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The role of Citizen's Advice in reducing stress and improving mental wellbeing: findings from a realist evaluation



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- **Introduction**
- **Methods**
- **Findings**



Introduction

- Reviews highlight evidence for the impact of advice services in improving mental health and well-being, daily living and social relationships (Burrows et al. 2011; Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014;).
- Some evidence for the impact of advice services in increasing accessibility of health services, and reducing general practitioner appointments and prescriptions (Palmer et al. 2012; Citizens Advice Bureau, 2012; Woodhead et al, 2017a,b)
- Currently unknown: how advice services and associated financial or non-financial benefits may lead to health improvements.



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The intervention: three intensive support services

- Young People's service
- People with severe and enduring mental health conditions
- GP referral project



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Methods - Theory driven evaluation

- ~ Policies and interventions/programmes are theories incarnate.
- ~ Evaluation is the process of formulating and testing those theories.
- ~ It is not interventions/ programmes or services that 'work'.

Realist evaluation explores these active explanatory ingredients



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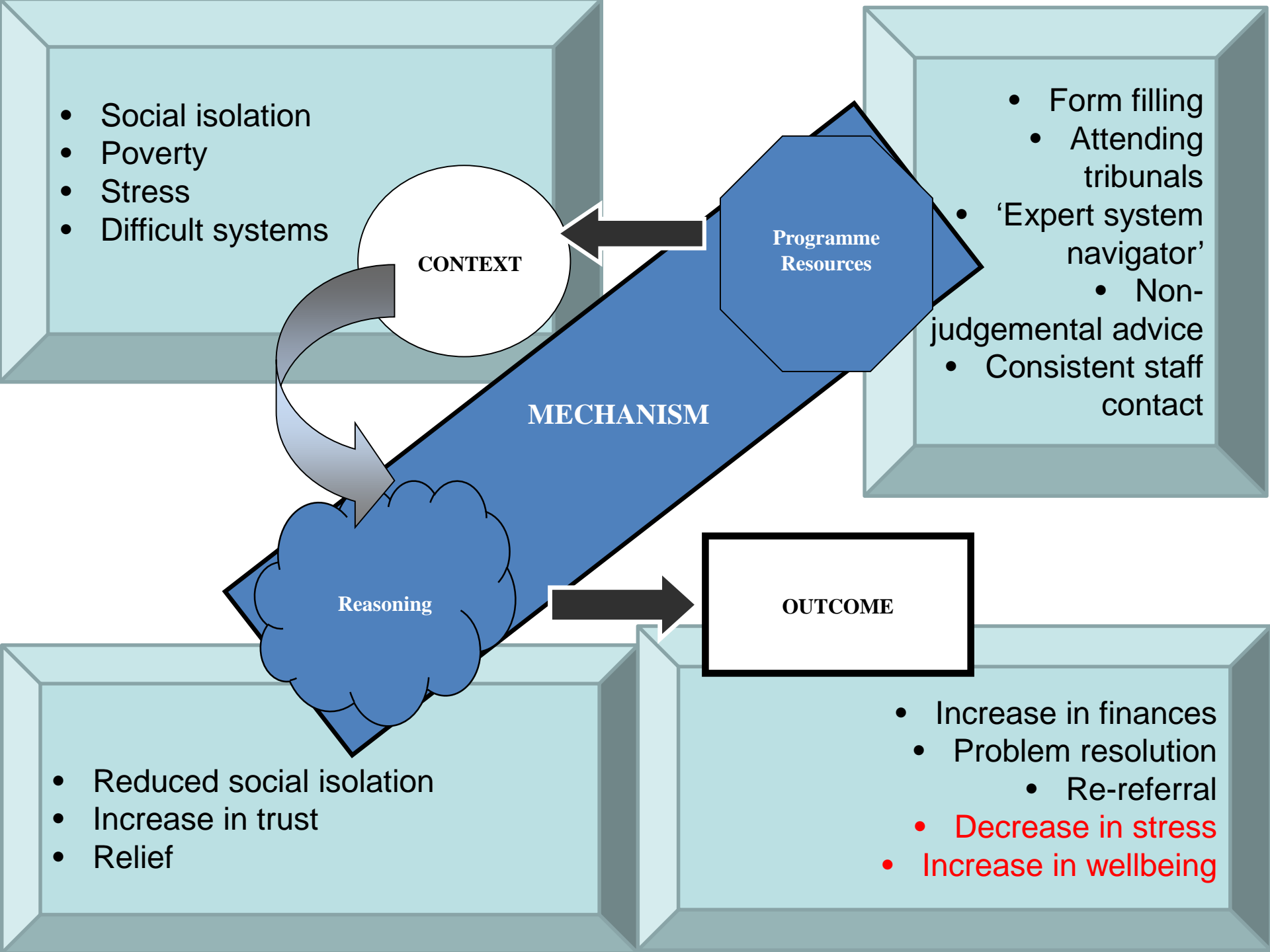
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How did we use realist evaluation?

5 study phases:

1. Developing programme theories (Context – Mechanism – Outcome configurations)
2. Refining programme theories
3. Development of a bespoke data recording template
4. Testing programme theories through empirical data
5. Verification of findings with a range of Citizens Advice and other voluntary services.

Aim: To build, refine and test an explanatory framework about how Citizens Advice Gateshead services can be optimally implemented to achieve health improvement.





