

The Home for Advantaged Thinking



The Foyer Federation
Strategy

2021-24



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1. What we are thinking

Over our 28 year history we are known for our innovation, bravery and commitment in shaping an inspirational and quality offer for young people in supported housing and beyond.

It was 7 years ago we launched our ambitious strategy 'Investing in our future' and so many things have changed in the social, economic and political landscape over that period of time.

Our network of Foyers have faced year after year of local authority funding cuts and reacted in different ways - some have embraced the challenges with courage and creativity and others have sadly reduced or abandoned their offer to young people. We've also been through our own changes at Foyer Federation, developing a partnership with SEUK to help sustain our services and begin to grow again.

We are so proud of our current members who have weathered this difficult period and work with over 2500 young people each year developing their talents and building a healthy transition into adulthood.

We recognise that we need to change and adapt to the world around us and create a space to unite like-minded organisations and services who are relentless in the pursuit of inspiring young people to realise their power and purpose. We want to see young people shape their own future and take the lead and we are willing to embrace the challenges to see that vision become a reality.

That's why we are **renovating** our house at the Foyer Federation, to build a new home, **the Home for Advantaged Thinking** where all young people can thrive...

Why don't you build it with us?

2. The Advantaged Thinking journey so far...

When Advantaged Thinking was first introduced at a TEDx event in April 2011, it resonated as something familiar to the Foyer network. Taking an approach to advantage young people through their abilities, rather than disadvantage them as liabilities, spoke to the original radical ethos of the Foyer concept.

A focus on finding ways to open talents also connected with stakeholders far beyond just supported housing. Advantaged Thinking expressed the fundamentals of an asset-based philosophy in a framework accessible to everyone from young people to practitioners, employers, funders and policy makers. Since its introduction, it has guided the development of national programmes that impacted positively on thousands of young people's lives, influenced the introduction of more opportunities in the wider youth sector, lead the way for asset-based innovations, and reached as far as Australia, where Advantaged Thinking has driven new communities of practice.



None of this should be surprising.

The origins of Foyers tells a very Advantaged Thinking story.

When the post war French government chose to invest in a Foyer network it did so not as a deficit-based response to a perceived housing problem but as part of a positive inquiry into what makes a good induction into adulthood for young people.

It is a question we still need to pose.

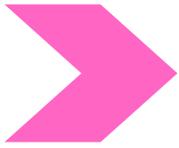
The deal in the original Foyer offer, providing access to a connected range of housing, employment, education, health and personal development services, remains as powerful a promise today as it was in the 1990s.

Our society continues to fail to find a way for all young people to receive such vital supports. Against this backdrop, Advantaged Thinking offers a beacon of inspiration to help us shape the alternative approaches required to meet the challenges facing young people. It questions how far we are truly prepared to believe in young people, to invest in their voices and aspirations, and so achieve the systemic reforms required to enable big changes to happen. From the language we use to the tools we apply, Advantaged Thinking reminds us to hold a positive vision of young people as authors of their own destiny, not passive consumers of more deficit-based services.

As we reconsider what the Foyer ethos can offer for young people in the next decade, the Foyer Federation's history and intellectual property provides the foundation for us to build a revitalised home for Advantaged Thinking – an exciting thinking and action space to collaborate with young people and the organisations that serve them, ensuring that access to the right range of quality services is in reach for everyone, wherever they live. Help be part of this future by building **The Home for Advantaged Thinking** with us, joining our members, the young people we work with, and those who fund and support our vision.

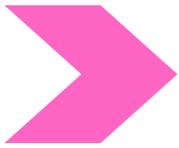


3. Who we are



Our vision

All young people take ownership and leadership of their futures, and develop the strengths and talents needed for a fulfilling life.



Our mission

We are building the Home for Advantaged Thinking to inspire and equip young people to realise their power and purpose.



Our beneficiaries

Young people who have experienced disadvantage and the services that work with them.

Our Values

Love is at the heart of all we do. It means genuinely looking out for the world around us, and knowing when to be tough and when to be kind.

Authentic leadership is about sticking to your values, being comfortable in your own skin and not trying to be someone you're not.

Mavericks are born to be original, quirky and maybe even a bit unpopular to shake things up and make them better.

Brave - having the quiet inner confidence to stand up for what really matters.

