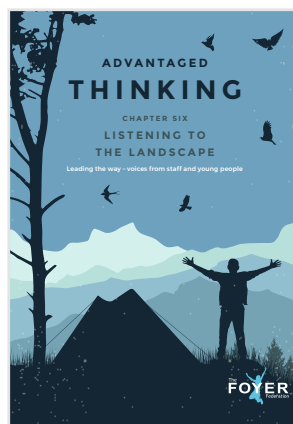
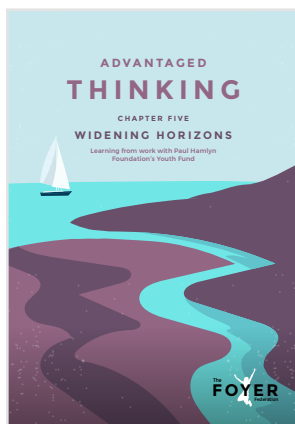
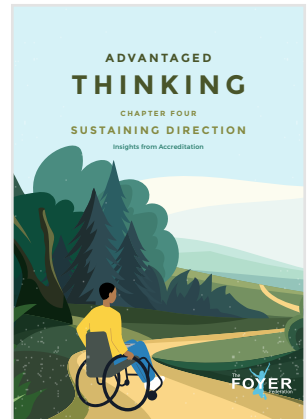
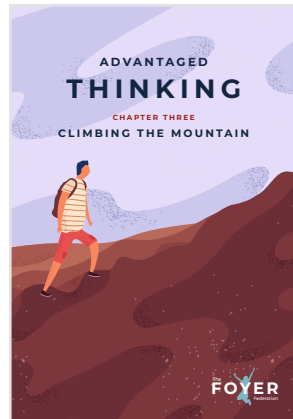
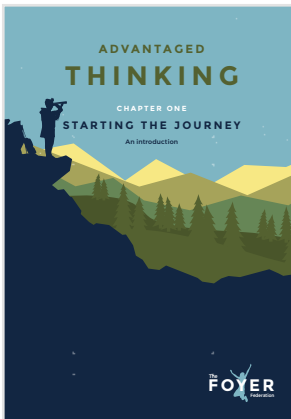
This room is about coming together around a common desire to see young people advantaged. It's about finding ways to learn together, challenge each other and do more to give all young people the chance to flourish.

Key activities in this room:

- Building on the strong connections and diverse relationships within the Foyer Federation's network of members and investors and maintaining and growing that community.
- Developing new communities of practice that are accessible to those currently outside of Foyer Federation membership, and providing inspiration and resources to support an Advantaged Thinking youth offer.
- Creating space for like-minded youth organisations to think, collaborate and challenge each other around asset-based thinking.



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
Work.Life, Core Building
30 Brown Street
Manchester
M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
www.foyer.net



Supported by:

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER EIGHT EXPERIENCING NEW PATHS

An Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework



CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPERIENCING NEW PATHS

“Advantaged Thinking empowers people to believe in themselves and have agency over their life decisions.”

Sally James, independent consultant in Australia

“Young people are the best at explaining Advantaged Thinking and what could be different. The most profound change happens when they are able to lead the change process.”

Nicola Kidston, Peer Power

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

AN ADVANTAGED THINKING LEARNING FRAMEWORK

CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the framework	2
2. The framework's structure	3
3. Competency levels of Advantaged Thinking learning	5
4. Learning domains of Advantaged Thinking	9
5. Principles of learning delivery	12

Each section includes two 'Taking Action' questions to help you to reflect on insights.



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE FRAMEWORK

Advantaged Thinking was born and grew with young people at its heart. However, the journey that Advantaged Thinking takes us on – one that hones our skills, experiences, and learning – has so often become confined to the services and staff that work with young people rather than the young people themselves.

“I feel that we need to equip and enable young people to become Advantaged Thinking advocates rather than staff ‘owning the rights’ to the ethos [in our services].” – Glen O’Hare, Operations Manager at Ravenhead Foyer

The Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework is a development idea that aims to put Advantaged Thinking into the hands of young people. It is an informal framework created with young people that moves beyond simple preparation for independent living to preparing for an Advantaged Thinking life in all its fullness.

The framework seeks to increase access to engaging content as a ‘living curriculum’ and address gaps in learning provision in youth supported housing. It will embrace quality existing learning provision while stimulating new content and approaches that remain relevant, contemporary and in tune with young people’s aspirations.

The long-term vision for the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework is that it will better enable young people to become Advantaged Thinking leaders.

