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## **New evidence shows First Nations solutions are leading to long term change**

Children's Ground second evaluation of its operations in Central Australia provides clear evidence that First Nations people can close the gap.

The [\*Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe \(Children's Ground Central Australia\) Evaluation Report – 2020-2022\*](#) shows that local First Nations people are leading transformational change with a new reality emerging across four communities in Alice Springs.

A new generation of children are engaged in early learning, families are engaged in employment and people across all ages are engaging in critical health promotion. First Nations leadership is on the rise and people are feeling empowered and hopeful for the future.

Significantly, the report highlights how Children's Ground is directly addressing 9 of the 17 Closing the Gap outcomes, including 'Early childhood and education and health', 'Youth engagement', 'Economic participation', 'Social and emotional wellbeing', 'Culture and languages' and more.

"This research is transformative," said Children's Ground Chair William Tilmouth.

"We continue to demonstrate that programs instigated and driven by First Nations communities lead to positive outcomes. And the evidence isn't modest. Hundreds more children are now accessing education, health and wellbeing opportunities. Adults are being employed and retaining their employment," said Mr Tilmouth.

"At the child, family and community level, people's lives are changing. You see their confidence and their sense of responsibility grow. People feel empowered, and they want to maintain and share that feeling," said Mr Tilmouth.

"Children's Ground is achieving critical outcomes in key areas where governments are struggling. First Nations solutions work. When we have the support and resources to lead and when we start from the bottom up, we achieve critical change," said Mr Tilmouth.

The evaluation of Children's Ground Central Australia from 2020-2022 reports:

- 351 children aged 0-5 years were engaged in early learning, marking a 57% increase from 223 in the 2017-2019 evaluation period.
- Child engagement in nutrition nearly doubled, with a 98% increase from 228 in 2017-2019 to 452 in 2020-2022.
- 83 local First Nations people were employed between 2020-2022, a 41% increase from 2017-2019.
- 31% of First Nations staff employed at Children's Ground (from 2017-22) had never worked in paid employment. 71% weren't employed when they started working with Children's Ground.
- 121 First Nations people engaged in training and professional development between 2020-2022.

The outcomes of the 2020-2022 evaluation are endorsed by a group of independent leading national researchers who advise and oversight Children's Ground's research and evaluation. They stated "This is an example of leading practice that should be implemented across all service and program delivery for First Nations and non-First Nations initiatives."

A pivotal aspect of the evaluation is the inclusion of First Nations voices from staff and families, with over 1,400 people engaged with Children's Ground from 2020-2022, an increase from 978 in 2017-2019.

"There is so much power in this report," said First Nations Community Researcher Veronica Doolan.

"As First Nations researchers we are engaging our own communities and working alongside them to document positive changes and on-going challenges. It's not someone from the outside telling us what's good or bad, and making decisions on our behalf. This is First Nations data sovereignty in practice," said Ms Doolan.

"We're empowered to research and report the facts about ourselves, and then use this information in ways that's appropriate for us. We're excited for the changes this could lead in our communities," said Ms Doolan.

With this evaluation report, Children's Ground continues to grow its substantial and long term evidence base, showing direct and positive impact against Closing the Gap outcomes and recommendations from key government reports.

Despite the compelling evidence, Children's Ground has been unable to secure adequate and stable, long-term government funding.

"The evidence that this approach works is undeniable. It's clear in the transformation we are seeing in communities and in the recognition we receive from independent researchers and practitioners," said Children's Ground CEO Jane Vadiveloo.

“This is a celebration of the power of philanthropy and collective investment to achieve foundational change by listening and acting on the vision of First Peoples. We need all political parties and all levels of government to take bold action to redress the serious realities faced by First Nations communities in Australia,” said Ms Vadiveloo.

“We invite government to engage with this report and commit to a bold and lasting partnership. Through funding and policy reform we can achieve real and impactful systems reform that will change the future for First Nations children and young people,” said Ms Vadiveloo.

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