



Starting strong: first steps in building successful early language systems

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Population, whole systems approaches to early child language

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DISCUSSION

Creating the conditions for robust early language development for all: Part two: Evidence informed public health framework for child language in the early years

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Abstract

Background: One of the most significant developmental accomplishments is the emergence of language in early childhood. Whilst this process is effortless for most children, others can face significant hurdles. Identifying, in the early years, which children will go on to have developmental language disorder is, however, fraught with several well-documented challenges. In the preceding paper we described and linked new research evidence about factors that influence language development in the early years, noting that exposure to some may be time sensitive and that these influences cluster together and can accumulate over time. We demonstrated that risk profiles were associated with and characterised low language trajectories, and we considered how this information could be integrated into a concept that moves beyond screening at single time points in the early years. We argue that this evidence might be used to build an improved early years framework for language thereby creating a more equitable surveillance system that does not leave children living in less advantageous circumstances behind. Underpinning this thinking was a bioecological framework that incorporates the social, environmental and family factors in the child's ecosystem known to influence language development in the early years.

Aims: To develop a proposal for the design and implementation of an early language public health framework based on current best evidence

Methods: We synthesised the findings from the companion paper (Reilly & McKean 2023) regarding early language trajectories, inequalities and clustering of risks with key public health concepts, relevant intervention evidence and implementation theories to develop a new framework for language surveillance and preventative interventions in the early years.

Main Contribution: An evidence informed early language public health framework is presented. Describing in turn (1) essential components



Prof James Law

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DISCUSSION

Creating the conditions for robust early language development for all—Part 1: Evidence-informed child language surveillance in the early years

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Abstract

Background: The emergence of language in the early years is a major developmental accomplishment that underpins learning, enables social interaction and, later, is an indicator of well-being. Learning language is an effortless process for most, but can be challenging for others. There is a need to act early. First, because there are several social, environmental and family factors known to influence how language develops during the critical early years. Second, there is a robust association between a child's socio-economic circumstances and language outcomes. Put simply, children living in less advantaged circumstance have poorer language outcomes, which are apparent very early and persist across the lifespan. Third, children with demonstrated weaknesses in language learning in early childhood have poorer educational, employment, mental health and quality-of-life outcomes across the lifespan. Acting early to counter these impacts is important; however, there are several well-documented challenges in accurately identifying in the early years children who are at later risk of developmental language disorder (DLD) and to deliver prevention and intervention programmes to scale. This is critical because many services do not currently reach those who need them most; as many as 50% of children in need may not be receiving support.

Aim: To determine whether an improved surveillance system, based on best evidence, could be developed

Methods & Procedures: A population or community surveillance system using repeatedly measured language methodologies, to identify children at risk of DLD

Main contribution: The evidence informed early language public health framework is presented. Describing in turn (1) essential components



Prof Sheena Reilly

Law, Reilly & McKean

LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT

CAMBRIDGE

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Law, J., Reilly, S. & McKean, C.

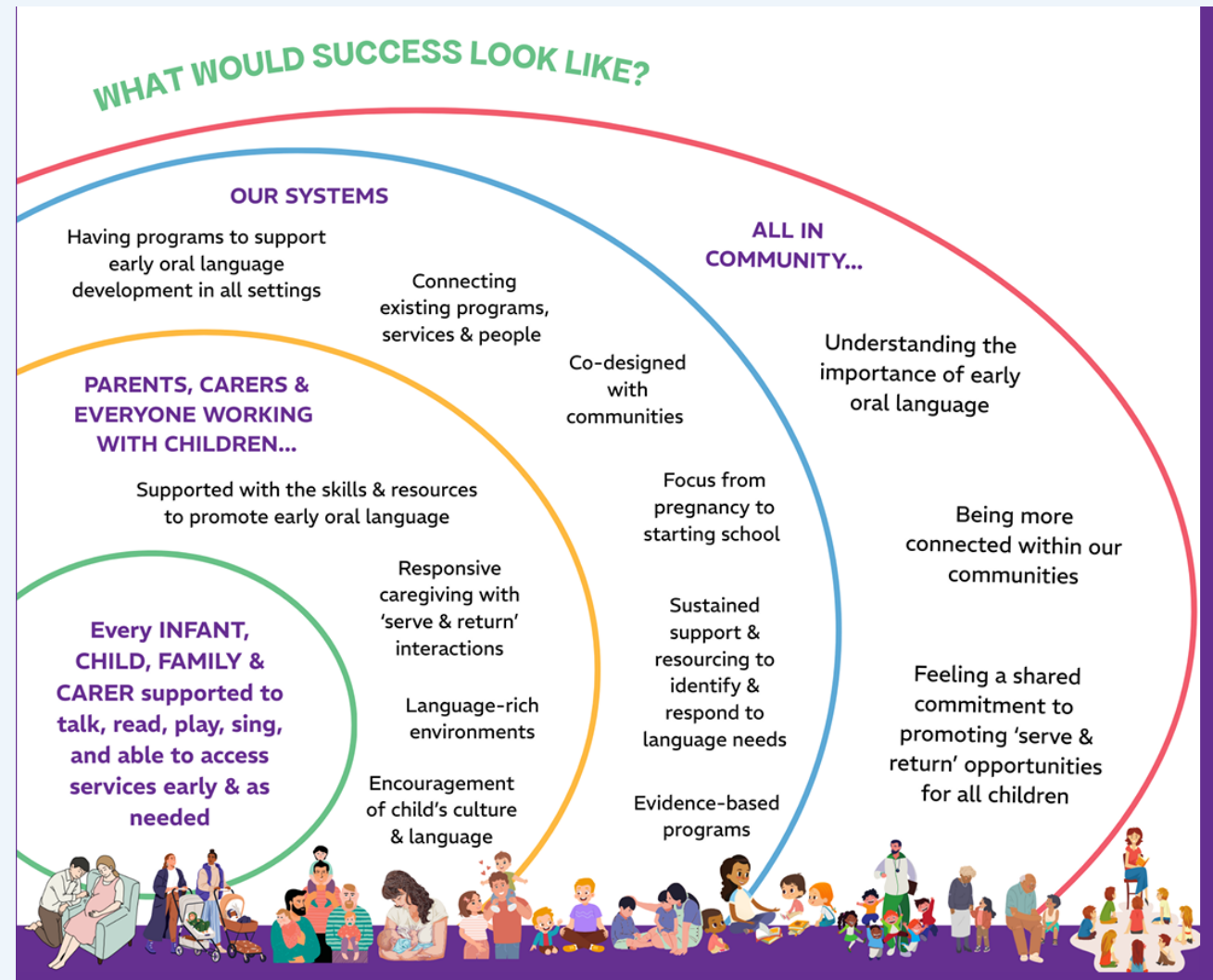
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Individual Differences
in a Social Context

