



Using the Capabilities Approach with children and young people

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Key points:

- The Capabilities Approach (CA) enables the development of a *multidimensional framework* that defines and evaluates social justice goals to address inequality and disadvantage.
- Capability domains should be *determined by the group affected* by the particular social justice issue.
- Each domain can be analysed according to *conversion factors* at personal, social and structural levels, to determine key enablers and barriers to achieving the goal.
- CA is a useful approach for CNS because:
 - It offers a *common framework* of goals for all stakeholders
 - *Children and young people define the capabilities set* in each neighbourhood
 - The *barriers and enablers* to achieving goals can be identified at personal, social and structural levels, allowing detailed evaluation of the contextual conditions for change
- *Children's capabilities are unique* in that:
 - They are linked to adults' capabilities and capacities
 - Capabilities differ across age and life cycle
 - Capabilities are inter-related (e.g. education is a pre-requisite to the achievement of other capabilities)
- CNS will develop a CA framework for children and young people in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock by combining literature on Getting it Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)/children's rights/capabilities with locally-defined capabilities generated through dialogue with local children and young people.

Introduction

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland is a place-based approach that brings people together to do more for children and young people in disadvantaged communities¹. A children's neighbourhood aims to make sense of the range of different services, projects and interventions in an area. Working in partnership with local people and groups, the initiative, and the organisations and businesses involved, will work to ensure that community services are working well together, are better planned and co-ordinated and importantly are focused on local interests and concerns.

This document sets out the initial background to adopting a Capabilities Approach in the evaluation of the CNS case study pilots. It outlines the key elements of a Capabilities Approach, issues for consideration when working with children and young people, and the next steps for CNS in implementing a Capabilities Approach.

THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH (Sen, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011)

A multidimensional framework that defines and evaluates social justice goals, by exploring *what people are able to do and to be*.

What is a Capabilities Approach?

The Capabilities Approach (CA) is a framework to evaluate wellbeing developed by working with disadvantaged groups to identify their own priorities. Amartya Sen (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) developed the CA in response to concerns that the dominant mode of measuring a nation's wellbeing focused solely on economic growth, or on 'happiness.' A focus on "those things that intrinsically matter" (Sen, 1992) rather than the means to achieve them, recognises that freedom and agency are vital aspects of the achievement of social justice, but also highlights the specific inequalities experienced by certain groups due to class, gender, race or disability.

¹ Definition taken from <https://childrensneighbourhoodsscotland.com/whats-a-childrens-neighbourhood>. Accessed 28 June 2018.

The Capabilities Approach defines wellbeing as a range of individual capacities, or “what people are actually able to do and to be” (Nussbaum, 2011). Each of these *domains* may require support at *personal, social and structural levels* (Brunner and Watson, 2015) in order for people to flourish. The approach recognises the multi-dimensional nature of inequality and the need for convergence across a range of social policies to address this. Although Sen insists that the capabilities set can be defined by the disadvantaged group themselves, Nussbaum (2011) has developed a core set of capabilities, detailed in Table 1.1. The CA domains generated elsewhere (Burchardt and Vizard, 2011; Biggeri, 2004) appear consistently similar to Nussbaum’s, suggesting that the core list is a useful and relevant one.

Table 1.1 Nussbaum’s ten core capabilities (2011: 33-34).

NO.	CAPABILITY DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
1	LIFE	Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length.
2.	BODILY HEALTH	Being able to have good health, be adequately nourished and have adequate shelter.
3.	BODILY INTEGRITY	Being able to move freely from place to place, and to be free from assault.
4.	SENSES, IMAGINATION & THOUGHT	Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason (literacy, mathematical and scientific training; creative expression). Being able to have pleasurable experiences and avoid pain.
5.	EMOTIONS	Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves.
6.	PRACTICAL REASON	Being able to form a conception of ‘the good’ and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.
7.	AFFILIATION	A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings. B. Being treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.
8.	OTHER SPECIES	Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9.	PLAY	Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10.	CONTROL OVER ONE’S ENVIRONMENT	A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life. B. Material. Being able to hold property and employment rights on an equal basis with others. Being able to work as a human being, entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with

		other workers.
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Nussbaum's core capabilities demonstrate the minimum requirements for a life lived with dignity, with all domains needing to be met. While Nussbaum's list offers a central set of capabilities, the literature on the applied use of the CA suggests that framework indicators can and should be adapted for use in particular fields and settings (Burchardt and Vizard, 2011, Lewis, 2012, Robeyns, 2003). A framework adapted to the local context reflects measures recognised within that field and the priorities of the groups concerned. A modified set of Capabilities domains, derived from work specifically with children and young people (Biggeri, 2007) follows at Table 1.4 (P.14) Section 4.

