

# Ecosystemic Partnership Approach



Implementation  
Guide

Ecosystemic approach to the mobilization  
of local communities in aid of the development  
of children aged 0 to 5 years

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*Information contained in this document may be cited provided that the source is mentioned.*



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DES COMMUNAUTÉS ENGAGÉES



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## Table of Contents

CREDITS	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Why produce a Guide?	5
1.2 Who is this Guide for?	5
1.3 What does the Guide contain?	6
1.4 Using the Guide	6
2 CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES	7
2.1 Intervention in underprivileged environments	7
2.2 Ecosystemic partnership approach to community mobilization	9
2.3 Protective factors to help guide actions	11
2.4 Winning conditions for successful child-family-community partnerships	12
3 THE ECOSYSTEMIC PLANNING PROCESS	14
3.1 Intention	14
3.2 Status and situational analysis	17
3.3 Planning	20
3.4 Implementation	25
3.5 Evaluation and outcomes	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

## BACKGROUND

By supporting the mobilization of local communities, Avenir d'enfants is contributing to the overall development of children five years of age and under living in poverty so all children have every opportunity to have a good start in life. A non-profit organization, Avenir d'enfants was created through a partnership between the Government of Québec and the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon. Avenir d'enfants administers contributions from these two partners to the Early Childhood Development Fund.

The mission of the Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ), a non-profit organization created in 2002, is to promote innovation and knowledge transfer, thereby improving educational achievement in Quebec. As a key player in this field, the CTREQ is a true hub of development founded on its twin cornerstones of innovative practices and scientific knowledge.

This ecosystemic approach-driven guide to implementing partnerships and mobilizing communities is based both on scientific and experiential knowledge. Its innovative spirit expresses itself in a deliberate process that seeks to change practices and encourage the best-possible development of children aged 0 to 5 years as well as their school readiness. Several challenges remain, including how to ensure that innovations can be successfully transferred, measured and sustained.

The idea of partnerships to link family, school, and community was one of the top priority actions to emerge from a consulting tour of educational institutions in 2004-2005. In order to address this widespread desire for action, the CTREQ set up a number of initiatives—including an online directory of existing projects linking schools, families, and communities—meant to help inspire and guide community actors by showcasing interesting project initiatives. The CTREQ also published a document outlining winning conditions for successful partnerships between schools, families and the community—*Les conditions essentielles à la réussite des partenaires école-famille-communauté* [PDF]. Authored by Rollande Deslandes, professor and researcher at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, the document introduces the main theoretical foundations for implementing successful partnerships. And then finally, in October 2010, following a seminar on school-family-community partnerships and the conditions that are crucial to their success, it became all too evident that a guide containing and elaborating the necessary

conditions for successful partnerships was necessary. The finished guide—whose main author is François Blain—on how to implement school-family-community partnerships based on an ecosystemic approach was published in August 2011.

Based on this first guide, Avenir d'enfants has produced an adapted version for communities that mobilize in aid of their children aged 0 to 5, based on an ecosystemic approach. This initiative shows Avenir d'enfants' commitment to address the needs of its different partners and their various needs through an approach that is better suited to the communities' realities, and using simpler tools for conducting situational analyses, elaborating a territory-specific profile, a concerted action plan and a guidance program. This Guide offers communities the chance to experience an ecosystemic approach and process that helps maximize the development of children age 0 to 5 years of age and ensures they have a good start in life as well as an excellent degree of school readiness.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Why produce a Guide?

For over a decade, various programs, strategies, and approaches have highlighted the importance of the child-family-community relationship<sup>1</sup> in order to encourage educational success as widely as possible, particularly in underprivileged areas. This vast terrain of inquiry has produced different kinds of scientific and empirical knowledge.

In an effort to make use of this knowledge and the winning conditions for a successfully dynamic child-family-community relationship, Avenir d'enfants adapted the guide using its own ecosystemic partnership approach. The resulting Guide is meant to be a concrete tool to help Local Groups of Partners (LGPs) implement this approach. From the earliest days of its existence, Avenir d'enfants has believed in the ecosystemic approach, convinced that its processes are much better suited to meet the needs of the LGPs. This approach has the advantage of providing simplified tools that enable community actors to collaborate more effectively on protective factors that affect children, families, and communities.

In short, the ecosystemic partnership approach described in this Guide will support the mobilization of community actors and organizations in aid of the development of children aged 0 to 5 years so that each child has every opportunity to have a good start in life and attains an excellent level of school readiness.

## 1.2 Who is this Guide for?

The Guide targets community and institutional stakeholders involved in interventions in underprivileged environments.<sup>22</sup> However, the approach covered here also implicates parents, children, and any community actors wishing to contribute in a spirit of partnership to any given project, wherever a mobilized local community is the foundation for effective community action.

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<sup>1</sup> Among other initiatives:

- Stratégie d'intervention Agir autrement (SIAA)
- Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS)
- École en santé, MELS-Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
- Famille, école, communauté: résussir ensemble program (FECRE), MELS
- Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture (PAÉLÉ), MELS
- Programme de soutien à l'École montréalaise

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<sup>2</sup> Although this Guide has been specifically designed for underprivileged environments, it can also be applied to more privileged contexts. Even though the ecosystemic model can be applied to all problem situations, the protective factors and systems covered are geared to the optimum development of children aged 0 to 5 and their successful school readiness.

### 1.3 What does the Guide contain?

The Guide is divided into six sections.

**Section 1** describes the background situations for which this Guide may be used. It provides answers to Why?, Who?, What?, and How?.

**Section 2** defines intervention in underprivileged environments and its theoretical foundations.

**Section 3** explains the meaning of partnership according to the ecosystemic approach.

**Section 4** recaps the winning conditions for successful partnerships and community mobilization.

**Section 5** introduces the protective factors to keep in mind throughout the targeted action in order to strengthen outcomes.

**Section 6** serves as a guide to the elaboration of a partnership project based on the ecosystemic approach. All of the required steps and actions are described in detail. This Guide is supplemented with a Toolbox to help carry out the process.

### 1.4 Using the Guide

This Guide refers to a number of specific concepts that serve as theoretical foundations.

It is designed to be concrete insofar as these concepts are integrated into the rigorous process.

The theoretical concepts are described in Sections 2 through 5 in the Guide. Since the concepts of intervention in underprivileged environments, partnerships, and the ecological system are of key importance, readers must have a clear idea of their meaning in order to understand the basis for the approach advocated in this Guide. The same is true for the winning conditions for successful partnerships and the protective factors. They must be kept in mind throughout the process in order to strengthen outcomes.

In addition to initial training workshops for development reps, territory managers and staff working for various Avenir d'enfants departments, as well as the coordinators and local partners who peruse this Guide, sustained follow-up and guidance services will be made available. These training and field support services are meant to help with the process of appropriation of the ecosystemic approach and its integration into the practices of Avenir d'enfants and its partners.

## 2 CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES

### 2.1 Intervention in underprivileged environments

#### 2.1.1 Poverty—a multifaceted phenomenon

Many terms, definitions and realities can be used to describe the concept of poverty.

To some people, poverty is explained in terms of a vulnerable population, low socio-economic empowerment, material poverty, or socially and economically disadvantaged areas.

To others, it is defined on the basis of variables, such as the poverty line, the rate of economic non-participation in families, mothers' educational achievement level, social support networks, school dropout rates, the health of the general population in a given area, the unemployment rate, etc.

The one clear consensus that emerges from these many competing elements is that **poverty hinges on many factors and equally affects the cultural, economic, social and citizenship domains, as well as education and health; and these factors can be passed on from generation to generation.**<sup>3</sup>

A number of researchers have tried to define the characteristic features of deprived socio-economic environments. According to Terrisse,<sup>4</sup> these environments are characterized by material poverty, the absence of social and professional integration into institutions (community organizations, municipal organizations, CSSS, CLE, etc.), family instability, low education and value transmission levels, as well as attitudes and behaviour that allow very few children to escape from the poverty trap. Desbiens<sup>5</sup> states that families in these environments are characterized by emotional deprivation, low levels of prosocial behaviour, harsh but inconsistent discipline, deficient parental involvement levels, and inadequate supervision.

