

# Theory of Change

(not just for funders...)

30<sup>th</sup> September 2025



# Objectives

Understand what a  
Theory of Change is

Understand the  
value of Theory of  
Change

Know how to get the  
most from your  
Theory of Change

Know how to get  
started in creating  
your Theory of  
Change

# My objectives

Enabling charities to  
articulate their  
impact model, and  
create clarity about  
what they do, how  
and why

Supporting human  
centred approaches

Championing  
equitable impact  
practice

## What I believe

Having absolute clarity on the what, how and why of our impact is essential for us to create real, positive change.

## My impact model

### What I do

Enable charities to articulate their impact model, and create clarity about what they do, how and why

### How I work

Co-design, human centred, evidence based, championing equitable impact practice

### The impact created

Decisions grounded in charitable purpose. Stronger evidence. Better able to fund work. Improved engagement.

REFLECTION: What do you want from the webinar?

Objective one:

Understand what a Theory of Change  
is

# The technical answer

“A comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

It is focused ...on mapping out or what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved.”

Center for Theory of Change



# As a charity





# It includes

Why you exist

What you do

Who you do it  
with

The change you  
will create,  
together



# It includes

Why you exist  
(Charitable  
Purpose)

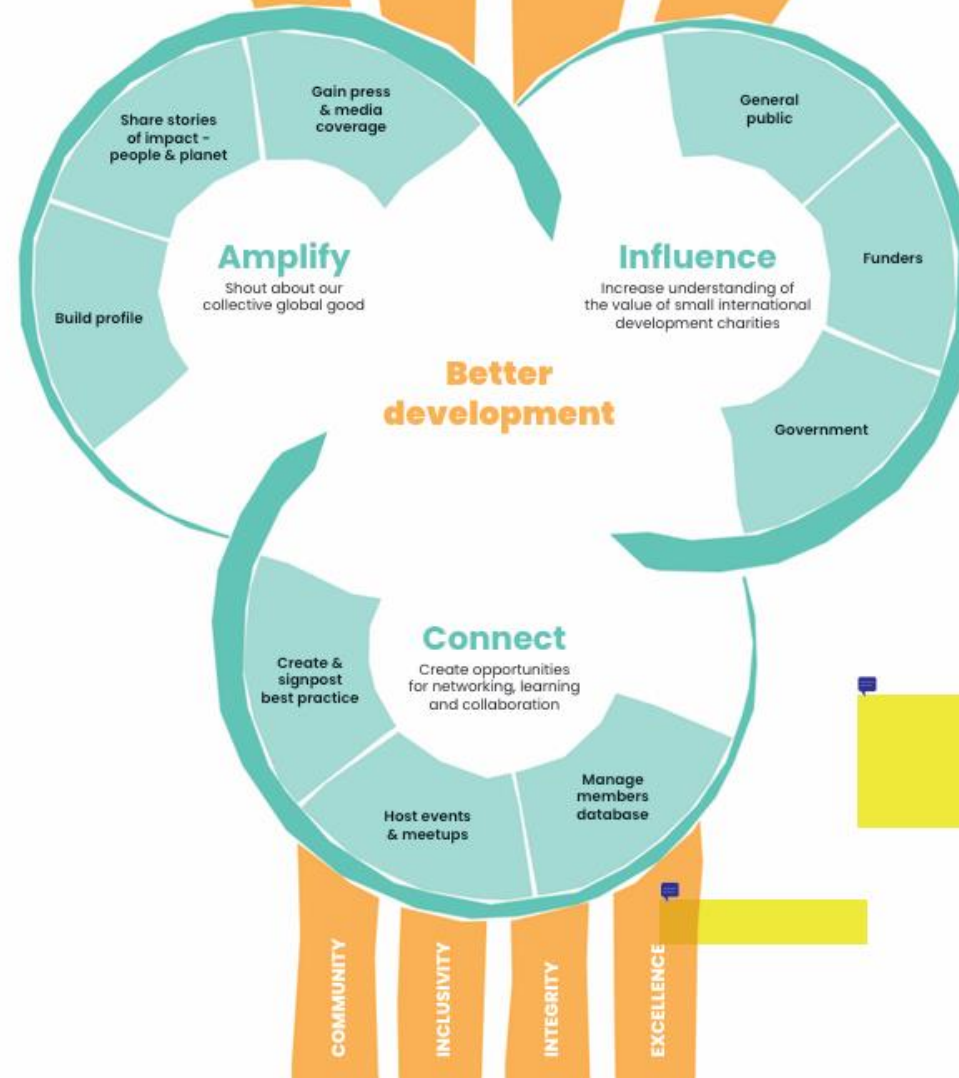
What you do  
(Activities and  
approach)

Who you do it  
with  
(Audience and  
Partners)

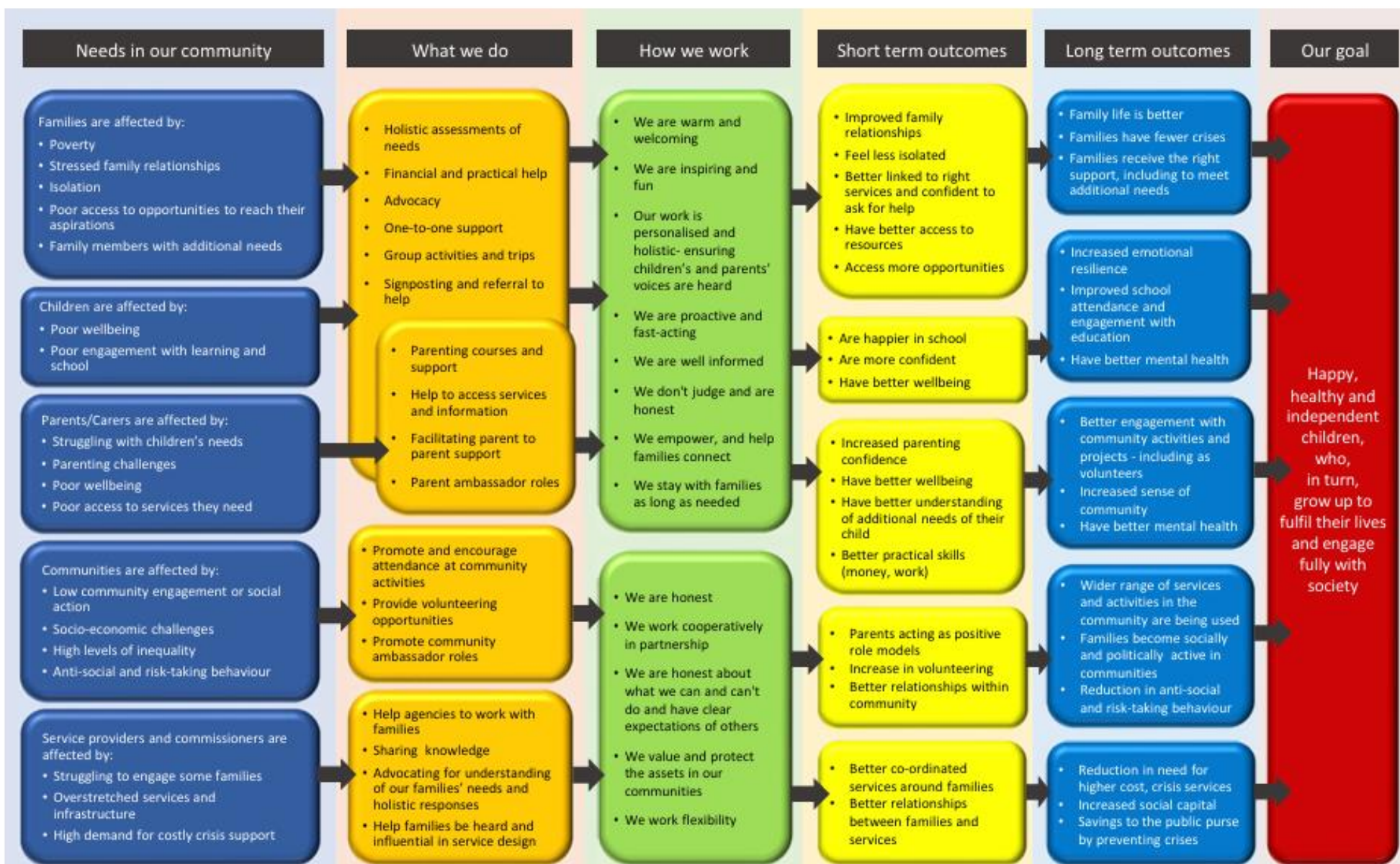
The change you  
will create,  
together  
(Outcomes and  
long term impact)

# Theory of change examples

An inclusive world supporting  
healthier, sustainable and  
empowered communities  
around the globe



# Our Theory of Change







# THEORY OF CHANGE

## ABOUT THE TRUSSELL TRUST

We're here to end the need for food banks in the UK.

