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Case study

TeamUp Netherlands

From theory of change to implementation

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The ToC developed for the TeamUp programme, with its elaborated inputs, outcomes, impact and assumptions provides good guidance for S4D programme implementation. Indeed, it is possible to see how the assumptions outlined in the ToC are addressed in programme implementation, from stakeholder engagement to facilitator training, and to COVID adaptations. A ToC approach leads to stronger programming and facilitates scaling (see *TeamUp International Case Study*).

TeamUp Netherlands overview

The TeamUp methodology was developed by Save the Children,¹ War Child² and UNICEF in 2015, and launched in 2016 in the Netherlands as a response to the inflow of refugees and the lack of psychosocial support available for refugee children. It is a non-verbal movement-based intervention for children aged 6–18. By end of 2020, it was implemented in 25 asylum reception centres across the Netherlands, in schools with newcomers, as well as in several countries worldwide (see *TeamUp International case study*). In the asylum reception centres children speak many different languages, and even when language is not a barrier to communication, the different backgrounds and cultures (e.g., one centre had 1,000 people from 60 nationalities),³ can create the need for a universal mode of communication.

Focused targets and theory of change

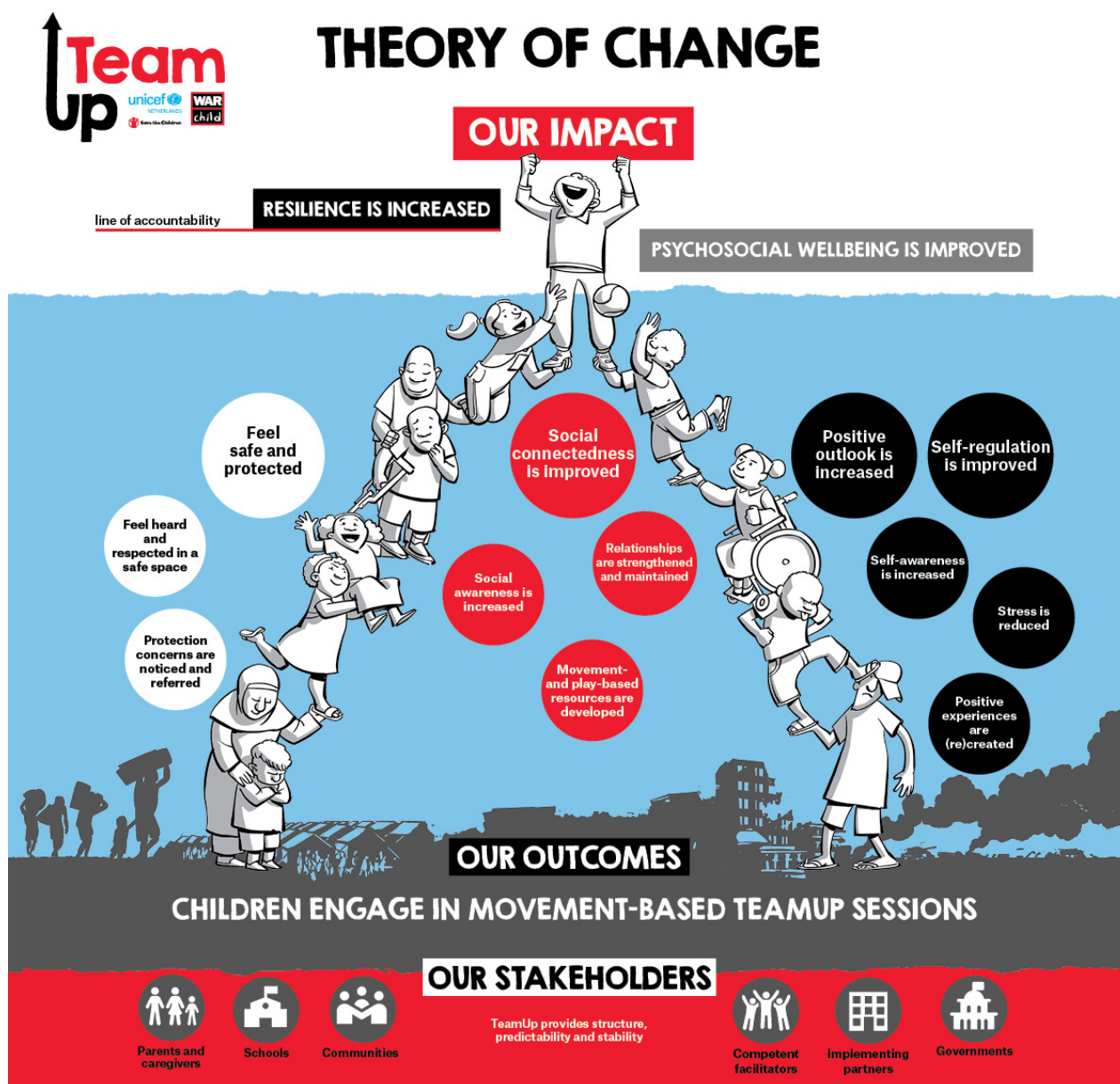
The programme aims to improve the psychosocial well-being of children, which in turn contributes to their resilience. The programme defines psychosocial well-being as a “balance between one’s internal resources and the faced challenges ... [it] emerges from their

