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**Gateshead  
Advice  
Centre**



# Uncovering the contexts and mechanisms through which an intensive citizens advice service has health impacts - emerging theories



Dr Sonia Dalkin, Dr Natalie Forster, Dr Monique Lhussier, Dr Phil Hodgson, Prof Sue Carr



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The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.



# Objectives

- To give a brief introduction to realist evaluation
- To describe the CAB project
- To demonstrate theory refinement
- To describe the working overall programme theory
- To briefly explain the use of abstract theory in the project



Work in progress: the theories presented are still under construction (refinement)

# 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).
- There is 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)
- Currently unknown: context and mechanisms through which advice services and associated financial or non-financial benefits may generate health improvements.



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# The Service:

- Evaluation of three intensive support services provided by Citizens Advice Gateshead:
  - Young People's service for people aged 16-25
  - Project for people with severe and enduring mental health conditions
  - GP referral project to facilitate access to advice for primary care patients

# Theory driven evaluation in a nutshell:

- ~ Policies and programmes are theories incarnate...
- ~ Evaluation is the process of testing those theories
- ~ It is not programmes that 'work'. Programmes offer resources to subjects. *And it is the subjects choosing to act on these resources that determine whether the programme works.* Their choices, of course, are always constrained by wider social circumstances surrounding the programme.

**Evaluation needs to explore these active explanatory ingredients ...**





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# Realist Evaluation:

Step 1: develop program theories

Step 2: test program theories using quantitative and qualitative data

Step 3: refine programme theories

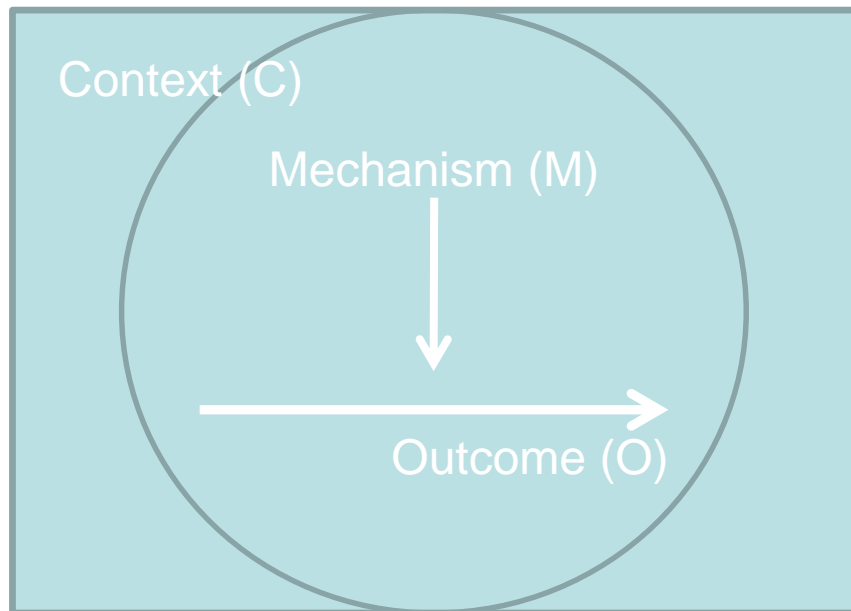


# Realist Methods:

Programme theories  
should be expressed in  
terms of Context  
Mechanism Outcome  
configurations

Pawson & Tilley (1997):

$$C + M = O$$







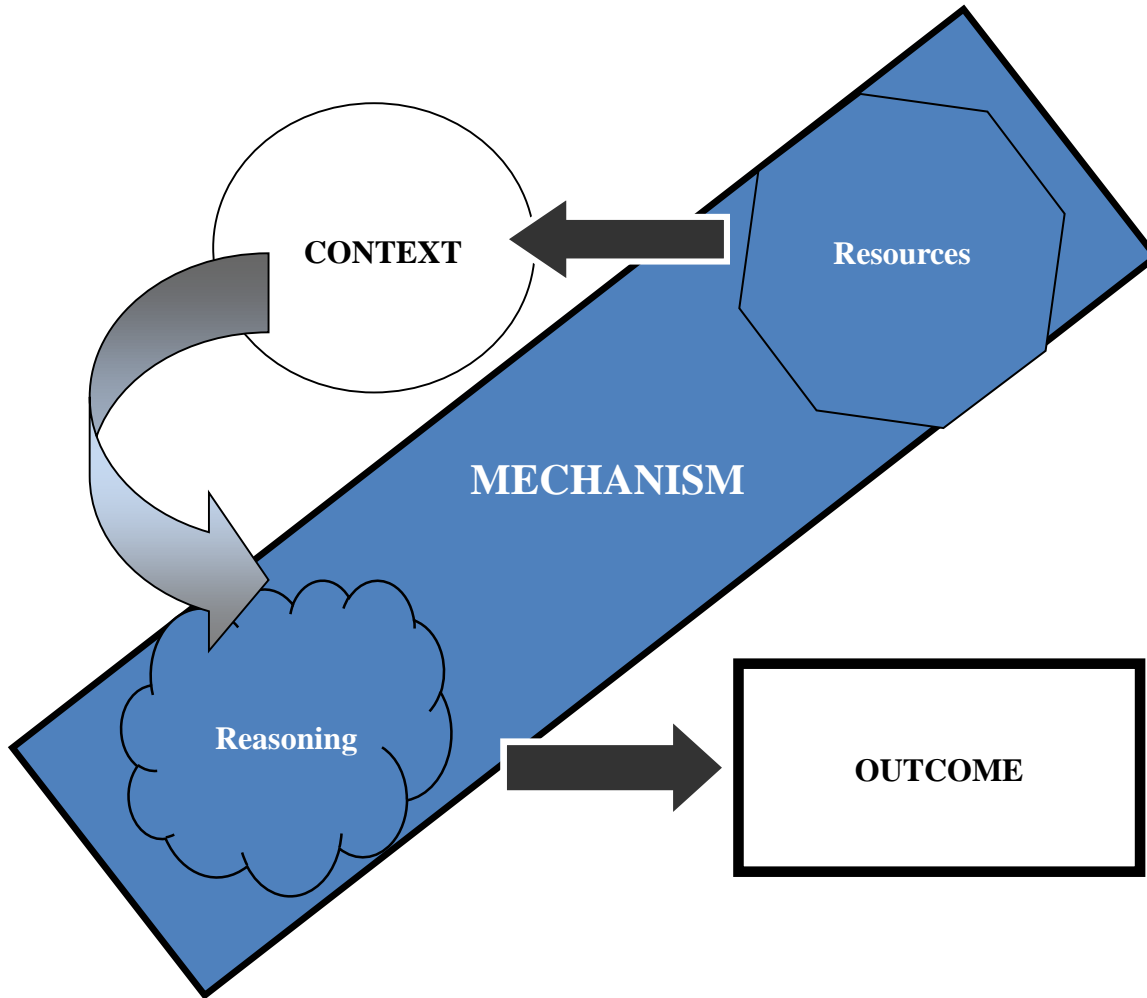
# Realist Methods:

- **Context:** Anything in the physical and social environment - Cultural norms/values, history, economic/financial conditions, existing public policy, outcomes of previous interventions (often found in comparative data)
- **Mechanism:** A combination of programme resource and stakeholder reasoning; the generative force that leads to an outcome. Triggered by contextual factors (often found in qualitative data)
- **Outcome:** intended or unintended, can be proximal, intermediate or final (often found in quantitative data)



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# Methods: Realist Evaluation

## **Realist evaluation operationalised in 5 phases:**

1. Developing programme theories
2. Refining programme theories
3. Testing programme theories through empirical data
4. Development of a bespoke data recording template to capture longer term impact;
5. Verification of findings with a range of CAB services.

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



Project phase	Methods
1. Building programme theories	Literature Interviews with CAB staff (n=3)
2. Refining programme theories	Interviews with CAB staff (n=3)
3. Testing programme theories with empirical data	Quantitative (questionnaire, n = 191, 91% follow up): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceived stress scale</li><li>• Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale</li><li>• Lifestyle questions</li></ul> Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interviews with CAB clients (n= 23)</li></ul>
4. Development of a bespoke data recording template to capture long term impact	Collaborative work with Gateshead CAB staff
5. Verification of findings with a range of CAB services	Events with wider CAB stakeholders (n=3)



<http://www.qsrinternational.com/blog/how-researchers-use-nvivo-to-enhance-transparency>

**Data management processes using NVivo  
(illustrated with select programme theories)**

CAB staff interview transcripts stored in NVivo as sources and data coded against each programme theory node

“If the client is vulnerable – if the DWP doesn’t do their part – they’re not going to chase them up and they don’t know. So you’ve got to be there and, you know, make sure that everything is, you know, given to that client.”

“The wellbeing benefit of having some platform, for a while, where you’re not scared of being pushed off it at any given point. I mean that, to me, it’s invaluable”

“Most of them [clients] say they feel much better because they feel like that stuff is off their shoulders now, and they can concentrate on some of the other things that are going on in their life”

**One NVivo node for each programme theory about how CAB improves people’s health**

**Theory 1:** In a context of neo-liberalism, CAB advice leads to increased knowledge about rights and a feeling of support to challenge people in authority, resulting in confidence to take action and reduced stress

**Theory 2:** In a context where financial stress is exacerbating a client’s mental health problem, CAB provides advice which reduces the person’s stress , preventing a continuing decline in their condition and meaning they can continue to self-manage.

**Theory 3:** In times of stress, CAB workers take responsibility for finding solutions to people’s problems, reducing the burden and increasing the person’s locus of control with respect to their health, resulting in greater capacity to prioritise health and wellbeing

Linked memo created for each theory node to record debate and decision making during collaborative meetings to develop and refine programme theories

Iterative process whereby theories inform, and are refined in response to interview data



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# Initial programme theory 1 – Lack of trust

Context – Client has not accessed CAB before

Mechanism (resource) - CAB do not create a trusting environment

Mechanism (reasoning) – Client does not have trust in CAB

Outcome – Client does not disclose all of their problems and therefore financial difficulties are not fully resolved; the client remains highly stressed