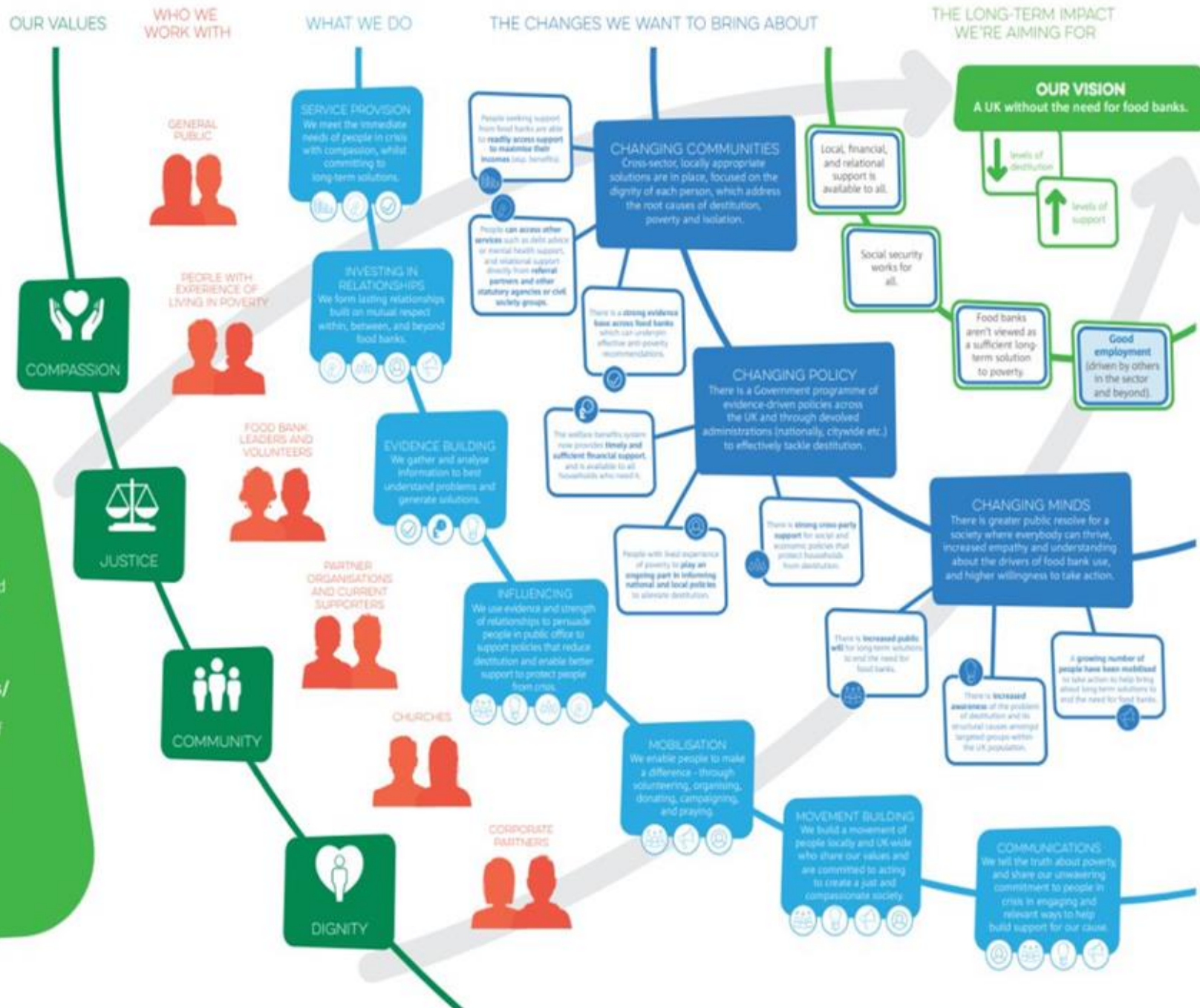
We support a UK-wide network of more than 1,200 food bank centres and together we provide emergency food and support to people locked in poverty, and campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK.

Our most recent figures for the number of emergency food supplies provided by our network: [trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/](https://trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/)

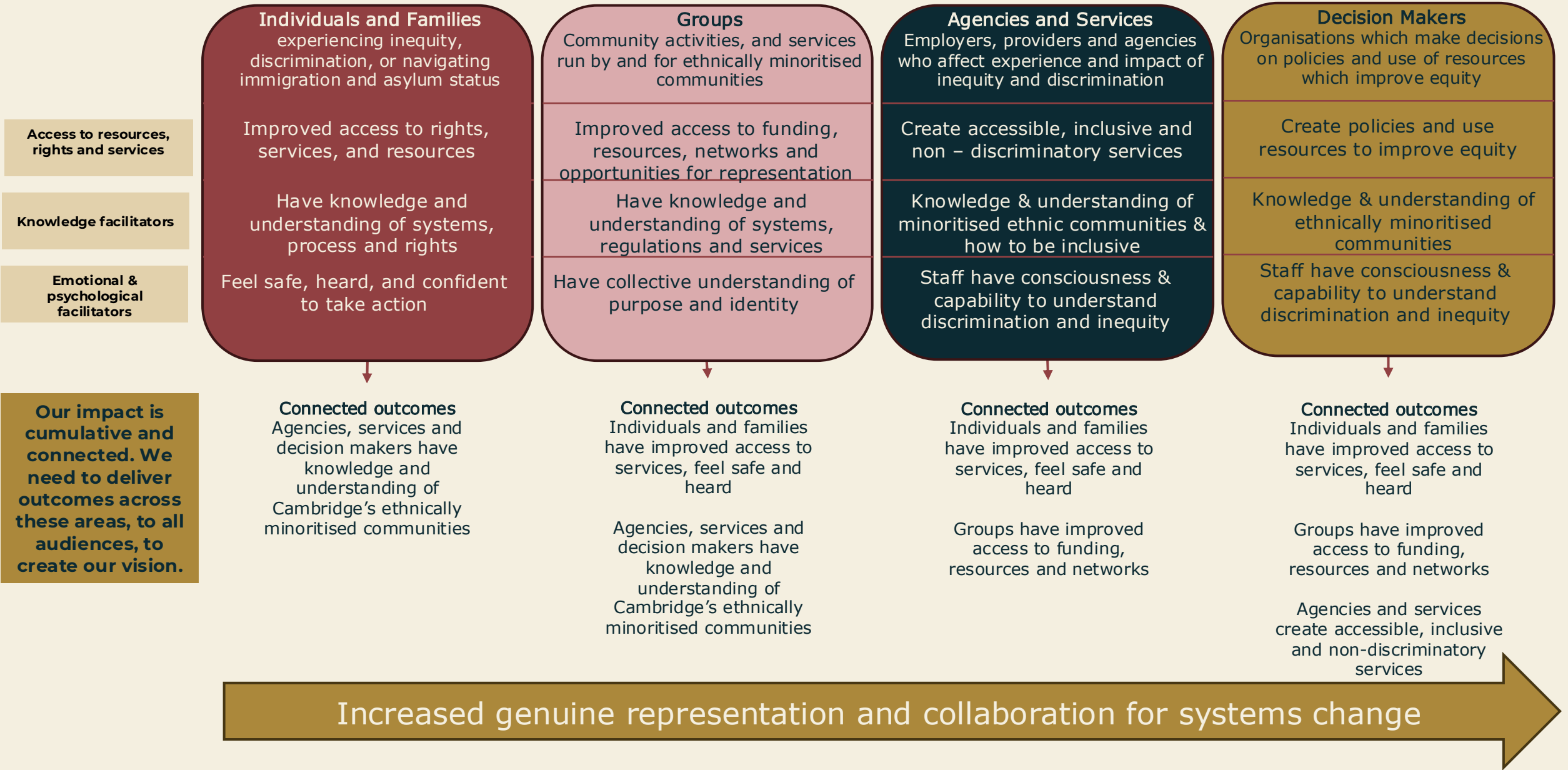
The Trussell Trust's food bank network brings together volunteers, staff and supporters of all faiths and none to make a difference. Local churches play a vital part in this work, with around 12,000 churches actively involved in donating food, and providing venues, volunteers and financial support for food banks.

You can read more about our work at [trusselltrust.org](https://trusselltrust.org)

The Trussell Trust is Reg. Charity in England & Wales (1130522) and Scotland (SC046248).  
Reg. Ltd. Co. in England & Wales (04340341).

