INSIGHT 06

ENDING WELL

What responsibilities remain when support, a project or an organisation comes to an end?



By Jessica Hosseiny
& Jonny Willis

REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB

RYS Insights draw on ten years of frontline work alongside children and young people on the move.

They include contributions from former staff, volunteers and leaders, presented through case studies, first-person accounts, questions for discussion and practical prompts.

They can be read alone or discussed with a team. They are intended to support reflection and discussion, rather than provide fixed answers or concrete solutions.



This insight can be read alongside these RYS Learning Hub Resources:

INSIGHT 03

Moral Edges

Explores the difficult ethical questions that can arise when care, responsibility and the limits of our role come into tension.



PRACTICE GUIDE 01

The RYS Practice Principles

Introduces the principles and approach that shaped how RYS worked alongside children and young people on the move.



TOOL 04

The Boundary Check

A practical tool for reflecting on boundaries, responsibility and whether the support you are providing remains appropriate.





IN THIS INSIGHT

Ending well is part of the work.

Whether it is a relationship, a role, a project or an organisation that is ending, responsibility does not disappear simply because the work is stopping.

Drawing on ten years of Refugee Youth Service practice, including our own decision to close, this Insight explores what it can mean to recognise an ending, prepare for it and leave with care.





01

KNOW WHEN TO END

Organisations and projects should not continue simply because ending is difficult. Keep asking whether the work, in its current form, can still justify continuing.



02

GIVE THE ENDING TIME

Naming an ending early creates space to plan, communicate and prepare rather than allowing change to arrive abruptly.



03

KNOW WHERE YOUR ROLE ENDS

People may still need support when your role comes to an end. Continuing need does not mean one worker, service or organisation should remain involved indefinitely.



04

PROTECT CONTINUITY

A good handover is about more than tasks. Think about the relationships, trust and knowledge that need somewhere to go.



05

MARK WHAT IS ENDING

Make space for sadness, gratitude, reflection and celebration. Something can matter even when it cannot continue.



06

LEAVE SOMETHING USEFUL BEHIND

Consider what can be transferred, shared or carried forward so that the value created does not disappear with the organisation or project.

01 KNOW WHEN TO END

Continuing is not always the responsible choice.



In work built around relationships and need, stopping can feel like failure. There will almost always be more to do, more people who could benefit and another reason to keep going. For organisations built around a strong sense of purpose, it can be easier to keep going than to step back and ask whether continuing is still the right thing to do.

This can be particularly difficult in work built around care. When commitment to a cause becomes tied to identity, loyalty and responsibility, choosing to stop can feel like abandoning the people you set out to support.

But continuing is a choice too.

At Refugee Youth Service, this question emerged gradually. The needs we cared about had not disappeared. But funding had become harder, the external environment had changed, and sustaining the organisation increasingly demanded energy that was no longer translating into the work we wanted to do. Eventually, the question was no longer simply whether RYS could continue, but whether we could still justify continuing in its current form.

Ending does not erase what came before. Nor does it mean that the need has ended. Sometimes it means recognising that a particular organisation, project or way of working has reached its limit.

The responsibility is to notice that point early enough to make a deliberate choice, rather than continuing until circumstances make the choice for you.

