

Gladstone Region Wellbeing
2025 Evaluation Report
December 2025



Gladstone Region engaging in action Together acknowledges the Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng and Taribelang Bunda peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work and learn.

We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and would like to extend this respect to all other First Nations peoples.

We recognise First Nations peoples' knowledge and continuing connection to land, place, and waters.

Our community's vision is to achieve opportunity, equity, and quality of life for everyone. Together, with every voice, we can create a better future.



Together in Action...a celebration of local stories - February 2025

Executive Summary

The Gladstone Region Wellbeing 2025 Evaluation Report presents findings from the second annual evaluation of Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT). GRT is a community-led, place-based collective impact initiative working to improve outcomes for children aged 0-5 years and their families across the Gladstone Region.

This evaluation captures progress during an early and developmental phase of implementation. As expected for long-term systems change work, population-level wellbeing outcomes are not yet evident. At this stage, the evaluation focuses on what can be credibly assessed: the extent to which the enabling conditions of change are strengthening, how systems supporting children and families are working better together (improved coordination and integration), and if the community is better positioned to influence outcomes over time.

Across the focus areas of GRT, the evaluation finds emerging evidence of early systems change. These changes are necessary precursors to long-term impact and reflect a maturing collective impact initiative.

Evaluation identifies the following contributions:

- Strengthened cross-sector collaboration and trust
- More effective shared decision-making and governance
- Enhanced data capability, shared measurement and collective learning
- Increased workforce confidence, cultural capability, and alignment around local priorities.

Together, these shifts indicate greater system readiness to act collectively, learn, and respond over time.

Key Findings by Focus Area

Our families have access to housing

The establishment of the Housing Round Table and co-designed regional Housing Strategy has supported cross-sector collaboration, shared planning, and long-term system readiness, reflecting a more coordinated and strategic response to housing challenges. While population indicators such as rental stress and homelessness have not yet improved, partnership maturity and alignment position the region to influence sustainable housing outcomes over time.

Our families have access to employment

With the local unemployment rate remaining above the Queensland average in 2025, there has been growing recognition that barriers exist in the systems that enable workforce participation including housing, childcare, and family supports. Community's decision has been to first strengthen these enabling conditions, and then support more coordinated pathways to employment over time.

Our parents have parenting confidence, healthy lifestyles and access to supports

Investment in sector capacity building, including programs such as Childhood Builders and First Nations-Led Trauma-Informed Training, has improved practitioner confidence, cultural capability, and collaborative practice across services. Although population-level indicators show mixed trends (e.g. domestic violence orders and child protection substantiations), local collaborative efforts represent early system changes that are enhancing the quality, consistency, and responsiveness of support available to families.

We are connected to self-identity, culture and community

Community-led efforts of the First Nations Working Group and Rites of Passage event have supported cultural identity, connection, and youth leadership, reflecting meaningful collaboration and empowerment. These efforts demonstrate growing trust, self-determination, and recognition of cultural knowledge as central to wellbeing, contributing to stronger community cohesion and long-term change.

Our children have quality early educational support

Collaboration among early childhood education and care (ECEC) services achieved 100% participation in local data collection, signaling a shift from competition to collective action. While childhood developmental vulnerability increased in 2024 and early education access remains challenging for some families, strengthened data capability and coordination among ECEC services are improving visibility of system pressures and enabling more targeted responses for children and families.

Our children have a healthy start to life

Collaboration between health, early learning, and community services has supported referral pathways, integration, and shared understanding of how to meaningfully support families in the early years. Although key health indicators (e.g. maternal health and childhood immunisation) remain below desired levels, early signs of system change for a healthy start to life are emerging through system collaboration and coordination, laying the groundwork for long-term improvements.

To date, over \$6 million has been invested in the Gladstone Region through the Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) initiative funded by Government, philanthropic and local investment, with an additional \$1.8 million projected for 2025-2026. Beyond financial investment, community members and partners have contributed thousands of hours to shaping local and statewide strategies.

Alongside this work, a range of new roles and programs have emerged across the community, including Family Support Coordinators and an Early Childhood Coordinator. As a ripple effect from GRT's early community engagement and partnerships, these developments reflect a broader shift influenced by increased collaboration, shared priorities and system alignment. In parallel, the GRT initiative has supported service innovation, including the co-designed Salvation Army Data Dashboard, which has strengthened service delivery and supported successful funding applications.

Overall, the 2025 Annual Evaluation confirms that while measurable wellbeing outcomes will take time, GRT is facilitating the right work at the right stage, and the initiative is strengthening the conditions required for long-term change and collective impact. Moving forward, the challenge is not activity or effort but maintaining realistic expectations about the pace of systems change.



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Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT) is a community-led, place-based social change initiative with the vision of *opportunity, equity and quality of life for everyone in the Gladstone Region*. Gladstone is a Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) demonstration community, receiving funding from the Australian and Queensland Governments to create better futures for children and families.

Purpose and Context

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this report is to summarise findings of the 2025 Gladstone Region Wellbeing Annual Evaluation Workshop. The findings are reported against indicators identified in the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Measurement Framework.

In the 2024 Annual Evaluation Workshop, outcomes could not yet be assessed due to early implementation of the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan. Instead, baseline population-level data was analysed by the newly established Data and Evaluation Working Group.

In 2025, the Annual Evaluation Workshop marked GRT's second evaluation activity and reflected growing momentum in implementing the Action Plan and system readiness for collective action. Throughout the year, the Data and Evaluation Working Group met quarterly, building capability to review and interpret data and project outcomes in preparation for the Annual Evaluation Workshop. The 2025 evaluation brought together population-level data, local service level insights and storytelling to assess early indicators of change in the context of GRT's contributions. This report outlines the findings of the 2025 Annual Evaluation, with a particular focus on enabling conditions.

Evaluation is a critical element of the GRT initiative, providing evidence of how collective community efforts are influencing wellbeing outcomes in the Gladstone Region.



Gladstone is a vibrant and ever-changing city full of people coming and going with different wants and needs. GRT undertakes the critical task of capturing and measuring what is important to this community, allowing the Data and Evaluation Working Group to help oversee the translation of this data into genuine local knowledge that helps drive the Gladstone Region forward with purpose.

- James Harris, Data and Evaluation Working Group Member.



Audience

This report is developed for the Gladstone Region community* and [partners](#) of GRT. Secondary audiences include those who may be interested in the value of place-based, community-led, collective impact approaches including other community-led, place-based initiatives, funders, partners, service providers and researchers.

The GRT SPSP initiative covers the Gladstone Local Government Area (LGA) which encompasses 10 [Statistical Area Level 2 \(SA2\)](#) regions and spans 10,484 square kilometres within Central Queensland.

**Note, GRT's definition of 'community' includes everyone who lives in, participates in, is impacted by, or impacts on life in the Gladstone Region.*

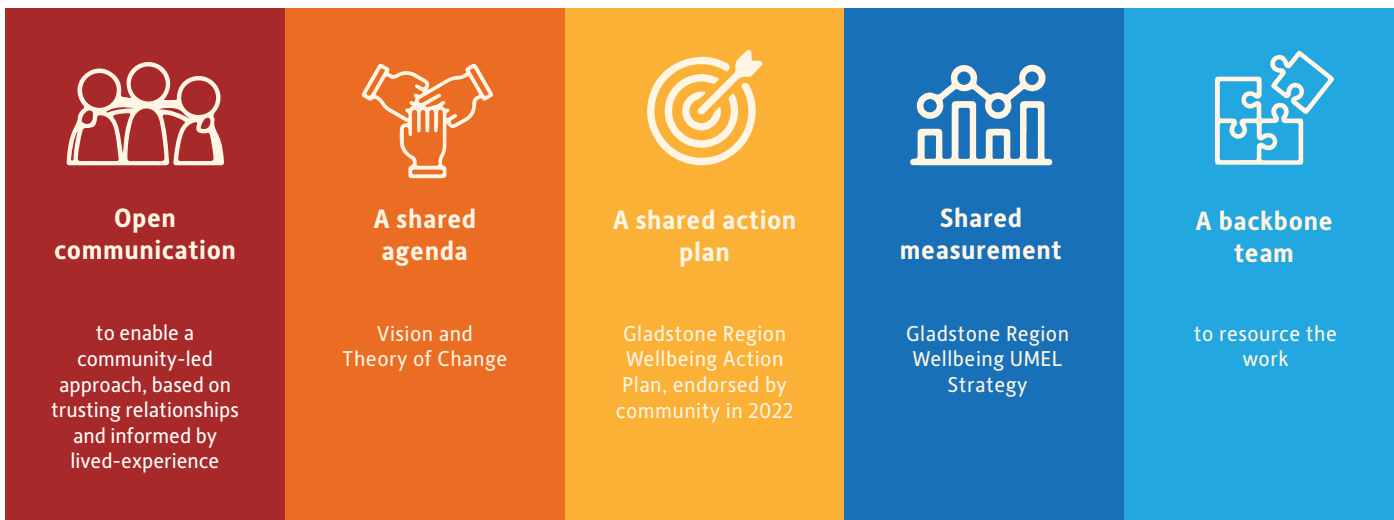
The Gladstone Region

Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, and Taribelang Bunda Country



Collective Impact Approach

GRT utilises a [Collective Impact](#) approach to creating change. The Collective Impact Model includes five key elements:



Theory of Change

GRT's [Theory of Change](#) captures community-identified priority areas of focus to improve outcomes for children aged 0-5 years old (prep age) and families to achieve the collective vision of *opportunity, equity and quality of life for everyone*.

