

Children's Ground Quarterly Report: Q1 2022

*Sharing our growth, reach
and impact over time*





The children were excited to start a new year of learning with Children's Ground as our plans for 2022 continued to build upon the vision of our Elders. This year has already brought both joy and significant challenges. We have lost loved ones – too many and too young.

The spread of Covid throughout the Northern Territory made our ongoing health promotion and Covid safety support all the more vital. Meanwhile, staff have been grappling with the virus themselves and supporting family members in isolation. This is an added challenge for many First Nations families in our communities who live in insecure or overcrowded housing, forcing some people to live in their cars to isolate themselves with Covid. There is a long-term housing crisis in First Nations communities and Covid has only exacerbated this insidious issue.

The Closing the Gap statistics continue to show the alarming gap in life expectancy between First Nations and non-First Nations people and the serious health issues that First Nations people live with. For us, these are not just statistics – these are the people we love. Each year we lose people. During the beginning of this year, grief has touched every person at Children's Ground. We have all felt the heartache of deep family loss across our communities – including, tragically, three young people in their thirties.

Last month, a young father and founding member of the Black Rock Band passed away in a car accident. We remember his smile, laugh and talent. In the past few weeks, we have lost two wonderful women – cultural and educational leaders who have died far too young. One was a founding cultural governance member and director for Ampe-Kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia). The loss of their knowledge and leadership is profound. The grief inherent in these losses is impossible to articulate.

We stand together as families for the future. We know how hard we need to work so that our children today can grow to live long healthy lives with freedom and joy. Through the deep sadness that is affecting the whole of Children's Ground, there is an inner strength and determination that is bringing us all together, a love and respect that holds us and a vision that is unwavering.

As the election draws near, we challenge governments and bureaucrats to make dramatic change. To be bold. To really understand the depth of the cultural and human rights abuses that continue day in day out and impact the lives of our families every day. First Nations people hold the history of this country and with it, the future. First Nations people hold a proud cultural law and life that we want to see honoured nationally. We want a commitment from governments to back our work at Children's Ground over the long term – to give us certainty to build on the change we are creating.

As we recognise and remember those who have passed, we look to the children who are our future – learning, growing and leading with hope and talent and showing us the way.

Order of Australia for one of Children's Ground's Founding Elders

This quarter, we celebrated the late Kwementyaye Kngwarreye Palmer who was awarded a posthumous Order of Australia for services to the First Nations community of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Mrs Palmer passed away in 2021 and was a founding Elder of Children's Ground. She was a respected educator, artist, leader, cultural professor, great-grandmother, Elder, advocate and loyal friend. This award acknowledges Mrs Palmer's lifelong commitment to protecting and healing Country, and her determination that all First Nations children access quality education in their First Language, on their Country. This vision was unwavering through Mrs Palmer's remarkable life. As a member of Yipirinya School Council and a Director at the Institute for Aboriginal Development, Mrs Palmer fought lifelong

for Arrernte education, language and culture. In 2014, she and MK Turner OAM were joined by Elders and community leaders in founding Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia).

"The whole family are proud of her for what she has done out of love for the community," said daughter Joyce Palmer. "She was a great leader to the community, especially with young kids. She fought to keep language and culture strong."

Children's Ground Health and Wellbeing Coordinator Tyson Carmody said Mrs Palmer's influence spread far and wide across the Arrernte community. "Everyone she met felt that love," he said. Tyson said it was her vision that Arrernte language be taught in schools and that Arrernte children remain connected to culture.

"That was her vision and her dream and that's what she got started [at Children's Ground]," he said.



Progress: Growth, Reach and Impact

KPI Growth: Proportion of full CGA delivery

The CGA is being delivered and evaluated in three regions across the Northern Territory. Each is at a different stage of the 25-year Approach. Development and growth in delivery is based on available resources. We work towards implementing the full CGA in each community as resources increase and enable growth. The graphic below presents % of delivery against the full CGA by the end of Quarter One 2022, and resource and growth targets for the next 5 years.



