

CASE STUDY

Connecting with young asylum seekers

How the Planning Star transforms keywork

Three years ago, Pathways to Independence and a group of partners collaborated on a Star that would meet the needs of children and young people seeking asylum. Triangle's research analyst, Dr Anna Good, finds out how it's going for the organisation now.

Young people's service provider Pathways to Independence UK is a small charity that packs a big punch. With project offices in Brighton and in Croydon, both hubs of migration, it's on the front line of responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers and providing them with specialist accommodation and support.

For years the charity had used the Young Person's Star as a keywork tool, but it wasn't an ideal fit for the particular needs of young asylum seekers. Having a tailored version of the Star was a dream that finally became a reality when Pathways to Independence secured Home Office funding alongside the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) to create a new Outcomes Star for unaccompanied

asylum-seeking children. That Star became the Planning Star.

Triangle worked with Pathways to Independence and the SESPM to map out and draft the new Star, ensuring wide participation from a range of other organisations including the Refugee Council. Pathways then piloted it rigorously for several months in 2019.

"Pathways was undoubtedly one of the most impressive and rewarding collaborations we've had, due to the depth of knowledge of their workers and the positive relationships they had with the young people they supported," says Triangle director Sara Burns. "They are real experts in the field, which is exactly what we

need to recreate a Star that speaks to and reflects the reality of people in a sector."

The benefits: engaging young people from the start

The Planning Star is now well embedded within Pathways to Independence's working practices. So what's it like for employees to use?

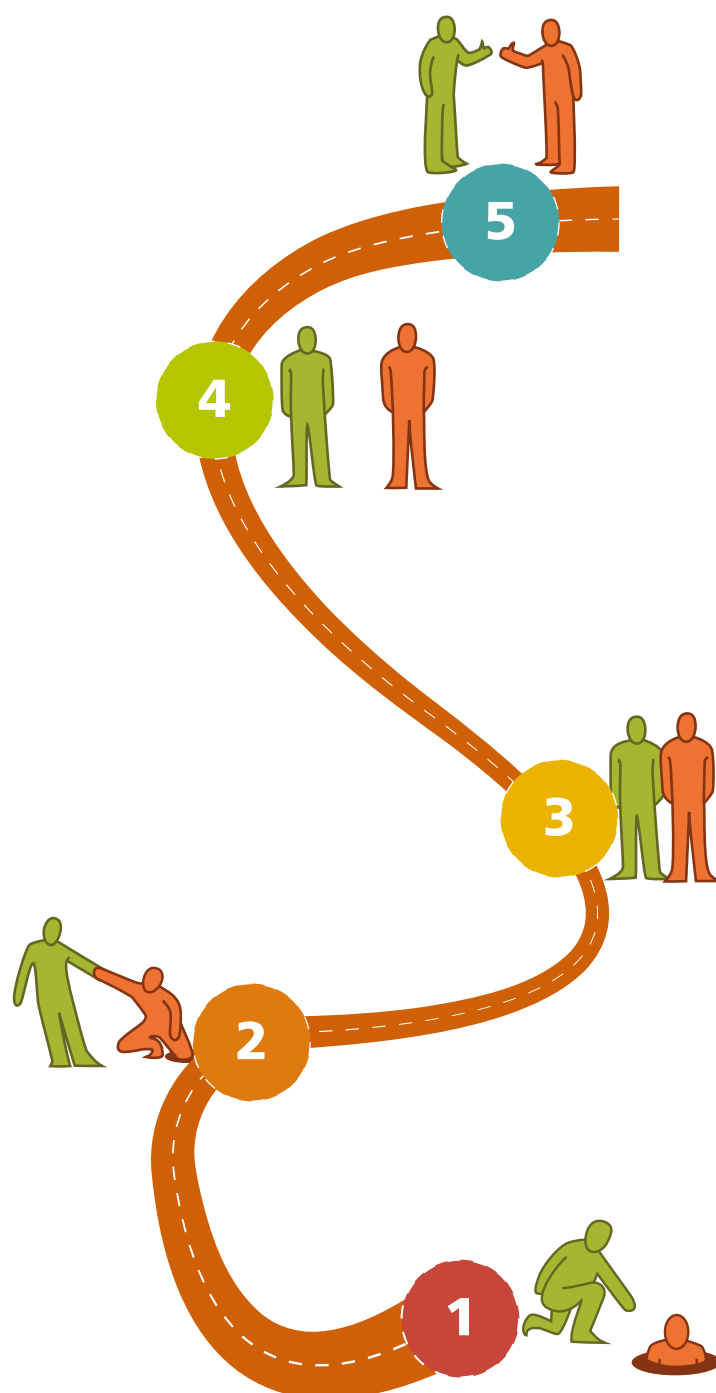
"At first I thought it might be just another piece of reporting and paperwork," says keyworker Chloe Christmas. "My view changed almost immediately from the first time I used it, because it wasn't a load of report writing. Suddenly we



