

THE ROLE OF PLANNING IN ENSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract: Planning is one of the key components of successful group social work, which ensures its targeted, systematic and effective implementation. This article presents a comprehensive review of the theoretical and professional literature on group social work planning, focusing on the main stages of planning: needs assessment, formulation of SMART goals, selection of participants, group formation, development of meeting structure, risk management, as well as monitoring and evaluation processes. In order to present the domestic experience of group social work planning, the experience of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers for children operating under the Armenian Evangelical Association of America (AMAA) was studied. The presented experience shows how systematic and conscious planning can contribute to the social development, well-being and social inclusion of children and families. The article pays special attention to the interdependence of planning and evaluation as a continuous professional process, which allows not only to organize the work of the group, but also to assess its effectiveness and make necessary improvements. Thus, the analysis of both theoretical sources and practical experience proves that effective planning contributes to increasing the quality of group activities, strengthening professional accountability, and ensuring more sustainable and significant results for beneficiaries.

Keywords: *group social work, group work planning, needs assessment, SMART goals, monitoring and evaluation, social inclusion.*

Introduction

Social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity play a central role in social work. Drawing on theories from social work and other social sciences, as well as local knowledge, social work engages people and institutions to jointly address life's challenges and promote shared well-being (IFCW, 2026).



Group work is particularly suited to fulfilling this mandate because it addresses individual needs through relational and collective processes, rather than through isolated, individual actions. It is best understood as a professional method that uses the group as an agent of change, rather than simply as a convenient format for working with several people at the same time. According to Ronald Toseland, a prominent American expert on group social work, group work is an activity that is carried out in groups and is aimed at meeting the socio-economic needs and solving problems of both individual group members and the group as a whole. As a result, group social work relies on the potential of human-group relationships and intragroup dynamics (Toseland & Rivas, 2021).

The modern standards of the International Association for Social Work with Groups describe group work as a structured and developmental practice that requires the definition of clear goals and actions at each of its different stages: group formation, initial, middle, and final stages (IASWG, 2022). This phased approach is important because, in practice, planning and evaluation are often incomplete or unsystematic. As Roselle Kurland points out, planning is often limited to superficial organizational or logistical decisions, while weak planning is directly related to early withdrawal from the target group, irregular participation, and the implementation of interventions that do not meet real needs (Kurland, 2005). Similarly, evaluation is often postponed until the end of the work, becoming more of an accountability requirement than an integral part of professional judgment, ongoing and effective work. Meanwhile, professional standards for group work clearly require continuous monitoring and evaluation of processes and results. This includes the use of observations, process notes, questionnaires, as well as preliminary (pre) and subsequent (post) surveys and a number of other tools and methods, ensuring the active participation of the target group throughout the process and the effectiveness of the implemented measures

In general, planning group work includes clarifying the purpose of the group, identifying the needs to which the group should respond, translating the needs into realistic goals and priorities, determining the participation formats, membership criteria, and the most appropriate size and composition of the group. Planning also extends to designing the group process, including the anticipated sequence of meetings, the balance between structure and flexibility, the selection of methods and activities most appropriate to the group's goals, and the practical arrangements necessary for implementation. Along with the above, specialists also consider possible risks and obstacles that may arise at any stage of the work and prepare appropriate responses in advance. Finally, planning includes the selection of tools and methods for documenting, evaluating, and monitoring the work, based on which the work will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, as needed, and further improved (IASWG, 2022; Toseland & Rivas, 2021). Thus, planning is not a one-time preparatory event, but an organized framework of interventions through which the group's purpose, process, and accountability are interconnected.

Needs assessment

Planning begins with the identification of a "need". In social work, it is simultaneously normative, empirical, contextual, and relational in nature. On the one hand, a "need" can be understood as a discrepancy between the existing and desired

conditions/situation, and on the other hand, as what beneficiaries consider to be a priority and urgent within their lives and environments. Contemporary social work research that addresses evaluation practice emphasizes that evaluation is not simply a neutral collection of facts but a situational judgment that is shaped by the institutional context, professional judgment, and available resources (Lamponen & Aarnio, 2024). In the context of group work, this means that the needs assessment should go beyond general problem statements and address in detail the questions of who the beneficiaries are, how they feel and perceive the problem, what strengths and barriers exist, and why the group work method is justified in this case, instead of or in combination with individual work, family work, or community work (IASWG, 2022).

In the professional literature widely used in social work, needs assessment is considered a key link between “problem analysis” and “intervention strategy selection”. In the context of group social work, modern needs assessment should include three interrelated levels (SASW, 2018; **Bronfenbrenner, 2009**):

1. The first is the individual level, which refers to the individual experiences of beneficiaries, personal difficulties, and goals for change.
2. The second is the group level, which includes common problems, the forms of relationships and interactions that are most effective for working together.
3. The third is the systemic or contextual level, which includes the capacities of the organization, the mechanisms of guidance and support, the constraints on access to services, as well as the risks and challenges at the community level.

Needs assessments can be conducted using a variety of tools. While the choice of a specific tool should be determined by the characteristics of the target group and the objectives, a well-founded approach typically includes: defining assessment formats, selecting or adapting validated scales, establishing baseline measurements consistent with planned outcomes, and selecting realistic data sources (self-report, observational assessments, interviews, etc.) (McCawley, 2009; Watkins, Meiers, & Visser, 2012; Altschuld & Watkins, Ryan, 2014).

Qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, direct observation, and similar methods, are particularly useful for understanding beneficiaries’ perspectives, group dynamics, and the context of issues. For example, individual interviews can reveal personal stories, motivations, and expectations for group participation, while focus group discussions with potential members or families can uncover common norms, needs, or concerns in a community. Observations in natural settings (such as children’s interactions on a playground or in a classroom) also provide valuable data, revealing patterns of social behavior that beneficiaries may not always be able to clearly describe. These methods are particularly effective when the subject of the assessment is one of meaning, experience, or relationship that requires open and in-depth exploration. Document review in the form of school records, beneficiary case files, or data from previous programs can provide statistical information about attendance, progress, current status, referrals, and a variety of other data. Such data are particularly useful for answering “how many” or “how much” questions and for ensuring accountability. In contrast, quantitative methods provide greater precision and measurability to the assessment. Short initial surveys or checklists can measure the prevalence of certain problems and establish baseline

indicators against which changes can be compared in the future (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Kettner et al., 2017; Faulkner, S., & Faulkner, C., 2024).

No single method can provide a complete picture of the needs and situation of beneficiaries, so a mixed methods approach is often preferable. In practice, this might mean, for example, conducting several exploratory interviews or focus groups to understand the nature of the difficulties, then conducting a short survey to measure the prevalence of these difficulties among all potential members. The use of mixed methods increases the validity of the assessment (triangulation) and allows for addressing both the “why” and the “how much” of the need. Therefore, the choice of methods should be driven by the specific assessment questions: qualitative methods to understand the needs and context, quantitative methods to make key indicators measurable (Creswell, 2023).

Applying the “SMART” method of goal setting in group social work

One of the key stages of planning group work is translating identified needs into clear, realistic, and measurable goals. If a need indicates “what is the problem?”, then a goal defines “what change do we want to achieve?” Without clearly formulated goals, the group can become a platform for general discussions without visible results, direction, or the possibility of evaluation. Goals should translate broadly formulated needs into observable progress. For example, if an assessment reveals that adolescents have difficulty managing anger or resolving conflicts with peers, then this need should be translated into a goal that specifies the expected behavioral, emotional, or cognitive change (SASW, 2018).

In this context, the SMART approach to goal setting is widely used. It is particularly useful in the field of social services and group work, where goals are often formulated in a very general, abstract or difficult-to-assess way. At the same time, modern professional literature emphasizes that the SMART approach should not be applied mechanically. In psychosocial, educational or developmental work, not all results can be expressed in numerical indicators alone. In some cases, the process of learning, the growth of self-awareness, the change of attitude, the development of skills or the application of new behavioral experiments are more important. Therefore, the SMART approach should be applied in a flexible but systematic way.

The main criteria for SMART goals:

- **Specific – simple, understandable and unambiguously formulated,**
- **Measurable – have clear indicators for assessing progress,**
- **Achievable – be realistic, yet stimulating and developmental,**
- **Relevant – directly derived from assessed needs,**
- **Time-bound** – provide a clear deadline.

Well-defined objectives describe what the beneficiaries should know, be able to do, apply, or demonstrate by the end of the group work.

Clearly formulated goals perform the following main functions:

- Define the direction and structure of group work – it becomes clear what change or result the group should achieve, and by what logic the meetings should be structured.

- Help choose appropriate methods and interventions – each topic, exercise or discussion is linked to the expected results, which makes the work purposeful and systematic.
- Facilitate progress assessment and process review – it is possible to track how far members are approaching the intended results and, if necessary, change methods or work processes in a timely manner.
- Increase accountability and professional justification – the specialist and the organization can clearly present the goals for which the group was implemented and what results were achieved.
- Strengthen member involvement and motivation – when beneficiaries see their own progress and understand the purpose of the work, their participation becomes more active and meaningful.

One of the important principles of goal setting in group work is that an effective program should include both group and individual goals. The most successful groups are usually those in which the overall group direction is combined with the personal needs and development goals of each participant. Professionals should support beneficiaries in clarifying their personal goals, linking them to the overall group goals, and forming joint starting agreements at the beginning. This approach contributes to both group cohesion and the involvement of each beneficiary (IASWG, 2022).

Determining the type, composition, and size of the group. Selecting participants.

At the planning stage, when the main purpose and expected outcomes of the group have been clarified, it is necessary to proceed to the next organisational and professional decisions, such as determining the type, composition and appropriate size of the group. These three directly affect the structure of the work, the experience of the beneficiaries, and the effectiveness of the intervention (IASWG, 2022).

First of all, it is necessary to clarify the type of group, since the same goal may require different group formats in different situations. The specialist must decide which type of group work is most appropriate for the defined goal, what methods should be used, how structured or flexible the process should be, and what professional role is required of the social worker in a given group. At the same time, it is important to choose assessment approaches that are most appropriate for a given format and will allow for an accurate assessment of the results in the future.

The next important step is to plan the composition of the group. It is necessary to determine who should be included in the group so that the work is safe, effective, and meets the established goals. This process should take into account the age and developmental characteristics of the beneficiaries, the commonality of the problem or need, their preparation and motivation, as well as linguistic, cultural and social characteristics. In addition, it is necessary to assess possible risk factors and understand how realistic it is for these individuals to work together within the same group.

Determining the size of the group is also important not only from an organizational but also from a practical point of view. It affects the level of involvement of each participant, the cohesion of the group and the effectiveness of managing the entire process. Therefore, it is necessary to choose a size that will enable all members to actively participate in the group processes, will ensure sufficient diversity, will not

complicate facilitation, will contribute to the formation of trust and group ties, as well as will ensure the realism of evaluation and monitoring.

In the preparatory phase of group work, recruitment and screening are also of particular importance, as they are interrelated and sequential processes. They ensure the appropriate formation of the group, the relevance of the beneficiaries and the effectiveness of further work. If recruitment is aimed at involving relevant people, then screening provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which a given group format meets the needs and capabilities of each potential participant. During recruitment, it is necessary to clearly present the goal and direction of the group to potential beneficiaries, clarify who the group is intended for, what the main conditions for participation are, in what format, duration and frequency the meetings will be held, what level of involvement is expected from the participants, as well as what possible benefits and limitations there may be. During the screening phase, the professional should assess how well the participant's needs match the group's purpose, whether he or she is ready for the group work format, has sufficient motivation and willingness to cooperate, and whether there are any individual risks or difficulties that may hinder participation. At the same time, it is necessary to understand what kind of support or accommodations are required for full participation and whether the group is the best option at this stage or whether another service or intervention would be more appropriate for the beneficiary (ASGW, 2007). Thus, properly organized planning, recruitment, and screening create a solid foundation for effective, safe, and purposeful teamwork.

Planning the structure of group work

One of the important components of group work planning is the structural design of meetings. Each meeting should be considered not as a separate activity, but as an integral part of a complete process, which stems from the goals of the group, the needs of the members and the current stage of group work. Effective planning implies not only the selection of topics for individual meetings, but also ensuring their phased, time and sequential logic. In other words, each meeting should have a clear goal, internal structure, and connection to the previous and subsequent meetings. Usually, a group meeting begins with an opening part, during which the participants are welcomed, a brief reflection on the previous meeting and an assessment of the current mood are carried out. This makes it possible to restore the continuity of the group and re-involve the participants in the general process. This is followed by the main thematic or goal-oriented work, where the planned questions are discussed, appropriate exercises are carried out, skills are developed or the experiences of the participants are discussed. At the end of the meeting, it is important to summarize, highlight key points, and clarify next steps so that participants end the meeting with a clear understanding and a sense of continuity. The content and purpose of meetings at different stages of group work are different. In the initial stage, meetings are mainly aimed at forming the foundations of the group. In this stage, the primary focus is on getting to know the participants, clarifying the group's purpose, defining rules and norms, as well as creating an atmosphere of trust and security. At the same time, it is important to discuss the expectations of participation so that each member understands his or her role, responsibility, and the results expected from the group. When the group has already

been formed and a certain level of trust has been established between the members, it moves on to the main working stage. At this stage, meetings focus on discussing problems, developing skills, mutual assistance, exchanging experiences, and providing feedback. Here, the change for which the group was formed is most actively implemented, and participants get the opportunity to apply new knowledge, develop behavioral or social skills, and receive support from the group. In the final stage of group work, meetings should contribute to closing the process and consolidating achievements. During this period, it is important to reflect on the progress of the participants, summarize the group experience, discuss feelings related to separation, and assess the meaning of the group for each participant. In addition, it is necessary to present possible resources for further support and clarify future steps so that the results achieved in the group are maintained even after the end of the group work (Steinberg, 2014).

Although meetings should be planned in advance, the professional must also maintain flexibility. The group process can always bring new needs, unexpected topics, or changing dynamics, so the professional must be ready to adapt the initial plan to the actual course of the group. It is the combination of structure and flexibility that ensures the effectiveness of group work and the real involvement of participants (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2018).

Risk management

Risk management is a key component of planning and implementing group social work. A group is a living environment of interactions, where, on the one hand, opportunities for support, development and change are created, and on the other hand, various types of dangers and difficulties may arise. If these risks are not assessed in advance and not managed systematically, the well-being of beneficiaries may be damaged, the normal course of the group may be disrupted and the effectiveness of the intervention may decrease. Risk management involves the timely identification of potential dangers, planning steps to prevent them and preparing the necessary response mechanisms. It applies not only to emergency or crisis situations, but also to those factors that can gradually weaken the work of the group (NASW, 2021).

Planning and evaluation as a unified process

Evaluation should not be perceived as a final report drawn up after the group work is completed or a separate stage that begins only at the end of the process. In group social work, it is a continuous process carried out throughout the intervention, the purpose of which is to collect, analyze and interpret data in order to understand how the group is developing, what results are recorded and what changes are needed for further work. In this sense, evaluation is not a final act, but a constant companion of practice, which supports the specialist in making informed decisions, adjusting the process and improving the quality of work. In group social work, planning and evaluation are more appropriate to consider as an interconnected and iterative cycle, where each stage feeds the next. This approach makes it possible to build the work not on the basis of a fixed plan drawn up once, but to continuously adapt to real conditions, beneficiaries' responses and newly emerging needs (Chianca, 2008; Toseland & Rivas, 2017).

In addition, it is important to clearly distinguish between two main areas of evaluation: process evaluation and outcome evaluation, as they complement each other and together provide a complete understanding of group work. Process evaluation focuses on how the group is implemented, that is, the extent to which the plan is implemented as intended and how the group work is progressing. Within this framework, attention is paid to the number of meetings held, the level of presence and participation of beneficiaries, their active involvement, as well as their commitment to the plan. At the same time, the group atmosphere is assessed to see whether it provides trust, security and open communication. In addition, the obstacles and supporting factors that may affect the process are also analyzed. On the other hand, outcome evaluation refers to the changes that have occurred as a result of group work. It allows social workers to understand what impact the group has had on the participants: whether there has been an increase in knowledge, development of skills, a change in attitudes or behavioral changes. It is also important to assess deeper changes, such as increased self-confidence, strengthened social ties or improved relationships, which are often important outcomes of group work. These two areas should be considered together, as only a combination of process and outcome makes it possible to get a complete picture of the effectiveness of group work and draw informed conclusions for further planning and improvement (Rossi, Lipsey, & Henry, 2019).

The effectiveness of evaluation largely depends on correctly selected indicators, since they are the ones that make it possible to measure the process and results of group work. Indicators should directly derive from the goals of the group and reflect the changes that the intervention is aimed at achieving. If the evaluation criteria are not related to the previously defined goals, it is difficult to understand how effective the group has actually been and what results it has provided. Effective indicators should be clear and understandable so that all parties involved have a uniform understanding of their significance. At the same time, they should be realistic for measurement, that is, it should be possible to collect the necessary data and assess the changes under the given conditions. It is also important that the indicators correspond to the goals of the group, be applicable in the given environment and useful in terms of making further decisions. Thus, correctly selected indicators not only record the results, but also contribute to the further improvement of the program (OECD, 2019).

Another important component of evaluation planning is beneficiary involvement, which is carried out through a participatory approach. This means that the views and experiences of group members should also be taken into account in the evaluation process. Beneficiaries have an important role in defining what changes are important to them, which indicators are most meaningful, how they perceive their own progress, and what improvements they suggest regarding the organization or content of the group work. This approach increases the relevance and credibility of the evaluation, as it is based not only on the observations of the specialist, but also on the real experiences of the participants. In addition, beneficiary involvement creates a greater sense of responsibility and participation, which in turn contributes to both the quality of the evaluation and the overall effectiveness of the group work (IASWG, 2022).

The role of documentation

Documentation is an important component at all stages of planning and implementing group social work, but it is especially important at the stage of organization and process management. Well-organized documentation contributes to the coordination of work, professional accountability, continuity of services and the possibility of further evaluation. It ensures that the process is carried out in a consistent, transparent and professional manner. It also plays an important role in the processes of control, supervision, program evaluation, research, risk management and quality assurance, and, if necessary, can also serve legal or administrative purposes. According to the professional guidelines of social work, records should be clear, accurate, timely and purposeful. They should not only record the actions taken, but also reflect the specialist's analysis, professional judgment and justifications for decisions. Effective documentation should contain only necessary and relevant information, present the interventions carried out, reflect assessments and the basis for decisions, as well as ensure the sequence and continuity of work, and is an important guarantee of its effectiveness, responsibility and professional quality (IASWG, 2022).

Case Study of Group Work Planning in “Shogh” Day Centers

To complement the theoretical analysis of group work planning, a qualitative study was conducted from July to December 2025 based on the experience of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers, which operate under the initiative of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and are one of the community-based programs aimed at the social protection and development of children in Armenia. The centers’ activities aim to support children from socially vulnerable families by creating a safe, stable and developing environment after school. The program combines educational, social, psychological and pedagogical components, contributing to the full development of children and their effective integration. “Shogh” Day Centers operate in a number of cities in Armenia: Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Stepanavan and Berdyan. Up to 300 children and their families benefit from the services of the centers (AMAA, 2026). The centers' activities are based on an after-school support model, where an important place is given to individual and especially group social work.

The study explored the implementation of planning and evaluation in the centres and their contribution to the effectiveness of group work. A qualitative method was selected because it allowed for an in-depth examination of professional experiences, planning procedures, and evaluation practices within the centers. Data collection relied on three complementary sources: document review, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and observations of group work practice.

The research was implemented in several stages. During the first month, preparatory activities were carried out, including the development of interview guides and data collection instruments, as well as the review and collection of relevant organizational documents. In the following months, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, while subsequent stages focused on the observation of practical group work processes and the analysis of collected materials.

The document review included group work plans, session curricula, pre- and post-assessment questionnaires, observation forms, progress reports, and other planning and

evaluation documents used within the “Shogh” centers. The review focused on how needs assessments, objectives, participant selection procedures, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluation practices were incorporated into group work planning and implementation. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants directly involved in the processes: 8 social workers and 5 centre coordinators from all centres. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and documentary materials were reviewed and coded according to the main stages of group work planning. The use of multiple data sources allowed for methodological triangulation, providing a comprehensive understanding of planning as an ongoing process that contributes to the quality, accountability, and effectiveness of group social work.

The analysis of the case of “Shogh” centers revealed a structured planning framework consisting of several interconnected dimensions that guide the organization, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of group interventions. To ensure a systematic approach to intervention design, these dimensions are explored through a series of guiding questions

Planning Dimensions of Group Social Work in Shogh Centers

1. Group objectives and intervention design

The planning of group work in “Shogh” centers begins with the assessment of the intervention context, conducted through home visits, observations, interviews, and questionnaires; defining the overall purpose of the group and the expected outcomes, as well as identifying the specific needs, challenges, or risk factors that the intervention seeks to address. Particular attention is given to the characteristics of the target population: age, social status, and other relevant demographic or psychosocial factors, as these influence both the content and methodology of the intervention. As a result of the initial assessment, groups are formed according to age, needs, behavioral characteristics, or common problems, thus reflecting the principles of evidence-informed social work practice. Then, based on the identified needs, an appropriate module for group work, be it educational, developmental, a combination thereof, etc., is selected. Planning also requires determining the structural parameters of the intervention, including group size, duration and frequency of meetings, and the overall implementation period. In addition, the planning process considers the multidisciplinary expertise required for effective implementation, defining the roles of social workers and other specialists involved in the group.

Guiding questions

1. What is the main goal of the group and what results do you want to achieve by the end of the project?
2. What needs or problems are planned to be addressed through the group?
3. Who is the main target group of the group (age, status, social characteristics, etc.)?
4. What type of group work is planned to be carried out (educational, supportive, developmental, therapeutic, etc.).
5. What will be the duration, frequency and total duration of the meetings?
6. How many participants are planned to be involved in the group?

7. What specialists will be involved in the process of organizing and conducting the group?

2. Expected results and directions of change

Following the design of the intervention, attention is directed toward defining the expected outcomes and anticipated directions of change. This involves identifying the knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills that participants are expected to develop. Depending on the objectives, desired outcomes may include positive behavioral changes, improved coping and communication skills, enhanced self-confidence, or greater awareness of specific social and personal issues. In addition, group work may seek to strengthen family relationships, improve peer interactions, and promote social inclusion. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, expected outcomes are translated into measurable indicators and evaluation criteria, which provide a framework for monitoring participant progress and determining the extent to which the intended changes have been achieved. The evaluation methods are selected according to the specific objectives of the intervention. For example, in time-management groups, participant diaries are used to assess changes in planning and organizational skills, whereas parenting groups evaluate outcomes such as improvements in parent–child relationships or reductions in violent disciplinary practices through a combination of home visits, observations, and questionnaires.

Guiding questions

1. What knowledge is expected to be developed among participants?
2. What practical skills are expected to be formed or strengthened?
3. What behavioral changes do you expect during or after the program?
4. What changes are expected in family or social relationships?
5. How will you understand that the program has been successfully implemented?
6. What are the main criteria or indicators of success?

3. Preparatory phase

The preparatory phase in “Shogh” centers focuses on creating conditions necessary for the successful launch of the group work. This includes gathering background information about potential participants to better understand factors that may influence their attendance and engagement. Particular attention is paid to identifying obstacles that could limit participation: transportation challenges, scheduling conflicts, or family-related constraints, and to developing appropriate responses to mitigate the impact. Preparatory activities also involve arranging the physical setting, securing the necessary materials and establishing a schedule that is accessible to all participants. In addition, efforts are made to introduce the group, communicate its purpose and potential benefits, and encourage active involvement from participants and, where relevant, their families.

Guiding questions

1. What information do you need to collect about the participants before the group starts?
2. How will you select or recruit participants?
3. What risks or barriers might there be to participation?

4. What organizational arrangements are needed (space, materials, schedule, transportation, etc.)?
5. How will you inform and motivate participants?

4. Curriculum Design and Session Structure

The content of the intervention is organized around thematic areas addressing the identified needs and objectives of the group. Depending on participants' needs, these themes may include time management, safe internet use, communication skills, conflict resolution, self-esteem development, prevention of behavioral problems, healthy lifestyles, and positive parenting, etc. For each thematic area, specific topics are developed for each session in a logical sequence, allowing participants to gradually build knowledge, develop skills, and reflect on their experiences. Every group meeting is designed with its own objective that contributes to the overall goals of the group work. A variety of methods: discussions, role plays, case studies, etc. are used to facilitate learning and skill development. Where appropriate, reflective assignments are given to support the application of new knowledge and competencies outside the group setting. Interactive activities further encourage active participation, strengthen group cohesion, and enhance participant engagement throughout the intervention process.

Guiding questions

1. What main topics will be covered during the meetings?
2. In what order will the topics be presented?
3. What objectives will be set for each meeting?
4. What methods will you use (discussion, role play, exercises, case studies, etc.)?.
5. What homework or practical assignments will be provided?
6. How will you encourage active participation and engagement?

5. Monitoring, Supervision, and Adaptive Management

The implementation of group work in “Shogh” centers is accompanied by continuous monitoring and supervision. Throughout the intervention, social workers document attendance, participation levels, behavioral changes, and progress toward group objectives through observation records, process notes, and other monitoring tools. Regular supervision provides an opportunity to review implementation of the modules, discuss challenges, and ensure adherence to established standards and objectives. Collaboration among social workers and other specialists, such as social pedagogues and psychologists, further supports the exchange of professional perspectives and facilitates an understanding of participants' needs and progress. The information collected through monitoring is used to assess the ongoing intervention, make timely adjustments to session content, methods, or activities in response to emerging needs, changing group dynamics, or implementation challenges. It's also used in design for the following group work, both for new participants and for this particular group.

Guiding questions

1. How will you track the frequency of participation?
2. How will you respond to absences or decreased engagement?
3. How will you record the results and progress of the meetings?
4. In what format will team collaboration between professionals be implemented?

5. What role will the supervisor or coordinator play in monitoring the process?
6. How will you change topics or approaches if necessary?

6. Reflection and Consolidation of Results

The next stage of planning focuses on organizing the synthesis and review of the group experience upon completion of the intervention. Opportunities are created for participants to reflect on their involvement, share their experiences, and recognize individual and collective achievements. Such reflection helps consolidate the knowledge and skills developed throughout the group process and identify the most significant outcomes from the perspectives of both beneficiaries and professionals. Key lessons learned are summarized and incorporated into reports and other organizational documentation. Social workers, supervisors, and other relevant specialists contribute to reviewing the overall experience and discussing its implications for future practice. The process also includes identifying participants and families who may benefit from continued support and informing subsequent follow-up activities.

Guiding questions

1. How will the overall experience and outcomes of the group be reviewed upon completion?
2. What feedback and reflections will be collected from participants?
3. How will participants present their achievements, experiences, and perceived changes?
4. What records, summaries, or reports will be prepared at the conclusion of the intervention?
5. Who will participate in reviewing the experience, identifying lessons learned, and discussing future follow-up needs?

7. Follow-up and sustainability

The follow-up stage focuses on sustaining the positive changes achieved through group work beyond its formal completion. Planning at this stage includes identifying strategies that support beneficiaries in the continued application of newly acquired knowledge and skills, while also determining whether they or their families may require additional assistance. The timing and methods of follow-up contact are established in advance and include home visits, consultations, observations, or other forms of communication, depending on the nature of participants' needs. Information gathered during this period contributes to understanding of the longer-term influence of the intervention and provides a basis for future projects, highlighting emerging needs and opportunities for the development of new groups, complementary services, or community-based initiatives.

Guiding questions

1. How will you maintain the positive results of the project after its completion?
2. What further support can be provided to participants?
3. When and how will follow-up contact or monitoring be carried out?
4. How will the results be used to plan future projects?
5. What new groups or initiatives can be formed based on this experience?

Conclusion

In this article, the role of planning in ensuring the effectiveness, quality and accountability of group social work was explored. A review of contemporary literature has shown that planning is not only a preparatory activity but also an ongoing process that guides all stages of group work. Effective planning allows social workers to respond to identified needs, select appropriate interventions, manage potential risks and create conditions for meaningful participation and positive change among group members.

The presented analysis highlights the following key conclusions:

- Professional standards and contemporary literature consistently indicate that effective group work requires systematic planning that includes needs assessment, formulation of SMART goals, participant selection, program design, risk management, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- The case study of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers demonstrated that planning is implemented through a structured and multidimensional framework encompassing intervention design, preparation, curriculum development, monitoring, supervision, reflection, and follow-up. This approach supports the organization of targeted and responsive group interventions.
- The findings further suggest that the use of comprehensive assessment methods, multidisciplinary collaboration, regular supervision, and ongoing monitoring allows practitioners to adapt interventions to the evolving needs of children and families, thereby strengthening participant engagement and the relevance of group activities.
- The study also demonstrates that planning and evaluation function most effectively when viewed as interrelated components of a continuous cycle. The integration of monitoring, participant feedback, reflection, and follow-up enables practitioners not only to assess outcomes but also to use the collected evidence to improve future interventions and promote the sustainability of achieved results.

Overall, this article shows that effective planning serves as a foundation for high-quality group social work. Strengthening planning capacity among social workers and organizations can enhance the impact, sustainability and integrity of group interventions, thus contributing to better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities in general.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.