Framing Evaluation

TOWARDS A THEORY OF CHANGE BASED EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR CAMBRIDGE AGENDA FOR CHILDREN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

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Contents

Introduction

The following report presents a comprehensive analysis of Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time (AFCOST) monitoring and evaluation needs. The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation strategy for AFCOST, which involves developing a clear plan for evaluating professional development activities and incorporating lessons learned. Evaluation is not a one-time event to demonstrate results, but is a critical part of the ongoing process of learning and improvement[1]. This report aims to:

- Introduce a monitoring & evaluation framework for AFCOST activities, including updated Theory of Change & logic models for core activities;
- inform monitoring and evaluation efforts, by making explicit the connections between different youth, program and system level outcomes;
- inform planning efforts undertaken by AFCOST staff; and
- help AFCOST staff make informed decisions about future program development priorities.

Background

Since 2001, AFCOST has offered a range of professional development activities to support out-of-school time (OST) programs across the City of Cambridge. This has consisted of a variety of on and off-site support—from coaching and training to advocacy and peer-learning and community events. In the early years from 2005 to 2009, significant efforts were made to establish an evidence based quality improvement system (QIS). QIS received a large investment in resources, both in terms of financial and human capital, and was most rigorously documented and evaluated.

The other elements of AFCOST's work, including the Middle School Network, EL STEAM Network, Training System and Annual Symposium, evolved in response to city or state priorities in out-of-school time or were identified as priority areas by staff involved in quality improvement processes.

In late 2016, a decision was made to pause and reflect on how AFCOST had expanded and diversified over recent years, initiate a five-year strategic planning process and invest in the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework. This report offers a set of recommendations for the implementation of a theory of change based monitoring and evaluation framework.

Process and methodology

The proposed monitoring and evaluation framework was developed using a collaborative model for developing a theory of change[2]. A collaborative approach uses "academic expertise (inputting evidence from research) and practice expertise (where stakeholders outline their view of how things work)"[3]. This process was suitable for three reasons:

- Not all AFCOST's programs had been documented as rigorously as QIS and therefore lacked clear documentation on the objectives, activities and successes needed to identify strengths and gaps.
- The modus operandi of AFCOST is collaborative and based on people's real and everyday experiences in the OST field in Cambridge. As such, knowledge about the underlying assumptions and logic of certain programs has been held in the experiences and stories of people facilitating, and participating in, different activities.
- There has been substantial progress towards the development of robust measurement frameworks in the out-of-school time field and there are obvious benefits to building on, rather than recreating, this important work[4].

The recommendations in this report are based on findings from the following research activities:

- Desk review of internal evaluation documentation
- Thematic coding of 11, 1-1.5-hour semi-structured interviews with AFCOST staff (conducted in 2017)
- 41 Director Survey responses (conducted in 2017)

- 10-15, 1-2-hour logic model planning meetings and workshops with program coordinators, quality coaches and leaders of AFCOST's major offerings using interview data & Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework[5].

Recommendations

1. *Direct evaluation efforts towards better understanding transfer to practice*

A persistent challenge for AFCOST is understanding how professional development interventions transfer to practice. Reiterating the findings of previous evaluations and the Director Survey, more documentation is needed on <u>what</u> and <u>how</u> learning transfers to changes at the program level. Recommended strategies to understand transfer to practice include:

- Renew efforts to track the implementation of QIS action plans within, and across programs to understand and articulate change and persistent challenges to change.
- Implement an annual program OST program staff survey & follow-up to understand relationship between staff perception of change and evidence of change at OST programs.

2. *Strengthen connections between professional development and child and youth development outcomes*

A key finding from the Director Survey and semi-structured interviews is that although AFCOST activities are inspired by a child and youth development approach, there is a need to be more explicit about the

connections between professional development and positive child and youth outcomes. Strategies to strengthen these connections include:

- Provide more opportunities for OST program staff to articulate and document how their learning results in real changes for the children and young people in their care.
- Clarify what child and youth outcomes AFCOST is seeking to support in the design and delivery of professional development activities.
- Include additional monitoring and evaluation activities to look explicitly at child and youth experience of OST programs. Options may include: inviting children and young people to act as observers as part of QIS, participatory action research projects, focus groups, interviews and the inclusion of a youth specific assessment tool such as SAYO-Y.

3. *Implement organizational wide monitoring and evaluation framework to monitor successes and challenges within, and across, AFCOST activities*

This report highlights how previous evaluation and monitoring activities have focused on the success of specific AFCOST activities, with less attention paid to how these activities complement one another and extend the impact of AFCOST as a whole. On one hand, this reflects the reality that AFCOST's activities have grown and expanded over the years, and on the other hand, that activities have been less rigorously documented in recent years. Specific strategies to improve data collection & analysis include:

- Create, refine and review logic models to ensure consistency with 5-year strategic plan.
- Implement and share logic models, and use these to guide AFCOST's monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Explore a potential partnership with a university to conduct a system-wide evaluation of the impact of AFCOST professional development on the OST community of Cambridge.
- Ensure monitoring occurs in a timely manner by implementing and streamlining the TRACK database to ensure participation and QIS activity data is captured and used to guide reflection and change.
- Streamline the documentation used by AFCOST staff to guide professional development and quality improvement work. For example, ensure all AFCOST staff use the same templates for Action Plans, and regularly save these for analysis & reflection in team and community meetings.
- Use the AFCOST's theory of change based monitoring and evaluation framework to strengthen the OST coalition understanding of the impact and purpose of professional development offerings.

4. *Clarify and continue to assess impact on equity and access*

A common theme in this report is the need to clarify and continue to assess how AFCOST activities impact issues of equity and access in the OST field of Cambridge. Suggested strategies to strengthen impact in this area include:

- Review training, symposium and community of practice offerings to identify common & cross-cutting equity and access themes.
- Use logic models to make explicit the connections between professional development activities and equity and access.
- Include specific questions in annual surveys and evaluations about how professional development activities enable OST staff to address specific equity and access issues in OST.

5. *Use revised Theory of Change and logic models to guide planning, strategy and development efforts*

This report introduces a revised Theory of Change and series of logic models as the foundations of AFCOST's monitoring and evaluation framework. While these documents provide critical tools for evaluation, they should also be used to guide planning, strategy and development efforts. Specific strategies to use the Theory of Change & logic models include:

- Use logic models to guide QIS system-level meetings, MSN Steering Committee and the OST coalition, reflecting on relevant data, progress and outcomes.
- Apply the Theory of Change to assess the relevance of new opportunities for development and growth. Does it fit and extend desired outcomes? Are there other areas of priority that need strengthening before investing in new growth areas?

Desk review

A review of 6 evaluations, 5 conducted by an external evaluator from the National Institute for Out of School Time (NIOST) and 1 by an internal staff member, indicates that the AFCOST has made steady progress towards establishing a relevant and effective quality improvement system to support and build the capacity of Cambridge out-of-school time (OST) programs. Except for the internal evaluation of the Communities of Practice (2015), evaluations focus on the evolution and effectiveness of the Quality Improvement System (QIS) initiative on program sites, staff and coaches (Appendix 1 Table of previous evaluation objectives, data and findings). The 5 external evaluations focus on different components the leading for quality and QIS, often assessing the effectiveness of new strategies such as the Organizational Self-Assessment and Quality Coaching for achieving continuous quality improvement. Other AFCOST initiatives are not reflected in evaluation documentation, specifically the Middle School Network, EL STEAM Network and Family Engagement initiative. Thus, existing evaluations only tell a partial story of the evolution and current work of AFCOST.

Strengths identified in previous evaluations:

- *Evidence of program changes, and consistent interest in participation*: Here the results vary across the years, as there is not always an "increase", but most participants continue to express that the strategies are "worthwhile"
- *Quality coaching:* Quality Coaching is a key ingredient in program change and staff development.
- *The classroom observations using a portion of NIOST Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT) is a strong*

component of the quality improvement process. Across the years, participants and sites consistently identify the usefulness of this tool for identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Persistent challenges identified in previous evaluations:

- *Organizational Self-Study (OSS):* The OSS may be an effective component of the quality improvement process, but more documentation is needed to understand its use and effectiveness.
- *The goals of Communities of Practice (CoP):* The goals of CoP have shifted from the early 'cluster meetings' to the model evaluated in 2014. More documentation is needed about the goals, effectiveness and rationale of current practice.
- *Transfer to practice.* Minimal documentation of transfer to practice. There is a two-part problem:

    o Documentation of transfer to practice may be weak (e.g. it might be happening more but is not documented);
    o Participants are not clear on how to implement changes.
- *Staff turnover:* Staff turnover impacts the sustainability of coaching and training.