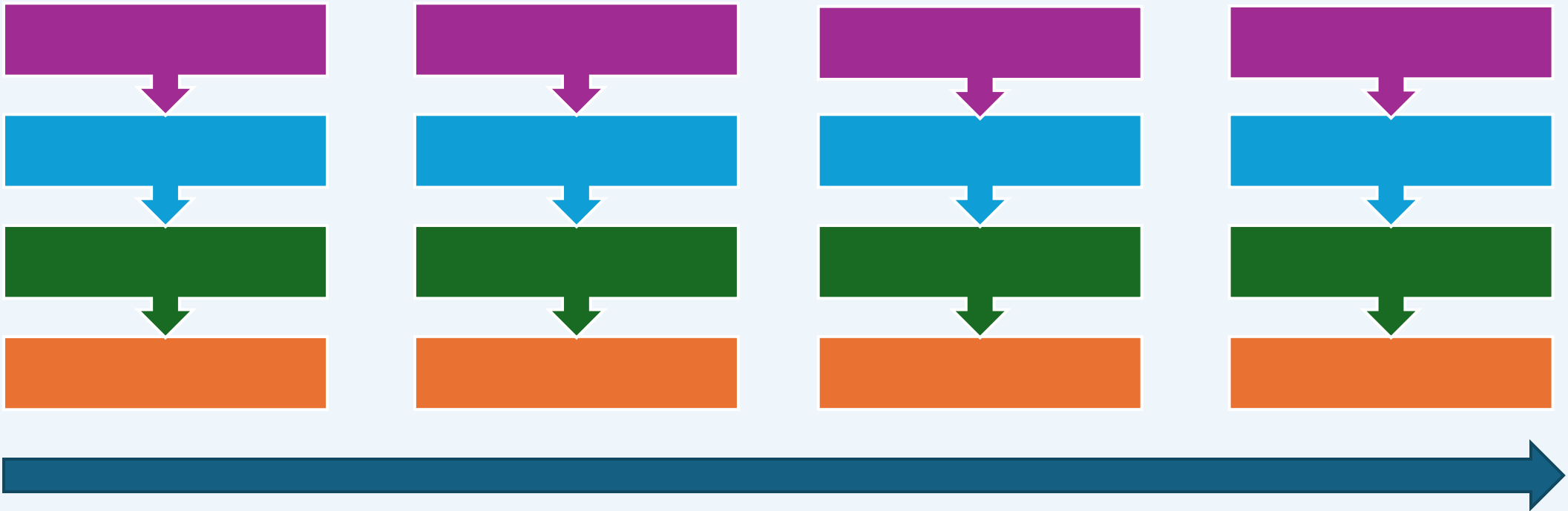


Key strengths of the QEOLP approach

- Evident commitment, clear focus for change and communication of the potential benefits for children
- Understanding the multi-layered influences on children's early language development
- Understanding that child language needs to be 'everyone's business' to make a difference to children's lives
- Recognition of the need for proportionate, tailored and culturally safe approaches for equitable benefits for all children



Key strengths of the QEOLP approach



Stacking support
across systems and
over time



Monitoring and
noticing across
systems and over time

Key strengths of the QEOLP approach



Ambition to use and generate the best available evidence to inform project design

Partnership with knowledge partners with extensive expertise in child language, early childhood systems, research evidence and implementation



Prof Trish Eadie

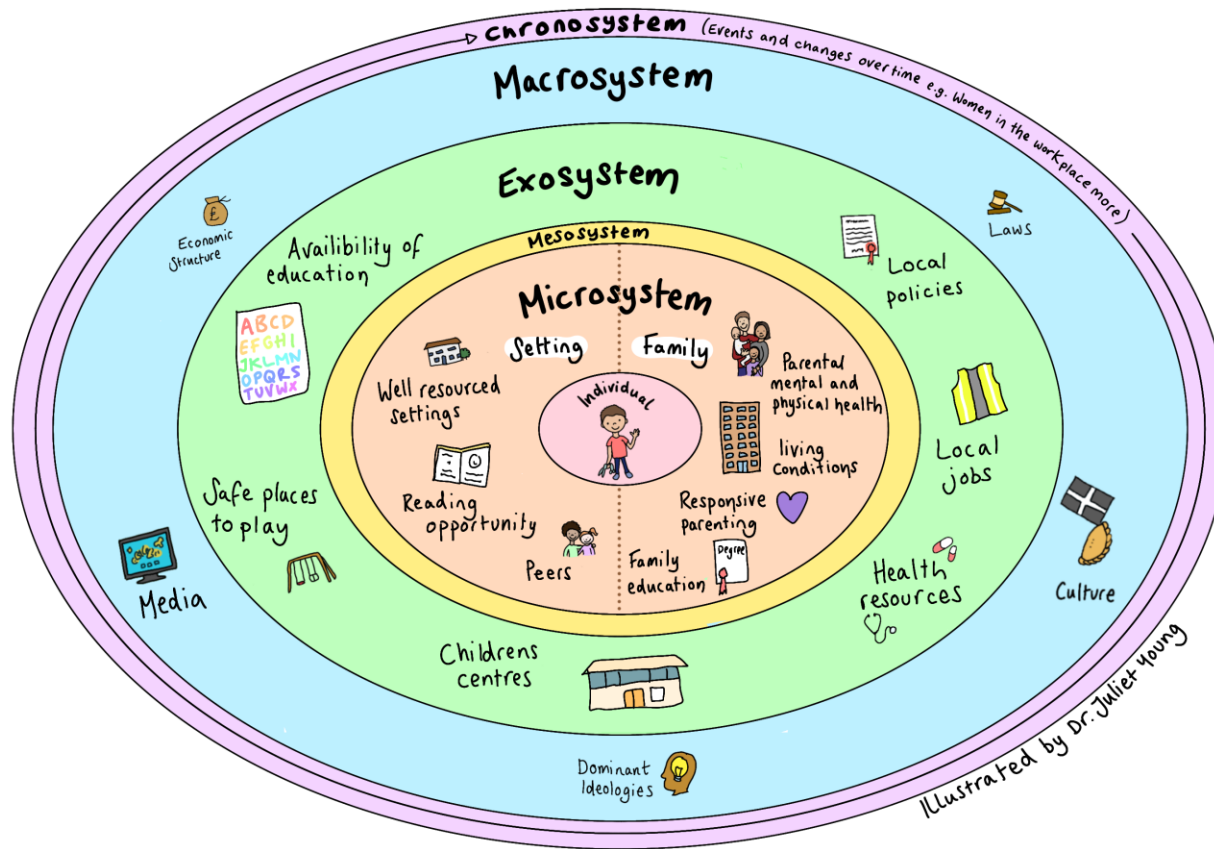


Ass Prof Penny Levickis



Dr Hannah Stark

Key strengths of the QEOLP approach



Engaging with the complexity of early years systems and diversity in community assets and challenges