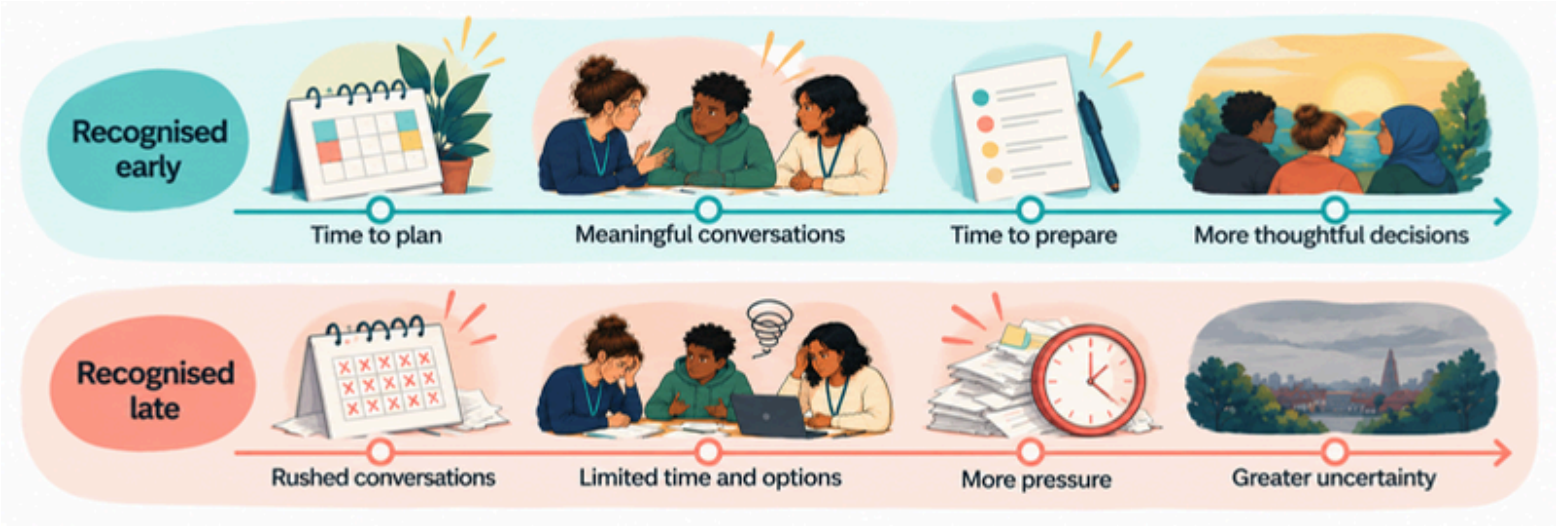


See the practical pages at the end of this Insight for questions to help reflect on whether something should continue, and prompts for planning an ending.

02 GIVE THE ENDING TIME

A good ending starts well before the final day.

Once an ending has been decided, time becomes one of the most important things you can give people. Announcing a departure, project closure or organisational closure as late as possible might feel protective. It can avoid difficult conversations and uncertainty. But it also takes away people's opportunity to prepare.



At Refugee Youth Service, we saw this at different scales. When a member of the team decided to leave, giving plenty of notice created time to transfer responsibilities, relationships and knowledge, and to acknowledge what her departure meant.

When we later decided to close RYS itself, we tried to apply the same principle: making the decision early enough to give staff, partners and young people time to understand what was happening and plan for what came next.

Time does not make an ending painless. But it makes a more thoughtful ending possible.

It creates space for questions, handovers and honest conversations. It allows people to experience the ending gradually rather than discovering that something important has suddenly disappeared.

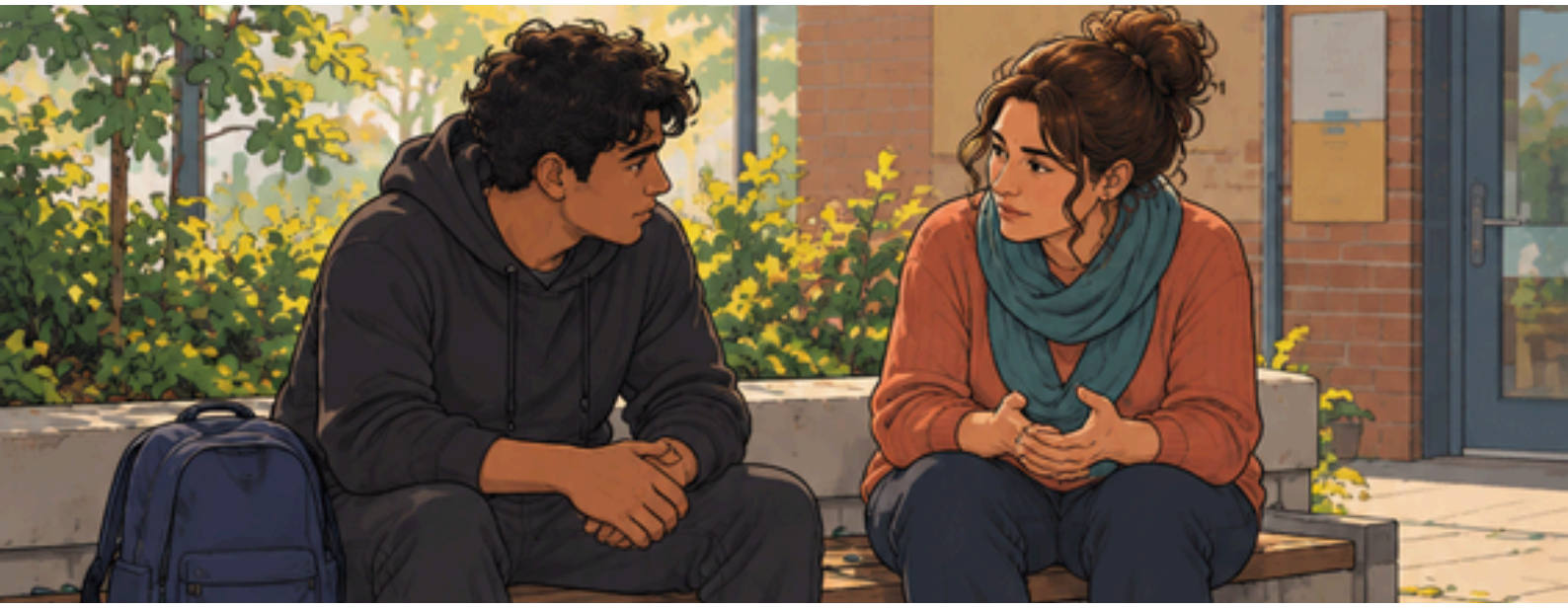
Not every ending can be planned far in advance. Sometimes decisions have to be made quickly. But where you have a choice, resist the temptation to delay difficult news simply because it is difficult to give.

