A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.1

Socio-emotional skills updates for informal and non-formal learning

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Acknowledgements

The original Framework of Outcomes for Young People was published in 2012. The framework[1] was developed by the Young Foundation as one element of the DfE-funded Catalyst Consortium[2] work programme. The original framework focused on seven 'clusters of capabilities' that were intended to provide a common language in youth work and provision for young people to help providers, commissioners, and the funding community to convene and align their work around a shared vision. The framework was based on an extensive review of research and was applied across a wide range of provision for young people in informal and non-formal settings, as well as targeted support for particular young people, groups, and communities.

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[1] https://youngfoundation.org/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people/

[2] Catalyst was a consortium of four organisations (led by the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, working with the Young Foundation, the National Youth Agency, and Social Enterprise UK) that worked with the Department for Education (DfE) as the strategic partner for young people as part of the Department's wider transition programme for the sector. Catalyst worked to deliver three key objectives over the two-year period 2011-13: to strengthen the youth sector market, equip the sector to work in partnership with the Government, and coordinate a skills development strategy for the youth sector's workforce.

1. Introduction

This updated Outcomes Framework is for everyone working with and for young people. It is particularly designed for practitioners, to support their thinking about planning, designing, delivering, and evaluating their provision for young people, and commissioners, to support their local mapping, planning, commissioning, monitoring, and evaluation activity. The rationale for an outcome framework was noted in 2018 by the Local Government Association, who funded version 2.0 of this framework, note: "A clear outcomes framework can help to effectively monitor the impact of a service at key milestones to spot where things aren't working and provide opportunities to make changes where needed. It can also support evidence of collective impact across the system".

There are many existing frameworks of outcomes, produced for different reasons and featuring different ranges of outcomes. The Centre for Youth Impact's Outcome Framework has always been firmly grounded in current research and has developed over time with the development of existing knowledge, from version 1 (The Catalyst Framework) in 2012 to this version, 2.1, in 2022. The focus of the 2.1 update has been broadened to include the wider funding community, which also plays a very significant role in supporting informal and non-formal learning provision for young people.

The framework is focused on outcomes for young people that research suggests support positive and healthy development through adolescence and into adulthood. It is our hope that the Outcomes Framework 2.1 will:

- Make clear that growth in socio-emotional skills is *the most important outcome* of informal and non-formal youth provision;
- Help all those involved in the monitoring and evaluation of informal and non-formal youth provision to produce more powerful evidence about the impact on both socio-emotional skill growth and subsequent later life outcomes; and
- Facilitate a shared measurement *and* quality improvement strategy across the sector, and support our collective approach to 'citizen science'.

There are three core elements of Framework 2.1:

1. An *Outcomes Framework* for understanding socio-emotional skill growth as the central outcome of youth provision;

2. A *Theory of Change* that describes how skills are developed and grow in provision for young people and how those skills 'transfer' to the settings of school, work, and life;

3. *Guidance for Measurement* to increase the accuracy of continuous improvement data and enable evaluators to understand and describe the impact of youth provision.

1.1. Explaining Key Terms

In order to streamline our description of the outcomes in Outcomes Framework 2.1, we start by explaining a few terms:

Provision for Young People. We refer to 'provision for young people' to mean provision that supports young people, which is not part of the formal education curriculum, but is nevertheless building skills with young people in both non-formal and informal settings. Framework 2.1 is relevant to open access work with young people in communities, youth voice, and social action projects, and to targeted work with particular individuals or groups of young people. This includes both one-to-one and group-based approaches. As it focuses on the 'life skills' that support young people to thrive in schools, homes, and communities, as well as to make positive transitions to adulthood, it will be relevant to provision that supports young people in all areas of their lives, including at key transitions such as gaining new academic and vocational skills, leaving care and living independently, and moving from education to employment.

Outcomes. An outcome is simply a consequence of something that happens as a result of something else (HM Treasury, 2020). Perhaps due to this broad definition, the term 'outcome' is often loosely used in discussions about impact and evaluation. We like the definition proposed by Eccles and Gootman (2002:67): The term outcome should be understood not as "final outcomes per se but rather indicators of progress along a successful life path." Critically, this helps us to understand that 'outcomes' include both socio-emotional skills themselves, as well as the positive life events they are associated with, such as gaining qualifications, sustaining fulfilling employment, fostering positive relationships with family and friends, and experiencing good health and wellbeing.[3]

Skill. We use the term *skill* as practically synonymous with *capability*. Rather than trying to distinguish between abilities, capabilities, capacities, competencies, knowledge, and skills (all of which can be viewed as referring to the same set of psychological and behavioural processes), we focus on what appears to be a more fundamental set of distinctions between different parts of socio-emotional skills.

We also refer more often to 'socio-emotional skills' than to 'socio-emotional *learning*' (or 'SEL') because whilst the learning 'process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply'[4] socio-emotional skills is important, equally important are the specific skills and integrated skill sets that, once developed, can transfer to all settings across the life course. As described below, we intend Framework 2.1 to help clarify both socio-emotional skills *and* the ways in which they are acquired (e.g., through engagement within provision) and applied (e.g., by transferring them to other contexts in young people's lives).

Domains. We use the term 'domain' deliberately to refer not just to young people's socio-emotional skills, but also to the predictors and outcomes related to these skills, such as 'domains

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[3] Check out Appendix 2 to see how both can be embedded seamlessly into an evaluation plan. An evaluation will also be needed to explore the extent to which provision then achieves its aims with and for young people and, like more accurate measures, a valid theory of change will give evaluators more power to detect the effect or find the impact signal in their statistical models.

[4] https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/)

of practice'. We believe that all of these elements are equally important in understanding, measuring, and improving impact. For example, in any given domain, like teamwork, there is a related set of teamwork-related 'staff practices' (that is, how practitioners relate to young people and shape the quality of provision) that interact with young people's teamwork skills to produce teamwork experiences within the provision as well as the transfer of young people's teamwork skills to other areas of their lives.

2. Outcomes Framework 2.1

Much of the original impetus to create an outcomes framework emerged from debates about youth provision and the challenges of evidencing the impact of informal and non-formal learning on young people's lives. Working with young people on a voluntary basis in a range of informal and non-formal settings and engaging in activities and conversations as tools for learning remain central to the thinking that underpins this framework. We believe the developments in this framework will further support practitioners who work with young people to design, explain, evaluate, and improve their offer to young people.

Framework 2.1 is also intended to be useful for commissioners in local authorities in moving away from 'service-based' commissioning towards a greater focus on impact.