Investment of time to galvanise effort, knowledge and expertise across Queensland - asset map

Key strengths of the QEOLP approach



- Codesign
- Synthesising evidence and knowledge across communities, services, and research evidence
- Codesigning a roadmap
- Localising in trailblazer sites



Learning from the PLACES study – first steps on a journey towards localized early language support



Working together – moving from silos to networks?



Let's get talking together

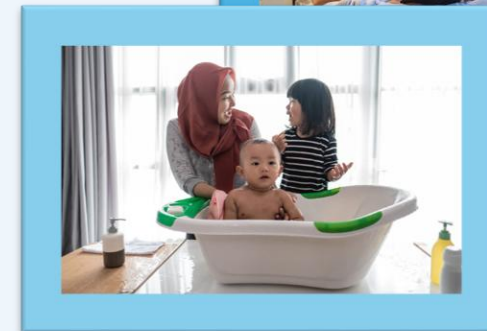
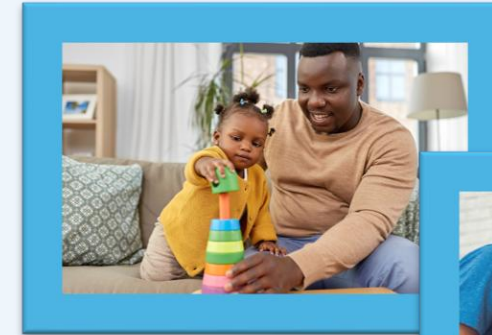
Promoting Local Access to Children's Early language and communication Support

Lindsay Pennington and Cristina McKean



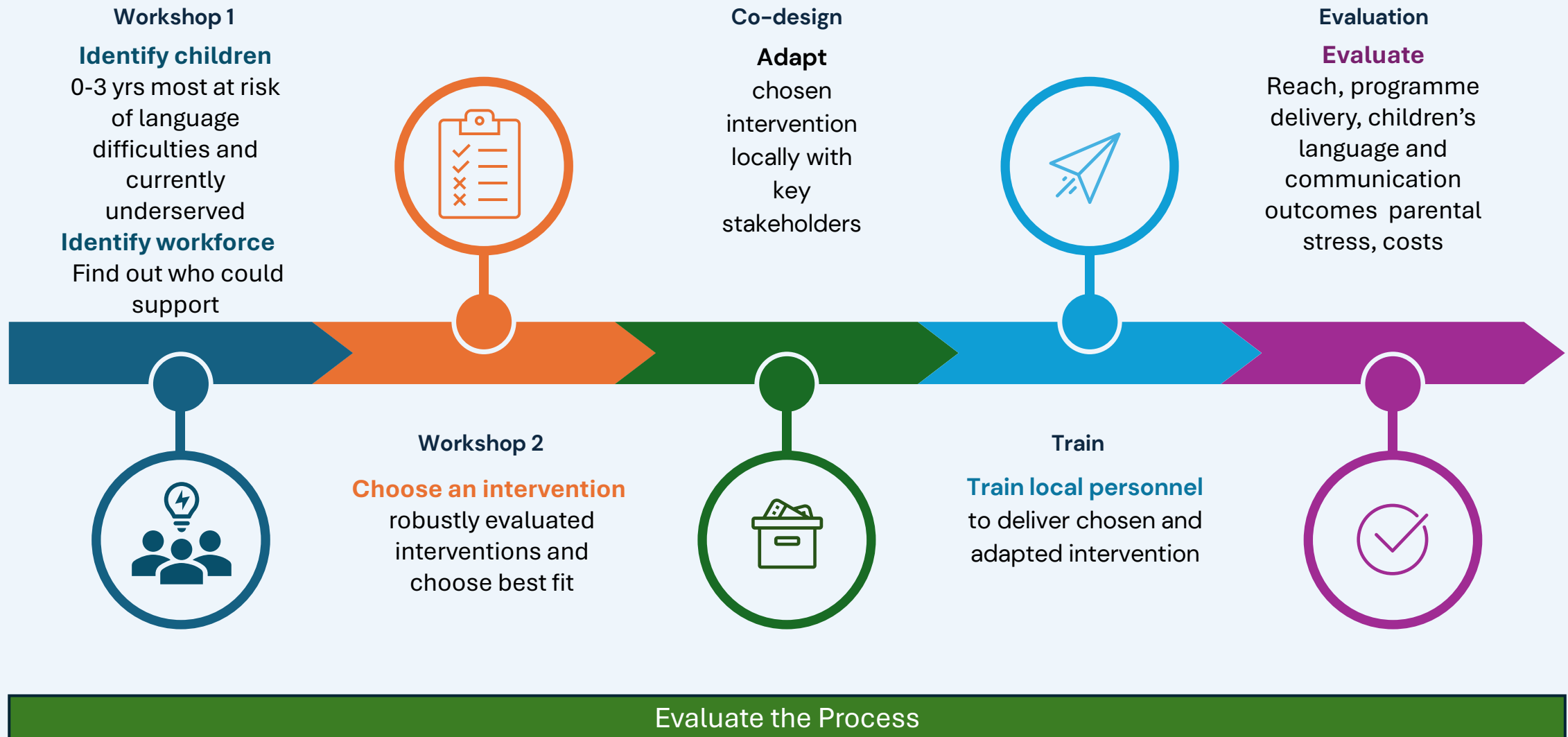
What were the key drivers of PLACES

- High levels of need and inequalities in access to support children 0 – 3 yrs
- Resource to support families is distributed and fragmented across complex and diverse systems
- Intervention evidence is patchy or an uncomfortable fit for populations and services