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| Project phase | Methods |
|---|--|
| 1. Building programme theories | Literature Interviews with Citizens Advice Gateshead staff (n=3) |
| 2. Refining programme theories | Interviews with Citizens Advice Gateshead staff (n=3) |
| 3. Development of a bespoke data recording template to capture long term impact | Collaborative work with Citizens Advice Gateshead staff |
| 4. Testing programme theories with empirical data | Quantitative (questionnaire, n = 191, 91% follow up): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived stress scale • Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale • Lifestyle questions Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with Citizens Advice Gateshead clients (n= 22) |
| 5. Verification of findings with a range of services | Events with wider Citizens Advice Gateshead stakeholders (n=3) |



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Questionnaire Development

Collaborative process between Northumbria University researchers and Citizens Advice Gateshead staff

Conscious that questionnaire had to:

- Be applicable to all clients
- Be an appropriate length (for client and staff to complete)
- Capture relevant data



Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? .. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

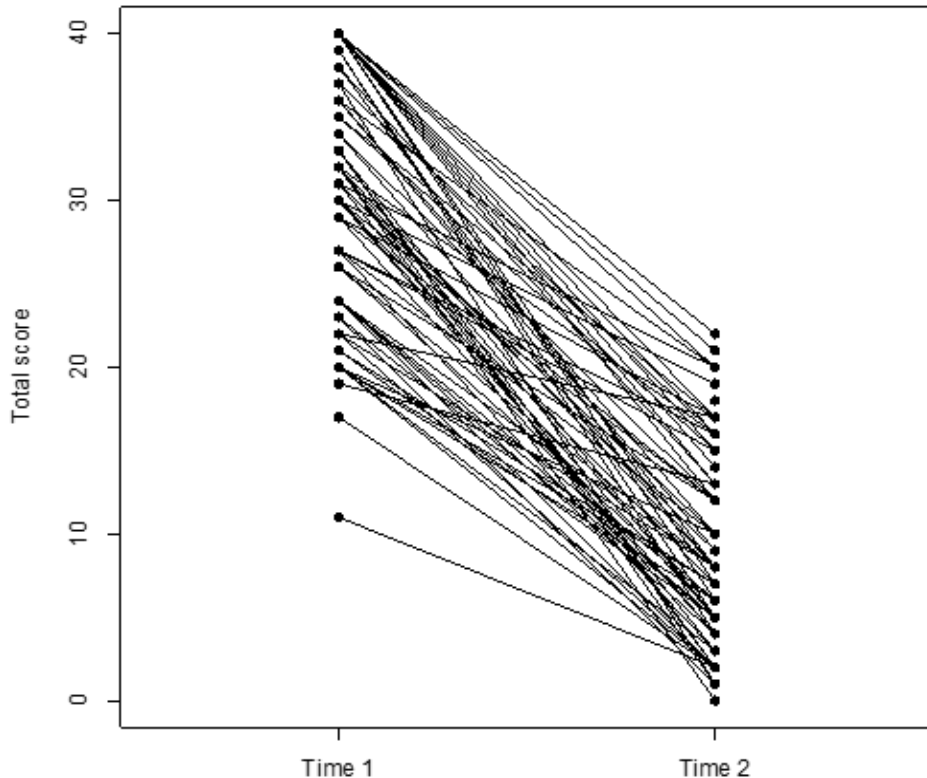


The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

| STATEMENTS | None of the time | Rarely | Some of the time | Often | All of the time |
|--|------------------|--------|------------------|-------|-----------------|
| I've been feeling optimistic about the future | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling useful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling relaxed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling interested in other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've had energy to spare | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been dealing with problems well | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been thinking clearly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling good about myself | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling close to other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling confident | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been able to make up my own mind about things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling loved | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been interested in new things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I've been feeling cheerful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



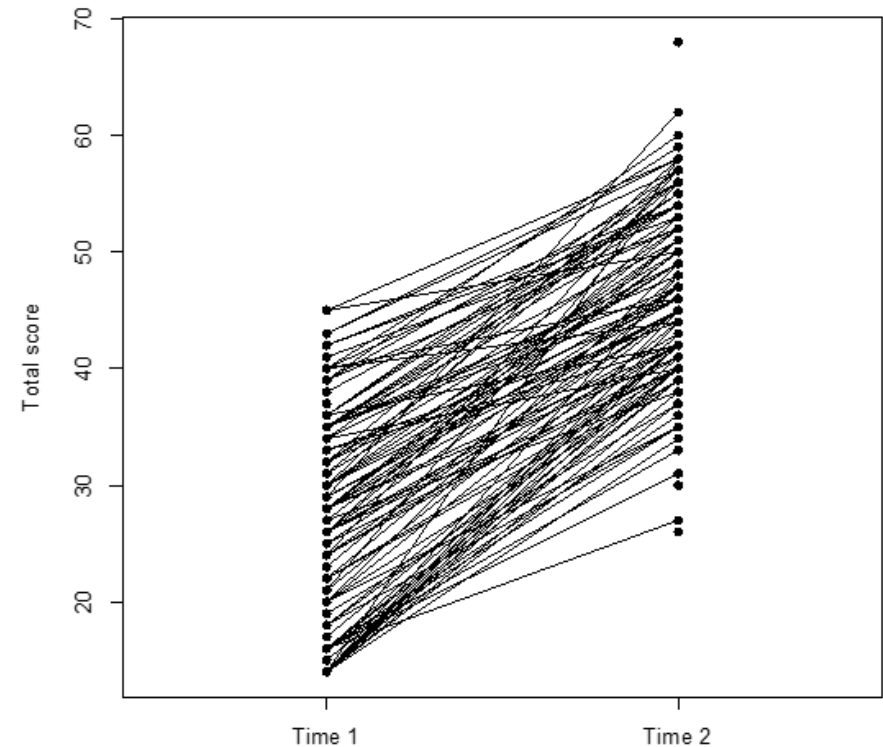
Findings - PSS



- PSS analysis showed a downward trend, indicating the **clients were less stressed on second visit.**
- Every client showed a decrease in their total score (min change = 5, max change = 36) with an average (median) change of 21.
- There was a significant difference between initial consultation and follow up ($p < 0.001$).

WEMWBS data

- Scores were on average higher by 20 at client follow up
- Thus showing a **very** significant difference between initial consultation and follow up ($p < 0.001$).





