



MEDIA RELEASE

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An apology for the past, but we must act on the present, and preserve and protect our future.

On the anniversary of Australia's apology to the Stolen Generations and its First Nations, we ask for action today to stop the escalation of children being removed from their families.

"The apology was a long time coming. It was well spoken. They apologised for the past. But we still have a variation of yesteryear, it's still going on. Sadly, children are still being taken from their families," said William Tilmouth, 2023 NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year and Chair of Children's Ground.

In 2023 the Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report indicated that Target 12 – reducing the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0-17 years old) in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031 – was not on track and worsening.

The recently released Productivity Commission review on Closing the Gap found governments have largely not fulfilled their commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and need to fundamentally rethink their systems, culture and ways of working.

"The statistics are damning. It just keeps going in the same direction," said Mr Tilmouth.

"The system is stuck at the crisis driven end, as opposed to prevention. We do not want to be the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, downstream. We want to be working upstream preventing the crisis before it can occur.

"There needs to be a massive systems change where control is relinquished back to communities. We have solutions that will work. The days of being dictated to and told what's best for us must be in the past. We are calling for real partnership with government.

"Many organisations like Children's Ground are gathering an undeniable, growing evidence base that demonstrates First Nations systems lead to positive outcomes for our children.

"When we empower our people, when we have accountability, and we can target resources at the grass roots – then we see change. Too many of our families are struggling and too many children are at risk.

“Children’s Ground work at the grass roots, led by communities and families, empowering them to take agency so that we can prevent harm to our children and strengthen our families.

“We are more than community controlled, we are community driven. We are accountable to the people that fund us and we are totally accountable to the people we serve,” said Mr Tilmouth.

Mr Tilmouth is a survivor of the Stolen Generations. His parents were also forcibly removed from their families as children.

“At the age of five my mother passed away and welfare swooped. The light-skin ones went south and the dark-skin ones went north. And that was the conveyor belt. My life from then was institutionalised,” said Mr Tilmouth.

“I understand the confusion these children are going through, having to forsake who they are to thrive, instead of being with family. I think it’s an appalling state-of-affairs and it needs to end.

“It hurts,

“But we’ll keep shaking the branches and trying to bring about change, and we’ll do it by proving First Nations-led systems lead to real, positive outcomes for our children and our communities,” said Mr Tilmouth.

END

William Tilmouth is available for comment.

Contact

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About Children's Ground

Children’s Ground is designed and led by First Nations communities who are creating a different future for the next generation of children.

Every child born today should experience a lifetime of opportunity and grow up strong in their identity and culture, free from injustice and economic poverty.

If all children can experience this basic right, then whole communities will be happy, healthy and safe places.

Learn more: childrensground.org.au