

Children's Ground Impact Report

January-June
2025



Wear it Yellow strengthens allyship through action and awareness

This year, Wear it Yellow brought together thousands of people across the country in a growing movement to celebrate First Nations culture, recognise and learn more about our history, and act towards reconciliation.

More than 1,400 schools, workplaces and community groups participated in Wear it Yellow during National Reconciliation Week, raising over \$440,000 to support First Nations-led education, health and employment. The scale of involvement shows a national commitment to support community-led change and respect for First Peoples and culture.

Wear it Yellow provides a platform for people to engage with First Nations history, truth telling, culture and knowledge. It creates space for learning that is grounded in truth and led by First Nations voices. In classrooms, staff rooms, offices and homes, people are choosing to reflect, to learn and to act in support of a more just future.

Each year, more people are coming back with deeper understanding and a stronger purpose. Children are learning about Country and culture. Adults are learning about a history they have not heard before—and they're responding. Workplaces are shifting how they approach reconciliation with a greater recognition of the responsibility and role of non-First Nations people to lead change within their sphere of influence.

Wear it Yellow is about national action and awareness so that First Nations children have the freedom to grow up with respect and dignity, proud in their identity and connected to culture. While there is a long way to go, the energy and support for Wear it Yellow shows that change is possible when there is a shared vision for justice, and when action is grounded in truth, respect and community leadership.

We thank every school, business, community group and individual that took part. Your leadership is what helps create real change.



Bringing community leadership to Parliament

In February, Children's Ground leaders travelled to Canberra to carry the voices of families, Elders and communities who continue to call for justice and reform.

At the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, Chair William Tilmouth joined survivors, advocates and national leaders at Parliament House, seated at the Prime Minister's table. The event was a reminder of the ongoing impact of the forced removal of children, the generational and enduring trauma, and the deep need for systems that protect the connection of children to their culture, Country and family.

Throughout the week Chair William Tilmouth, Co- Director Veronica Turner and CEO Jane Vadiveloo met with Federal Ministers, advisors and representatives from the Prime Minister's Office, advocating for long-term investment in community-led solutions.

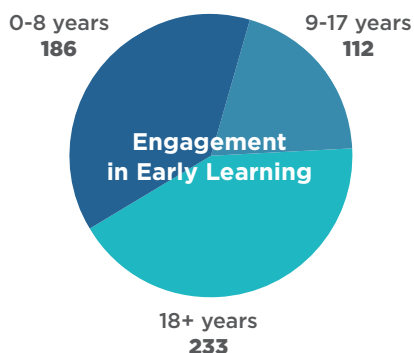
These conversations followed the February update to the national Closing the Gap data, which again reflected worsening outcomes across key indicators. Children's Ground called for bold structural reform grounded in the strength of First Nations knowledge systems and the success of community-led delivery.

While government made targeted funding announcements during the same period, Children's Ground continues to push for deep and sustained reform. The trip reinforced the critical role of advocacy alongside delivery, where voices from community are heard directly and solutions led by First Nations people are placed at the centre.

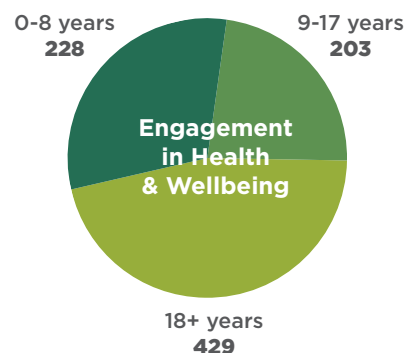


Progress, growth and impact

531
people engaged in **Early Learning**



860
people engaged in **health and wellbeing**



542
people engaged in **cultural learning and wellbeing**



119
First Nations people engaged in **employment** in our delivery regions

Overall, 154 First Nations people engaged in employment, including employment within the Stronger Communities for Children Program and First Nations staff not from Children's Ground communities.



102
First Nations people engaged in **governance** and local decision-making



Engagement across the platform remained strong in Semester 1, 2025, with families continuing to participate across learning, health, and cultural activities at significant levels. Governance engagement shifted to 102, down from 204 in the previous reporting period, reflecting the timing of formal gatherings and the challenges faced by communities in the first half of 2025. Employment was 119, compared with 116 in Semester 2 2024, influenced by seasonal workforce transitions. While some areas recorded slightly lower numbers to the previous reporting period, participation remains steady and demonstrates ongoing commitment as delivery deepens and community leadership strengthens.





