PRACTICE GUIDE 05

ACCOMPANIMENT OVER RESCUE

How can we support without taking over?

By Roz Freiburghaus &
Mohammad Yasco



REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB



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

The Refugee Youth Service Learning Hub brings together learning from ten years of working alongside children and young people on the move.

It brings together Insights, Practice Guides and Tools shaped by frontline practice, lived experience and reflection. These resources are not a fixed model to follow. They are shared to support reflection, discussion and adaptation in different contexts. Some of the other available resources are detailed below.

INSIGHTS

Exploring some of the bigger questions that have shaped our practice.

PRACTICE GUIDES

Practical approaches, with ideas that can be adapted and applied in different settings.

TOOLS

Resources that can be taken, adapted and used by others.



PRACTICE GUIDE 01

THE RYS PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The principles and approaches that shaped how RYS worked alongside young people.



PRACTICE GUIDE 02

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Practical learning for creating spaces where young people can feel safe, welcome and supported.



INSIGHT 04

BEYOND THE SERVICE

What changes when services are provided within a community space?

IN THIS GUIDE

Accompaniment means supporting someone without taking ownership of their choices.

Through Yasco's experiences and practical guidance, this guide explores what it can look like to move away from rescue and towards working alongside young people.



01 KEEP CHOICE WITH THE YOUNG PERSON

Support should increase a young person's ability to make choices, not replace those choices with what we think is best.



02 SUPPORT THE DECISION, DON'T MAKE IT

Help young people understand their options, ask questions and consider what might happen next, while leaving the decision with them.



03 BUILD TRUST THROUGH AUTONOMY

Being listened to without pressure, judgement or blame can create the confidence to talk openly, ask for help and make decisions.



04 TAKE A STEP BACK

Bring your knowledge, experience and advice, but recognise when to step back. Accompaniment means standing alongside someone, not directing their path.

WHEN RESCUE IS NEEDED

There is often an inherent power imbalance at play when we try to rescue people instead of accompany them on their journey. Think of some real-life rescue examples in your head right now. What do you see? Maybe people being pulled from rubble from a building that's collapsed. Maybe captives being liberated in a covert operation. Maybe a mountain rescue of someone who became badly injured. Or an ordinary person giving emergency CPR whilst waiting for paramedics to arrive.

In these examples, someone faces an immediate danger that calls for urgent intervention. But not every difficult situation requires someone else to take control. When we approach people as though they need rescuing, even when they don't, we risk undermining their autonomy and creating new vulnerabilities or dependencies.



WHEN RESCUE ISN'T NEEDED

Let's go with a simple example. Let's say it's a hot day, and someone you're with is in need of something refreshing and cool. In rescue mode, you might say: "Oh look, an ice cream truck, here have a strawberry ice cream". They might take it from you, and they might eat it, but they might not enjoy it. They'll get a sense you meant well and they might feel obliged to eat it and say thanks. Maybe because you didn't ask and therefore didn't know, they have an allergic reaction. Or, maybe they love it but will come to depend on you to provide something when it's hot out.

What does it mean to accompany someone instead? We would start by recognising they are a human with their own set of preferences, choices, autonomy, and unique experiences that make them individual. We would aim to understand these. We would show them we respect whatever choices they make, even when we might personally disagree with those choices or see the dangers in them. We might offer our insights and share them if they want them, but never to pressure or persuade them. The aim would be to support long-term independence while helping people build and maintain their own support networks.



ACCOMPANIMENT IN PRACTICE

Let's stick with the ice cream example. You're accompanying someone and it's a hot day. You think you're both in need of something refreshing and cool, so you start a conversation. You share what you're thinking and ask what they might like, rather than assuming you know. Here are a few possible responses.

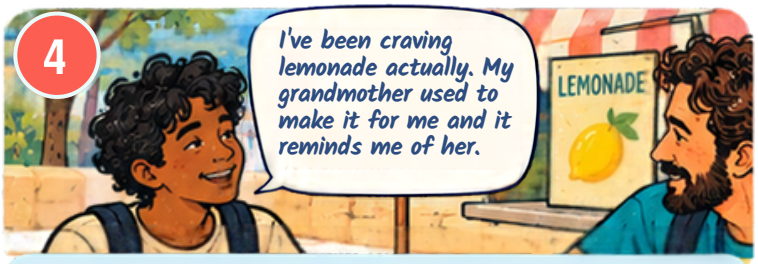




You respect their choice and leave it there. No pressure, no persuasion.







