



# **WHAT WORKS**

## **A Manual for Designing Programs that Build Resilience**

**Michael Ungar, Ph.D.**

With support from the Resilience Research Centre  
Illustrations by James Neish

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Print Design by Brandon Mott.

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**by  
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# PREFACE

## WHY THIS MANUAL?

*What Works: A Manual for Designing Programs that Build Resilience* is an easy-to-use guide that explains what resilience is and how the concept can be used in the design of programs for children, youth, and families. It is an ideal resource for social services staff, community facilitators, counselors, humanitarian aid workers, and policy makers in low-and-middle-income countries (LMIC), where financial and human resources are scarce, as well as in high-income countries (HIC), where resources are easier to find but children's problems can still be complex and difficult to treat.

Using lessons learned from programs offered around the world, *What Works* defines resilience, describes principles for program design, identifies the essential ingredients that resilience programs provide, and, finally, outlines seven steps that program designers need to follow to build effective programs.

The manual has been designed as both an open access interactive electronic document with links to supporting audio and video content, and a printable version for readers globally. It uses a number of different approaches: graphics to enliven the presentation, exercises and resources to help program designers tailor their work to different cultures and contexts, and an online community to share best and promising practices from around the world.

Developed by Dr. Michael Ungar, in partnership with his colleagues at the Resilience Research Centre in Halifax, Canada, *What Works* showcases the very best ways to create programs that build resilience.

## MANUAL OVERVIEW

*What Works* provides:

- a brief history of the concept of resilience and its application to practice (with a focus on the needs of children, youth and families in challenging contexts);
- a definition of resilience that emphasizes a systemic, social justice perspective;
- a discussion of seven principles that ensure that programs nurture and sustain resilience;
- a list of the seven most important processes that promote resilience;
- detailed instructions for the seven steps which program designers use to create their programs and ensure that they're effective;
- inspiring case studies of great programs gathered from around the world;

- a troubleshooting section that anticipates some of the challenges that may occur when using the manual in different settings and with different types of organizations;
- exercises (e.g., a service use satisfaction questionnaire, resilience assessment, appreciative inquiry tool, and a workshop design checklist) and resources to make it easier to use a resilience approach to program design; and
- guidance on how to monitor program outcomes and convince funders to keep funding programs that work.

## THE AUTHOR

Michael Ungar, Ph.D, is the founder and Director of the Resilience Research Centre at Dalhousie University where he holds the Canada Research Chair in Child, Family and Community Resilience. In 2022, Dr. Ungar was ranked the number one Social Work scholar in the world in recognition of his ground-breaking work as a family therapist and resilience researcher. That work has influenced the way human development and organizational processes are understood and studied globally, with much of Dr. Ungar's clinical work and scholarship focused on the resilience of marginalized children and families, and adult populations experiencing mental health challenges at home and in the workplace. In addition to providing consultation to international NGOs like the Red Cross and Save the Children, government agencies in more than a dozen low, middle, and high income countries, and educational institutions at all levels of study, Dr. Ungar's research has also influenced the HR and corporate social responsibility initiatives of Fortune 500 companies like Unilever, DHL and Cigna. Dr. Ungar's work emphasizes how to use the theory of resilience to increase both individual and institutional agility during crises, with numerous organizations having adopted his concept of resilience as a negotiated process that enhances wellbeing and social responsibility. He is the author of over 250 peer reviewed articles and book chapters and 17 books. His blog, "Nurturing Resilience", can be read on Psychology Today's website.

For more on Dr. Ungar's work and the knowledge-sharing activities of the Resilience Research Centre, please go to [www.resilienceresearch.org](http://www.resilienceresearch.org).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of thanks to the many scholars and program designers who took the time to review the content of this manual. These include not only all of the program designers interviewed in the accompanying videos and whose stories are featured in the manual, but also Dr. Linda Theron (University of Pretoria, South Africa), Dr. Jackie Sanders (Massey University, New Zealand), Dr. Silvia Koller (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), Dr. Masego Katisi (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway) and Dipak Naker (Raising Voices, Uganda).



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# INTRODUCTION

A short distance from the brick homes with carved wooden doors of Brazil's growing middle class in Presidente Prudente, a small city in western São Paulo State, is an impoverished favela where children are supposed to attend school but many do not. Their parents send them instead to the garbage dump to scrounge for recyclables, beg on the streets, or work as domestic laborers where they are likely to encounter physical and sexual violence. For some children, though, there is an alternative. Each day, 200 youngsters are bused to a refurbished cement block building at the edge of their community where recreation workers and educators offer a program called Aquarelle. It is an energizing, hope inspired blend of arts, music, sports, tutoring, and mentorship that is transforming children's lives. For five hours at a time, the youth are protected from exploitation. To attend, the children have to spend at least one hour of each visit being tutored by a teacher in a subject in which they are weak. After that they can choose from a rich buffet of activities that are culturally appropriate. Children learn graffiti arts, folk music, and a traditional martial art called Capoeira which combines choreographed movements of hand-to-hand combat with fluid dance moves reminiscent of jazz. There is a chorus of clowns that has grown into a small business entertaining at children's parties, and a silkscreen printing shop that creates innovative T-shirt designs. There are also ample opportunities to play basketball, field hockey, or to simply relax with a video game. There is plenty of evidence that the program works beyond attracting a waiting list of children anxious to participate.

This manual is about designing programs like Aquarelle so that more children can experience mental and physical wellbeing no matter the terrible conditions in which they live. In short, it is about resilience. Programs like Aquarelle teach us that resilience isn't just a set of personal qualities that make a young person successful. Resilience is the process that brings out those traits and creates worlds rich in psychological, social, political, economic and even environmental resources that help children become the best they can be, no matter their life circumstances. The success of Aquarelle is no surprise because it puts into practice many of the principles that guide the best resilience-promoting programs in the world.

## WHY A MANUAL ABOUT BUILDING RESILIENCE?

Early in my career as a community organizer and then as a clinical social worker doing what I could to improve the lives of young people struggling with mental health problems, I noticed that many did much better than I expected. They seemed to magically overcome the terrible experiences they'd had growing up. At first, I believed that their success was because of some special qualities they had as individuals. Only when I began researching resilience did I come to see that individual qualities count far less than good, supportive environments rich in resources. These environments frequently include great programs designed to create the conditions that children need to be their best, no matter the challenges they face.

Perhaps it was the powerful way in which these children told me their stories that made it easy for me to see their resilience. They had managed to overcome



(or at least live with) histories of abuse, community violence, poverty, the horrendous legacy of colonization and cultural genocide, racism, sexism, and institutionalized homophobia. Some had physical or intellectual disabilities. Some had both. They had caregivers with severe addictions or other mental illnesses. Many experienced poor access to health care (if any access at all), lousy schools (if they could afford to attend), and little concern by service providers or their governments for their right to participate in making decisions for themselves.

Despite this lengthy list of adversities, children (and their caregivers) patiently explained to me that helping-professionals like me needed to focus more on the protective factors that predict successful adaptation despite a bad start in life, rather than endlessly diagnosing psychopathology, disorder, and other kinds of problems.

*What Works* shows how to do this. It is a guide to designing programs that nurture and sustain resilience by answering questions like, “Why do some children show better than expected outcomes?” and “What types of programs are most likely to improve children’s resilience?” It then approaches program design like a good cook approaches a meal. I’ll provide both a recipe for resilience-promoting programs as well as suggestions on how to adapt this recipe to different cultures and settings around the world.

Throughout this manual, I have relied on both what is written about program design and what people all over the world tell me works in practice. By the time you have finished reading and watching the accompanying videos, you will be able to design new programs (or improve programs that are already running) to help young people, their families, and communities develop resilience in ways tailored to their particular cultures and context.

## WHAT IS A PROGRAM?

In this recipe book for resilience I will use the term “program” even though what I mean are programs and interventions that facilitate individual, family, or community change. Regardless of what word we use, young people facing adversity need help from well-designed efforts that add to their resources if they are to experience resilience. And like great recipe books, this one offers nothing more than guidelines to get program designers started. Great cooks improvise, adapting recipes to their own unique tastes. Likewise, a program can be offered by a professional or a trained lay person. A program can be good advice delivered through a smartphone, online, or in person. It can mean changes to social policy that improve the odds that children, families, and communities facing problems will survive. Good programs that improve resilience almost always address a problem from more than one angle, helping different systems (a person, a family, a school, or a community) recover, adapt, or transform.

## HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL (AND SHORTCUTS TO GETTING STARTED)

This manual is a guide to building programs that support resilience. If you're like most program designers, though, you probably want to get right to the instructions on how to create programs that work. That makes sense, so I have briefly outlined the seven steps to program design in Part One. This will help you to get started if you are under pressure to design a program quickly. If you have time, however, program design will make more sense (and likely be more successful) if you familiarize yourself with Parts Two, Three, and Four. Part Two explains what resilience means and why it is important to program design. Part Three shares seven important principles that make programs that build resilience work and explains why these principles are key to successful program design. Part Four describes the essential ingredients or processes which are critical to children's resilience. Then in Part Five, I return again to the seven steps that program designers follow when building a successful intervention. This time, though, I provide much more detail and plenty of exercises to guide the work. Part Six provides a checklist that you can use to self-assess how well your program is designed. Part Seven offers suggestions for troubleshooting programs when they don't work as well as you would like. Part Eight is a blank Project Design Template that you might find useful when working through the many steps toward getting your program developed and launched.

### KEY MESSAGE

**IT IS PERFECTLY FINE TO READ PART ONE AND START DESIGNING YOUR PROGRAM. YOU CAN READ THE REST OF THE MANUAL AFTERWARDS, ESPECIALLY PART FIVE (A MORE DETAILED DISCUSSION OF THE SEVEN STEPS FOR PROGRAM DESIGN), TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHY EACH PART OF THE DESIGN PROCESS IS NECESSARY.**

## IS THIS MANUAL JUST FOR CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS?

Though the purpose of this manual is to describe how to design great programs that build child and youth resilience, it will also be of use to anyone designing a program for other age groups (such as adult refugees, adults with mental health and addictions issues, or seniors in need of housing). After all, a cook trained to work in an Italian restaurant with pastas, seafood, and vine-ripe tomatoes has skills that are just as useful in an Indian restaurant preparing curries, naan, and daal. Likewise, a literacy teacher who knows how to design interventions for children will have plenty to offer if asked to assist with a program for marginalized adults who never had the chance to get a good education.

The principles, essential ingredients, and step-by-step instructions for program design do not change, though each population demands that the ideas fit the context in which they are being applied. Indeed, many of my colleagues work with the elderly or adults in workplace settings. Some work with women who have experienced interpersonal violence at home or on the job. I have colleagues who have even adapted the ideas in this manual to work with adults with intellectual disabilities and military personnel who are returning home from overseas deployments.

# PART ONE

## A Quick Guide to Designing Programs that Build Resilience

If time is short and you need to develop a program design quickly, then this is the one part of this manual that you need to read. Think of this as a quick light meal that provides just enough food to take away your hunger but nothing more. If you want to really understand program design, you will have to read the remainder of the manual, especially Part Five where I explain each step of program design in greater detail and provide exercises to help you practice the skills required to create great programs. In the meantime, here is a quick guide to how to design programs that build resilience.

Before you begin, though, you should keep in mind that resilience-promoting programs focus far more on increasing capacity rather than decreasing disorder or disease. In fact, most resilience programs are designed to enhance a short-list of essential experiences for participants. In this manual, I've described these experiences as “ingredients” of successful programs. These include:

- building relationships;
- encouraging powerful identities;
- providing participants with opportunities for power and control;
- promoting social justice;
- improving access to basic material needs (like food, housing, and safety);
- developing a sense of belonging, responsibility for others, spirituality, and life purpose; and
- encouraging a sense of culture and historical roots.

Good programs that nurture resilience help young people, their families, and their communities find their way to as many of these experiences as possible in ways that reflect their values and beliefs. With these ingredients in mind, you are now ready to design a program.

## STEP 1: CHOOSE A PROGRAM

Just as great cooks need to first decide what kind of meal they are going to prepare and who they are going to feed, the first step to designing a great program that builds resilience is to find the right problem to solve, then choose a program design that can be put into practice with the resources on hand. In general, the best programs address people's most pressing problems. These are the problems that people are most motivated to change. If a problem is a priority, then people are more willing to participate in finding the solutions that they think will be useful.

### *Establish a local advisory committee.*

If you want to know what problem is most important, and which solutions are most likely to be helpful, you will need to establish a local advisory committee (LAC) of adults and young people who can help direct the program design. Sometimes it is easier to create two committees: one for adults and one for children and youth. A good LAC helps to focus the work and build bridges between program designers and the people who need the program.



### *Conduct a needs assessment.*

There are lots of ways to find out what risks a community faces, what they need, and the strengths they have to overcome bad situations. The methods may change, but the result is the same: a better understanding of a community's strengths and challenges. Visual tools—such as mapping a community's resources on a big sheet of paper or conducting door-to-door surveys—are useful ways of getting lots of people involved in identifying the most important problems they face and the solutions that programs can integrate into their design. There are plenty of other approaches that program designers use to find out what matters to a community, like hosting workshops, following the news, and using arts-based and other visual techniques to document young people's experiences. A good LAC can help with choosing the best way to assess a community, especially if the LAC includes both professionals and non-professionals from many different backgrounds.

### *Ten questions to consider.*

With your advisors in place and an assessment of the community's strengths and challenges underway, you are ready to think about program design. There are ten questions to consider before you go any further:

1. What problem is going to be solved?
2. How will we know when the problem is solved (what outcomes are most desirable)?

3. Whom is this program for?
4. What other risks (or dangers/adversities/challenges) do community members say they face that contribute to the problem that your program hopes to solve?
5. If there are risks that program designers see but community members do not, how can awareness of these risks be increased?
6. What resources do people in the community already have that could help them succeed?
7. What other resources (and experiences) do they need so they can do well in the future?
8. Of all the things that they need, which are the most meaningful to them?
9. Which are the most practical to find and share?
10. Which are the best investment of time, human resources and money?

The answers to these questions will change depending on whom a program is for and what it is that participants say that they value. Once you have answers to these ten questions, you will be ready to design a program that matches people's needs as closely as possible.

*Adopt, adapt, or create a new program? Decide which is best.*

It is at this point that you will have to get down to work and start figuring out what your program will actually do and how it will achieve its goals. A big consideration will be whether to (1) adopt a program that already exists elsewhere and offer it locally, (2) be inspired by a program that exists elsewhere and adapt it to the community with which you are working (your LAC can be very helpful when modifying a program and helping it to fit the local context), or (3) create a new program from the ground up. While it is easier to adopt and adapt, creating a new program will be necessary if the community where you are working is unique or one with problems for which no one has yet developed a solution.

## STEP 2: CREATE YOUR PROGRAM OUTLINE

It is easier to succeed if you know where you are heading. A program outline (sometimes called a logic model) is very useful when designing a program to build resilience. Just as it is important to think about all the ingredients one needs before trying a new recipe, a good program outline provides a map that tracks how specific activities will create desirable outcomes.

To create your program outline, first answer the following questions:

1. Who is your program going to serve? Be specific. This is the target population.
2. What do you need to make your program run (e.g., funding, staff, community partners, in-kind donations from the community, a meeting space). These are your inputs.
3. What are the main activities that you intend to do as part of the program? How long will they last?
4. List all the tangible things (things that can be counted) that will be completed/created because of the program's activities. For example, how many participants will be part of the program? How many meetings will be held? These are your outputs.
5. List all of the program's possible outcomes. These can be short-term outcomes like changing attitudes, improving skills, or teaching participants new ways to interact with others. You should also have long-term outcomes, like making your community a better place to raise children or making the environment more sustainable. Remember, these changes are just as important to resilience as individual adaptation or skill development.

Once you've answered the questions, you can fill in the one-page template that you'll find in Part Five. The number of boxes and the size of the boxes can change. All that is important is that you record your inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. An outline is especially useful when evaluating your program.







### STEP 3: GATHER YOUR RESOURCES

Once you know which program is needed (Step 1) and you have figured out what you want to achieve (Step 2), then you are ready to gather the resources necessary to create your program and build resilience. Among the many things that you will need are: human resources to run the program; financial resources to pay for supplies; and infrastructure, like a place to work with children and their families. Which resources you need will depend on where your program is being run. If you are designing your program for a setting that is extremely poor or disadvantaged, you might train local people to be the facilitators, who in turn train other people to help expand the program at little or no cost. Likewise, if the community where your program is to be offered has plenty of resources, but people distrust professionals, you may want to consider employing non-professionals who are already trusted in their community. Finally, make a budget. How much money do you have? How much more do you need? The better you resource your program, the more likely it is to succeed.

### STEP 4: BUILD LINKS FROM YOUR PROGRAM TO OTHER SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Programs that build resilience usually build bridges to other programs and people's natural supports (e.g., family and friends) to help participants meet all of their needs and to avoid duplicating services. Working with other organizations also solves problems like confidentiality (agreements to share information can be developed together) and ensures that children and families receive all of the services that are available. It is usually best to introduce your program to other service providers early in the design process so that your program is not perceived as a threat to programs that already exist.

Every great cook knows that great meals need contributions from lots of different people. Family members. Friends. Farmers. Program design is much the same. It works better when we coordinate services with other organizations. To assess how well your program design will promote coordination, answer the following questions during the design phase:

1. Thinking about your community and the other services and supports available to young people and their families, is your program really necessary?
2. Does your program include a plan to transition participants back to their own network of natural supports after the program is finished?
3. If a child needs something that your program can't deliver, will your program be able to help the child access other services and supports?

Good program design means responsibility for a child's, family's, or community's problems is shared.



## STEP 5: ADAPT YOUR PROGRAM TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT

A great program design can still fail if it is not well-adapted to the context in which it is going to be used. Programs that build resilience are flexible in how they are run. To assess your program's capacity to adapt to local contexts, answer the following questions:

1. Is the program able to adapt to the needs of different participants?
2. Is it meaningful to the people who will participate?
3. How will the program accommodate individual differences?
4. If my program can't be adapted to individuals, can it adapt to the needs of specific communities?
5. Will the program be able to run even with the financial and social constraints of the host organization? The host community?
6. Is there a review process built into the program to ensure that as conditions change the program changes too?