The aspiration is that the framework will:

- Be accessible online from any location
- Allow content to be created and added by young people, for young people
- Include a variety of learning materials for different delivery styles as well as self-learning materials
- Have inbuilt recognition, reward and tracking of progress
- Provide access to new opportunities such social action projects and work experience

The following sections provide the initial thinking on how an Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework might be structured and shaped.

2. THE FRAMEWORK’S STRUCTURE

A ‘curriculum’ refers to specific activities and experiences through which learning is conducted. As a curriculum, the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework’s core structure can be split into three connected parts:

- Overall levels of competency in Advantaged Thinking
- Learning domain 1: Technical understanding of the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking
- Learning domain 2: Application of Advantaged Thinking to achieve impact through its Theory of Change areas



Level One competency is about engagement and preparation to learn.

Level Two competency is about understanding and applying Advantaged Thinking with purpose in the context of one’s life.

Level Three competency is about taking on responsibility and power to promote or create Advantaged Thinking learning opportunities for oneself and others.

At all competency levels, learners will be expected to experience provision that brings to life the understanding and application of Advantaged Thinking as defined in the Foyer Federation’s two learning domains, and to enjoy learning that demonstrates the 10 principles of learning delivery that underpin the curriculum. The competency levels also offer a simple way of tracking Advantaged Thinking performance in a service through associated KPIs that can show the percentage of young people at a particular competency level. These could be adapted as a metric for service commissioners and managers wishing to promote Advantaged Thinking outcomes.



The Foyer Federation will formally endorse and manage content as a 'recognised resource' to access within the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework and will endorse 'recognised delivery centres' that offer young people access to the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework within a creative and quality learning environment.

Learning providers are encouraged to identify content that can be endorsed by the Foyer Federation to meet the expectations of the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework. **Young people** will also be encouraged to create new content for endorsement with the support of learning providers where needed.

To achieve endorsement, content must show how it:

- A. Supports progression in or across the three competency levels
- B. Achieves outcomes from either or both learning domains
- C. Offers proof of how the required delivery principles can be met

Further details of A, B and C are provided below.

Delivery centres are encouraged to be endorsed to offer young people Advantaged Thinking experiences. To achieve endorsement, centres must show how they will uphold the delivery principles, offer endorsed content and engage in annual reviews of quality. In return, they will be able to offer young people Advantaged Thinking certification through the Foyer Federation.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Do you have or could you create future content to be endorsed as a learning resource for the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework?
- Q2 What do you see as the positives for being a delivery centre able to offer young people access to learning experiences through the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework?

3. COMPETENCY LEVELS OF ADVANTAGED THINKING LEARNING

Competency Level One:

Getting ready to excel through Advantaged Thinking

At this level, learners will be able to:

- Develop self-confidence, understanding and belief
- Get inspired and engaged to experience learning
- Show commitment to learn by themselves and with others

Outcome: Young people are ready to learn, evidenced by levels of confidence, engagement and preparation to take up a future learning opportunity.

Endorsed learning provision will introduce young people to Tests One, Two and Five of Advantaged Thinking and invest in preparing young people to engage and commit to learning.

Foyer Federation benchmarking data shows that 56% of young people entering Foyers are not involved in employment, education or training, evidencing the need to re-engage young people. Achieving readiness to excel through Advantaged Thinking will secure this.

KPI: % of young people ready to excel through Advantaged Thinking.



Competency Level Two: Experiencing Advantaged Thinking

At this level, learners will be able to:

- Reflect on the 7 Tests to advance self-awareness
- Use the 7 Tests as a personal development tool
- Apply Advantaged Thinking to life experiences

Outcome: Young people direct and achieve a positive impact in their life, evidenced by use of Advantaged Thinking to progress personal quality of life in any of the Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change areas

Endorsed learning provision will allow young people to use and express the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking by exploring any or all of the practical contexts identified through the Theory of Change areas from the Advantaged Thinking learning map.

KPI: % of young people achieving improved quality of life through Advantaged Thinking.



Competency Level Three: Leading Advantaged Thinking

At this level, learners will be able to:

- Develop content to promote Advantaged Thinking
- Showcase their Advantaged Thinking Action to influence others
- Train, coach and mentor others to use Advantaged Thinking

Outcome: Young people have the power to influence others, evidenced by examples of young people promoting, sharing and supporting Advantaged thinking with and for others

Endorsed learning provision will equip young people to develop or deliver their own Advantaged Thinking material and experiences, giving them the power to influence and inspire others and achieve further quality of life impact for themselves.