# Refining PT1

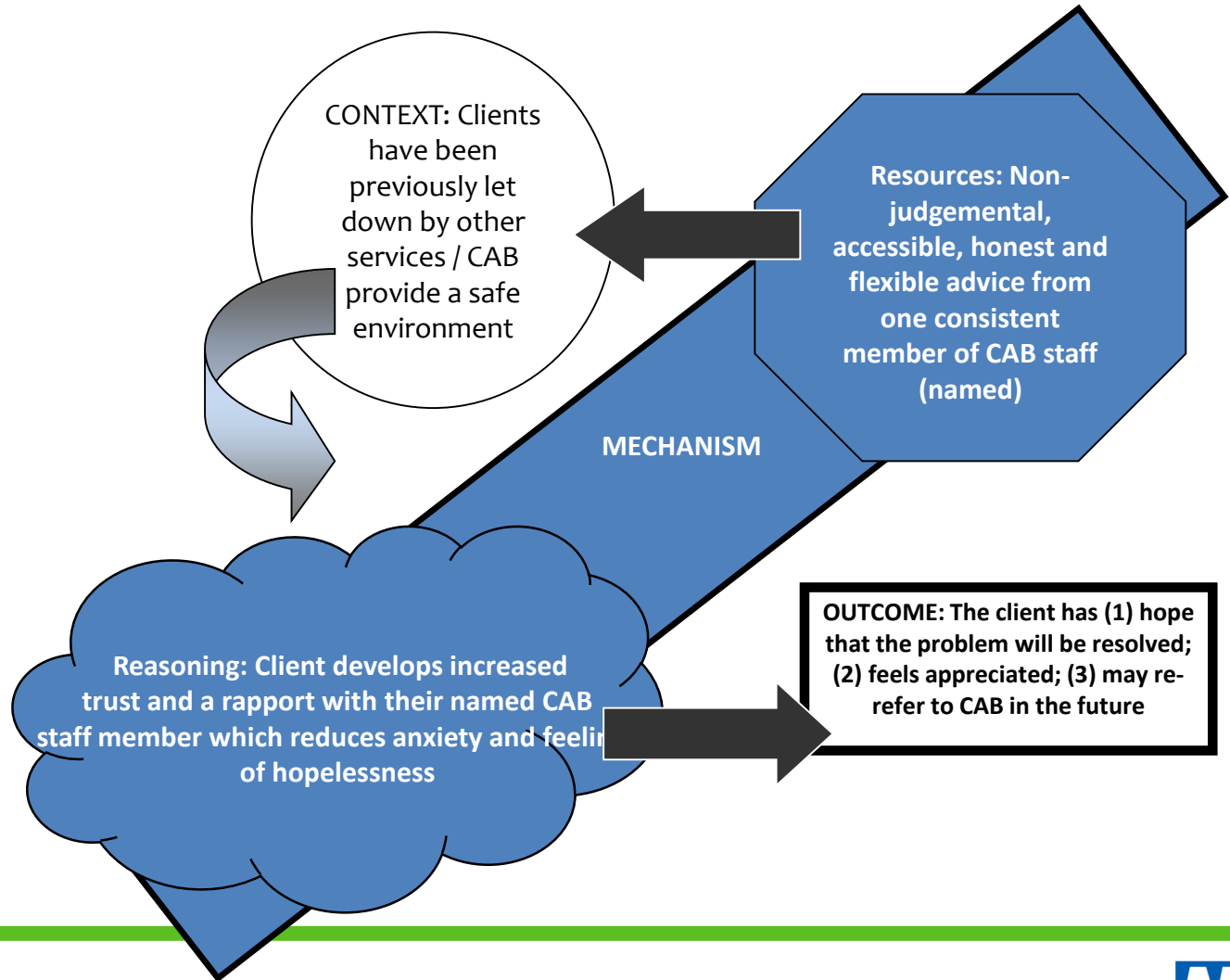
*Because [CAB Advisor's] always been there, from day one, [CAB Advisor] always been there cause I was saying to our [name] just the other week god help us if [CAB Advisor] was ever to pack up cause [CAB Advisor] knows the way I am. If I had to go to somebody new and start from scratch I wouldn't be able to do it, I just wouldn't be able to do it. [CAB Advisor] knows me like, you know. A new person doesn't and I couldn't go through it all again no way (Client 12)*

*She's [CAB Advisor] really supportive and with the condition me husband has (paranoia), he sort of has to build up trust with you if you know what I meant (laughs)... yeah we've been lucky enough when we've spoke to [CAB Advisor] to have like her every time to deal with whatever questions he's you know got back to her with or things like that so that's built up trust obviously having the same case worker (Client 13)*

*[CAB Advisor]'ll sort it out anyway cause she's spot on. I wouldn't, I would never ever want anybody else bar [CAB Advisor] because she as I say she's known the family for a lot of years (Client 12)*

*I would say so (trusting CAB staff). I mean, at the end of the day they're a voluntary organisation and they're certainly there to... You know, the feeling I get is they're there to represent you as a client, not an organisation. You know what I mean?[...] they're focused on you. You know, they haven't got the interests of, you know... You know, for instance, the DWP or the council or, you know, anybody like that... (Client 17)*

# Refined programme theory 1 (~~Lack of~~ Trust)





# Initial programme theory 2 - Expertise

Context: The forms are burdensome and very difficult to complete.

Mechanism (Resource): CAB fills in the form for clients, using their expertise of the system

Mechanism (reasoning): Relief and increased trust due to CAB staff's knowledge

Outcome: less stress experienced, form is accepted and processed



# Refining PT2

*Yeah yeah erm because you know for a fact [CAB Advisor] knows what she's doing, she knows the law, she knows things that I haven't got a clue about so I feel really confident that she is, I've got the best person with is er at these tribunals and hearings and that, I feel totally confident that [CAB Advisor] gives it 100 percent and is real- she cares, it's not just a job I think with [CAB Advisor], she cares er she's phoned me up before and asked me 'do you know you could be entitled to this' or so she cares genuinely about the people she represents. (Client 5)*

*Yeah we did, we did because when you get all these forms and you don't know what to do and [CAB Advisor] says well I'll do it, you think god, thank god for that because, some of the words and what they want to know like, I didn't really understand it, so she filled all of it in on our behalf so that was good. (Client 1)*

*Mental health issues. Depression and such like. And I just couldn't get my head round actually filling the form in. (Client 2)*

*Well, she's... She seems like a friend. I think I could talk to her about anything, to be fair. And comparing with the housing – dealing with them – she just knows their ways and she... Well, just the housing benefit, the way they put it down. It... Well, [CAB Advisor] knew that they put it... It's their little code, because I just couldn't understand it – "[CAB Advisor], what does that mean?" And she went, "Oh, well, they know what they're doing. Blah-de-blah." And she... She just seemed to know all the little tricks of the departments if you like. (Client 2)*

