Developing a theory of change (revised March 2014)

Contents

Summary

The aim of this guidance is to help Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations use a theory of change approach to help design, evaluate and communicate about their projects.[1] It is written for VCSE organisations in the criminal justice sector, most of who are involved in delivering projects directly for service users. The example used throughout is for a supported housing project that aims to help people move away from crime. However it should be noted that theory of change is suitable for all kinds of projects, including those that do not deliver services directly.

In summary, theory of change is a tool that will help you think about and design projects; working methodically from the need you are trying to address, to the change you want to achieve and the activities you will deliver.

This process of thinking about change, and how to achieve it, helps teams work together to develop and communicate a shared understanding. It is also a good way to develop plans for evaluating the effectiveness of what you do because it provides a coherent framework for testing whether a project is working as planned and how it can be improved.

Ultimately, this will help your organisation to focus on improving outcomes for individuals, communities and society and to better communicate what you achieve.

This guidance takes you through the process of developing a theory of change step-by-step. It introduces you to the basic concepts and some of the different ways to represent and use your theory of change.

1) Introduction to theory of change

A theory of change is a tool to help you describe a project's pathway from the need you are trying to address, to the changes you want to make (your outcomes) and what you plan to do (your activities).[2]

It is often represented in a diagram or chart,[3] but a full theory of change process involves more than this. It should help you consider and articulate the assumptions that lie behind your reasoning and address the question of *why you think your activities will lead to the outcomes you want*. It should also challenge you to develop clear aims and strategies and to explore whether your plans are supported by evidence. The output of a theory of change process is a diagram setting out a hypothesis of how a project is intended to work, which in turn provides a template for evaluation and data collection.

[1] We use the term 'projects' throughout this document as a shorthand way to refer to the full range of interventions a charity might provide, including all approaches, practices, interventions and programmes – even organisations as a whole.

[2] The terminology around theory of change is slightly confusing because there are variations in the approach. In this document we use the term to refer to the broad family of approaches that all help to articulate the reasoning behind projects. We include outcomes chains, planning triangles and logic models within this family, which are seen as variations in the way a theory of change can be *represented*.

[3] Examples of this are used throughout the guide, based on a supported housing project

VCSE organisations can benefit a great deal from the process of creating a theory of change. A full range of possible advantages is discussed in the box below.

Theory of change is actually a very simple idea. Throughout our work and personal lives we have aims and objectives and ideas about how to achieve them, but we rarely take the time to think these through, articulate and scrutinise them. All a theory of change process does is to make these assumptions explicit and therefore more testable.

However, while the idea itself is simple, what can makes doing a theory of change complicated or challenging are the social problems you are looking to address and the context in which you are working. This is why creating a theory of change can sometimes be daunting and there will nearly always be a point in the process where feel you have too much information to make sense of. This guide aims to help you through this process to help you produce something that both strengthens the design and delivery of your projects and enables you to feel more confident about your approach to evaluation.

The benefits of a theory of change

A theory of change can:

Help teams work together to achieve a shared understanding of a project and its aims. The process of agreeing a theory of change teases out different views and assumptions about what a team is aiming for and how it should work together. This can be motivating; your staff will feel involved in project development and see how their work contributes to long-term goals. You should also find that having a theory of change gives you a clearer sense and consensus around strategy and direction, both for individual projects and possibly your organisation as a whole.

Bring the process of change to the forefront. All change occurs incrementally through intermediate outcomes, like improvements in service users' knowledge and attitudes. A theory of change encourages you to focus on these outcomes, articulate and measure them.

Make projects more effective. A theory of change is an agreed statement of what you are trying to achieve. This can then help managers identify where activities are not contributing to your goals in the right way and take action.

Quickly communicate a project's aims. A theory of change diagram is a neat way to summarise your work and communicate it to stakeholders like funders and commissioners. They may feel more confident if they can see a project has been through a theory of change process.

Help determine what needs to be measured (and what does not) so you can plan your evaluation activities. This is important because evaluations can lack organisation or strategy. A theory of change helps by providing a framework for the evidence you should collect, which will give you greater confidence in your approach.

Encourage teams to engage with the existing evidence base. The best theories of change are justified by up-to-date knowledge of what works in criminal justice. This could be drawn from data your own organisation collects and/or research published by others, such as academics and government departments.

Help identify and open up 'black boxes' in thinking. The reasoning behind projects is often full of leaps and assumptions, like attendance at a training session automatically leading to changes in behaviour. A theory of change should reveal these hidden assumptions, some of which you may then discover are unfounded, out-of-date or inconsistent with the evidence.

Help with partnership working. Developing a theory of change in collaboration with other organisations can help you work together to clarify roles and responsibilities and establish consistency around outcomes. This could be especially useful for joined-up working between partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors, for example. A completed theory of change can also help with training new staff/volunteers and replicating services, as it shows what a service aims to achieve and how.

Act as the basis for claims about attribution. If – by collecting good quality evidence to test your theory – you can show you have achieved targets and desired changes at each stage, then you have a stronger case for saying that your project has made a difference (see section 6).

2) Creating a theory of change

A summary of the process

The process of developing a theory of change should begin with identifying the group you are working with, their needs and characteristics and the final goal[4] that you want to achieve for them.

The *"final goal"* should describe the change you want to see in service users, and by extension, in society as a whole. It should be realistic and succinct; you should not set more than a few final goals for each project (it is often best to have just one). A final goal should also be relatively long-term, obviously good or beneficial and something that funders or commissioners will be interested in. For example, the final goals of the supported housing project we use in this document are 'reduction in criminal behaviours'. Your organisation as a whole should also articulate its final goal(s) (related to your charitable objects) and these should be aligned to those of individual projects.

When thinking about final goals it is useful to consider what your particular project should be accountable for and what it should not be. Many projects will state "reducing reoffending" as their final goal; which they undoubtedly aim to contribute to, but the extent of success will depend on a wide variety of conditions and factors, many beyond your control. For this

[4] We use the term 'final goal'. Other terms which mean the same thing are 'final outcome', 'long-term goal/outcome' and 'vision'

reason we suggest drawing an **accountability line** between the outcomes you achieve directly and the longer-term goals these are intended to contribute to (which you will see in the charts below). Where you draw the accountability line is a matter of judgement, it should mark the distinction between outcomes that your project has direct influence over and those that you only contribute to because of other factors.

Once you have defined the final goal(s), you should work backwards through the steps you think are needed to achieve it. To do this it can help to think in terms of "intermediate outcomes": which are not your activities, but rather the changes *in service users*[5] that will contribute to achieving your final goal. This is perhaps the most important part the process: too often we jump from activities to final goals without thinking through the actual changes that need to take place in between. In fact, virtually all projects that aim for social change do so through the mechanism of improving service user's knowledge, skills, attitudes, thinking and behaviour so that they can make better choices for themselves. Hence intermediate outcomes need to be clearly articulated within your theory of change.

Intermediate outcomes should also be something that your project can clearly make a difference to; hence they should be feasible, given your scale activity, and short-term (but also linked logically to your long-term goal(s)).

An important point to note at this stage is to put aside any thoughts about how you will measure or evidence the theory of change you are working on. The project itself should not be designed around what can be measured, so nor should the theory of change. Any questions about future evidence collection should be left until later.

Once you have established an initial set of final goals and intermediate outcomes, you then need to consider how your activities will make this change happen. Take each intermediate outcome in turn and think about how your project will achieve it. This may include describing:

- The resources you will use.
- The activities you will carry out.
- The features that make activities particularly successful.
- How users will need to engage with your project if it is going to work.

After doing this you should think about what else is needed, both within and outside your control, for the project to work (which we call 'enabling factors'). These could include factors that make your service particularly effective, the support you depend on from other organisations and providers, or wider factors in society that could help or hinder your work.

Throughout the process you should consider what evidence already exists which is relevant to your theory of change**.** This will ideally be in the form of references to published research, but could also include your own organisation's experience and data. When reviewing this evidence, ask yourself the question, *why do we think this particular project is the best way to help our service users towards their long-term goal?* You may find some evidence that

[5] For most projects intermediate outcomes relate to change in service users. However there are some projects like professional development, improved partnership working or organisational restructuring where the intermediate outcomes might relate to changes in staff or volunteers.

supports your theory, but you may also find some that contradicts it. It is important to think this through and, if necessary, modify what you do to reflect what the evidence tells you.

Finally, only once you have a theory of change you are broadly happy with, you should start thinking about what you will do to measure and evaluate it. We cover this more in section 5.

Key components

A theory of change often uses a diagram or chart to describe a project in visual form. However, this should not be seen as the only element. The best theories of change also demonstrate the thinking that lies behind your project and include:

- An introduction to what a theory of change is (for anyone who is unfamiliar) and a description of the process you have been through to create it (including who has been involved).
- An analysis of the context and situation (sometimes called a 'situation analysis'): discussion of the background to the project; the problem in society you are trying to address (and its consequences); your target group, and their needs and characteristics (see Appendix 4 for the questions to ask when conducting a situation analysis).
- A 'narrative theory of change': a written description to accompany the diagram, focussing on the assumptions underpinning the project (see page 19).
- References to existing evidence that relates to the theory of change ('looking backwards' at evidence you have already and any published research/literature that is relevant). See section 5.
- Plans for measurement and evaluation that arise from the theory of change, sometimes called an 'evaluation framework' (looking forward at what you need to collect to test whether the theory of change is delivered). See section 5.

