

Children's Ground Impact Report

July-December
2024



Grounded in evidence: Proving the power of community-led change

A significant achievement in the second half of 2024 was the release of our 2020-2022 Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia). This landmark report provides powerful evidence that First Nations-led systems are transforming lives.

The report tracks progress across four Central Australian communities and includes the voices and experiences of more than 1,400 people. It affirms what families have long known: when culture is at the centre and communities are in control, children and families thrive.

The evaluation found that nearly nine in ten children aged zero to eight were engaging in both First Language and English learning, most for the first time. Half of all participating First Nations adults were employed in Children's Ground programs, showing a strong increase in local economic participation. Families also stepped into leadership, with more than 80 percent of participants in governance activities reporting a stronger sense of decision-making power and confidence in shaping their community's future.

In health and wellbeing, every child involved in the program demonstrated an improved understanding of hygiene, nutrition and bush foods, integrating cultural and western health knowledge in ways that felt relevant and empowering.

These outcomes were not isolated. They were connected across learning, health, employment, governance and cultural revitalisation.

The evaluation was formally endorsed by our Independent Research Advisory Group, who described it as a landmark body of evidence and recognised it as a model of best practice for First Nations-led service delivery.

Led by First Nations community researchers in partnership with Children's Ground's western-trained research team, the evaluation was grounded in both cultural and academic knowledge systems. It was overseen by Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme, the Central Australia First Nations Governance Committee, ensuring that cultural authority guided every stage of the process.

This report confirms what communities have always known. When families lead and culture is strong, children grow up with pride, power and the tools to shape their future.

Read the report:

www.childrensground.org.au/reports

EVALUATION OF AMPE-KENHE AHELHE Children's Ground in Central Australia 2020-2022



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 December 2024.



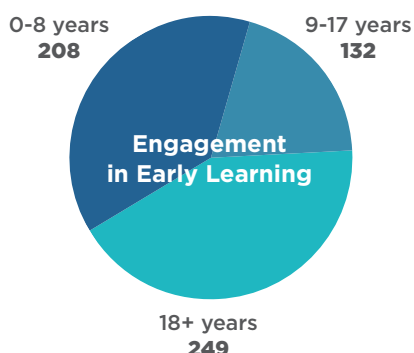
Note: Delivery of the full CG Approach is early years and primary aged learning including after hours and specialist opportunities e.g. sport, music, arts; health and wellbeing, employment, enterprise, community development - all delivered in community, culturally centred and locally governed.



Progress, growth and impact

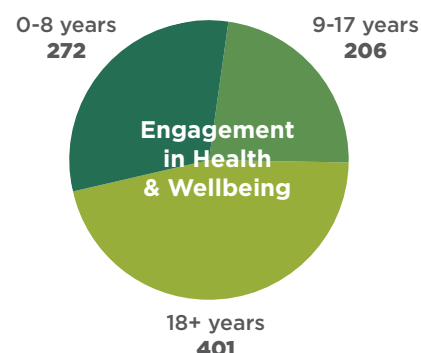
589

people engaged in **Early Learning**



879

people engaged in **health and wellbeing**



547

people engaged in **cultural learning and wellbeing**



116

First Nations people engaged in **employment**



204

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



Semester 2 marked a period of renewed growth and strong community leadership across all regions. Engagement increased across early learning, health and wellbeing, cultural practice and local governance, demonstrating the power of community-led delivery and the strength of relationships built over time. Families showed strong commitment to children's learning, health and cultural identity. Participation increased across learning, health promotion and cultural programs, with many families involved in multiple areas. Governance engagement also grew, with community members shaping programs and leading local initiatives throughout the semester.



Children's Ground Approach in action



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.

Learning on Country partnership with Yipirinya School

This semester, Children's Ground and Mpweringke Anapipe communities proudly teamed up with Yipirinya School to deliver vibrant two-way learning through hub-based sessions and overnight camps on Country. Twice a week, primary-aged children stepped outside the classroom to immerse themselves in rich, hands-on education grounded in language and Culture.

