

3rd National PRECI Conference May 2026 (Adelaide SA) Parent feedback

PRECI successfully secured a National Disability Conference Initiative Grant to support parents to attend the PRECI Conference and below is a summary of the valuable feedback they shared.

Songhwa: (NT)

One of the most valuable parts for me was hearing from practitioners, professional social workers, and organisations from different regions about how they support families like ours, what approaches they are trying, what has been successful, and what challenges they have experienced along the way. It was incredibly meaningful and inspiring.

Some workshops were quite academic and the schedule was definitely very full, but as a parent I found everything so interesting and valuable that I honestly did not even feel tired. I'm also very grateful to have received the Parent Grant support to attend. As an immigrant parent and someone whose first language is not English, opportunities like this can sometimes feel a little overwhelming at first, but everyone was so welcoming and supportive. I truly appreciated being included in such an open and encouraging environment.

I will do my best to use the knowledge, connections, and experiences I gained to continue supporting and encouraging other families as well.

Thank you again for creating such a warm and supportive space. Adelaide was beautiful, and I truly enjoyed the whole experience 😊

Caroline (NSW)

I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend the PRECI Conference. Truthfully, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect, but I walked away feeling that every "hat" I wear was spoken to throughout the experience. As both a medical doctor with a strong interest in the child developmental space, and a parent who has personally navigated the early intervention journey over the last few years, as well as someone involved in non-profit boards advocating for children and early intervention services, I found the conference deeply valuable on multiple levels.

As a parent, the conference reinforced something I had slowly come to learn throughout our own journey — that more therapy does not necessarily mean better therapy, and that many parents entering this space are making incredibly important decisions while carrying fear, grief, uncertainty, and overwhelm. It was validating to hear these realities acknowledged so openly and thoughtfully.

What surprised me most was learning just how many incredible programs, supports, and service models exist beyond what many families commonly encounter through the NDIS pathway alone. Even with my background in healthcare and advocacy, there were many initiatives and approaches I had never come across, which highlighted how important conferences like this are for connecting families and professionals to high-quality support earlier.

Finally, as both a doctor and board member, I was genuinely struck by the passion of not only the PRECI team, but also the many service providers and clinicians who attended. There was a very clear sense that the people in this space are deeply committed to improving outcomes for children and families, and that for many of them, this work is far more than simply a job — it is a genuine passion and purpose.

Ashlee (SA)

I feel so thankful for the opportunity to attend the 2026 PRECI conference. It was so uplifting to be surrounded by people who are passionate about supporting children and families like mine and hearing the way so many people in the field are innovating to improve early childhood intervention for future cohorts of children.

I found Aunty Suzanne's Welcome to Kurna Miyurna very moving. I was struggling with my decision to attend the conference knowing that it was adding pressure at home. Aunty Suzanne helped me shift that mindset and trust that I was right where I needed to be.

I took a lot from Professor John Tobin's keynote address. It emboldened me to advocate for my children from a rights-based perspective and challenged me to give my children every opportunity to express their views and afford them due weight in decision-making.

Dr Kathleen Hebbeler's address on Data Informed Systems thinking was fascinating. It triggered lots of thinking about the gaps in data and information I have observed in South Australia (for example, data on the accessibility of schools), how it limits our ability to support our young people, and how to address this.

Matthew Dickinson spoke very movingly. I appreciate his prominent positioning on the program to centre lived experience and ensure we had the chance to hear directly about the impacts (positive and negative) of early childhood intervention. It was a great reminder to consider the whole child, and prioritise the views of the child, when making decisions about healthcare and therapies.

I attended the concurrent sessions on Inclusion and Participation, and then Home and Community Inclusion, followed by the Rapid Fire Presentations and Family Participation.

There were so many takeaways, including:

- the importance of offering opportunities for visual communication
- the validity of walking in nature with others as an early childhood intervention goal
- ways we can support schools to embed inclusive practices

Last but not least, Dr Robin McWilliams' closing plenary keynote was so engaging, and I was thrilled to learn about Routines Based Interviewing. I had recently shared with friends that I felt I needed support to review and troubleshoot our family's routines, because we are finding it so difficult to complete even the most basic daily tasks. The questions Dr McWilliams poses at the end of the interview made me feel so seen, and it was so affirming to have someone say that a regular date night for mum and dad is a valid early intervention goal! I'm tempted to buy copies of his book of Aphorisms for my child's therapists for Christmas.

Thank you again for the opportunity to attend the PRECI conference. I'd been starting to feel more exhausted, cynical and frustrated lately, and this gave me a much-needed injection of hope.

Neethu (SA)

Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend PRECI conference. Attending the PRECI conference provided me with invaluable insights into the National Best Practice Framework and opportunities to hear from national and international passionate professionals. I left feeling inspired and equipped with practical strategies to better support my child. Especially Mathews talk was heart touching. My Son has Autism, I see him in Mathew. As a mother, His words giving me inspiration and hope that I am on the right track.

