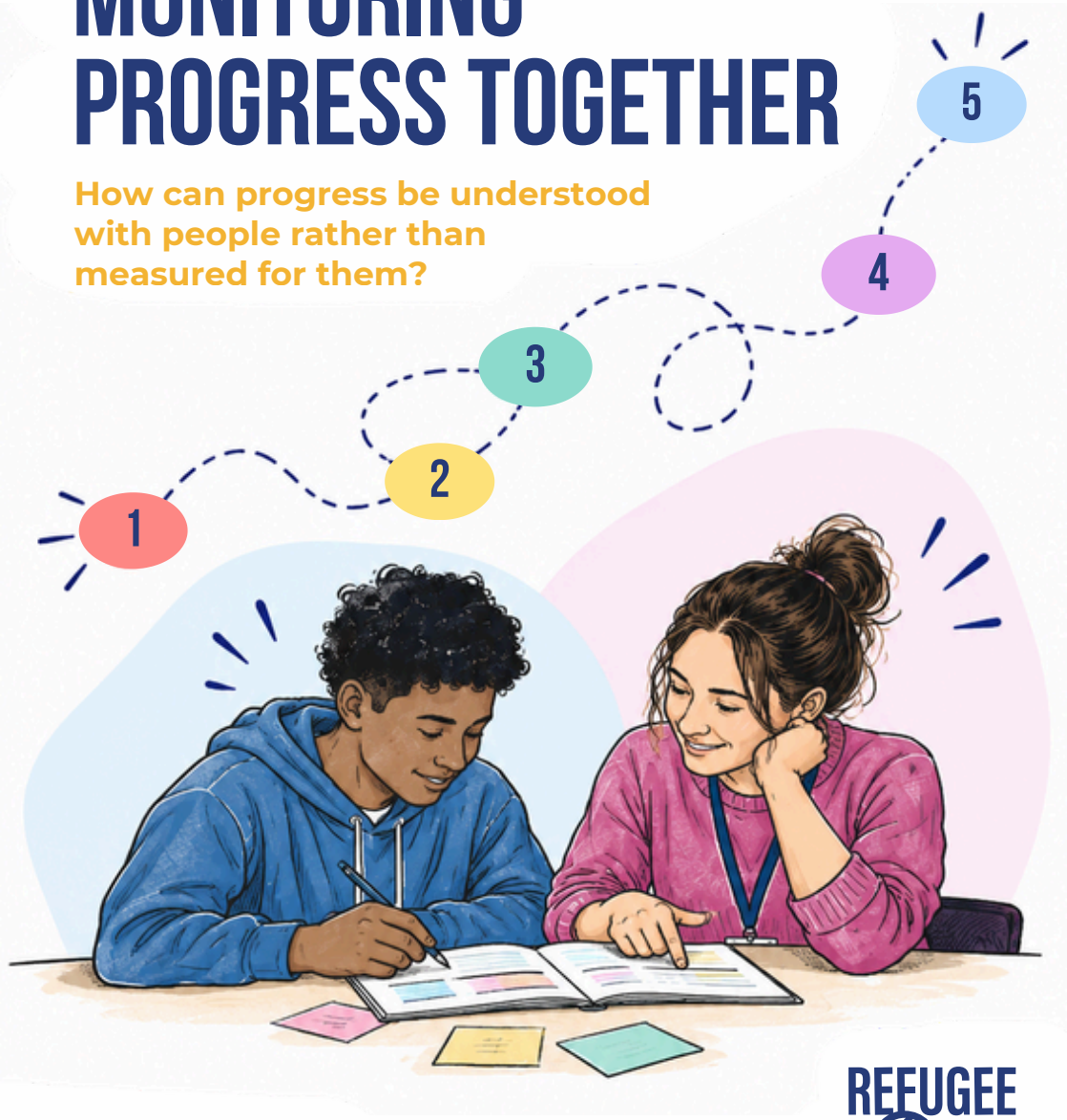
PRACTICE GUIDE 04

MONITORING PROGRESS TOGETHER

How can progress be understood with people rather than measured for them?