PLACES process

3 Local Authorities with differing populations and services

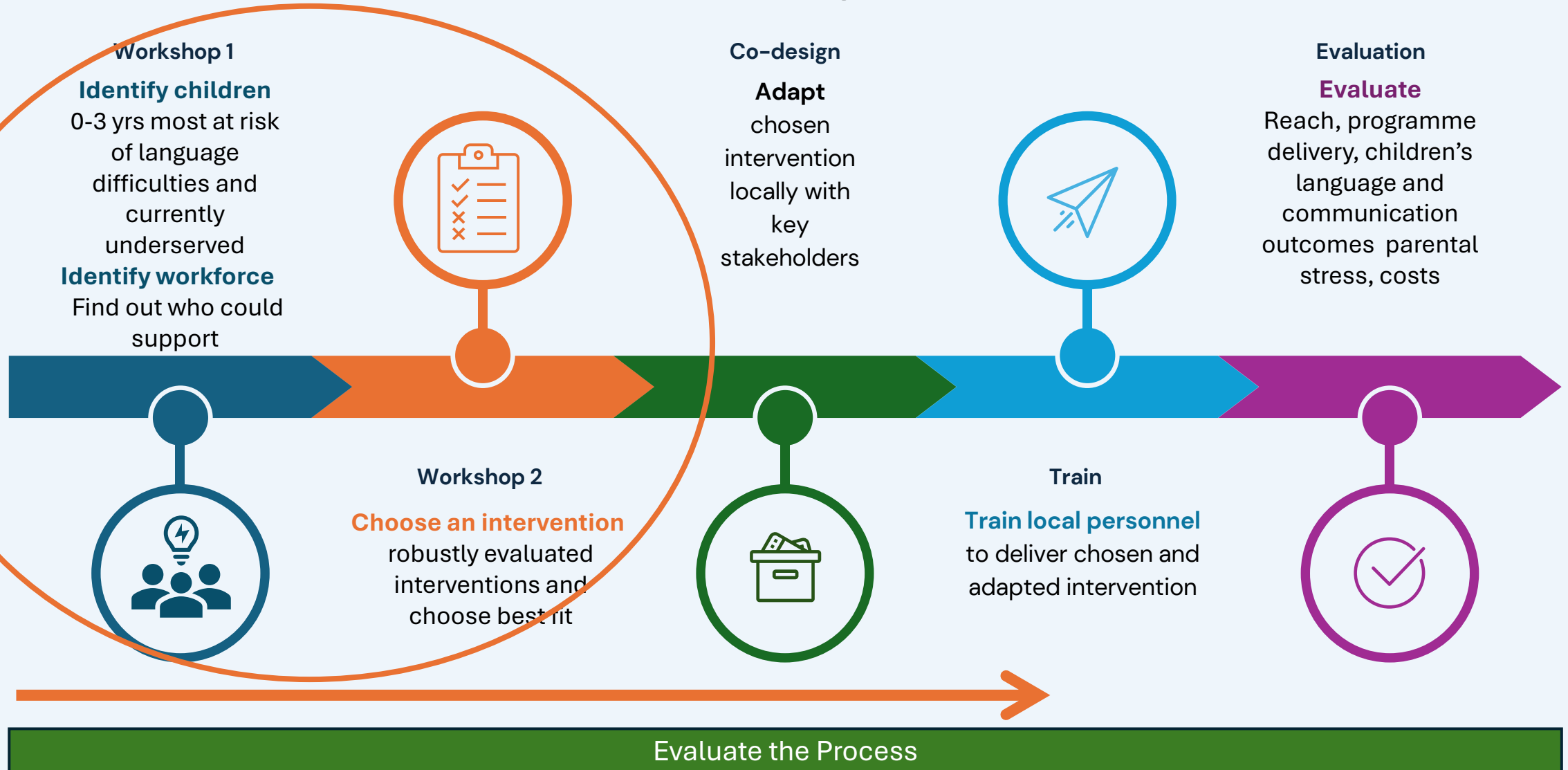


What do we hope to learn?

- Understand how multi-sector services can be configured within local authority areas to deliver high quality early language interventions to reduce inequalities in early language abilities
- Identify the factors which influence successful localised implementation of early language interventions for young children at risk of speech language and communication needs
- Create a framework to map types and locations of data needed to identify groups of children at risk of SLCN, current workforce and service access
- Create guidance for health, local authority and third sector services on how to select, adapt, implement and embed evidence based early language interventions

PLACES process

3 Local Authorities with differing populations and services





Let's get talking together

Workshop Phase - Interim Analysis

Lesley Ward and Tim Rapley

Cristina McKean and Lindsay Pennington





Key themes



Implications for the
implementation of
localised, evidence-based
early language support

Preparatory work is essential

- Finding the core team
- Reaching key stakeholders
- Understanding the context



A system working *beyond* capacity

- Change can feel impossible in a context of scarcity
- The ground moves beneath our feet – takes energy to just maintain
- **Essential to design the change to fit the community assets and challenges**





