

Children's Ground Quarterly Report: Q2 2022



Sharing our growth, reach and impact over time





Australia is at a watershed moment in its history. The 2022 election result has proven there is a strong desire for change. Our Elders have been seeking change, our ancestors sought change and we continue to seek change. We are many Nations. We are many voices. Children's Ground commits to working with the new government to ensure that First Nations communities everywhere can have their voices heard and deliver their own solutions.

Children's Ground celebrates and congratulates the record number of ten First Nations MPs who were elected to Federal Parliament in 2022. In his acceptance speech, Prime Minister Albanese affirmed his commitment to First Nations people: "Together we can embrace the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We can answer its patient, gracious call for a Voice enshrined in our Constitution. Because all of us ought to be proud that amongst our great multicultural society we count the oldest living culture in the world." These words brought great hope to us all.

We applaud this commitment. But we must ensure that if our voices are to be enshrined, that it is truly the voices of the people. It cannot be a select few. Many First Nations people in our communities have not heard of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. It is critical that all our people's voices are heard, recognised and uplifted. A voice must embrace the many Nations across these lands.

Our voices have always been strong, but they have not been heard. It is essential that government truly listens to us and supports us to live as First Nations people – in our communities, on our homelands and protecting and strengthening our First Languages. We need real

pathways to economic opportunities where we live. This is the only way there will be meaningful reconciliation and sustainable rights and equity for First Nations people. The policies of the past haven't worked; it's time for a new approach. The Children's Ground Approach is our design, our voice and our governance, protecting our cultures and languages and achieving outcomes in local empowerment, cultural rights, education, health and employment.

Children's Ground is at a critical time in our growth and development. We have achieved foundational change in a short period of time. Holding this and growing it with integrity and sustainability is our next task.

We have faced more loss across our families this quarter and attended many funerals, including for young adults who we grieve for deeply. Through this sadness we are uplifted by the amazing strength of our Elders and leaders and the incredible people who surround us and support us.

This quarter, we celebrated National Reconciliation Week and felt the commitment of children and adults in schools and workplaces across Australia. 510 groups of people raised an incredible \$77K for First Nations families through our Wear It Yellow for Children's Ground campaign.

We hosted visitors to our communities, including inspiring musician and Children's Ground ambassador Missy Higgins in Central Australia. We were thrilled to welcome back a group of wide-eyed students and next generation leaders from St. Ignatius in the Top End. We came together with pride – despite all the loss, grief and challenges – to show our visitors who we are, and how we are creating change, hope and opportunity across our communities.

We walk together, laying a new path. And we know when we see the joy in the children – the laughter in their eyes and culture in their spirit – that we are laying the right path.

Thank you for walking with us.

Remembering Kwementyaye Gorey

We honour the life and legacy of Kwementyaye Gorey. We are shattered by her passing. She was a founding leader and Cultural Governance member of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia). She was a powerful voice and a wonderful leader. She was a treasured senior member of the Arrernte nation – a grandmother, educator, translator, cultural knowledge holder and dear friend.

As a qualified interpreter and educator, Kwementyaye leaves behind a long legacy of Arrernte language teaching and preservation in Central Australia. She was one of the founding Senior Arrernte educators and governance members of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe – leading the way with her passion, vision and determination for her grandchildren to grow up learning strong language and culture.

"We have a vision to keep growing with these kids," Kwementyaye said. "We want them to know everything – about culture and country and language, as well as the Western way. We want to see our children succeed; to live a healthy life and maybe even run the place! If we see their dreams come true, our dreams will come true too."

At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, Kwementyaye was instrumental in articulating the Arrernte-kenhe Angkentye (Arrernte Early Years Curriculum) and the development of Arrernte educational resources. Her published works include Athakwere Akweke Angkethakwe (The Thirsty Little Mouse), Alkngarrileme (Warnings) and Iwenhe Arratintyeme Ingwele? (What Comes Out at Night?).

