

ADVANTAGED THINKING

CHAPTER FIVE

WIDENING HORIZONS

Learning from work with Paul Hamlyn
Foundation's Youth Fund



CHAPTER FIVE WIDENING HORIZONS

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

Paul Rogers, Northside Partnership

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

Young people from InspireChilli research workshops

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

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

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

1. INTRODUCING ASSET-BASED APPROACHES WITH PEOPLE

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

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

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

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

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

TAKING ACTION:

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

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

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

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

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



1. Does the organisation stand for something positive?

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

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

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

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

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

3. Does the organisation build positive relationships with people?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. Does the organisation positively promote people?

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

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

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

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

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

TAKING ACTION:

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

3. WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR IMPACT AND EVALUATION

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

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

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

1. TALK:

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

2. UNDERSTAND:

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

3. WORK WITH:

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

4. INVEST IN:

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

5. BELIEVE IN:

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

6. INVOLVE:

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

7. CHALLENGE:

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

TAKING ACTION:

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

4. TAKING ACTION FROM LEARNING ON ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

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

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

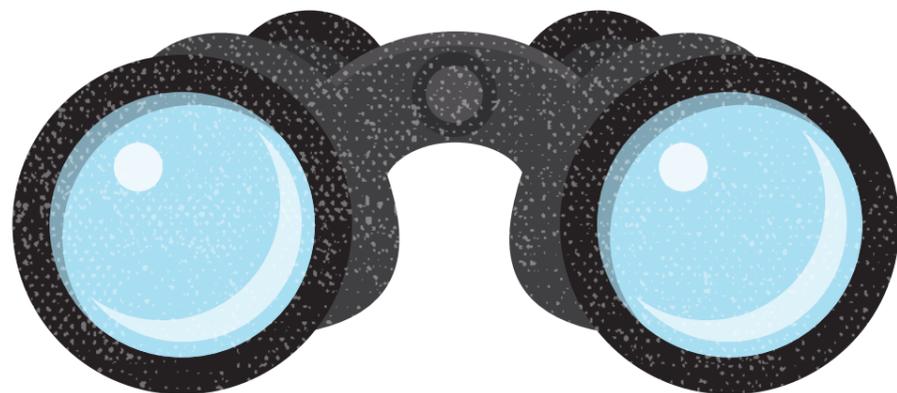
LEARNING INSIGHT	ACTION POINT
5. Influencing an asset-based approach to staff recruitment, training and management is a sustainable route to change inside organisations.	A 'start here' step for organisations wishing to embed asset-based working is to update HR approaches. This can ensure that everything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



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

TAKING ACTION:

- Q1 Which of these 10 learning points resonated most with you?
- Q2 What actions should you prioritise to take in response to these learning points?



5. ADVANTAGED THINKING FOR RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP

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

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

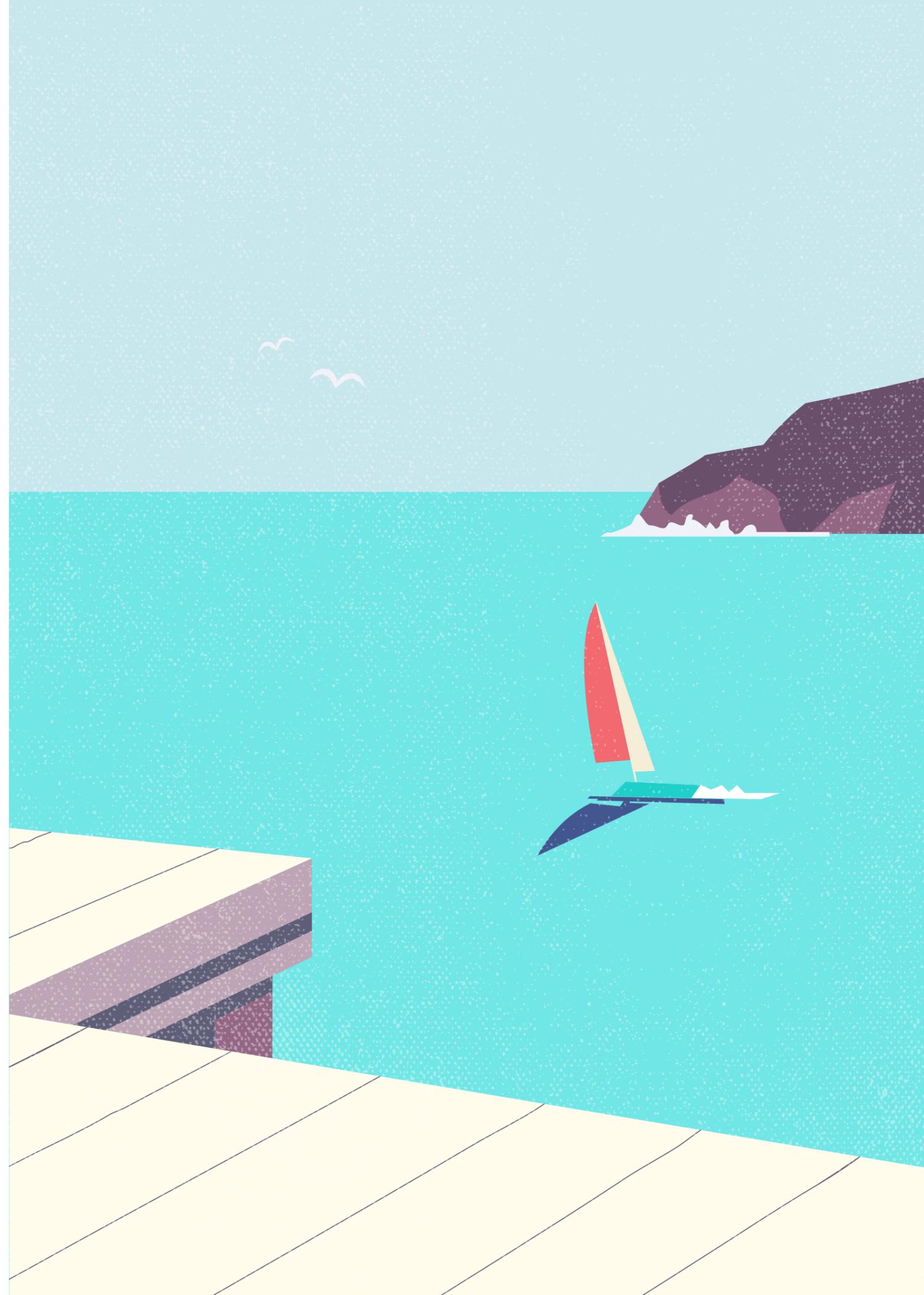
ADVANTAGED THINKING TESTS	RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP SIGNPOSTS
ONE: Talk How a leader expresses an Advantaged Thinking ethos	RELENTLESS IN communicating the organisation's vision and role modelling its values through positive, person-centred language and action
TWO: Understand How a leader promotes and uses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