Learning and Wellbeing

We centre First Nations learning and literacy as the foundation for children to grow as successful learners and to become fully multilingual. This leading practice also supports children to thrive in Western literacy and numeracy, which are critical to their future.

Early Years and Wellbeing programs are led by communities across our three regions and delivered through culturally centred, play-based learning environments.

At Akarba learning grows from Country

This semester, Elders from Yarrenyty Arltere (Larapinta Town Camp) led a long-awaited journey to Akarba, a remote and sacred homeland west of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). After several delays due to Sorry Business, the Learning and Wellbeing team, families and children were finally able to make the trip together for the first time.

Guided by senior Elder and educator Blanche, whose deep cultural authority made the visit possible, the day unfolded as a living classroom. Akarba is Blanche's homeland, and the learning centred on her story, language and knowledge. Children were introduced to their skin names, heard creation stories in language and learnt about their totems and responsibilities through song, story and direct experience with the land. They walked with Elders to identify bush foods and plants, traced family connections across generations and sat with quiet concentration as cultural knowledge was shared.

Families cooked kangaroo tail on the fire, exchanged stories under the trees and spent time together on Country. For many children it was the first time meeting extended relatives in this place. The learning was layered through language, identity, kinship and connection, all held in a setting where children felt safe, proud and strong.

IMPACT:

The visit to Akarba gave children a foundation for learning that begins in early childhood and grows from Country. Immersed in First Language and cultural knowledge, supported by Elders and family, children strengthen identity, literacy and wellbeing through lived experience.

By learning on Country, a space was created to listen, speak, observe and connect. It brought together cultural and relational knowledge with the skills and routines that support development. Surrounded by intergenerational teaching, children engaged in both structured and informal learning in a setting shaped by community. These moments, grounded in place and guided by culture, support children to grow as confident learners across language, identity and life.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Reading and counting in First Language at Uyenpwe Atwatye

At McGrath's Dam, children from Uyenpwe Atwatye (Hidden Valley) spent the day swimming, reading and learning on Country. After the water play, they sat with educators Marita and Bambi to practise counting in Arrernte using custom-made bush food counting cards. These multilingual resources, designed by First Nations artists and storytellers, support early reading and numeracy through visual learning and cultural familiarity.

Sitting in a circle, the children counted along in language, identifying local foods and learning the rhythm of numbers in their First Language. The session reinforced core early learning outcomes while building cultural confidence and language fluency from a young age.

IMPACT:

These early years sessions show how learning grows from Country, culture and language through the oldest learning systems in the world. By using bush foods and Arrernte counting cards, children are developing core literacy and numeracy in a way that reflects who they are and where they come from. Learning in First Language supports strong foundations for future education, building confidence, fluency and cultural pride from the start.



Learning through Country and conservation in the Top End

Young people from Minmarama and Kulaluk communities recently took part in a new series of After Hours learning sessions at Ludmilla and Rapid Creeks, delivered in partnership with Landcare NT. These sessions blended environmental education with First Nations knowledge systems, placing young people on Country to learn through observation, story and guided cultural practice.

At Ludmilla Creek, young people and families learned to identify local bird species using binoculars and checklists, observing their behaviour alongside tidal movements and seasonal changes. Listening to birdsong in the early evening became both a scientific and cultural practice.

At Gurambai (Rapid Creek), the focus shifted to native animals and bush foods. With support from Learning, Health and Support Worker Jackie, young people explored language and knowledge connected to the environment, including the Larrakia word "Dungalaba" for saltwater crocodile.

These sessions created a learning space that was grounded in the local landscape, where young people could develop their understanding of Country while building confidence and connection through cultural knowledge.

IMPACT:

This place-based, culturally-led learning builds knowledge that is directly connected to young people's lives. By combining ecological education with First Language and traditional knowledge, it strengthens cultural identity and fosters a deep sense of belonging. Practical, outdoor learning nurtures skills, curiosity and wellbeing while reinforcing the authority of community educators.





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.

Staying strong on Country through men's wellbeing at Irrkerlantye

Irrkerlantye (White Gate) is home to Traditional Owners who have led cultural life in Mparntwe for generations. For many years, families lived in tin sheds without secure tenure, power or water. In 2024, four new insulated cabins were built through a community-led project, employing local residents and providing safer housing for families deeply connected to this place.

