

Children's Ground Impact Report

January-June
2024



First Nations leaders in Canberra

In February, senior Leaders and educators from Children's Ground were in Canberra to formally launch the M.K. Turner Report at Parliament House and to advocate for First Nations education reform.

The M.K. Turner Report is a landmark report that was developed with more than 60 First Nations education experts representing a diversity of Nations. The Report offers six recommendations with the central recommendation being for the Australian Government to commit to the establishment of a new First Nations education system, designed and led by First Nations people.

While in Canberra, we held individual meetings with key parliamentarians and decision makers from the Department of Education, Productivity Commission, NIAA, Department of Health and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The visit culminated in an event at Parliament House hosted by the Hon. Marion Scrymgour, Member for Lingiari.

Our Elders and senior Leaders stood together, strong and dignified as they asked the Australian Government to work with us towards improving education outcomes for our First Nations children.

Accompanying the report was a public petition that to date has been signed by nearly 83,000 people calling governments to implement a First Nations education system.

This has been a critical step forward in our vision for systems reform and we look forward to keeping you updated on progress towards the implementation of a First Nations education system.

"Our First Nations Education system will Close the Gap, will improve our productivity and will give us a voice. Education can transform a family in one generation. It will restore our dignity, our cultural authority and give our children agency and freedoms.

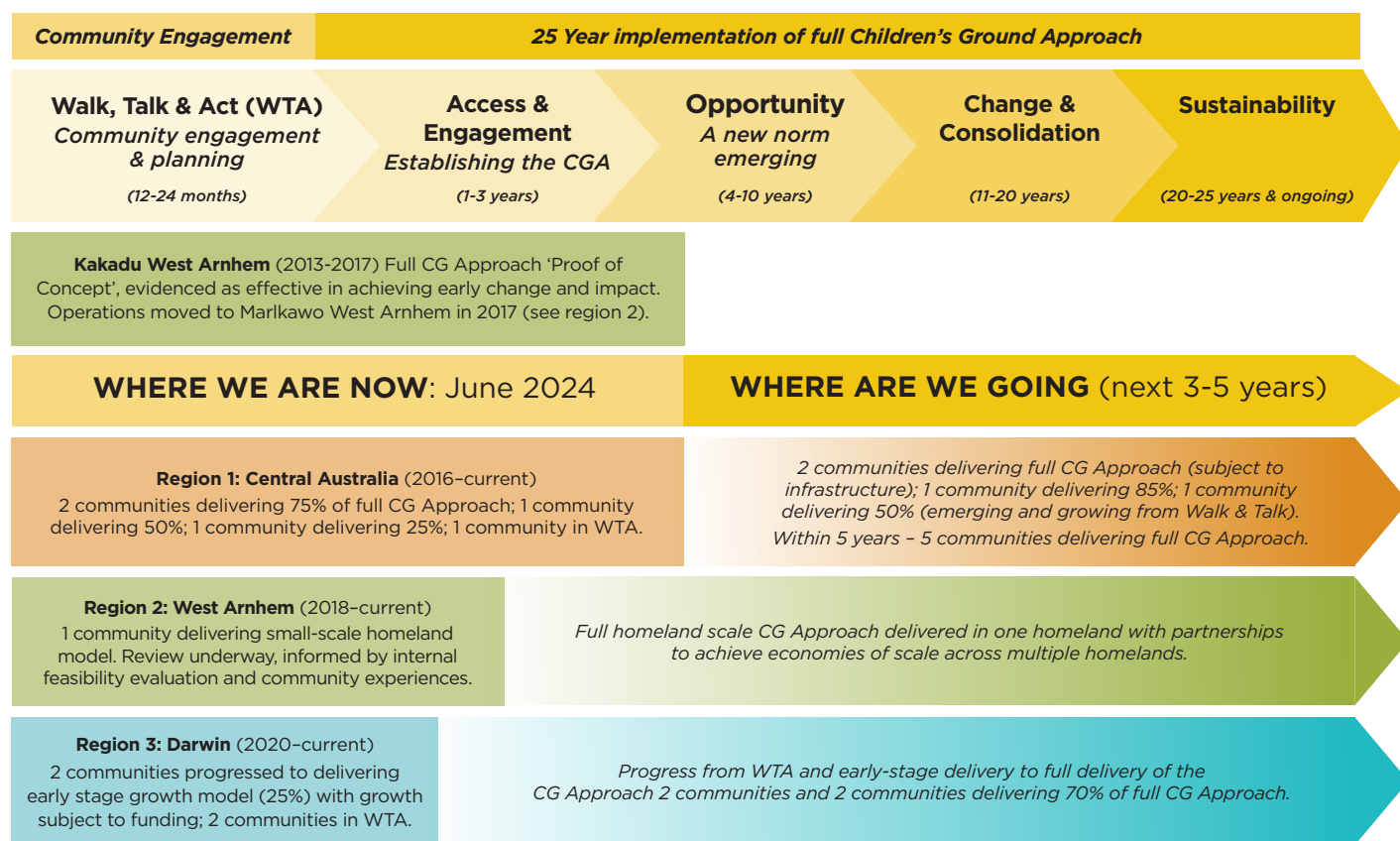
We can create transformational change. We now need political commitment. Education is in our hands." - William Tilmouth, Chair, Children's Ground.