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

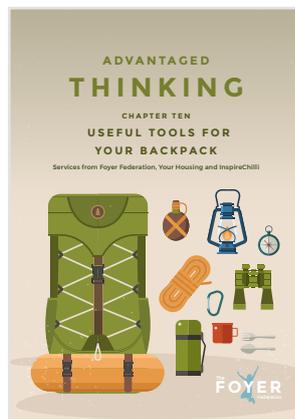
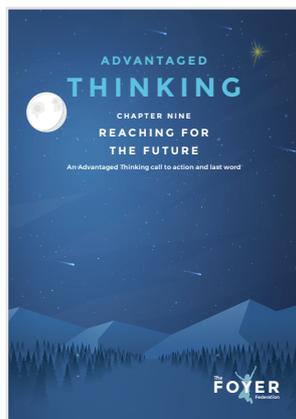
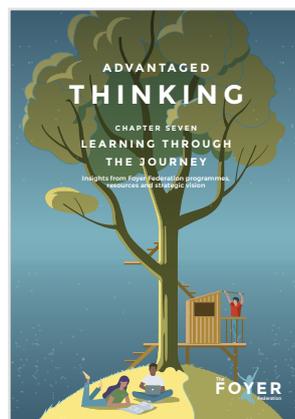
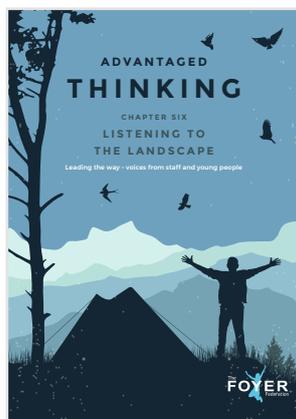
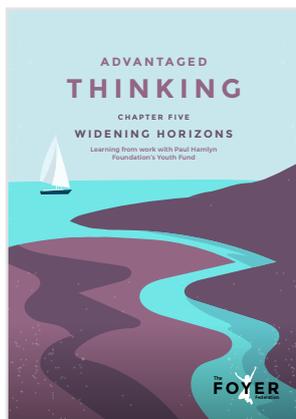
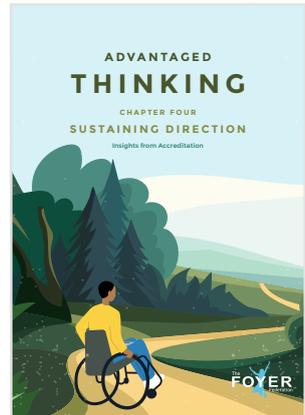
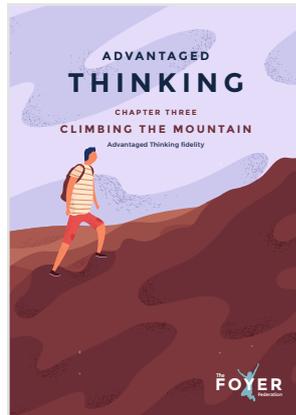
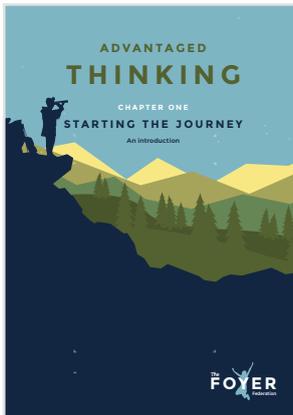
TAKING ACTION:

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

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



Advantaged Thinking series of reports:



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