If you are borrowing a program and adapting it to your community, you will need to ask yourself as the program designer, "Which parts of this program can I change, and which do I have to keep the same?"





## STEP 6: TRACK YOUR SUCCESS

If your program is going to endure, it will need some way to show that it is building resilience. There are lots of different ways to show effectiveness (in Part Five I discuss several). Regardless of what evidence you produce, the goal is always the same: convince young people, families, communities, and funders that the program has value and is worth the investment of their time or money.

### *Process evaluation.*

One way to prove that your program works is to show that it is doing what you had said it would do in the program plan. This is called a process evaluation. Check in with your participants, your LAC, and the community at large to find out if your program is perceived as gathering the resources it promised to gather, running the activities it was supposed to run, producing the outputs it hoped, and achieving the outcomes it was designed to achieve. If necessary, modify the program plan to reflect what the program actually does before you run the program again.

### *Impact evaluation.*

A more complicated way to evaluate a program's success is to measure the impact it has had on participants, their families, and communities. Resilience-promoting programs look for signs that problems have decreased, and strengths have increased. If you want to do an impact evaluation and use surveys to test for change, you may want to collaborate with a professional evaluator or someone teaching or studying at a local college or university. Evaluating programs can require a different set of skills from designing and running programs. The trick is to ask the right questions and gather the right information to prove that your program is succeeding.





## STEP 7: PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

If your program is well-designed and you can show that it is working, then the final step to designing a program that builds resilience is to plan for sustainability. That means convincing stakeholders to keep supporting the program, and even enlarging it by offering the program to more and more people, both in your community and in other communities facing similar challenges. Sustainability starts with describing in detail the context where the program has been run. Once you are clear about the setting in which the program has worked, it will be easier to show others that it can be useful in a different community. The program might be replicated exactly as it is, or only the best parts of the program kept when it is adapted to a new community with slightly different needs.

## SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN STEPS

If you follow these seven steps, your program design is likely to work when it is put into practice. These seven steps are, of course, good for all programs, whether they build resilience or focus on disease. Building resilience, however, requires that program designers follow these steps more closely. It would be difficult to imagine, for example, a program that builds resilience that has not been adapted to the needs of young people locally or has not developed a clear program plan with outcomes that are positive. It is not enough to say, “My program will decrease depression.” A resilience-promoting program will also build social support, help children create powerful identities, embrace cultural strengths, ensure safety, give young people experiences of social justice, and help them feel a sense of belonging. These are the foundation stones for resilience. Well-designed programs work with communities to identify and improve these aspects of children’s lives.

You can start designing your program now. Remember, though, that resilience programs are seldom perfect. They come into existence with the best of intentions, then get changed as program designers learn from young people and communities what works and what does not. If I have learned anything over the years, it is that designing good programs takes time.

# PART TWO

## What is Resilience?

The concept of resilience is being used widely to address humanitarian crises, protect children from trauma, help communities recover from natural and human-made disasters, and prevent long-term negative outcomes from dozens of other kinds of challenges. Fortunately, resilience has become an important part of the design of programs that respond to threats to children's mental and physical health. Because resilience affects so many parts of people's lives, it is no surprise that research is showing that resilience is not just an individual trait. Resilience is better understood as a process that changes systems. Just as our physical health depends on systems like our families, government policies, the economy and the natural environment to provide us with access to the food we need to keep healthy, well-designed programs ensure that the different parts of our lives (systems) give us what we need to sustain our wellbeing during difficult times. For this reason, Dr. Ann Masten, who is based at the University of Minnesota in the United States, defines resilience as "the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development. The concept can be applied to systems of many kinds at many interacting levels, both living and nonliving, such as a microorganism, a child, a family, a security system, an economy, a forest, or the global climate."<sup>1</sup> Whether we are talking about a person (a biological system), a community (a social system), an economy (an economic system), a country (a political system), or a natural environment (an ecological system), resilience is the system's ability to deal with change and come out at least as strong as it was before it was disturbed. Sometimes, a system shows resilience because it is improved by the experience of having been forced to change. This is a great definition to start with, though putting this definition into practice can be a little tricky.



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1 Masten, A. S. (2014). Global perspectives on resilience in children and youth. *Child Development*, 85, 6-20. doi:10.1007/s10567-013-0150 (P.6)

For that reason, I think of resilience as the ability of young people, families and communities to navigate to the resources they need (which means those resources have to be available and accessible) and negotiate for these resources to be provided in meaningful ways. When we think about resilience, navigation means choosing the resources one needs and then going and finding them. Of course, just like a sailor on a vast ocean, to navigate we need both the desire to get somewhere and a place to land. There is no point trying to navigate if the world around us has made few, if any, resources available or accessible. Likewise, it is not enough for service providers, governments, or even our family and friends to put resources in front of us if what is offered is not meaningful. People prefer to navigate their way to the supports and opportunities that they think will help them the most. Offer the wrong resources, and people (even if they experience many challenges) will show little motivation to accept the help that is offered. Great program designers concerned with resilience design interventions to help people navigate and negotiate effectively, ensuring that they have what they need to solve problems in ways that make sense to them.

The word resilience can describe three different processes:

**1. RECOVERY:**

A system, whether it's a person, community, economy, country, or natural environment returns to the same level of functioning it had before it encountered a problem.

**2. ADAPTATION:**

A system changes to accommodate a disturbance and by doing so survives or thrives.

**3. TRANSFORMATION:**

The environment around an individual, such their as community, the economy, or their country, is changed in ways that make it easier for a system under stress (like a person) to do well.

In all three cases, a system shows resilience when it can respond to sudden or prolonged stress that forces the system to do something different to succeed. The idea of resilience reminds us to think about change and about interwoven, mutually dependent systems that help us experience wellbeing.

Consider the problem of girls in Tanzania who, according to my colleague Angela Ifunya, have to leave school because drought caused by climate change has dried up sources of water close to their homes. Fetching water now requires girls (who are given this task) to walk long distances, which means they have less chance to study. Furthermore, their family farms are no longer productive, which means that there is little or no money available to pay for the girls' education. Those long walks also make the girls vulnerable to violence. In this case, building the resilience of these girls means making their families, schools, and communities stronger and better resourced. It doesn't mean asking the girls to change. It means putting in place a program that can change the many different systems that make these girls vulnerable.



First, families will need to be inspired to provide their daughters an education. Cultural values will have to change as well so that girls are valued as much as boys are. Second, communities will need to address the scarcity of water and find other ways to provide enough water for each household. Third, educational institutions will need to adapt to make it easier for cash-strapped farmers to send their children to school. If all this is accomplished, and girls still don't go to school, then the fourth intervention would be to work with girls themselves to change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors so that school becomes something that is meaningful to them. Give girls and the systems that affect them (their families, communities, departments of education, and even the water beneath the land they walk on) help to change and the chances that girls go to school will be much greater than if only one of these systems adapts. The resources that are most likely to make a difference and improve resilience are well-studied. I will list several of these important ingredients for resilience in Part Four.

**KEY  
MESSAGE**

**CHANGING MULTIPLE SYSTEMS OVER TIME MAKES SUCCESS MORE LIKELY, EVEN IN VERY CHALLENGING CONTEXTS.**



## PROGRAMS THAT BUILD RESILIENCE SOLVE “WICKED” PROBLEMS

Though researchers, mental health professionals, aid workers, and community developers all tell me that they understand resilience, there remains a great deal of confusion among people who design programs regarding: (1) what resilience is; (2) how a framework for resilience can be applied to solving practical problems facing children, their families and communities across cultures; and (3) how to convince organizations and governments to shift their focus from programs that stop disease, disorder, and dysfunction to ones that emphasize capacity-building and resilience-promoting ways of helping young people to thrive.

The challenge when writing a manual like this is to present resilience-building as neither so simple, so intuitive, or so magical that program designers are left expecting uncomplicated, easy-to-build programs that work in isolation from one another. What we know is that change seldom endures when programs are put in place that address just one aspect of a child’s life (like motivating young women to go to school, or convincing their parents that girls need an education) without also thinking about all the other systems that make change possible. Program design can’t be so complex, though, that front line staff like humanitarian workers and mental health counselors become overwhelmed with the need to change multiple systems at the same time. To deal with this problem, I will explore a set of easy to apply principles, then use case examples to put these principles into practice.

### KEY MESSAGE

**THOUGH GREAT PROGRAMS USUALLY FOCUS ON ONE SYSTEM AT A TIME—SUCH AS IMPROVING A CHILD’S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OR MAKING A CHILD’S COMMUNITY SAFER—GREAT PROGRAM DESIGNERS ARE ALWAYS AWARE OF THE OTHER SYSTEMS THAT NEED TO BE CHANGED WHEN SOLVING WICKED PROBLEMS.**

This approach strikes the right balance between systemic thinking about resilience and its application to solving complex social problems. We need this understanding of resilience if we are going to address wicked problems such as how to stop climate change from forcing millions of people from their homes (i.e., climate change refugees) or the persistence of child sexual abuse, early marriage, and child trafficking. We need to understand resilience in culturally nuanced ways if we are going to prevent the high rates of depression and suicide among Indigenous youth, or the vulnerability of poor families to pollution from power generation plants and the toxic tailings of the mines next to the communities in which they live. A well-thought out model of resilience has the potential to inform the design of programs that can help children to adapt in these situations while transforming the world around them so that the root causes of their problems are changed as well.

## KEY MESSAGE

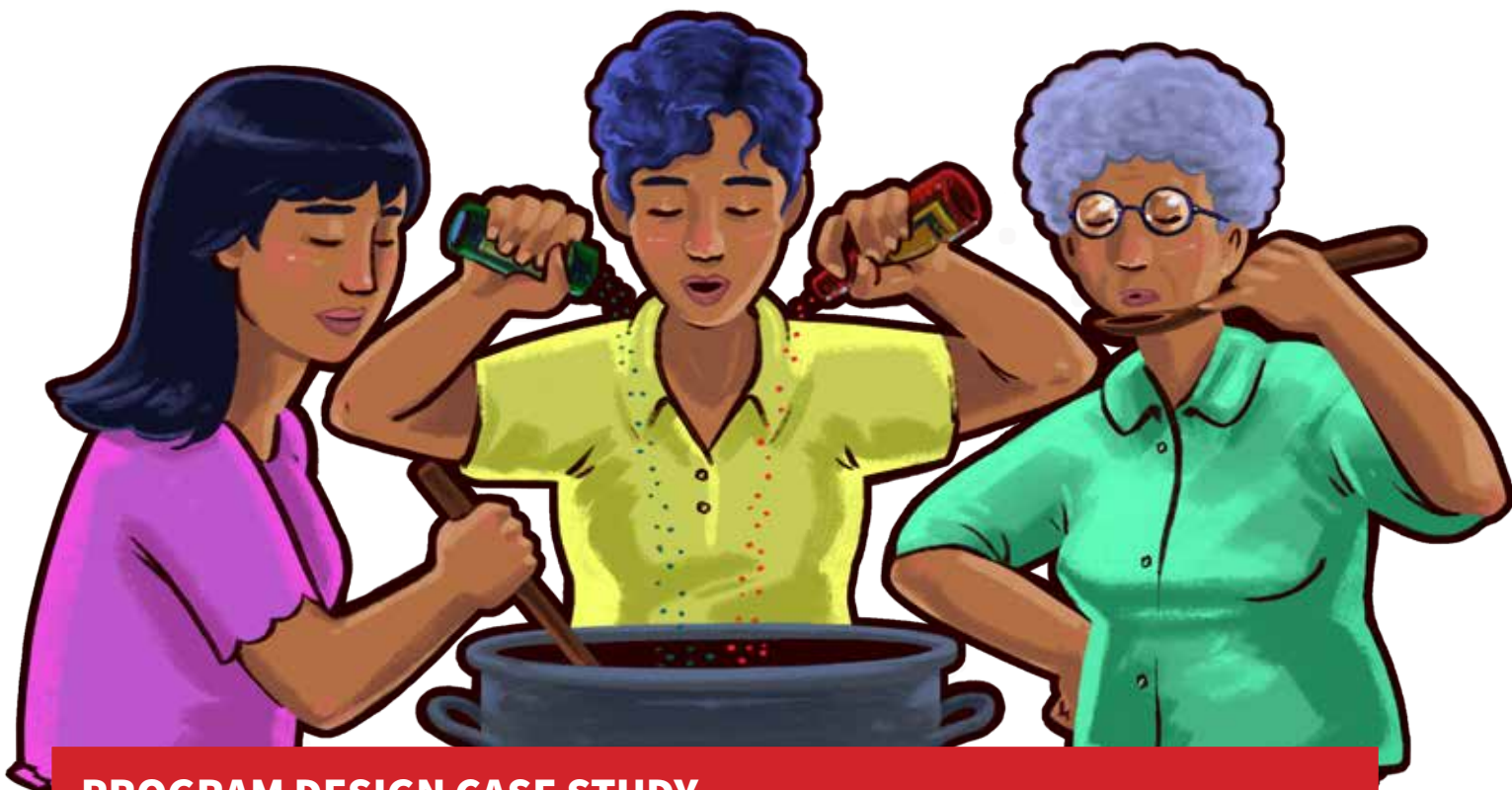
Let's use hunger as an example of a problem that can be solved if we were to improve the resilience of both individuals and the social and political systems that protect people against hunger. Hunger, like many other wickedly complex problems, is not something that individuals can fix on their own. It is a problem of food scarcity, economic instability, political corruption, and greed. No amount of positive thinking is going to provide food for a child if there is none available. Even more astounding is that the same traits that make a child resilient when there is food scarcity can put a child at risk when food is plentiful. For example, the child with a more difficult temperament is likely to be better fed during a drought than a passive quiet child who seldom fusses. While a child's whiney behavior may not be helpful in a stable environment where food is abundant, that same behavior can actually make a child more resilient in a scarce environment.

The same pattern appears in research on education, health care, and the other social determinants of health. Young people do best when they get the resources they need that help them to adapt to their social and physical environments.

**RESILIENCE IS AS MUCH ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE (OUR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESOURCES) AS WHAT WE THINK (OUR MINDSET).**

In my experience, if we talk about resilience as something inside of us we wind up blaming children who don't change for their lack of resilience. We also end up applauding those who have succeeded without paying enough attention to all the systems that have to be in place for that success to occur. Motivation and hopefulness are both important to resilience, but good program designers know that we can motivate children to change their behavior and inspire hope in the future by creating opportunities for them to do well in the present. Consider, for example, efforts to help young women avoid early pregnancy. We can motivate young women to avoid sexual contact by promoting a better sense of self-esteem and educating them on the better outcomes women experience when they delay pregnancy. Those are good strategies but personal motivation to change will do little to change the rate of pregnancy unless efforts are also made to change the environment around the girls. Will young women have equal access to education and to opportunities after they graduate to use their education? Have young men been taught to respect young women more and avoid coercing them into sex? And of course, do young women (and young men) who do engage in sexual activity have access to contraception? The best programs not only address attitudes towards sex, they also work with both boys and girls and with their communities to address intimate partner violence that contributes to unprotected sex. Combined with good education, reproductive health care, and access to contraception, a multisystemic approach to a complex problem like early pregnancy can be very successful.

As the example shows, if we introduce a program that is focused on changing a young person's motivation, without the resources to support that change, the changes that are created (if any) are likely to be temporary fixes that do little to improve a child's wellbeing in the future. This manual is meant to help program designers avoid these perilous pitfalls when launching programs for vulnerable populations.



## PROGRAM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Tim Crooks is the Executive Director of Phoenix Youth Programs in Halifax, Canada. The city-wide program provides a continuum of services for street-involved young people who are in need of a range of services. Crooks says that Phoenix is really three programs: (1) early intervention and prevention, (2) shelter services to meet acute needs during a crisis, and (3) support for young people to return to their community and succeed. To accomplish this, Phoenix has a clear set of goals but the outcomes that they strive to achieve are those that matter most to their community. That means providing both direct interventions and advocating for young people's rights. Staff are encouraged to take the time they need to form relationships with youth and then to advocate on their behalf while providing direct services. While there are many programs that work with street-involved young people, few see their role as providing services long before children are forced to leave home and again long after they have left the security of an emergency shelter.

Phoenix has grown over the last 30 years, now employing more than one hundred staff whose roles are, in part, to network with other organizations across Halifax. Together, staff provide services that are quick and responsive, avoiding the long wait lists of larger institutions like hospitals and addictions treatment facilities.

Phoenix has been very effective at convincing both government funders, businesses and philanthropists that it is a much-needed service. Part of that success has been integrating best and promising practices into the work that they do while being willing to change programming as new needs emerge in the community. The impact Phoenix is making is very evident: fewer young people on the street, less crime, and more young people succeeding as part of their community. "It comes back to trust," says Crooks. Phoenix meets the needs of the community and the community has been willing to offer the program sustainable funding.

**[WWW.PHOENIXYOUTH.CA](http://WWW.PHOENIXYOUTH.CA)**

**WATCH THE VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH TIM**  
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## THE THREE BASIC TOOLS FOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Even the most mediocre of cooks needs the right cooking utensils. The world over, every kitchen I have ever been in has a ladle, a knife, and something to pick up food with, whether that is chopsticks, a fork, or the hands of a competent cook.

Resilience programs are similar. They all combine three basic tools (their utensils) which distinguish these programs from other types of interventions (such as those that decrease the incidence of disease or create economic growth for the sake of profit). Specifically, all resilience-promoting programs pay attention to: (1) risk exposure, (2) desired outcomes, and (3) protective processes and factors.



### RISK EXPOSURE

To build a program that will increase resilience we always begin with an assessment of the risk factors that individuals, institutions, and communities experience.

We need to know:

1. The severity of the risks (how big a disruption have they caused?)
2. Chronicity (how long have they been disruptive?)
3. Whether a risk factor affects one system (like an individual, family, or school) or whether it affects many systems at the same time
4. Whether people blame themselves or others for the risks that they face
5. What the risks mean to those whose lives are disrupted.