psychological state of being (e.g., sensations, thoughts and emotions) in interaction with social factors (e.g., family, peers and their community)”.⁴ Relatedly, resilience is the “ability to draw from one’s own resources and the ones available in the immediate environment in culturally relevant ways” (ibid., p. 12). The programme uses a well-developed and researched theory of change (ToC) (see *Figure 1*) that demonstrates how these impacts will be achieved and clearly defines the inputs, outcomes and assumptions underpinning the programme.

Rather than being a specific sports-based intervention, TeamUp is based on games connected to psychosocial themes (e.g., fear, assertiveness, anger) that allow children to have fun and play without thinking about the difficult contexts they come from. Through movement and play-based learning, TeamUp provides temporary relief from the stress that children in protracted displacement normally experience and a unique opportunity to learn life skills. Since activities revolve around movement rather than conversation, language is not a barrier to participation. On the contrary, sessions become an opportunity for children to learn the language of the host community, which helps their societal integration. A female participant explained: “I have people that I can ask what things are called in Dutch and I’m learning the language a lot. I enjoy that.” Furthermore, as play has been shown to support children’s neurological and psychosocial development, this approach is considered especially beneficial for children who have undergone extensive trauma and stress.^{5,6,7,8}

TeamUp notes that “psychosocial wellbeing is improved when children can fulfil their individual and social needs” and that resilient children can draw not only on their “personal restorative capacities but [also] on existing protective resources in their environments; including

Figure 1: Theory of change



their parents, school and community”.⁴ Based on this, TeamUp’s ToC shows how they aim to increase the resilience and psychosocial well-being of refugee children by achieving four interrelated outcomes: feeling safe, feeling socially connected, cultivating a positive outlook, and self-regulation, which together improve psychosocial well-being and, consequently, resilience. Each of these outcomes is composed of several

components. For example, to achieve a sense of safety, it is crucial that protection concerns are noticed and acted upon, that children feel heard and respected in a safe space, and that they feel safe and protected. Safety is considered to be foundational to all the other outcomes, as the positive experiences that are fundamental for the other outcomes are not possible without it (see Box 1, on children’s feelings of safety).

The programme is designed around achieving these specific outcomes and impacts, which are linked to inputs and programme implementation.

The links between inputs, outcomes and impact (see *Figure 1*) are underpinned by several assumptions:

- The capacities that the child builds during the TeamUp sessions are replicated by the same child outside the sessions in contexts such as the school or the family setting.
- Children participate in TeamUp long enough to be able to work on the intended changes.
- Children feel comfortable to engage their bodies.
- A functioning training and mentoring system is in place for TeamUp facilitators which enables them to create a safe space for children participating in TeamUp.
- Facilitator teams are relatively stable and enduring
- Parents accept TeamUp as a suitable activity for their children and allow them to participate.
- Space is accessible and safe for all children.
- Referral services are available and accessible.
- The non-verbal modality is sufficient for children to reflect and to increase self-awareness.
- There is sufficient sustainability in the context in which TeamUp is implemented, in terms of safety and security and the continuation of the intervention.