Evidence-based research shows that the trajectory of a child's lifelong access to opportunity can be influenced by childhood disadvantage. Based on current data and community stories, not all children in the Gladstone Region have the same opportunity to thrive. Children thrive when they feel valued, loved and safe, have access to life's basics, are starting school ready to learn, participate within the community, and have a positive sense of culture and identity. Increasing opportunities for our children strengthens the wellbeing of our whole community and supports a brighter future for the Gladstone Region.

GRT focuses on prevention and early intervention to strengthen the foundations that support children and families. The initiative recognises that meaningful, lasting change requires collective action, with community, services and government working together rather than in isolation to understand local issues, share decision-making, and enable change. This work requires transparency, storytelling, adaptability, trust, courage and creativity to change entrenched norms, respond to changing environments and act together for a

better future. These are the conditions required (*Enabling Conditions*) for change. The social service system plays an integral role in the outcomes of families and children. When local services struggle to meet the demands of the community, *System Support* is required to improve the health of the system to enable the right support at the right time for children and families.

Working together can help our community access housing and employment, stay connected to culture and each other, and feel confident and supported as parents to live healthy lifestyles. It also ensures children get a healthy start to life and the quality early education they need to thrive. These supports represent the change elements, or *Early Indicators*, that contribute to *Long-term Population-level Outcomes*. These outcomes include families having access to life's basics, feeling independent, and having purpose. They also include children feeling safe, happy and loved, growing up at home with their families, and beginning school ready to learn and on track to thrive.

Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan

The objectives of GRT's Theory of Change are activated through the [Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan](#). In 2022, the Gladstone Region community endorsed the community-designed Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan, as reflective of the issues, impacts and solutions that they had identified and discussed over a two-year period, and as the collectively agreed way forward to achieve the shared long-term desired outcomes.

During and since that time, community has been actively working on developing and implementing initiatives identified as priorities in the Action Plan, each at various stages of project planning and delivery. The Action Plan is being implemented by local Working Groups and supported by GRT's Backbone Team. These [projects](#) each have measures linked to the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Measurement Framework to evaluate the extent to which change is occurring, and outcomes are improving for children and families.



Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (UMEL)

The [Gladstone Region Wellbeing UMEL Strategy](#) helps our community understand how we're growing, learning, and working together to support children and families. It brings together four important elements-**Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (UMEL)**, so we can see not only *what* is changing, but *why* it matters to the people who call Gladstone home.

At its heart, the UMEL Strategy shows how community-led, place-based action is making a difference. It helps us build shared knowledge through both stories and data, so everyone including families, services, partners, and community members can see the progress we're making together. It supports thoughtful, evidence based decision-making, keeps us accountable to the outcomes we care about, and builds momentum for our shared vision for a thriving Gladstone Region.

The Strategy recognises the many factors that shape wellbeing, especially the social determinants of health. It aligns our local approach with evidence based frameworks such as Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth ([ARACY](#)) [Nest Wellbeing Framework](#) and [The Common Approach®](#), ensuring our indicators reflect what matters most for children and families across the six wellbeing domains.

We know that improved outcomes can emerge in many ways. Sometimes directly through a program or project, and sometimes indirectly, as the community inspires, enables or activates

changes that would not have happened otherwise. This means every story, every partnership, and every small shift in practice contributes to a bigger picture of positive change.



Ultimately, the success of this community-led initiative is reflected in how wellbeing improves for children, families and the broader community over time. The indicators within the UMEL Strategy, shaped in partnership with the community and summarised in the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Measurement Framework, help us track this change in a way that is meaningful, transparent, and grounded in what the people of Gladstone have said matters most.



Gladstone Region Wellbeing Workshop - January 2024

Gladstone Region Wellbeing Measurement Framework



The [Gladstone Region Wellbeing Measurement Framework](#) includes indicators designed by community to measure outcomes resulting from projects of the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan. The Measurement Framework summarises the indicators identified in the UMEL Strategy to assess change across four categories of focus:



Enabling Conditions of Change



System Support



Early Indicators of Change



Long-Term Population Impact Outcomes

Enabling Conditions help assess dynamics and interactions between stakeholders in the system, measuring factors such as transparency, adaptability, trust, courage, and participation, that enable a collective impact approach to be effective and the system to function.

System Support includes key performance indicator (KPI) style project measures to ensure that projects designed to improve the health of the system are achieving the identified goals and objectives they set out to achieve. The overall aim is for the system to include the right balance of supply and demand, enabling the right support at the right time for our children and families. It also requires the right mix of supports to ensure access to effective prevention and the earliest possible intervention strategies.

Early Indicators of Change utilise local and population-level data to measure participation of families and children in preventative activities and protective behaviours that enable wellbeing.

Long-Term Population Impact Outcomes measure our overall community wellbeing, assessing our progress and our effectiveness in ensuring our families have access to life's basics, feel independent and have purpose, and our children feel safe, happy and loved growing up at home with their families, and are starting school ready to learn and on track to thrive.

The GRT Evaluation Cycle

Evaluation involves developing and answering key evaluation questions using evidence. Measuring outcomes and evaluating change are important elements of the Gladstone Region Wellbeing UMEL Strategy.

Learning leverages both measurement and evaluation findings to inform strategy, practice and delivery adaptation to enable continuous improvement.

Short Evaluation Cycles

Short evaluation cycles involve deep-dive sessions on data, woven together with storytelling about topic specific working group activities and the implementation of interventions and solutions. These cycles assess whether collective actions are making a difference in shifting the dial on wellbeing. Short cycles occur through quarterly meetings with the Data and Evaluation Working Group.

Long Evaluation Cycles

The long evaluation cycle involves the Data and Evaluation Working Group undertaking a formal 'sense-making' process to weave data and insights together to address the key evaluation questions on an annual basis. To support participatory data synthesis, an Annual Evaluation Workshop is facilitated to co-interpret and analyse data, measuring the '*what*'*. An annual Evaluation Report summarises the findings and evaluation processes for the year.

**The 'what' refers to the actions taken to intervene, prevent or improve an issue or impact.*

The collective impact momentum of the GRT initiative is assessed through enabling conditions such as collaboration and trust, using an annual learning and planning cycle previously known as 'Progress Mapping and Learning Circle' to measure the 'how' (see below graphic). Whilst this process was not conducted in 2025 due to changes in SPSP reporting requirements, the Backbone Team completed internal review and forward planning to develop the 2025-2026 Activity Work Plan. During the 2025 Annual Evaluation Workshop, storytelling revealed shifts in the enabling conditions (the how), which were evaluated by focus area and incorporated into this report.

To learn more about GRT's Enabling Conditions, see Pages 7 and 10, or view GRT's [Theory of Change](#).



Measuring the 'How' - Progress Mapping

Community members come together each year to reflect on how the work is being done. This process, known as progress mapping, helps assess how effectively the collective impact approach is supporting this community-led, place-based effort (*the how*) to respond to local needs and drive positive social change.

Measuring the 'What' - Evaluation Cycle

As the community moves into implementing improvement projects, the evaluation cycle is expanding to measure outcomes. The key evaluation questions guide the annual evaluation cycle. This enables the community to measure what is changing as a result of the work (*the what*), particularly the outcomes of projects delivered through the community-designed Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan.

Data and Evaluation Working Group

In September 2024, GRT hosted an interactive Data and Evaluation Workshop to support the development of a place-based wellbeing evaluation process. Local data and evaluation practitioners collaborated to develop three Key Evaluation Questions for inclusion in the Gladstone Region Wellbeing UMEL Strategy.

