

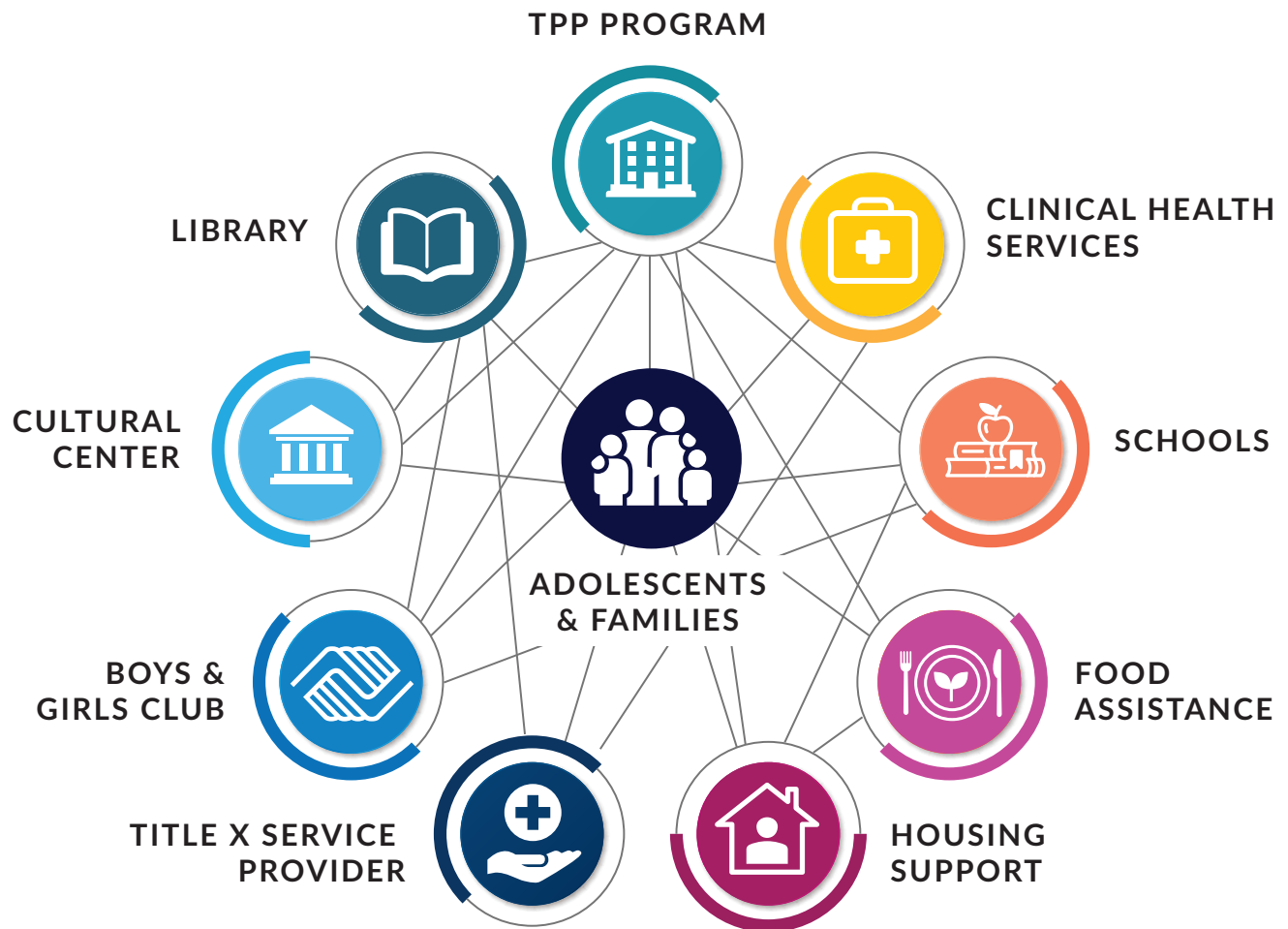
# Understanding Systems Thinking in the Context of TPP Programs

Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) programs operate in complex, multilayered systems. A systems thinking approach can help TPP program staff address the complex challenges associated with helping adolescents make healthy decisions, as well as with other challenges that impede their work.

## A System of Care

Each TPP program exists within a system of care—a coordinated network of clinical and community-based services and supports designed to help adolescents make healthy decisions. A system of care is most effective when all organizations and people within the system coordinate, bolster, and build on one another's efforts to support youth in the community.

### A SYSTEM OF CARE\*



\*This graphic shows one example of a system of care as it is defined within this toolkit.

