PRACTICE GUIDE 02

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Learning from Velos Youth's *Methodology for Safe Spaces*



REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB

Ten years of practice. Shared for others to use, question and build on.

The RYS Learning Hub brings together learning from ten years of work alongside children and young people on the move. It shares the approaches we developed, the questions that challenged us, and practical resources from the work.

These resources do not offer a fixed model to follow. They are an invitation to reflect, adapt and develop practice in your own context. The Learning Hub includes:

INSIGHTS

Ideas, experiences and questions that shaped our thinking.



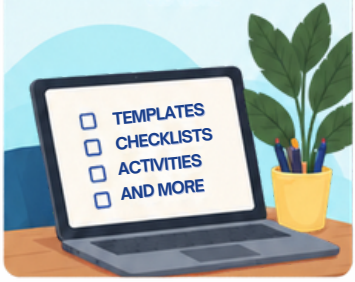
PRACTICE GUIDES

Approaches and learning developed through frontline practice.



TOOLS

Practical resources used and adapted through the work.



ALSO IN THE LEARNING HUB



INSIGHT 04

Beyond the Service

Trust, relationships and community.



PRACTICE GUIDE 01

The RYS Practice Principles

The principles underpinning our approach.



PRACTICE GUIDE 03

Meeting a Child for the First Time

Building trust from the first interaction.

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REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE LEARNING HUB

ABOUT THIS PRACTICE GUIDE

This Practice Guide brings together key learning from the Safe Spaces project, a European Commission initiative to create inclusive, protective and empowering environments for unaccompanied young people and youth on the move aged 15–25. The original methodology was written by Maria Ntetsika and Gina Psylliakou, drawing on the experience of Velos Youth, Follow Me, Open Europe and Fundación Scalabrini.

The pages that follow draw out some of the key learning from the methodology. They are not intended to replace or rewrite the original resource, but to provide an accessible way into a substantial body of work and to highlight ideas that we think are particularly worth carrying forward. Throughout, we signpost where you can explore each area in greater depth in the full Safe Spaces methodology.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1 → 2 → 3

Explore the Highlights

Discover key learning from the Safe Spaces methodology, across a series of pages.

Reflect and Apply

Use the ideas and questions to inform your thinking and practice.

Go Deeper

Follow the page references to explore the full methodology and its original context.

READ THE FULL METHODOLOGY

Methodology for the Creation of Safe Spaces for Unaccompanied Young People on the Move (Maria Ntetsika and Gina Psylliakou)

BEFORE YOU CREATE THE SPACE

A safe space begins with understanding, not assumptions. Before you plan a space, it is important to understand the context, the people you want to reach, and what already exists.

01 START BY LISTENING

Consult young people to understand their priorities, challenges and the gaps they experience in existing support. Listen for what matters to them, rather than starting with what you think they need.

02 UNDERSTAND WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

Map the services and organisations around young people. Identify what is available, where the gaps are, and who could complement the space.

03 THINK ABOUT WHERE THE SPACE SITS

Consider accessibility, transport connections, safety and inclusivity, alongside the presence of complementary services nearby.

Think about what the surrounding area might feel like to a young person arriving for the first time.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Who have we listened to?
Whose understanding of young people's needs is shaping the space?

What is already around us?
Where are the genuine gaps, and where could partnership be more useful than duplication?

Who might struggle to get here?
Where are we located in reference to where people live? Where are other services based?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 5-6

DESIGNING THE SPACE

The way a space looks and feels can shape whether young people experience it as somewhere they belong.

04 INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DESIGN

Where possible, young people should have a role in shaping the physical environment, from colours and furniture to layout and decoration.

Not only will it create a space that young people are more likely to want to be, it also can create a greater sense of ownership and belonging.

People naturally feel safer in a space that feels like 'theirs'.

05 MAKE IT FEEL HUMAN

A safe space does not need to be highly polished or institutional. The methodology recommends creating an environment that feels "warm, inclusive and human", noting that a simple and humble aesthetic can sometimes be more effective. The aim is somewhere that feels welcoming and lived-in, rather than somewhere that simply looks like a service.

06 DESIGN FOR DIFFERENT WAYS OF BEING

Different moments require different kinds of space.

The methodology suggests combining areas for socialising and recreation with somewhere to share food, flexible activity space, reception, and private rooms for confidential support.

Build in choice, so young people can find the kind of space they need at that moment.



? **Who can see themselves here?**

How have young people influenced the way the space looks and feels?

? **Does it feel like a service?**

What makes the environment feel warm, informal and welcoming rather than institutional?

