

Children's Ground Quarterly Report: Q3 2022



Sharing our growth, reach and impact over time





“First and foremost, our kids need to be on Country because the Country is the classroom. It’s where the language lives. Our literacy is not just in letters, it is in our relationship to the land and with each other. It is in our songs and our practices that are tied to our Country and culture. How can you learn to read this if you’re not seeing it and feeling it? Living it? Having that strong connection to Country and language, especially in those first five years of a child’s life will strengthen them and their self-esteem from the start. You can’t separate Country from language.”

Amunda Gorey, Children’s Ground community researcher, artist, and Arrernte language teacher

Children are the centre of our communities – the centre of Children’s Ground. This quarter, we celebrated them nationally through two significant dates: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day and Indigenous Literacy Day. But really, we celebrate our kids every day. We acknowledge their achievements in weekly community assemblies and in daily learning experiences. We are seeing a generation of children engage in culturally safe early years and primary learning – many of whom had rarely engaged in education before Children’s Ground. We are celebrating the educators, the cultural professors and the Elders leading the learning in both Western and First Nations systems. As Arrernte man and Children’s Ground Founding Chair William Tilmouth says, *“We are taking all the learnings from the past, from what our Elders have said all their lives and we are backing Aboriginal people’s ideas and leadership to achieve an approach that puts children at the centre of the story – to ensure that children grow up with the very best of their culture. This is a foundation of strength that grows from knowing who you are, who your family are, where your Country is and from knowing your language.”*

Progress: Growth, Reach and Impact

KPI: Q3 2022 access, delivery and engagement

158

learning sessions delivered with integrated health promotion

18+ years
225



0-8 years
204

341

occasions of targeted **health** promotion and support

18+ years
268



0-8 years
218

9-17 years
118

7

First Nations **languages** being preserved or revitalised

18+ years
217



0-8 years
200

87

First Nations people engaged in **employment**

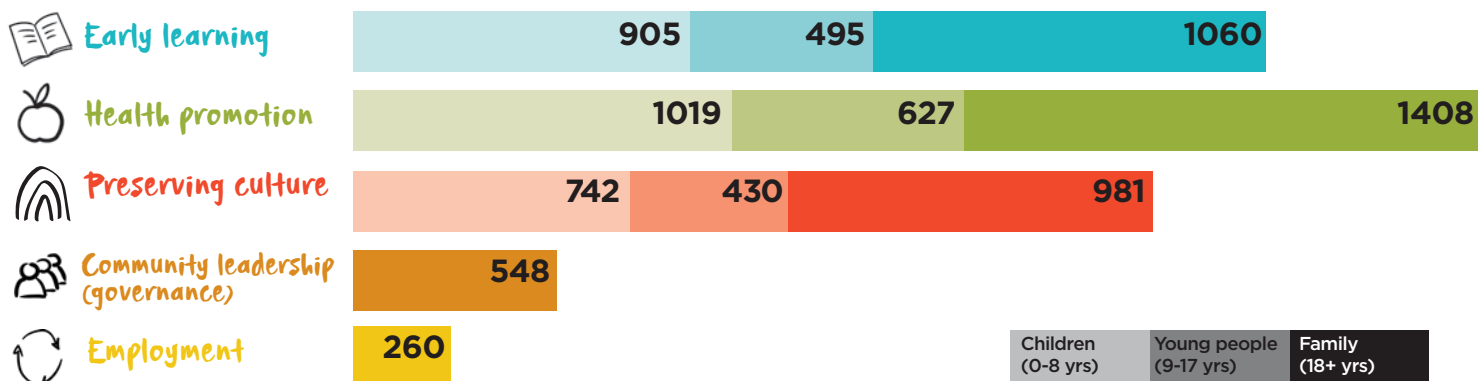


122

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



KPI: Reach over time (2014-2022)



Note: Data is subject to slight changes as we continue to work with communities to obtain accurate birthdates and demographic data.

Progress: Growth, Reach and Impact

KPI Growth: Proportion of full Children's Ground Approach (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 are 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 3 2022, including resource and growth targets for the next five 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.



Learning & Wellbeing



Literacy comes to life during Learning on Country

At Irrkerlantye in Central Australia, a visit by some local creatures brought the Learning on Country lesson to life.