Factors affecting how you approach your theory of change

While the process of articulating the underlying logic of a project always remains the same, there are choices around how you approach the theory of change process and how you represent it, which are worth thinking about in advance. Some of the key factors are below:

- ***The purpose of your theory of change*:** Before starting, it is useful to think through the potential benefits, highlighted in section 1, and to decide on which of these is most important for you. If your main aim is to build a shared understanding across your team, then it will be important to involve as many people as possible; if you are looking to communicate externally, you will need to work towards a clear summary diagram and put effort into presentation; and if you want to improve your evaluation approach, then you may only need to do a simple planning triangle or logic model (see section 3) and move more quickly on to your evidence.
- ***Size and complexity of the project*:** This is an important issue to think about. It is possible to do a theory of change for a whole organisation, but this will take time and

the diagrams may be complex (see box on page 16). It is easier to create a theory of change for simpler projects so it might be better to start on something like this before moving on to the wider organisation. Another approach is to do a very general overall theory for an organisation and more detailed models for individual projects.

- ***Stage of development*:** Some projects are well-established with a robust evidence base behind them, so developing a theory of change will be relatively straightforward (there may even be examples already developed you can draw from). Exploratory or innovative projects will require more thought.
- ***Understanding of the causal process*:** In terms of representation (section 3), if the nature of causality for a project is already well understood (for example improved work related skills leads to increased employability), then it is probably not necessary to spend time on an outcomes chain – a simple logic model may be sufficient (see following section).
- ***Direct or indirect impact on service users*:** Some projects are processes or system changes; for example, an organisational restructure, a new IT system or a professional development network. These can be more challenging to theorise as the link to end users is indirect, while the intermediate outcomes relate to changes for your colleagues or stakeholders.

Involving people

In our experience, it is nearly always better to develop a theory of change by engaging a range of people - including practitioners, volunteers and managers and also other stakeholders and services users. It is not necessary or efficient to involve everyone; a group of between 3-10 people seems to work well, depending on the size of the project.

You can develop a theory of change either in a workshop or by talking to people individually. Workshops are more efficient and tend to be the most common approach. They need to be facilitated so everyone feels able to contribute, regardless of their position in the hierarchy.[6]

It can be a demanding process and people can begin to lose focus after a few hours, so we suggest spending half a day at most. You can always reconvene the group later, which will allow time for writing up, taking stock and circulating. You may also find it useful to circulate a draft more widely for further feedback, for example to senior managers and partner agencies.

The Ikea effect[7]

This is the observation that people feel a greater commitment to and ownership of things they have helped to create. We find this is the case with theory of change; the more people you involve at the start the stronger the commitment to the finished article.

[6] Appendix 4 provides a template for running a theory of change workshop

[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IKEA_effect

Using existing evidence

Alongside consultation, a theory of change should be informed by knowledge of what works in criminal justice and the particular type of intervention you are providing. In particular, you should seek to address the overall question: *why do you think this particular project is the best way to achieve your long-term goal?*

You should do this by considering what evidence there is for assuming that each of your activities contributes to the outcomes you want. A key area of focus should be on evidence for the causal links between intermediate and final outcomes (because this is the hardest thing to measure yourself and therefore where citing external evidence will be most useful). In criminal justice there are some well-established pathways that are known to lead people away from offending, summarised by a range of evidence reviews.[8] By using these resources, you should be able to consider the evidence for how your project and the intermediate outcomes you aim for will achieve will contribute to your final goals.

If there seems to be no directly relevant evidence it is valid to look further afield. There may be evidence from other countries or work with different types of service users or social problems that could help.[9]

More tips on the process:

- Keep it simple! It is unwise to be over-ambitious when first using theories of change; pick a small-scale project to begin with.
- In workshops, start by brainstorming or writing on post-it notes to populate a general theory of change and get your group talking. Only move towards specific issues and refinements once everyone has had a chance to speak.
- Set aside time at the end of a workshop to record notes and type them up, and bear in mind that this will require time and effort.
- Circulate the draft theory to as many people as possible. This will help build consensus and support.
- Your theory of change will never be perfect. You risk wasting time in later stages worrying too much over wording and specific links. The main aim is to produce something that everyone broadly agrees with and is useful for your aims.
- A theory of change should be seen as a working document. You can always make further alterations to reflect what you learn and new situations.

[8] A good starting points for accessing this material is: http://www.clinks.org/support-evaluation-and-effectiveness/existing-evidence

[9] Appendix 5 provides an illustrative evidence review for the supported housing project

3) Representing a theory of change

A diagrammatic representation of a project is the centrepiece of most theories of change. This section discusses five different ways to approach this:

- Planning triangle
- Logic model
- Outcomes chain
- Outcomes chain structured around service users' journeys
- Written narrative

We describe each approach and then provide an example of it for the supported housing project. As you read each description it might be useful to refer back and forth between the diagrams.

Although these approaches to representation differ in appearance and focus, important aspects remain the same. They should all be built on the key elements of consultation, drawing on existing evidence and backwards mapping from outcomes to activities. They also have similar aims of helping you to think through your strategies, communicate about projects and plan evaluation activities. In this section we outline the pros and cons, so you can decide on the best approach for you.

A theory of change is not only a diagram; it is also the process of thinking through and describing in full how a project is intended to work. The diagram should be seen as a representation and a summary.

A good diagram should:

- Show a coherent causal model (a comprehensible explanation of the causal processes that you think will lead to your outcomes).
- Be logical (each element should plausibly lead to the next).
- Communicate clearly.

The planning triangle

A planning triangle is the simplest way to approach a theory of change, and therefore a great way to start.[10] It is a visual tool which helps you to delineate three key elements of a project; activities, intermediate outcomes and final goals. The suggested process is as follows:

As described above, begin by agreeing your final goal and add this to the top of the triangle (the small amount of space encourages you to keep it short).

After this, populate the middle section with intermediate outcomes, asking yourself;

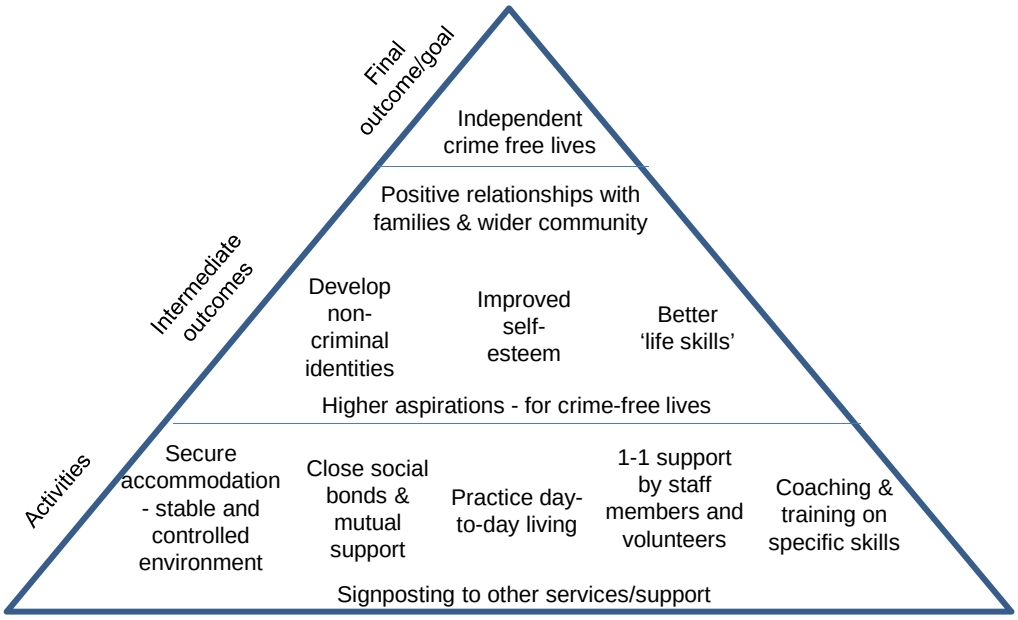
- What needs to change in order to achieve your final goal?
- What differences will your project help to make for your service users?

The intermediate outcomes you add to the triangle should all be plausibly linked to your project and occur within its lifetime. It is also good to use 'words of change' when describing outcomes, such as 'more', 'better', 'less', 'improved'.[11]

Finally, at the bottom of the triangle you should list the activities you will deliver to achieve the intermediate outcomes. Each activity should have a direct link to one or more of the intermediate outcomes. If not, ask yourself why is the activity included? It may help to number the outcomes and put the relevant number(s) against each activity.

An example of a planning triangle for a supported housing project is shown below.

Planning Triangle for a supported housing project



[10] http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/about-performance-improvement/about-monitoring-evaluation/ces-planning-triangles

[11] It can be hard to think in terms of outcomes. If this happens, start by looking at what activities you intend to do and ask yourself why you are running them. What changes in people are these activities intended to lead to?

Once the triangle is complete, you will need to think about the indicators you will use to measure whether each element is achieved. We return to this issue in the section on using a theory of change to determine your evidence collection (section 5).