#### 2.1.2 Poverty and the child

A warm and supportive environment that is sensitive to a child's needs instills confidence in his or her abilities to overcome challenges, including starting school. Although this is true for most social environments, in underprivileged environments it represents a real challenge. According to the Direction de la santé publique (Québec's public health department)<sup>6</sup>, children in underprivileged environments more often reach the age of school entry without all the skills expected of their age group, which jeopardizes their school readiness.

The school dropout rate among children from poor families is double the average, which, in turn, especially in the current social and economic context, considerably increases their chances of experiencing unemployment, deprivation, exclusion, and all the problems connected to poverty. It should be noted that according to the 1991 report *Un Québec fou de ses enfants* a child's exposure to four or more risk factors jeopardizes his/her ability to assume a parenting role in adulthood.<sup>7</sup>

In closing, it should be noted that the predictive factors of educational success are anchored in the child's early development, well before he or she begins school.

#### 2.1.3 Poverty and the family

Scientists agree that parents play the primary and most significant role in the earliest years of a child's development and so are the main contributors to the development of very young children. They exert the greatest influence by far on their children's attitudes, habits, and behaviours.

Many research studies on the predictors of educational success recognize that a mother's low

<sup>3</sup> MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX, 1991

<sup>4</sup> TERRISSE, B. et al., 2000

<sup>5</sup> DESBIENS, N.S. et al., 2006

<sup>6</sup> MINISTÈRE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA SOLIDARITÉ SOCIALE, 1996

<sup>7</sup> BOUCHARD, C., 1991

educational achievement levels is one of the most predictive factors of a child's later educational failure.<sup>8</sup>

It should also be noted that one of the reasons for educational failure is the parents' lack of knowledge of how to motivate and help their children succeed in school.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, there is a close correlation between people's health, income, educational achievement on the one hand and the educational practices in their families on the other.<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Poverty and the community

Risk factors are present in each and every socio-economic environment. However, their frequent presence and juxtaposition in underprivileged environments is well documented. The probability that a single risk factor will negatively impact a child's adaptation is low. Negative effects are due to the accumulation of factors as well as their reciprocal interaction.<sup>11</sup> The coexistence of several risk factors can have multiple effects on the child's physical health, as well as his/her general, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

For example, the chances for educational success are not equally distributed throughout Quebec's territory. According to MELS data, 35% of students attending schools in underprivileged environments leave school before obtaining a diploma or qualification, compared to only 20% in other environments.<sup>12</sup>

It should be added that dropouts are generally less involved in their communities, and they will be tomorrow's poorly educated parents, increasing the chances that their children will also experience educational difficulties and drop out before obtaining a diploma.<sup>13</sup>

All of these issues raise the question of the cultural gaps between underprivileged and more privileged environments—gaps that give rise to the phenomenon of cultural betrayal, which lies at the root of social exclusion and the recurrence of poverty.

#### 2.1.5 The gap between underprivileged family "culture" and school "culture."

As noted by Bourdieu, schools are not culturally neutral.<sup>14</sup> They reflect the dominant social classes' values and

preferred ways of thinking.<sup>15</sup> This has created a gap, often still very much in existence, between the underprivileged family's "culture" and the school's "culture." This phenomenon, known as "cultural betrayal," experienced by underprivileged families determines the relationship between these two systems and often results in the families' social exclusion.<sup>16</sup> The discrepancy between in-family practices (language, physical expressions, relationships with time) and the practices valued by the school conditions the contact zone where the school's learning modes and the family's sociocognitive characteristics brush up against one another.<sup>17</sup> According to Millet,<sup>18</sup> a family's precarious economic circumstances and forms of socialization characterized by isolation and the sometimes excessive interventions by social services, as well as limited educational and cultural resources are not very compatible with the monitoring requirements of the school, or, more broadly speaking, with the legitimate culture that it promotes. Children in this situation are often faced with a choice and most often opt for the culture of their families, and thereby help ensure that the same culture is passed on from generation to generation.

<sup>8</sup> The MELS index to denote socio-economic environment (IMSE) includes this variable, among others.

<sup>9</sup> SAINT-LAURENT, L., 2000

<sup>10</sup> MELS, 2003

<sup>11</sup> LAROSE, F. et al., 2004

<sup>12</sup> MELS, 2009

<sup>13</sup> JANOSZ, M., J.S. FALLU, and M.A. DENIGER, 2000

<sup>14</sup> BOURDIEU, P., J.C. PASSERON, 1964

<sup>15</sup> BRUNER, J., 1996

<sup>16</sup> LAHIRE, B., 1995

<sup>17</sup> MILLET M. and D. THIN, 2005

<sup>18</sup> MILLET M. and D. THIN, 2005



### 2.1.6 Poverty and the social dimension

There is consensus that whether it's a question of successful school entry, educational performance, the rate or level of educational achievement, dropout, or absenteeism rates, **"a family's or community's circumstances of poverty impacts the child's educational history and social adjustment"** [Translation].<sup>19</sup>

It has long been recognized that poverty significantly affects the educational dimension.<sup>20</sup> In 1966, the Coleman Report noted that students from underprivileged backgrounds are at greater risk of experiencing difficulties at school. After analyzing more than 15 studies, Forquin<sup>21</sup> concluded that "children from modest backgrounds often lag behind their more privileged peers in terms of learning and that the chances of continuing their studies varies according to their social backgrounds [Translation]."<sup>22</sup>

Sévigny,<sup>23</sup> who is interested in the relationship between secondary school graduation rates and poverty, observes that the poorer a student's residential neighbourhood the less likely s/he is to obtain a secondary school diploma. "Failure in school in turn increases the likelihood that an individual will face social and professional integration challenges [Translation]."<sup>24</sup>

"Since the family has the primary and most influential impact on a child's development, it is unsurprising that youth with behavioural problems often come from troubled families [Translation]."<sup>25</sup>

Although many efforts have been made to foster equal opportunities in underprivileged environments, including anti-poverty measures at the local, regional, and national levels, the persistent weight of the circumstances of poverty and the failure of schools to adapt to this situation are confirmed in the assessment of various policies, measures and programs as well as in the results of research carried out across North America.

## 2.2 Ecosystemic partnership approach to community mobilization

### 2.2.1 Partnerships to help transform practices

Partnerships are an important, even essential, component in a number of models and approaches used to mobilize communities. The many definitions of the partnership concept are well documented in the relevant literature. For the purposes of this Guide, we will select two that are relatively complete summaries of the concept.

According to Dhume,<sup>26</sup>

"A partnership is a **cooperative form of action** founded on the **free, mutual, and contractual commitment of different but equal actors** who constitute one collective actor from the perspective of changing action methods—to do things differently or to do things better—who are focused on a **common goal**, given its complexity or the fact that it transcends the framework for action of each of the actors, and who for this purpose elaborate a framework of action adapted to the project that has brought them together to jointly act based on this framework."

Boisclair,<sup>27</sup> for his part, developed a partnership typology by describing **four types of interdependent partnerships**. According to this typology, the success of each stage is a prerequisite for moving on to the next stage.

As such, effective communication (**information exchange**) is essential to the exchange of ideas and opinions (**consultation**). Consultation, which precedes the sharing of ideas and opinions, makes it possible to reach agreement on the directions, strategies, and actions to take, thereby creating a synergy (**a concerted action**).

<sup>19</sup> TERRISSE, B. et al., 2000

<sup>20</sup> CHOUINARD, R. et al., 2007

<sup>21</sup> FORQUIN, J.-C., 1989

<sup>22</sup> GAUTHIER, C., 2004

<sup>23</sup> SÉVIGNY, D., 2003

<sup>24</sup> CHOUINARD, R. et al., 2007

<sup>25</sup> DESBIENS, N.S. et al., 2006

<sup>26</sup> DHUME, F., 2001

<sup>27</sup> BOISCLAIR, M., 2005

And finally, the pooling of resources and responsibilities is made possible. It engages the actors to make an effort to reach a goal. The contribution of each actor in a relationship of associates (**collaboration**) is necessary for the action to succeed.

Based on the above, **a partnership is more a process than an end in itself, its ultimate goal being to transform the practices affecting the subject of the partnership.**

The Guide encourages a collaborative-type partnership, with **co-construction** as its central feature.