Following the workshop, community members were invited to form a local Data and Evaluation Working Group. Twelve people expressed interest, and ten members completed induction workshops in October-November 2024. These sessions established the group's purpose and Terms of Reference, set the scope for evaluation cycles, built shared data literacy, and supported familiarisation with the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub and UMEL Strategy.

By November 2024, the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data and Evaluation Working Group was formally established. The group now leads the collective review, interpretation and sense making of wellbeing indicators to address the Key Evaluation Questions and track progress towards improved outcomes for children and families.

The [Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data and Evaluation Working Group](#) is made up of community members who bring their lived experience, local knowledge and passion for improving outcomes for children and families. While group members are not expected to be experts in every focus area, they play an important

role in asking thoughtful questions, exploring what the data is telling us, and helping our community understand if change is occurring as a result of the implementation of the community-led GRT initiative.

It is not the role or responsibility of the Working Group to implement the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan. Instead, the group helps shine a light on what is working well, where barriers or gaps may exist, and what further questions or correlations need to be explored. These reflections are then shared with other working groups so the whole community can continue learning, adapting, and taking action together.

In 2025, the Data and Evaluation Working Group held three meetings to conduct short-cycle evaluations, focusing on Domestic and Family Violence, Housing, Child Protection, Maternal Health, and Childhood Development. In November 2025, five new members were recruited and inducted into the Working Group to support participation and diversity.

The Data and Evaluation Working Group has an endorsed Terms of Reference with the following objectives:

1. To review, interpret and analyse data to answer the Key Evaluation Questions:

- *has the initiative improved wellbeing in the region across the focus areas of the Theory of Change that we intended to shift? Where have the results made a difference?*
- *is the impact effective, sufficient, sustainable and enduring? What improvements have been enabled in the systems?*
- *to what degree have the outcomes justified the investment?*

2. To record limitations and barriers in the evaluation process:

- *to identify further inputs for improved evaluation*
- *to develop questions for use by the Backbone Team and working groups, that support improved outcomes.*



2025 Evaluation Methodology

In December 2025, ten members of the Data and Evaluation Working Group participated in a six-hour workshop in Gladstone to conduct the long-cycle evaluation review.

The agenda included introductions, a review of the Terms of Reference, and a screening of [“What Surrounds Us Shapes Us: A Framework for Building Children’s Resilience”](#) by the Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP), establishing a child-focused context for the evaluation.

The Working Group conducted data analysis with integrated storytelling and insights shared by GRT’s Project Leads across key focus areas, concluding with a reflection session on the Key Evaluation Questions.

In addition to the evaluation findings, the activity reflects the initiative’s current stage of evaluation maturity. The focus remains on ‘developmental evaluation’ by building shared measurement capability, testing and refining approaches, and strengthening system readiness, rather than demonstrating impact achieved through long-term outcomes at this point in implementation.



Data and Evaluation Working Group Annual Workshop - November 2025

2025 Evaluation Findings



Our families have access to housing

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

The following indicators were reviewed and evaluated for change:

 Indicator	 Findings	 Source
↓ % rental stress	<i>No change since 2024 Evaluation:</i> ↑ Rental stress increased between 2011-2021 in the Gladstone Region, consistent with Queensland.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ %, rate of Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) clients	↑ Between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 financial years, the number of Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) clients aged 0-14 years old increased. ↑ Between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 financial years, the rate of all Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) clients increased from 83 per 10,000 to 87.7 per 10,000 and remained above Queensland. ↓ In 2023-2024, the rate of SHS clients decreased to 67.6 per 10,000 and fell below Queensland.	Homelessness services Data - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Dashboard - GRT - Housing - Seer Data
↓ # rent assistance payments	↓ Between July-September 2020 and July-September 2023, there was a 26.7% decrease in households receiving Rent Assistance. The number of households receiving Rent Assistance remained steady between 2023-2025.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ #, % rate of homeless persons aged 0-14 years	<i>No change since 2024 Evaluation:</i> ↑ Between 2016 and 2021, homelessness increased by 35% in the Gladstone Region. Gladstone had a lower rate of homelessness at 34.2 persons per 10,000 compared to Queensland in 2016 but exceeded the Queensland rate at 44.5 per 10,000 in 2021. Children and youth aged 0-14 years old made up 25% of all homeless persons in the Gladstone Region in 2021. ↑ The rate of homelessness for children aged 0-4 years, 5-9 years and 10-14 years increased between 2016-2021.	TableBuilder Australian Bureau of Statistics Dashboard - GRT - Housing - Seer Data

Housing remains a critical issue for families in the Gladstone Region, with community feedback consistently identifying rental affordability as one of the most significant pressures. In some cases, families have resorted to motels or caravan parks due to lack of affordable housing in the region.

Population-level data indicates sustained housing pressure in the Gladstone Region. Rental stress increased between 2011 and 2021, in line with Queensland trends. Homelessness among children aged 0-14 years also rose between 2016 and 2021 in the Gladstone Region, with children representing 25% of all people experiencing homelessness in the region.

In 2021, Gladstone's overall homelessness rate exceeded the Queensland average. Between 2020 and 2023, the number of households receiving rent assistance declined by 26.7%, before stabilising through to 2025. Use of Specialist Homelessness Services increased between 2021 and 2023 and remained above the state average, before declining in 2023-2024 to below the Queensland rate.

“Things (data) are pointing the wrong way.” – Data and Evaluation WG

Community feedback continues to highlight the importance of long-term housing solutions to address rental affordability pressures. Without stable, affordable options, families remain vulnerable to housing instability and reliance on short-term or crisis accommodation, placing ongoing pressure on local services.

What is happening (the what)

Gladstone Region Housing Strategy: Critical friends, community-led and long-term planning

Established in 2023, the [Housing Round Table \(HRT\)](#) brings together all three levels of government, housing providers, and community partners to support shared planning and decision-making to address housing shortages in the Gladstone Region.

The HRT has co-designed and progressed the [Gladstone Region Housing Strategy](#), a long-term solution to enable the right mix and location of housing at the right price, with several tangible outputs now in place and underway including:

- completion of a Historical Brief (endorsement pending)
- development of a Housing Supply Plan
- testing of a Housing Monitoring Model
- early engagement with builders and developers to inform inclusions in a Housing Investment Plan.



In 2025, HRT members participated in individual meetings with GRT to strengthen communication, clarify expectations and inform future ways of working. These discussions supported improved engagement and participation.

A planned reflection reviewed objectives and confirmed alignment with community priorities, after which members endorsed continuation of the agreed strategic direction.

Current focus areas include improving visibility of existing housing stock, exploring incentives for affordable housing delivery, strengthening partnerships, and supporting information sharing across levels of government.

Housing and data experts have peer-reviewed the strategy's methodology, assumptions, and risks, providing feedback that confirmed the approach as sound and innovative, with insights used to support ongoing learning and refinement.

“Your work could serve as an excellent case study for best practice.”

“Impressive, sophisticated model – kudos to the Housing Round Table.”

“Long-term planning is exceptional.”

“Not aware of any other location with a strategy as mature as this.”

How the work is happening (the how)

These outputs represent measurable progress in moving from fragmented ways of working towards a collaborative, long-term housing approach. The HRT has enabled:

- knowledge sharing
- shared interpretation of housing data and demand
- alignment of assumptions and planning horizons
- increased transparency around constraints and risks
- a shift from isolated responses toward collective problem-solving.

These shifts reflect strengthening enabling conditions, including collaboration, trust, shared decision-making and shared leadership.

What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)

The evaluation confirms that housing remains a major challenge for families in the Gladstone Region, with population-level indicators and community voice continuing to reflect significant pressure. At the same time, there are clear signs that the way housing stakeholders are working together has improved, particularly through the Housing Round Table and the shared development of a region wide Housing Strategy.

While population-level outcomes have not yet shifted, this stage of the work is appropriately focused on strengthening system readiness and early outcomes rather than physical delivery. These changes reflect stronger relationships, improved collaboration, and a more aligned shared agenda, which are important precursors for long-term change.



As a result, Gladstone is better placed than in previous years to influence housing outcomes over time, recognising that meaningful change takes time. The evaluation highlights growing capacity for coordinated action through aligned decision-making, data, and investment, supporting the region's ability to contribute to long-term housing outcomes.