KPI: % of young people leading Advantaged Thinking.



TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** How well does your current service(s) perform against the three KPIs?
- Q2** How could you ensure stronger outcomes across these three competency levels?

4. LEARNING DOMAINS OF ADVANTAGED THINKING

Learning Domain 1: Technical understanding of the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking framework

Learners will be expected to explore and develop technical understanding across some or all of the 7 Test areas, demonstrating the learning outcomes defined below for each Test:

Test One:	Talk about people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a positive mindset • Use the power of positive language • Present the best you in any context
Test Two:	Understand people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what makes a strength • Recognise and value personal strengths • Deal with weaker areas in a positive way
Test Three:	Work with people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a team player • Create a positive network • Benefit from coaching and mentoring skills
Test Four:	Invest in people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify positive opportunities • Make effective decisions • Develop your full potential
Test Five:	Believe in people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe in yourself and others • Trust and be trusted • Bounce back from failures
Test Six:	Involve people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show commitment and responsibility • Volunteer to help others • Get involved to influence change
Test Seven:	Challenge people	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a cause to campaign for • Develop activism skills • Overcome barriers and negatives

Further guidance and content for learning through the 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking will be made available from the Foyer Federation separate to this publication.

Learning Domain 2: Application of Advantaged Thinking to achieve impact through Theory of Change areas

The 7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking

	Talk about	Understand	Work with
Housing	What makes a good tenant	Housing experiences, options and requirements	Getting the most from landlords and contractors
Health	Healthy Wellbeing and positive lifestyles	Emotional resilience and positive health interests	Getting the most from a coach, personal trainer and counsellor
Finance	Responsible financial choices	Spending habits, goals and financial challenges	Getting the most from your bank or a financial advisor
Social	Positive networks and social impact	Community connections; social interests; positive family connections	Getting the most from mentors and external agencies
Employability	Positive work choices and personal potential	Work readiness and aspirations	Getting the most from work coaches, employers, and being in a team
Education	Joy of lifelong learning and personal potential	Learning styles, talents and skill gaps	Getting the most from learning coaches and facilitators
Personal development	Growth goals to flourish	Positive personal qualities	Getting the most from coaches and mentors

Invest in	Believe in	Involve	Challenge
Developing tenancy skills	Positive housing aspirations	Personalising your room; contributing to a positive community environment; other volunteering	Youth housing campaign
Positive health activities and resources	Healthy futures and strong minds	Leading or co-producing health activities and action projects	Mental wellbeing campaigns
Financial capability resources, move-on subsidies, and positive incentives	Financial independence	Get involved in budget or grant decisions	Campaign for accessible banking and grants
Community connection and social experiences	Civic participation and youth activism; mutual aid projects; relational connections	Get involved in community decisions, external events and comms	Campaigns on community perceptions, youth spaces and youth activism
Work readiness skills and experience, enterprise and apprenticeships	Work aspirations and opportunities	Get involved in social action projects and/or internal work opportunities	Work opportunity campaign
Formal and informal programmes; digital learning; Independent and group learning	Lifelong learning	Share expertise and talents with others, e.g. through 'Pass it On'	Campaign for accessible learning provision
Life skills, personal budgets and talent bonds	Thriving goals and behaviours	Set personalised goals and success measures	Campaign against disadvantaged stereotypes

'Advantaged Thinking Learning map'

Further guidance and content for impacts through the Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change areas will be made available from the Foyer Federation separate to this publication.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which Tests and Theory of Change areas do you engage young people to learn about and develop through?
- Q2** Which outcome areas might bring the most benefit to your learning offer?



5. PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING DELIVERY

Learning experiences delivered as part of the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework must be:

1. Inspiring and exciting
2. Personalised to young people's interests and goals
3. Accessible to all young people
4. Engaging for different learning styles
5. High quality with clear learning aims and outcomes relevant to young people
6. High value with meaningful forms of recognition and achievement
7. Designed with the active involvement of young people
8. Able to connect with opportunities for progression
9. Able to offer opportunities for young people to lead or co-deliver sessions
10. Delivered by appropriately skilled and qualified trainers, offering demonstrable lived and/or learning experience to facilitate an Advantaged Thinking learning space

Learning providers offering content to be endorsed by the Foyer Federation for the Advantaged Thinking Learning Framework will be required to evidence how learning content supports these principles.

