

# Annual Report



2025

**Children's Ground honours the sacred lands of all First Nations peoples. We pay our respects to our ancestors and Elders, to Traditional Owners and custodians of these lands. These lands were not ceded.**

In Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in Central Australia, we work on the land of the Arrernte people. In the Top End of the Northern Territory, we work in West Arnhem on the land of the Bolmo people. In Garramilla (Darwin), we work on the land of the Larrakia people. In Naarm (Melbourne), we work on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We are thankful to live and work on these lands.

### **Our commitment to First Nations peoples**

To honour our past, to listen to the voices of our ancestors, to respect our Elders and to honour the land. We pay our respects to all First Nations peoples across the many Nations who continue to live by the laws and customs that have evolved for over 65,000 years.



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**Children’s Ground is an Aboriginal Community Controlled and Owned Organisation. Our governance comes from the land and from the people.**

We are driving long-term change through First Nations Culture and leadership; transforming education, health, wellbeing, employment and community life. We are breaking cycles of injustice and disadvantage with self determination, evidence, equity and opportunity.

# Our vision

First Nations peoples across Australia have self-determination and enjoy social, cultural, political and economic justice.

Our next generation of children know and celebrate their Culture and identity, have freedom of choice and expression and can live with opportunity, peace, harmony and wellbeing.

Australians recognise our shared history and celebrate First Nations Culture and strength.

# Our purpose

To achieve systemic reform over 25 years through the Children's Ground Approach, led by our First Nations people, and to evidence this approach for national reform.

To celebrate and uplift First Nations knowledge, creating equity and access to high quality education, health and economy in community for the next generation of children.

# What we value

- Respect
- Inclusive and collective leadership
- Self-determination and agency
- Honesty
- Family
- Bravery and disruption
- Love
- Creativity
- Humility

Learn more about our Approach at Appendix A (page 76)



# Message from the Co Chairs

Reflecting how authority has always been held in our communities, with women and men working alongside each other and making decisions collectively, Children's Ground is now guided through a shared model of leadership, with both of us carrying responsibility together. Evelyn stepped into the role of Co Chair in late 2025.

We have worked alongside each other over many years across Central Australia and the Northern Territory, through community organisations, governance and national work. We know the communities, the families and the systems we are dealing with, and we bring that into how we lead our work. Taking this on together strengthens continuity and steadies the path ahead.

It supports shared leadership, strengthens decision making and keeps this work grounded in community

authority over the long term. This is part of our continued succession planning, that is being undertaken across the organisation, from Elders to senior management.

This year has shown the strength and aspiration that sits within our communities. We are not just an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, we are an Aboriginal Community Owned Organisation. We have a governance structure that reinvigorates our cultural governance that rests with each community – and this is our success. It is not enough to have a Board that sits under Western laws and defines what it means to be Aboriginal Community Controlled. At Children's Ground, community must own, must be the leading voice and their solutions must drive our future.

It has also required courage and persistence as governments continue to make decisions that shape the lives of our children without trusting the knowledge and leadership held in community.

Across the Northern Territory and beyond, we have seen Government decisions and legislative changes that move our children further away from family and culture.

Amendments to youth justice regulations and ongoing delays in community led initiatives have reinforced a consistent pattern. Governments respond to the visible symptoms of distress while the deeper causes remain unaddressed. Our children are still being removed, still being locked up and still being failed by systems that claim to protect them.

Criminalising children weakens families and deepens harm. Real safety is built through culture, through family and through opportunity. It is built on Country, in language and through strong community life. That is where prevention exists, and where long term change must be grounded.

In our communities, prevention is being built in the way it should be, through culture, family, opportunity and strong community life. We are seeing steady growth in the strength of community led solutions. Across regions, leadership is deepening and confidence in how work is carried is increasing. Families are shaping the direction of learning, health and community life, and this is changing how children grow up.

In our communities, education, health and wellbeing continues to be led by cultural authority, Elders and Community Leads. Children are building critical health foundations while developing in literacy, numeracy and digital skills alongside cultural knowledges. The power of Country and culture creates safety for our children to grow with confidence, self-determination and pride.