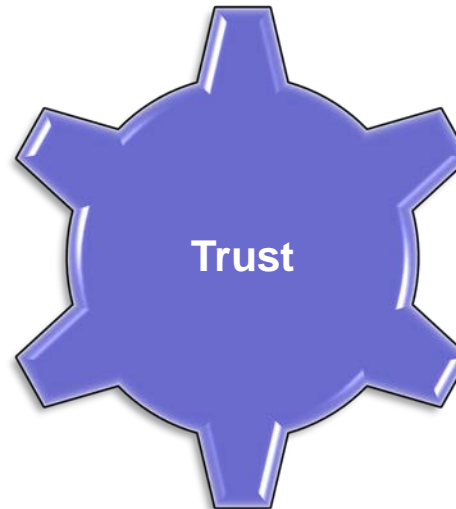
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Interview data: 3 broad explanatory categories



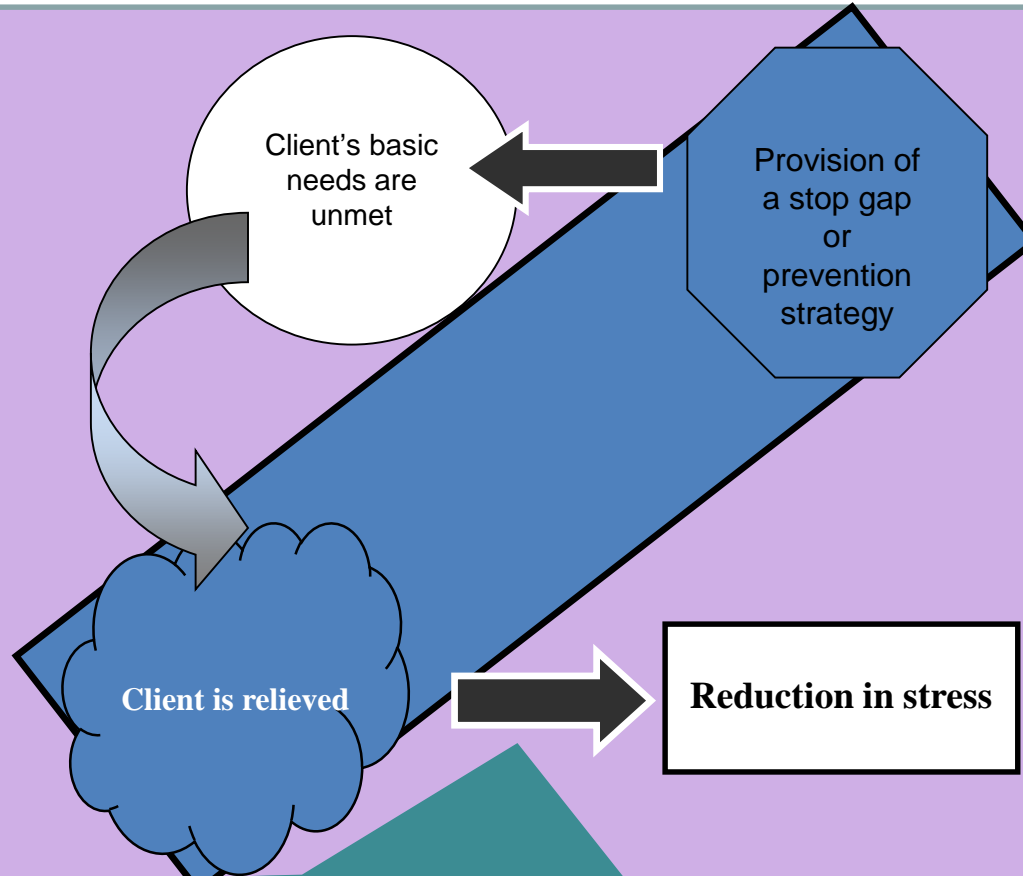


Capabilities

- Sen's (1985, 1999, 2004) capabilities model attempts to reflect wellbeing and quality of life within the boundaries of what a person is able to achieve, rather than using a standardised set of outcomes
- It suggests that Citizens Advice Gateshead changed clients' capabilities, through the resources they provided
- This was captured under four refined programme theories