“Housing is a long-term project. Bricks and mortar is not a quick process.”
– Data and Evaluation WG

“The first step is building the relationships for change.” – Data and Evaluation WG

Our families have access to employment

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

The following indicators were reviewed and evaluated for change:

 Indicator	 Findings	 Source
↑ % labour force participation	<i>No change since 2024 Evaluation:</i> ↓ Between 2011-2021 there was a decrease in labour force participation in the Gladstone Region from 66.3% in 2011 to 61.8% in 2021. Despite the decrease, the Gladstone Region had a higher labour force participation rate compared to Queensland in 2021.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ % unemployment	↑ Unemployment in the Gladstone Region increased between September 2024 - June 2025 and remained higher than the Queensland rate.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ # Jobseeker welfare payments	Jobseeker payments decreased by 36.8% between 2020-2022 but have remained steady through 2023-2025.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ # food provisions required	The Salvation Army Gladstone provides food assistance to the Gladstone community at Booth's Food Kingdom. Community members who are experiencing food insecurity can access a free food hamper, and/or low-cost supermarket items. Between April-October 2025, Booth's Food Kingdom supplied 589 food hampers to the Gladstone community, averaging 5-6 hampers per day.	
↓ # financial assistance required	<i>The Salvation Army Doorways Emergency Relief Service</i> provides emergency relief and holistic case management, with referrals to internal and external support services. Doorways services are offered in Gladstone with the aim of supporting people as they seek to make positive changes in their lives. ↓ There was a decrease in the number of clients accessing the Doorways Emergency Relief Service in Gladstone in 2025 compared to 2023 and 2024. The majority of clients presenting to The Salvation Army Gladstone experienced financial issues, with 49.9% reporting 'increased expense' difficulties in 2025. In that year, 72% of clients accessing the service were provided with financial assistance.	
↑ % of families where one parent is employed full-time	<i>No change since 2024 Evaluation:</i> ↓ Between 2011-2021 Census periods there was a decline in families where at least one parent was employed full-time from 65.7% in 2011, down to 58.1% in 2021. The percentage of families where at least one parent is employed full-time was higher in Gladstone compared to Queensland and Australia in 2021.	ABS (combined datasets) 2021 Gladstone, Census All persons QuickStats Australian Bureau of Statistics
↓ % of families earning less than \$650 per week	<i>No change since 2024 Evaluation:</i> ↓ The percentage of families earning less than \$650 per week in the Gladstone Region decreased between 2006-2021. In 2021, a higher percentage of Gladstone Region families earned less than \$650 per week in 2021 at 6.9% compared to Queensland at 5.7%.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub

Indicator	Findings	Source
↓ % children in low-income, welfare dependent families	↓ The percentage of Gladstone Region children in low-income, welfare dependent families decreased between 2022-2023. Between 2021 and 2023, the percentage of children living in low-income, welfare dependent families in Gladstone was higher than in Queensland overall.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub

Employment is an important part of family wellbeing, but many families in the Gladstone Region continue to experience employment and income pressures. Service sector feedback highlights increased demand for assistance with costs of food, accommodation, transport, and medication between 2022-2024.

Population-level data reflects ongoing employment challenges. Labor force participation declined in the Gladstone Region between 2011 and 2021, though it remained broadly consistent with Queensland rates. Unemployment rose from 5.4% in September 2024 to 6.7% in June 2025, exceeding the state average. Underemployment is also a concern, as some individuals are classified as employed despite insufficient income to support their families. Despite JobSeeker payments decreasing by 36% between 2020-2022 and plateauing through to 2025, Gladstone still recorded a higher proportion of low-income, welfare-dependent families compared to Queensland between 2021-2023.

These trends raise critical questions for the region: *Why is unemployment higher in Gladstone compared to Queensland? What systemic barriers are preventing families from accessing sustainable employment?*

Local service data from The Salvation Army indicates financial hardship remains the primary presenting issue for clients, with emergency relief and food assistance peaking around school and holiday periods.

While some long-term indicators, such as the number of families earning less than \$650 per week, have improved, cost-of-living pressures persist. Childcare shortages remain a recurring barrier to workforce participation, with many families relying on grandparents for care.

“We want more parents in the workforce to support their families.”
– Data and Evaluation WG

What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)
The evaluation confirms that employment outcomes have not yet shifted and that families continue to experience financial pressure. At this stage, there is no employment specific project or working group active under the GRT initiative. This reflects an intentional decision informed by community insight.

Insights from community members highlight the interconnected nature of employment with other system pressures, particularly housing stability and access to childcare. Families experiencing housing insecurity face ongoing barriers to sustaining work, accessing childcare, and engaging in training.

As a result, collective efforts have focused first on strengthening the conditions that support workforce participation such as housing stability. Future employment efforts are therefore being considered only once key enabling conditions, such as housing and childcare access, are strengthened.



Our parents have parenting confidence, healthy lifestyles, and access to supports

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

The following indicators were reviewed and evaluated for change:

 Indicator	 Findings	 Source
↑ # participation in parenting programs	Not yet evaluated	(Local Service Data - Not yet collected)
↑ # participation in early intervention programs and supports	Not yet evaluated	(Local Service Data - Not yet collected)
↑ # parents reporting change in parenting confidence	Not yet evaluated	(Local Service Data - Not yet collected)
↓ # domestic violence orders, where a child is named	↑ In 2023-2024, 35% of Domestic Violence Order (DVO) applications in the Gladstone Region had a child named on the DVO, an increase from the previous year at 28.2%. Despite there being a decline in the number of all DVO applications lodged at the Gladstone Magistrates Court between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, there was an increase in both DVO applications and protection orders where a child was named between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024.	
↓ # mental health referrals and presentations for children and parents	Analysis and outcomes of mental health referral data is pending approval.	
↓ #, % child protection substantiations	↓ Between 2018-2019 and 2023-2024 financial years, there was a 36.3% decrease in the number of children subject to a substantiation in the Gladstone Region. Despite this, Gladstone has had a higher rate (per 1,000 children) of children subject to a substantiation compared to Queensland each year from 2014-2023. Note: this indicator will be set to change in 2026 as per <i>Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety</i> enhanced intake assessment and reporting processes.	

Supporting parents to feel confident, supported and connected is essential to ensuring children feel safe, happy and loved while growing up at home with their families. Population-level data shows mixed but important trends in child and family wellbeing in the Gladstone Region.

In 2023-2024, 35% of Domestic Violence Order (DVO) applications in the Gladstone Region had a child named, an increase from 28.2% the previous year, despite an overall decline in total DVO applications. Child protection substantiations

decreased by 36.3% between 2018-2019 and 2023-2024, although Gladstone consistently recorded higher substantiation rates than Queensland overall during the past decade.

These trends highlight ongoing pressures on families and the need for a skilled, coordinated workforce capable of providing timely, appropriate support. They also reinforce the importance of building social service sector capability as a foundation for long-term change.

What is happening (the what)

Sector Capacity Building

The [Sector Capacity Building Initiative](#) has delivered priority training identified by the local social services sector to address ongoing workforce skills shortages critically impacting the quality and availability of community supports. A collective training model has been trialled to reduce training cost barriers, support sector wide participation, and strengthen workforce capability through

upskilling, and shared learning and practice. [Rio Tinto, Here for Gladstone](#) has partnered with community and made a significant contribution to support this three-year initiative through a staged phase out approach. Ongoing evaluation is exploring capacity to pay, informing long-term sustainability and optimisation of training in the region.

Childhood Builders Training

[Delivered in 2024 and 2025](#) in partnership with QKP, ARACY, Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation, and GRT, the program engaged more than 60 practitioners across health, social services, early education, and community sectors. It equipped practitioners with evidence based frameworks such as The Nest (Australia's Child Development Wellbeing Framework) and strengthened practitioner capacity to support children's brain development and wellbeing.



Childhood Builders Case Study

First Nations-Led, Trauma-Informed Training Series

Co-facilitated by BilaEmpower and Yaleela Torrens, the [First Nations-Led, Trauma-Informed Training](#) provided the region's first opportunity for practitioners supporting children and families to participate in training of this kind, grounded in local First Nations context. It explored trauma frameworks and supported culturally responsive practice.

Grounded in Connection: First Nations-Led, Trauma-Informed Training

Brain-Based Approach to Youth Mental Health

Contemporary neuroscience-informed professional development for child and youth practitioners was delivered by internationally recognised psychologist and neuroscience educator Karen Young, improving confidence and capacity of practitioners to shape positive client interactions.



The Science of Connection: Gladstone Champions Brain-Based Approach to Youth Mental Health

Project Management Training

Delivered by The Guinea Group, this training strengthened skills in planning, risk management, stakeholder engagement, leadership, and impact measurement, with participants applying tools to real projects and initiating new collaborations to deliver high-quality outcomes for clients and community.

Building Skills, Strengthening Impact: Project Management Training for Human Services

How the work is happening (the how)

Through targeted, locally delivered training, practitioners report increased confidence in engaging families holistically, applying strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches, and supporting children's wellbeing. Frameworks such as *The Nest Wellbeing Framework* are now more consistently embedded across services, contributing to shared language and improved integration.