This year we have seen more young people stepping forward with responsibility. They are contributing to programs, supporting younger children and taking part in research and evaluation. Women have held the backbone, but we are seeing more men standing alongside our women and this is critical to long term change, guiding younger generations through mentoring and responsibility. Employment is grounded in culture, Country, long term pathways and skills development, providing access to opportunities many have not had before.

This is steady growth that we have seen year on year. It shows communities standing stronger in their own authority and responsibility, shaping their future with confidence and backing their children with clear direction.

**We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go and we face structural barriers to empowerment that are deeply concerning.**

This year the Australian Government shared the final report for an independent evaluation of the Children's Ground Approach, commissioned through the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The evaluation confirmed our Approach as a leading, community led, place based and First Nations led model for addressing complex disadvantage prevention and early intervention. It confirmed alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and key government policies. The key recommendation was for the Government to fully fund the operations of our organisation in the Northern Territory.

Since May 2025 Children's Ground has engaged with Government to implement the recommendations. As at April 2026 there remains no government commitment. We continue to work with all levels of government to realise this recommendation.

Further concern remains regarding the lack of Government progress on approval for the construction of an intergenerational community centre and youth facility in a major town camp in Alice Springs. After securing independent funding over two years ago, Children's Ground continues to wait on both the Northern Territory and Australian Governments approval processes for this critical community infrastructure. This is a community led project that will deliver local employment, safety and activities for children and young people and families where they live. Families want kids off the streets and this could be happening now. A solution created by community, funding secured by community, that will empower and create change in community, but there's a lack of Government support. These ongoing structural barriers are serious.

Children's Ground is a movement for transformative change to replace the status quo. A highlight this year was William receiving the Australian Human Rights Medal and recognition of his life long work and advocacy. This recognition sits with the generations who have carried this work and with the communities who continue to lead it. It reflects decades of effort from Elders, families and community members who have held firm to culture and responsibility.

We see this work every day. Families are taking a stronger role in decision making. Staff are building skills in planning, governance and coordination. Elders continue to guide with patience and strength. Children are growing up confident in who they are.

Our children deserve systems that support this. Education that strengthens identity while building the skills needed to navigate contemporary Australia. Health that invests in prevention. Justice that protects dignity and keeps children close to family and culture. The national conversation continues to speak about reform and partnership. Our position remains clear. Change must be led by communities, supported through sustained investment and carried with genuine authority.

We acknowledge the Elders who guide this work. We acknowledge the families who carry responsibility for children every day. We acknowledge the staff who continue to work with commitment and humility. We acknowledge the partners who understand that long term change requires patience and consistency. We thank the Board and the Research Advisory Committee for their guidance, expertise and oversight.

The responsibility to act sits with all of us. When children are supported through culture, opportunity and self determination, they grow up strong in who they are and prepared for the world around them. That is what we see, and that is what this work continues to build.

**William Tilmouth and Evelyn Schaber  
Co Chairs, Children's Ground**



# Message from the CEO

In 2025, a compelling independent Australian Government evaluation of Children's Ground highlighted our strength of governance, local ownership and evidenced impact and change.

While we are still early in our 25 year journey and face barriers in implementing the full approach, what has been achieved by communities continues to inspire hope and show what is possible.

This change is all the more remarkable against the background of the continued injustice our leaders live with daily, including frightening rates of incarceration, child removals, ill health, poor housing, racism and heightened risk arising from political debate about crime and cultural rights. Despite this, there is an unwavering focus on the future as communities continue the steady work of raising children who are creating change.

Public discourse has increasingly focused on punishment and control. In our communities, the focus has remained on prevention, belonging and opportunity. This year we have lost young people, adults and old people. Every family. There is never a time without sorry business.

Through these periods First Nations leaders and staff balanced organisational leadership and the future with cultural obligations to family and kin. Children have continued to arrive at learning spaces, gather on Country, sit with Elders, learn and grow. Health and safety remains a focus as we work to a future of less funerals, less hospitals, less imprisonment, less injustice, less child removal and more employment, education and cultural celebration.