Capability domains and functionings

The Capabilities framework is made up of a set of *domains*, with the achievement of each one defined by a series of *functionings*. The domain defines what a person is able to do and to be, or what they have the freedom to choose (Kelly, 2012); the functioning represents the 'being or doing' (Robeyns, 2003) or what they actually choose (Kelly, 2012). For example, a capability domain might be the opportunities a person has to maintain good bodily health, such as access to nutritious food and health services, while the functionings represent the achievement of these, such as eating well and having access to suitable exercise. Within each capability domain, there is considerable scope for exploring a variety of functionings. These functionings may be easier to formulate within research settings with community groups, since they are the actual achievable 'beings and doings', rather than the more abstract concepts of freedom delineated by the Capabilities domains.

The value attributed to each domain may not necessarily be equal, and some domains facilitate achievement of others. So for example, Health or Education may underpin the ability to participate in meaningful activity, or Affiliation may support emotional attachment. Capabilities allows a broad conceptualisation of each domain that allows a discourse on broader concepts of freedom and quality of life (Kelly, 2012). Domains often cluster together, with the cumulative impact of inequalities creating *corrosive disadvantage* through a clustering of inequalities across a number of Capabilities domains and functionings (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2013). Conversely, supportive conversion factors can create *fertile functionings*, wherein positive achievements accumulate across several

domains concurrently. For example, the domains of Affiliation, Participation and Education may be particularly fruitful in this regard.

Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) suggest that the process of identifying a set of capabilities domains should include prioritising them. They argue that it is unlikely that government will be able to offer all citizens a high level of sufficiency in every one of the capability domains concurrently, so the needs of some domains will need to be prioritised over others. In their research on disadvantage, Wolff and De-Shalit asked research participants to prioritise their 'most important three functionings' (Wolff, 2009) so that priorities were determined by those with direct experience of the issues of disadvantage explored by the research.

Burchardt and Vizard (2011) discuss the importance of creating a balance between 'bottom-up' participative strategies for determining capability domains and functionings at the local level, with "internationally recognised human rights standards". While the importance of locally led definitions is vital – and indeed, is a human right in itself – they argue that local strategies may be imperfect due to research time constraints and issue of adaptation, and these may conflict with standards and principles embedded with human rights frameworks. In order to address this question, they developed a two-stage process for generating an agreed list of capabilities: first, they derived a 'minimum core' list from the international human rights framework; secondly, this is refined through a deliberative research exercise. Finally, the lists are combined. Where there is any conflict, they use a 'trumping' rule where the international human right will take precedence over the list derived from deliberative consultation. This decision is made on the basis that the international human rights framework has been derived 'through procedures that are at least in part democratic and deliberative' (Burchardt and Vizard, 2011) and has legally binding international commitment by the majority of states.

Conversion factors

For Sen, individual agency and the freedom to make choices are impacted by *social, political and economic conditions*, which can work to either support or hinder the achievement of opportunities (Buzzelli, 2015). The translation of the valued freedoms a person has

(capabilities), into the actual achievement of these states (functionings), requires resources, or 'assets', on a *personal, social or structural* level (Brunner and Watson, 2015). These resources are referred to as *conversion factors*.