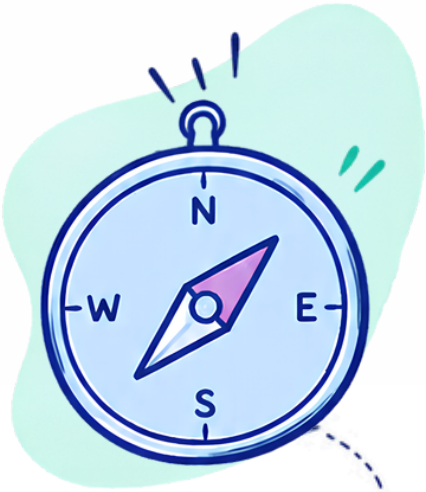
Written by
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REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB

The RYS Learning Hub brings together learning from ten years of work alongside children and young people on the move. It shares approaches developed through the work, questions that challenged our thinking, and practical resources others can adapt and use.

These resources are not a fixed model to follow. They are an invitation to reflect, adapt and develop practice in your own context.



THIS PRACTICE GUIDE CAN BE READ ALONGSIDE THE FOLLOWING RYS LEARNING HUB RESOURCES:

PRACTICE GUIDE 01: THE RYS PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

An overview of the core principles and approaches that guided our work.

PRACTICE GUIDE 05: ACCOMPANIMENT OVER RESCUE

Reflections on why working alongside rather than doing for, leads to stronger and more sustainable change.

TOOL 02: MONITORING PROGRESS TOGETHER

A practical tool to help you explore and record progress together with the people you support.

IN THIS PRACTICE GUIDE



WHAT COUNTS AS PROGRESS?

Why an outcome alone doesn't always tell us whether someone is moving forward.



STARTING WITH THE PERSON

How people's priorities and needs can shape what meaningful progress looks like.



UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS

Why progress has to be understood in the context of what might be getting in the way.



BUILDING THE APPROACH

How we turned these ideas into a practical tool, then tested and adapted it with the people using it.



SEEING PROGRESS TOGETHER

How revisiting progress can make changes visible that might otherwise be missed.



THE CONVERSATION IS THE POINT

How monitoring together can become part of the support itself, rather than something done to people.

CONTEXT

In 2023, RYS created the No Children in Hotels Project to support children and young people who had been assessed as adults and placed in the adult asylum system and hotel accommodation. These were children who wanted to dispute that assessment in order to access their internationally recognised rights as children.

From the start, we wanted the project to offer what Refugee Youth Service had always sought to provide through our work in France and Greece: **wraparound, holistic, needs-based care.**

An age dispute might have been what brought a young person to RYS, but our support extended across the different areas of their life where they needed and wanted help, typically including education, health, asylum and integration.

This Practice Guide draws out what we learned from trying to understand and monitor progress in this context. It looks particularly at what progress can mean when the barriers to moving forward are exceptionally high, and change can be painstakingly slow.

"I wasn't just disputing my age. I needed support with so many other parts of my life. I didn't want to just stand still."





WHAT COUNTS AS PROGRESS?

How do you measure progress on an age disputes project? Do you do it based on successful disputes, when a child's true age is legally recognised?

If we had decided to do this, the whole team and the children we were working with would have become even more demoralised than we already were.

Focusing on this one specific aspect of their life in the UK seemed like we were looking at them with the same single-issue vision we were trying to resist: reducing them to one part of their experience or identity, rather than viewing them as a whole person with a myriad of needs.

Given that we wanted to continue to implement the RYS practice model of holistic, needs-based care, our monitoring needed to reflect that too. It had to recognise progress in the other areas children and young people needed and wanted support.

"I just want to learn English, go to college and have a normal life like other 17 year olds. But everything is on hold."





We needed measures that could show that a young person's life was moving, even when the systems around them were not.

WHEN THE USUAL MEASURES DON'T WORK

Broadening what we monitored created another challenge. Even in areas such as health, education and access to rights, the usual measures of success often didn't reflect what was actually happening.

We also saw, through working with children stuck in asylum hotels for adults, that one of the biggest sources of stress was exactly that: feeling stuck, like their life wasn't making any progress.

We therefore wanted the monitoring process itself to support children's wellbeing, by recognising together that things in their life could still be changing and moving forward, despite the barriers around them.

SOME OF THE COMMON BARRIERS TO PROGRESS WERE...



Healthcare

Difficulties registering with a GP due to language, technology or fear, and long waiting times to access services.



Legal support

Finding legal representation for an age dispute could be difficult, with long waits and limited availability.