Children learnt counting, plant and animal names in Arrernte, hunted and cooked bush foods, made bush medicines, and connected deeply with Country and cultural identity. These sessions also celebrated the important role of older siblings, who supported and guided their younger brothers and sisters as leaders in learning.

Family involvement was at the heart of this success. Families consistently showed up, led activities, and created powerful community-driven learning experiences that celebrated culture, knowledge and pride.

IMPACT:

Through this partnership, children are learning in environments that nurture Culture, community and identity. On-Country education empowers children to engage deeply in their learning journey while celebrating who they are. With families at the centre, we are creating a strong generation of learners who are proud, connected and loving learning.



Children's Ground Approach in action

A living classroom at Marlkawo

At Marlkawo, learning is not confined to walls or timetables – it happens every day, through land, language and family. This semester, children and families continued to shape a model of learning that reflects the way knowledge has always been passed down: through lived experience on Country.

In the mornings, children engaged in numeracy and literacy activities aligned with western learning. In the afternoons, the focus shifted to cultural knowledge including hunting, cooking bush tucker, learning about bush medicines, and speaking in First Language.

The balance of structured learning and hands-on cultural education gave children the opportunity to build critical academic and life skills while deepening their identity. Families led the sessions, creating an environment where learning felt joyful, relevant and full of pride.

IMPACT:

At Marlkawo, learning is a whole-of-life experience. The integration of cultural and western education supports children to grow up strong in their identity, confident in their learning, and connected to the knowledge systems that have shaped their families for generations. This approach nurtures educational development as well as the social, cultural and emotional wellbeing of the whole community.



After Hours programs

Children's Ground's after-hours programs in Knuckey Lagoon, Minmarama/Kulaluk and 15 Mile have continued with energy and joy in 2024, offering safe, supportive environments where young people can connect, learn and grow.

Through strong partnerships, we delivered the Spark Box program, combining culturally relevant learning apps with nutritious snacks and guided support to build literacy skills. Young people also got active with BoxFit and Hoops4Health.

The after-hours mural project gave young people a chance to express pride in their community through art, creating a vibrant and welcoming space. Visits from the AFL team and holiday trips to the skate park and Wildlife Park added excitement and inspiration.

Alongside these partnerships, First Nations mentors led the way in building pride in healthy lifestyles, showing young people the strength of cultural leadership and community role models.

Children and young people helped shape the program themselves, contributing ideas for excursions to cultural and recreational sites that will be included in future activities.

IMPACT:

The after-hours programs are creating safe, engaging spaces where children and young people can continue to learn, play and grow outside of school hours. Through culturally grounded activities, creative expression and physical movement, they are building confidence, strengthening emotional wellbeing and deepening their love of learning.

For First Nations children, after-hours opportunities are about equity and opportunity, as well as creating space for connection, pride, and growth in environments that reflect their culture, values and community leadership.





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.

Orange Sky Mobile Laundry

In November, Children's Ground teamed up with Orange Sky Australia and the Snow Foundation to roll out a bright orange mobile laundry service in Mparntwe. In just two weeks, 217 loads of laundry were completed across five communities.

This solar-powered laundry truck is fitted with three washing machines and three dryers, providing families with the ability to wash clothes and blankets in community. This is a huge win for health, helping to prevent the spread of skin conditions like scabies that arise due to overcrowding and lack of white goods and reducing infections that can lead to serious illness, including rheumatic heart disease.

Looking ahead, the service will be fully delivered in 2025 with the added bonus of local employment opportunities, as community members join the team to run this essential service.

IMPACT:

Clean clothes and bedding are essential for good health and dignity. By bringing laundry services directly to families, Children's Ground is helping to improve environmental health outcomes while also providing meaningful employment opportunities. This practical, community-led health initiative supports prevention and builds pride.



OzHarvest partnership supports on-Country camps

Throughout the dry season, Children's Ground partnered with OzHarvest to keep the Marlkawo community well-fed and thriving during on-Country camps. With more than 30 people often attending, this partnership was a game changer.