The Children's Ground Approach was designed to create a First Nations led system that surrounds and creates opportunity for children from before birth into adulthood. In 2025 that system has continued to operate with increasing maturity and coordination. Early childhood learning has remained grounded in First Language and cultural knowledge, with literacy, numeracy and digital confidence developing alongside identity. Health teams have supported mothers, babies and children through consistent health access and prevention focused engagement. Increased resources have allowed us to create extended hours delivery and engage more young people and men in employment. After hours is a time of risk and need for many. Creating opportunities for children, young people and families in both town and out bush has been a highlight of the year.

Employment of local people has become a driving force of change. With over 200 staff and 70% First Nations staff, the majority are from local communities.

We are working to create a new reality, working families, regular income, role models and uplifting of cultural expertise and safety. Employment has expanded across learning, health, community development and operational roles, with more positions held by people from community who carry both professional and cultural responsibility.

Children are developing skills that allow them to move confidently between cultural knowledge systems and contemporary education. Young people are stepping into responsibility during extended hours programs and community events, supporting younger children and contributing to delivery. Community leaders are engaging directly with government, philanthropic partners and national forums, articulating reform priorities with clarity and authority.

In 2025 we earned income of \$17,217,550. Children's Ground Limited ended the year with a surplus of \$518,924. Our financial goal in 2025 was to grow the Approach and retained earnings to ensure a secure cash flow and mitigate financial risk.

A central strategic priority remains securing long term, coordinated investment at scale to fully implement the Children's Ground Approach in three regions with the resources, standards and quality required for long term sustainability and change. The Australian Government commissioned evaluation provides compelling evidence and clear recommendations for full, flexible, multi departmental funding aligned to long horizon reform. Translating those recommendations into practical agreements remains a focus for the coming year. Philanthropic partnership continues to provide critical stability, and strengthening a ten year runway remains essential as the organisation grows and fiscal risk increases.

Children's Ground's collective public private investment strategy saw 40.5% of income from government and 59.5% from philanthropy, corporate partners, general donations and other income.

This year has also required disciplined organisational stewardship. Increased staffing has required structural growth and refinement to ensure internal systems and infrastructure can meet our growing needs. Risk management processes and operational systems have matured. As the Children's Ground Approach scales, maintaining fidelity to its standards and cultural foundations remains central.

As Children's Ground's national reform agenda expands, the tension between systems change work and place-based delivery requires careful balance. Strategic partnerships across education, language, research and leadership are advancing a clear roadmap for reform shaped by First Nations authority. This work must be properly resourced so that community delivery retains its quality, cultural grounding and integrity.

Governance remains a defining strength of the organisation.

First Nations Cultural Governance and the First Nations controlled Western governance Board operate in partnership, ensuring decisions are strategically rigorous and culturally anchored. Stability across senior leadership positions has created deep expertise and continuity. In 2025, this was strengthened through the establishment of a co chair model, reflecting First Nations governance where women and men hold authority together. Evelyn Schaber stepped into the role alongside William, bringing experience across community, education and governance, and strengthening leadership across both community and system engagement. This supports continuity and strengthens succession as the organisation progresses its long term work. Succession planning remains a key focus, with deliberate transition pathways for all senior positions and a First Nations leadership program continuing to build the next generation of leaders across the organisation.

The policy environment during 2025 has required clear and consistent advocacy. Rates of youth incarceration remain deeply concerning. Legislative changes that lower the age of criminal responsibility and expand punitive responses risk entrenching harm. Evidence consistently supports prevention, early intervention and community led systems that strengthen safety through culture, family and opportunity. Children deserve courage and leadership from those who hold power. Children's Ground will continue to advocate for investment and reform that protects dignity and upholds rights.

William's continued leadership has shaped the vision, courage and direction of Children's Ground, guided by his Elders. His recognition this year through the Australian Human Rights Commission's 2025 Human Rights Medal represents the culmination of a lifetime devoted to advancing the voice, rights and self determination of First Nations peoples. We congratulate William on this well deserved recognition.