With improved living conditions, men in the community are stepping further into leadership roles that strengthen daily wellbeing. Thirteen men, including Elders, are actively engaged in caring for community, supporting on-Country activities, assisting Elders with transport to essential services and providing practical help for those who are unwell or palliative. Some are leading Family Night activities, bringing families together to share food and strengthen connections, while others are helping to create a nature-based playground for children.

These men are modelling care, cultural responsibility and community leadership. Their work is grounded in cultural roles and priorities, ensuring that children see strong male role models walking alongside Elders, supporting families and creating spaces that reflect the values of the community.

IMPACT:

At Irrkerlantye, men are leading with strength to support health, wellbeing and learning in community. By caring for Elders, creating safe spaces for children and modelling cultural responsibility, they are promoting physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Their leadership builds trust, encourages participation in community life and supports the growth of the next generation with strong role models grounded in culture, family and connection to Country.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Caring for health through culture and connection in the Top End

At Minmarama, children and young people are learning about dental health through song, story and cultural connection. Led by Karen, a local First Nations Health Promotion Lead, the sessions bring together Western and First Nations knowledge to build understanding of how to care for teeth and gums. Children learn in ways that feel familiar and safe, supported by a trusted member of their community.

Each Top End community has had its own First Nations health lead. These roles are embedded within community life, creating consistent pathways for health education and support. As a senior community member, Karen brings together clinical understanding, cultural insight and strong relationships with families.

Through this work, health becomes part of everyday life. Children sing while brushing their teeth. Families have conversations about wellness. Health education is guided by community, shaped through relationships and shared in language that speaks to daily experience.

IMPACT:

Culturally led health promotion strengthens health literacy and supports the wellbeing of children and families. Local health leads build environments where clinical knowledge is shared through relationship, rhythm and story, creating space for confident, informed decision-making.

Karen's role shows the strength of community-led care. Her presence fosters trust and supports learning that continues beyond the session. This model strengthens health outcomes by embedding care within community life and recognising the leadership of those who live it every day.



Story and movement strengthening wellbeing at Burt Creek

Each week at Mpweringke (Burt Creek), children gather for Social and Emotional Wellbeing sessions guided by First Nations educators. Using animal storytelling and movement, children explore their feelings in ways that reflect the world around them. They crawl like an atyunpe (perentie), slither like an apmwe (snake) and soar like an irreyte (eaglehawk), connecting their bodies to emotions through play and imagination.

Emotional literacy, understanding and expression are important for all children, and especially important when social injustice has resulted in trauma as a lived experience for many young ones.

Grounded in Apmerngtyele, the Arrernte worldview, these sessions help children build emotional literacy while learning about the land, animals and their own place within it. For many, this is the beginning of a lifelong journey of self-awareness and cultural connection.

IMPACT:

The wellbeing sessions at Burt Creek reflect how cultural knowledge and movement can help children understand their emotions in a safe and supported way. Through storytelling and play, children are developing emotional literacy and strengthening their sense of self. These sessions nurture calmness, connection and cultural safety, laying the groundwork for lifelong wellbeing.





Economic Development and Wellbeing

In Semester 1 of 2025, Children's Ground employed 119 First Nations people across our regions in roles 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.

Mac's path reclaiming culture through work

Mac is a proud Arrernte man whose path into employment with Children's Ground has become a story of reconnection, purpose and strength. Like many from his generation, Mac grew up within systems that denied him access to his First Nations knowledge, language and cultural leadership. Returning to this knowledge has reshaped not only his work, but his vision for the future of his family.

When Mac first joined the Children's Ground team he spoke of growing up without his language and the weight of that loss. Today, he sees his grandson singing in Arrernte after a single learning session. He sees the change already beginning.

Mac now works full-time in the Men's and Youth team supporting operations, maintenance, education and cultural learning across Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. Through this role, he has returned to his homelands, reconnected with kin and is learning language from Elders, many of whom are family. His work supports a platform of local delivery that brings together learning, health and cultural knowledge, grounded in Arrernte systems and led by community.

IMPACT:

Mac's journey shows how employment can rebuild connection, foster leadership and strengthen identity. It's never too late!

Through this work he is walking with others who are returning to Country, learning language and shaping futures for their families.

Economic development at Children's Ground creates employment pathways that are rooted in purpose, care and cultural strength. As people grow in their roles, they carry others with them. With each step, they are building futures where children grow up strong in identity, connected to kin and surrounded by the knowledge systems that sustain life and belonging.