OzHarvest supplied regular deliveries of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and even 50 kilograms of locally caught barramundi each week. The community cooked up whole fish on coals and enjoyed big bush meals together, making learning and living on Country possible for everyone.

IMPACT:

Nutritious food is a cornerstone of community wellbeing. With support from OzHarvest, Children's Ground is ensuring that on-Country learning is supported by healthy meals that nourish families and bring people together. This collaboration is making large-scale cultural learning sustainable and joyful.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Community-led Health and Early Learning leadership

This semester marked an exciting milestone in Children's Ground's work across Darwin, with each of the three communities – Knuckey Lagoon, 15 Mile and Minmarama – welcoming dedicated First Nations Health Leads and Early Years Leads. These incredible women are respected community members and passionate advocates for better health and stronger futures for children and families.

Living and working within their communities, these leaders are uniquely positioned to guide programs that reflect cultural values, priorities and knowledge systems. Their work is about shaping a health and wellbeing approach grounded in trust, care and cultural integrity.

The Women's Health Leads are working with families to identify health priorities for women and girls. They are supporting access to preventative care, coordinating service visits and delivering education around nutrition, hygiene, maternal health and chronic disease prevention. Their leadership is creating safe, supportive pathways for women to take charge of their health.

Alongside them, the Early Years Leads are embedding health into everyday learning. Through fun, play-based and on-Country sessions, they introduce children to foundational health knowledge, like brushing teeth, washing hands and staying active, within a cultural framework that supports emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

These roles are already creating ripple effects. Families are reporting stronger engagement, and children are learning with joy and confidence. Women are stepping forward, feeling heard and supported. Most importantly, the talent in community is leading the way.

IMPACT:

When health and early learning are led by people from within the community, programs become trusted, culturally safe spaces where families feel seen, respected and supported. It also creates deeper and more effective health promotion, shared knowledge and education within community through day-to-day and peer-to-peer discussions. The presence of First Nations Health Leads and Early Years Leads ensures that care is guided by lived experience, cultural knowledge and deep relationships.

This leadership is strengthening health literacy, improving early childhood development, and empowering families to take control of their wellbeing. It supports children to grow up learning strong health habits in ways that reflect their language, culture and values, laying the foundations for lifelong health and learning.

At the same time, we are creating meaningful employment and development pathways, building confidence, capability and leadership that ripple across community life. This is community-led change in action: healing, educating and strengthening the next generation from the earliest years.



Children's Ground Approach in action



Economic Development and Wellbeing

In Semester 2 of 2024, Children's Ground employed 116 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.

Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Band at Woodford Folk Festival

In December 2024, the Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Band brought Arrernte language and culture to the national stage at the Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland. Led by Myles Turner, grandson of Dr M.K. Turner OAM, the band delivered two dynamic performances and workshops that invited audiences to sing, move and learn in Arrernte.

Their music is created to keep language alive. At Woodford, they shared not only songs, but also cultural sign language and stories, showing the power of music as both education and celebration.

This opportunity supported cultural leadership, professional development and income generation. With support from Virgin Unite, the Community Benefit Fund, the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program, and Fender, the band continue to step confidently into the world of creative enterprise inspiring pride and opening new economic pathways through culture.

IMPACT:

The Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Band's performance at Woodford Folk Festival shows how culture can fuel economic development and wellbeing. By sharing music and language on a national stage, the band generated income, built professional skills and reached new audiences. This kind of creative enterprise supports sustainable livelihoods grounded in cultural knowledge, while inspiring pride and opening economic pathways for the next generation of First Nations artists, educators and cultural leaders.



Faye takes the wheel – driving community empowerment

Faye, a cultural health worker and early years support worker from Yarrenyty Arltere, completed training to earn her Light Rigid licence. This enabled her to safely drive a small community bus, helping families access Children's Ground sessions on and off Country.

On her very first day, she proudly drove into Larapinta Valley Town Camp to pick up families for an early years session. The joy on the children's faces seeing a community member in the driver's seat sparked celebration and pride across the camp.

