

Children's Ground Impact Report: January to June 2023

(and a bit of July!)



children's
ground



Honouring our Elder

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report contains an image, name, words and the story of someone who has passed with the permission of family.

While just outside the scope of this reporting period, we have included highlights from July to cover two important events and the impact on Children's Ground and everyone around us.

The passing of Dr MK Turner OAM

Dr MK Turner. MK. She was our *Akngerrepate* – our Elder. She was an Elder for all of us at Children's Ground and beyond. She was an Elder for Arrernte people in Central Australia and for First Nations and non-First Nations people across Australia.

She was known by many as the Queen of the Desert.

Dr MK Turner OAM held a power that came from the land. She had a brilliant mind and was a visionary. Her profound cultural knowledge and humanity resonated with everyone who was privileged to know her. She was a law woman who held the integrity of Country, culture and language that her ancestors have held for over 65,000 years. Her loss reverberates deeply for all who know that she was a living university of wisdom and knowledge. She was an endless spirit of joy and generosity, living reconciliation and bringing people together through universal respect and love.

MK was an Arrernte professor, artist, author, linguist, teacher, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, family member and friend, loved and known by all in Central Australia.

To us at Children's Ground, MK was everything. She was a founding Director and cultural authority. She created the vision for the organisation and held us all to her commitment to changing the face of First Nations-led education for the future of First Nations children.

She was Children's Ground's heart, soul, life and love. MK simply was Children's Ground and the reason this organisation exists and thrives.

"It's an extremely sad and huge loss. The loss of an amazing person, her knowledge and her leadership. Children's Ground is what she always wanted to do. She worked her whole life to achieve this. Along with many others, she led the way for us and so many children and families have benefited. Her legacy will continue - we won't give up on what she wanted to achieve."

- William Tilmouth, Chair of Children's Ground

Her State Funeral was held on the 17th of August in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) under the trees at the Atherreyurre (the Bungalow/Telegraph Station). Over one thousand people attended. Her cultural authority, knowledge and generosity were celebrated. Her commitment to the rights and wellbeing of others throughout her life was highlighted. She brought people together from all walks of life. Hers was an extraordinary life that started with her childhood on country with her family and spanned through to the devastating impact of colonisation and her lifelong fight to protect language, culture and law.

View on [SBS](#), [NITV](#), [Channel 9](#), [ABC News](#), or [NT News](#).



★ NAIDOC celebration and awards!

In July, during *NAIDOC week*, we openly embraced the theme of this year's celebration, '*For Our Elders*'. Our Elders are our founders, leaders, visionaries and guides. Our Elders are our teachers, sharing cultural knowledge and shaping our communities. Our Elders do not retire, rather, they become increasingly important and are elevated as critical authorities.

This year, our founding Chair, William Tilmouth was awarded national 'Male Elder of the Year' at the 2023 National NAIDOC Awards held in Meanjin (Brisbane).

This prestigious honour was accepted on William's behalf by Edmund and Mitchell Doolan. These two young men are our next generation leaders. They did an outstanding job at the ceremony which was televised nationally by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Back in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), five Children's Ground First Nations leaders were recognised for their contribution to community with local NAIDOC Awards, including Edmund Doolan: Youth of the Year, Felicity Hayes: Caring for Country and Culture (Female), Michael Gorey: Caring for Country and Culture (Male), CT Turner: Community Impact.

Children's Ground celebrated the awards at a special NAIDOC Open Day event that we hosted in July. This community celebration attracted over 500 people and we celebrated the National NAIDOC theme '*For Our Elders*'.

We celebrated our Elders, staff, young people and families who are leading Children's Ground to change the future for their children, grandchildren and our communities. Our Elders led the celebration, with MK sharing her love, knowledge, song and spirit with everyone present.



Top: Edmund and Mitchell Doolan accept the NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year Award 2023 on behalf of Children's Ground founding Chair, William Tilmouth

Bottom: William Tilmouth and Edmund Doolan - NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year Award 2023

"He (William) is humble, powerful, brilliant and unrelenting in his fight for freedom for his people and the basic dignity of all."

- Children's Ground CEO, Jane Vadiveloo, who has worked with William for more than 20 years.

You can watch and listen to [William's acceptance speech here.](#)

Top: Edmond Doolan (cool glasses), CT and Michael celebrate their awards

The following morning, Dr MK Turner OAM passed away. At Children's Ground, our excitement and joy quickly turned to a profound feeling of loss and grief.

At times like this, we are reminded of the strength and resilience of our people. We come together to lift each other up in times of celebration and to support each other in times of grief.

The United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period between 2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to draw global attention on the critical situation of many Indigenous languages and to mobilise stakeholders and resources for their preservation, revitalisation and promotion. In this UN Decade of Indigenous Languages, we celebrate all First Languages being spoken, revived, and strengthened every day. We celebrate our children who are multilingual and building their literacy across languages. Through Children's Ground, First Nations Elders, leaders, children and families are working every day in many different ways to strengthen and revive First Languages.

Reviving languages

Children's Ground has been leading a special project to capture and revitalise the Akarre-Akityarr language, one of the Arandic languages originating from the north-east of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). The project was the inspiration of M.K. Turner OAM who was one of the few living speakers with deep knowledge of the original language. We worked in partnership with Bonya and Atitjere communities, Batchelor Institute and Bonya school. Children and young people were introduced to this threatened language, learning to speak and write it, and revive it for future generations.

