

# Using a capabilities approach to address social disadvantage

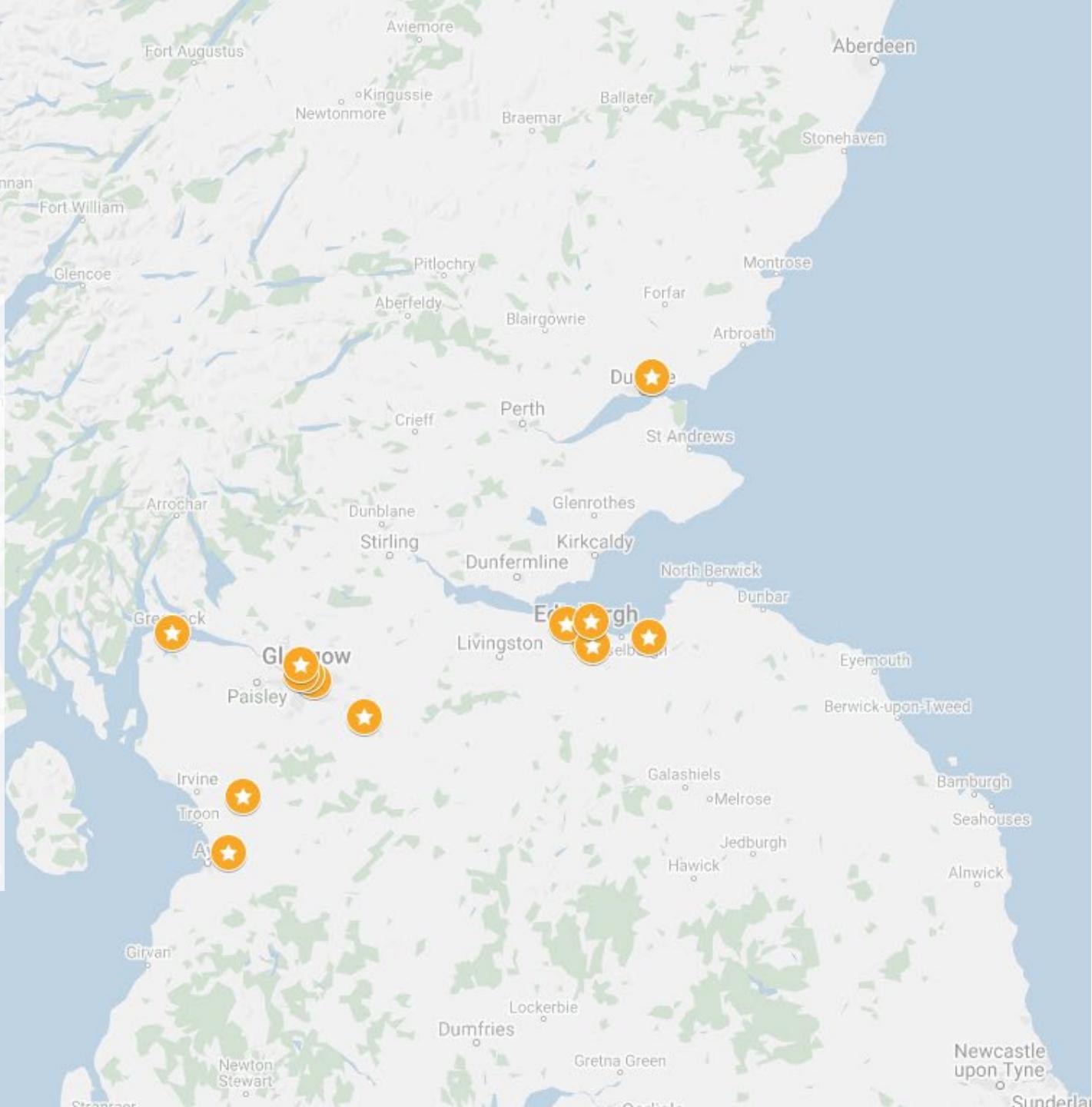