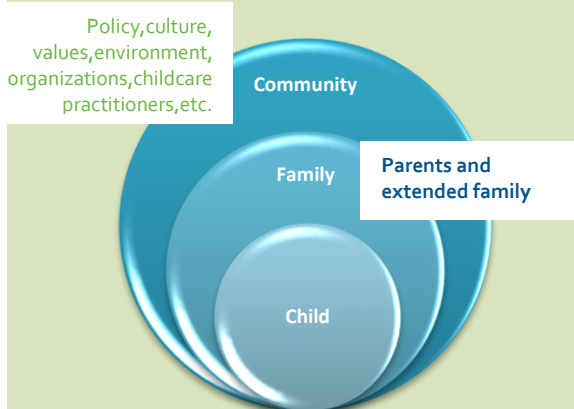
### 2.2.2 The ecosystemic approach

The vast majority of research on parent education refers in particular to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model.<sup>28</sup> This model considers social phenomena, organizations, policies, and individuals as systems in interaction with other systems.

In other words, the **ecosystemic model takes into account the child and the child's different environments, within a dynamic, mutually influential relationship.** The desired changes can be achieved through negotiated relationships between these environments and written into the concerted action plan.

The ecosystemic approach described in this Guide hinges on a process that makes sure the different systems interact with one another within a concerted action plan. The adoption of the ecosystemic approach<sup>29</sup> is recommended when organizing activities and programs that implicate the parents' and the community's participation in their children's successful school readiness and education.<sup>30</sup>

### *Avenir d'enfants' preferred model for the optimum development of children and their school readiness.*



### 2.2.3 Local community focus: education

"An education-focused community is considered to be 'a community that mobilizes its actors—organizations and their staff—with a focus on sharing and quality relationships in order to **encourage children's best-possible development and school readiness** [Translation]."<sup>31</sup>

The organizations and individuals who constitute this local education-focused community are the parents, children, as well as the institutional, community, economic and political organizations within the geographic environment corresponding to the territorial and cultural limits of the social environment.

The ecosystemic approach is concerned with educational continuity and the management of transitions. The local education-focused community reinforces and shares the adults' responsibility for their children's successful development and school readiness.

<sup>28</sup> BRONFENBRENNER, U., 1979 and 1986

<sup>29</sup> BRONFENBRENNER, U., 1972, 1979, and 1986

<sup>30</sup> LARIVÉE, S. et al., 2009

<sup>31</sup> Reference: *Programme famille école communauté réussir ensemble*, 2007; adapted from the CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION's definition in *L'école, une communauté éducative. Voies de renouvellement pour le secondaire*, Quebec, CSE, 1998, p. 15

#### 2.2.4 Child-family-community collaboration

Daycare services, community organizations, schools, public institutions, municipalities, and local and regional authorities should seek to sustainable changes to their practices by offering services that facilitate the child-family-community relationship as it attempts to foster school readiness. This way, instead of simply extending services to just “show” parents how to do things right, the focus should be on initiatives with a proven track record rather than just on linear, “mechanical” planning models.

“Doing things differently requires that the status quo be questioned, a rigorous process of co-constructing integrated solutions within a concerted action plan, undertaken by the organizations within a given territory, with the involvement of all actors in this relationship, a sustained multi-year effort, [...] involving the entire community”<sup>32</sup>.

Child-family-community collaboration for successful school readiness becomes much easier when it is well-planned, well-organized and supported by organizations in the community. When these organizations embrace and support the values associated with partnership, the resulting programs tend to be better, with more involvement from parents and members of the community.

Child-family-community collaboration for successful school readiness is thought to be a more significant factor than the type of family or neighbourhood,<sup>33</sup> which means that collaborative intervention stands a greater chance of producing lasting changes than discrete interventions at the family or community level alone.

The foundational concepts and implementation approach outlined in this Guide should help transform the relationships between children, parents, community, and the staff of organizations and ring in a new collaborative culture. The Guide also recommends that any action or actions undertaken form an integral part of a concerted action plan.

### 2.3 Protective factors to help guide actions

Research into resilience has introduced the concept of **protective factors**, enriching the discourse on interventions in underprivileged environments. Strictly speaking, resilience is not an approach, but more of an intrinsic “quality” that an individual possesses both on a personal and an environmental level. “Resilience can be defined as an individual’s ability to successfully adapt to a (social, school...) environment, even when exposed to adverse conditions (underprivileged environment) [Translation].”<sup>34</sup>

In the context of this Guide, the interest in resilience is based on the interactions and dynamics between the protective factors and the risk factors that resilience introduces.

The concept of resilience introduces the notion of protective factors, which, when present in an individual’s family, social, or school environment, facilitate his or her social adjustment and help reduce the impact of risk factors, or may even stifle their appearance. The protective factors and the risk factors simultaneously depend on the child, his or her family, and the community.

“The likelihood that a single risk factor or a single protective factor will have an impact on the adjustment of a child (or on other systems) are low, his or her adjustment levels being determined by an accumulation of factors and their interactions with each other [Translation].”<sup>35</sup> It may be reasonably believed that the greater a child’s exposure to protective factors, the better his or her ability to assume the role of parent in adulthood.

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<sup>32</sup> DESFORGES, C. and A. ABOUCHAAR., 2003

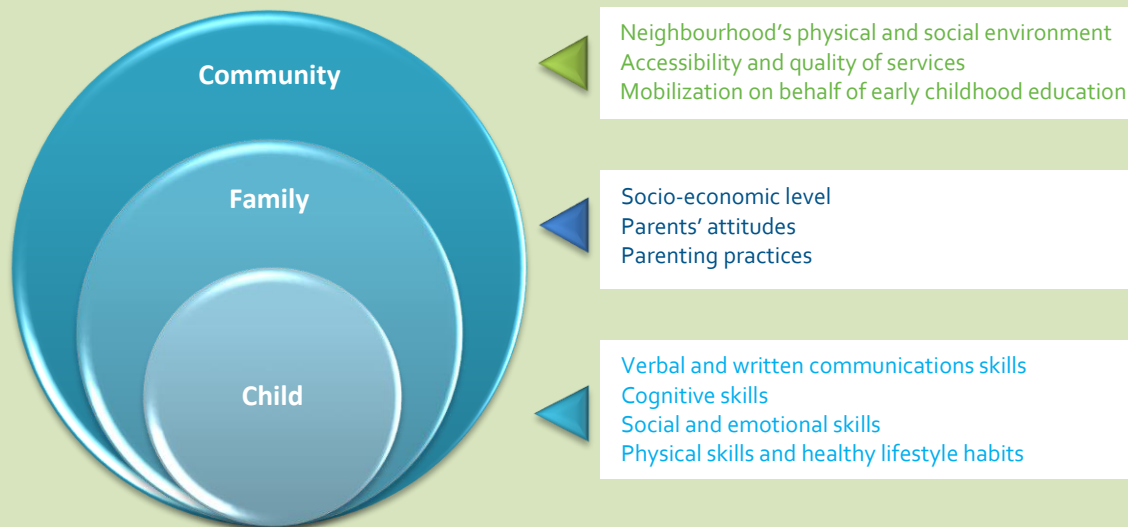
<sup>33</sup> LARIVÉE, S. et al., 2009

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<sup>34</sup> TERRISSE, B., 2000

<sup>35</sup> LAROSE, F. et al., 2004

### Protective factors linked to successful school readiness



Generally speaking, any action proposed must be universal in nature (preventive and educational) and based on the development or reinforcement of protective factors.

A review of the scientific literature and an analysis of the various protective factors affecting children aged 0 to 5 years, the family, and the community have been carried out. The criteria for selecting these factors were: they were evaluated, they had an impact in underprivileged environments, and they are associated with successful school readiness (for a description of the protective factor categories or "families, see Tools 4 and 5 in the Toolbox).

## 2.4 Winning conditions for successful child-family-community partnerships

In 2010, the CTREQ participated in research into the essential conditions for establishing partnerships.<sup>36</sup> Based on a literature review, Christenson and Sheridan<sup>37</sup> compiled four conditions for ensuring optimum relationships. They named them the **4As**—for approach, attitude, atmosphere, and actions.