As Kwementyaye once said, "Most children in the world go to school and learn in their own language. So why not our kids?" She worked hard to ensure Arrernte children could go to an Arrernte school with resources in their own language.

Losing our loved ones - too many deaths, too young

We pay our respects to all families of Children's Ground. Every family has been affected by multiple losses. We lose families far too often, but this quarter we have lost so many people it is devastating. We have lost young mothers and fathers to heart disease and car accidents. We have lost cultural, family and community leaders to ill-health and suicide. Every one of them has passed away too young. Families everywhere are mourning loved ones and gather in grief and Sorry.

Love, respect and importance of cultural ceremony, kinship law and practice underpin the strength and resilience of people at these times.

We pay our respects and send our love to all.

This emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual grief and trauma are a result of 250 years of assault on First Nations people. When we speak of structural genocide, this is how it manifests. Children's Ground is determined and designed to change this reality. We must establish a system that delivers equity and justice and in turn secures the health and wellbeing of families.



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 2 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.



Progress: Growth, Reach and Impact

KPI: Q2 2022 access, delivery and engagement

128

learning sessions delivered with integrated health promotion

18+ years
212



0-8 years
164

355

occasions of targeted **health** promotion and support

18+ years
280



0-8 years
199

7

First Nations **languages** being preserved or revitalised

18+ years
130



0-8 years
132

74

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	886	482	1039	
	Health promotion	957	597	1377	
	Preserving culture	639	377	892	
	Community leadership (governance)	515			
	Employment	239			
			Children (0-8 yrs)	Young people (9-17 yrs)	Family (18+ yrs)

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

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Learning & Wellbeing



First Nations Learning Centre at Marlkawo seeing high engagement

This quarter, intergenerational learning at Marlkawo in remote West Arnhem Land has been going from strength to strength. Here, all educational activities with Children's Ground happen on Country, in First Language and culture, and in English. Learning at Marlkawo flows between Western learning in the Balabala classroom and First Nations learning on Country, connected to the land, language and culture. Our learning teams' innovation has allowed us to continue the learning journey of children through times of grief and sorry business in a way that honours people's lives.

Sharna and Kestianna have been teaching healthy routines and running small literacy groups. Children now have their own mini library in their community, where they can borrow their home readers and library books. Everyone is very excited to read! Cultural leader and educator Raymond held an incredible bim (art lesson) where the wurdurd (children) learnt about creative cultural practices and decorated their library bags.

We rounded out an incredible term of learning with our first Marlkawo school awards evening to celebrate the strengths, culture, spirit and learning of all children.

Impact: The interconnectedness of the Children's Ground Approach happens naturally in Marlkawo where families are living on their traditional Country in remote West Arnhem Land. On Country, everything is connected. Everything wurdurd (children) learn on Country is connected to their health and their spirit. Children's Ground is removing access barriers to education at Marlkawo by bringing learning to where children live and learn best. With the community and led by our Elders, Children's Ground's accessible, culturally-responsive learning environments are result in regular, engaged attendance from wurdurd supported by loving families.



Kielan is loving learning with Children's Ground

5-year-old Kielan has loved learning with Children's Ground over the past three years. Here, he is surrounded by supportive family in a culturally responsive educational environment. Kielan's grandmother Marita and educator Amber have noticed some big changes for Kielan:

"He used to be really quiet and always hiding, not really wanting to be seen much. Now he's the first kid running out when he hears the bus in the morning. We can see he has a strong sense of belonging now. Kielan loves bringing his little brother along to learning sessions and teaching him about Country. He's always helping his brothers and others learn. This is what we want to see – our children being themselves and finding their place."

Impact: At Children's Ground, 100% of children are engaged in early learning alongside their family. By creating safe, open and inclusive learning environments that bring in the whole family, children feel supported to develop their confidence and identity. We are also seeing positive impacts for the whole family who report the strengthening of family connection, health and wellbeing and sense of empowerment.