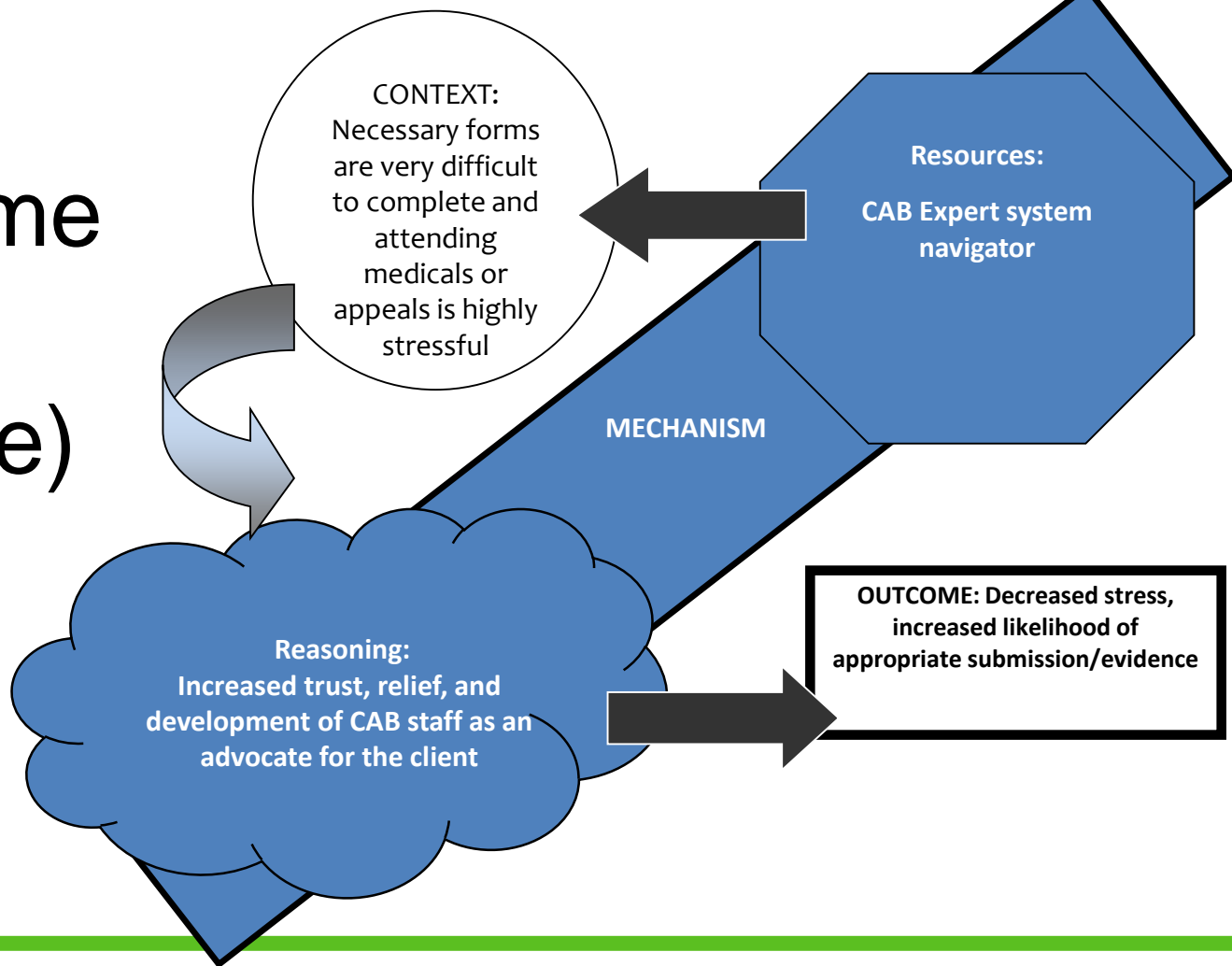


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# Refined programme theory 2 (Expertise)



# Initial programme theory 3: social isolation

**Context** - the client is socially isolated

**Mechanism (resource)** - increased finances can decrease social isolation / CAB worker available for client to discuss issues

**Mechanism (reasoning)** - In the case of increased finances the client may feel less reliant on people, as they have finances to engage in social activities.

In the case of CAB staff reducing social isolation, this may reduce the clients anxiety. Furthermore, off loading issues to staff, when clients potentially don't have another outlet, can result in increased feelings of companionship and reduced anxiety ('a problem shared is a problem halved')

**Outcome** - Less stressed and increased wellbeing, reduced social isolation



# Refining programme theory 3 – social isolation

*Yeah, yeah, er, no I don't mind ringing [CAB Advisor] cause then [CAB Advisor] knows exactly what condition I'm in. I don't mind [CAB Advisor] ringing me but [CAB Advisor] got no need to ring me unless I, she knows I need the help. (Client 12)*

*And I think sometimes when I ring her [CAB Advisor] I can like let off steam and she doesn't judge is. (Client 13)*

*I don't know maybe it's me but erm I found her very easy to talk to and erm I couldn't thank her [CAB Advisor] enough simple as that. (Client 7)*

*I just wanna say that [CAB Advisor] did an amazing job and she's per- she's brilliant and I like her like I say even if she was passing I'd say come in have a cup of coffee you know what I mean she's a lovely woman and I wouldn't be I wouldn't be sitting laughing now if it wasn't for her helping is cause I wouldn't a had a clue (Client 11)*