You have a chat about their memories, and off you go to find a lemonade.



The person feels listened to, heard, respected, and the lemonade meets their need for something refreshing and cool. They know where to go next time they need one.

It's a matter of *not what you do* but *how you do it*. It's a matter of *doing with*, not *doing to*.

But don't take my word for it. Yasco was supported by multiple different professionals on his journey to safety and adulthood in the UK. He shares his views on what it's like to have decisions made for you, to be persuaded, to be accompanied, and how this led to him wanting to become an RYS board member and take an active role in organisational decision-making to support other children and young people.

He also offers advice to professionals working with children and young people. Oh, and tells us what his favourite ice cream is.

Roz Freiburghaus
& Mohammad Yasco
Refugee Youth Service



01 | CHOICE AND CONTROL

Yasco's experience

When I first arrived in the UK, the authorities didn't believe I was a child, so they put me in an asylum hotel with other adults. Eventually I made friends, but before long I was moved to another hotel where again I didn't know anybody.

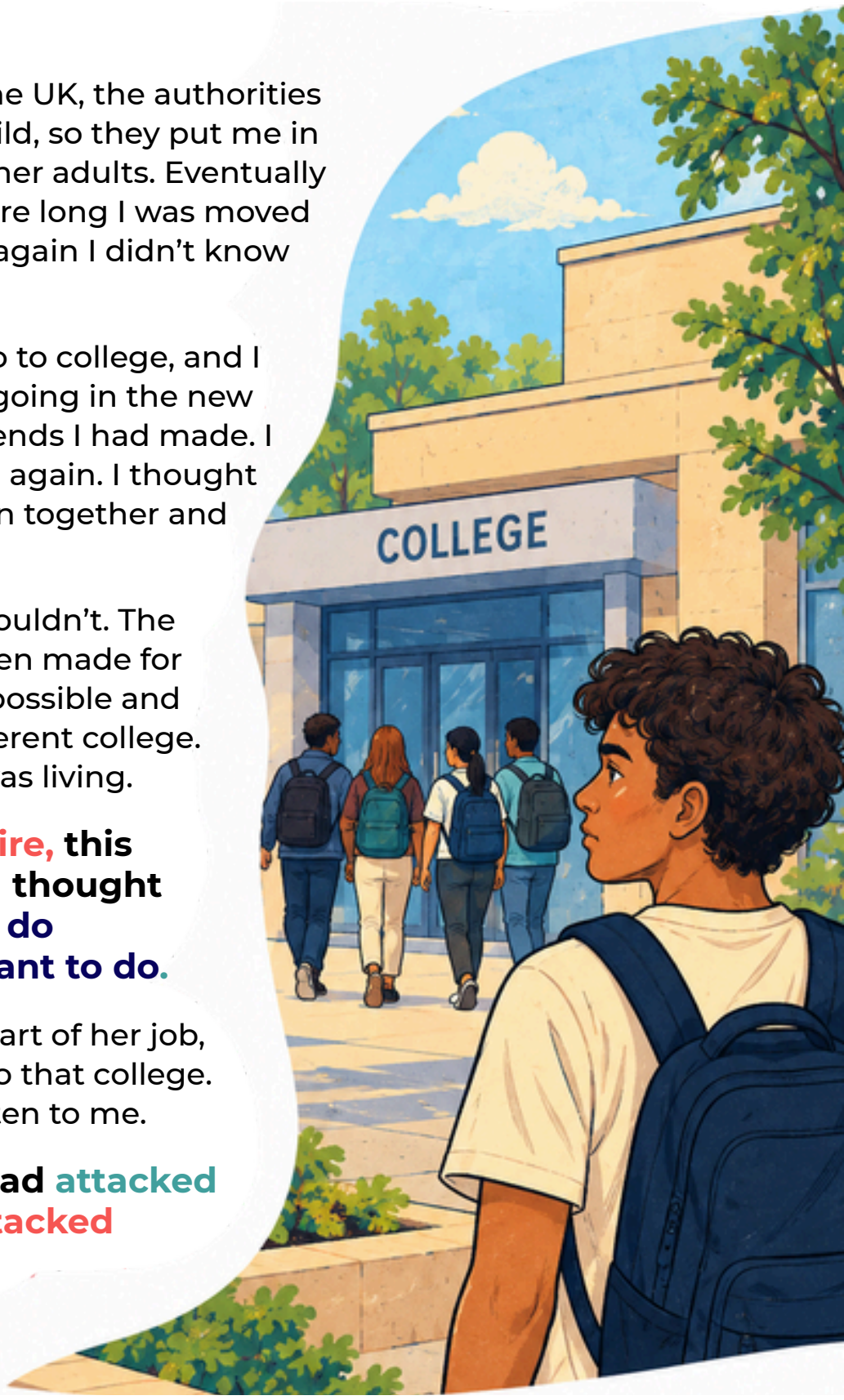
I was told that I could go to college, and I was looking forward to going in the new school year, with the friends I had made. I was excited to see them again. I thought it would be good to learn together and be in the same place.

