

Contribution Analysis: Evaluating the impact of intensive family services, applying theory in a real-world context

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Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to the Elders both past, present and emerging

What I'm going to talk about

- Our evaluation and its purpose
- Why we chose Contribution Analysis
- The 'steps' of Contribution Analysis
- Our experiences using Contribution Analysis
 - The value it brings
 - Its challenges and limitations

What you'll take away from today's session

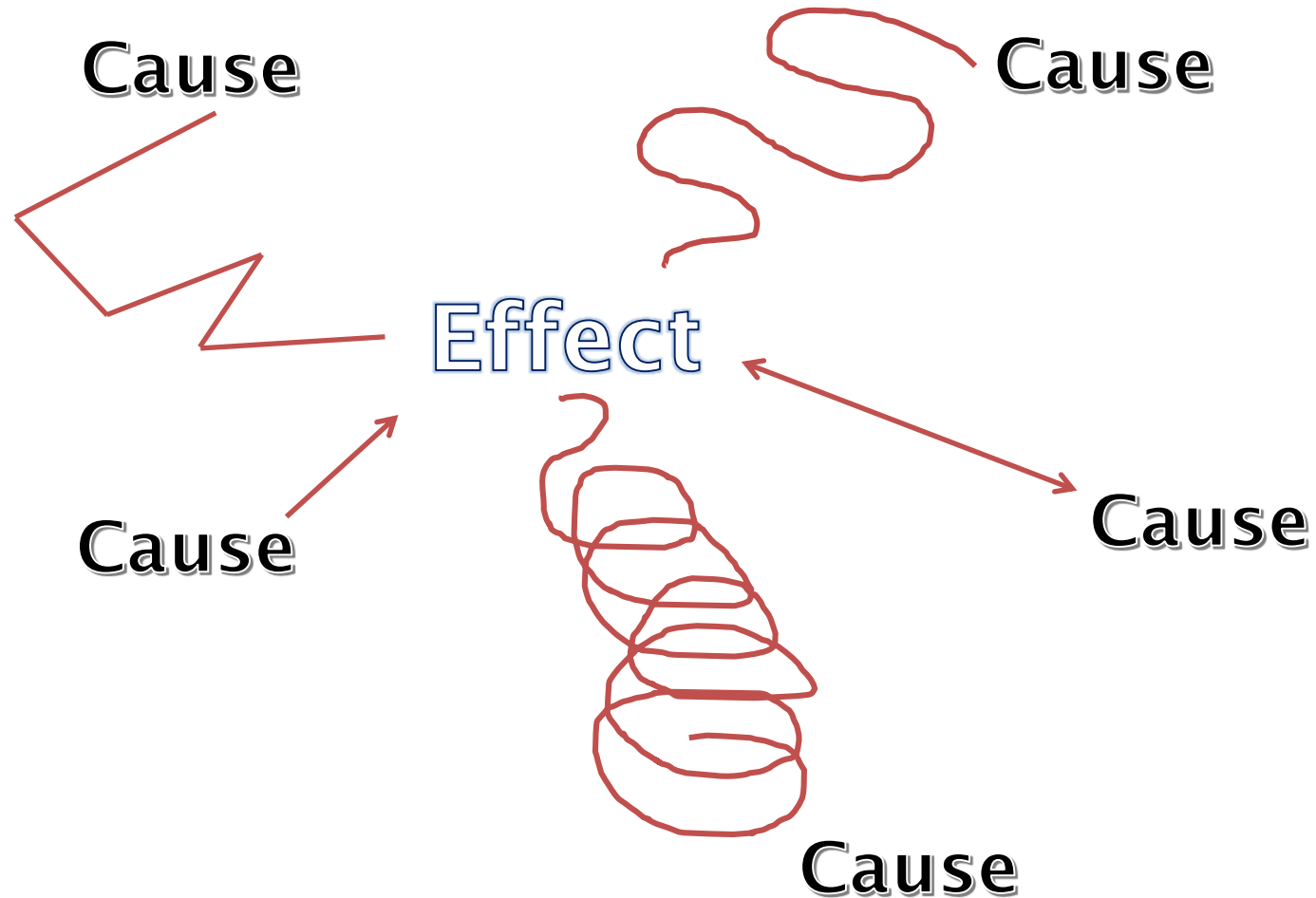
By using theory - we can *Strengthen* and *Guide* decisions about *what* data to collect and *when*