Being **Savvy** isn't a science; it's a mind-set. It's about being smart and creative, while keeping one eye on the now and one on the end of the game.

4. What we do

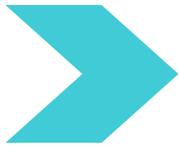
We are innovators...

Creating purposeful opportunities for young people that develop enterprising minds, active citizens and future leaders.



We are capacity builders...

Helping our partners and network to grow their quality and impact by providing the tools, expertise and support to help them create the right environment for young people to thrive.



We are influencers...

Challenging partners and stakeholders to adopt Advantaged Thinking - believing and investing in young people.



We are leaders...

Developing communities of practice and ground-breaking solutions, listening carefully to our network and tailoring our responses to put Advantaged Thinking in to action

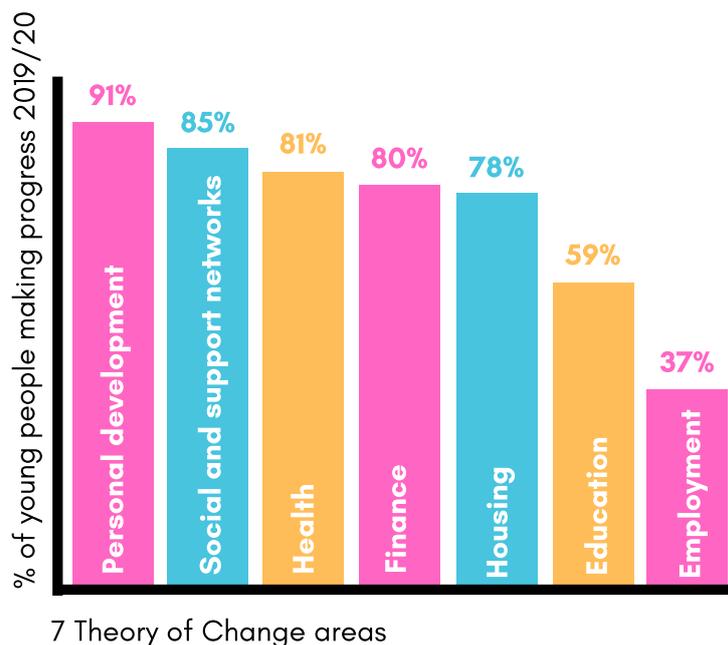


5. The importance of being 'Foyer'

'Foyer' is a term often misunderstood and can be wrongly confined to a particular type of building, model or service offer. We prefer to describe 'Foyerness' as an approach that can include those elements but is much more. Here are a few elements of what being 'Foyer-like' is all about:

- Having a culture of trust where young people feel safe, take ownership and have power to change things.
- Working in an asset-based way that promotes and develops the talents of young people.
- Providing opportunities for young people to develop their social skills, financial management, health and personal strengths as well as the chance to learn and earn (based on the Foyer Federation's Theory of Change, 2016).
- Having genuine positive impact and enabling young people to transition into adulthood in a holistic way.
- Celebrating the success of young people's progression and achievement.
- Cultivating and developing young leaders.

Last year, Foyers had the following impact with young people:



6. Preparing for the renovation



Youth consultations & survey (August 20)

Network consultations (July 20)

SWOT and Governance Review (June 20)

Youth and homelessness sector research (March 20)

Network survey, SEUK insights and Friends of Foyer meeting (Nov 19)

As we prepare for the renovation, we've spent 2020 making sure we build on the strong foundations of our history and network. We've grounded our ideas and vision through conversations with our friends, the young people in Foyers, our members and our partners.

6.a Foundations on which to build

- 28 years of developing a **network** of Foyers where young people can thrive
- 7 years of **Advantaged Thinking** - developing asset-based culture and practice with local services
- 12 years of delivering asset-based **programmes** that create lasting impact
- 22 years of delivering **accreditation** and quality assurance in youth housing
- Legacy of **influencing** more positive, inspirational and asset-based services for young people - in the youth housing sector and beyond.
- Developed international and national **partnerships**

6.b Surveying the site

The Foyer Federation and Foyer network have navigated through a challenging period. Survival has come at a price, with the network reducing in size from 135 services in 2014 to 55 in 2020, along with a sharp drop in income for new programmes. But both the Federation and Foyers have also proved resilient, overcoming significant pressures to sustain their core focus on Advantaged Thinking values, beliefs and impacts, from which to shape the future. Foyers and the Federation have done a lot with little but still want to achieve more for and with young people.