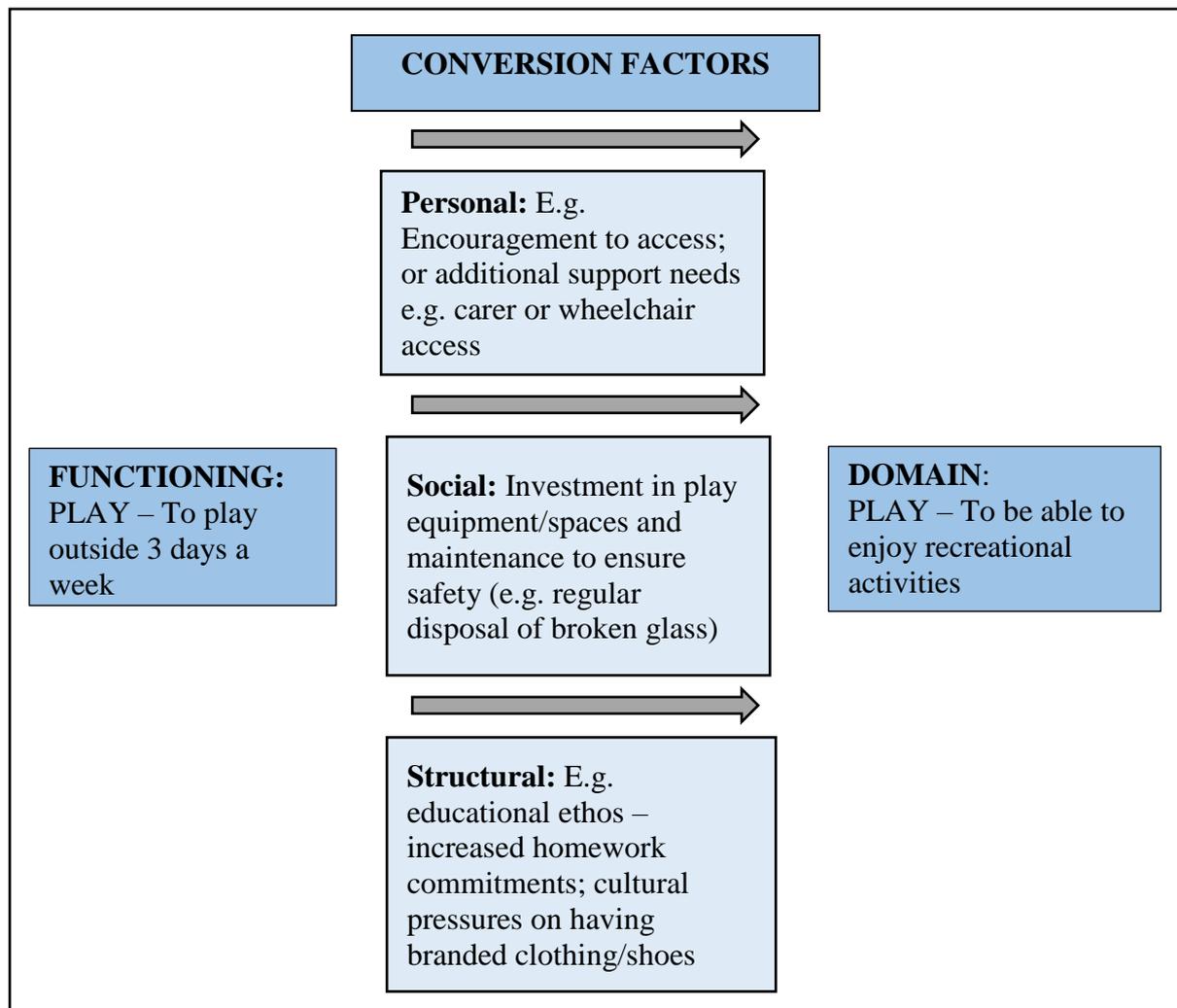
- *Personal factors* are the resources held by an individual, such as income, education or social relationships;
- *Social factors* may be public sector or voluntary organisations;
- *Structural factors* include large-scale influences such as globalisation or capitalism, cultural stereotypes and caring responsibilities.

The analysis of the positive or negative influence of conversion factors at personal, social and structural levels is a helpful tool in understanding the factors that may prevent people from achieving their chosen values. Burchardt and Vizard (2011) have developed a useful model of analysis that offers the capability domains as the 'end point' and traces back the impact of personal characteristics such as gender, race and disability as well as resources such as income and health care and contextual variables such as labour market, public attitudes and family.

Table 1.2 demonstrates the personal, social and structural conversion factors involved in achieving the capability freedom of 'play,' taking the example of a child or young person.

Within Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland, conversion factors will be a useful means of evaluating context, by exploring how a capability domain (whether material, personal or social) might be translated into an achieved functioning, by identifying the individual, organisational and structural factors which support or hinder this.

Table 1.2 Depiction of conversion factors for capabilities domain of 'play'.



A Capabilities definition of empowerment

Capabilities views agency and empowerment as a critical part of the process of determining and working towards domain goals. Sustainable empowerment (Drydyk, 2013) is defined as having three critical aspects:

- Addressing power inequalities
- Building agency
- Meeting capabilities goals

This definition avoids the pitfalls associated with participation and empowerment techniques that are not measurable or are not linked to the causes of inequalities (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Criticisms of the capabilities approach

In the main, criticisms of the Capabilities Approach focus on difficulties in its application. Sen (1994) himself recognises the complexity and challenge of operationalising an approach which values pluralism at its heart. However, he states that “the search for an approach that would be at once *both* 1) informationally *sensitive*, and 2) *informationally undemanding* is unlikely to be successful”.