- Applying theory to real-world evaluations can be
 - *Messy* – data collection and quality may vary
 - *Iterative* – counterintuitively we may need to go backwards to move forward
 - *Challenging* – assumptions may not be met or be wrong
- This is our first go at applying contribution analysis – we are learning as we go ...

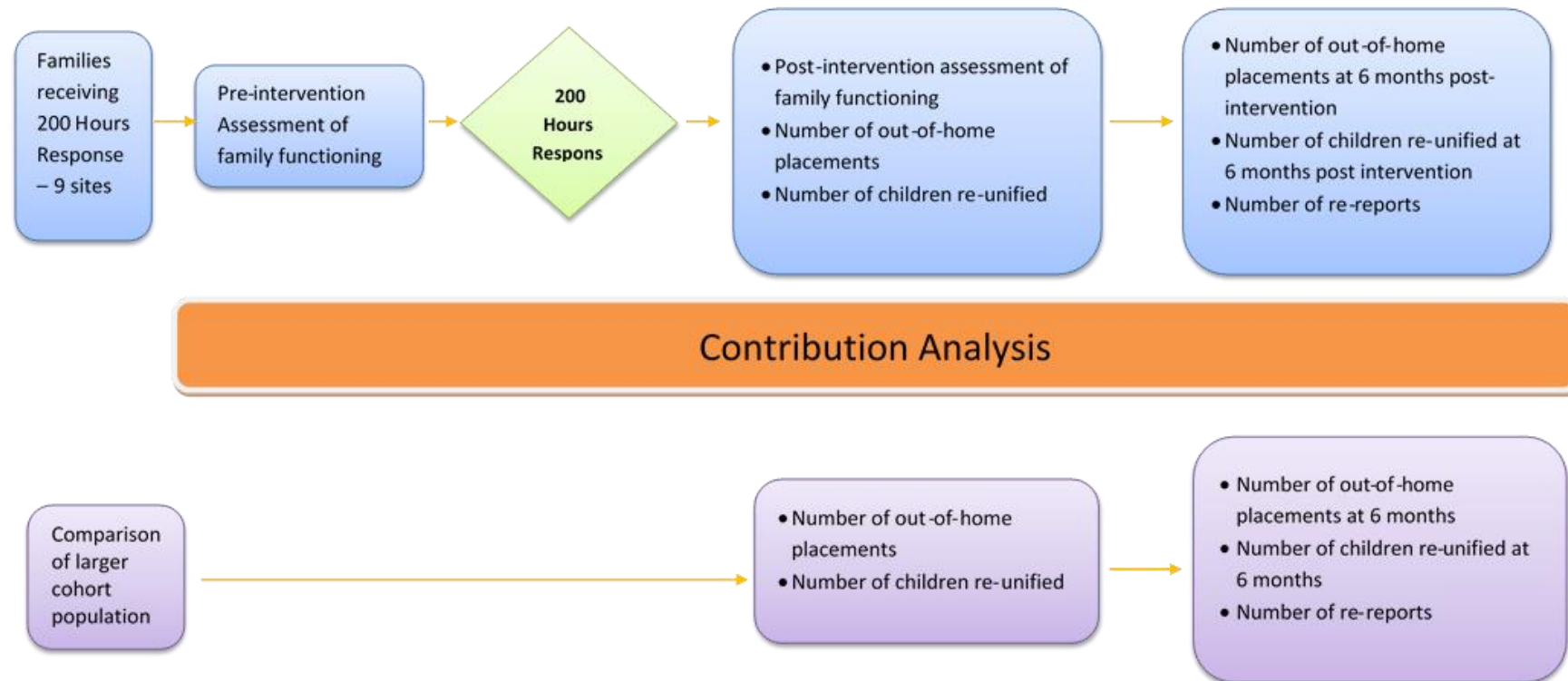
Purpose of the evaluation

To understand the impact of the 200 Hours Intensive Family Support Program (as a whole) in terms of family functioning and preventing children from entering the statutory child protection system

