

# Children's Ground Quarterly Report: Q4 2021

*Sharing our growth, reach and impact over time*



**Children’s Ground has rounded out another remarkable year of impact, inspiration and challenge with an unwavering commitment to social justice and human rights.**

End-of-year celebrations in each community honoured the achievements of children and families in 2021. This includes progress in Cultural and Western learning, child and family health, increasing local employment, protection and strengthening languages, publishing new Arrernte children’s books and more.

Significantly, we finished the year with an important milestone in evidence-based practice that showcases the impact of the Children’s Ground Approach towards systems change. With the release of the first Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children’s Ground Central Australia) evaluation, we are seeing progress and early change indicators for children and families in Central Australia.

*“I have always said that we have been researched to death and we need to research ourselves back to life. This evaluation is an important contribution towards achieving this goal,”* says William Tilmouth. *“Instead of focusing on the symptoms and the crisis, Children’s Ground is focused on the cause and the future. Our children and their education, health and wellbeing are at the heart of this, but most importantly, so are our culture and our identity. The evaluation details key baseline data and the achievements and challenges of the early implementation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. It also presents progress toward long term outcomes in education, employment, health, community engagement and empowerment.”*



# Highlights for this quarter

## Celebrating Human Rights Day with the release of our evaluation

December 10 is an important day at Children's Ground. Not only do we celebrate justice and equal opportunity as part of UN Human Rights Day, but we also mark Children's Ground's birthday – the day we officially celebrate the founding of a new approach to achieving long-term change.

In 2021, we marked December 10 in Central Australia with the launch of 'Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe: Children's Ground in Central Australia – 2017 to 2019', hosted by First Nations families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar AO and Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt.

This collaborative and powerful report demonstrates early progress against key Closing the Gap goals in key areas of early childhood learning, adult employment, local decision-making and community wellbeing, just three years into a 25-year plan. 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 (see page 9 for more findings).

Joining families and staff at our launch event, Ken Wyatt said the evaluation showed the importance of a service system led by First Nations communities in local language and culture. The Minister said the new childhood strategy launched earlier that week by the Australian Government and SNAICC (the peak body for First Nations children) provides the foundation for a long-term, child-centred approach to refocus future policy and investment towards evidence-based early childhood outcomes. *"And your report does that. It provides both the aspirations and the outcomes. And when I look at the practice principles that you have put in place – if we can put that into place in every community, then we will achieve the five key goals of the national strategy."*

Health and Wellbeing Coordinator Tyson Carmody spoke to NITV about the evaluation findings:

*"We're seeing those children engage positively with their learning, with their health, and more importantly with their culture and family... It's really important. It just becomes the norm, as it should be."*

Developmental Psychologist and Children's Ground Research Advisory Group member Dr Tim Moore said the key differences between Children's Ground and other service providers were its First Nations community-led approach and starting early. *"These core features distinguish Children's Ground from most other initiatives and are the reason for its success. And it is a success,"* he said.



## Winning the NT Education & Care Award

Children's Ground leaders and educators are thrilled to have our innovative work in First Nations education recognised nationally by winning the Outstanding Achievement in Innovation Award at the Northern Territory Education and Care Awards. The judging panel had these passionate words to share about our work:

*"Elders and cultural educators have designed a First Nations early childhood curriculum that encompasses cultural teaching approaches, knowledge systems and practices alongside the national Western Early Years Learning Framework. The authentic approach to building on the aspirations of community and developing partnership begin with a Walk, Talk and Act process. Cultural early learning resources have also been developed with staff and families. In the words of one parent – 'She (daughter) learned really quick. She used to talk in English and whisper in Arrernte – now she talks proud in both.' Children's Ground have been genuinely and authentically committed and present in their relationships, walking with people, listening with open hearts and minds to the aspirations, and seeing the assets and strengths from which to conjointly make safe and happy spaces for teaching, learning and growth across generations."*

A big thank you to the NT Government, NT Education and Care Awards and Good Start Early Learning NT for celebrating our innovative, place-based, community-led approaches to early learning that equally value First Nations Cultural and Western learning and wellbeing. It is an honour to be recognised for our hard work and effort and for our cultural knowledge and ways of teaching.

# Progress: growth, reach and impact

## KPI Growth: Proportion of full CG Approach delivery

The CG Approach continues to be delivered and evaluated in three regions - each is at a different stage of the 25-year Approach. As at quarter three 2021, this happened to the extent shown below. In this quarter, there has been no change in the number of communities Children's Ground is working alongside.