Conclusion and implications

QIS has evolved through a rigorous process of planning and evaluation. However, the most recent and comprehensive assessment of the QIS system occurred in 2009 and there is relatively little coordinated

documentation about the state of the broader AFCOST offerings today. The earlier version of the QIS theory of change (Appendix 2:1) needs to be updated to more accurately reflect the processes, expected results and potential factors leading to continuous quality improvement. This is especially critical given that previous evaluations suggest that although there are number of strong components that seek to improve the quality of Cambridge afterschool programs, the links and rational behind these components are not always clear. Previous evaluations suggest that this lack of clarity has impacts for staff and programs involved in QIS, and for AFCOST staff implementing QIS. There is a need to:

- There is a need for more clarity, refinement and documentation of two specific activities: i) OSS and how it supports the overall goals of the QIS, and ii) CoPs and how these spaces support professional development of the OST community of Cambridge.
- Establish a clear set of outcomes and required data inputs to measure success across different AFCOST activities. While there is a degree of consistency in the questions asked across different evaluations, it is not always clear how outcome measures have shifted over the years and there are critical opportunities for longitudinal analysis.
- Create logic models to understand the inputs, processes, outcomes and expected impact for the different AFCOST activities. A previous attempt to create an organizational wide theory of change (Appendix 2.2) reveals gaps in data collection, particularly around the youth and family input, and does not capture the breadth of current activities and goals.

Director Survey

Introduction

In June 2017, 117 out-of-school time directors from 41 community organizations and 24 city-run programs were invited to share their experiences of Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time (AFCOST) 2016-17 activities in a short, 13-question, anonymous survey. For this survey, executive and program director staff were grouped together as director level. The average director participated in 13.7 hours of professional development in 2016-17, with a maximum of 70 hours and minimum of 0 hours. This is the first time out-of-school time directors have been asked to reflect on their experiences across the spectrum of AFCOST's activities rather than just specific activities. In future evaluations, we will target users based on hours of participation to better understand experiences.

The overarching mission of AFCOST is to increase and sustain high quality out-of-school time experiences for children, youth and families in Cambridge. Out-of-school time directors are a key lever in leading and sustaining quality programming and many of AFCOST activities focus explicitly on increasing their capacity to be program and organizational leaders. As such, the survey was designed to respond to the following key question:

- To what extend does participating in AFCOST activities increase the capacity of out-of-school time directors to lead high quality programs?

The survey had a 35% response rate with 41 individual responses. While this response rate is within the average range expected for internal surveys, a higher response rate would greatly increase the representation of people's experiences in AFCOST's work. Survey respondents self-identified as program directors (71%), executive level directors (22%) and a small number (7%) as "other" such as a curriculum consultant and event managers. It is important to note that this report does not include the perspectives of front line staff, who are another key player in creating and sustaining high quality and a core audience for other AFCOST activities.

Survey respondents were given the option to respond to a series of demographic questions. 32 of the 41 respondents provided this information. Perhaps the most relevant demographic findings were that 75% of survey respondents identified as female, 72% were under 44 years of age, 51% identified as white/Caucasian and 19% Black/African American, 13% Hispanic/Latino, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% multiple race/ethnicity. This may be reflective of the OST community of Cambridge, but more data is needed to test this assumption. It would be useful to further survey staff to understand more about the demographics and tenure of the OST community of Cambridge, and whether this is reflective of the field in general or distinct.

Key Findings

Being a leader: Most directors (95%) said Agenda for Children's 2016-17 activities helped support their professional development as a leader of out of-school time with over half (54%) finding activities very helpful or extremely helpful.

Equity & Access: Most directors (92%) found Agenda for Children's 2016-17 activities helpful in supporting them to make OST more accessible and equitable for children, however more than half (55%) said it was only slightly to moderately helpful and a few (7%) said it was not helpful at all.
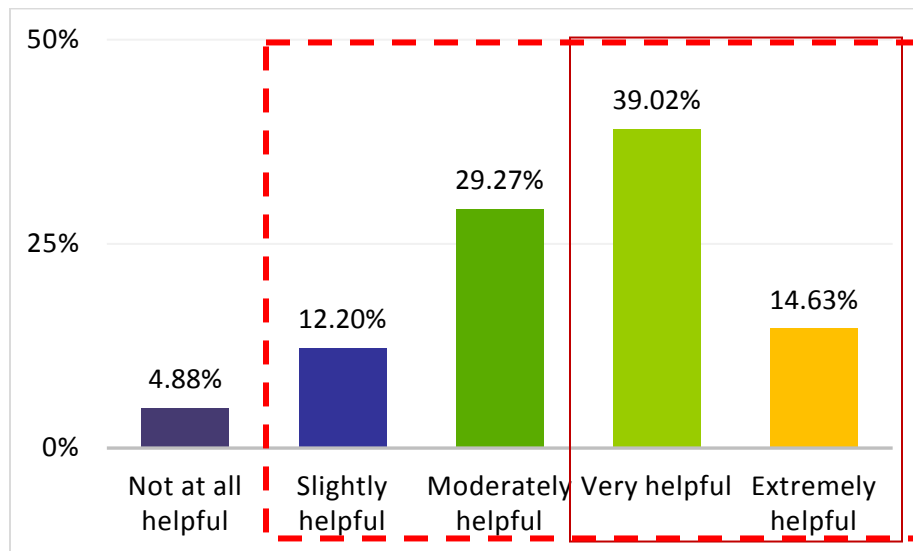
Figure 1: How helpful were AFCOST's 2016-17 activities in supporting your professional development as a leader in out-of-school time?
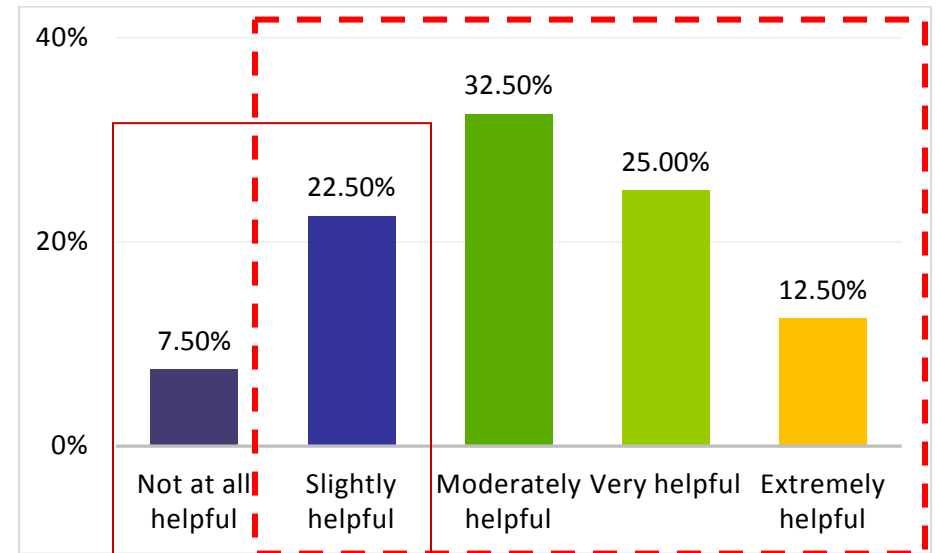
Figure 2: How helpful were AFCOST's 2016-17 activities in supporting you to make out-of-school time more accessible and equitable for children and young people?

"I think CoPs and QIS offer opportunities for every level of the organization to grow, learn and engage with the field in a variety of ways. I think it improves quality AND job satisfaction."