Age assessments

Assessments could take months, leaving young people approaching 18 while still trying to establish their age.



Education

Adult classes considered them too young, while colleges could treat them as too old based on their recorded date of birth.

STARTING WITH THE PERSON

We began by listening to the needs children and young people expressed themselves. We asked questions such as “Is there anything else you want support with?” and “How do you want us to support you with that?”, using interpreters where needed.



Some things came up again and again. Young people wanted to learn English. They wanted to see a doctor or dentist, go to school or college, understand appointments, and know how to access the community around them.

These conversations helped us understand what young people themselves saw as important. They also helped us avoid assuming that the issue which had brought someone to our service was necessarily the issue they most wanted help with that day.

But needs aren’t always expressed. Alongside what young people told us, we also drew on our experience of child welfare, development and trauma. We knew that children might need sustained positive connections, consistency, clear boundaries and expectations, and support that recognised the effects of trauma, even when they did not describe those things as needs themselves.

Our understanding of progress therefore came from bringing these perspectives together.



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

Their priorities, goals and requests for support.



WHAT WE LEARNT THROUGH THE RELATIONSHIP

What we observed over time.



WHAT OUR PRACTICE EXPERIENCE TOLD US

Child development, welfare and trauma.

MAKING PROGRESS DESPITE THE BARRIERS

Once we understood how much of a young person's situation could be outside their control, we had to think differently about what progress looked like.

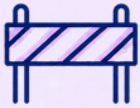
Reaching the end goal could take months, or might not happen at all while we were working together. But that didn't mean nothing was changing. There could be important movement towards a goal long before the final outcome was reached.

We began to pay more attention to those steps. What did the young person understand now that they hadn't understood before? What had they decided? What had they tried? What were they ready for, even if the system wasn't yet ready for them?



THE GOAL

To enrol in college and continue their education.



THE BARRIER STILL STANDS

Their imposed adult date of birth is being used by the college, preventing them from enrolling as a child.



BUT PROGRESS IS STILL HAPPENING

1. Understanding their options
2. Identifying a course or subjects
3. Making contact with the college
4. Explaining the situation and providing evidence that their age is being disputed
5. Being ready to enrol when access becomes possible



If we had only measured whether the young person had enrolled in college, all of this progress would have remained invisible.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

We knew the problem: young people could be highly motivated to move forward while facing barriers they had little power to change. We had also begun to see an opportunity: monitoring progress together could help make the movement that was happening visible, even when the final outcome remained out of reach.

Now we needed to turn that thinking into something practical. Before designing the tool itself, we started with five basic questions: who was it for, why were we using it, when might it be useful, how should it work, and what would make it accessible?



WHO?

Who would use it?

Young people, support workers, volunteers and cultural mediators.



WHY?

Why measure progress together?

To understand change collaboratively, and help young people see movement in their lives.



WHEN?

When would we use it?

At the start, during reviews, when someone felt distressed or stuck, and as support ends.



HOW?

How should it work?

As a visual aid to support discussion and planning, rather than simply a form for staff to complete.



ACCESS?

What would make it accessible?

Visual with accessible language, adapted to age, literacy and communication needs.



SOMETHING TO USE WITH PEOPLE, NOT ABOUT THEM.

The tool needed to be simple enough to sit between a young person and a worker and help them have a conversation. The aim wasn't to produce a score that belonged to RYS. It was to create a shared picture of where things stood, what had changed and what might come next.

DESIGNING, TESTING, ADAPTING

We started with a prototype based on a tool that had been developed by our sister organisation, Velos Youth. The first version was in English and had no images. We shared it with social workers, session workers and interpreters, and tested it directly with children and young people.

We gathered feedback from the people who would actually use it and adapted the tool in response. We added visual aids, thought more carefully about accessibility, translated it and printed it in colour.

Each change was intended to make the tool easier to understand and use together, so that it could support a meaningful conversation rather than simply record information.

> *"The tool only became useful because we tested it with young people and the people supporting them. Their feedback shaped every version."*



Not a linear process!

1 PROTOTYPE

Start with something, rather than trying to perfect it.

2 TEST

Use it in real conversations with young people, staff and interpreters.

3 LISTEN

Ask young people, staff and interpreters what works and what doesn't.

4 ADAPT

Change the language, visuals and structure in response to feedback.

