

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER THREE

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

Advantaged Thinking fidelity



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“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

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ADVANTAGED THINKING FIDELITY

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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.

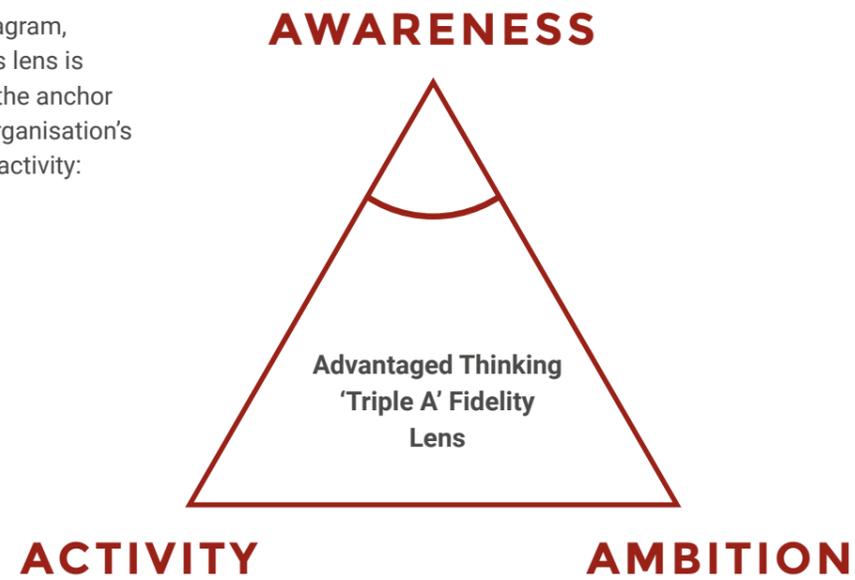
6. Any assessment systems should be weighted towards awareness.

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

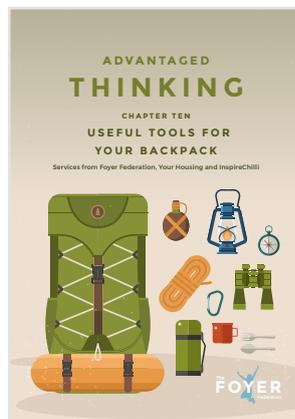
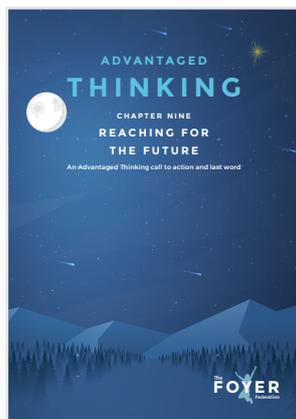
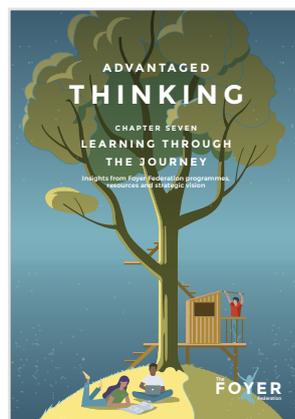
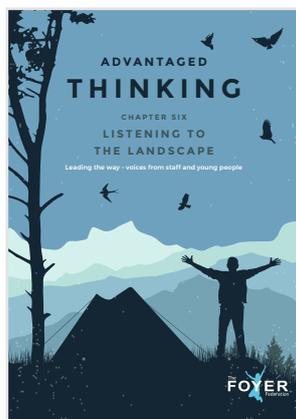
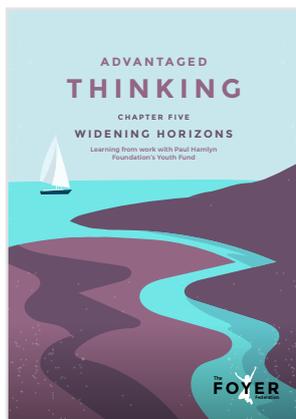
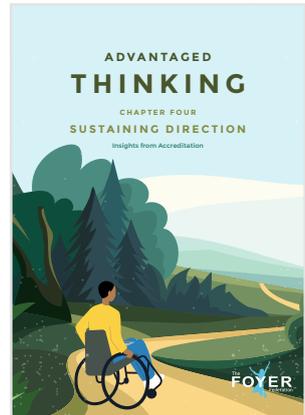
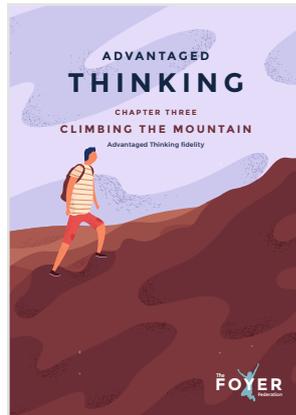
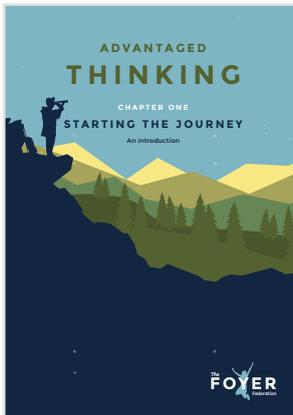
Q11: Do you think the service always listens to young people and tries to achieve the right things for you?

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

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