The Foyer Federation will expect all delivery centres offering Advantaged Thinking Curriculum provision to evidence that delivery is reviewed on an annual basis with young people to show:

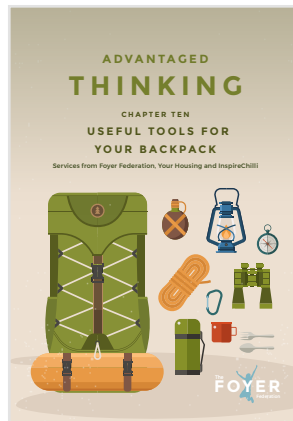
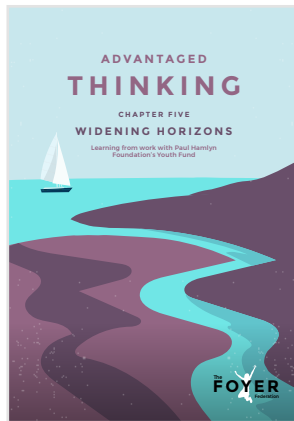
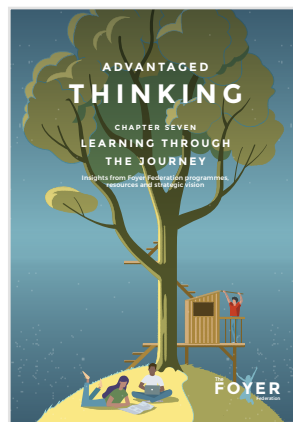
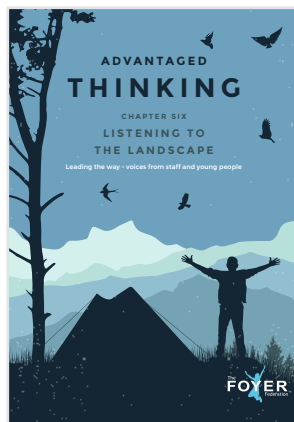
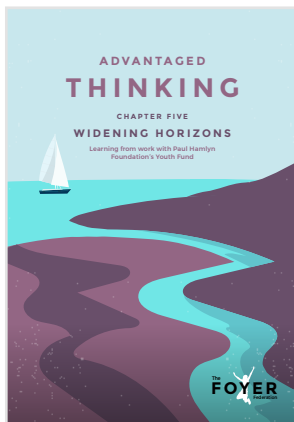
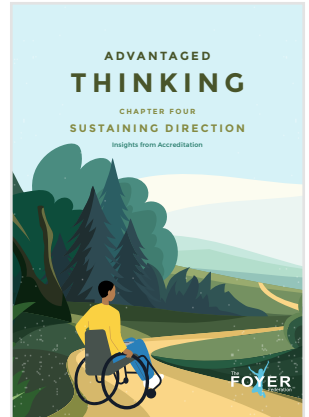
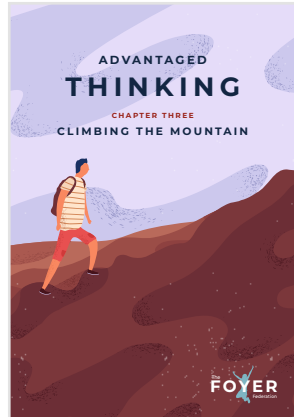
- Curriculum fidelity through the use of appropriate learning offers
- Consistency in the quality of learning experiences
- Relevance to young people's needs and goals
- Positive learner feedback
- Achievement of impact

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** How many of the learning delivery principles do you uphold in your current offer?
- Q2** How might an annual review process be of benefit to your learning offer?



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH



inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net

Supported by:



ADVANTAGED THINKING



CHAPTER NINE REACHING FOR THE FUTURE

An Advantaged Thinking call to action

CHAPTER NINE

REACHING FOR THE FUTURE

“Advantaged Thinking to me is like a pair of magical glasses I get to wear all day, every day which, in the simplest of terms, sharpen my view of the important things in life”

“These Advantaged Thinking glasses clear up how I talk about people. They remove the fuzziness around how I work with and understand people, and they even help me stay on the pathway to thriving which, at times, can be difficult to see. When I’m wearing my Advantaged Thinking glasses, just the knowledge that I am wearing them is enough to remind me to truly hold high expectations for people and to seek out their stories and listen with sincere curiosity so I can better understand them and look for ways of empowering them to reach their potential. I also like to offer my magical Advantaged Thinking glasses to others around me just so they can try them on for a bit as this often sparks incredible conversations around what they now see and how this new ‘clarity’ affects their thoughts and ideas.”

