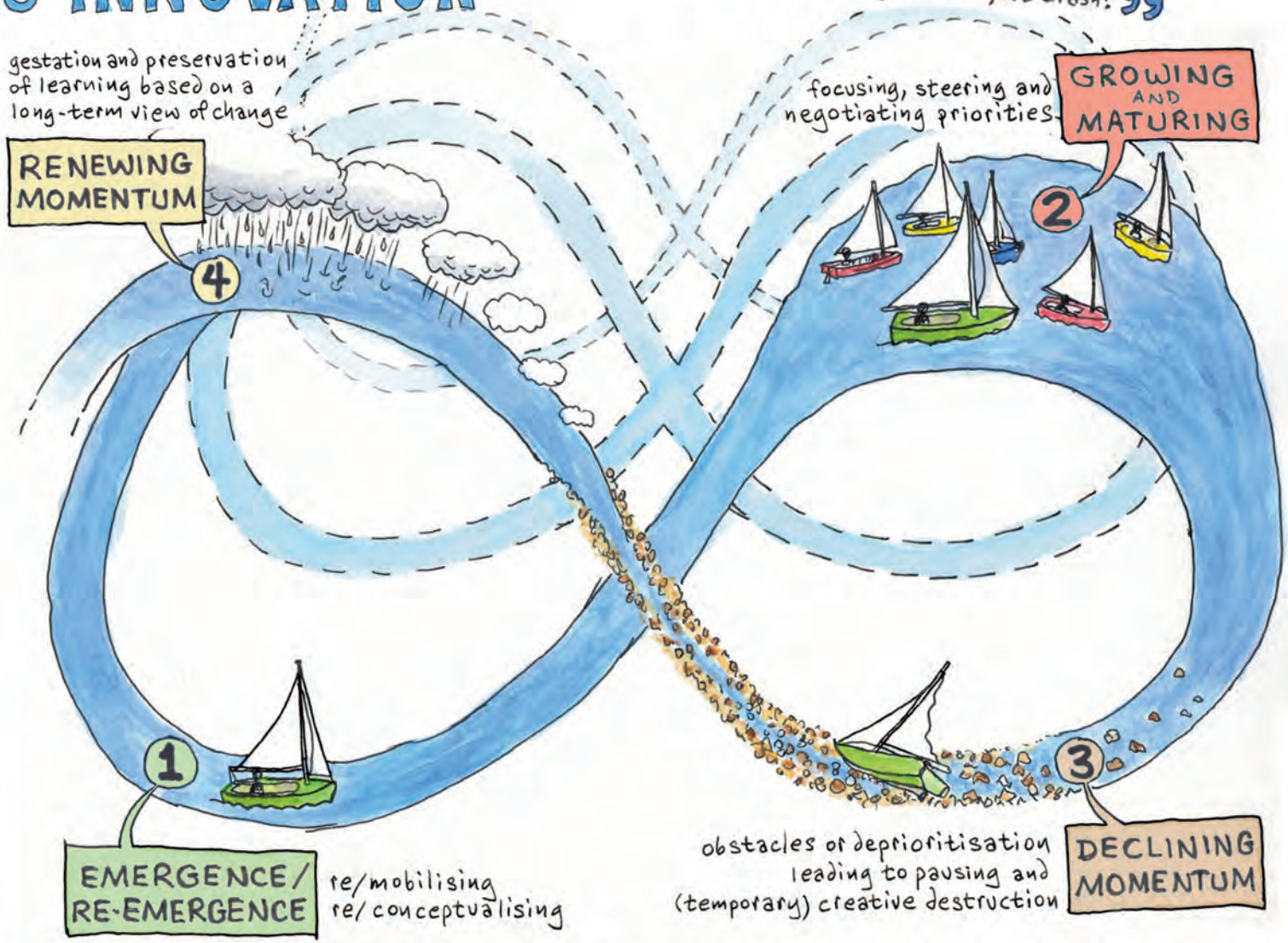
Exploring Transitional Safeguarding Journeys: An ECOCYCLES APPROACH to WHOLE-SYSTEMS INNOVATION

This graphic resource draws on the Innovate Project's findings about the early stages of innovation journeys to develop Transitional Safeguarding systems in selected research sites. Using complexity principles and the ecocycles perspective on change and development[1], we pose key questions that can facilitate planning and reflection in organisations and interagency partnerships at different stages throughout an innovation journey towards whole-system change.

The Innovate Project
www.theinnovateproject.co.uk
Researching youth, risk and complexity

Transitional Safeguarding[2] is an emergent framework to better support and safeguard young people in transition to adulthood. It envisions boundary-spanning, co-produced, locally-configured and evidence-informed whole systems change.

For further information: and



[1] Holling, C.S. (1987) 'Simplifying the complex: The paradigms of ecological function and structure', *European Journal of Operational Research*, 30(2): 139–146; Hurst, D.K. and Zimmerman, B.J. (1994) 'From life cycle to ecocycle: a new perspective on the growth, maturity, destruction, and renewal of complex systems', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 3(4): 339–354; https://www.liberatingstructures.com/31-ecocycle-planning/

[2] Holmes, D. and Smale, E. (2018) *Transitional Safeguarding - Adolescence to Adulthood: Strategic Briefing*. Dartington, Totnes: Research in Practice.

