

# Child Agency

OT Australia Conference  
25-27 June 2025



# Our Approach

- Ensuring children's goals were represented
- Considering the broader context of child agency
- Creating tools and resources to use with children and families
- Supporting staff to deliver resources effectively
- Embedding the rollout in existing organisational support systems



# Outcomes for the Child Agency Project

- **Child:**
  - Understand our involvement
  - 'Voice' in all parts of visits/intervention
  - Goals are important and meaningful for the child
  - Voice is present in stakeholder discussions
- **Caregiver:**
  - Understand their perspectives and values
  - Ongoing and changes as needs change
- **Staff:**
  - Understanding and belief in child agency
  - Practice is consistent with this





# Initial data

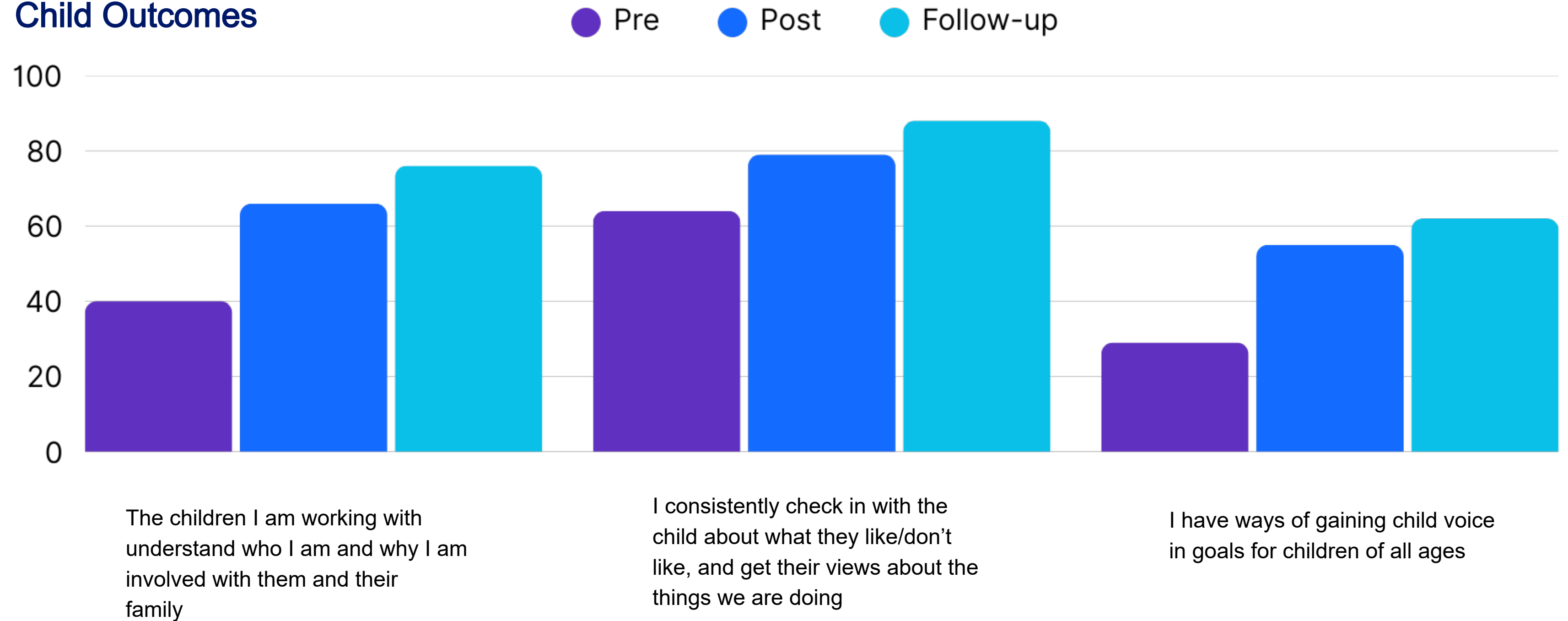
## Key findings:

- Less than half of staff felt children understood their role and involvement in the program.
- While many staff adjusted sessions based on child feedback, fewer actively sought it, suggesting a more passive approach.
- Only 43% of staff felt confident discussing child involvement with children and caregivers.
- Some children were involved in providing feedback in visits, however most children were not involved in joint planning in visits.