An outcome framework can most clearly help in identifying outcomes of value and their relationship to one another. This can help to plan when and where to evaluate. An outcomes framework can also support the design of large-scale and robust impact evaluations which are intended to measure the impact of provision on specific outcomes identified in advance. This sets the scene for Outcome Framework 2.1, which is focused on socio-emotional skills that matter most to young people *and* how they are supported to intentionally master them. Framework 2.1 is organised around three key elements; the framework for defining socio-emotional skill growth outcomes, a theory of change for how skills grow and transfer, and guidance for picking measures that align to the outcomes and theory of change.

Long-term outcomes pertaining to education, employment, health, family, community don't exist in a vacuum or 'occur' one at a time. These outcomes emerge in chains of cause and effect that are different for each individual person as they move through different life experiences. In fact, using the term 'outcomes' is somewhat deceptive, since the outcomes that we're usually referring to are often just behavioural (that is, seen from the outside) waypoints or markers along pathways of individual mental and behavioural skill development across the contexts of young people's lives.

This is where socio-emotional skills enter the conversation as they are the most important outcomes of youth work and provision for young people. Socio-emotional skills are critical missing mediators of later outcomes, so it makes sense that practitioners will benefit by learning to talk more clearly about socio-emotional skills, how they grow, and how they transfer to other settings in young people's lives. If you feel like we've been here before (for example, in the early 1990s debate about 'soft skills'), we have, and we're continuing to build on a significant consensus here: it is already established that, for young people at key transition points, well-developed socio-emotional skills increase the likelihood of reaching the waypoints that we call positive later life outcomes, such as the attainment of qualifications; securing, sustaining and progressing in employment; forming and maintaining positive relationships; developing a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle; and taking action on social injustices that matter to us[5]. This evidence

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[5] See the Education Endowment Foundation report on Social and Emotional Learning.

base is continually growing and remains a strong foundation for the life-long benefits of acquiring socio-emotional skills (Gedikoglu, 2021).

Our strategy, then, is to anchor the Outcomes Framework 2.1 to socio-emotional skills in three ways. First, we align the current evidence base about socio-emotional skills with the current evidence base about staff practices and provision more generally. This means focusing on *how* socio-emotional skill growth depends critically on the staff practices that support that growth. In other words, socio-emotional skill (or 'soft skill') growth is the central outcome of informal and non-formal youth provision.

Our second strategy is to ensure the links between equity and socio-emotional skills are clear. Young people experiencing the greatest challenges in life are likely to have lower levels of socio-emotional skills[6]. Supporting socio-emotional skill development is therefore critically important in addressing short- and long-term inequalities[7], with quality youth provision demonstrating a powerful 'equity effect'[8].

Our third strategy is to align the Outcomes Framework 2.1 with leading-edge neuroscience pertaining especially to young people who have experienced trauma or stress. This matters particularly at a moment in time when we are emerging from a global pandemic that has had a deep and extensive impact on the lives and opportunities of children and young people. We do this by extending the Outcomes Framework 2.1 more deeply into the realm of mental skills, or the 'neuroperson', and the strategies that young people can be supported to learn and use to become *intentional* authors of their own development. Importantly, this development of the Outcomes Framework 2.1 in terms of the neuroperson reveals the extent to which socio-emotional mental skills are equally applicable to both young people experiencing stress *and* the practitioners who are serving them.

2.1. Six Socio-emotional Skill Domains

We continue to organise the Framework of Outcomes 2.1 around six domains of socio-emotional skill: Emotion Management, Empathy, Initiative, Problem Solving, Responsibility, and Teamwork [9]. As we set out in the Framework of Outcomes 2.0, we selected these domains because:

- They emerged directly from practice and the voices of young people about the experiences that build socio-emotional skills and how skills transfer beyond the setting and into the early adult life course[10];

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[6] See the Education Endowment Foundation guide to social and emotional learning.

[7] See Feinstein's guide for the Early Intervention Foundation.

[8] See The Youth Investment Fund Learning and Insight Paper 7, Scanlon, K et al (2021).

[9] The work of Reed Larson and colleagues provided the primary evidence base for developing the interview questions, socio-emotional skill domains, and performance standards. Domain content was derived primarily from the voices of practitioners and adolescents via hundreds of interviews conducted across two decades. A list of published work related to the six SEL skill domains can be found in Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016, Appendix C. A complete list of Larson's work in this area can be found at http://youthdev.illinois.edu/).

[10] Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al. (2016); Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al. (2016)

- They have extensive overlap with many other socio-emotional skill frameworks, including the CASEL, Catalyst and CCSR frameworks, and CASCAID standards[11]; and
- They describe, in plain language, sets of socio-emotional mental and behavioural skills that are both developed during provision *and* transferred beyond provision.

These six domains are intended to both simplify and extend the common language for discussing and promoting socio-emotional skill growth in a way that is easily understood by practitioners, commissioners, and young people. They reflect sets of interrelated staff practices and the mental and behavioural socio-emotional skills that young people grow in youth provision settings and then transfer to other areas of their lives. In particular, socio-emotional skills in each of the six outcome domains can be viewed as important contributors to longer-term outcomes (as shown in Figure 1), reflecting the logic of socio-emotional skills as generic life skills that can apply in many situations.

Figure 1
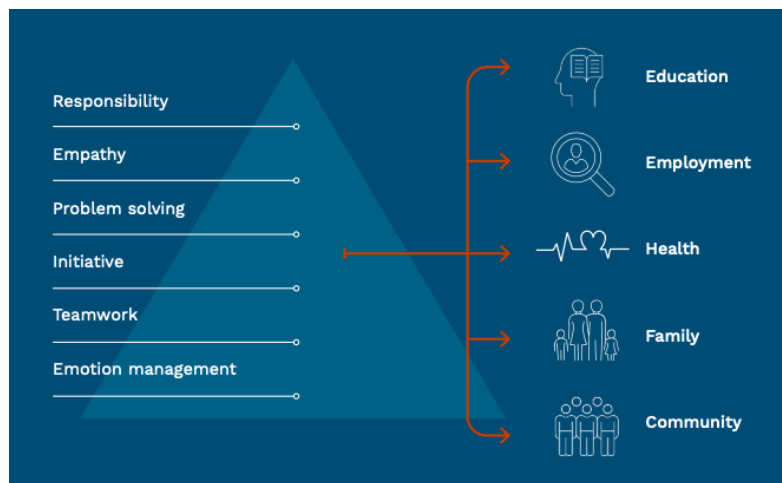
The six outcome domains are intended to help practitioners offer young people intentional opportunities to develop and practice specific skills. Measurement efforts should then focus on both the opportunities offered to young people *and* the development of mental and behavioural skills amongst young people. Mental and behavioural skills in particular will develop and grow over different 'arcs of developmental time', which means they need dependable support, further adding weight to the importance of consistently measuring and observing the quality of provision (see Appendix 1).