1a. Stop Gap

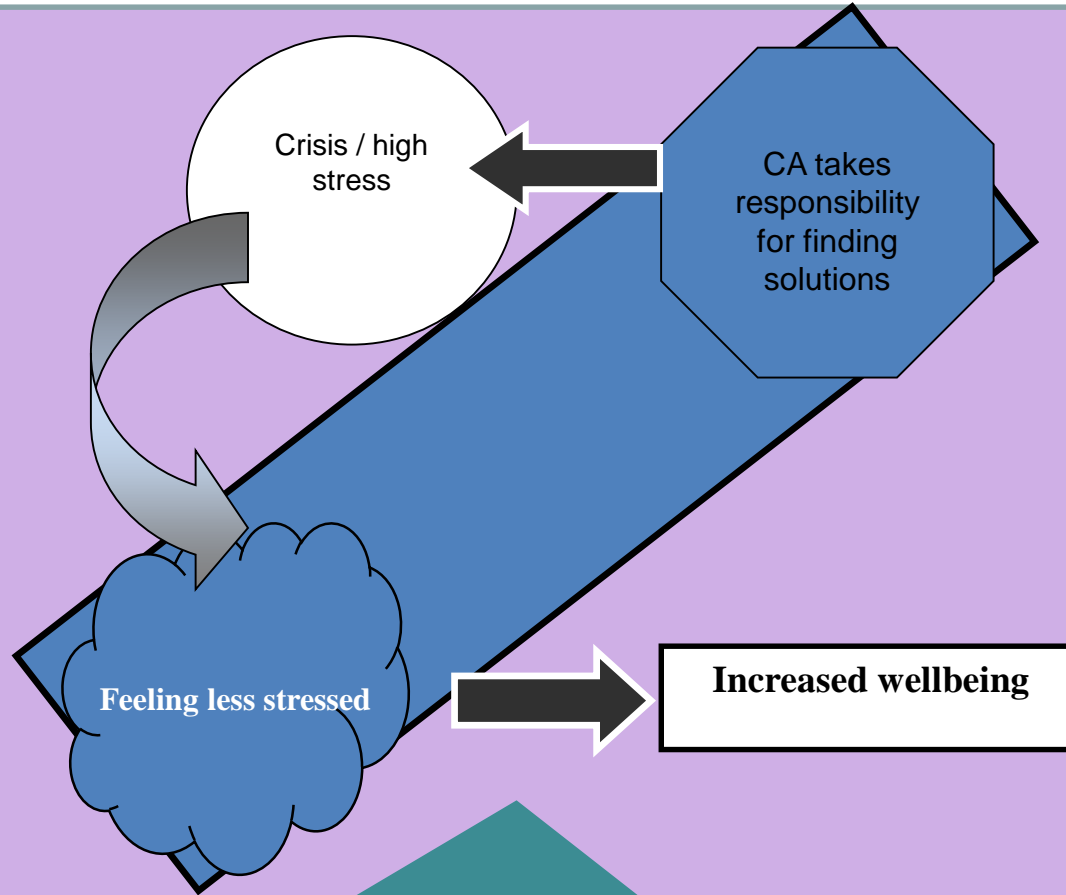


"they helped is get er wey the benefits that, the benefit that I'm entitled to [...] I wouldn't of knew anything I would of ended up losing me flat you know what I mean, I would of ended up homeless and everything" [Client 22]





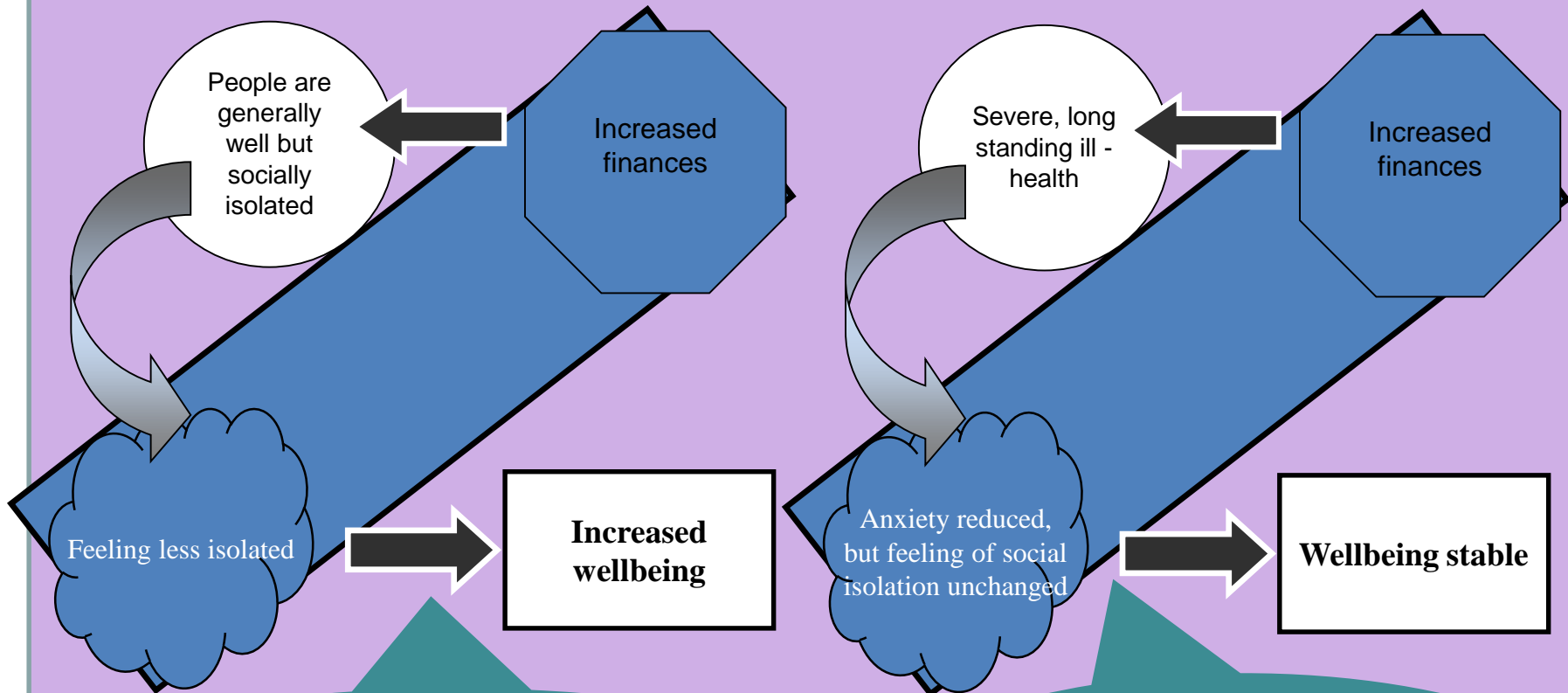
1b. Stress



"Erm I don't know I think I just feel a lot happier than what I I that's why I call her our fairy godmother because if we're stuck or we have a problem I always sort of phone her and just say [adviser] I'm sorry to bother you but could I just run this by you and she'll go 'ahhh of course' and she'll advise the best way possible [Client 13]"