How would you know that an organisation is led by young people?

"I haven't come across this much. Most young people are not given the chance to explore their strengths as well as work on weaknesses. We are expected to be perfect and polished and it makes leadership difficult to get into."

Foyer resident, 2020

The Foyer offer is as relevant to young people's future as it has ever been in its 28 year history. Despite operational pressures, Foyers are performing strongly, with increased levels of 80% to 90% of young people making progress in housing, health, social skills, financial capability and personal development; and more young people taking up work and education, with 50% in one of these options on exit. The network scale might have decreased, but the Foyer Federation can still reach two and a half thousand young people each year, of whom 84% achieve positive stays through Accredited Foyer members.

The opportunity is how to maximise the full potential of Foyer's Advantaged Thinking approach for those young people in need of transitional housing, personal development and social connection – needs rising through the pandemic period and its likely aftermath. The Foyer Federation's work to build a stronger **Home of Advantaged Thinking** offers an entry point for anyone who wants to invest in young people's access to a positive community that is committed to support, challenge and inspire current and future generations.

All this gives the Foyer Federation the confidence to explore the future with fresh determination to thrive. Driven by a positive focus on what we can do next to make a difference with others, the Foyer Federation actively seek relationships with like-minded organisations to help address challenges and progress opportunities identified through our new strategy's research.

"If I'm encouraged to take part in something that will develop a skill, I will take part. If I feel encouraged, it makes me want to work harder."

Foyer resident 2020

There are increased pressures on staff from rising mental health needs among young people, reduced time and resources in contracts to work with young people, higher attrition rates that have left smaller numbers trained in coaching approaches, reduced external services and challenges from external support systems such as the impact of

universal credit, and the ongoing need to navigate external barriers to education, employment and housing options for young people. While Foyers continue to thrive, we know we can and should do better. The following insights need to be factored in to how we build:

6.c Insight 1 - Mental Health

We have witnessed a 10% rise in the numbers of young people entering Foyers with a mental health diagnosis, at 46% of entrants. The actual need level is far higher, with many young people experiencing challenges that have not been previously diagnosed or have only been recognised in the safe environment of the Foyer.

In a recent survey of young people in Foyers, 68% noted that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.



6.d Insight 2 - Staff resilience and skills

Staff attrition rates have jumped from 8% to 21%, which has led to smaller numbers of support staff trained in coaching, reduced by almost 10% to 56% of the workforce. Coaching skills safeguard an organisation's approach to working with young people, which we would like to see embedded in a more sustainable way beyond the offer of a single training course.

6.e Insight 3 - Opportunities to earn and learn

The lowest areas of impact across our Advantaged Thinking Theory of Change continues to be progress in education and employment, with a marginal 5% decline in numbers making progress in education from 59% to 54%, but an increase of 7% in employability up to 47%. These outcomes are far behind the 80-90% progress figures achieved in Advantaged Thinking areas where Foyers have more direct control over impact, namely financial capability, health, social connection and personal development. Overcoming challenges for young people to access opportunities in education and employment will require greater innovation to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on positive transitions. In a recent survey of young people in Foyers, between 49% to 51% noted that the pandemic had a negative impact on their education and employment prospects.

6.f Insight 4 - Foyers must be digital for the future

There is historically poor digital infrastructure in many Foyers with less than half of the Foyer network lacking accessible free wifi for young people in their rooms and/or without the staff skills and technology to maximise use of digital options, meaning that Foyers are too often on the back foot to fully harness digital innovation.

What does a positive service that believes in young people look like to you?

"When young people don't feel they have to hide or pretend or blend in. When I feel I can be 100% honest, that's a positive."

Foyer resident, 2020

We want Advantaged Thinking services to be at the head of digital learning and communication opportunities. Access to wifi should be a standard expectation for young people's accommodation, with staff fully skilled and resourced to work in more agile ways.

We recognise that many Housing Associations have begun to prioritise digital investments, but the process of change has been slow, particularly to impact on young people's access to improved infrastructure and equipment. The pandemic period has encouraged some services to experiment with more digital communication and support alternatives, which we want to build on going forwards.