Participants across multiple training activities reported changes in practice, including:

- shared language
- more holistic assessments and reduced duplication
- improved responses to stress and trauma
- increased confidence working with community and managing challenging cases
- greater awareness of the relationship between practitioner wellbeing and service quality.

Key reflections from participants included:

“Since the training, assessments are more holistic, and our team is aligned.”

“I am walking away with a changed perspective and commitment to lifelong learning.”

“Today was powerful, insightful, and encouraged me to challenge what I think I know.”

“I appreciated the gentle challenge of my assumptions about being genuine in relationships.”

Managers observed tangible improvements in staff performance and service delivery, and several

organisations have begun translating learning into new initiatives, including collaborative projects and planned nature-based, trauma-informed parenting programs.

What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)

At this stage, the work is generating early, practice-level outcomes rather than population-level change. Indicators related to parenting confidence, early intervention participation, and mental health supports have not yet been evaluated, reflecting current limitations in local data collection and reporting rather than a lack of activity or impact.

What is emerging are foundational system changes that align with the **Enabling Conditions** within the Theory of Change. Improvements in practitioner confidence, shared language, cultural capability, and collaborative practice, supported by investment in workforce capability, are essential precursors to sustained improvements in family wellbeing.

At the same time, the persistence of child protection substantiation rates higher than Queensland, alongside increasing DVOs involving children in the Gladstone Region, highlights the complexity of family pressures and reinforces the importance of early, integrated, and trauma-informed support.

Taken together, these findings suggest the work is on the right trajectory, strengthening the system's quality, capacity, and readiness to respond more effectively to families over time. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be needed to assess whether these practice- and system-level changes translate into sustained improvements in family wellbeing and population-level outcomes.



We are connected to self-identity, culture and community

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

Connection to culture, identity and community is a key source of strength and wellbeing for families, particularly for First Nations children and young people. Our community has identified and prioritised the importance of equitable participation and access to supports that are responsive to, and reflect, the unique needs and experiences of First Nations community members.

The community continues to reinforce the importance of self-determination, culturally safe spaces and practices, and intergenerational connection in supporting the wellbeing of our children and families.



What is happening (the what)

Rites of Passage: Empowerment and connection to culture

The Rites of Passage event celebrated the achievements of graduating First Nations youth from Gladstone Region high schools and supported their transition into adulthood. First held in 2024, the event provided opportunity for equitable participation and celebrated and strengthened cultural connection through practices including a smoking ceremony, Kup Murri meal, symbolic artwork, and storytelling.

The [second Rites of Passage event was held in November 2025](#), celebrating 24 high school graduates. The event fostered the participation of local Elders, families, schools, and broader community representatives. Feedback described the event as culturally respectful, empowering and inclusive, and indicated progress towards a key objective of encouraging younger First Nations students to remain engaged in and complete their education.

“It was a culturally appropriate celebration that made me feel proud of my culture and achievements.” – High School Graduate

“I think this event appreciated the First Nations Youth appropriately, by presenting handmade trophies by an Elder, the inclusion of all indigenous students in the community, a representation of culture through smoking ceremony, stories, people and food.” – Attendee

“Very important with the culture, our children, learning from their Elders words and stand up and be counted.” – Attendee





How the work is happening (the how)

First Nations Working Group

Since its establishment in April 2022, the [First Nations Working Group](#) has built trust and fostered collaboration within the Gladstone Region community. Members have supported one another to navigate challenges, strengthen confidence and step into community leadership, advocating for change.

The group has participated in capacity building opportunities within and outside the region, such as ChangeFest and [Deep Collaboration: Power and Equity](#) training. The group has also shaped meaningful community activities including Rites of Passage and monthly “Cuppa and Yarn” gatherings.

The working group has contributed ongoing shared learning and guidance on data sovereignty and the respectful use of local data and stories to inform decision-making, and has provided support to GRT on culturally appropriate engagement (e.g. design of a local Acknowledgement of Country).

“The collaboration between GRT and the First Nations Working Group is a meaningful demonstration of reconciliation.” – Gay, Working Group Member

“As a young Indigenous student, people believed in me and encouraged me to do more. I wanted to do the same for other young Indigenous students.” – Jasmin, 2024 Rites of Passage Graduate

“If there is a purpose we cannot and will not be shut down, because purpose cannot be killed.” – Shar, Working Group Member

What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)

Qualitative insights point to strong, sustained collaboration and meaningful cultural impact. The First Nations Working Group demonstrates resilience, trust, and collective purpose, alongside clear examples of community-led action that are strengthening cultural engagement, community connection, pride, leadership, and youth empowerment. Early signals also suggest improvements in how systems engage with and support First Nations communities.

The Rites of Passage has achieved its immediate aim of cultural recognition and celebration and is building a pathway for long-term sustainability. Together, these reflect a positive shift in the Gladstone Region, where community knowledge, leadership, and connection are increasingly recognised as central to equitable and lasting change.

“This is a great display of steps forward.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“Our community is more connected than we realise.” – Data and Evaluation WG

Our children have quality educational support

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

The following indicators were reviewed and evaluated for change:

 Indicator	 Findings	 Source
↑ % parents reading to children at home	↑ The number of parents in the Gladstone Region reading to their children increased from 81.7% in 2021 to 83.2% in 2024. In 2021, only 81.7% of parents in the Gladstone Region read to their children compared to 92.5% of Queensland parents.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ % children requiring further assessment	↑ 23.7% of Gladstone Region children represented in the AEDC data were recorded as requiring further assessment in 2024, double the number recorded in the region in 2015, and higher than Queensland at 18% in 2021.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ % children developmentally vulnerable across 5 domains	↑ Between 2021-2024, the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in the Gladstone Region increased in 4 of the 5 AEDC domains. Gladstone had a higher percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in 4 of the 5 domains compared to Queensland.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↑ % pre-school enrolments <i>* In 2026, the pre-school indicator will change to reflect Kindergarten Program enrolments for 4 year olds only.</i>	In 2020 and 2021, a higher percentage of Gladstone Region children were enrolled in pre-school* compared with Queensland. ↓ Since 2022, the percentage of children enrolled in pre-school in the Gladstone Region has decreased and fallen below Queensland.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↑ % children developmentally on track (prep year)	↑ In 2024, the percentage of children developmentally on track on all 5 domains in the Gladstone Region increased from 50.6% in 2021 to 51.2%. Despite this, Gladstone remained below Queensland for the percentage of children developmentally on track on all 5 domains in 2024.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub

Families and practitioners across the Gladstone Region are reporting increasing challenges in supporting children's development and accessing early years services. Parents describe difficulties managing child behaviours, long waitlists for developmental assessments, and the pressure of balancing work, routines, and their children's needs. Many families struggle to secure kindergarten and childcare places, with some enrolling babies during pregnancy due to long waitlists. While the introduction of [Free Kindy](#) for Queensland children in 2024 has helped reduce financial barriers, it has also contributed to increased demand for kindergarten places.

Local providers report that capacity to increase places is constrained by workforce shortages and limited physical space, alongside growing concerns about workforce fatigue and burnout. In response,

some early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are adopting more equitable enrolment practices, including prioritising children without existing placements during initial Kindy intakes to improve access for families who would otherwise miss out.

Early childhood professionals note that navigating referral pathways can be complex, and child health practitioners report that inefficient referrals contribute to high demand for developmental assessments, often at a point when earlier supports may have prevented developmental delays. At the same time, there are signs of strengthening collaboration, with greater involvement of allied health professionals in early learning settings and an increased focus on early developmental assessment and support.



Against this backdrop, data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) and regional wellbeing indicators show a mixed picture for early childhood development in the Gladstone Region. While some positive shifts are emerging, overall outcomes continue to lag behind Queensland averages. The proportion of Gladstone Region parents reading to children at home increased from 81.7% in 2021 to 83.2% in 2024, signalling strengthening engagement in early learning, though still below the Queensland average of 92.5%.

Developmental vulnerability increased across four of the five AEDC domains between 2021 and 2024, with the Gladstone Region recording higher vulnerability than Queensland in most areas. In 2024, 23.7% of children required further developmental assessment, double the proportion recorded in 2015 and higher than the Queensland figure of 18% (2021). Although the proportion of children developmentally on track across all five domains rose slightly from 50.6% in 2021 to 51.2% in 2024, this remains below the state benchmark.

Pre-school enrolment trends also show a decline. After exceeding Queensland averages in 2020 and 2021, participation in the Gladstone Region fell below the state level in 2022.