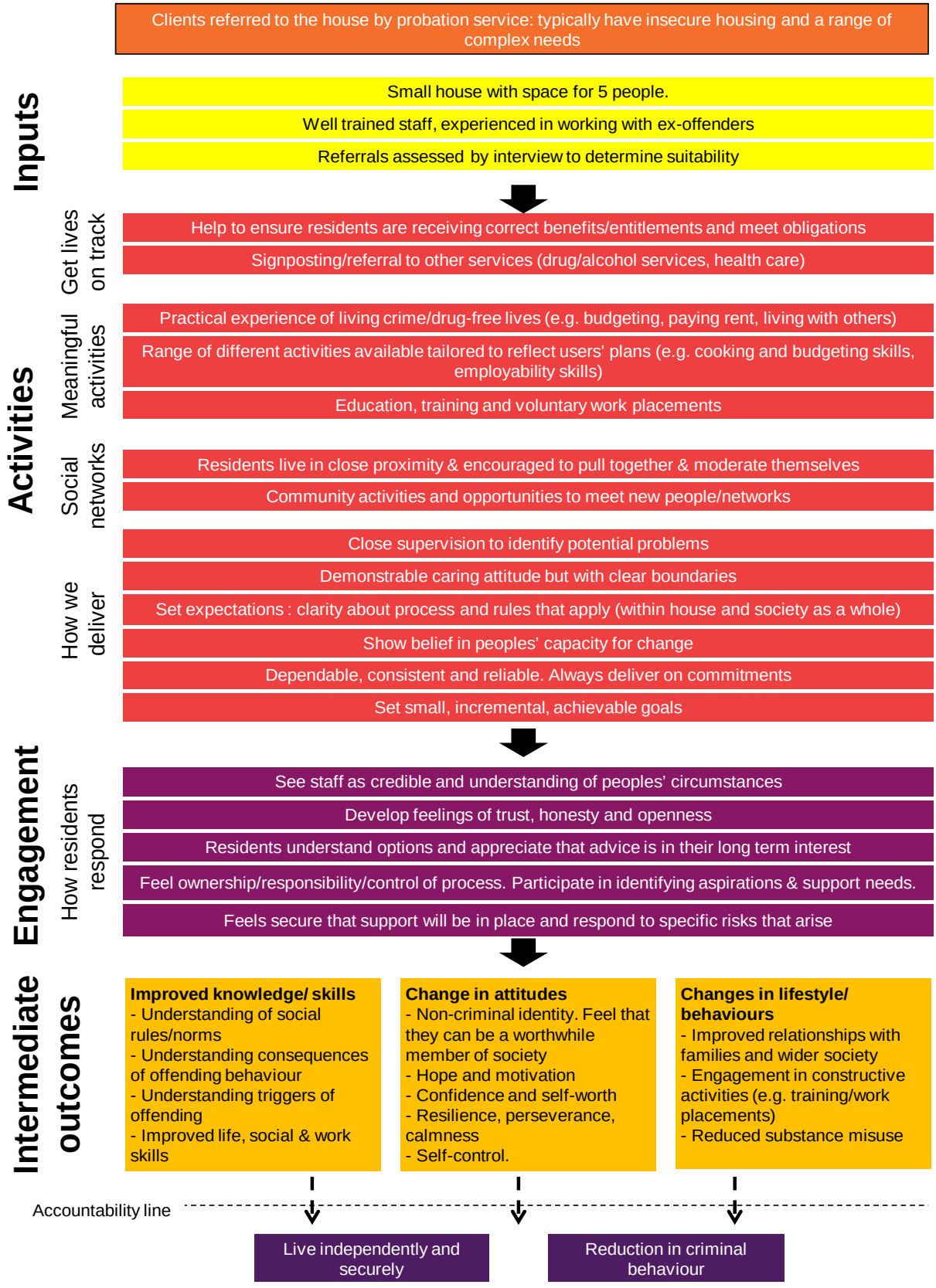
Logic models

A logic model is similar to a planning triangle but allows more detail to be included, particularly about how a project is delivered. Appendix 3 provides step-by-step advice on creating a logic model; while here we summarise the main components.

As with the planning triangle, start with your final goal and work backwards to the intermediate outcomes. It is often helpful to break these down into the changes you are trying to make to people's; i) knowledge and skills; ii) attitudes and thinking; and iii) behaviours all of which should logically help them towards the final goal. As with the triangle, once you have agreed intermediate outcomes you should then focus on activities, but this time in more detail so you may chose to describe:

- **Inputs:** the resources that go into the project, including budget and staff time required, and the relationships you need with other organisations.
- **Activities:** what you actually do. The logic model gives you space to break this down into different components, so you can describe the assessment process, the steps you take to become familiar with people and build trust, and the schedule of the different activities you deliver. You can also address the issue of how you deliver; think about the unique qualities you bring and what makes your project effective.
- **Outputs:** This is the quantity of activity you deliver; for example, the number of users, how many sessions they receive and the amount of contact you have with them.
- **Engagement:** This is how your users should respond and engage with the project. It's often overlooked but is in fact vital to much criminal justice work, in which the relationships you establish are key to success.

Illustrative logic model for a supported housing project.



What makes a good logic model?

A logic model should describe the key aspects that make the project work - from inputs through to the final goal. It should be clear so that someone else can come along, see what you have done and replicate it. It should also provide a template for evaluation: data collection should be orientated towards testing whether each element is delivered (see section 5).

Like the planning triangle, logic models are comparatively easy to do. They tend to be useful for evaluation as they include detail about how a project works, and can therefore inform decisions about what to evaluate. We also find they are good for communication as they represent projects in a more compelling way than a triangle, while the connections between different elements are less complex than in an outcomes chain (see below).

However, there are limitations to both triangles and logic models:

- The process of creating them can become a pro forma exercise in which people simply catalogue project components without careful consideration of cause and effect.
- They can encourage people to list too many features, not all of which are fundamental to the change process.
- They are not good at showing the dynamic features of projects. They create the impression that inputs happen first, followed by outputs and then outcomes; whereas in most projects, different aspects occur at different points in time.
- Similarly, there is only limited scope to plot sequences of outcomes and the more subtle aspects of causality. For example, in many projects there is an assumption that users will go through a change in knowledge first, leading to a change in attitude and then behaviour, which is harder to reflect through these formats.

These challenges can be overcome by the approaches below.

Outcomes chains

Outcomes chains are the diagrams most closely associated with the term ‘theory of change’. They differ from planning triangles and logic models because there is greater focus on causality i.e. what exactly causes both small-scale changes in users and the overall change you are looking to see. In planning triangles and logic models causality is implicit; it is assumed that outcomes flow from the activities listed. Preparing an outcomes chain encourages you to challenge this by thinking more about how and why change occurs.

The main aim is to **agree the central rationale for the project** and the conditions needed for success. Doing this should highlight the strategic choices you are making - for discussion and agreement, so it is particularly useful if you are designing a new service or project.

Outcomes chains can be harder to do because they force you to think in more detail about the sequence of outcomes and require more complicated visual expression than putting

words in boxes and listing inputs and activities etc. However, the effort can be worthwhile, because it will help you test and clarify the thinking behind a project.

Why is causality important?

Causality is really the key evaluation question that voluntary sector organisations face – *how do we know our work makes a difference?*

In our guide to comparison group studies[12] we outline one way to address this question, but these approaches are difficult for many organisations, so the next best option is to articulate causal relationships as best we can and then test them against the evidence we have (both that which is available already and that we collect through our own evaluation work).

Thinking about causality is particularly valuable because it should help your team agree the really important aspects of your service which, in turn, will enable you to conduct the best possible evaluation.

The focus of an outcomes chain is on engagement and outcome factors rather than activities. The priority is to map the *sequence* of how outcomes are intended to occur and to focus on what is absolutely critical to success. Inputs and activities should only be shown in summary terms and without much detail, because they will distract from the main aim of summarising the key causal processes. In creating an outcomes chain you should also give greater thought to the conditions needed for success; both those inside and outside of your control.

To create an outcomes chain begin – as always – by taking your final goal and deciding what causes it (your intermediate outcomes). You then ask yourself what causes your intermediate outcomes and then what causes these in-turn. You should continue this backwards mapping, focusing on cause and effect, and keep re-working it until you capture the process of change as best you can. You may well find that you need multiple outcomes chains reflecting different elements of the project and different outcomes, some of which may be interrelated.

Only when you are happy with the outcome chain(s) you have developed should you begin to map your activities onto the chain to show where they all fit in.