But I was simply told I couldn't. The decision had already been made for me. They said it wasn't possible and that I had to go to a different college. One nearer to where I was living.

This was not my desire, this was not my willing. I thought you're forcing me to do something I don't want to do.

I considered this to be part of her job, but I didn't want to go to that college. I felt like they should listen to me.

I felt like someone had attacked my freedom, and attacked my opinion.



01 | CHOICE AND CONTROL

Practical Guidance



The best outcome is not always the one you would choose.

As professionals, we can become focused on achieving the best possible outcome for a young person. But autonomy is part of that outcome too. A decision may lead somewhere different from where you would have advised, while still giving the young person something important: ownership over their own life.

1. **Start with what they want**
   Ask what matters to the young person, what they want and what they hope will happen.

2. **Offer expertise, not instructions**
   Share information, explain the options, risks and opportunities, while being clear about what remains their choice.

3. **Question your idea of "best"**
   Ask whether another option is genuinely unsafe or impossible, or simply not the option you would choose.

4. **Leave room for disagreement**
   Where there is a genuine choice, respect it. Where safety is at risk, advocate for the safest option while preserving as much choice as possible.

A good outcome is not only about where someone ends up. It is also about the agency they had in getting there.

Autonomy is part of the outcome.

02 | DECISIONS UNDER PRESSURE

Yasco's experience



I challenged the decision that I was an adult. The process went on for about a year and a half. By the time I turned 18, my solicitor came to me with an offer from the local authority.

They would recognise the age I had always said I was, but I had to agree to give up the leaving care support I could have received if they had recognised me as a child from the beginning.

I wanted my real age to be recognised. But without that support, I was worried I would become homeless and have to manage everything on my own.



The other option was to reject the offer and continue the case, which could mean going to court. My solicitor advised me to accept.

I felt under pressure to agree.

But if I didn't accept, I would stay with the age they had given me and remain in the adult asylum system. I had already been moved from one hotel to another, and I had to share a room with older men I didn't know. There was drinking, smoking and sometimes fighting.

I didn't feel safe. I felt like I had no choice. Like I had no opinion. There is this expression in Arabic: my right side is hell, my left side is hell.

Yasco's experience continued

My solicitor told me that it would be better to accept their offer. She explained that we could go to the High Court, but by then I was already an adult and I would not get as much support as I would have when I was younger.

I felt uncomfortable. I was worried about becoming homeless without the support. But in the end, I told her OK, and I accepted the offer.

So I got my correct age. But I was still living the same life. I was still living as an adult in a hotel.

And before long, I was evicted. I became homeless.

I went back to my solicitor and explained my situation. I told her:



> *"I would not be in this situation if I had not accepted their offer."*



02 | DECISIONS UNDER PRESSURE

Practical Guidance



01 Make the options understandable

Explain each option, what might happen next and what is still uncertain. Check understanding rather than assuming that agreement means everything is clear.

02 Advise without taking over

Professionals have knowledge and responsibilities that matter. Give your advice clearly, including when you strongly believe one option is safer or more beneficial, but distinguish “this is what I advise” from “this is what you must do.”

03 Be honest when there is no good option

Sometimes every available choice carries a serious cost. Acknowledge that honestly. Don’t present the option you consider least harmful as though it is an obvious or positive choice. Recognising the difficulty of the decision can itself help someone feel heard.

04 Give it time to sink in

Where circumstances allow, don’t expect an immediate answer. Give the young person time to think, ask questions, talk it through and come back to it. Information may need to be heard more than once before someone is ready to decide.

Having options doesn’t always mean having a real choice.