The CGA requires all key elements to be implemented fully to achieve long term change. Children's Ground is a developing organisation. It is expected that being fully operational in three regions will take a further 3-5 years as funding resources are secured. From the beginning of 2022, we saw the Darwin region moving from Walk & Talk Community Engagement & Planning into small scale growth model delivery.



Progress: Growth, Reach and Impact

KPI: Q1 2022 access, delivery and engagement

71

learning sessions delivered with integrated health promotion*

18+ years
140



0-8 years
117

563

occasions of targeted **health** promotion and support

18+ years
266



0-8 years
146

9-17 years
99

*Seven communities currently deliver early learning, ranging from 1-4 sessions per week depending on their stage of development. Learning delivery in all communities was significantly impacted by COVID-19 this quarter.

7

First Nations **languages** being preserved or revitalised

18+ years
130



0-8 years
98

63

First Nations people engaged in **employment**








70

First Nations people engaged in **governance** and local decision-making



KPI: Reach over time (2014-2022)

 Early learning	822	455	982
 Health promotion	917	574	1323
 Preserving culture	587	354	847
 Community leadership (governance)	500		
 Employment	232		

Children (0-8 yrs)	Young people (9-17 yrs)	Family (18+ yrs)

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Learning & Wellbeing



Empowering Children to Set Their Own Learning Goals

At Children's Ground, children begin each new year by setting goals for their learning, health and wellbeing, supported by their family.

"Most mainstream schools and institutions tell children and families what their learning will look like, but not at Children's Ground," says educator Lee. During a Mpweringke Anapipe family night, educators talked to the children about their visions for themselves and their learning goals for the year. The children painted these goals on a large canvas mat which will be used as a central sitting place during learning sessions. "I want to learn about snakes and paint," said Winston. "I want to hunt with my family," said Desmond. Children will continue to record these learning goals and visions as the year progresses. From the foundations of these learning activities, we integrate numeracy, literacy, sciences, the arts, health and wellbeing.

Impact: By setting their own learning goals, children are empowered to be active and engaged participants in their individual learning journeys. As evidenced in our early progress evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, we are seeing a new cohort of children engaged in culturally safe early years learning – children who had rarely or never participated before. Creating a safe, open and inclusive environment where the whole family is invited to participate in each child's learning journey has led to a new normal of children engaging in early learning alongside their families.



Intergenerational School Up and Running at Marlkawo

"We will be teaching our kids from the start. As they grow up and have their own kids, they will then teach them the Children's Ground way. We are still at the beginning. In 10 years' time, if I'm still alive, I will see Marlkawo have a proper school, proper houses with fans, a big generator with a working shower and toilet." – Cecily Djandjomerr, Elder, Co-Director CG Top End.

This quarter, we made a big leap forward in achieving Cecily's dream. For the first time, early years, primary and high school students could attend school on their Homeland of Marlkawo with Children's Ground. The children were proud to show their educators where they were up to in their learning and where they wanted to head next. Anthony, Tyler, Keith and Mahalia were keen to get straight into mathematics equations. Keith remarked, "Can we do more and harder ones tomorrow?" The children are so excited to have an all-ages school on their Homeland!

Impact: By reducing access barriers to education, we are seeing child and family engagement in learning flourish. At Children's Ground, we create learning environments in our communities where children live, removing hurdles to accessing high quality education. Our kids go through a lot of worry and sadness. But when our kids are at Marlkawo, their spirit settles, they are healed by Country, and they can focus on their learning. We know that the best place for our children to learn is on Country in an intergenerational setting. This has positive outcomes not only for a child's learning, but also for the entire family's social, cultural and emotional wellbeing.

"It was a privilege seeing first-hand what we all know, that the Children's Ground approach is the best approach. Our children never stop learning and so we must be there to capture those opportunities for learning either during our 'normal' work hours or after hours." – Tyson Carmody, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Health & Wellbeing

Mwerre-ileme Boxes (Healthy Boxes)

In Central Australia, educators and health specialists have collaborated in the creation of Mwerre-ileme Boxes (Healthy Boxes) to integrate health promotion into early years activities. Children learn and practice routines that support their physical health and their social, emotional and cultural health and safety.