Criticism of operational challenges highlight Sen’s reluctance to define a definitive capabilities set (Sugden, 1993) as well as potential disagreement over the relative value of different domains, making it difficult to use the CA for inter-personal comparisons (Beitz, 2009). These have been countered by Sen’s argument that there is considerable agreement over domain values, either by using a dominance ranking or an intersectional approach. This would appear to be affirmed by research on the ‘top six’ dominant capabilities (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), and by research on commonalities among what is seen to constitute “a good life” across urban and rural populations (Clark, 2005).

Although the CA is applauded for its recognition of diversity, its need to be used in conjunction with another body of theory (Robeyns, 2003) means that frameworks derived from a Capabilities basis can be diverse and difficult to compare.

Another considerable challenge is the informational requirement, both in data generation and in analysis. The evaluation of social states necessitates data on multiple functionings, which may then need to be analysed across three conversion modes and also in terms of wellbeing and agency. At times, the relevant social indicators may not be available, particularly as quantitative data. Challenges also reside in the development of a framework that is robust but allows for meaningful local deliberation. The testing of plain language is a key consideration in developing a framework appropriate for use in the local context (Lorgelly *et al.*, 2015). Burchardt and Vizard’s (2011) approach of a two-stage process may also help to address the issue of reflecting complexity but remaining accessible, by using the weight of an existing set of determinants alongside local discussion.

Other criticism of capabilities include concern that it may be overly optimistic in underplaying the effect of political power on decision-making (Qisilbash, 1996 in Kelly, 2012), and that the Capabilities Approach is so flexible that its language of choice legitimises its use by neoliberal environment to support a redefinition of justice (Walby, 2012).

Using a Capabilities Approach with children and young people

Capabilities research with children and young people has been used in three distinct ways: primary research with children and young people (Biggeri, 2004; 2007); primary research with stakeholders working with children and young people (Buzzelli, 2015); and secondary research to evaluate policy concerning children and young people (Otto, 2015). For the purposes of the Children's Neighbourhood, initial research will fall into the first category of primary research with children and young people. We plan to use case studies to focus both on the individual experience, but also seek to understand how the perspectives, preferences and orientations of children and young people's capabilities "are influenced, constrained or enabled by the wider economic, social, institutional and cultural environment" in which they live (Biggeri, 2007).

Recent research highlights the importance of locating children and young people's voices at the centre of any strategy for understanding the dimensions of their wellbeing (Biggeri, 2007). With the selection of appropriate research tools, children and young people of all ages are capable of expressing what it is they value and why. The act of listening in itself acknowledges children's autonomy, agency and critical thinking skills (Biggeri *et al.*, 2006).

Although childhood represents a wide diversity of experience (Facer *et al.*, 2011), it is an important life stage with a value in and of itself (Potsi *et al.*, 2015). A historic tendency to view children as human *becomings* rather than human *beings* posits the ultimate goal of individual development as adulthood. The Capabilities Approach, however, seeks to value children as "competent social agents (with) an active social world beyond audible and visible scrutiny ... but as actors with limited and unequal access to action" (Bühler-Niederberger and König, 2011). Nussbaum (2011) has identified children's rights as "the fourth frontier of

human justice”, with the argument that children and young people’s rights are not adequately conceptualised to ensure entitlement, because of the great power differentials at play. The vulnerability and powerlessness of children requires a new approach to basic rights (Dixon and Nussbaum, 2012), with a requirement to consider the interconnectedness of individual and collective dimensions to young people’s capabilities, such as education, work and voice (Bifulco, 2013).

Biggeri (2007) identifies five specific issues arising within Capabilities work with children and young people (CYP), summarised in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3 Key issues for a Capabilities Approach with children (Biggeri, 2007).