1c. Increasing health and wellbeing / decreasing social isolation

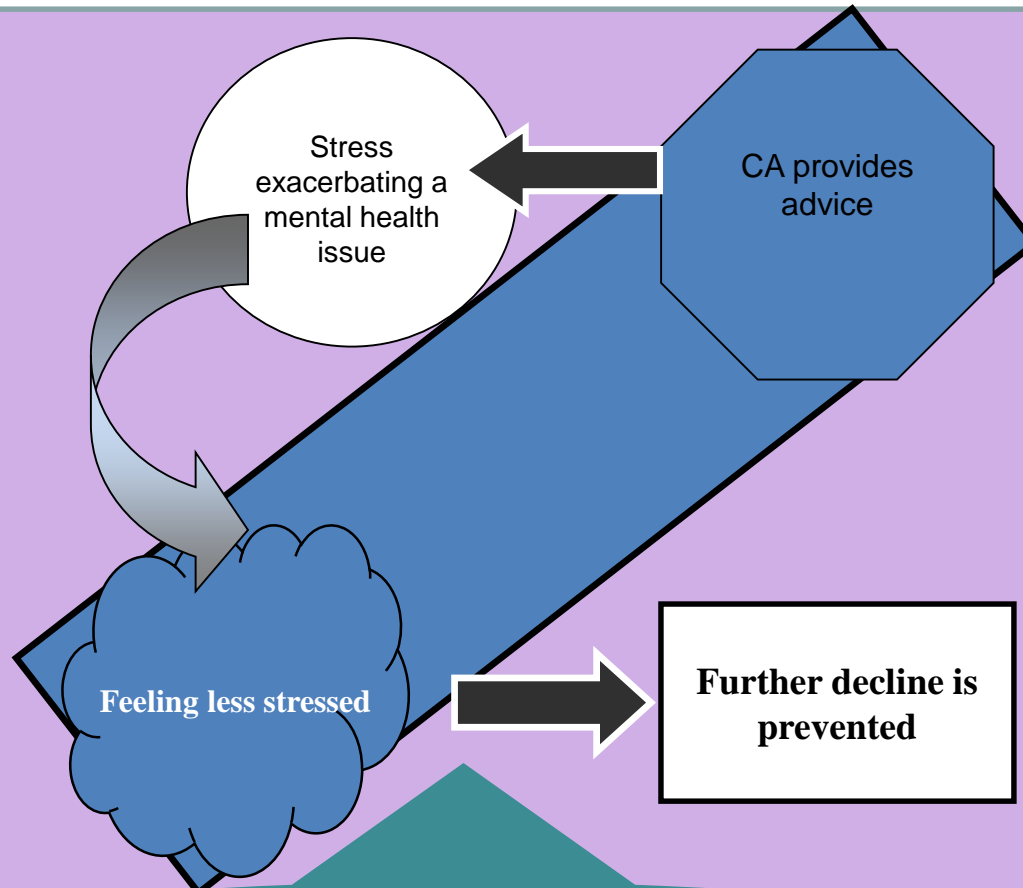


"[if hadn't received extra income] we wouldn't of been to go out ... we saved up a bit money er so we can have a couple of days out" [Client 5]

"But at the end of the day it's just mo- it's just money it's not gonna ch- change anything is it, I'm still gonna be with a bad back the rest of me life." [Client 11]



1c. Mental Health



"Well my partner wouldn't have been here. He wouldn't have been here. Like, he was at the point, when your finances are so bad cos he was suicidal and he wasn't right. So that (extra money and advice) made his life easier, and mine, it made us, like better." [Client 1]



2. Trust

- Hurley's (2006) model of trust suggests 6 different domains of trust, which were evident in the interviews with clients





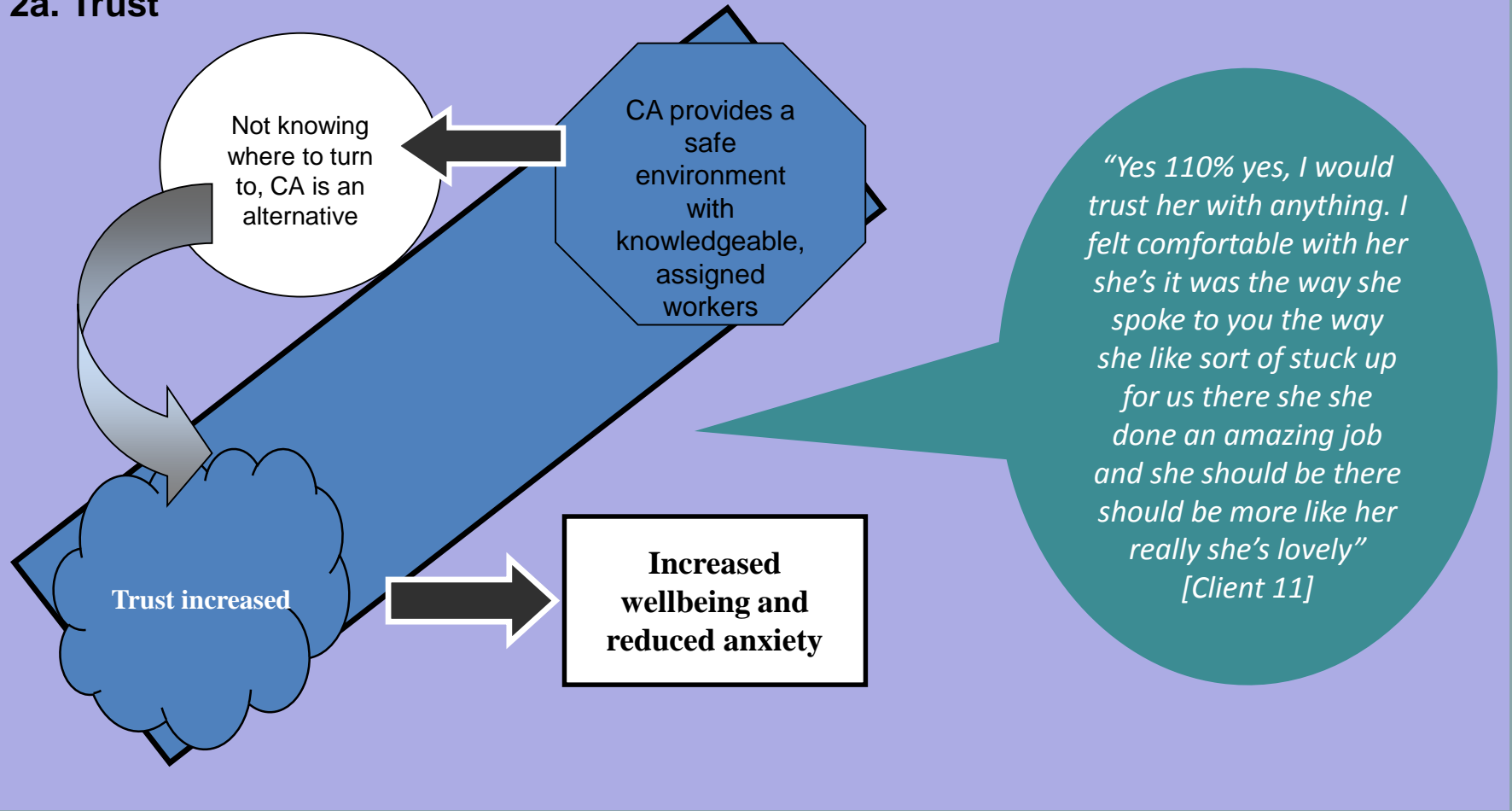
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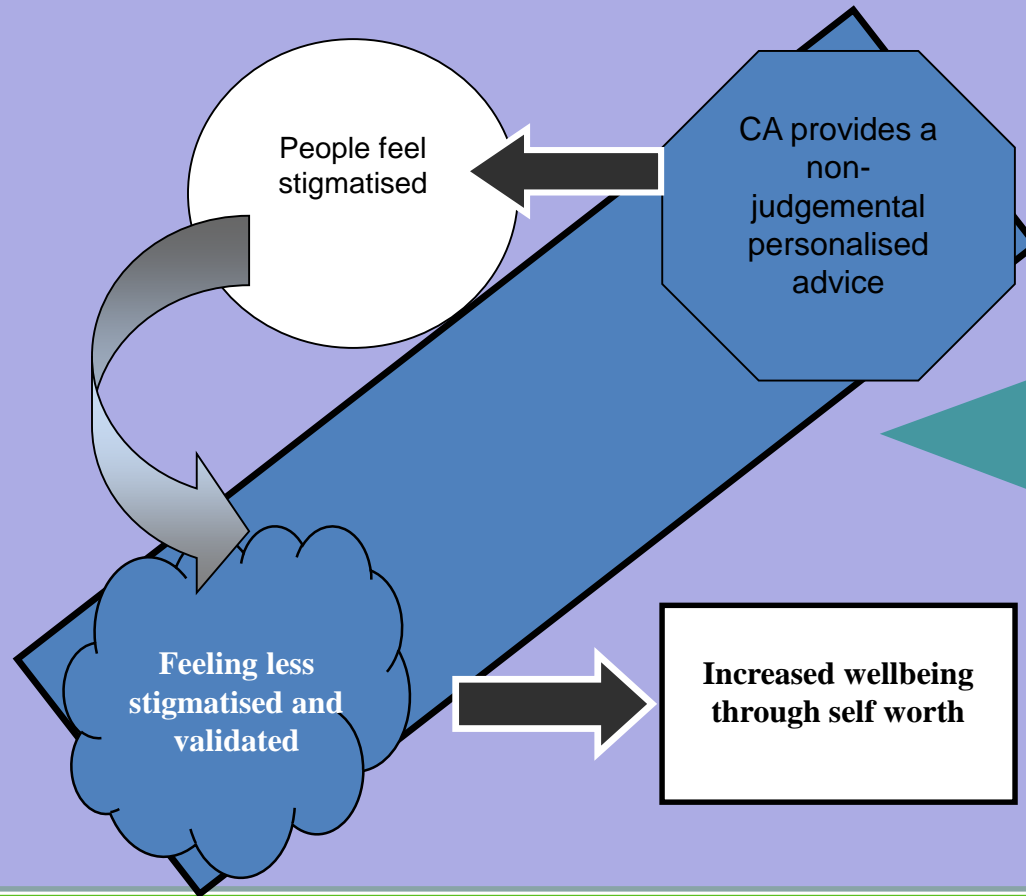
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2a. Trust