I tried to keep my son away from public judgment, especially when we go to playground and library because his autistic behaviour misunderstood and disturbance to them. After this Conference, I understood the importance of ecological therapy. I will help him to improve his confidence and ask for help at toy library and go to inclusive play areas.

Topics like "Participation in Play "and "Walking in nature with others" helped me for this. I deeply appreciate PRECI for the commitment to including parents in these conversations.

Carly (Vic)

Firstly, I am feeling very grateful.

I needed a few days to fully absorb and reflect on the experience, and I can genuinely feel my life taking a new direction because of it.

What an amazing experience, and how lucky I was to have had the opportunity to attend.

Quietly, my brain has been swimming with ideas, and I feel excited to dive more deeply into learning, becoming more involved, and immersing myself in the culture of best practice.

This was my first experience in a conference setting. I didn't go in with many expectations, but I did go in with an open mind — ready to listen, learn, and see what I could take away from it.

One of the things that stood out most was how willing people were to network, connect, and meet others. That felt like such an important part of the conference experience. It was amazing to find so many people all sharing similar values, ideas, and encouragement toward positive contributions and change.

The diversity of speakers was excellent and very thoughtfully planned. Each speaker delivered information in a way that inspired thought and reflection without feeling overwhelming. The environment itself was perfect for bringing people together — networking, connecting, finding your feet, and having plenty of opportunities to gather information and resources.

Again, everything felt very well planned and well spaced. The timing worked well, including finishing at a good time for dinner afterwards if people wanted to continue conversations and connections. No one seemed left wanting more in terms of organisation, food, or drinks.

One of the biggest things I took away was a much stronger understanding of the processes behind policy and the uphill battle involved in creating meaningful change. It shifted my thinking and gave me a new appreciation for the work happening behind the scenes.

The message from the Welcome to Country continued to reverberate throughout the conference. Not only did Auntie Suzanne Russell deliver a message that deeply spoke to the reason for the conference, but it was inspiring enough to ripple through many of the other speakers' messages as well.

Hope for a future where inclusion is not something families have to fight so hard for, but something naturally built into the culture and systems around us.

I left feeling that change is possible — not only in policy and practice, but in the way people see, value, and support families like mine.

I deserve peace. I deserve to be heard. My family deserves a system that works with us, not against us. Most importantly, my child deserves to be exactly who she is — to grow, thrive, belong, and be celebrated without her differences ever being seen as deficits.

I can see the possibility of a future where there is truly a place for her, not just to fit in, but to flourish.

Sinead (WA)

Quite honestly, it's been the most amazing experience for me - not only have I left with greater understandings; important networking for better services and supports for my children with disabilities; but what really touched me was the genuine, intrinsic passion and motivation the whole PRECI board have to make best practice and inclusion a fundamental part of lives for our most vulnerable in society - not only in Australia, but worldwide.

I was also blown away by how every single therapist and professional I met, as well as every speaker I listened to, all shared the underpinning notion of adhering to child rights and also the importance of giving the family a voice and critical role in therapy and intervention. I was able to not only learn from professionals in attendance, but bond with them during the breaks and particularly at the wonderful dinner event - and have even made friends now. It was so lovely to see how passionate every individual at the conference was!

Thanks again for all, I'm forever grateful and returning home feeling inspired, full of gratitude and motivated to continue advocating.

Jenny (NSW) - abridged

Locating myself in the field

My mother taught me about the concept of holism. Her intellectual cultural knowledge insists the importance of unity amongst all constitutive parts that make up the world, and where each has a place. It is a view to accept things the way they are and to live in harmony with it. My mum's conceptual knowledge stems from Chinese and Anglo Australian intellectual cultures which she uses to interpret and make sense of the world. This lesson was particularly pertinent for me after receiving the news, at 12 weeks pregnant, that my son Henry was high risk of having Down syndrome. Down syndrome was presented as the worst thing that could happen to a person and their family. The subtext of the conversations from the medical professional saw my child as a burden on society – a life not worth living. As a family, we rejected this medical advice and deficit narrative as it was not congruent with our family and cultural values. This rupture was the beginning of my journey in disability policy advocacy. I believe sometimes life shows us the paths we must take.

I live in Sydney. Being away from home, especially with a young family is difficult. My mother's sentiments however were present, familiar and echoed in the opening of PRECI Conference 2026 through **Aunty Suzanne Russell's** warmth and Welcome to Country where she reminded that we all belonged. That we all had a place and a part to play. "Breathe, be present". "Inhale. Exhale". She further reminded that our presence at the Conference is important because of its greater purpose. "I am a champion; we are all champions" was deeply affective and recognised the strong connection to a shared vision amongst attendees (from all over Australia and abroad). Our greater purpose takes us on a journey, with commitment to improving the lives of Australian families. Her words provided much comfort and inspiration.