This last part of the assessment is particularly important to finding solutions that build resilience. Do people see the risks they face as potential problems, opportunities for personal growth, or just an expected part of life? Sometimes a phase of consciousness-raising may be necessary to mobilize communities to help them accurately assess the challenges that they are experiencing. When this works, people come to see their daily hassles as part of larger systemic problems that need to be tackled. Depending on how a risk factor is experienced, it will exert a small or big influence on outcomes.

### KEY MESSAGE

**RISK EXPOSURE IS COMPLEX, MULTISYSTEMIC, AND DIFFICULT TO PREDICT.**

## KEY MESSAGE

### DESIRED OUTCOMES

Second, we need to ask ourselves what outcomes are we trying to achieve and what is possible in the context where our program is to be offered? A good outcome should be an indicator of something positive that occurs despite the risks that an individual or group of individuals are exposed to or aware of. Resilience is not an outcome. It is the means we use to promote positive outcomes under conditions of adversity. Outcomes can be things like individual thoughts and behaviors such as a positive change in a child's attitude towards attending school, or increased self-esteem among children who have been sexually abused. It can mean less anxiety, decreased signs of trauma (like nightmares), or fewer delinquent behaviors. Outcomes can also mean a change in access to resources such as better housing, safer streets, and more time spent in healthy relationships with parents and caregivers. Outcomes can even be changes to social policy like new laws that provide children with access to free health care, or funding for anti-bullying programs in schools. It might be changes to policing practices so that parents who are visible minorities are incarcerated less often for non-violent offences.

**OUTCOMES ARE CHANGES THAT ARE DESIRABLE AND CONTEXTUALLY AND CULTURALLY IMPORTANT AT ANY SYSTEMIC LEVEL.**

### PROTECTIVE PROCESSES AND FACTORS

Third, effective resilience-promoting programs improve children's access to protective processes and factors that make it more likely that children who have been exposed to one or more risk factors will still achieve good outcomes. Protective processes are the filter between risk and outcomes. They determine whether a system will falter, recover, or thrive under stress. A protective process, then, is action that occurs over time rather than a simple change which occurs just once. It is the difference between being provided a meal at school just once (which will produce little long-term change in a child's resilience) and enrolling a child in a year-long school feeding program that improves a child's overall nutrition, engagement at school, and ability to learn. These protective processes are always contextually specific. What makes a child more resilient in one setting might do little in another.

The list of processes and factors is long and includes many powerful predictors for resilience such as those suggested in the 1980s by Norman Garmezy in the United States and Michael Rutter in the United Kingdom. Almost every such list emphasizes the need for children to experience a close relationship with caring adults, to have self-esteem, and to experience control somewhere in one's life. Every list also reminds us that children need opportunities to use their talents and be provided with access to the supports they need to thrive like education, housing and, health care. Whether we are talking about the social determinants of health or the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, resilience depends on putting in place the resources young people, their families, and their communities need to cope with, or escape entirely, harmful situations.

## HOW DO WE KNOW IF SOMETHING IS A RISK FACTOR, OUTCOME OR PROTECTIVE PROCESS?

There are many protective processes that are known to create positive change. The problem is that they are too often treated as simple cures for very complex problems. In general, the more complex the problem the more complex the mix of protective processes will need to be if a program is to build resilience and predict future success. The more protective processes that are made available to children and their families in challenging contexts, the more that resilience is likely to occur.

Be careful, though. Resilience is often mistakenly used as an outcome when designing programs and when testing to see if a program is working. Take, for example, a parenting program in Uganda called Enhancing Family Connection which was a culturally appropriate adaptation of the Parent Management Training-Oregon Model used in other countries. The program was designed to increase parent-child attachment in a context where those attachments have been destroyed by decades of civil war. But is attachment between parent and child the outcome that the program was meant to achieve, or was the goal something else? I believe that the outcome that the program designers wanted was for traumatized children and their families and communities, despite their awful pasts, to be able to lead productive lives. That means reduced child delinquency, less bullying, a higher rate of school engagement, less social strife, and fewer incidents of violence towards children in the home. These are all outcomes that can be measured but are different from the process of parents looking after their children better and being more emotionally attuned. Good parenting protects children from a harsh past (i.e., it makes children more resilient) and makes it more likely that good outcomes, like the behaviors I just mentioned, occur. It is important that we keep clear what is a risk factor, what is a protective process, and what are the desirable outcomes that we want to see when systems change. Not all communities, though, find the same protective processes helpful when building children's resilience. For example, an outspoken child in one culture may be prized for his gregarious personality. In another culture, such behavior may make adults angry.



## KEY MESSAGE

Indeed, when designing programs it can be tricky to decide whether a risk factor is an outcome or if an outcome is a risk factor. Say, for example, I am working with racially marginalized Indigenous children in Canada's north who show high levels of depression and report multiple suicide attempts. It would be completely reasonable to try and decrease depression scores (which are associated with suicidal thoughts and actions). In that case, lower depression would be the desired outcome. If that is what we want to achieve, then our recipe for an effective program would be to address the risk factors for depression (such as feelings of hopelessness and experiences of social injustice) and enhance the protective processes that prevent depression (like school engagement and empowerment) from occurring. If it worked, young people would report lower levels of depression as indicated by self-harming behaviors or troubling thoughts and feelings. In this example, less depression is our desired outcome.

One could, however, imagine a very different program design where depression is treated as a risk factor for children who attempt suicide or harm themselves in other ways such as by dropping out of school or becoming socially withdrawn. In this scenario we would treat depression as the risk factor, connection with an elder or a strong sense of culture as protective processes, and a higher rate of school engagement and less self-reported anxiety as the outcomes. As these two examples show, we can treat depression as a risk factor or an outcome, as long as we are clear which it is and design our program accordingly.

These three basic tools for any study of resilience (risk exposure, desirable outcomes, and protective processes) are useful no matter what your program is trying to do. Just be sure to have a clear idea of which risk factors are likely to be influenced most by which protective processes to produce the most desirable outcomes. You can only prove that your program is working if it is designed with each of these three elements clearly described. Once you know what you are trying to accomplish it is much easier to design a program that works.

**WHEN DESIGNING A PROGRAM TO BUILD RESILIENCE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE CLEAR WHICH RISK FACTORS A PROGRAM ADDRESSES, WHICH PROTECTIVE PROCESSES ARE LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGE, AND WHICH DESIRABLE OUTCOMES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES, THEIR COMMUNITIES, AND THEIR SERVICE PROVIDERS.**

## EXERCISE

### IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS, PROTECTIVE PROCESSES, AND DESIRABLE OUTCOMES

Great programs usually have all three basic tools built right into them. Think about a program you've designed or one that you've participated in. Complete the table below, carefully considering how the design of the program improved people's capacity to cope in the future.

<b>NAME OF THE PROGRAM:</b>	
<b>BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:</b>	
<b>WHO WERE THE PARTICIPANTS?</b>	

WHAT RISKS WERE PARTICIPANTS EXPOSED TO?	WHAT PROTECTIVE PROCESSES DID THE PROGRAM PROMOTE THAT HELPED PARTICIPANTS COPE BETTER?	WHAT WERE THE PROGRAM'S DESIRED OUTCOMES?

### DEBRIEF QUESTION 1:

<b>DID THE PROGRAM MATCH THE PARTICIPANTS' LEVEL OF RISK EXPOSURE? HOW?</b>

### DEBRIEF QUESTION 2:

<b>DID THE PROGRAM ADDRESS PROBLEMS AND BUILD STRENGTHS ACROSS MULTIPLE SYSTEMS? WHICH SYSTEMS? WHAT CHANGED?</b>

## WHY ARE SOME PROGRAMS BETTER THAN OTHERS AT BUILDING RESILIENCE?

A child brings a knife to school to protect himself from bullies. Is it an effective solution? Should the child be disciplined and forced to attend a program that teaches delinquent children better ways to behave? Or would suspending the child for three days be more effective at changing the child's behavior?

The science of resilience teaches us that the best way to respond to this problem may not be to focus entirely on the child, but on the systems that surround the child. Should the child's school put in place a safe-school policy that prevents bullying? Should the child's peer group be encouraged to help keep the child safe? What role can the child's parents play? The police? The solutions we prefer always reflect our biased definition of the problem. In this example, is the problem the child's to solve, or is the child's behavior a symptom of a dangerous school environment that needs to be changed?

To demonstrate what I mean, let me retell the story of the child and the knife twice with some crucial details changed each time.



### STORY #1:

A child brings a knife to school to protect himself from bullies. He comes from an upper middle-class community with safe streets and a police force that is honest. The child is majority culture, meaning that his skin color and language skills let him blend in with most of his peers. His parents have secure jobs and the child has access to plenty of extra-curricular programs like sports and music. In a situation like this, it is reasonable to discipline the child and focus on the child's misbehavior. There are few risk factors other than emotional problems (these can, of course, be very serious) and the outcome (better behavior) is desirable to everyone, including the child. The child, even if he is being bullied, likely understands that he made a bad choice. He could have talked to his parents, or his school, or even the police. He could have kept himself safe without putting others in danger by bringing a weapon to school. A program that focuses on improving the individual child's emotional intelligence and teaches him anger management and better problem-solving skills would likely help him to change his behavior. These programs would also improve the child's capacity to cope with another stressful situation in the future by dealing with deeper emotional problems while changing the child's experience at school.



## STORY #2:

A child brings a knife to school to protect himself from bullies. He comes from a family where one of his parents has a history of violence. The streets he walks are known for gun violence. He lives in poverty. The police ignore children like him because of his skin color and home address. His school is under-resourced and has done little to control the violence on its playground and in its toilets. The boy with the knife is small for his age. He has a learning challenge and is teased because of it. He is impulsive and has trouble controlling his temper, especially when threatened. In a scenario like this, efforts to change the boy's behavior through programming is doomed to fail unless other systems that put the boy at risk also change. His school needs to change. His parents need to change. His community needs to change too. In fact, asking the boy to change his behavior will have limited effect because the boy's behavior is an adaptation to a bad environment. Suspending the boy from school for three days might actually put him in more danger. Rather than being in school and engaged with healthy adults, he would be left to fend for himself on the streets of a dangerous community where the only way of staying safe might be to associate with other delinquent youth and become even more violent than he already is. Successful programming should address both the child's emotional problems and the toxicity of the child's school, home, and community. By working at both the individual and community levels at the same time, positive change is more likely.

## DESIGNING THE RIGHT PROGRAM

Designing the right program to build resilience always starts with a risk assessment. At lower levels of risk, interventions that change individuals can be very effective. At higher levels of risk, a bunch of interventions with different systems will be necessary to produce the desired outcomes. For example, in the case of the boy with the knife who faces many complex challenges (Story #2):

1. We could provide the boy with an anger management program that teaches him better problem-solving skills. We could also engage him with a resource worker to address his learning challenges and make him feel more accomplished at school.
2. We could, at the same time, help the school create a safe school policy where playgrounds and toilets are monitored, and children are taught mutual respect. A series of after school programs could be designed that encourage tolerance and participation rather than competition.
3. If we really wanted to help the boy, we could also reach out to his parents and find a way to protect the boy from violence at home. Though it would be difficult to do, one could even imagine educators and counselors advocating for a change to policing practices so that kids trust the police and feel comfortable turning to them when they are in trouble.

No single program is going to achieve all of these outcomes, though there are programs in different parts of the world that try very hard to meet all of a child's needs even when a child's world remains stubbornly the same and rife with violence.

## PROGRAM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Dr. Masego Katisi is the founder and former Director of EARTH, a national program in Botswana that provides grief counseling and social support to children whose parents have died because of HIV/AIDS and other causes. Started in 2002, the program was a response to the burden placed on government services and extended families overwhelmed by the growing number of orphans. Dr. Katisi worked with three communities to design a program that could provide culturally relevant ways for orphans to experience secure attachments with an adult, safe housing, and the rites of passage which mark children's transition into adulthood. While there were many NGOs already providing support when EARTH began, most of that help was short-term and directed at meeting children's most basic needs like food and education. EARTH was intentionally designed to help children deal with their grief by adapting tools borrowed from western psychology. Aware of the stigma that these children experience following the death of their parents, EARTH builds on the principle that "every child is everyone's child."

An important part of the program is a two-week wilderness camp where each child and a professional working with the child in the child's home community are invited to participate in a series of programmed activities. The professionals are provided with materials to work with the children both in groups and individually. Arts-based activities are introduced slowly, though are an essential tool for helping children to talk about their experiences of loss.

During the camp, children are also prepared for an initiation ceremony that includes cultural performances and a certificate to mark their successful completion of the program. These activities are a substitute for traditional rites of passage which would have been provided by the children's families.

When the children return to their communities they continue to receive support from EARTH facilitators who link the children to government and non-governmental services. EARTH also connects the children to cultural leaders and to a network of volunteers. As Katisi explains, "We are building what has been lost."

The grassroots success of the program has resulted in local community leaders advocating for the program to be expanded. It now reaches all orphans in Botswana. An evaluation is ongoing. Initial results show that children improve their resilience and attachments to peers and school. New initiatives are testing how to apply the same model to young people who are vulnerable to joining gangs and other forms of violence.

**[WWW.ARKANDMARK.ORG](http://WWW.ARKANDMARK.ORG)**

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## THRESHOLDS, FEEDBACK LOOPS, AND TRADEOFFS

Every recipe book spells out a few simple rules for preparing a meal. But as anyone who has tried to recreate a recipe handed down from parent to child knows, good cooking is seldom as easy as it looks. Ingredients aren't always the same. A special technique might make sense in one kitchen but cause disastrous results in another. There is no substitute for experience, mentorship, and experimentation if one wants to get things right.

Likewise, resilience is both easy to understand and complicated to put into practice. Thresholds, feedback loops and tradeoffs are three concepts that one needs in order to understand resilience. They may sound simple but can be extremely tricky to apply to program design. Without these concepts, programs run the risk of failing.



## *Thresholds*

Systems keep functioning as long as they remain relatively stable. For example, the ability of children to control their emotions makes them less likely to be traumatized by war, prejudice, and other forms of violence which can over-burden a child's neurological response system triggering a host of fatal reactions. A family, too, may be coping just fine with very little money until a catastrophic weather event puts a parent out of work. A community may be great at looking after everyone who lives there until it is confronted by an influx of thousands of refugees. In each example, systems are forced to change when the load on them exceeds the threshold of their capacity to deal with disruption. When this happens, systems need to find ways to adapt. If they have the resources they need to be resilient, they create innovative ways of coping (these are also sometimes called new regimes) with a higher threshold for stability.

Programs can help children, families and communities secure the resources that they need to cope with higher levels of stress, like the challenges that come after civil war or an economic crisis. Increasing the threshold of a system so that it can withstand more stress can happen through all types of resilience-promoting programs. Children can be taught to calm their emotions, a family can send a son or daughter to find work, and a community can open shelters for immigrants or help them find jobs and increase the economic strength of the community as a whole. To experience resilience, systems need to work through a crisis and establish new thresholds that can accommodate the adversity which threaten to tumble them into chaos.

## *Feedback Loops*

To understand feedback loops, consider a program to build resilience that provides children in street situations with shelter overnight. The promise of safety draws these children into relationships with adults who then have to do very little to convince the children to attend school. As children engage at school, their lives stabilize and they connect permanently with the shelter, eventually staying there full-time and leaving the dangers of the street (and in some cases the dangers they encountered with their families) behind. Each step in the child's adaptation involves feedback from one positive experience to the next. Success breeds success just as exposure to risk factors can expose children to one negative experience after the other (e.g., a child who comes from a very poor family and has a small vocabulary before starting school at age five is less likely to succeed at school, which in turn contributes to early school leaving, early pregnancy, and other risky behaviors a decade later). Feedback loops can be positive and promote resilience, or negative, making children more vulnerable in the present and in the future.



## KEY MESSAGE

### *Tradeoffs*

What's good for a child may not be good for a family. What's good for a family may not be good for a community. What's good for a community may not benefit the natural environment. When we think about resilience there are always winners and losers. It is important to remember that programs are disruptions in children's lives that are supposed to bring solutions but can also compromise the vitality of other systems. Consider a program that prevents child labor by removing children from families that exploit them. In a situation like this, the program may unintentionally decrease the economic viability of the family itself. It may also undermine the children's relationships with their parents. Is the program successful if the child goes to school? Has the program done more harm than good? Such questions shouldn't lead program designers to ignore the risks that children face. Instead, the goal should be to keep children safe but minimize the potential problems that even good programs can sometimes cause children and their families. In the case of child labor, a program will be more likely to succeed if it ensures that families have other ways to succeed as farmers and merchants without exploiting their children.

**EVERY GOOD PROGRAM THINKS ABOUT THRESHOLDS, FEEDBACK LOOPS AND ULTIMATELY THE TRADEOFFS THAT RESULT WHEN ONE SYSTEM'S RESILIENCE IS IMPROVED AT THE EXPENSE OF ANOTHER.**

## SUMMARY

Resilience is a process that involves multiple systems working together to decrease the impact of wicked problems on children's lives and improve positive outcomes. Resilience programs are constructed with three basic tools in mind: they assess risk, choose desirable outcomes, and pay attention to the protective processes that decrease risk and improve the ability of children to succeed. Some programs are better at building resilience than others. Indeed, resilience can look very different in different cultures and contexts. Regardless of the setting, programs improve resilience when they help young people who are overwhelmed by stress to cope better. Such programs increase a child's, family's, or community's capacity to cope (its threshold) while encouraging positive feedback. There are, however, tradeoffs. One child's resilience can jeopardize the resilience of others, or look very different depending on a community or family's values.

# PART THREE

## Seven Principles for Program Design

If you talk to program designers all over the world whose programs build resilience, and ask them to describe what they do, they repeat many of the same design principles. Much as great cooks share a common talent, great resilience programs are based on seven principles that designers tell me are the reasons why their programs are effective. All seven principles are not present in every program, but the more of these principles that are embedded in the design of a program, the more likely it is that the program will be experienced as helpful by its participants.