Dan Frost, Colony 47, Tasmania

A collaborative project with:



Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

AN ADVANTAGED THINKING CALL TO ACTION

CONTENTS

1. Introducing the offer and calls to action	2
2. The offer for service managers and funders	3
3. Call One: The aspirational ask for service managers and funders	4
4. Call Two: How service managers and funders can take immediate action	5
5. Call Three: Challenges to inspire future success	6
6. Last word	8

Each section includes two ‘Taking Action’ questions to help you to reflect on insights.



1. INTRODUCING THE OFFER AND CALLS TO ACTION

An Advantaged Thinking call to action is not about encouraging people to act in response to a problem – the definition used in the Cambridge Dictionary – but inspiring people to take action to create good. It is the potential that Advantaged Thinking promotes. Our call to action is an invitation to take up a pair of ‘Advantaged Thinking glasses’ and use their clarity with purposeful intent. Behind this invitation sits an offer that highlights why Advantaged Thinking should always be someone’s approach of choice.

We have directed our Advantaged Thinking offer and three Advantaged Thinking calls to action at service managers and funders, but they can be meaningfully applied to anyone in any context.

1. THE OFFER:

Why Advantaged Thinking should be an approach of choice

2. CALL ONE:

The aspirational ‘ask’ to commit to

3. CALL TWO:

How to make an immediate start to take action with Advantaged Thinking

4. CALL THREE:

Challenges to inspire future success

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which of the offers and calls to action is most important to you?
- Q2 Who else beyond service managers and funders could these be addressed to?

2. THE OFFER TO SERVICE MANAGERS AND FUNDERS

While the context and needs for each person’s Advantaged Thinking journey will be different, our insights highlight shared positives in terms of what Advantaged Thinking can offer:

1. **Advantaged Thinking is a powerful, proven framework for delivering an asset-based approach** with a decade of practice impact that is far richer than just ‘positive thinking’, being strengths-based or delivering psychologically informed environments. Advantaged Thinking brings these different aspects together into something that is centred on the person, service and system.
2. **Advantaged Thinking works** for services, the staff who run them and, most importantly, the people who use them. There is a compelling evidence base for its asset-based approach, with a growing bank of inspiring Advantaged Thinking examples.
3. **Advantaged Thinking can help to address both practice development and systems change.** It supports advancing the quality of services as well as influencing the policies and systems through which services must work.
4. **Advantaged Thinking has developed tools** you can use to resource your journey, including a range of off-the-shelf examples you can instantly plug into.
5. **Advantaged Thinking has an international community of practice** to learn from. There is a growing number of leaders willing to share their insights, from the UK to Australia.
6. **Advantaged Thinking has the power to inspire people** at all levels of decision making because it is interested in the people we are as practitioners, as well as the people we are responsible for. It has far more meaning than just another set of words to adopt.
7. **Advantaged Thinking can be measured and quality assured** to safeguard its value. There is a track record of quality assurance and performance measurement approaches that offer both existing frameworks and bespoke new ones that meet the requirements of different organisations and commissioners.

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which of these offers has the most value for you?
- Q2 Why might you see Advantaged Thinking as a go-to approach?

3. CALL ONE: THE ASPIRATIONAL ASK FOR SERVICE MANAGERS AND FUNDERS

To progress Advantaged Thinking, we ask that service managers and funders:

1. Offer flexible approaches that enable services and staff to personalise their approach around the goals of the people they are working with
2. Support consistent, asset-based policies and procedures that move practice away from transactional, deficit-based models of support
3. Invest in purposeful staff, training and mentoring those who care for Advantaged Thinking to develop their skills and capabilities over time while allowing those who do not share that passion to move on
4. Share power with people to create meaningful space for the those using services to shape how the services operate and take up positions of influence at all levels
5. Be collaborative and relational with other services to join up provision in ways that suit the goals of people and generate the most effective outcomes
6. Focus on improvement journeys that are about discovery, challenge and development – not quick-fix outcomes that rarely work in the long term
7. Think creatively about capturing impact in ways that involve all people and track progress over time to truly understand people's lived stories

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which commitment do you feel most passionate about?
- Q2** What might help you overcome any obstacles to you achieving these?