2.2. Socio-emotional Skills within Outcome Domains

In order to further clarify the core set of socio-emotional skills that allow young people to excel in each of the six outcome domains, we have to look more closely within each domain and ask questions like: *What* makes someone good at emotion management, teamwork, or any other outcome domain? And: *Which* specific aspects of young people's learning and development should practitioners be focusing on when trying to help them grow their socio-emotional skills?

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[11] See CASCAID.co.uk

We know that high-quality staff practices promote socio-emotional skill growth, but how do they do it?

One clue to answering these questions comes from thinking about the relationships between the six outcome domains and recognising that they are not as distinct as we might like (at least for the purposes of measurement). For example, even though we might decide to focus our practice or evaluation on one particular domain, like teamwork, we recognise that collaboration and teamwork skills depend on socio-emotional skills that are associated with other domains like emotion management, empathy, and initiative. It might be compelling to report that we have 'improved young people's teamwork skills by x percentage points', but this fails to take account of the holistic nature of young people's learning and development.

This kind of overlap among outcome domains prompted us to look more closely within each of these domains to find the core set of socio-emotional skills that allow young people to excel in any given domain. These are listed in more detail in figure 2 below. As described in the following section, we describe this core set of socio-emotional skills in terms of the *neuroperson* or, more specifically, schemas, beliefs, and awareness.

Figure 2.

Domain	
Emotion Management	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to be aware of, name, understand, and constructively handle both positive and negative emotions. Mental Skill Indicators: Focusing and shifting awareness; reappraisal; response inhibition. Behavioural Skill Indicators: Easily frustrated; remains calm in stressful situations.
Empathy	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to relate to others with empathy, compassion; acceptance and understanding; and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences. Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to understand how others feel; feel what others are feeling; and feel bad for others who are worse off or whose feelings are hurt. Behavioural Skill Indicators: Noticing when others are emotionally upset; showing empathy by reflecting others' feelings; and responding to others' feelings without taking them personally.
Initiative	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to take action, sustain motivation; and persevere through challenges toward an identified role. Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to take initiative; generate new solutions; persist during challenges; and risk failure. Behavioural Skill Indicators: Take initiative; set ambitious but realistic goals, stay on task despite distractions, and push through during a challenging task.
Problem Solving	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to plan, strategise, and implement complex tasks, including critical thinking, goal setting, and responsible decision making.

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	Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to brainstorm and organise ideas; make alternative plans; make step-by-step plans; manage time; and keep track of goal progress.
	Behavioural Skill Indicators: Brainstorm ideas before developing a plan; evaluate alternative plans for reaching a specific goal; create plans with multiple steps; manage time; keep track of goal progress; and adjust to feedback.
Responsibility	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfil obligations of challenging roles.
	Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to take responsibility for their actions; be counted on to get their part done; do the things that they say they are going to do; and do their best when an adult asks them to do something.
	Behavioural Skill Indicators: Finish the task that they started, do the things that they said they are going to do, acknowledge mistakes and take action to address them, and do the things an adult asked them to do.
Teamwork	Young people's socio-emotional skills: Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others, including through communication, teamwork, and leadership.
	Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to do a fair share of group work, help others, seek help from others, respect others' viewpoints, and hold others accountable.
	Behavioural Skill Indicators: Help or cooperate with others who are struggling, seek help from others, remind others to do their part, and keep track of their own and others' group progress.

2.3. The Neuroperson

Understanding how young people can achieve (and be supported to achieve) positive socio-emotional skill growth in domains like empathy is aided by thinking about socio-emotional skills as integrated sets of schemas, beliefs, and awareness within any socio-emotional skill domain. This is because socio-emotional skills at the domain level tend to be a combination of more specific mental and behavioural skills. The 'neuroperson' *mental* skills (i.e., schemas, beliefs, and awareness) are involved with young people processing emotion and becoming more *behaviourally* skilled in areas like self-regulation and social interaction.

We use the term *neuroperson*[12] to emphasise how socio-emotional skills can be defined and understood in terms of three different kinds of information storage and processing systems that are centred in three different areas of the brain: the limbic system (schemas), the neocortex (beliefs), and the prefrontal cortex (awareness). These three systems work together to promote (or

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[12] The neuroperson part of the MPC*n* framework is a practical simplification of the more detailed Basic Levels of Self (BLoS) model (Roeser et al., 2006; Roeser & Peck, 2009).

undermine) optimal experience and behaviour in any outcome domain and all areas of life[13] as shown in figure 3 below.

Figure 3.

The Neuroperson Model
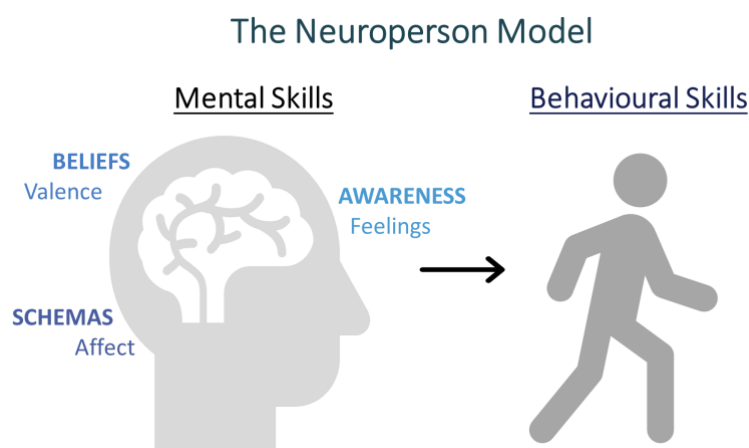
Schemas are non-verbal, non-symbolic[14], affectively-charged[15] mental representations of self and the world. Schemas are typically formed in early childhood, during child-caregiver interactions, and are enduring parts of young people's identity. Schemas influence how a young person will respond to provision. Young people enter provision having had a wide range of childhood experiences within the home, at school and in communities (both positive and negative), and 'meeting young people where they are at' means being sensitive to their feelings and understanding that they may be emotionally triggered in a way that makes it difficult to be mentally present and engaged. Schemas tend to be stable across the lifespan but can change with effort and persistence.