### PRINCIPLE 1: HELP PEOPLE TO NAVIGATE

Every cook knows that there are bad ways to prepare a meal and there are good ways to do the same thing that are more likely to create exceptional culinary results. In my experience, the very best resilience-promoting programs help children and families navigate to the resources they need to overcome adversity. They make resources available, then ensure that young people (a) know those resources exist and, (b) can access resources when they're needed. For example, a program to address post-traumatic stress after a tsunami needs to get mental health professionals strategically placed so that young people and their families can find them even if they are living in shelters. Placement, though, isn't enough. People also need to feel that the service is accessible. That can mean addressing a range of problems, from providing transportation so that children can reach a service, to ensuring that parents have adequate childcare when they have more than one child in programming at the same time. Making a program accessible might even mean setting up local support networks so that children can feel heard. (Empowerment is a powerful protective experience during a crisis.) Ensuring that programs are available and accessible, however, is not enough. If it was, then every program that was offered would succeed.

**KEY  
MESSAGE**

**THE BEST PROGRAMS MAKE RESOURCES BOTH AVAILABLE  
AND ACCESSIBLE.**

## PRINCIPLE 2: HELP PEOPLE TO NEGOTIATE

Young people are more likely to prefer and use programs that they've helped design and that are tailored to their specific needs. In general, all people, young and old, show more resilience when they are able to negotiate for the supports they want and are given those supports in ways that are meaningful to them. This process of negotiation is extremely important. If program designers offer a program that participants haven't helped design (or at the very least, chosen), it is unlikely that the program will build resilience. It might control, punish, or treat, but it won't build children's long-term capacity to handle challenging situations. If, instead, a program provides what children need in ways that are meaningful to children, they are much more likely to experience success.

A program in Whitehorse, Canada, for example, has been managing to get youth who spend much of their time on the street to use a drop-in center and stay out of trouble. The Youth of Today Society is an inspiring example of how to help young people experience resilience by listening to them and responding with a program tailored to their needs. Youth of Today began with a simple idea: many of the young people who were hanging around the streets of Whitehorse (most of them Indigenous youth with parents who had suffered the cultural genocide of forced placement at residential schools when they were children) were in need of a safe place to spend time and a hot meal every day. This was the initial goal of the program. A building was donated by a local business and then renovated into a drop-in center with comfortable couches, computers so that young people can get online and follow their social media, and, as the hook to get young people to come in from the cold, a three-course hot meal each day. The center survived on donations for years until the government saw the wisdom of having a safe place for young people to go. Police, social service agencies, and other service providers all appreciate that Youth of Today gives young people the supports that they value.

At first, though, those same professionals saw Youth of Today as a great opportunity to find clients for their services. The center was bombarded with requests from public health workers, educators, and drug and alcohol counselors who wanted to set up services inside the Center. Wisely, the management of the center would have none of it. They insisted that since young people attending the center had not asked for those services, they should not be allowed in. What the center did need, however, were cooks. Professionals like public health nurses and psychologists were invited to come into the center and help prepare meals. Needless to say, the offer didn't go over well...at first. Professional helpers insisted that that wasn't their job. In time, however, as they gave in and agreed to help cook, something quite magical occurred. The young people attending the program began to seek out these professionals for help. It was not long before cooking pasta turned into discussions about safe sex, drug abuse, and suicide. Grief work was done, but not in the conventional way of office-based therapists. Youth of Today is a wonderful example of how a program can negotiate with participants to ensure it is offered in a way that participants experience as meaningful.

## EXERCISE

### A PROGRAM USE SATISFACTION SURVEY

Even the best recipes fail now and again, usually because the cook hurried, forgot a step in the preparation, or missed an ingredient altogether. Programs that build resilience suffer the same challenges. They can overlook the needs of the people that they are trying to help, not take enough time to understand the problems that they are trying to fix, or their programming is too individually focused to change all the systems that are putting children at risk.

As most programs are never evaluated, it is tough to say which are most likely to be helpful and which are a waste of time and money. One solution to this problem is to ask participants and their caregivers (or other significant person in their lives) whether they are satisfied with their program, then use their feedback to make the program better. The Program Use Satisfaction Survey is a tool that has been used in studies of resilience around the world to do just this.

To complete the survey, think about a program (or service) that you have designed and delivered, or if you have never designed or delivered a program before, then think about a program (or service) you yourself have received. It could be a program provided by a government or community organization. Maybe it was a medical service or a training or education program. Any program can be evaluated using this tool. Use these nine questions to reflect on your experience of the program.

	NAME/DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM (OR SERVICE):	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Overall, I was satisfied with the program that I participated in.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I helped choose my program.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I had a say in how this program was delivered to me and could ask for what I wanted.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I could get the program when I needed it.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Staff respected my religious and spiritual beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Staff spoke in a way that I understood.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Staff were sensitive to my cultural and ethnic background.	1	2	3	4	5

## 8. THE MOST HELPFUL THING ABOUT THIS PROGRAM WAS...

## 9. THE LEAST HELPFUL THING ABOUT THIS PROGRAM WAS...

***While there are no right answers, programs that help people to navigate and negotiate effectively (and in the process improve their resilience) are more likely to receive higher scores from participants than programs that fail to properly assist with navigating and negotiating.***

The principle of negotiation means that programs should be designed from the very beginning with the agility required to meet the needs of children and families with many different and competing problems. Though programs strive for “fidelity” (adherence to a prescribed way of offering a program), resilience is too contextually sensitive to be entirely scripted like a recipe book. Program manuals have their purpose, but only in so far as they inspire the flexible application of great ideas to new populations in very different contexts.

Programs are most likely to succeed if they adapt to changing social conditions and changes to an individual’s bio-psycho-social development. A child’s chronological age, as well as her ability to make friends and act independently, can dramatically influence which programs work best in which situations. So too do local and national politics. Even the decade one grows up in and the political party in power have a profound impact on which programs are available and which of these will produce the greatest change. A program that is tailored to the needs of a child or adult at one point in time is going to need to be revisited if it is delivered again after a change of government, economic boom or bust, or serious social disruption such as a civil war. Each of these place-based challenges can take away children’s choices or open new opportunities. A change of government can, for example, mean more health care and better education or the exact opposite. This is a tragic truth of resilience. A crisis can sometimes be a catalyst for positive change or spiral a system into a pattern of dysfunction.

An interesting example of this need for negotiation has been Toronto’s Africentric Alternative School. While the establishment of such a school in 2009 may seem to revisit a terrible history of racial segregation, the school means something very different to members of the African-Canadian community who asked that the school be started. In the multicultural, but still racist context of modern-day Toronto, many children of African-Canadian descent have not been successful in the regular school system because of factors related to discrimination and historical marginalization. A



## KEY MESSAGE

racialized curriculum and special accommodations for racial minorities make sense in this particular context and at this point in time. Change the context (e.g., remove the barriers to education many African-Canadian children experience) and a school that separates children by race quickly stops making sense. As long as the social environment is toxic, flexible solutions are needed to help children creatively adapt to the wicked problems they face.

Negotiation can also mean not intervening or intervening in the least intrusive way possible. The best program designers know that program participants will bring with them a range of problems and different levels of risk exposure. Programs should have the capacity to offer different curriculum from the least to the most intrusive depending on a young person's problems or how stubbornly persistent they are. After all, an 11-year-old with a drug problem and no consistent caregiver is going to need a very intrusive (and restrictive) program to get her off of the street and into treatment. This could mean involving the police, child welfare authorities and then mental health and addictions workers who later pass the child along to educators. In contrast, a 16-year-old with a mild pattern of substance misuse and a stable family may need nothing more than a voluntary group treatment program and counseling for her family to help them motivate their daughter to accept help.

**DESIGNERS OF PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE RESILIENCE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THE PROTECTIVE PROCESSES WHICH ARE MOST LIKELY TO PRODUCE THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF CHANGE ARE THOSE THAT ARE THE MOST MEANINGFUL TO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS IN A SPECIFIC CONTEXT AT A GIVEN POINT IN TIME.**

## PRINCIPLE 3: THINK ABOUT SYSTEMS

The resilience of one system (like a family) will influence the resilience of other systems (like a child's psychological wellbeing). Every context, however, is a little different. A family led by a father with complete control over everyone's behavior may look resilient if it reinforces the cultural values of the community, but actually



undermines the resilience of women and children in the family who want their rights respected. It follows, then, that programs should address both risk factors (like patriarchy and threats to human rights) and protective processes (like social justice and experiences of self-esteem) at more than one systemic level at the same time. The best programs pay attention to individual (e.g., cognitive and affective responses to stress), relational (e.g., family, peers) and social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of children's lives. When one system experiences resilience, there will always be tradeoffs that make other systems more vulnerable.

There is, indeed, abundant evidence that different systems affect our mental and physical health. These include our neighborhood streets, the design of our homes, the green spaces in our community, public transit, and social policies. All of these aspects of our lives have profound and enduring influence on individual resilience, especially when bad things occur in our lives. For example, there are health problems specific to living close to a mine in a rural community just as there are risks specific to living in a high-rise ghetto in a mega-city. Resilience processes need to respond to the diversity of children's experiences and the multiple levels of stress and opportunity different systems bring with them.

A very important development in this understanding of how social and environmental systems “get under the skin” of children and mark them for life is the study of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Research around the world is showing that when children experience one or more of ten childhood risk factors, the chances of them developing mental and physical health problems like heart disease and depression as adults are very high. These ten adverse childhood experiences are: (1) verbal abuse, (2) physical abuse, (3) sexual abuse, (4) emotional abuse, (5) neglect, (6) witnessing intimate partner violence between caregivers, (7) the divorce or separation of caregivers, (8) living with a caregiver with a mental illness, (9) living with a caregiver with an addiction, and (10) a caregiver who was incarcerated.

Two things are remarkable about the ACE studies that make them relevant to designing programs that promote resilience. First, all ten adverse childhood experiences are entirely preventable. We can change social policies so that fewer parents go to jail. We can do more to help families under stress and prevent family breakdown. We can certainly influence rates of child abuse and domestic violence. The second remarkable thing about ACE studies is that they have never explained why a majority of individuals do not develop the diseases and disorders that are predicted by their ACE scores. This likely occurs because many children at risk still enjoy access to the resources that they need to do well.

Good programs should minimize a child (or family and community's) exposure to risk, but they also need to facilitate access to the processes that promote resilience (these essential ingredients for resilience will be discussed in Part Four).

## KEY MESSAGE

**A MULTISYSTEMIC APPROACH TO BUILDING RESILIENCE IS MORE LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE THAN A PROGRAM WHICH FOCUSES ON CHANGING ONE SYSTEM AT A TIME.**



## PRINCIPLE 4: COORDINATE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Services delivered in silos, each standing alone with a limited role in a child's life, seldom serve young people well when their problems are complex. After all, individuals in dire need of help, such as refugees or children with disabilities, don't experience a problem like a lack of housing as distinct from other challenges like psychological distress or a shattered network of family and friends. These issues collide. That is why the best-designed programs coordinate services to ensure as many challenges as possible are resolved at one time. Effective programs draw together supports from many service providers, family and friends, and the wider community in ways that are easy to navigate. The better coordinated programs are, the more success each program is likely to have.

There are, however, many reasons why programs fail to coordinate services for children. Though different agencies (mental health, juvenile corrections, child welfare, education, recreation, etc.) share common goals, that doesn't mean that they work well together. Too often they don't like to share resources, defending their turf through excessive specialization or resisting opportunities to collaborate when it comes to finding new sources of funding.

Programs that are highly specialized also risk defining children's problems in ways that fit their narrow mandate. For example, programs focused on children's education offer tutoring and other academic supports. Those concerned with food security focus only on food supply. Mental health is the concern of someone else. It is no surprise, then, that children are defined by the programs that they receive. A child with mental health needs who has broken the law and is in a detention center for children will be labeled a delinquent and offered programming to change his criminal behavior. That child, however, is still a child in need of supports. If programs do not coordinate services, then there is a good chance that a delinquent child with a traumatic past will be discharged back into the same environment where his delinquent behavior was his survival strategy. When programs for children coordinate services and provide a buffet of opportunities, the chances of a delinquent child doing well after being in custody is much, much better. Properly housed, offered schooling and a tutor, given access to recreational diversions, and kept safe from dangerous adults, a delinquent child is more likely to beat the odds stacked against him than a child who gets only one program focused on one of his needs.

### KEY MESSAGE

**COORDINATING PROGRAMS MAKES IT EASIER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WHO NEED HELP TO NAVIGATE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE MAZE OF OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM.**

## PROGRAM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Dipak Naker is the co-founder and co-Director of Raising Voices, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that works to prevent violence against women and children in Uganda and other sub-Saharan countries. Their “Good School Toolkit” that they’ve developed is used in over 750 schools, with the goal of taking it to every school across Uganda and then into other countries in the region. Raising Voices is focused on changing school environments at a systems level so that complex problems like violence can be changed for good.

Inspiration for the program came from work in a medical clinic where the co-founders observed that children often reported experiencing violence from a parent, and women described abuse by their partners. An intake survey was launched which asked questions like, “Have you ever experienced violence?” and “From whom?” After an initial sampling at the clinic, a wider community survey was conducted. It showed that 90% of children were experiencing violence at school. That included emotional, physical, and psychological violence from teachers and other students. Although there were many NGOs in place to address this same issue, and the government had policies as well, the problem persisted.

To design Raising Voices, a group of six schools were engaged in a continuous series of pilot programs until they had developed and trialed an intervention that worked. The program that succeeded best is a series of illustrated manuals for teachers, children, and families, made very accessible through language and design. In part, the success of the program was its shift in focus. Rather than making children more resilient in contexts of violence, Raising Voices makes a coordinated effort to change entire schools so that children are exposed to less violence. When they are exposed to violence, Raising Voices helps to ensure that resources are made available to keep children safe.

The program makes the work easy to replicate, laying out a six-step program. First, the school’s head teacher identifies two educators and two students who are natural leaders and will take responsibility for the intervention. These “protagonists” receive training and then are encouraged to go back to their school and ask others about violence while documenting attitudes. This first step helps the protagonists to identify allies and learn about their school’s values.

Step two is to establish school committees comprised of interested partners. These partnerships are key to the success of the protagonists.

During step three, the protagonists run learning programs. There are activities for teachers held during staff meetings as well as strategies to share the written manuals with students. The cartoon booklets that the children read are full of stories, teaching them how to cope with violence and prevent it. The booklets tackle difficult topics like bullying and corporal punishment.

Step four encourages new interventions. Once students and staff are thinking about violence, protagonists ask them what can be done locally to prevent it. What are alternatives to corporal punishment? What policies need to be developed? How can students be kept safe at school and at home?

Step five is outreach to the wider community. People are asked for their thoughts regarding “How do we make a better, violence-free school?” and “How do we raise our standards and think about building a good environment for learning and psychosocial development?”

Step six is consolidation. Those involved in the change process are asked, “What has this journey meant for your school?” and “How can we measure change?” Parents, educators, and children are all part of this consolidation. The result has been a program that can be rolled out to hundreds of schools at a very low cost.

The program appears to be working. Raising Voices partnered with a professional evaluator that helped them design a randomized control trial to assess the impact of the program. Over 18 months, the program showed that it could reduce the risk of psychological and physical violence by teachers towards students by 42%. And that is just the beginning.

[WWW.RAISINGVOICES.ORG](http://WWW.RAISINGVOICES.ORG)

**WATCH THE VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH DIPAK**  
[RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS](http://RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS)



## PRINCIPLE 5: PROVIDE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT

Children of all ages dislike having to tell their stories over and over again to get help. Their caregivers dislike even more having to constantly navigate their way in and out of programs when their child is in crisis. It can be frustrating, not just for those needing help but also for program staff who feel that the help they offer is nothing more than a rest stop instead of a destination.

Programs that provide continuous support are more effective, especially when the support that they offer is enduring and complex enough to meet children's many needs. Young people who have experienced trauma and are asking for help expect that the adults to whom they have reached out will remain a part of their lives. They expect to work with at least one person who knows the child's name and past without having to constantly enroll in new programs to get their needs met. Jumping around from program to program might make sense to service providers with narrow mandates ("I only do trauma counseling", "I only look after housing", etc.) but it seldom makes children more resilient when their problems are complex.

The more a program does what it can to build a child's resilience and provide consistent access to the same supports over time, the more likely a child is to engage with that program and stay involved.

**KEY  
MESSAGE**

**IMPROVING A PROGRAM'S CONTINUITY INCREASES THE ODDS  
THAT THE PROGRAM'S PARTICIPANTS WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.**



## PRINCIPLE 6: BE RELEVANT TO PLACE AND CULTURE

Great services show sensitivity to the many different ways that culturally distinct communities solve problems. Designing services to promote resilience challenges the notion that programs can ever be one-size-fits-all.

By culture, I mean the values, beliefs, and everyday practices (like the food we eat) that a group of people say are important to them. A cultural practice can be inherited from ancestors or embedded in people's religion. It can also be a set of values expressed by a population that share a common identity such as members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer community (itself highly diversified by race and ethnicity) or union members working in remote mining towns. A distinct cultural group may appear online as easily as it does face-to-face. For example, refugees who exchange information through the Internet are an online community dedicated to helping one another.

Culturally competent programs mean that program facilitators make the effort to understand and celebrate differences. Programming need not be delivered only by cultural insiders as long as cultural outsiders work in partnership with local advisors to make programs fit for children and their caregivers in ways that make sense to them.

### KEY MESSAGE

**PEOPLE IN EVERY CONTEXT AND ACROSS EVERY CULTURE ARE MORE LIKELY TO ACCEPT HELP WHEN THE HELP THAT IS OFFERED IN WAYS THAT MATCH THEIR VALUES, BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS.**



## KEY MESSAGE

### PRINCIPLE 7: SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOLUTIONS

When it comes to programs providing help to children, there are always multiple stakeholders involved. Just as cooking a meal can sometimes need more than one cook, resilience is seldom the responsibility of any one individual. It requires shared commitment to mobilizing the informal supports that young people already have while creating new programs designed to fill in gaps where more support is needed. Better to help young people do for themselves rather than having things done for them, as long as they have the resources they need to solve their problems and those problems are small enough for them to fix. When that is not the case, responsibility for helping young people overcome challenges must be shared.