In June this year The Little Akarre/Akityarre Picture Book was launched at the NT Writers Festival, with children from Bonya School who contributed to the book attending and helping to read the book. The book was also launched and distributed in Bonya community and in Atitjere with amazing pride and excitement felt by everyone. It's the first contemporary resource in Akarre/Akityarre and a huge step for the language group.



The United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages

Music, language and creative arts inspiring learning

In April over 200 people, gathered as Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia) released the first single from our forthcoming album Ampe-mape Alyelheme (Kids Sing). From babies to our Elders, people came together from communities leading Children's Ground and Alice Springs residents to sing along to 'Tyerrtye Atyinhe' (my body). This has a hilarious accompanying video with kids, young people, adults and Elders dressing up to sing the classic song "heads, shoulders, knees and toes" in Arrernte. Children and families had a wonderful time creating lyrics and music and bringing it all to life. You can see the video here ([Kids Sing](https://childrenground.org.au/watch/tyerrtye-atyinhe-my-body/)) - <https://childrenground.org.au/watch/tyerrtye-atyinhe-my-body/> and make sure you watch it to hear the funky version of this old classic in Arrernte!

The very first children's Arrernte language album of its kind, *Ampe-mape Alyelheme (Kids Sing)* is a vibrant collection of Arrernte children's songs, written by long-time educators and first-time musicians from Children's Ground. Fourteen Arrernte songwriters and artists from Central Australia aged 15 to 55 combined their creativity to bridge a gap in the children's music scene and create Arrernte music for Arrernte kids, with a huge helping hand from The Cat Empire vocalist Harry Angus and Emily Lubitz of Tinpan Orange.

Ampe-mape Alyelheme (Kid's Sing) is a learning resource and aims to increase visibility and accessibility of First Nations languages. The ampe (children) at Children's Ground now have music available in their own language that can be enjoyed by Arrernte families and educators.

Emily Lubitz aka Tinpan Orange said, *"Being welcomed into the Children's Ground family to work on these songs has been an honour. We have loved collaborating with such inspired community leaders who are so dedicated to giving their kids and grandkids a rich culture and steady life. These songs are a beautiful expression of the deep work the organisation and the families are doing."*

The Cat Empire's Harry Angus shares, *"I had a great time working with the Ampe-kehne Ahelhe mob to help create these pieces of music, and I learned so much along the way. It was inspiring to see the different generations of family working together to create art. I think we all enjoyed mashing ancient knowledge and culture together with synths and beats to create a kind of East Arrernte version of Sesame Street which can hopefully be enjoyed by kids, parents, and grandparents alike. Mwerre Anthurre!"*

Critically, it builds our learning and development resources in First Language and engages children. As one of our young leaders said about the songs:

"They are perfect. They make sure that our children know more words in language, they are learning what their bush foods names are in language, what comes out during the day and night and their body parts. I see kids dancing along to the music and trying to sing along, as they know the lyrics." - Nakita Furber, Cultural educator, Mpweringke Anapipe July 2023.



The United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages



Singing and signing language together!

In April, more than 100 children and families from *Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe* (Children's Ground) welcomed Emma Memma, Elvin Melvin and their crew to Arrernte Country. Children and families alike were dazzled and entertained at the live concert by Emma Memma and Elvin Melvin in the morning. This was followed by several hours of hand-signing, singing and dancing. Together, children and families from the local community taught Emma Memma some Arrernte hand signals and Children's Ground songs in First Languages from their new album.

This event was a special celebration of Arrernte hand signs. It was particularly significant for one young boy who has attended Children's Ground since he was three. He is profoundly hearing impaired and has been learning sign language to enable him to communicate.

Combining First Language, Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and Arrernte hand signing is making learning engaging and accessible for all children.



★ Wear it Yellow for Children's Ground and Reconciliation

This year our 'Wear It Yellow' campaign continued to grow. Across the country children, young people and adults dressed in yellow to support Children's Ground.

Around 1,800 schools, early learning centres, workplaces and individuals took part. This is amazing!

As part of Reconciliation Week, Wear It Yellow also called for people to have a conversation about what reconciliation means. We shared and encouraged people to use our free 'Listening, Learning, Acting' education and workplace resources to learn, teach and connect more deeply with First Nations issues during National Reconciliation Week and beyond.

People also tuned in for our **'Teaching truth telling'** webinar (<https://youtu.be/8oYCwX5luKs>) during our Wear It Yellow Reconciliation week. This was an opportunity to support parents/carers with ways to talk to children, students, and other adults about the true history of this country. The discussion focused on the challenges affecting the education of all young people on the truth of Australia's history and how to introduce concepts such as racism, genocide, assimilation and the First Nations history of this country.

We want to sincerely thank everyone who supported the campaign by encouraging your families, communities and colleagues to sign up and get involved. Your support has made a significant contribution to supporting First Nations Elders, leaders, families and communities in continuing to lead the change they want to see for their children, grandchildren and next generation cultural leaders.