The esteemed **Ana Maria Serrano** professed, at the very beginning of her pre-conference workshop, the importance of professionals "having heart". Her session instilled the need to reframe professional practice and approaches when supporting families. Practice needs to be centred on the family, their needs, values and culture, and their knowledge. Her *Parental Empowerment Paradigm* sees professionals striving to have "fulfilled encounters" with families which consists of providing safety, meeting needs, and building family confidence and sense of wellbeing. The way that this can truly be achieved is through valuing and embracing the knowledge that parents already have and their family strengths to support their child. It is a reframed position to build on existing supports as opposed to overtaking them.

What I found impactful about Serrano's workshop was the emphasis on the importance of informal supports. Through reflecting on our own knowledge of everyday life situations, attendees realised that the first point of call for anyone when seeking advice and help is through who we know and trust - our family and friends. This activity foregrounded the need for professionals to centre this truth in their own practice - through encountering families' knowledge. Importantly, for multilingual Australia, she summarised this well through a discussion of the nuanced meanings derived from the term *empowerment* in multiple languages. The English definition of empowerment did not quite capture the essence of this 'paradigm shift.' The best translation she could find came from Brazil - empowerment when translated as 'empoderamento' means "letting power out".

"Letting power out" was continued through **John Tobin's** address focusing on the 'paradigm shift' from a 'standardisation of evidence for standardised child-as-client' approach to a Rights based approach (preferably a child-and-family-as-agents in a justice-oriented, situated practice). The former situates children as vulnerable, lacking competence, expertise and premises that children are deficits, needing help to "fit in". The Rights based approach sees children as capable, skilful, and resilient with evolving capacities. Children have their own unique worlds and identities that need to be heard, seen and taken seriously. The Rights based approach focuses on developing the child holistically and not changing them into what is deemed as "standard" and "typical". This approach is socially and ecologically driven and works to affirm the unique identity and profile of children and their family/carers' knowledge, moving away from its counterpart, which has neoliberal underpinnings that seek to standardise development.

Tobin's presentation was evocatively reinforced by the contributions of **Mathew Dickinson** and his lived experience, foregrounding the importance of listening to children for their knowledge when making early childhood interventions. What was poignant in his recollection was his knowledge of the missed opportunities of being who he was and pursuing what he wanted, due to the system that was designed to support him negating his individual voice and knowledge. His knowledgeable recount of the frequent withdrawals for therapy support throughout his childhood, due to his complex needs, gave no space for what he wanted and left him isolated from family, friends, interests, school and everyday activities. This resulted in the development of mental health issues for many years. Matthew narrates the turning point for him was going on an outdoor program where supports listened and enabled him to do what he wanted. Where a dependency-based lens would have prevented him from engaging in certain physical activities like kayaking, Matthew was trusted in his own health and decisions. He stated that it was the first time he felt listened to and didn't feel supervised - it was the healthiest he had felt in a long time. Matthew shared that he enjoys going out with friends, hiking, and volunteering. He now has his driver's licence, is in the process of completing his certificate III in individualised support, seeking employment and hoping to live independently with his girlfriend.

A move towards affirmation of identities, unique family circumstances, and knowledge saw deep dives into ways therapy and supports bring forward and encourage family participation, and hopefully the sharing of family knowledge.

In the spirit of embracing the recurring concepts of "reframing" and "paradigm shifts", where formalised knowledge came off a podium, equally, just as important are the knowledge exchanges and learning that occurs in the corridors of the conference.

Thank you Denise and PRECI, and Early Ed, for the opportunity to learn and think amongst trailblazers in policy advocacy, development and reform.

Asya (SA)

I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity to attend the PRECI Conference in Adelaide. The parent grant made it possible for me to be part of such a meaningful, inspiring and deeply affirming experience.

Coming to PRECI as both a parent and an occupational therapy student made the conference especially meaningful. As a mother of a child with a rare muscular dystrophy, I have spent many years navigating therapy, equipment, school support, hospital systems, the NDIS and everyday accessibility needs. I was not only listening as someone who has lived through these systems with my son, but also as someone hoping to contribute to this field through future research.

What stood out to me most was how strongly the conference valued children and families as active voices in early childhood intervention. The sessions reminded me that meaningful support is not only about services, assessments or therapy goals, but about understanding the child, the family's daily life, culture, relationships, routines and sense of belonging.

I also felt very fortunate to connect with so many amazing people. What stayed with me was not only the knowledge and expertise in the room, but the humility, warmth and genuine passion people had for children, families and early intervention. It was inspiring to be surrounded by professionals, researchers, advocates and parents who all seemed deeply committed to creating better outcomes in a thoughtful and human way.

The conference strengthened my own goal of moving into research. It helped me see even more clearly how powerful research can be when it is grounded in lived experience, family stories and everyday realities. As a parent from a culturally diverse background, I feel especially motivated to contribute to work that amplifies family voices, supports culturally diverse communities, and helps build more inclusive systems for children with disability.

I left the conference feeling more hopeful, connected and motivated to continue advocating not only for my own son, but also for other families navigating similar challenges. Thank you to PRECI for creating such a warm, purposeful and inspiring space.