**SOLVING CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY THAT MUST INCLUDE CAREGIVERS, SERVICE PROVIDERS, EDUCATORS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND, OF COURSE, CHILDREN THEMSELVES.**

### EXERCISE: APPRECIATING WHAT ALREADY WORKS

There are plenty of examples of great programs that promote resilience and reflect the seven principles of program design. A great way to discover what works and for whom is to participate in an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) exercise. AI helps us identify individual and collective strengths. It shifts the focus from the expertise of the outsider to the wisdom of people living in challenging environments. It focuses attention on the solutions they have already tried and found helpful so that these solutions can be put into practice again in the future.

Who participates? The exercise is ideal for program designers and program participants, though the goal is to hear stories of success from anyone who has coped well with the same kinds of problems that program designers want to address. It works great as a team-building exercise, but it can also be part of the early phase of the program design process.

There are two parts to an AI exercise when discovering ways to build resilience. This exercise can be done in less than an hour or take a half a day depending on how detailed the facilitator wants the discussion to be.

## PART A

In small groups (4-8 people are ideal), invite community members (or other program designers) to take turns describing a program that they've experienced which helped young people and their families navigate and negotiate effectively for the supports they needed to experience resilience.

- Be very specific when describing the program, its activities, and the participants.
- Where was the program offered?
- When was it offered?
- What other details can you provide to help others understand what the program did and how it improved the resilience of the participants themselves or others with whom they interacted?

## PART B

Now here's the tricky part. It is one thing to describe programs that build resilience, it is quite another to explain why these programs work well. After each example of a successful program (Part A) ask who, and/or what, was needed to make this positive experience possible?

- Again, be as detailed as possible. What would someone see the program doing that made the difference?
- What did participants do that made it more likely that the program would work?
- If you were the program designer or facilitator, what did your colleagues, supervisors, government, or community do that helped the program to succeed?
- What lessons did you learn from this experience?
- If someone else was going to offer the same program and they wanted it to be successful, what advice would you give them?

Part B can look pretty easy but typically program designers, facilitators, and program participants attribute the success of a program to a flimsy set of ideas that make it difficult to repeat the success. People will say, "Oh, my program worked because we cooperated," or "My program was a success because we were flexible (or client-centered, or empowering, etc.)." While all this may be true, these descriptions lack detail. A good AI process asks people the deeper reasons for their success. If cooperation is one of the explanations for why a program worked, then we need to know, "How did the staff of the program cooperate?" "When were meetings held between colleagues, and with other program staff?" and "Who paid for these meetings to take place?" When I ask questions like these I hear fuller descriptions from both program participants and program designers regarding how organizations set aside time for program staff to travel to meet with other agencies in the community, of how their funder provided them with money to network, and of participants who were willing to either sign consent forms or verbally agree to program facilitators talking with each other so that they could help participants deal with complex problems. It is easy to say, "We cooperated." It is much more interesting to find out how that cooperation occurred so that other programs can do the same.

## SUMMARY

In Part Three I introduced seven principles for program design that make programs much more likely to support resilience. Some of these principles, like navigation and negotiation, are the foundation for almost every great program. Other principles appear in many but not all programs. Depending on the population that will become the participants in the program, program designers will want to include some or all of these principles in their designs. The exercises in Part Three can help you decide whether your program is likely to be effective for the children and families that join in.



# PART FOUR

## Essential Ingredients for Designing Programs that Build Resilience

In Part Three I showed that great resilience-promoting programs are built on a set of seven principles. They can be very helpful, but program designers need more than just principles to be effective. Good programs also provide participants with access to many essential ingredients for resilience. Each of these ingredients is a protective process that helps children, families, and their communities cope with adversity. The more adversity children experience, the more these essential ingredients influence children's positive development.

These ingredients are much like the foodstuffs a cook needs to have on hand to create a meal. The world over, well-prepared cooks keep essential ingredients in their kitchens that they use over and over again. No single recipe will use all of these, but over time each ingredient will find its way into a meal. There must always, for example, be a source of carbohydrate whether that is flour, rice, or corn. Cooks need oil, grease, ghee, or fat. Every cook needs salt, herbs, and spices. There will be meat or legumes. Which of these ingredients are the most important depends on the meal, people's cultural preferences, and the availability of different foodstuffs. It would be hard to imagine, though, a great cook without either a well-stocked kitchen or an incredible amount of talent at turning a few ingredients into culinary delights.

Resilience programs, too, are built from a short-list of essential ingredients. Among the most common things that great resilience programs include in their designs are experiences for participants that help to:

- Build relationships;
- Encourage powerful identities;
- Provide opportunities for power and control;
- Promote social justice;
- Improve access to basic material needs (like food, housing, and safety);
- Develop a sense of belonging, responsibility for others, spirituality, and life purpose; and
- Encourage a sense of culture and historical roots.

All of these are experiences essential to both improving resilience and delivering good programming for children who face significant challenges. Each is just as

## KEY MESSAGE

important as the others. Indeed, there are likely many more ingredients than just these, though these are among the most commonly used in resilience programs. Good programs, then, help young people, their families and their communities navigate to as many of these experiences as possible, all the while helping them to negotiate for each experience to happen in a way that reflects the values and beliefs of participants.

**PROGRAMS THAT BUILD RESILIENCE ARE MOST USEFUL WHEN THEY INCLUDE MORE OF THESE SEVEN PROTECTIVE PROCESSES.**

## PROGRAM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Paul Baker is the Regional Executive Principal for the Adventure Learning Academy Trust in Cornwall, England. He oversees programming at Gulval School, an elementary educational program that was struggling with a declining student body and plenty of behavioral problems among the students that did attend. Baker and his team have managed to dramatically change the culture of the institution, and in the process made the school a hub for community service and social connections. Gulval School serves an underprivileged rural community that has been ravished by changing economic conditions. In an effort to make the school meaningful to students, staff, and the wider community, Baker has integrated into the curriculum two pygmy goats, a flock of chickens, several rabbits, and a dog. The choice of animals is intentional, as they can all be easily cared for by the children. Selling the eggs that the chickens lay helps to offset expenses for feed and veterinary bills. While all students benefit from taking turns looking after the animals, often without adult supervision, it is the most vulnerable students that have benefitted the most. Walking the dog before school or coming in on the weekend to feed the chickens and the goats makes children feel that they belong at school and that they have a meaningful contribution to make. These activities have not only given the children opportunities to assume real responsibilities, they have also been a way to teach children about business, math, and agriculture, while encouraging them to think about future careers that won't require them to leave their community.

The animals have also helped to bring adults together, too. Baker holds annual "big digs" where parents are invited to volunteer their talents to help the school to achieve its goals. Chicken pens are built, fields are cleared, and other tasks are done that have made the community feel like their small school is an important resource. Enrolment has risen as a consequence, which means that the school is likely to remain open.

Though including animals in school programming may seem like a small change to make, it has started a cascade of positive transformations among the children, school staff and families. Baker describes the result as a "growth mindset" that has taken hold.

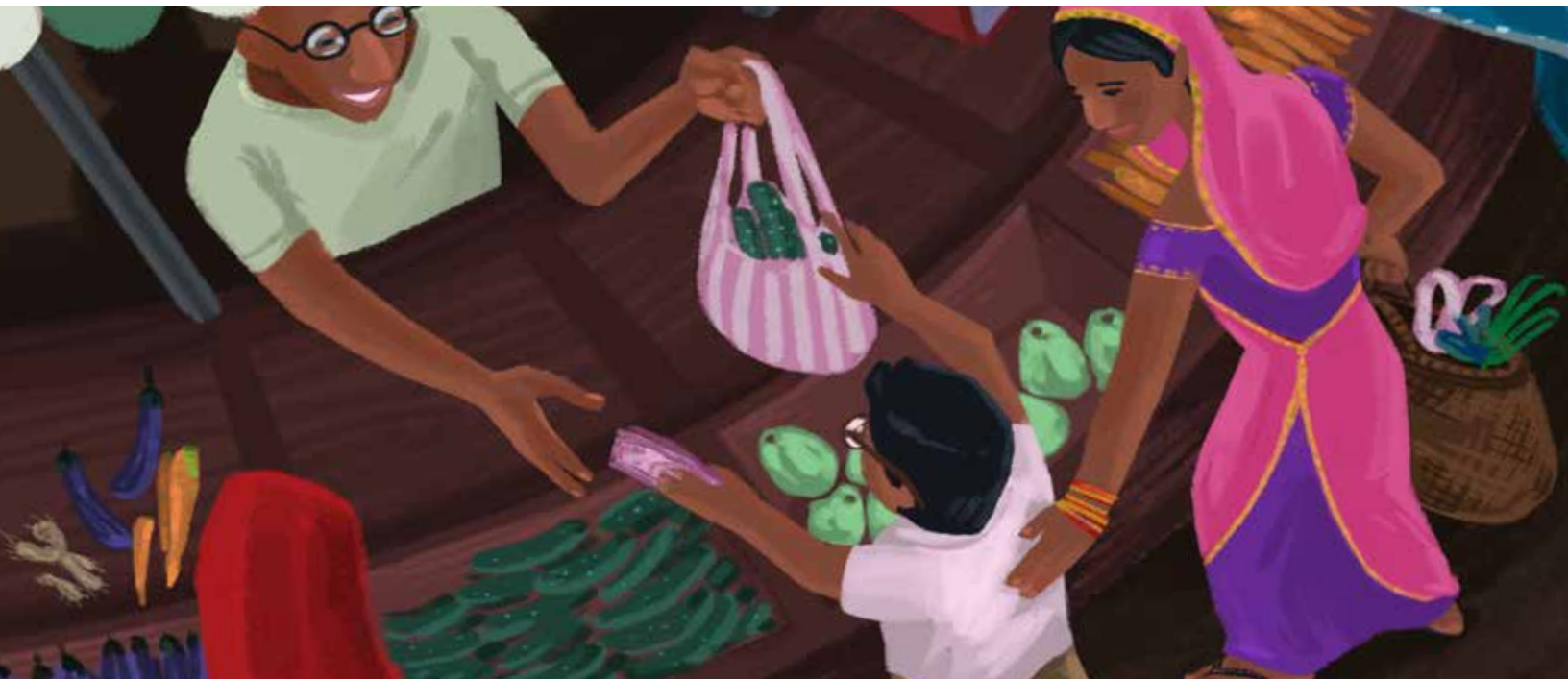
While there was no formal community needs assessment before the program started, Baker and his staff knew that the community was stressed and that far too many students were truant on a regular basis. The growing engagement of parents in the school and improved behavior of the students, including performance on standardized tests, indicate that something positive is happening.

**[GULVALSCHOOL.ORG.UK](http://GULVALSCHOOL.ORG.UK)**

**WATCH THE VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH PAUL  
[RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS](http://RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS)**

## INGREDIENT 1: BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Great programs not only encourage new relationships between participants and program staff, but also with others in a young person's community. Through activities, children connect with elders, their parents, peers, and the professionals tasked with helping them. Good programs help children grow their social networks and prevent isolation, apathy, and frustration. The larger the number and the more diverse the types of relationships a program encourages, the more likely it is that young people and their families will have the resources needed to withstand the next disaster that comes their way. These new relationships, however, are more likely to thrive when they have a reason to exist. Children are more likely to bond with others when they share responsibility for another's wellbeing, share a common goal, or play a part in making their program a success.



## INGREDIENT 2: ENCOURAGE POWERFUL IDENTITIES

Programs are places where participants experiment with new identities and have their choices affirmed. Identities are never wholly ours to create on our own. We know who we are by what others tell us about ourselves. All children, no matter their ability, race, ethnicity, or life circumstance deserve to see themselves as powerful and respected and to have their identities reflected back to them by others in their families, schools, and communities. Programs that promote resilience create opportunities for children to know themselves in new and better ways, offering a safe space to express their strengths and demonstrate them to others.

### **INGREDIENT 3: PROVIDE EXPERIENCES OF POWER AND CONTROL**

We all have a right to make decisions about the things that matter most to us, and we need to be able to resist when others try to make decisions for us that are not in our best interest. While we do better with some structure and consequences (they make us feel psychologically safe and give us predictability and routine), we also need to experience personal and social empowerment. Effective program designers the world over design their programs in ways that help young people increase their personal sense of power and give them real opportunities to make decisions for themselves.

### **INGREDIENT 4: PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Programs that try to change individual behavior (like those that focus on self-regulation, mindfulness, or improving self-esteem and employability) run the risk of paying too little attention to the barriers faced by young people that prevent them from overcoming challenges like poverty and abuse. Changes to a child's behavior are never sustainable unless programs advocate with and on young people's behalf for fair treatment at home, at school, and in their communities. Great programs that build resilience address the reasons that young people feel isolated, insecure, or unsafe such as racism, sexism, homophobia, or prejudice against them because of physical or intellectual disabilities. The more a program promotes social justice, the more enduring the resilience will be that a child experiences during the intervention.

### **INGREDIENT 5: IMPROVE ACCESS TO BASIC MATERIAL NEEDS**

Programs that build resilience, even psychological resilience, will inevitably tackle other social (e.g., access to mentors, teachers, and experiences of human rights) and material (e.g., housing, food, clothing, and safe streets) determinants of health. It is difficult to cope with a potentially traumatizing event like a natural disaster or death of a family member to gun violence without the stability of a safe place to sleep, a meal on the table, a school to attend, public transportation, health care, and streets free of violence and intimidation. No single program that builds resilience will tackle all of these wicked problems. Great programs, though, acknowledge the barriers that children face and do whatever they can to get children's basic needs met while treating other problems like trauma, anxiety, depression, and disordered behavior.

## **INGREDIENT 6: DEVELOP A SENSE OF BELONGING, RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS, SPIRITUALITY, AND LIFE PURPOSE**

Resilience depends on more than just relationships. People of all ages need to experience a sense of belonging. That can come through relationships, or it can come from a sense of place (e.g., attachment to the land, a community, or a nation). A sense of belonging can be sustained through an online virtual community or grow through frequent physical contact on the street and in the shops. It often comes through a religious affiliation or meaningful work. We find a sense of belonging through our extended family, peer group, clan, tribe, or country. No matter how we achieve this sense of connection with others and with place, a sense of belonging has the potential to bring with it life purpose. It can even promote a deeper sense of spirituality. Both concepts remind us that our lives are important in mysterious ways. These feelings sustain us during difficult times, even when all we have left is the mental representation (i.e., a memory) of what it was like to be part of a family or community. Knowing that our lives matter to others, and feeling a sense of connection because of it, is a powerful force for thriving when our lives are full of challenges and our wellbeing is threatened. Programs that help participants experience this sense of belonging are far more likely to have a positive impact and sustain participation.

## **INGREDIENT 7: ENCOURAGE A SENSE OF CULTURE AND HISTORICAL ROOTS**

Culture informs daily practices and the rituals we use to get through a crisis. It can be built on stories from our ancestors or invented through new forms of social interaction (e.g., hip hop created a subculture that many young people connect with). Culture can encompass religion, or the other way around: religious practices can become embedded in culture. Either way, many great programs that build resilience use a child and a family's culture as a tool to give them more resources during challenging periods in their lives. Culture prescribes what to do and when. It provides the stability of routines. It helps children predict good things for the future by reminding them of times in the past when their family survived adversity. It grounds children and keeps their problems in perspective, while offering them ways to keep close to others.

## EXERCISE: HOW MANY RESILIENCE RESOURCES DOES A CHILD HAVE?

How many of the essential ingredients for resilience are in a child's life? To complete this exercise, think about a young person in a program that you've helped to run or hope to run. How would this child answer the following questions? Each sentence makes a statement about one of the essential ingredients. The more statements that children can complete, the more likely they will be to experience positive development during challenging periods in their lives. Great programs make it easier for children to complete these sentences.

### RELATIONSHIPS:

"I can reach out to my \_\_\_\_\_ to get help when I need it."

### IDENTITY:

"I feel respected for what is special about me when I am with/at/doing \_\_\_\_\_."

### POWER AND CONTROL:

"In my \_\_\_\_\_ I get to participate in making decisions that affect my \_\_\_\_\_."

### SOCIAL JUSTICE:

"When I am with others at my \_\_\_\_\_ I feel treated fairly."

"When I am with \_\_\_\_\_ I am responsible for myself/others."

### BASIC NEEDS:

"I am well-cared for by \_\_\_\_\_."

"I feel safe when I am with/at \_\_\_\_\_."

### SENSE OF BELONGING, RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS, SPIRITUALITY, LIFE PURPOSE:

"At my \_\_\_\_\_ people miss me when I am not there."

"There are people in my life who expect me to \_\_\_\_\_."

"When I don't meet expectations, I know that \_\_\_\_\_ will happen."

### SENSE OF CULTURE AND HISTORICAL ROOTS:

"There are places such as \_\_\_\_\_ where I can celebrate my culture and beliefs."



## EXERCISE: HOW GOOD IS YOUR PROGRAM AT NURTURING RESILIENCE?

Choose one of the programs featured in this manual or in the videos available online. Each is an example of a program that does a great job of promoting resilience. As you become familiar with the description of what the program does, use the grid below to count the number of essential ingredients for resilience that the program helps to build. You can also complete the table by thinking of a program that you have participated in or designed or delivered.

**NAME OF PROGRAM**

PROTECTIVE PROCESS	IS THIS PART OF THE PROGRAM? YES OR NO?	WHICH PART OF THE PROGRAM PROVIDES AN EXPERIENCE OF THIS PROTECTIVE PROCESS?
Build relationships		
Encourage powerful identities		
Provide opportunities for power and control		
Promote social justice		
Improve access to basic material needs (like food, housing, and safety)		
Develop a sense of belonging, responsibility for others, spirituality, and life purpose		
Sustain a sense of culture and historical roots		

## **EVEN THE MOST CHALLENGING OF PLACES HAVE HIDDEN RESOURCES**

There is a fable that tells the story of a traveller who arrives in a village where people have long ago stopped trusting each other. He knocks on a woman's door asking for a little food but is refused. Cleverly, he says that he needs only a pot and a ladle with which he will make a wonderful soup from a stone that he pulls from his satchel. The woman is skeptical but can think of no reason to not loan the poor man what he needs. In the town square, the man lights a fire and brings water to a boil as people gather to watch. He places the stone gently into the pot and then, a moment later, tastes his soup. "Not bad," he says. "It would be fabulous, though, with just a bit of onion." One of the townsfolk, obliges. It is, after all, just an onion. Again, the traveller tastes his soup, this time wondering aloud if a ham bone wouldn't add just the right touch of flavor. And so the story goes until a great pot of hearty soup is cooked and all the villagers have contributed. A feast follows. "Remarkable," they say, "to make such fine soup from nothing but a stone."