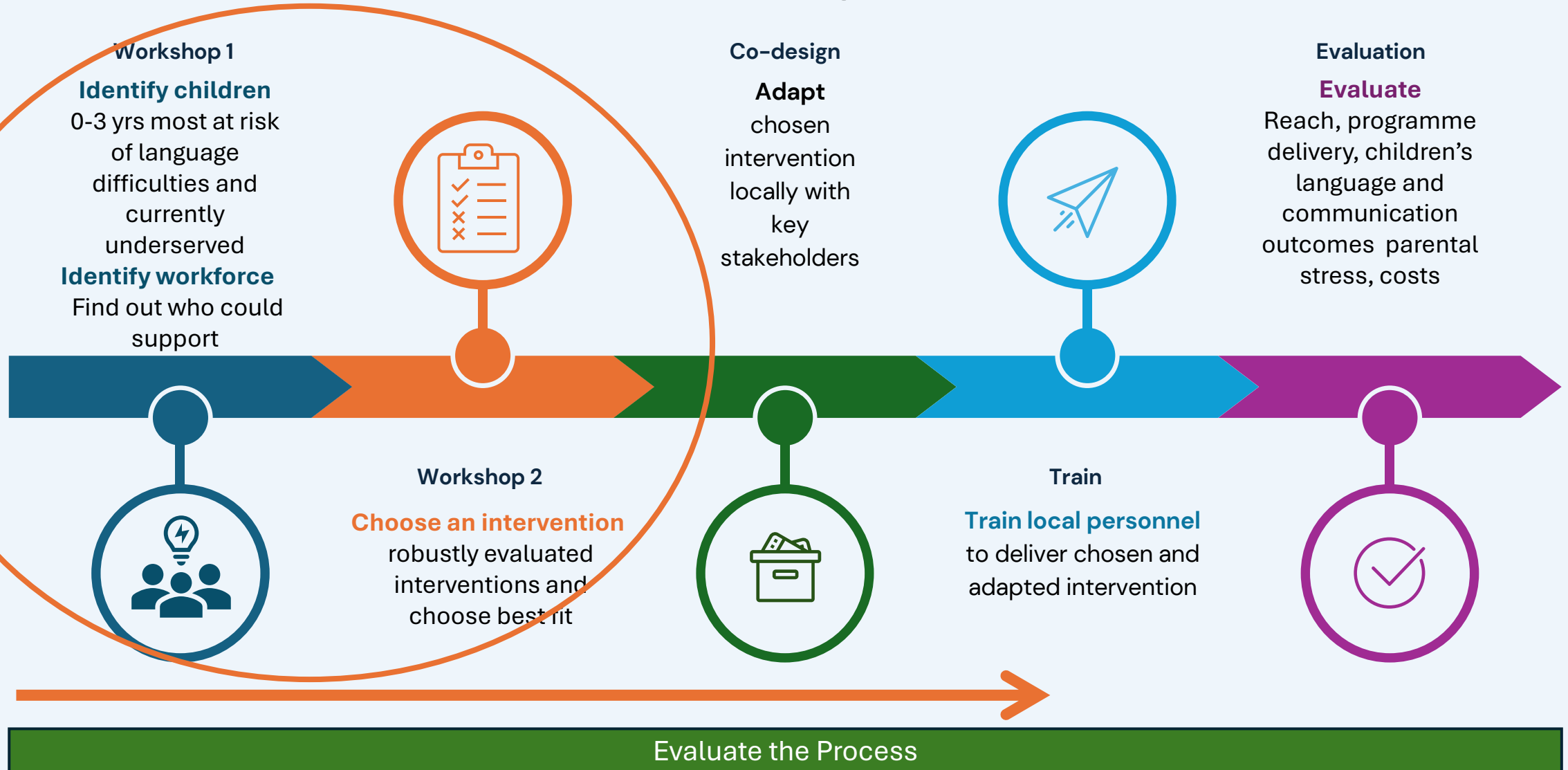
Key themes

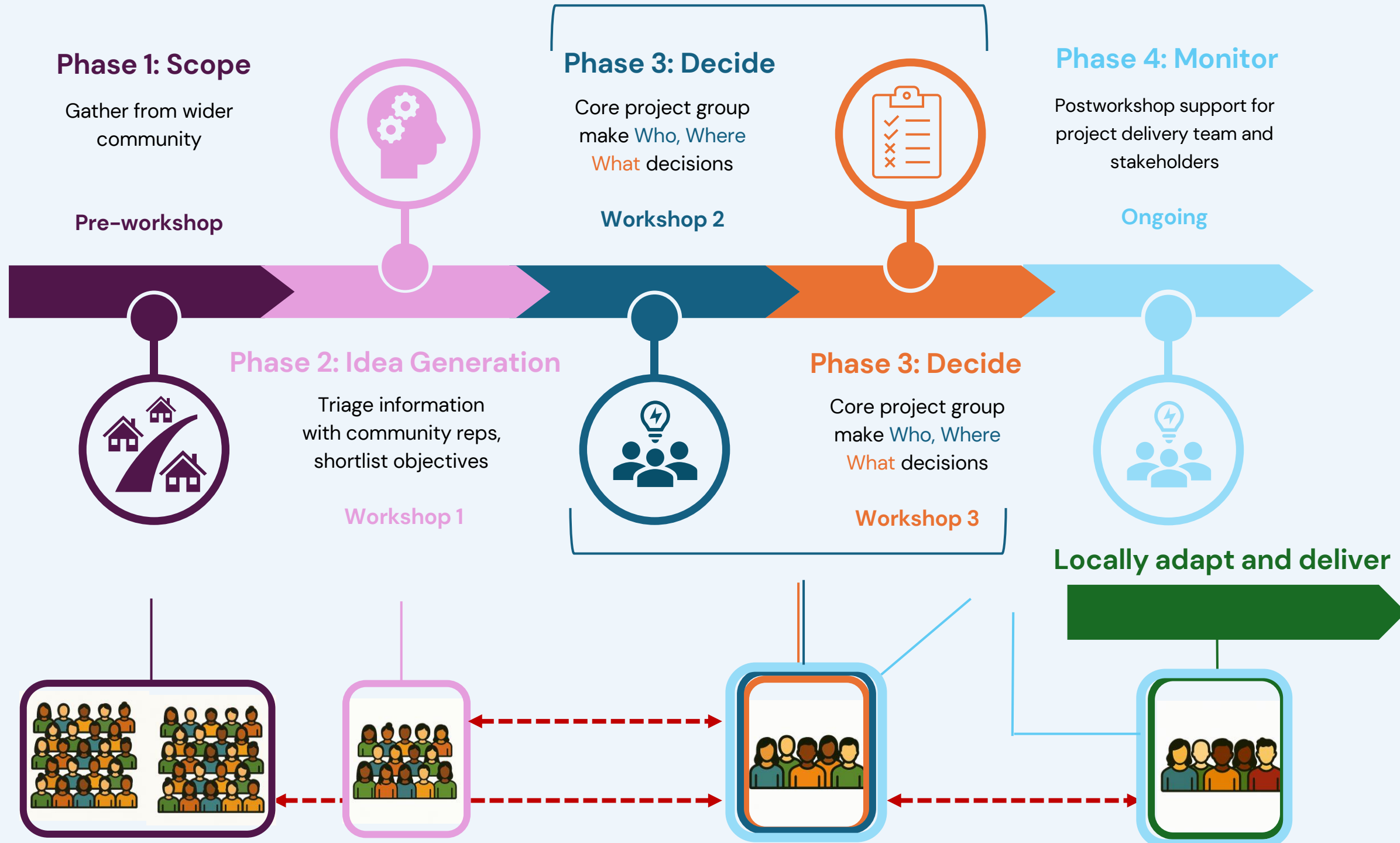


Implications for the
implementation of
localised, evidence-based
early language support