The most powerful indicators of progress continue to be visible in daily life. The path ahead requires persistence. Securing coordinated funding reform. Strengthening infrastructure to support intergenerational delivery. Expanding local employment and leadership pathways. Progressing national alliances. Protecting the integrity of community voice and vision.

I extend my gratitude to our Elders, Cultural Governance members and Board and Research Advisory Group for their wisdom and strategic guidance. I acknowledge the extraordinary commitment of staff who carry this work each day with care and professionalism. I am profoundly grateful to our philanthropic and government partners whose long term commitment and belief in this vision make sustained, generational change possible. Above all, I acknowledge the children and families whose strength and generosity shape the future being built. Children's Ground remains committed to ensuring First Nations children grow up with dignity, opportunity and freedom, grounded in culture and supported by systems that honour their authority and potential.

**Jane Vadiveloo**  
**CEO, Children's Ground**

# 2025 data snapshot

**1502**

community members across generations engaged with Children's Ground.

## Learning and Wellbeing



**287**

children (0-8 years) engaged in early learning activities in their First Language and Culture as well as in English.

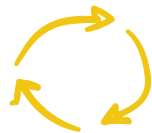
## Health and Wellbeing



**1299**

children and their family members engaged in targeted and universal health promotion and support.

## Economic Development and Wellbeing



**196**

community-based First Nations people were employed with Children's Ground, role modelling active engagement in work and leadership for children and young people.

An additional 29 First Nations people were employed from other Nations across Australia. Data includes First Nations staff employed in Stronger Communities for Children sites.

## Community Development and Wellbeing



**173**

community members engaged in governance, designing and directing Children's Ground in their communities, for their children and families.

## Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing



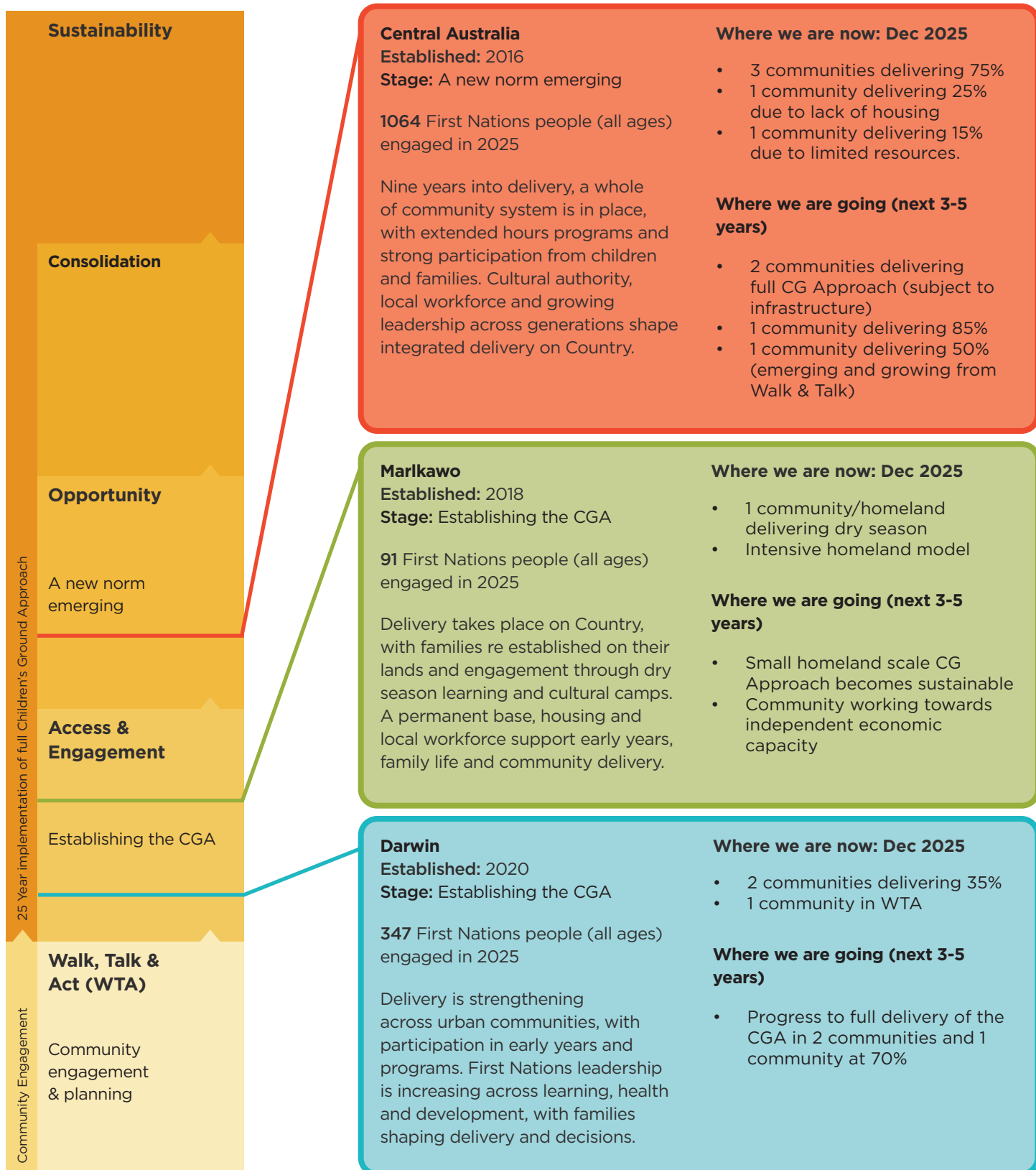
**837**

children, young people and families engaged in cultural knowledge and practice including strengthening and revitalisation of First Languages.

# How each region is tracking on our 25-year Approach

This scale shows where each region sits in implementing the Children's Ground 25 year approach. It reflects the level of delivery achieved across reform areas and across the community. Position is shaped by funding, delivery capacity and time, which determine how much of the full approach can be implemented.

The percentages below indicate the extent the Children's Ground Approach (CGA) has been implemented in each location.



# Independent Evaluation confirms the Children's Ground Approach

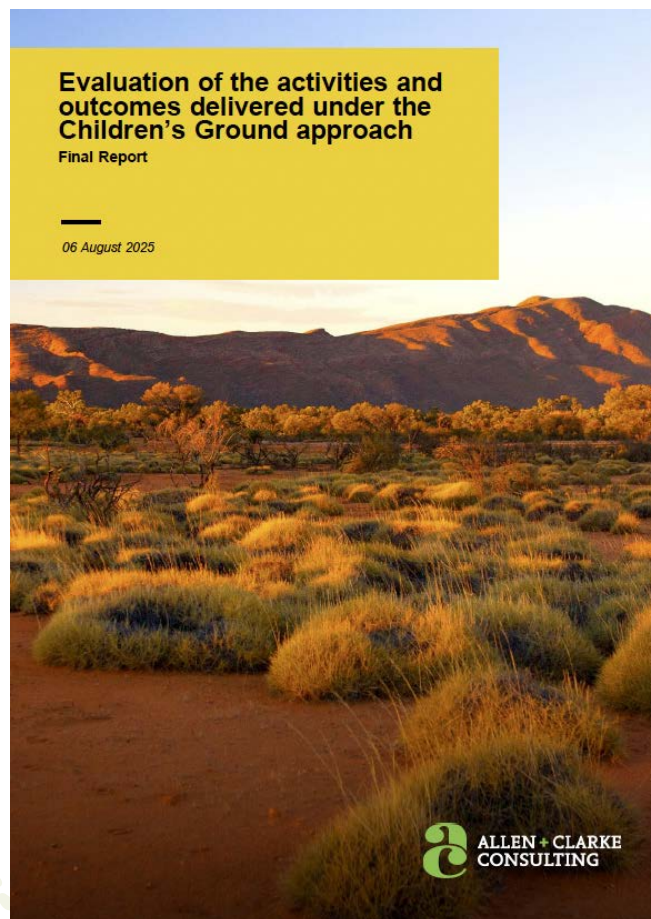
In 2025, Children's Ground received the final report of an independent evaluation of the Children's Ground Approach conducted by Allen + Clarke Consulting, commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

The evaluation confirms that the Children's Ground Approach is being delivered effectively and is aligned with leading practice in prevention, early intervention and place based, First Nations led design. It finds that the integrated model is contributing to improved outcomes and is operating as intended in complex community contexts.