IMPACT:

Faye's journey reflects the power of community-led economic development. Gaining her licence created new employment opportunities for herself while supporting children and families to access learning and health programs. This role strengthens economic wellbeing by building local skills, increasing workforce participation, and ensuring services are delivered by and for community. It's a clear example of how investing in people creates lasting, place-based impact.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Ampe-kenhe Art calendar – creative enterprise for children and community

In Central Australia, children painted their experiences of learning on Country, capturing stories and landscapes from Rungtutjirpa, Uyenpere Atwatye, Sandy Bore and more. These vibrant artworks were curated into the 2025 Ampe-kenhe Art Calendar, produced with artist Beci Orpin.

Sold locally and online, the calendar shared children's cultural learning across the country while generating income to reinvest in First Language and creative enterprise projects.

IMPACT:

This initiative blends culture, creativity and enterprise. The calendar celebrates children's voices and connection to Country, while simultaneously generating income, promoting First Nations art and bringing cultural knowledge into homes nationwide.



Weaving futures in Marlkawo

Women and girls at Marlkawo led a powerful continuation of cultural practice through weaving – an act of strength, learning and growing opportunity. Throughout the dry season, the daluk (women) taught the yawkyawk (young girls) how to harvest pandanus, strip and dye fibres with bush colours, and weave baskets using traditional techniques passed down through generations.

These workshops were more than skill-sharing. They were spaces of cultural connection, resilience and leadership. Young people learnt how to weave and why weaving matters as a form of identity, healing and legacy.

Importantly, the women began exploring the economic potential of their work. The baskets created during the workshops became the first steps towards developing an income stream, with plans underway to grow this into a sustainable cultural enterprise. The project blends tradition and innovation, preserving cultural knowledge while opening new opportunities for financial independence and community-led economic development.

IMPACT:

Weaving in Marlkawo is creating real economic opportunity through cultural knowledge. Families are developing income-generating activities that are locally led, culturally grounded and sustainable. This work strengthens economic wellbeing by building skills, supporting intergenerational learning and creating pathways to financial independence. It reflects a powerful model of community-driven development where Culture and economy grow side by side.





Community Development and Wellbeing

Building dignity: Community-led housing upgrades at Irrkerlantye

Following years of advocacy by families and Children's Ground, the Northern Territory Government approved funding for a long-awaited housing upgrade project at Irrkerlantye (White Gate), bringing much-needed change to a seriously neglected communities.

Seven local men, including two Elders, were employed to lead the refurbishment of four tin sheds that had served as makeshift homes for decades. Working alongside a technical builder and project manager, the team gained hands-on skills and job readiness experience as they rebuilt the structures from the ground up.

The upgrades included new concrete foundations and footings, steel framing, insulated walls and ceilings, secure doors and windows, ceiling fans, and front verandahs to provide airflow and shelter in the Central Australian heat. Each shed was connected to underground water tanks via pressure pumps and fitted with solar-powered lighting and electrical sockets, enabling families to turn on a tap, plug in a kettle, turn on a light or watch television for the very first time!

Families were central to the process. After completing the first cabin, community members assessed the upgrades and gave feedback on privacy, ventilation and accessibility, ensuring the final result was both culturally appropriate and practically sound.

The emotional impact was immediate and deeply felt. For the men involved, the experience provided meaningful paid employment and the pride of contributing directly to the wellbeing of their own families and community.

IMPACT:

This community-led project shows what is possible when people are resourced to lead change. At Irrkerlantye, families turned decades of advocacy into action, creating safe homes, building local skills and restoring dignity. This is what real investment in community leadership looks like.





Community Development and Wellbeing

■ Youth leadership across communities

Young people in Darwin communities continued to grow as leaders, taking on responsibilities that strengthened their communities and inspired those around them.

At Minmarama and Kulaluk, young people supported cultural activities and helped maintain shared community spaces. From organising fishing trips to assisting with day-to-day infrastructure needs, they contributed in ways that fostered connection and pride.

At 15 Mile, young people helped deliver after-hours basketball and football sessions. They prepared equipment, encouraged participation, and supported younger children to feel included and confident.