PLACES process

3 Local Authorities with differing populations and services





Phase 1: Scope

Gather from wider
community

Pre-workshop



Phase

*'Things are only as good as the
context in which they work.'*

Overview	• Community-based scoping phase • Lays the foundation for all subsequent phases • Most labour and time intensive of the four project phases • Appropriate time and resources should be scheduled into the project timeline
Stakeholders	• Broad range of individuals and organisations whose roles or experiences intersect with the proposed project space • Strategic, managerial, experiential (professionals and families) stakeholders
Aim	• Provide the context of the local EY environment through community information gathering and organisational data acquisition. • Context = current need, provision, strengths, engagement, gaps, and challenges
Outcome	• Information and data collated for the subsequent 'Idea generation' phase

Phase 1: Scope

Gather from wider community



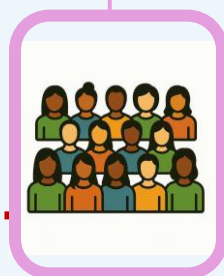
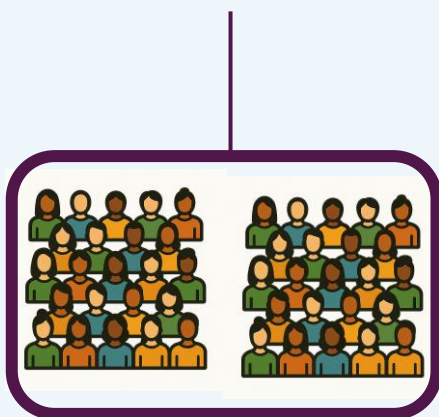
Pre-workshop



Phase 2: Idea Generation

Triage information with community reps, shortlist objectives

Workshop 1



“You want to make sure that you've encompassed everybody's views, opinions, and all the kind of knowledge or data or whatever it is, intelligence that they bring to the table.”

Overview	• Create a foundation of shared understanding of the local EY situation through collated information and knowledge exchange • This new lens offers the potential to highlight new community partnerships and action pathways to tackling long-standing issues
Stakeholders	• Representative selection of organisations/individuals identified as relevant to the project in Phase 1 • Same breadth, smaller number, of Phase 1 representation • Strategic, managerial, experiential (service providers and users) stakeholders
Aims	• Engage representative stakeholders to review the collated scoping information • Suggest and shortlist options for the early language project • Develop a draft project focus/objectives for the subsequent ‘Decision’ phase
Outcome	• Co-produced short-list of project focus/objectives streamlines the process of the subsequent ‘Decision’ phase

‘But you’re just taking people’s feedback in the first few sessions and then moving on to getting some of your key decision makers into a room. Where I would say for us, probably five or six people was ample.’

Overview	- Key parameters finalised by a core project development group: Who will receive the support Where will it be delivered and by whom What support will be delivered - Non-linear relationship between these Qns
Stakeholders	- Core group who have: - Strategic authority to approve the project - Managerial authority to drive the project - Experiential knowledge to deliver the project - Same breadth, smaller number, of Phase 1 and 2 representation
Aim	- Review the short-list of potential projects developed in the previous phase - Refine and finalise the project focus/objectives - Decide the Who, What, Where parameters of project delivery
Outcomes	Co-produced project objectives are ready for localised adaptation