"We continue to build stronger relationships with in-school staff that allow us to make sure that the most in-need youth follow through and get their applications in…"

Increasing Quality: Participating in AFCOST 2016-17 activities increased the capacity of directors to offer high quality out-of-school time programs, with most (77%) saying it increased their capacity to a "moderate" and "very" high extent.
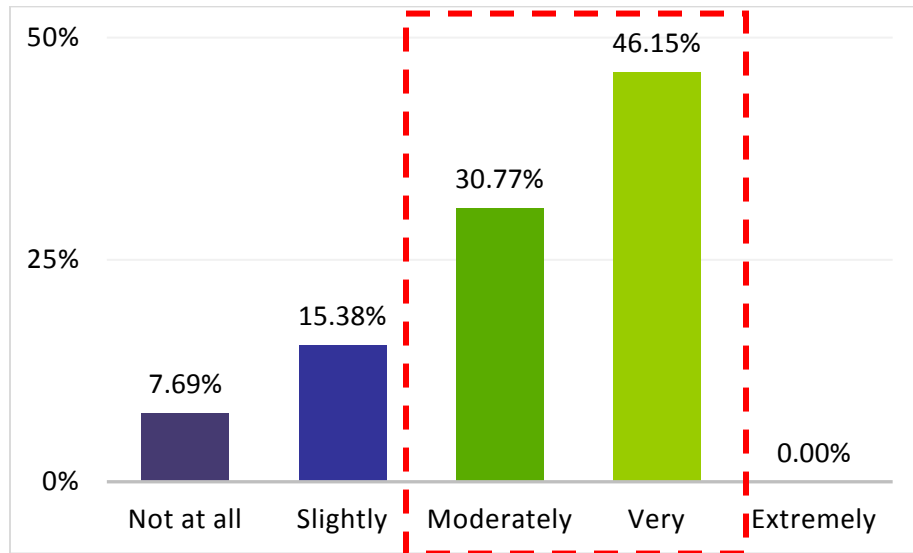
Figure 3: To what extent has participating in AFCOST's 2015-17 activities increased your capacity to offer high-quality out-of-school time programs for children and young people?

Positive outcomes for children & young people: Directors who answered that they had increased their capacity "moderately", "very" or "extremely" were prompted to give a specific example of how their increased capacity contributed to positive outcomes for children and young people who they work with. Just over half of directors (57%) provided specific examples, with the others skipping the question. Of the directors that did provide examples, only 47% explicitly named children or youth in their answer. This may suggest an area for improvement for AFCOST in supporting directors to make explicit what

they are learning to do more intentionally in their practice and the benefits for children and young people.

"We have created new systems around youth voice that stemmed out of conversations we have had with peer groups"

CoP & QIS key levers for quality: Directors said that the quality improvement system (QIS) and communities of practice (CoP) were the most effective activities in supporting their capacity to offer high-quality programs for children and young people.
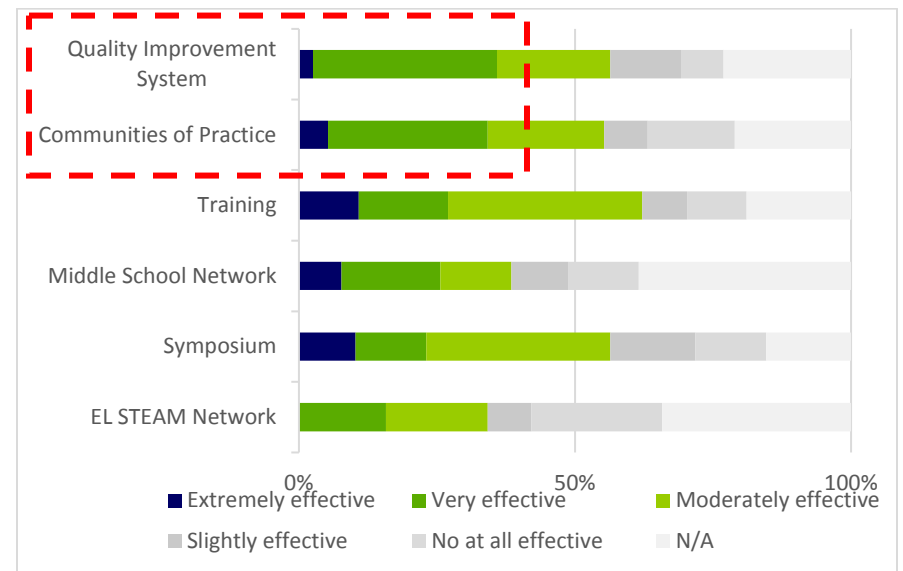
Figure 4: How effective were AFCOST's different activities in increasing your capacity to offer high quality programs to children and young people?

Directors said that QIS was very effective (27%) and extremely effective (7%) and that the CoP was very effective (23%) and extremely effective (14%). This was consistent with Director's open-ended responses about how participating in AFCOST activities contributed to positive changes at their programs, with the majority naming QIS and CoP as key levers in these programmatic changes. Training was also viewed as effective, but with less direct program changes noted because of participating in training.

"From participating in the QIS, myself and staff could really pay attention to how we execute our staff meetings, making sure all voices were heard and in the process the program ran better with the families and children at the center"

Professionalizing the field: Directors who completed the survey reported improved abilities to lead quality OST programs. The largest increase came from Directors who felt they had shared and learned with peers across the OST community of Cambridge.

Directors (32.5%) said that participating in AFCOST 2016-17 activities increased their "ability to share and learn with peers across the out-of-school time community Cambridge" to an extremely high extent. This was closely followed by "ability to critically reflect on my practice" and "ability to communicate the importance of quality out-of-school time experiences for positive child and youth development", with 27.5% of directors observing an "extremely" high increase in these areas.
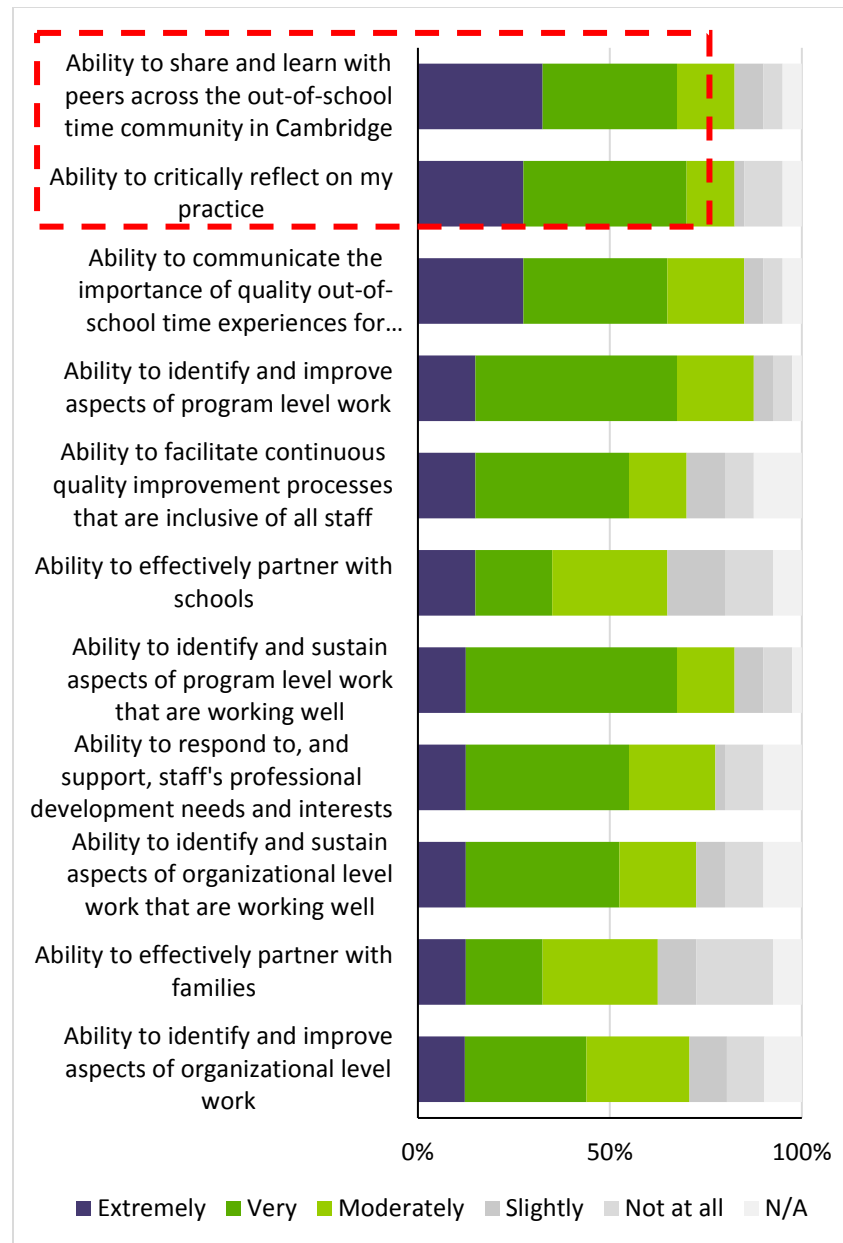
Figure 5: How has participating in AFCOST 2016-17 activities increased your abilities in the following areas? Data sorted by "extremely" followed by "very".

