

Program Theory within Policy-Initiated Evaluations: The Norwegian Low-Income
Family Study

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Abstract

Using as an example a project where the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Directorate developed a comprehensive model for the follow-up of low-income families, this article demonstrates the process of developing a program theory for policy-initiated interventions. The data consist of interviews with program developers, political documents from early stages, and observations of the program's development. The results demonstrate that, although research inspired the program developers, the program was also the outcome of policy priorities, experiences from earlier projects, and input from the practice field. Multiple sources contributed to its relevance for the practice field, however, increasing its complexity. The program includes several intervention levels and follow-up areas, and partially builds on elements found to be important across interventions. Although a program theory can be difficult to conceptualize within policy-initiated interventions, it is important to articulate it prior to evaluation and, if necessary, reassess it when data have been analyzed.

Keywords

social work, program theory, intervention, policy-initiated, poverty, evaluation

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As a part of general trends within welfare policies, family-focused interventions have become more prevalent within contemporary welfare services (Fløtten & Grødem, 2014; Parr, 2008). They are more common in the UK and the US, however (White, Warrener, Reeves, & La Valle, 2008), than in the Nordic countries, where the distribution of income and services through taxes has been the main political priority (Fløtten & Grødem, 2014). However, this does not necessarily mean that the Nordic countries are succeeding in preventing child poverty, thus the comparative study by Arcanjo, Bastos, Nunes, and Passos (2013) demonstrates that universal benefits *per se* are not enough to reduce child poverty, but that there is also a need to target measures for families at risk of poverty.

In Norway, persistent child poverty, measured as children living in households with less than 60 percent of the median income continuously over three years, has increased from less than 4 percent in 2001 to 10 percent in 2015, thus calling for intensified measures to reduce poverty among children and families (Epland & Kirkeberg, 2017). For comparative purposes, the OECD defines child poverty as children living in households with less than 50 percent of the median income in any given year. Measured in this way, the level of child poverty in Norway was 8.1 percent in 2015, compared to 11.2 percent in the UK and 19.9 percent in the US (OECD, 2015). Although, the level of child poverty in Norway is lower than in the UK and the US, the increase in Norwegian child poverty in recent years is of greatest political concern.

In Norway, the level of child poverty is significantly higher among children with immigrant parents. The main reason for higher levels of child poverty among immigrants is that immigrants tend to have a weak connection to the labor market (Epland & Kirkeberg, 2014). While the unemployment rate for the whole population was 2.3 percent in 2017, the

immigrant population had an unemployment rate of 5.6 percent. For immigrants from African countries, the unemployment rate was especially high, at 9.6 percent (Statistics Norway, 2017).

The Social Services Act and the Act of Welfare Services regulate social work practices in Norway. These acts state that vulnerable children and youth and their families ought to receive comprehensive and coordinated welfare services (NAV-loven, 2006). Still, there have not been any nationwide guidelines or programs specifying *how* social workers should follow up with and coordinate services for low-income families. In order to respond to this lack of attention to low-income families and their children, the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Directorate has developed a comprehensive follow-up program, called the HOLF program. In addition to tools and methods for case-based counseling, the program introduces family coordinators as a new position within labor and welfare services.

The long-term goal of the HOLF program is to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty, while short-term objectives are to develop and implement a model that can improve the follow-up of low-income families, enhance goal-focused follow-up skills for professionals, and improve the coordination of existing services. In their work with families, family coordinators should especially aim to facilitate parental employment, ensure that housing and finances are adequate, and enhance the social inclusion of the children.

The Norwegian Welfare and Labor Directorate has commissioned an independent evaluation of the program's effectiveness. The evaluation is conducted as a cluster-randomized study, with 29 participating Welfare and Labor offices. Besides the effects of the intervention, implementation processes will also be studied. The research protocol for the evaluation project has been registered at Clinicaltrials.gov (Identifier:NCT03102775). The research protocol for the project has been published in Malmberg-Heimonen, Tøge, et al. (2017).