Establishing causality for programs operating in complex systems



Evaluation design

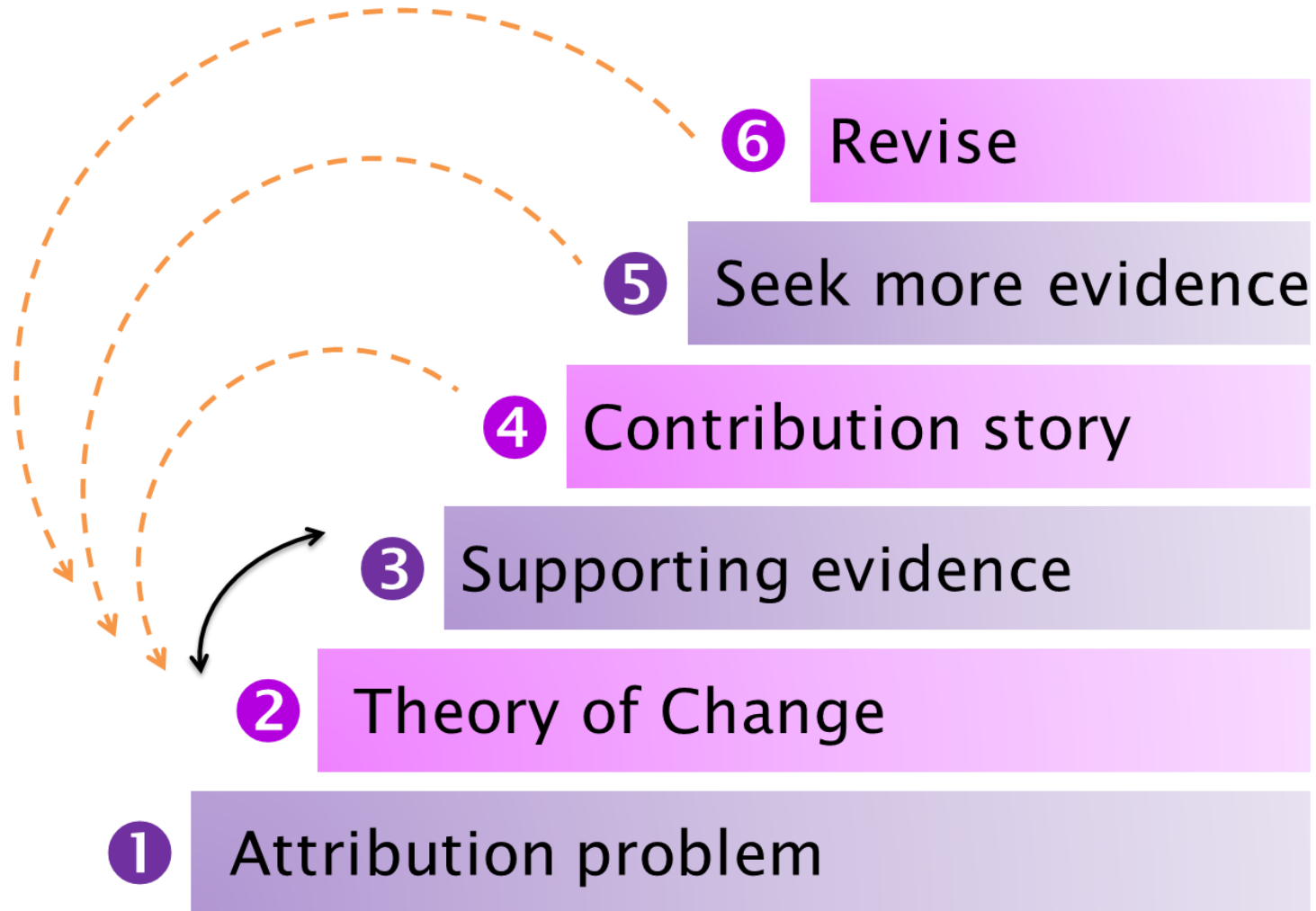


- It was not ethical to use a RCT
- Chose a quasi-experimental design (using a non-random comparison group)
- Contribution analysis was selected to strengthen the robustness