Phase 3: Decide

Core project group
make **Who, Where**
What decisions

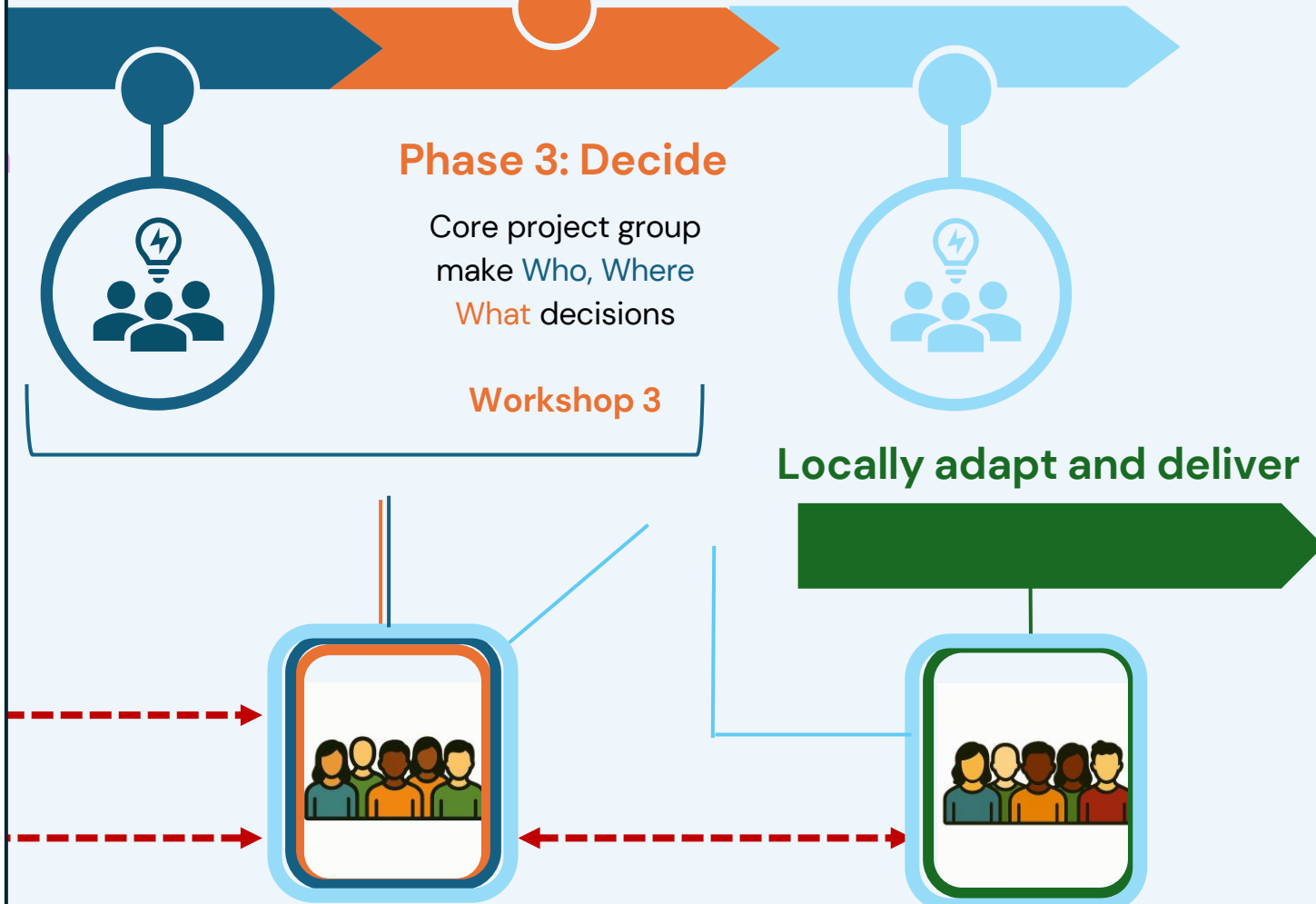


Workshop 2

Phase 4: Monitor

Postworkshop support for
project delivery team and
stakeholders

Ongoing



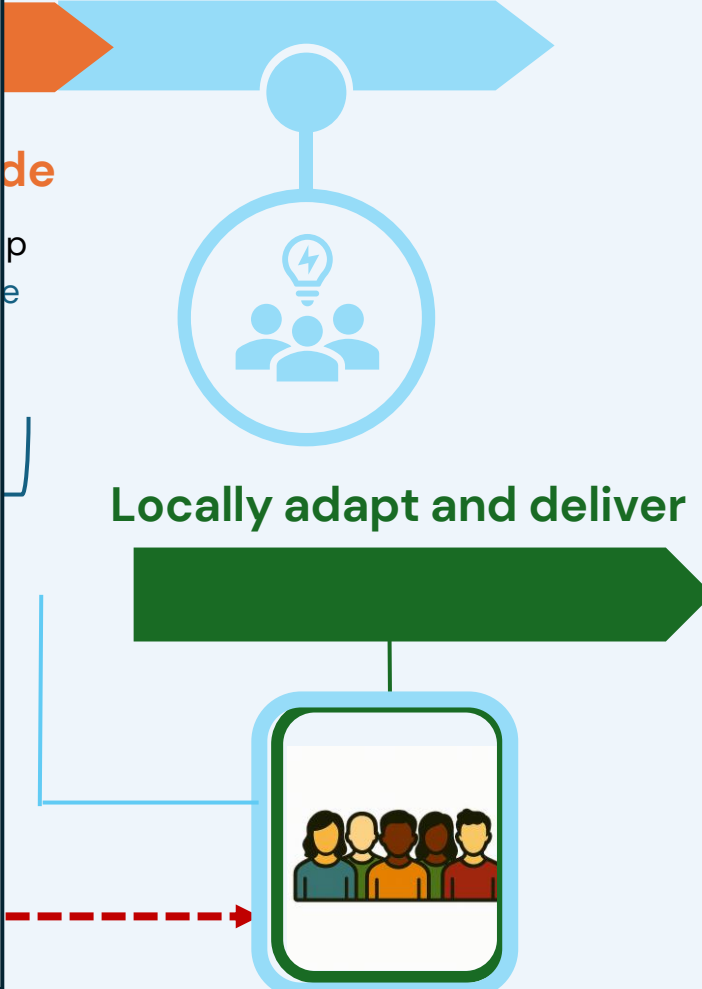
'The post event, the ongoing learning, the ongoing implementations. So sort of seeing a framework from conception through to delivery and evaluation and beyond, I think would be useful.'

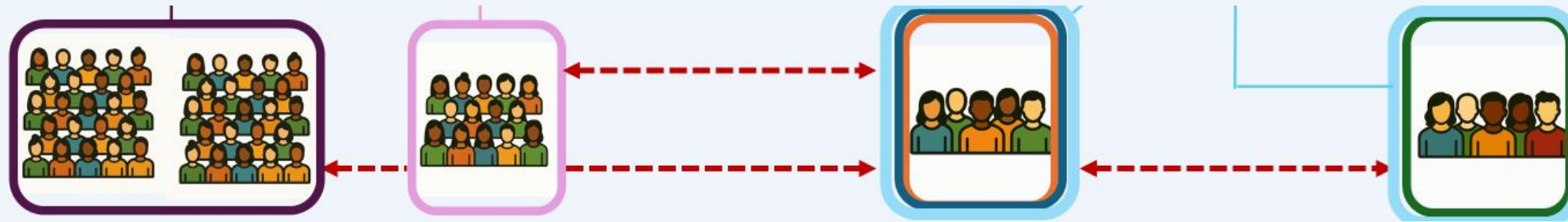
Overview	• Successful local delivery requires continual monitoring at an individual setting level • Monitoring provides a bridge for open engagement between the development and delivery stages of a project
Stakeholders	• Designated Core Group (Phase 3) representative(s) • Key project delivery stakeholders
Aim	• Maintain communication across the development and delivery stages of a project • Support fidelity of delivery • Identify key components/resources necessary for facilitating delivery
Outcomes	• Designated member(s) of the Phase 3 core project development group included in key meetings at the subsequent delivery stage • Summarised meeting minutes and action lists