The evaluation provides clear evidence of what is required to sustain and extend this work.

It sets out a pathway for coordinated, multi departmental investment aligned to the scale and timeframe needed to address intergenerational disadvantage. This creates a clear foundation for the next phase of Children's Ground, strengthening delivery across regions and supporting continued growth of a community led system.

Children's Ground looks forward to working with government to translate these recommendations into long term investment and coordinated action that supports children, families and communities over time.



## Purpose of the Evaluation

In 2024, the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department) engaged Allen + Clarke Consulting to undertake an evaluation of the Children's Ground Approach with a view to making recommendations to inform the Australian Government's consideration of future funding for Children's Ground.

### The evaluation was designed to answer five Key Evaluation Questions:

- How well are the activities being implemented under the Children's Ground Approach?
- How effective is the Children's Ground Approach?
- To what extent are the activities delivered under the Children's Ground Approach contributing to improved outcomes?
- How well do the activities delivered under the Children's Ground Approach align with government priorities?
- What do the evaluation findings mean for how the Australian Government funds Children's Ground?

## Evaluation Findings

### Implementation

Children's Ground delivers a wide range of mutually supporting activities to First Nations people in communities facing significant challenges such as overcrowding, environmental health and limited services. Activities are delivered by community members employed or volunteering for Children's Ground in partnership with non-community staff.

*"Activities are implemented well (i.e., efficiently and effectively) under the Children's Ground approach, primarily because their delivery responds directly to the needs and circumstances of the communities that Children's Ground works with."*

The cost of implementation was considered reasonable given context and alignment with leading practice. Greater efficiency and effectiveness will require consistent and long-term funding.

### Effectiveness

*"The Children's Ground approach is an effective mechanism for service provision and aligns with leading practice for prevention and responsiveness to complex disadvantage through holistic design, place-based design and First Nations-led design."*

Children's Ground shows strong capability in leading whole-of-community and First Nations system design. Its employment pathway addresses key barriers to work and its community governance processes empower people and enable control of the approach. These factors greatly increase effectiveness.

### Contribution to outcomes

The evaluation found significant progress towards shorter-term outcomes across all service areas.

*"the Children's Ground approach makes a direct contribution to First Nations children engaging in early years, cultural, and on-country learning, First Nations people engaging in health promotion and support, and First Nations employment."*

The evaluation found significant progress towards shorter-term outcomes across all service areas.

### Alignment with government priorities

The evaluation found that activities delivered under the Children's Ground approach align closely with government priorities, including:

- 10 Closing the Gap outcomes (and indirectly with seven more)
- 10 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan priorities (and indirectly with two)
- All eight Early Years Strategy outcomes
- All five Early Childhood Strategy goals
- All four National Justice Reinvestment Program principles.

## Funding Implications

Allen + Clarke found "strong evidence that Children's Ground is achieving the shorter-term access and engagement outcomes specified in the program logic." It recommended that the Australian Government establish "a comprehensive multi-departmental, long-term funding approach for Children's Ground" including an initial seven-year commitment.

### Departments identified as best placed to fund specific service areas include:

- Department of Health Disability and Ageing
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Education
- National Indigenous Australians Agency
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Attorney-General's Department.

## Key Recommendations

Government commits to a coordinated, multi-departmental funding approach over an initial seven-year period to support long-term delivery and evidence of outcomes in Central Australia and Darwin.

Government establishes an inter-agency governance group to oversee funding implementation, including Northern Territory Government representation where costs are shared.

Children's Ground should increase engagement with under-represented groups to strengthen its potential as a justice reinvestment option.

Children's Ground should consider enhancements to its already effective cultural governance processes.

Children's Ground should strengthen and formalise relationships with other service providers in Central Australia and Darwin.

The Australian Government and Children's Ground should establish processes to share and generate data that measure progress towards outcomes.

Children's Ground should improve communications with government stakeholders.