These findings are consistent with the fact that most directors said they participated in the symposium, training and communities of practices most frequently—activities that explicitly seek to foster peer learning, communication skills and shared problem-solving.

"Because of the resources of the COP, my staff are more resilient, staff retention is higher, leading to better, more continuous relationships with program partners, families and youth. For the first time ever, we will have no turnover in 2016-17 and 2017-18 school year roles!"

School & Family Partnership: Directors (30%) said that they had "not at all" or only "slightly" increased their abilities to effectively partner with families. This was closely followed by directors (27.5%) noting that they had "not at all" or only "slightly" increased their ability to effectively partner with schools. This finding is not surprising given that AFCOST offered few explicit activities to support building school and family partnerships with out-of-school time programs in 2016-17. Despite this, four directors made open-ended comments about stronger relationships with school staff and new family engagement strategies because of their involvement with AFCOST.

Conclusion and implications

- *Professionalizing the field – a key area of strength & achievement:* The survey findings affirm previous evaluations and anecdotal evidence that AFCOST continues to support the professionalization of the out-of-school time field in Cambridge by creating spaces for out-of-school time staff to learn and share with peers, and communicate about the importance of out-of-school time for positive child and youth development.

- *Connecting learning to outcomes for children & young people:* The survey findings suggest that we should explore more opportunities to make explicit, the connections between professional development activities and benefits for children and young people in out-of-school time programs. How can we further support directors – and other staff – to articulate how their increased capacity as professionals is directly impacting positive outcomes for children and young people?

- *Impacting equity & access in out-of-school time:* Although directors found the professional development activities helpful to them in addressing equity and access in out-of-school time, we should make more explicit connections between professional development activities and the goal to improve equity and access

Semi-structured interviews

A series of in-depth, 1-2-hour interviews were conducted with 11 AFCOST staff. Staff were invited to take part in an interview if they had been working with AFCOST for 12 months or more, and if they had been involved as members of the AFCOST Leadership Team. Across the 11 staff members, the average number of years of involvement with AFCOST was 10 years.

Staff were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role and responsibilities with AFC?
2. What is the history of the initiative/s you oversee? (the situation?)
3. How do you understand the purpose of the initiative/s? (the causes/purpose)
4. How do you understand the outcomes of your work? (How do you want things to be different?)
5. What actions do you take to achieve those outcomes?
6. What helps you to see and understand the success of those outcomes? (How do you know if change is happening?
7. What is the story you would like to tell, and be told, about the impact of your work? (What do you hope happens for person A, B, C as a result of your work with them? What might prevent these things from happening?)

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes emerging from the interview data. Over 78 pages and 48000 words were reviewed and coded to identify what outcomes AFCOST staff believed they are working towards, the actions they take to achieve those outcomes, and how they know if change is happening. In addition, staff were asked to reflect on their understanding of the history and evolution of AFCOST work.

Key themes

Systems Level Impact: Staff reflected that while AFCOST's organic approach to activity design has led to innovation and growth, it has also meant that the connections between activities and systems level change are not always clear. Seven of the staff interviewed discussed wanting more clarity, understanding and opportunities to reflect on how different activities work together to create impact at the systems level. A key ingredient for this system level reflection, staff noted, would be more consistent and accurate data collection and documentation:

- *"We don't have a system for tracking across interventions and opportunities"*
- *"… we have this trove of data that no one is really looking at."*
- *"… if someone isn't paying attention to the whole it can be neglected and can get more vulnerable as a system that will be sustained"*
- *"…in the last couple of years has made it a little less clear how we make sure that there is real cross-site coherence and ways of understanding the model, and ways of talking about the model"*
- *"at a systems level, there are questions about how to monitor [change]"*
- *"… how many kids are in OST and how many could be? … who is getting benefits, across neighborhoods? There are other problems but we don't have the data on it."*
- *"Within the Agenda for Children, there has not been the resources to focus on the impact of our work."*

One staff member suggested that some of the earlier strategies, such as having a midyear event or summer retreat for program leaders and staff, could be reinstated to maintain coherence around quality and system level thinking across OST programs in Cambridge. Notwithstanding this desire for greater attention to system level impact, staff were consistent in their views of what impact AFCOST is trying to create:

- *"So, the purpose then is, equity. So that families accessing programs are getting quality services."*
- *"The tagline for the work is around equity, and increasing equity around the city so that any child in the city between 2 and 6 can have access to a high-quality program and experience. Building strong relationships with staff, building skills and developing themselves. So, the idea of improving quality is deeply entwined with increasing equity in the city."*
- *"At the most basic level it is to make sure that there is increase of high level quality of programs across the city and so for families regardless of where their child goes there should be some confidence, if it is a QIS site, that there is a commitment to quality and evidence of that quality that can be shared in different ways."*
- *"... it shouldn't matter where a kid ends up in after school in Cambridge it should be a high-quality program."*

Professionalizing the field: Reflecting a key strength also identified in the Director Survey 2016-17, seven staff members spoke about AFCOST's critical role in increasing the professionalization of the OST community of Cambridge over the past decade. This professionalization was understood as increasing the capacity of OST workers to be reflective, motivated, and critical thinkers as well as seeing themselves as part of a broader field and learning community.

- *"When I think about success I see these faces of young afterschool professionals who are now in their 30s and 40s who have made this a profession."*
- *"One of the biggest changes I have seen is that people talk about practice. We have a shared language about practice."*
- *"There is more consistency around expectations, people are working in a field where they can see themselves moving…"*
- *"I think that is the impact over time. We have learned we have our own story to tell and we have our own expertise."*

Staff were also consistent in their view of how they hoped OST professionals benefited from AFCOST work. Specifically, inspiring OST professional interest, agency, confidence and understanding of youth development:

- *"Do they have a sense of agency, confidence and willingness to take risks?"*
- *"[the work] is about building something longer in terms of [OST staff] sense of competence, and coherence, and ability to try and then hopefully seeing really tangible and clear results with children…"*
- *"[There is] a recognition of the value of youth development."*

Transfer to practice: Echoing the challenges raised in previous evaluations, staff discussed that while AFCOST had helped professionalize and unite the OST community in Cambridge around shared language and standards of quality it was less clear how AFCOST professional development interventions transferred to practice.

- *"There is this transfer to practice piece that is this constant, amorphous blob that we keep chasing. How do we know that what is happening in these spaces is actually making a difference on the ground?"*

- *"Trainings are wonderful but you take people away from training and expect that they are going to bring that back to their site and how incredibly difficult that is…"*

For AFCOST staff reflecting on this dilemma, there was agreement that people were transferring learning to practice but that evidence for this was difficult to ascertain without formal monitoring and evaluation support. Several staff spoke about the need to invest more effort within professional development spaces to make the transfer to practice more explicit.

- *"For example, if you go to a training on social-emotional support, there might be 3 indicators they should internalize and see that in their practice."*
- *"I wonder how to set that up… how to ask folks. And some of the best years have included some deep disappointment when I have asked 'so what have you learned this year?' And I get blank stares."*

Staff also warned against trying to "force" people's reflections on transfer to practice:

- *"People don't immediately transfer."*
- *"We've run into a lot of road blocks in that area in terms of change not happening as fast as we would like it to…"*

Yet, there was also a sense that if the learning community is successful then OST professionals are likely to feel more accountable and responsible for ensuring the quality of their programs and work. Still, interest in learning more about how professional development opportunities result in real changes in programs remains strong amongst AFCOST staff and should be a focus for further monitoring and evaluation work.

Supporting innovation and excellence: While most staff interviewed spoke positively about how AFCOST had increased the professionalization of the OST community of Cambridge, staff also felt there were opportunities to further support innovation and excellence.