The CG Approach requires all key elements to be implemented fully to achieve long term change. Children's Ground is a developing organisation. It is expected to take a further 3-5 years to be fully operational in three regions, as funding resources are secured. In this quarter we saw an increase in funding for Economic Development & Wellbeing in Central Australia.

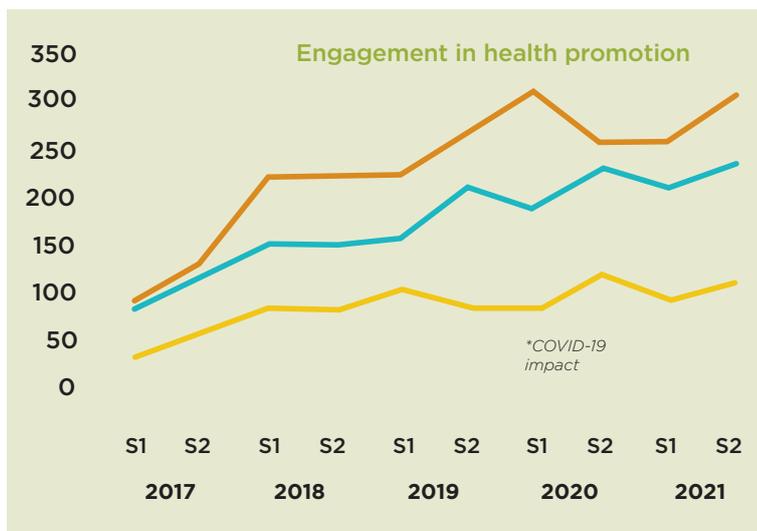
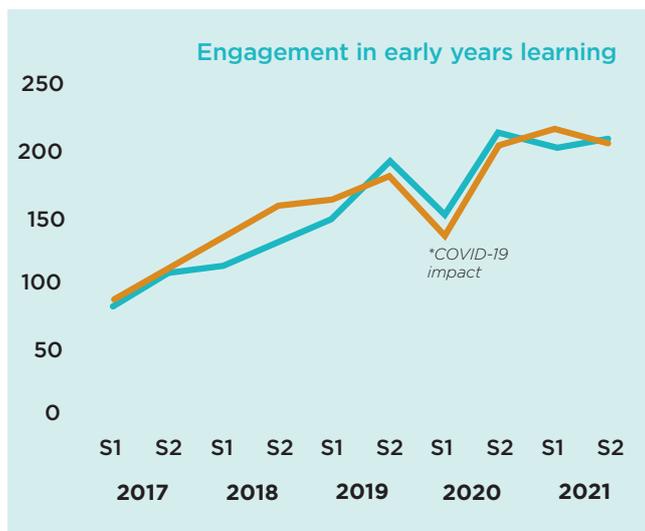
How we are tracking against full implementation	WTA	< 25%	35-50%	50-75%	75-100%
	CENTRAL AUSTRALIA		WEST ARNHEM		DARWIN
Learning & Wellbeing					
Family Health & Wellbeing					
Economic Development & Wellbeing					
Cultural & Creative Development & Wellbeing					
Community Development & Wellbeing					

These quarterly reports will present progress across key performance indicators (KPIs) and measures of the CG Approach.

## KPI: Quarter four 2021 access, delivery and engagement



# Progress: growth, reach and impact



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

## KPI: Reach over time

KPI	Children (0-8 yrs)	Young people (9-17 yrs)	Family (18+ yrs)
 Early learning	802	446	972
 Health promotion	894	562	1311
 Preserving culture	559	343	836
 Employment	228		
 Community leadership (governance)	481		

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



## Learning & Wellbeing



### End of year Learning Journey Reports

Children's Ground marked the end of another rich year of learning with celebrations in each community. Alongside presents, Santa presented each child with their 2021 Learning Journey Report and each family with a book of photos celebrating the year that was. Educator Lee explains: "Yesterday we saw ampe (children) more excited to get their learning reports than Christmas presents! Parents were reading the reports with excitement and children smiling with pride. These reports reflect who each child is and how they are growing strong in their culture. From toddlers to primary-aged, all children were excited to think back on the learning they experienced this year. When I asked Anna what she wanted to do more of next year, she immediately said 'anthepe' (Arrernte dance)! She showed me the photos and reflected on her learning. It was magic. The pride and joy children have in knowing we see their strengths and whole self in a learning context will be with them forever."