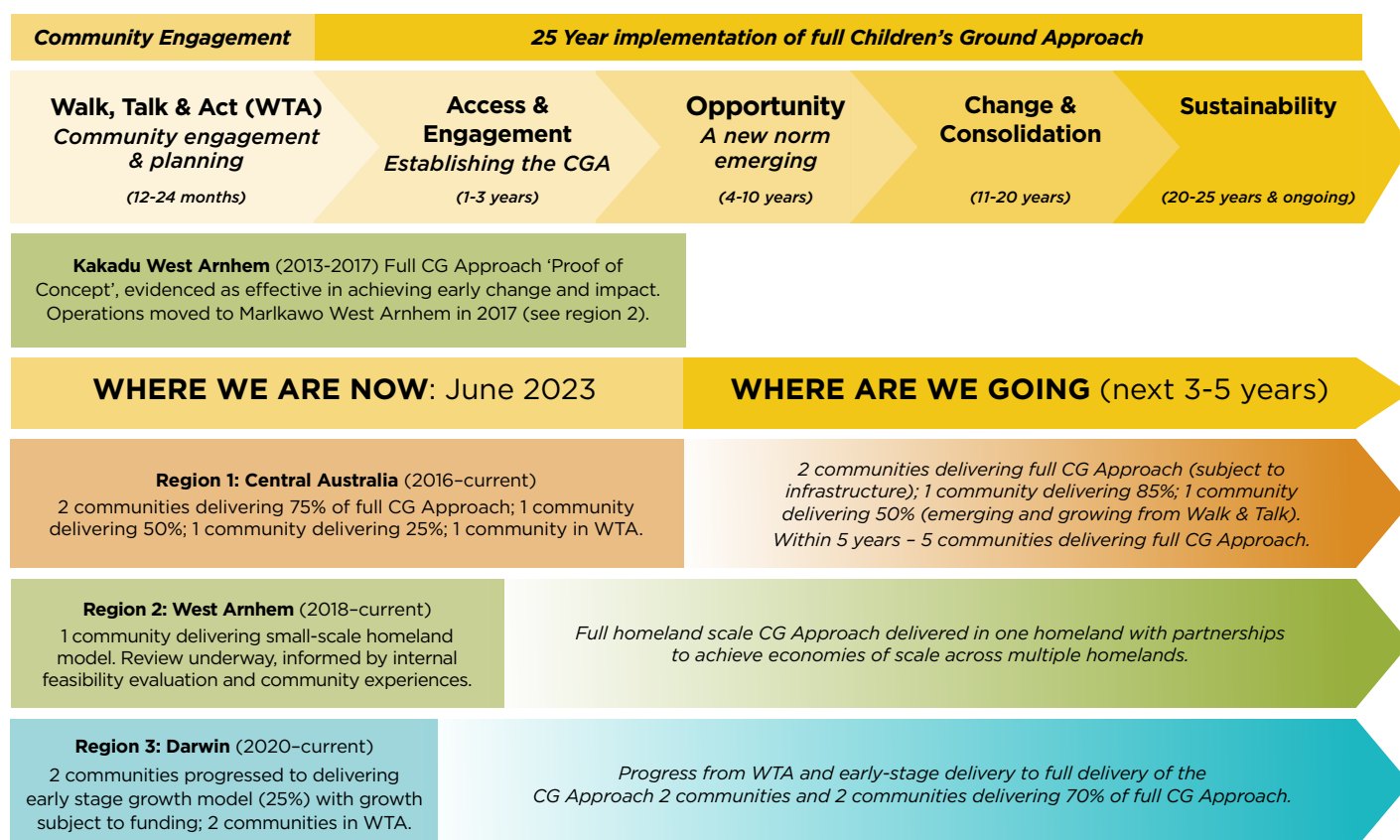


Strategy, growth and scaling

Growth and scaling so far...

The Children's Ground Approach (CG Approach) is a comprehensive, integrated, culturally designed service system with operational principles to achieve long term community level change. The CG Approach continues to be delivered and evaluated across the three regions in which we work in the Northern Territory. Each region is in a different stage of implementing and delivering the 25-year plan, ranging from our initial Walk, Talk and Act (WTA) community engagement and planning phase, through to comprehensive delivery of the CG Approach. In each region and community, we continue to work towards full implementation to ensure long term sustainable and transformational change.

Each location's progress is reliant on the resources available on the ground. The graphic below demonstrates the percentage (%) of delivery against full implementation of the CG Approach by the end of June 2023. This diagram also illustrates the delivery and growth targets for the next three to five years for comparison.



Note: Delivery of the full CG Approach is early years and primary aged learning including after hours and specialist opportunities e.g. sport, music, arts; health and wellbeing, employment, enterprise, community development - all delivered in community, culturally centred and locally governed.



Strategy, growth and scaling

Children's Ground Cultural Governance operates at a regional and community level. In each region, a group of communities' lead Children's Ground. Each community leads delivery for their own community. All communities come together for regional governance, resource sharing, evaluation and shared practice.

The following is a brief overview of the development of each region over the period.

Central Australia continued to grow and deepen in experience and progress. Key areas of learning, employment, health and wellbeing and local governance continue to strengthen. In an exciting milestone, learning extended from early years into primary aged learning in one community with others waiting for the resources to follow.

In the area of health, maternal and child health research and practice was a focus, and the nutrition program continues to provide important health foundations for children and families. Local community employment is a demand that is hard to keep up with.

In terms of engagement, we have extended our reach over recent years and some numbers are beginning plateau as expected and we will work to sustain engagement and strengthen quality.

Four communities are implementing the broader CG Approach, and a fifth is in Walk, Talk and Act, with early stage learning and wellbeing delivered weekly.

Key challenges continue to be the level of loss and grief and health issues experienced by families. This creates stress and employment interruption for many. In turn this impacts operations in different ways, meaning that we must continue to be flexible and responsive to support people and maintain our vision.



A key strength has been culture and language, centred in on-Country learning integrated with western learning and the development of learning resources in First Languages.