There is huge potential to improve communication, social connection and support opportunities through a consistent digital skills and infrastructure offer that fully involves young people. We believe that digital should be part of the solution in how we work with young people to respond to increased challenges and needs. 61% of young people in Foyers have identified that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their relationships and social connections.

Intelligent use of digital channels will be central to how Foyers continue to connect young people with future opportunities and positive supports.

6.g Insight 5 - Foyers and the Federation need the right resource to make change happen

Dependency on funding relationships that are often too short-term, at risk to change, inadequate or inappropriate for an Advantaged Thinking approach, or too resource-heavy to utilise and influence, all mean that the Foyer network and Federation are constantly required to fight for resources. The Federation has operated without a formal CEO for an extended period of time, during which it has benefitted from Social Enterprise UK 's support to safeguard its stability.

"Spend time with young people. If you don't understand how I think it will be hard for you to find the starting point to help me."

The Federation needs the right resource that enables its programmes and network to invest in young people's power and purpose. A **Home for Advantaged Thinking** demands adequate space to achieve more. Young people's potential is being short changed – we want to provide young people with the impetus to make big change happen.

6.h Insight 6 - The growth and interest in Asset-based approaches

The Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking radar continues to spot and connect with examples and interest in asset-based approaches, such as:

1. The promotion of Strengths-based approaches in Danny Kruger's report for government on Levelling up Communities, noting that 'the principle of self-efficacy – that people have the capacity, with the right help, to effect positive changes in their own lives and the 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'.
2. The explicit requirement in applications to the National Lottery Community Fund to evidence both a 'people led' and a 'strengths based' approach, ensuring that organisations are 'making the most of, and building on, the skills and experiences of people'.
3. Increased focus at Homeless Link on supporting organisations to become 'more strengths based', with ongoing work to develop a new resource for services and commissioners that was showcased at the 2020 'Everyone in for Good' conference.
4. Ongoing investment for asset-based services through Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Youth Fund, which was established due to their belief that a focus on asset-based approaches will better help young people to thrive and 'become successful adults and members of society'.

5. The recognition given to the ABCD model (Asset-based community development) in Nesta's New Operating Models report (2020), recommending this as an innovative approach for local authorities to help cultivate 'the conditions for people to flourish – and, over time, reduce the demand for services at the point of crisis'.
6. The spotlight on the importance of a 'person-centred' asset-based ethos in the successful work of youth organisations from the Listening Fund to meet increased demands during the Covid-19 period, demonstrating how a strong asset-based culture enables organisations to adapt more effectively to external challenges.
7. The increased interest of commissioners to promote Psychologically Informed Environments and trauma-informed practice, both of which offer useful tools to help services develop some of the wider positive, person-centred features of a fully asset-based approach.
8. The recognition of international partners, from the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Australia whose work to lead Advantaged Thinking resonates through the successful impacts achieved by the Education First Youth Foyer model, through to the strong focus on Advantaged Thinking in the new strategic plan of Northside Partnership in Ireland.
9. The efforts of like-minded leaders such as the Better Way Network, who advance asset-based principles through their work to improve services and build strong communities.
10. 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.

These insights contribute to the secure foundations for our **Home for Advantaged Thinking**.

7. The Home for Advantaged Thinking

We have identified four main rooms within the **Home for Advantaged Thinking**. These rooms describe our strategic aims but more importantly they contain the life within the home:



Room A - Leadership

A space for young people to realise their power and purpose through opportunities for youth leadership and activism.



Room B - Quality

Where we develop the capacity, quality and impact of youth services.



