



Children's Ground Ltd.

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Senator Patrick Dodson
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Department of the House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House | Canberra ACT 2600 | Ngunnawal Country

16 December 2022

Dear Senator Dodson,

I would like to thank you and the committee members for providing Children's Ground with the opportunity to present to the Joint Parliamentary Committee in relation to the *Inquiry into community safety, support services and job opportunities in the Northern Territory*.

We acknowledge the importance of this inquiry and its critical focus on the following key areas in the Northern Territory:

- *Community safety and alcohol management*
- *Job opportunities and Community Development Program reform*
- *Justice reinvestment community services*

We also acknowledge that the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012 (SFNT Act)* is sunsetting and that the objective of the SFNT Act is to 'support Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory to live strong, independent lives, where communities, families and children are safe and healthy'. Now that the SFNT Act and its accompanying referral of powers to the Australian Government are potentially ending there needs to be assessment of the repercussions of this action.

As invited, we provide this written material as part of our evidence to the committee.

When presenting to the inquiry Children's Ground was asked to detail 'our truth' as we saw it with our people, with our families and children and in our communities. As we stated then, we know that families and children have been and continue to be at risk as a result the impact of colonisation, ongoing injustices and how this manifests in alcohol issues and are compounded by a welfare system that has undermined our people. We also know that community safety is a grave issue that our children and families face every day. These risks were present before the intervention, during the intervention and in these early days since legislations has changed. The increase in alcohol consumption in recent months is distressing and as we stated in our evidence, alcohol misuse creates risk for children and our families. The current challenges facing our communities are widely known and we require transformation in government policy to address these enduring risks.

Children's Ground has long advocated for investment into prevention, into our cultures, people and our solutions and the voice of community to lead the answers for our people. We all know that the way of working in the past has not worked. Government funding has too often been directed towards deficit based and crisis focused programs that do not deliver outcomes in the critical areas of health, education, economic development, community development, and cultural development and wellbeing. Too often government systems and services further exacerbate the issues. They can be prohibitive and, rather than assist First Nations people, create barriers and disincentive for engagement. The answer to this failure is clear; governments must listen to First Nations people and our culture must be at the core of all systems and services.

At Children's Ground we back First Nations knowledge and practice. We celebrate that First Nations people have outstanding cultural health, education and governance practices that are sadly being ignored by government. We know that our people continue to live by the laws and knowledge that come from our Elders, the land and our kinship. We have built an approach that places this at the heart of what we do, and from here we engage with western and global knowledge and practice.

For too long governments have failed to understand that the way to create opportunity and wellbeing for First Nations people is not by adopting Western constructs and systems, but by supporting the First Nations cultural practices that have created prosperity for over 65,000 years.

Children's Ground 10 principles: Start Early; Critical mass - work with everyone; Deliver the whole, not the bits;
Innovation – new ways and old ways; Assume and celebrate ability; Expect and deliver the best;
Child, family and community led; Stay for a generation; Whole of community, within community; Culturally safe

At Children's Ground we believe that the only way the government can have a positive impact in the areas detailed in the terms of reference of this inquiry is to listen to the voices and aspirations of First Nations people and change the way they work in response. Strong First Nations cultures are integral to improved socio economic outcomes for First Nations people. All levels of government must draw on the wisdom and expertise of 65,000 years of culture and ensure that our voice, language, connection to land and cultural knowledge is at the core of all decision making.

Children's Ground provides the opportunity to change the system and adopt a different approach that works. Children's Ground delivers outcome driven and impactful programs that have First Nations culture at the core of all decision making and delivery. We strive to end injustice that has led to complex and extreme economic disadvantage by transforming the system. By evidencing a new approach that is designed with First Nations people and celebrates First People's culture and knowledge, we work with whole communities that experience unacceptable generational trauma and inequity. This is where the focus of government must be.

Children's Ground also has a highly innovative flexible employment strategy to engage First Nations people who have rarely or never worked before. These people live in our communities and are the people who lead our work. Our people have talents and aspirations but have not been given the opportunity in the past. The Children's Ground employment strategy has the principle of cultural equity ensuring that First Nations expertise is remunerated at par with Western-trained expertise in delivery. We aim to establish a workforce of cultural and community experts working alongside sector experts. Our employment model includes an open access philosophy coupled with training and support as well as time to build confidence and identify areas of interest.

At Children's Ground we address the key social, cultural and economic determinants so that every child born in that community today can enjoy a life of opportunity and wellbeing. This 25-year approach aspires to excellence recognising that children, families and communities who need the most, deserve the best, that they are the experts in their own lives and that it is their voice and talent that will create change. Children's Ground was created to close the gap, and to help First Nations children experience a lifetime of opportunity, entering adulthood strong in their identity and culture. We have the answers as First Nations people. Our culture and language must be at the heart of everything.

Children's Ground was incubated by the Australian Government in 2010 as an approach of innovation. This process resulted in the Children's Ground organisation being incorporated to lead evidence based transformational systemic change. Ours is a model of collective partnership between Government and philanthropy. To date the Australian Government has provided some funding, but not substantive funding. We face significant financial risk in our work to achieve long term change. We are waiting for government. We are seeking a long term commitment from Government to back a system designed and led by First Nations people, responding to key recommendations from the Productivity Commission and relevant inquiries, and is producing the evidence of impact in key Closing the Gap targets. We bring private funding to the table to support Government investment.

We would be very pleased to meet with the Joint Parliamentary Committee again to discuss this inquiry and any other issues that are referred by the Parliament in relation to First Nations people and communities. Please also find attached the following documents that provide a framework of the work of Children's Ground and the outcomes we are achieving.

- Statement from Felicity Hayes (Arrernte Elder and Children's Ground First Nations Director)
- Children's Ground Evaluation (Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe: Children's Ground in Central Australia)
- Children's Ground Economic and Wellbeing Framework
- Children's Ground overview documents (introduction, outcomes, financial)

Yours sincerely,



William Tilmouth, Chair



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Children's Ground

Economic Development and Wellbeing Framework

Economic Development and Wellbeing is one of five of the integrated services platforms that make up the Children's Ground Approach.

To understand the context within which Economic Development is delivered within Children's Ground, it is important to understand the broader Approach that supports and is necessary for enabling outcomes in this area.

Children's Ground – a Bold, New Response

Children's Ground is a First Nations organisation. The Children's Ground Approach (CGA) was designed to address the systemic failures that perpetuate extreme disadvantage and to evidence a model for change. It is founded on the oldest knowledge systems in the world and is informed by leading national and international practice. The CGA can be implemented by any organisation or group of organisations to achieve sustained, long-term change.

As First Nations people, we want our children to have a different future - where they are respected, they have access to high quality education, employment and health, and can celebrate social, cultural and economic inclusion. We designed Children's Ground to achieve this outcome.

This chapter presents, in concise form, Children's Ground's systemic, strategic and service reform agenda.

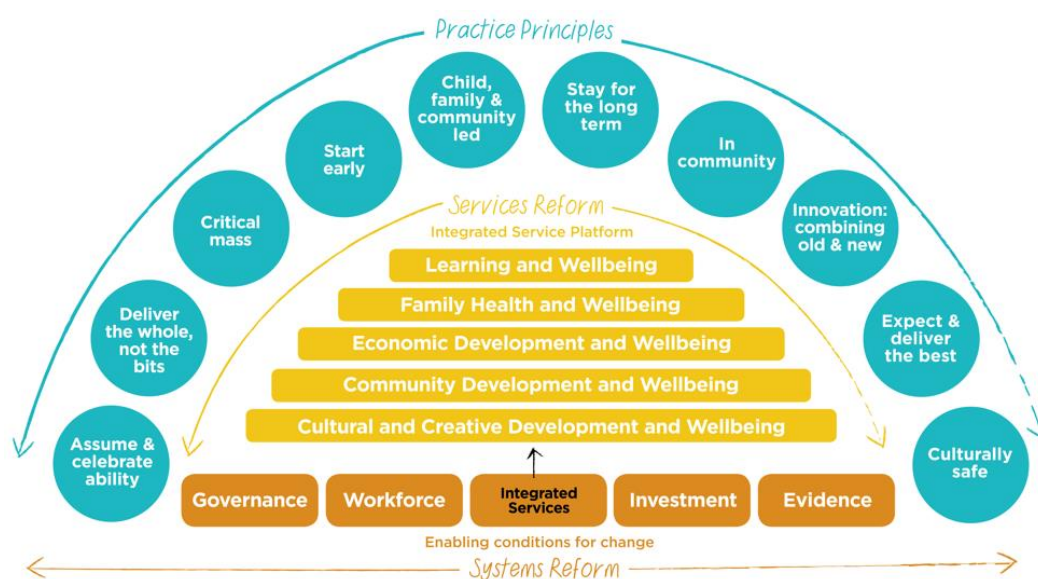
Children's Ground: Reforming the System

Children's Ground has created a reform agenda to achieve long term wellbeing for all children and families. As a 25-year strategy led at the community level, the CGA addresses the key social, cultural and economic determinants to support generational change. Local leadership and governance are backed by resources for high-quality services that are culturally responsive and focus on the child, their family and their community.

The CGA is not a service to people; it is part of the community. It frontloads resources into equitable access and prevention. It is an approach that builds the social, cultural and economic capital where children live, building upon a history of resilience. It recognises that children, families and communities who need the most, should receive the most and deserve the best. It recognises that we are the experts in our lives and that our voice and talent are critical to creating change.

The system is underpinned by three reforms that all inter-relate:

1. Practice principles
2. Integrated Services platform
3. Systems – enabling conditions for change



Community agency (leadership and governance) is the single most important principle and practice of the model. It is only by securing the consent, support and active involvement of the community in the governance, design, delivery and evaluation of responses that enduring change will be achieved.

Systemic Reform

To change the status quo, we need to radically change the way the system operates. Children's Ground has reformed five key areas to redress the current system failings and to evidence a new system to achieve long term impact.

	Current System	Children's Ground
1. Governance	Top down	Bottom up
2. Service Delivery	Crisis response and delivered in silos	Preventative and integrated
3. Workforce	Short-term; outsiders	Local and long-term
4. Investment	Short-term, project based	Long-term, collective, at scale
5. Evidence	Outputs based (what and how many)	Outcomes based (impact) First Nations led

A dual Governance system ensures that corporate governance is balanced with local First Nations governance. Day to day decision making is in the hands of community through **community cultural governance** led by elders. This is supported by a **Western governance** Board of Directors that brings together corporate, financial, not for profit, legal, cultural, health and education expertise.

A high quality and responsive **workforce** that combines cultural and Western expertise in each area of delivery is engaged in location. **Local employment** of local talent is a centrepiece. Recognising barriers to employment faced by First Nations people, this is enabled through a unique, flexible, 'no barriers' approach to **employment and workforce**. This is a long-term strategy for the new generation to be the economically independent workforce in the region for the future.

Collective investment combines philanthropic funding with government funding to enable scale, excellence, innovation and flexibility to deliver change. Innovative funding partners are committed to funding long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs alone.

Monitoring and evaluation, combined with robust data collection, informs performance quality and development. This involves a longitudinal evaluation that is oversighted by a national Research Advisory Group and is co-designed and led by First Nations people on the ground. This builds the **evidence** and evaluates the impact of the CG Approach.

These reforms are the pre-conditions required for a system of equity, inclusion and high quality. A system with the right governance arrangements; an integrated approach to learning, wellbeing and development; strong evidence of efficacy; the right workforce; and investment which is focused on outcomes are required to create a different future with children, families and communities.

Strategic Reform: Practice principles

Children's Ground is a generational approach, underpinned by ten strategic practice principles, all of which are instrumental to achieving change.

Long term success is premised on the full CGA being implemented.

Principles

Start early

- Begin in the early years
- Maternal health, early childhood & sexually active young people
- Prevention focus in all that is delivered

Stay for the long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-birth to 24 years - all major risk transition periods • Build whole of community change across a generation • Long term economic, social and cultural wellbeing
Child, family & community led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance by local people who design, deliver & evaluate the CGA • Families are fully involved • Place based and intergenerational approach – delivering where and how people live
Critical mass (work with everyone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and know all children and community members • Engage enough children and families (critical mass = at least 75% of children and their families) to enable widespread shift from inequity to opportunity
Assume and celebrate ability (strength-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the ability of children, families and community and build upon this strength • Recognise First Cultural knowledge and expertise • Respond to each child and family and community
Deliver the whole, not the bits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate <i>Learning, Wellbeing and Development</i> including key areas of education, health, governance, culture, society (community), employment, enterprise and wellbeing • Intergenerational and placed based
Innovation – the best of the old & the new	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine both the old and the new to create innovation • First Nations knowledge systems • Leading practice & global innovation
Expect and deliver the best (excellence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit and train a high quality workforce • Provide the best resources and services to deliver high quality services • Expect/encourage the best of all people • Meet key human rights instruments & principles
In community (place-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering where people live • Bringing everyone together where people live • Building upon the social, cultural and economic capital for the whole community
Culturally Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are nurtured in their culture and identity • Children and families experience culturally respectful and safe environments • Privilege First Culture and language through culturally responsive leadership

Community agency is the single most important principle and practice in our model. It is only by securing the consent, support and active involvement of the community in the governance, design, delivery and evaluation of responses, that enduring change will be achieved.

Service Reform

Service Reform is about what we do and how we do our work with community, families and children. It directly relates to one of the key systemic reform areas 'Integrated Services' and the practice principle of 'Deliver the whole not the bits'.

The Children's Ground Approach integrates First Nations knowledge with leading practice in global knowledge systems. On the ground in communities, the CGA delivers the following services and supports, referred to as the integrated 'Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform' (LWD platform).

Our *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform has five service areas - each with their own strategy and operational framework (listed below):

1. Learning and Wellbeing (Education)
2. Family Health and Wellbeing (Health)
3. Community Development and Wellbeing (Society, Governance, Culture and Environment)
4. Economic Development and Wellbeing (Employment, Training and Enterprise)
5. Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing (Embedded across the other four areas)

Children's Ground's *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform targets key social, structural and economic determinants and the multi-level influences on children's development from pre-birth to 25 years. It is a full system of services and wrap around responsive supports that are the requisite foundations of prevention and empowerment.

The CGA is delivered with genuine integration - it is not hindered by siloed funding streams and delivery. Content and delivery are individualised and tailored for each child, family and community to ensure children are equipped to enter adulthood confident and economically independent in local and global environments.

In simple terms, we make sure children and their families have the sort of opportunities that most Australians enjoy: a high quality education, creative and cultural lives and agency in their health and wellbeing. This approach is place-based, allowing communities to shift from having little or no access, to having agency over a range of opportunities that support culture, safety, learning, health, economy, skills development, fun and celebration.

See Appendix 1 for a summary outline of the CGA Learning Wellbeing and Development Integrated services platform.

Where we work

Children's Ground was designed with communities that face the greatest disadvantage and inequity. Where we work, economic poverty is experienced by every family. Children in these communities experience the worst outcomes in the country in education, health and safety. Engagement in both the criminal justice and child protection systems are some of the highest in Australia. Children engaging with Children's Ground are on a treadmill from birth that leads them through a life of higher risk factors at every stage of life leading to almost certain early death.

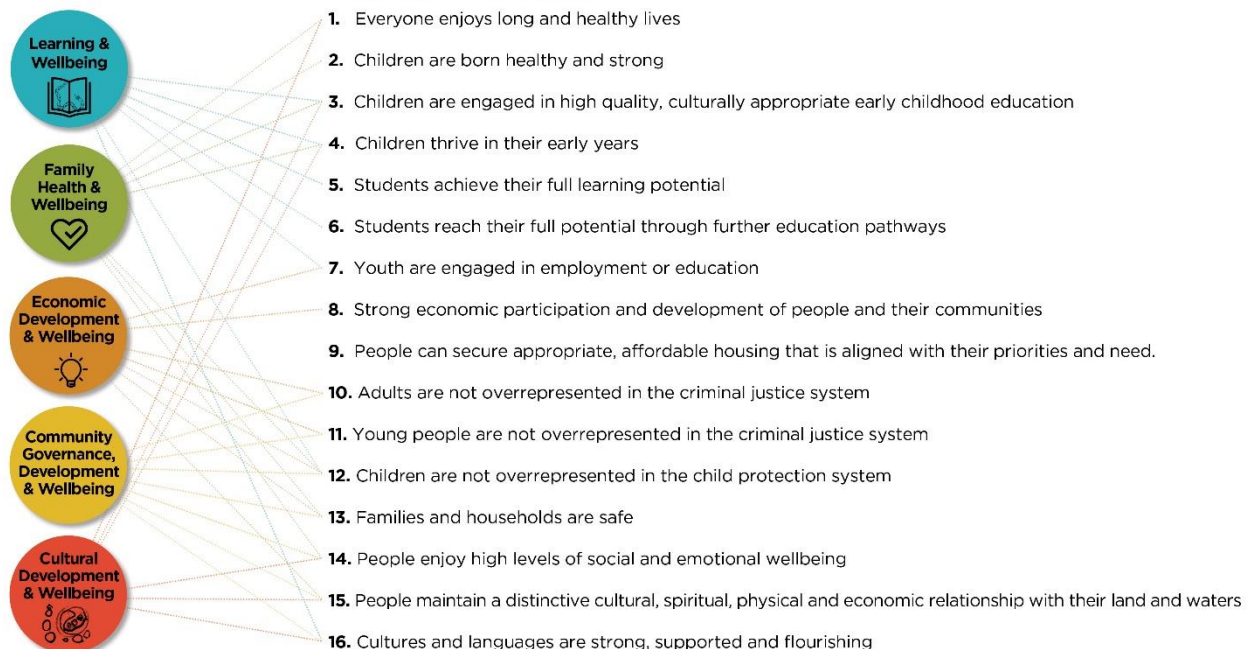
Compounding the basic issues of equity for all children are issues of institutionalised racism and the mono-cultural domination of Western research and educational think tanks. The lack of cultural diversity and equity in our systems fails to respond to a globalized world, limiting and undermining development and wellbeing for children and families, particularly those who are living with poverty and whose first cultures are not Western.

All of the factors that create this life path are preventable.

The CGA is designed to create a new path for children from birth. It responds to the key national targets for Closing the Gap.



Children's Ground Platform Areas → Closing The Gap Targets



Evidence – to achieve scale, deep and enduring change

The ambition of Children's Ground is to disrupt the status quo and replace a failed and damaging system with an empowered approach that enables long term sustained justice and wellbeing for First Nations people. Children's Ground's long-term strategy is to demonstrate the efficacy of the CGA in a small number of communities and to build the robust evidence and leading practice for broadscale reform.