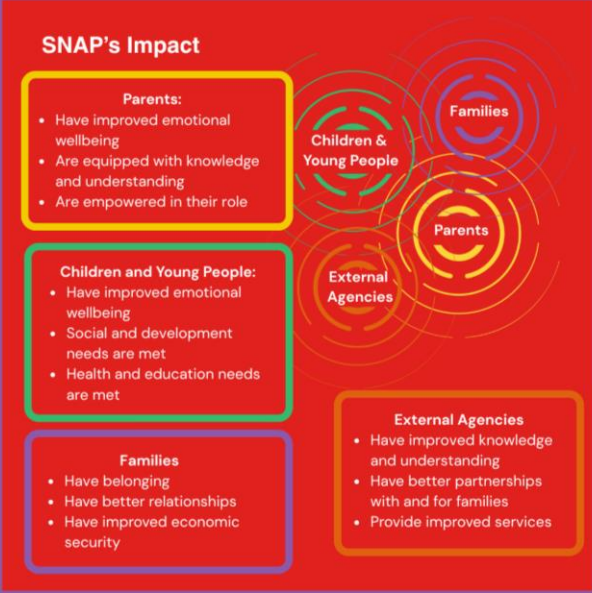
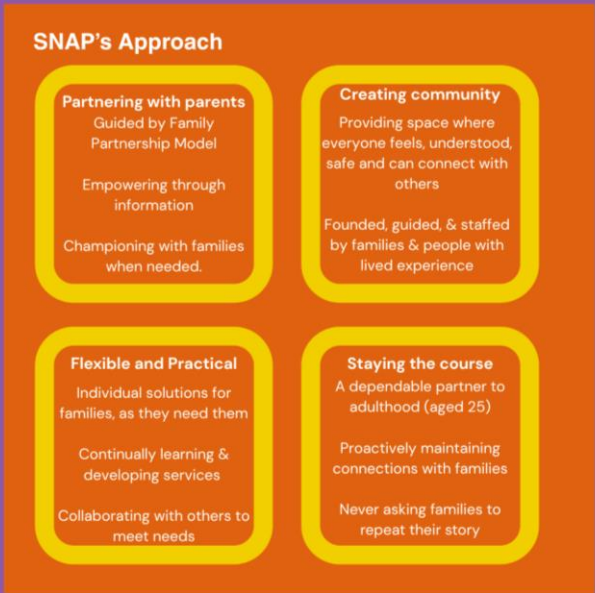
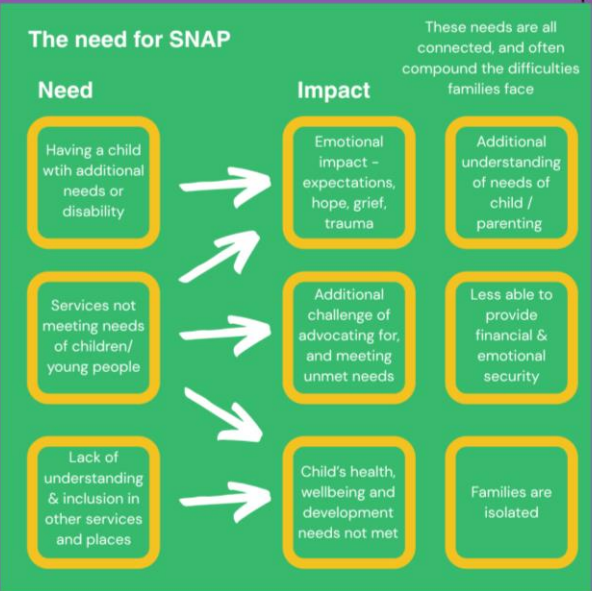


**Vision:** A world where diverse communities live in harmony and every individual, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic origin, has the opportunity to realize their full potential.



# SNAP's Impact Model

"Partnering with parents, we support families whose children have additional needs or disabilities by providing compassion, guidance and hope."





# What a theory of change is and isn't

It is

A description of  
how and why you  
will create change

A way of finding  
clarity in the  
complexity of what  
you do

The basis for  
understanding,  
interpreting, and  
communicating  
impact

It isn't

Set in stone

The diagram

One size fits all

Objective two:

# Understand the value of Theory of Change

REFLECTION: What do you want from a Theory of Change?

# The value of Theory of Change

Deepening your  
impact

Creating space  
for learning

Strengthening  
strategy

Improving  
evidence and  
communications

## What's missing?

# The value of Theory of Change



Deepening your  
impact

## For individuals

Empowering people in their journey

Supporting reflection

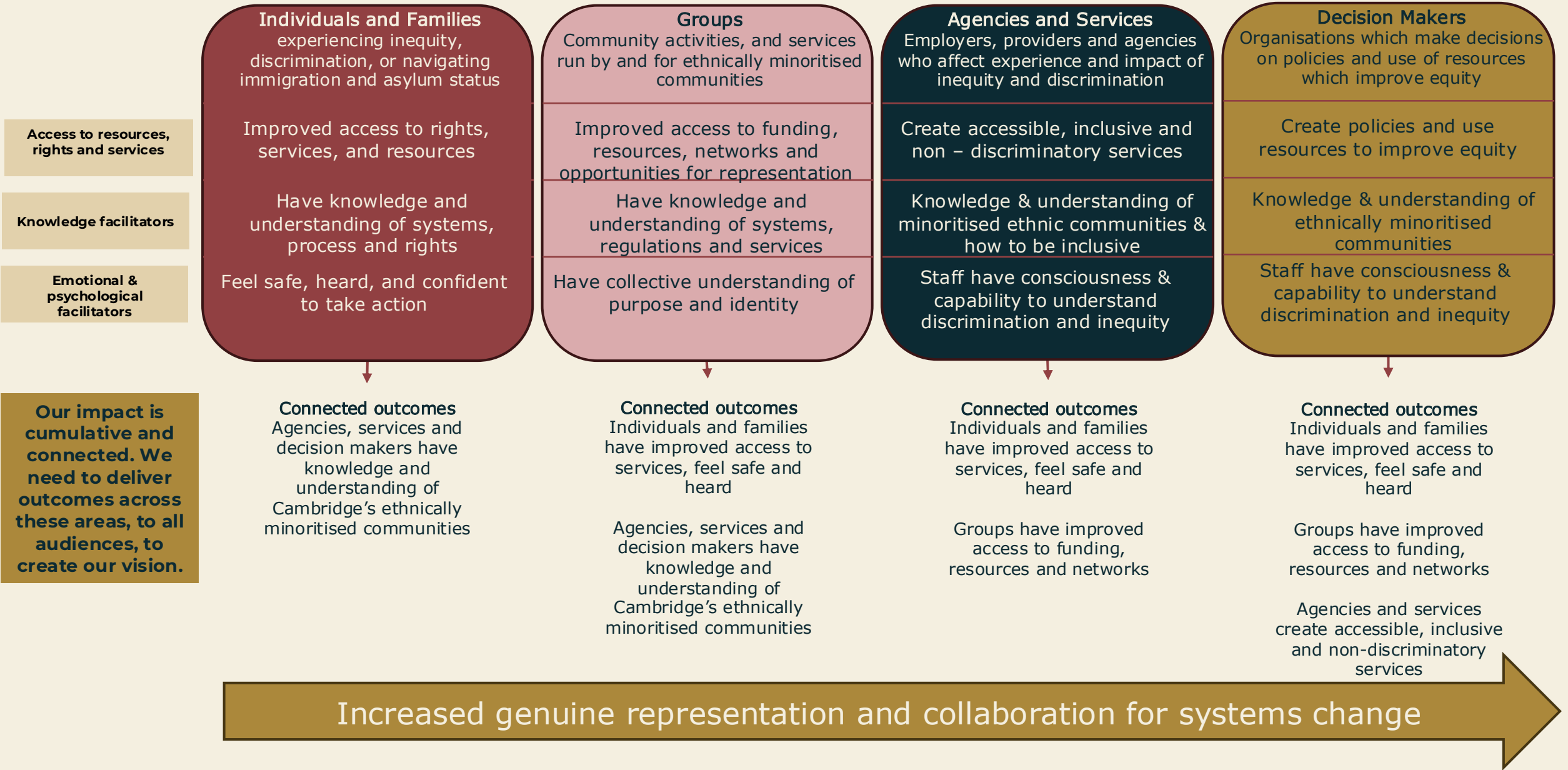
Championing progress

## For the people you work with and for

Improving intentionality and shared understanding

Improving connection and opportunity for collaboration

**Vision:** A world where diverse communities live in harmony and every individual, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic origin, has the opportunity to realize their full potential.



# The value of Theory of Change



Creating space  
for learning

Identifying what is important about how  
you work

Understanding what matters most to  
people so you can strengthen it

A basis for shared learning –  
organisational, and with partners

# The value of Theory of Change

Digging deep and reflecting on how you are delivering your purpose

Sharing knowledge and creating collective understanding on what is happening internally and externally

Creating consensus on what is important





# The value of Theory of Change

The basis for monitoring impact (on your terms...)