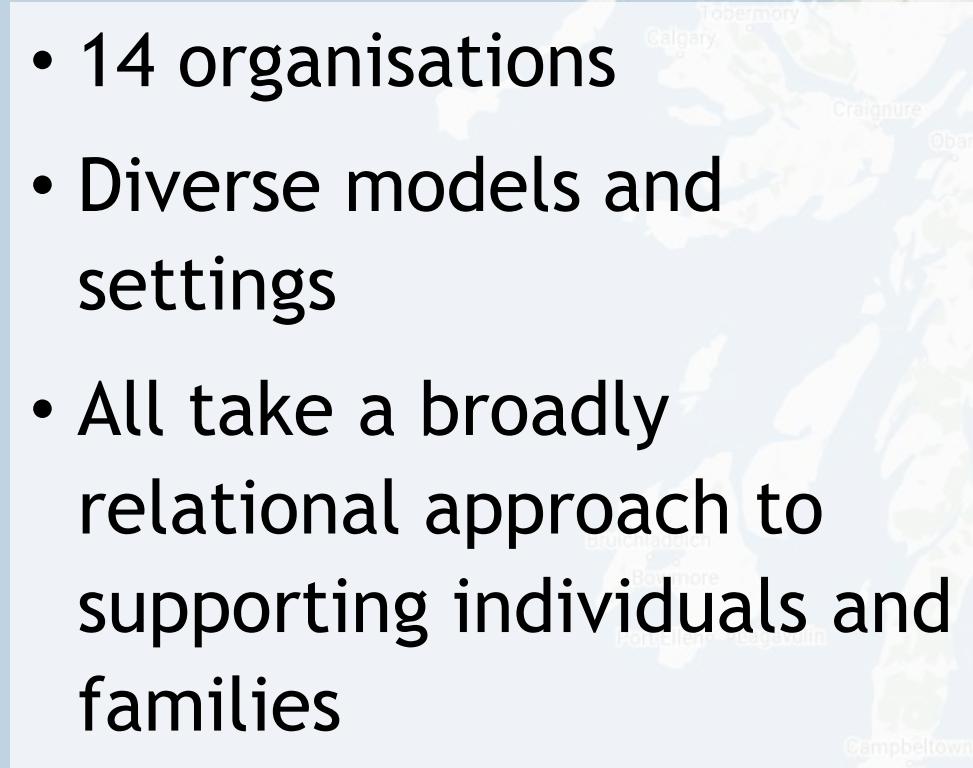
Co-designing a research methodology for the Social Innovation Partnership learning programme