Children's Ground has an ethics approved, longitudinal evaluation oversighted by an independent National Research Advisory Group made up of members from leading research institutions across Australia. The Children's Ground Evaluation framework tracks progress across nine outcomes for children, families and whole communities.

First Nations leadership and researchers are central to our long-term participatory evaluation design.

Economic Development and Wellbeing Strategy

Introduction

One of the key drivers to addressing injustice and disadvantage is economic security and independence. This has been denied for First Nations people in Australia since colonization and the introduction of a Western monetary economy.

First Nations people have been structurally and systemically excluded from the financial economy of the state. The combination of an introduced monetary economy, economic abuse of First Nations people, and the colonization and damage to First Nations economies have together created economic oppression. Lawful economic controls were used against First Nations people until the 1970's allowing states to control peoples' finances. Stolen wages and forced/unpaid labor were the norm until the referendum in 1967 which led to increased rights to participate in the mainstream economy.

Despite increased rights, economic freedoms have not been achieved for First Nations people. Since the 1970's, First Nations communities have been subject to ongoing welfare policies rather than economic development policies. The absence of measures to secure economic literacy with few entry points into the mainstream financial economy has been coupled with a pervasive system of welfare that has cemented economic poverty. This has resulted in a new form of financial controls that have caused endemic hardship and resulted in devastating social, cultural and personal trauma. Many First Nations communities live in an 'economic bubble' that sits outside of the mainstream economy. This has created deep economic injustice. First Nations people are not able to engage freely or fairly in the Western economic system.

Children's Ground is led by communities in which poverty and economic stress are experienced by all families. Most adults have little or no work history. Systemic racism and associated barriers mean that successfully moving into sustainable employment is very difficult and for many unachievable.

The ANU has reports that income gaps are narrowing in urban areas but widening in more remote areas, particularly in very remote areas. Also included in the report is that over the past decade, poverty rates have risen in remote and very remote Aboriginal communities¹. Evidence shows that, in 2019, more than half of the Indigenous population in very remote Australia was in income poverty².

While for many people, Centrelink is the main form of income, there are others who live without any income due to a range of system barriers. The current jobseeker allowance rate is \$310.40 per week or \$16,140.80 per annum³. The poverty line for single adults is \$457/week⁴. The social, health and mental health costs of unemployment are extreme.

Employment creates economic benefits to the individual and to the national economy. A person living in Australia and earning \$75,000 a year will be taxed a \$17,422 contribution to Australia's

¹ Markham, F and Biddle, N. (2016) Income, Poverty and Inequality; census paper 2 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU

² By Sila, U. and Dugain, V. (2019) Income Poverty of Households In Australia: Evidence From The Hilda Survey Economics Department Working Papers No. 1539, OECD

³ Centrelink payments 2021

Single, no children	\$310.40pw	Single, with a dependent child or children	\$333.75pw	Partnered	\$282.70pw
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⁴ Poverty in Australia 2020, ACOSS; <http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty/>

economy, leaving a net pay of \$ \$57,578 per year. This tax exceeds the cost of a welfare payment (without including the significant additional administrative costs of Centrelink).

Employment affords people dignity and contributes not only to economic health, but to mental health, social health and physical health within families.

The family environment of a child is a key determinant in health and educational outcome.⁵ Studies have shown that jobless families experience lower socioeconomic status, impacting educational attainment, health, safety and access to basic services. Children living in a jobless family fare worse in terms of educational, social and health outcomes.^{6 7}

“...inequality is largely a result of policies – of what we do and don’t do. The laws of economics are universal...Every aspect of our economic, legal, and social frameworks helps shape our inequality... In virtually every domain, we have made decisions that help enrich the top at the expense of the rest.”⁸

Professor Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winning economist

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013 Authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing

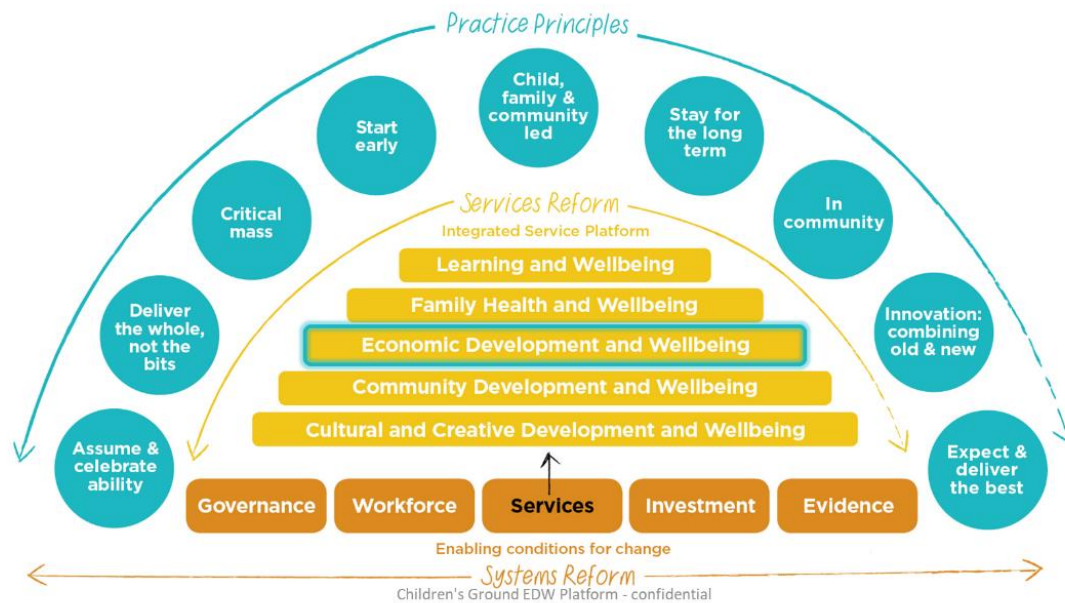
⁶ Baxter, J; Gray M; Hand, K; Hayes, A (2012) Parental joblessness, financial disadvantage and the wellbeing of parents and children, Australian Institute of Family Studies

⁷ Marmot, M. (2017) The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World: the argument. International Journal of Epidemiology, 1312–1318

⁸ Stiglitz JE (2014) The Price of Inequality: Why inequality matters and what can be done about it

Children's Ground's Economic Development and Wellbeing Strategy

Achieving economic freedom can only be addressed through a long-term comprehensive strategy. The Children's Ground Approach designed to achieve economic, social, cultural and political empowerment. This is achieved through Children's Ground's integrated services platform; Economic Development and Wellbeing Framework is one of five areas in this platform. The remaining four (health, education, culture and community) interact with and enable economic freedom. Each of the five areas is dependent on the other.



Children's Ground has a 25-year longitudinal evaluation which includes key indicators for economic wellbeing for both families and communities. The aim is to secure economic independence for a critical mass of community adults and for employment and economic security to be the norm for the next generation of children as they exit into adulthood.

We want employment to be the norm in our communities. We do not want to live on Centrelink payments, or with no money. We don't want to see our families struggling.

- staff/family member

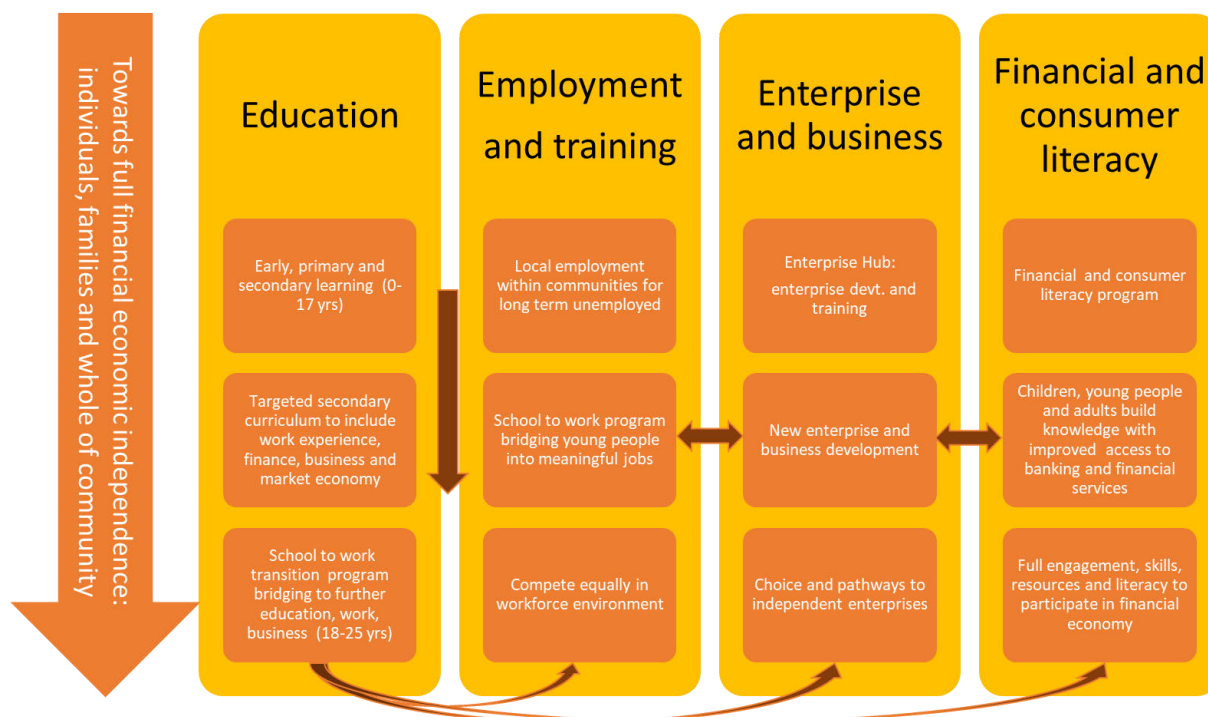
Children's Ground's Economic Development and Wellbeing strategy focuses on key activities, resources, systems and structures to achieve economic equity and the freedoms for people to engage in a global economy. Achieving economic equity requires:

- understanding of historical and enduring economic barriers and enablers
- cultural safety and cultural economies
- understanding of and access to Western and global economic opportunities and developments

Children's Ground begins its 25-year journey through understanding the economic environment of the community. This varies across communities. We then ensure that the delivery platform is designed so that young people emerge from Children's Ground with the skills to enjoy employment and economic independence relevant to their immediate community and more broadly.

Children's Ground believes that an economic development platform should be supported in every First Nations community. The Children's Ground Economic Development and Wellbeing strategy has four key strands, one of which connects directly to our Learning and Wellbeing strategy (education).

Children's Ground Economic Development and Wellbeing framework



Education

Education is the key foundation for employment and long-term economic wellbeing. Educational systems, pedagogy and curriculum are currently failing First Nations children. Children's Ground has designed a learning approach with four stages from early childhood to primary, secondary and post-school transition. The learning system is designed for First Nations children to express their talents, to develop as people and to achieve education success and cultural and social wellbeing. First Nations-led pedagogy and curriculum spans both First Cultural and Western academic outcomes. Economic literacy begins in early childhood and grows through a child's learning journey. In secondary school, the curriculum includes targeted economic and financial literacy to ensure students understand Western and global economic systems as well as an introduction to business and enterprise.

The Children's Ground Learning and Wellbeing strategy and operational framework are only referenced briefly in this document for its critical enabling connection to economic development and wellbeing. As a major operational arm of Children's Ground, Learning and Wellbeing has its own fully articulated strategy.

Employment

Workforce Development

Children's Ground's employment strategy aims to create employment and job quality as a norm in First Nations communities. Through placed based (in-community) employment, the social and economic capital of communities will be strengthened. The economic home environment has significant influence on child life outcomes⁹ and intergenerational economic exclusion. A comprehensive employment structure, job creation and wage equity are required to achieve this.

Where Children's Ground works, unemployment is the norm. People either live on Centrelink payments or have no income. Some people have had some experience of work. Few people have had full time employment or sustained employment. As a result, children grow up in very stressed economic and social environments.

High unemployment and low incomes have become an intergenerational reality because of systemic and structural racism that has resulted in:

- Mainstream economic exclusion and pathway barriers to employment
- Mainstream educational exclusion and skills barriers to employment
- Mainstream employment exclusion through active discrimination
- Lack of recognition of First Nations expertise and cultural economies resulting in unpaid and underpaid work being performed by a large proportion of First Nations adults across a range of disciplines
- Trauma and a range of cultural, linguistic, social and emotional barriers to employment
- Geographic and resource barriers to employment

A history of high non-First Nations turnover staff in Aboriginal communities is a cause of serious structural failures. The continued investment in attracting a non-First Nations workforce to remote communities and a lack of investment in building local and long term workforces remains a significant policy failure that sustains economic poverty.

Children's Ground's goal is to establish sustainable local First Nations employment. Children's Ground recognises First Nations and Western skills and expertise as equally important. Achieving employment growth requires:

- Local employment – employing local people who are unemployed to work in their communities across a range of essential and other services
- Job creation – creating new employment to meet the service needs of communities **and** creating cultural-based employment opportunities
- Wage equity – equal recognition of Western and cultural skills
- Education and training – providing professional and workforce development

The strengthening and recognition of cultural skills within economic structures is key to workforce development reform. Principles of empowerment, self-determination and cultural authority are central to the success of Children's Ground's workforce development.

While our long-term strategy is for quality educational experiences to underpin future economic independence for the next generation of children, we also have an immediate employment strategy.

Our strategy provides for immediate employment of local people who have previously experienced chronic unemployment. Children's Ground is realistic about employment sustainability being affected by historical and current personal and family stress and trauma. We create soft entry points

⁹ 2021, Cooper, K., Stewart, K. Does Household Income Affect children's Outcomes? A Systematic Review of the Evidence. *Child Ind Res* **14**, 981–1005

for local people who are new to the workforce and build skills through mentoring and on the job training over time.

To reduce barriers, encourage workforce engagement and achieve employment outcomes, Children's Ground has key principles and practice standards in place:

- **Culturally safe workplace:** Providing cultural safety in the workplace goes beyond training non-First Nations staff in cultural competence. Cultural safety is genuine when children and families see their language and culture reflected in service delivery and systems. Children's Ground ensures culturally safe workplaces through widespread employment of local First Nations people across all service platform areas – this affords First Nations staff and 'service users' to experience services and supports in their first language that incorporate cultural teaching, learning, health and governance knowledge systems and practices.
- **Equity in employment:** Work has always been part of life for First Nations people. However, domains of cultural expertise have never been recognised in Western economic and employment structures. In the few areas that First Nations people are engaged for cultural and linguistic talent (e.g. teaching or health), they have historically been placed in junior roles and either paid through CDEP or low paid employment. At Children's Ground, we recognise cultural expertise. First Nations specialists exist across health, education, nutrition, medicines, sciences, evaluation, law, aged care, early childhood, land management, mental health, the arts, governance, etc. We recognise both First Nations and non-First Nations expertise and we employ and remunerate people equally.
- **No barriers to employment:**
 - Where someone in the local community expresses an interest in working, Children's Ground will attempt to provide employment (dependant on budget available). Children's Ground cannot keep up with the demands for employment within communities. Adequate funding would result in employment outcomes of people who have experience entrenched unemployment
 - **Transport:** A key practical and logistical barrier to employment for many people includes transport. Transport support and solutions require dedicated attention and resourcing.
- **Flexible employment approach:** We have created levels of employment engagement from soft casual engagement to flexible part time/permanent to full time employment. Staff with no previous work experience are initially placed on casual contracts to build confidence and experience, moving to part- and full-time work when they are ready. When there are periods of family or personal stress, employment flexibility allows people to reduce their hours without penalty or fear and to resume work when they are able. Children's Ground's policy of "No Barriers to Employment" along with our "Flexible Employment Approach" allows people who are not in the position to hold down daily or regular employment to still have access to work opportunities. People are encouraged and supported to move into stable employment but are also not judged or penalised where this does not occur.
- **Employment engagement support:** There are barriers to meeting the requirements of key paperwork and compliance involved in employment. Birth certificates, bank accounts, tax file numbers, police checks and working with vulnerable people checks are just some of the critical compliance and administrative requirements for employment. Support for navigating systems to secure these documents is needed due to language, cultural and structural barriers. The inability to access a birth certificate, for example, can create a cascade of serious barriers that can prevent employment for months or years. Despite job services providers, it is more common than not that people engaging with Children's Ground require significant support to meet these requirements.
- **Work support:** Mentoring and training

- **Work plans** are developed for each staff member outlining their interests, the expectations of their role and how Children's Ground will assist them to develop their skills. In the early period of employment, staff are encouraged to explore different employment options to identify one that interests them the most.
- **Mentoring and induction:** understanding time sheets, work structure, compliance and policy requires training and support for people who have never worked. Ongoing mentoring is needed as people build their confidence and skills.
- **Training** is provided to support staff interests and the skills relevant to their respective roles. Training includes:
 - Personal development to assist with overall employability including gaining learners and probationary drivers permits and basic literacy and numeracy
 - Professional development ranging from compliance (e.g. mandatory reporting) through to professional development and further training (education, health, evaluation etc.)
- **Social, emotional and physical wellbeing:** support is provided through counselling and our health team and through employment conditions that support health and wellbeing to reduce barriers to employment. Local staff and leaders continue to live with trauma and extreme personal stress. Some staff are homeless, others live with family violence, chronic health, mental health risk and effects of alcohol and other drugs. Grief and loss are persistent for most. Until we reduce the level of trauma in future generations, work environments must accommodate and respond to the trauma, stress and burden of ill-health that people continue to live with as a result of colonisation.
- **Empowerment and leadership development:** In many organisation there is a lack of **local** First Nations staff in positions of leadership. At Children's Ground, local leadership is prioritised. First Nations land based (traditional owner) governance is actively promoted. The voice and leadership of users and local community members is considered critical to success. Local leadership is supported through dedicated governance structures. All First Nations community members are included in cultural governance, the direction of the organisation and the development of services provided. First Nations Elders and senior cultural staff hold Co-Director positions in the organisation. Training and development opportunities are aimed at increasing the skill base and working towards senior leadership across the organisation. Youth leadership is an additional focus and is critical to role modelling and generational leadership change.
- **Excellence and accountability:** Children's Ground aims to deliver high quality services through highly trained staff in all areas of cultural and Western knowledge systems. Expectations of employees are set by the Cultural Governance committees and the organisation. This includes a staff Code of Conduct developed and authorised by the community. These standards are monitored at a local level by leaders for their communities.
- **Inclusion:** Local community members are included in all Children's Ground operations, with many choosing to volunteer and engage as participants which in turn often leads to employment

Place-based employment and building community level economic health

Placed based delivery is a cornerstone principle of Children’s Ground. Building the social, cultural and economic capital across whole communities requires investment in that community over the long term at adequate levels to achieve equity, high quality and sustainability.