Nevertheless, a rigorous evaluation of the effects of social programs is not enough. Scholars emphasize that we not only need to know whether interventions generate effects, but also how and under what circumstances they operate (Becker, Bryman, & Swift, 2012). While program evaluation deals with the assessment of outcomes and processes related to specific interventions, program theories are predefined ideas about how and why evaluated interventions operate (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

Policy-initiated interventions are often developed in response to the various needs of policy makers, practitioners, service users, researchers, or, most commonly, a combination of these. Several sources with various interests and experiences may increase the complexity of the program theory, and consequently its evaluation (Weiss, 1998). Through interviews with program developers and analyses of political documents, as well as observations of program development, the aim of this study is to illuminate the process of developing a program theory for the policy-initiated HOLF program.

The Role of a Program Theory within Policy-Initiated Interventions

A program theory defines the causal mechanisms in an intervention, grounded in knowledge about the intervention itself and the context in which it operates. As such, a program theory contains ideas of how and why an intervention generates predefined and specific effects. The more complex the intervention is, the more we need to understand how various program elements and activities are expected to lead to the anticipated effects. Complex interventions are characterized by several intervention levels, actors, and program elements, and the sum of the various elements tend to be larger than the individual parts (Hawe, Shiell, & Riley, 2004; Oakley, Strange, Bonell, Allen, & Stephenson, 2006). Complex interventions are also non-standardized and changing, they are implemented by multiple organizations, and their results are sensitive to context and initial conditions (Funnell & Rogers, 2011, p. 73). Multiple sources and actors involved in program development can also

lead to a program theory with several causal chains, which may even contradict each other (Dauphinee, 2015).

However, there are different understandings and definitions of program theories. For instance, Weiss (1998) uses the concept of a program's theory of change as consisting of a program theory and an implementation theory. While the implementation theory is about how program goals are translated into service delivery, the program theory is about the mechanisms of change: what it is about the intervention activities that will lead to their anticipated effects. Within the realist evaluation perspective, however, Pawson (2013) is critical of causal interference and emphasizes the importance of identifying the mechanisms by which, and the context in which, a specific intervention works. He argues that randomization alone is not sufficient to remove the contextual complexity and that interventions can therefore not be evaluated by simply comparing the average treatment effect between experimental and control groups.

Funnell and Rogers (2011, p. xix) define a program theory as "an explicit theory or model of how an intervention (...) contributes to a chain of intermediate results and finally to the intended or observed outcome." They divide a program theory into a theory of change and a theory of action. A theory of change describes the central processes that are hypothesized to generate changes for individuals. A theory of change can, for instance, be a behavioral or psychological theory or practice-based knowledge of how things work. The theory of action includes a description of how the intervention is built to activate its theory of change. Which working methods or tools are to be used? How will the skill training take place? What are the success criteria and outcomes? A logic model binds together the theory of change with the theory of action, thus showing their internal connection. Consequently, the logic model visualizes the program theory for an intervention, connecting the content of the intervention with its anticipated effects (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

According to several scholars, including Funnell and Rogers (2011), Lippke and Ziegelmann (2008), and Michie, Johnston, Francis, Hardeman, and Eccles (2008), program theories are important in developing research-based interventions. Such interventions build on theoretical assumptions derived from research evidence, are implemented with fidelity to the intervention model, and evaluated by robust evaluation methods (Malmberg-Heimonen, West, & Vuori, 2017). Nevertheless, few of the interventions implemented within social work practices fulfill the requirements for being research based, and as Michie et al. (2008) state, there is often a lack of proper program theory in evaluations of complex interventions.

It is rare within social work to encounter a situation in which scientific evidence alone would constitute the foundation of an intervention. The fact that social work interventions are often shaped by various initiatives also affects how a program theory is developed as well as its nature. While scientific theories or research evidence are often the main sources for a program theory within research-based interventions, several sources influence the program theory within policy-initiated interventions. Some of these sources are deductive, that is, drawn from research, while other sources are inductive, for instance, influenced by experiences from the practice field, guidelines from the political field, or decisions based on political prioritizations. Within policy-initiated interventions, the program theory can even reflect policy makers' or practitioners' perceptions more strongly than it reflects research evidence (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011).

It is recommended that evaluators develop the program theory *prior* to the program's implementation and evaluation. By doing that, they ensure that the evaluation does not affect the process of developing a program theory, that is, where the results of the evaluation explain all or parts of the causal models retrospectively. When a program theory is developed prior to evaluation, the evaluator can use it to formulate and empirically test hypotheses of interest (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). A predefined program theory, communicated to policy makers and

program developers, will also reduce the risk of role conflicts with those evaluating the program. Further, if the evaluation generates unexpected results, a previously defined program theory can be altered or further developed, as exemplified by the study of Masterson-Algar, Burton, Rycroft-Malone, Sackley, and Walker (2014).

Data and Methods

The data included in this study are political documents, interviews with program developers and policy makers, and observations from the pilot phase of the program development. The documents are formal plans from the Labor and Welfare Directorate and the Norwegian Government setting out the arguments for the HOLF program and announcing its launch. To describe the program, we have used the HOLF manuals that the project group in the Labor and Welfare Directorate have produced.

Other data used in this study are from interviews with all central actors from the Directorate. We interviewed three officials that have participated in the development and implementation of HOLF and two officials in leading positions –policy makers who have closely followed the project development. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were conducted by one of the co-authors of this manuscript. We recorded and transcribed all interviews. The main themes for the interviews were the development of the HOLF program, where the ideas derived from, and how each of the program developers and policy makers had contributed to the program.

Further, researchers observed the program development and piloting phase, including meetings with the Directorate and various actors, and monthly full-day supervision seminars between the project group from the Directorate and family coordinators from pilot offices. This observation data was collected over a period of six months and included minutes from all of the meetings and seminars we observed.

Results

Description of the HOLF Program

The program is described in two manuals developed by the project group at the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Directorate. The HOLF Process Manual describes the work of the family coordinators, including the model, tools, and details of the work processes, while the HOLF Implementation Manual describes the implementation of the model in local offices, including the responsibilities of office leaders (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2016a, 2016b). We will give a short description of the program here; a more comprehensive description has been previously published (Malmberg-Heimonen, Tøge et al., 2017).

The aim of the program is to facilitate parental employment, improve the families' housing and financial situation, and enhance the social inclusion of the children. Consequently, all follow-up activities with the families should support at least one of these four goals. The HOLF program has two interacting intervention levels; the first is the follow-up work coordinators do directly with the families, and the second is inter-professional collaboration to improve the coordination of welfare services. In order to succeed with the coordination of services, an action network is established. The action network should involve family coordinators, relevant collaborators, and leaders. When it comes to barriers for coordination of services, the action network will solve problems related to a specific family, and, at the principle level, solve problems related to institutional barriers and promote inter-professional collaboration at the municipal level. A third work process of the HOLF program is the administrative part of the work, aimed at ensuring proper documentation of the follow-up work. Table 1 shows the work processes of the program.

Insert Table 1 here

To support implementation of the program, the Labor and Welfare Directorate arranges six seminars for family coordinators and office leaders. Each seminar treats a specific perspective of the HOLF program; one example is the child perspective. Office leaders are key actors in implementing the program. They are responsible for establishing inter-professional collaboration and supporting the work of family coordinators, especially by removing institutional barriers. The project group at the Directorate monitors all office leaders in order to ensure that they follow the implementation manual.

The program also includes continuous supervision of family coordinators. The supervision follows a train-the-trainer principle, where the project group within the Labor and Welfare Directorate supervises and trains family coordinators from the pilot offices, who in turn supervise and train family coordinators from the 15 experimental group offices. The project group provides family coordinators from pilot offices with monthly group-based supervision in face-to-face or Skype meetings. The supervision follows a specific structure. The family coordinators present challenges from their work with families. Thereafter, the supervisor (one of the family coordinators from the pilot offices) asks specific questions about how the coordinator thought, how the coordinator acted, and whether and how the coordinator could have thought and acted differently. Other coordinators participate in the discussion, giving their advice on the specific case.

Principles, Forms, and Tools in the HOLF Program

The HOLF program involves five principles that family coordinators should apply in their work with families, as well as with collaborators and leaders. The principles are: 1) acknowledge the situation and needs of the family, 2) clarify roles and expectations, 3) provide adequate and relevant information, 4) identify the family's resources and opportunities, and 5) define support needed to achieve the goals.

Within the HOLF program, the family coordinators should use three different types of forms in their follow-up work: the charting form, the family plan, and the PCE form. The charting form investigates the four follow-up areas of employment, housing, the financial situation, and the social inclusion of children. Family coordinators use this form at initial meetings with the family. The family plan is a rich list of subsections related to the four follow-up areas. The coordinator and family members discuss the family's needs, possibilities, and goals, and they write down the goals and the actions they have to take to reach each of the goals. The PCE form is a list of issues related to preparing for, conducting, and evaluating meetings. The coordinators are to use this to prepare for and evaluate meetings with families, collaborators, and leaders.

The program also involves tools family coordinators should apply in meetings with families and collaborators; the tools have been partially inspired by other methods, such as motivational interviewing (Miller & Rose, 2009). Appreciative communication implies a communication style that is positive and based on recognition, and coordinators should use it in all communication with families and collaborators. IIMM (Inform, Involve, Mobilize, and Make responsible) is a tool for informing and involving the family and collaborators and making them responsible for reaching their goals. The Menu Agenda is a tool that family coordinators use in meetings with the family with a view to acknowledging each family's wishes and needs. The family and family coordinator fill in important themes to work with, discuss them, and collectively agree on and prioritize themes for the specific meeting. IAR is a tool for Investigating, Adding information and Re-investigating. The family coordinator makes inquiries into the information needs of the family and communicates this information to the family; thereafter, the family coordinator investigates whether the family has understood the given information. SMART goals is another tool; it emphasizes that goals set

with the family should be Strategic and specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results based, and Time bound (Bovend'Eerd, Botell, & Wade, 2009).

Developing the HOLF Program

The Arguments for a Low-Income Family Program

The first policy documents describing the needs for developing a program to improve the follow-up of low-income families is a report written by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Directorate in 2014 (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2014). This report gives two main reasons for developing the HOLF program. First, it points out the need to counteract intergenerational transmission of poverty and social problems and suggests that better and more coordinated support for low-income families would contribute to social inclusion, hence reducing the risk of future poverty and social problems among children in these families. Second, addressing children's needs was important in order to fulfill requirements in the Norwegian Social Services Act and Act of Welfare Services, which state that children and families should receive comprehensive and coordinated welfare services and be acknowledged in all decisions within social and welfare services. The report from the Directorate also points out that improving the situation for low-income families requires that the Norwegian Labor and Welfare offices improve coordination of their own and inter-organizational services aimed at promoting health, housing, education, and employment, and contribute to improving the situation for the children by, for instance, promoting child-care, school, after-school services, and leisure activities.

The need for a follow-up program for low-income families originally formulated by the Labor and Welfare Directorate later became an official part of the Norwegian Government's political strategies (2015 to 2017) to reduce poverty (Barne, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2015). At this point, policy makers decided that the piloting of the program ought to be initiated in 2015 and that the project would be evaluated.

The Preparation Phase - A Literature Review and Previous Family Projects

During the preparation phase of the project, the Labor and Welfare Directorate commissioned a literature review with the aim of summarizing research on family interventions and their effectiveness in the Nordic countries and the UK (Fløtten & Grødem, 2014). The aim was to identify family interventions with promising evaluation results. The aim was, further, to assess whether and how family interventions that have proven to be effective in other countries would be useful and possible to implement in a Norwegian context. The review demonstrated that the family intervention research was limited and that there was a lack of knowledge regarding the effects of existing projects. While some family intervention projects were identified, predominantly in the UK, the Directorate later concluded that the welfare structures in Norway were different from those in the UK, which implied that it would be difficult to implement these programs in Norway.

The literature review (Fløtten & Grødem, 2014) showed that successful family projects included a close and comprehensive follow-up, a designated social worker/family coordinator, approaches supporting empowerment, qualified and suitable staff, coordination of existing services, and an understanding that the program as a whole was more important than its specific parts. The conclusion was also that there is a need for robust evaluation methods to estimate effectiveness of family interventions, thus the review also questioned the individual-oriented perspective in most of the family projects, as well as the potential of family interventions in reducing poverty, especially compared to income transitions and universal services for children and families.

Despite the importance of the literature review in the first phase of developing the HOLF program, the project group at the Directorate was not able to extract any concrete advice on what to do. Consequently, the project group studied Norwegian child poverty projects that the Directorate had funded earlier and collected the most important experiences.

The lessons learned from these projects, according to the project group, concerned the importance of leader involvement and ensuring that family coordinators were given discretion and autonomy in their work. Following the literature review and earlier project experiences, the project group developed an initial model for how to work comprehensively with low-income families.

At this point, the Labor and Welfare Directorate invited researchers from various institutions to attend a seminar, where the project, initial model, and a forthcoming research call were discussed. At this seminar, the participating researchers received information about the project and could ask questions. For the Directorate the seminar was also a reality check where they raised questions related to the evaluation design and measures. After the seminar, the Directorate launched a call for the evaluation of the HOLF program, which was to involve 30 offices and employ a comprehensive evaluation method, preferably a cluster-randomized design, including an evaluation of the implementation processes. The call was for a research project with a total duration of 3.5 years.

Pilot Testing Phase - Ensuring Experiences from the Practice Field

Starting from this early model and the development work done so far, the project group at the Directorate wanted to test and further develop various elements of the model in collaboration with practitioners at local Labor and Welfare offices. The Directorate chose three offices that had previous experiences with follow-up work with low-income families as “pilot offices,” as they were expected to be motivated to take up the challenge of testing and developing various program elements. These offices varied in terms of institutional structure, size, and caseloads of immigrants and refugees, and they were not a part of the main evaluation. The Labor and Welfare Directorate further funded six family coordinators, two at each office.

The work within this phase of the project was comprehensive. Each member of the project group followed the work of one pilot office, that is, they initiated regular meetings with the family coordinators, leaders, and inter-professional collaborators and provided supervision for the family coordinators. The supervision included discussions, testing, assessment, and revision of various tools and elements that the project group believed could be appropriate for inclusion in the HOLF model. The two family coordinators that worked at each of these offices followed up with a number of low-income families, and at the same time were testing tools and various forms that were a part of the HOLF program. An important aspect of this piloting and testing phase was that family coordinators continuously gave feedback to the project group at the Labor and Welfare Directorate, thus enabling the project group to develop the program to fit the practice field. When the main evaluation began, the family coordinators from the pilot offices provided supervision and support to the family coordinators from the 15 offices randomized to the experimental group.

The experiences from the pilot phase were qualitatively evaluated by researchers (Malmberg-Heimonen et al., 2016). Interviews with family coordinators from pilot offices demonstrated that there was a need to clarify how children should be involved in the follow-up. This evaluation also revealed that it was important to strengthen the roles of office leaders in order to make it easier for family coordinators to manage the coordination of existing services. The Labor and Welfare Directorate followed the advice from the evaluation, and improvements were made prior to the cluster-randomized evaluation of HOLF. Related to the involvement of children, the Directorate clarified that children ought mainly to be involved through the follow-up of the parents, which, they argued, was in accordance with the mandate of the Directorate. An implementation manual ensured office leaders' involvement by pinpointing their responsibilities in the project.

Previous Experiences - Organizational and Private

In the interviews, several of the project developers and policy makers stated that a number of earlier projects funded by the Directorate had also influenced the development of the HOLF program. Two of the interviewees (PM2, pp. 11-12; PD3, pp. 4-6) particularly emphasized the evaluation of the Comprehensive, Methodological, and Principle-based Approach (CMPA), a program that had been developed and implemented between 2009 and 2013. There are several links and similarities between HOLF and the CMPA program, thus some tools and forms used for follow-up were similar. One of the program developers had also contributed to the development of the CMPA program earlier (PD3, pp. 5-6). As was the case for the HOLF program, the CMPA program was also evaluated by a cluster-randomized design (Malmberg-Heimonen, 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen, Natland, Tøge, & Hansen, 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen & Tøge, 2015).

Other projects that the Directorate had funded earlier also influenced the development of the HOLF program. This includes a Norwegian project for the evaluation of the effects of Individual Placement and Support. According to interviews, this evaluation project especially contributed in terms of its methodological and evidence-informed approach to follow-up (PM2, p. 22). Another earlier project of significance for the development of HOLF was one that showed that participants found a close follow-up from a designated social worker to be important in the process of getting a job or returning to education (PM2, p. 9).

The development of HOLF has also drawn on internationally validated methods and tools, especially Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012), emphasizing the importance of communicative skills to support change (PD3, pp. 3-4, 16). Accordingly, the ongoing process of developing national guidelines for the follow-up of welfare service users (the Norwegian supervision platform) also influenced HOLF. The supervision platform has been particularly important for the development of the five principles that form the basis of the HOLF program (PD2, p. 4; PD3, p. 6).

Finally, the project group members' own experiences have had an impact on the program development. For instance, one of the project group members had been involved earlier in the implementation of an intervention program – Multi systemic treatment (PD3). Another member of the project group had comprehensive experiences from various parts of the Labor and Welfare Directorate (PD1, pp.1-2), while the third member of the project group had experience in competence development and various organizational development programs within the Norwegian labor and welfare offices (PD2).

Discussion

Introducing a Logic Model for HOLF

We have applied the pipeline logic model by Funnell and Rogers (2011, p. 244) for the program theory (Figure 1). The pipeline model is rather simple and builds on a single causal chain, where client needs are connected to program elements, program activities, and finally, the anticipated outcomes of the evaluation. Within HOLF, client needs are understood through an underpinning concern in Norway of an increased prevalence of children and families living in persistent poverty. An additional concern is that children who have parents with poor connections to the labor market are at a higher risk of poverty themselves when they reach adulthood than are children without this background. Although poverty rates in Norway are lower than in several other countries, such as the UK and the US (OECD, 2015), the intergenerational transition of poverty is relatively strong (Lorentzen & Nielsen, 2008).

Another assumption is that professionals have not previously worked in a sufficiently comprehensive or goal-focused way with low-income families and that the existing follow-up is not efficient enough, especially when it comes to the coordination of welfare services. Within HOLF, a comprehensive perspective is understood as including the whole family, with a follow-up on several areas and with an emphasis on the coordination of services (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2016a, 2016b). The argument from the Norwegian Government is that

the HOLF program, by intervening early in families' situation, will reduce intergenerational poverty in the longer term (Barne-, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2015).

The literature review (Fløtten & Grødem, 2014) and field visits to local Norwegian family projects conducted at the start of the project demonstrated some important insights, which we have included as program elements. These were a goal-focused and comprehensive follow-up, a dedicated family coordinator/social worker, empowering follow-up processes, and the coordination of services. The experiences from earlier Norwegian family projects also demonstrated the importance of leader involvement in program implementation.

At the family level the program activities are the various methods and tools that family coordinators use in their follow-up work with families. At the system level, program activities also include measures to involve office leaders and various inter-professional collaborators. One program activity the establishment of an action network, with the aim of improving inter-professional collaboration.

The last part of Figure 1 refers to the desired outcomes of the program. In a short-term perspective, the expectation is that family coordinators will work more comprehensively, in a goal-focused, systematic, and empowering way. In a medium-term perspective, the expectation is that families will improve their situation on the four follow-up areas of employment, financial situation, housing situation, and the social situation of the children. The anticipated long-term effect of the program is less intergenerational poverty.

Insert Figure 1 here

Referring to Funnell and Rogers's (2011) concepts of theory of change and theory of action, the theory of change within HOLF is family coordinators establishing an empowering but goal-focused work alliance with the family, which is seen as the main way to improve the

situation within the follow-up areas. Giving family coordinators tools, teaching them to use those tools, and preparing them to work comprehensively with the families ensures that they will see the different follow-up areas in conjunction with one another, and that different welfare service areas will be coordinated. This, in turn, will help the families get an overview of and control over their life situation and enable them to more effectively use the counseling and measures they receive. Consequently, the assumption is that families' challenges will be reduced when it comes to the four follow-up areas, which in turn will improve the situation of the children in a long-term perspective.

The theory of action consists of program-specific elements and activities and is about how the concrete tools and methods of the HOLF program are to change the situation of the families. A central aspect of the activities involves the concrete work family coordinators do with participating families: establishing contact; providing information; charting resources, needs, and goals; and doing the continuous follow-up work. Here the various forms and tools make the follow-up structured and goal-focused.

Reflections on the Program Theory Development

Our analyses have shown that the research review, earlier projects, the project groups' experiences, feedback from the practice field, and political decisions all influenced the development of the HOLF program. Multiple sources and actors guided the development, which resulted in a complex program theory, where it can be difficult to establish a clear causal chain between the various program elements, program activities, and their anticipated outcomes (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). At the same time, the project group at the Directorate has worked systematically with the development and implementation of the HOLF program, which will help its further evaluation.

Although the major part of the sources for the HOLF program were inductive, for instance, political decisions and experiences from the practice field, deductive sources,

deriving from scientific knowledge, also guided its development. Deductive sources included the literature review and experiences from earlier projects. The CMPA project that the Directorate had commissioned earlier, where similar methods and tools were used to follow up with longer-term welfare recipients, especially contributed to the HOLF program. The CMPA program was also evaluated in a cluster-randomized design, where the evaluation demonstrated positive effects of the program on welfare recipients' employment outcomes (Malmberg-Heimonen, 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen et al., 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen & Tøge, 2015).

However, within complex interventions, several levels, elements, and actors can lead to a program theory with multiple strands and causal chains, and where activities and effects of these chains can contradict each other. In such situations a traditional causal logic model may not be sufficient to present the program theory (Dauphinee, 2015). HOLF also builds on a program theory where several program elements and activities have independent and interacting effects. While the work to coordinate and improve the services for a specific family is a mechanism at the family level, the work to reduce structural barriers and improve inter-professional cooperation is a mechanism at the system level. The different mechanisms at the two levels may also interact; for example, the work done at the system level has the potential to facilitate family coordinators' follow-up at the family level. As such, we may need to reassess the program theory when we have gathered and analyzed data from the evaluation.

The HOLF program includes program elements and program activities that can be understood through the common elements perspective (Wampold, 2015), such as building trust with families, user involvement, communication, empowerment, and the importance of a good relationship between the families and family coordinators. These are elements that have been found to be efficient across interventions. However, as summarized by Carolyn Weiss

(1998), one of the challenges in developing program theories for complex interventions is to identify and separate program-specific elements from elements common to other interventions or even to ordinary practices. Thus, an important question is whether and to what degree the various elements and activities of HOLF are program specific, common across interventions, or even represent Norwegian social work practices in general.

To sum up, the results of this study showed that various sources contributed to the development of the HOLF program, increasing its complexity. Similarly, these sources led to a program that is sensitive to its context. It is important that program theories are developed and articulated prior to the evaluation. Nevertheless, and following Brousselle and Champagne (2011) as well as other scholars, it is essential for evaluators to reassess the program theory when the data from the evaluation have been collected and analyzed.

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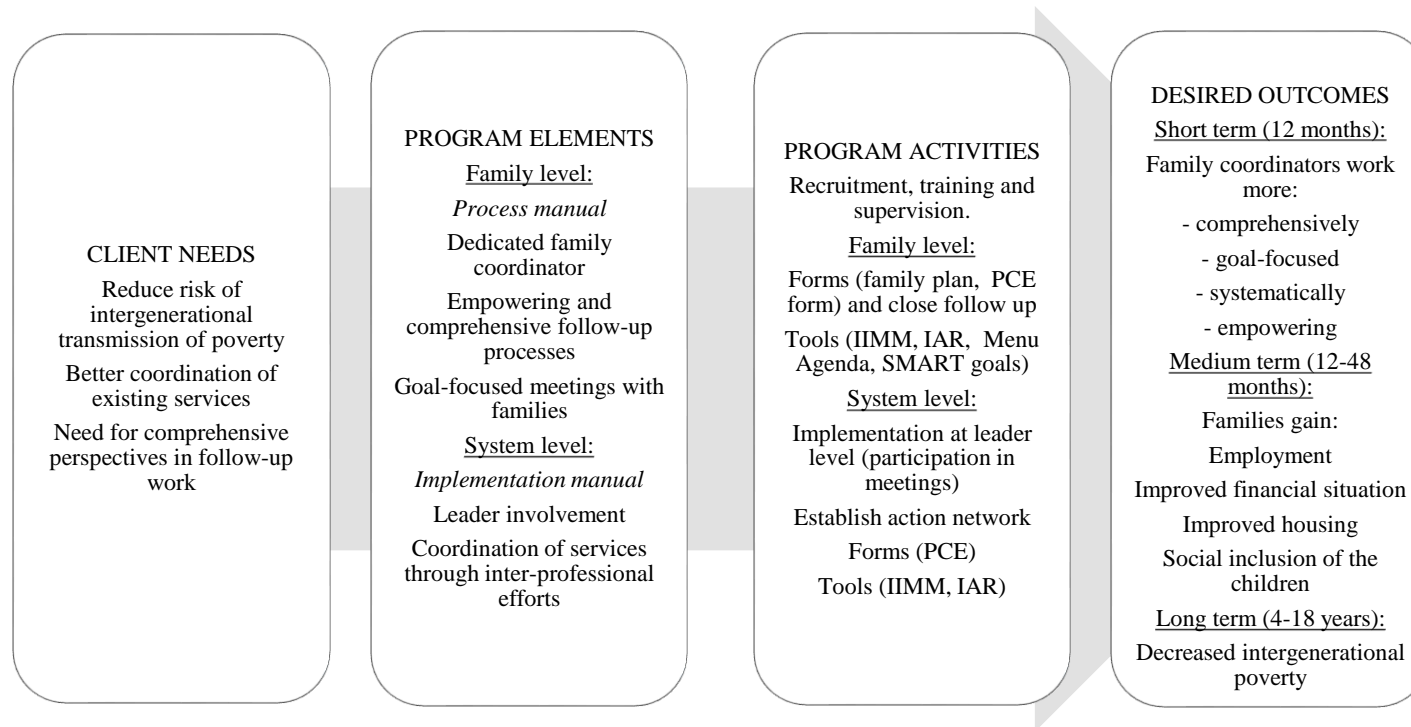
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Table 1. Work processes within the HOLF program

Work process 1: Meetings with families	Work process 2: Coordination of services	Work process 3: Administrative part of the work
Information, consent and contract.	Clarify roles and expectations with internal and external collaborators.	Document family needs, goals and working capacity.
Chart the situation of the family; employment, housing, financial situation and children's situation.	Establish an action network.	Document and follow up the family plan.
Plan activities by using the family plan.	Meetings with collaborators to coordinate services based on each family's goals, needs and activities.	Administrative procedures (applications, decisions) to improve services families are entitled to.
Clarify and involve internal and external collaborators for the coordination of services.	Follow up and coordinate the inter-professional effort.	Evaluation of follow-up activities and processes.
Implement the activities from the family plan. Evaluate and adjust the family plan. If successful, end the follow-up.	Evaluate and adjust the inter-professional effort.	

Figure 1. A logic model for HOLF



Source: Funnell & Rogers (2011, p. 244).