2b. Stigmatised position



"We've been to appointments before where people kind of say, well for one instance we went for an appointment and they said 'do you, you'll al- do always want to be a burden on your family [name] do you not want to get a job?"
[Client 13]



3. Buffer theory

- Interviews suggested that Citizens Advice Gateshead functions as a buffer between the client and the state.
- Bhabha's Third Space theory helps to support our findings – this theory explains the relationship and power structures between groups
- Citizens Advice Gateshead acted as a guide through, or creator of, this 'Third Space', allowing the state and the client to interact.



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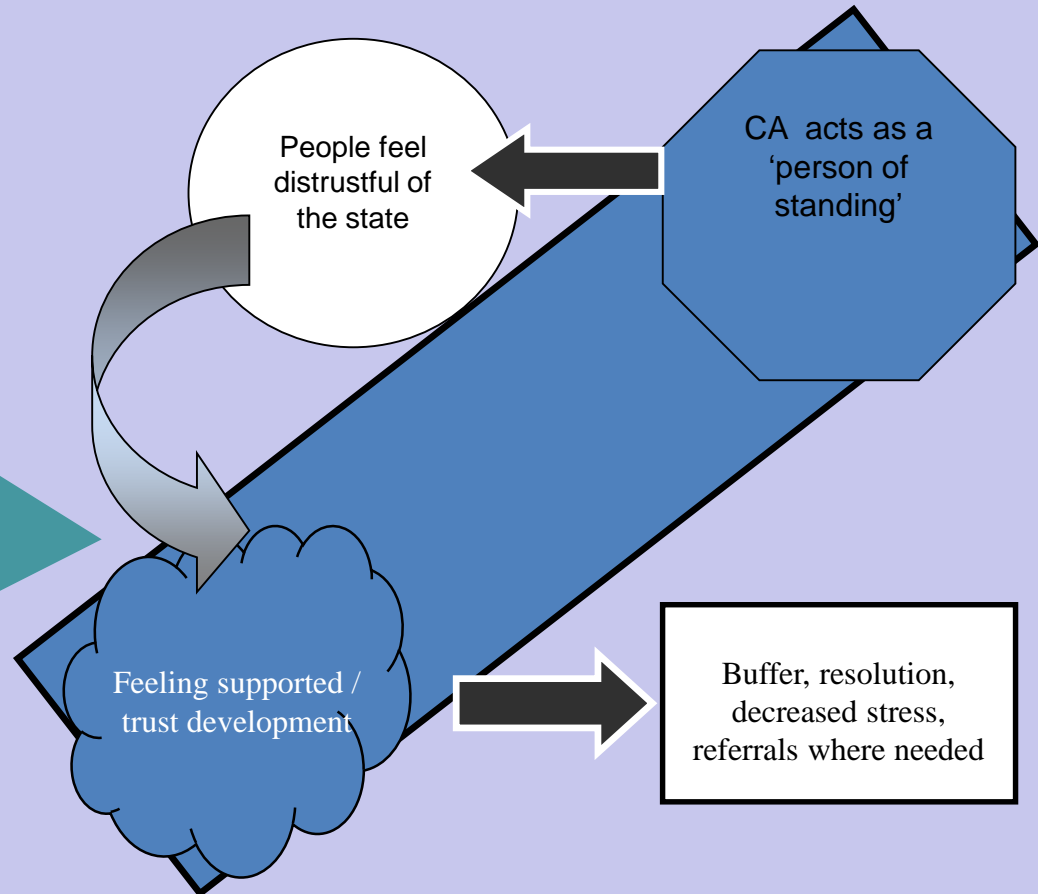
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3a. Buffer