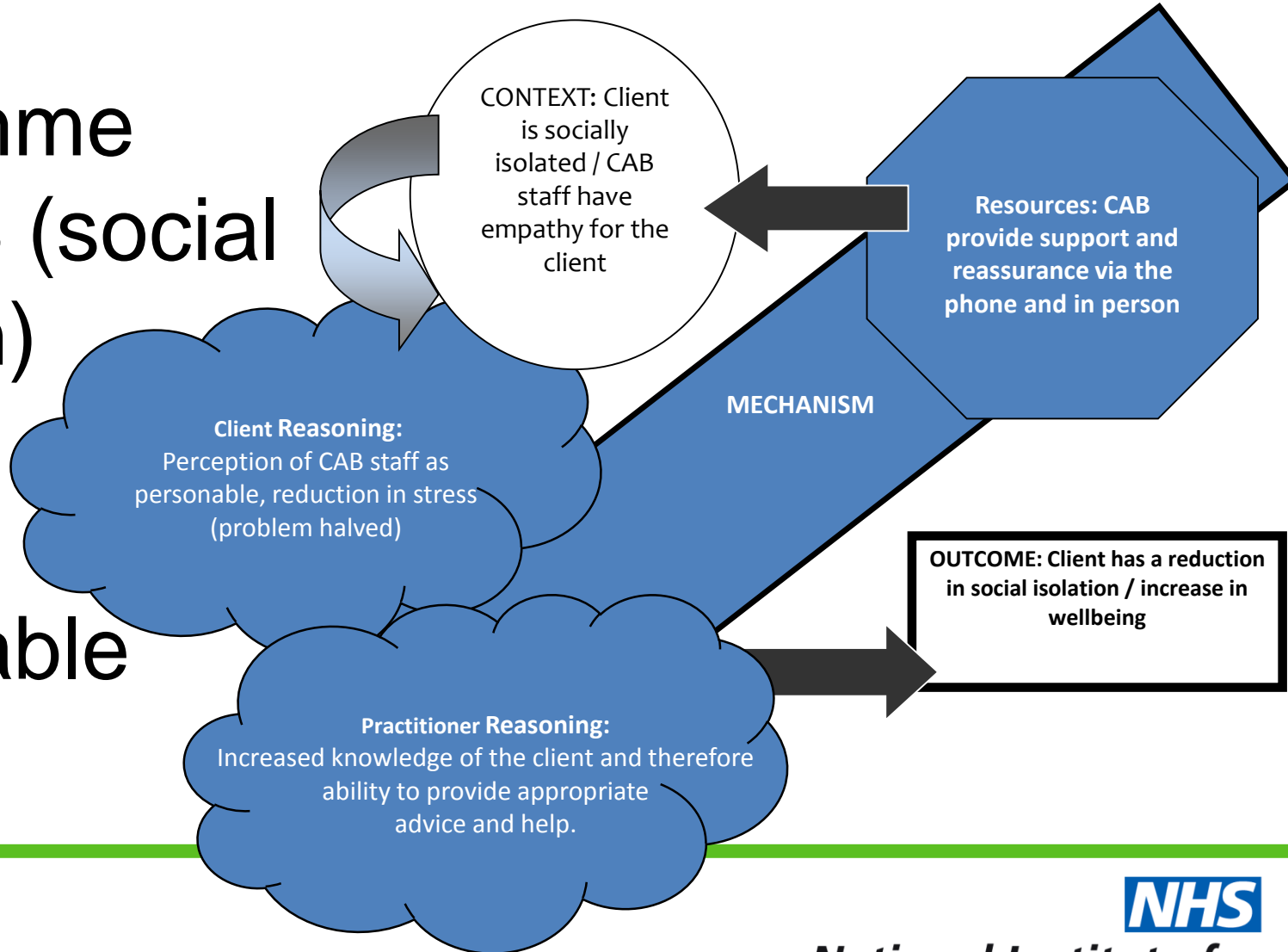
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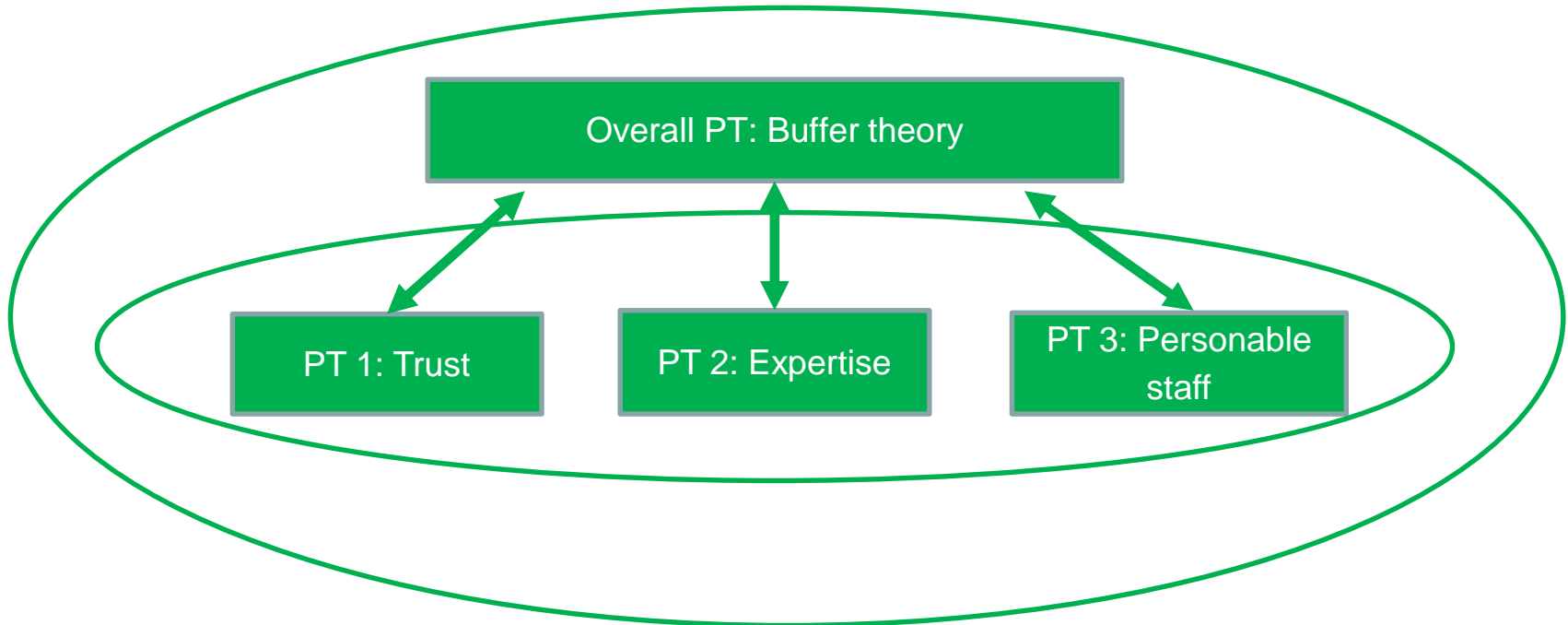
# Refined programme theory 3 (social isolation)