In Knuckey Lagoon, young people travelled to Mparntwe and participated in Utyerre Apanpe, the First Nations Educators Forum, contributing to national conversations about the future of First Nations education.

These experiences are building confidence, communication and collaboration, while deepening cultural identity and a strong sense of responsibility. Through these actions, the next generation is already influencing community life, modelling leadership and helping shape a future grounded in care, connection and cultural strength.

IMPACT:

When children and young adults take on leadership, they contribute to stronger, more connected communities. Their involvement in cultural activities, community maintenance and local decision-making is creating safer, more vibrant environments for everyone. This leadership is building skills, confidence, actively shaping the wellbeing of families and strengthening the foundations for long-term community development led by those who live it every day.



Children's Ground Approach in action



Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing

From the Land: Celebrating Culture at the Apmerenge-ntyale Festival

In October, Children's Ground proudly hosted the Apmerenge-ntyale: From the Land Festival, a powerful two-day celebration of First Nations knowledge, culture, creativity and leadership. Held in partnership with Desert Knowledge Australia and supported by the Northern Territory Government, the festival brought together hundreds of community members, educators, performers and cultural leaders on Arrernte Country.

The festival honoured the vision of the late Dr M.K. Turner OAM and celebrated the cultural framework she helped shape – Apmerenge-ntyale, meaning “from the land.” This philosophy sits at the heart of the Children's Ground Approach and guided every aspect of the event.

Families from across Central Australia came together for music, dance, language, food and storytelling. Performers included Gomeroi rapper Kobie Dee, Warnindhilyagwa singer Emily Wurramara, hip-hop collective 3%, and Mparntwe's own Dem Arrernte Mape. Local artists showcased their work, and young people took centre stage to share dance and song in First Language.

Workshops and conversations explored topics from cultural governance to education reform, and the festival became a space of learning, healing and intergenerational connection, led by community, for community.

IMPACT:

Events like the Apmerenge-ntyale Festival are vital because they create space for First Nations knowledge, language and leadership to be celebrated on community terms. They bring generations together, strengthen cultural identity and affirm the value of living culture in everyday life. These gatherings foster pride, connection and joy, while amplifying voices that are too often overlooked. They are powerful acts of cultural continuity, community wellbeing and self-determination.



Children's Ground Approach in action



Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing

Kinship and skin name creativity with Charles Darwin University

Eight First Nations artists and staff from Central Australia took part in a creative screen-printing program in partnership with Charles Darwin University (CDU). The workshops invited participants to explore their Arrernte skin names through design, transforming cultural identity into powerful visual storytelling.

Eight standout designs were transferred onto eco-dyed bags, which were later exhibited at the CDU Student Showcase at Watch This Space Gallery in Mparntwe, a proud moment for both artists and their families.

The project also led to the creation of new flashcard resources to support skin name learning in early years and primary sessions. These materials, translated into Eastern Arrernte, Western Arrarnta and Luritja, are now used to engage children in learning about kinship and cultural identity.

IMPACT:

This project brought culture and creativity together to strengthen identity, language and pride. Through art and education, families are passing on powerful knowledge and ensuring that kinship systems continue to guide and connect the next generation.



Publishing Akarre-Akityarre books with community

The Stronger Communities for Children (SCfC) team, supported by Children's Ground, partnered with local families and language speakers in the Plenty Highway region to revitalise Akarre-Akityarre languages through creative publishing.

Across Engawala, Bonya and Atitjere, community-led language classes and workshops gave rise to the development of three new children's books created by community members. Each story was written in Akarre-Akityarre and illustrated with local artwork, capturing knowledge, humour and day-to-day life in a way that speaks directly to young readers.

The books are now being used in homes, learning centres and playgroups across the region. They're tools for cultural continuity, intergenerational connection and pride in identity.

IMPACT:

When language is lived and shared, literacy thrives. These community-created books combine both First Language and English and are helping to keep endangered languages strong, while giving children the joy of seeing their own world in print. Literacy in First Language is a key determinant for literacy in additional languages such as English. This is cultural education in action, led by community, held in language and made for future generations.





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