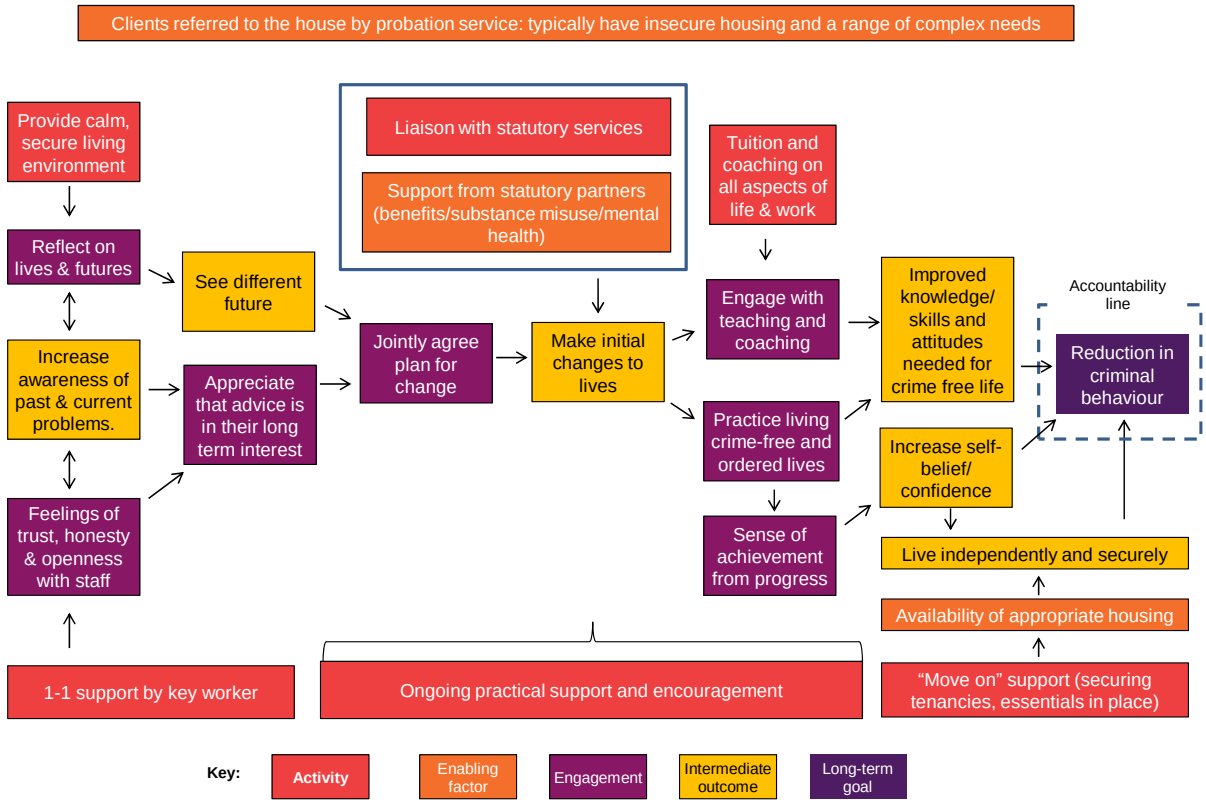
A key challenge you will find is that causality is complex. Any project that works with offenders will actually be deploying a multitude of causal processes flexibly throughout the process, which is very hard to capture this in a single diagram (e.g. encouragement, sanction, practical help, therapeutic support, positive activities etc.)

We suggest two alternative ways around this problem. Firstly, you could develop an outcomes chain which works only at a very general/abstract level. This is illustrated in the

[12] http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingControlGroupApproachesToIdentifyImpact.pdf

chart below, where the main elements of the housing support project are presented in a causal sequence. Note how all the intermediate outcomes in the logic model above are reduced here to "Improved knowledge/ skills and attitudes needed for crime free life" and that the chart includes no description of how services are delivered. This is because the aim here is to simplify rather than go into detail, so that the main causal relationship is bought to the fore. The benefit of this is that it should highlight, as clearly as possible, the elements that you think are *fundamental* to the success of the project. This is especially useful if the aim of the aim of the theory of change is to communicate to stakeholders or agree a broad strategy, but less helpful when you are trying to determine specific evaluation measures or show *how* a project works.

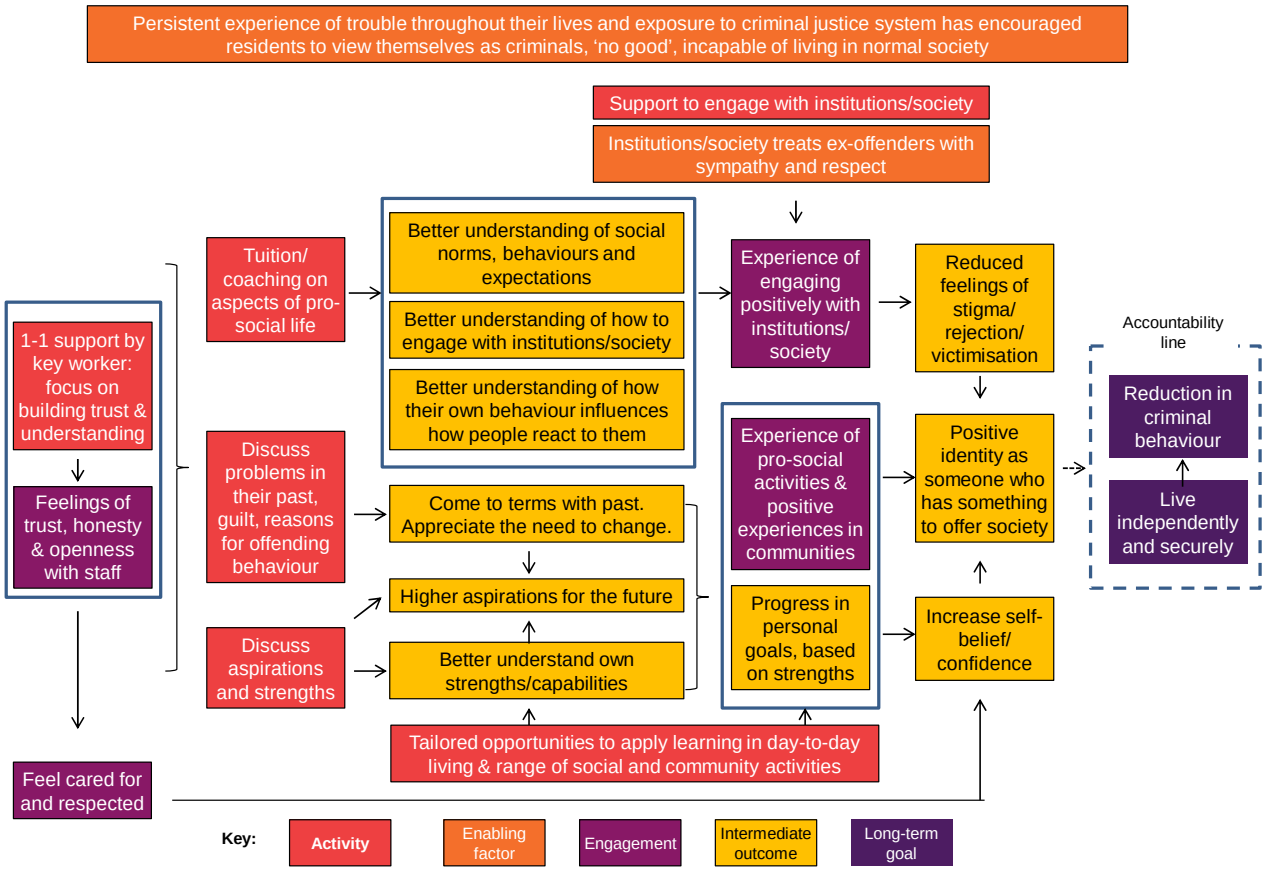
General-level outcomes chain for a supported housing project



An alternative approach is to focus the outcomes chain on specific aspects of the project or individual outcomes. This is usually better than trying to capture all processes and outcomes in a single diagram which can take a lot of time and produce a complex diagram, which will be hard to read.

The chart below illustrates this approach by showing an outcomes chain for how the supported housing project works to create pro-social, anti-criminal identities. Note how even this diagram is fairly complex, despite only looking at one intended outcome of the project.

Specific-level outcomes chain for increasing pro-social identities through supported housing



Tips for dealing with complexity

At some point you will probably find yourself with a mountain of information relating to different aspects of outcomes, features of projects and routes to success. If so, it's worth remembering that a theory of change is necessarily a simplification and a summary of reality. You cannot hope to capture everything; rather you need to make judgements about what are the really important factors and issues to reflect.

Some practical tips are:

- Remove some of the detail from your outcomes chain and include them in an appendix (particularly around inputs and activities – outcomes are the most important part of the model).
- Use references and footnotes to signpost people to more information and evidence.
- Think about expressing the theory of change at different levels of specificity. A useful analogy is the view of the earth from different heights. From high up you can only see the broad shape of things but as go down more detail comes into view. In the same way you can develop a single outcomes chain that summarises the broad causal links alongside more outcomes chains or logic models to describe specific elements of projects or specific outcomes.

Outcomes chain structured around service users' journeys

Two problems we have found using outcomes chains for criminal justice projects are:

1. Projects are complex. They work with people in many different ways and particular outcomes having no single cause, but are rather crafted through an accumulation of different interventions. Furthermore, desistance theory[13] emphasises that change is a *process* rather than an organised sequence of steps, with uneven, yet mutually enforcing progress across a number of pathways simultaneously. This can make it very hard – if not impossible – to plot a theory of change using traditional outcomes chains.
2. The process of engagement and building trust – whilst not an outcome – is a fundamental part of the process that needs to be captured and represented. However this is overlooked in many outcomes chains which only focus on outcomes. Ideally theory of change diagrams should reflect the centrality of 'engagement'.

In response to these challenges we have found that a useful approach is to build the theory of change around the service-user's anticipated journey through a project. So, as always you would begin with the final outcome and then work backwards to define the steps users broadly go through, and then think about your activities and outcomes that are most relevant *to each stage of that journey*.