Firstly, all the ampe (children) quietly listened to Senior Arrernte Educators Felicity, Therese and Susan read Therese's book *Ayeye Thipe-Akerte (Arrernte Stories About Birds)*. Ampe learned the names of thipe (birds) from their Elders in Arrernte and in English – where they live, what they eat and the sounds they make. Then suddenly, they were visited by some of the thipe they were reading about! Alpwertekalpwerte (butcher bird) watched from a nearby tree and then slowly came closer to sit behind them, singing softly. The ampe kept quiet and listened as she sung her song. As they continued to read the book, more thipe visitors arrived. A flock of pelkere (crested pigeon) flew over and snacked on the leftovers of their lunch. The final visitors were the arrpwere (magpie) and angepe (crow) who came to join the fun and stayed close by as they finished reading the book. By the end of the story, all the children could point to the thipe around them and call out their Arrernte names.

Impact: Learning on Country, learning in First Language and learning through the right family for Country are all key to First Nations pedagogy. We see children engaged, learning – connecting with literacy and life.

"I was so happy to be there teaching my kids on their Homelands. For some of them, it was the first time they ever saw a big flocks of birds like that. Janine was so focused and interested in watching the thipe, learning their names and sounds. Often, she doesn't say many words, but today out on Country she was talking in both English and Arrernte, finding her own voice as she talked to the thipe." – Susan



Everything is Connected

Shirley Djandjomerr is a First Nations leader and educator at Children's Ground in Marlkawo in the Top End of the Northern Territory. Here, she shares a story about a blended learning activity at Children's Ground, where culture, language and health promotion all combine to provide an enriching educational experience:

"On Country learning sessions allow us to watch how our wurdurd (children) grow. Last week we were teaching the wurdurd about the Djang sites – Djurungdjurung and Ngalkordow. We visited these two special sites and talked about taking care of them. We then went to Miyuku for a swim and fish. While we were there, Angela caught a burarr (water goanna). The wurdurd were so excited to show us that they knew all the names for body parts in Kunwinjku. They went from the kunkodj (head) to the morlawnoh (tail) and said all the names. It made us proud seeing them share their cultural knowledge and their First Language. The wurdurd took turns learning how to pull the guts out and clean the burarr up ready for cooking. They had been learning about internal organs and their functions the day before with the health promotion specialist. When they pulled the kunnjam (intestines) out of the neck, they washed it out to study it and relate it to their learning from the day before in the Children's Ground classroom. This is how we do things at Children's Ground. We combine the learning we do in the classroom with the learning on Country. Everything is done together and supports one another."

Impact: Marlkawo families are delivering First Nations designed education – engaging children in early and primary learning who had previously never or rarely participated. When children can access education that privileges their culture and language, delivered by educators in their community, they thrive.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Article 14: Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Health & Wellbeing

Social and emotional wellbeing activities seeing results

Children's Ground's Social and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellors support First Nations families' health by embedding wellbeing activities into everything we do, including learning sessions. Recently in Central Australia, children and their families engaged in a health promotion activity on Country led by the Arrernte Children's Ground book *Alkngarrileme: Warnings* written by L Gorey, Veronica Turner and Felicity Hayes.

We opened the session by speaking about signs of safety and danger – both on Country and in our bodies. After reading *Alkngarrileme: Warnings*, we walked around Country looking for dangerous and safe things. After the walk, we all sat down together and talked about signs in our bodies that tell us how we feel. We drew the things going on in our bodies when feeling akangkeme (happy) or aheakngerre (angry). Children and adults talked about these signs and what we can do in response to these signs to help each other stay mwerre (good) and akangkeme (happy).

Impact: Social and emotional wellbeing activities aim to support the development of emotional literacy and encourage children to identify and express how they're feeling. Eighty-nine per cent of families have reported that children's emotional health is better or much better through engagement with Children's Ground. By encouraging children's families to engage in the sessions as well, we are supporting the health and wellbeing of the whole family.