Better able to communicate what you do and why

More consistent messaging

More credibility in being part of conversations about policy and decisions

Improving  
evidence and  
communications

# Not just for funders...



But it will help you find funders and funding where there is better alignment

REFLECTION: What resonates for you?



Objective three:

Know how to get the most from your  
Theory of Change

# A bad Theory of Change

Created to respond  
to funder priorities

Not listening to  
diverse voices

Overplays the role  
of the organisation

Prioritising external  
knowledge over  
internal knowing

Doing it as a 'tick  
box'

Is full of  
confirmation bias

# A good Theory of Change

Created to  
respond to  
funder priorities

Created for the  
whole organisation  
first.

Not listening to  
diverse voices

Inclusive. Involve  
the whole  
organisation.

Overplays the  
role of the  
organisation

Acknowledges the  
role of others and  
limits of your role

Prioritising  
external  
knowledge over  
internal knowing

Be confident in  
what you do, your  
knowledge and  
understanding.  
(But open to  
external view)

Doing it as a  
'tick box'

Being clear on the  
value and what you  
want to gain before  
you start.

Is full of  
confirmation  
bias

Positively  
challenges thinking  
and assumptions.



**ALI LYONS**

# Find a balance

What you know  
about the people,  
place, situation and  
how you know it.

What sits behind  
your approach (staff  
training and  
professional  
backgrounds,  
participatory  
approaches etc)

What external  
frameworks,  
knowledge,  
approaches can  
strengthen your  
work, and your  
evidence base?

Your foundations

Strengthened

# REFLECTION: What influences the way you work?

What you know works

Funders

Regulatory bodies

Status quo

People you exist for

What we believe matters

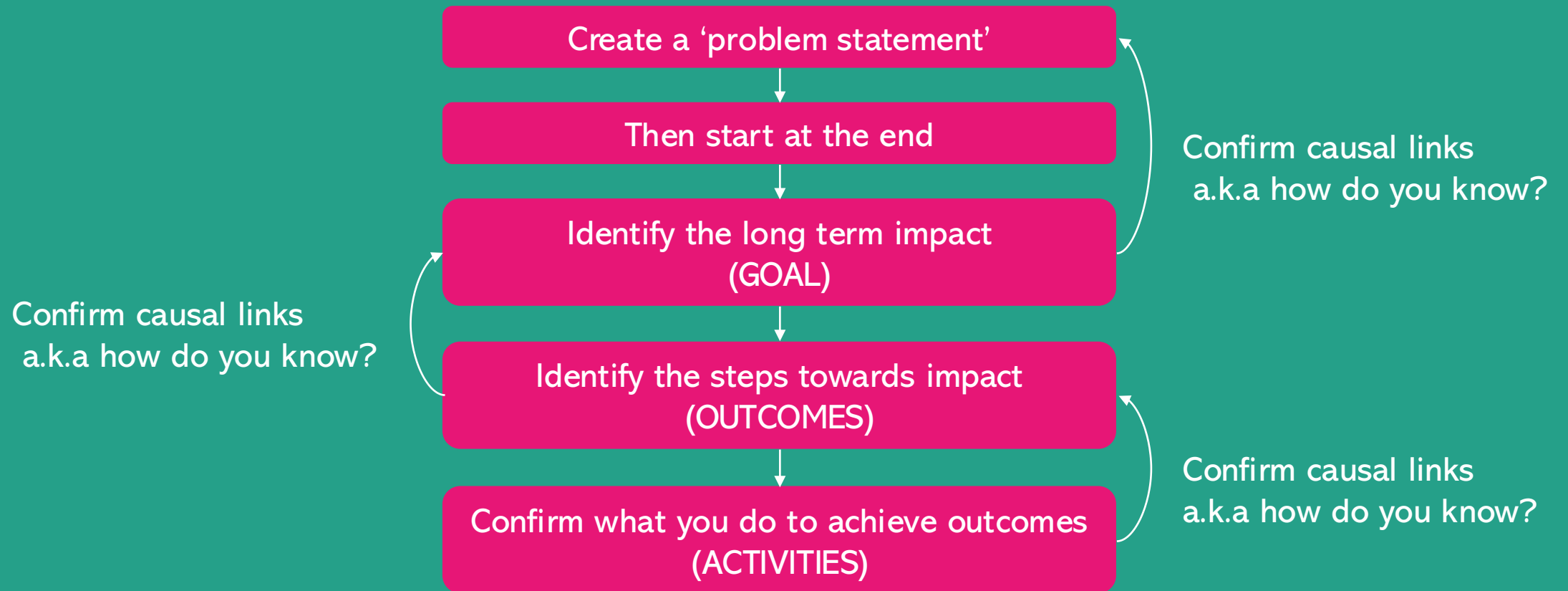
A professional/ theoretical framework



Objective three:

**Know how to get started in creating  
your Theory of Change**

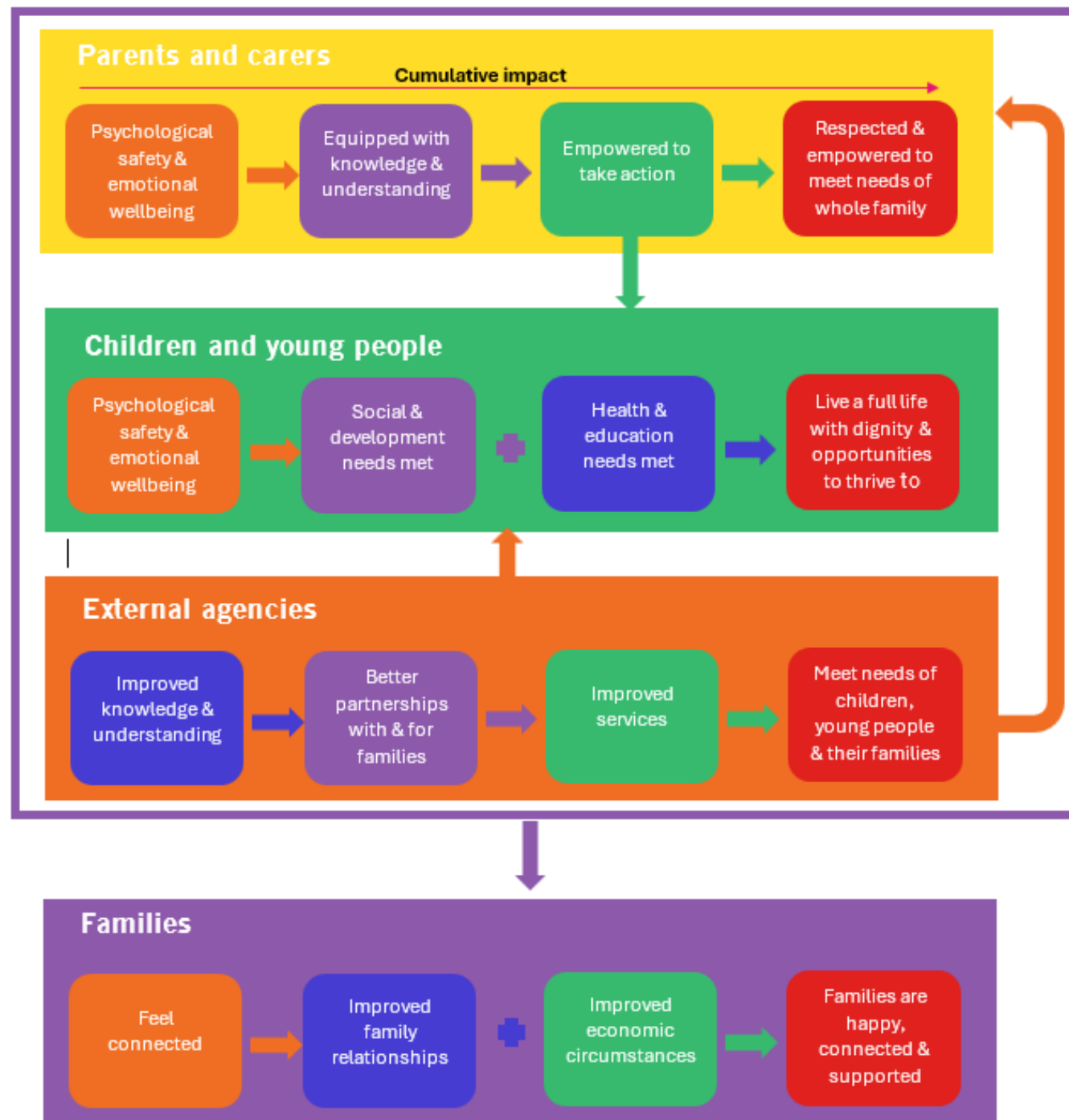
# The traditional approach



# The trouble with the traditional approach

Created by  
academics and  
prioritises  
academic  
evidence as  
superior

Assumes clear  
linear cause and  
effect



# The trouble with the traditional approach

Created by  
academics and  
prioritises  
academic  
evidence as  
superior

Assumes clear  
linear cause and  
effect

Assumes you are  
solving  
problems...