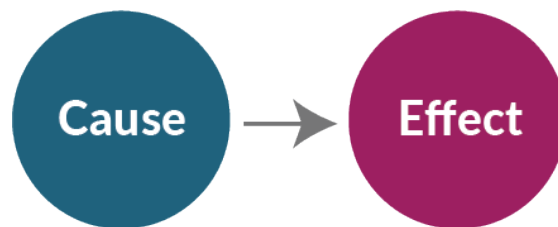
## A Systems Thinking Approach

When you take a systems thinking approach, you look beyond a specific issue to the system in which the issue occurs. All TPP programs can apply systems thinking to more effectively address the key issue they focus on: helping adolescents make healthy decisions. You can also use systems thinking to address other challenges, such as low enrollment, that your program may face. Systems change occurs when, over time, the complex causes of an issue change or are resolved.

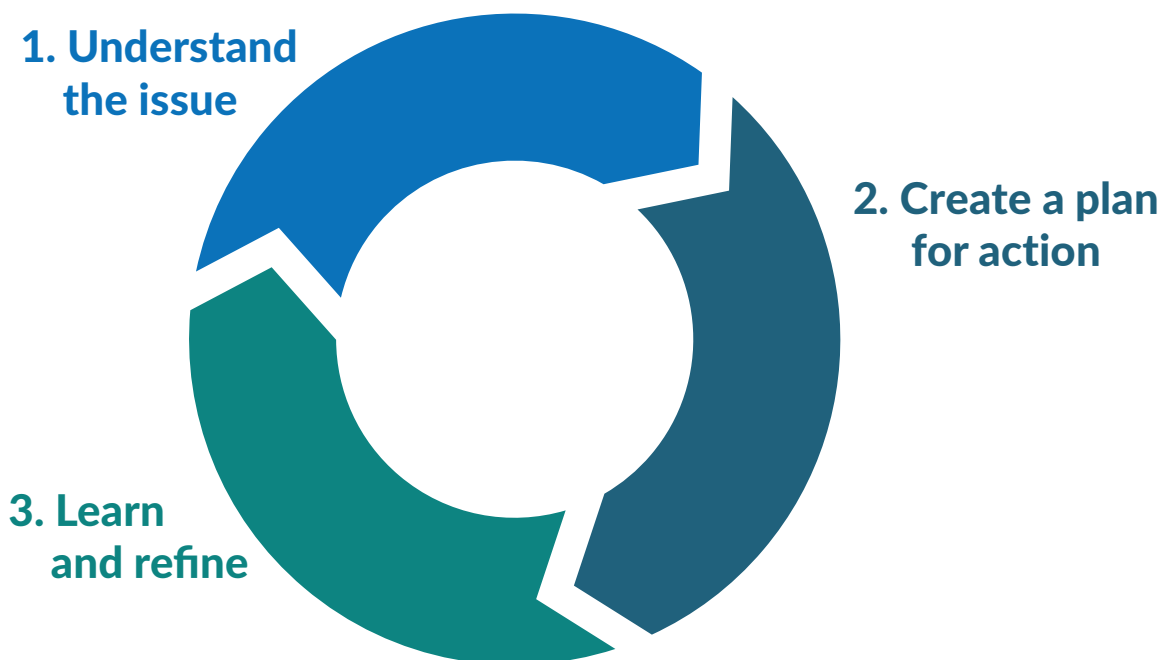
Systems thinking is most effective when there is a strong commitment to learning; a willingness to be open to seeing, doing, and thinking differently; and an openness to multiple perspectives, including those of TPP program participants, staff, partners, and other stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

### LINEAR VS. SYSTEMS THINKING<sup>2</sup>

#### Linear Thinking



#### Systems Thinking



<sup>1</sup> Senge, P. M. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*. Random House.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Gopal, S. & Preskill, H. (2016, April 11). *Putting Systems Thinking into Practice*. FSG. <https://www.fsg.org/blog/putting-systems-thinking-practice>

# Applying Systems Thinking to Your TPP Program as a Whole

## 1. Understand the issue:

Look beyond simple explanations for why adolescents in your community struggle to make healthy decisions (e.g., insufficient access to contraception). Gather information to identify the reasons why adolescents in your community make unhealthy decisions (e.g., pervasive cultural norms that discourage talking about sex or limited educational opportunities).

## 2. Create a plan for action:

Work with the other organizations and people in your system of care to develop and implement a plan for how to address the causes of unhealthy decision making among adolescents in your community. For example, partner with local cultural leaders to educate parents and youth about the value of talking about sex.

## 3. Learn and refine:

Use your learning agenda and monitoring and evaluation plan to assess these new efforts and to continually refine your approach based on what you learn.

# Applying Systems Thinking to Other TPP Program Challenges

## Example: Low enrollment

## 1. Understand the issue:

Examine the reasons for low enrollment in your TPP program, and include the youth perspective. Discover that your program's timing and setting don't align with students' availability or their priorities, like getting mental health support.

## 2. Create a plan for action:

Collaborate with the school to identify a more convenient time and setting for classes, along with counselor support.

## 3. Learn and refine:

Gather feedback from participants and other stakeholders on the new time, setting, and counseling services, and further adapt your program as needed.