This is illustrated in the chart below, which shows a broad engagement or change journey running through the middle with activities and outcomes on either side. Importantly, progress at each stage is shown as being influenced by both the associated activities but also *everything else that has been achieved to that point*. It's also recognised that gradual achievement across all outcomes happens throughout the journey, rather than one thing happening and then the next, and that progress can go backwards as well as forwards (which is a better reflection of reality).

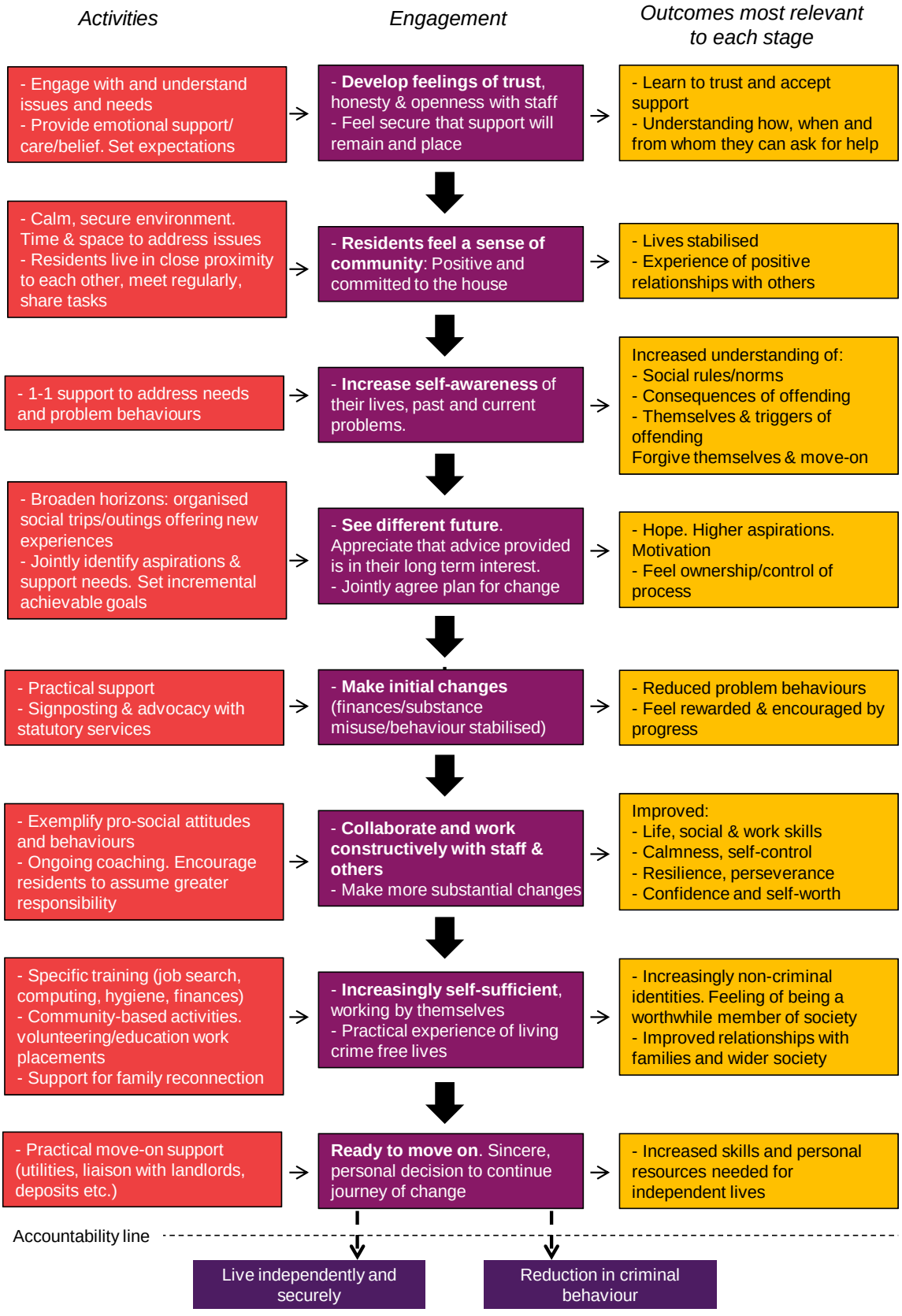
Another aspect of the chart to note is that each stage (represented horizontally) can be seen as mini-theories of change or 'change mechanisms' themselves.

An example of this kind of theory of change for the supported housing project is shown below.[14]

[13] Desistance is the process of both ceasing and refraining from offending. Read more in Clinks guide to desistance http://www.clinks.org/criminal-justice/do-it-justice

[14] We also encourage you to look at the Community Chaplaincy model we have developed, which is a more fully realised example of this approach. http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/Community%20Chaplaincy%20ToC.pdf

Outcome chain built around service user journey for the supported housing project



We feel this approach is useful because it does not oversimplify the change process in the way that outcomes chains can do. At the same time, reading horizontally, it provides a series of specific causal mechanisms to test, which the logic model and triangle approaches don't do so well. A good tip for creating an outcome chain like this is to think about what users will be thinking, feeling, saying and doing at different points in the process. Get agreement around this first and then build your activities and outcomes around each of these stages.

Narrative theory of change: Articulating assumptions

Finally, whichever approach you decide to use, it is always a good idea to describe the theory of change in written form. This is sometimes referred to as "stating your assumptions", which are the things you believe to be true about a project in terms of; a) the context for your services users; b) the causal mechanisms your project will be based on; and c) relevant enabling factors.[15] It is likely that you will already have a good idea of these from going through the theory of change process and representing it an a diagram, however the further challenge of expressing the theory of change in written form can really help to headline the key causal links and organise your thinking. You may also find that writing a narrative theory of change challenges the diagram itself (e.g. it can help you see that key elements have not been reflected). The process also helps you to bring out the key questions that you need address when looking at the existing evidence, and working out what evidence to collect yourselves.

An example for this for supported housing project is shown below.

An example of a narrative theory of change/set of assumptions for a housing project:

Context

- We work with people who have been released from custody with housing problems along with a range of needs and a high risk of reoffending behaviour.

- There are numerous causes of offending behaviour. Direct causes include substance misuse, financial problems, lack of positive relationships. Indirect causes include criminal identities and attitudes, lack of understanding of social norms and limited aspirations[16].

Causal mechanisms

- Providing secure accommodation offers them a stable and controlled environment upon which other activities can be based, thereby enabling us to address multiple needs.

- The relatively small number of units facilitates the development of close social bonds and mutual support within the house. This in-turn helps people to learn and practice positive relationships with people outside the house, including their families and the wider community.

[15] A useful discussion around the importance of assumptions is here: http://www.researchtoaction.org/2012/10/peeling-back-the-layers-of-the-onion-theories-of-change-assumptions-and-evidence/

[16] See Appendix 5 for a further discussion of the causes of offending.

- The experience of practicing day-to-day living (with the support of staff) is necessary for developing the right skills and attitudes to help people achieving these themselves in the long-term.

- Relationships between staff and residents are crucial to the change process. Residents need to trust that staff are acting in their best interests, feel they can depend on them and accept direction where it is given.

- Encouraging residents to feel they have ownership and control over their aims/plans, and an investment in the house, is essential for meaningful engagement and commitment.

- Residents need to develop self-esteem, confidence and resolve. They need to feel positive about themselves and be resilient to setbacks. Change occurs slowly and incrementally and is supported across a range of activities and life skills. Continual encouragement and support is needed to offset setbacks and risks.

- For sustainable change, residents need to develop a non-criminal identity, in which crime is seen as morally unacceptable and consequences of criminal actions are understood. Conversely, residents also need to see the benefits of pro-social behaviour, have aspirations for a crime free life and feel themselves capable of living this way.

- With this level of time and effort, individuals with complex needs can be equipped to lead independent crime free lives.

Enabling factors

- Success depends on the referral of appropriate people to the house, in particular we are unable to help people until severe mental health or substance misuse use problems are stabilised.

- Statutory services need to support residents in accessing benefits and other services such as health.

- Long-term success is depending on the availability of appropriate housing for residents to move to as well as volunteering, education and work opportunities.

4) Reviewing and testing your theory of change

Once you have a draft theory of change it is useful to review it against the following questions:

- Is a clear service user group shown? Are their needs and characteristics described?
- Does it enable you to give someone the '2-minute story' of the project?
- Do staff, service users, members of the public understand it?
- Does it show how all the outcomes you have listed will be achieved? (It is a common mistake to include outcomes for which there is no clear cause or activity).
- Does it capture the essence of your project? (I.e. how you will deliver and what makes it unique or special).
- Does it answer the question of why you think the project will be particularly successful (ideally backed-up by existing evidence)?
- Would something else or another activity have the same impact? If so, then you may have failed to communicate why you think the project will be particularly effective.

You should also ask whether your theory of change is:

- **Realistic:** i.e. if followed, the activities are likely to contribute to the desired change? Is it doable, can you achieve what you are setting out to do?
- **Plausible:** It should describe change that the project can really achieve, and not just wishes it could.

Another useful way to test the theory of change is to add in expectations about numbers/flow. For example, you might predict that 100 people will start on the project, and that 80 will continue to engage, 60 will achieve intermediate outcomes and 30 will achieve final outcomes. This will help you understand the scale of change to expect, whether you have invested resources to achieve the change you want or whether the expected level of outcomes is really worth the effort and resources invested.