Broaden and Build Schemas*.* Young people's experiences tend to be dominated by one of two different kinds of schemas. If they have had a history of supportive (e.g., warm, responsive, and encouraging) caregivers, they tend to form *secure attachment* schemas, or what we call *Broaden and Build* schemas. When activated, Broaden and Build schemas generate (a) positive feelings, like interest and curiosity; (b) proactive behaviour, like exploration and initiative; and (c) a wide scope of attention. Young people with well-developed Broaden and Build schemas tend to appear comfortable and confident in their demeanour and to respond constructively and with awareness when frustrated or in stressful situations. Their wide attentional scope also helps them keep track of both what's going on around them, in the setting, and what's going on inside their body, including both physical sensations (e.g., muscle tension) and emotions.

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[13] McNeil et al., 2019; Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016; Peck & Smith, 2020

[14] This means no words, numbers, or other symbols.

[15] This means characterised by emotion.

Narrow and Constrain Schemas. If young people have had a history of non-supportive (e.g., cold, nonresponsive, and discouraging) caregivers, they tend to form *insecure attachment* schemas, or what we call *Narrow and Constrain* schemas. When activated, Narrow and Constrain schemas generate (a) negative feelings, like fear and anger; (b) reactive behaviour, like withdrawal and blaming; and (c) a narrow scope of attention. Young people with well-developed Narrow and Constrain schemas tend to appear shy, anxious, or agitated in their demeanour and to respond ineffectively (e.g., by withdrawing or pushing others away) when frustrated or in stressful situations. Their narrow attentional scope makes it difficult for them to keep track of what's going on around them (except for perceived threats) or inside their body (except for negative emotions).

Beliefs are verbal-symbolic[16] representations of oneself and the world. Basic beliefs form over time into complex belief systems, such as attitudes, goals, and plans. Values, opinions, and mindsets are also examples of beliefs. Beliefs are formed automatically by social interactions and intentionally during self-reflection. Beliefs are relatively malleable and can change as a result of a single social interaction or even just reflecting on previous or anticipated social interactions.

Both schemas and beliefs are generally unconscious. They only influence feelings and behaviour when they have been 'activated' by an environmental trigger or self-reflection.

Awareness refers specifically to consciously focusing on thoughts and feelings. Using focused awareness (or *executive attention*) to interact with activated schemas and beliefs (i.e., thoughts and feelings) allows young people to keep information active in working memory to form new beliefs (e.g., plans, goals), and inhibit impulses that might result in destabilising their own learning (or the learning of others). Awareness is the basis for all forms of self-reflection. Young people use awareness to reflect, evaluate, plan, problem-solve, and develop their own personal and social identities.

2.4. Agency

The neuroperson model distinguishes between *two different types of agency*: automatic and intentional. All young people have automatic agency that governs most of their daily experiences. This comes from their prior experiences in the form of schemas and beliefs about the self and the world around them. Schemas and beliefs automatically construct meaning and behavioural responses from the immediate situation. In contrast, intentional agency occurs only when young people consciously focus their awareness on their thoughts and feelings, as in self-reflection.

Using awareness (executive attention) to consciously engage in personal and social learning is intentional agency. This occurs best when young people are in the right conditions for themselves and when practitioners 'meet them where they are at'. They feel safe and supported, interested and challenged, and have opportunities to consciously and actively reflect on information and its meaning. It can be challenging for practitioners to create opportunities for young people to intentionally reflect on information and experiences.[17]

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[16] This means characterised by words, numbers, or other symbols that take the form of ''X' exists, completely or to some extent, and (usually) that X is (completely or to some extent) good or bad.'

[17] This is why the Engagement domain scores on the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) are almost always lower than the other three PQA domain scores.

2.5. Trauma-Informed and Mindfulness

Opportunities to intentionally reflect on information and experiences are particularly important when working with young people who have experienced chronic stress or trauma, which may mean that they respond unintentionally (i.e., automatically) to triggers or challenges. Young people are powerful when they are supported to consciously focus their awareness on what's happening in and around them, and what this means for their personal and social development because shifting and sustaining the focus of awareness allows young people to become intentional authors of their own identity and development.

The *neuroperson* model is therefore the most fundamental and carefully distilled understanding of socio-emotional skills available informed by decades of research. You may therefore choose to embed this model into your theory of change, practice, and evaluations. The socio-emotional skills depicted within the *neuroperson* model (schemas, beliefs, and awareness) are all enacted in different combinations in the domains of socio-emotional skills identified above. The *neuroperson* is therefore embedded centrally within all the domains. Some organisations choose to work at the level of socio-emotional skill domains as they feel they closely reflect the way they describe their work to young people. You will need to decide which way of describing socio-emotional skills is best for your organisation.

2. Theory of Change

The process of developing a theory of change is a highly beneficial and reflective process that we recommend to both commissioners and youth organisations. Taken together, the parts of the neuroperson can be arranged into a theory of change that is applicable to most youth provision. The theory of change provides an overview of how the various parts and processes associated with provision and socio-emotional skill development go together. It also helps to inform approaches to evaluation of young people's development, the quality of provision, and the links between them. Youth organisations and agencies frequently need to explain to themselves and others, preferably through their theory of change, how their programme methodology is intended to lead or contribute to young people achieving particular outcomes, and why this is something that benefits young people. Therefore, a theory of change sits usefully alongside the Outcomes Framework 2.1.

The MPC*n* theory of change provides an overview of how youth provision and socio-emotional skill growth go together. It helps us think about how the skills developed within provision for young people are both (a) embedded within the wider context of policy decisions, community assets, and the quality of provision and (b) related to shorter-term and longer-term outcomes and achievements. Taken together, as shown in figure 4 below, the elements in the theory of change show the main pathways through which young people develop and learn in provision, and transfer this learning to other contexts of their lives.