**Approach** (belief) in the partnership concept lays the groundwork for collaboration among organizations.<sup>38,39</sup> It recognizes that "families and the community can also contribute to successful school readiness, and that all partners together share a unique and essential role to attain a shared goal [Translation]."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> DESLANDES, R., 2010

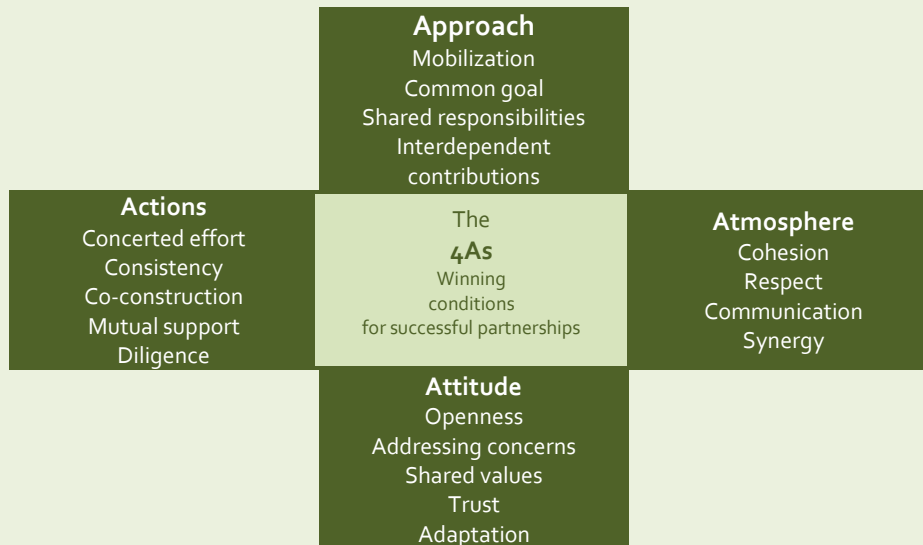
<sup>37</sup> CHRISTENSON, S. and S.M. SHERIDAN, 2001

<sup>38</sup> DESLANDES, R., 2010

<sup>39</sup> Adapted from GESTWICKI, C., 2000

<sup>40</sup> DESLANDES, R., 2010

*The winning conditions for partnerships in support of successful school readiness*



**Attitudes** refer to the values and perceptions the actors have of one another.

**Atmosphere** is the working climate in which the collaboration takes place. It should help produce a healthy relationship between the families, community members, and childcare specialists.

An open, trusting, and inviting atmosphere provides a sound foundation for planning actions.<sup>41,42</sup> In this respect, the support and leadership of the organizations' directors, the Instance régionale de concertation (IRC), the Conférence régionale des élus (CRÉ), or of a local organization are crucial.

And finally, **Action** refers to the strategies for building shared responsibility, one of these strategies being based on an action group composed of representatives from parents and community organizations. An action group guides the implementation of a concerted and unified action plan that has assigned roles for the child, family, and community.

This Guide constantly revisits the importance of the winning conditions (the 4As) within the partnership implementation and community mobilization process, based on the ecosystemic approach.

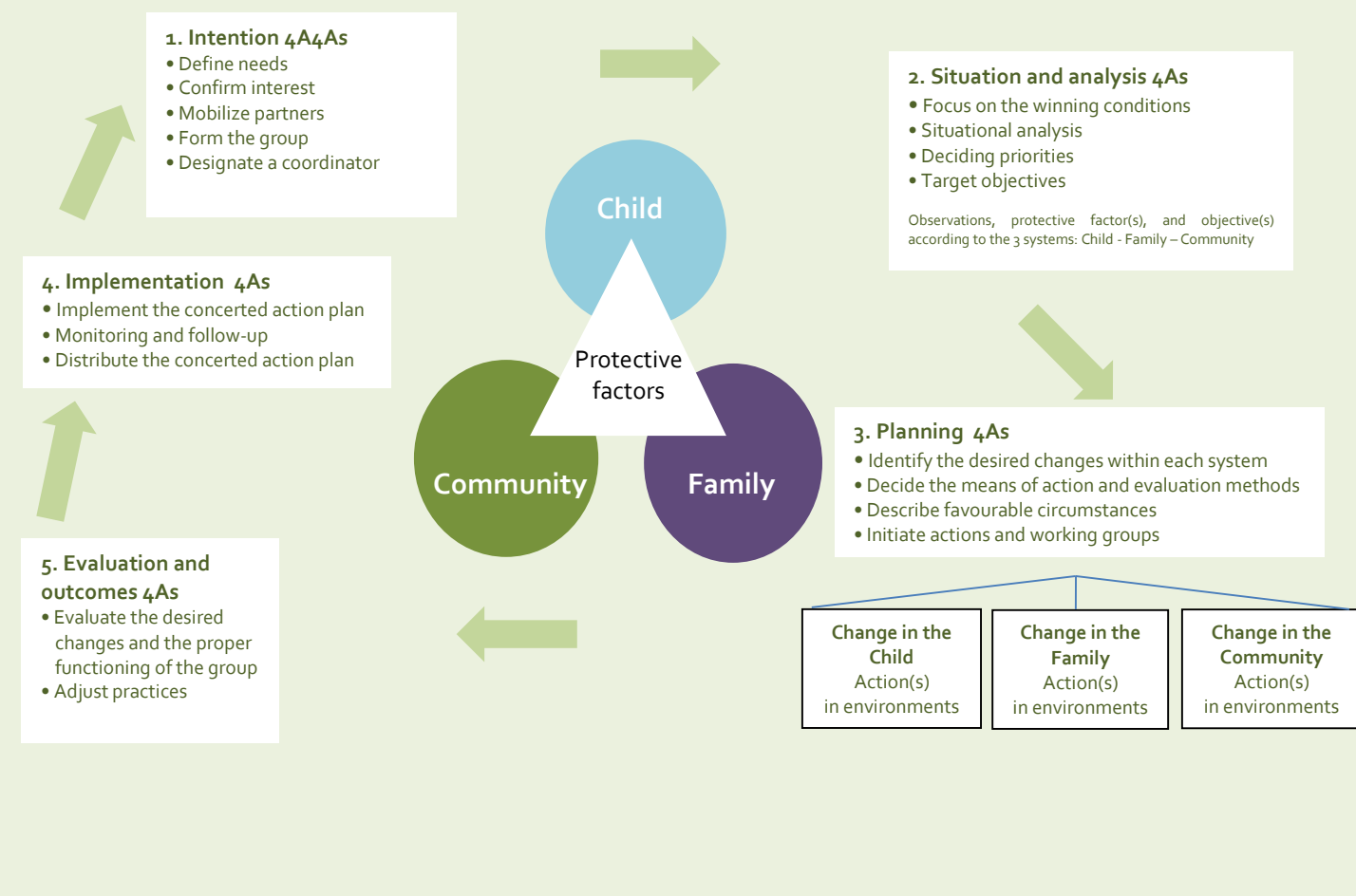
<sup>41</sup> DRYFOOS, J. and S. MAGUIRE, 2002

<sup>42</sup> CHRISTENSON, S. and S.M. SHERIDAN, 2001

### 3 THE ECOSYSTEMIC PLANNING PROCESS

This section outlines the various actions involved in the ecosystemic approach: intention, situation and analysis, planning, implementation, evaluation and outcomes.

#### *The ecosystemic approach in action*

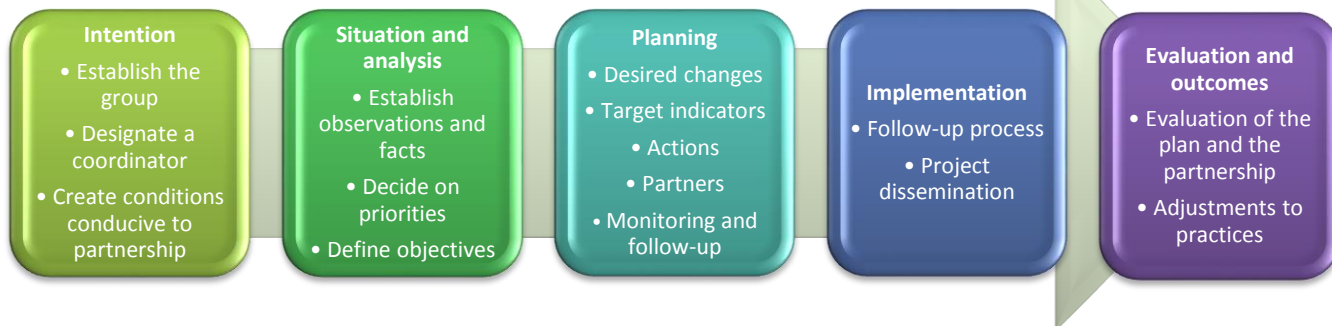


The steps in the process are described to illustrate each action. A separate Toolbox is also provided to offer more concrete assistance in implementing some of these steps. Some of the tools have been purposely designed completed to serve as examples. The proposed approach is outlined in summary form in a table contained in the Toolbox.