The **Darwin** region continued its Walk and Talk community engagement and planning, alongside the successful early-stage delivery of the CG Approach. Two communities progressed with culturally centred and responsive early years learning, local employment and governance, health and wellbeing and community development. Two others continued a primary focus on community engagement and planning.

In **West Arnhem**, the families of Marlkawo sustained their delivery of a small homeland version of the CG Approach. During this period, however, the devastating impact of ill health has led to family loss, deep grief and extended sorry business. The impact of ill-health and family loss has been profound over the past four years. The community is now taking time to grieve and then to plan their future for their homeland. At the same time we see the next generation of children firmly connected to their traditional lands, showing a joy, freedom and peace of spirit when on country.

» Looking forward

Children's Ground is evaluating the implementation of the CG Approach in three very different contexts:

- Remote homeland (people living on their traditional lands)
- Remote/regional (Mparntwe/Alice Springs where people are still living on or closely connected to their country and speaking language) and;
- Larger town (Garramilla/Darwin where many people are living far away from their Country as well as Larrakia people living on their Country).

The evaluation process continues to encompass local governance, workforce, investment, integrated service delivery and review, through culturally centred design.

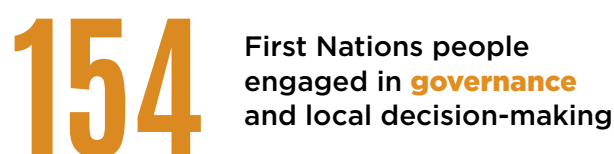
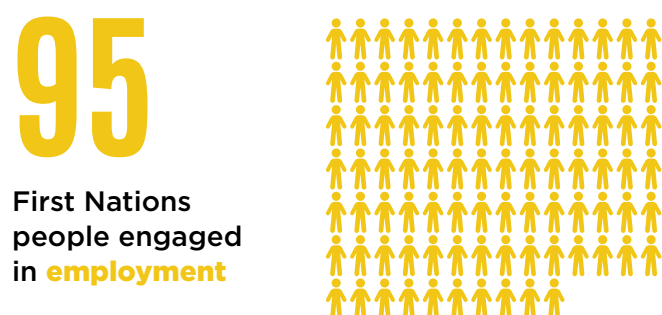
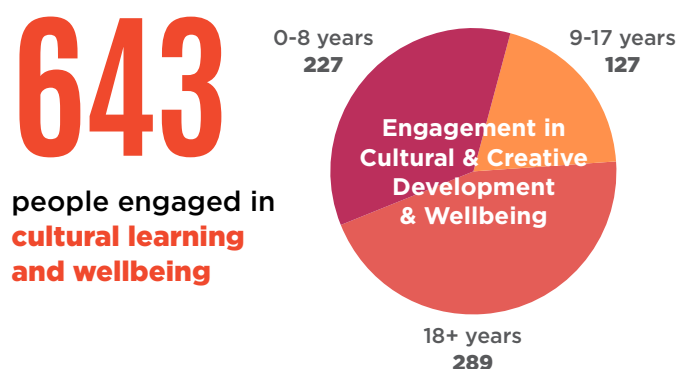
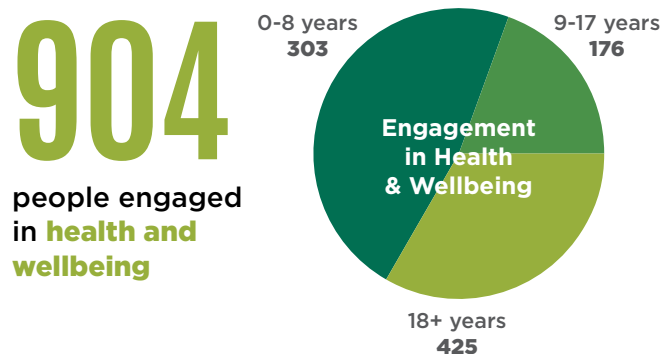
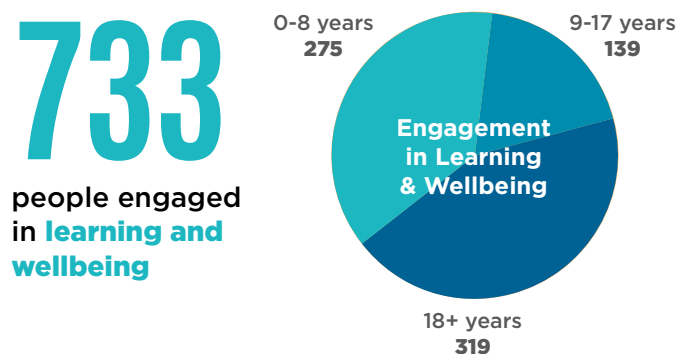
We aim to establish the full CG Approach in each region and community and, subject to funding, grow to one further region over the next three-to-five years.



Engagement and Reach

This section of the Report presents the number of children, young people and families who have engaged in the CG Approach across the three regions in which Children's Ground currently operates, showing our progress with reaching and engaging whole communities.

The data presented below covers January to June 2023. Engagement and reach data is presented by each service platform within the CG Approach.



There has been a steady increase in engagement. This pattern is slowing as our reach has increased across community. Growth is expected to plateau in some communities in Central Australia in coming years.

In the first semester of 2023, we saw an increase in the number of children and families engaged in Learning and Wellbeing, compared with the second semester of 2022.

There was a decrease in the number of people engaged in universal and targeted health promotion and support.