### Ellarisha's learning journey

*"Ellarisha has been attending Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe since 2015 when she was a few months old. She has grown alongside Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. As she learns, we learn. We have watched Ellarisha develop her cultural knowledge and understanding. As she gets stronger and learns more, we feel increasingly happy and proud to watch her achieve her goals. Ellarisha recently achieved all of her learning goals, including counting and writing. She has also learnt her skin name, Ngwarraye, and how to crush and make bush medicine from her grandmother. Ellarisha has been setting new goals, and hopes to learn more anthepe (Arrernte dance) and to write her skin name. Ellarisha loves watching and pointing at thipe (birds) and is curious to learn the Arrernte names for birds."*

- Alison and Lee, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe educators

**Impact:** Children's Ground's culturally based Learning and Wellbeing framework has resulted in unprecedented engagement of First Nations children in early years learning - most of whom had not previously engaged in early years learning. 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 in our early progress evaluation, children engaging in early learning in their first language has improved Cultural and Western learning and development outcomes. Children's Ground is providing 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, consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

# The Children's Ground Approach in Action

## Family Health & Wellbeing

### Learning on Country for health and wellbeing

In addition to Western health promotion, the Children's Ground Health and Wellbeing Team facilitate regular Learning on Country days where children and their families can experience the healing capacity of connecting to Country and culture. Recently in Central Australia, First Nations Health staff Larissa and Edmond were joined by Arrernte educator Cathy to lead a health day out at Trepghina Gorge after the big desert rains. Water (kwatye) in the desert is precious and it changes the landscape. Many of the children and families hadn't been to this part of Country before - they had only heard stories. Edmond and the young men explored the gorge and found a large pool of water and a waterfall at the end. As soon as the children heard that, everyone set off walking through the gorge to find the kwatye! Initially, some of the children were nervous when approaching the clear kwatye. But after a few hours of splashing, running and swimming with their family, the children found it hard to leave the kwatye. The wellbeing of children and their families is connected to Country; we can really see people's cultural and mental health strengthen on days like this. Spotting tadpoles was a new experience for the children and provided a great learning opportunity. Two-year-old Shane progressed from screaming at tadpoles in fear to chasing them and catching them - using fantastic developmental language to express his excitement. It was also the first time Shane's baby brother, who was only a few weeks old came, to a Learning on Country trip!



**At the end of the day, Larissa found a large white gum tree and guided the children into hugging the tree while she spoke to Country which is part of First Nations health practice. It was a great moment of learning about connection and responsibility to the land while also calming and clearing the children's minds.**

### Nutrition lessons at Marlkawo

At Children's Ground, health promotion and nutrition lessons are embedded into every learning session. Children's Ground educator Caitlyn shared a story of a recent food-focused learning session in Marlkawo, West Arnhem Land: *"Young learner Susan wanted to bake a healthy banana cake for her Grandmother Annie's birthday. As always, we integrated learning into the process. We used our past experiences to think about which ingredients might need to be in the cake, then cross referenced those with a recipe we found online. We then wrote our own ingredients list and each step as we went. Susan and Anthony are very visual learners and drew symbols next to each ingredient to help them to read the recipe independently. Both children were involved in the entire process - and even learnt that the sweetness from bananas was enough without adding too much of the raw sugar! Yum! This nutrition-based learning session included reading, measuring, planning, making and learning about food."*



**Impact:** Children's Ground's whole of family approach to health is seeing improved child development, wellbeing and behaviour change through a focus on both Western and Cultural health promotion and support. Children's emotional wellbeing is supported through trauma informed practice and the healing power of Country strengthening children's spirits. Health promotion provided in community and in first languages is increasing health agency across entire communities. Building health literacy from children's earliest years is laying the foundations for healthy life choices.

# The Children's Ground Approach in Action

## Creative & Cultural Development & Wellbeing

### Children are developing cultural awareness

Elders have a clear vision – that children must grow up as First Nations children with a deep understanding of their culture and their identity. Throughout 2021, we saw children grow in their identity, knowledge and confidence. Children's Ground educators used the conclusion of Q4 to reflect on the learning journeys of each child – celebrating everyone's strengths and spirits.