# An alternative approach

## Lay strong foundations



# An alternative approach

Clarify what you believe /  
want to see

Vision / Long term goal  
/ strategic period goal

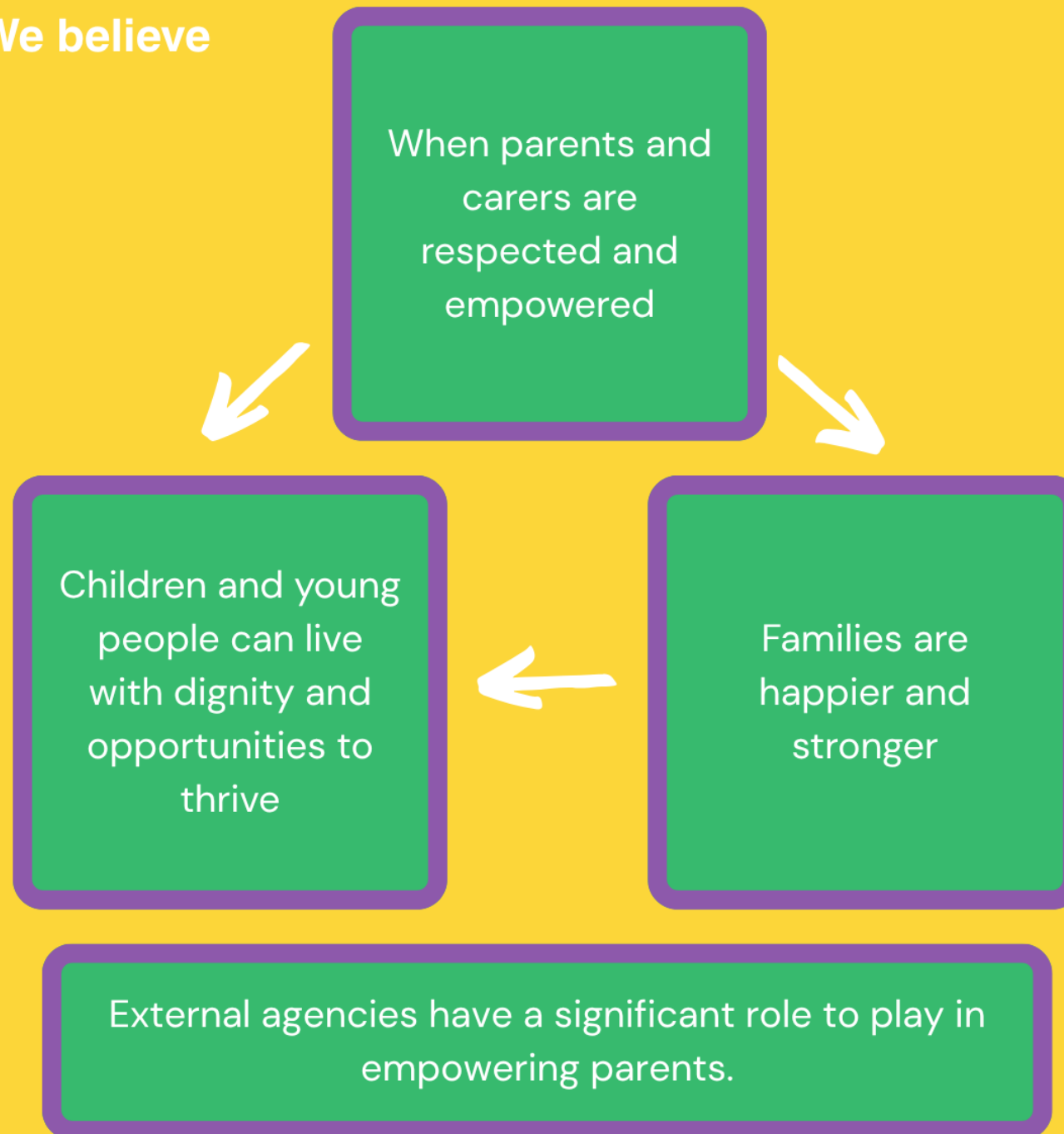
Create clarity about what you know about  
why this is important

Be clear on what is in your power to  
change and why you are best to do that

Breakdown what you do to create change

Understand what about your approach  
matters and makes change possible

## We believe





# An alternative approach

Knowledge,  
understanding,  
evidence

Identify what you believe / want to see

Create clarity about what  
you know about why this  
is important

Be clear on what is in your power to  
change and why you are best to do that

Breakdown what you do to create change

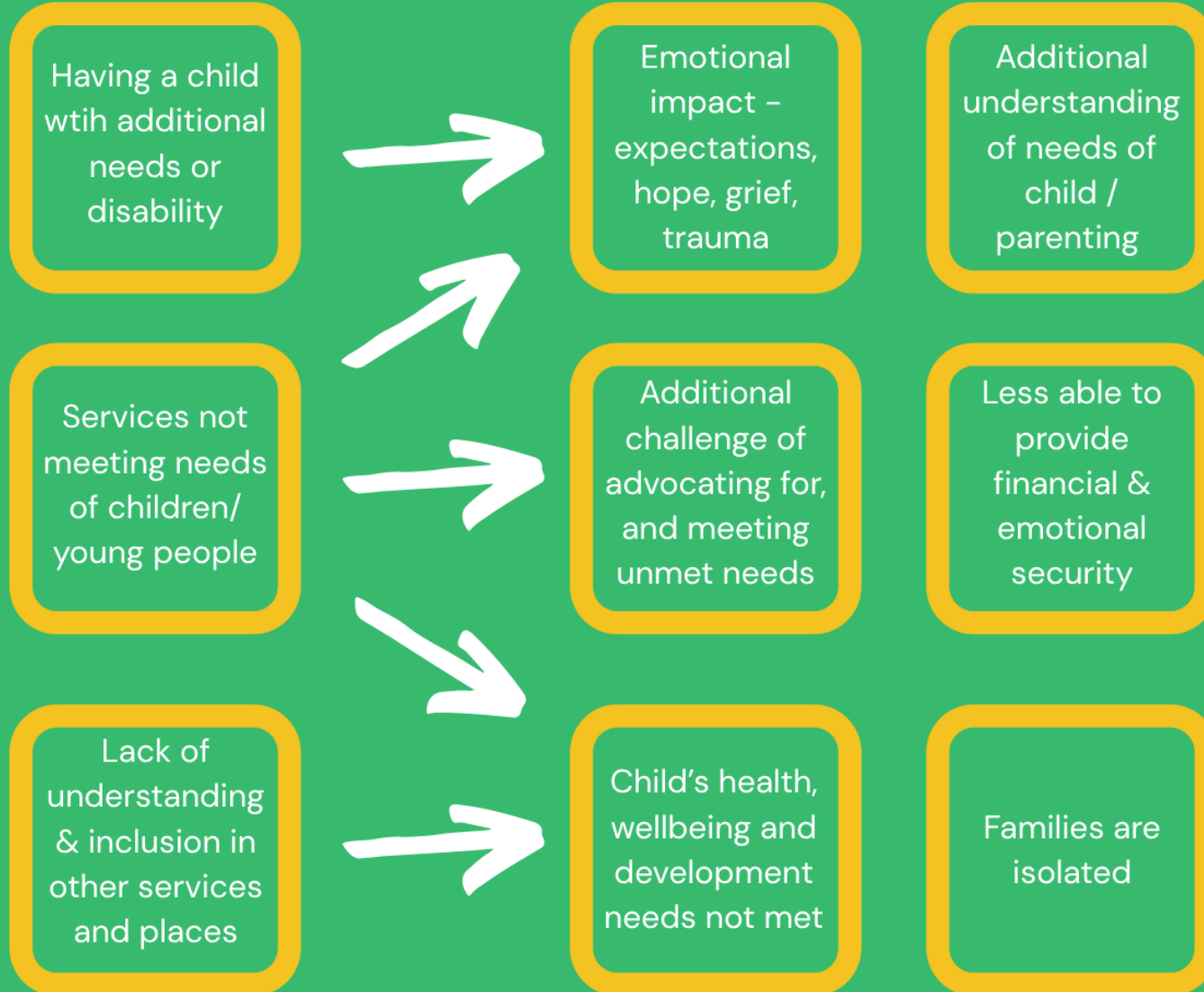
Understand what about your approach  
matters and makes change possible

# The need for SNAP

These needs are all connected, and often compound the difficulties families face

## Need

## Impact



# An alternative approach



# SNAP's Impact

## Parents:

- Have improved emotional wellbeing
- Are equipped with knowledge and understanding
- Are empowered in their role

## Children & Young People

## Children and Young People:

- Have improved emotional wellbeing
- Social and development needs are met
- Health and education needs are met