Together, these indicators point to ongoing access, capacity and developmental challenges during the critical early years, reinforcing the experiences shared by families, practitioners and service providers, while also highlighting areas where system responses are beginning to shift.

What is happening (the what)

Early Childhood Education and Care Survey: Collaboration among ECECs

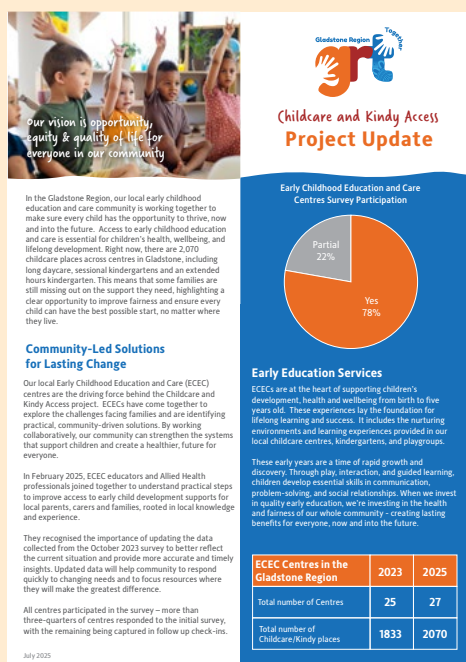
In response to local trends, ECEC services across the Gladstone Region have adapted their approach to planning and service delivery. ECEC centres are leading the Childcare and Kindy Access Project, working together to better understand and respond to the challenges faced by families.

Through collaboration, services are shifting from working in isolation to sharing insights and identifying practical, community-driven solutions. This more coordinated approach is strengthening the local system and improving how services support children and families.

In late 2023, an ECEC survey was conducted to better understand access to childcare and kindy, including available places, waitlists, and barriers to increasing capacity. More than half of all services participated (56%), with findings shared at the February 2024 Early Years Event. This created a shared evidence base and supported stronger cross-sector dialogue.

Building on this work, ECEC educators and allied health professionals came together in February 2025 to identify practical ways to improve access to early developmental supports for local families. Through these discussions, participants recognised the need to update the original data to reflect current conditions and provide more timely insights.

A follow-up survey in 2025 achieved a 100% response rate and informed the August 2025 [Childcare and Kindy Access Project Update](#). This process marked a shift from competition to greater coordination across services. The updated data highlighted several systemic constraints limiting service capacity, including workforce shortages for suitably qualified staff (particularly Diploma level or higher), closed rooms and facilities, and misalignment between perceived and actual enrolment patterns.



Ongoing participation over time, including full sector engagement in 2025, reflects growing trust, shared ownership, and a willingness to work together. This has enabled services to move beyond individual perspectives toward a more coordinated understanding of system pressures, challenges, and opportunities.

Achieving 100% participation in local ECEC data collection is a notable milestone, signalling strong collective commitment to improving outcomes. This level of collaboration supports more targeted responses, earlier intervention, and more informed decision-making, helping to strengthen access to services and lay the foundations for improved learning and development outcomes for children in the Gladstone Region.

What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)

The evaluation indicates that the Gladstone Region is in an early stage of systems change. There are emerging signs of progress in how the early years system is functioning, including stronger collaboration, increased data sharing, and improvements in practice across services.

At the same time, population-level indicators, including AEDC results and enrolment data, show that these changes are not yet reflected in measurable improvements in early childhood development outcomes. Ongoing challenges, such as educator shortages, limited service capacity, long waitlists, and constrained assessment pathways, continue to influence children's access to timely support and impact early development and school readiness.

While improvements are not yet evident in the data, feedback from the evaluation reflects growing confidence in the work underway and indicates that important foundations are being established to support long-term change.

Collaboration has emerged as a critical enabler of change.

“We see value in what has been done so far.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“The work in the region is hitting the mark, but it can't translate into numbers yet.” – Data and Evaluation WG

While there are 2,070 early childhood places across the region, operational capacity does not meet community demand. Open sharing of data has been critical in surfacing these challenges and supporting more realistic, fit-for-purpose responses.

Ongoing data collection and shared analysis will continue to support timely, informed decision-making, helping the community respond to changing needs and focus resources where they can have the greatest impact. See more here: [Our Children Have Access to Quality Early Educational Support](#).

How the work is happening (the how)

This work has been supported through a collaborative, data-informed approach, with services actively participating in shared data collection, analysis, and cross-sector dialogue. Survey findings have been openly shared and discussed, contributing to greater transparency and a stronger shared understanding across the sector.

Our children have a healthy start to life

What we're seeing in the Gladstone Region

The following indicators were reviewed and evaluated for change:

Indicator	Findings	Source
 ↓ % women who are overweight or obese during pregnancy	 ↑ Between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in the percentage of birthing women who were overweight or obese in the Gladstone Region. In 2023, the Gladstone Region had a higher percentage of birthing women who were overweight or obese compared to Queensland.	
↓ % women smoking before and after 20 weeks gestation	↓ Between 2022 and 2023 there was a decrease in the percentage of birthing women recording 'Yes' as their smoking status during the first 20 weeks gestation and after 20 weeks gestation in the Gladstone Region. Despite this, the Gladstone Region had a significantly higher percentage of birthing women smoking before and after 20 weeks gestation compared to Queensland in 2023.	
↑ % women attending antenatal visit during first trimester (before 14 weeks)	↑ Between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in the percentage of birthing women attending their first antenatal visit in the first trimester (<14 weeks gestation) in the Gladstone Region. Compared to Queensland, a lower percentage of birthing women in the Gladstone Region attended an antenatal visit in the first trimester (< 14 weeks) in 2023. There was a higher percentage of birthing women attending their first antenatal visit in the second trimester (14-28 weeks) in the Gladstone Region compared to Queensland. This indicates that more women in the Gladstone Region are delaying their first antenatal visit until the second trimester compared to Queensland.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↑ % children fully immunised	↓ There was a decrease in the percentage of children fully immunised in the Gladstone Region between 2021-2023. In 2024, fewer children in the Gladstone Region were fully immunised at 1, 2 and 5 years of age compared to Queensland, and below the target rate of 95%.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub
↓ % babies born with low birthweight	From 2020 onwards, the proportion of low birthweight live births (<2500 grams) in the Gladstone Region fluctuated. It increased in 2020, reached its highest point in 2021, decreased the following year, and then rose again in 2023. ↑ Between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in the percentage of livebirths with a low birthweight in the Gladstone Region, slightly higher than the Queensland percentage in 2023.	Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub

Indicator	Findings	Source
↓ % babies born with APGAR score ≤7 at 5 minutes <i>*APGAR- Appearance, Pulse, Grimace Reflex, Activity, Respiration</i>	↓ Between 2022 and 2023, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of livebirths with an APGAR score of ≤7 at 5 minutes after birth in the Gladstone Region, indicating improved outcomes in 2023. The percentage of babies born with an APGAR* score ≤7 at 5 minutes in the Gladstone Region was just below the Queensland percentage in 2023. Correspondingly, there was an increase in livebirths with an APGAR ≥8 in the Gladstone Region indicating improved outcomes in 2023.	
↓ % admissions to Intensive Care Nursery/ Special Care Nursery (on birth)	↓ Between 2022 and 2023, the percentage of livebirths in the Gladstone Region requiring admission to an Intensive Care Nursery or Special Care Nursery decreased. In 2023, the Gladstone Region had a lower percentage of livebirths requiring admission to an Intensive Care Nursery or Special Care Nursery compared to Queensland.	
↓ rate of perinatal death*	↓ Between 2021 and 2022, the rate of perinatal death decreased in the Gladstone Region and was below the rate per 1,000 for Queensland and Australia.	

Data from the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub and the National Perinatal Data Collection highlights several ongoing challenges in supporting a healthy start to life for children. The Gladstone Region continued to record a higher percentage of birthing women who were overweight or obese compared to Queensland, with rates increasing between 2022 and 2023. While the percentage of women smoking during pregnancy declined slightly over the same period, prevalence remained significantly higher than the state average in 2023.

Antenatal care patterns show mixed progress. While more women in the Gladstone Region attended their first antenatal visit in the first trimester in 2022 and 2023, a greater percentage of women in Gladstone still delayed antenatal care until the second trimester compared to Queensland overall in 2023. Reported barriers include GP costs and limited access to bulk billing services.

Birth outcomes also present a complex picture. From 2020 onwards, the proportion of low birthweight live births (<2500 grams) in the Gladstone Region fluctuated. It increased in 2020, reached its highest point in 2021, decreased the

following year, and then rose again in 2023, to slightly above the Queensland average. APGAR scores and admissions to Intensive Care Nursery or Special Care Nursery improved in 2023, with Gladstone performing slightly better than the state. Perinatal death rates have declined but remain highly variable due to small sample sizes.