Progress, growth and impact

The Children's Ground Approach (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 are working on 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 June 2024.



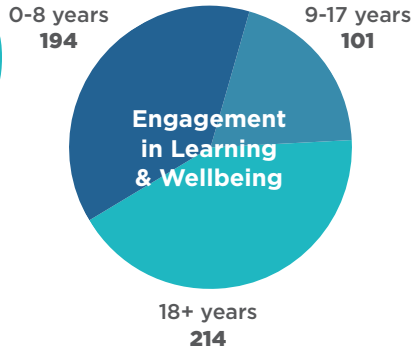
Note: Delivery of the full CG Approach is early years and primary aged learning including after hours and specialist opportunities e.g. sport, music, arts; health and wellbeing, employment, enterprise, community development - all delivered in community, culturally centred and locally governed.



Progress, growth and impact

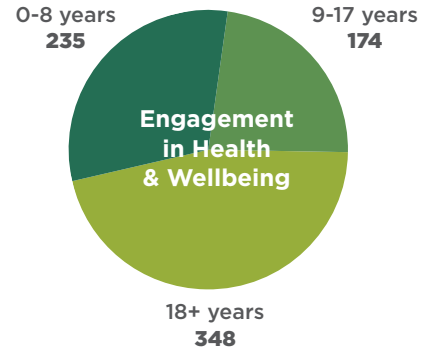
509

people engaged in **learning and wellbeing**



757

people engaged in **health and wellbeing**



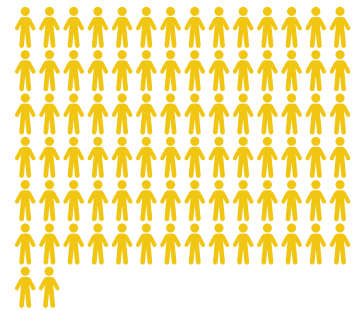
483

people engaged in **cultural learning and wellbeing**



86

First Nations people engaged in **employment**



121

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



There has been a decrease in engagement across some areas the CG Approach in the first six months of 2024. Engagement has been impacted by the significant deaths of two young people and of a long-term community leader of Children's Ground in Central Australia. This period also included the Marlkawo 'wet season' months where access and delivery are impacted.





Learning and Wellbeing

Western learning, especially numeracy and literacy, is so important for our children. However, learning for First Nations children goes beyond just this; our learning system is embedded in culture and is about building strong and confident First Nations people who are proud in their identity. This gives them the foundations to thrive.

Early Years and Wellbeing programs are being led by communities across the three regions, delivered through a culturally-centred, play-based learning environment.

Early Learning in action!

3 year old Dante has been coming to Children's Ground sessions at 15 Mile community in the Top End regularly since he was small and always has the best time!

The Early Years educators have noticed that he used to always play by himself but now wants everyone to join in with him and he has started to use words to tell people about what he is doing. Dante loves to sort toys by colour and enjoys playing games with the parachute – especially singing 'twinkle, twinkle little star' underneath it.

Dante has learnt all about Bush Apples – where they grow, what time of year they grow and what will make them grow big.

He also knows that they are red when ripe. He knows the names of different types of fruit and vegetables and has been trying new healthy foods at sessions.

This semester Dante has been continuing his learning in both his First Language and culture as well as English. He is growing up learning about and being celebrated for his culture and identity, while also being supported in his Western learning.

IMPACT:

Lifelong wellbeing begins in early childhood. Supporting children and families to access and regularly take part in high quality early years learning is crucial in the development and foundations of a child's life. Dante is learning in a culturally responsive environment, supported by his family and growing stronger in his development where his identity is celebrated.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Flexible learning keeping kids in school

In Central Australia, families at Burt Creek homeland in the Mpweringke Anapipe northern outstation region, recently experienced an extended period of significant Sorry.