According to the MPC*n* theory of change, high-quality staff practices and content offered in a setting where staff and young people meet will encourage higher levels of engagement from young people during provision. Over time, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people's engagement during provision fuels the growth of socio-emotional skills. With longer-term participation in, and intensity of exposure to, high-quality settings, these socio-emotional skills will become integral parts of young people's emerging identities and so transfer to other areas of their lives.
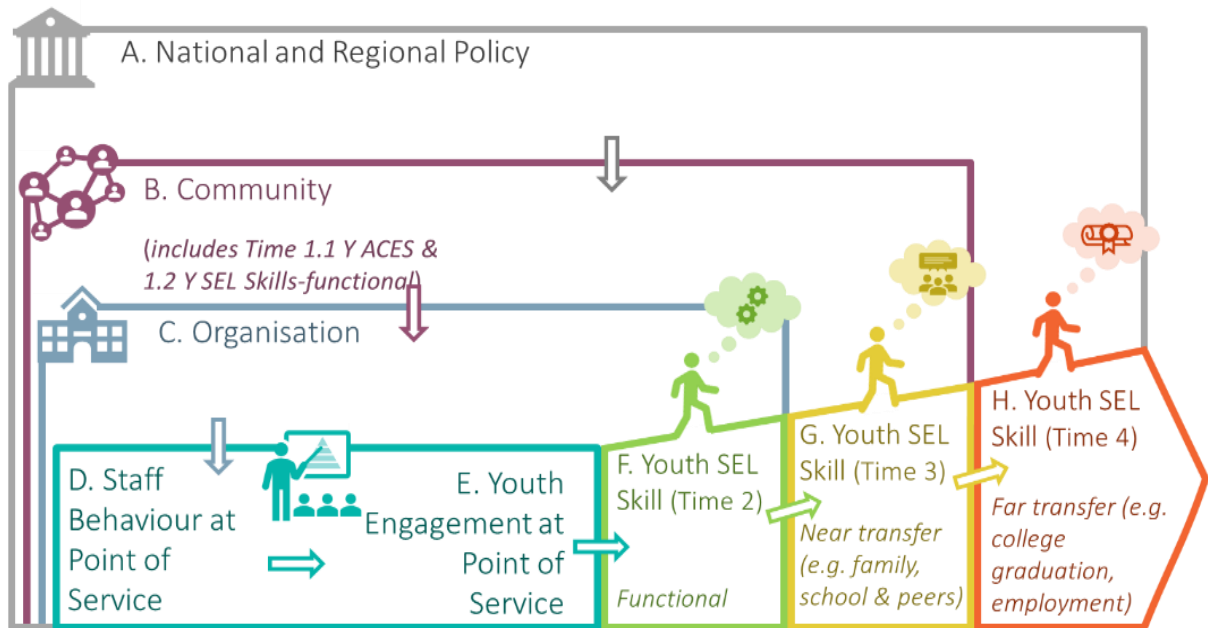
Figure 4: The MPCn Theory of Change

Framing young people's engagement during provision within the context of interactions between the socio-emotional skills they bring to provision *and* the quality of staff practices helps thinking about quality improvement and young people's development in ways that support intentional action. That is, the elements set out in the MPC*n* theory of change provide a generic template to which one or more specific theories of change from either an individual project or a broader strategic partnership can be aligned. The process of developing specific theories of change is a highly reflective and beneficial process that we recommend to funders, commissioners, and organisations serving young people.

This approach of embedding specific theories of change within a generic theory of change also helps clarify how any given measure (e.g., of socio-emotional skills) can be used as an 'outcome' in some cases (e.g., when evaluating the effects of quality practice on young people's socio-emotional skill growth) and as a 'predictor' in other cases (e.g., when evaluating the effects of socio-emotional skills on improved mental wellbeing).

Similarly, this approach helps clarify how contexts and mechanisms vary depending on focus. For example, the mechanism for improving the quality of practice can be viewed as professional development experiences, the mechanism for improving young people's engagement during provision can be viewed as quality improvement, and the mechanism for young people's socio-emotional skill growth can be viewed as their engagement during high-quality provision.

Finally, it is most effective to start from the left-hand side of the MPC*n* theory of change, and for funders and commissioners to support this. The left-hand side of the theory of change focuses on context and setting, such as the assets, needs, interests, and experiences that young people bring, the relationships that practitioners develop with young people, and the engagement of those young people in provision. All of these are mediators of longer-term impact (and any cost savings that might be of interest to funders and commissioners). Because young people arrive at provision

with very different prior experiences and ways of seeing the world, effectively engaging young people's learning and agency depends on practitioners building and maintaining relationships with young people and their communities, which means getting to know young people deeply.

We strongly believe that organisations that embed meaningful approaches to evaluation and learning at the heart of their culture, and strive to gather a rich body of evidence of how their approach supports young people's development, are much better placed to achieve equity goals and enable young people to achieve positive change in their lives and the communities in which they live.

We recommend that providers and commissioners embed the Outcomes Framework 2.1 in practice through:

- Using it to identify beneficial outcomes for young people that can be achieved or enhanced through informal and non-formal youth provision;
- Developing specific theories of change that show the relationships between contexts, mechanisms of change, and outcomes related to specific parts of their provision;
- Adopting an approach to evaluation that explores each set of relationships (rather than any one thing on its own); and
- Regularly reviewing and reflecting on insights that are emerging through the evaluation approach to inform adaptation and improvement.

The theory of change can be used to identify the kinds of measures needed to help answer a wide range of research and evaluative questions.

3. Guidance for Measurement

As theories of change illustrate the ways in which programmes are designed to support specific young people in certain ways, they are also valuable blueprints for evaluation. Each section of a theory of change presents an opportunity to ask evaluation questions. The theory of change also helps narrow down the wide range of measures that could be used to answer such questions. In this framework, aligned to socio-emotional skills, we focus on measures that are best suited to understanding socio-emotional skill development and programme quality.

We begin by discussing some general issues to keep in mind when thinking about selecting measures for quality improvement and evaluation purposes, and then describe a set of socio-emotional skill measures aligned to the six outcome domains. Next, we describe a set of socio-emotional skill measures aligned to the neuroperson model. Finally, we describe a set of measures designed to assess setting quality and young people's engagement during provision.

It is both impractical and empirically unsound to recommend any particular tool as appropriate to all provision and purposes – there is no one tool that can be universally promoted above others. However, the principle of measuring socio-emotional skills is universally accepted[18]. We encourage providers (and their funders and commissioners) to think carefully about the specific skills they intend to support and develop in provision, and then select tools that are designed

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[18] See, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation guide by Chaterjee Singh (chapter 4 monitoring and evaluation).

explicitly to focus on those skills which have been shown empirically to be sensitive to changes predicted to occur within the span of time during which they are able to collect pre-test (at the start) and post-test (at the end) data. The selected measures must also be *feasible* to administer, meaning both providers and young people must have the time, motivation, and infrastructure necessary to complete the measures.

3.1. Functional and Optimal Skills

When seeking to measure socio-emotional skills, it is important to understand the difference between skills that emerge during engagement in high-quality provision (sometimes referred to as 'states'), and skills that transfer in and out of provision (sometimes referred to as 'traits'). States refer to *optimal* skills levels: that is, the 'best' a young person can do when experiencing the highest quality provision. Traits refer to *functional* skills: the 'best' a young person can do when they have no support immediately around them. Most measures of socio-emotional skill reflect functional skills: how young people 'perform' in general, without high-quality support. Most providers are more interested in the effect of *their* provision on young people's socio-emotional skill growth. This is where using observational measures of young people's optimal skills during provision, at two or more points in time, can be particularly helpful.