Room C - Influence

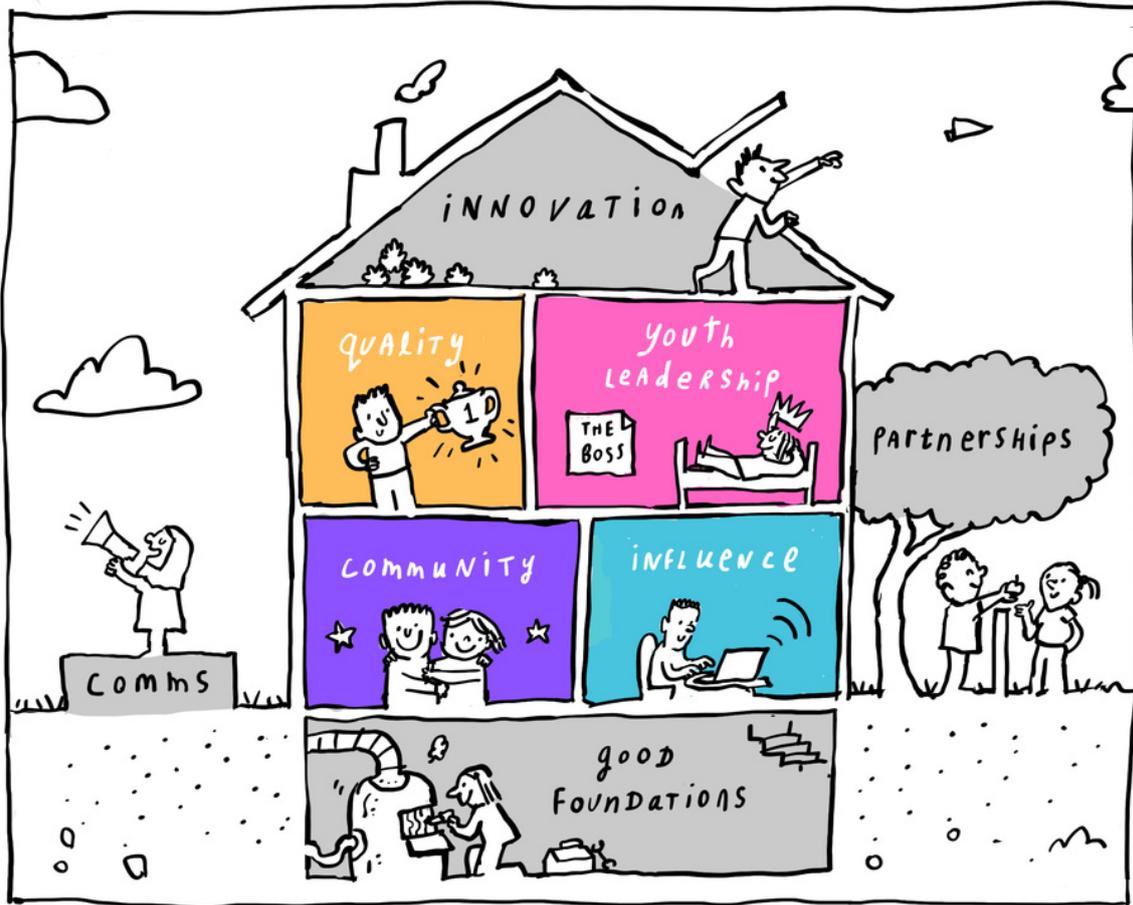
Where we communicate and promote a vision of Advantaged Thinking that creates the right environment for young people to realise their power and purpose.



Room D - Community

Where we grow an Advantaged Thinking network that connects thinkers and doers, fosters learning and shares inspiration.

7. The Home for Advantaged Thinking



A home is not just a combination of rooms. A great home responds to the environment, has a strong structure, provides moments of inspiration, functions effectively and provides a place of safety and warmth.

From the outside we want the **Home for Advantaged Thinking** to be welcoming, a place where young people, youth services, funders, partners, corporates and others can share a common vision for seeing young people realise their power and purpose.

We want the foundations to be built on good governance, a strong business plan and a lean and innovative operating model.

We want the structure to be built on the views, decisions and actions of young people.

We don't want to do this alone. The most beautiful creations come through collaboration...which part will you help us design and build?



8. Room A - Youth Leadership and Activism

Create a space for young people to realise their power and purpose through opportunities for youth leadership and activism.

What?

We are seeking to achieve the following objectives over the next three years:

1. Ensure young people are fully represented in positions of power across the organisation including governance.
2. Develop opportunities for young people to use their skills and lived experience to achieve the aims of the vision.
3. Challenge and inspire others to do the above.

Why?

A low bar has been set in youth supported housing when it comes to youth leadership and activism. A lack of ambition and fear of losing control can hamper youth services from allowing young people to lead and have genuine agency.

On a regional and national scale young people who have experienced homelessness have very little voice and power to change the way the services they live in are run and are designed.

We get inspired by listening but often don't take action - what are we scared about? Are we too busy to give young people the skills and opportunity to lead?

Young people and the services that support them need greater knowledge, skills, opportunity and inspiration to take youth leadership and activism seriously.