Children's Ground Approach in action

Growing community leadership through the Young Alidju Group

At 15 Mile, the Young Alidju group (young women) continues to grow into a vibrant space for cultural learning, creative practice and youth engagement. These weekly sessions are led and supported by local women who are stepping into leadership roles, drawing on cultural knowledge to guide young people through painting, bush foods, cooking and storytelling.

Local women leaders from community are working closely with Children's Ground staff to plan and deliver each session – sharing knowledge while developing skills in coordination, mentoring and youth support. This work is not only supporting young people to connect to culture, it is strengthening intergenerational connections, as well as local employment pathways by building confidence and capability among community leaders.

IMPACT:

The Young Alidju program demonstrates how employment and leadership can grow from within community. First Nations culture is based on intergenerational structures. This program builds on this strength, connecting young women with older women. This in turn strengthens connections, knowledge, mentoring and support across community. Local women are leading with cultural authority and creating opportunities for young people to learn on Country, take part in cultural activities and build practical skills for future work. Their roles provide paid employment within community while developing expertise in event coordination, youth engagement and cultural education.

Young people see the talent and strength in their community with women leading in ways that make it possible for them to pursue similar roles, continue cultural teaching and take on leadership positions that benefit both their families and community.



Creative skills and youth engagement in Knuckey Lagoon

In Knuckey Lagoon community, creative learning is opening new pathways for youth engagement. Hugo, who works closely with young people in the community, has introduced videography sessions that give participants hands-on skills in camera work, storytelling and production, while building confidence and encouraging creative expression.

The response has been enthusiastic, with young participants capturing community life, sharing stories and learning how to use technology as a tool for storytelling and cultural preservation. This work is helping young people to develop creative and technical skills alongside cultural knowledge, showing how contemporary tools can be used to strengthen identity and share community voices.

IMPACT:

These sessions demonstrate the value of creative programs that strengthen youth voices, confidence and engagement and encourage community leadership. Videography builds practical skills in storytelling, technology and production, opening pathways for learning and potential future employment. Most importantly, it gives young people the opportunity to see their voices valued and their stories shared, fostering pride and confidence in their identity and community.





Community Development and Wellbeing

Children's Ground works with families to build strong, safe and connected communities. We support cultural authority, local governance and community-led decision-making.

Through intergenerational centres, families access services, celebrate culture and shape their future. By strengthening community leadership, we help grow the social and cultural foundations that support long-term wellbeing.

Strengthening local voices at 15 Mile

In 2025, weekly community governance meetings at 15 Mile have continued to grow as a central space for families and residents to come together. Held every Monday in the community hall and shared over lunch, the gatherings create time for people to discuss priorities, raise concerns and celebrate achievements. Ideas raised in these sessions have informed community events, guided after-hours activities and helped identify shared priorities for the year ahead. The meetings also provide an opportunity for services to work directly with families in a way that responds to local needs and respects cultural leadership.

IMPACT:

These meetings are strengthening local governance by ensuring decisions are shaped by those who live in the community. They provide a practical way for residents to influence programs, plan activities and address issues collectively. By meeting regularly in an inclusive environment, families are creating a safer, stronger and more connected 15 Mile.



Youth Governance begins in Minmarama and Kulaluk

A group of young people gathered for the first Youth Governance session, coming together to design and create a Yarning stick to use during conversations about their dreams and visions for Minmarama and Kulaluk. The session was filled with creative energy and a sense of ownership, as the Yarning stick took shape as a symbol of youth voice in community decision making.

IMPACT:

Youth governance is creating a pathway for young people to take an active role in shaping their community. Through creative, culturally relevant activities, they are developing skills in leadership, collaboration and accountability. This early engagement builds the confidence and experience needed to carry community priorities forward into the future.





Community Development and Wellbeing

Leadership in action at Uyenpere Atwatya

At Uyenpere Atwatya, more than 80 family members gathered for Family Night, a vibrant expression of local leadership, cultural authority and collective decision-making. Families came together across generations and kinship groups to share stories, eat, watch a movie and shape their vision for a purpose built community centre.

The night was grounded in Arrernte leadership. Men prepared the space and ensured the area was ready to welcome everyone. Senior leaders led open discussions around the fire, speaking first in Arrernte and then in English. Conversations flowed from family needs to service design, with a strong focus on creating a centre that belongs to everyone, a place for learning, health, safety and connection. Children listened as Elders spoke, watching their families lead with clarity, care and strength.

All areas of the Children's Ground platform were present, walking alongside community to support governance, decision-making and delivery. The gathering reflected a whole-of-community approach where services operate in partnership with families and cultural leadership is central.