4. CALL TWO: HOW SERVICE MANAGERS AND FUNDERS CAN TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION WITH ADVANTAGED THINKING

Advantaged Thinking is ultimately about taking action. These 'action stations' below are where a service manager or funder can make an immediate start:

1. Reflect on how your values and intentions align with Advantaged Thinking
2. Look at how the 7 Tests promote things that matter to you and measure yourself against them, identifying areas you can take action on within your own practice and processes
3. Take stock of how your current approaches can encourage Advantaged Thinking, challenging yourself to remove any blocks that might get in the way and to shape new paths where they are required
4. Be authentic and accountable to those you seek to benefit through your work by involving them in your Advantaged Thinking journey, seeking their advice and inspiration at each stage
5. Reach out to those who have experience with Advantaged Thinking to learn from and ally with them
6. Shape a plan for what you can achieve through Advantaged Thinking – and how you can do it
7. Commit at every level – from the governance of your organisation to its staffing, processes and funding. Everything matters to bring Advantaged Thinking to life

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1** Which of these 'action stations' are best for you to make a start from?
- Q2** Is there anything else you need to help you begin to advance Advantaged Thinking?



5. CALL THREE: CHALLENGES TO INSPIRE FUTURE SUCCESS

Our challenge to service managers is to develop a thriving culture of Advantaged Thinking that shows:

1. Consistency across each service area
2. Strong foundations to sustain practice into the future
3. Action to influence others in your community and network
4. Aspirations to do better with and for the people a service exists to benefit
5. Authentic outcomes and role models that demonstrate positive impact

Our challenge to funders is to free services to adopt Advantaged Thinking by building funding approaches that allow:

1. Flexibility for services to work with people in personalised ways
2. A culture of trust in which the relational comes before the transactional
3. Investment in resources for services to enable them to look beyond just helping people to cope
4. A focus on holistic outcomes defined by people's experiences and achievements
5. More genuine, decision-making power to be held by the people you seek to benefit

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which of these final challenges resonates most with you?
- Q2 How could you challenge yourself or others to do more with Advantaged Thinking?

6. LAST WORD

Whether you are a funder, service manager or a person in a position to influence people's lives, please share your experiences with any aspect of Advantaged Thinking by connecting with the Foyer Federation's Home for Advantaged Thinking. **It is a home for everyone's voice.**

In the words of Joe Howie from Brotherhood of St Laurence,

"Advantaged Thinking keeps us facing the right direction, focuses our effort on what matters and ultimately enables us to develop and evolve practice collaboratively."

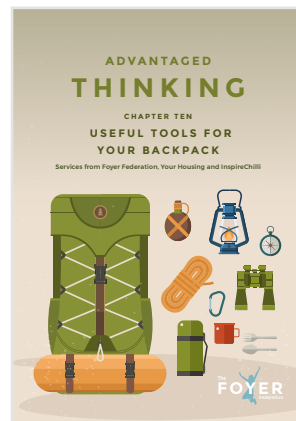
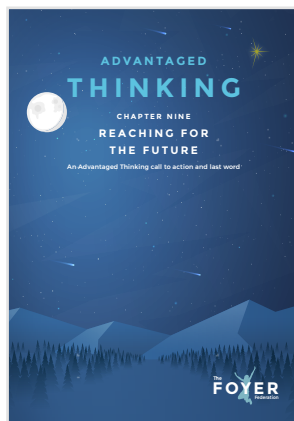
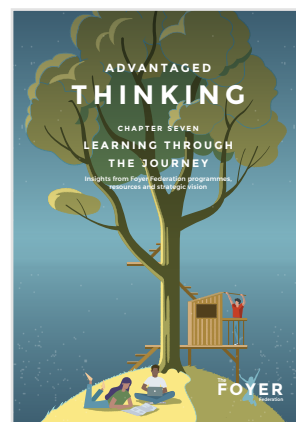
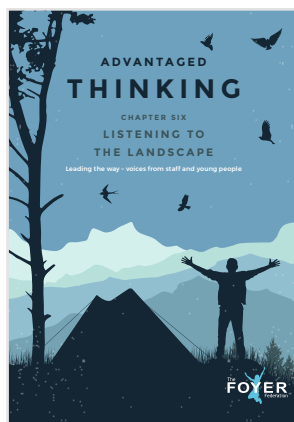
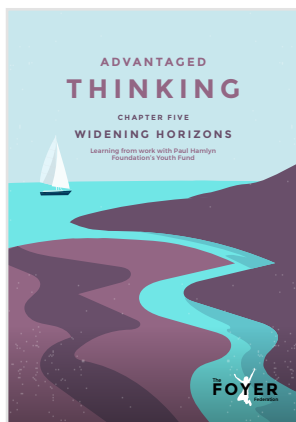
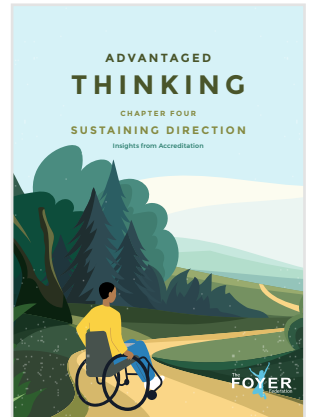
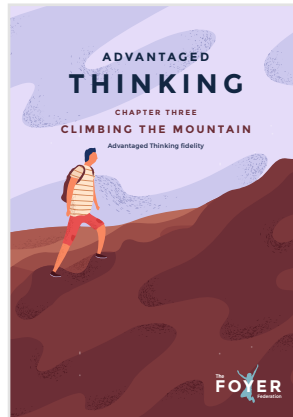
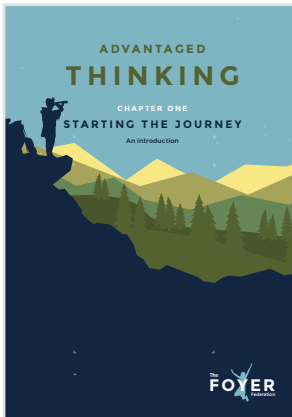
Advantaged Thinking is the ultimate compass to signal positive direction. Use it.