In Central Australia, young Arrernte educator Natassia reflected on Monica's cultural learning progress this year: *"Monica knows that she must smoke herself and listen to Elders on Country to keep her utnenge (spirit) strong. Monica follows Fransisca (her sister) in how to cover herself in smoke and clean her utnenge. Monica spends a lot of time on her Country. When she's on Country she seems calm and centred. Monica engages in calm play and her spirit roams the Country and strengthens itself."*

Senior Arrernte educator Cathy (family and mentor to Natassia) added, *"Monica is a strong child. She knows who her Ngangkeroes (Arrernte traditional healers) are, Auntie Mildred and Auntie Meo. She knows they can help her and look out for her. Monica is developing her understating of her cultural responsibilities around her deceased family – often understanding why her family are upset or grieving. She is very empathetic and understands the cultural protocols of sorry business."*



**Impact:** Through Children's Ground, families are seeing a generation of children grow up proud in their culture and strong in their identity. If all children can experience an education and upbringing that celebrates their language and culture to feel that they truly belong, we will see a formidable generation empowered and confident in their identity. Children, young people and families are reporting experiences of cultural empowerment through Children's Ground – with cultural governance and customary law underpinning all decision-making, service delivery and learning frameworks. This is changing the system and changing the future for the next generation.

## Community Development & Wellbeing

### Community garden coming to life

In the last quarter of 2021, the first trees were planted in the Knuckey Lagoon community garden. This is the result of a long process of planning and logistics with support from Children's Ground, and we are celebrating the progress we have made.

So far, children have planted native trees and bush tucker alongside staff and their families.

*"I can't wait to see these plants in 25 years; the kids will be all grown up and know that they planted these for their community."*

- Pauline Grant, Learning, Health and Wellbeing Support

**Impact:** Communal gardens are known to positively impact the health and wellbeing of communities through encouraging connection to nature, planting and seasonal change, as well as promoting community cohesion and coordination. Families from Knuckey Lagoon are looking to the community garden to strengthen family relationships and encourage self-sufficiency and empowerment in food production.

# The Children's Ground Approach in Action



## Economic Development & Wellbeing

### Pop Up Shops in Central Australia and the Top End

First Nations creatives in Central Australia and the Top End of the NT are broadening their economic opportunities and financial literacy through selling art, crafts and educational resources at local pop-up shops and markets.

Learning, Health and Wellbeing support worker Pauline has been managing the Children's Ground pop-up stall at the Sunday Nightcliff markets in Darwin. Pauline is learning new skills in marketing, sales and customer service and is gaining confidence in sharing the Children's Ground story with the Darwin community. Pauline's daughter Chayanne from Knuckey's Lagoon often comes along to help out and learn about painting from her mum.

In Central Australia, First Nations educators and artists hosted an end-of-year pop-up shop in the Alice Springs CBD selling an array of their locally designed arts and crafts: gift cards, tea towels, t-shirts, paintings and books. The store attracted a steady stream of local customers keen to purchase First Nations products and learn more about Children's Ground. It was here that the new series of Arrernte children's books was launched: three new First Nations educational resources that will support improving literacy outcomes across multiple languages. Additionally, the publication of these books contributes to the development of culturally-based economic opportunities for First Nations authors.

**Impact:** Children's Ground's pop-up shops are contributing to the development of culturally and creatively based economic opportunities for First Nations families. Staff are learning valuable skills in financial literacy, marketing and business development that support the development of emerging creative enterprises.



## Learning on Country with Mpweringke Anapipe

*"Running, swimming, spearing, digging, and hunting. These are just a few of the incredible things that happened during our Learning on Country session yesterday. Anyone on the outside watching our learning session yesterday would have seen: families on Country having damper, swimming in a dam and just having a good social time – which is already amazing. But we know so much more than this is happening.*

*Natassia is quietly teaching ampe (children) to dig for soakage and find the little frogs deep down in the riverbanks.*

*Teenage women are reconnecting to the land, their families and themselves. They are being brave, having fun and jumping into the dam. They're talking about women's issues, being on Country and sharing stories.*

*Ally is making damper for the Elders, her big brother and family while talking stories of the land and old ways. She is reading Children's Ground books in Arrernte language. Children are surrounded by strong Arrernte speakers.*

*Michael making a fire, and cuppa tea for everyone. The role and leadership of men is so important.*

*Nakita teaching babies and little ones to swim in the dam.*

*Children going for big walks; Natassia helping them find caterpillars; learning where and when to find them.*

*Maxine, Pricilla and the young women are tracking animals – using shovels and crow bars to find food on Country. Children and young people are watching their family round up goannas and hunt them properly. They are learning how to live from the land.*

*Driving back at sunset, watching the thipe (birds) cover the sky."*

– Educators from Mpweringke Anapipe, Central Australia

## Building confidence, sharing our story

In the last two weeks of 2021, 12 different First Nations staff presented at a variety of online, local and national events. Four staff members engaged in public speaking for the first time. Children's Ground is committed to showcasing all voices – from quiet to confident – and encouraging mentoring and role modelling.