5) Using a theory of change to determine evidence collection needs

A key benefit of developing a theory of change is that it can help you to understand what evidence you need to collect. Basically, this is done by looking at each element and thinking about what evidence you already have and where there are gaps.

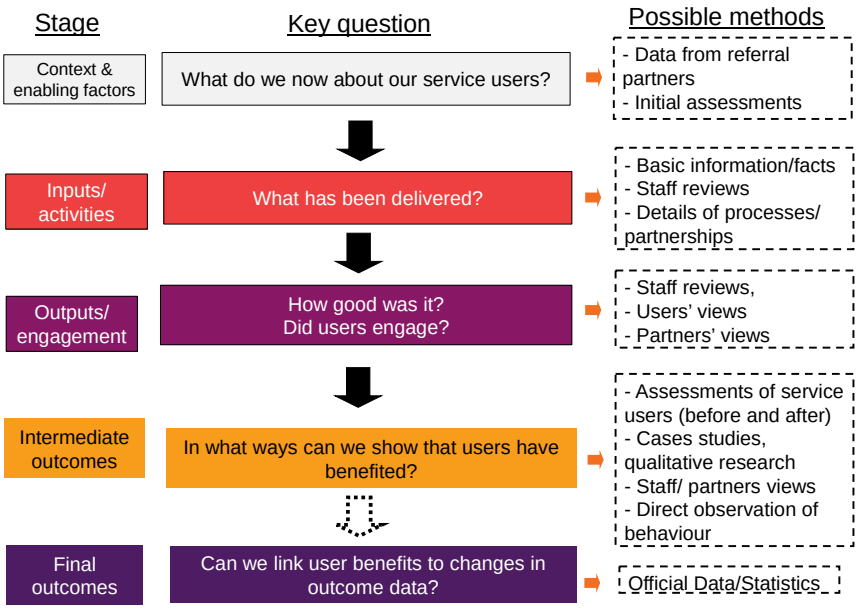
Theory of change relates to evidence collection in two distinct ways.

Looking backwards: As stated above, the development of your theory of change should, as far as possible, be justified by existing evidence about what works to achieve your goals (either from your own sources or external/academic literature). In this respect a theory of change is essentially a hypothesis – based on the best available information – about how a project should work.

If you find that some of the existing evidence is strong, for example the link between stable employment and housing and desistance from crime, then you will not need to test this again through your own evaluation. However, if you want to show that your project is effective you will still need to show that you actually achieve stable employment and housing.

Looking forwards: A completed theory of change helps you make decisions about what evidence you need to collect *in future*; to test whether the theory was delivered and was correct. We refer to this as your 'evaluation framework', which is an approach to making your evaluation activities more strategic and coordinated. This is the main focus of this section.

To develop an evaluation framework you should look at each element of your theory of change, in particular the engagement and outcomes you need for the project to work, and think about what evidence you already have and where there are gaps. Essentially, each time you have indicated that one thing will lead to another, you should try to collect evidence to understand the extent to which this actually happens. The following chart outlines the questions relevant to each section of a logic model.



To help you think further about what evidence you need to collect ask yourself the following questions:

Question	Explanation
Why do you need to evaluate the project?	It's worth giving some initial thought to why you need to evaluate, who the audience for the evaluation will be and what questions they are most interested in? Answers to these questions —alongside your theory of change— should help you to decide what your priorities for evaluation are. [17]
For each element of the theory of change, what are the indicators of change you aim to see?	Indicators are the things you can monitor to test whether or not the change you want is actually occurring. Indicators can be: - 'Direct'; e.g. asking someone whether they feel more confident or recording whether someone has achieved a qualification; or - 'Proxy'; e.g. changes in behaviour and attitude that *suggest* an increase in confidence. The best way to measure *change* is to collect and compare information about indicators at different points in time (i.e. amongst service users before and after your intervention). But you can also compare indicators across different projects, against known averages (benchmarks), between different subgroups of users or between different levels of quality or quantity of project implementation.
What standard of evidence you need?	Different approaches to collecting evidence provide findings with different levels of validity and reliability and it's important to consider what is most appropriate for you. This will depend on; a) what the potential audience for the evaluation expects (i.e. your stakeholders' views on evaluation); and b) the resources you have available.[18] The highest standard of evidence you can achieve is through a 'counterfactual' design in which the outcomes for your service users are compared to a 'comparison group' who did not receive it. This tends to be highly regarded because it enables you to confidently **attribute** impact to your project. It is hard to do, but there may be other ways to compare your outcomes to a counterfactual.[19] If these approaches are not possible, section 6 describes another way to think about attribution.
How are you going to collect	This relates to which methods you will use to record indicators of

[17] Please see our guidance on 'what makes good evidence' http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/WhatMakesGoodEvidence.pdf

[18] Please see our guidance on 'standards of evidence: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/StandardsofEvidenceGuide.pdf

[19] Please see our guidance on comparison groups. http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingControlGroupApproachesToIdentifyImpact.pdf

Question	Explanation
information about your indicators of change?	change. There are broadly two different approaches; - **Quantitative**; which involves measuring and counting things (through questionnaires, operational statistics and observations); and - **Qualitative;** which involves talking to people to better understand how and what they think. This is not the place to explore the respective merits of these approaches.[20] However it is worth noting that the best evaluation frameworks deploy them both. This technique of combining different methods is called 'triangulation'; bringing together as many different evidence sources as possible to make the robust and persuasive case you can.
Who will collect this information and when?	These are practical questions around your data collection approach, including: - Options around who will collect data (including external researchers, service managers or key workers themselves). - Frequency of data collection (requiring a careful balance between the importance of tracking progress and not overburdening staff and service users). - Whether you need to collect evidence from everyone or just a sample of service users. [21] Some of our other guidance goes into more detail on these topics.[22]
For each indicator, what will success look like?	Once you have thought about indicators and methods It can be useful to define what level of success you want to see. For example, what percentage of service users you expect will stay with the project, what percentage will show improvements in attitudes and by how much etc.

It is likely you already have some data collection systems in place. These may be focused on activities and outputs, such as 'we supported 210 people last year' or '70 people completed a course'. Organisations tend to find collecting data about outcomes more difficult - 'non-criminal identities' or 'improved life skills', for example. You might have anecdotal evidence that these are being achieved, or even case studies and reports from service users, but these are rarely enough when you are trying to demonstrate change over time or for large numbers of people. Using existing tools to measure outcomes is one option to

[20] Please see our evaluation 'hints and tips' document for more information: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/EvaluationHintsTips.pdf

[21] Please see our guidance on sampling: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/IntroductionToSampling_0.pdf

[22] See, for example, our guidance on using off the shelf tools (above) and involving staff in research: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/InvolvingStaffVolulnteerInEvaluation.pdf

improve the quality of your data, and the theory of change process should help you to identify which of these tools is best suited to your project.[23]

Below is a table you can use to help you determine your evidence collection priorities. To illustrate how it can be used, we have added examples from the Housing Project:[24]

Stage of the model	Indicators	Information collection methods	When and by whom	How to report and use
Close supervision to identify potential problems and challenges	a) Amount of time spent 1-1 with service users. b) Service user perceptions content	a) Record of sessions/time spent b) Qualitative interviews with service users	a) Key workers record basic facts about each session b) 6 monthly qualitative interviews by service managers	a) Collected and analysed in central database b) Informal feedback through team meeting. Key findings added to annual evaluation report
Develop feelings of trust, honesty and openness	a) "I really felt like I could talk to them" b) "I felt like they were being honest with me, even when it was something I didn't want to hear"	a) Service user questionnaire used at monthly intervals	a) Key workers hand over questionnaire every month. Completed by user and sealed in envelope to ensure confidentiality.	a) Reported on on-going basis to ensure engagement requirement is being fulfilled. b) Analysed across user groups to explore differences that may suggest service improvement.
Hope and motivation	a) "I feel hopeless about my future" b) Qualitative assessment	a) NOMS Multi-dimension change measurement questionnaire b) Qualitative interviews with service users	a) Used twice –at start of intervention and upon completion b) 6 monthly qualitative interviews by service managers	a) Analysed across user groups to explore differences that may suggest service improvement. b) Informal feedback through team meeting. a) and b)

Finally, there is a risk that by going through the process of linking your theory of change to evaluation activities you end up with too many things to measure; which could be expensive, burdensome and even impede project delivery. In this case you should consider what are the most important aspects to measure or evaluate - which an outcomes chain is particularly useful for.

[23] Please see our guidance on using outcomes tools to measure change: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingOffShelfToolstoMeasureChange.pdf

[24] This table is taken from: http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/Resources/CharitiesEvaluationServices/Documents/Monitoring%20and%20evaluation%20framework.pdf

6) Using a theory of change to guide evaluation reporting

Ultimately, you should aim to reach a point where you have; developed a theory of change; described how it is justified by existing evidence; and collected evidence from your own project to test whether you; a) delivered services the way you intended; and b) achieved the engagement and outcomes you intended.