5 MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

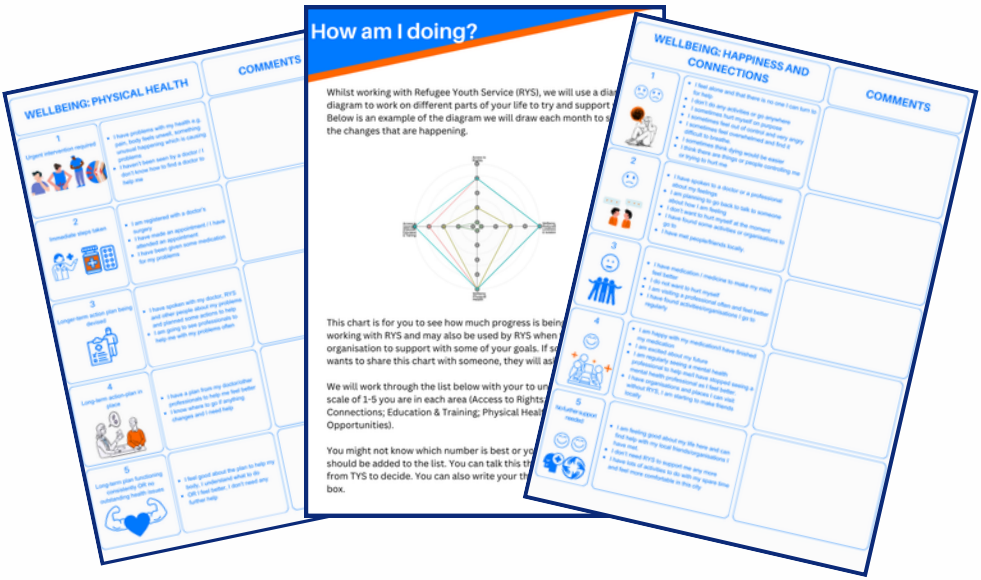
Translate it and consider literacy, age, development and different communication needs.

WHAT WE ENDED UP WITH

The final tool brought together four areas of a young person's life. For each area, we developed five descriptions representing different stages of progress, from 1 to 5. A young person and worker could look at these together and discuss which description best reflected their current situation.

The scores could then be plotted on a diamond chart, creating a visual picture of where things stood. When the tool was revisited, a new diamond could be added alongside the first, making changes over time visible.





SEEING PROGRESS THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE MISSED

A. had been living in an adult asylum hotel for several months. The first time we completed the monitoring tool together, his diamond was small. He had no lawyer for his age dispute, wasn't registered with a GP and knew very few people outside the hotel.

A few months later, we got the tool out again. At first, A. didn't think there was much to record. He was still in the same hotel and was still waiting for a decision about his age.

But we started going through the four areas together.

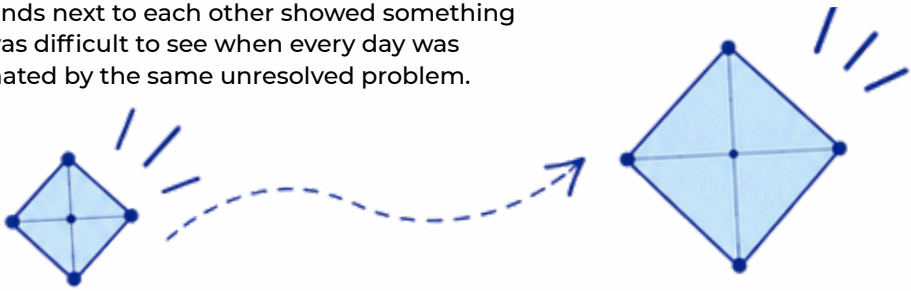
He now had a lawyer. RYS had gathered the documents needed for his age-dispute case and the local authority had agreed to undertake an assessment. He had registered with a GP and had been seen about a health problem that had been worrying him. He had also started going regularly to an activity outside the hotel and had met people there.

We drew the new diamond. It was noticeably bigger.

The things A. most wanted to change hadn't all changed. He was still waiting. But putting the two diamonds next to each other showed something that was difficult to see when every day was dominated by the same unresolved problem.