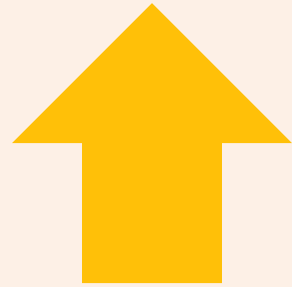
# What changes have been reported?

## Child Outcomes



# What changes have been reported?

## Caregiver Outcomes



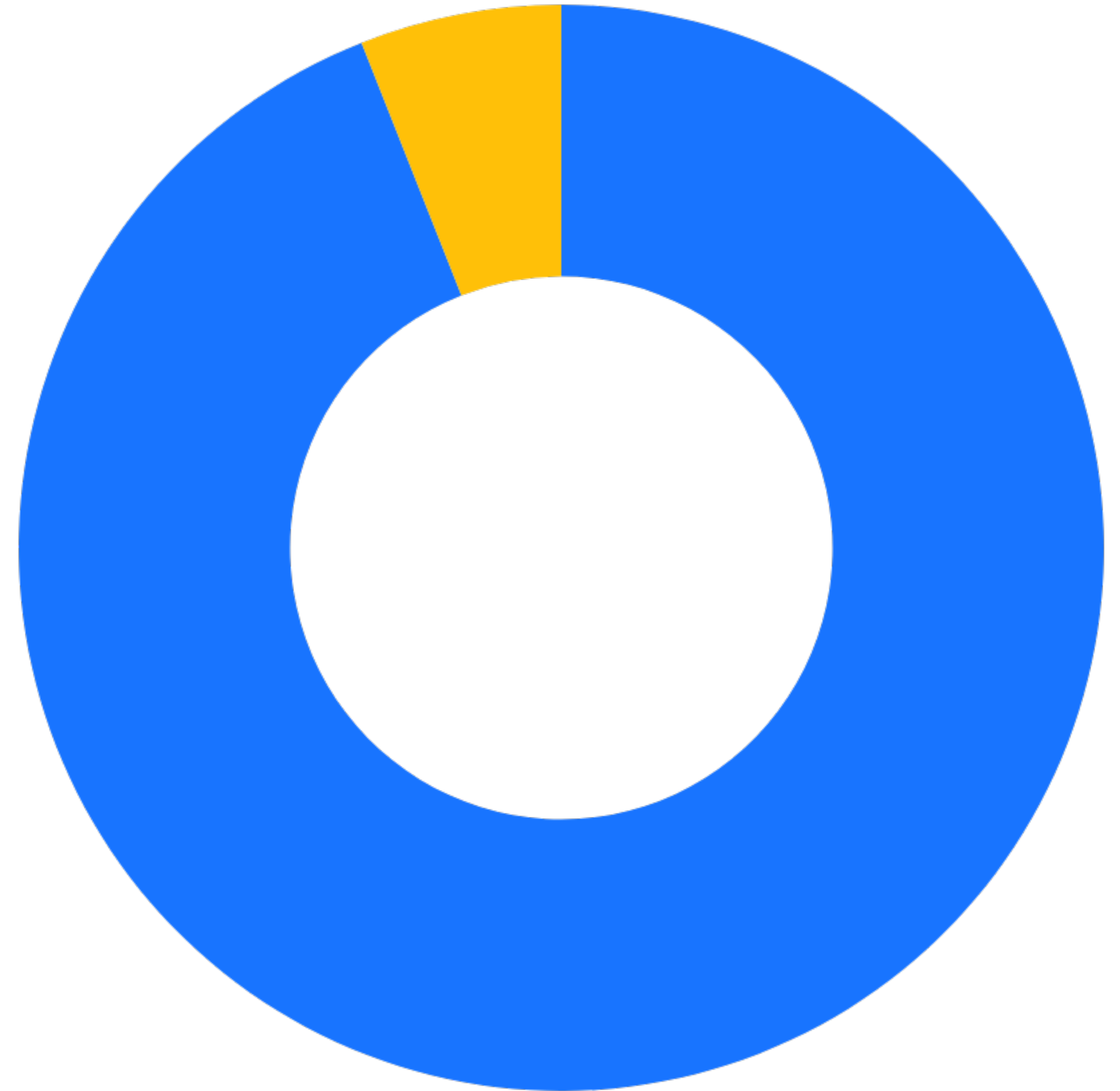
60% of staff now  
exploring caregiver's  
views of Child Agency