Giving the ending time can lead to a more considered, respectful and supportive process for everyone involved.



03 KNOW WHERE YOUR ROLE ENDS

Need continuing does not always mean your role should.



In work built around relationships, endings are rarely neat. A person may still be struggling. The next service may not offer the same relationship. There may be gaps in support. Stepping away can feel deeply uncomfortable.

We experienced this when supporting young people through age disputes. Our role was to help them challenge an incorrect age decision and access the rights and services they were entitled to as a child. When that process ended, our support usually ended too.

That could mean ending a relationship with a young person we had worked alongside for months, even when other parts of their life remained difficult. They might still be isolated, struggling with their mental health, living with uncertainty or want the relationship with a trusted worker to continue. Attempts to connect them with other organisations and sources of support did not always work.

That made endings uncomfortable. The young person's need had not necessarily ended. Our particular role in their life had.

The temptation in those moments was to keep extending the relationship. But doing so indefinitely would blur the purpose and boundaries of our work and make promises we could not keep.

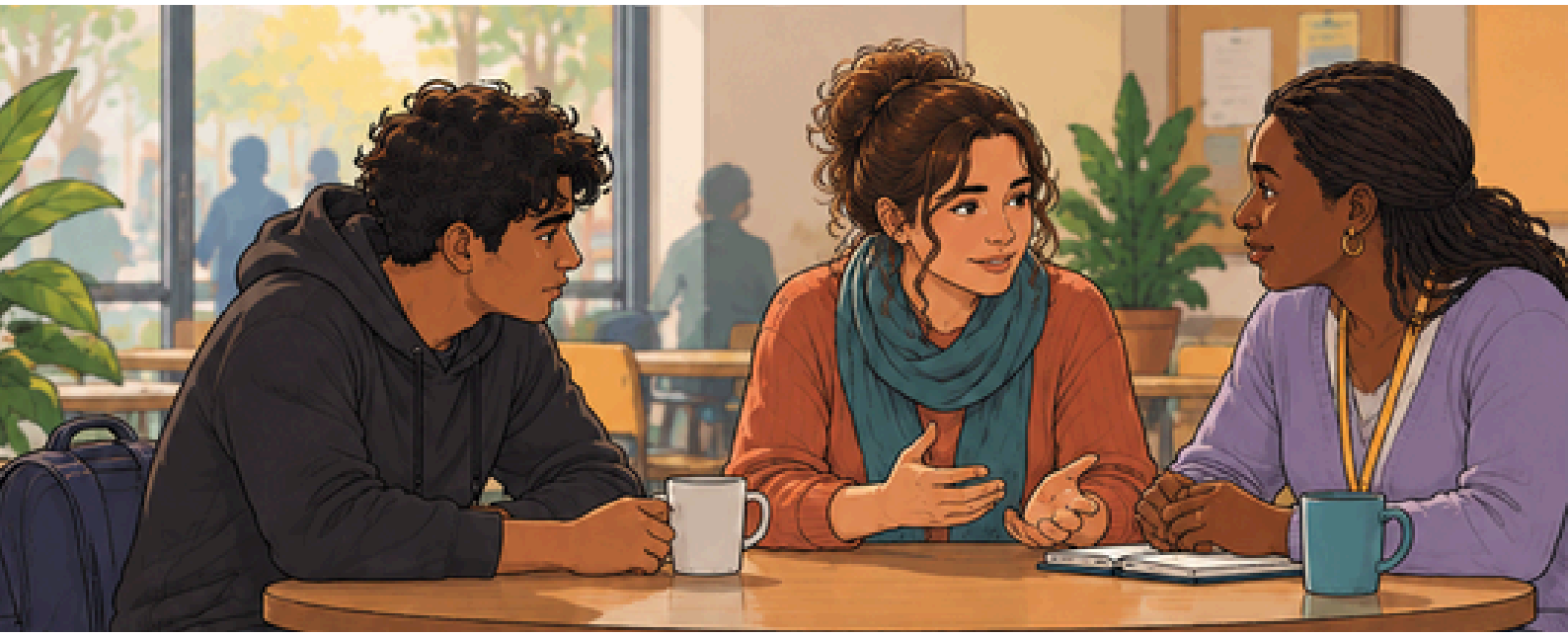
There was another difficult part of this: accepting that we might never know what happened next. We could make introductions and try to ensure they had other support, but would often lost sight of what happened in their life afterwards. Learning to live with that uncertainty was part of accepting the limits of our role.