- *"[What] I think what Cambridge can provide in terms of outcomes, is more room to dream. I see there to be a lot more potential for a broader, bigger impact."*
- *"The ways we could grow is to know how we are different from other people and learn from that. Rather than just existing in our work. How do we compare to others?"*
- *"…there is a lot that Cambridge has to share and in sharing we will learn more about the work we do and inspire other people and it will become a much more dynamic environment."*

Child and youth experience: At a fundamental level, staff expressed that all AFCOST's work was about improving and understanding the experience of children and young people in OST programs through professional development learning and networks. This was viewed as the most critical outcome, and the most difficult to measure and understand. Staff commented that there are few *known* avenues available for children and young people to express their experiences about OST programs and have those experiences heard and responded to at a program and system level. In other words, OST programs may well have systems in place for children and young people to actively participate in informing program practice, but that these opportunities are hard to see and articulate from the vantage point of AFCOST's current monitoring and evaluation system.

- *"Ultimately, I think it is, and we haven't named it yet, it is about youth outcomes. That is the greatest measure of our success, and it is the greatest challenge."*
- *"We're not quite there yet in terms of giving them [children and young people' a place at the table to help. And if you do the QIS work well, and you get an ultimate 4 on the APT, the highest quality program should have a lot of youth leadership in design and delivery. So that's the work ahead I think."*
- *"At the child level, it is really seeing what their experiences look like. Are we seeing a change? In terms of how, even if the result is not immediately better, do we see change in how the adult is trying to support that young person, do we see a difference in intention, a different kind of execution that adults are bringing in service of trying to enhance children's experience."*
- *"I do think we need to figure out a way to look at youth outcomes."*

A related question to the child and youth experience, is what would AFCOST need to look for to understand the impact of their work at a child and youth level? Several staff shared their ideas and answers to this question:

- *"I think that comes back to outcomes and tools like the SAYO as a potential way to look at some things and because those are looking at aggregate experience in different ways it makes it less about an individual child and more about the conditions that the adults are providing impact all children, and should impact children in different ways.*
- *"… kids [should] want to be there, like the people that are there, and want to connect with them."*
- *"So, one of the successes is for kids that are challenged by school that the environment supports them for greater success in the afterschool. So, supporting kids to have strong peer relationships and ones that*

are healthy relationships and that they are learning how to be kind and to care. Or rather learning to express that, not that we are necessarily teaching that to them but we are supporting it in our programs. *"I do think there is something here that we need to get clearer about the pedagogy about youth development in general."*

Here, staff reflected on essential positive skills and beliefs that they hope children and young people might develop because of AFCOST's support for continuous quality improvement efforts at program sites. Key outcomes mentioned include: positive child and adult relationships, positive peer relationships, supportive conditions and climate of OST program sites.

Conclusion and implications

The key themes identified from the semi-structured interviews reiterate many of the core strengths and areas of improvement noted in previous evaluations and the Director Survey. AFCOST staff reflected on the increased professionalization of the OST community of Cambridge because of efforts to improve the quality of programs and offer professional development. They also highlighted the need to demonstrate the "transfer to practice" from quality coaching, training and other strategies that aim to build the capacity of OST programs to lead continuous quality improvement. The need to understand the impact of quality improvement, training and other efforts on children and young people was also reiterated across the interviews.

Theory of Change Based Evaluation Framework

This section details the revised AFCOST theory of change and introduces the monitoring and evaluation framework, as represented by the logic models developed with the AFCOST staff responsible for different activities. The theory of change was revised based on the collaborative sessions with AFCOST program coordinators to develop their program logics, interviews and a review of AFCOST strategic plan.

The theory of change & program logics presented on the following pages draw together key outcomes identified in logic model planning sessions, AFCOST strategy plan 2017-22, and Every Hour Counts measurement framework. These documents provide a simple set of outcomes at the system, program, and child and youth level to guide monitoring, data collection and evaluation efforts. Importantly, the logic models do not cover "all" aspects of AFCOST's current activities and more work is needed to identify core, outcome indicators across AFCOST's work. The following pages provide the foundation for this monitoring and evaluation work to be refined and developed.

Theory of Change

Unite the OST community of Cambridge through a shared vision of quality and regular convenings

Professionalize the OST community of Cambridge through training, special-interest networks, and communities of practice

Build capacity of OST programs to lead continuous quality improvement through coaching & ongoing support

Equity: Every child, young person & family in Cambridge has awareness of, and access to, quality OST programs

Increase access & engagement of children and young people in quality OST programs in Cambridge through targeted assistance & advocacy

Facilitate partnerships & data sharing between quality OST programs, schools and families to coordinate children and young people's learning journeys

Positive child and youth outcomes

Logic Model Development

Collaborative Process

10-15, 1-2-hour logic model planning meetings and workshops were facilitated with AFCOST staff responsible for different activities. These meetings and workshops aimed to provide a space for AFCOST staff to reflect on their desired outcomes related to specific activities that they were responsible for, as well as reviewing the alignment of these outcomes and strategies with comparable OST intermediary measurement frameworks. Every Hour Counts, formerly the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS), evidenced-based and comprehensive measurement framework was used to guide discussions of outcomes[6].

Every Hour Counts' measurement framework was selected because it looks across youth, program and system levels outcomes. This perspective is particularly useful for intermediaries, such as AFCOST, to make improvements at the system and program level, while also understanding 'the impact of programs on youth outcomes'[7]. Every Hour Counts measurement framework aims to provide a 'blueprint for coordinated accountability and improvement, so quality practices lead to measurable, improved outcomes for students'. In short, to achieve change for children and young people, youth-level, program level and system level elements must be addressed.

Figure 6 Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework 2014, p.4

How to read the logic models

On the following pages, four logic models are introduced: Quality Improvement System, Middle School Network, Professional Development System and School & OST Partnerships. These constitute four core functions of AFCOST's work, and while they are presented here as separate logic models, the desired outcomes are interrelated. For example, the QIS and Professional Development System logic models both seek a long-term impact of "increased high quality out-of-school time opportunities for all Cambridge youth", while the MSN logic model seeks to ensure equitable access and engagement of middle school aged young people in quality OST programs.

Terminology

The following definitions are adapted from the Logic Model Template developed by The Evaluation Center – School of Education and Human Development – University of Colorado Denver.[8]

Logic model is a graphic that illustrates a program's theory of change, showing how day-to-day activities connect to the results or outcomes the program is trying to achieve. Similar to a flowchart, it lays out program activities and outcomes using boxes, and using arrows to connect the boxes, shows how the activities and outcomes connect with one another.

Priorities: What are the core priorities and context for why specific strategies have been selected?

Inputs: What existing resources are available for program implementation? These include human resources, technology, partnerships.

Strategies: How will the program achieve its objectives? These are not specific day to day activities, but describe clusters of activities and tasks that will be conducted to accomplish outcomes.

Participation: Who is reached by the strategy? E.g. program staff, young people.

Outcomes: Outcomes refer to changes that are expected to occur because of implementing strategies.

> **Short term outcomes:** These can typically be accomplished in one to three years and are often expressed at the level of individual change.

> **Medium term outcomes:** These may take four to six years and build on the progress expected in the short-term outcomes.

Impact: Impacts are long term changes that are expected to result if the strategies are carried out effectively and/or sustained. These are often about conditions, and may take 7-10 years to accomplish.

Quality Improvement System Logic Model

Overarching Goal: To build the capacity of out-of-school time professionals to lead continuous quality improvement efforts through self-assessment, action planning and intentionality in program practice for equity and quality.