Every First Nations community requires basic service equity with all services considered, planned and delivered in the context of access to Western and first cultural skills, practice and access. This includes but is not limited to services in the areas of education, health, municipal services, aged care, early childhood, mental health, sport and recreation, financial services (including banking & Centrelink), housing repairs and maintenance, transport and nutrition/food security.

Local people in local jobs driving local economy

Education Early childhood, primary, secondary, post- secondary	Health	Youth	Child and family	Aged Care - Elders
Transport	Land Management and environmental services	Retail	Arts	Culture
Housing R&M	Local council and Government services	Financial Services (banking, centrelink)	Municipal Services	Enterprise and other

Historically, communities have either poor service access, or where services are delivered, they are often dominated by non-local and non-First Nations staff.

Children’s Ground believes that a comprehensive economic development strategy for communities requires employment of local First Nations people within their own communities over the long term across all key service areas and all levels of employment.

While Children’s Ground is not in the position to create employment across all service areas, we begin within our five key areas of service delivery (education, health, culture, economic development and community development). We ensure that local community members are employed and building the skills needed to sustain services over the long term. In addition to key service areas, communities begin planning for social enterprises and independent economic opportunities. The recognition of mainstream Western services as well as culturally based employment services is part of the design for employment in each community.

Our aim over 25 years is for each community to be at par with national levels of employment, that local First Nations people are in key leadership roles in each service area and that cultural expertise is actively recognised and equally remunerated within employment opportunities.

This requires a combination of each of the areas of Children’s Ground’s Economic Development and Wellbeing framework – education, job creation and employment, enterprise and economic literacy.

If this is achieved community-wide, the foundation for generational change will be achieved and will impact broader social outcomes as a key determinant of health, wellbeing and safety, and for learning and development of the current and future generations of children.

Impact

Children's Ground's employment approach has been implemented in two regions with strong results evidenced in early evaluation findings. Findings from two evaluations shows that Children's Ground's flexible employment model changed the system in terms of the way First Nations people (particularly those who were long-term unemployed) engaged in employment.

In the Kakadu region from 2014-16, 87 local First Nations people were employed with 94% staff retention rate. Of these, 81% were not working when they began employment with Children's Ground. ABS Census data shows an increase in the share of Aboriginal people who were employed in the region between 2011 and 2016 was not part of a broader trend in the NT. This outcome was significant against a national trend that has seen no significant improvement in the Northern Territory Aboriginal employment outcomes across the period of Closing the Gap.

In Central Australia from 2017-19 a total of 59 First Nations people were employed, with 84% not working when they started with Children's Ground (with unemployment ranging from 2 months to 20 years) and 34% reporting having never worked before.

In addition to supporting economic security for individuals and families, employment provided a broader impact. It resulted in improved health, education and wellbeing of children and families. It also impacted local governance leadership and empowerment.

Family employment was found to be an enabler for families' engagement in their children's learning and wellbeing, as well as for child participation in learning. Analysis of employment and learning participation data for family groups/units demonstrated a link between children's attendance in learning and their family's attendance in employment at Children's Ground.

Employment of local staff not only supports the economic wellbeing of individuals and families, but it is also critical to the standards and expertise required for Children's Ground operations. As leaders of Children's Ground and as First Nations people, we are the only ones that can set the standards for Children's Ground to privilege and enact cultural knowledge systems and practices. While our people have limited Western work experience, we have generations of cultural work experience. First Nations people come to Children's Ground to lead not because we have a problem. First Nations people come to teach our children, to lead our communities and deliver services. This in turn has been evidenced with reported increases of empowerment and the strengthening of self-determination for communities and individuals.

Local First Nations staff are also critical to standards through policy development. This in turn creates critical cultural safety and sustainable employment. It has also created cultural safety in service delivery. As an example, First Nations leaders determined standards in Learning and Wellbeing that require children to be taught in an intergenerational environment that responds to kinship structures. This sets the direction for both employment and service structures.

The employment of local First Nations staff has:

- sustained and strengthened cultural knowledge, practice and expertise
- been instrumental in local decision making, planning and leadership
- enabled cultural safety
- created confidence and pride across communities
- enabled access to health and wellbeing
- enabled access to other support needs for children, families and communities
- reduced harmful behaviours such as alcohol and other drugs for some individuals
- strengthened cross-cultural collaboration and standards
- enabled cultural and Western trained staff to work together and mentor each other in their relevant skills

- begun to establish new norms and role models for employment for families and communities

The evaluations found that the high level of First Nations employment in some communities began to change the status quo. Children witnessed adults working as a new norm. In evaluation interviews, community members commented on the impact at personal and community levels. Below are quotes from the qualitative analysis from both regions:

"It was the first thing I had in my life where I felt really good. I kept coming and it has kept growing and growing."

"It's giving them kids a good example about you can't be sitting over there and drinking and smoking dope and stuff like that. You've got to have somewhere you can have space and where you can do your job, work."

"People are working and getting more confidence and learning too."

"It's good for kids to see family working. They feel much better. Mum got work. Working on country. My kids love it when I go to work – they have a smile on their face."

"A lot of people ask me to work here. I said we will be getting people to work but it will be slow because of funding."

"I used to go out drunk every day. Smoke gunja [marijuana] every day. But now got this job. Everything start changing for me."

"So all the boys, some of them, were turning 18, 19 and going somewhere else, getting drunk, smoking all the time, just walk around here. Then when Children's Ground came up, then all the young people, men and adults, they started revive, doing their stuff, doing things for kids."

"And I'm really, really proud my son. He's got his own, you know, experience working."

First Nations staff/families

"They had huge employment down there [at Children's Ground]... that has a huge knock on effect for health and wellbeing, people being employed is just vital."

Local service, 2017

"Some of the [Children's Ground] employees...actually improved their health which I think was directly related by Children's Ground. Some of the diabetics had improved blood sugar control, purely from the fact that the nutrition program that was happening down there and also getting out and exercising, moving around. You actually saw it, it's not just anecdotal, you've got evidence through their results that that happened."

Local health service

Financial and Consumer literacy

There are a range of significant barriers that impact the financial literacy of First Nations people. The structural exclusion from the financial economy has led to poor financial literacy. This, combined with language, cultural and geographic barriers, has resulted in significant gaps in knowledge, resources and information in relation to financial systems.

In many First Nations communities, banking and financial services support is limited or does not exist. There are few financial counsellors available to First Nations communities. Bridging the divide by eliminating barriers to participating in monetary is critical if First Nations people are to be economically empowered.

Children's Ground's Economic Development and Wellbeing platform aims to bridge these gaps and works to prevent these gaps emerging for the next generation.

Financial and consumer literacy is supported in our approach through a dedicated financial and consumer literacy program in each region to support people in their:

1. Financial management
2. Consumer literacy
3. Consumer rights
4. Access to financial services

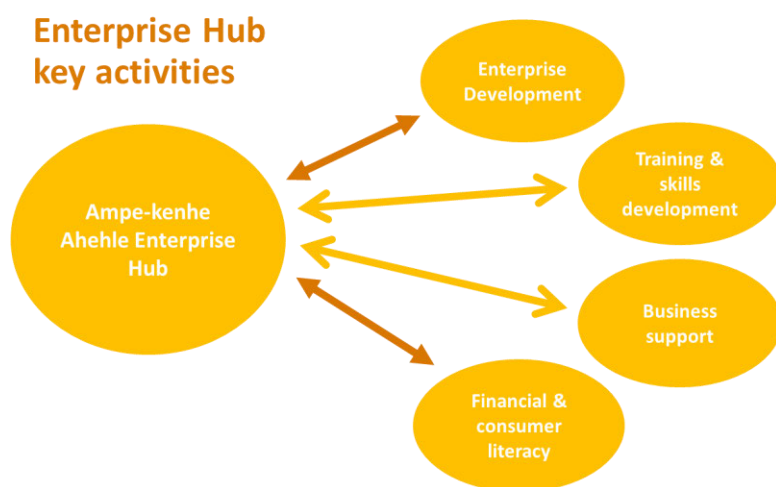
This includes supporting First Nations employees with savings plans through payroll, a financial and consumer literacy counsellor and training in financial and consumer literacy.

Enterprise and Business Development

First Nations economic development builds the social, cultural and economic wealth in communities and regions where people live.

Over the next 25 years, we aim to see young people and adults with opportunities and business knowledge/skills to be able to make informed decisions regarding enterprise and business development. There are emerging opportunities through digital connectivity to bring global and future economies to any community in Australia. It is critical that we look at the possibilities - not the challenges.

In each region, Children's Ground aims to establish an Enterprise Hub.



The Hub is designed to deliver the Children's Ground Enterprise Development program consisting of:

- Training and skills development programs in enterprise and small business
- Enterprise development – incubation and acceleration
- Business support
- Financial and consumer literacy
- Access to business development and investment partnerships

Children's Ground's Enterprise Hub aims to:

- Embed financial and business skills in community knowledge and practice
- Ensure Cultural and intellectual property standards and knowledge
- Establish and, where viable, scale enterprises as an avenue for independent income and local employment
- Advance the cultural economy through enterprise and business development. The cultural economy is an emerging area of business opportunity for First Nations people and

encompasses a range of areas including, but not limited to, the arts, environmental management, cultural consultancy, education and training, cultural tourism, cultural health and wellbeing

- Develop skills, knowledge and experience of market economies within the community so that local people have full agency in business opportunities over time. This includes ending a history of cultural exploitation to enable informed choices to engage as equal partners in business
- Provide First Nations young people with the opportunity to be part of new emerging economies through digital capabilities where they live – lifting the ceiling on possibilities and creating innovative business models for remote and culturally diverse contexts
- Create employment and economic independence in communities where there has been intergenerational economic exclusion and hardship
- Create partnerships with national First Nations business initiatives and investment groups

First Nations businesses only represent between 0.6 and 0.8 per cent of the 2.1 million businesses nationwide.¹⁰ There are extensive opportunities at local business level, national and global levels for individuals and communities to consider. Taking advantage of larger opportunities requires adequate resources and skills to ensure business planning for success.

¹⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) Indigenous Business Sector Strategy. Available at: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/indigenous-business-sector-strategy>

Economic Development & Wellbeing strategy - 25 years outcomes

The Economic Development & Wellbeing strategy is designed so that community enjoys economic wellbeing achieved through:

1. **Education:** children in each community in each region succeed in their learning, exiting secondary school to further education and/or independent workforce
2. **Employment:** adults of working age are in workforce, education or training
3. **Enterprise:** successful individual/community small business/enterprises



Children's Ground Employment Trial – proposal to Government

In 2017, Children's Ground made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into 'The appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP)'.

Children's Ground proposed that the Government support a trial of the proposed Children's Ground 'employment and training' initiative. The following is a summary outlining the proposal for the current environment.

Children's Ground Workforce proposal – a cost neutral opportunity for Government

Children's Ground proposes trialing an alternative approach to employment, training and workforce development to improve employment outcomes for First Nations communities.

This proposal requires no funding, and in real terms will be income generating for Government by removing people from Centrelink into meaningful employment and reducing the administrative and third-party costs associated with job seekers.

The current jobseeker allowance rate is \$310.40 per week or \$16,140.80 per annum allowance costs the government \$403,520 over a 25 year period (not indexed). This does not include the costs of Centrelink administration.

Children's Ground's community-led employment and workforce development strategy will significantly reduce this cost and seeks to build 'sustainable employment for people experiencing deep and persistent disadvantage'.

Core elements of the proposed alternative approach are described here:

1. An organisation or community is allocated a number of 'positions', for example, the equivalent to 50 jobseeker allowance payments a year for a period of three-to-five years.
2. There is an immediate savings to government by removing the administrative costs associated with supporting 50 job seekers on Centrelink payments, as well as the costs associated with third party employment agencies for those 50 job seekers.
3. This payment effectively becomes a wage subsidy for the employment of 50 people who agree to exit the welfare system. Payments allocated to the organisation or community are attached to real individuals who are recognised as living with high barriers to employment and/or are chronically unemployed.
4. The jobseeker payment would provide for the first 10 hours of work per week. The organisation/community would commit to fund additional hours worked and create work opportunities of a minimum of 20 hours a week - the organisation must commit to real wages.
5. This model increases the capacity of the organisation to employ staff, and to increase work hours available to staff. This would allow people to move from casual to permanent part-time work and career development opportunities.
6. Participants would be placed on an employment contract with relevant entitlements and an understanding that, at times, cultural commitments and chronic ill-health, etc. require flexibility in employment conditions which will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. This means a safety net of income can be provided for legitimate reasons, which reduces the likelihood of people simply disengaging from employment.
7. The organisation/community would also receive an additional annual payment for a dedicated Workforce Support Officer for every 25 staff and a full-time counsellor. The workforce officer would establish a training, mentoring and leadership program for all participants with individualised work and support plans that include support for continued engagement with employment. These costs would be offset by the savings from for-profit employment providers and associated incentive payments.
8. The organisation/community would provide an annual employment report against payments to the Government (or more often if requested).

This proposal creates a new employment model and can be introduced alongside the current system.

In this model, the engagement is direct between the individual and the employer. This system enables securing adequate resources internally to support workforce development for organisations with demonstrated capacity and commitment to local employment outcomes for long term unemployed.

This model would require a serious assessment of organisations applying to:

- support community-based employment
- ensure system compliance, accountability

- have the ability to provide meaningful employment for First Nations people
- be a competitive employer with high quality work conditions that are stimulating and rewarding

Assessing performance

Success is based on engagement in employment, growth in employment stability and mapping employment entry points, pathways and support that lead to longevity in employment.

The success of this project will be measured on:

- Number of staff employed
- Number and proportion of staff employed for 13 and 26 weeks or more
- Average hours of employment for staff, analysed by contract type, gender and location, among other factors
- Number of training programs completed (and proportion of certificate training completed) that is relevant to the staff member's interests and role requirements

At the end of five years, the target is that at least half of the participants would have transitioned to sustained independent employment.

Summary

This is a cost-neutral proposal for Government with immediate employment outcomes. In real terms, this proposal is income generating for Government by creating employment, an increase in taxable workforce, a reduction on Centrelink administrative demands and a reduction on other Centrelink assistant payments.

These indicators align with the Government's Closing the Gap targets in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Furthermore, First Nations communities currently depend on a transient non-Indigenous workforce while local people remain chronically under employed. This strategy is to shift the status-quo from an external non-Indigenous workforce in First Nations communities to a local skilled workforce that provides the economic wellbeing for the community.

Conclusion







The only long-term option for First Nations communities is to enjoy economic freedom through equity in economic opportunity.

This is achievable through a comprehensive strategy for individuals, families and communities. It requires a focus on both people and systems to reduce structural and racial barriers while building the skills for current and future employment opportunities.

Children's Ground's Economic Development and Wellbeing Framework is based on the strength and history of First Nations work and culture. It creates the foundations for economic freedoms and justice and for long term economic security.

Appendix 1:

Children's Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform

	Stage 1 Early childhood 0-8 year olds	Stage 2 Childhood 6-11 year olds	Stage 3 Young people 12-16 year olds	Stage 4 Emerging adults 17-24 year olds
Learning & Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations & Western curriculum• Early childhood education• Integrating health• Family engagement• On country and in centre• Pre numeracy and literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations & Western curriculum• Incorporating global skills and knowledge - key skills in cultural knowledge, numeracy, literacy (written and digital), problem solving, ethics, social and global knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations & Western curriculum• Learning for adulthood – responsibility & respect• Enterprise and creativity• Workforce ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations & Western curriculum• Provide individual support and mentoring plans to assist transitions to work and further education
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical, emotional, social, cognitive, creative, academic, cultural, financial knowledge and skills• Individual learning and wellbeing plans• Out of hours education and extracurricular programs			
Family Health & Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health promotion – Promotion outreach and social determinants focus (integrated into programs as well as outreach)• Social and emotional wellbeing – Counselling, learning integration (addressing trauma and stress)• Child and maternal health – Support and education focused on maternal and child health, sexual health, nutrition, childhood emotional and cognitive development, parenting• Nutrition – Preparing and cooking breakfast, lunch and morning/afternoon tea for children• Environmental health – Supporting healthier and safer environments in which children live			
Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance, Children's Ground Intergenerational Community Centre, Community Development• Promoting safety, inclusion, wellbeing, care and responsibility, culture and celebration• Strengths based			
Culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural and creative knowledge and lore as foundations to learning, identity, skills and economy			
Economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment, training and enterprise – long term mentoring and leadership, enterprise, curriculum and skills development that leads to employment in local contexts and in broader opportunities			
Coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal and external service coordination – formal agreements, partner delivery, collective impact, facilitation of access to other services			

Integration and Delivery

The service system is designed to create a safe environment for children and families. This is achieved by regarding and respecting the individual, their culture and their identity. The culture and identity of a child is fundamental to their learning and wellbeing.

We recognise that the First Nations world view connects the development of the person to the land and the people in a sophisticated system that combines education, health, wellbeing, society, law, philosophy, environment and culture. This is known by different names in different Aboriginal nations and languages.¹¹

¹¹ Altyerre (Arrernte), Jukurrpa (Walpiri), Tjurkurpa (**Pitjantjatjara**), Man-garre (Kunwinjku), An-garre (Gundjeihmi).

The Children's Ground *Learning Wellbeing and Development* platform integrates three knowledge and practice systems:

1. Local cultural systems of knowledge (pre-colonisation)

The oldest culture in the world has sophisticated systems of knowledge and practice that continue to underpin the life and identity of the young people and families with whom we will be working. Our work respects and promotes this knowledge and practice.

2. Leading practice and pedagogy post-colonisation in relation to First Nations culture and knowledge

For example, bilingual learning and wellbeing, immersion schools, language nests, intergenerational learning centres, healing centres and relevant cultural and historical curricula, both local and national.

3. Global leading practice in areas of learning, wellbeing and development:

- Education
- Digital literacy and economies
- Health
- Enterprise and business etc.