*Due to these findings and other research, the indicator '↓ rate of perinatal death' will continue to be monitored but not used as an indicator of outcomes in the 2026 Annual Evaluation.

Childhood immunisation rates remain an area of concern. Immunisation rates for Gladstone Region children aged one, two, and five years have declined since 2021 and remain below the 95% target and Queensland averages. Anecdotal stories suggest that community perceptions about immunisation have shifted since the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to slower progress in this area.

“Our healthy start to life data is heading in the wrong direction.”
– Data and Evaluation WG

What is happening (the what)

The Early Years: Increasing connectivity, alignment and collaboration

In February 2025, ECEC educators and allied health professionals collaborated to make early childhood development supports easier for families. The session, led by Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CQHHS), clarified available local services, streamlined referral pathways, and provided practical guidance for navigating developmental assessments. This work responded directly to longstanding challenges associated with fragmented systems, process overwhelm, and limited visibility of local supports.

Following the workshop, ECECs identified additional local services and alternative referral options, enabling earlier access and reducing wait times for families. Educators reported increased confidence in discussing assessment pathways with families, while CQHHS observed improvements in the quality and completeness of referral documentation, supporting more efficient assessment processes.

In September 2025, early years leaders, including educators, health professionals, service providers, and government representatives, met with Professor Sharon Goldfeld, paediatrician and Director of the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital and Director of Population Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, to learn more about key early years topics across the national ecosystem and to share local insights and realities. The [Early Years Workshop](#) in September reinforced the importance of local leadership and demonstrated how integrated, system-wide approaches can improve access and early supports. Professor Goldfeld's visit validated local experience and strengthened momentum for collective action. Local

stakeholders have stepped forward as Early Years Leaders and Champions, bringing their knowledge and experience to support collaboration and alignment. GRT is supporting the development of this group who are shaping priority actions for 2026 and working toward stronger system integration and innovation; positioning Gladstone as a practical testing ground for collective impact in the early years.

To deeply understand maternal health behaviours and outcomes, GRT also launched a [Pregnancy Health and Wellbeing Survey](#) in late 2025 to capture the voices and experiences of local parents to help shape future solutions.

How the work is happening (the how)

Progress to date has been driven through deliberate collaboration and shared learning. Workshops and forums have brought together a diverse range of early years stakeholders to map services, identify issues and solutions, and strengthen referral pathways. These sessions have addressed longstanding issues of fragmentation and inconsistent processes, and stimulated a shift toward greater coordination.

The visits and engagement with national leaders, including Professor Sharon Goldfeld, have helped align local priorities with best practice and reinforced the value of locally led solutions. Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of having dedicated space to meet, share experiences, and collectively problem solve.

At the most recent meeting in December 2025, one participant expressed the following gratitude:

“Thanks for creating a forum like this.”
– Participant



The establishment of the Early Years Leaders and Champions group will support ongoing shared decision-making, coordinated action, and system level integration. Stakeholders are committed to shaping next steps for 2026, including improved data sharing, innovation, and collective accountability, ensuring that early years systems become more navigable and responsive for families over time.



“We need to move forward for our community.” – Participant



What this tells us (evaluation interpretation)

The evaluation indicates that while population-level health outcomes are not yet improving, foundational systems change is underway. There are emerging signs of strengthened relationships, improved communication, and reduced isolation among services, alongside growing recognition of the need for collaboration, integration, and shared decision-making to better support families. These shifts are creating the conditions necessary for long-term impact.

Although it is too early to attribute measurable outcome changes directly to GRT’s contribution, practical improvements are evident. These include clearer referral pathways, increased educator and practitioner confidence, and more timely access to

supports for families navigating complex systems.

At the same time, persistent challenges, particularly smoking during pregnancy, delayed antenatal care, and declining immunisation rates, highlight the influence of broader social, economic, and system-wide factors beyond the control of any single initiative. These findings emphasise the complexity of the issues and the need for sustained, coordinated action and realistic expectations about the pace of change.

Stakeholder reflections reinforce that meaningful progress is occurring through shifts in how the system operates, including better conversations and a growing willingness to work collectively. The evaluation also raises important questions about how systemic change can be better captured over time, and whether alternative indicators may be needed where data reliability is limited.

Overall, the work reflects the early stages of systems change, where building a connected and collaborative “community of practice” is an important step. While impacts on child and family outcomes are not yet visible, these foundations are critical to sustained improvement over time. Strengthening the early years system is essential to ensuring children and families can access the right support at the right time.



“The work that has been done is amazing, but we are not seeing the impact on our children yet.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“It’s a little early to tell if there is impact, but the resources created (including the referral pathways guides) are a practical output to enable access and make a difference to families.”

– Data and Evaluation WG

“This work has enhanced conversations and referrals...it has empowered services and support staff to pick up the phone.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“The valuing of data is leading to systems change.” – Data and Evaluation WG



Key Evaluation Questions

Key Evaluation Question 1

Has the initiative improved wellbeing in the region across the focus areas of the Theory of Change that we intended to shift? Where have the results made a difference?



“The work we are doing is not showing in the data yet...there is lag time.”

– Data and Evaluation WG

“The work is really hard to measure.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“Gladstone is a transient community which will impact data outcomes.” – Data and Evaluation WG



At this stage of implementation, the initiative has not yet produced measurable population-level improvements in wellbeing outcomes, which is expected given the long-term nature of place-based, systems change. Across all focus areas: housing, employment, parenting confidence and supports, cultural connection, early education, and healthy start to life; population-level indicators largely remain unchanged or show mixed trends.

However, the evaluation identifies clear areas where progress is most evident at the system and practice level:

- ➔ **Housing:** The establishment of the Housing Round Table and development of a region-wide Housing Strategy represent a shift toward coordinated, long-term solutions. These efforts have strengthened shared understanding, cross-government collaboration, and strategic planning capacity, although rental stress and homelessness indicators have not yet improved.
- ➔ **Early Education:** Collaboration among ECEC services achieved 100% participation in local data collection, signaling a shift from competition to collective action. Childhood developmental vulnerability increased in 2024, and access to services remains challenging for some families.
- ➔ **Parenting Confidence & Supports:** Training programs such as Childhood Builders and First Nations-Led Trauma-Informed Training have improved practitioner confidence, cultural competence, and collaboration. Quantitative indicators (e.g. Domestic Violence Orders and Child Protection Substantiations) show mixed trends.
- ➔ **Healthy Start to Life:** Improved referral pathways and integration and collaboration are emerging as early signs of systemic change. Maternal health indicators and immunisation rates remain below desired levels.
- ➔ **Cultural Connection:** Strong progress is evident through the First Nations Working Group and the Rites of Passage initiative, which have strengthened cultural identity, connection, and youth leadership. These initiatives reflect meaningful collaboration and cultural empowerment.

Overall, the initiative is delivering early results by strengthening the conditions required for long-term change, particularly through collaboration, shared understanding and system readiness, although population-level wellbeing outcomes have not yet improved.

Key Evaluation Question 2

Is the impact effective, sufficient, sustainable and enduring? What improvements have been enabled in the systems?



“On the ground working with families there is change occurring...there is a mindset change.” – *Data and Evaluation WG*

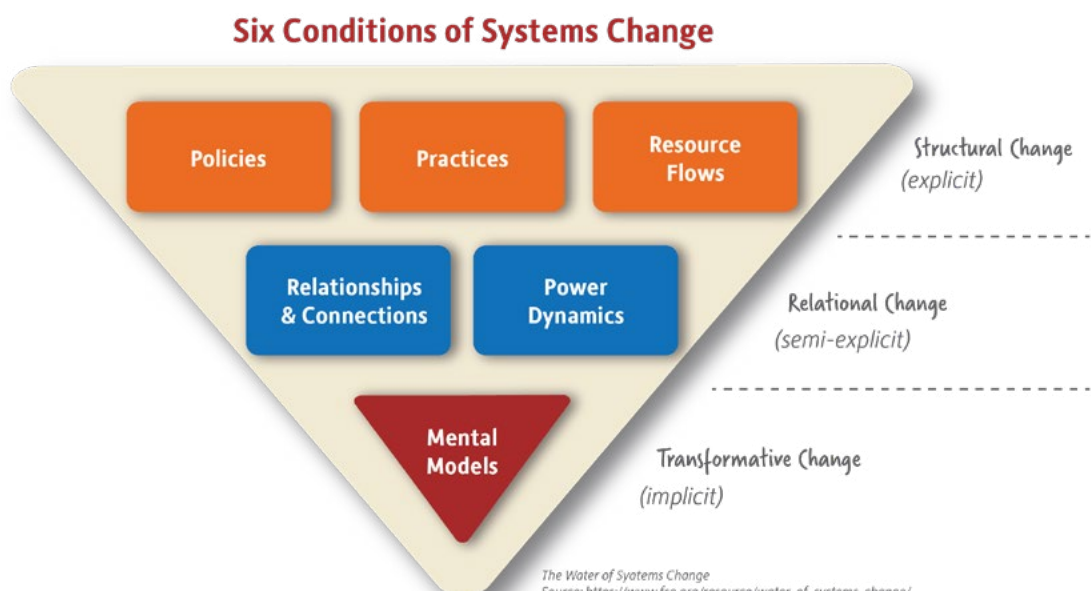


The evaluation indicates that the initiative is contributing to meaningful systems strengthening, with impact most evident in how the system is working rather than in population-level outcomes at this stage.