During cultural Sorry, families are often required to travel to Sorry Camp to mourn the loss of their loved ones. For the families at Mpweringke, this meant travelling to an outstation a further 140kms from their home, and 200kms from town. Access to services was also limited.

Children's Ground First Nations and Western educators, alongside community, held two to three day visits, camping out in the outstation during the period.

These camps also meant Children's Ground families had access to work, and the wider community was also able to access support and resources like healthcare.

IMPACT:

Children's Ground's First Nations-learning model is flexible and culturally responsive to the needs of the community.

It recognises that cultural ceremony such as Sorry Business, is a time of wellbeing and learning within family and critical to child development. It is flexible to minimise gaps and lack of access to learning. It prioritises continuity of learning, ensuring children and families who are responding to cultural and family priorities can create plans and stay connected and re-engage when ready through culturally centered learning environments.

First language literacy

In Central Australia, we are teaching the children literacy in their first language as well as in English.

In a recent Arrernte learning session at Mpweringke, the Arrernte educators broke down Arrernte words into syllables. The ampe (children) then made clapsticks to rhythmically break down words into syllables, counting how many syllables in each word.

Learning first language in this way not only supports fluency and how to pronounce words correctly, but also plays a role in revitalising endangered languages. It also supports their learning in English and strengthens their culture.

IMPACT:

The World Bank and United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples links education in first language to success in learning. As we teach children about literacy through language sessions on Country, we develop their identity and support them to grow up as strong and proud First Nations people.





Health and Wellbeing

Children's Ground's Family Health and Wellbeing Framework includes delivery and focuses not just on the physical, but also the cultural, social, emotional and environmental health needs of our children and their families.

Keeping body, mind and spirit strong

At Children's Ground, Cultural and Western Health practices are integrated into every Early Years Learning session through healthy routines like brushing teeth, blowing noses, hand washing, smoking with bush medicines and role modelling.

In communities in Central Australia, children also learn important traditional health practices from cultural health practitioners and traditional healers. Smoking ceremonies and making bush medicine are two regular activities. At Uyenpere Atwatye, in bush baths, children are bathed in bush medicine. The bush medicine baths provide both physical and emotional health and wellbeing. The medicines prevent and respond to skin sores and general health.

In Central Australia this semester there has also been a focus on Rheumatic Heart Fever and Disease (RHF and RHD). This is experienced by many people in the community. Over the next two years we will be focusing on preventing RHD through partnerships with other organisations such as the team at Deadly Heart Trek who visited some of our communities, providing screenings for families.

IMPACT:

Our Health and Wellbeing platform takes health outside of clinics and into community, providing high quality health promotion, early prevention and intervention. We create bridges for families to engage with health services while also recognising the importance of cultural health practices for body and spirit.

In the Top End, the Children's Ground Health Team and leaders at 15 Mile collaborated with Danila Dilba Health Services to support a flu drive in 15 Mile community.

In the days leading up to the event, the Health Team actively engaged with community members, talking with families about the flu drive and were able to answer any questions or worries about the vaccine. On the day of the event, more than 30 people attended, and 14 community members received flu shots. This gathering not only provided protection against this year's flu but also enabled the community to come together and enjoy some lunch, reinforcing the importance of culturally safe and locally accessible healthcare.

IMPACT:

For families in the Top End, health is strengthening as we develop relationships with health workers and other stakeholders, creating an environment of trust and ongoing care. We are building bridges to local services and strengthening engagement and access. There can be a range of barriers facing families in accessing health services. Getting in early, preventing illness and creating effective systems in partnership with others is our goal.





Economic Development and Wellbeing

In Semester 1 of 2024, Children's Ground employed 117 First Nations people in roles across all areas including Learning, Health, Men's and Youth, Administration, Finance, Research and Evaluation, Community Development and Governance. We build pathways through education and skills development, celebrating everyone's abilities and supporting them to experience economic stability.

Staff Spotlight

Jackie T

Community Leader, Minmarama Community

Jackie T is a community leader at Minmarama community in the Top End and a Learning, Health and Support Worker at Children's Ground. She has been working at Children's Ground for five years now, since Children's Ground began in Garramilla (Darwin).

