

ADVANTAGED
THINKING

CHAPTER ONE

STARTING THE JOURNEY

An introduction



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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

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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.



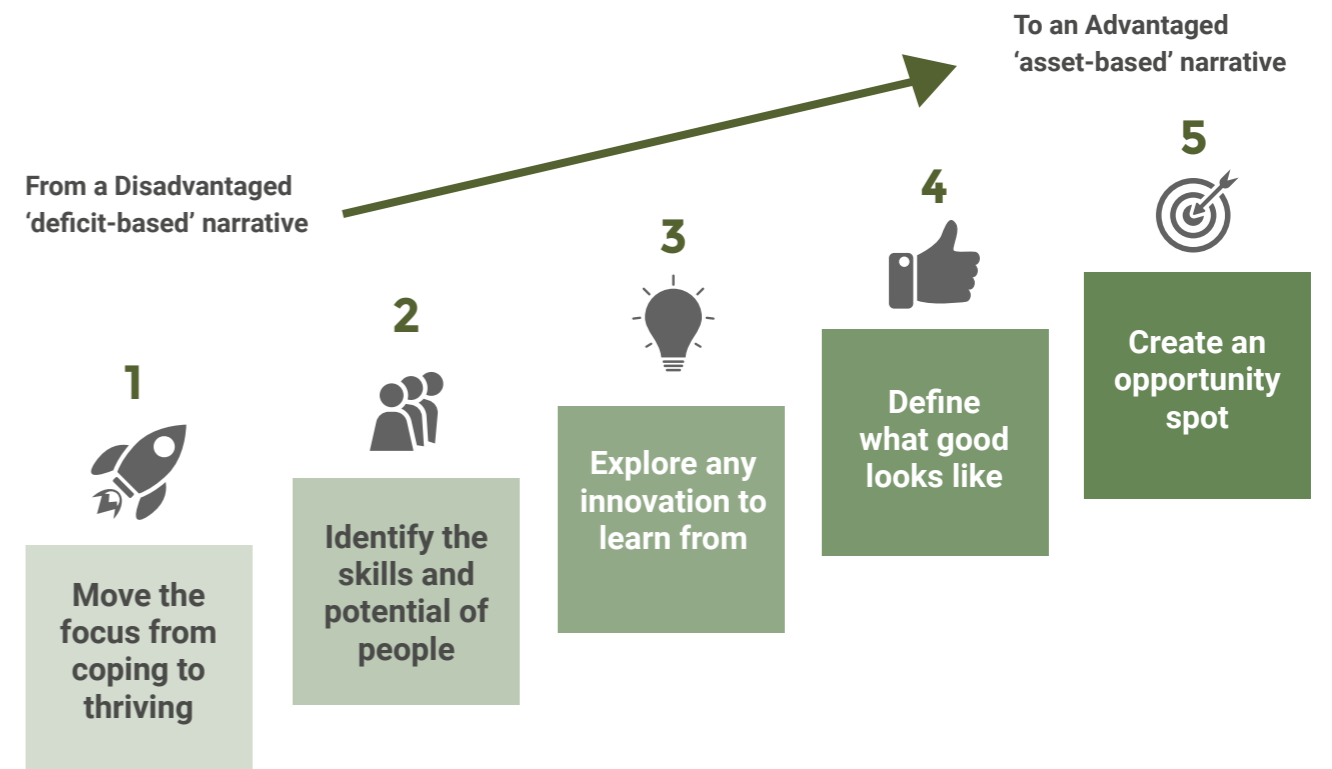
The paradigm shift draws from something called the 'sustainable livelihoods ladder'. This shines a light on the difference in aspiration between supporting people to cope (providing safety through dependency) and inspiring people to take positive risks, build skills and experiences, and adapt towards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