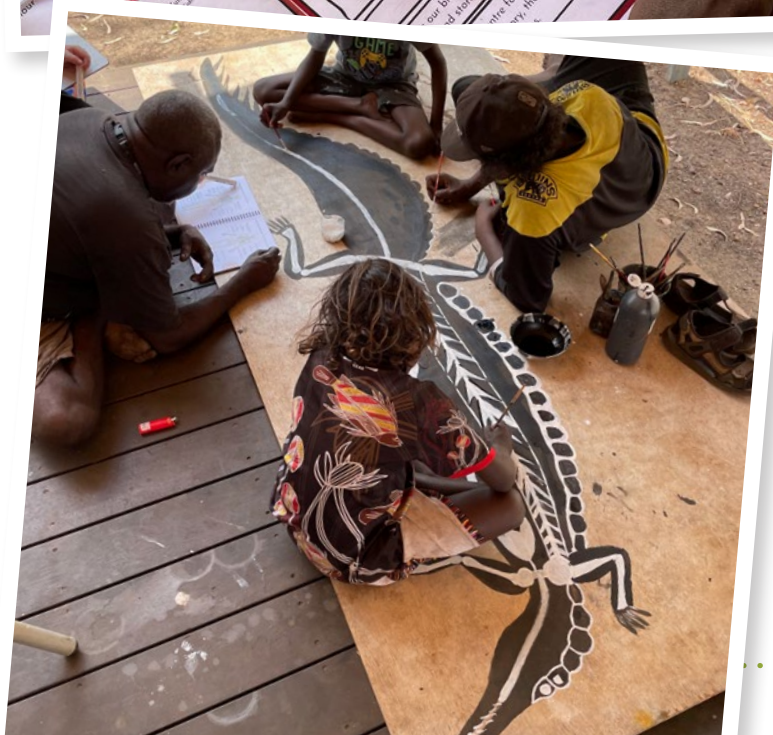
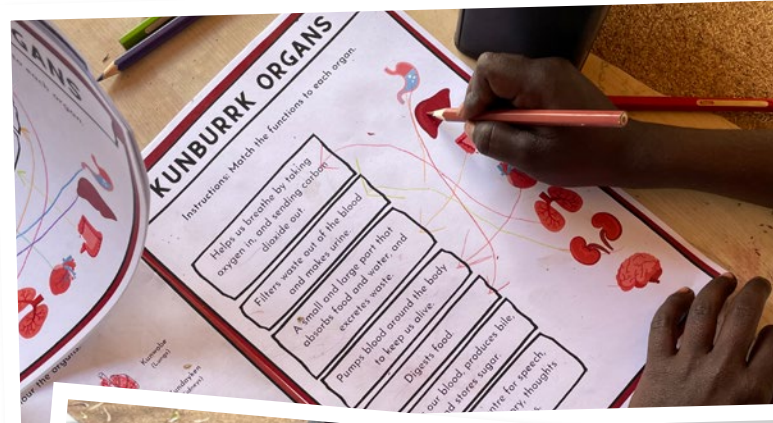


Health promotion through art – a First Nations approach

At Marlkawo, Kunred (Country) connects everything and leads all learning – including health education.

Kuwarddewardde (seasons of the land and abundance of life) determines Children's Ground learning focuses. During the recent Kurrung season, health and learning activities focused on freshwater crocodiles and their bodies. Wurdurd learnt about the heart, digestive system, bones of the bodies and blood of the crocodile. Senior Cultural Educator Raymond Guymala reinforced this learning in bim (art) classes where wurdurd learnt how to paint traditional freshwater crocodiles and the internal body parts.

Impact: By connecting health education to culture, art and Kundred, wurdurd are encouraged to understand the interconnectedness of all things, building upon their knowledge of land and culture. A First Nations education approach integrates learning, health, culture and creative arts to provide wurdurd with a holistic understanding of themselves and the world.



Creative & Cultural Development & Wellbeing



Strengthening at-risk languages

On August 9th, Children's Ground celebrated the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The 2022 theme 'The role of indigenous women in the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge' aligns with our international obligations to honour and respect the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032).

Children's Ground used this day to honour the ground-breaking language revitalisation work of MK Turner OAM: Eastern Arrernte Elder, Children's Ground Director, linguist, educator, and newly appointed Doctor of Education.

MK is one of the few living speakers with deep knowledge of the original Akarre-Akityarre language, one of the Arandic languages from the north-east of Mparntwe. Instigated by MK, Children's Ground embarked on a project to capture and revitalise the Akarre-Akityarre language alongside senior Akarre-Akityarre speakers, many of whom are learning the older use of the language from MK. Bonya and Atitjere communities held language workshops in partnership with the local school, where children were introduced to the threatened language, learning to speak it and revive it for future generations. The work of MK, senior Akarre-Akityarre speakers and Children's Ground's resource development team culminated in an Akarre-Akityarre written and audio wordlist and a children's picture dictionary.

The Akarre-Akityarre wordlist was revised and recorded in partnership with The University of Melbourne. The picture dictionary was created in partnership with the Department of Education, the Northern Territory Government, Bonya School and Atitjere Stronger Communities for Children. Thank you to First Languages Australia for funding this critical language project.

Impact: Currently, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies considers all First Nations languages to be 'under threat.' At the time of invasion, over 250 First Nations languages were spoken – now only 123 remain. Of these, only 12 are still acquired by children as their first language. Children's Ground seeks to provide the space for Elders and cultural leaders like MK to revitalise and re-establish learning, language and cultural knowledge systems to strengthen at-risk languages and preserve the world's oldest knowledge systems.