After blowing noses, wiping faces and washing hands at the start of every early years session, children point to their hurts and sores, both physical and emotional – cuts, boils, scratches or sore hearts from teasing or other emotional pains. Mwerre-ileme Boxes contain bush medicine, wipes, band aids and cream to address minor sores and facilitate conversations. During these health sessions, family members support their children. Together they are learning about health and wellbeing and prevention. For example, how skin sores can cause heart and kidney disease if not treated properly. Everyone celebrates the child's ability to be care for themselves and their bravery when they share their emotional understanding.



"During Mwerre-Ilime time yesterday, First Nations educators Cathy and Veronica brought out different types of bush medicine that the children had made the day before in their On-Country learning session. Seven-year-old Tippy-toe explained how she crushed Emu bush to make the medicine she now was wiping on her foot. Everyone was communicating in

Arrernte, checking in with children and helping them to clean their sores and heal them. Well done Veronica and Cathy for completing the learning cycle and truly integrating incredible First Nations lead health into the session!" – Lee, Children's Ground Educator

Impact: Families are reporting that children are healthier and happier through engagement with Children's Ground. In the early progress evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, 89% of families said that children's physical health (their body and nutrition) and emotional health (their mind and behaviour) was better or much better. 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.



Vaccination Success in the Top End

In preparation for the start of the school year, our teams in Central Australia and the Top End were in overdrive, supporting people impacted by Covid by providing health information in language and working with local health organisations in regards to vaccinations. In the Top End, we've been working with the NT Health Mobile Vaccination Team to provide vaccinations at Minmarama and Kulaluk communities in Darwin. Children's Ground operates early years and after school activities in these town camps, so our existing relationship enabled families to feel safe, comfortable and educated about their choices. Young people and adults stepped up to be vaccinated against Covid. – Well done everyone!

Impact: Health promotion provided in community and in First Languages increases health agency and early intervention and prevention. Children's Ground aims to reduce barriers to access for First Nations families by delivering health services where people live. The ability to access culturally-safe health services within their own communities, where they feel safe and comfortable, empowers communities to take control of their own health.

Creative & Cultural Development & Wellbeing



Music Program Kicks Off in Central Australia

This quarter, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia) launched a new music program, led by Arrernte musicians. The first workshop started with a singalong of the new Children's Ground Arrernte language songs on the bus, led by educators Carol and Amanda. Upon arrival to Country, Nooky, Riley and Vito began playing these songs on guitar and encouraged children to play along. "Kelsie was really loving the guitar," said Kelsie's uncle Riley, "I was showing her how to hold her hands and play – her strum is strong!"

Adults and children collected artetye (mulga) wood on Country to carve and paint clapping sticks. Eight-year-old Winston gently showed the younger kids how to clap the sticks together with rhythm. One-year-old Carlagero was very interested in exploring how to use the clapping sticks. He observed family, danced along with the music and clapped the sticks together and on the ground to make sounds. Carlagero rapidly increased his confidence using the sticks, dancing and clapping along with Cathy and Winston, grinning from ear to ear.

Impact: Creativity is integral to First Nations societies and has always been expressed in learning through music, art, storytelling and song. Music and rhythm support cultural and creative development, learning and engagement and has positive impacts on emotional wellbeing.

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Community Development and Wellbeing



Celebrating International Women's Day with Arelhe-kenhe Ayeye

On International Women's Day, a group of fifty strong First Nations women and children from communities in Central Australia came together for Arelhe-kenhe Ayeye (Women's Story) on Arrernte Country. We were delighted to be joined by women from Akeyulerre Healing Centre and Atitjere community. This day was a chance for women to come together in a safe, calm space to yarn about social and emotional wellbeing, workplace skills and leadership.

Impact: The early progress evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe shows that Children's Ground is strengthening social connections for individuals and communities. Employment, placed based delivery, local governance and community events create opportunities for social connectedness. The strengths-based approach of Children's Ground, where First Nations culture and governance are prioritised, is changing the relationship that people previously had with services – from one of being a recipient to one of being in control.