? **Can the space adapt?**

Is there room for social connection, activities, privacy, and confidential support?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 6-7

CREATING SAFETY AND CONSISTENCY

Safety depends on what happens every day, not only on what is written in a policy.

07 SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Safeguarding policies, codes of conduct and clear procedures establish how people are expected to behave and how concerns will be handled.

Boundaries should protect young people while making expectations clear for everyone using or working within the space.

08 BE CONSISTENT

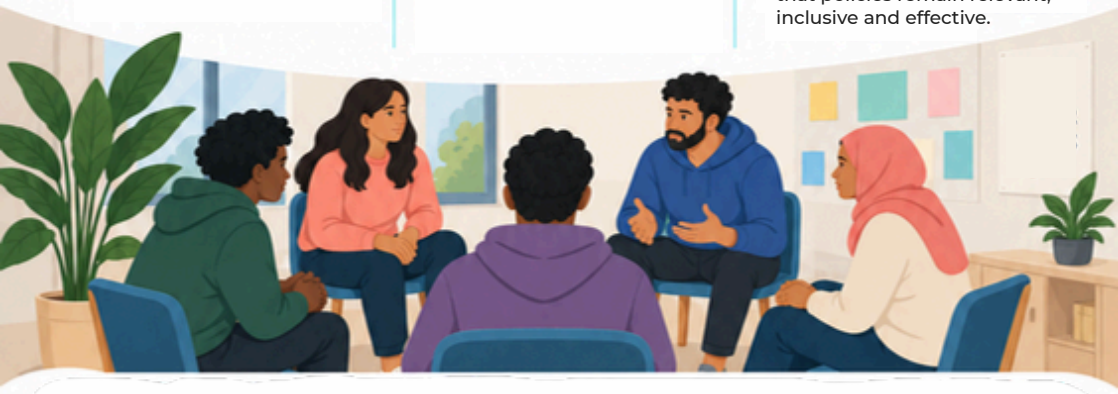
Policies only matter if they shape everyday practice. Everyone in the team, including volunteers, should understand the procedures and apply them consistently.

Consistency builds trust and fairness in a community.

09 LET THE RULES EVOLVE

Policies and procedures should not become static documents. As circumstances and young people's needs change, the way the space operates may need to change too.

Regular review and reflection, ideally involving both staff and young people, helps ensure that policies remain relevant, inclusive and effective.



?

Are expectations clear?

Do young people, staff and volunteers understand the boundaries of the space?

?

Are we consistent?

Would a young person receive a broadly consistent response regardless of who is working that day?

?

What needs to change?

How do young people and staff contribute to reviewing the way the space works?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 6-7

BUILDING THE TEAM

Building the right team means bringing together the right roles, skills and ways of working.

10 BUILD AROUND THE NEED

The team should reflect what young people actually need from the space. This often means a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together roles such as coordination, social work and youth work rather than assuming one profession can provide everything.

The right mix will depend on the purpose and context of the space.

11 VALUE HOW PEOPLE WORK, NOT ONLY WHAT THEY KNOW

Technical expertise matters, but so do the qualities that shape everyday interactions with young people.

Key skills include active listening, cultural awareness, trauma-informed practice, communication and the ability to build trust while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

12 INVEST IN TRAINING AND INDUCTION

Everyone working in the space, including volunteers, should understand its safeguarding approach, policies, professional boundaries and ways of working.

Training and induction help create a shared approach, so practice remains safe and consistent across the team.



? Does the team reflect the need?

Do the roles and skills within the team match what young people actually need from the space?

? How do people work with young people?

Are relational skills given as much attention as professional knowledge and qualifications?

? Do staff and volunteers have the same foundation?

Are all team members clear on the safeguarding approach, boundaries and ways of working?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 11-14

BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Trust is not assumed. It is built through what young people experience over time.

13 EARN TRUST THROUGH CONSISTENCY

Trust is the cornerstone of a functioning safe space. For young people who may have experienced disrupted relationships or unreliable systems, it can take time.

Keeping commitments, respecting confidentiality, communicating clearly and responding consistently all contribute to a young person experiencing people within the space as reliable.