How? - to achieve these objectives we will:

- Create a Youth Influencer group and recruit young people to our board
- Recruit a trustee with experience of increasing youth voice
- Create a new Youth Involvement strategy to help drive youth led change within the charity
- Create an online platform with and for young people to share their skills, experiences and passions - increasing their voice nationally.
- Invest directly in young people's talents and strengths through Talent Bonds to enable them to take ownership of their future.
- Design and deliver leadership programmes that build power and purpose with young people and increase opportunities to thrive.
- Increase the amount of young people who have access to our leadership resources and support.

Who?

We want to work with funders and decision makers who share our ambition and vision for young people to take the lead. Those who are willing to challenge the status quo and develop new ways of giving young people greater power.

We want to partner with other youth organisations who are open to collaboration and developing like minded networks for young people.

We would welcome new conversations with businesses who want to support direct work with young people to develop their talents, provide new experiences and invest in their future.

We will be working closely with staff in Foyers and other youth services to support them to create local changes that contribute to a wider system change and ensure young people realise their power and purpose.



9. Room B - Quality and Impact

Develop the capacity, quality and impact of youth services.

What?

We are seeking to achieve the following objectives over the next three years:

1. Validate and accredit Advantaged Thinking approaches
2. Mobilise and resource effective leadership for Advantaged Thinking services.
3. Evidence the value and impact of Advantaged Thinking for young people.

Why?

Many youth services claim to work with the strengths and talents of young people but there is still a lack of clear criteria and standards for working in an asset-based way across the sector.

Pressure from local authority funding cuts has caused support contracts to be heavily focussed on quick housing outcomes and/or bare bones support instead of holistic and inspirational services that deliver long term positive impact.

We want to help more services and commissioners to understand the benefits of asset-based working and sustain and express this approach.

Youth services need support to reflect on their culture and the effectiveness of their practice.

Commissioners state they want more guidance and concrete measurable outcomes related to asset-based practice.

In our recent Power Up programme and youth survey, young people were clear about the need for greater consistency in Advantaged Thinking delivery from frontline coaches and support workers.

How? - to achieve these objectives we will:

- Work with our current FOR Youth Partners to consistently review and accredit their service offer and delivery.
- Work with young people to equip staff within youth services to put Advantaged Thinking into practice and develop leadership and innovation skills.
- Develop an Advantaged Thinking learning curriculum and grow an impact dataset that provides a robust evidence base to support the work of Foyers and other Advantaged Thinking services.
- Widen and develop our network of members by accrediting new services and working with them to achieve a high standard of quality.

Who?

We are interested in connecting with funders of youth services who want to ensure a consistent asset-based delivery model is achieved.

We are looking to partner with like minded infrastructure or membership organisations and expand the reach of our accreditation and quality development programme.

We want to talk to forward thinking commissioners who want to trial, develop and embed an Advantaged Thinking quality framework to raise standards in youth housing provision and beyond.

We want to speak to Housing Associations who want to develop an innovative and bold youth offer or start delivering a 'best in class' Foyer service.



10. Room C - Influence

Communicate and promote a vision of Advantaged Thinking to create the right environment for young people to realise their power and purpose

What?

We are seeking to achieve the following objectives over the next three years:

1. Connect and amplify positive voices for young people into a united Advantaged Thinking campaign.
2. Challenge policy and decision makers to listen to young people and act on their knowledge and experience
3. Create a brand for the Advantaged Thinking home that is accessible and useful to others.

Why?

There is an imbalance of power and influence within youth supported housing - young people rarely sit in positions of power and have little opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

There is a lack of cohesion and understanding around asset-based working within the youth sector and a tendency towards individualism, with a competitive and protective culture.

Policy influence has often been done at a senior level by large charity structures that don't involve young people with lived experience of homelessness.

How? - to achieve these objectives we will:

- Continue to capture the stories of young people through our website, social media and digital platform.
- Collaborate with other like minded organisations to celebrate and promote the talents and skills of young people in supported housing.
- Design and build a campaign with young people that creates a united movement for Advantaged Thinking and 'asset-based' thinking.
- Create a common brand and space for like minded youth organisations to think, collaborate and challenge each other around asset based thinking.

Who?

We want to work with funders and businesses who want to listen to young people and back their ideas and insights with investment.

We want to connect with other youth organisations who want to unite and collaborate to design an asset-based brand.