# Personable staff





# Buffer theory (1)



# Buffer Theory (2)

- CAB functions as a buffer between the client and the state. They do this through their trusting relationship with clients (M1), their expertise (M2) and through providing a holistic service (M3).
- Client self re-referral to CAB is also enhanced by the aforementioned mechanisms
- In the context of a CAB client applying for welfare benefits to the state alone (the 'direct' route, without CAB advice) the clients available resources change and the mechanisms cannot fire.





# Refining the buffer theory

*And if it wasn't for you's (CAB staff) explaining like like like wh- what I was entitled to and about the law do you know what I mean and things like that er I, I would have been stuck I would have lost everything. (Client 22)*

*Well when I phoned up the, DWP to update me tax credits and stuff like that, they just talk to you like you're stupid. Some of them, I mean sometimes you can get some lovely people, but sometimes you just get some one's where you just want to smack your head off a brick wall. They just haven't got a clue what they're going on about. They get mixed information from everybody and like I say, little mini dictators... I shouldn't say that. (Client 3)*

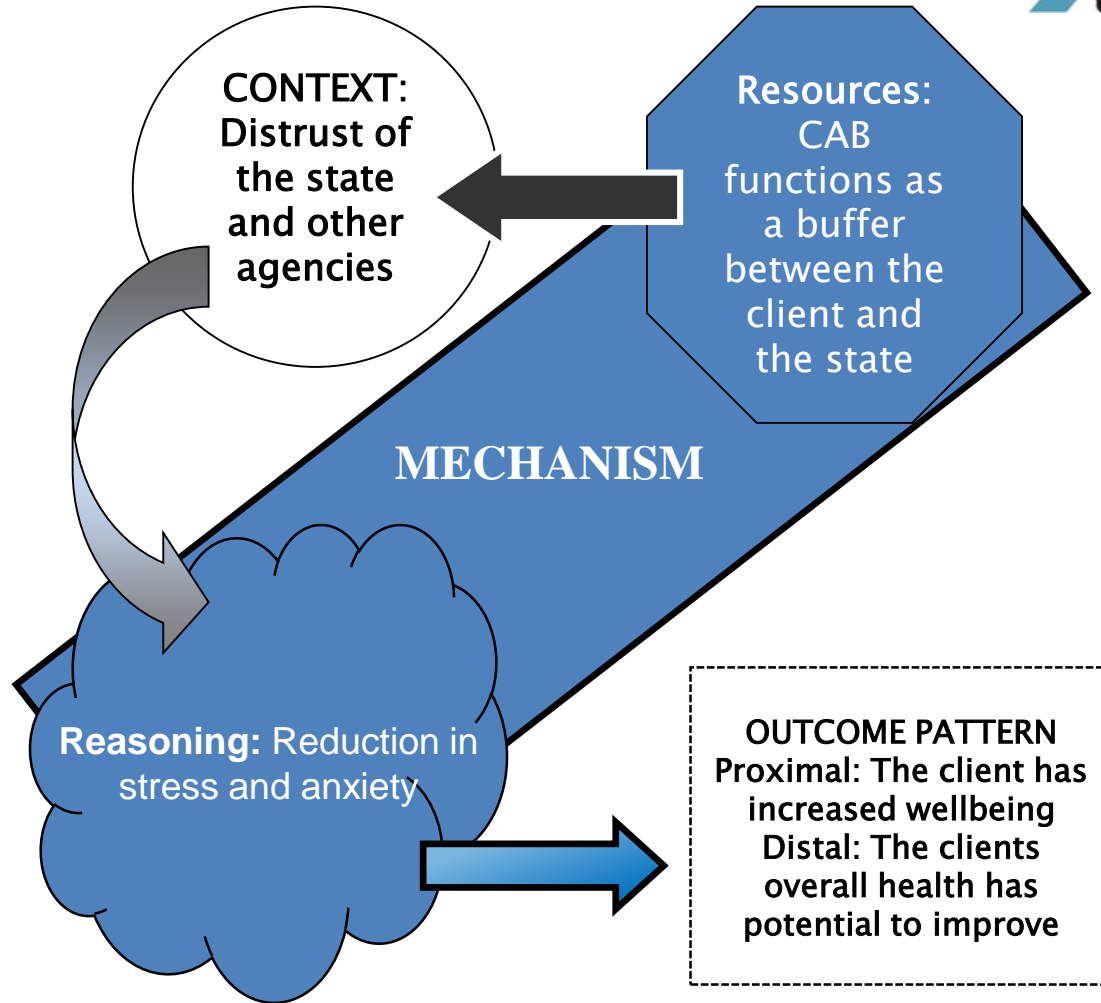
*Well I worry about like you s- I've seen it on the telly about various citizens advice's bureaus having their funding cut and stuff it is a worry if the citizens advice is not there I think people like me wouldn't have anybody to turn to, the government would tell we what's what and that would be it and er it's a case of know ya place and do as you're told. (Client 5)*