## Families

## Parents

## External Agencies

## Families

- Have belonging
- Have better relationships
- Have improved economic security

## External Agencies

- Have improved knowledge and understanding
- Have better partnerships with and for families
- Provide improved services

Influences your ability to create impact

National government

Local policy makers

Funders

Health professionals

Parents

Schools

Children and young people

Donors and supporters

Who you have impact on

# An alternative approach

Identify what you believe / want to see



Create clarity about what you know about why this is important



Be clear on what is in your power to change and why you are best to do that



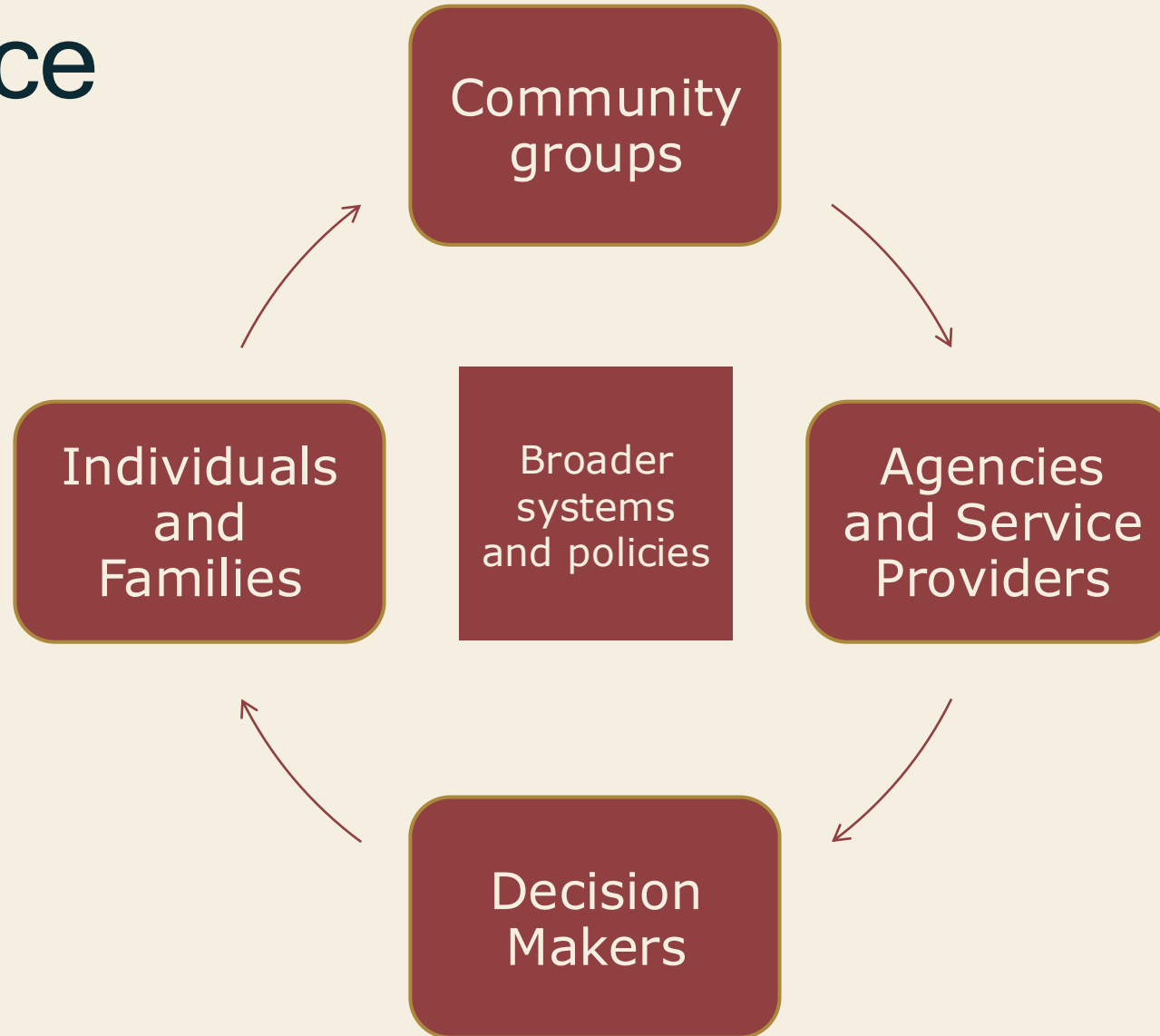
**Breakdown what you do to create change**



Understand what about your approach matters and makes change possible

Don't focus on your services – find the component parts and match to your audience

# Audience



# Activities

Access to information	Case work	Skills Development	Championing Cambridge's minoritised ethnic communities
Communications	Liaise and facilitate with services	Training	
Digital resources	Advocate on behalf of individuals		Communications
Information events	Formal advocacy/tribunals		Events to platform groups
Practical advice, support and signposting			Influencing
			Facilitating representation

These are the activities we deliver through our various services.





# An alternative approach



What's your secret sauce?



# SNAP's Approach

## Partnering with parents

Guided by Family  
Partnership Model

Empowering through  
information

Championing with families  
when needed.

## Creating community

Providing space where  
everyone feels, understood,  
safe and can connect with  
others

Founded, guided, & staffed  
by families & people with  
lived experience

## Flexible and Practical

Individual solutions for  
families, as they need them

Continually learning &  
developing services

Collaborating with others to  
meet needs

## Staying the course

A dependable partner to  
adulthood (aged 25)

Proactively maintaining  
connections with families

Never asking families to  
repeat their story

# An alternative approach

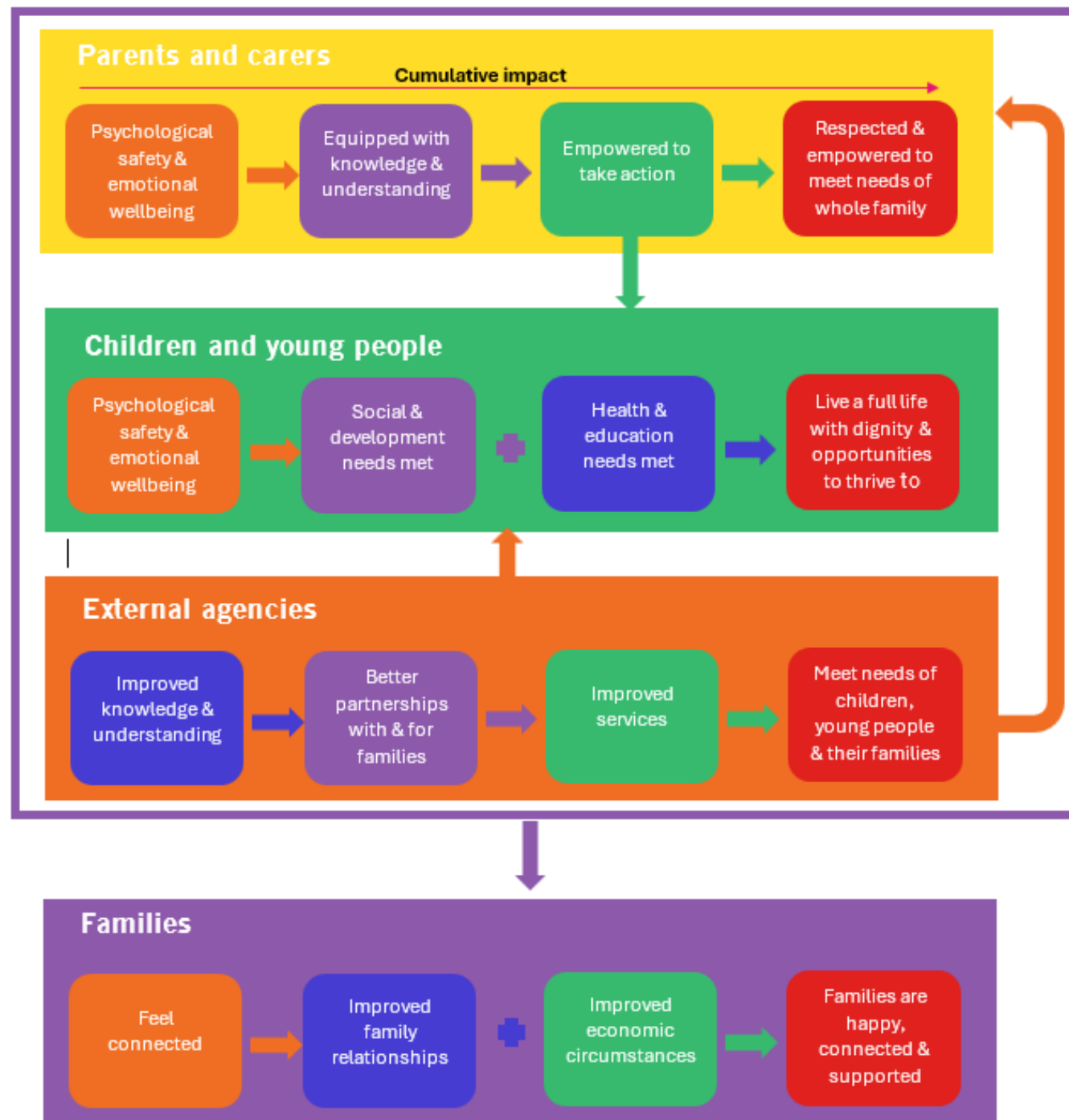
Then find your causal links (a.k.a how do you know?)