PRIORITIES	INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		IMPACT
		Strategies	**Participation**	**Short Term** Accomplished in 1-3 years	**Medium Term** Accomplished in 4-6 years	**Long Term** Accomplished in 7-10 years
Children and youth from low-income families & communities of color accessing & participating in *quality* out-of-school time opportunities	**City of Cambridge & Non-Profits** Leadership, partnership, policy, funding, staff, data	Organizational Self-Study (OSS)	# program sites, staff # of *self-studies*, *debriefs*	Increased ability to identify and address aspects of organizational functioning to improve	Sustained integration of aligned assessment tools and processes to support quality	Increased high quality out-of-school time opportunities for all Cambridge youth
		Assessment of Program Practice Tool (APT)	# programs, staff, *classroom observations & debriefs*	Increased ability to identify and address aspects of program functioning to improve	Program staff, at all levels, are engaged in regular quality improvement activities continually improve program practice	
	Funders Financial support, networks	Identification of strengths & areas for improvement	# of programs, staff & *action plans created & implemented # evidence of progress in OSS/APT ratings*	Increased intentionality in program practice based on national standards of quality		
Program staff access quality improvement support aligned with national standards Equity and access	**Research partners** National standards, measures, evaluation	Providing multi-level Quality Coaching	# programs, staff, *hours, & frequency of quality coaching # narrative reports*	Program staff have increased confidence, skills and efficacy to be effective in their roles, to provide quality programming for youth and engage in reflective practice	Increased professionalization and capacity of OST workforce in Cambridge	Cambridge OST programs are informed & shaped by children, youth and families
	Community Families, professionals, youth	Youth & family engagement in quality improvement	# of youth & family engaged in QIS # case studies	Increased opportunities for youth and family to contribute to quality improvement efforts	Youth and family are engaged in quality improvement activities in partnership with program staff	

Professional Development System Logic Model

Overarching Goal: To improve the quality of out-of-school time (OST) programs by having staff, at all levels, engage in comprehensive training, professional networks and self-development opportunities.

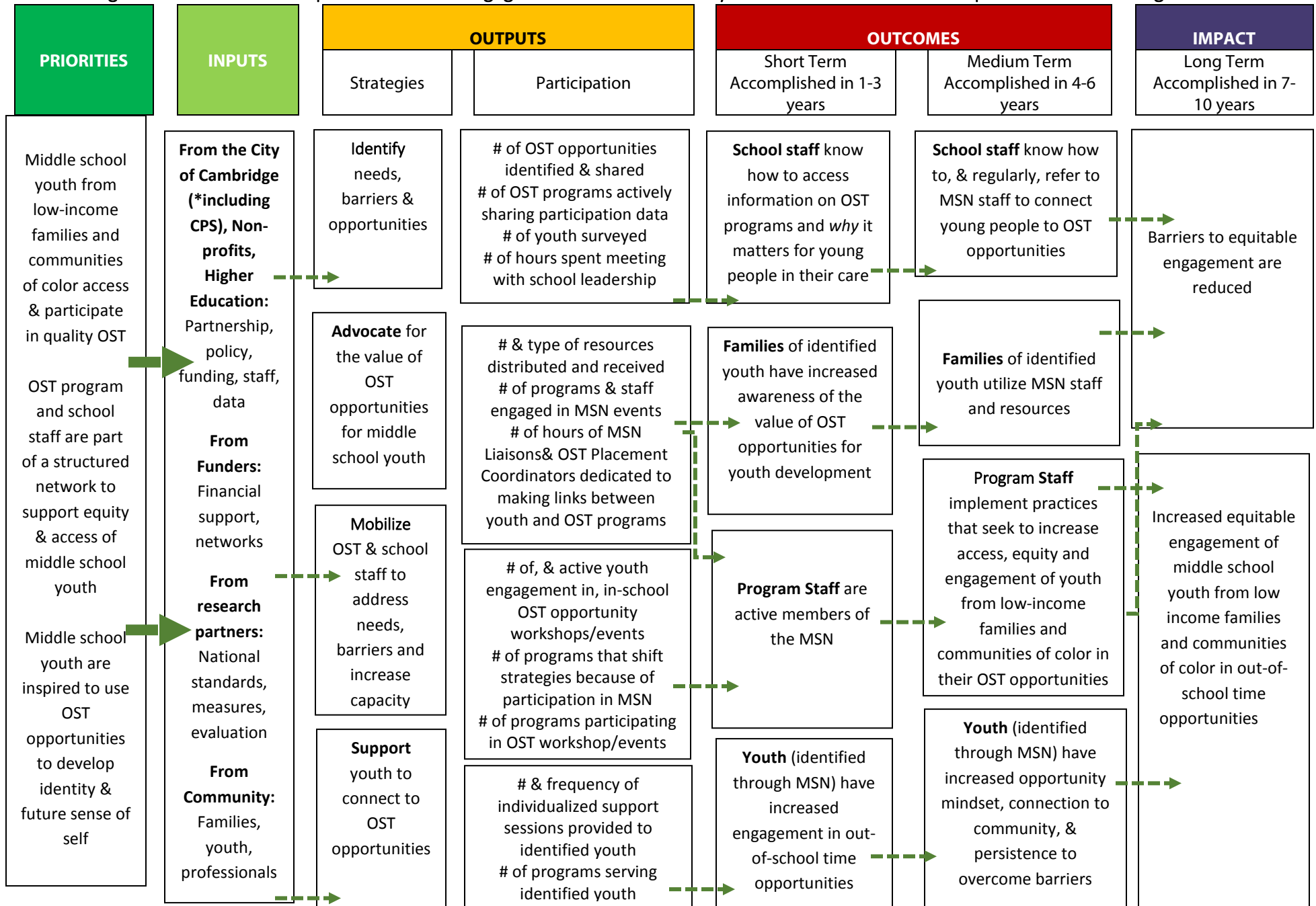| PRIORITIES	INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		IMPACT
		Strategies	Participation	Short Term Accomplished in 1-3 years	Medium Term Accomplished in 4-6 years	Long Term Accomplished in 7-10 years
Children and youth from low-income families & communities of color accessing & participating in *quality* out-of-school time opportunities	**City of Cambridge & Non-Profits** Leadership, partnership, policy, funding, staff, data	**Create** spaces for peer learning and networking amongst OST staff	# & regularity of OST programs & staff attending CoPs, training & symposium	New & long-serving program staff have access to, and take advantage of, professional development	OST staff are committed to professional growth, continuous learning and building leadership capacity	
	Funders Financial support, networks	**Design** & coordinate the development of, diverse content & learning modalities relevant to the youth development field	# of PD sessions provided in diverse content areas # & type communications & learning resources shared	Program staff have increased knowledge & abilities relevant to the youth development field	Program staff continually take advantage of PD sessions, & are recognized at their workplaces and the community at large for their efforts	Increased high quality out-of-school time opportunities for all Cambridge youth
Program staff access quality improvement support aligned with national standards and	**Research partners** National standards, measures, evaluation	**Coach** program staff to facilitate & lead PD sessions	# of program staff supported to become trainers & learning leaders # of program staff presenting at annual symposium	Program staff design, facilitate & lead PD sessions		
Equity and access	**Community** Families, professionals	**Facilitate** transfer to practice	# of spaces created for people to share what they have transferred to practice	Program staff transfer learning to practice	Program staff are inspired & feel part of an inclusive, continuous learning community	

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Middle School Network Logic Model

Overarching Goal: To ensure the equitable access & engagement of middle school youth in out-of-school time experiences in Cambridge.

PRIORITIES	INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		IMPACT
		Strategies	Participation	Short Term Accomplished in 1-3 years	Medium Term Accomplished in 4-6 years	Long Term Accomplished in 7-10 years

Middle school youth from low-income families and communities of color access & participate in quality OST

OST program and school staff are part of a structured network to support equity & access of middle school youth

Middle school youth are inspired to use OST opportunities to develop identity & future sense of self

From the City of Cambridge (*including CPS), Non-profits, Higher Education: Partnership, policy, funding, staff, data

From Funders: Financial support, networks

From research partners: National standards, measures, evaluation

From Community: Families, youth, professionals

Identify needs, barriers & opportunities

Advocate for the value of OST opportunities for middle school youth

Mobilize OST & school staff to address needs, barriers and increase capacity

Support youth to connect to OST opportunities

# of OST opportunities identified & shared
# of OST programs actively sharing participation data
# of youth surveyed
# of hours spent meeting with school leadership

& type of resources distributed and received
of programs & staff engaged in MSN events
# of hours of MSN Liaisons & OST Placement Coordinators dedicated to making links between youth and OST programs

of, & active youth engagement in, in-school OST opportunity workshops/events
of programs that shift strategies because of participation in MSN
# of programs participating in OST workshop/events

& frequency of individualized support sessions provided to identified youth
of programs serving identified youth

School staff know how to access information on OST programs and *why* it matters for young people in their care

Families of identified youth have increased awareness of the value of OST opportunities for youth development