**Tool 1: Summary of the Ecosystemic Approach in Action**

#### 3.1 Intention

In order to support the collective responsibility for the development of children aged five and under, encourage sustainable change, and foster school readiness, the partners join together into a group and all commit to a planning process with the goal of developing a concerted action plan. This step requires the establishment of a group of partners, designation of a coordinator, and mobilization of key actors and partners in the targeted environment.



An initial meeting will bring together these partners in order to develop a common vision to address the problem situation, introduce the ecosystemic approach, and plan the situational analysis.

### 3.1.1 Establishing the group

It is important from the very beginning to secure the membership and participation of a basic core group of partners that are mobilized on behalf of children aged five and under and that come from a variety of sectors and backgrounds, including but not limited to

- Health and Social Services Centres (CSSSs)
- Educational child care services (CPEs, coordinating offices, daycare centres)
- Family-oriented community organizations
- Schools
- Municipalities

The group of partners, however, must include community organizations serving the needs of the children, families and community being targeted. **The partners' summary involvement is considered not only desirable but essential.** An ecosystemic partnership project cannot be carried out effectively without their respective contributions.

The partnership conception at issue here goes beyond the notion of consultative group; instead it is truly a collaborative partnership. All of the partners contribute to co-constructing the situational analysis as well as the concerted action plan throughout the process. They combine their responsibilities and their contributions in order to work towards a common goal: to act in order to achieve optimum school readiness. In more concrete terms, the group of partners' main functions are to conduct a

situational analysis, decide on priorities, plan actions, and conduct regular monitoring and follow-up to ensure the actions are carried out and evaluated.

### 3.1.2 Designation of a coordinator

The implementation of the partnership process based on an ecosystemic approach requires very careful coordination.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- From the very beginnings of the project and during the planning stages, the provision of information on key developments (to parents, organizations, etc.) can prove to be an important source of motivation.
  - ▶ The coordinator is primarily responsible for this, but each group member must also ensure that his or her organization and its networks are kept informed of the project's progress.
- From the very beginnings, it is **necessary to ensure that the greatest possible number of potential partners is targeted.**
- Reaching out to major actors who carry influence even when they are not directly connected to the problem situation can produce unexpected results. The ecosystemic approach focuses on the interrelationships between the child, the family, and the community. For example, making the effort to intervene with young children by collaborating with adult education services, among others, could certainly prove useful, as parents in underprivileged environments are potential users of such services.
- It is possible that not all potential partners will already be present in the initial phases of the process. New members may be added throughout the process. Consequently, a customized inclusion process should be planned.



#### Winning conditions:

Ensure that all partners understand the advantages of the ecosystemic approach and adhere to it

- The partners and the coordinator leading the project demonstrate the importance of each and every partner's contributions

- Ensure that all partners recognize the problem situation and how it affects the chances for school readiness



The designation of a person in charge of the group and the process is essential and should be decided as soon as possible. The coordinator, in executing his or her role, will encourage reinforced **mobilization and partner cohesion**, as well as maintaining the **respect for the ecosystemic approach**.

#### Coordinator's role

- Preparation and facilitation of meetings
- Contribute to the elaboration and execution of the situational analysis and the concerted action plan
- Ensure monitoring and follow-up of the group's decisions
- Where required, build and maintain awareness of the importance of the winning conditions

In short, the coordinator is the person with a comprehensive overview of the group's work and functions.

#### 3.1.3 Creating the winning conditions for a successful partnership

From the very beginnings of the project, it is imperative to focus on the **Winning conditions for a successful partnership**, which will affect the entire process.

It should once again be emphasized that the winning conditions (the 4As) are an integral part of the process proposed in this Guide.

The *approach* advocated here generally highlights the unique and interdependent partner contributions. Concrete *actions* are regularly proposed to ensure each member of the group is adequately integrated. The balloon features and key background terms and even the text itself have been designed to promote the approach among all actors.

This section reserves a special place for actors, as the working *atmosphere* will primarily take shape during the initial meetings of the group. The atmosphere will impact on the partners' *attitude*, creating a partnership climate among the group.

**The partners' attitude and the atmosphere at the working meetings will greatly affect the quality of the group's work, and especially on the partners' motivation levels, the consistency of their actions, and the duration of their participation in the process.**

Although the coordinator plays a predominant role in this respect, all group members share the responsibility to foster a productive climate. This shared responsibility can enter into play during the group's meetings, but these favourable conditions can also be transferred to their own specific environments, including their own working groups.



#### Winning conditions:

- The coordinator creates a pleasant work atmosphere for all partners:
  - ▶ Together with the group, he or she adopts a clear decision-making process that is respectful of everyone.
  - ▶ He or she and the partners agree on the frequency of meetings.
    - Meetings must take place within a reasonable timeframe in order to maintain motivation, but should be sufficiently spaced apart to account for the group members' availability.
    - It is recommended that meetings be held once every four to six weeks.\*
    - It is important that the coordinator and those charged with specific tasks have sufficient time to make headway in their assigned actions and that the meetings are scheduled to account for real-time developments.
  - ▶ Ideally, the coordinator draws up a meeting schedule for the whole year.
  - ▶ The coordinator finds a suitable space, where the group meetings can be held. Ideally, this room should be reserved on behalf of the partnership project.
  - ▶ The coordinator is responsible for the sound structuring of meetings (clear objectives, meeting agenda, minutes, user-friendliness, etc.). **Tool 2: Meeting Objectives and Tools** provides an overview of the objectives that should be targeted during meetings, as well as related tools.
  - ▶ The coordinator adopts strategies to ensure that all partners take part in the meetings and feel at ease to express their expectations and opinions. He or she encourages partners to develop shared values and demonstrate a willingness to address the concerns of others. The coordinator puts a special emphasis on mutual trust and respect.
  - ▶ The coordinator makes sure that meetings are organized and conducted to the satisfaction of all partners.
  - ▶ The coordinator makes sure that, at the conclusion of a meeting, all group members have a sense of having contributed to advancing the project.
- The partners help nourish this atmosphere as well:
  - ▶ They assume an attitude that is comprehensive, open, positive and constructive. They make an effort to adapt to each other's needs.
  - ▶ They communicate in a respectful and transparent manner.

\*In some situations, this frequency may not be adequate



## 3.2 Status and situational analysis



The situational analysis involves gathering, sharing, and analyzing data that will lead to a precise description of the problem situation's relevance to children's optimum development and school readiness. This is an essential prerequisite to ensure any interventions later on are based on an enlightened understanding.

**It is essential that each and every partner participates in every step of the analysis.** The particular perspectives each partner can bring to bear helps ensure the understanding of the problem situation in all three systems (child, family, community) is as comprehensive as it is accurate.

### 3.2.1 Establishing observations and facts

#### Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data available

Qualitative data consists of empirical knowledge, perceptions, and observations related to the problem situation.

Quantitative data consists of measurable information, such as statistics of various types (ratios, percentages, frequencies, rates, etc.).

The cross-tabulation of the available qualitative and quantitative data lets the group focus on recurring information, which gives rise to specific findings. By analyzing the available data, the group will gain a better understanding of the changes that need to be implemented and how the situation affects each of three systems.

In doing so, the partners will be able to share their respective difficulties and build a shared vision of children's optimum development and school readiness in

their respective environments. This represents an opportunity to reinforce the partners' mobilization and cohesion, which in turn will encourage the creation of group synergy.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- Observations and perceptions gathered in the field must be backed up with facts and reflect a broad consensus. This will prevent that any findings are based on prejudices.
- In order to analyze a situation without drowning in data, it is important to draw on information that is already available.

If never-ending inquiries are launched, the presentation and sharing of this data in order to yield findings may become too burdensome for the group.

#### Analysis of services offered by partners

Pooling the actions, services, and programs currently available in the targeted environment enables the group to devise a comprehensive portrait of the services offered among its members. An analysis of this data will reveal the strengths and weaknesses in the services offered, depending on the populations of the different systems targeted.