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Health & Wellbeing

Revitalising cultural health practices

Earlier this month, Children's Ground teamed up with Akeyulerre to facilitate a number of baby smoking ceremonies in Central Australia. Grandmother CT said:

"We smoke our children to be strong and healthy and to grow without illness. Mothers smoke their werlatye (breasts) to be healthy and strong and provide for their babies."

These smoking ceremonies arise from over 65,000 years of law and culture and are important for a baby's utnenge (spirit) and wellbeing. "I want to smoke my son to make him healthy and strong," said Anna. "His grandmother did the smoking while other Elders provided support. All the young kids were also smoked on the day."

Impact: Children's Ground is providing the space for Elders and cultural leaders to revitalise and re-establish cultural practices and knowledge systems, such as baby smoking ceremonies. These events are not only important for the cultural health and wellbeing of the child, but for social and family connection and cultural pride. Families are engaging in ancient cultural practices and showing their children the beauty and strength of culture and tradition.



Strengthening skills in suicide awareness and prevention

During Quarter 2, Children's Ground educators and health specialists in the Top End attended a suicide awareness and prevention workshop 'Suicide Story... Our Way' facilitated by the Suicide Story Aboriginal Advisory Group in collaboration with Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory.

"At first we were all feeling shy," said Learning, Health and Wellbeing Practitioner Esther Kenyon, "...but then I realised that we were all there for the same reason - to educate ourselves about suicide prevention, and that each and every one of us there has lost a loved one through suicide, or supports another loved one that has lost someone to suicide. I've also learnt that before you light someone else's fire, you need to make sure that your own fire is burning."

Learning, Health and Wellbeing Practitioner Jackie Treves thought the workshop provided her with practical tools to help others. "Being there myself as a Larrakia woman, the knowledge I felt over the 3 days, we were talking about fire and what it represents - the strength and knowledge that we have - and that was strong for us."

Knuckey Lagoon Senior Community Leader Paw Paw Grant agreed, "It was inspirational and touching, because within the workshop you felt that connection. Coming from your own people - coming from people who live our way, in our communities, who understand our lifestyle, know our background. You feel that fire!"

Impact: 'Suicide Story...Our Way' is a workshop by First Nations people, for First Nations people which made Children's Ground participants feel comfortable, seen and heard. Most families at Children's Ground live in a context of complex trauma and social stress including overcrowding, family violence, economic poverty, grief and mental and physical health concerns. By integrating First Nations-led health promotion into every aspect of Children's Ground, we are seeing improvement in health literacy and early intervention. 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 Children's Ground Approach in Action



Economic Development and Wellbeing



Staff profile: Edmond Doolan

Edmond is a respectful, friendly and passionate young Arrernte man who works brilliantly at Children's Ground in the role of Men's and Youth Learning and Wellbeing Support. He is deeply connected to the community and culture and is both an inspiration to colleagues and an example for other youth in Mparntwe. Edmond has an important connection to young children coming to Children's Ground and has delivered and supported sessions on cultural learning, reading, singing and health. He cares about being a good role model for the children he works with and is helping to bring more young men into the team. Edmond's brother is also on staff at Children's Ground and together they contribute to developing a space for boys and young people to engage.

"We see the children learning: not only learning literacy and numeracy but also learning about their culture; learning on country. Children are developing healthy routines and eating nutritious meals every day. On top of this, the children are seeing more and more of their families working at Children's Ground. This encourages more families to get involved, which brings everyone together and connected with everything the children are learning. It is important we hold our standards high to show our families that they deserve the best." Edmond Doolan

Edmond also plays a role in ensuring vehicles are packed for learning and resources are ready to take on site. He has worked on various camps providing logistics around organizing gear, setting up of camp sites, assisting families to ensure everyone has blankets, swags and/or tents, and supporting and leading learning. He can usually be found cooking

at events. Edmond is also part of the Governance group for the Mpweringke Anapipe Outstation group and the Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme (Children's Ground Central Australia Governance Committee). Both governance groups establish the focus for term planning and delivery, contribute to evaluation, and ensure we continue to grow as we commit to our principle of Work with Everyone.