3.2. Mental and Behavioural Skills

Measures that provide detailed information about mental processes and skill growth, such as *direct assessments*, are becoming more widely available and viable for use within provision[19], but may nevertheless remain impractical in many settings. In most cases, we continue to rely on observational or self-report measures of mental skills.

The theory of change helps us understand that young people's socio-emotional skills are influenced at the community level. This relates to the 'functional' socio-emotional skills that young people have and use in community settings such as in the family, a peer group, a formal learning setting, or at work. Measures of young people's socio-emotional skills in community settings are part of a needs assessment or a pre-test, where you are interested in understanding young people's socio-emotional skills *before* they start participating in your provision. Detecting medium- to long-term changes in socio-emotional functional skills is feasible with typically available self-report measures for young people and a wide range of provision quality is best achieved where mental skills are measured about once a year.

We believe that young people's mental skills can be measured by observers (i.e., the skilled and trusted adults who support them) using highly sensitive measures coupled with very high-quality provision – these are optimal skill measures of young people's behaviour that allow reliable inference to young people's specific mental skills. These measures can reveal significant short-term changes in socio-emotional skills (e.g., across several months). Being fully responsive to each young person, especially those young people with challenging socio-emotional histories, and providing the most relevant support for helping them to achieve optimal skill levels requires a valid baseline measure of socio-emotional skills. As a practical matter, baseline (e.g., pre-test) measures of functional skills may often be most feasible when used within the first few weeks of young people's participation in provision, after they get to know and become comfortable with

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[19] McKown et al. (2019). *Student social and emotional competence assessment.*

you. If you're using measures as part of a pre-test, you'll need to use the same measures at a later time point: the post-test.

Measuring socio-emotional mental skills in provision for young people can be fraught with practical and ethical challenges. However, young people's socio-emotional *behavioural* skills, which are influenced by their mental skills, can be observed by practitioners over hours and weeks as part of the relationships that are naturally built. Using observational measures can provide sensitive and detailed information about young people's socio-emotional behavioural skills, and this information can be used both to guide programme quality improvement goals and to assess short- and longer-term changes in young people's behavioural skills. Observing behaviour also enables practitioners to understand young people's 'state', the skills that are emerging as a result of engaging in provision, and the relation of those skills to specific features of the quality of provision. As with mental skills, if you're using behavioural observation measures as part of a pre-test, you'll need to use the same measures at a later time point: the post-test.

In both of the typical cases, (a) medium to longer-term change in functional socio-emotional skills using youth self-reports or (b) tracking short term growth in optimal skills using trained observers, interest in the impact of provision will be shared across providers, commissioners, schools, CCGs, Police and Crime Commissioners, and so on. Every effort should be made to join up data gathering and analysis across youth organisations and providers. Commissioners have a particularly important role to play in enabling this.

3.3. Socio-emotional Skill Measures Aligned to the Six Outcome Domains

Many youth work organisations are actively using the six outcome domains in their theories of change because the names of the domains closely reflect the types of outcomes they are funded to deliver. Two tools identified below are available to measure the development of socio-emotional skills across these domains. These are the most general measures of socio-emotional skills and are aligned directly to the six outcome domains of Framework 2.1 and are available, with guidance for use, from the Centre for Youth Impact[20].

ARYB. The 'Adult Rating of Youth Behaviour' (ARYB) is an observational rating instrument used to assess *optimal* socio-emotional behavioural skills in six domains of skill (i.e., Emotion Management, Empathy, Problem Solving, Initiative, Teamwork, & Responsibility) and is a good indicator of how young people are likely to perform in settings where they are well supported. The ARYB asks staff to rate young people's socio-emotional skills in each of the six domains based on behaviours displayed within provision settings over multiple sessions. Staff should observe each young person for at least four provision hours before using the ARYB. The ARYB can be used as a pre-test for provision planning purposes, getting to know young people more deeply, and as a post-test for assessing socio-emotional skill growth. If your primary goal is to assess socio-emotional skill growth outcomes, we recommend the ARYB for a focus on optimal behavioural skills which we view as the most valid and sensitive (to change) information about socio-emotional skills. Further, deriving estimates of change from staff ratings of young people's optimal socio-emotional skills during provision is ideal for generating impact estimates of the effects of OST programme quality on young people's socio-emotional skill growth.

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[20] This link takes you to the Centre for Youth Impact's measurement resources – here we have an Overview to Measurement which covers the strengths and limitations of a range of seven social and emotional skill measures and provides technical guides to each.

YRSS. The 'Youth Report of Socio-emotional Skills' (YRSS) is a self-report survey used to assess young people's *functional* mental and behavioural skills in the six domains of socio-emotional functioning. The YRSS asks young people about their socio-emotional skills *in general* (i.e., beyond the youth provision setting and into environments such as home and school). As with ARYB, the YRSS can be used as a pre-test for provision planning purposes and for getting to know young people more deeply, and also as a post-test for assessing socio-emotional skill growth in one or all of the six outcome domains.

3.4. Socio-Emotional Skill Measures Aligned to the Neuroperson Model

Youth organisations might also decide to adopt and measure the neuroperson model as it reflects the most fundamental elements of socio-emotional skills comprised of schemas, beliefs, and awareness. The most specific measures of socio-emotional skills are aligned directly to the neuroperson model of the Outcomes Framework 2.1[21]. The neuroperson model highlights that behavioural skills are an external manifestation of mental skills developed through mental and behavioural engagement with the context (which includes both activities and social relationships). Consequently, behaviour provides an important and easily accessible source of information about young people's growth in both observed behavioural skills and inferred mental skills.

ARY. The 'Adult Rating of Youth' (ARY) is a staff observational rating instrument used to assess young people's *optimal* socio-emotional behavioural skills as generated by three distinct but interrelated aspects of mental skill (i.e., schemas, beliefs, and awareness). The ARY asks staff to rate young people's socio-emotional behavioural skills based on the behaviours young people display during program activities, as observed during multiple sessions. It is focused especially on behaviour that reflects emotion regulation (i.e., schemas) and reflective thinking (i.e., awareness).[22] We encourage practitioners to focus more on the neglected areas of schemas and awareness due to their critical roles in helping young people (and practitioners) develop their automatic and intentional emotion regulation skills. The ARY can be used as a pre-test for program planning purposes and getting to know young people more deeply, and also as a post-test for assessing socio-emotional skill growth.