Phase 1

EMERGENCE/ RE-EMERGENCE

In this phase, initial ideas emerge (or re-emerge, based on previous work) and gain traction. Relationships are mobilised and initial plans and visions are set out. This can generate enthusiasm and energy as well as surface ambivalence or scepticism about whether systems change is achievable.

Transitional Safeguarding connects with longstanding concerns about system and service gaps, proposing the reframing of issues through a safeguarding lens and a boundary-spanning approach. Innovate Project research found that this phase focused on:

- Surfacing key issues, needs and narratives for young people, e.g. by tracking and exploring individual journeys through services and systems
- Identifying key partners and working to expand this network across service boundaries
- Connecting/reconnecting with existing relevant initiatives across sectors

KEY QUESTIONS for planning and reflection

1. How will your innovation generate, build on and sustain boundary-spanning connections and relationships within your local system?
2. How will you reach and connect with young people, families and communities to genuinely centre their lived experiences?
3. What structures, processes and methods will generate and sustain co-production among system partners?
4. Who will lead across services and systems to generate interest and commitment and how will they be supported?
5. What resources will be needed and available (including by collaboration or 'pooling') to get the initiative started?
6. How can initial plans be developed based on a timeframe that is realistic about the long-term nature of systems change while recognising and capturing any 'quick wins' from the outset?

Phase 2

GROWING AND MATURING

In this phase, ideas grow into more detailed and concrete visions of change, which may need to be negotiated based on competing needs and priorities. Nurturing relationships, flexibility as well as tolerance of uncertainty can mitigate against tensions and struggles that are surfaced in this phase.

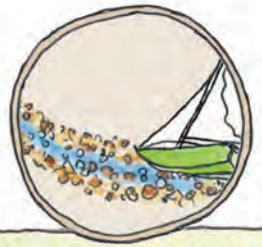
Transitional Safeguarding offers a set of key principles to be applied in relation to local need and local concerns. Innovate Project research found that this phase prioritised:

- Keeping the voices and experiences of young people and their communities a central concern
- Working with and through relationships to negotiate co-produced systems change in contexts of high stakes and high pressures

KEY QUESTIONS for planning and reflection

1. How will your innovation cultivate and utilise boundary-spanning connections and relationships to resolve tensions and challenges productively?
2. How will your innovation maintain its focus on the needs and priorities voiced by young people and communities in contexts of pressure and uncertainty?
3. How will your initiative balance and deal with conflicting views and priorities as part of a co-productive approach?
4. How will those leading initiatives across services and systems be enabled and supported to be persistent, flexible and resilient facilitators and mediators?
5. With limited or no dedicated resources, how will system partners be supported to keep up the consistent level of involvement needed to sustain momentum?
6. How will your innovation track long-term goals, recognise short-term achievements and remain flexible enough to respond to changed needs or renegotiated priorities?

Phase 3



DECLINING MOMENTUM

In this phase, internal or external obstacles and barriers may lead to waning support or participation, a possible sense of decline or even of 'failure'. Anticipating adverse dynamics allows innovations to build capacity for pausing, reflecting, collectively acknowledging and working through practical and emotional impacts.

Transitional Safeguarding, at the time of Innovate Project research, is an early-stage example of whole systems innovation. Achieving the changes it proposes is expected to involve time and possible challenges along the way. Our research suggests that where momentum declines, addressing this may be helped by:

- Taking stock of what change has already been achieved locally and what remains outstanding and communicating this throughout the system partnership
- Keeping in touch and open with young people and their communities about pauses in planned innovation work

KEY QUESTIONS for planning and reflection

1. How can boundary-spanning connections and relationships in your system buffer against adverse events and declining momentum?
2. How can your innovation remain accountable to young people and communities, focusing on their needs and mitigating against the motivational and emotional impact of adverse events and declining momentum?
3. How will your innovation sustain, preserve and carry forward co-produced learning despite possible pauses in work?
4. How will your innovation prevent and seek to mitigate against isolation, individualised blame or resignation (both emotional and actual) among champions and leaders?
5. What resources and capacities will allow you to anticipate and deal with the practical and emotional impact of adverse events?
6. What will help system partners appreciate the long-term nature of systems change and allow the innovation to sustain the stop/start dynamics such change may involve?

Phase 4

RENEWING MOMENTUM

A long-term view on the time and efforts involved in systems change highlights the need for capturing and preserving 'lessons learnt' from both achievements and adversity, despite fluctuating energy and momentum. Processes that encourage and sustain collective 'memory-holding' can help renew momentum and energy at the right time, allowing innovations to sustain work across iterations.