*Wey just the Tory government cause they don't want people like me to have access and help off people like you's (CAB) 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)*



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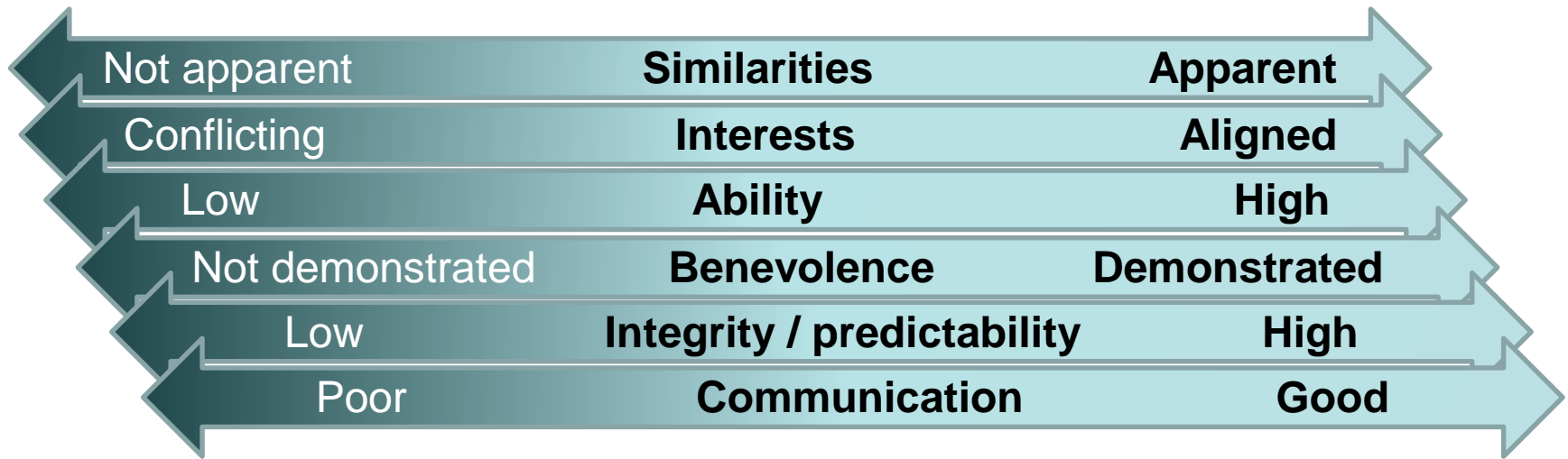


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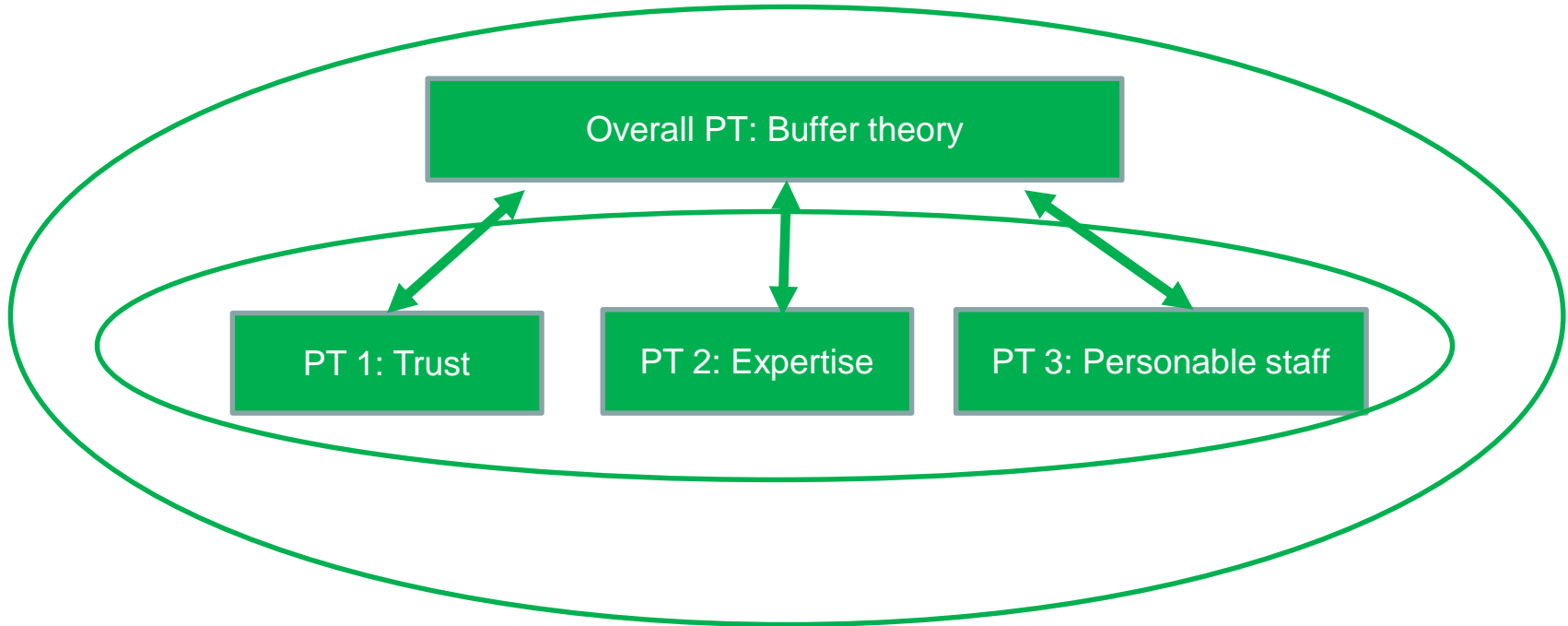