3.5. Setting Quality and Engagement Measures

Further insight into the adult practices and young people's experiences that grow socio-emotional skills can support youth organisations to design provision for optimal impact[23]. Emphasising the quality of staff practices reveals how the development and application of socio-emotional skills apply as much to practitioners as it does to the young people they serve. There are three setting measures aligned to the Outcomes Framework 2.1: two aligned roughly to the six outcome domains and one aligned specifically to the neuroperson model.

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[21] This link takes you to the Centre for Youth Impact's measurement resources – here we have an Overview to Measurement which covers the strengths and limitations of a range of seven social and emotional skill measures and provides technical guides to each.

[22] The ARY also includes two optional scales that are focused on youth behaviours that reflect beliefs about emotion (i.e., Emotion Knowledge) and social equity (i.e., Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion).

[23] See Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al. (2016), *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social & emotional learning.*

SEL PQA. The **'**SEL Programme Quality Assessment (PQA)' is an observational rating instrument that was designed to assess the quality of *staff practices* during provision, build a quality-focused organisational culture, develop improvement goals, identify staff training needs, and provide information about how specific aspects of quality relate to specific aspects of young people's SEL skill growth. It was developed through over a decade of collaborative efforts among researchers and practitioners working on several different versions of PQA, including sustained conversations among expert practitioners in thousands of settings about (a) what the standards and benchmarks for high-quality services should be and (b) what kinds of service designs are necessary to achieve those high standards and benchmarks[24]. The SEL PQA, used as either a self-assessment or completed by trained external observers, includes 41 items that produce ten scale scores (nested within four domains): Creating Safe Spaces (Safe Space); Emotion Coaching, Scaffolding Learning, and Fostering Growth Mindset (Supportive Environment); Fostering Teamwork, Promoting Responsibility and Leadership, and Cultivating Empathy (Interactive Environment); and Furthering Learning, Supporting Youth Interests, and Supporting Plans and Goals (Engaging Environment). The SEL PQA can be used as a pre-test to inform improvement goals and training priorities and, if used as both a baseline and follow-up measure (e.g., annually), changes in PQA domain scores can be used to assess improvement in provision quality.

TPI. The 'Teacher Practices Instrument (TPI)' is an observational rating instrument that was designed to assess the quality of staff practices in provision, as aligned to the neuroperson model. Each of the 36 items on the TPI describes the practices adults implement to create an environment that encourages young people's socio-emotional skill growth. It is focused on staff practices that are warm and responsive, scaffold content skills, and encourage awareness.

YES. The 'Youth Engagement Survey (YES)'[25] is a self-report survey, completed by young people, that is used to assess *mental engagement* (e.g., enjoyment, inclusion, attention, voice) during provision. Mental engagement during provision is not a 'mental skill' but, rather, refers to the *conscious thoughts* and *feelings* that result from the interactions between the events occurring within provision and young people's mental skills (i.e., their schemas, beliefs, and awareness). Thoughts and feelings of enjoyment, inclusion, interest, and challenge indicate active mental engagement that is expected to promote socio-emotional skill growth. Conversely, lack of mental engagement is expected to prevent socio-emotional skill growth. YES scores tend to reflect closely the quality of provision, so these scores can be an especially efficient way to assess how well staff understand the socio-emotional skills of participating young people and adjust their practices to 'meet young people where they are at.' They can also be used to inform decisions about future training decisions or provision planning, and, if also used as a follow-up measure, YES total scores can be used to assess changes in mental engagement at the point of interaction.

3.6. Near- and Far-Transfer Outcomes

As seen on the right-hand side of Figure 1, we expect the socio-emotional skills developed and refined during provision will be applied in (i.e., transferred to) other areas of young people's lives, in community contexts other than youth provision, such as learning in school, work or vocational training, and in family and peer relationships. We refer to performance and behaviour *outside* of provision as involving the *near transfer* of the socio-emotional skills developed during provision to

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[24] Smith et al., 2012; Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016; Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016.

[25] The YES is also known as the Youth Report of Point-of-Service Engagement (YRPE). For more information, see: https://www.qturngroup.com/

other community settings because the growth of socio-emotional skills during provision should be evident in how those skills are transferred to activities and identities such as being a family member, student, and friend. If changes in near transfer effects are of interest, the same measures of near-transfer outcomes should be included as both a pre-test and a post-test, where post-tests are scheduled not more frequently than biannually or annually.

Similarly, we expect the socio-emotional skills developed and refined during provision to transfer not only to contemporaneous areas of young people's lives but to all areas of their future lives, such as attaining qualifications; securing, sustaining and progressing in employment; fostering strong and supportive adult relationships; and developing a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle. We refer to future experiences and behaviour as involving the *far transfer* of the socio-emotional skills because the growth of socio-emotional skills during provision should be evident in how those skills are transferred to personal and social achievements occurring during adulthood and in contexts that can extend well beyond the local community into regional, national, or international contexts. Measures of the far transfer of socio-emotional skills don't have pre-tests, but they are helpful in understanding the impact of quality provision across the life course of young people. Gathering data in these areas is time - and resource - intensive. Again, it should be a shared endeavour across a range of agencies, with the burden primarily carried by the public agencies most interested in long-term outcomes. Until that point in time, it is useful for youth provision, as much as possible, to link or align their data collection with public agency data collection enabling data to be easily compared and/or correlated[26].

Conclusion: Bringing it all together

This document has set out the background and process for developing the Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.1. The document has focused on models for understanding how young people develop and grow socio-emotional skills, a set of outcome domains to help build a common language and shared understanding, a deeper dive into the core psychological processes that enable domain-level skills and behaviours, a theory of change connecting engagement in provision with skill development, and guidance on measurement.

Critically, the document has also emphasised the importance of staff practices and setting quality in both supporting socio-emotional development and measuring it.

We hope that Framework 2.1 can unite partners in local areas around a shared understanding of how and why quality youth work and provision for young people develops socio-emotional skills, and creates a powerful vision with and for young people and communities. A strong feature of more recent work on developmental experiences and skills is the recognition of the importance of integrated identity and the interaction of young people's lives and relationships across home, family, community, peer groups, and learning environments.

We also hope that the different agencies and actors in the lives of young people will take a more shared approach to thinking about outcomes, while also differentiating their focus depending on the type of provision. Decisions about measurement should be taken carefully and in collaboration with young people and partners. Approaches to measurement should be integrated into quality practice, and the data shared to build collective knowledge and insight.