KEY ISSUES FOR DEVELOPING A CAPABILITIES SET WITH CYP (Biggeri 2007:199)	
1.	Children’s capabilities are affected by the capabilities of adults (parents, guardians, teachers)
2.	Converting capabilities into functionings depends on parent, guardian and teacher decisions (i.e. child conversion factors subject to further constraints)
3.	Capabilities are inter-related (e.g. Education intrinsic for other capabilities)
4.	Life cycle and age are important in defining relevance of capability
5.	Children & Young People are the future vehicles for change: they will shape future conversion factors

Biggeri highlights the vulnerability of children and young people’s achievement of capabilities, because they are dependent on the adults around them. The first issue relates to the inter-dependence of children’s capabilities with adult capabilities; the second, that converting children’s capabilities into functionings also relies on adults as ‘conversion factors.’ A third aspect concerns the inter-dependence of ‘core’ capabilities on others, something that affects children more consistently than adults due to age and experience. For example, a basic education may be key to the achievement of all other capabilities. A fourth issue is the importance of age in defining the relevance of capabilities for children and young people. Different capabilities may be prioritised differently across the life cycle, and this aspect of temporal change needs to be considered in the development of a Capabilities framework for children and young people. The last issue again relates to

temporal change: that children and young people will determine future conversion factors and can therefore be seen as a vehicle for change.

These factors highlight the importance of developing a means to consider the capabilities of key adults within the child or young person's life, as well as developing a temporal analysis that can take account of critical life stages and consider the future role of children and young people when they become adults. The set of children's Capabilities used by Biggeri (2007) to identify wellbeing outcomes for children in Italy, India and Uganda is shown in Table 1.4.

Adaptation of the Capabilities Approach to the Scottish context requires consideration of the key cornerstone of recent Scottish government legislation relating to the wellbeing of children and young people: The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014². A key aspect of the Act is 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC), which highlights the importance of wellbeing, and the need to "tailor the support and help that children, young people and their parents are offered to support their wellbeing". GIRFEC has defined eight indicators for wellbeing, as below:

Table 1.4 SHANARRI Indicators of Wellbeing (GIRFEC, Scottish Government, 2014)

Getting It Right For Every Child (SHANARRI indicators of wellbeing)	
SAFE	ACTIVE
HEALTHY	RESPECTED
ACHIEVING	RESPONSIBLE
NURTURED	INCLUDED

Mapping the SHANARRI indicators across Capabilities domains demonstrates a good fit between these frameworks (Table 1.5). The exception is that SHANARRI does not take account of socioeconomic factors specifically. Given CNS's focus on looking beyond inequalities to their causes, the issue of Standard of Living will remain critical to CNS, even if this domain is not selected as a primary focus for the work of the project.

² Scottish Government The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, SHANARRI Indicators. Accessed 30/07/18. <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/wellbeing>

Table 1.5 Capability Domains for CYP research mapped to SHANARRI indicators.

NO.	CAPABILITY DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION	SHANARRI INDICATORS
1	LIFE & PHYSICAL HEALTH	Being able to be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length	ACTIVE
2.	LOVE & CARE	Being able to love and be loved by those who care for us and being able to be protected*	NURTURED
3.	MENTAL WELLBEING	Being able to be mentally healthy	HEALTHY
4.	BODILY INTEGRITY & SAFETY	Being able to be protected from violence of any sort	SAFE
5.	SOCIAL RELATIONS	Being able to enjoy social networks and to give and receive social support*	NURTURING
6.	PARTICIPATION	Being able to participate in public and social life and to have a fair share of influence and being able to receive objective information	RESPONSIBLE
7.	EDUCATION	Being able to be educated	ACHIEVING
8.	FREEDOM FROM ECONOMIC AND NONECONOMIC EXPLOITATION	Being able to be protected from economic and noneconomic exploitation	SAFE
9.	SHELTER & ENVIRONMENT	Being able to be sheltered and to live in safe and sheltered environment	
10.	LEISURE ACTIVITIES	Being able to engage in leisure activities	ACTIVE
11.	RESPECT	Being able to be respected and treated with dignity	RESPECTED
12.	RELIGION & IDENTITY	Being able to choose to live or not according to a religion (including peace with God, or the gods)	RESPECTED
13.	TIME-AUTONOMY	Being able to exercise autonomy in allocating time and undertake projects*	RESPONSIBLE
14.	MOBILITY	Being able to be mobile*	ACTIVE

*The asterisk denotes that, given the age and maturity of the child, the relevance of a capability may vary.

Capabilities research methods suited to children and young people

The use of a single, open question (Biggeri, 2007), such as ‘What are the most important opportunities a child or young person should have in her/his life?’ can open dialogue on capabilities while avoiding confusing language or pre-empting capabilities domains. Responses can be later codified by researchers against the capabilities framework, allowing for the introduction of new domains or the deletion of those not valued by CYP research participants.