This was due to uncertainty of continued health funding from the Australian Government's Department of Health and Aged Care and an expected decrease in intensive COVID health related delivery.

We sustained First Nations employment and engagement in regional and community governance between semester two 2022 and semester one 2023.

There was a pleasing and anticipated increase in the number of children, young people and adults engaged in Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing.

Children's Ground Action and Impact

The CG Approach is a new system based on the First Nations system of life, learning and society, called Apmerengentyele (from the land) in Arrernte (Central Australian First Language).

The CG Approach has an integrated service platform that focuses on prevention and early intervention, responding to social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing. This includes learning, health, governance and economic and community development – all of which are culturally-centred and include western knowledge and skills.

Our emerging evidence shows that the integrated and interconnectedness of the CG Approach, alongside local governance, empowerment and cultural delivery and safety,

were central to creating early change for children and their families.

This section provides a snapshot and examples of action and impact of the CG Approach across our five key areas of service delivery: Family Health and Wellbeing, Learning and Wellbeing, Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing, Economic Development and Wellbeing, Community Development Wellbeing. For all three existing regions: Central Australia, West Arnhem and Darwin. The data presented is applicable for the half-year period from January to June 2023 and encompasses all Children's Ground regions. The impact summaries are presented against Children's Ground's long-term evaluation outcomes.

Family Health & Wellbeing

Children's Ground's Family Health and Wellbeing Framework includes delivery and focus for each community on the physical, cultural, social and emotional and environmental health of our children and their families.

Prevention and early intervention approaches include: maternal and family health (during pregnancy) and health and wellbeing for sexually active young people; child and family health promotion, literacy and agency; nutrition and food security; social and emotional wellbeing; supported access to local clinical health services; cultural and traditional health.

Preventing chronic ill-health - Health prevention and promotion through healthy routines

Every learning session embeds healthy routines like brushing teeth, blowing noses, face and hand washing and behaviours like the importance of sneezing into our elbow!

Building health literacy and health behaviours is our focus. Children learn through role modelling and conversations about the health from educators, health practitioners and families.

Play-based learning is how little ones learn. During a health session in Central Australia at Irrkerlantye (White Gate – Mparntwe/Alice Springs), a little one watched older children playing with the dolls and joined in. The kids role-played changing a nappy and bathing. They practiced washing the dolls' eyes, ears, mouths, noses and bottoms. They checked that their mouths, eyes and ears were clean. On the way home, a little one looked after another baby doll, making sure dolly was sitting down in the bus with her seat belt on.

Learning about health is part of play and daily activities where kids watch, listen, do and learn. One of our health messages for children and families is 'clean eyes for strong hearts' and this understanding is being emulated in play.



Children's Ground Action and Impact

Cultural health promotion on Country

Every Wednesday in Central Australia at Uyenpere Atwatye (Hidden Valley Town Camp, Mparntwe/Alice Springs), health sessions are run on Country where the focus is strengthening traditional health practices.

These sessions are delivered by cultural educators and an Angangkere (Traditional Healer). Baby/child smoking ceremonies and bush medicine baths are examples of cultural practices that are now undertaken regularly. Many families had stopped observing these practices due to limited access to Country and the plants needed to perform these ceremonies. These practices are about holistic wellbeing. They ground and centre children and families in Country and culture.

Children are learning how to safely practice traditional medicinal practices. They are receiving education to cover their body in bush medicine – how to smoke, pick, crush and boil bush medicine to make baths and oils and how these protect their Utnenge (spirit) while safeguarding their overall health and wellbeing.

Learning cultural health practices contributes to physical and social/emotional health and wellbeing. Our trauma-informed delivery has a focus on social and emotional literacy, regulation and safety in all learning sessions.



Children's Ground Action and Impact

Maternal and child health - Women supporting next generation mums

In Darwin's 15 Mile community, First Nations leaders have established the 'Young Alidju (Aboriginal Women) Group', which engages young women aged between 11-18 years living in or frequently visiting the community. The group provides a safe space for the girls to gather, learn and share with family and Elders with integrated western sexual health education and cultural knowledge sharing. Topics discussed so far include mental health and wellbeing, healthy and unhealthy and abusive relationships, puberty and hormones, periods and menstrual cycles, as well as self-care, anger management, bullying, sorry business and healthy coping mechanisms. Since implementation of the Young Alidju Group, the young women have become more confident and engaged each week.

In Marlkawo (West Arnhem), western sexual health promotion was delivered during after school activities,

with a focus on social and emotional wellbeing, puberty and discussions around women's business. There has also been a focus on sharing cultural maternal and child health knowledge and practices. This was led by First Nations female Elders, aunties and grandmothers who educated each other and young women who will become mothers and are the next generation of cultural leaders.

Young women and mothers have reported that providing a safe space for women to share their personal stories has led to further conversations within families and contributed to strengthening relationships between young women and their mothers, grandmothers, aunties and Elders. The relationships and trust built between health practitioners, women and families supports holistic health and wellbeing plans with women in community. This builds health literacy and supports women to have agency over their health behaviours and wellbeing.

IMPACT: Children are healthy and happy (evaluation outcomes)

Access to both Cultural and Western health practices and literacy strengthened over the period for children and families. Access, engagement and behaviour change led to improvements in children's physical, social, emotional and cultural health and wellbeing.

Promoting health agency in children from their earliest years is critical to preventing the complex health burdens and chronic diseases that are widespread in our communities. Children are growing up with the knowledge and normal practice of focusing and prioritising their physical and emotional wellbeing.