#### Analysis of protective factors

An analysis of the protective factors will identify those factors currently affected by the partners' actions, as well as those that may eventually become affected as well. This information will present an opportunity to sound out the partners' interest to intervene in new protective factors.

This information is essential, as during the elaboration of the concerted action plan, the protective factors will guide the decisions on which actions to implement.

And finally, the key findings to emerge from these three analyses will create a well-informed picture of the situation at its outset and will thus help guide the selection of priority areas.

#### Situational analysis one step at a time:

- **Preliminary:** The process of analyzing the situation is briefly described to the partners. The members of the group arrive with qualitative and quantitative data to share.
- **Identification by the group of the findings resulting from the qualitative and quantitative data** using **Tool 5: Our observations and findings**.
- The coordinator introduces the protective factors, the next steps in the situational analysis, and the corresponding tools. The partners are asked to complete these tools and return them to the coordinator so that he or she can summarize the data in time for the next meeting.
- ▶ **Introduction of the protective factors: Use the following tools:**  
**Tool 3: Table Listing Protective Factors Connected to School Readiness**  
**Tool 4: Protective Factors Fact Sheets.**
- ▶ Tools to be completed by the partners with regard to their respective environments:  
**Tool 6: Analysis of the Services Offered by Organizations in the Community**  
**Tool 7: Organization's Existing Protective Factor Measures and Activities**

This tool may also serve as a source of inspiration for those developing an overall action plan while gathering data.

- Coordinator's presentation of the data summary based on the tools completed by the partners.

#### ▶ Analysis of the data by the group:

Record the findings using **Tool 5: Our observations and findings**

- See the completed sample of **Tool 5: Our observations and findings**, for some concrete examples of a data analysis conducted with the help of these tools.

#### Things to keep in mind:


- It is important not to confuse a finding with a desired change or an action that the partners would like to carry out (e.g. very few children aged one and under have access to books).
- It would be premature to identify solutions before having clearly defined the problem.
- If the partners lack sufficient data to clearly define the problem in all three systems, the group may collect specific data whenever it feels it needs more information on or the other aspect of a problem. In such cases, the group must make sure that the data collected can be readily compiled. This should be done as quickly as possible so as to not unduly delay the next stages in the process.
- The analyses of the services offered and of the protective factors must be done in a general, globalized manner, without the need for any necessary connections to the initial findings.
- These analyses can serve as references when planning the actions.
- These two types of analysis are generally conducted only once, even though they may occasionally have to be updated.

#### Winning conditions:

- Ensure that the statements and opinions of each and every partner are given their due significance and value
- Ensure that all findings are derived from the data shared between a large number of the partners

### 3.2.2 Deciding priorities

The priorities are the aspects of the situation that the group deems the most important and on which the partners plan to focus their efforts. In the model presented here, the priorities take on the guise of the protective factors that the group chooses to work on.



#### Winning conditions:

- Make sure there is a consensus within the group on what findings to prioritize
- Make sure the prioritized findings are the ones that will have the biggest impact on school readiness

The protective factors will emerge from the priority findings established by the group in the course of deciding its priorities. The coherence of the concerted action plan can be ensured by carefully connecting the initial problem situation to the priorities that guide the action. The *Summary Diagram of the Reflections Informing the Planning of Actions* on page 29 reflects this continuity.

In order to develop a **concerted action plan**, the group must consider at least one protective factor for each system (a minimum of three protective factors altogether), thereby ensuring that any intervention will have an impact on each of the systems.

#### Deciding priorities one step at a time:

- Tool 5: Our observations and findings, lets the group record the findings that the partners deem most important within each finding category. This will help facilitate the comparison of the three analyses during the process of deciding the priority findings.
- **Use Tool 8: Our Priorities** (complete the first two columns):
  - ▶ **Select at least one priority finding for each system** from the findings that emerged from the situational analysis—these are the findings the group deems most important. You must consider **all three data analyses** that were carried out (qualitative and quantitative data, services offered by the partners, and protective factors).
  - ▶ **Associate at least one protective factor with each system.** These protective factors are connected to the priority findings for each system. Once the factors are chosen, make sure they are linked to the appropriate system, as illustrated in the tool. A completed example of Tool 9 is included in the Toolbox.
- During the elaboration of a concerted action plan, the group will choose to target a minimum of one protective factor for each system, i.e. at least three protective factors altogether.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- In cases where the protective factors do not exactly match the group's chosen priorities:
  - ▶ Carefully check once again whether the priority finding(s) truly belong together with the system they have been associated with.
  - ▶ Review the table listing the protective factors and their descriptions and select the factor that most closely resembles the finding, even if it is not a perfect match.

### 3.2.3 Defining objectives

By defining one or more objectives for each of the protective factors selected, the group will be able to fine-tune its intention within the targeted system. In fact, before deciding what actions to implement, it is absolutely necessary to have a clear idea of what the group of partners hopes to achieve.

#### Defining objectives one step at a time

- **Defining at least one objective for each of the protective factors selected.**

In order to do this, the group can either base its decision on the priority finding or on the need underlying the finding. Objectives should be formulated in a positive manner. Furthermore, when formulating the objective, it is important to keep in mind which system the desired change is associated with. For example, when targeting the family system, the objective might be formulated like this: reinforce parents' positive perceptions of early childhood education.

  - ▶ Record these objectives in the third column in Tool 8: Our Priorities.



#### Winning conditions:

- Ensure that objectives are clear and shared by the entire group

The objectives were formulated in a sufficiently comprehensive manner so that each of the systems can contribute to them.

### 3.3 Planning



In this stage of the process, the partners jointly elaborate a concerted action plan. They'll decide on the desired changes and propose the implementation of actions so these changes can materialize.

If there are a lot of partners, the group can be subdivided into three smaller working groups (reflecting the three systems). Each working group will be tasked with working on one system. In a subsequent plenary session, each working group can present its results to the other partners.<sup>43</sup>

In any event, the partners must demonstrate a willingness to work together to resolve the initial problem situation, support one another, share resources, and complement each other. This way they will create a partnership of "equals," within which each member of the group will be called upon to play a unique and indispensable role.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- The elaboration of a plan is real work that often requires revision.
- The group should not be reluctant to review and revise work already done in order to make adjustments.
- This will produce an improved final product.

#### 3.3.1 Identifying desired changes

A desired change is defined here as a behaviour, attitude, or belief that the group would like to see evolve within a targeted system. We need to ask the following question: what change would the group like to see in this system in order to help attain the objective?

The interrelationship between protective factors and systems is at the heart of the ecosystemic approach. **Each of the systems plays a role in strengthening the protective factor being targeted.** It is this interactive factor that facilitates a comprehensive approach and encourages a sustainable change in practices.<sup>44</sup> And so it represents the core starting point in the planning process.

By identifying the desired changes, the partners will gain a comprehensive and positive vision of the initial situation, which in turn will stimulate their commitment. They will also be in a better position when the time comes to choose which actions to implement.

<sup>43</sup> This strategy can also be used in the situational analysis.

