On time, in place: Community-based early supports for children with developmental concerns



Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

September 2026

Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Let's make change that lasts

Acknowledgment of Country

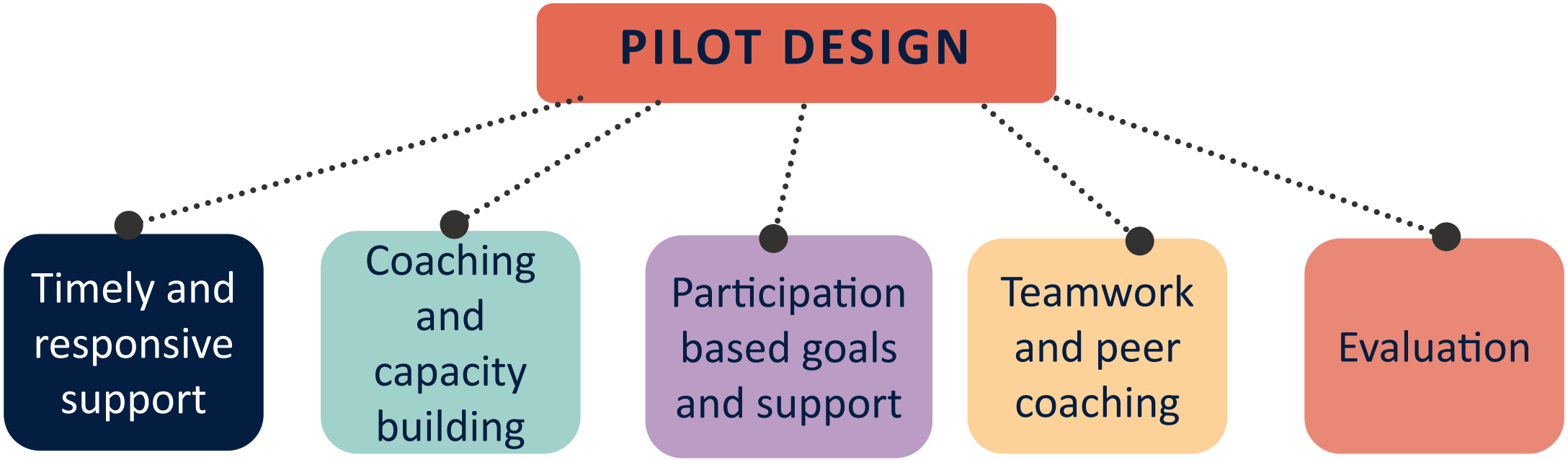
The Brotherhood of St. Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our organisation operates. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.

SYSTEM CHALLENGES

- Timeliness issues
- Navigation challenges
- Inaccessible systems
- Specialised lens on services

CONSEQUENCES

- Under-resourced families
- Children’s development impacted
- Unmet needs
- Inclusion decreases


PILOT DESIGN
Timely and responsive support
Coaching and capacity building
Participation based goals and support
Teamwork and peer coaching
Evaluation

PILOT REACH

PROGRAM NUMBERS

- **Total families referred:** 154
- **Total families served:** 126
- **Average program duration:** 8 months
- **Average sessions per family:** 12.21
- **Average hours spent with family:** 16.6

PILOT REACH

CHILD PROFILES

- **Average age at entry:** 3.2 years-old
- **Participating in ECEC at entry:** 78%
- **Connected with GP:** 20%
- **Gender:** 42% girls, 58% boys
- **Identified as having developmental concerns at entry:** All

PILOT REACH

DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Languages spoken at home:** 26
- **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin:** 4%
- **Australian citizens:** 76%
- **Bachelor educated or above:** 48%
- **Countries of birth:** 21
- **Gender:** 88% female, 12% male
- **Interpreter required:** 11%

What did families say?

Knowledge increased

“Prior to this program I didn’t have any idea — I thought a child had to have a diagnosis before we could receive any support at all.”