The Children's Ground Approach in Action



Economic Development and Wellbeing



Creativity, language and confidence strengthened through music

After more than a year of writing, rehearsing and recording, the new Arrernte-led musical project: Ampe-mape Alyelheme (Kids Sing) debuted in September at Desert Festival in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), marking a pivotal moment in a journey of language revitalisation and creative expression.

The band performed nine original songs in Arrernte, with many new musicians gracing the stage for the first time. But performing to an audience wasn't the only first for several group members – through writing and learning the songs, some of the young people were learning to read Arrernte for the first time.

“(Writing songs and singing in Arrernte) is important for the young ones, for their language to keep going – so they know how to use it properly,” says music group member William Lowah. “People are losing it a bit now, getting mixed with English. We’re trying to make it come back, using them real old words. It’s slowly happening for the kids. No one really gave them a chance, so it’s time now.”

The show was an overwhelming success, with festival goers singing and dancing to songs like ‘Akaperte, Pwerlepe, Ampere, Ingke’ (Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes). “The show was fun,” said Arrernte musician Myles Turner. “I loved performing the songs and getting the messages across to the kids in a fun way. Such a great feeling after countless hours of practice.”

Impact: In Central Australia, resource development is central to our Economic Development and Wellbeing platform. But it's clear that our outputs – children's books, songs and learning tools – are not the only outcomes of this work. Through engaging in developing language resources for Arrernte kids, creators are strengthening their understanding of language and culture and developing vital skills in confidence and creative expression.



Community Development and Wellbeing



Community Assemblies Create Pride

Children's Ground supports community aspirations to create places of safety, inclusion and joy, where children and families live.

At Marlkwawo, weekly community assemblies bring everyone together to celebrate the achievements and efforts of the wurdurd (children) in their learning. Community members take turns presenting and running the assembly, role-modelling public speaking and creating a sense of pride amongst the group. Here, wurdurd have the opportunity to celebrate and showcase their Western learning and cultural and community learning. Achievement awards are presented at these assemblies and aim to highlight and celebrate everyone having a good go and their growth in all aspects of their lives.

Impact: Communal events, such as weekly assemblies, provide celebration opportunities and strengthen social connectedness between families and communities. At Children's Ground, we are supporting communities to be socially, economically and culturally vibrant places where children love learning and are proud to share their achievements.

Children's Ground represents at international education conference

Representatives from Children's Ground participated in the 2022 World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) on Kaurna Tarndanya (red kangaroo place) in Adelaide. More than 2000 delegates represented 90 Nations for an inspiring week of learning and sharing about First Nations governance, education and decolonisation.

This is the second WIPCE for Senior Arrernte Educator and Traditional Owner for Mparntwe Felicity Hayes, after attending the 2017 conference in Canada. "We have the same issues so that we can share our solutions with each other," says Felicity. "We want to de-colonise together. Make it strong for the next generation. it is good to have this conference on home-soil - on Country"

"Attending WIPCE was inspirational because I met a lot of First Nations people from across the world," said Children's Ground Educator Pauline Grant. "I am excited by the new friendships made, and the sharing of our ideas and knowledge. We're here all as one to make a change for our next generation. We need more opportunities like this."

Children's Ground delegates delivered two presentations during the week-long conference. The first centred around the First Nations-led approach of Children's Ground and how we are the decision-makers, service designers, deliverers and evaluators of a system designed to privilege our language, culture and voice. Members of Utyerre Apanpe (First Nations Educators' Network) also joined to present a In My Blood It Runs screening followed by a panel about building a First Nations-led education system in Australia.

"WIPCE is a global conference filled with inspiration," added Senior Arrernte Educator Veronica Turner. "Getting to know others culture, sharing culture. We're here to be the change and make change."



Honorary Doctorate for MK Turner OAM

Senior Arrernte Professor and Children's Ground leader, Elder and Board member, the incredible MK Turner OAM, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Batchelor Institute in September for her professorship and commitment to First Nations education.

Children's Ground Founding Chair William Tilmouth shared these powerful words about MK at the ceremony:

"Someone who never stops learning and teaching is MK Turner...Today she is being recognised for her knowledge and work teaching others. She has shared her deep understanding of our culture with so many people. She is a published author. She is an interpreter. She is our eminent cultural knowledge holder. She is a law woman. She is respected by both First Nations and non-First Nations people. We have known MK to be a professor for many years now.

She hasn't needed a piece of paper to be recognised and respected throughout the community. Through Aboriginal law we respect her cultural authority as an Elder and we respect her knowledge. We are grateful that she has supported so many of us to understand and know our culture. Being awarded a doctorate gives her the rightful recognition in the Western world."

[Watch the video of the ceremony and William's speech.](#)