Program Staff are active members of the MSN

Youth (identified through MSN) have increased engagement in out-of-school time opportunities

School staff know how to, & regularly, refer to MSN staff to connect young people to OST opportunities

Families of identified youth utilize MSN staff and resources

Program Staff implement practices that seek to increase access, equity and engagement of youth from low-income families and communities of color in their OST opportunities

Youth (identified through MSN) have increased opportunity mindset, connection to community, & persistence to overcome barriers

Barriers to equitable engagement are reduced

Increased equitable engagement of middle school youth from low income families and communities of color in out-of-school time opportunities

Appendix

Appendix 1 Table of previous evaluation objectives, data and findings

EVALUATION DETAILS	NOTES
2003 – Leading For Quality, Wendy Surr, NIOST Objectives: 1. Determine the extent to which participating sites have increased depth of their commitment and are engaging in continuous improvement process. 2. Examine whether Leading for Quality's quality improvement strategies move programs towards and/or contribute to actual changes in program quality Data: • 2 focus groups with Cluster Members & Quality Facilitators – Spring 2003 • 35 Participant & QF surveys • Organizational Leaders Survey • Project documentation – agendas, minutes of meetings, participation data	Strengths identified: ➢ Training delivered by NIOST considered "top notch" by participants (p.49). ➢ 30-35 programs participating actively in L4Q initiative (p.9) ➢ 80% of survey respondents felt that their participation in L4Q was worthwhile, and important. ➢ Over half participants engaged in independent program improvement efforts such as: conducting observations of their programs, trying out new ideas at their sites, and in some cases, implementing more sustainable changes (p.4). ➢ Cluster meetings most effective at facilitating networking and collaboration. ➢ Training perceived as most effective providing participants with new ideas to try out and sites, and recognize areas for program improvement. Weaknesses identified: ➢ More results-focused approach, and produce more tangible and measurable changes in programs. ➢ Improve accountability and follow-through. ➢ Not enough time available to plan – in order to support program improvement efforts (p.50). ➢ Surr points out that 'the data presents conflicting information about the perceived goal of the initiative' (p.54). She argued only a small minority of staff see the initiative as helping them improve the quality of their programs, rather than networking and collaboration. ➢ Issues translating new learning to other staff members (e.g. theory to practice). ➢ Attendance issues at cluster meetings, and more attendance from other staff at trainings (p.23) ➢ Over half of organizational leaders report that it is unlikely that they will be able to make improvements in the foreseeable future due to barriers to quality such

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<tr>
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as: child/adult rations, reduction in group size, change/improvements in space (p.24)

➢ Several programs officially involved in L4Q are not participating regularly in project-sponsored activities (p.5)

Recommendations:

➢ Explore ways for participants to choose level of accountability to which they would like to be held (e.g. *Low = participation in L4Q sponsored activities only, Moderate = participation and experimentation with new ideas, High = in-depth program assessment and concrete plans to inform sustainable program improvements)* (.34)
➢ Cluster meetings: participants pair up and "follow-through buddies", check-in and agree on plans…
➢ Participants meet with Organizational leaders to determine explicit goals for program improvement (p.34).
➢ "Follow-up" reporting could be required as a regular component of cluster meetings (p.34)
➢ The project needs to: clarify goals, policies and expectations, find effective ways to engage organizational leaders in helping programs overcome barriers, and create a clear and appropriate accountability structure.

2004—Leading for Quality, Wendy Surr, NIOST

Objectives:

What aspects of L4Q are going well, what would benefit from improvement

Data:

- Surveys: Cluster member surveys (83 responses), leaders (36 responses), Quality Facilitators (17 responses)

Strengths identified:

➢ Increased motivation, focus on program improvement and belief that new changes are sustainable seen in more than half cluster members
➢ Indications of modest changes in more than half Cambridge programs – areas of youth choice, building youth interest and staff strength, greater involvement of parents. (Note: Indirect evidence, no data collected from program participants or parents).
➢ High levels of participation
➢ Increased opportunities for networking
➢ Greater staff involvement in making improvements at sites

• Focus Groups: Spring 2004 Cluster members (11 members), Leaders (12 participants), Quality Facilitators (5 participants) • Session Evaluations (after each reflection and training event) • Spring 04 Targeted Program Improvement Effort (T-PIE) Write-Ups • Monthly meeting session evaluations from leaders.	➢ Participants have a strong interest in learning and connecting with other Cambridge programs, sharing practice and resources. ➢ Strong interest in on-site coaching (p.48) **Weaknesses identified:** ➢ Most L4Q components perceived to be only somewhat effective and effective ➢ Participant sense that L4Q needs to be better suited to their differing needs, models and ages served. ➢ Many report not having much success translating theory into practice at their sites ➢ Drop in enthusiasm for L4Q ➢ Time major barrier for participants. Lack of clarity around what is expected from participating programs (p.39) **Recommendations:** ➢ More concrete and pragmatic training ➢ Cluster meetings: Keep regional focus, ensure strong facilitation, communicate consistent attendance and promptness to strengthen group, clearer focus in meetings, maintain portion of meeting for sharing/networking, member input into planning meetings. ➢ Greater emphasis on action planning and individualized site based support ➢ Leaders and cluster members agree that "outside, trained advisor" was their #1 choice for coaching. ➢ Is there clarity around what "success" looks like? How will we know when we've gotten there? ➢ More clarity needed on which quality standard should be adopted, plan to address obstacles to program improvement. ➢ Should L4Q reduce or consolidate some of its components in order to sharpen the focus of efforts and maximize participant time? (p.4) ➢ Important for L4Q to create mechanisms to measure current level of quality of participating programs, to help programs identify strengths, challenges, set goals and track and document progress (p.52).

	Additional comments: - 37 programs involved - <u>Less ability of staff to report on changes in child-staff areas, even though this was identified as a key change area (p.14)</u> - No data from youth or parents (p.16) - Cluster members concerned about usefulness of the T-PIE tracking tool, and instead suggested other approaches <u>including 'youth outcome measurement tool'</u>, check-lists of improvements, formal and informal assessments by parents, staff and youth (p.47)
2005—Leading for Quality, Wendy Surr, NIOST **Objectives:** 1. Determine which aspects of the project were going well, and which would benefit from improvements 2. Document evidence of actual changes in program quality and recommend new approaches for maximizing change **Data:** - 72 site staff and administrator surveys (41 Site Coordinator/Director 14 Group Leader/Lead Teachers 14 Assistant Teacher/Group Leader 3=Other roles) - Training session evaluations	**Strengths identified:** ➢ Dramatic increase in numbers of individuals participating in L4Q events ➢ Increased provision of organizational supports ➢ Signs of engagement in program improvement process: nearly ¾ of staff/administration/leaders have a better idea of areas that need strengthening (p.3) ➢ Evidence of change in sites: strong evidence that shift in practice (particularly towards a "youth-centered approach") are beginning to take hold (p.3) ➢ Higher reports of sustainability of program improvement efforts **Weaknesses identified:** ➢ Persistent issues with staff turnover ➢ Not enough time to plan ➢ Only slightly more than 1/3 of participants' report "taking it back" – e.g. ongoing issues with translating theory/learning to practice ➢ Lack of consistent team attendance at training events **Recommendations:**

	➢ Find ways to best address the two key FY05 challenges: "planning time" and staff turnover (e.g. perhaps include in Monthly Leaders' Group discussions, address through coaching, touch on during training events). ➢ Explicitly build upon the theme of "youth-centered" programming as new topics are introduced in FY06. ➢ Continue to encourage participation in training events by <u>all</u> levels of site staff and continue to emphasize the importance of <u>consistent</u> team attendance at events ➢ Increase the emphasis and convey the critical importance of experimenting with, and applying new ideas (taking back) each training. ➢ Establish new mechanisms to support and facilitate follow-up action at sites, with attention to supporting the efforts of Group Leaders (the group most likely to "take back" trainings). ➢ Create space for "promising practices" e.g. sharing on a website (p.6)
2008—Leading for Quality, Wendy Surr, NIOST **Objectives:** To establish more explicit links between Self-Assessment Reporting (SAS) and coaching. Rather than providing general support, coaches asked to provide specific support to help sites implement program improvement plans. **Data:** • Pre-Survey (21 site staff, 7 SAS team members and coaches) • Action Plan (3 sites) • Dosage of support (estimate) • Post-survey & interviews (26 site staff, 7 SAS team members). • Total data collected from 31 site staff	**Strengths identified:** ➢ SAS was consistently implemented from implementation to debrief, however from debrief the SAS model and coaching support was not consistently implemented. ➢ Participation fluctuates; however, participation of site director is common and important. ➢ On-site supports (SAS and/or coaching) help sites make at least one targeted change in their program. **Weaknesses identified:** ➢ Changes in sites not likely to be sustained due to staff turnover ➢ Changes that require staff to gain new skills difficult to achieve ➢ Many sites did not view SAS as something they would do again, nor as a model that they would use to do their own self-assessment. **What might enhance success:** ➢ program directors level of engagement in SAS, engagement in some aspect of SAS by all (or nearly all staff)