Children's Ground should continue to work to expand the amount and maximise the effectiveness of philanthropic funding.

## Conclusion

**The evaluation found that Children's Ground is achieving and progressing service and systems reform through First Nations-led design, delivery and leadership. It concluded that the Children's Ground approach provides a strong, evidence-based foundation for achieving long-term, generational change in First Nations communities.**

# Evelyn Schaber appointed Co Chair

Children's Ground announced the appointment of Evelyn Schaber as Co Chair, recognising the dual and equal roles of men and women in First Nations governance. The appointment was ratified by the Board in December, confirming Evelyn's role as part of the organisation's long term leadership.

Evelyn is an Arrernte woman from Central Australia and a senior First Nations leader with extensive experience across governance, education and community led organisations. Born and raised in Mparntwe Alice Springs, she has worked for more than five decades supporting Aboriginal self determination and building systems grounded in community authority.

Her leadership spans the establishment of key First Nations institutions in the Northern Territory, contributions to national reform processes and senior roles in tertiary education. Evelyn has worked with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Aboriginal Legal Aid and the Central Land Council during their early operational periods. She also contributed to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody through the Underlying Issues Unit and has held roles with the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Evelyn is a senior Aboriginal educator with over thirty years' experience across vocational and higher education. She holds a double degree in Teaching and Education.

Evelyn joins founding Chair, William Tilmouth, as Co Chair, strengthening Children's Ground's governance through shared leadership grounded in First Nations cultural authority. The appointment supports continuity, succession planning and long term leadership stability as the organisation continues delivery of its 25 year community led approach.

The Co Chair model reflects cultural governance principles, with shared responsibility, gendered leadership roles and collective decision making at its centre. This structure strengthens Children's Ground's ability to engage across communities, systems and institutions at local, Territory and national levels, ensuring leadership remains connected to community priorities and accountable to children and families.



Evelyn's appointment reflects a long standing commitment to leadership that is grounded in culture, language and community. As Co Chair, she brings deep knowledge of community systems and governance, alongside a strong focus on ensuring that children grow up with a clear sense of identity, belonging and connection to culture.

*Stepping into this role is about continuing the vision of the old girl, Dr M.K. Turner OAM. Her vision was grounded in cultural knowledge and a clear understanding of what children and communities need to thrive over the long term... this role represents a commitment to carrying that vision forward.*

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**Evelyn Schaber**  
Co Chair

# William Tilmouth awarded 2025 Australian Human Rights Medal

In December, Arrernte leader and Children's Ground Founding Chair, William Tilmouth, received the Australian Human Rights Medal.

The award recognises decades of leadership grounded in lived experience, cultural authority and a deep commitment to the rights, dignity, voices, self determination and futures of children, families and communities.

William's life has been shaped by his forced removal as a child, injustice and the long journey home to family, language and Country. These experiences have guided his lifelong commitment to advancing the rights of First Nations children and families and strengthening community authority across Central Australia and the Northern Territory.

Over many decades, William has worked alongside communities to guide organisations and influence systems so they reflect the priorities, knowledge, leadership and solutions of First Nations people. After returning home to Alice Springs, he worked with Tangentyere Council and Alice Springs Youth Support Services. He later served as Executive Director of Tangentyere Council from 1988 to 2010 and held leadership roles including Central Australian ATSIC Regional Chair and Chair of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Health Service.

As Founding Chair of Children's Ground, William has played a central role in establishing a model grounded in culture, Elders and community voice. This approach places children, families and community at the centre of decision making and supports long term change through a 25 year commitment led by community authority. His leadership continues to guide the organisation's direction, ensuring it remains accountable to the communities it serves and responsive to children's lives.

William's leadership carries deep responsibility to people and place. It reflects a lifetime of work built through relationships, cultural care and a clear commitment to dignity and self determination.

He carries forward the knowledge and strength of those who came before him while creating space for the next generation to grow with confidence, identity and purpose.



This recognition honours the leadership William carries on behalf of the communities he walks with. It reflects the strength of a vision grounded in justice and cultural authority, and a future where children and families are supported to grow strong in culture and community.