had a new engaging tool instead of having to write an essay every few months about the young person – it was more of a fun way of reporting on progress.”

For Chloe, part of that appeal is the interactivity built into the Star. “It gets the young people involved in the process, rather than me just writing a report without the young person there. They can really see what’s going on and put their views forward and be part of it. It’s all about them so it’s great that they can be involved in it.”

It also helps that the Star is so visual. “It looks cool,” says Chloe. “It’s colourful and attractive and not just another pathway plan they’re used to. I’ve never had a young person disengage with it – they’ve always been up for doing it. I think it’s impossible to introduce it in a boring way because it looks so engaging.” With many of the young people speaking little or no English when they first arrive, the Star’s translated resources are also proving really helpful. “I did one the other day with a new arrival and used the translated materials throughout and it was so useful,” says Chloe. “Even just the pictures on the Journey of Change are brilliant. Young people relate to that, and you don’t really need to explain it – the pictures do the talking.”



The Journey of Change scale is “not a scale of bad to excellent, it’s a scale of support and progress and I think that’s something really important to explain.” – Chloe Christmas



Helping front-line staff have deeper conversations

Not only is the Star outwardly engaging, it also allows front-line staff to go into more depth. This is crucial when dealing with children who may well have lost family and who are likely to have experienced other trauma on their journey to this country. They also face the additional worry over whether or not they will be able to stay in this country when they reach 18.

“The Star can initiate a more in-depth conversation, particularly around mental health,” says peer adviser Davina Dunn. “Sitting down and actually ring-fencing this time to have a more in-depth discussion has resulted in young people confiding more about mental health when perhaps they would have glossed over it before in normal keywork situations. In the particular case I’m thinking of it was really illuminating and at that point we could go in and start referring.”

Not surprisingly, Pathways is very trauma-informed as an organisation and keyworkers are skilled in handling trauma with care and sensitivity. But workers too can experience trauma second-hand when dealing with young people who have been through so much. And here the Star has some other less obvious benefits.

“Actually for our keyworkers it’s really good for them to see their successes using the Star,” says team leader Taz Fletcher. “When they’ve been working with young people for

months or years they can see that there’s been a shift in the areas that they’ve been working on. The young person might be doing GCSEs now but started on courses to learn basic English. The Star helps to celebrate successes and that is good for your well-being and feeling supported as a keyworker.”

Focusing on where action is needed

The Star also helps to focus both young people and workers on where action and support are most needed.

“If a young person goes from a 5 to a 3, for example, they can find it a bit disheartening, but it brings up a good conversation about the ups and downs of life and it’s healthy for them to see,” says Chloe. “It’s not a scale of bad to excellent, it’s a scale of support and progress and I think that’s something really important to explain. Some young people think being at 1 is the worst thing in the world but actually for me it’s great because it shows exactly what we need to work on and that we can do something to help.”

Allowing for a difference of opinion

And the best feature? Workers at Pathways to Independence are united on one particular aspect of the Planning Star – allowing for disagreement between the young person and the keyworker.