69% of staff are ensuring  
the child's voice is  
included in discussions  
with stakeholders (e.g.  
schools, NDIS)

## Staff Outcomes

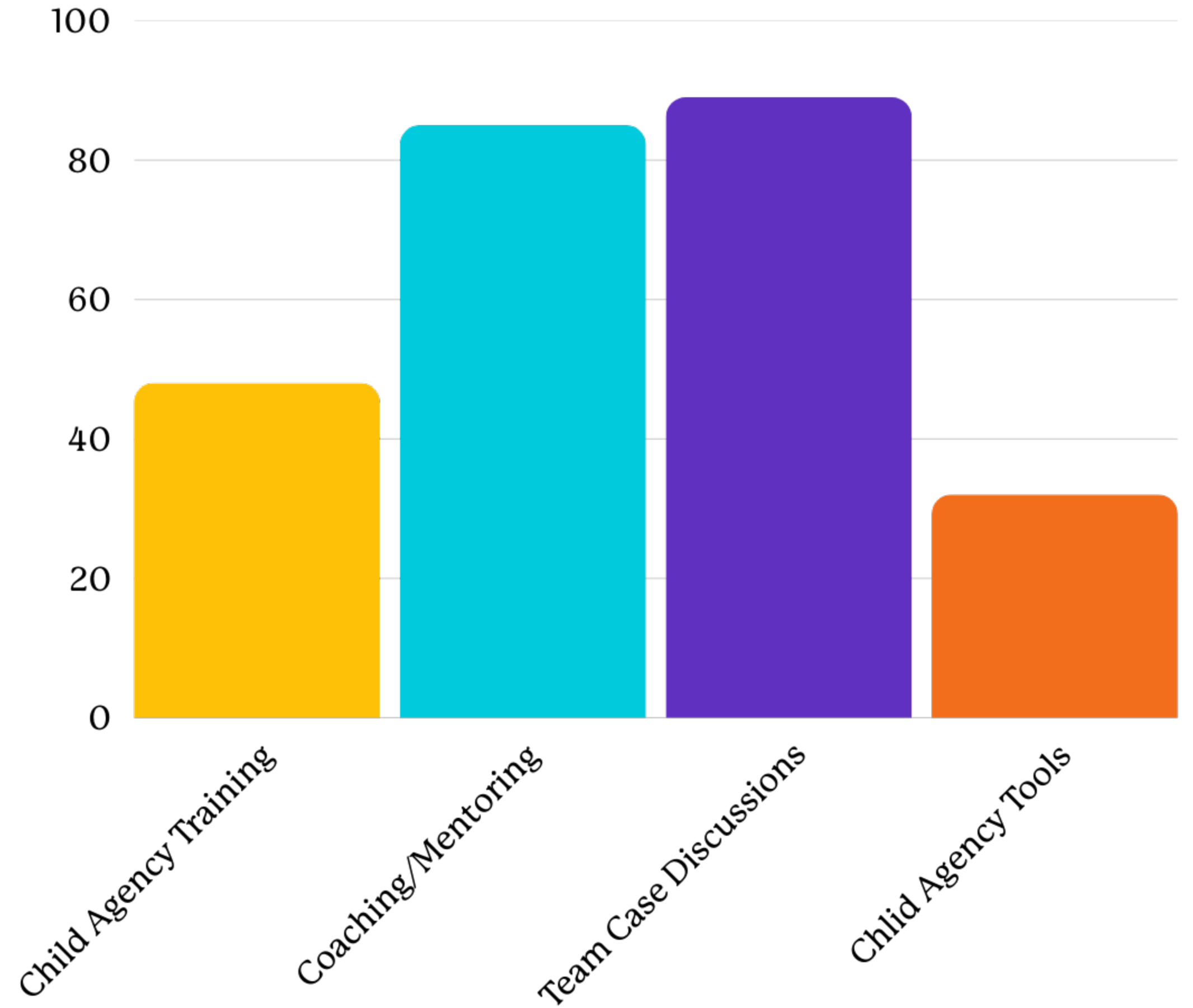
I understand  
how Child  
Agency relates  
to my work