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[26] The Centre for Youth Impact has a Youth Provision Data Set resource which suggests a range of public agency data sets which may be useful comparisons to your organisational data.

Commissioners and the wider funding community have a critical role to play in guiding practitioners towards reliable, robust, and shared measurement tools, alongside welcoming dialogue about expectations for measurement and the scale of change.

This framework also highlights where practitioners have the greatest influence and interest: their 'in the moment' interactions with young people, the opportunities they offer in their settings, and the relationships they form over time. Through this updated framework, we make the case to shift the focus from longer-term or 'transfer' outcomes measurement and instead encourage a sharp focus on staff practices and quality, which can create the powerful conditions in which young people learn and develop.

Appendix 1. The Quality of Staff Practices and Settings

The experiences of young people in youth provision were not taken into account in the original Catalyst Framework. This was mainly a reflection of the policy and practice context at that time, which had an overwhelming focus on young people's outcomes over process or the quality of practice. As such, the original framework was focused on the articulation and measurement of outcomes for young people, instead of understanding the practices of practitioners, the setting and experiences that can best support the development of young people, and how. By including a focus on staff practices, settings, and quality in Framework 2.1, we are making links more directly between provision and socio-emotional skill development.

Socio-emotional skills associated with the six outcome domains should not be considered on their own. They exist in the context of young people's experiences, past and present, and are shaped not just by engagement in high-quality youth provision, but also by the influences of their families, peers, communities, and schools. At the neuroperson level, socio-emotional skills are mainly composed of schemas and beliefs that have been developed through previous learning and socialisation experiences. Therefore, practitioners need to recognise the socio-emotional 'histories' that young people bring into settings. To do this effectively, they need to build deep and trusting relationships with young people. Creating high-quality opportunities for young people to develop socio-emotional skills will enable young people to 'transfer' these skills to other domains of their lives, supporting transitions over time.

Further insight into the settings, practices, and experiences that can create the conditions for development in socio-emotional skills can support youth organisations to design provision for impact. Additionally, it can enable practitioners to focus on creating high-quality engagement experiences for young people during provision. Perhaps most importantly, emphasising the quality of staff practices reveals how the development and application of socio-emotional skills apply as much to practitioners as it does to the young people they serve. Self-care should be an integral part of the professional development opportunities provided to all practitioners.

It is important to recognise that most experiences in youth work and provision for young people are rooted in relationships (with practitioners or peers), but there are also other aspects of the experience that matter. The work of the Youth Investment Fund on mechanisms of change – or young people's 'in the moment' experiences - provides three different areas of focus which should inform the focus of evaluation:

1. **Environment and relationships**: young people trust and feel trusted; young people feel respected; young people don't feel judged or punished; young people feel safe and secure.
2. **Nature and delivery of activity**: young people feel positively challenged; young people feel a sense of enjoyment (including fun and a deeper satisfaction); young people feel a sense of purpose, achievement, and contribution.
3. **Empowerment and community**: young people are empowered to create change in their lives and the world around them; young people feel included and have a greater sense of connection with their community.

Appendix 2: How an Outcomes Framework Supports an Evaluation

We found this diagram[27] helpful in understanding how an outcomes framework supports a broad perspective on evaluation, as it underpins all the elements of the evaluation approach:
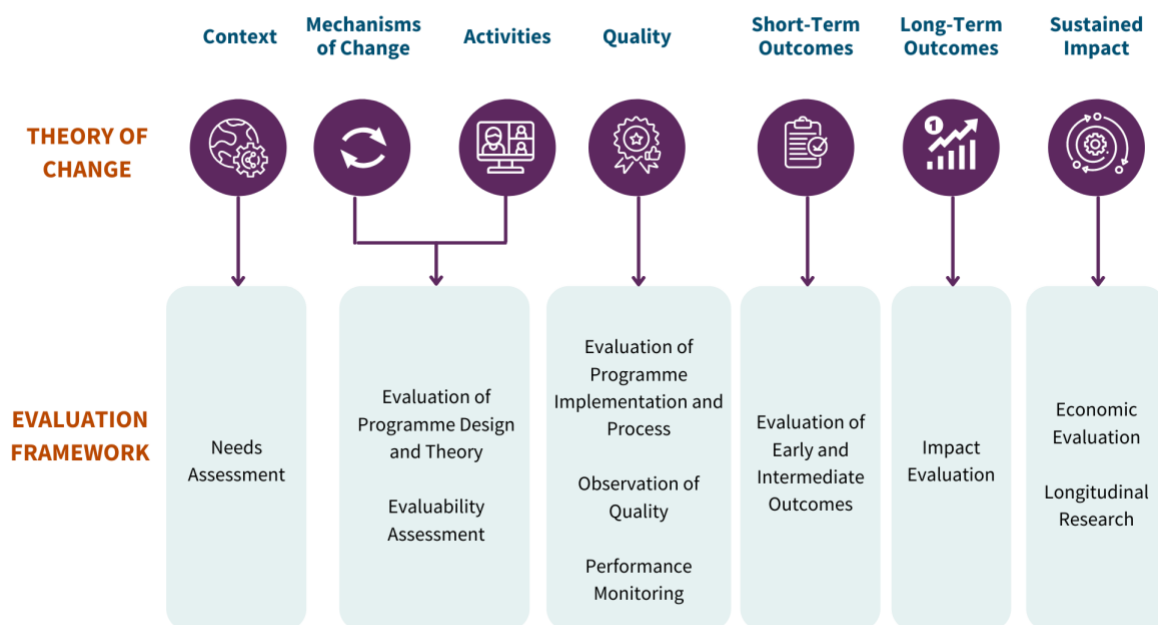

Figure 27

In this model, an outcomes framework is integrated into the evaluation framework. It is an important backdrop to considering need and demand and should inform programme design (that is, the activities that are offered, and the active ingredients (or 'mechanisms') that are likely to be significant in affecting change). There should be a close relationship between how a youth organisation thinks about *outcomes for young people* and how it thinks about *its own role* (the quality of setting and relationship) in contributing to those outcomes. An outcomes framework can most clearly help in identifying outcomes of value, and a theory of change can most clearly help in identifying their relationship to predictors and further transfer outcomes. This can help to plan when and where to evaluate. Integrated outcomes, theories of change, and evaluation frameworks can also support the design of large-scale and robust impact and economic evaluations, which are intended to measure the impact of provision on specific outcomes that are identified in advance.

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[27] Adapted from the American Evaluation Association Needs Assessment Topical Interest Group blog, Hamann, S (18 June 2019).

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