With this evidence in place, your theory of change should then provide you with a framework for interpreting and reporting results. Essentially, what you need to do is use your evidence to show whether results were consistent with the expected theory, and, if there is positive evidence against each element of your theory of change, then you have the basis for a narrative that the project has made a difference. It's important to stress that this does not represent 'proof' because alternative explanations for your findings cannot be definitively ruled out,[25] however it is still the foundation for a more robust and believable analysis.

The basic approach is to take each of your intended output/engagement/outcomes in your theory of change and assess whether these have been achieved by looking across the different evidence sources you have. We suggest asking yourself the four questions in the table below through which you can begin to plot where a breakdown may have occurred, or indeed, confirm the pattern of your success.[26] In particular, it will be important to unpick any 'implementation failure' (i.e. the project was not delivered or users did not engage in the way you wanted) from 'theory failure' (i.e. the project was delivered effectively but outcomes were not achieved). Of course, it is unlikely to be as clear cut as this, but it's still useful to keep this distinction in mind.

Was the project adequately implemented?	Was there sufficient uptake, engagement & adherence?	Were intermediate outcomes achieved?	Were final outcomes achieved?	Interpretation
×	×	×	×	Implementation failure
✓	×	×	×	Engagement/ adherence failure (first causal link)
✓	✓	×	×	Theory failure (activities did not lead to outcomes)
✓	✓	✓	×	Theory failure (intermediate outcomes did not influence final outcomes)
✓	✓	×	✓	Theory failure (different causal path)
✓	✓	✓	✓	Consistent with theory

[25] The only way to do this would be through a Randomised Control Design study. See http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingControlGroupApproachesToIdentifyImpact.pdf

[26] Funnell, S. C. & Rogers, P. J. (2011). Purposeful Program Theory: effective use of theories of change and logic models. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Your analysis can be strengthened further by thinking more about what your evidence tells you about the **causal relationships**[27]. For example you could:

- Drill-down into the data to look at patterns/correlations for individuals/subgroups. Think about the process that specific individuals went through. Did those who engaged or attended more achieve better outcomes? Were particular intermediate outcomes more important than others?
- Disaggregate the data to explore variations and 'outcomes patterns', which are helpful because they shed light on the significance of different causal paths. Consider whether certain types of users did better than others? What were the reasons for this and what were the contextual and enabling factors that affected success?
- Get participant feedback. Do service users report that they achieved the final outcome because of the pathway you intended? Do they think your project was helpful? Although this alone will not be sufficient evidence of effective practice and impact, it will help to support other evidence. You can also ask other stakeholders or staff for their views.
- Compare your results to other data. What outcomes are expected for service users who are similar to yours (based on official statistics or what happened before)?
- Combine all your evidence, both that you have collected and wider evidence from academic research that you used to help create your theory of change. It may be that there is powerful external evidence that can support claims about impact.

Finally, having worked through this process you should be able to start drawing conclusions and reporting about the effectiveness of your project.[28] Think about the following questions:

- To what extent is your theory validated? What can you say confidently about your results? What can't you say?
- What works for whom in what circumstances?
- Are there alternative explanations?
- How should the original theory be refined?
- What further evidence do you need to collect?
- What have you learned? What would you advise someone who was repeating the process?

[27] This process is called Contribution Analysis, which you can read more about here: http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/contribution_analysis

[28] Please see separate guidance on this http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/ReportWritingGuide.pdf

Appendix 1: Further resources

We have selected further online resources to support you in creating a theory of change.

NPC's introduction to theory of change and the origins of the technique:

http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/theory-of-change/

Charities Evaluation Services' introduction – 'Making Connections':

http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/tools-and-resources/Evaluation-methods/making-connections-tools

A range of useful resources from the Better Evaluation site

http://betterevaluation.org/plan/define/develop_logic_model

The SIB group's video summary:

http://www.sibgroup.org.uk/impact/help/plan/

An online seminar on the use of theories of change in a youth justice context:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csFTQvu6ZTo&list=PL0uO_ppGG85e8A2cr9T9ord0pzeENprrO

A US website with a range of resources on theory of change

http://www.theoryofchange.org/

A Prezi looking at the issue of developing theories of change for complex projects:

http://prezi.com/cjutwzfsfspe/theory-of-change-for-complex-interventions_mary-de-silva/

Guidance on how to use a theory of change to help you write up findings:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/175356/0116687.pdf

A short guide on developing a theory of change by Project Oracle

http://www.bvsc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Project-Oracle-Standard-1-training-Theory-of-Change-Step-by-step-guide.pdf

Two of the best introductions to the subject:

http://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide

http://www.advocacyinitiative.ie/download/pdf/campaigning_for_change__learning_from_the_us.pdf

Appendix 2: Establishing a common language

When developing a theory of change it helps to establish a common language amongst your colleagues. We recommend some terms below, but it is not essential that you adopt these - rather the most important thing is that everyone in the team has a common understanding[29].

Inputs: The resources a team or project needs to carry out your activities.

Activities: A description of a project's components. An activity is something within your control that you plan to do or aspects of how you chose to deliver the project. You can also include considerations around the quality of delivery.

Outputs: The quantity of activity you deliver; for example, the number of users, how many sessions they receive and the amount of contact you have with them.

Engagement: This reflects reality of how the project is delivered and what users make of it. Engagement is about the nature of the relationships you aim to establish but also about how service users engage with and use the resources you give them. A useful way to think about engagement is what you achieve with people *on the day*, or while you are working with them, and how you want service users to see you.

Intermediate outcomes: These are how you want service users to be influenced or changed by our service in the short-term, which will contribute to a final goal such as reduced (re)offending. It may include changes in users' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour but also 'harder measures', like entering a substance misuse project or sustaining a tenancy. A useful way to think about intermediate outcomes is the outcomes achieved *after the project* - what service users take away from it.

Final goal: This describes the broader social change you are trying to achieve and how your project contributes to it. For criminal justice charities, desistance from crime and/or reduced offending tends to be the main focus.

Other terms we have used in the guidance are:

Enabling factor: Something outside of your control that can help or hinder your project.

Evidence: Information you already have or plan to collect that is relevant to supporting/testing the theory of change.

Assumption: The underlying beliefs about a program, the people involved, the context and the way we think the program will work. These are sometimes implicit in a logic model or theory of change, but it can be useful to state them explicitly.

Finally, two useful resources on terminology are: [30]

- http://www.jargonbusters.org.uk/.
- http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/how-does-theory-of-change-work/glossary/#2

[29] More detail is available here: http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/Evaluationglossary.pdf

[30] However, neither includes the concept of 'engagement', which we believe is particularly important for projects in criminal justice.

Appendix 3: A step-by-step approach to creating a logic model

Here we outline a step-by-step approach to developing a logic model for criminal justice projects and suggest questions to pose at each stage.

As always, start by defining the impact you want to achieve, making sure it is not too abstract and something that you could realistically contribute to. Then, working backwards from this, you should note all the intermediate outcomes that are needed to achieve this goal, and finally the activities that lead to these outcomes. Of course, there are other ways to do this, but the steps below outline an approach we have found works well.

Step 1: Agree the project you want to work on and, if you are creating a logic model for the first time, ensure it is sufficiently narrow, local, focused etc.

- Briefly, what is the project?
- Who are you planning to work with and what are their needs?

Step 2: Agree the **final goal** for the project.

- Ultimately, what does the project aim to achieve? (In criminal justice we suggest the final outcome should include 'reducing (re)offending' but you may have others to add).

Step 3: Fill out the **intermediate outcomes** section.

- What factors are associated with achieving your final goal? Ideally this will be supported by both external/academic evidence and consultation with colleagues/stakeholders to gather your own experience and local knowledge.
- What changes in service users': i) knowledge and/or skills; ii) attitudes and/or iii) behaviours might contribute to your impact? Think of these as ways in which you are trying to equip your services users to change.

Step 4: You can now move on to the **inputs** and **activities** section.

- What are the basic elements of what you are planning to deliver?
- What will it look like?
- How will you target it?
- Who/which organisations will you need to work with?
- What resources will you need? How much will it cost? (inputs)
- How will we deliver? What are the key features?
- What will quality delivery look like?

Step 5: This is the outputs section, which focuses on the volume of work.

- What volume will you deliver?
- How many service users will be involved?
- How much time will you spend with service users?
- How frequently do you expect them to be involved?

Step 6: The next section of the theory of change focuses on the project '**engagement'**.

- What kind of user engagement and satisfaction do you need for the project to work?
- What is a good/effective service? What should delivery look or feel like in practice/'on the day'?
- What makes it work? What makes the organisation particularly effective?
- What are the mechanisms that describe how users will engage with project to deliver the intermediate outcomes you have outlined above?

The last question above is particularly crucial; it is worth getting the group to reflect on whether they feel they have really answered this.

Step 7: What are the **'enabling factors'** that will affect the project's success? These might be both within and outside your control. You may identify crucial enabling factors, such as the level of referrals or the need for sufficient capacity in partner organisations, which it will be important to include within your model. Alternatively, you may decide to list these as a postscript to the model itself

Step 8: You now have a draft logic model, which you will need to **review it.** If you are working collaboratively, take your group up and down the model to eliminate duplication or anything that is not directly relevant. Ensure that there is a logical link between different sections.

- Do all the entries make sense?
- Is each entry clearly related to something else?
- Does it seem possible that you will contribute to the intermediate outcomes through the activities, outputs and engagement you have described?

