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MEDIA RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 10 DECEMBER 2021

First Nations community-led approach to creating generational change is working, evaluation report reveals.

MPARNTWE/ALICE SPRINGS - An evaluation of the work of First Nations- organisation Children's Ground shows hundreds of children now have access to early childhood learning and that a "no barrier" pathway to adult employment is succeeding.

Launched on Human Rights Day, the report *Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe: Children's Ground in Central Australia – 2017 to 2019*; demonstrates early progress against key Closing the Gap goals just three years into a 25-year plan, with marked progress in early childhood learning, adult employment, local decision-making and community wellbeing.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Hon Ken Wyatt and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar AO will launch the report in Mparntwe/Alice Springs today (Friday).

One key finding was that a new generation of children (0-8 years) were engaging in Western and Cultural early learning, with 89% of children across the communities engaging alongside their family – with most engaging in formal learning for the first time.

There are few evidence-based approaches in Australia, so this evaluation provides an important contribution to leading practice and national policy design. The evaluation presents progress toward long term outcomes in education, employment, health, community engagement and empowerment.

"We have always been researched by other people, and now we need to research ourselves," said Children's Ground Co-Founder and Board Chair William Tilmouth. "The more we lead and own this work, the better the outcomes will be. This evaluation is an important contribution towards achieving this goal."

"Instead of focusing on the symptoms and the crisis, Children's Ground is focused on the causes and the future. Our children and their education, their health and wellbeing are at the heart of this, but most importantly, it is our culture and our identity," Mr Tilmouth said.

The Children's Ground approach focuses on the next generation of children in the context of their family and community and recognises the central role of culture and language in the engagement and wellbeing of children. The integrated Approach is starting to see results. Baseline and Early Progress reveals:

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

- A new generation of children (245 children aged 0-8 years) in culturally safe early learning (82% of the community's children when only 14% were attending before Children's Ground's operations)
- Employment of adults who were previously not working (59 adults employed 84% not working before Children's Ground and 34% were never before employed)
- Improved health access for children (256 children 0-8 years) and families (487 aged 9+) engaged in targeted preventative health and health promotion
- 89% of families reported that children's physical health (their body and nutrition) and emotional health (their mind and behaviour) was improved.

The evaluation report includes the powerful voices of First Nations people from four communities in Central Australia – where nearly 1000 people engaged with Children's Ground over the initial three-year period.

"Since Children's Ground started in Central Australia, I have watched the lives of children and families change," Mr Tilmouth said.

"I have watched confidence grow, seen children accessing early learning for the first time, adults who have never worked finding meaningful employment. When our people lead and design our own solutions, they succeed. Across our communities, people are finding that their voices are being heard. They feel empowered and proud," Mr Tilmouth said.

Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground) Co-Director Veronica Turner said it was "the first time we have been involved in evaluation".

"We are designing and delivering our programs, we are collecting the data and we are evaluating our progress. By following our Elders and following our culture we are creating change. We are making decisions," Ms Turner said.

We are making sure our children are strong in their first language and culture and in English and western skills. We are strengthening our languages and ways of teaching and being. This is our human right," she said.

CEO and Co-Founder, Jane Vadiveloo, said the Children's Ground's Approach had the potential to change the existing system and create long lasting change and justice for First Nations communities.

"This second major evaluation (of the Approach) confirms we are establishing pathways to not just close the gap but to prevent the gap for the next generation."

Ends

For interviews and more information, contact:

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Background on Children's Ground

Who we are?

Children's Ground is a not-for-profit organisation that gives voice and choice to First Nations communities. First Nations language, culture and knowledge systems are given priority at Children's Ground. Many Children's Ground people and families have been impacted significantly by colonisation and are socially and economically excluded from western systems.

Our aim is to work with every child and their family, in a community, over a 25-year period. We create change by delivering services across five intersecting areas that influence long-term wellbeing. These are: learning, health, economic opportunity, culture and community development.

Where is Children's Ground active?

Central Australia:

- Irrkerlantye (Whitegate Town Camp) established 2017
- Yarrenyty-Arltere (Larapinta Town Camp) established 2017
- Mpweringke Anapipe (northern Alice Springs outstations) established 2017
- Ewyenper Atwatye (Hidden Valley Town Camp) established 2019

Top End NT

- outstations in West Arnhem, Marlkwawo and surrounds – established 2018
- Darwin Local Areas – Kululak, Minmarama, Knuckey's Lagoon, 15 Mile

What makes Children's Ground unique?

- First Nations collectively-led and driven – at both the Board and community levels
- Holistic approach to what works for First Nations people – everything must work together to improve health, education outcomes, access to jobs, economic independence, housing.
- gathering evidence to drive systemic reform in government policy and service delivery.

How does Children's Ground monitor and measure results?

Children's Ground collects data to measure and report outputs (annually) and outcomes (impacts) every two years (calendar year linked to schools). To view reports published by Children's Ground visit: [CG Reports link](#). An expert Research Advisory group works with our research and evaluation team to analyse data, results and findings.