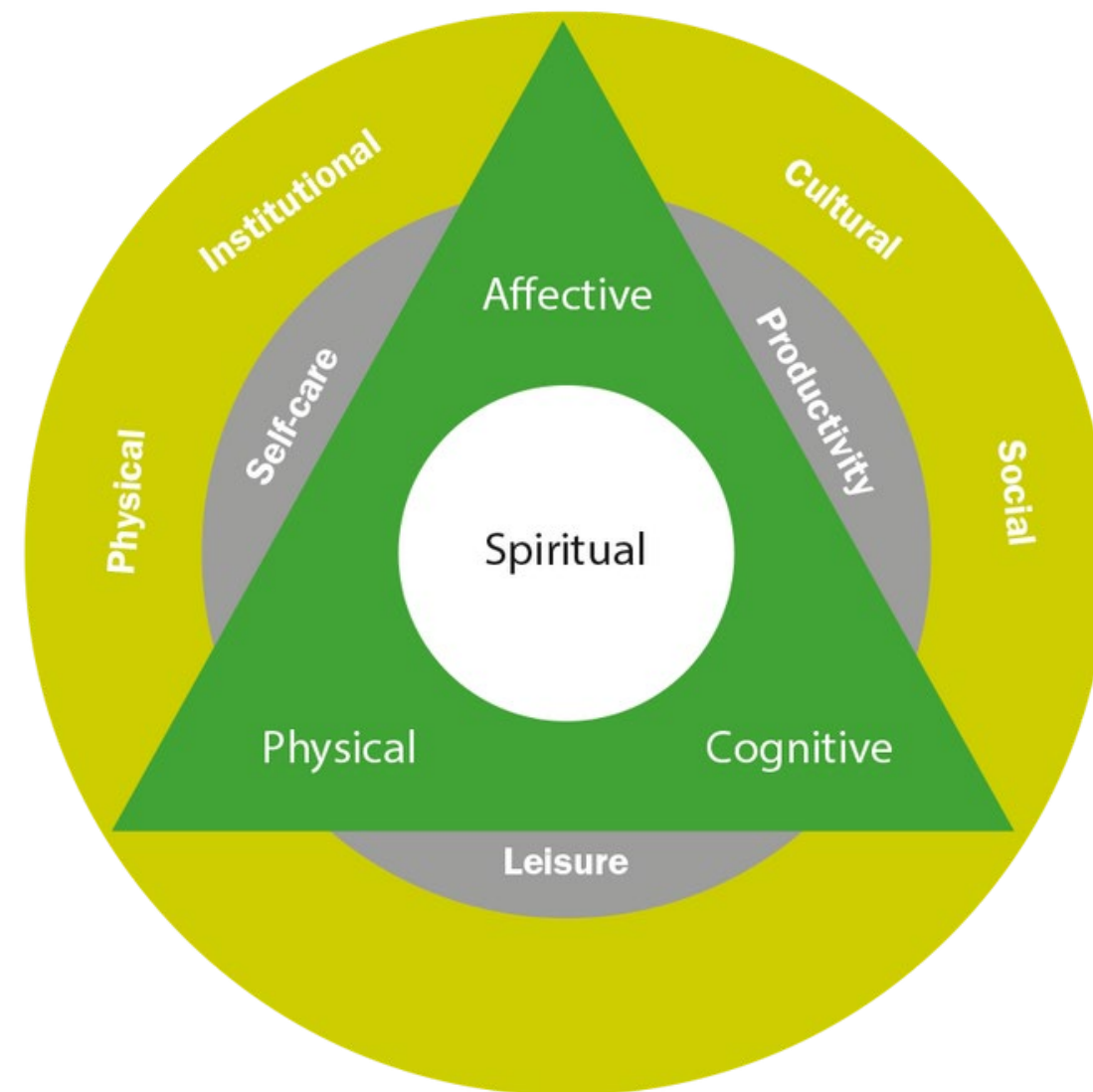


## Staff Outcomes

What is currently supporting you in ensuring child agency is an ongoing part of your practice?



# Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement



Person
  Occupation
  Environment

The Canadian Model of Occupation, Performance and Engagement or CMOP-E (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007)

- **Child:/Person is at the centre**
  - Family/caregivers, educators, teachers, siblings, friends sit in the social environment
- **The interrelationship between Person, Occupation and Environment is needed for Occupational Performance**
  - The child needs to be included for choice and performance in meaningful occupations.
  - Motivation and engagement increases when the child is included to support this interrelation

***Client Centred and Family Centred  
Practice is key to outcomes***



# What does this look like?



# What are children working with us telling us?

“ Fun and  
relationships are  
important ”

“ I’m sad that we  
didn't get to play  
together today. ”

“ I had lots of fun  
and my favourite  
thing was to do  
my laces. ”

“ I’d like to  
spend time together  
in the sandpit next  
visit. ”

What are children working with us telling us? (cont).

“ I want say in when  
visits happen  
(to minimise missing out  
on important things) ”

“ I’m sad I missed out  
on writing about  
Meerkats in class. ”

“ I don't want to  
miss morning tea  
play. ”

“ I enjoyed  
missing the  
objects game. ”

## What are the children working with us telling us? (cont.)

“ We want to work  
on things that are  
not too easy and not  
too hard! ”

“ It helped having something  