14 CREATE A SECURE BASE

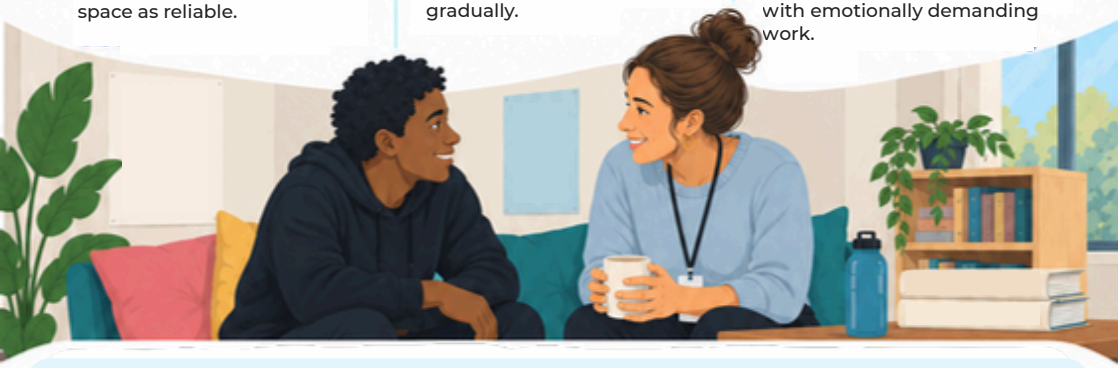
Safe spaces can provide a temporary secure base through predictable routines, supportive relationships and clear boundaries.

Connection does not need to be forced. Low-pressure opportunities to engage, alongside consistent responses from trusted adults, can allow relationships to develop gradually.

15 KEEP RELATIONSHIPS PROFESSIONAL

Relational practice does not mean removing professional boundaries. It requires self-awareness, confidentiality, ethical practice and recognising the limits of your role.

Supervision and reflection can help practitioners notice their own responses, maintain appropriate boundaries and reduce the risks that come with emotionally demanding work.



What makes us trustworthy?

What do young people repeatedly experience that shows them they can rely on us?

Is connection allowed to take time?

Can young people engage at their own pace without being pushed into relationships or activities?

Are relationships well supported?

Do staff have the boundaries, supervision and space for reflection needed for relational work?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 20-29

RELATED INSIGHT: BEYOND THE SERVICE

Explore how trust, relationships and community can change what a service becomes

SEE THE WHOLE PERSON

See the person, not just the problems you are there to help solve.

16 LOOK BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE NEED

A young person may arrive asking for help with one issue, but that issue sits within a much wider picture. The methodology encourages looking across different areas of their life rather than responding only to the presenting problem.

Understanding that wider picture can reveal needs, strengths, risks and sources of support that might otherwise be missed.

17 BUILD ON STRENGTHS AS WELL AS NEEDS

Assessment should not become a list of problems. Young people also bring abilities, relationships, interests, knowledge and ways of coping.

Recognising these alongside vulnerabilities creates a fuller understanding of the young person and can help support build on what is already working in their life.

18 PREVENT, DON'T ONLY RESPOND

Safe spaces should not only intervene once something has gone wrong. The methodology gives prevention a distinct role, including identifying early signs, strengthening protective factors and creating conditions that support wellbeing before difficulties escalate.

Support can be valuable even when there is no immediate crisis to solve.



What are we not seeing?

Are we looking beyond the reason a young person first came through the door?

Where are the strengths?

Have we identified and recognised the young person's capabilities, relationships and resources as well as their needs?

Are we always responding to crisis?

What are we doing that might prevent difficulties from escalating in the first place?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces methodology: Assessment, pp. 28–33 | Prevention, pp. 52–58

WORKING TOWARDS CHANGE TOGETHER

Support should help young people shape what happens next, not simply decide it for them.

19 SET GOALS TOGETHER

The methodology recommends co-creating a Personal Development Plan with each young person, including short and medium-term goals.

This keeps the young person involved in deciding what they want to work towards, rather than support being defined entirely by professionals.

20 COMBINE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPPORT

Progress may require more than one kind of intervention. The methodology combines individual sessions with group activities, practical skill-building and opportunities to connect with the wider community.

The mix should reflect the young person's needs, goals and circumstances.

21 REVIEW AND ADAPT

Goals and interventions should not be fixed. The methodology recommends regular progress checks, reviewing goals and adjusting support as circumstances change or new opportunities emerge.

It also builds transition and exit planning into the intervention cycle, helping young people prepare for what comes after the service.



Who is setting the direction?

How much influence does the young person have over the goals they are working towards?

Does the support fit the person?

Are we combining different approaches rather than expecting one intervention to do everything?

Are we willing to change course?

How do we know when support needs to adapt, or when it is time to step back?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces Methodology, pp. 46-53

RELATED PRACTICE GUIDE: ACCOMPANIMENT OVER RESCUE

Explore what changes when we work alongside young people rather than trying to solve things for them.

SAFETY BEYOND THE WALLS

A safe space cannot meet every need. What surrounds it matters too.