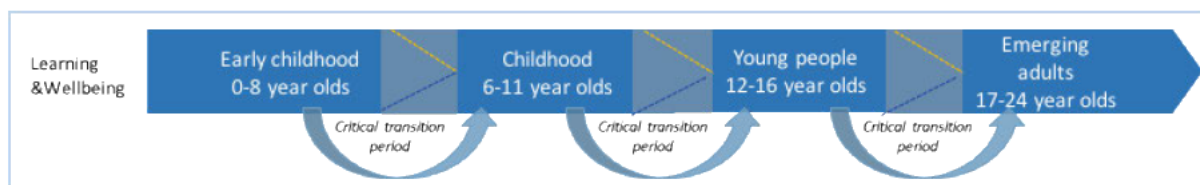
The CG Approach combines local cultural knowledge systems with international and national evidence, contextualises these and integrates them to shape innovative opportunities that are congruent with the aspirations of parents and their community.

Community Engagement and Planning (Walk Talk and Act)

The first phase of any work requires community engagement and planning. This can take six to 12 months and works at the pace of each community and region. This is a process undertaken with the community, to listen and determine both the community's interest and ability to partner for long term change. Children's Ground will only work where we have an invitation, agreement and shared vision with the local community and key decision makers for the region. The community engagement process leads to a decision by Children's Ground's board and the community to move to implementation of Stage 1 of operations and a five-year strategic plan.

Appendix 2: Introduction to Children's Ground Learning and Wellbeing Strategy (Education)

Education is the key foundation for employment and long term economic wellbeing. This begins in early childhood and continues through to adulthood. Children's Ground's Learning and Wellbeing Framework and is one of the five areas of Children's Ground's integrated services platform. Our Learning and Wellbeing is designed so that the current generation of children engage in learning that is in their first language and is based on cultural and Western knowledge systems and competencies. It is summarised below.



The long term strategy sits in comprehensive and high quality education. This journey begins in early childhood.

The Learning and Wellbeing Framework is based on the following:

- Empowerment
- Learning through first language and culture
- Deep Western and global knowledge
- Learning from birth to adulthood

Key outcomes include:

- Children who are engaged in and excel in learning
- Children who are healthy and happy
- Children who are secure in their identity
- Children who finish their formal education and:
 - Achieve cultural knowledge outcomes
 - Achieve Western and global knowledge outcomes
 - Are critical and creative thinkers
 - Are physically and emotionally healthy
 - Are secure in their identity
 - Have an opportunity to pursue interests in sport, creative arts, music or other talents at the highest level
 - Reach adulthood with the opportunities to be economically independent and able to pursue further education, careers or business interests
 - Enjoy social, cultural, economic, health and justice equity

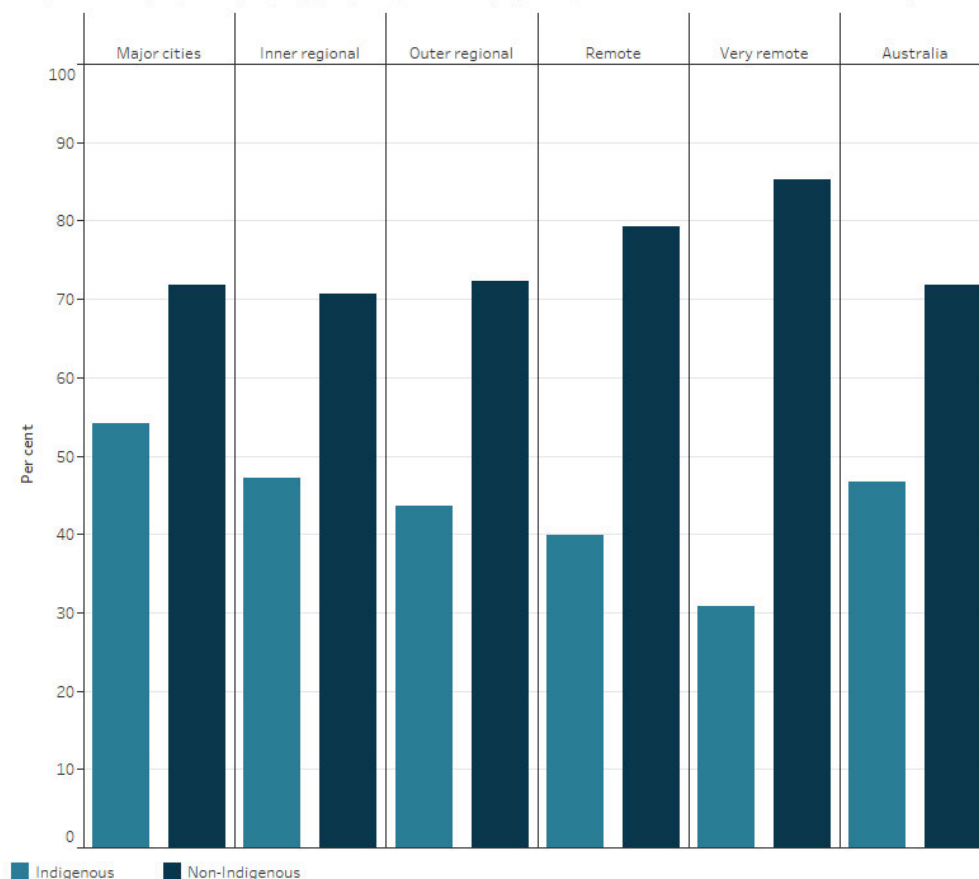
There are four stages of learning wellbeing and development at Children's Ground:

1. Early Childhood: birth – 5 years	Begin with the generation being born today to create a pathway for a lifetime of learning and wellbeing
2. Childhood: 6-12 years	Primary years schooling: ensuring the foundation of learning in both cultural and global skill are embedded and that children are creative problem solvers and engaged learners
3. Young people to adolescence: 13-17 years	Secondary years schooling: curriculum includes cultural and national educational standards as well as dedicated curriculum on financial economic systems and market economy
4. Adulthood 18-25 years	Transition to economic independence: further education, training, employment, enterprise

Our long-term learning and wellbeing framework aims to address long term entrenched economic injustice by ensuring the next generation of children are able to enter adult hood with the skills and access to economic opportunity and independence. Our aim is to achieve this for a critical mass of children with a community to achieve sustainable whole of community change (see the Children's Ground Learning and Wellbeing Framework for more detail).

Appendix 3: Data

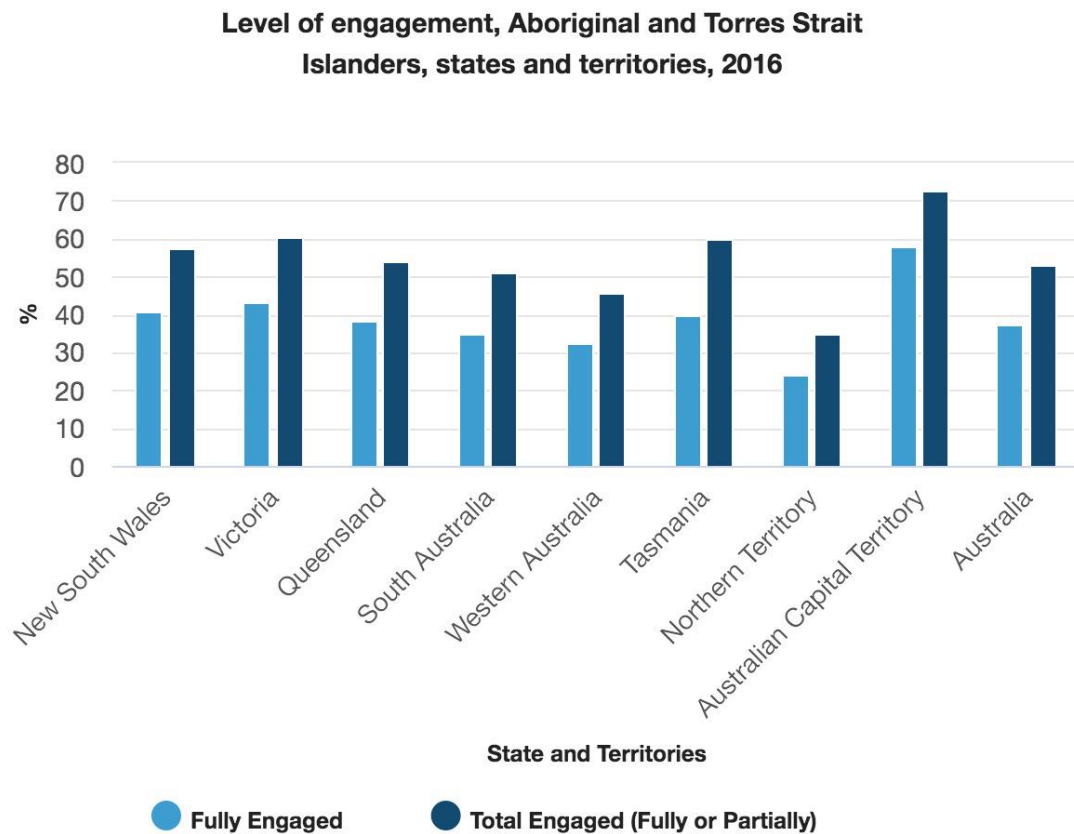
Proportion of people employed, people aged 15–64, by Indigenous status and remoteness area, 2016



Source: ABS 2018, SCRGSP 2018.
<http://www.aihw.gov.au>

- The NT Aboriginal employment rate fell from 33.1% in 2011 to 27.3% in 2016, resulting in the lowest rate of all the jurisdictions
- From the 2011 Census, the NT unemployment rate increased from 19% to 26.7% in the 2016 Census for Aboriginal Territorians

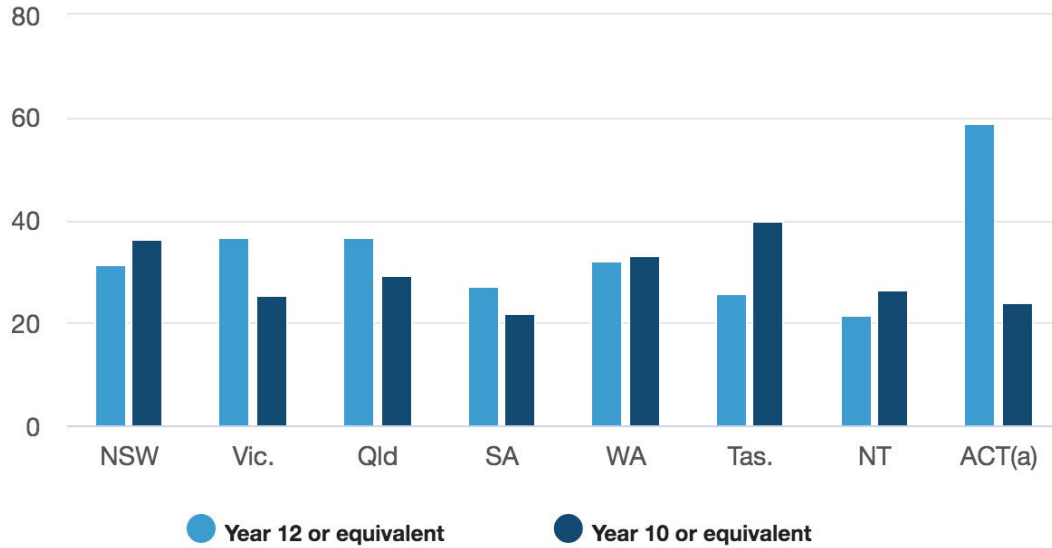
Engagement in Employment, Education and Training (EETP)



Source(s): ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2016

**Highest year of school completed for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander persons aged 20 years and over by
State and Territory**



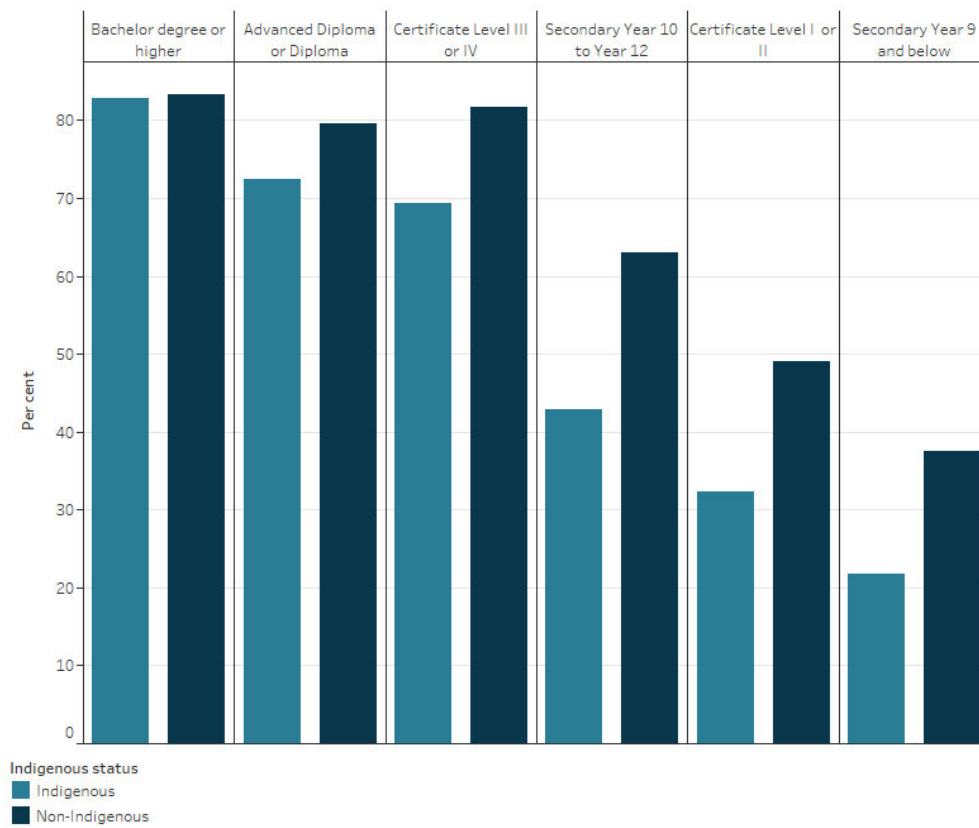
Cells in this table containing data have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. Discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

(a) Year 12 or equivalent for ACT has a high margin of error and should be used with caution.

Source: 2018-19 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education Statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2018-19 financial year

Proportion of people employed, people aged 15–64, by Indigenous status and highest educational level, 2016



Source: ABS 2018.
<http://www.aihw.gov.au>



Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe: Children's Ground in Central Australia

Summary of key findings

2017 to 2019 | Baseline and early progress

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"Nurturing the relationship with the country nurtures families and communities. When you are on country you can feel the spirits of the land and the ancestors with you. We are communicating with them and they are our guardians."

M.K. Turner, OAM, Arrernte Professor, Elder and Law Woman, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Director Children's Ground

Acknowledgements

Children's Ground acknowledges the unceded sovereign lands of First Nations people. We pay our respects to ancestors, Elders, adults and young people, and the children who are our future. This report was created on the lands of the Arrernte nation.

Children's Ground gives particular recognition to:

M.K. Turner, Arrernte Elder, Cultural Professor and Law woman
Mrs. Palmer (dec.), Arrernte Elder, Cultural Professor and Law woman
Mrs. Abbot (dec.), Arrernte Elder, Cultural Professor and Law woman
Therese Ryder, Arrernte Elder, Cultural Professor and Law woman
Felicity Hayes, Traditional Owner, Mparntwe (Alice Springs)

This report is for the community and the First Nations leaders and families who were instrumental in designing, establishing, monitoring and developing Children's Ground. It is for policy and law makers, funders and those who want to learn more about First Nations people and systems design.

This report is the result of many years of history, commitment and unrelenting determination of Elders. We thank all of you. This report shows how far we have come and how far we have to go. Most important are the ampe akwekes – the children. We live and breathe for you. We do what we do for your future, your rights and your wellbeing. You hold the history and the future. You inspire everything we do.

To all of our funders, we thank you. We could not do this work without you.

Children's Ground thanks our national Research Advisory Group for their support and guidance. We also thank their member institutions who are national leaders in research and evaluation. Please see the letter from the Group on the final page of this report.

Quotes through the report are attributable to First Nations family/staff members and were provided through the evaluation process, unless otherwise attributed.

Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe - Children's Ground in Central Australia: 2017 to 2019 Baseline and early progress © Children's Ground 2021

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Photos throughout this report have been approved by community leaders. Please be advised that this report may contain photos of people who are deceased.

Voices from communities

"There's been lots of change. Just little kids coming to school [CG Early Learning] every day nearly is big"



"Kids are safe because all family are getting together now – parents are there too."

"When I first started [at Children's Ground], I didn't have a job and I was always struggling you know, with my kids going to school and stuff like that. But now that we've found Children's Ground, people's voices are being heard. And all those years that our Arrernte mob were struggling with education and finally we've got a say."

"Families feel proud."

"Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe is different to other organisations because it is run by us – our Elders, our families and all the community that come to Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. We speak with our own strong voices. Our structure is determined by our Arrernte kinship and we follow the leadership and guidance of our Elders. They support each generation to have their say; we want our younger generation to learn from the experience of others and take opportunities to get stronger at leading and telling our story. They are our future leaders. This is why our committee is open to all family members or people who come to Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe."



"It's [CG] always giving somebody a chance because that person who never had a job before, or had a job and didn't like it and then might like this one. So it makes them feel more comfortable and want to come into work all the time. They know that they're being supported."

"We've got quite a lot of little ones, new ones... and they're growing and growing, and growing and new ones are coming."



"We talk with families about Children's Ground – we talk about safety so we make it a safe place. We tell them no fighting at Children's Ground. At home she [daughter] gets scared when there is screaming and fighting, but it's not like that at Children's Ground."

"When you go to mainstream classes they don't invite them [families] for children's learning... Like when I was working [in mainstream school] there was no involvement with families... only a meeting when somebody just broke a window or something or somebody's making trouble or fighting with kids. That was the only time that they brought in the families... But now, we got families involved with children's learning."



About this evaluation



This first evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground in Central Australia) covers a three-year period of establishing and growing the CG Approach with communities from 2017 to 2019.

Children's Ground's longitudinal evaluation has ethics approval from the Central Australian Human Research Ethics committee, and the evaluation method, data analysis and report have been oversighted by a national Research Advisory Group, consisting of experts in academic, community and systems research and evaluation. See the Research Advisory Group's endorsement of this evaluation report on page 21.

Children's Ground's evaluation framework is presented through both a Western and Arrernte lens.