Economic Development and Wellbeing



News from the Black Rock Band

Last month we were celebrating; now we are grieving. First Nations musicians Black Rock Band gave an incredible performance at the Port Fairy Folk Festival in March on a stage hosted by First Nations music legend Archie Roach – their first live set in almost two years. Black Rock Band emerged from Children's Ground's Creative, Cultural and Enterprise platforms in West Arnhem, NT and our work with young men at risk of engagement with the criminal justice system. But devastatingly, just a few weeks later, one of the founding members of Black Rock Band passed away in a tragic car accident. His passion for music, love for family and connection to Country and culture were unwavering. We send our love to all the families affected by this tragic loss – a father, brother, son, musician and friend gone too soon. Rest in Power RR.

Impact: When we reflect on impact, we reflect on RR's life. The Black Rock Band gave him a place to express his amazing talent. He was proud about his music, culture and language. At Children's Ground, we watched a young man build his skills and work through this artistry. Thank you RR for everything you gave.

"When we sing 'make a change' we are singing to black fellas and white fellas, to everyone, we've all got a part to play. It's about the change we need to make – as a nation, as a community, and every day for ourselves." Richie Guymala, lead singer and founder, Black Rock Band.

Acknowledging National Close the Gap Day

Children's Ground invests in whole communities to shift the status quo from crisis and deficit to prevention and excellence. This National Close the Gap Day, Children's Ground highlighted the progress we are making against Closing the Gap outcomes – as evidenced in our early progress evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia).

- Children engaging in early learning in their First Language has improved children's cultural and Western learning and development outcomes.
- 82% of children (0-5 years) across four communities engaged in early years learning. Before Children's Ground, only 14% had previously engaged in early learning.
- 89% of families reported that children's physical and mental health improved through engagement with Children's Ground.
- People who were living with chronic unemployment are now working: 84% were unemployed when they started at Children's Ground.
- Across all Children's Ground areas, 481 First Nations people engaged in governance and decision-making for their families and communities (2014-2021).



Children's Ground: saving money, changing the future

For every dollar invested, the Government is projected to save \$5.70 based on a new Cost Benefit Analysis of the Children's Ground Approach. The following is an excerpt from the CBA report:

"The cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of the Children's Ground Approach has quantified the net economic benefits...This report quantifies costs and benefits using an 'avoidable cost' framework as recommended by the Productivity Commission.

The cost-benefit analysis finds that there is substantial economic benefit flowing from reducing Indigenous disadvantage using the Children's Ground Approach. There are significant projected savings in government expenditure if disadvantage was reduced. In present value terms, the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments would save over \$362,200 per participant if the Children's Ground Approach was successful over 25 years. There are also significant projected net economic benefits flowing from the Children's Ground Approach.

The CBA comprehensively accounts for the benefits of avoided government expenditure and income received by the participants. This translates to a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of 5.7."

Children's Ground's approach directly invests in a child's education and health with the long-term view to prepare children for educational and employment opportunities when they become adults. It seeks to build social and economic capital in communities and engage communities and families in the governance and implementation of the model, creating ownership of outcomes.

The report was completed by Julia Mitchell. Julia Mitchell is an economist with 30 years' experience in the private, NGO, university and public sectors focusing on resource allocation modelling and forecasting, economic evaluation for education and human services relating to First Nations people and communities. She is currently the Director of the Non-Government Schools Unit at the NSW Department of Education.

With Children's Ground	Without Children's Ground
 Children's Ground costs approximately \$10,000 per person per year.	 The cost of an interstate school scholarship is in the order of \$50,000 per student per year.
 First Nations educators are employed and remunerated for cultural expertise.	 First Nations people often hired into assistant or advisor roles.
 First Nations educators design their own First Nations curriculum and integrate Western learning outcomes.	 Non-First Nations educators insert First Nations learning into Western curriculum.
 Children learning in their First Language and culture.	 Children learning in a foreign language and culture.
 Local community enjoy meaningful, long-term employment.	 Non-First Nations people from outside the community brought in for short-term employment.
 Health services in community, in First Languages and culturally safe.	 Health services in clinics outside community, in English and Western design.
 Whole communities benefit.	 Individuals benefit.