A boundary is not the same as abandonment, and ending well means being honest about what you can and cannot continue to offer. It means preparing someone for the ending, doing what you reasonably can to connect them with what comes next, and avoiding promises that cannot be sustained.

The aim is not to make every ending feel complete. Sometimes it won't. It is to make sure that the ending is clear, considered and honest.

04 PROTECT CONTINUITY

When something ends, think carefully about what needs to carry forward.



Good continuity is about relationships, knowledge and trust as well as practical responsibilities.

A worker may hold knowledge that took months to develop. A young person may have told their story repeatedly before finally trusting someone. Partners may have learned how to work together. When a relationship, role or project ends, we should try to carry as much of that forward as possible.

At RYS, when our support for a young person was ending, we tried to identify other sources of support and make introductions where we could. This meant helping the next organisation understand the young person and their situation, while involving the young person in what was being shared and what would happen next. When colleagues left, we took a similar approach, making time to transfer relationships and knowledge alongside responsibilities.

The aim is to avoid making people start again unnecessarily.

Continuity will not always be perfect. A referral may not work out, another service may work differently, or there may be no equivalent support available. But we can still think carefully about what can be carried forward, who needs to be connected and what would make the transition easier.

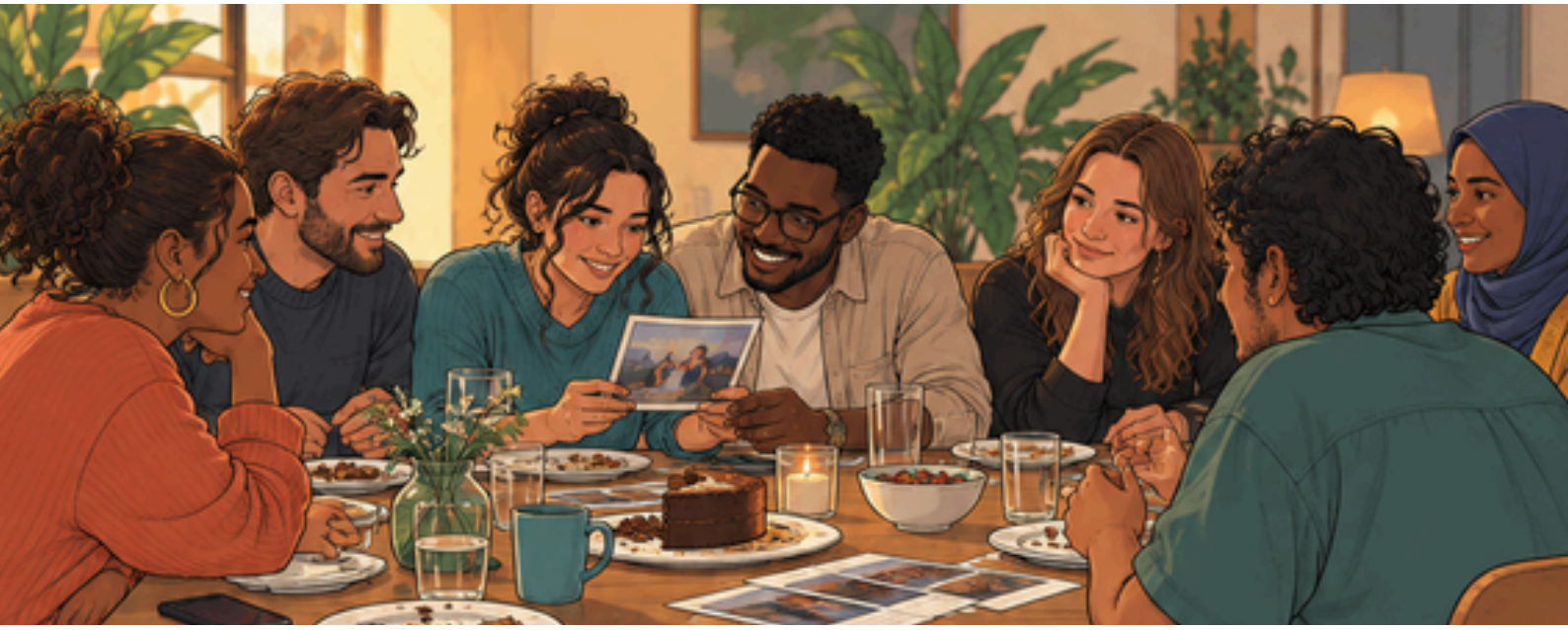
This applies beyond individual support. When a project or organisation ends, relationships with partners, knowledge built through the work and useful ways of working can also be transferred rather than simply disappearing.