These assumptions inform the implementation of the programme at every stage. Further, they highlight the need to engage with various stakeholders, such as parents, caregivers, communities, schools and governments who can help ensure that the assumptions underpinning the success of the programme are met.

Implementation

Sessions

In line with these assumptions that are under the control of the programme, TeamUp is implemented according to the following principles: same place, same face, same time. This ensures predictability, consistency and

Box 1: Children feel safe

Focus group discussion with children highlighted that children feel safe while participating in the programme, with all three components of the safety outcomes in evidence.

If a problem occurs during the session, they solve it with words. While in Syria if a problem occurred, they would solve it by hitting and beating.

10-year-old girl

We feel safe because there is an adult supervising the session, while when we play alone there is no order.

13-year-old boy

We don't argue or fight during the session, we only play.

10-year-old boy

The facilitators guard the children.

10-year-old boy

reliability, and blends these with the children's ability to make their own choices. The open but recurring structure of the sessions, the routines used, the consistent presence of facilitators and the regular occurrence of the sessions give a sense of stability which refugee children often lack. The one-hour sessions are meant to be an opportunity to achieve peace, stress relief and growth. Children seem to realize the benefits of participating. For instance, one 10-year-old girl stated that "when I return from school, I am tired, then I go to the session, I return active and my mood changes".

A crucial part of the programme is that it is always implemented alongside a referral system where

facilitators can identify and refer children in need of additional support. In the Netherlands, it is implemented in partnership with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) which is responsible for receiving asylum seekers and preparing them for a future in the Netherlands or elsewhere. Through this partnership, the COA provides TeamUp with a roster of children and handles any referrals. This partnership also ensures the sustainability and stability of the programme.

Children are invited to participate through home and school visits as well as via word of mouth and visuals hanging in the centres (posters and/or distribution of flyers). The programme is delivered in roughly one-hour sessions, one day a week and always on the same day, which provides children with some much-needed structure. Each session of TeamUp has three parts: opening, main activity and closure, and only needs some play materials and a space where children can play and be safe. In the Netherlands, group composition and size change every time, and can range from 2 to 20 participants, partly due to high turnover in the centres, with an average of 10–15 children per session. A team of at least two facilitators uses a series of activities and routines revolving around eight themes (fear, assertiveness, anger, stress and tension, conflict, bullying, respect and friendship), and the facilitators choose the theme of the day based on the needs of the group. For instance, one game for children aged 6–11 related to respect and accepting authority called 'Circle ball hit' is played as follows (see Box 2 for example of this learning):

1. One child holds the ball, the other children stand around her or him.
2. The child holding the balls says: 'Stand in the basket, and the ball is for ... [name of a group member]', while throwing the ball up as high as possible. While the child is saying this, the other children run away from the child holding the ball.
3. The child whose name was called out turns around and grabs the ball as fast as they can. As soon as the child has the ball, they say 'Stop!' loudly.
4. All children freeze and stand with their legs wide apart. The one holding the ball takes a maximum of

three large steps, then tries to roll the ball on the floor between the legs of one of the children. If she or he succeeds, this person is the new thrower. If she or he fails, the one who tried is the new thrower.

This game teaches children to listen to, and respect, the ball thrower and the catcher as they have to move and stop on their words. The games are adapted for age, divided into 6–11 and 12–17, and games for older children can be more complex, such as variations of dodgeball or dance-related games. Nevertheless, engaging older teenagers remains a challenge. As a result, TeamUp is starting a co-creation process to potentially adapt the programme to better fit their age group.

Box 2: Children learn respect and tolerance

TeamUp helps children learn many skills that can help improve their psychosocial well-being. Among these are respect and tolerance, which are important skills in the diverse context that are asylum centres, as well as more broadly.

In TeamUp you can have fun with your friends. There are boys and girls and we interact with each other, while in football the players attack you to take the ball.

13-year-old boy

They don't discriminate and they talk kindly. There is no racism.

13-year-old girl

We feel equal. Either among us [with other children of same nationality] or with them [children of other nationalities].