Children's Ground Action and Impact

Learning & Wellbeing

A Children's Ground FIRST in Central Australia - Primary Learning on Country!

We are beginning to realise the vision of our Elders to establish schooling on their homelands north of Alice Springs. In partnership with Yipirinya School at the start of 2023, our Central Australian region celebrated the inaugural delivery of targeted primary age learning with a small group of children and their families living on or connected to their Country at Burt Creek outstation in Mpweringke Anapipe (approximately an hour north of Alice Springs). Extending our Early Years learning through to primary age learners is a significant step in establishing First Nations-led education for our children.



Early years learning and wellbeing continues to be strong

Early years Learning and Wellbeing continued to be led by eight communities across the three regions, delivered through a culturally-centred, play-based learning environment that privileges First Language and Culture and is inclusive of pre-numeracy and literacy in English and maths.

Learning occurred in community, On Country and in centre. The presence and role of family members in learning is vital to First Nations education. As a key evaluation indicator for long term impact, 100% of children are engaging in learning alongside their family.

IMPACT: Children have knowledge and skills for life and learning (evaluation outcome)

In the first semester of 2023, 28 children aged between 6-13 years engaged in primary education two days per week alongside their family on their traditional lands. This is the first time children had access to primary learning on their own Country, taught by cultural and western-trained educators.

This is an important milestone. Our founding Elders set the directive to establish learning for school-aged children of Mpweringke Anapipe (Northern Outstations) and their families. This has taken years to realise. This is the first time since colonisation that a school aged learning program, a basic right for our children, has been accessible at Mpweringke Anapipe.

Now children can progress through early childhood into primary aged learning on Country, through a learning system that comes from our culture and language. This is an important step in Children's Ground's progress to effect national reform in First Nations-led education.



Cultural & Creative Development & Wellbeing

Cultural Development and Wellbeing is embedded across all areas of the CG Approach, in learning, health, employment and community development. Whole community access to and engagement in cultural knowledge systems and practices were interrupted by colonisation. Re-establishing access through intergenerational learning is core to our identity and survival as First Nations people.

Our Elders and cultural professors lead this work and continue to uphold identity, cultural knowledge, language and law as critical to a child's lifelong wellbeing and learning. Through cultural systems of learning and development, children develop creative thinking with flexible and adaptive skills to engage in a global environment with confidence. The following shows cultural development and wellbeing within learning.

Intergenerational Learning on Country

Across all three regions, 594 people of all ages engaged in Learning on Country.

At Marlkawo (West Arnhem Land), Wurdurd Garriygarrmerren (Children's Ground) is led by Bolmo traditional owners. Here, 100% of learning is delivered on Country, either in the classroom that has been built or out bush.

Cooking is an excellent way to transfer knowledge and it's even better when all daluk (women), bininj (men) and wurdurd (children) are involved.

In May, the entire community of Marlkawo rose early to prepare for a kunkerri (ground oven) celebration at Bakalelleh river crossing. News quickly spread of bulikki kunkanj (beef) and kandidjdjawa (damper) and next minute everyone was involved... even the duruk (dogs)!

Bininj prepared the kunkerri by collecting kundulk (wood) and kunwarrde (rocks) for the fire. The young men showed the young boys how to dig the hole and make it flat at the bottom. They then demonstrated how to stack the kundulk and kunwarrde to make a strong, safe kunak (fire).

"This is the proper way to cook kunkanj" (Raymond Guymala, Community Leader, Marlkawo)

The male Elders explained the process to balanda (non-First Nations) staff while the men worked and translated the process into English. There were detailed discussions about what flavour was best for the meat. One of the younger men scaled a tree, picked and washed leaves with kukku (water) and placed the leaves in the kunkerri. Finally, the group showed the children how to cover the hole with kunkod (paperbark) and soil. Daluk showed yawkyawk (younger girls) how to make kandidjdjawa (damper).

Families were happy, learning across generations with wurdurd, teaching and learning about kunred (Country) and in Kunwinjku (first language) and in English.

Once the kunkanj was cooked over four hours, we all sat together and ate the munme manymak (good food).

The children were able to talk and write about their experience in English and made an electronic presentation.



Children's Ground Action and Impact

IMPACT: The learning on country session above responds to a number of our evaluation outcomes - impacting learning, culture, health, mental health and family wellbeing. The following highlights two impact areas.

Children know their history and are culturally confident (evaluation outcome)

This Learning on Country session demonstrates how cultural and Western education can be successfully combined for learning outcomes that span knowledge, practice, language, culture, literacy, country, kinship, science, communication and nutrition. Wurdurd built skills in listening, watching, doing, learning, attention, comprehension and translation.

Engaging children, families, Elders and other local leaders beyond a traditional classroom to learn in a communal environment continues to deliver results in terms of learning, health, community development, employment, identity and culture.

Children are learning through culture, embedding understanding of language, kinship and the lores of country and place. They are learning about health and nutrition. They are learning about process and roles and responsibilities.

Knowledge is shared in first language by Elders and next generation leaders who are employed by Children's Ground as cultural educators.

Western educators use these learning experiences to extend learning into English during other learning sessions. This approach supports improved English literacy proficiency across generations of First Nations people.

Families walking alongside their children (evaluation outcome)

Families walking alongside their children' has been identified by First Nations leaders across the regions in which we work as a headline outcome indicator for the evaluation.