03 | WALKING ALONGSIDE

Yasco's experience

My experience with Refugee Youth Service was different.

I never felt like I was doing anything without my choice.

I could talk about my age dispute, my accommodation or my education. I could explain what I wanted and what I was worried about.

They listened to me. They didn't laugh at me or blame me.
It felt like speaking with family.

I felt comfortable because I knew the decisions were mine.

Even when I wasn't sure what to do, I knew I could talk things through with them without being pushed in one direction.

The message I always felt from them was:

> "Yasco, we're going with you whichever way you choose."



03 | WALKING ALONGSIDE

Practical guidance

Make it clear that your support does not depend on agreeing with their choices.

Accompaniment means staying alongside someone without needing to steer them. A young person should be able to disagree with you, change their mind or choose a different path without wondering whether they will lose your support.

01 | LISTEN WITHOUT LOOKING FOR THE ANSWER

Give someone space to explain what they want, what they are worried about and what matters to them. Listening does not always need to lead immediately to action.

02 | ASK BEFORE YOU STEP IN

Before offering advice or taking action, ask what would be useful. Sometimes someone wants information, sometimes practical help, and sometimes simply someone to listen.

03 | KEEP SUPPORT SEPARATE FROM AGREEMENT

You can disagree with a decision and still accompany the person making it. Be clear about your concerns, but also be clear that your support does not depend on them choosing what you would choose.

04 | STAY ALONGSIDE, NOT OUT IN FRONT

Let the young person set the direction wherever possible. Your role may be to help them understand the route, navigate obstacles or reconsider along the way, but the journey remains theirs.



04 | STEPPING BACK

Yasco's experience

I think sometimes professionals need to **take a step back.**

Be on the same level as this child so you can understand them.

You might have more experience than them. You might know things they don't know yet. But something that seems silly to you might not seem silly to them.

If a young person wants an ice cream in winter, you can tell them:

"You might feel colder if you eat this."

You can give them your advice. But that doesn't mean you can reject their choice.

> *"Respect their choices, even when you might disagree or see the dangers in them."*



04 | STEPPING BACK

Practical guidance

Your experience gives you knowledge, not the young person's perspective.

Working with children and young people means holding expertise and responsibility. But experience can also make something seem simple, obvious or unimportant when it doesn't feel that way to the person in front of you.



01 | NOTICE THE POWER YOU BRING

Your role, age, knowledge and access to systems all affect the relationship. You don't have to intend to take control for a young person to experience it that way.

02 | DON'T DISMISS WHAT SEEMS SMALL

Something that appears trivial, unrealistic or unimportant to you may matter greatly to them. Start by trying to understand why it matters before judging the request itself.

03 | GET ONTO THEIR LEVEL

Literally and figuratively, try to see the situation from where the young person is standing. Take time to understand their world, their experiences and what matters to them.

04 | KNOW WHEN YOU REALLY DO NEED TO STEP IN

Stepping back doesn't mean abandoning professional responsibility. If there is a serious safeguarding concern, act. But don't turn every disagreement, risk or choice you wouldn't make into a reason to take control.

PASSING IT ON



I want to offer my support to others as much as I can. I cannot be selfish. What support I got from Refugee Youth Service I want to pass it on to as many people that are facing the same problem or issues as me.

If I can change the situation for one person, that's better than doing nothing.

I was so happy to join the Refugee Youth Service board. **Actually, it was my privilege.**

I hope to join other organisations so I can offer my support. As a volunteer or as a paid person, it doesn't matter, it's to help people.

And how will I take the approach of walking alongside people?

As a listener, and a learner. I should listen to what they're saying. I should respect their choices. **I'm not here to tell them what to do.**

Oh, and what is my favourite flavour of ice cream? **Chocolate.**

Mohammad Yasco
Refugee Youth Service

THANK YOU *for reading*



We hope this guide has offered useful ideas and reflections on accompaniment: supporting children and young people without taking over, and creating space for their choices, perspectives and decisions.

This guide is 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.

EXPLORE THE LEARNING HUB

Find all of our Insights, Practice Guides and Tools at:

refugeeyouthservice.org/learning-hub



INSIGHTS

Exploring some of the bigger questions that have shaped our practice.



PRACTICE GUIDES

Practical approaches, with ideas that can be adapted and applied in different settings.



TOOLS

Resources that can be taken, adapted and used by others.