Over the past 12 months, Edmond has also shown strength and leadership in combatting Covid-19 misinformation in his community and sharing the story of Children's Ground through various public speaking events including a conference. Edmond speaks candidly about his challenges and his vision for the next generation of children. He is a wonderful young leader who is respected and loved as he inspires children, young people, adults and Elders.

Impact: Through his commitment to Children's Ground and leadership within his community, Edmond is fast becoming a role model for the younger generation. When young people can see members of their own family and community working, leading and being celebrated, it is inspiring and encouraging – what Edmond has achieved is possible for themselves too. Our families are worried about our young people being lost. We are working to create the space for them, so that they know that they belong and are valued. At Children's Ground, we celebrate ability. And Edmond shows the talent that exists in our communities. We look forward to more young people being able to express their talent at Children's Ground. Our supported, flexible and culturally responsive approach to employment is about creating the opportunity for skills to be supported and grown, creating employment and strength across our communities.

The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Community Development and Wellbeing

The fight for fundamental human rights

The outstanding human rights abuses at Irrkerlantye continue, and we continue to raise our voice to highlight this injustice.

In the lead up to the 2022 Federal election, Felicity Hayes, Traditional Owner of Mparntwe (lands in and around the town of Alice Springs) and a co-Director of Children's Ground and Senior Arrernte Educator, spoke strongly on ABC Alice Springs with a last-minute plea to the major parties to listen to First Nations voices.

Felicity's Country is Irrkerlantye, a homeland on the outskirts of town just three kilometres from the centre of the Alice Springs, where she and other residents live in tin sheds without running water or electricity:

"Last week we buried my sister. She was a long-term resident of Irrkerlantye. She was diagnosed with cancer and passed within two weeks of her diagnosis. She was living in a tin shed with no running water and no electricity, 3 kilometres from the centre of Alice Springs. She lived a very hard life but was always gentle and showed respect to everyone.

We are hurting. We have been living this way, neglected by all levels of Government, for over 40 years. She came to meeting after meeting with me, talking with Government, waiting patiently for housing and water. Now she has passed away. How can this happen in Australia? We have been asking Government for housing and essential services for this whole time, however nothing has been done to provide the most basic services that all people are entitled to.

We are Traditional Owners of the second largest town in the Northern Territory and we still have no government support. We want to be shown respect so that we can live with dignity on our country."



Impact: In response to Felicity's advocacy, elected member for Lingiari Marion Scrymgour visited Irrkerlantye just before the election and she spoke to Felicity about the challenges there. We continue to work with all levels of government to support Felicity in securing tenure and accessing basic human rights on her country at Irrkerlantye. The very reasonable and outstanding requests from Felicity and her families are for: tenure, water infrastructure to secure permanent water supply, power (solar) and the other municipal infrastructure that any other suburb in town would receive. She is requesting a few houses and a community centre from which they can deliver learning for children and establish a local enterprise for future economic wellbeing. This is the second largest town in the Northern Territory. To date, the NT Government has failed to support the Traditional Owners to live in a small area on their country with dignity and basic human rights. We will continue to champion, advocate and support Felicity until these basic requests are met.



The Children's Ground Approach in Action

Creative & Cultural Development & Wellbeing



Cultural Elders leading the way with song

Last quarter, Arrernte children from Mpweringke Anapipe in Central Australia experienced an incredible day of learning, immersed in their culture, song and dance, on Country at Althateme. Children's Ground cultural Elder and educator MK Turner OAM brought an exuberance to the day – singing Arrernte songs as she arrived to work in the morning and carrying this energy through the entire day. These are the old songs – the songs of land and country. She sang in the car; she sang for the children – she even woke up singing the next day.

At Althateme, the next generation of Arrernte educators stepped up to guide the young girls in learning anthepe (Arrernte girls dance). MK continued to provide guidance, singing the songs and making sure everyone was following the correct cultural way.

Impact: Learning on Country at Althateme was a rich day of cultural education for children and families, with MK inspiring everyone and reminding us of her important culture knowledge as an Arrernte professor.