22 BUILD STRONG REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Young people may need support that sits outside the expertise of the team. The methodology emphasises mapping and building relationships with other services so young people can access specialist support when needed.

Referral should be part of the way the space works, rather than something improvised when a need arises.

23 WORK WITH THE WORLD AROUND THE YOUNG PERSON

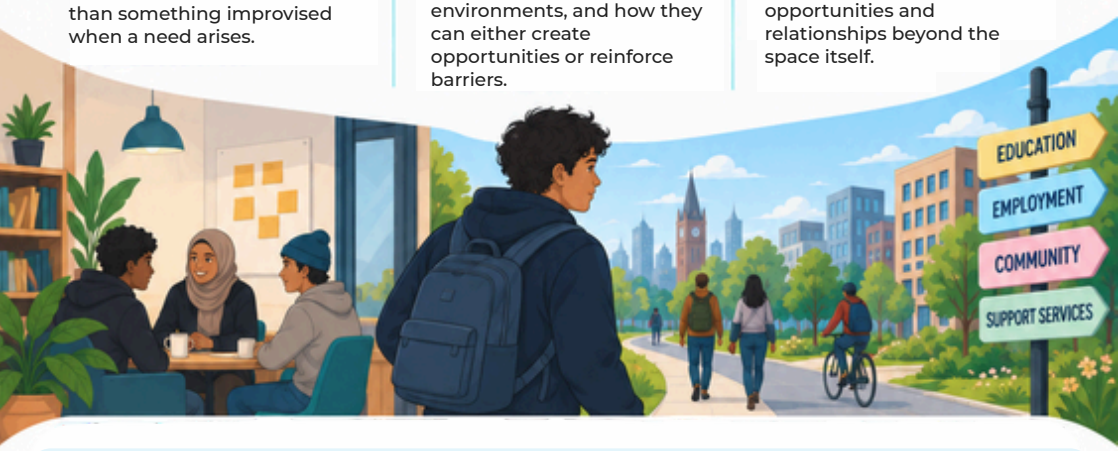
The methodology takes an ecological perspective: a young person's wellbeing is shaped not only by individual circumstances, but by relationships, community, services and the wider systems around them.

Support therefore means paying attention to those environments, and how they can either create opportunities or reinforce barriers.

24 CREATE CONNECTIONS BEYOND THE SERVICE

A safe space can provide stability and belonging, but the aim is not for a young person's world to become centred on the service.

Connections with education, employment, community activities, other organisations and wider social networks can help young people build opportunities and relationships beyond the space itself.



What can't we provide?

Are there clear pathways to people and services that can?

What is happening around the young person?

Which relationships, systems and environments are helping or creating barriers?

Where do connections lead?

Are we helping young people build relationships and opportunities beyond our own service?

GO DEEPER

Safe Spaces methodology: Partnerships and Referral Pathways, pp. 15–17
Ecological Perspective, pp. 58–61

SO, WHAT MAKES A SPACE SAFE?

It's not one thing, but many things working in harmony together.

A safe space is more than a building or a service. It is the result of multiple elements coming together: the environment, the relationships, the boundaries, the support and the connections around it. Each element reinforces the others.

LISTEN
Start with young people and their context. Make space for them to shape what happens.

DESIGN
Create a space that feels welcoming, flexible and human, where young people can be themselves.

PROTECT
Build clear boundaries, consistent practice and a culture of safety for young people and staff.



RELATE
Earn trust through reliable, professional and respectful relationships.

UNDERSTAND
See the whole person, including their strengths and aspirations, as well as their needs.

WORK TOGETHER
Keep young people involved in setting goals, choosing support and reviewing progress.

CONNECT
Build pathways, relationships and opportunities beyond the space, working with the wider community around the young person.

The aim is not simply to create a place where young people are safe. It is to create the conditions in which they can **feel safe, exercise agency, build relationships and connect** with life beyond the space.

CARRY THE LEARNING FORWARD

The Safe Spaces methodology brings together learning from different organisations and contexts. This Practice Guide has highlighted some of that learning. The full methodology goes much further.



WHAT WILL YOU CARRY INTO YOUR OWN PRACTICE?

Take the learning from this guide and consider how it can support your work with young people.

READ THE FULL METHODOLOGY →
Explore the original resource in full

EXPLORE THE RYS LEARNING HUB →
Discover more Practice Guides, Insights and Tools

Safe Spaces
"Integration program for unaccompanied refugee youth"

Methodology for the creation of Safe Spaces for Unaccompanied young people on the move
Written by Maria Ntetsika and Gina Psylliakou

Co-funded by the European Union