

Box 3.2 Sarah

When Sarah first came to the agency, she was a 17-year-old girl who was pregnant, as such, Sarah affected not only her life but also the lives of those around her. Sarah's family became quite distressed, reacted angrily, and expelled her from their home, leaving her to fend for herself. Confused and alone, Sarah dropped out of school in order to pursue employment to financially support herself and her forthcoming child. Sarah's limited education seriously impaired her ability to become self-sufficient and to support her child in the future. The employment and wage system is geared toward promoting people with education and skills and has few supports for young single parents without an adequate education. Sarah's baby will also face many challenges, such as poverty and undernutrition, which in turn will have a direct impact on the baby's physical, mental, and psychological growth and development. Cultural norms that

Box 3.A Now You Try It . . . Identifying Systems, Needs, and Interventions

System Involved	System Needs	System Interventions
<p>Justin recently exited foster care when he turned 21 and aged out of the system. He had been in foster care on and off since the age of eight years. He finds himself in a homeless shelter with only three weeks of guaranteed residency before having to move out of this temporary "home" as well. Justin has few marketable skills, as he dropped out of high school at 16 and has never been on his own before. His daily living skills are limited, but he has learned to do his laundry, locate the local soup kitchens for food, and find enough day jobs to keep his basic daily needs met. He also sells his blood and plasma. However, he does not earn enough to manage rent or transportation when he leaves the shelter. He has little knowledge of how to prepare for</p>	<p>permanent employment and few job skills to market. In addition, Justin was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when he was 12 and has been maintained on medication since that time. With the loss of his Medicaid benefits when he left foster care, Justin also lost his ability to purchase his medication. He has one week's supply of pills remaining.</p> <p>As the social worker attending to clients in the homeless shelter where Justin temporarily resides, identify the systems and subsystems that are active in Justin's life. Then identify the types of needs and interventions needed within each system in order for Justin to begin to build some stability in his life.</p>	

resources. The mezzo system is the small group, such as the family, which has its own complexities and dynamics. Such small groups strongly influence and are influenced by their individual members. Community organizations and agencies also fall under the mezzo system classification. The macro system is the large group, such as the social institutions of work, schools, and the religious community (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Zastrow, 2013). To this aim, Zastrow (2013) put forward four goals of social work practice that address all levels of system intervention:

1. To support the development of people's problem solving, coping, and developmental abilities
2. To connect people with systems that offer them opportunities, resources, and services
3. To ensure the humane operation of systems that respond to people's needs
4. To advance social policy

Individual, community, and national systems interact along a continuum with the aim of enhancing system performance so that healthy functioning dominates and dysfunction is minimized. This environment or ecology of systems plays an important part in the development of individuals, families, and communities. Social work is at its best when the transactions of these systems promote growth and development, and creates an environment that is amenable to positive growth (Ashford & Lecroy, 2013). In Box 3.3, the social worker intervenes at the micro level when involved in individual assessment and counseling with Sarah, at the mezzo level when working with Sarah's family and linking Sarah to the prenatal clinic and parenting class, and at the macro level when intervening with the educational, employment, and social welfare systems. Practice interventions at all three system levels were necessary to bringing stability to Sarah's world and to support her growth and progress over the two years that followed.

Ecological Perspective

Ecological perspective, or the person-in-environment perspective of social work practice, expanded and benefited from the transfer of general systems theory in the physical sciences to the living systems of the human family. The work of German (1973, 1979) and German and Gitterman (2011) further deepened our understanding of the complexities of the human condition in the context of various subsystems in their groundbreaking ecological perspective. Borrowing concepts from ecology (the study of organisms and their relationship with their environment), the ecological perspective provided more concrete ways for understanding the person in environment than systems theory had been able to do. For example, the notion of "goodness of fit" between a person and the environment sprang from the ecological framework and provides a lens through which to assess the extent to which a person's adaptive behaviors promote growth and health (a good fit) or support a decline of physical, social, or psychological functioning (bad fit). Other important concepts that are part of understanding a person in the environment are the role of stress and coping measures that individuals bring to their environment and their ability to relate or build attachments, friendships, and positive family relationships, all of which serve as resources when meeting life's challenges (German & Gitterman, 2011).