# Context

- The **Social Innovation Partnership** funds projects across Scotland that are addressing child poverty and social disadvantage
- A unique collaboration between the Scottish Government and independent grantmaker the Hunter Foundation
- I-SPHERE and Homelessness Network Scotland were commissioned to deliver a three-year learning programme to understand the impact the work is having and draw lessons for policy

# The partners

- 14 organisations
- Diverse models and settings
- All take a broadly relational approach to supporting individuals and families



# Why are capabilities relevant?

- The programme is explicitly built around the hypothesis that more relational forms of support will enhance well-being and capabilities
- Taking a capabilities approach to evaluating its impact allows us to:
  - recognise the **diversity** of people's views about what makes for a good life
  - explore how **inequalities** affect the ability of people to pursue the capabilities that they have reason to value
- The challenge: developing a research model that is conceptually robust, but can be applied across the wide range of approaches and settings that the programme contains

# Defining the capability approach

## The capability approach (in our view...)

Understands human well-being as best assessed through capabilities, which are the **freedom to be and do things that we have reason to value**

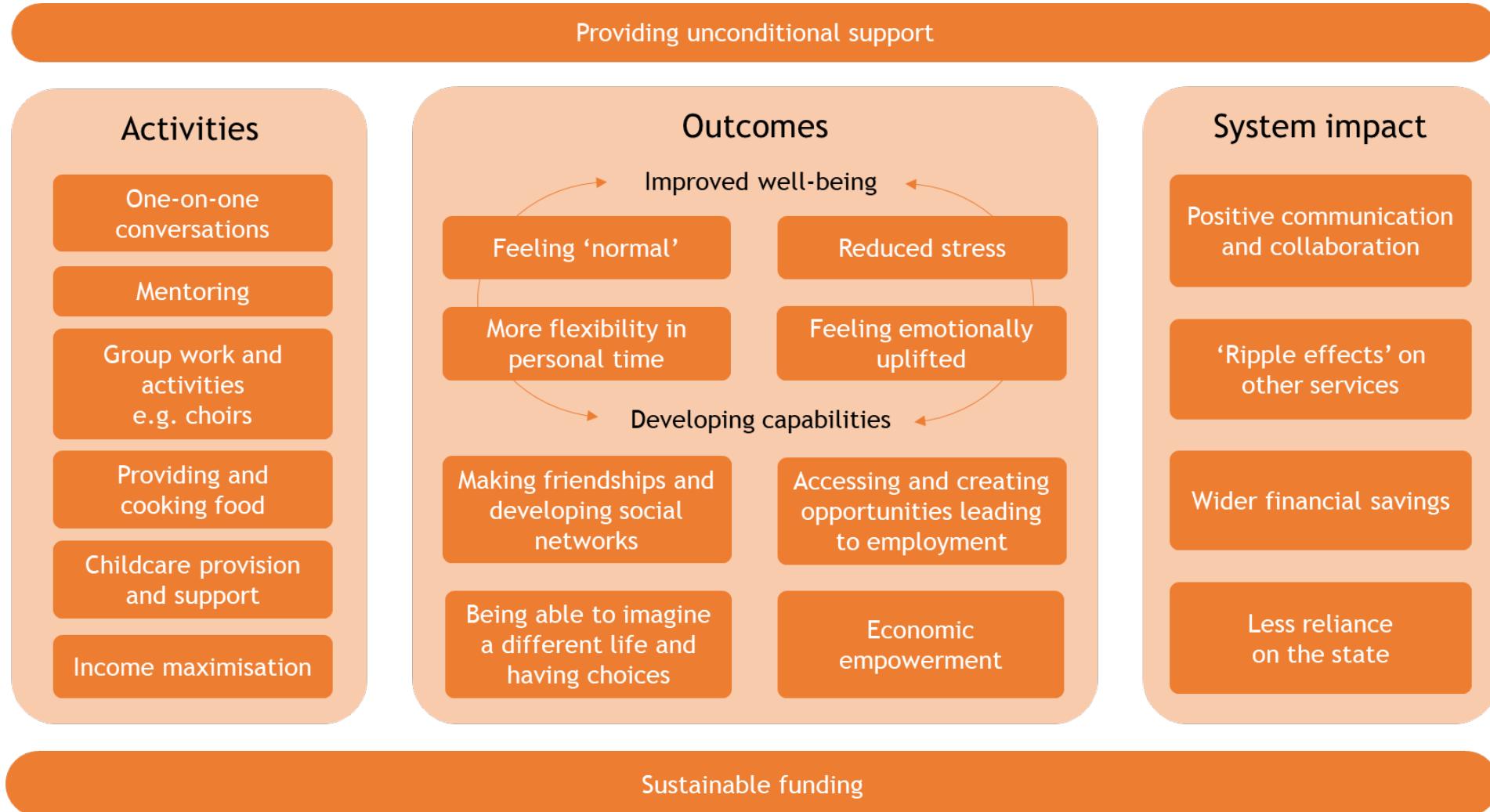
Proposes that we should **evaluate social arrangements** by the extent to which they enable people to develop and exercise these capabilities

Is best understood as a family of theories and methodologies that **need to be adapted to a specific purpose**

# Co-design process

- Brought together a group of practitioners drawn from across the organisations, some with relevant lived experience
- Over one face-to-face workshop and several online calls, we explored the capability approach and together developed a model of change for the programme
- This model aimed to reflect *how the organisations themselves* saw the change they were creating, and will serve as a basis for our research