Arrernte Evaluation Framework

In 2011, Arrernte leaders articulated the CG Approach and outcomes in this painting. Since starting Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia), Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme (First Nations Community Governance) has used this painting through the analysis of outcomes of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe¹.

This picture represents our home, land, communities and people. We see this painting as a living image, we are living it and leading it. People have lived it for the last sixty thousand years - even today we still live it, but we are bombarded from all these negative influences.

This painting shows us standing strong as a group. We are standing together, and we invite others to come join and be strong with us. We all work together, different languages and dialects coming together. This is how we lead Children's Ground.

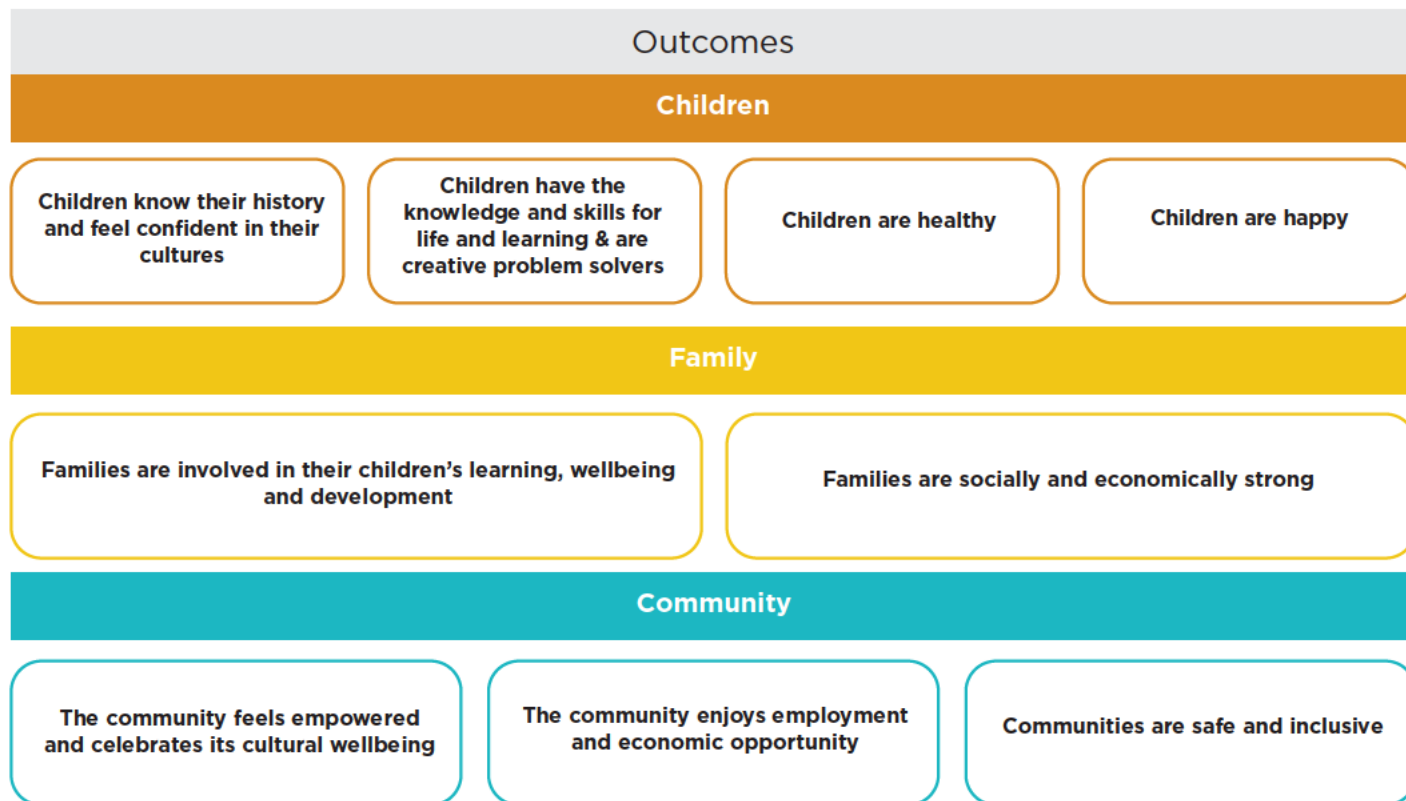
We use this painting to evaluate how we are going with Children's Ground. We are collecting numbers about kids and families engaging in learning, health and work. We are also collecting stories from our families and staff. We look at both the numbers and stories to see if we are making changes for kids that we all want to see.

¹ See full evaluation report for a detailed description of each element of the painting.

Western Evaluation Framework

The Western evaluation framework has nine long-term outcomes for children, their families and the community, outlined in Figure 1. Short and medium-term progress indicators are attached to each outcome to measure change and impact over 25 years of the CG Approach. Short-term indicators are focused on establishing equitable access to and engagement in services, supports and opportunities. Medium and longer-term progress indicators focus on impact for children, families and communities.

Figure 1: Children's Ground longitudinal evaluation framework



Children's Ground's 25-year longitudinal evaluation looks at three key evaluation questions:

- Has the CG Approach been implemented as intended? (process analysis)
- What progress occurred towards longer term impact against the evaluation outcomes? (impact analysis)
- What are the systemic drivers for change? (systems analysis)

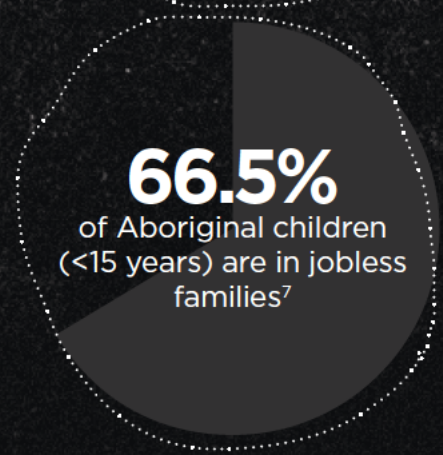
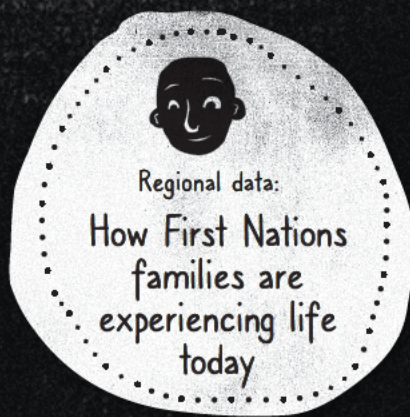
The evaluation reports on; a baseline for the longitudinal 25-year evaluation; process effectiveness and integrity; performance against key practice principles (intent); and early impact in progress measures towards long term outcomes.

While Central Australia was not at full scale operations for the CG Approach, this evaluation assessed development and impact in the context of the full CG Approach and long-term evaluation outcomes.

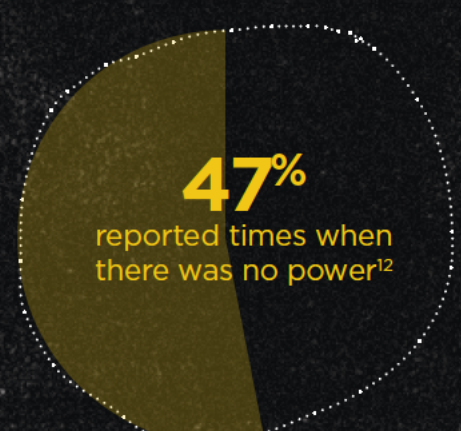
The evaluation has been undertaken within a Participatory Action Research model that respects the knowledge and experience of local people and provides them with agency over research and evaluation processes. First Nations leaders have been involved in designing and leading data collection and evaluation from the outset.

"Research is the story of 65,000 years of the way we lived on such a hard country and how we lived here. People knew their environment - through watching and seeing - they learnt from observing what was happening. They knew the nature, the stars and what season was coming. And they passed this on through the stories of old people. This is research. This is how we survived. This is how we looked after country. We do research every day of our lives. This is what we are doing now - evaluating what we do at Children's Ground - watching and seeing the changes. It is important to our Aboriginal story and for Children's Ground. We are doing research our way and the Western ways. We need to do both. Government looks at numbers - we need to tell it that way as well our way - we have to look at things in many ways."

William Tilmouth, Senior Arrernte man, Children's Ground co-founder and Chair of Board



In CG communities:



² Children's Ground internal administrative data, 2017-2020. Unpublished

³ PHIDU ATSI Social Health Atlas of Australia, March 2017 release

⁴ Australian Early Development Census data (AEDC), Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Social Health Atlas of Australia, March 2017 release

⁵ 2021 Northern Territory Government Office of Aboriginal Affairs: Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

⁶ Northern Territory Government Department of Territory Families 2015-16 Annual

⁷ PHIDU ATSI Social Health Atlas of Australia, Published 2021

⁸ Children's Ground internal population baseline survey data, 2020. Unpublished

⁹ Children's Ground internal population baseline survey data, 2020. Unpublished

¹⁰ Children's Ground internal population baseline survey data, 2020. Unpublished

¹¹ Children's Ground internal population baseline survey data, 2020. Unpublished

¹² Children's Ground internal population baseline survey data, 2020. Unpublished



Children's Ground's early progress and findings



82%

of children
across 4
communities
engaged in **early
years learning**

100%

children received early
childhood **learning**
through their first
language and
culture

224

children

engaged in targeted
preventative **health
promotion**

July 2018-2019, **487** family
members engaged in **health
promotion** and support

107

people engaged in
governance and decision-
making for their families
and communities

150

young
people

337

adults

978

people of all ages
engaged in
Ampe-kenhe
Ahelhe

89%

of families
reported
that children's
**physical and
mental health** improved



6

languages
strengthened through
learning

100%

of families reported
increased access to
services for **physical and
emotional health** and
wellbeing



59 First Nations people were
employed at Children's Ground

84% were previously
unemployed

34% of staff had never
worked before



The Children's Ground Approach

Children's Ground is a First Nations systems solution to empower children and communities to achieve social, cultural and economic agency and lifelong wellbeing. Led at the community level, the Children's Ground Approach (CG Approach) addresses the key social, cultural and economic determinants targeting key building blocks to achieve long term generational and sustainable change.

The CG Approach frontloads resources into equitable access and prevention. Local leadership and governance are backed by resources for high-quality learning, health and employment that is culturally responsive.

As shown in Figure 4, the CG Approach is a systems reform agenda that encompasses:

- Five systemic areas that create enabling conditions for systems change
- An integrated service platform of learning, health, employment, governance and community and cultural development and wellbeing (see Figure 3)
- Key practice principles which guide how the CG Approach works with the community



As shown in Figure 2, the CG Approach recognises the critical and influential relationship between children, families and communities as fundamental to long term change.

Figure 2: Ingkerrenyake Anyenteke-irreme (Child, Family and Community together)

Figure 3: Children's Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform

Learning & Wellbeing:

Early childhood learning, innovative schooling, afterschool and holiday programs and extracurricular learning and wellbeing



Family Health & Wellbeing:

Health promotion, cultural health, social and emotional wellbeing, child and maternal health, nutrition, environmental health



Economic Development & Wellbeing:

Employment, training, mentoring, financial literacy, enterprise development



Community Development & Wellbeing:

Local governance, safety, community development, social and cultural capital, celebration



Creative & Cultural Development & Wellbeing:

Creative and cultural knowledge and practice



Internal integration & external service coordination and collaboration

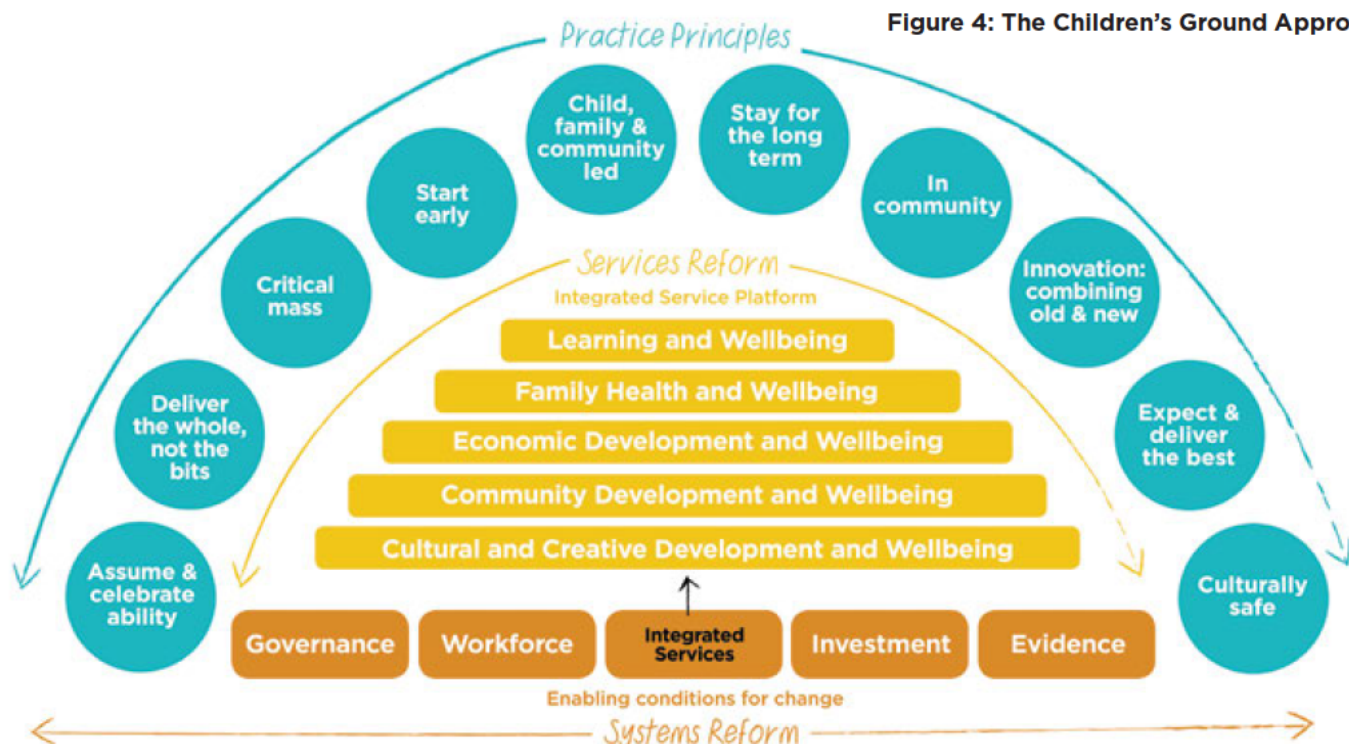


Figure 4: The Children's Ground Approach

Establishing & Growing Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe



In 2016, at the request from Elders and with support from the Children's Ground's Board, it was decided to introduce the CG Approach as a 'growth model' in Alice Springs.

Insufficient funding meant that initial attempts to establish the Approach in 2011 were not progressed. At the end of 2015, Arrernte Elders asked Children's Ground to return to Alice Springs. Their urgency was driven by watching the passing of Elders and their own vulnerability due to age. M.K. Turner OAM stated, "We need to start Children's Ground here, bring it back here, for our kids and families, before I pass away".

The Elders leading Children's Ground have a fifty-year history of educational and community leadership and contributed to the design of the CG Approach. They wanted to lead fundamental change in their communities, including the protection of language and culture and improved education, health and wellbeing for the next generation of children.

Elders identified four communities for implementation within the broader Arrernte nation. Community Engagement and Planning (CEP) was undertaken in 2016 ahead of implementation in 2017. In January 2017, the CG Approach was established in three communities across the Central Australia region (Irrkerlantye,

Mpweringke Anapipe and Yarrenyty Arltere), and in June 2019, when additional funding became available, operations began in Uyenpere Atwatye.

This evaluation covers the period of early implementation and development of the 'growth model'. This meant implementing the CG Approach and the suite of integrated services over time, based on the resources available and with the intention to reach full scale delivery that can be sustained for 25 years. The staged implementation saw delivery and engagement grow each year as funding increased over the period. Full scale delivery was not reached during this period.

The table below shows the growth over time by each service area of Children's Ground's Integrated Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform.

This evaluation marks year three of the 25-year Children's Ground strategy for Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. Implementation of the CG Approach in Central Australia started with delivering 20% of the model at the beginning of 2017 and increasing delivery to 60% by the end of 2019.

The release of the report has been delayed due to COVID-19, which interrupted necessary processes for First Nations leadership in data, analysis and reporting.

Tracking against full CG Approach and model	CEP	<25%	25-50%	50-75%	75-100%
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Learning & Wellbeing					
Family Health & Wellbeing					
Economic Development & Wellbeing					
Cultural & Creative Development & Wellbeing					
Community Development & Wellbeing					

Key findings: Change and impact for children

Outcome area: **Children have the knowledge and skills for life-long learning**¹³



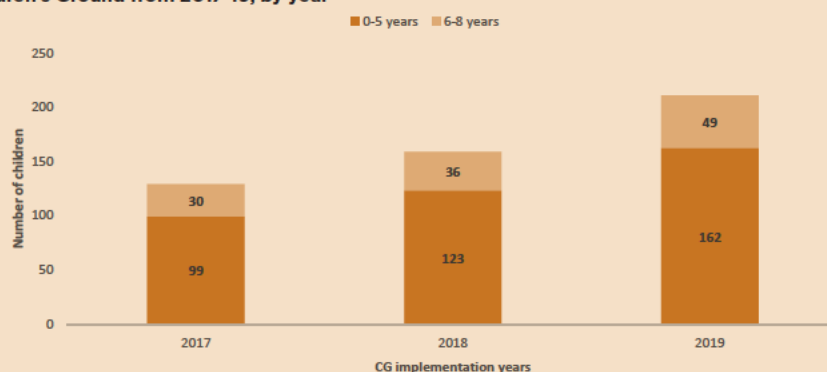
A new cohort of children are engaged in culturally safe early years learning - children who had rarely or never engaged before.

Key finding:

82% of children (0-5 years) across four communities engaged in early years learning (223 children).

Before Children's Ground, only **14%** had previously engaged in early learning.