	- perceptions of organizational barriers, presence of a coach - organization and supervisor support for change, presence of a coach, greater intensity of support (more frequent), - existing (or acquitted) capacity of the Program Director to lead change at the site - nature of the change (quality of activity or schedule may be easier than a practice), extent of change (changes that do not require staff to gain new skills in order to implement may be easier to implement) - Focusing on just one targeted change, explicitly aiming for program-wide change, creating a clear and written Action Plan, stability of program director and key staff (p.22-3). Also a number of key questions raised to addressed (p.23) and appendix with evaluation measures (p.24-118).
2009—Leading for Quality, Wendy Surr, NIOST – with Sasha Stavsky, Rachel Behler, Lucia Milla-Lugo **Objectives:** To evaluate the effectiveness of the Integrated Self-Assessment approach **Data:** 81 ISAS end of year surveys - Attendance and participation records - Action plans - Organizational self-study survey ratings for round 1 - Coaching records and reports - One hour, semi-structured phone interviews conducted with coaches and program directors from six randomly selected sites	**Strengths identified:** - Coaching critical to success: building capacity of program directors (p.2) - All programs made some positive changes as a result of participation in I-SAS (p.35) - Observations, debriefs and coaching were felt to work well together, and be effective (p.50) - Greater levels of confidence in the sustainability of changes brought about by I-SAS (p.41) - Community of Practice provides support, but not linked to changes at site (p.3) - Findings suggest that sites believe they have increased confidence and capacity to conduct self-assessments on their own, especially classroom observations. (p.51) - Sites that selected one item to focus on made greater progress than sites that selected multiple items (p.51). Focus is important. - Number of hours of participation of program directors in different supports appears to be linked to an increased confidence in engagement in self-assessment without ongoing coach support. **Weaknesses identified:** - OSS may be effective, but not directly linked to progress - Components not viewed as connected (p.25)

	➢ OSS and Community of Practice need further refinement and strengthening to fully integrate and maximize use of ISAS components (50) ➢ Not one of 17 sites fully implemented the model as originally designed (p.52). Recommendations: ➢ Should number of rounds of observations, OSS, and COPs be scaled back to better match levels of participation that took place in 2008? (p.52) ➢ Reflect on best use of OSS. What are the advantages/disadvantages of coaches taking on more organizational change work? ➢ Can ISAS better support development of partnerships between coaches and administrators? ➢ Should turnover be tracked more systematically? E.g. high amount of turnover at program director and front level line staff. ➢ Should L4Q adopt program director core competencies? (p.53) ➢ Quantifying and documenting changes in programs as a result of ISAS is a challenge. How can we have more concrete and accurate ways to measure change at sites? How can coaches more effectively convey changes they are seeing to site administrators? How will we know when we have been successful at a site? (p.53).
2015 Community of Practice Alice Cohen **Objectives:** To evaluate the Communities of Practice (2013-4) based on three key aspects: Healthy group functioning, personal growth, transfer to practice, youth outcomes. Follows Garland, Hubert and Ralf (1965) "A Model for Stages of Development in Social Work Groups" theoretical framework (p.8). **Data:**	**Strengths identified** ➢ Respect and appreciation of facilitator; group cohesion and reported transfer to practice. ➢ All interviews described achievements in personal growth: self-awareness, deepening of personal motivation for youth work, understanding what they have to offer. ➢ Claims that 'it is evident that youth have been impacted by activities and practices that staff bring to the program from CoP' (p.5). Issues with data/assumptions. ➢ 95% of interviews report transfer to practice (this is at odds with measures of previous evaluations?)

|	
• 9 observations of 3 CoPs • 32 randomly selected interviews from participants in CoPs	**Weaknesses identified:** ➢ Fluctuation in attendance impacts group cohesion ➢ Program directors group not feeling as safe as other groups] **Recommendations:** ➢ Maintain COPs – space for mutual learning and respect ➢ Increase articulation of transfer to practice and youth outcomes ➢ Program director group requires more experiences to enhance trust etc. ➢ Set expectations for attendance ➢ Add self-selection to group affiliation ➢ Open groups to all OST in city ➢ Groups should have access to the minutes of other groups ➢ Elevate public states of OST in city **Additional comments:** Problem with assumption that successful youth outcomes can be identified solely by staff (p.25-6). There is an opportunity here to collect data on children and youth experiences.

Appendix 2: Previous Theories of Change

2:1 Leading for Quality Theory of Change

The first theory of change (below) was produced by Wendy B. Surr as part of her evaluation of AFC's Quality Improvement System (QIS) then known as the Self-Assessment Support model (SAS). The theory of change was used to guide the evaluation, illustrating key processes, expected results and potential factors (Surr 2008, p.4). Noteworthy, are the items of site readiness, initial engagement, role of attitudes towards the improvement process, and the eventual change in attitudes and commitment to continuous quality improvement.
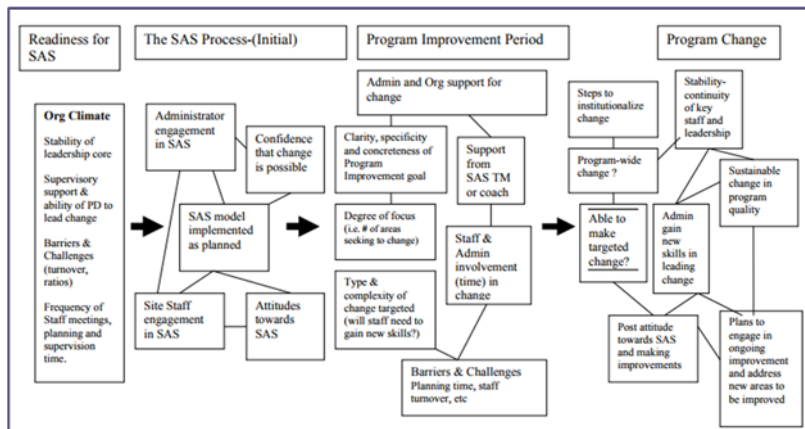
2:2 Agenda for Children Theory of Change

The second theory of change was produced by former Child & Youth Services Planner, Jake Murray, and aimed to include the diversifying services offered by AFC (Figure 2).
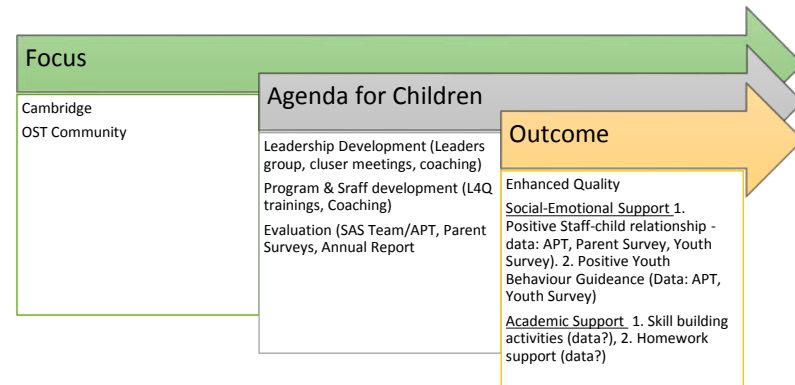
Endnotes

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[2] Laing, K. and Todd, L. (eds) (2015). Theory-based Methodology: Using theories of change in educational development, research and evaluation. Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University, p.4.

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[4] Every Hour Counts (2014). Measurement Framework: How to measure success in expanded learning systems.
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