We are truly grateful for all the voices and examples referenced in our journey through these nine chapters. **In Advantaged Thinking, every journey and experience counts.**

Finally, we hope that this publication inspires your direction, whoever you are, so that you can inspire us with what you achieve. **We look forward to learning with you.**



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH



inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net

Supported by:

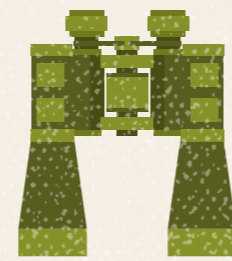


ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER TEN USEFUL TOOLS FOR YOUR BACKPACK

Services from Foyer Federation and InspireChilli





This chapter shares current offers that are available for purchase or sharing from:

1. The Foyer Federation
2. InspireChilli.



A collaborative project with:

1. SERVICES FROM THE FOYER FEDERATION

Registered charity 1040482
Registered company: 2699839

Advantaged Thinking was introduced to the world by the Foyer Federation in 2011. All our products, services and initiatives are built on a foundation of Advantaged Thinking, as well as being grounded in the reality of working alongside young people.

A. Membership: Join the Advantaged Thinking movement by becoming a member of our network. There are three tiers of membership available for youth housing services and other organisations with a passion for Advantaged Thinking. Membership gives your service, staff and young people access to a network of Advantaged Thinkers, practice-focused events, innovative programmes, funding for projects and young people, and asset-based resources and toolkits.

B. Accreditation: Become an accredited Advantaged Thinking service by engaging with our nationally recognised quality development programme, FOR Youth (as featured in Chapter 4).

C. Training: We offer a variety of online and face-to-face training to complement and deepen your Advantaged Thinking practices. These include:

- Advantaged Thinking – moving your service towards an asset-based culture
- Coaching – an Advantaged Thinking way of working with young people
- Powering Up Youth – developing youth leadership and power within your service
- Building Resilience – promoting wellbeing within individuals and staff teams

D. Consultancy: We can work alongside organisations who wish to improve their asset-based offer to young people on consultancy basis.

E. Programmes: We design and deliver programmes in collaboration with young people, staff and youth organisations to enhance their ability to be Advantaged Thinkers and ensure that all young people can realise their power and purpose (as featured in Chapter 7).

F. Advantaged Thinking Action Pack: This set of flash cards, co-created with our members, comes with a list of suggested uses to help organisations and teams continually embed the principles of Advantaged Thinking into their day-to-day work, and to keep challenging themselves to deepen their practice.

G. Co-creation: We can co-create solutions, tools and resources alongside professionals and young people to address challenges, needs and aspirations.

We work alongside Young Consultants, each of whom has lived experience of homelessness or other challenging circumstances, to deliver our services. Our fees help pay for their time as well as being reinvested back into the charity to ensure we are consistently doing more for young people who can't live at home.