Graph 1: Number of children aged 0-8 years engaged in Learning & Wellbeing with Children's Ground from 2017-19, by year



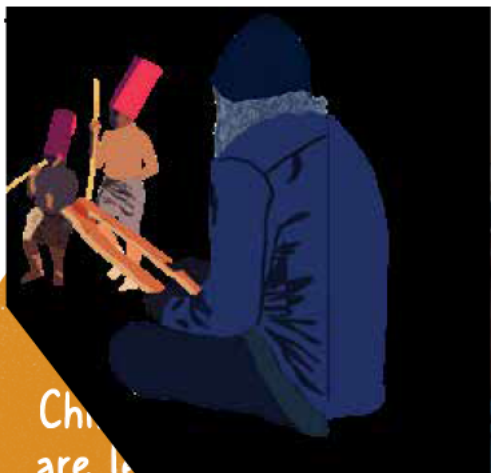
100% of children engaged in early learning alongside their family.

Children engaging in early learning alongside their family is becoming the new normal.



¹³ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework

Outcome area: **Children know and feel confident in their culture**¹⁴



Children are learning and developing in their culture.



100% of children engaged in cultural learning on country, in their first language and alongside and led by their family.

Children's Ground seeks to provide the space for Elders and cultural leaders to revitalise and re-establish learning, language and cultural knowledge systems within and outside of formal early learning sessions. This is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Children's Ground's Learning and Wellbeing framework requires children to learn on country. This is enacted through a policy of twice-weekly on-country learning led by First Nations educators and Elders, underpinned by kinship and law.

The evaluation found that most children progressed in their first language and cultural knowledge over the period, and that cultural foundations of the learning approach were a key driver to engagement of children and families.

"Through Children's Ground, for the first time in our colonial history, we are creating places of education that come from our language and culture, that honour our identity and knowledge and history... Our next generation will be formidable. Their identity will not be denied."

William Tilmouth, Senior Arrernte man, Children's Ground co-founder and Chair of Board

"It's really important for our children to walk on their Country - to know what it's called, what the story is for that place and how they are related to the land. There's so much to learn and learning is everywhere when you are on Country."

"It has been so long. It is good to see somewhere where kids feel empowered and happy and feel like people actually value their culture. I have worked with kids... their experience has been that they have been told all their life that it is bad to be an Aboriginal person. It is sad. You shouldn't feel like that. You should feel proud about your background and your family and your history...you should feel proud about being Aboriginal. It is not a bad thing. It's a good thing. I think this place [Children's Ground] is building that."

"I've got great pride in working with my people and teaching my little ones. Because I want them to grow up to be smart people too."



Valuing culture and identity was a key driver of engagement for children and families

¹⁴ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework



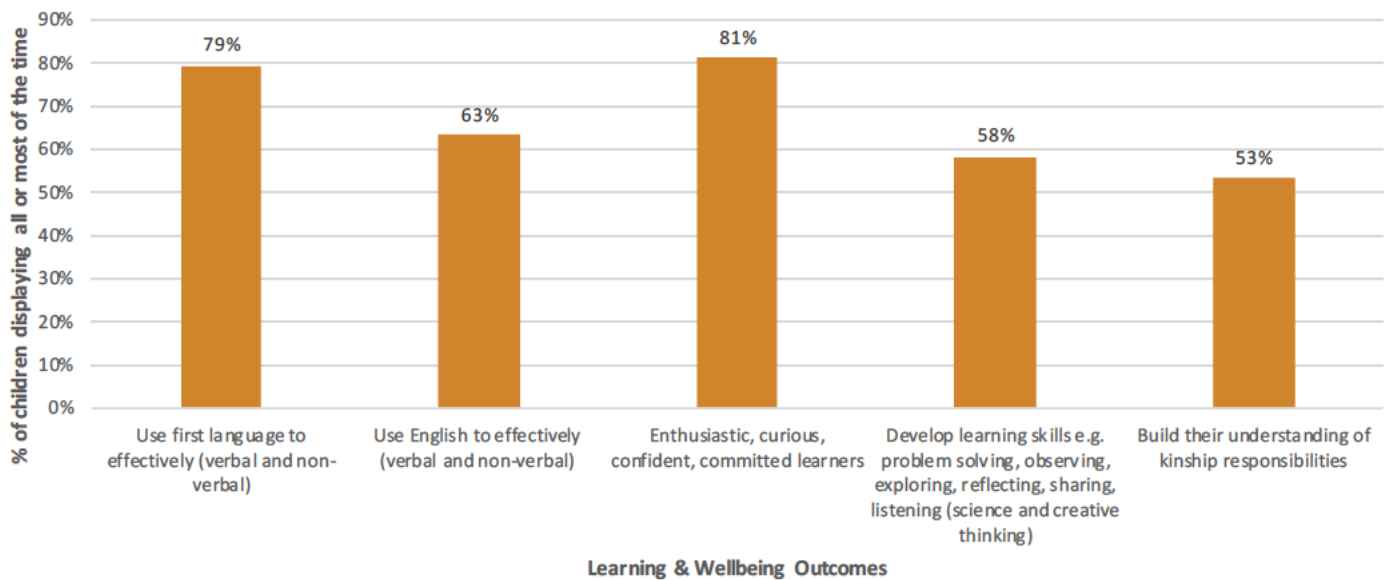
A majority of children progressed in their cultural and Western learning.



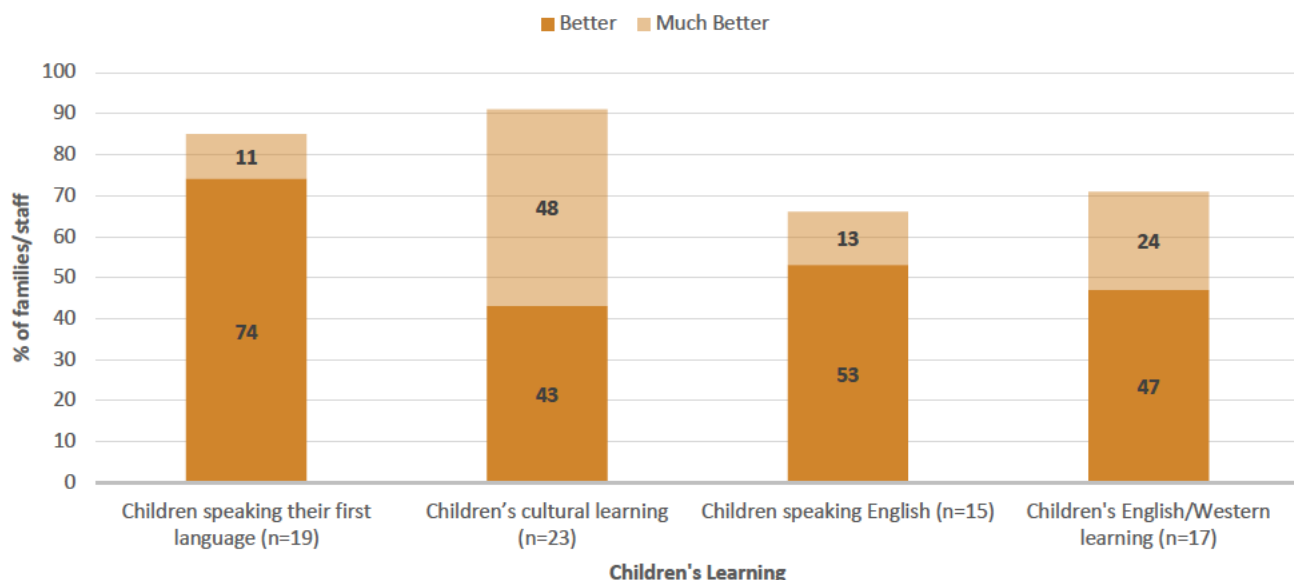
The Akaltje Learning and Wellbeing progress and outcomes framework was developed from the Arrernte learning curriculum framework- the Arrernte Angkentje, written by Arrernte Elders and educationalists. It also drew from the National Early Years Learning Framework and international frameworks.

Developmental progress for children 0-8 years is assessed by Arrernte and Western educators.

Graph 2:



Graph 3: First Nations family/staff perspectives on children's learning



"There's been a lot of changes. Just little kids coming to school [CG Early Learning] every day nearly is big."

"We've got everything here [at CG]. There is nothing to do at home so when they are here they have everything and their mind is learning. They love it."

"Children's Ground has changed how they act. At home they are mad, crazy you know. But at Children's Ground they are good... and we practice this at home."

"I finished the session by telling the women that any good early childhood service anywhere in Australia would be envious of the learning environment they had just created for their children right here on country. It had all the elements of a great learning space: high quality relationships between adult and child, an adult teacher for each child, a learning environment supported by natural resources and most importantly, kids immersed in their own language and culture. My EC [Early Childhood] self had an obligation to add that these were the most important requirements to prepare kids for school. This little community group out at Whitegate had it all."

Helen Fitzgerald, Children's Ground Early Learning Educator

Summary of change and impact

Children's Ground's culturally based Learning and Wellbeing framework has resulted in unprecedented engagement of children in early years learning in four communities in Central Australia.

Children's Ground has created equitable access and has engaged a new cohort of children aged 0-5 years in early learning. Most children had not engaged in early years learning prior to Children's Ground.

There was a steady increase in numbers of children engaging in early learning each year.

Engagement of children and families was directly enabled through the Arrernte Angkentye Early Years Learning curriculum framework designed by Arrernte educators. This was combined with First Nations policies and standards for delivery including family engagement.

For children and families in Central Australia, this is the first time a culturally designed early years learning service has been available to communities in a sustained way.

As reported by families and staff, children engaging in early learning in their first language has improved children's cultural and Western learning and development outcomes. Children's Ground continues to build towards the delivery of early learning to Universal Access levels.



Outcome area: **Children are healthy and happy**¹⁵



Key findings:

- **224** children (aged 0-5 years) engaged in targeted preventative health (skin, ears, eyes, dental, weight, immunisation)
- **100%** of children engaged in Western and cultural health promotion (through engagement in early learning)
- **89%** of families reported that children's physical health (their body and nutrition) and emotional health (their mind and behaviour) was better or much better

Children's Ground's Family Health & Wellbeing platform and framework is titled *Utnenge, Tyerrtye, Mwerre Atnyenetyeke Iltye Tyerrtye Urrperle-kenhenge 'Health in the Hands of the People'*.

Children's Ground delivers health promotion universally (for all people accessing Children's Ground), as well as in targeted ways by working with children and their families to address their specific health concerns and needs. Maternal and child health promotion, social and emotional wellbeing and cultural health are key focusses. Health promotion is also integrated in early years learning for children aged 0-8 years.

The Children's Ground Family Health & Wellbeing framework was not implemented in Central Australia formally until late 2018 following the receipt of funding. Prior to this, parts of the framework were implemented e.g. nutrition deliberately embedded in all early learning from the beginning.

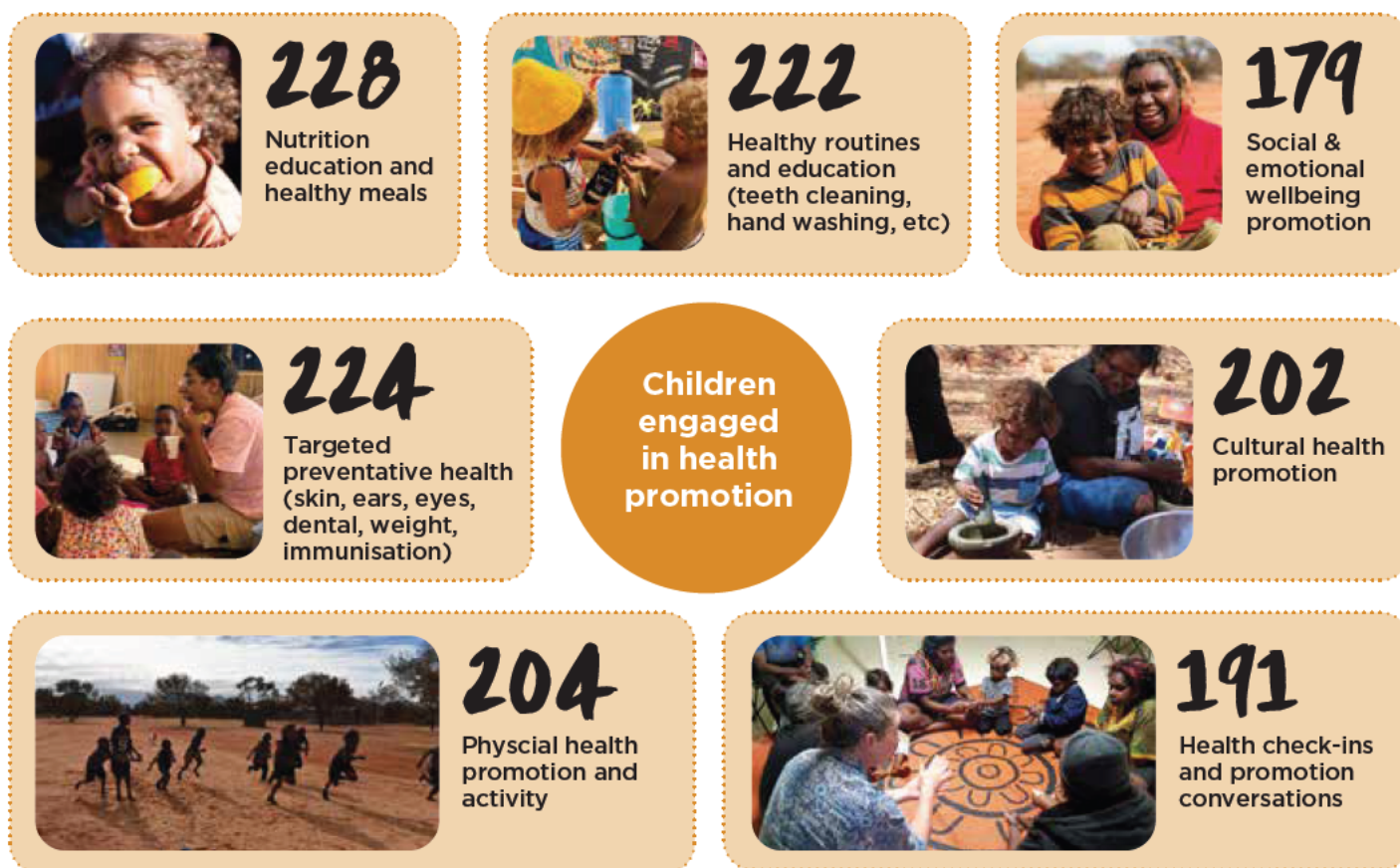
"We do our healthy routines with the little ones, so we teach them about keeping themselves healthy, talking about nutrition and how it's important to always have healthy nutritional snacks, like no sugar in their diet."

"The health team are always talking with the kids. They are learning about health – nose blowing, washing hands, cleaning teeth – I can see them learning. They have songs with these things – they are singing them all the time, at home too. They know the songs and what to do for each song."



¹⁵ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework

Figure 5: Number of children aged 0-8 years engaged in health promotion, by type, from July 2018 to December 2019



A core element of the growth model in Central Australia focused on increasing access to and engagement in places and environments of safety that promote and respond to children's social/emotional wellbeing (SEWB).

"Our intention should always be to create a calm and settled space where kids and adults can creatively express their deeply held emotions through art and play. Our goal is for kids to practice and develop self-regulation - to discover ways they can calm and relax themselves as they play."

Helen Fitzgerald, Early Childhood Educator, Children's Ground



Universal and targeted health promotion and support for children through Western and cultural health practices resulted in improved child development, wellbeing and behaviour change.

The data indicates that Children's Ground's Family Health & Wellbeing approach improved health access and established health practices as a regular and normalised focus for children. Building health literacy from children's earliest years lays the foundations for healthy life choices.

Health promotion provided in community and in first languages increased health agency and early intervention and prevention. This was evident through regular health hygiene practices of children and nutrition changes through improved nutritional intake, literacy and food security. Cultural health knowledge and practice also improved.

Families of children with targeted health needs were supported to access health services, illness was identified and early intervention occurred.

Children's emotional wellbeing was supported through trauma informed practice, emotional regulation, relaxation and a strong focus on the spirit of children being strengthened through being on country and engaging in cultural health practice.

Key findings: Change and impact for families

Outcome area: **Families are involved in their child's learning, wellbeing and development**¹⁶



Families are walking
alongside their
children.

Key findings:

- **319** family members 18+ years engaged in learning and health promotion alongside their children.
- **100%** of families felt there were more activities and opportunities for children and families to spend time together.
- **100%** of families reported that families are 'walking alongside their children' more or a lot more.

"Children's Ground is different from other childcare organisations or childcare centres, because in Children's Ground you see families working together with families. Families are there all the time with their kids, watching them. The children love families being there, seeing, 'Oh, I've got my mum and my aunty here. My grandmother.' That's what's good about Children's Ground, is families being there with families, for the children."

"Families are not just sitting at home anymore – family are getting together...Kids are learning quickly because they are learning from their family."



Outcome: **Families are socially and economically strong**¹⁷

Key findings:

- **487** family members engaged in health promotion and support (150 young people 9-17 years and 337 adult family members 18+ years).
- **100%** of families/staff reported increased access to services for physical and mental health.

Families have
increased access
to health and
wellbeing services
and support.



A majority of families at Children's Ground live in a context of complex trauma and social stress including overcrowding, family violence, economic poverty, grief and health concerns.

The role of Children's Ground's Family Health team is to work with families to prevent illness and to improve health outcomes for those living with illness. By delivering in community, the team works with individuals and families to address multiple and complex health burdens.

Through delivery in first language and community context, the aim is to improve health literacy, health access, prevention and early intervention and health management. The aim is to bridge the gap by removing the structural and cultural barriers to access while making health and wellbeing a visible part of everyday life.

The social strengthening of families includes physical health, mental health, cultural health, connectedness, interpersonal relationships, family living circumstances and safety.

"Kids and families are more confident when Children's Ground is involved. By themselves it's hard to make appointments anywhere."

"People come in here because they got health workers and stuff like that support to take them to the hospital or for their appointments, go to housing or to all those things that come in – the problems that happen."

"Kids are safe because all family are getting together now – parents are there too."

"Makes me feel free [being at CG], and my daughter too."

¹⁶ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework

¹⁷ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework

Outcome area: **Families are socially and economically strong**¹⁸

People who were living with chronic unemployment are working.

Key findings:

- **59** First Nations people were employed at Children's Ground. **84%** were unemployed when they started at Children's Ground. **34%** of staff had never worked.
- **83%** of families/staff referred to employment of young people and adults as role modelling for young children.

"It's [CG] always giving somebody a chance because that person who never had a job before, or had a job and didn't like it and then might like this one. So it makes them feel more comfortable and want to come into work all the time. They know that they're being supported."