14-year-old girl

TeamUp at home

During the COVID crisis, TeamUp was unable to provide regular sessions owing to movement and social distancing restrictions. However, given that psychosocial concerns were likely to increase during this period of isolation,^{9,10} TeamUp adapted the programme to be delivered digitally for children aged 6–11. They encouraged the use of a same place, same face, same time approach (though this was not always possible as the sessions were run at a national level and not by location), plus additional ‘emergency sessions’ when emotions were running high. The guidance for TeamUp at Home included 10 videos and an activity sheet (see *Figure 2* for an excerpt from the activity sheet).¹¹

Facilitators

Facilitators are an important part of the programme. In the assumptions outlined in the ToC, a functioning training and mentoring system for TeamUp facilitators and relatively stable and enduring facilitators are important elements. Facilitators are volunteers that are at least 21 years old, with a background in working with children, and are available for at least nine months and four hours a week (to prepare sessions and to mobilize children post-evaluation). When someone applies, their background is checked and they are interviewed on their expectations, motivation and the importance of safeguarding by responding to scenario-based questions.

Once selected, facilitators undergo a two-day training session based on a manual covering all aspects of the programme. The facilitators then give test sessions to see if they are a good match and after three months undergo a follow-up two-day training session.

Once a facilitator has completed both training sessions, they will have learnt about:

- The rationale behind TeamUp and the importance of providing psycho-social support to displaced children
- The psychology of participants, stress, past traumas
- How to plan and facilitate a session, for example, the seven variables that you can vary in a session (like materials) (see *Figure 3* for overview of session preparation and facilitation)
- How to deal with language issues-demonstrations
- How to identify and deal with problematic behaviours of the children
- First aid.

The facilitators are also continuously mentored in their work. As of November 2020, TeamUp Netherlands had about 160 active facilitators, supported by five volunteer coordinators and a trainer. Each coordinator works with 7–10 teams and visits them every month to discuss session implementation, logistics, materials, organization, contents and concerns about specific children. These visits also serve as a mentoring scheme for facilitators.

Figure 2: TeamUp at Home guidance

TeamUp **TEAMUP AT HOME**



Gather everyone together with your special TeamUp yell and greet each other with an elbow bump. Show everyone else taking part how you're feeling: thumbs up, thumbs down or in the middle. Start off with giving each other a compliment or thanking them for joining.



What is extra important these days? Washing your hands, of course!



For this exercise you could play a relaxing song. Find a spot in the room or stand in a circle. Shake your body loose. Relax and carefully roll your neck, loosen your fingers, hands and arms. Roll your shoulders, slowly twist your ankles, and bend your legs and knees. Make circles with your hips. Then slowly settle down. When you're ready, try to focus on your body. How does your body feel today?



Take a towel and put it in the side of your trousers, at the side of your body. Next, find some room to stand opposite from your TeamUp buddy - at an arm's length. Put your feet flat on the floor and stand still. Now, count to three and try to take your buddy's towel. Whoever is able to steal the other person's towel gets one point. After two points you can try something new. For example, this time you won't stand still, but move around in the space, with your feet on the ground to make the game more challenging.