See the practical pages at the end of this Insight for prompts on planning continuity through an ending.

05 MARK WHAT IS ENDING

An ending can be sad and still be worth celebrating.



Endings involve practical work, but they are also emotional. People may feel sadness, relief, pride, uncertainty, gratitude or several of these things at once. Making space for those feelings is part of ending well.

At RYS, we learned this through different kinds of endings. When colleagues left, we made time to acknowledge what they had contributed and the relationships they had built. When RYS itself came to an end, we brought together current and former staff and Board members to look back at what we had created together. We shared memories, reflected on what we had learned and accomplished, and talked about what people would take with them.

Closure can easily feel like failure. Marking an ending creates space to tell a fuller story.

Something does not have to continue forever to have been worthwhile. A relationship can end having mattered deeply. A project can finish having achieved something important. An organisation can close while leaving behind relationships, learning and work that people are proud of.

Looking back also helps people understand what they are taking forward. Asking what changed, what was learned, what people are proud of and what they want to carry into whatever comes next makes reflection more than an exercise in nostalgia. It connects the ending to what follows.

What people carry forward will be different. For one person it might be a relationship, for another a skill, a changed perspective or a sense of what is possible. Taking time to name these things helps ensure that the value of the work does not end when the work itself does.



See the practical pages at the end of this Insight for prompts on making space to reflect on and acknowledge an ending.

06 LEAVE SOMETHING USEFUL BEHIND

Not everything has to end when the work does.

Over time, organisations and projects accumulate things of value: knowledge, tools, relationships, ways of working, resources and sometimes money or equipment. An ending creates an opportunity to think deliberately about where those things should go.

For RYS, this became an important part of closing the organisation. We knew that RYS itself would disappear, but we did not want everything we had learned and created over ten years to disappear with it. We began thinking about what could be shared, transferred or made useful to others rather than simply archived or lost.



Keep

Preserve what may be useful for future projects or continuing work.



Share

Make learning, knowledge and resources available to others.



Transfer

Pass on assets, relationships or activities that others can carry forward.



Let go

Accept that some activities, roles or systems have reached their natural end.

The Learning Hub is one result of that process. It brings together practical tools, approaches and reflections from our work so that other people and organisations can adapt them to their own contexts. We also looked at our remaining resources and assets and considered where they could offer the most value after we closed.

But not everything needs to be carried forward. An ending is an opportunity to decide what is genuinely worth keeping.

Some resources will no longer be relevant. Some ways of working belonged to a particular time or context. Others may be useful to someone else, particularly if they are adapted or shared in the right way.

The question is not "How do we save everything we built?" but "What could still be useful, and to whom?"

That might mean sharing a tool, documenting what you learned, transferring equipment or funds, connecting people who could benefit from knowing one another, or being honest about something that did not work so others can learn from it.

Ending a relationship well

Practical prompts for bringing a support relationship to an end

Use these prompts to plan an ending with the person you support and, where appropriate, with colleagues or other services involved.

BEFORE THE ENDING



Give notice

Does the person know that your support will end, when it will happen and why?



Be clear about what is ending

What will you no longer be able to offer? Is anything continuing, and is that distinction clear?