Like the fable of stone soup, programs that build resilience need not have all seven ingredients that I just listed. What they need, though, is a way of bringing out the best in people, communities, and institutions so that resilience follows. Indeed, every manual that describes health promotion, community development, or other type of resilience-enhancing processes, encourages the participation of people locally in finding solutions to their problems. Great programs promote agency and self-efficacy rather than dependency and compliance. They put participants into positions of power as co-designers.

## **CAUTION: SOMETIMES, RESILIENCE CAN BE CONFUSED WITH SOMETHING BAD**

My grandmother used to say that everything is good in moderation. Resilience-promoting processes are usually helpful, but in some circumstances encouraging children to experience the essential ingredients of resilience can actually put them more at risk for problems. Cultural identification, for example, sometimes leads to prejudice and xenophobia directed at those who are outsiders. A powerful identity for one child can mean that others' identities are put down. A child from a very privileged background whose power and control are increased may start to feel entitled or show narcissistic tendencies. Even an excessive amount of safety can bubble-wrap children and prevent them from developing healthy coping skills. Sometimes relationships with adults or peers can place young people in exploitive situations.

Indeed, everywhere that I have travelled, whether it is to a township in South Africa, an Arctic community in Canada, a village on Japan's northern coast, an urban slum in Brazil, or an orphanage in rural India, I have found that in and of itself a protective process is unlikely to produce resilience unless it is tempered by social justice. For example, while participation in religious activities and a strong identification with one's culture can be protective, especially during a crisis, religious and cultural zealots may argue for practices that actually harm children. These include behaviors like female genital mutilation or preventing sex education from being offered in public schools even though children locally are at risk of sexual abuse.

Indeed, culture is always controversial when designing programs that are intended to help build resilience. Consider the problems that well-meaning aid organizations encounter when they combat child labor by insisting that parents send their children to school rather than work on family farms. These organizations sometimes encounter the awkward situation of trying to improve children's rights in contexts where children say they prefer to work. After all, for some young people, work brings with it the promise of respect in their community (a powerful identity), a sense of belonging, cultural continuity, and a chance to help their family remain economically viable. It places them in the shadow of elders who can mentor them into adult roles. School, especially a poorly resourced school, might not provide any of these ingredients for resilience if there is no reasonable expectation that a better education guarantees children well-paying jobs when they become adults.

Resilience is always contested terrain in which those with different amounts of power negotiate for the resources that they need to do well. What doing well looks like is a question of who controls the definition of what is and is not successful child development and what resources young people and their families need to thrive. An individual child's, family's, or community's resilience should not, however, compromise the resilience of others with less power to control their fate. In the field of resilience, these are known as tradeoffs between systems.

## SUMMARY

Good programs provide access to essential ingredients for resilience (protective processes). The more of these ingredients that a program enhances, the better the program will be at improving the resilience of its participants. There are, however, drawbacks to resilience when protective processes are put in place without attention to social justice.

# PART FIVE

## Seven Steps to Designing a Program that Works

Ready to design your program? In this fifth part of *What Works*, I will apply the principles from Part Three to a seven-step process which will help you to design programs that can help participants find all of the essential ingredients for resilience that I described in Part Four. This is your recipe book!

A checklist is provided in Part Six of this manual to help you keep track of your progress.

### STEP 1: CHOOSE A PROGRAM

Imagine that you are at home with your family. They are ready to eat but what do you cook? What do they want? And just as importantly, what raw ingredients are realistically available to turn into a meal?

With dinner preparation it is clear: the problem that is being solved is a hungry family. Designing a program is a little different. Before we begin to design, our first step has to be to find the right problem to solve and the right outcome to achieve.

#### **TASK 1A: ESTABLISH A LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE.**

Establish a local advisory committee (LAC) of adults with program expertise who can comment on what it is that children need and what kind of programs work well in their community. It might also be necessary to establish a Child and Youth Advisory Committee (CYAC) which includes children who will later be participants in the program. In some cases, children and adults can work together, though it is often better to have two committees with at least two young people sitting on both the CYAC and the LAC so that they can represent the voices of youth when the LAC meets. Both committees are important when adapting program designs to local contexts and ensuring that any work done meets local needs.

There is, however, one drawback to these committees. They can sometimes stand in the way of innovation. A good LAC should be problem-solvers, willing to look at new program ideas. Remember, program design with a focus on resilience is about negotiation and finding the right program that builds capacity in ways meaningful to participants. Program designers have a responsibility to prove to local stakeholders that there are effective solutions to children's challenges that may not already exist in the community. The role of the LAC is to assess these ideas and offer advice on the

viability of each new program that is proposed. In some cases, however, it may be better to have a group of advisors upon whom you depend, but not create a formal committee if you think that they will resist new solutions to recurring problems. A good committee is always one that the community perceives as a credible group of people who have been wholeheartedly engaged to ensure that any program that is offered will be responsive to the community's needs.



### ***TASK 1B: CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT.***

A needs assessment or community survey (carried out in a culturally relevant way and sensitive to how people prefer to talk about their problems and solutions) is one way to discover what kind of program is most needed and likely to have the most impact on the lives of children and families. You can also hold a community workshop or start an online poll. Getting this needs assessment right helps to guarantee that the program you design and deliver will be the best one at the best time in the best place.

As there is no one perfect way to conduct a needs assessment, I have not provided specific details for any one approach. Your LAC can help guide you as you develop your needs assessment, suggest who should be interviewed, and review the results once the assessment is completed. The point is to work with your community and identify what they feel are their most pressing challenges without repeating services and supports that already exist. Every community will feel comfortable with a different strategy to gather this information. Some will prefer a door-to-door survey by trusted individuals. Others will prefer to participate in focus groups at a local recreation center. Still others may prefer to be asked for their opinions through a phone call or online questionnaire. Some communities believe it is the role of their leaders to identify problems and solutions. Others believe the process should be more participatory. Some communities like to hear the voices of young people while others find the idea of consulting with children culturally inappropriate. No matter which type of needs assessment you carry out, you will have to find out what problems people want to fix and the solutions that they have already used to try and fix them (including the services that already exist). The results of the needs assessment will help you to decide which program is necessary and what kind of intervention is most likely to fit with how the community sees the problems facing its children.

One easy way to map a community is to ask stakeholders (these include members of the LAC) to draw their community on a piece of paper, chalkboard, or other medium, mapping out possible locations for the program and places that pose problems for participants getting to the program once it is running. Maps can include public transportation routes or alternatives like walking paths. When considering each resource, think about its availability and accessibility (e.g., how safe are the roads and public transit system?). Next, think about where the program will actually take place. Does the space that will host the program have the necessary bathrooms, seating, lighting, and is it accessible at the time of day that the program will operate?

After thinking about a community's needs and infrastructure, we can then think about other ingredients, such as if parents need childcare and whether food should be served (e.g., if a program is working with children after school, a healthy snack can encourage their participation and improve their attention). All of these details can be drawn on one map to show the relationship between barriers to participation and the resources that a community has to support a new program.

Finally, program designers need to consider what other services and supports are available to potential participants. Will this program be the only program trying to help? Should this program co-locate with another service (e.g., can a food bank and a parenting program offer services in the same building, or a mental health program for children and after-school tutoring)? These other programs can also be represented on the community map.



## EXERCISE: ASSESSING A PROGRAM'S LEVEL OF COORDINATION, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, AND CONTINUITY

### ***Ecomap Version 1:***

As part of a community needs assessment, create an ecomap of services. Do this by drawing in the center of a piece of paper a symbol to represent the program being designed (maybe it is a building, a person, or something that represents the program's goals). Then, one by one, draw symbols for other formal supports like government services, schools, and medical services, as well as informal supports like caregivers, extended family, peers, religious institutions, and nongovernmental organizations that have resources to help the child.

As you place each service, program, or informal support on the paper, draw lines between your program and these other parts of a child's life:

- Use thick solid lines to represent strong relationships. The stronger the line, the more contact you expect to have.
- Use thinner lines and dotted lines to represent weak connections. These could of course be strengthened as part of your program by coordinating services and supports.
- Draw wavy lines to those services and supports that might be in competition with your program and those actively discouraging children and families from participating in your program.

You can use symbols like walls and closed doors to represent services and supports that pose barriers to coordination, shared responsibility, and continuity of service. Keep in mind, though, that not all resistance to collaboration is malicious. After all, caregivers can be hesitant for their children to participate in programs because of past trauma in their own lives, fear of stigma, a lack of money, or other problems, real and imagined. Funders, too, can pose barriers to participation. They can argue that your new program is not the type of program they want to fund, even if it is likely to be helpful. Once your ecomap is drawn, it will be much easier to see where you need to strengthen links with other programs and supports.

### ***Ecomap Version 2:***

The same exercise can be done again but this time use it to map risk factors and protective processes that are making it more or less difficult for program participants to cope with the challenges faced in their families and communities. This exercise can be done with the participants naming and drawing the different parts of the ecomap.

### ***TASK 1C: ENSURE THAT YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK***

With your advisors in place and consultation with the community underway, you are ready to think about your program design. Here are twelve questions to ponder before you go any further:

1. What problem is being solved?
2. Whom is this program for?
3. What outcomes are most desirable?
4. What risks (or danger/adversity/challenges) do program designers and key informants from the community say they face that contribute to the problem being addressed?
5. What risks do people locally identify as important to them?
6. If there are risks that program designers see but community members do not, how can awareness of these risks be increased (if necessary)?
7. If people in the community were doing well in the future, despite these risks, how would they know?
8. What resources do they already have that could help them to succeed?
9. What other resources and experiences do they need to protect themselves so that they can do well in the future?
10. Of all the things that they need, which are the most meaningful to them?
11. Which are the most practical?
12. Which are the best investment of time, human resources, and money?

The answers to these questions will be very different depending on where and for whom a program is being created, but the answers are critical to designing a program that will be locally meaningful while still building on what we know about resilience. After you have answered these twelve questions (with the help of your community advisors and your program's expected participants) you will be ready to begin designing.



### **TASK 1D: ADOPT, ADAPT, OR CREATE A NEW PROGRAM**

Even after you know the type of program that you want to create, you'll need to decide if you are going to adopt a program that's already been tried elsewhere (adapting it to the needs of your participants) or start from the beginning and design your own. Maybe you'll do a combination of both, borrowing elements of someone else's work while inventing something new.

No matter how you approach this first step, at some point after consultations are as complete as they can reasonably be you'll have to decide on the best program for the children whom you want to help. Your decision is likely to reflect many different considerations. What kind of program is preferred by the people you are trying to help? What kind of program does the funder like best (there is, after all, no point promising a community a service which won't be funded)? Which program do you think will actually work? What kind of program are you and your colleagues trained to offer? There is a saying that if all you have is a hammer, then every problem is a nail. It is no surprise that program design is often constrained by the tools we have on hand.

Designing a program that builds resilience is about designing for positive development. The participants need to understand that the program you are offering does more than just suppress problems, it builds capacity for the next crisis. Funders have to be on board too. You need to ask yourself, "Will my funders value the work I want to do? Or would they prefer a more conventional 'illness' or 'disorder' focused approach?"

### **EXERCISE: IS YOUR PROGRAM LIKELY TO SUCCEED?**

To assess the likelihood that your program design is the right one, answer the questions below for each design that you are considering. This assessment of feasibility and fit will help you to choose the right program for your place and population. You can even add your own questions.

For each program design idea, tally the score. A higher score means a more feasible program that will fit the needs of children locally. Once you have considered all of the possibilities, and thought hard about the best program to design, you will be ready to move on to Step 2.

**PROGRAM DESIGN IDEA #1:  
[SHORT TITLE]**

**A. WHAT PROBLEM (RISK FACTOR) IS YOUR PROGRAM DESIGNED TO SOLVE?**

**B. WHAT OUTCOME(S) IS YOUR PROGRAM DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE?**

**C. WHAT RESILIENCE-PROMOTING PROCESS(ES) WILL YOUR PROGRAM USE TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES?**

	YES	MAYBE	NO	COMMENT
<b>D. IS THE PROGRAM IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?</b>	2	1	0	
<b>E. IS THERE A FUNDER WHO WILL FUND THIS PROGRAM?</b>	2	1	0	
<b>F. DO THE PROGRAM FACILITATORS HAVE THE TRAINING TO OFFER THE PROGRAM?</b>	2	1	0	
<b>G. DOES THE PROGRAM EXIST ELSEWHERE OR ALREADY HAVE EVIDENCE THAT IT WILL WORK?</b>	2	1	0	
<b>H. [ADDITIONAL QUESTION(S) TO ASSESS FEASIBILITY]</b>	2	1	0	
<b>I. [ADDITIONAL QUESTION(S) TO ASSESS FIT]</b>	2	1	0	

**REPEAT PAGE FOR PROGRAM DESIGN IDEAS #2 AND #3**

### ***TASK 1E: ARE THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES AND ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS EVIDENT IN YOUR PROGRAM?***

Now that you are sure that your program is the right one for your community, it is important to think about the seven principles discussed in Part Three and the essential ingredients that I outlined in Part Four. Ensuring that more of these are part of your program will improve the odds that it will work in practice.

Once again, program designers can learn something from great cooks. Up and down the supply chain, successful cooks put into practice principles which make their meals a success. For example, they coordinate with those who farmed the ingredients, the grocers who sold them the freshest produce, and those who wash the dishes afterwards. In the kitchen they share responsibility for the many tasks that need to be done. They work as efficiently as possible, building on past successes rather than inventing new procedures every meal. Nothing is overcooked. Timing is impeccable. The food arrives at the table at the right temperature. Children's likes and dislikes are respected. Every meal is in some way a testament to an entire interwoven set of systems that are coordinated and share responsibility over time.

Program designers who want to build resilience need to ask themselves whether the programs that they have developed will improve children's lives in the ways that they hope they will. The answer to this question is likely to be a resounding "Yes" if their programs reflect the seven principles and make available and accessible the essential ingredients for resilience. If you discover missing principles and ingredients necessary for a successful program, be sure to revisit tasks a, b, c, and d before proceeding to Step 2. While not every principle and essential ingredient appears in every program that promotes resilience, the more that you can integrate these in to your design the better.





## STEP 2: CREATE YOUR PROGRAM OUTLINE

Even the most basic meals follow a recipe. They start with ingredients. The food is prepared, served, admired (you hope), and, finally, eaten. Designing programs is remarkably similar, only we talk about inputs instead of ingredients, activities instead of food preparation, outputs instead of the number of meals served, and outcomes instead of people's satisfaction with the meal, their health, or whether they feel loved by the cook. This outline for program design is sometimes called a logic model. It is a series of "if-then" statements. If these resources are available, then we can do these activities. If we do these activities, then we can expect these outcomes. A logic model (or outline) describes how specific activities of the program will lead to change and achieve the desired outcomes. Logic models are created by the same people who helped you carry out the needs assessment: your LAC. It's important, though, to be sure and include the voices of frontline staff, funders (if possible), community members who will be affected by the program, and of course children themselves.

Outlines for programs that build resilience are similar to other program outlines, but the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes focus on positive aspects of development rather than putting an end to a disorder (e.g., an addiction), disease (e.g., trauma), or pattern of dysfunction (e.g., child labor). Though you may want these outcomes to be part of your program too, if your goal is to build resilience then you are likely to focus on other aspects of your program such as increasing people's capacities or strengths (e.g., improving self-esteem or a child's sense of belonging at school), the capacity of the child's environment to sustain the child's wellbeing (e.g., the child's school will accommodate children's needs better), and protective processes that make good outcomes possible (e.g., schools will collaborate better with caregivers). A program outline can be created easily by following a few simple steps.

### ***TASK 2A: DEVELOP CONTENT FOR A SIMPLE PROGRAM OUTLINE.***

To create your program outline, work your way through the following questions, recording your answers as you go:

1. Whom is your program going to serve? Be specific. This is the target population.
2. What do you need to make your program run (e.g., funding, staff, community partners, in-kind donations from the community, a meeting space, etc.)? These are your inputs.
3. What are the main activities that you intend to do as part of the program? How long will they last?
4. List all the tangible things (things that can be counted) that will be completed/created because of the program's activities. For example, how many participants will be part of the program? How many meetings will be held? These are your outputs.
5. List all of the program's possible outcomes. These can be short-term outcomes like changing attitudes, improving skills, or teaching participants new ways to interact with others. You should also have long-term outcomes like making your community a better place to raise children or making the environment more sustainable. Remember, these changes are just as important to resilience as individual adaptation or skill development.



## TASK 2B: FILL IN THE TEMPLATE

Now that you have figured out your program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, fill in the Program Outline Template. When using the program outline template, remember that the number of boxes and size of boxes, even the lines between the boxes, can be changed to fit the needs of your program. Your outline will be especially useful later on if you choose to evaluate your program or want to show funders that your program is working (see Step 6).

PROGRAM OUTLINE TEMPLATE				
	TARGET POPULATION			
INPUTS				
ACTIVITIES				
OUTPUTS				
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES				
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES				

## STEP 3: GATHER YOUR RESOURCES

As already discussed, it is always easier to cook a great meal in a kitchen that is equipped with the right utensils. It is also easier if you have at your side well-trained assistants to help with the food preparation and quality ingredients. That does not mean that you have to have stainless steel appliances, Michelin star chefs, and organic vegetables like you might find in a New York City bistro. It means, instead, the right tools, the right people and the right basic ingredients to create a hardy, good tasting meal that people feel satisfied eating.