Don't get caught up  
in making it neat  
before you've  
untangled it!

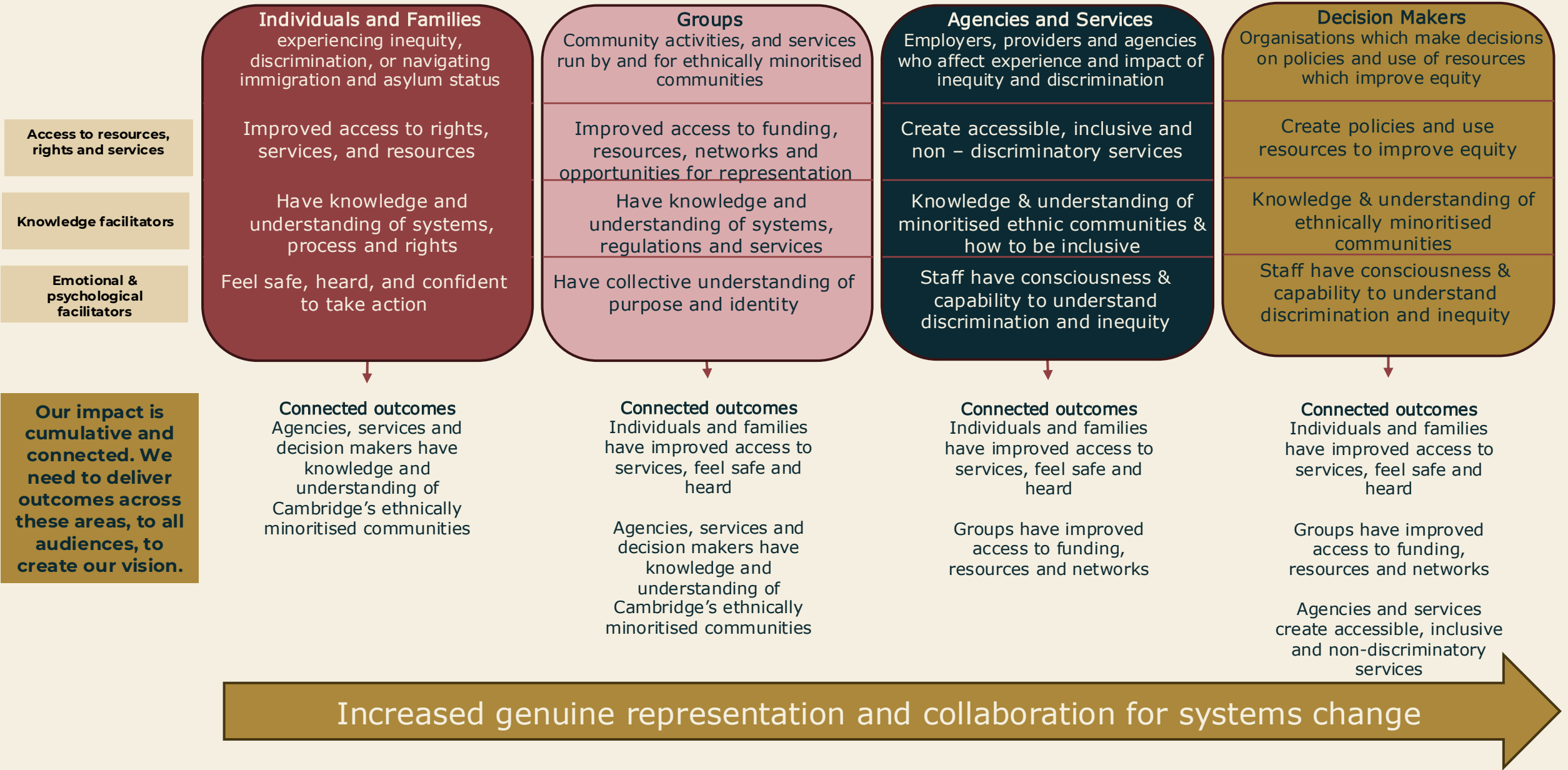
Think about the  
specific people,  
places, conditions you  
want to change in  
turn

Think about the  
connections between  
these people

Map the complexity



**Vision:** A world where diverse communities live in harmony and every individual, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic origin, has the opportunity to realize their full potential.



# Doing it well



Good conversation



Iteration



Sense checking

# Reflection

Which areas need most work in your organisation?

Clarify what you believe / want to see



Create clarity about **what you know** about why this is important



Be clear on what is in your power to change and why you are best to do that



Breakdown what you do to create change



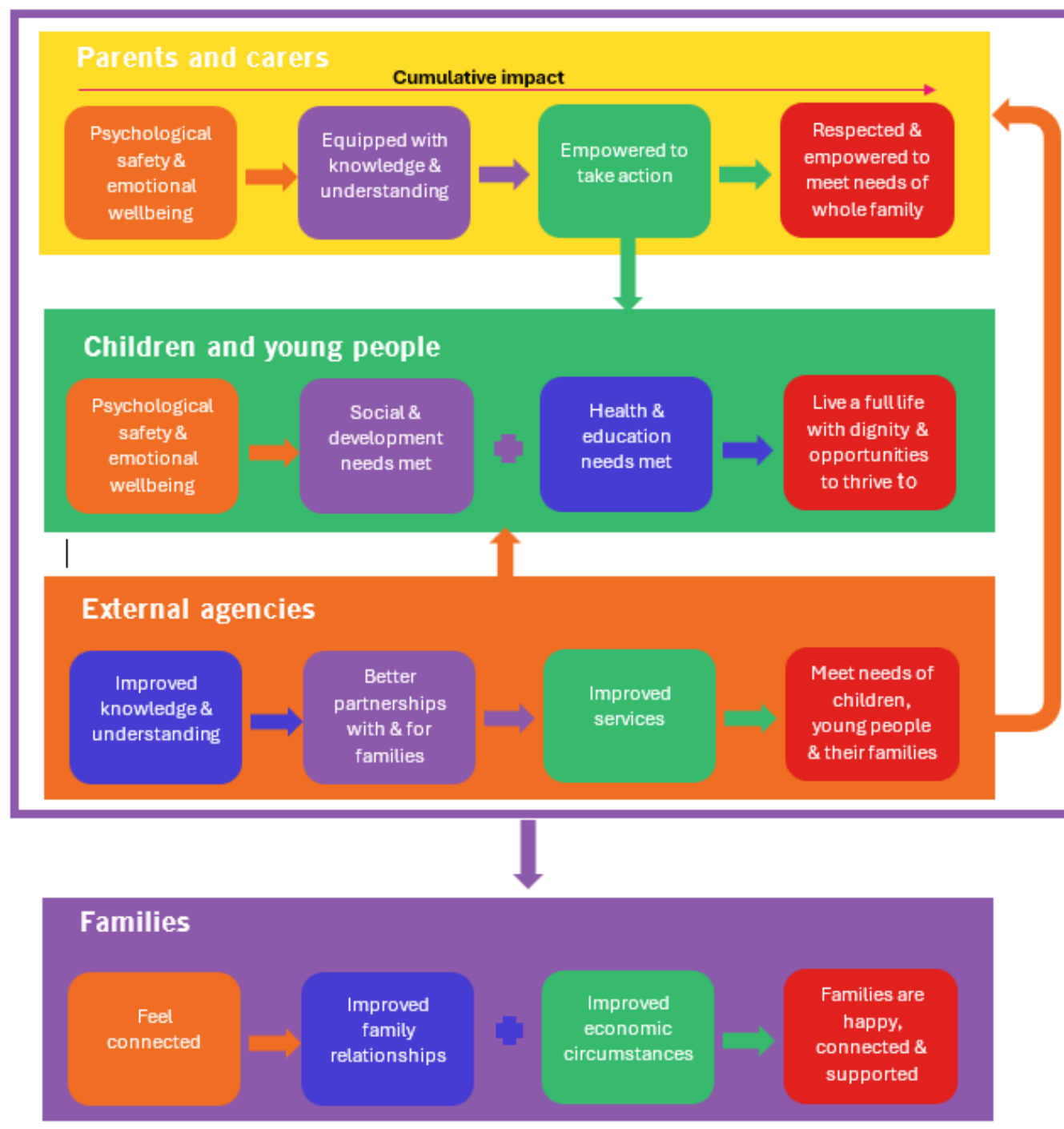
Understand what about your approach matters and makes change possible

# Measuring impact



# What to measure





## Outcomes

What can you measure to check if these things are happening?