Skills increased

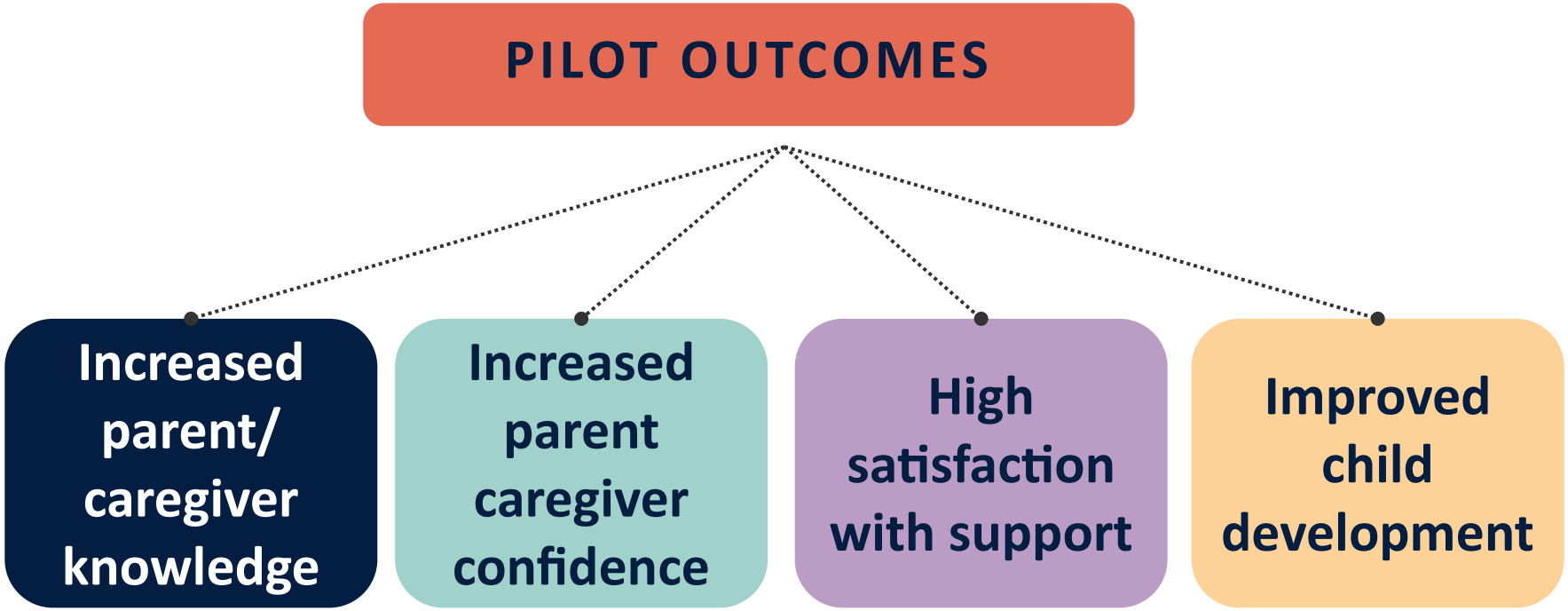
“New ideas and strategies were very relevant and helpful in connecting with my child. I got to learn and interact better with my child.”

Practical strategies helped

“I learnt how to structure evenings and mornings to have a less stressful environment.”

Parent-child connection increased

“The program has helped my child mature, and me and my child feel closer so I can understand him more.”


PILOT OUTCOMES
Increased parent/ caregiver knowledge
Increased parent caregiver confidence
High satisfaction with support
Improved child development

PILOT AT A GLANCE

- 126 children and caregivers in the first cohort, delivered in 2024
- 105 families invited to the follow-up survey in January 2026
- 59 caregivers responded — 48% of the first cohort

WHAT ENDURED

- Service participation increased: 83% health or mainstream, 98% ECEC or school
- Satisfaction was high: 86% with services, 100% with community groups
- Caregiver capability endured: 88% confident supporting learning, 92% advocating

WHAT WEAKENED

- Confidence accessing supports fell from 90% at exit to 71% at follow-up
- This remained above the 58% recorded at entry
- Enduring capability, but external service pathways stayed a constraint

WHERE TO NEXT

- Expansion of the model to new cohorts and locations
- Workforce innovation to sustain skilled, consistent practitioners
- Scalability focus so growth does not dilute the model

KEY LESSONS

- Service context: place-based delivery in homes and communities
- Capacity building model at the centre of practice

EES Evaluation report

EES – One Year on

Questions