# Abstract theory





# Where to next?





# Where to next?

Overall PT 1: Buffer theory

Overall programme theory 2: Trust

Ability

Benevolence

Interests

Integrity/Communication

Predictability

Similarities

PT 1:  
Expertise

PT 2: Personable  
staff

Now interviewing iteratively and enquiring about these constructs of trust / searching previously collected data we for them



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Integrity/ Communication

Predictability

*“Ah she was really, really we-, she was asking how I was she was keeping is informed so she was a god send she really is.” Client 11*

*“She told is ‘don’t worry about it, everything will be alright’ and as I say, true to her word, they were. She’s never failed us once, and that goes for the wife as well she never failed us once.” Client 12*

*“But when you come here you prefer to see... Because we always see the same person, yeah. So he’ll only speak to [CAB Advisor]” Client 14*



Interests

*“Yes, yeah. I would say they are... I suppose you get the impression that they are impartial. And you’re there to, sort of, I suppose, champion, sort of, you know... People’s needs, really.” Client 17*

*“I don’t think you could do that sort of job and have it just as a job, it has to be something you’re really bothered about hasn’t it? Yeah so that was great.”*

*Client 24*

*Yeah, yeah, they’re focused on you. You know, they haven’t got the interests of, you know... You know, for instance, the DWP or the council or, you know, anybody like that...” Client 17*



## Similarities

*“You can’t fault, like... I know you can’t fault the team, but [CAB Advisor] herself... Like, when she came to the tribunal with me, she was going through a really rough time” Client 14*

*You talk about everything, you sit and chat, I mean, well she generally talks about her two littlun’s at the same time.” Client 23*

*“I think [CAB advisor] had been through a bit of a time herself and I think she just, yeah, there was a caring side and you thought well yes, bit of empathy.” Client 24*





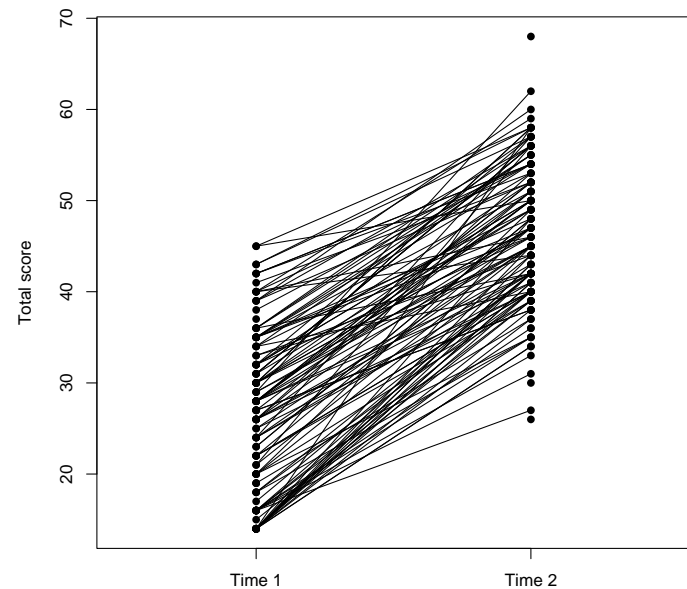
# Layering theory

- **Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).** Helping us to explain why CAB staff try to establish similarities with clients since support is more effective when people giving and receiving support share identity.
- **Hurley's model of Trust**
- **Third Space (Bhabha, 2004)** Third Space can help us explore the importance of the buffer theory. It facilitates an understanding of the incompatibility of the state's systems and capabilities of the clients, and how this may drive perception of each other and lead to the requirement of a third space – Citizens Advice



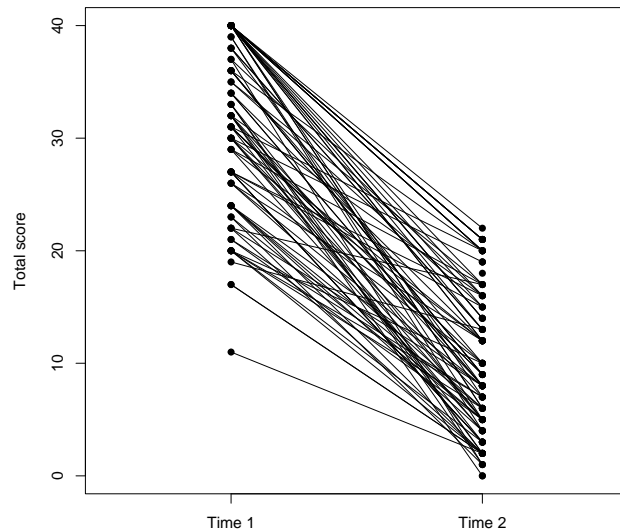
# Quantitative data: WEMWBS

- Plot clearly shows the trend for higher responses at the second visit.
- Significant increase in wellbeing ( $p < 0.001$ ) from first contact with CAB to follow up contact.





# Quantitative data: Perceived Stress Scale



- Plot clearly shows the trend for lower responses at the second visit.
- Significant decrease in stress ( $p < 0.001$ ) from first contact with CAB to follow up contact.



# Conclusions

- Trust development, personable staff and staff expertise are the foundation theories which lead to the overall programme theory of 'CAB as a buffer between the client and the state'
- These programme theories were supplemented through use of an abstract theory of trust (Hurley, 2006).
- Social Identity theory and Third Space theory now also being used to enhance understanding of the programme theories
- Quantitative data supports qualitative findings
- Specific health outcomes have been difficult to evidence in the research (e.g. reduction in smoking, healthier eating) – hence, the focus on stress, anxiety and wellbeing.
- Presented a small portion of the evidence due to time purposes

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# Any questions?

@SoniaDalkin

@MoniqueLhussier

@ForsterNatalie

@Susan\_M\_Carr