We are looking for corporates who can provide expertise and support to build a wide reaching brand and campaign around Advantaged Thinking.

We would like to talk to social enterprises and charities that can develop media relations with young people and help them to tell their story and influence positive change.



11. Room D - Community

Grow an Advantaged Thinking network that connects thinkers and doers, fosters learning and shares inspiration.

What?

We are seeking to achieve the following objectives over the next three years:

1. Support and develop communities of practice that bring different organisations and people together to act as a force for Advantaged Thinking.
2. Signpost and disseminate examples of best practice in Advantaged Thinking.
3. Encourage peer to peer support and learning.

Why?

Our recent network consultations and Friends of Foyer feedback highlighted the value of working together and having a common Advantaged Thinking movement and community of practice.

The opportunity to learn from each other, share inspiration and good practice develops better quality services and motivates staff on the frontline.

The high pressure environment of youth work presents lots of challenges including high staff turnover and potential burnout. Being part of a national community with peer learning and support builds resilience and sustainability within services.

How?

- Continue to connect and work alongside our strong existing network of members and investors
- Gather a diverse network of staff and young people at digital and face to face events both regionally and nationally.
- Create opportunities for youth services to work together to co-create new initiatives, tools and resources.
- Develop new communities of practice that are accessible to those currently outside of our membership and provide inspiration and resources to support an Advantaged Thinking youth offer.

Who?

We want to create new communities of practice with funders who support cohorts of youth services.

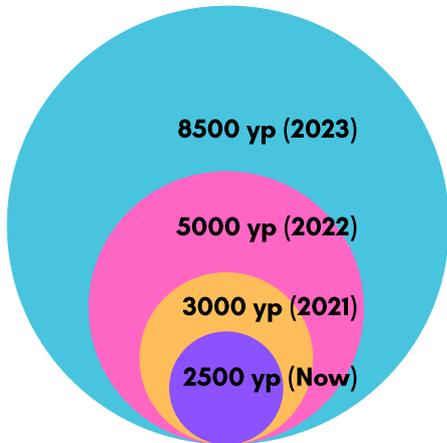
We want to hear from organisations who want to commission themed asset-based communities of practice eg for a particular client group or mission.

We would love to talk to other youth membership bodies who want to connect and collaborate over effectively delivering an asset-based community of practice.

We want to work with new local services who want to join our existing networks and/or access our products, tools and services that bring Advantaged Thinking to life.



12. The impact of the Home



We aim to reach more young people each year

80

We want to accredit 80 Advantaged Thinking services, 50% of which will be outside our current network by 2024

We will develop three new communities of practice and increase our network of connected services by 200% to 150 projects over 3 years



We will work with our network to embed an Advantaged Thinking curriculum in all Foyer services.

13. The Construction Team - get involved!

We want to hear from you at this time to help shape the design and build of the home:

WHICH ROOM EXCITES YOU MOST?

- A) A space for young people to realise their power and purpose through opportunities for youth leadership and activism.
- B) Developing the capacity, quality and impact of Advantaged Thinking youth services.
- C) Communicating and promoting a vision of Advantaged Thinking that creates the right environment for young people to realise their power and purpose.
- D) Growing an Advantaged Thinking network that connects thinkers and doers, fosters learning and shares inspiration.

IS THERE ANYTHING MISSING FROM THE HOME?

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK WITH US?

Companion documents to the Strategic Plan include our Comms Strategy, Business Plan and Youth Involvement Strategy that will be available on request.

Email any thoughts, ask for a meeting or get involved on our website:

www.foyer.net/homeforadvantagedthinking

[#homeforadvantagedthinking](https://twitter.com/homeforadvantagedthinking)

advantagedthinking@foyer.net

14. Thank you

To Paul Hamlyn Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn, Berkerley Foundation and the Tudor Trust for sticking with us during a challenging year and enabling us to rethink, refresh and redesign our offer.

To Blgrave Trust and the Listening Fund for challenging us to listen to young people, give them a voice and take action with them.

To Social Enterprise UK for your operational and strategic support over the last year.

To Colin at Inspirechilli for your insight, hard work and dedication to young people and the Foyer Federation.

To our Investor members for your ideas, support and engagement in our future direction.

To our Foyer members for standing united with us as we grow an Advantaged Thinking vision and movement for young people.