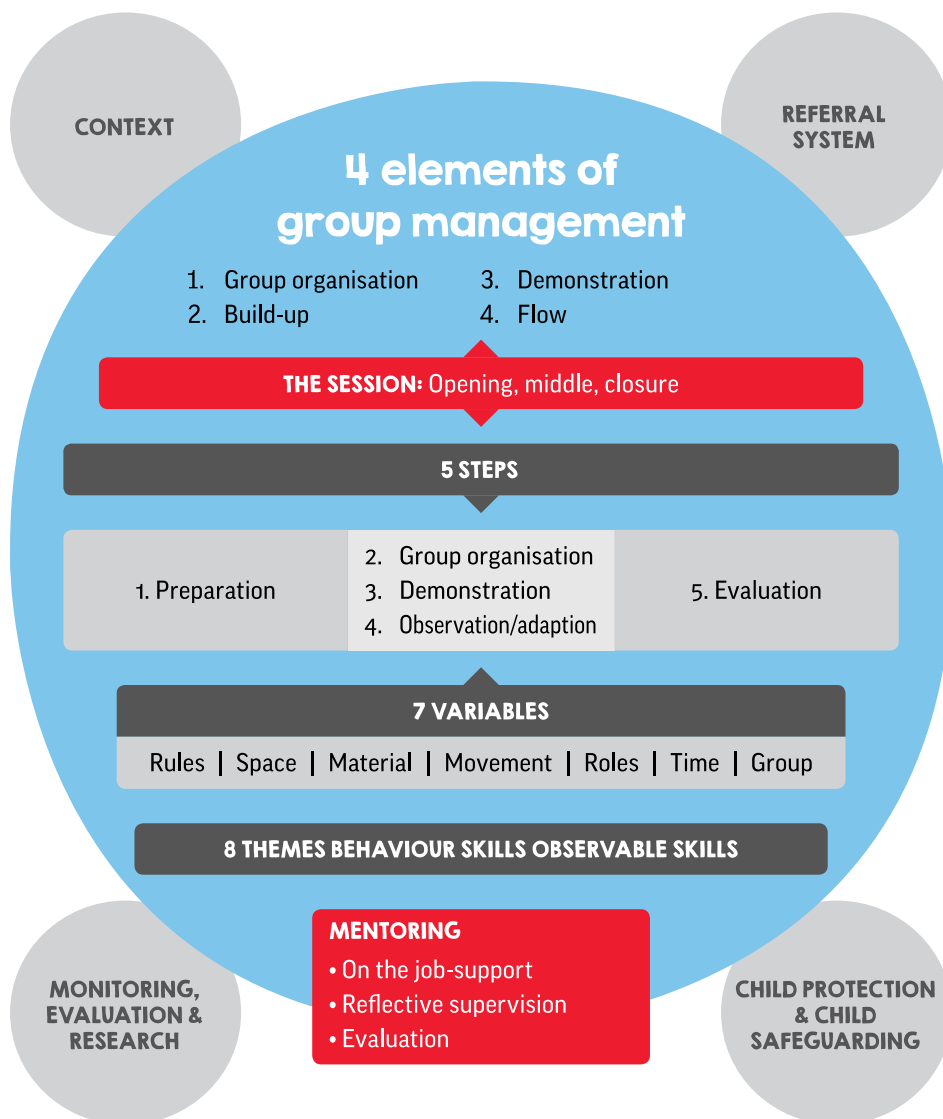
Context This game can help children better deal with conflict situations. During the exercise, one needs to defend their towel tail, hence protecting themselves while trying to steal the towel tail of the other, moving in different ways. Still, they have to be aware of each other. They may or may not seek physical contact and set boundaries. How do they deal with this?



Create a calm atmosphere with a soothing song of your choice. Try to do this exercise in silence. Stand face-to-face with your buddy. Stand firmly with your feet on the floor and relax your legs and knees. Extend your arms and hands, but do not touch each other. Make movements with your hand and arms. Follow your buddy's movements as precisely as possible, as if you were his or her mirror image. You switch the role of leader and follower after a couple of minutes.

Context This exercise revolves around listening without talking, attuning yourself to the other person and learning to share leadership.

Figure 3: Elements of session facilitation



¹ Save the Children is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1919 and is broadly focused on helping the most marginalized children, whether it be those dealing with pneumonia, hunger or war. See: <<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do>>; <<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/our-history>> , accessed 5 May 2021.

² War Child is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1993 and is dedicated to protecting and speaking up for children affected by war. See: <<https://www.warchild.org.uk/who-we-are/our-history>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

³ This case study is based on interviews and focus groups with children, parents, facilitators and programme staff in one of these 25 centres.

⁴ TeamUp, "Theory of change", 2020.

⁵ Bratton, Sue C., Dee Ray, Tammy Rhine and Leslie Jones, 'The Efficacy of Play Therapy With Children: A meta-analytic review of treatment outcomes', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2005, pp. 376–390, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.36.4.376>>.

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⁹ Dalton, Louise, Elizabeth Rapa and Alan Stein, 'Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19', *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, vol. 4, no. 5, 2020, pp. 346–347, <[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30097-3/fulltext#articleInformation](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30097-3/fulltext#articleInformation)>, accessed 5 May 2021.

¹⁰ UNICEF, 'Child Protection Learning Brief #2', 10 October 2020c, <<https://www.unicef.org/media/83951/file/MHPSS-UNICEF-Learning-brief.pdf>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

¹¹ For the videos, see: <www.warchildholland.org/projects/teamup/teamup-at-home/>, accessed 5 May 2021.

for every child, answers

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