Jackie is a Larrakia woman and is leading the implementation and growth of Children's Ground in her community of Minmarama. She leads the After-Hours programs with school aged children, and has begun leading Early Years sessions while also acting as an advocate for the needs and aspirations of the community. She is proud of her community and her work at Children's Ground;

"It just makes me so happy when I see the children. The smiles on their faces. The glow of their faces when they come to Children's Ground. It makes me

glow, to see them so happy.

That's what Children's Ground is about. It's about going out into the community, leading programs with members of the community to bring a brighter future for our kids.

In the Top End we have early years now and after school programs. Before we didn't have this. To have the children come and love to come and learn, and to come with their parents who also love to come. To be happy with their children.

I think I'm just going to stick with Children's Ground for the rest of my days. Until I'm old and grey. This is what we need to do for the next generation of our kids."





Community Development and Wellbeing

Fostering community connection in Minmarama

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

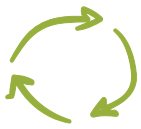
In Darwin's Minmarama and Kulaluk community, a weekly 'after-hours' program has started for school-aged children from ages 6 to 15. Each week the young people are engaging in fun, healthy activities, ranging from sports like basketball and boxing, to nature explorations at the Darwin Botanic Gardens. A highlight has been a visit from a professional AFL team, the Gold Coast Suns, who visited for a community barbeque and to run footy drills and games for the young people and their families.

Future goals for the program are to integrate Learning on Country and cultural learning sessions as well as employing young people from the community who have expressed interest in facilitating these sessions.

IMPACT:

While Children's Ground is in early stages of implementation in Darwin communities, programs like the After-Hours activities are laying the foundations for engagement, empowerment and change. These programs build community connections as well as support social and emotional wellbeing.





Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing

Culture nights at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe

This year, the community leaders at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe have introduced culture nights as part of extended hours learning for kids while also creating a space for families to strengthen their culture and language. The idea was introduced by C.T., Director of Apmerenge-ntyeye who is a holder of important cultural song and ceremony. She wants to see language, culture and law strengthened and is keen to create a safe, regular space for this to be shared and upheld.

Culture nights allow families from across Mparntwe (Alice Springs) to spend time together, to preserve and pass on traditions and knowledge. At these sessions, Elders and cultural leaders have the aim of passing on old knowledge and supporting intergenerational learning. We are at the beginning of, and we are excited about where this is heading with families working together and sometimes more than three generations coming along!

“Our kids need to know their dance and song. This is why I came to Children’s Ground. We may have different groups coming in at different times. We have a senior Elder man who is the right person to be able to do the song for his group. Other groups have different Elders. We know some of the songs and we are listening to the recordings for some of the other songs the Elders have left for us to learn. There are still many songs we don’t know.”

- C. Turner and R. Young (deceased).

IMPACT:

With the passing of Elders, the new generation of Elders have a big responsibility to continue culture and law. It takes new ideas to make sure these practices continue, especially with most people no longer living on country.

The cultural nights have allowed families to take ownership of their legacy. They have reflected on the negative media and trouble going on in town, and collectively found a solution for all generations to spend time together safely and focus on what is important. They have created a safe, positive environment that supports cultural health and fosters social and cultural bonds.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Sharing our languages with the world!

First Nations linguists and artists at Ampe-kenhe Ahele (Children's Ground Central Australia) create language resources in Central and Eastern Arrernte, Luritja and Western Arrarnta as an important tool to teach and share language.

This semester families worked with the Resource and enterprise team to produce a film clip for the single 'Merne Mwerre (Good Food)' from our album of Arrernte kid's songs 'Ampe-mape Alyelheme'. The film clip is empowering and entertaining starring songwriter and young leader Edmoond Doolan, alongside rising stars Jarrel Williams and Monisha Martin Turner.

The song, sung in both Arrernte and English is all about encouraging kids to make healthy food choices and growing strong in body and spirit. Merne Mwerre is not only a catchy educational song for Arrernte kids, but a fun celebration of culture and language for First Nations and non-First Nations kids alike.

A launch for the clip was held in Mparntwe with a community barbecue and was accompanied by additional free language resources featuring illustrations from Children's Ground artists.

This is the third film clip that has been produced by the musicians, artists and families of Ampe-kenhe Ahele, with more planned to be produced in future!

IMPACT:

Creativity is integral to our communities, and it has always been expressed in learning through music, art, storytelling and song. Creating songs and resources for our kids in our own First Language is not only important for their literacy, learning and wellbeing but sharing our language and culture with the world. The representation of First Language through learning resources has immense positive impacts on children but is also creating visibility and accessibility of language and culture.



Watch the video!





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