How does Contribution Analysis add value?

- A systematic framework (including an explicit Theory of Change) to conduct analysis by
- Does not require a counterfactual
- *Reduces* uncertainty about how an program contributes towards observed results (evidence supporting the causal chain)

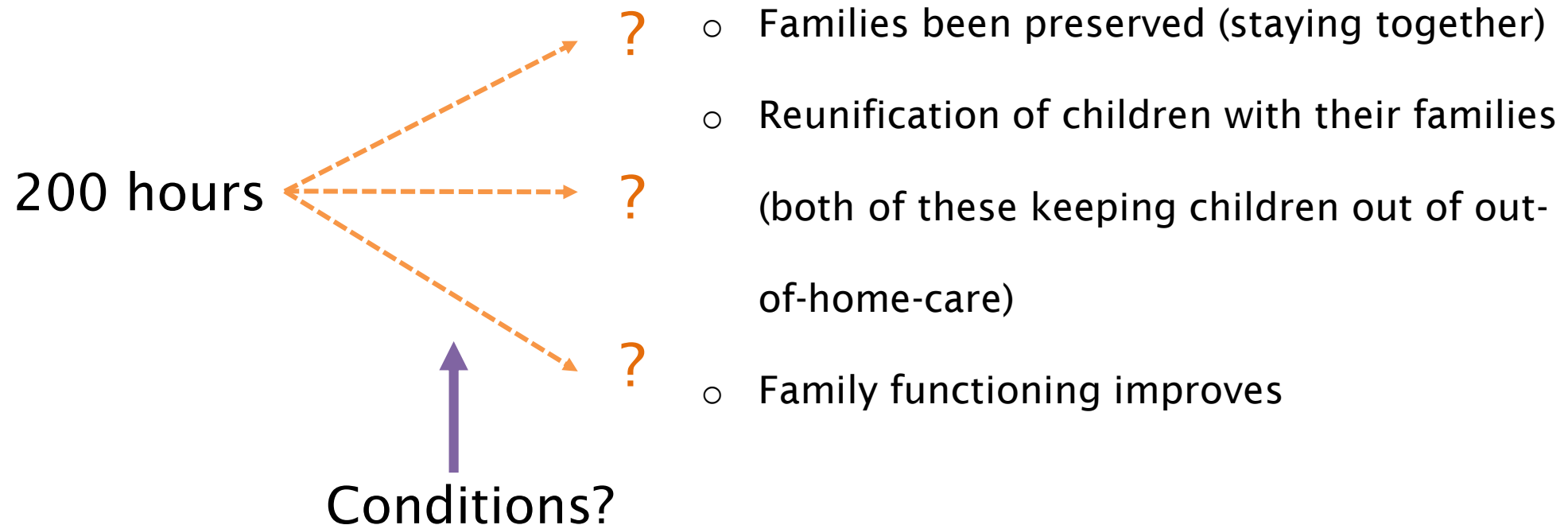
The Framework – Contribution Analysis's 6 steps



(Mayne 2008, 2011)