Analysis of capabilities work with children and young people suggests the use of participatory, child-centred research methods to ensure that children and young people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can be full participants (Garcia and Ritterbusch, 2014). These may include reflective materials, written/spoken text, pictures and videos, and could take place with a variety of participants, including children and young people themselves, parents, teachers or support workers.

Developing a CNS Capabilities methodology

Children’s Neighbourhoods proposes to develop a capabilities framework that draws on Burchardt and Vizard’s ‘top-down/bottom-up’ approach. This allows the combination of capabilities developed through rigorous processes of deliberation (e.g. U.N. Rights of the Child) with capabilities derived through local dialogue with children and young people. This will entail three stages of work:

Table 1.6 CNS Stages of Capabilities Development

CHILDREN NEIGHBOURHOODS SCOTLAND - STAGES OF CAPABILITIES DEVELOPMENT	
STAGE 1.	Compile a set of capabilities based on children’s rights, SHANARRI, previous capabilities’ work with CYP and stakeholder interviews
STAGE 2.	Generate a set of capabilities with CYP through a series of workshops and focus groups
STAGE 3.	Merge capabilities sets according to Burchardt & Vizard (2011) rules

Research tools will draw on recommendations from Biggeri (2004; 2007), opening an initial reflective space where children and young people are invited to consider what will be

important to them in the future, and then asking them to 'talk and draw' the key factors in their future wellbeing. The research with children and young people (CYP) will begin by working with groups of 15-30 CYP to identify the key capability domains. This will be followed by small focus groups and individual interviews exploring the individual capability domains in further depth, in order to generate a set of functionings for each. Interviews will also take place with stakeholders, including teachers, parents and youth workers, to establish capability sets for these key individuals, and to generate data on their perceptions of CYP capabilities.

Following the merging of both sets of data, the CNS Capability Framework will be presented to stakeholders for discussion. This will provide an initial step in establishing a set of shared goals around work with CYP groups: one of the key process outcomes highlighted in the CNS Theory of Change.

The Capabilities Framework will become the key set of outcomes by which Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland will evaluate the progress of its work. The project will seek to continue children and young people's involvement via 'citizen's juries' and school panels, with small groups of CYP being invited to question stakeholders on an annual basis on their work towards enabling CYP capabilities domains. In addition to consideration of Capabilities domains and functionings, analysis will take place across conversion factors and temporal stages in CYP development, to explore the key barriers and enablers to successful achievement of capabilities, and the different capabilities required at key points of CYP development from 0-18 years.

Conclusion

This paper offers a background to the Capabilities Approach, and specifically, its application with children and young people in the context of Children's Neighbourhood Scotland. In addition to a broad definition of the Capabilities Approach – including domains, functionings and conversion factors – it outlines key considerations in relation to children and young people, including the particular vulnerability of this group, their dependence on the capabilities of adults, specific relevant research methods, and a brief overview of the

methodology proposed within the early stages of research of Children's Neighbourhoods in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock. The approach is necessarily iterative, and the methodology aims to adapt to the needs and priorities of children and young people as the project progresses. A key outcome of the approach will be the generation of a CNS Capabilities Framework, generated by children and young people in the local community, and used as the frame by which the work of Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland will be assessed.

Next steps for Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

The CNS research process will progress as follows:

Stage 1: Analysis of existing documentation to determine a set of children's capabilities from the literature.

This will include consideration of the following documents:

- The UN Rights of the Child
- Scottish Government's GIRFEC indicators (SHANARRI)
- Scottish Children's Parliament mural on 'My Community' created at Dalmarnock Primary School
- Existing CA frameworks developed for research with CYP (Biggeri, 2007; Buzzelli, 2015)

Stage 2: Generation of Capabilities set with children and young people in Bridgeton & Dalmarnock

- Research in Sacred Heart Primary School (August – October 2018)
- Research in Dalmarnock Primary School (October – December 2018)
- Research with young people in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock (To develop links in partnership with PEEK, St. Mungo's, Youth street work with Urban Fox)

Stage 3: Combining the capabilities set from Stages 1 and 2

Using the method outlined by Burchardt and Vizard (2011), CNS will generate a composite set of Capability domains and functionings for Bridgeton and Dalmarnock, offering a shared set of indicators for stakeholders.

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