Six First Nations leaders from Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe presented at the 2022 SNAICC – National Voice for our Children virtual conference 'Innovative Approaches to New World Challenges'. The four presentations explored aspects of the Children's Ground Approach and First Nations leadership across governance, culture, health, resource development and enterprise.

The presentations clearly had a remarkable impact on the audience, many of whom enthusiastically asked for our leaders to provide workshops and consultations on the Children's Ground Approach. One participant noted that Children's Ground is changing how people are working across Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

*"Through many presentations across different platforms in 2021, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe staff have displayed professionalism and both commitment to the organisation and to their own development. They have pushed others to question their bias, their practice and their knowledge. They are disrupting. To watch staff build confidence and push themselves is testament to the Children's Ground Approach – our commitment to workforce development and self-determination. That staff feel safe to push themselves, that they want to achieve excellence is an outstanding achievement supported by solid mentoring, role modelling and the 'have a go' approach of Children's Ground."*

– Mel Kean, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Director

## The fight for Irrkerlantye continues

Another year has gone by and the struggle for tenure, human rights and justice for Traditional Owner Felicity Hayes and her family at Irrkerlantye (Whitegate Town Camp) continues. Despite ongoing delays, a remarkable achievement has come through at the end of 2021 – the incorporation of Kweyenpe Aboriginal Corporation. This corporation will hold the title for Irrkerlantye when tenure comes through. An Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) is currently being negotiated with the Government. Once this is finalised, tenure can be progressed. Children's Ground and the Hayes family are looking forward to seeing a positive outcome from the Chief Minister's initial support in 2020, twenty years after Native Title was awarded in 2000. It is time to see this dream come to life, and for equal human rights to be afforded to the Hayes family.

## Telling the story of our children and young people

In October 2021 (in Children's Week), the Northern Territory (NT) Government launched the second '[Story of our Children & Young people](#)' data report. These reports provide comprehensive data and stories about the wellbeing of children and young people living in regions and communities across the NT.

Since 2019, Children's Ground has been a member of the Editorial Group guiding the development of these reports that provide important data for program, service and policy planning, development and leadership across a range of wellbeing indicators: Health, Education, Safety, Material basics, Identity and Participation – with data frameworks considered from a Western and Cultural perspective.

This recent report includes trend data over years (where available) and is accompanied by an online data platform so people can create their own data reports to understand the wellbeing of children and young people in their region.



## Building an evidence base of change and impact

[The evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe \(2017-2019 baseline and early progress\)](#) is now publicly available. Spanning several years, the evaluation of the first three years of Children's Ground in Central Australia followed a rigorous evaluation method that brought together First Nations and Western data analysis and reporting.

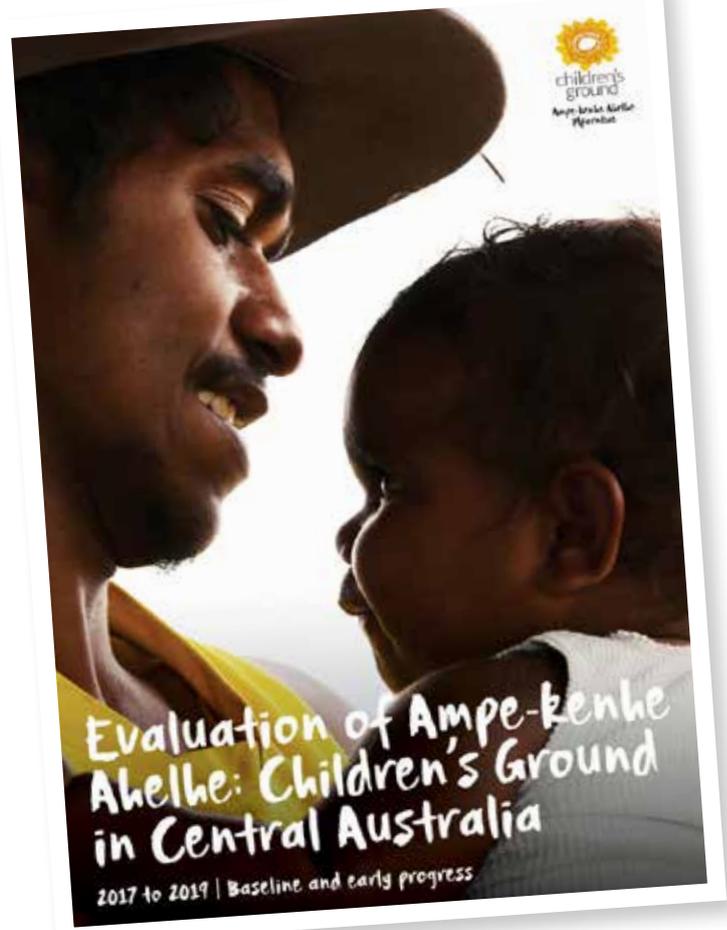
This evaluation reinforces the evidence from our first proof-of-concept evaluation, finding that the Children's Ground Approach is:

- Engaging a new cohort of children in early learning who had previously rarely or never participated;
- Engaging First Nations people in meaningful employment, many who previously experienced chronic unemployment
- Creating environments of safety
- Empowering First Nations families through governance and decision-making about their children and community
- Privileging first culture and languages and cultural teaching and learning, which has been evidenced as the foundation for early change and impact.

Excerpt from Children's Ground's Research Advisory Group letter endorsing the report:

*"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".*

This evaluation report marks the beginning of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe's 25-year journey to change the status quo of First Nations children, young people and families. Triennial evaluation reports will be undertaken with First Nations and Western evaluation teams working alongside each community to tell their story of the Children's Ground Approach. Evaluation reports will be released publicly to contribute to the national and international evidence base for changing systems that impact First Nations families daily, to ensure they are designed, governed, implemented and evaluated by First Nations people living in communities.



## Key findings: Early change and impact

Engagement in the Children's Ground Approach



### Children (0-8 years)

- A new cohort of children (245) engaged in early years learning. These children had rarely or never engaged, with only 14% previously engaged in early learning
- A critical mass (82%) of children engaged in cultural and Western early years learning
- A majority of children progressed in their cultural and Western learning
- All children engaged in early years learning alongside their family - many for the first time
- 100% of children engaged in health promotion integrated in all early learning sessions
- A majority of families reported improvements in children's physical and emotional wellbeing

"There's been a lot of changes. Just in nearly a year."

"Kids are learning counting, cutting, shape. She [daughter] used to talk in English. She talks now in both."

"Children's Ground has changed how they know. But at Children's Ground they are. The little ones know their country. Mum, they know how to address everyone in learning. This every day at Children's Ground. Culture makes kids who they really are, and learn culture late."

"We need to stay for generations, the life. They are our future. They're our leaders, you know. Leading the way."

### Families (young people 9-17 years and adults 18+ years)

- 59 First Nations people were employed at Children's Ground
- People who previously lived with chronic unemployment are working - 84% were not working when they started at Children's Ground and 34% had their work end
- 562 family members of all ages engaged in family/community celebrations and events
- 100% of families reported increased activities and opportunities for children and families to spend time together - with families walking alongside their children
- 487 family members have engaged in learning and health promotion alongside their children
- 100% of families/staff reported increased access to services for physical and emotional health and wellbeing

"Families are not just sitting at home. Kids are learning quickly because they're here."

"When I first started [at Children's Ground] always struggling you know, with my kids. But now that we've found Children's Ground. And all those years that our Arnhem men and finally we've got a say."

"It gives them an opportunity to be a part of Children's Ground and work. This could be his career and he's here. This is his life. And then we got the voice to talk, we are the ones and then we know where to get families, and where their connection is."

"Families feel proud. No one has ever done."

### Communities (people of all ages)

- In total, 978 people of all ages engaged in Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia)
- Increased family and community involvement in local decision-making
- 63% of families/staff reported feeling safe, comfortable or free at Children's Ground (without being directly asked about feelings of safety)
- Young people and adults have been hearing their languages and culture alongside children
- Next generation cultural and community leadership has strengthened
- Growing cultural, social and economic opportunities in communities

"Children's Ground is a safe place, you know whatever issues that are outside of Children's Ground. We want what's best for our kids."

"To tell you the truth, I've been really broad decisions for us. Now it's us that are the ones and for our children."

"I'm looking at how we used to - how we got teaching us a lot about the world. Through it. And we're passing our knowledge on to our."

"We have got generations of people here. We then we have got the younger ones - their got their kids and their grandmas. I think that of family participating gives us a really, after the future."