Improvements include:

- ➔ **Stronger collaboration and trust** across sectors, organisations, and levels of government, reducing siloed approaches and enabling shared problem-solving.
- ➔ **Enhanced data capability and shared measurement**, with partners increasingly using local and population-level data alongside storytelling to inform decisions, test assumptions, and adapt practice.
- ➔ **Improved governance structures** in topic specific working groups (e.g. Housing Round Table, First Nations Working Group, Gladstone Region Systems Leaders Working Group), providing forums for collective leadership, accountability, and long-term planning.
- ➔ **Greater system readiness**, evidenced by clearer referral pathways, improved planning alignment, and a shift toward prevention and early intervention.
- ➔ **Increased workforce capacity and cultural competence**, driven by coordinated training initiatives that are improving consistency, confidence, and quality across the social service system.

While these changes are not yet sufficient on their own to drive population-level outcomes, they are necessary and foundational. Importantly, many of these improvements such as shared ways of working, strengthened leadership, and embedded collaboration, are likely to be sustainable and enduring, as they are now embedded within local relationships, practices, and governance arrangements rather than reliant on single projects. This reflects the [Transformative and Relational Change](#) elements of Systems Change (see below).



Key Evaluation Question 3

To what degree have the outcomes justified the investment?

At this point, the full return on investment cannot be assessed against population-level wellbeing outcomes. However, the evaluation finds that the investment has been justified in terms of system-level value, readiness, and positioning the region for positive future impact.

Key returns on investment include:

- **Strong foundations for long-term change**, with over \$6 million invested to date enabling collaboration, governance, workforce development, and shared measurement, essential prerequisites for enduring wellbeing improvement.

Value of Investment: Funding received by Gladstone Region via GRT

Year	Pre 2020-2022	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Australian Government	<i>Pre-investment in consultant support</i>	\$485,000	\$717,410	\$992,160	\$1,114,484	\$1,114,484
Queensland Government	\$0	\$450,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000
Other Corporate and Philanthropic Investment		\$50,000	\$30,000	\$293,290	\$134,472	\$180,000
Revenue (Fee for Service)		\$1,800 (*plus \$1,800 CQUniCares Donation)			\$909	
Total		\$988,600	\$1,347,410	\$1,885,450	\$1,849,865	\$1,894,484

Value of Investment: Community participation 2024/2025

- **Leverage beyond direct funding**, including thousands of hours of community participation, partner contributions, and in kind support, reflecting strong local ownership and commitment. This includes topic-specific working groups that dedicate time and expertise to design, test, and implement strategies that address local priorities.



- **Tangible system benefits**, such as new and strengthened service roles, improved referral pathways, enhanced data capability, and tools (e.g. online data dashboards, shared frameworks) that directly support service planning and funding success.
- **Increased evaluation maturity**, with improved capacity to understand change, use evidence, and answer key evaluation questions more robustly in future years.
- **Influence beyond the region**, with Gladstone contributing to and shaping state level strategies and reforms, resulting in additional resources and initiatives flowing back into the community.

Gladstone's community voice has contributed to broader statewide strategies for children and families. Since early 2021, local priorities have aligned closely with the objectives of the Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP). Community engagement has informed key outputs, including the *Early Childhood Development Better Systems Roadmap*, *Place-Based Rivermap*, *QKP Phase 3 Strategy* and the *Putting Queensland Kids First* submission to government. Gladstone has since benefited from a range of initiatives introduced, including the rollout of Early Childhood Coordinators, in-school health practitioners, Behaviour Specialists and Family Support Coordinators.

Gladstone was also acknowledged for its Referral Pathways Guides, which have inspired similar initiatives in Rockhampton and Livingstone.

Partnerships have strengthened local data capability, evolving from basic visualisation to integrated correlation analysis. GRT partnered with The Salvation Army in Gladstone to co-design a bespoke online data dashboard. This platform combines service- and population-level data, enabling real-time insights for planning and resource allocation.



"The dashboard showcases real stats helping to support the local narrative and evidence local need."
- Chris Ford, Manager, The Salvation Army Gladstone



This approach has improved The Salvation Army's service delivery, identified systemic gaps, and supported funding success, including a \$20,000 grant for Booth's Food Kingdom. The data dashboard provides visibility of local trends, correlates service demand with community indicators such as unemployment and homelessness, and supports evidence-based decision-making.

The Salvation Army reports increased confidence in using data for planning and attributes the dashboard's visual storytelling to its success in securing new funding. [See The Salvation Army: Empowering Decision-Making Through Data Case Study.](#)



The initiative is demonstrating early value by improving collaboration, building capability, and strengthening systems. These outcomes place the Gladstone Region in a far stronger position to achieve improved long-term wellbeing outcomes.



"The investment has contributed to putting us into a position to answer Key Evaluation Question 1 and 2 in the future... we are starting to see how we can measure change." – Data and Evaluation WG



Learning and Reflection

The 2025 Annual Evaluation Workshop combined data and community insights across key focus areas, including housing, employment, children's development, early education, and a healthy start to life. While shared measurement capability is still developing, the Data and Evaluation Working Group recognised that early signs of meaningful progress are emerging, and that impact measurement will require several years due to the long-term nature of systems change.

The Working Group reflected on the evaluation process:

“The work was nicely summarised including the projects delivered and community participation.” – Data and Evaluation WG

“Really liked the presentation from each project lead and intertwining qualitative data with quantitative data.” – Data and Evaluation WG

The Learning and Reflection Criteria (see below) offered opportunities to pause and reflect on the data outcomes.

The Working Group consisting of new and existing members worked collaboratively throughout the six-hour workshop. Their collective achievements for the second evaluation are celebrated.

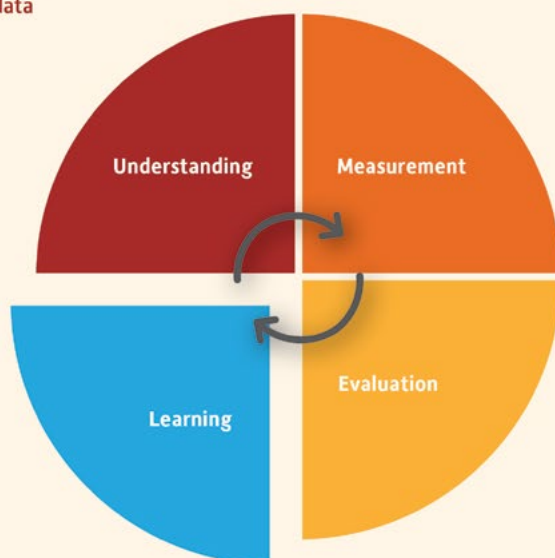
Learning and Reflection Criteria

Interpretation Questions

- 1 **What is the data telling us about the change that has occurred?**
 - a. What happened? What does this mean? Did it improve, worsen or stay the same?
 - b. What else do we need to assess impact using this data source? ie did the data collection parameters change, any environmental variable?
 - c. What have we missed? ie lag time of solution to show up as outcome?
- 2 **Did this meet our expectations?**
 - a. Why / Why not? Did the outcome match the change effort applied?
 - b. What surprised us? ie evidence that solution worked but data worsened.
- 3 **What risks does the data indicate we are facing? ie worsening conditions**
 - a. Are there new, emerging risks? ie further worsening of conditions.

Process Questions

- 4 **Did we measure the right things? ie is the data appropriate to evaluate the outcomes and ascertain the contributions of GRT?**
- 5 **What evaluation activities need to be adapted or improved?**
 - a. What evaluation activities aren't we doing that we should be doing?
- 6 **What should we do next to improve our evaluation process?**





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