to play with (play doh, sensory  
toy) while we talked about  
tricky subjects. ”

“ Next time I want to  
try and get further to get to  
the bottom of the page  
with writing in the future. ”

“ It felt like the school  
passport questions were a  
quiz but enjoyed the  
growth mindset activities. ”

## What are the children working with us telling us? (cont.)

“ We want to work  
on goals that are specific  
and functional ”

“ I’ll be able to climb  
up the rock wall (all  
the way up) in the park  
by myself. ”

“ I’ll read the  
78 Storey Treehouse  
Book by the end of  
January 2025. ”

“ I’ll rollerskate for  
10 minutes without  
falling over. ”

We realised we'd been  
having all these  
conversations about diet but  
had not included him...  
*Child with a diagnosis of  
Prader-Willi syndrome- lifelong  
dietary management*

He's taking more ownership  
for our work and making his  
own goals  
*Speech Pathologist working  
with a schoolaged child*

A 'revelation'  
*Parent using it with 6 children  
not just the one receiving  
services previously labelled  
with PDA*

He's shared information I  
wasn't aware of before  
*Occupational Therapist  
exploring goals with a child*

Child agency supports participation in meaningful occupations and better outcomes



# About the Presenters

## **Danica Smith**

Occupational Therapist / Discipline Specific Mentor

[danica.smith@noahsarkinc.org.au](mailto:danica.smith@noahsarkinc.org.au)

## **Kylie Matusewicz**

Practice Coach / Psychologist

[kylie.matusewicz@noahsarkinc.org.au](mailto:kylie.matusewicz@noahsarkinc.org.au)

Working intentionally to  
support child agency is  
important for children  
now and for their future