In each region, First Nations Elders and other community leaders have introduced a strict policy that children engaging in learning must be accompanied by at least one family member at all times. This is about cultural safety and First Nations systems and standards in intergenerational teaching and learning. The policy is consistent with western empirical evidence that families are the greatest influence on a child's learning and wellbeing.

Children engage and actively learn when they are taught in an intergenerational learning system. Through the process, communities, adults and young people become actively involved in teaching and learning themselves. Young people learning alongside children continues to be a highlight across all communities. The strength of community grows with Elders, community leaders and other adults coming together to teach and care for wurdurd.



Children's Ground Action and Impact



Economic Development and Wellbeing

Economic Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground includes employment, training and enterprise opportunities for local First Nations people from the communities leading the CG Approach. Importantly, Children's Ground is designed for future economic independence of the current generation of children.

Employment options range from flexible to permanent so people can build their employment experience and consistency over time (if needed). Employment is supported through workplace and financial literacy, training and social and emotional wellbeing support.

Building a local First Nations workforce

Central to Children's Ground's long-term strategy of building a local First Nations workforce is training and professional development that recognises both First Nations and western standards, skills, practice knowledge and employment compliance.

Across three regions, 121 First Nations people engaged in training and employment support with Children's Ground.

In Central Australia and the Top End, training included legislative workplace requirements (first aid, health and safety, mandatory reporting, etc), computer skills (word, email, sharepoint, internal data system, etc), multi-media digital training and mentoring and in-services. Cultural skills and training occurred through working with Elders, linguistics (oral and written) and cultural knowledge sharing with senior cultural knowledge holders.

Over the period, external training has included trauma informed practice, narrative therapy, music therapy, family violence, safe and legal child seat installation, media training, adult literacy and management training, Certificate III in business administration and drivers licenses.

IMPACT: Families and communities are economically strong (evaluation outcomes)

The impact of employment cannot be overstated. In our communities, unemployment and underemployment are endemic. Employment has provided improved financial wellbeing and empowered individuals as leaders. Training is also contributing to the empowerment of individuals and family groups. Western and culturally-based training is enabling professional and personal development, both of which are critical for active engagement in employment and building a local First Nations workforce.

There are now role models for children and young people. For children coming to Children's Ground, it is now a norm to be surrounded by families who are working, learning and leading.



Children's Ground Action and Impact

Community Development and Wellbeing



Refurbishing and revitalising community spaces

In Darwin's 15 Mile community, a community leader reflected that she has sat in her community looking at a dilapidated building for over a decade, noting that the unused community space was disappointing and disheartening. When Children's Ground began in 15 Mile, revitalising this community space was one of their first identified priorities. First, we worked on the community centre for early years learning and nutrition. During this period, led by the community, we finished the refurbishment of an old demountable next to the centre for a new office and meeting space.

IMPACT: The community is safe, inclusive and respects diversity (evaluation outcome):

A key part of the CG Approach includes establishing intergenerational places of safety, learning and wellbeing, where families and communities can gather and where services are delivered. These centres and spaces promote and deliver community safety, local area governance and interagency coordination and demonstrably assist in building social, cultural and economic capital where people live.





Connecting through country, ancestors, human rights and inspiring each other

In June, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground) was honoured by a special visit from Dame Graça Machel, who was hosted in Australia by Igniting Change. Dame Graça Machel spent three days with Arrernte Elders, leaders, children and families in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

As the Deputy Chair of global group The Elders, Dame Graça Machel commits her brilliance and time to achieving and upholding peace and human rights around the world. She was the first Education Minister of Mozambique. She has fought the greatest humanitarian injustices in the world, working alongside her first husband, the late Samora Machel, President of Mozambique and her second husband, the late Nelson Mandela, when he was President of South Africa. She continues to uphold and support the rights and development of women throughout Africa through the Graça Machel Trust.

"As Elders, we strive to use our collective clout to bring people together, amplify the space to give voice to the voiceless, and catalyse action. We understand true leadership as that of service leadership which promotes equity and dignity for all." - Dame Graça Machel

Dame Graça was welcomed to Country by Felicity Hayes (Traditional Owner Mparntwe, Co-Director Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe) at Irrkerlantye (White Gate) - Mparntwe/Alice Springs. It is here where children and families continue to live in conditions that violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The welcome at Irrkerlantye was deeply moving. Dame Graça expressed her respect for Elders in both actions and words and her interpersonal connection with the late Dr MK Turner was powerful. Over the next few days she visited the Purple House, sat on country with families and enjoyed a night on country with dancing, singing and a huge cook up, where all five Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground) communities came together on Arrernte country to celebrate.



Dame Graça spoke at a special gathering of First Nations women organised by Jess Wishart of the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network and Children's Ground. Children's Ground's Veronica Turner spoke with Mrs Machel, which was followed by an awe-inspiring panel featuring Shirleen Campbell of Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group, Naomi Anstess of the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network, and singer-songwriter Nancy Bates, facilitated by Leila Akahloun of the Graça Machel Trust. Next generation leaders spoke of their pain, their vision, their passion and their power - passionate about **being** the change they want to see. Everyone felt united in their ongoing fight for human rights and their hopes for the future.

Jo Willmot (Wakka Wakka woman, Children's Ground Board member and Elder) said *"After this afternoon I have so much hope for the future."*

Throughout Graça's visit we connected through our lands, our ancestors and our histories. She listened, sat on country and heard our stories and honoured our truth. We have shared our human rights struggles with her and we have been strengthened by her spirit and her deep understanding.

