

Our Theory of Change

Helping children and young people have a fair chance to be who they want to be

Introduction

Many organisations have a ‘theory of change’ which are statements and visual images that present what they do, how they do it and what difference they make.

It really helps an organisation be clear about what work to do, how to do it and what their service users can expect. It also sets out what changes as a result of the organisation’s activities.

The development process

The impetus for developing this theory of change was to underpin a new organisational strategy and to refine our monitoring, evaluation and learning plans. We started the process of consulting with staff and young people, and designing our own theory of change, in the Autumn of 2022.

It was new to us so we had lots of conversations, with lots of different people, and produced over nine different versions to get to where we are to date. Our consultation included workshops with young people in our services, with our Board, and with staff at all levels and in all areas of the organisation.

We were helped on this journey by Professor Kaz Stuart from the Centre for Youth Impact. Kaz explained the process and facilitated conversations at every step.

Read on to view our final theory of change and the rationale behind the inclusion of each component in the diagram, and how they relate to one another.

Our theory of change

1. Who we work with

We support children and young people up to the age of 25 with multiple and complex needs



2. What we do

We provide three services, delivered in a variety of ways:



Housing provision and sustaining accommodation



Emotional wellbeing and mental health



Specialist information, advice and support



3. How we do it

Our people:

- offer you safe, inclusive and consistent homes and support
- listen to you and plan together
- work in a compassionate and respectful way valuing you as a whole person
- celebrate and build on your strengths and help you feel like you belong
- support you to progress, make your own choices, and have your own goals for the future
- support you to feel understood and empowered to create change in your own lives, local community and the world around you
- support you to give feedback and to influence or improve all services
- strive to make local systems work better for you



4. The impact we have

As a result of working with us you will...

- no longer experience homelessness
- positively move on to more independent living
- know how to get the support you need
- assess your own risks and seek your own help
- have more trusted relationships and communities
- have more life and social skills
- be better at learning from experiences and coping with everyday life
- have better emotional wellbeing and mental health
- have better self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem

in the short term

...have improved...

- housing situation
- ability to make safer choices
- sense of belonging
- ability to live independently
- learning, employment or training
- ability to advocate for yourself
- resilience
- security in your own identity
- positivity and contentedness
- transitions in your life
- independence
- mental wellbeing

in the long term



5. Our aim is

For children and young people to have a fair chance to be who they want to be

Our values - we welcome all, we inspire, we support and we speak out
Our approach - psychologically informed services and environments

The five sections of our theory of change

1. Who we work with

We discussed the different children, young people, and, in some cases, adults who access our services. We agreed that the core group were **children and young people up to, and including, 25 years of age with multiple and complex needs** - although currently we do have some services for over 25s and work with families in others. The core group will be the focus for our future strategies.

We mapped out the 'demographic information' and worked out that what they had in common were that the children and young people we work alongside may have one or more characteristics from the list below (although sometimes they may not have any and be accessing a universal service for any child or young person up to the age of 25).

We support children and young people who may have an absence, presence, or risk of

- ▶ homelessness
- ▶ domestic abuse
- ▶ substance use
- ▶ involvement in criminal activity
- ▶ exploitation
- ▶ economic difficulties
- ▶ not in employment, education or training (NEET)
- ▶ mental and physical health issues (mild to moderate)
- ▶ self-harm or suicide
- ▶ life transitions
- ▶ adverse childhood experiences
- ▶ trauma
- ▶ family relationships
- ▶ bereavement

Groups we particularly support:

Children and young people who are LGBTQ+, Black and racially minoritised, neurodiverse, have experienced exploitation, are care experienced, young families, young carers, young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

2. What we do

We clarified our support offer in three service areas:

- ▶ Housing provision and sustaining accommodation
- ▶ Specialist information, advice and support
- ▶ Emotional wellbeing and mental health

We do this by inputting skilled staff and volunteers who are supported and supervised, trusted suppliers, contractors, partners and funders, buildings and housing that are in good repair, appropriate resources, quality marks and professional accreditations, evidence of what works, an effective organisational culture and infrastructure, youth voice to shape services and income from commissions, local authority rents, housing benefit and donations.

For more information on each area, please see below.

Housing provision and sustaining accommodation

Housing referrals, supported accommodation, housing and tenancy support, independent living skills, sustaining tenancies support.

Specialist information, advice and support

Drop-in support, housing and tenancy support, relationships, job education and training help, out of hours support, advice line, crisis support, advocacy support, onward referrals, access to sexual health resources, safeguarding and protecting vulnerable people, parental support, keywork on life skills (budgeting, savings, maximising income, self-care, cooking, organisational skills, communication skills, safe plans, risk assessment, cleaning, laundry), skills for life, employability skills, maintenance training, sexual health, psycho-educational support, coaching, mediation, youth group work, case work, school and college work support, advocacy, social and emotional skills sessions (responsibility, empathy, problem solving, initiative, teamwork, emotional management), creative arts, visits and outreach.

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Counselling, high and low intensity, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), canine therapy, play therapy and drama therapy, systemic therapy, systemic family therapy, rap & spoken word, foster and adoption therapy, Black and racially minoritised therapy, LGBTQ+ therapy, social prescribing, confidence building and boundary setting, digital resources and sessions, spiritual support via prayer, chaplaincy, accessing relevant faith communities, meditation, social activities, shared meals, community links, food market, group work.

3. How we do it

In this section, we have identified the ‘magic’ of what we do here. In other words, how the skilled staff and volunteers work alongside children and young people to enable them to belong, contribute and thrive, and to achieve our final aim of having ‘a fair chance to be who they want to be’ (see point 5).

There are some obvious ways that we work – for example providing safe and inclusive homes or listening to those in our services to help improve things.

This section is all about the people who work and volunteer for us and how we can ensure we have a psychologically informed approach, provide safe environments for people, and have a trauma informed approach at the heart of how we work.

Our values are important to us and underpin the whole theory of change: we welcome all, we support, we inspire and we speak out.

4. The impact we have

This section sets out the outcomes we expect to occur for the children and young people we support as a result of engaging with our services.

The short term outcomes define the small positive changes that occur as a result of how our staff and volunteers are working with children and young people.

These lead to the long term outcomes we expect people to experience after leaving our services (and are likely to have been shaped by other factors and people helping them too).

5. Our aim

Put simply, our overall aim is for children, young people and families to ‘have a fair chance to be who they want to be’.

Conclusion

We believe our theory of change demonstrates who we work with, what we do, how we do it, what impact we have and our overall aim for the children and young people we work with. We will use our theory of change to underpin decision-making, improve services, communicate what we do, and support and develop our people.

We are working on a new Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework (called a ‘MEL’) which will frame how we have oversight of the activity of the organisation, and how we are measuring our performance and impact. The new MEL will improve how we communicate our impact to everyone.

Keep in touch

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