For more information about our services, please visit www.foyer.net. You can also get in touch with us at inbox@foyer.net

2. SERVICES FROM INSPIRECHILLI

Registered company: 09629007

All of InspireChilli's work applies an asset-based approach and Advantaged Thinking expertise drawn from Director Colin Falconer's international experience.

A. Inspirational speeches for events – from conferences to award ceremonies.

B. Facilitating away days and training for teams, boards or services seeking to advance or develop asset-based practice, strategies and tactics, including expert resources.

C. Programme learning or service evaluations through an asset-based lens.

D. Mentoring, from young people to CEOs, or support for new mentors.

E. Research and programme development.

F. Producing and leading asset-based quality assurance standards and frameworks.

G. Bespoke 'critical friend' service for senior teams, leaders or boards, including expert resources.

H. Developing practical strategies for meaningful youth involvement.

I. Setting up and running leadership groups for and with young people.

J. Writing specialist content for publications and funding applications.

InspireChilli's services are charged on an affordable scale based on the nature and length of the work and the budget of the organisation. All fees include an investment back into young people through InspireChilli's Team Young People and Inspireside Initiative that seeks to invest in bringing inspiration to life for people and communities.

For further information, contact hello@inspirechilli.com

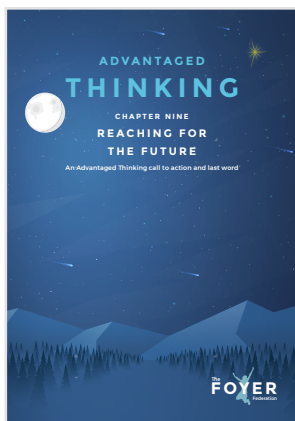
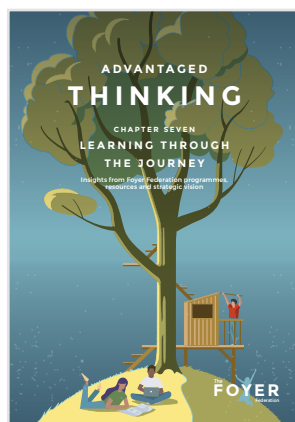
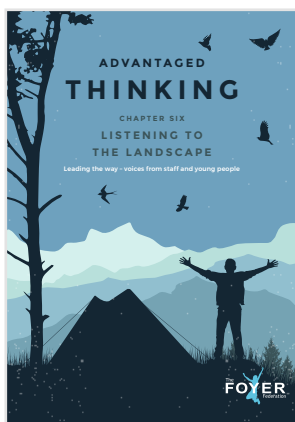
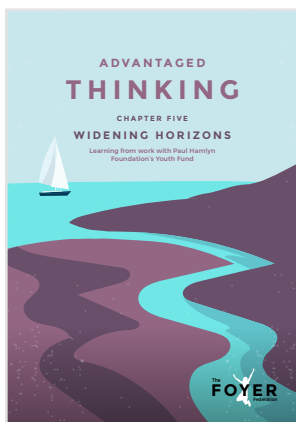
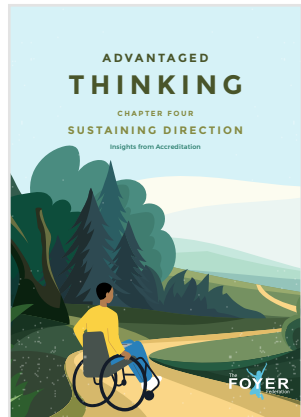
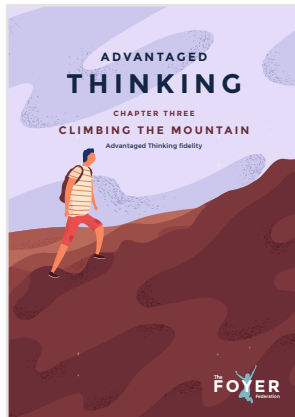
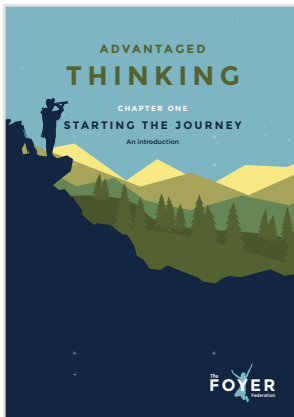


Supported by:



Creating more places for people to thrive and be recognised as a sector leading landlord

Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



The Foyer Federation
 Work.Life, Core Building
 30 Brown Street
 Manchester
 M2 1DH

inbox@foyer.net
 www.foyer.net



Supported by: