

Programme **MegaMarie^{plus}** (2023-2025)

Strengthening family centres – for the benefit of children and families

The foundation for an individual's educational and health biography is built in pregnancy and the first years of life. From birth onwards, «children discover the world, driven by their curiosity and attentively accompanied by us». (www.orientierungsrahmen.ch)

Parents, as reliable, caring and loving caregivers, are of crucial importance for the development of their children. To this end, they need a family-friendly environment. This includes spaces for play, creative activities, exchange and everyday counselling. Family centres in nearby neighbourhoods are perfectly positioned to do exactly that. Their objective is to support parents or other close caregivers and provide as many children as possible with the chance to develop to their potential with attentive support.

In some communities in Switzerland, family centres are well established, in others, they are struggling financially, despite the great efforts of volunteers. Moreover, in many places there are no suitable, good services for young children and their families. This is where the **MegaMarie^{plus} programme** comes in: From 2023 to 2025, family centres throughout Switzerland will be supported and jointly further developed for the benefit of children and families.

In the MegaMarie^{plus} programme, a **four-leaf clover** symbolises experiences and ways of expressing themselves that are highly significant for children in the first years of life: «play», «literacy», «creativity» and «movement» (Figure 1).

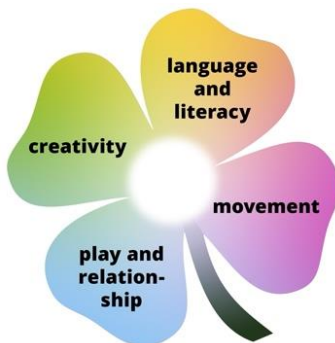


Figure 1: Four fields of experiences

In addition, the distinct centre of the four-leaf clover stands for the **holistic way of experimenting and learning of young children** as well as for **cultural participation** of them and their families.

The expertise of the programme implementers forms the connecting and structuring core of the cloverleaf, as good **quality** of services, content, structures and processes is based on **reflection and continuous learning with each other**.

The indirect beneficiaries of the programme are children, parents, grandparents and other caregivers. The direct beneficiaries are implementers and specialised agencies, professionals and volunteers as well as administrations and political bodies of municipalities and cantons (Figure 2).

Through the implementation of the programme over a period of three years, activities and services in family centres are to be increasingly

- oriented towards the cloverleaf;
- based on evidence and resources;
- impact-oriented;
- carefully accompanied by professionals;
- easily accessible, especially for fragile and isolated families.

Family centres can thus play an important role in the development and establishment of family-centred structures and services from pregnancy onwards.

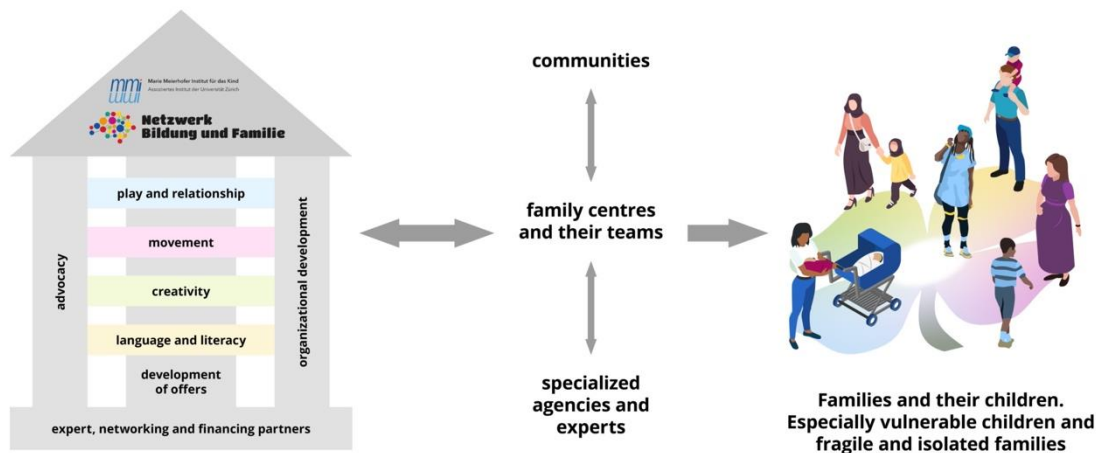


Figure 2: Programme overview

Objectives and levers of the MegaMarie^{plus} Programme

The **objectives** of the programme can be summarised in three points:

- Create more easily accessible and inspiring spaces for young children and their families;
- enable children to have stimulating and attentively guided experiences;
- connect parents and strengthen their skills.

The programme wants to contribute and make sure that services offered by family centres and other meeting places benefit children and parents in fragile situations. The program also aims to reach more isolated families with preventive services from pregnancy onwards. In Switzerland, at least half a million children grow up in poverty or dwell in precarious circumstances for other reasons. Many of them are not exposed to even basic experiences. Already when they enter kindergarten, they have poorer chances of growing up healthily and receiving a good education. Their opportunities for social participation are thus already limited. The rights of children defined by the UN Commission on the Rights of the Child in 1989 can be supported in various ways by this programme.

The programme uses **three levers** to achieve its objectives:

- (1) **Knowledge transfer and strengthening the evidence-base:** Family centres are supported by professionals and specialist agencies in designing their own evidence-based services for children and their families or in bringing tried and tested services into the centre.
- (2) **Institutional strengthening and organisational development:** Family centres are supported with workshops, webinars, visitations, guidelines and consultations to strengthen their structures and develop organisationally.
The network of family centres will be further developed so that they can learn from each other in the medium and long term and jointly advocate for their concerns.
- (3) **Anchoring and advocacy:** Municipalities and cantons are counselled so that they recognise the value of family centres and increasingly support them in their establishment and operation. This enables sustainable development and the anchoring of the services in the society.

Sponsors and partners of the MegaMarie^{plus} programme

The MegaMarie^{plus} programme is designed and supported by the Marie Meierhofer children's institute and the Education and Family Network. It is implemented by the two organisations jointly with family centres and other meeting places for families with young children and intergenerational offers. The programme is also integrated into a broad alliance of professional organisations, interested municipalities and cantons. There are also links with the «Alliance Enfance» and various federal offices, namely the Federal Office of Public Health (Bundesamt für Gesundheit; BAG) in the areas of prevention and health care, the Federal Social Insurance Office (Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen; BSV) in the area of family and poverty prevention, and the State Secretariat for Migration (Staatssekretariat für Migration; SEM) in the area of early childhood and integration.

In consultation with the participating partners, the two programme sponsors draw up an annual plan with thematic focal points and suitable activities for the course of the year. The following organisations and initiatives have so far agreed to participate in the MegaMarie^{plus} programme:

- Associazione Progetto Genitori
- Cantone Ticino, Dipartimento della sanità e della socialità
- Laboratorio Ingegneria dello Sviluppo Schürch - LISS
- «Kinderfreundliche Gemeinden» Programme by UNICEF Switzerland and Lichtenstein
- «Primokiz» programme of the RADIX Foundation
- Schweizerisches Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien SIKJM
- Stiftung LAPURLA
- Verband Künste für Kinder und Jugendliche KKJ
- Verein a:primo
- Verein Fadenspule

With the RADIX programme «Purzelbaum^{family}» the coordination of activities has been agreed.

The MegaMarie^{plus} programme is intended to have an impact throughout Switzerland. In Ticino, organisations are already on board. Discussions are taking place in the Romandie. Partners in the language regions are to be involved in the development and dissemination of programme elements according to their expertise and needs, or are to take the lead in this.

Programme participation and targeted reach

Participation and involvement in the MegaMarie^{plus} programme are possible at any time during the term. They include

- advocating for evidence-based attitudes and work in the field of ECEC;
- the connection and further development of offers with different focal points in terms of content;
- the implementation of low-threshold organisational and quality development measures;
- disseminating the objectives and content of the programme and supporting contacts with communities and relevant content and implementation partners;
- financial participation in individual project objectives.

The aim is for around 24,000 children and parents from fragile and isolated family situations to benefit from the programme over the course of the three programme years. This will be possible if professionals and volunteers from 60 small to large family centres actively participate in the programme. The programme aims to ensure that at least 25 municipalities actively support family centres for the benefit of their youngest residents and their families. Through the association of municipalities and the cantonal conferences, municipalities and cantons are to be informed about the programme and selected activities.

Programme meeting framework

The implementation of the MegaMarie^{plus} programme is made up of various meeting frameworks. They are used to give impulses or to stimulate and accompany an in-depth examination of a topic.

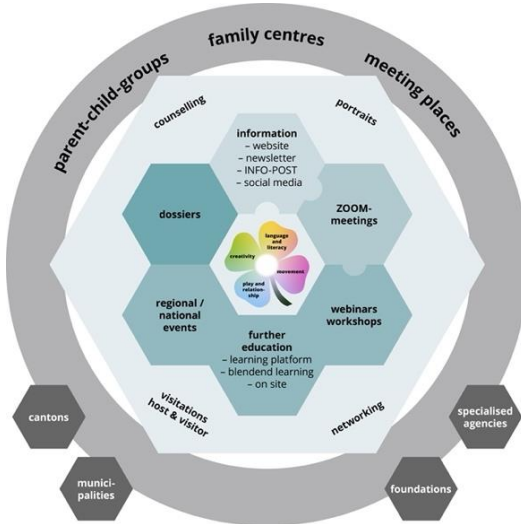


Figure 3: programme activities

The Education and Family Network has a platform on which information and handouts on the programme can be disseminated. The **family centres** can introduce themselves on the platform with a portrait and participate in mutual **visitations** either as hosts or as visitors.

Monthly online meetings: The Education and Family Network invites one or more persons each month to report on an offer, procedures and experiences and to discuss them with the participants.

Annual regional and national events provide impulses, networking and exchange of good practice.

With **webinars and workshops**, specific topics are dealt with in greater depth with interested family centres and communities.

Dossiers are prepared for selected key issues.

For individual concerns, family centres and communities can make use of specialist **counselling**.

It is planned to develop four thematic dossiers:

- Dossier on the cloverleaf with its four leaves and its distinctive centre
- Reader-friendly handouts on elements that make up good quality early childhood and family support services in the family living environment
- Argumentation and practical advice for committed people in administrations, politics and family centre sponsors: «Why are family centres important for a municipality and its young inhabitants and their families?»
- Dossiers with handouts for operational and organisational issues of family centres, in particular also on the topic of quality management

Resources and funding of the MegaMarie^{plus} programme

For the family centres, participation in activities, the use of counselling and the use of materials is free of charge. The MegaMarie^{plus} programme is possible thanks to funding from foundations and the contributions of the participating partners. The executing agencies applied for a grant from The Human Safety Net (THSN) Foundation of Generali and they were convinced with the MegaMarie^{plus} programme: THSN international is contributing Euro 660,000 to the programme. This generous donation and donations from other foundations cover costs for staff, events, communication, dossiers and evaluation. THSN national supports the implementation of the programme with communication and with the voluntary commitment to family centres of Generali Switzerland employees.

The partners of the MegaMarie^{plus} programme make various contributions to the best of their abilities and according to their possibilities. They participate with human resources and make their expertise and already developed materials available. They also support the implementation of the programme through their own activities and networks.

Impact orientation: monitoring - evaluation - learning

The concept and activities of the MegaMarie^{plus} programme are evidence-based and guided by the change model as shown in Figure 4.

Initial situation	Measures	Results	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Many poverty-stricken, isolated, fragile families with young children – too little exchange, low-threshold counselling and stimulating activities – markedly unequal opportunities for children <p>Family centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lacking in many places – many are barely able to survive and only thanks to the great efforts of volunteers – potential of meeting places for young children and their parents lies fallow 	<p>Formation of an alliance of family centres and specialist organisations for programme implementation.</p> <p>Events, workshops, counselling and dossiers for the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – dissemination of good offers in family centres; – operational and organisational strengthening of family centres; – sensitising people in administration and politics to the importance of meeting places, especially for fragile families with young children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Services for families with young children are increasingly oriented towards good quality and their impact: 60 family centres have participated in the programme. – The fit between family centre services and the needs of fragile and isolated families has improved: 24,000 children and parents have been reached. – The anchoring and expansion of family centres in all regions of Switzerland has been boosted: 25 municipalities have actively participated. 	<p>The potential of family centres is utilised: they are supported by the communes and cantons with material and other resources.</p> <p>Family centres are professionally and operationally strengthened, learn from each other and support fragile families by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – strengthening parents; – offer young children a stimulating environment and attentive guidance in learning and discovering the world.

Figure 4: Change model

The implementation and impact of the programme will be assessed with the following measures:

- The activities that take place within the framework of the programme and their reach are documented on an ongoing basis and compared annually with the goals set.
- Selected aspects of programme implementation and impact will be evaluated by an independent body over two years starting in summer 2023.

The evaluation questions are formulated jointly with the programme implementers, interested family centres and the partner organisations.

The MegaMarie^{plus} programme relies on an emerging learning community of family centres, professional organisations and communities. With the introduction of a proven tool for data collection and with coaching, the family centres are supported from the start of the programme in documenting their services and activities as comparably as possible.

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