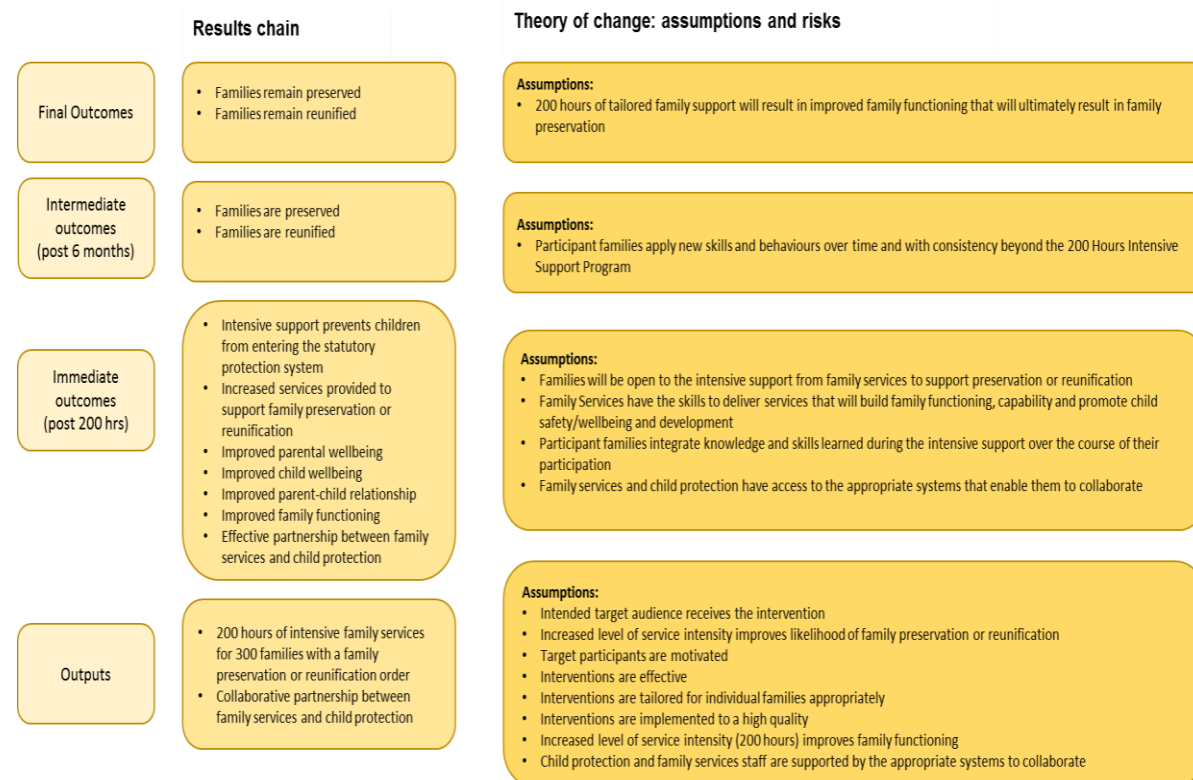
Step 1: The attribution problem ...

- Has 200 hours made a difference to or influenced the expected outcomes?
- Is it reasonable to conclude 200 hours has added value?