<sup>44</sup> LAROSE, F. et al., 2010



#### Winning conditions:

- When formulating the desired changes, ensure that all three systems contribute to the attainment of each of the objectives
- Make sure that all partners have played a role in identifying the desired changes

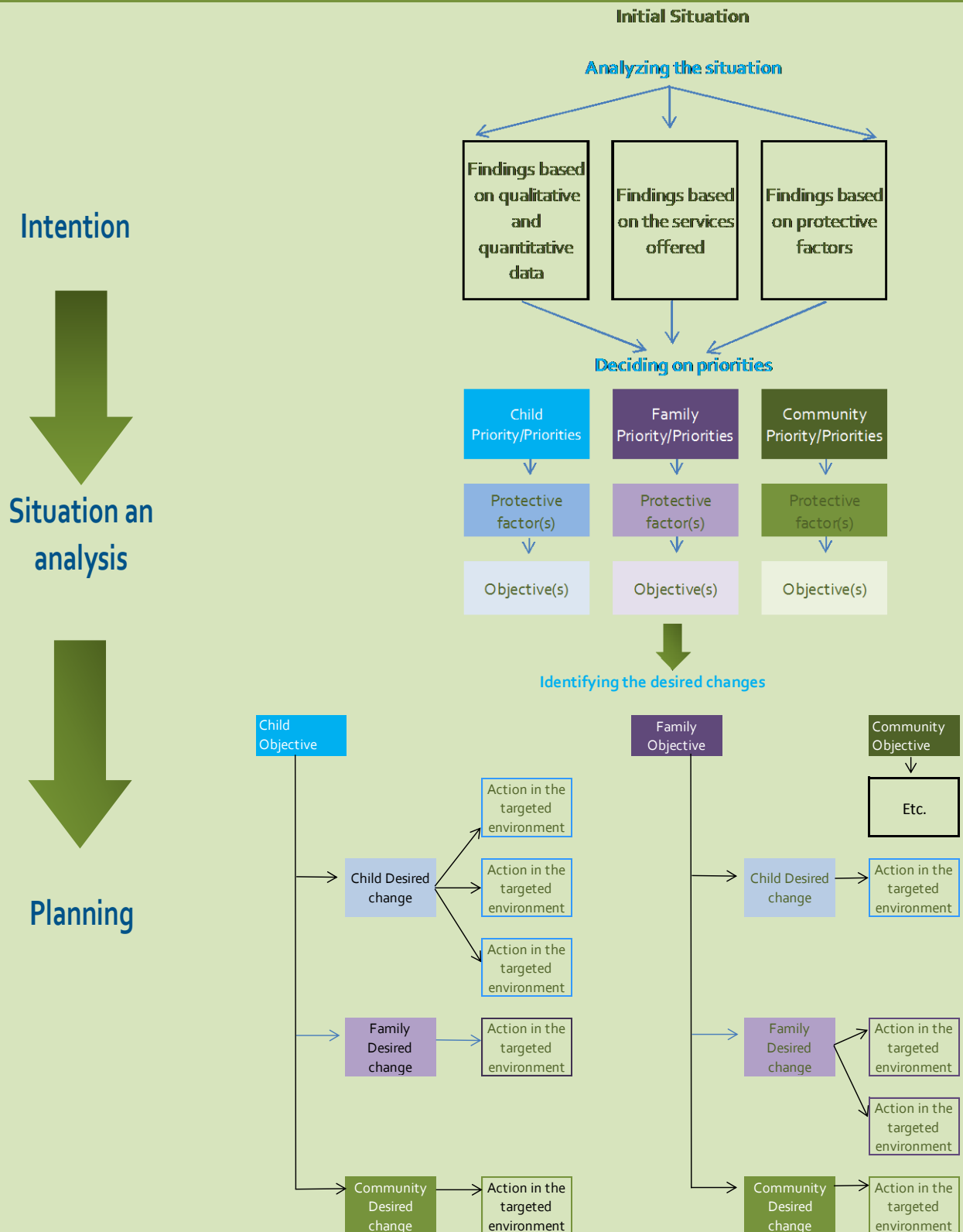
#### Identifying the desired changes one step at a time:

- For each of the objectives formulated in the previous stage, the group will have to identify at least three desired changes, i.e. one per system.
  - ▶ Use **Tool 9: Triennial Concerted Action Plan**, to record the desired changes.
- Complete only the first column for now. Use the same table over again for each of the targeted objectives. In other words, when elaborating a concerted action plan, this table will have to be completed at least three times, i.e. at least once for each of the systems.
  - ▶ Here are a few tips when formulating the desired changes:
    - Aim for changes that are attainable as well as measurable.
    - Choose desired changes that are distinct from one system to the next.
    - Refer to the findings (change often constitutes the positive dimension of a finding) and the protective factor descriptions.
    - Use active voice verbs in the present tense or the expression "... is able to ..."
    - Avoid using expressions like: *in order to*, *because* or *in order to*, as these formulations can imply two changes.
  - ▶ A completed example of Tool 10: Triennial Concerted Action Plan, is included in the Toolbox.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- This stage requires a different kind of project planning.
- Usually, once the objectives have been identified, the group goes on to describe what actions to implement in order to attain the objectives.
- When using the ecosystemic approach, an essential prerequisite is to consider one's desired changes within each of the systems.

## Summary Diagram of the Reflections Informing the Planning of Actions



### 3.3.2 Choosing actions to implement and the evaluation process

This is when each partner's contribution to the concerted action plan is planned. Once the desired changes have been identified, the group is ready to plan what actions to implement so that these changes can materialize.

More specifically, the actions implemented will make it possible to attain the desired changes. If the objective is to change practices, the partners must, of course, demonstrate their willingness to innovate and **go beyond their current practices**.

Inevitably, more than one action will be planned in order to maximize the impact on the desired change. Be that as it may, each action must, in and of itself, be sufficiently effective to achieve some aspect of the desired change.

All of the planned actions associated with each of the desired changes **must constitute a coherent whole that commands enough clout over the system so that change can materialize**. The accumulation of the outcomes—granted they are positive—will help attain the desired changes, and thereby also reach the objective.

By agreeing to perform activities within the framework of the concerted action plan, the partners effectively formalize their commitment. The recording of their names on the planning template is proof of their participation in the concerted action plan. This can be taken even further by asking the group's members to sign the planning template.

The group is unlikely to want to implement a concerted action plan of this magnitude unless it can be assured that the energies invested will bear fruit. Once the planning stage is underway, **provisions need to be made for a reliably accurate reporting system that can keep track of the progressive realization of the desired changes**.

More specifically, data must be collected throughout the project's duration so as to enable the partners to substantiate the effects of their actions when the time comes to evaluate the project. As such, it is essential during the planning stage, to identify the kinds of information that should be collected and to decide how the evaluation will be carried out.

#### Choosing actions and the evaluation process one step at a time:

- The group plans its concerted action plan and the coordinator records the proposals in Tool 9: Triennial Concerted Action Plan. The partners focus their efforts on one desired change at a time. It is preferable to identify all of the action plan's desired changes before finalizing the plan. The table should then be completed, line-by-line, and all the boxes filled in. The group identifies the actions and evaluation tools associated with the desired change. Each of the partners involved in an activity will be responsible for evaluating the desired change targeted with this activity by using the tools provided.
- **Define at least one indicator and one target for each desired change and identify the target population.** The indicator corresponds to what the group hopes to observe while the target establishes the expectations in terms of how far the indicator can be realized. For example, if the desired change projects that the family uses children's books with rhymes or repetitive sounds, the indicators would be the number of families involved, the type of books, and the frequency of their use, whereas the targets would be 75 families, three types of books, and once a month.

- The partners propose actions that they can implement within their own **target environments**, with protective factors as a source of reference and inspiration. The coordinator makes sure that all the proposed actions for each of the desired changes stand a reasonable chance of attaining their goal. Access to scientific resources can be very helpful in carrying out this task.

► **Appoint a person who will be responsible for monitoring each desired change.**

The person will be in charge of monitoring and follow-up activities with the various partners involved in the desired change. He or she will make sure that actions are carried out according to plan and that the partners evaluate the desired change. A follow-up timeline/deadline will be determined during the planning phase.

- **Identify at least one evaluation tool** for each targeted indicator and **determine its frequency of application**. This will make it possible to assess whether or not the target has been reached. All data must be easy to collect and analyze. The durability of the desired change should be evaluated no later than a few months following the activity's conclusion.



**Winning conditions:**

- Make sure to exploit the input from each of the members when choosing which actions to implement (e.g. community leaders)
- Make sure each and every partner has a unique and essential role to play while striving to reach a common goal.



## 3.4 Implementation



### Winning conditions:

- Aim for circumstances likely to enhance the effectiveness of the action to be implemented
- Rely on practices that already function well

During the implementation phase, the partners turn their focus on the action(s) chosen during the planning phase. Since these actions generally play out over a longer period of time, the partners' motivation may begin to flag. It is therefore of crucial importance to monitor the actions underway in order to keep the "flame" alive. This is also a good opportunity to remind the partners of all the common goals they are trying to reach through their efforts.

### 3.4.1 Circumstances that favour effective implementation

Once they are back in their respective environments, the partners are tasked with implementing the actions they have proposed. They can achieve this task with help from their working group.