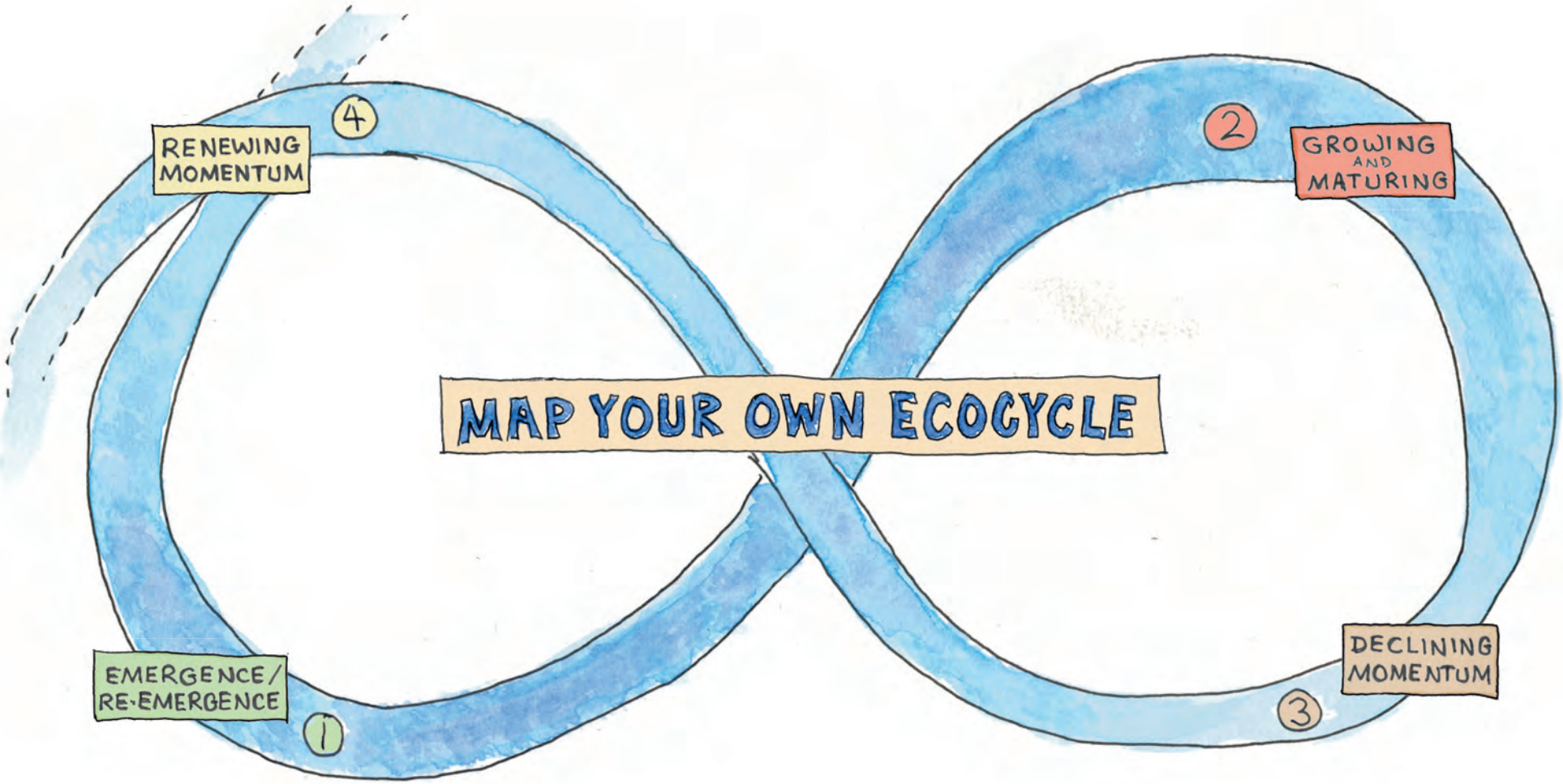
Transitional Safeguarding is a long-term endeavour based on strong practical and moral drivers. Maintaining momentum for systems change can be challenging in contexts of significant service and system pressures at local levels. At national level interest and momentum are continuing to grow. Innovate Project research suggests that, where and when needed, renewing momentum may be facilitated by:

- Identifying dedicated processes and methods that capture and preserve learning about local systems change.
- Making use of the growing body of resources and networks about Transitional Safeguarding at national levels, see: →

KEY QUESTIONS for planning and reflection

How can the work of your initiative be reinvigorated through:

1. system connections and relationships that provide a fresh perspective or renewed focus?
2. renewed commitment to and actions that centre the voices and lived experiences of young people and communities?
3. re-focusing on co-production by checking-in with existing partners as well as seeking out new partners?
4. re-negotiating structures and support provisions for cross-system leaders?
5. reviewing and potentially re-negotiating resources and capacities within the system?
6. reviewing any changes or reconfigurations in short- and long-term goals and plans?


MAP YOUR OWN ECOCYCLE
1
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RE-EMERGENCE
2
GROWING
AND
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3
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4
RENEWING
MOMENTUM