Phase 4: Monitor

Postworkshop support for project delivery team and stakeholders

Ongoing

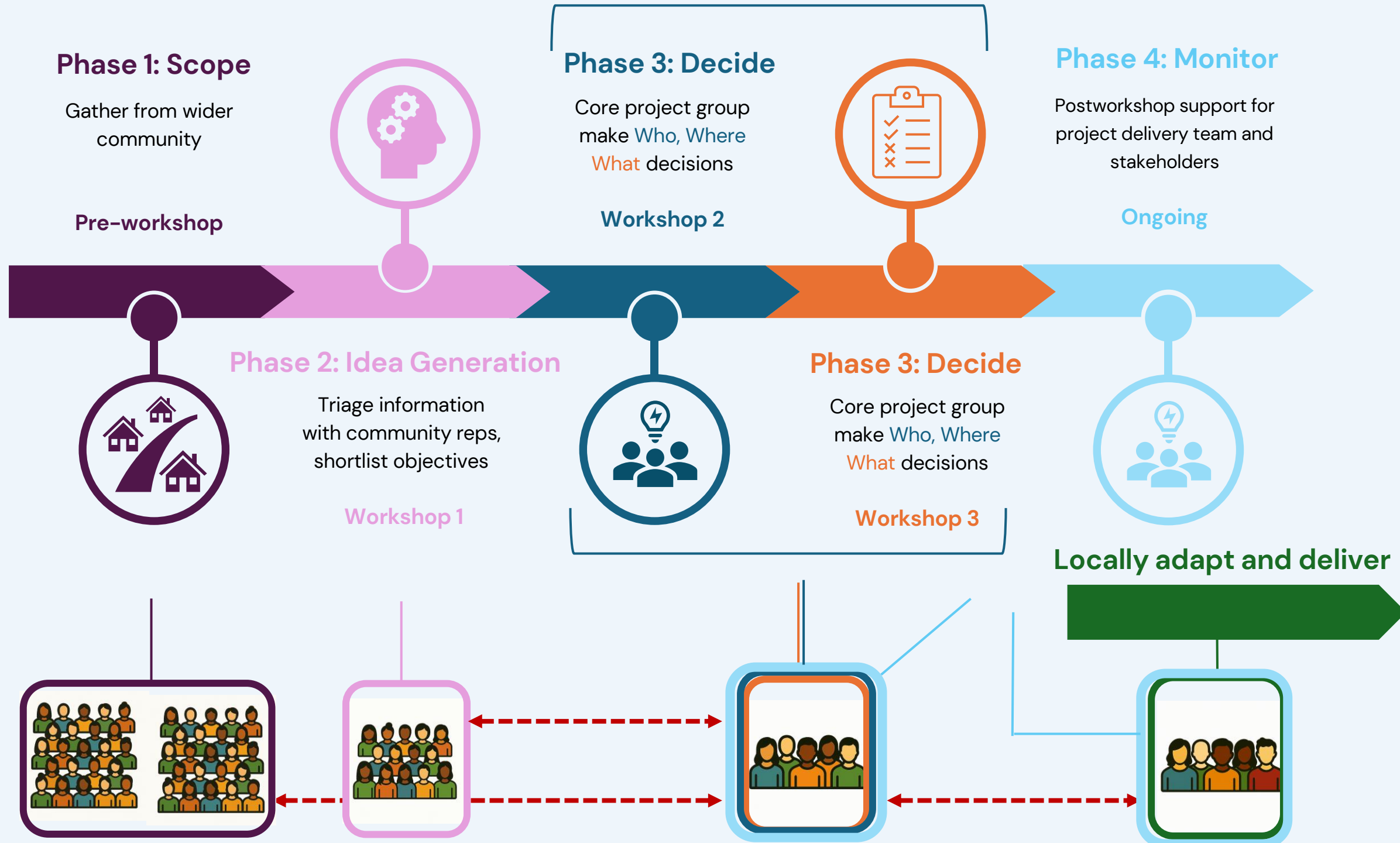




Feedback loops

Phase 3 Decide – this core group can and should loop back and out to the larger stakeholder groups to test their decisions with those who are likely to be delivering these decisions or experiencing changed services – balances equity of voice and decisiveness of action – (test and learn)

Phase 4 Monitor – the delivery group and core group should liaise and if necessary to nudge or facilitate progress – and to then loop further to wider stakeholder groups if needed – it may be that a test and learn approach means going back to the wider group to rethink or to identify more or different resource etc etc.....



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Learning from the PLACES study – first steps on a journey towards localized early language support



Working together – moving from silos to networks

Supporting stammering, speech, and language needs in the early years: a rapid evidence review with case studies on working together

Findings report

September 2025

Authors: McKean, C., Charlton, J., Knowland, V., Stringer, H., Thomas, U., Whelan, A., Millard, S., Levickis, P., Murray, L., Richardson, E.

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Research Report

A qualitative case study in the social capital of co-professional collaboration for children with speech, language and communication needs

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Abstract

Background: Effective co-practice is essential to deliver services for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The necessary skills, knowledge and resources are distributed amongst professionals and agencies. Co-practice is complex and a number of barriers, such as 'border disputes' and poor awareness of respective priorities, have been identified. However social-relational aspects of co-practice have not been explored in sufficient depth to make recommendations for improvements in policy and practice. Here we apply social capital theory to data from practitioners: an analytical framework with the potential to move beyond descriptions of socio-cultural phenomena to inform change.

Aims: Co-practice in a local authority site was examined to understand: (1) the range of social capital relations extant in the site's co-practice; (2) how these relations affected the abilities of the network to collaborate; (3) whether previously identified barriers to co-practice remain; (4) the nature of any new complexities that may have emerged; and (5) how inter-professional social capital might be fostered.

Methods & Procedures: A qualitative case study of SLCN provision within one local authority in England and its linked NHS partner was completed through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with professionals working with children with SLCN across the authority. Interviews, exploring barriers and facilitators to interagency working and social capital themes, were transcribed, subjected to thematic analysis using iterative methods and a thematic framework derived.

Outcomes & Results: We identified a number of characteristics important for the effective development of trust,



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Improving partnerships to improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities: qualitative findings from a mixed methods systematic review

Natalie Tyldesley-Marshall[†], Rebecca Johnson[¶], Janette Parr[†], Anna Brown[†], Iman Ghosh[¶], Amin Mehrabian[¶], Yen-Fu Chen[†] and Amy Grove^{¶*}

Warwick Evidence, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom

Background: Effective collaboration between different services is recommended by government policy for children and young people (CYP) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across many countries. In the UK, despite significant shifts in policy towards partnership working, there remains a scarcity of scientific evidence on how this should be achieved. This mixed methods systematic review examined interventions leading to improved service outcomes for multiagency working for CYP with SEND.

Method: Eleven databases generated a total of 7,473 results. Data from 137 selected studies were analysed. However, only qualitative research findings from thematic synthesis regarding key ingredients of effective partnership are reported.

Results: From these, five key ingredients for effective partnership working in SEND services were identified: (1) participation, and legitimacy to participate in a partnership; (2) personalisation and consultation with children, young people, and their families in designing and delivering services; (3) respectful communication, and feeling that involvement is valued; (4) preparation to be an

System Enablers

Sufficient resource for time to build relationships
Empowering leadership - supporting individual agency
Investment in building connection and relationships – preparing for and nurturing partnership
Service models and commissioning arrangements which enable flexibility

Shared values & beliefs

Child Language is a priority
Child and family at the Centre
Responsibility is shared
Collaboration adds value

Qualities of communication

Safe - to challenge and be vulnerable
Open honest respectful
Accessible and timely
Conversation
Formal and informal
Co-work – practical exchange

Cultures of collaboration

Negotiated ,distributed and flexible
Agency and autonomy
Strong individual relationships
Challenge hierarchies
Mutual respect
Understand how knowledge is distributed
Actively connecting

Safety - Trust – Reciprocity - Flexibility



Learning from the PLACES study – first steps on a journey towards localized early language support



Working together – moving from silos to networks

You are on an exciting path.....good luck
and let's keep talking!