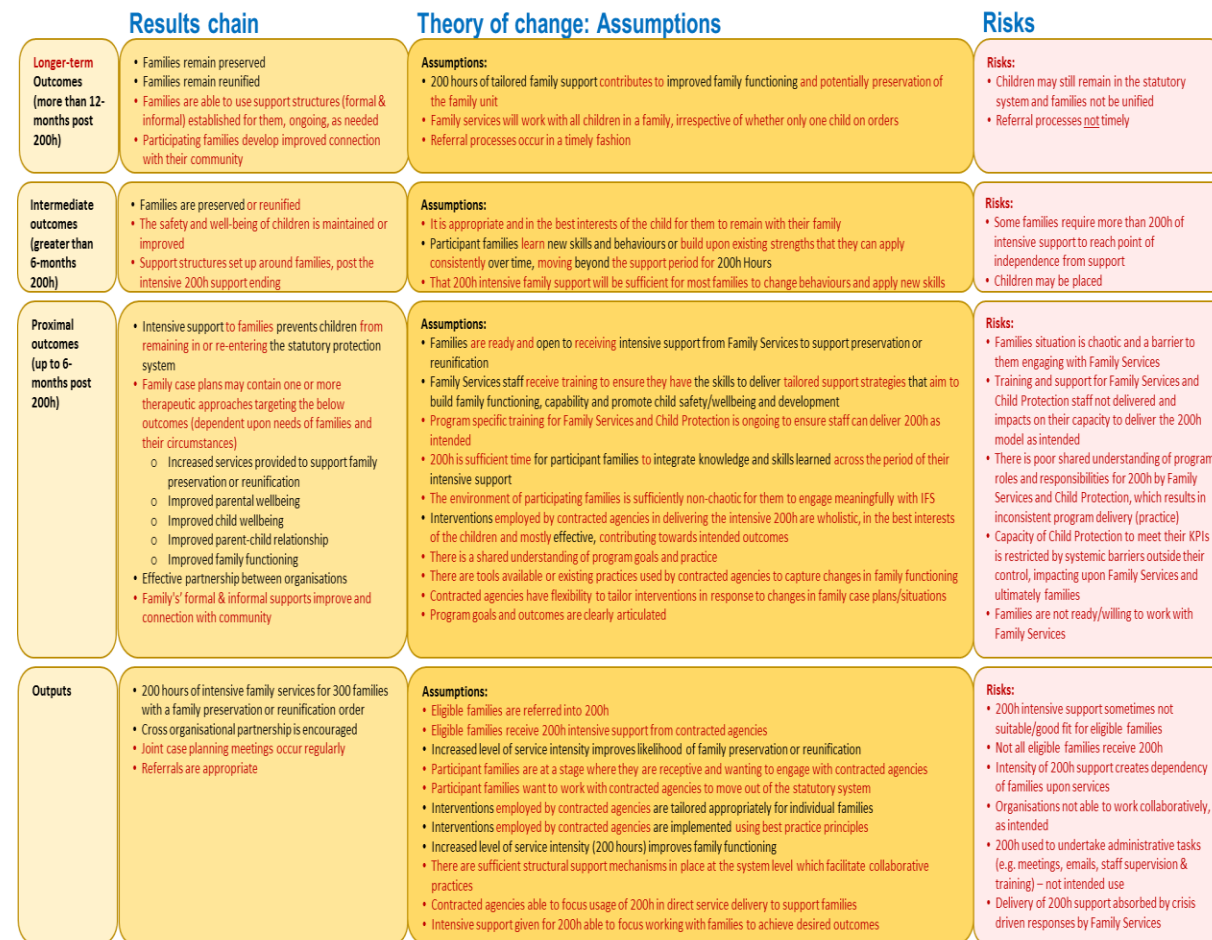
Steps 2 & 4: Develop & assess the Theory of Change

Our *first* rendition of the Theory of Change



200 hours theory of change outline: *through provision of intensive support vulnerable families functioning will improve resulting in families being preserved or reunified and children being kept out of the out-of-home-care system*

Our *second* rendition of the Theory of Change



With critical input from Intensive Family Preservation Support workers

Step 3: Gathering the evidence

Challenges faced

- Mixed findings
- Variability of strength and quality of evidence
- Variation in how outcomes defined
- Model discussed in literature differs to that used in Victoria

Limitations of Contribution Analysis

You can only make a contribution claim when:

- You have a clearly articulated Theory of Change
- The program has been implemented as depicted in the Theory of Change

Contribution Analysis also:

- Cannot be used to uncover a new Theory of Change
- Does not provide definitive proof or quantitate the degree that a program contributes to observed changes

In summary...

As long as there is a clearly articulated Theory of Change applying Contribution Analysis can help you to construct a reasoned argument supporting a conclusion that a program has plausibly contributed to observed results

Where are we now and next steps?



Generating our performance story

- Compiling client service journeys

and ...



thank you



What are your experiences?

Has anyone used contribution analysis, other theory based approaches to evaluation?

What have you learnt?

Its key

- Strengths?
- Weaknesses?

Would you use it again?

Why, why not?



Contact us

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Useful references

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