Step 9: Finally, someone needs to volunteer to take the logic model away, type it up and circulate for further comment and refinement. You should expect a number of iterations until everyone is happy.

Appendix 4: A theory of change workshop template

The table below outlines a template for a generic theory of change workshop session for you to adapt. We have included rough timings for a 2.5 hour session, although this will depend very much on how many people are involved and how complex the project and theory of change are. The most important parts are exercises 3 and 4, so focus on these if you have less time.

Introductions	If people don't know each other already it's useful to get them to introduce themselves. It may also be useful to understand any previous experience about theory of change, programme theory, outcomes mapping or logic modelling, as well as any expectations for the session.
Exercise 1: Elevator pitch **(5 minutes)**	Turn to your neighbour and take **one minute** each to describe what you do in your job Report back to the group. Scribe in one colour for inputs/activities/outputs and another for outcomes. Say that both are important, but ToC is about showing how one links to the other. Make sure everyone has an understanding of the project that you will be doing the theory of change about.
Exercise 2: Situation analysis **(20 minutes)**	In groups of 3-4 work through the following questions; 1. The main problem that project address 2. **Causes** and characteristics and needs of service users 3. Contributing factors/barriers to progress 4. Opportunities Report back to group: Scribe and group together. 5. Looking at the things we have listed in 2-4, which are "in scope" for projects and which are not. I.e. what can you do something about?
Exercise 3: Developing a theory of change **(1 hour)**	Facilitated in groups of 3-4 using post-it notes. 1) Pose 3 key questions in sequence. - What long-term outcomes you are aiming for with service users (get everyone to agree on the wording) - Intermediate outcomes: What are the characteristics or strengths you need to give service users to achieve these outcomes (think in terms of changes to their knowledge/skills, attitudes & behaviours) - What needs to happen for service users to achieve these outcomes? 2) Cluster outcomes – summarise themes on post-its 3) Organise in a chain of "if-then" statements (if you can)

	4) Present to other groups (if applicable) 4) Critical review: Is every link properly explained? Does it seem plausible/logical that one link will lead to the next. If not, what else needs to be included? 7) What evidence is there that each element leads to the next (if there is no evidence then the link is an 'assumption') NOTE: Try to focus on the journey service users through and not the activities the services provide (this comes later) Similarly, try to keep discussions as general as possible – specific details of how things are delivered is the focus for the next exercise.
Exercise 4: ***What does our project do to activate the theory of change?*** **(30 minutes)**	Consider the following questions in sequence. Depending on how many people are involved get people to shout out answers or break them up into groups and ask them to write ideas down on post-it notes. 1) Look at the sequence of intermediate outcomes in the draft theory of change. What activities or processes do we need do to make these outcomes happen? 2) How do you want service users to engage with these activities and processes – what does good look like 'on the day'? 3) What elements of good practice and principles do we need to apply to make sure this happens? 4) In a few words how would you describe the key features of what makes your programme work, what are the critical factors, active ingredients, what makes it special/distinctive?
Exercise 5: Enabling factors **(10 minutes)**	Consider factors outside your control that might influence the theory of change. It may be useful to think in terms of; a) structural factors; b) institutions and; c) other circumstances. In particular, what other stakeholders or partners are important to your success?
Exercise 6: Evidence **(10 minutes)**	What evidence are we aware of any evidence that supports the ideas in the theory of change? (Any element not supported by evidence is referred to as an 'assumption')
Conclusion **(5 minutes)**	Outline next steps: Explain that you will write up the notes and invite further comments from everyone at that stage. Get feedback on the session: Ask, "what went well? and "even better if?"

Appendix 5: Illustrative evidence review in support of a theory of change process (for the supported housing project)

Research identifies homelessness or unstable housing as one of the most critical issues hindering the ability of ex- offenders to 'move on', together with wide recognition that the provision of accommodation can reduce the risk of re-offending.[i,ii] It also stresses that a holistic approach is required to address the complex needs that often underlie offending behaviour and help individuals reintegrate into society on their release from prison. Charities can play an important role in providing both accommodation and support services of this kind. This paper presents the evidence linking stable housing to decreased risk of re-offending and examines what has been shown to be the most effective support services.

Housing and offending

Ex-offenders often have problematic housing histories that include rent arrears and/or abandoned tenancies, previous evictions or barring from certain types of accommodation.[iii;iv] A study from Scotland showed that, in 2008, a third of prisoners were not in stable accommodation before imprisonment and one in twenty was sleeping rough.[v] Another study found that around six in ten ex-offenders were living with immediate family on release, while at least 16% were homeless or living in temporary accommodation.[vi] Of the latter group, approximately seven to eight out of ten went on to reoffend within a year, compared to only half of those in stable accommodation. This clearly shows that offending is disproportionately high among those who are homeless or without stable accommodation.[vii;viii] The link is so strong that changing accommodation more than once during the months following liberation from custody and/or living in unstable accommodation is one of the main predictors that an ex-offender will return to prison.[ix] One study estimates that stable accommodation can make a difference of over 20 per cent in terms of reduction in reconviction.[x]

Homelessness leads to offending, and offending leads to homelessness

Rough sleepers are more likely to be drawn into the criminal justice system[xi], as behaviour related to 'survival' on the streets often leads to shoplifting, squatting, or drug abuse. The latter frequently serves as a gateway to further criminal activity, including theft, robbery, drug dealing and prostitution, in order to fund drug habits.[xii] Lack of accommodation is also independently linked to offensive behaviour, so even if homelessness does not lead to drug abuse, for example, it can result in other types of offensive behaviour.

Individuals stand to lose their accommodation on entering prison, which increases the risk of homelessness. In one study, about 50% of offenders were not able to return to their original accommodation, and 16% to 38% became homeless on release.[xiii] This suggests that imprisonment for short sentences seriously destabilises the future prospects of at least half of those imprisoned, and therefore increases the likelihood of re-offending and re-incarceration. The practical implications of not having stable accommodation can be severe: gaining access to certain services and securing employment are often contingent on having a formal address.[xiv] Ex-offenders themselves are painfully aware of this connection: in one

study, 60% of prisoners believed that having a place to live was an important factor in preventing them from reoffending in the future.[xv]

Holistic and flexible support works

Not every offender requires support, but some will have experienced a lifetime of social exclusion, often associated with having poor basic skills and high levels of need relating to mental health problems and substance misuse, for example.[xvi] Studies suggest that holistic assessment processes which identify the full range of ex-offenders' housing-related and wider support needs at an early stage, and assist in the transition to independent living, are key to ensuring tenancy sustainment.[xvii xviii]

Support ranges from the immediately practical—such as assistance with benefit claims or registering with a GP—to tackling broader, longer-term needs in order to promote independent living. [xix] When a multi-agency approach providing stable housing in conjunction with wider support to address issues relating to employment or attitudes and motivations, for example, ex-prisoners are much less likely to return to prison.[xx xxi xxii] Offenders also face financial insecurity, family breakdown, multiple deprivation, and overdependence. Independently—but especially in combination—these support needs can all impact on housing problems, and vice versa. Ex-offenders also tend to settle in already disadvantaged areas where they deplete the economic and social resources of the communities. Such communities need strengthening, and ex-offenders need to be encouraged to move to areas where the risk of getting involved with people from their criminal past is reduced.[xxiii]

Staff matters

Charities need to consider the above when providing services to ex-offenders. However, whatever the approach, the capabilities of staff are essential to the success of an intervention. The advice and advocacy support workers provide when communicating with housing and benefits agencies are often regarded as central by users, but in order to take advantage of this support, a trusting and respectful relationship is key to the user taking the worker's suggestions seriously, users say.[xxiv] In such user-ratings of services, support that accepts users' non-linear path to reintegration into society, treats them as individuals, helps them strengthen positive personal relationships and develop personal aspirations are rated the highest.[xxv] In this respect, charities can have an advantage over other types of service providers: voluntary organisations are often locally based with close bonds to the community into which the ex-offender is placed, and working with volunteers can strengthen the impression of interacting with another individual, not 'the system'—a concept against which many offenders harbour strong feelings of mistrust and alienation.

Challenges for the supported housing model

Although the case for providing supported accommodation to ex-offenders is strong, there are a number of potentially critical aspects that charities need to consider. One is the transition to non-supported housing. Research shows that for many users this phase is often chaotic and unplanned, which can endanger the long-term impact of the intervention: if only a year later the end result is homelessness, the risk of re-offending rises again.[xxvi] Another is

financial insecurity: when an individual enters education or employment, the loss of benefits can make it hard to cover the relatively high rent of supported accommodation.[xxvii] As education and employment make people much less likely to re-offend[xxviii], this emphasises that the effectiveness of housing interventions is contingent on the successful transition to cheaper, independent, housing after the initial period.

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[xi] Shelter Cymru, 2004, Hickey, 2002 in ibid

[xii] Arnull et al., 2007, Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone & Peeters, 2003, Hickey, 2002, Shelter Cymru, 2004 in ibid

[xiii] McIvor & Taylor, 2000 in ibid

[xiv] Kirkwood and Richley in ibid

[xv] Kim Williams, Jennifer Poyser, and Kathryn Hopkins: *Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey*. Ministry of Justice, 2012

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[xxv] ibid

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[xxvii] Arnull et al., 2007; Carlisle, 1996; Communities Scotland, 2007 in ibid.

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