Designing programs for resilience follows a similar pattern. Once you know which program is needed (Step 1) and you have figured out what you want to achieve (Step 2), then you are ready to gather the resources necessary to create your program. The list can be long or short. You will need human resources to run the program, financial resources to pay for supplies, and a place to work with children and their families. What each of these (and other resources) looks like will depend on where your program is being run. If you are designing your program for a setting that is extremely poor or disadvantaged, you may want to consider a train-the-trainer model for your program (training local people to be the facilitators, who in turn train other people to help expand the program). Likewise, if the community where your program is to be offered has plenty of resources, but people distrust professionals, you may want to consider employing para-professionals who already live in the target community and are known to be trustworthy individuals. Once again, the solution to program design and implementation is to bring together the best resources you can and use them in ways that program participants will find useful.

There are other considerations as well. What is the community's physical geography (Are there mountain roads to navigate? Is it extremely cold or extremely hot?) and public infrastructure (Is there public transportation? Is there affordable cellphone coverage so that program designers can contact people to tell them about the program?). Both aspects of communities influence how a program gets designed and delivered.

### ***TASK 3A: PLAN YOUR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES***

Next, we need to think in detail about the activities of the program itself. Agendas will be needed. Ice-breakers should be designed to help children get to know one another and their facilitators. Safety plans will have to be anticipated in case participants become stressed or need extra help of any kind. That means finding the right staff with the right skills which might mean bringing in outside experts who can be coaches while the program is getting established.

### ***TASK 3B: DECIDE ON YOUR BUDGET***

At some point (earlier is better) as a program designer you will need to consider your budget. How much money do you have? Do you need external funding or will there be a fee for the service? What about advertising? A website? Are these costs anticipated?

## EXERCISE: IS YOUR PROGRAM READY TO BE LAUNCHED?

Just as great cooks get their kitchens ready and ensure that all of their ingredients are on hand before they begin meal preparation, so too do program designers consider the multi-level systems that have to be in place for a program to succeed. Overlook a crucial system (e.g., how will children get to the program safely?) and even the most well-intentioned efforts will fail.

Answer the questions in the table to assess your program's level of readiness. The more times you answer "yes" to the questions, the more likely your program is to be successful from the very start.

**NAME OF PROGRAM:**

RESOURCES REQUIRED	YES	MAYBE	NO	COMMENTS
People: Do you have approval from community leaders and elders to offer the program?	2	1	0	
People: Do you have the right people to run the program, with the right skills?	2	1	0	
People: Will you be able to provide the training and support that the program staff need?	2	1	0	
Infrastructure: Do you have the right space in which to operate the program?	2	1	0	
Infrastructure: Do you have the supplies you need for the program?	2	1	0	
Infrastructure: Is the program available and accessible to participants (e.g., transportation, childcare, etc.)?	2	1	0	
Funding: Do you have enough money to operate the program?	2	1	0	
Funding: Are there other possible sources of financial and staff support? (e.g., donations of time, space, equipment; are people willing to train as volunteers, etc.)?	2	1	0	
Other resources (list here)	2	1	0	
	2	1	0	
	2	1	0	



## STEP 4: BUILD LINKS FROM YOUR PROGRAM TO OTHER SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Now that we know that your program is needed, are we sure that children and their families can't get the same support elsewhere? What do other programs offer that could be useful to the young people that you are trying to help? How can we establish communication between programs? How can problems such as confidentiality be solved if we coordinate our interventions with other program developers? How can we avoid competing for the same funding so that each program's chances of getting support are improved? And finally, if a participant in your program experiences an emotional, financial, or other type of crisis, will it be possible to refer the participant for the kind of support she needs? It is easier to succeed through partnerships than on your own, especially when your efforts to coordinate programs prevent competition for scarce resources. Ideally, links to other programs should have been made at the beginning of the design process so that new programs are not perceived as threats to programs that are already established.

To help you assess your level of coordination, ask yourself these three questions as you design your program:

1. Thinking about your community and the other services and supports available to young people and their families, is your program really necessary?
2. Does your program include a plan to transition participants back to their own network of natural supports after the program is finished?
3. If a child needs something that your program can't deliver, will your program be able to help the child access other services and supports?

Good design means a fair division of responsibility for the wellbeing of participants. It is critical that no program be an island unto itself, nor any single program leader be the only person with the ability to carry out the program. Such programs will be neither sustainable nor will they build resilience among participants. Charismatic leaders have their place when motivating change, but if a program depends wholly on one person it is unlikely it will solve all of the problems facing a child growing up in a dangerous or neglectful environment. It is far better to build programs that share responsibility for solutions between program leaders, different services providers, a child's natural supports, and, of course, program participants themselves.

Building bridges to other programs also ensures continuity. What if your program ends and a child is still not showing signs of improved functioning? What if your program's funding ends, or staff leave, before all of the children under your care are ready to transition out of the program? Step 4 reminds program designers to anticipate how participants will experience help (is it reliable over time?) and the changes that might occur that can't be controlled. It's always a good idea to have a backup plan.

## STEP 5: ADAPT YOUR PROGRAM TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT

It can be tough to be a vegetarian in southern Brazil, where meat is the mainstay of the diet. It can be just as difficult to eat a meat-heavy diet in Southern India, where being a vegetarian is exceedingly simple. If you invite people to dinner, you need to know where they are from. Of course, your ability as a cook to accommodate everyone's food preferences is not only about your talents but also depends on whether the raw ingredients are available to prepare different kinds of meals.

Designing programs in different cultures and contexts is like feeding a lot of different people with very different tastes. We need to demonstrate flexibility. As program designers, we need to ask ourselves:

1. Is my program able to adapt to the needs of different participants?
2. Is it meaningful to the people who will participate?
3. How will my program accommodate individual differences?
4. If it can't adapt to individuals, can it adapt to the needs of specific communities?
5. Does my program fit with the current financial and social constraints of the host organization? Host community?
6. Is there a review process built in to the program to ensure that as conditions change my program changes too?

These questions become even more complicated to answer if the program you are offering relies on someone else's manual. In a case like that, the program may find it challenging to demonstrate fidelity to the original design and still adapt to local conditions. You will need to ask yourself as the program designer, "Which parts of this program can I change, and which do I have to keep the same?"

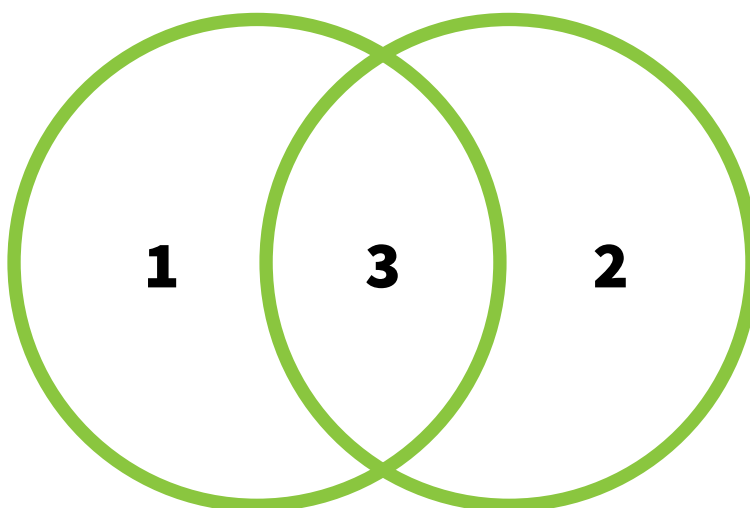
A great way to adapt your program to local contexts is to invite input from your LAC. The LAC should already include people with program expertise along with representatives from the different stakeholder groups (e.g., children, parents, teachers, other program providers). While an LAC can help choose a program design, my experience has been that they become very important when adapting best and promising practices to local contexts.

## EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF PROGRAMMING

Think about your program as a diagram with two overlapping circles. Draw the circles, then do the following:

1. In the circle on the left, list the parts of your program that every participant needs, no matter where the program is delivered or the participants' cultural backgrounds. For example, a good relationship with the program facilitator and safety are parts of every program that I have been involved with. Be sure to consider aspects of resilience-promoting programs as discussed in Parts One, Two, and Three of this manual.
2. In the circle on the right, list the parts of your program that are unique to meeting the needs of your participants in the context where you will be working with them. Maybe your participants prefer a program that includes music, theatre, or activities out on the land. These design elements will reflect cultural and contextual adaptations of your program.
3. Next, in the area where the two circles overlap, list the things that the circles on the left and right share in common. Filling in this middle space should help you identify both culturally specific aspects of your program and those that are supported by evidence from programs like yours.

Modify your program design as needed to ensure it gives participants the best possible opportunities to develop resilience.





## STEP 6: TRACK YOUR SUCCESS

Effective resilience-promoting programs include some way to show that they are making a difference in the lives of their participants. Evaluators distinguish between practice-based evidence, evidence-based practice (the gold standard for programs), and evidence-informed practice. All three concepts are used to decide whether a program is likely to produce the outcomes that it is intended to produce. Increasingly, these concepts are being adopted by funders to justify which resilience-promoting programs deserve their support.

- Practice-based evidence is the accumulated wisdom of what works based on previous programs that young people or the professionals helping them say are good interventions. Practice-based evidence is organic. It grows out of the experiences of many program designers and participants across many different programs. A program that builds resilience based on practice-based evidence is hoping that previous programs that look similar and are thought to be successful are good predictors of what will work the next time around.
- Evidence-based practice draws on the best research and scientific theories to predict whether a program will succeed. Program designers need, however, to ask if the evidence that a program is effective is relevant to the context where it will be used. Are the changes it is expected to make in children's lives the changes that children and their caregivers want? Just because a program worked in Bangkok, for example, does not mean that it will work in rural Kenya (or vice versa).
- Evidence-informed practice sits somewhere in the middle between practice-based evidence and evidence-based practice. When a program is new and innovative—and addressing a problem which has been overlooked or ignored—there is unlikely to be a program which has already been proven to work. In cases like this, program designers can turn to the research and see what it says are the most likely of the essential ingredients for resilience to produce the most change over time. With that in mind, designers can then use that research (the evidence) to inform the design of a program even if there is little clinical proof to guide the application of the research into practice. Programs for Indigenous young people at risk for suicide, or child soldiers who are being demobilized, are good examples of areas where interventions are being designed and implemented based on research. Until several of these projects are completed, though, we won't have enough proof to say which ones work best. That means that we won't have an evidence-based practice that we can rely on when we repeat the program in a second community.

While most programs won't have the resources to show that their program is an evidence-based practice, they can show that their work is evidence-informed or builds on practice-based evidence by undertaking a few simple tasks.

### ***TASK 6A: EVALUATE THE PROCESS***

Keep detailed notes on how your program was designed, the needs it addresses, and how decisions were made to deliver it. This type of process evaluation tells the story of a program's development, and whether all the necessary steps (as I described them above) took place. The more steps that were adhered to, the more likely it is that funders will be convinced that your program is needed, culturally relevant, and well run. It is important to ask program participants and key informants in the community, including members of the program's advisory committees, for their thoughts about the program and whether it accomplished what it set out to do.

### ***TASK 6B: REVIEW (AND, IF NECESSARY, REVISE) YOUR PROGRAM OUTLINE***

Go back to the program outline (logic model) that you developed during Step 2. Ask yourself, "How will I gather information on every input, activity, output, and outcome (both short- and long-term)?" If you can't find a way to document one or more of these parts of your program, revise your Program Outline so that it includes only things that can be recorded. The more you demonstrate that you know what you are doing and are on track to achieving your goals, the easier it will be to convince others that your program is credible.

### ***TASK 6C: EVALUATE THE IMPACT***

It is expensive and complicated to conduct an impact evaluation that measures things like changes in children's behavior or rates of psychological disorders. Most programs can, however, track simple indicators of success to show that they are working. Be sure to not just look for signs that problems have decreased in intensity or frequency. Resilience-promoting programs assess whether the capacity of children and families to cope with present and future problems has increased as well as whether their communities have improved their capacity to support children and families when change is necessary.

Look for evidence that your program has had a positive impact on as many of the essential ingredients for resilience as possible. Quantitative measures (with standardized questions and validated scales) may be what funders want, but a few well-selected case studies can be just as powerful for a small program that is building an evidence base. If you do want to survey participants and ask them about changes to their risk exposure, resilience, and outcomes, you will need to talk with someone who knows how to select and use the right measures. Many resilience assessment tools are available online (some at no charge). For example, the Resilience Research Centre's Child and Youth Resilience Measure can be easily downloaded at <http://cym.resilienceresearch.org/>.

### ***TASK 6D: CONSIDER A COMPARISON GROUP***

A comparison group is a group of children that do not receive your program but can be compared with the group that do because they share the same level of risk exposure. In low-resource environments, however, there are seldom opportunities to find a population at the same level of risk as program participants who are not receiving the program, and who are still willing to participate in an evaluation. In some instances, this can be children on a wait-list who are interested in being part of the program in the future. When a comparison (or control) group is not available, program evaluators can still gather stories of participants who have made a significant change, as well as of those who may have dropped out of the program. By selecting a range of exemplary experiences, evaluators will be able to look at who the program works best for and explain why.

### ***TASK 6E: MODIFY THE PROGRAM DESIGN***

Use what you've learned from your evaluation to modify your program and make it better. Keep in mind, evaluations require a different set of skills from program design and delivery. Good program designers invest in the relationships needed to prove that their program works.

## **EXERCISE: WHAT KIND OF PROGRAM EVALUATION DO YOU NEED TO DO?**

When designing an evaluation, ask yourself:

- Who is the evaluation for (i.e., who will use the results)?
- What kind of information will they need to evaluate my program's effectiveness?
- Is this information available?
- Can my colleagues and I collect the information required with the financial and human resources available?
- Do my colleagues and I have the expertise to analyze the information we gather?
- Are there other types of evidence (like audio recordings, children's drawings, or photographs of program activities) that can help show that our program is working?
- Are we demonstrating that our program is having an impact on the essential ingredients for resilience?

Use your answers to these questions to decide what kind of evaluation you want to do. An impact evaluation with standardized measures is complicated and sometimes expensive. A process evaluation will tell you if your program is doing what it set out to do but won't say whether participants actually improved their resilience. When it comes to evaluation, program designers can only accomplish what their resources allow them to do.

## STEP 7: PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Good recipes withstand the test of time. If they were written down, their pages have become dog-eared with notes scratched in the margins, the paper crusty with splatters from mixing bowls. If they were shared through kitchen lore, they have become tales told by one generation to the next to recall the magic of a special meal and the mystery of its ingredients. These reminiscences remind cooks that food preparation is as much artistry as it is science. Good chefs start by following the rules. Great chefs grow beyond the rules. They understand that recipes need equal parts experience and inspiration. They adapt as new ingredients become available. The best meals that I have ever had began with a recipe but were turned into a local delicacy by an inspired cook who knew what her friends and family wanted.

By now, you should have a well-designed program worthy of being delivered. It has been carefully adapted to the setting where it is to be offered. It reflects the very best science of resilience and what you have learned about great program design. It has a plan for coordination, ways of documenting its successes, and can even be changed if changes are necessary. Best of all, it fits the needs of its participants and is likely to help them deal with adversity now and into the future. You will even have put in place some type of evaluation to show others the merit of your work.

If you are confident that your program is a success and improves resilience, then it is worth considering your program's sustainability. That means ensuring that the program continues to be offered to the children and families whom it is already helping as well as to new participants.

There is a science to how programs that improve resilience are designed, adapted, and scaled. A good program in one context that develops evidence for its effectiveness is seldom repeated, though, unless program designers pay attention to the steps necessary to helping their programs to grow. Here are five things that program designers do to ensure a program's sustainability.

### ***TASK 7A: DESCRIBE THE CONTEXT***

Before a program can be repeated, program designers have to be able to describe in detail the context where their program was originally offered. What was it about that particular community, those particular participants, and the particular risks they faced which made this the right program at the right time in the right place to solve the right problem and leave participants more resilient? When exporting a program to another community it helps to know why it worked in the past. Be sure to carefully document details about the context where your program is being run.

### ***TASK 7B: SHARE THE PROGRAM***

Publishing a report that tells people that your program works seldom convinces anyone to change the way that they already offer help to children and families. Resilience-promoting practices are best shared by champions who are willing to talk about their program and show why the program worked. It is the experiences of the participants and the facilitators (both their heart felt testimonials and the results of a program evaluation) that have the biggest impact on the decision by program

managers and funders to try something new. Attend conferences, participate in workshops, write a blog, or produce videos. All of these techniques can offer other program designers and community stakeholders the opportunity to become emotionally engaged with what your program accomplished and the lives that it changed.

### ***TASK 7C: ADAPT THE PROGRAM***

No matter what a program does, or how successful it has been, it will always need some adaptation to fit different risks and take advantage of different resources when it is offered to a new population of children and families. Sustainable programs are those that demonstrate a balance between flexibility in their design and fidelity to the core principles of practice that made the program work in the first place.

### ***TASK 7D: MONITOR PROGRESS***

Good program designers build into their programs some way of tracking outcomes as their program is adapted to new settings. Online communities of practice are a great way to keep in touch with other program designers and share tips on how to implement your program in different settings.

### ***TASK 7E: SCALE UP***

If a program appears to be adapting well to new contexts, and the outcomes are still good, it's likely worthwhile scaling up the program so it can be used widely. That means developing a program manual and finding a platform on social media or through publications to announce to the world that your program is working just fine and that you are willing to share it. Good programs deserve to be repeated.



## PROGRAM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Joanna Waddington is the founder and Director of ACE Africa in Tanzania, a community development program with a focus on improving children's resilience. Among their initiatives is a program that has adapted the Child-to-Child model to train children between the ages of 8 and 13 to become peer facilitators and teach life skills to younger children. ACE Africa's focus is on improving children's health and ensuring that their rights are respected, two goals that communities throughout Tanzania have identified as priorities.

Teachers work with children who become agents of change by forming their own clubs to talk about issues relevant to them and develop solutions. For example, to deal with the problem of diarrhea, children created their own hand washing stations at school, then trained children and families in the wider community to build similar stations in their homes. Other areas of concern have included children's rights and better protection for children from abuse and neglect. All of these activities are directed by the children, though the program leaders (who are adults) help to build bridges between government and non-governmental services that support the children's empowerment. The result is groups of children mobilized to tackle concerns that they see as important.