# Think outside the box

Stories



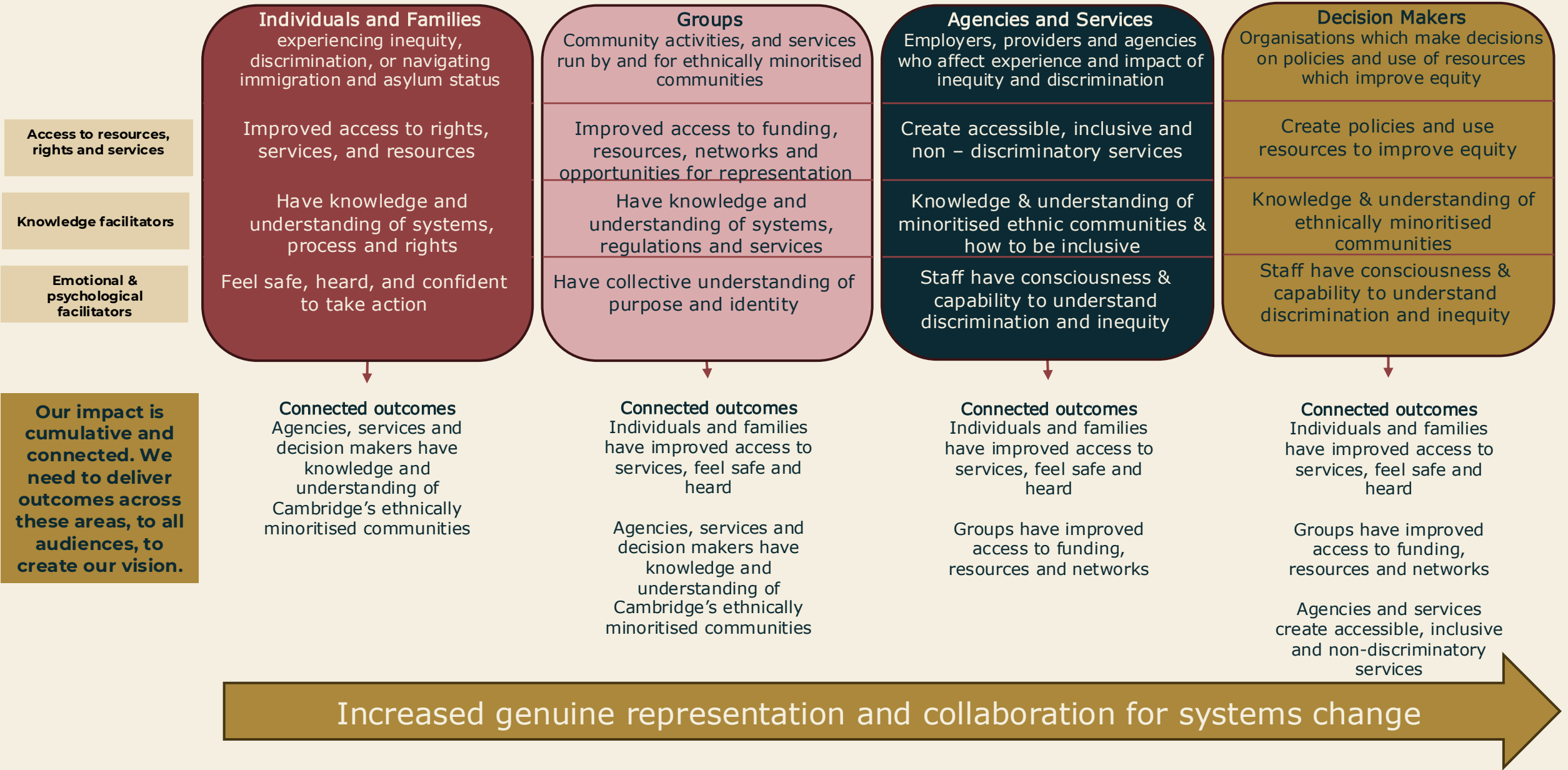
Reflective practice

Patterns

Feedback

Listening

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# Develop a learning approach



Listening, observing,  
analysing, reflecting  
- together

# Finding the right measures



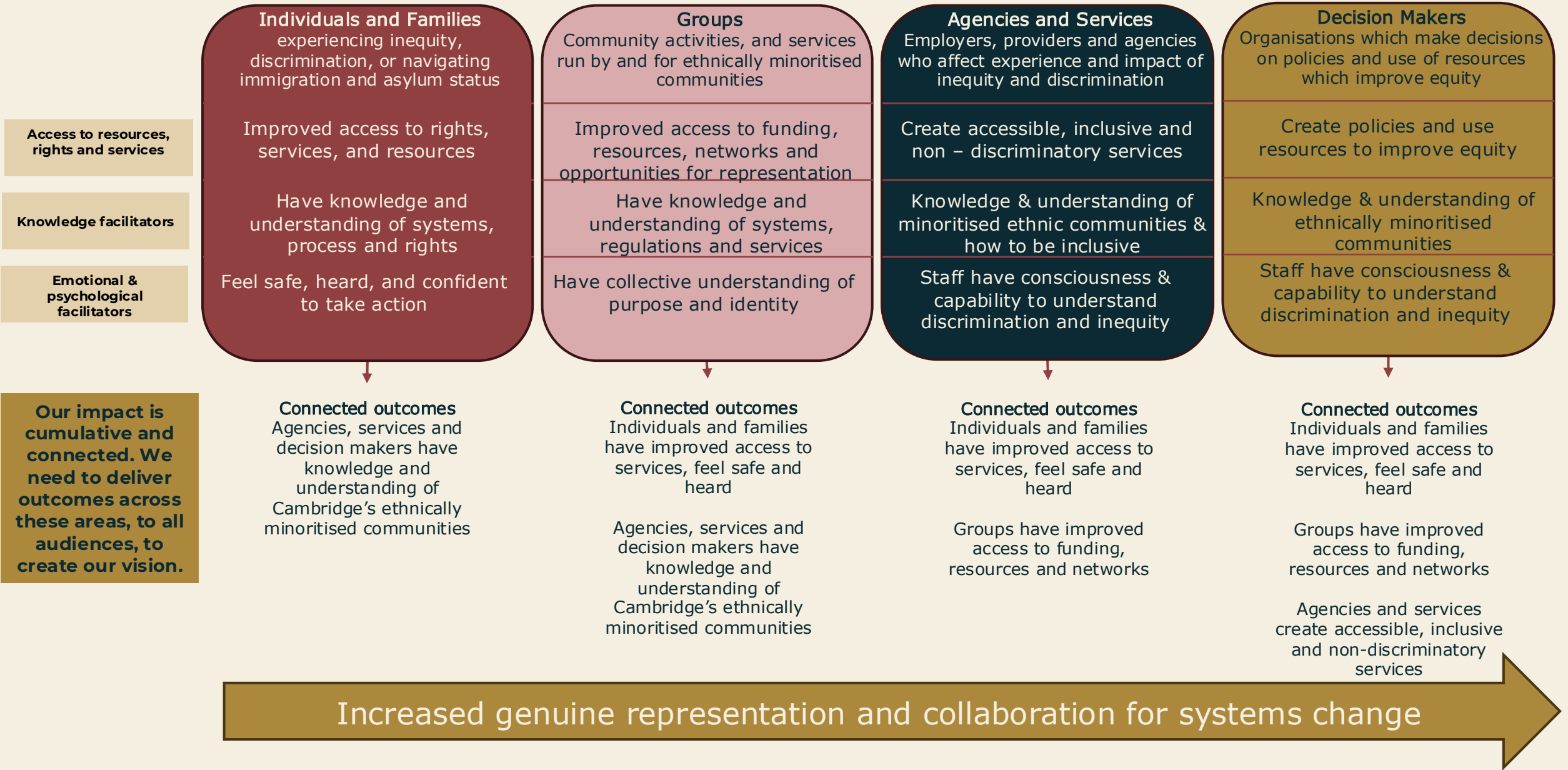
# Identify what matters

To the people  
you exist for

To be able to do  
your job well

To funders and  
partners

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# Finding the right measures

Audit what you  
already do

See what is out  
there, but make sure  
it is a good fit

Prioritise doing a few  
really well

Be proportionate

# Recap



# Objectives

Understand what a  
Theory of Change is

Understand the  
value of Theory of  
Change

Know how to get the  
most from your  
Theory of Change

Know how to get  
started in creating  
your Theory of  
Change

REFLECTION: What action are you going to take?