*Draft model of change for the Social Innovation Partnership*

# Reflections on the co-design process

Viana Maya, pRESPECT

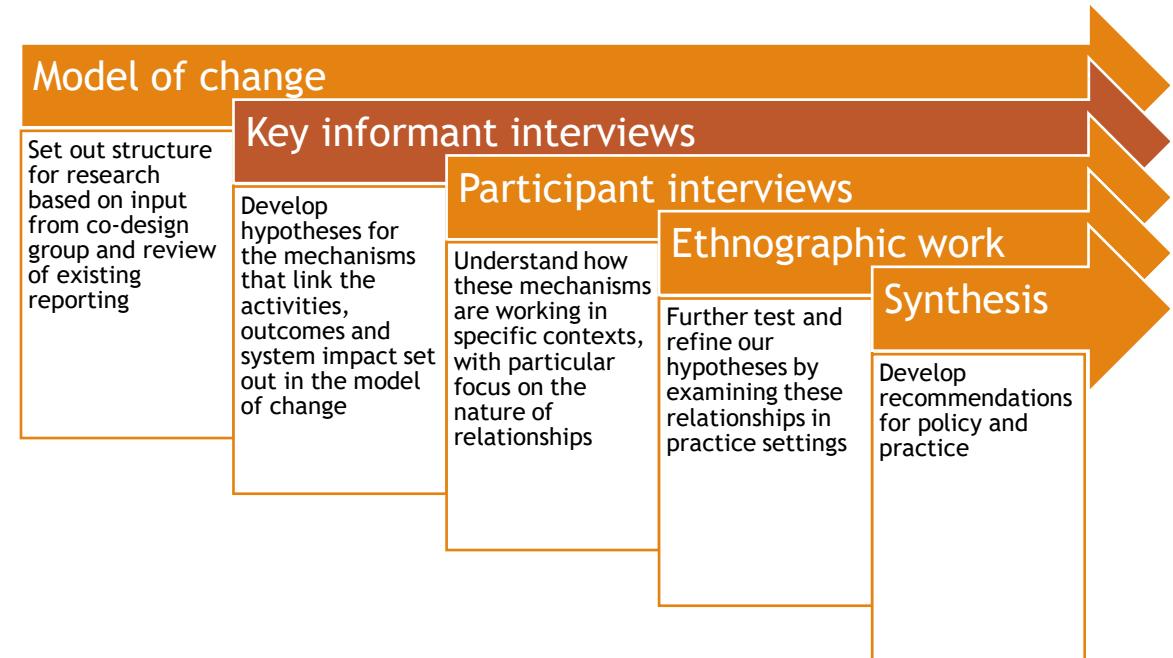
# Agency and well-being

- The model illustrates how change in people's lives involves choices both about individual well-being and their wider motivations (such as work or obligations to others)
- Similarly, Sen separates *agency freedom* and *well-being freedom*:

“The former is one’s freedom to bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce, while the latter is one’s freedom to achieve those things that are constitutive of one’s well-being” (Sen, 1992, p. 57)
- Importantly, these concepts are interdependent, and a key assumption of the model is that gains in one reinforce the other.

# Methods and fieldwork

- We adopt a **realist** approach that uses qualitative methods to develop and test hypothesis about “what works, for whom, under what circumstances”
- The model of change provides a broad structure, and the outlines of our analytical framework for coding research material.
- Over the course of the research, it will change and develop to reflect the observations that are coming from the fieldwork.



# Challenges with a capability approach

- Dilemma of selecting which capabilities that are in scope
  - Adopting a restrictive list of ‘accepted’ capabilities may make unwarranted assumptions about what people value
  - Taking a broad, inclusive approach raises issues with harmful and adaptive preferences
  - Need to reach a balanced account of what people *have reason to value* which includes a deliberative process that takes second-order preferences into account
- Workability as a basis for informing policy
  - Policymakers need to make decisions on aggregate impact on groups, not individuals
  - Connecting our account of the SIP’s impact to population-level measures (such as financial measures of poverty, or outcome measures for employment) will be key

# Change of plan...

- Some aspects of fieldwork, such as key informant interviews, can be done remotely and will commence in the summer. These interviews will include a focus on the impact of COVID-19.
- Interviews involving vulnerable individuals and ethnographic work cannot take place right now, but hopefully can resume in the autumn.
- In the meantime, we've focused on secondary analysis of existing reporting material and developing research instruments.



# Questions