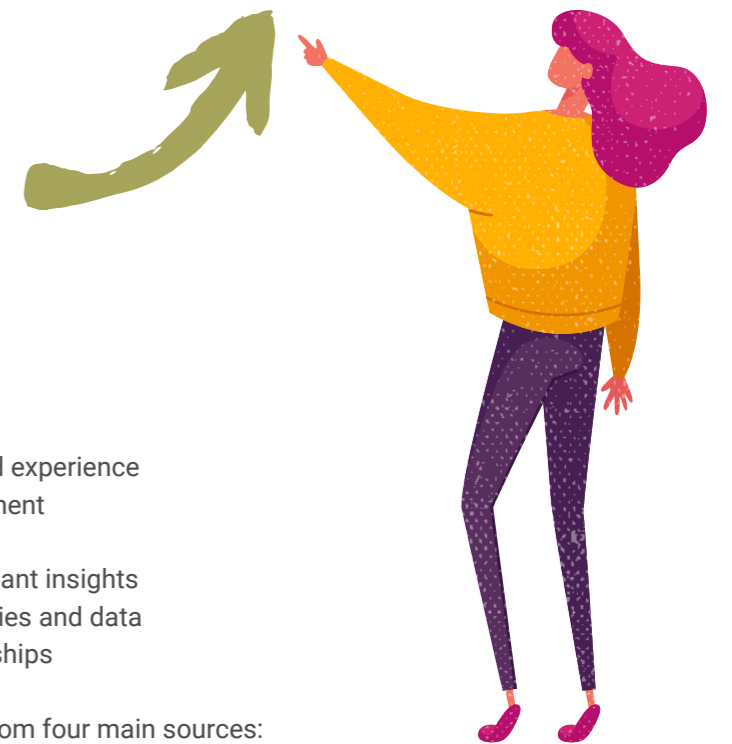
Q2 Which test do you find most inspiring to take action on?

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.

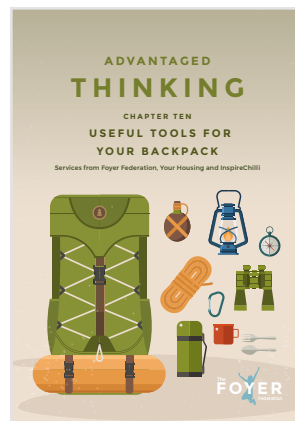
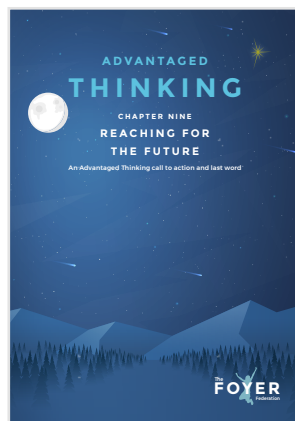
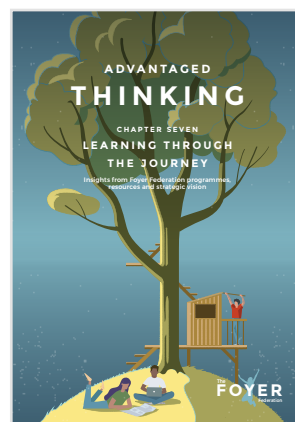
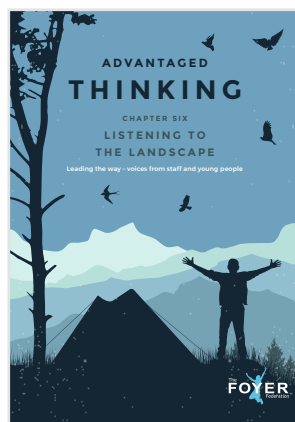
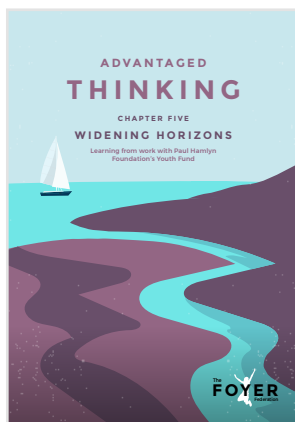
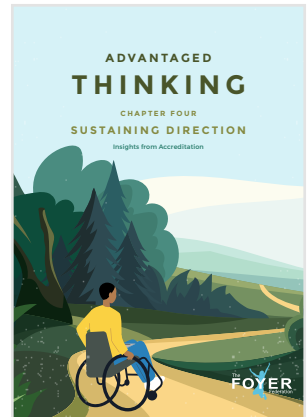
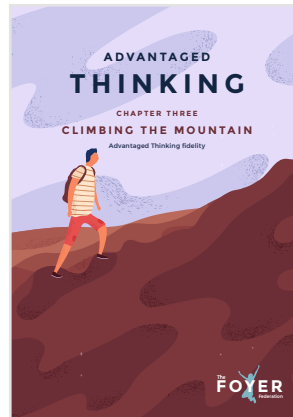
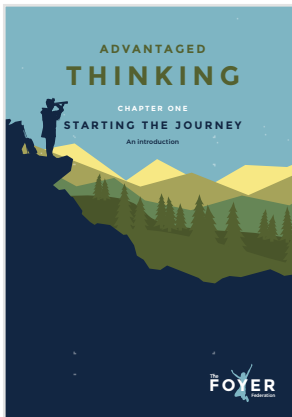


TAKING ACTION:

- 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:



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