We are so grateful to the wonderful Jane Tewson CBE, the Founder and Director of Igniting Change and the Graça Machel Trust for making this visit to Country possible.

Graça was presented with a painting by Amunda Gorey (Arrernte woman and artist). Our families have been inspired by Graça. She has given us all strength to keep fighting for our rights, our dignity and for justice for our people.



National Reform, Research & Leadership

Sharing our voice, our story and our evidence

Our First Nations leaders from Central Australia and the Top End presented at three national and international conferences.

In Canberra on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country, four of Children's Ground's female First Nations leaders presented at the Wiyi Yani U Thangani National summit. This was the first ever national gathering of its kind and was an outcome of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) project, led by Commissioner June Oscar AO. The summit aimed to be a platform for agreement-making where First Nations women came together, raised their collective voice, and determined the way ahead.

Children's Ground First Nations leaders presented 'Country is our classroom', discussing the importance of First Nations led, designed and evaluated learning across the early years, guided by Apmerengentyele which is a complex system of knowledge and practice that underpins a First Nations world view – this is a shared foundation of a First Nations education system. With over 800 First Nation women delegates, the team shared and learned from each other over a week of empowering and celebrating First Nations women from across Australia.

In Cairns, on the lands of the Gimuy-walubarra Yidi people, two First Nations leaders presented at the Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference. They presented in partnership with the Remedy Project which has been undertaking a research project with Children's Ground over the past 18 months which explores music as a primary cultural determinant of health for First Nations communities.



In Darwin on Larrakia country, three First Nations leaders delivered two presentations at the World Community Development Conference on First Nations community governance and decision-making and the CG Approach.

On the last day of the World Community Development Conference, Children's Ground's community of 15 Mile held a practice exchange, hosting 20-30 conference delegates in their community. From early in the morning they prepared a ground oven which cooked away while the delegates participated in an early years learning session run by cultural and western educators. Over lunch community leaders and other Children's Ground First Nations staff held a Q&A session with the visitors. This included sharing information about the CG Approach and how and why it has been important in their communities, and the impact it has had on their children and families.

Alice Springs – there is a solution

Early this year there was a flood of negative stories about Mparntwe (Alice Springs) across all media accompanied by fraught public discussion of First Nations young people, alcohol, and long-running social unrest.

This period highlighted the critical issues that children and families live with daily. Statements by families included the following:

Alice Springs is our home. For some of us it has been our traditional lands for ever. It is now a place where many people live and visit and we want to see all children living with safety and freedom. Instead, our children live with racism, risk and harm. Our young people are lost. We have seen generation after generation struggling...

For fifty years we have been speaking out. We live in tin sheds. We live in overcrowding. We live in communities which have nothing. Other people make decisions about us and do not listen to our voice. We are treated like third class citizens on our own country. Nobody would be expected to live like we do anywhere in Australia. The racism is so ingrained that government after government set the bar so low that we are forced to continue to live in appalling conditions without basic dignity...

Our people live with trauma, oppression and surveillance. The response from government has been to increase policing without any investment in our people or our communities...Our kids are not succeeding in western schools. Our families are dying and live with diseases... Our families are being locked up and our kids taken away at record rate. We do not want to lose our children. We do not want another stolen generation. We do not want our kids walking the street...

These solutions are in our communities with our people, through our culture. We have incredible strength and ability. Stop putting us down. Stop talking about us as if we are criminals and neglect our children. We have been calling out for generations. We are not a political campaign we are children and families. Treat us with respect, trust our intelligence, listen to our voice, commit to real support. There are answers. They are not hard. They are very simple. But they need political will, not political divide.

What the media didn't show was the incredible strength and resilience of First Nations people and the leadership that exists within our communities who work tirelessly to change the status quo and create a different reality for the next generation.

At Children's Ground we do this every day. We work to address the underlying causes of trauma and injustice experienced by many of our children, young people and families over generations. We do this while uplifting our culture and instilling human rights.

Despite Government saying that they want to do things differently nothing has changed. We are still waiting for them to come and sit down with us and back our solutions that are working. We will keep reaching out and hope our voices will be heard. We can and we must transform the system for the future of our children and our culture.

We applaud the strong voices of our leaders at Ampekenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia) who engaged with local, national and international media during this time, including publishing an opinion piece in [The Guardian](#) and being featured on the [ABC](#).

They shared the perspectives of communities who experience the complex daily reality that our First Nations leaders are working to change. They showcased that the Children's Ground Approach is working on the ground and highlighted the serious support needed to continue creating change.

During the period, William Tilmouth, senior Arrernte man and Children's Ground Chair, had an opinion piece published in [Crikey](#) on January 26. He also appeared on [The Drum](#), [10 News First Midday](#), [SBS](#) and in [The Guardian](#).

Cherisse Buzzacott, Arrernte woman and Children's Ground Head of Health and Wellbeing, was interviewed on ABC's [The Drum](#) (min. 36). Cherisse and Felicity Hayes, Senior Arrernte Educator and Children's Ground Co-Director, were also featured on ABC News. Jane Vadeloo, Children's Ground CEO, spoke with French news outlet [Le Monde](#).



Our Voices come from the land.
Our Voices are in our languages.
Our Voices have authority in our
Elders, who hold the laws of the land.
Our Voices are in our children and
young people.

We Want the Voices of Our People
to be Heard.



Read our full statement on the Voice to Parliament
on the Children's Ground website.