Because turning a desired change into reality can be very challenging, it is best to ensure the implementation phase has been very diligently planned. As such, **each of the partners should think over what circumstances will help advance the action before moving on to the implementation phase.** This way the group can help ensure that the actions being implemented stand a chance of producing the hoped-for effects. More specifically, setting down these circumstances will make it easier to monitor action and make any necessary adjustments.

**Research into the theoretical foundations underpinning practice can be very useful at this stage.** Experiential knowledge derived from similar practices or scientific knowledge connected to the desired change could highlight both success factors and traps to avoid and

thereby help guide the action's implementation and make practices more effective. All partners should constantly examine their own practices in order to learn from them and avoid repeating past mistakes.

### 3.4.2 Monitoring and follow-up

The monitoring and follow-up process is of strategic importance when executing a concerted action plan. On the one hand, the process **ensures that actions are implemented as planned.**

Frequent communication patterns should be instituted between the coordinator, the individuals tasked with monitoring and follow-up and the group's partners. Even though specific individuals will have been assigned to monitor the desired changes, the monitoring activities can be further reinforced through the input of each and every partner responsible for an action. Each of the partners has an obligation to respect their commitments, make sure that the actions are carried out according to plan, and that the plan takes existing knowledge into account.

On the other hand, regular discussions on how the actions are playing out, success stories, difficulties encountered and solutions proposed help build cohesion among the group or partners or the working groups and encourage a sense of belonging. By resorting to various communication strategies and occasional meetings, the partners will have an opportunity for sharing and to build something together.

#### Monitoring and follow-up one step at a time:

- It is the partners' responsibility to **monitor the implementation of the activities** carried out in their respective environments. They should check with their working group to ensure that these actions are proceeding according to plan.
- On the dates scheduled for this purpose, those tasked with monitoring the desired changes inquire about the implementation process from their partners. The monitoring task force then communicates this information to the coordinator. Since the coordinator is responsible for the general monitoring of the planning process, he or she possesses all the information needed to oversee the concerted action plan in its entirety. The coordinator also suggests any necessary adjustments and ensures that any new partners are included in the process, whenever necessary.
- The group's partners meet according to schedule they have set for themselves in order to discuss the concerted action plan, monitoring and follow-up, and any results. Meetings of smaller teams may also be organized between the person tasked with monitoring a desired change and the partners that play an active role trying to attain it.
- At the beginning of every year, the dates for meetings should be set as part of a work calendar. The group also once again validates each partner's commitment to the concerted action plan.

#### Things to keep in mind:

- Even in groups or working groups where everyone is equal, those in charge should not hesitate to monitor the actions undertaken by their colleagues.
- It is their duty to issue reminders to ensure the concerted action is executed smoothly, the actions are effective and the desired change can be achieved.
- This helps ensure the project functions and operates smoothly.

#### 3.4.3 Project dissemination

Even though the concerted action plan will have already been the subject of a number of public communications in its initial and planning stages, the public relations campaigns will step up during the project's implementation and realization.

Once the actions are well underway, the partners will want to share their successes with parents, community organizations, and the general public.

**Explaining what actions are being executed and why, as well as the successes already achieved constitute a second motivation for the group.** The recognition of the efforts of each and every one is a significant factor ensuring partners' ongoing commitment to the project. In this respect, the coordinator has a key role to play.

#### Project dissemination one step at a time:

- **The group makes a communications plan for disseminating information on the project.** Various communication methods can be used: meetings with parents, bulletin boards, local newspapers, partners' own communication devices, conferences, seminars, etc. The coordinator is responsible for **ensuring this communications plan is followed.**



#### Winning conditions:

- Identify the information that the group would like to make public
- Ensure that this public communication contributes to partners' motivation

### 3.5 Evaluation and outcomes



During the evaluation process, the partners ensure they are on the right track by verifying that the anticipated outcomes actually occur. Several aspects need to be measured: the actions' effectiveness, the attainment of the desired changes, and the smooth running of the group. The partners then find solutions to make the necessary adjustments to their practice.

#### 3.5.1 Evaluation of the concerted action plan and the partnership

Evaluations are a vital element of any project conducted by responsible groups of partners. When performed on an ongoing basis, evaluations can facilitate any necessary adjustments to help overcome undesirable situations and help maintain a higher degree of success. It is almost like a compass that tells the group whether or not it is on the right track.

##### Things to keep in mind:

- Evaluations are not a control measure but an exercise in gaining knowledge and guidance.
- Confirming the relevance of the actions being carried out reinforces the sense of competence among the members of the group.

##### Evaluation of desired changes

Evaluating the desired changes requires the collection and analysis of the results obtained from the partners' action with the help of the evaluation tools determined during the planning stages.

This enables the group to **observe whether the actions implemented have lived up to expectations and, as such, whether they have enabled the desired changes to materialize.**

##### Evaluation of the proper functioning of the group

A diagnostic assessment of the proper functioning of the group will enable the coordinator to sound out how satisfied the partners are with the working atmosphere and the actions that have been carried out. Their impressions will shed some light on what has been learned so far and how the functioning of the group may be improved in the project's subsequent phases.

This kind of evaluation should be conducted at least once a year. However, since establishing a group always calls for various adjustments, it is not advisable to wait for a whole year to conduct the first such evaluation. It is best to evaluate the group's functioning, even if only informally, after the first few meetings.

The functioning of a group hinges on several aspects, for example the decision-making process, internal operations, everyone's participation, leadership, outspokenness, sense of belonging, members' and organizations' expectations and needs, the working climate, etc.

##### Evaluation of the concerted action plan and the partnership one step at a time:

- Whenever an action has concluded, or according to a set frequency, **the partner tasked with its implementation in its respective environment, together with the partner's working group, evaluates the circumstances in which the action has been carried out.**

##### Winning conditions:

- Make sure the actions produce the intended outcomes and the desired changes materialize
- Make sure the members of the group are satisfied with the work atmosphere and the actions undertaken

- According to a set frequency established during the planning stages, **each partner involved in an action is responsible for evaluating the desired change targeted in this action.**
- **The coordinator is responsible for evaluating the proper functioning of the group.**
- The partners add all those results to the communications plan that they wish to disseminate to the public.
- The partners take the time to celebrate the project's success and the efforts made. This boosts their sense of belonging, makes them proud of their accomplishments and inspires them to continue.

### 3.5.2 Adjustments to practices

Any evaluation would be rendered pointless if the adjustments required to improve the practice fail to be carried out. **Since the ecosystemic approach aims for sustainable changes to practices, any adjustments in order to overcome undesirable situations encourages the actions' evolution towards sustainability.**

Sustainable change nevertheless requires consistency and perseverance. It may therefore be helpful to partners to accentuate their successes and join forces to solve any problems that may surface.

The monitoring and follow-up of the actions being implemented should enable the group to fairly readily figure out the reasons for any successes as well as which aspects need to be rectified. This information, will help the group to define any necessary adjustments to their practices.

Not until later—in the light of the results—will the group make decisions based on these results (maintain, adjust, or abandon the action). The evaluation of the desired changes will constitute a useful source of information when deciding which actions to maintain. The

partners' experiential knowledge as well as research findings will prove invaluable when validating potential adjustments or proposing new ones.

The desired changes and the protective factors should also be examined from a more comprehensive perspective and periodically be called into question, as the group may wish to change them over time. The partners might also judge the impacts to be sufficiently well grounded so as to allow them to move on to others. It would be advisable in this case that the group makes sure the impacts can stand the test of time.

#### Adjustments to practices one step at a time:

- When the desired change is being evaluated, the partner and the corresponding working group are called upon to reflect on the reasons for their successes and failures. **They try to determine what adjustments need to be made and what strengths should to be maintained and record them in the tool supplied.**
- When the coordinator presents the overall results associated with a desired change, **the group reflects on what has been implemented.** Based on the results, the partners examine the actions one at a time. They then decide whether to maintain any given action carried out, whether the proposed adjustments are likely to produce improvements, or whether it should be abandoned altogether.
- If necessary, **the coordinator asks the team to reflect on the desired changes.** The partners then decide together whether these changes are still relevant, or whether they should be changed or replaced altogether.

While reviewing their annual plan, the group—in the light of the evaluation of the desired changes—may decide to change the protective factors or the objectives they wish to target.

#### Winning conditions:

- Identify what improvements could be made so that the action can have a bigger impact on the desired change
- Identify any strengths that could be used to advantage in other actions

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