IMPACT:

This is an example of local governance and shows what happens when families are resourced to lead. Cultural authority guided every part of the evening, and the vision that emerged was clear. Families want a space where everyone feels welcome, where children grow up strong in culture, and where the next generation sees leadership in action.

The event reflects the purpose of community development at Children's Ground. Community centres are not just sites of service, they are places of cultural continuity, collective care and shared governance. By supporting families to lead and shape decisions, we are strengthening the systems that sustain community life.



Children's Ground Approach in action



Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing

Culture is at the heart of Children's Ground. It guides how children learn, how families care for each other, and how communities stay strong. Led by Elders, educators and artists, cultural knowledge and creative practice are embedded across all areas.

Children grow with a strong sense of identity, grounded in first languages, cultural systems and creative expression. Through this, they develop the confidence and adaptability to walk in both cultural and global worlds.

A new energy on Arrernte Country

In early 2025, over 60 First Nations staff and non-First Nations colleagues gathered at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground Central Australia) to focus and plan for the year, ensuring that culture and language continues to lead our work. We are watching the next generation of Elders stepping into their leadership after significant loss in recent years.

The in-service was guided by the principle of Amperengtyle, the Arrernte worldview and legacy of the late Dr MK Turner OAM, which continues to shape the foundation of Children's Ground. Each day began in language, with sessions flowing into planning, cultural practice and leadership development. Cultural educators led the process, sharing knowledge of kinship, anthepe (traditional women's dance) and language that is now central to program design and delivery.

One of the most powerful moments came when a First Nations senior cultural team member, once too shy to speak in meetings, was recognised for her leadership. She has since stepped into the role of Co-Director. Her journey speaks to the strength of a workplace where cultural identity is celebrated and leadership grows through care, trust and connection.

IMPACT:

This in-service recentred cultural leadership across Children's Ground in Central Australia. Programs are shaped through weekly Amperengtyle planning sessions, where First Nations educators guide delivery through language, kinship and Country. Western trained educators use this foundation to create meaningful learning sessions and pathways for children in rich learning environment.

First Nations learning systems are the oldest in the world. Children and families are engaging in learning because their culture and language is reflected, because children are set up to succeed and their knowledge and identity is valued. Critical thinking, exploration, connection and active learning are skills that translate to the broader learning journey and success.





Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing

Weaving knowledge across generations

In Knuckey Lagoon, children and young women are learning the full cycle of traditional weaving practice with Sylvia, a respected master weaver and cultural educator. Through Children's Ground, Sylvia has been working with the women's group and early learning sessions to pass on her knowledge, from collecting pandanus and stripping fibre to preparing natural dyes and weaving intricate designs.

Children are exploring the textures and movements of pandanus, learning to twist and shape with their hands. For older girls, the work deepens. They learn not only the technical skill of weaving, but the story behind each pattern, the responsibilities of women's knowledge, and the connection to Country that grounds the practice.

Sylvia often shares her own journey with the group, reflecting on how she learned from her grandmother and mother. In this way, she becomes a living bridge between generations, holding cultural memory and strengthening identity through action.

IMPACT:

This work reflects a system of experiential education grounded in cultural authority and community knowledge. Through cultural practice, children and young people are developing fine motor skills, cultural knowledge and creative confidence. They are learning through doing, surrounded by family and guided by lived tradition. These sessions build cultural capacity in the community and ensure knowledge stays active and relevant.



Cultural learning on the coast with Knuckey Lagoon

On a recent bush trip, Knuckey Lagoon children and families gathered on the beach with community leaders Sylvia and Pawpaw to share stories, cook together and explore the mangroves. The day was rich with learning, as children helped collect shellfish and cook kangaroo tail and vegetables, learning about health, nutrition, the environment, the seasons, how to prepare food over fire and care for Country with respect.

Sylvia showed children how to build and light a cooking fire, while Pawpaw introduced traditional knowledge about mangrove worms and tidal movement. The younger girls learned how to cast fishing lines, watched the crab catch and helped clean and prepare the food. As the fire burned down and the meal was shared, families yarned about culture, language and growing up strong on Country.

IMPACT:

This bush trip reflects cultural education embedded in daily life. Children learned on Country with Elders, gaining skills in traditional food preparation, seasonal knowledge and language. These experiences strengthen identity, creativity and belonging. Children are developing their learning skills through experiential practices of watching, listening and doing. They are ensuring cultural knowledge stays alive and relevant for future generations while deepening the connection between young people, their families and Country.





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