"It gives them an opportunity to be a part of something. Be a part of Children's Ground and work. This could be the first time for a person, that has never had a job in their lives and it builds their confidence too."

"People are working and getting more confidence and learning too."

"It's good for kids to see family working. They feel much better, Mum got work. Working on country. My kids love it when I go to work – they have a smile on their face."

"Really good role model for kids... they can get up and go to school every day, and put education in front, first, and they know that there's a responsible person that they look up to."

Some families/staff talked about their personal experiences with employment at Children's Ground. These included both positive experiences and challenges.

"It was the first thing I had in my life where I felt really good. I kept coming and it has kept growing and growing."

"I'm very proud to work here."

"I try my best every day to come. My feeling in my heart is that I want to come, but I get pulled away for other things."

"When I first started [at Children's Ground], I didn't have a job and I was always struggling you know, with my kids going to school and stuff like that. But now that we've found Children's Ground, people's voices are being heard. And all those years that our Arrernte mob were struggling with education and finally we've got a say."

Creation of First Language learning resources: learning, employment and enterprise outcomes.



Summary of change and impact

Extensive engagement of families in the learning and health of their children has been evidenced. The reports from families demonstrate the strengthening of family connection, health and wellbeing and sense of empowerment.

Evidence of strong employment outcomes in the context of a decline in employment across the Northern Territory (Closing the Gap) is significant. The processes and systems that have enabled First Nations employment include the strength based, flexible employment model that responds to key barriers to engagement.

Families have high aspirations for their children and grandchildren to experience a different future and life than they did. The key drivers of family engagement have been evidenced as local First Nations governance, employment, health access and prioritising the time and space for families to connect.

Through the principle of 'family and community led', families were involved in early learning policy development and decided that children will always come to early learning accompanied by a family member. First culture and language were regularly celebrated through family and community events which were soft entry points for families into early learning, family health, employment and community governance.

¹⁸ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework

Key findings: Change and impact for community

Impact on community outcomes requires a long term strategy. Change in these outcomes can only be realised when the generation of children growing up with Children's Ground become young adults, have their own families and are the critical mass within the community who enjoy cultural, social and political opportunity and empowerment. The following provides a brief overview of progress to date.

The prevalence of injustice and trauma

Elders and leaders reflected on a wide range of experiences impacting their lives and the lives of their families. These were recorded through the community engagement period and in the evaluation process during a session on baseline trauma and stress. These are considered prevalent for 100% of the population.

- Massacres
- Children removed
- Land taken away
- People moved off land (into missions)
- Religion forced on people
- Forbidden from speaking First Language
- Foreign diseases brought in
- Culture taken away - people tried and continue to resist
- Alcohol/drugs/tea/sugar/tobacco
- Basics card – control of our money
- Control over lives - everything
- Trauma
- Still not listened to – no voice
- Chronic ill health
- Poor literacy and numeracy
- Low income
- Not a lot of opportunity/jobs
- Poor housing
- No running water
- Poor nutrition
- Die younger
- Issues with grog and safety
- Suicide
- Lots of people in prison
- If you speak up, you don't get results
- Kids on the streets
- Racism
- Not recognising traditional law people
- Government got involved in Aboriginal law when they should not have
- People now go straight to police for protection which can make argument worse
- Funerals
- Sadness for everyone
- Accidents, suspicious death, missing person
- Alcohol-related death, domestic violence
- Medical conditions
- Deaths in custody
- Black Lives Matter and what it means to us

Outcome areas: **The community feels empowered and celebrates its cultural wellbeing**
The community enjoys employment and economic opportunity
(reported in 'Change and impact for families')
Communities are safe and inclusive¹⁹

Key finding:

- **107** First Nations people engaged in governance and decision-making for their families and communities.



Increased empowerment and agency in local decision-making.

Community empowerment and leadership

"We are speaking up at meetings, we are telling our story at conferences, we are pushing ourselves to lead. We're in the driver's seat now – everyone else can get in the back seat."
 Lorraine Gorey, Senior Arrernte Educator

Families, leaders and staff were asked 'How First Nations people making the decisions about their lives and about Children's Ground is now, compared to before Children's Ground started.' Of those who answered the question, all (n=17) reported it was better (59%) or much better (41%).

"We engage everybody, families and children, and all. I'm being a leader, leading the way and showing what we can do for our children's future, and we are being strong leaders and all that... We can show them our way of leading, being a great leader and being a good role model for our children."

Adults expressed hope and pride in seeing engagement and leadership within the next generation, many of whom had their cultural learning and cultural transmission disrupted by the impact of colonisation.

Prior to being engaged at Children's Ground, many young people were unemployed and experiencing serious risks with the criminal justice system, suicidality, alcohol and other drugs. As they emerge as leaders and build their confidence, their position as role models to children is shifting their status quo; the effect on long-term wellbeing of their community is evident.

"I think they are learning too [young people]. Doing governance and having the strength to get up and talk in public. You can see young people – they want to do things... And they watching too how people work, and listening."

¹⁹ Key outcome area from Children's Ground Western Evaluation Framework



Key finding:

- **978** people of all ages engaged in Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe.



Key finding:

- **63%** of staff/family members commented on improved safety without specifically being asked about safety.



"Children's Ground is a safe place, you know, we don't want to bring whatever issues that are outside of Children's Ground into Children's Ground. We want what's best for our kids to learn."

"To tell you the truth, I've been really bored listening to other people making decisions for us. Now it's us that are the ones making the decisions for ourselves and for our children."

"I'm looking at how we used to - how we grew up with our grandparents teaching us a lot about the world. Through the eyes of Aboriginal people. And we're passing our knowledge on to our little ones."

"We have got generations of people here. We have got the old girls, and then we have got the younger ones - their daughters, and then you have got their kids and their grannies... I think having that several generations of family participating, gives us a really strong possibility of surviving into the future."

"I am comfortable here because it is better than outside. When I pass this boundary outside of Children's Ground I feel alone - wondering what am I going to do. My feeling here is really good to have - always someone to talk to."

Summary of change and impact

While it is too early to determine community level impact, early progress in community outcomes was evidenced in First Nations Governance, community inclusion and safety, economic inclusion and cultural and social community level engagement.

This evaluation found that Children's Ground strengthened the social connection for individuals and communities. Employment, placed based delivery, local governance and community events created a range of opportunities for social connectedness between families and communities.

Community governance reinforced First Nations standards relating to core obligations of customary law, roles and responsibilities which underpinned decision making and service delivery. People reported experiencing cultural empowerment.

The CG Approach established governance and service design and delivery processes that shifted the balance of power into the hands of local First Nations people.

The hope and pride reported by Elders and families from seeing young people engage in employment, leadership and cultural learning alongside the children is evidence of the CG Approach beginning to empower next generation leadership within intergenerational environments.

These are the central building blocks for long-term community level change over the 25-year CG Approach.

Process findings and analysis:

Has the CG Approach been implemented as intended?

Key Process Findings - Summary

The evaluation found that the CG Approach has largely been implemented as intended within the context of a growth model. Not having the resources for implementation of the full CG Approach impacted standards for access, place-based delivery, critical mass (service reach), full delivery and integration of services. Focus areas for improvement are quality, training and improved systems to structurally embed key practice principles.

"We've come a long way with Children's Ground to here. From starting up from a little place then growing. We got new staff and new people... We've got a lot of little kids that want to come to Children's Ground. A lot of families too. More families getting involved."

Key findings and summaries in relation to evidence of process effectiveness and progress in relation to each practice principle are presented here, using a traffic light system.

● On-track and effective ● Strengthening required ● Not on-track

<p><i>Child, family & community led</i></p>	<p>Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme governance committee, led by Elders and community leaders from each community, provides strong leadership and meets weekly to direct Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. Each community has defined leadership aligned with First Nations governance. Over the period, there was increased engagement of young people in governance. Further need to strengthen place-based, community level and daily governance.</p>	<p><i>In-community (place-based)</i></p>	<p>Due to limited resources, operations began as centralised and service 'to', rather than in community. 'In-community' has progressed in each area but remains compromised. Achieving standards of in-community delivery requires dedicated resources for each community.</p>
<p><i>Start early</i></p>	<p>A clear focus on setting a new foundation for the next generation of children. Prioritising integrated learning, health and cultural wellbeing in early childhood (children aged 0-5 years). Key focus on prevention through social, cultural and economic determinants such as education, health promotion, employment and cultural empowerment.</p>	<p><i>Expect and deliver the best</i></p>	<p>Progress made with some key delivery and organisational standards of excellence. It takes time and adequate resources to design and embed excellence from cultural and Western perspectives. Achieving high quality delivery consistently and efficiently are areas for development as resources grow.</p>
<p><i>A critical mass (work with everyone)</i></p>	<p>Achieved a critical mass (at least 75%) of children (aged 0-8 years) in the service population and their families. Further work is needed to understand the full population and to reach children and families who are not currently engaged.</p>	<p><i>Assume and celebrate ability</i></p>	<p>Effectively mobilised community and individual strengths, while embedding first language and culture across the CG Approach.</p>
<p><i>Deliver the whole, not the bits</i></p>	<p>The full Children's Ground integrated platform has not been implemented. Implementation grew over the period as resources increased. Integration across platform areas occurred but requires strengthening. Local service collaborations occurred but were limited due to capacity.</p>	<p><i>Stay for the long-term</i></p>	<p>This principle can only be assessed over time. Key early foundations of First Nations governance, employment and long term strategic plans are in place.</p>
<p><i>Innovation – combining the old and new ways</i></p>	<p>Effectively established both cultural and Western approaches across the service platform and within key organisational systems. Need to grow and strengthen depth and quality over time.</p>		

First Nations findings and analysis



Tyerrtye Arrernte mapele iwerre ineme. Anwerne angkentyele ileme nthakenhe mpwaretyeke. Arrpenhele ilettyeke arrangkwe. Anwerne apurte-irremele decision mpwareme, tyerrtye mape akwethe angkeme community-ke ante itne ileme involved-irretyeke. Anwerne apurte-irremele alakenhe mpwareme. Anwerne aweme. Arrantherre, tyerrtye mperlkere mapele aweme. Anwerne amparre arrwekele arrenele ante iterrentye anwernekenhe awetyeke.

Community are making the decisions and leading: Arrernte people are leading the way. We have more people in decision making - people are always talking to community and getting people involved. We are making the decisions. No one is telling us what to do. We're all doing it together. We are being heard.

Anwerne akaltyele- atheme akngerre apmerenge ante communitynge. Apmere-nge akaltye- atheme re atyeporre anthurre aneme ampe mapeke ante itneke artweye mape, itne akaltye-irretyeke arrangkwe town-le anemele. Itne akaltye-irreme mwerre apmerere anemele.

Arrernte language, culture and family are everywhere: We are doing more learning on country and in the communities. Learning on country is the most important because children and families can't learn what they need to in town - on country they are learning culture that they will not learn in town - cultural learning.

Tyerrtye arrpenhe mape apetyame warrke-irretyeke anwernenge year arrpe-ananhele. Tyerrtye artweyenge atningke apetyame warrke-irretyeke. Warrke nenhe aneme second chance tyerrtye mape-ke Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe.

Employment: More people are coming to work with us every year. A lot more families are coming and working. Employment is like a second chance for those that need it. People have chances and opportunity here at Children's Ground.

Akngerre-parte mape involve-irreme and itne iwerre imernemele. Anwerneke artweye mape akaltye-antheke akngerre-parte mapele, anwerne ampe ingkernenye mape mwantyele akaltye-anthetyeke, arntarnte aretyeke ante itele-aretyeke nthekenhe itne anwerne akaltyele antheke.

Elders are involved and leading: Knowledge from the old people being passed on, learned and respected by children and our young people and families.

Anwerne akngerre-irreme. Numbers akngerre-irreme, kele nhenhe mwerre. Ampe akweke mape apetyame. Ingkernenye mape apetyame warrke-irretyeke ante involve-irretyeke leadership-ke. Anwerne awethe uthemele ante angkemele ampe artweye mapeke. Tyerrtye arrpenhe mapeke anwerne arritye-kenhe akwete. Anwerne akwete ampe mape ante itneke artweye mapeke angketyeke.

Children and families learning together: We are growing. The numbers are going up which is good. More children are coming with their family. More babies are coming. More young people are coming along too and getting involved with the leadership. We need to do more Walk and Talk [community engagement] - we haven't got to some people yet. We need to keep working to get more children and families.

Akngerre-aparte mapele ileme tyerrtye ingkernenye ante ampe akweke mape itne iterrke anetyeke, itneke ilemele nenghe angkamele anetyeke ante decision mpwaremetyeke.

Next generation leadership: Elders are giving power to the young ones - getting them involved in the decisions.

Anwerne areme support akngerre artweyenge-ke. Tyerrtye arrpenhe mape nhenhe apure-irreme, anwerne mwerre awelheme ante inemele support anwerne apeke ahentye anemele.

Support for children and families: We see more support for families. People can get shame sometimes, but we are comfortable here and get support if we need it.

Systems findings and analysis



"Our abilities to close the gap in health disparities are being blocked at every turn because we are refusing to address the intrinsic interconnection of all social, economic, cultural and spiritual aspects of our life."

June Oscar, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2018

The Children's Ground Approach is designed to be fully implemented to achieve long term change. The evaluation found that it is possible to implement a growth model and achieve early stage impact, but that it is not sustainable and not optimal. Inadequate funding placed stress on all elements of the organisation and there was a cost to quality and standards. At the same time, the growth model achieved important early progress.

Children's Ground's integrated Learning, Wellbeing and Development service platform is designed to reflect First Nations approaches of life integration, rather than Western siloed services. First Nations systems integrate every aspect of a person's identity, wellbeing, learning, cultural responsibilities, kinship (family and social connections) and surrounding influences on each of these.

Evaluation evidence demonstrates that the authorising environments and conditions for integration were in place. Multidisciplinary teams were provided the flexibility and structure to work together and be

responsive in their support of children and families. While staff identified challenges and the need for further policies, systems and practice development, the integrated delivery enabled responsiveness and early intervention with children and families.

Place-based delivery in communities was not able to be implemented to the extent intended over the first three years. However, the in-community delivery that was achieved over the first years reportedly provided early experiences of physical and cultural safety in services in communities. It also enabled increased activity, delivery and opportunities improving the social, cultural and economic capital.

Within the constraints of the growth model, considerable progress was achieved in establishing the critical foundational elements of the Approach. The evaluation found that change was enabled through an inter-connected relationship between key elements of the Children's Ground Approach.

Reform in one area of service delivery and systems alone won't create sustained change

A key evaluation finding of the CG Approach in Central Australia and full model in Kakadu West Arnhem is that the key driver of early impact and change is the interconnectedness in delivery and the combined impact of the key system enablers (i.e. governance, workforce, investment, integrated services and evidence). There was an authorising environment for the integrated service delivery platform and culturally-based delivery in community. Arguably the most important enabler of change to date has been creating the space and conditions for the voice and culture of local First Nations people. This is not in isolation from integrated wrap around services, supports and opportunities, which were interconnected enablers across the system, service platform and delivery. The collective investment model enables both integrity in delivery and the processes of empowerment.

Local governance, integrated services, family employment, cultural safety and place-based delivery were all enabling conditions for change

This evaluation found that:

- Child and family engagement in early learning was enabled by support that reduced access barriers.
- Learning engagement was stimulated by culturally-based learning in first language and on country – which was in turn enabled by First Nations employment, planning and governance.
- Engagement in Western early learning was achieved through the provision of safe, culturally-based, relational and respectful learning environments.
- First Nations governance enabled employment, cultural standards in learning and high levels of family engagement.
- Universal integration of health promotion in early learning increased health knowledge and literacy of children and their families together.



Genuinely privileging culture and empowerment was a key driver for engagement

This evaluation demonstrates that the key drivers of engagement in Children's Ground are the visible respect for and privileging of first language and culture and community empowerment. Cultural safety and empowerment were achieved through First Nations employment, governance and intergenerational engagement – all of which enabled first language and culture to be embedded across all areas of the integrated service platform and activity delivery.

The strengths-based implementation and First Nations culture, governance and employment in design and delivery changed the relationship that people previously had with services – from one of being a recipient to one of being in control. This shifted the power in decision-making to sit with the communities and has been the most significant enabler and driver of empowerment. It also facilitated family-to-family engagement and intergenerational environments that are owned by the families and communities.

The Children's Ground Approach is aligned with leading practice

Western research about addressing the changing and complex needs of First Nations children and families identifies key features of a comprehensive, community-based service framework. This evaluation demonstrated that the CG Approach provides a framework to implement these key features alongside cultural knowledge systems and practices. The CG Approach has evidenced process effectiveness and early impact from incorporating these system features in design and delivery. Furthermore, it is translating and validating Western research in a First Nations context and has found that Western leading practice is achievable when it is implemented within a culturally safe framework and delivery model – led by First Nations people.

“Only by respecting the language, culture and knowledge of the learner can we together build literate, schooled and educated societies, where lifelong learning is the norm”.

Conclusion



"There are things we do well and things we can do better, and it is growing. Once we have got the whole model here, we can make bigger changes for people's lives."

This evaluation demonstrates that, even in the short-term, change is achievable when a service system is genuinely First Nations led, when first language and culture are privileged and when integrated services respond to the complex social, economic and cultural determinants of health, wellbeing and life.

The evaluation provides an important baseline against which to evaluate the long-term impact of Children's Ground in Central Australia.

"We are in the business of hope. Our families have not had the freedom to hope, knowing that they would be rejected and ridiculed. But now this is what I see. I see hope and with hope I see empowerment".

William Tilmouth, Senior Arrernte man, Children's Ground, co-founder and Chair of Board, 2020

Research Advisory Group endorsement

October 2021

William Tilmouth
Chair of the Board
Chair Research Advisory Group
Children's Ground

Dear William

Re: Evaluation of the Children's Ground Approach in Central Australia, 2017-2019

We commend the Children's Ground team on delivering this baseline and early progress evaluation report about establishing and increasing your operations in Central Australia from 2017 to 2019. As the first of many public evaluations from Central Australia throughout your 25-year strategy you are still in the early days, yet on a positive pathway for evidencing generational change, with and led by First Nations communities.

For this evaluation, we have provided advice and guidance for the evaluation method, data collection and analysis. This report was reviewed by our Research Advisory Group on multiple occasions to interrogate the data, analysis and evaluative judgements. We have expressed our confidence in the rigour of this evaluation and endorse the high quality and participatory method and robust analysis processes.