"You learn really well when you're on your homeland because country looks after you when you're learning."
- MK Turner OAM

At Children's Ground, Arrernte language, culture and family are everywhere. This is what is most important to our families. Through learning on Country and practicing Arrernte song and dance, children are feeling culturally safe, and families are empowered.

Nothing about us without us: talking up Children's Ground at AIFS

This quarter, First Nations leaders from Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia) presented at the AIFS (Australian Institute of Family Studies) conference. A symposium of three presentations was delivered by Felicity Hayes, Veronica Turner and Natassia Gorey-Furber. The conference theme was 'Putting families at the centre'. Our symposium was titled *At Children's Ground we're not just at the centre...We are leading!* and presentations included:

- *By us, for us:* Our governance and employment
- *Nothing about us without us:* Children's Ground in action, led by us
- *Researching ourselves back to life:* Our evaluation and evidence

Many conference goers came to talk with the team about their presentations and to learn more about Children's Ground. Reflecting on their conference attendance, Felicity and Veronica said:

"The Children's Ground approach, it was decided by our elders, our families, and it is different to the current systems that have failed our children for generations."

Felicity Hayes, Traditional Owner for Mparntwe, Children's Ground Co-Director and Senior Arrernte Educator

"We attended the AIFS conference in Melbourne last month. We talked about the principles of Children's Ground - they guide us as we are doing our work. I really liked sharing our stories and talking about what Children's Ground is, that it is run by us the families and how our children are engaged in it." Veronica Turner, Children's Ground Co-Director and Senior Arrernte Educator



As our Children's Ground story continues to strengthen across communities and into new regions, and as our evidence of impact grows, presenting at such influential national conferences is important – particularly those such as AIFS, which bring together practice, research and policy.

Sharing our story and evidence broadly marks an important contribution to Children's Ground's efforts to reframe national discourse around the rights and lives of First Nations children, families, communities from the many Nations across Australia and internationally.

Utyerre Apanpe address the incoming Federal Government

April 2022 marked the sixth meeting of Utyerre Apanpe (National First Nations Educators' Network) in Central Australia to progress the First Nations Education Reform agenda started in 2019. The group is comprised of over 20 different languages and Nations and is calling for a First Nations-led education system in line with Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is Utyerre Apanpe's message to the incoming Federal government:

"Australia has many languages and many Nations. In every homeland, in every community, we want to see our education come back to life and we want it run by our people. It is time that the Australian Government establishes laws and funding for our education system. Utyerre Apanpe invites the Government to sit down with us. We have a national plan and framework. We ask the Australian people to support this plan and investment for the future for our next generations.



The Government spends millions of dollars on our kids going to prisons, kids going into care and kids in hospital. We feel this pain and we still wait for our voices to be heard. We want investment in our educational systems. We are the educational leaders from many First Nations and many languages. We have one plan for the future for all of our children. We are one voice."

Read the full statement [here](#).

Welcoming Missy Higgins to Arrernte Country

This quarter, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe hosted new Children's Ground ambassador, musician Missy Higgins on Arrernte Country in Central Australia with her children Sammy and Luna.

During her visit, Missy walked alongside Arrernte Elders who lead Children's Ground, learning about their vision for the learning, health and wellbeing of Arrernte children. Missy visited a Learning on Country activity at Mpweringke Anapipe where she helped to prepare kangaroo tail for lunch and joined in a reading session of Children's Ground's Arrernte kids' books. A highlight was attending a baby smoking ceremony at Emily Creek, East of Mparntwe.

"It has been such a wonderful and eye-opening experience," Missy said. "I wanted to come up and work with Children's Ground and sit with them and be with them and have a look at what they were doing and how things work on the ground. And what I have come to realise is that Children's Ground do something quite unique, in that they really have a preventative approach rather than a crisis management approach... It's been an honour to be here and to see that first-hand," she said.

"From what I can understand, Children's Ground is one of the few organisations that is truly First Nations-led and back people to make their own decisions and to bring up children their way."