The result has been a comprehensive approach to improving children's lives through partnerships and the very real inclusion of children in the work. All of this was accomplished by strategic use of funding. Initial small projects in a limited number of communities were paid for by small trusts, philanthropic organizations with enough resources to support pilot initiatives. Once these projects proved that they were effective, ACE worked with communities to advocate for funding from both larger foundations and government sources. As programs have grown in scale and been extended to more and more communities, the government has been encouraged to establish children's councils which are reinforcing the importance of the work being done. Culturally specific engagement strategies are always used, such as whether men and women are asked to attend the same meetings. ACE advisors have ensured that the organization is responsive to local norms.

Much of this growth can be attributed to the careful evaluation of outcomes achieved by the program designers. With great care, they have been asking community members and children to identify the most important factors that should be assessed to demonstrate that the intervention is working. For example, they have assessed if awareness of children's rights has changed over time. They have tracked changes in the rate of child abuse (initially, it was seen as positive that the rate of reported child abuse was rising as it signaled that the community was disclosing more abuse). An increase in the number of children attending school, especially girls, was another meaningful metric of change, as was the participation of parents in school activities. Better nutrition and awareness of sexual health issues were also used as indicators that ACE programs were achieving their goals. Evaluation results and a culturally sensitive adaptation of an internationally recognized method of intervention have combined to help create a sustainable program that is addressing complex issues in children's lives.

**[WWW.ACE-AFRICA.ORG](http://WWW.ACE-AFRICA.ORG)**

**WATCH THE VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH JOANNA**  
**[RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS](http://RESILIENCERESEARCH.ORG/WHATWORKS)**

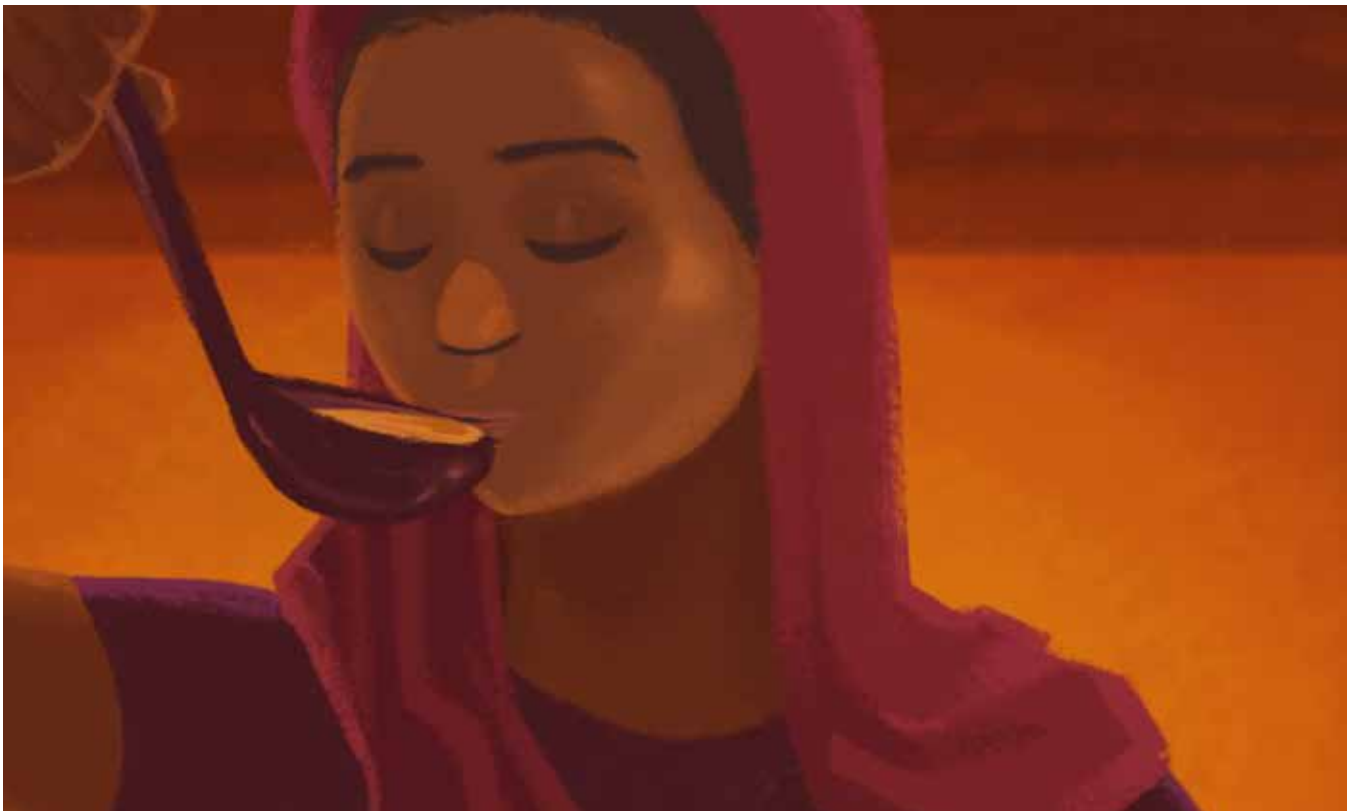


## EXERCISE: IS YOUR PROGRAM READY TO BE SHARED?

If you are confident that your program is working well and you would like to see it offered to more children and families, you will need to assess both whether your program is ready to be shared, and the likelihood that others will adopt it. Here are some questions to ask yourself to determine your program's level of sustainability:

- Who will be our program's champion when we share what we've done?
- What evidence do we have that our program is effective? How will we need to package that evidence so that others will be willing to review it?
- How can we share the experiences of our program participants in ways that respect their need for confidentiality but still engage other program designers and community stakeholders emotionally?
- What program resources (like manuals, videos, and tools to monitor progress) are we willing to share with other program designers so that they can repeat our program and build on what we have learned?

Different service sectors have their own rules for sustainability. For example, in some contexts, program designers may be willing to pay for a manual. In other contexts, they will only replicate programs that are free and available online. Some service providers like to attend certification workshops. Other services have no funding for such training. Sustainable programs answer the above questions in ways that help them get repeated by matching their plan for repetition with the needs of program designers in high and low resource contexts.



# PART SIX

## A Checklist: Will Your Program Enhance Resilience?

This manual began with a discussion of what resilience is, then shared a list of seven principles, essential ingredients for resilience, and outlined seven steps for effective program design. To see how well your program design reflects the ideas discussed throughout this manual, you will want to complete the exercise Will Your Program Enhance Resilience? It is a short checklist to review your program's fidelity to the principles and practices discussed in this manual. The more times that you answer "yes" the more likely it is that your program's design is going to achieve the desired outcomes. The questions are grouped under different challenges that program designers face when designing interventions that build the capacity of children and families to cope in stressful environments.



## EXERCISE: WILL YOUR PROGRAM ENHANCE RESILIENCE?

Here is a checklist of all of the important program design features discussed throughout this manual. How well does your program design reflect the principles and practices that have been shared? If you are unsure, or your program design is still improving, select “NO” for now, then change your answer to “YES” when the program fully reflects the principles and practices of great design.

### CHALLENGE 1

Has your program been designed using the seven design principles for effective resilience-promoting interventions? Will your program for children and their families:

1	Help them navigate to the resources they need to deal with unusually difficult times in their lives?	YES	NO
2	Help them negotiate for the things they need to be provided in ways that are meaningful to them?	YES	NO
3	Be appropriate for the social, economic, and political context in which participants live?	YES	NO
4	Honor their values and beliefs?	YES	NO
5	Affect multiple systems at the same time or over time?	YES	NO
6	Help to coordinate services and supports?	YES	NO
7	Be flexible in how it is delivered to different populations of young people and their families?	YES	NO
8	Provide continuity in the support it provides (e.g., contact after the program ends if required)?	YES	NO
9	Be the least intrusive it can be?	YES	NO
10	Be relevant to the geographic location (the built and natural environment) where it is offered?	YES	NO
11	Encourage the shared responsibility for solutions to young people’s problems?	YES	NO
12	Be evaluated to show that it is effective?	YES	NO

**CHALLENGE 1 SCORE:** \_\_\_\_ OUT OF 12

## CHALLENGE 2

Which of the essential ingredients for resilience does your program help children, families and/or communities experience?

1	Build relationships?	YES	NO
2	Encourage powerful identities?	YES	NO
3	Provide experiences of power and control?	YES	NO
4	Promote social justice?	YES	NO
5	Improve access to basic material needs (e.g., food, housing, and safety)?	YES	NO
6	Develop a sense of belonging, responsibility for others, and life purpose?	YES	NO
7	Sustain a sense of one's culture and historical roots?	YES	NO

**CHALLENGE 2 SCORE:** \_\_\_\_ OUT OF 7



### CHALLENGE 3

Has your program completed all of the steps of the design process?

1	Have you chosen a program through consultation with your local advisors (including young people and their families)?	YES	NO
2	Have you conducted a community needs assessment to identify problems and possible solutions?	YES	NO
3	Have you created a program outline (logic model)?	YES	NO
4	Is your program fundable?	YES	NO
5	Have you gathered your resources (e.g., people, money, space, supplies, etc.)?	YES	NO
6	Have you built into your program ways for your program to coordinate with other services?	YES	NO
7	Have you built into your program ways to share responsibility for young people's problems across multiple systems (e.g., with the child's family, school, and other service providers)?	YES	NO
8	Will your program have the supports it needs to ensure continuity of service?	YES	NO
9	Have you adapted your program to your local context?	YES	NO
10	Have you developed ways to track your success?	YES	NO
11	Encourage the shared responsibility for solutions to young people's problems?	YES	NO

**CHALLENGE 3** SCORE: \_\_\_\_ OUT OF 11

**TOTAL SCORE:** \_\_\_\_ **OUT OF 30**

# PART SEVEN

## Troubleshooting Programs That Don't Work

(or don't work as well as you would like them to work)

Even with attention to every detail of program design, things still go wrong. If you are getting pushback from your community or your organization, or have low rates of participation in your program, then consider the following solutions to everyday challenges of effective program design. The ideas presented here reflect what my colleagues and I have learned about designing successful programs that build resilience.

### TROUBLESHOOTING PROGRAM DESIGN PROBLEMS

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
Children and families are not interested in participating in a needs assessment.	<p>Work with your local advisory committee to find a better way to ask the community what it needs.</p> <p>Identify culturally appropriate ways to ask children and elders about their needs.</p> <p>Ask yourself “Is this the right time to enter the community?” “Is this the right time to design a program?”</p>
Other services and supports are reluctant to collaborate or refer children and families to the new program.	<p>Identify someone who has credibility with the organization that you want to partner with; ask them to arrange an introduction. Attend one of the organization’s staff meetings (if you can secure an invitation) and present your program design as a work in progress.</p> <p>Ask other service providers to help you design your program and commit to integrating their suggestions.</p>



PROBLEM	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
<p>There are not enough resources to run the program.</p>	<p>Identify the program priorities of local funders and host agencies. Adapt your program to these priorities if possible, finding ways to integrate your content into programs that match organizational mandates.</p> <p>Share stories of your success, or partner with people who may eventually be participants in your program, so that they can explain to potential supporters why this new program is needed.</p> <p>Share with potential funders the potential for the program to provide a “return on investment”.</p>
<p>Staff at the host organization have no time to run a program.</p>	<p>Ensure staff understand that the new program could help them reduce their workload if it is successful in helping children and families develop the capacity to cope with recurring and future stressors.</p> <p>Consider a program design that trains non-professionals and volunteers to deliver the program.</p> <p>Use technology if necessary to further reduce the need for human resources (e.g., develop an online application, or screening tool).</p>
<p>There is no suitable space to hold program meetings.</p>	<p>Consider partnering with another organization or program whose clients/participants need the program.</p> <p>Look for strategic partnerships with government and non-government organizations that may have space available.</p>
<p>The program design is borrowed from another program and requires strict fidelity to the original design.</p>	<p>Work with your local advisory committee to decide which aspects of the program have to remain the same and which can be adapted.</p> <p>Contact the team that designed the original program and ask them to refer you to other program designers who have adapted the program.</p> <p>If the original program developers won’t let you adapt their program, consider a different program design.</p>

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
<p>Participants do not come to the program because of fears for their safety.</p>	<p>Run the program in a community setting that is non-stigmatizing and safe like a library, recreation facility, or school.</p> <p>Assess the risks and, with the help of your local advisors, develop solutions that match children's needs.</p>
<p>The program is not adapting well to the culture or context of the participants.</p>	<p>Ask your local advisory committee for help. Revisit your program outline and look for ways to achieve the same outcomes in culturally and contextually relevant ways.</p>
<p>Program participants attend erratically or leave the program early.</p>	<p>Contact participants who have left and ask them to evaluate the program.</p> <p>Adapt the program so that it is offered in shorter modules. Re-contract with participants after each module so that they can choose to stay longer if they want to stay or can leave without feeling that they have failed (or that the program failed).</p>
<p>The program is not demonstrating the outcomes that were expected.</p>	<p>Review your program outline and ensure that the expected outcomes are reasonable. Ask, "Have we included resilience related outcomes?" "Are we too focused on stopping problems?" "Are we tracking well the development of people's capacities?" "Is our assessment of outcomes long enough to see change in the future and in conditions of heightened stress?"</p> <p>Work with an expert in program evaluation (e.g., approach your local college or university) to find better, simpler ways to document the program's outcomes.</p>

# PART EIGHT

## A Project Design Template

It is time to integrate everything discussed in this manual. A project template can be useful when developing a full description of your program. I have included one here that should capture all of the elements that you will want to consider as you move through the seven steps of program design, paying attention to the seven principles and ensuring access to the essential ingredients for resilience. Most funders will require some version of these questions to be answered when you apply for financial support. Be sure to work with your local advisory committee when filling it in. The template will help guide your conversation and ensure that every aspect of program design and implementation is considered.



## SECTION ONE: THE ORGANIZATION

Host organization name:			
Address:			
Primary contact (including title) for the new program:			
Other program leaders (including their organizational affiliations and contact details):			
What type of organization is hosting the program? Choose as many as required.	Not-for-profit organization	Professional organization	Provincial or local police service
	Provincial, territorial, municipal, regional, or Indigenous government	University, college, or other educational institution	Individual researcher
	Research institution, domestic or international	International non-government organization	For-profit institution, provided the nature and intent of the proposed activity is non-commercial
	Other:		
What is the mandate/mission of the host organization?			
Organizational expertise: Briefly describe the expertise, resources, skills, experience and knowledge that qualify this organization to deliver this program.			
Organization funding history: List the most relevant funding the organization has received for programs in the past. For each award, provide the project title, funding source, amount of the award, and the year(s) that it was received.			

## SECTION TWO: THE PROGRAM

Program title:

Program Summary: Describe in three to five sentences what the program will do, with what resources, when and where.

Program duration: Start date/end date

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the target population.</li> <li>• Describe the overall project goal and specific objectives.</li> <li>• Background: justify why this program is important based on a needs assessment with the community and other research. Which problem will the program address? What is the evidence that this program will be able to help?</li> <li>• Resilience principles and essential ingredients: describe briefly how the program will reflect the seven design principles for resilience-promoting programs and how it will influence participants' access to the essential ingredients for resilience.</li> <li>• Other programs: describe other programs like the one you are proposing and the evidence that supports their effectiveness.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program outline: share the program inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>• Timeline: list the key activities and when they will occur.</li> <li>• Resources: identify the resources needed for the program and where they will come from.</li> <li>• Linkages: identify other programs, services and supports that will be linked to this new program. Explain how these linkages will be built and maintained.</li> <li>• Adaptations: identify ways that the program has been adapted to meet local needs.</li> <li>• Discuss social justice issues: explain how the program accounts for gender, race, and other forms of marginalization.</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## BUDGET

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How much funding do you need to operate your program? Provide a budget, listing expenditures and income.</li><li>• Who will provide this funding?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will the funding be provided as cash, or will you be able to secure “in-kind” contributions (e.g., free meeting space, supplies, access to social media, etc.).</li></ul> |
|---|---|

## EVALUATION PLAN

How will you show that the program is effective?

## PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will you share results with participants, their families, and others in your community?</li><li>• How will you share results with other organizations?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will you encourage other organizations to offer a program like yours?</li><li>• If your funding ends, how will you sustain your program?</li></ul> |
|--|--|



## CONCLUSION

Building resilience is different from preventing or stopping problems. It shifts the focus to increasing the capacity of children, families, and communities and helps them to anticipate and deal with recurring and chronic challenges. It even anticipates new challenges that might come in the future. It inspires program designers to think about positive development rather than just suppressing disorder or ending disease and dysfunction.

As we have seen, resilience is not a latent quality inside an individual child or a quality of a family or community. It is instead a process that involves multiple systems working together to help young people thrive when they are facing unusually high amounts of stress. Programs can help build resilience, but they need to be designed with an understanding of the things that help all young people cope better—like relationships, a powerful identity, a sense of belonging, and social justice. Good program design, like meal preparation, follows a predictable set of steps, is inspired by a set of principles, and involves both fidelity to rules and artistic license to be creative. Just as cooks around the world tailor their menus to the places they live and the gardens outside, programs that build resilience are attuned to the cultural and contextual differences found among children experiencing adversity all around the world.

Program design is neither easy nor complicated. It is, however, complex. A good designer needs to think about many things at once if a program is to meet young people's needs and leave them more resilient. Multiple systems will be changed. Some, as the examples in this manual show, may even be transformed.

Now it is your turn to start designing!



# RESOURCES

## Resources to Read

Here is a short list of the resources used to develop this manual. They may be useful to you, too, in your design work.

- Abramson, D. M., Grattan, L. M., Mayer, B., Colten, C. E., Arosemena, F. A., Bedimo-Rung, A., & Lichtveld, M. (2015). The resilience activation framework: A conceptual model of how access to social resources promotes adaptation and rapid recovery in post-disaster settings. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 42(1), 42-57. doi: 10.1007/s11414-014-9410-2
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