Children's Ground's commitment to long-term public and transparent evaluation is a credit to your approach and organisation, particularly amongst a landscape where initiatives and programs for First Nations people are often not extensively or well evaluated. You have demonstrated the importance of services and systems to deliver in an environment of continuous learning and improvement to maintain responsiveness to and empowerment of communities.

Evaluation of real-world, whole of community initiatives can be challenging. The Children's Ground team has navigated these challenges and presented a comprehensive, fair and balanced assessment of the progress, early impact and the challenges associated with resources, growth and scaling. This evaluation demonstrates that over the three years of this evaluation, Children's Ground's delivery of their Approach in Central Australia has achieved a lot with very little in the context of their fully resourced model.

The significant focus on process evaluation clearly articulates how you are seeking to achieve systems and service reform in real-world settings. It also evidences the importance and impact of all processes and systems being empowering and enabling First Nations people.

Children's Ground is breaking the mold and transforming the way systems can work alongside First Nations communities. The collation of many direct quotes from First Nations staff and families as evidence is amplifying the voice of the First Nations communities who lead Children's Ground. The respect for and empowerment of First Nations people in the evaluation shines through and provides valuable insights for anyone working with First Nations communities.

This report builds on the evidence from Children's Ground in Kakadu West Arnhem. With an increasing evidence base, the demonstrated effectiveness and early impact of the Children's Ground Approach is compounding. To date, your two evaluations have shown progress in key government policy areas nationally and in the Northern Territory - progress that has not been publicly evidenced against Closing the Gap in employment, health and early childhood education.

Your next step is to share this report and evidence broadly and to use it to inform relevant policy and practice changes beyond Children's Ground. The report makes a compelling case for the continuation and broader implementation of this important work.

Kind regards,

Children's Ground Research Advisory Group

Professor Sally Brinkman: Co-Director, Fraser Mustard Centre. Senior Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute

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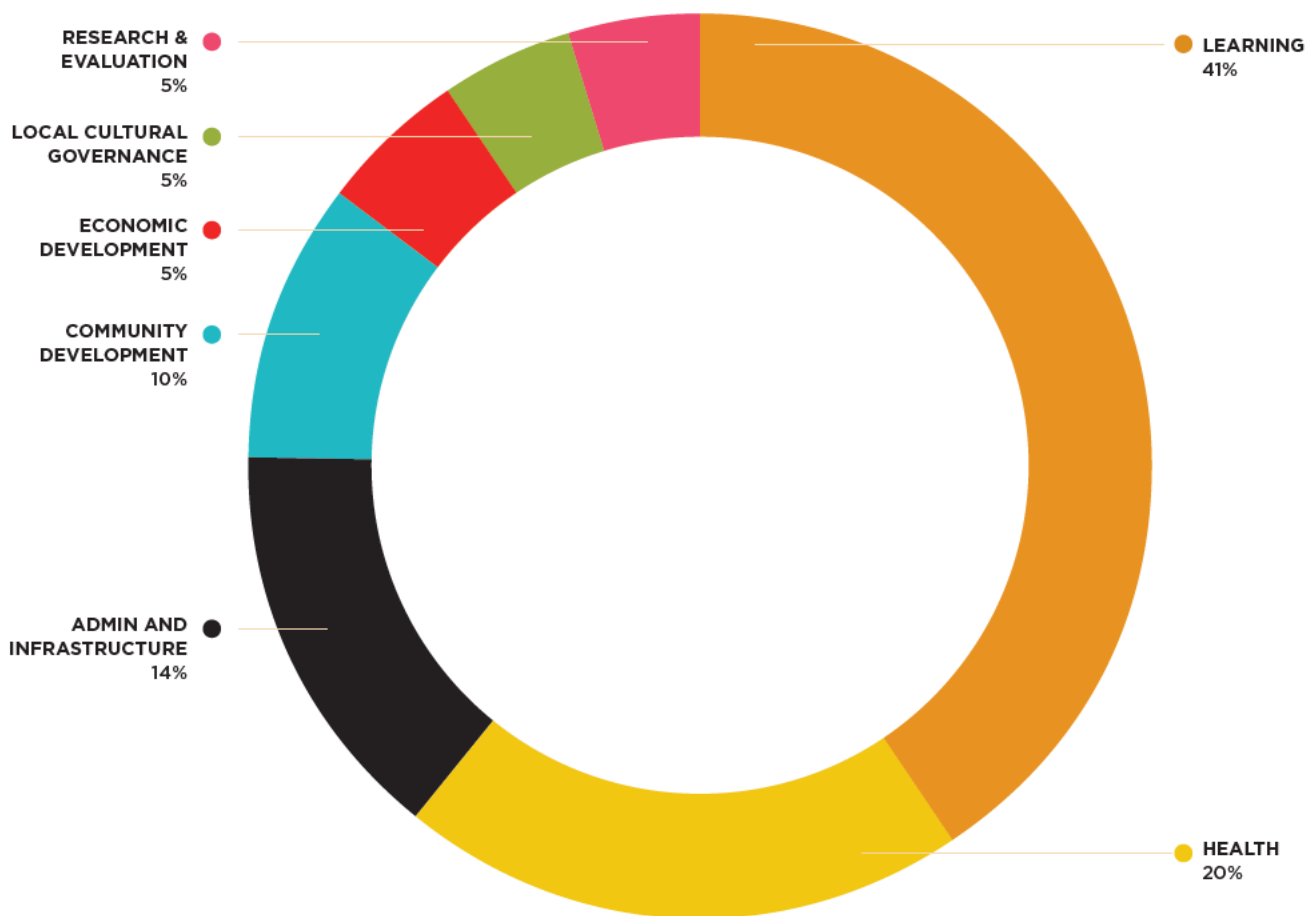
Professor Fiona Arney: Director, Positive Futures Research and Arney Chong Consulting



"We've been following government nearly all our lives – this is a new beginning. We are following a new path, our own path as First Nations people for the future of our children. At Children's Ground, the community is taking the lead. We are very proud of that. We are the government of ourselves."

M.K. Turner, OAM, Arrernte Professor, Elder and Law Woman
Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Director Children's Ground

HOW CHILDREN'S GROUND MONEY IS USED



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Every child born today should experience a lifetime of opportunity, entering adulthood strong in their identity and culture, connected to their local and global world, and economically independent.

If all children can experience this basic right, then whole communities will enjoy wellbeing. Now is the time for the Government to invest in the future.

[1] Mitchell, J. (2021). Cost Benefit Analysis of Children's Ground Approach (unpublished).

[2] Mitchell, J. Cost Benefit Analysis (unpublished).

[3] The Cost Benefit Analysis comprehensively accounts for the benefits of avoided government expenditure and income received by the participants; Mitchell, J. Cost Benefit Analysis (unpublished).

[4] The Productivity commission 2021 Australia's prison dilemma Research paper

[5] Australian Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2022

[6] The Australian Institute of Family Studies [2018]: The economic cost of child abuse and neglect.

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Financial Model



THE CHILDREN'S GROUND APPROACH IS PROVEN, EFFICIENT AND WILL SAVE THE GOVERNMENT MONEY.

At Children's Ground, our long term strategy is for all children to be successful in their education and enjoy a healthy life and economic independence. To do this, Children's Ground will bring the best of Government and Philanthropy together in a model that allows us to enable all children and families to live with dignity and justice, free from economic poverty.



GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT WORKING TOGETHER

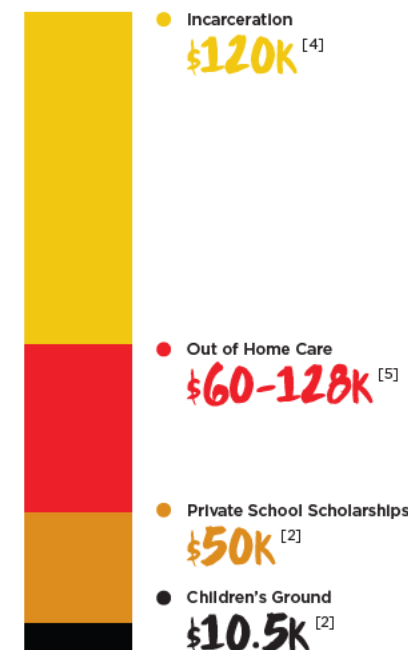
Backing 12 communities where service equity is poor and injustice is high. Over 5 years, a comprehensive preventative approach, building First Nations practice and evidence.

THE CHILDREN'S GROUND PROGRAM COSTS LESS THAN \$11K PER PERSON PER YEAR.^[2]

For this modest sum, we deliver early childhood, primary aged learning and support, after hours programs, youth programs, language and cultural programs, health promotion, nutrition, social and emotional wellbeing, Elders support and employment for young people at risk and adults.

Our evidence-based programs will result in a significant reduction in Government costs in the long term.

The annual cost per child in care at 30 June 2021 varied across jurisdictions, ranging between \$60,408 and \$128,918.^[5]



SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES.

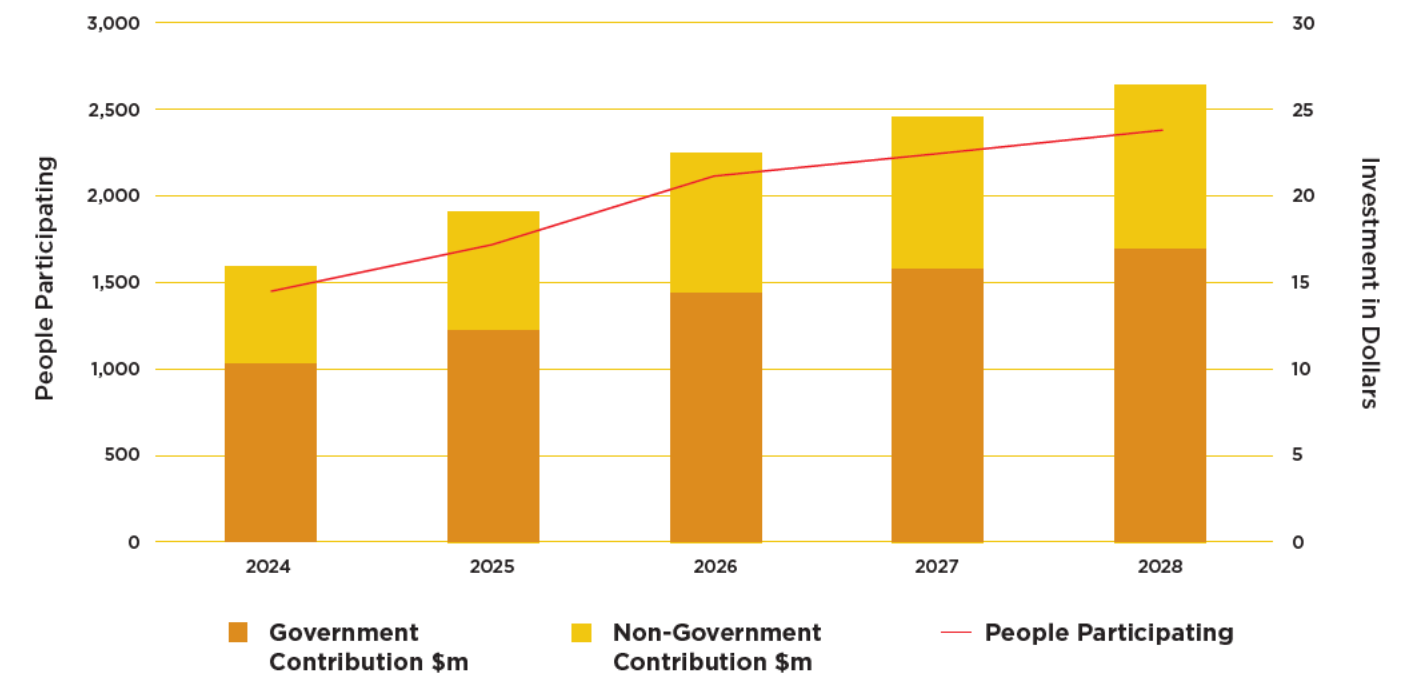
3000+
children, young people and adults

1200+
children aged 0-12 years

1000+
young people at risk

115+
un/underemployed young people and adults employed

In 2016/17 approximately \$5.2 billion was spent nationally on child protection, OOH services, intensive family support services and family support services.^[6]



SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMIC BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

For every dollar invested in Children's Ground the Government will achieve a cost benefit of

\$5.7



A Cost Benefit Analysis has shown that there is substantial economic benefit from reducing Indigenous disadvantage using the Children's Ground Approach.^[1]

The estimated Net Present Value (NPV) the Children's Ground Approach would generate per participant over 25 years is

\$649K^[3]

Every child born today should experience a lifetime of opportunity, entering adulthood strong in their identity and culture, connected to their local and global world, and economically independent.

If all children can experience this basic right, then whole communities will enjoy wellbeing. Now is the time for the Government to invest in the future.



A First Nations organisation Changing the future for our children

[1] Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2022). 'COAG targets and headline indicators.' <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard>

[2] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020). 2020 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework. Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Indigenous Australians Institute. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/>

[3] 'Family Matters. (2021). The Family Matters Report 2021. <https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FamilyMattersReport2021.pdf>

[4] Family Matters, The Family Matters Report; AIHW, Health Performance Framework; Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2019), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, Australia. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-survey/latest-release>.

[5] Priest, Naomi & Paradies, Yin & Gunthorpe, Wendy & Cairney, Sheree & Sayers, Sue. (2011). Racism as a determinant of social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal Australian youth. The Medical Journal of Australia. 194. 546-50. 10.5694/j.1326-5377.2011.tb03099.x.

[6] Australian Government Productivity Commission. (n.d.). Socioeconomic outcome area 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives. <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area1>

[7] Children's Ground internal data; Children's Ground. (2021). Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe - Children's Ground in Central Australia: 2017 to 2019 Baseline and early progress. <https://childrensground.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Evaluation-of-Ampe-kenhe-Ahelhe-2017-2019-June22.pdf>



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WE ARE CHILDREN'S GROUND.

Through our Elders, through our cultures and our languages, and in our communities, we are creating a different future for the next generation.

We have a First Nations solution. We have a long term approach to ensure every ampe akweke (child) born in our communities today can enjoy a life of opportunity and wellbeing, based on their identity. We want the very best for our children. We want excellence.

We have the evidence that what we are doing is working. We can prevent harm and provide a great life for our children. It is cost effective and it will save the Government money.

We will support the Government's efforts to close the gap.

OUR VISION

For all children and families to live with dignity and justice.



We have the solutions. With over 65,000 years of culture to pass on. History, languages, traditions, customs, science, education, laws, land management, the arts... our knowledge is endless and it holds our future.

We have been waiting to be seen, heard and supported.

WHO ARE WE

Children's Ground is a national First Nations organisation, founded in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

WHAT WE DO

Our 25 year Approach is delivered by community, in community. We integrate learning, health, culture, economic wellbeing and community life to address the determinants for social, cultural and economic wellbeing for future generations.

HOW IT WORKS

Our evidence-based approach responds to key determinants needed for any child's future success. With First Culture and language at the heart, we ensure our children have the cultural and global skills for life. We back the talent and leadership in our communities.

THE PROBLEM

We want to stop the harmful cycle of previous generations. Our children, families and communities have struggled for too long.

Despite the best efforts of the Government, the Closing the Gap (CTG) statistics, Productivity Commission reports, inquiries, and Royal Commissions all point to a robust evidence base of system failure for our people.

Today our children are:

- More likely to be living in economic poverty and overcrowding.^[1]
- More likely to die at birth (3x in NT).^[2]
- More likely to be taken into welfare (11x in NT).^[3]
- More likely not to finish school, to end up in jail, to be unemployed, to suicide, live with chronic illness.^[4]
- Highly likely to experience racism.^[5]
- Destined to die younger than the average Australian.^[6]

WE HAVE A SOLUTION

- ✓ It's designed and run by First Nations people.
- ✓ Backed by large philanthropic corporations.
- ✓ It will save the Government money and support its efforts to close the gap.
- ✓ We have a proven model backed by evidence that works.



WE ARE LOOKING FOR SHARED COMMITMENT

Government commitment for five years.

To enable 12 communities to deliver and lead a First Nations solution, with excellence to deliver long term outcomes.

For every two dollars from Government we will be bring one dollar.

Upholding The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people.

"Children's Ground is our organisation. We continue the work of many old people who came before us and who designed Children's Ground with a vision to achieve great change and to make sure that the voice of the people is heard"

William Tilmouth | Chair

OUR RESULTS

Evidence of Impact^[8]

Children's Ground is addressing
key CTG outcomes:



A great start to life

CTG targets 3, 4 & 5 – Early Learning

- ✓ A new cohort of children (489 0-5 year olds) engaged in early years learning.
- ✓ Less than 14% had previously engaged in early learning.
- ✓ 100% Children receiving early childhood through their first language and culture.

Preventing chronic health

CTG targets 1, 2 – Health and Maternal and Child Health

- ✓ 2304 people engaged in targeted health promotion.
- ✓ 758 children 0-8 years engaged in targeted nutrition.
- ✓ 211 babies 0-1 years engaged in maternal and child health.

Families are working

CTG target 8 - Local Employment

- ✓ Employed 224 local community First Nations staff.
- ✓ 34% had never worked before.
- ✓ 84% were not working when they started with Children's Ground.

Led by First Nations people

CTG 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander informed decision-making

- ✓ 481 people involved in community and regional governance since 2014 – designing CG Approach and integrated service delivery for their children, families and communities.
- ✓ “Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground) is different to other organisations because it is run by us – our Elders, our families and all the community that come to Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. We speak with our own strong voices. Our structure is determined by our Arrernte kinship and we follow the leadership and guidance of our Elders. They support each generation to have their say.” Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme (Children's Ground Cultural Governance Committee)

CLOSING THE GAP TARGETS

Priority Areas

- ✓ ASI community controlled organisation
- ✓ Partnership arrangement joint decision making
- ✓ Decreasing Racism
- ✓ Regional data for community decision making

SOCIOECONOMIC TARGETS

ALL 17 TARGETS - EVIDENCE AND PRACTICE

OUTCOME

- ✓ Children engaged in early childhood
- ✓ Children and young people knowing their culture and speaking their language
- ✓ Children and young people succeeding in education
- ✓ Children and young people who are emotional physically and culturally safe
- ✓ Families engaged with their children
- ✓ Families who are employed
- ✓ Communities that are safe
- ✓ Communities where we are making decisions about our future
- ✓ Communities where culture, employment and wellbeing is the norm

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Chair of the Board
Chair Research Advisory Group
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