Plan what comes next together

What does the person think they will need afterwards? Who else could provide it? Can you make an introduction?



Share information carefully

What information needs to move with them? Does the person understand what will be shared, with whom and why?



Make time for a final conversation

Is there anything the person wants to ask, say or reflect on before the relationship ends?

QUESTIONS WORTH DISCUSSING

- What is the person most concerned about losing when our support ends?
- What would make the transition clearer or easier for them?
- Who already knows and understands their situation, and who might need to?
- Is anything continuing because it is still part of our role, or because ending the relationship feels difficult?

BEFORE YOU FINISH, CHECK...

- [ ] The person knows **when and why** support is ending.
- [ ] They have been involved in **planning what happens next**.
- [ ] **Introductions, referrals or handovers** have been made where possible.
- [ ] They understand **what information is being shared and why**.
- [ ] There has been a **clear final conversation**, rather than support simply stopping.





Not every ending will feel complete. You may not be able to resolve every need or guarantee that the next source of support will work. Focus on making the ending clear, considered and honest, without promising what you cannot sustain.

Ending a project well

Practical prompts for bringing a project or service to an end

Use these prompts to plan the ending with your team and consider the people, partners and responsibilities affected by it.

BEFORE THE ENDING



Map who will be affected

Who relies on the project, works with it or needs to know that it is ending? Who could be affected indirectly?



Give people time

When does each group need to know? What will they need time to understand, decide or prepare for?



Plan unfinished work

What commitments, cases or pieces of work will still be open? What needs to be completed, handled over or consciously stopped?



Protect continuity

Which relationships, support or responsibilities need somewhere to go? How will you make that transition?



Decide what should continue

What knowledge, resources, partnerships or ways of working are worth sharing or transferring rather than losing?

QUESTIONS WORTH DISCUSSING

- If this project did not already exist, knowing what we know now, would we choose to create it?
- Who could be most affected by the ending, and have we involved them early enough?
- What are we at risk of leaving unfinished or unclear?
- What has this project created that could still be useful after it ends?

BEFORE YOU FINISH, CHECK...

- [ ] Everyone affected has **been told clearly and with as much notice as possible.**
- [ ] Unfinished work has been **completed, transferred or deliberately closed.**
- [ ] **Ongoing support, safeguarding or other responsibilities** have been addressed.
- [ ] Partners know **what is ending, what is not** and who to contact afterwards.
- [ ] Useful **knowledge, resources and learning** have somewhere to go.
- [ ] There has been time to **reflect on and mark the ending** with the people involved.



Do not leave the ending until the work is already finished. The final phase of a project is part of the project itself. Make enough space for communication, handovers, learning and the people affected by the change.

Ending an organisation well

Practical prompts for planning an organisational closure

When RYS closed, we treated the closure as a project in itself, with its own plan, responsibilities and oversight. We also tried to make sure that how we closed reflected the values that had guided how we worked. Use these prompts with your Board, team and, when appropriate, the people you support to plan the closure and consider what ending will mean for your organisation.

BEFORE THE ENDING



Start with your values

How should your organisation's values shape decisions about communication, assets and what you leave behind?



Treat closure as a project

Who will lead it? What needs to happen and by when? How will progress and support be risks be tracked?



Involve the people affected

Who should have a say in how the organisation ends? How can people contribute to decisions that affect them?



Map your responsibilities

What governance, financial, legal, safeguarding or data responsibilities need attention before or after closure?



Plan what you leave behind

What should happen to remaining assets and relationships? What knowledge can you leave behind?

QUESTIONS WORTH DISCUSSING

? Are the decisions we are making about closure consistent with the values we said mattered while the organisation was operating?

? What will this ending look and feel like for the people we support?

? What responsibilities will remain after the final day, and who will hold them?

CHECK...

- [ ] The closure has a **clear plan, responsibilities, timeline and oversight.**
- [ ] People affected have been **informed** with enough time to prepare.
- [ ] The **people affected** have been **consulted and involved.**
- [ ] Relationships have been **appropriately ended or transferred.**
- [ ] **All legal, contractual, data and regulatory responsibilities** have been addressed.
- [ ] There has been space to **reflect on and mark the ending** with the people involved.

THANK YOU FOR READING

Continue exploring

This resource forms part of the Refugee Youth Service Learning Hub, which brings together Insights, Practice Guides and Tools developed through ten years of work alongside displaced children and young people.



REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE

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