“The option to put a worker and service user only reading when there’s disagreement is just brilliant,” says Chloe. “It still allows the young person to have a voice and it shows we’re actually understanding it. It’s something a lot of other reports don’t have, so it’s another USP of the Star.”

The impact: tailor-made but wide-reaching importance

For Pathways to Independence, collaborating on the Planning Star has been a rewarding process. It has created a tool that feels tailor-made for their projects, helping them improve both keywork and reporting to funders. But it’s also created a hugely useful resource for the looked-after children sector. And right now, that feels more important than ever.



The Star helps keyworkers to “see their successes” and it “helps to celebrate successes and that is good for your well-being and feeling supported as a keyworker.” – Taz Fletcher

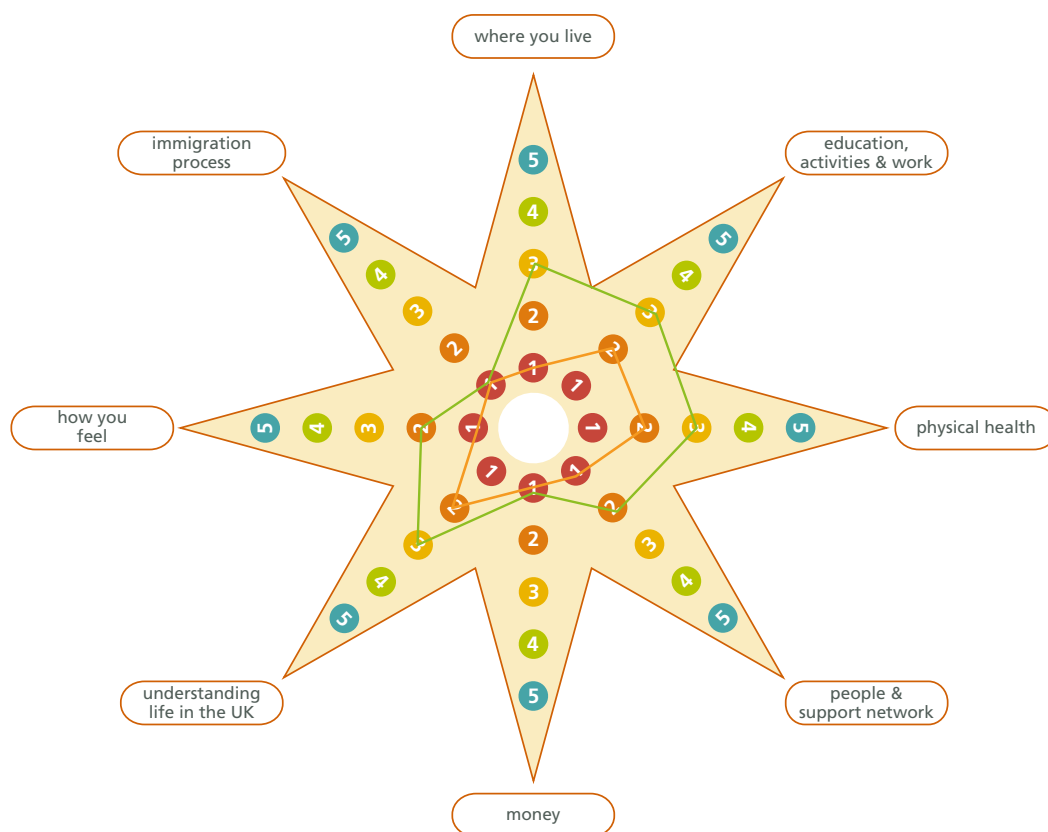


More information and next steps

Visit our website for previews of the Star, guidance and information: www.outcomesstar.org.uk

Triangle are the social enterprise behind the Outcomes Star, based in the UK. If you are not based in the UK, please visit our website for the contact details of organisations supporting the Outcomes Star internationally.

The Planning Star is designed for use with children and young people who are separated from their families and have come to this country to seek asylum.



Find out more

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