> *"I felt like nothing had changed. But looking at the tool together showed me that actually, some things had moved."*





THE CONVERSATION IS THE POINT



The tool was designed to be completed with a young person, not about them. The descriptions gave us somewhere to start, but deciding where things stood was intended to be a conversation.

A young person might know immediately which description felt closest to their experience. At other times they might be unsure, think something was missing, or want to explain why none of the descriptions quite fitted. The comments section gave space to record that context.

This meant the number was never the whole story. What mattered was the conversation around it: what had changed, what had not, what was getting in the way, and what the young person wanted to happen next.

WHEN WE RETURNED TO IT

The tool wasn't just for a scheduled monthly monitoring exercise. It could be useful at different moments, including:

AT THE START

To understand priorities and establish a starting point.

DURING SUPPORT

To notice changes and decide what to focus on next.

WHEN SOMEONE FELT STUCK

Particularly after difficult news or when it felt as though nothing was changing.

WHEN SUPPORT WAS ENDING

To look back at what had changed and support a positive ending.

TRYING THIS IN YOUR OWN CONTEXT

Our approach was shaped by the young people we were supporting and the specific barriers they faced. If you are considering using a similar approach, these questions may help you reflect on how it could work in your own context.



1. WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY COUNTING AS PROGRESS?

Are you measuring only the final outcome, or the movement towards it too?



2. HOW WILL YOU DEFINE PROGRESS TOGETHER?

How can you understand what progress looks like from the perspective of the people you support?



3. WHAT IS WITHIN THE PERSON'S CONTROL?

Where might external barriers make your usual measures misleading?



4. COULD THE MONITORING ITSELF BE USEFUL?

Could revisiting progress help someone recognise change they aren't currently able to see?



5. WHAT WOULD MAKE IT WORK FOR THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT?

Think about language, literacy, age, communication, visuals and how the conversation is facilitated.



BUILD IT AROUND YOUR CONTEXT

We used four areas because they reflected the needs, goals and barriers of the young people we supported. Your tool might use more, fewer or completely different areas. A simple 1–5 scale can still provide a consistent way to recognise and revisit change.

MAKING IT PART OF THE WORK

Like any new approach, the tool took time to become part of our everyday practice. Although we were enthusiastic about using it, the immediate demands of supporting children often took priority.

We realised that introducing the tool wasn't enough. We needed to make space for it, remind one another to use it and recognise the benefits it could bring.

We made it a regular agenda item in team meetings and case discussions, sharing experiences of when it had been useful and what we were learning.

Over time, we saw how it helped children recognise their progress, supported more meaningful conversations and strengthened our understanding of their needs. It also helped us communicate progress to funders, including changes that traditional outcome measures might have missed.

Using the tool became something that both young people and staff could find encouraging, particularly when progress otherwise felt difficult to see.

> We needed to remind each other and encourage each other to use it.

> Children enjoyed getting it out to see how much progress they'd made in a short space of time.

> It boosted team morale.

> It also gave us valuable data for fundraising applications and feedback to existing funders.

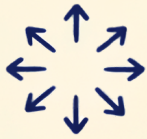


THANK YOU FOR READING

Continue Exploring

We hope this Practice Guide has been useful in sparking ideas and supporting your work. Progress looks different for everyone, and we encourage you to adapt these ideas to your own context.

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.



PRACTICE GUIDES

Step-by-step guidance drawn from frontline practice.



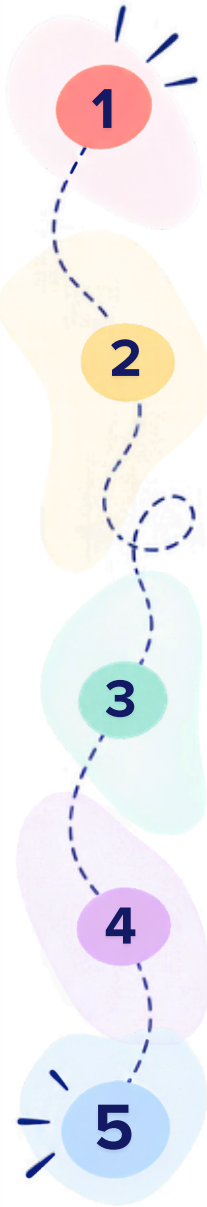
INSIGHTS

Learning and reflections on key themes from our work.



TOOLS

Worksheets to support frontline practice.



REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE

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