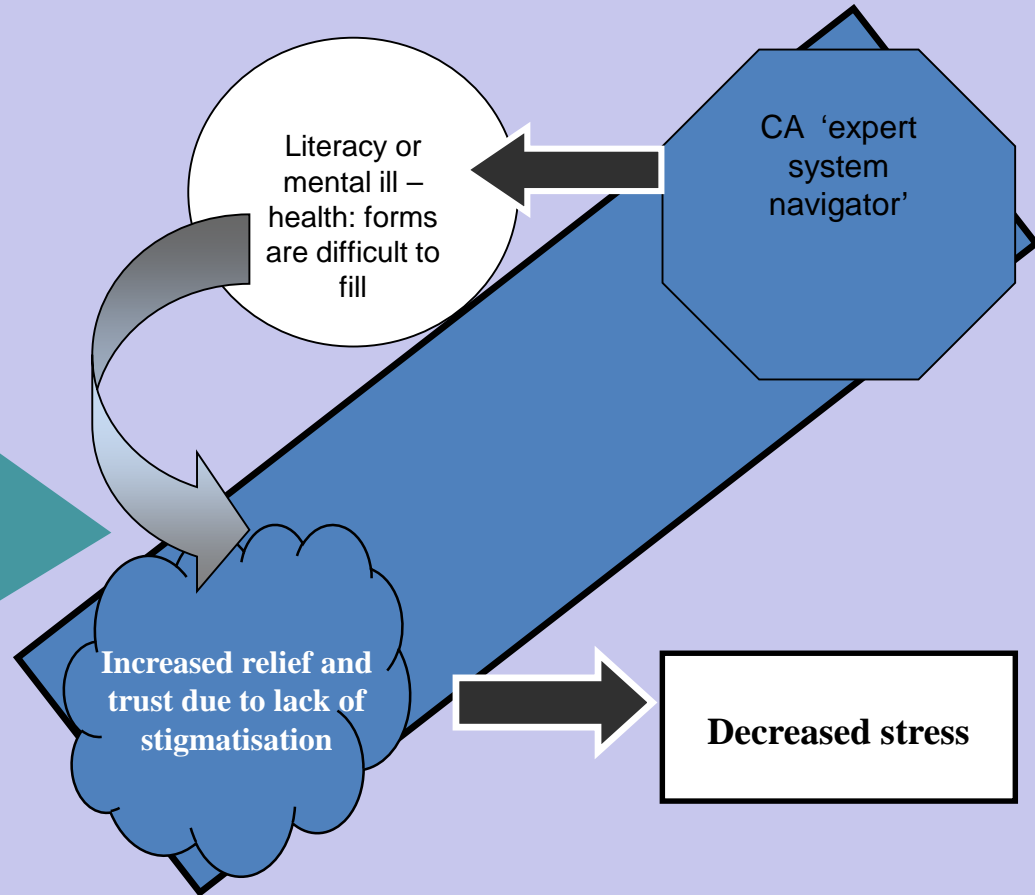
"We just the Tory government cause they don't want people like me to have access and help off people like you's (Citizens Advice) you know what I mean that tells you your rights and the law do you know what I mean and so it's them who I would say who would have a negative like opinion of it, I think it's a great thing you know what I mean." [Client 22]





3b. Form filling

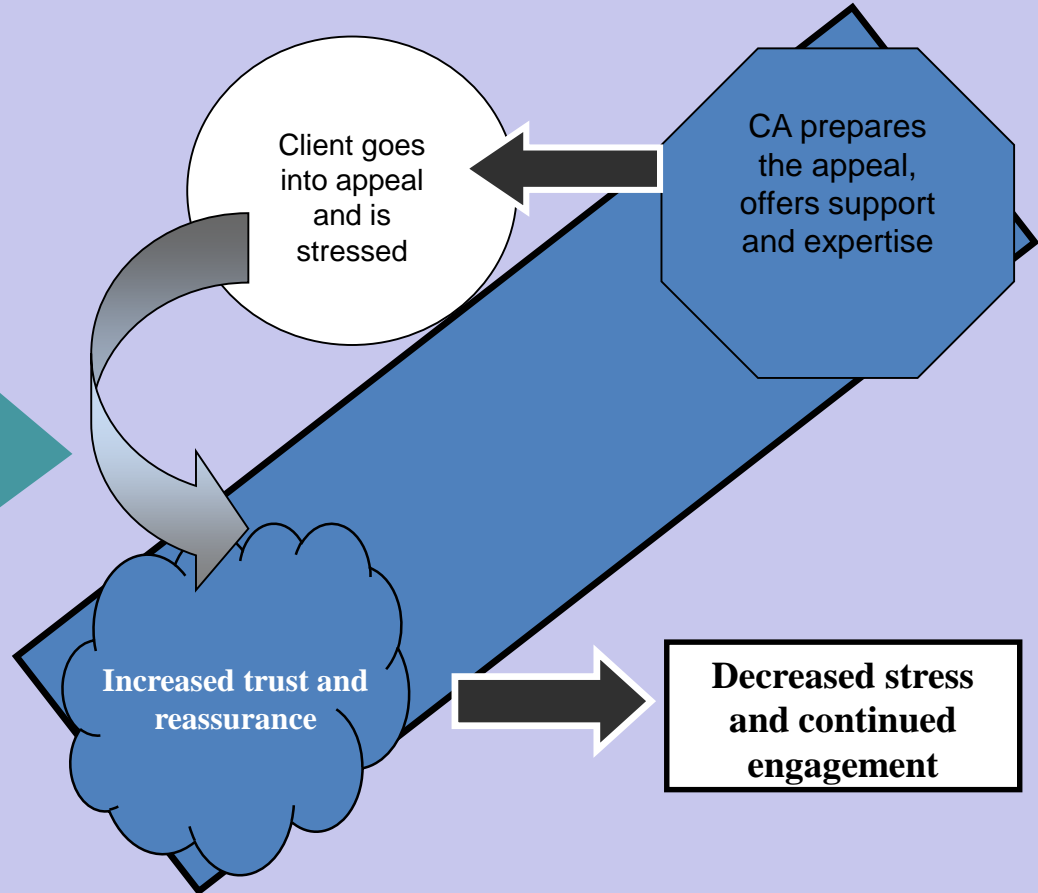
"(I) phoned her (advisor) straight away and she saw me and she filled in all the paper work which just took off like the pressure because you get legal documents and they're quite confusing, erm, so I wrote her a letter, stating everything and then from there she put it more into legal terms and we went to a tribunal. We had, it actually went that far. And when we went the judge actually said you don't have to say anything, what was put in writing was done eloquently enough that they just took that and that was it." [Client 24]





3c. Tribunal attendance

*"I felt more safe like with [adviser] being there cause she understood everything about my illness, d'you know what I mean, and I mean the paperwork she had to go through and that, she really did understand what I was going through and I won at the end it's all thanks to her"
[Client 11]*





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Conclusions

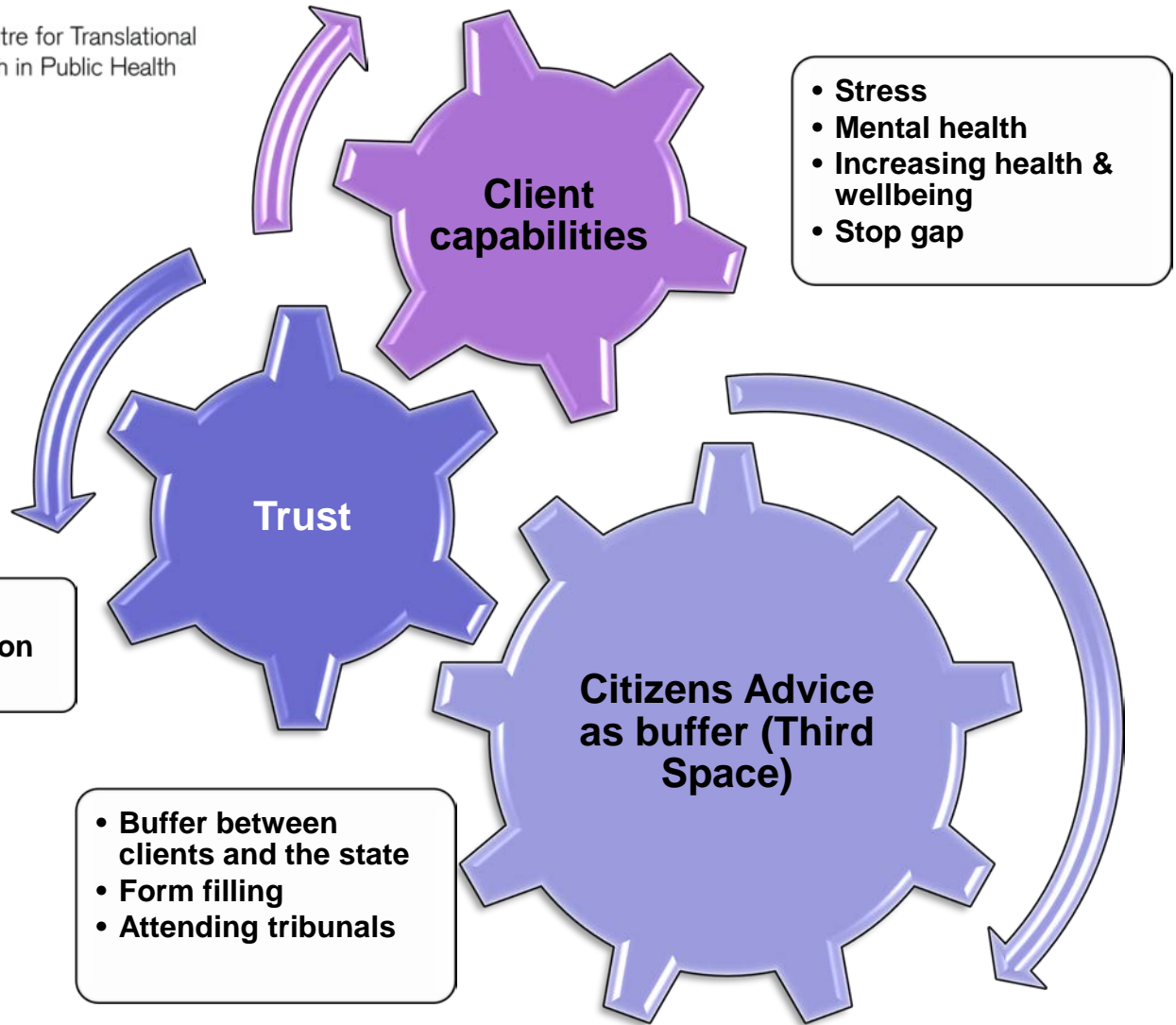
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Conclusions

- Use of a stress and wellbeing lens has allowed comparisons across client cases.
- Stress significantly decreased and wellbeing significantly increased from pre advice to follow up.
- Three categories of interview data explain the findings: client capabilities, trust, and buffer.
- Within these categories, there are 9 programme theories



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Any questions?

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