In accepting the award, William stood alongside his grandson and said:

*What drives me is the strength and the determination of our people. I see solutions in every community. I see the culture, vision and the leadership of our people. I have hope for the future generations. I see the brilliance of our young people. I have hope for our children, that our children can grow up free from oppression, violence, fear, poverty and discrimination."*

**William Tilmouth**

Co Chair and recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Award



## January

- 2025 begins with staff across regions coming together for planning, reflection and preparation, strengthening governance and aligning community priorities for the year ahead.
- January 26: Children's Ground hosted an online conversation led by Central Australia and Top End communities, bringing forward community voices, history and lived experience, and supporting truth telling, reflection and greater understanding of our shared history as a nation.

Teams from across regions came together at the beginning of 2025 for in service, building connection and preparing for the year ahead.



## February

- Children's Ground learning delivery commences for 2025 across all regions. Children, families and communities in full swing in learning, health and community development programs and on Country.
- Chair William Tilmouth attends the Apology to the Stolen Generations Anniversary Breakfast at Parliament House. A delegation of our leaders meet with Ministers and political stakeholders, continuing advocacy for long term investment in community led reform.
- Learning on Country - In Central Australia, early years children walk across the hills identifying animals and mimicking their sounds, singing together as they learn through movement and observation on Country. (Read more about Children's Ground in Central Australia on page 22).

We celebrated the women and girls across our regions on International Women's Day, recognising their leadership in learning, health and community life.



## March

- At Yarrenyty Arltere, young people prepare the basketball court for a community family night, cooking a barbecue and later door knocking to share leftover meals with families.
- CEO Jane Vadiveloo delivers a keynote address at the INSPIRE National Early Childhood Conference, sharing the Children's Ground Approach and the role of culture and identity in systems reform alongside leaders from Central Australia.
- In Central Australia and the Top End, young people begin shaping and planning the Extended Hours Program, proposing trips to waterholes, town pool excursions, arts sessions, basketball games and cultural camps.
- We co-hosted the ALIVE symposium in Mparntwe. Focused on mental health, we contributed expertise on culturally determined approaches to social and emotional wellbeing (Learn more on page 54).

## April

- Minmarama holds an all in community day, bringing together Extended Hours, Early Years and Women's Group programs (Read more about Children's Ground in Garramilla on page 40).
- At Uyenpere Atwatye, integrated health learning sessions bring together Arrernte and Western health knowledge, bush medicine, health education and Orange Sky laundry on site supporting families
- Children's Ground hosts a creative space at Kids Day Out with the Good Friday Appeal in Naarm, celebrating shared history, culture and children's creativity.



## May

- First Nations' educators in Mparntwe participate in professional learning grounded in Apmeregentyele, deepening shared understanding of Arrernte systems of knowledge and practice.
- Wear it Yellow raises more than \$430,000 to support children and families to access education, health and wellbeing programs in their communities.
- In the lead up to NAIDOC Week, we release a series of resources featuring leaders from Central Australia and Top End leaders speaking about culture, language and leadership across generations.



We contributed to *Indigenous Business Australia's Impact Report 2024*, sharing community insights to strengthen pathways to financial wellbeing.

## June

- In Minmarama, families paint self portraits and family images on canvas, with children explaining their artwork and sharing pride in culture and kinship.
- First Nations staff present at the AIATSIS Summit, contributing to national dialogue on research and reform (Learn more on page 54).
- Our End of Financial Year campaign funds two new buses for Central Australia, expanding access to homelands for language learning and cultural leadership on Country.
- The dry season delivery begins in Marlkawo with new staff given a traditional welcome to community and Country, and the community preparing for the season ahead (Read more about Children's Ground in Marlkawo on page 32)



# 2025 highlights

July - December

## July

- We release a public statement opposing amendments to the NT Youth Justice Regulations, calling for investment in prevention and community led solutions (Learn more on page 53).
- NAIDOC Week marks 50 years. We host an Open Day in Mparntwe featuring anthepe, bead making, live music and leadership from Elders and young people, alongside community celebrations in Minmarama and Kulaluk where families cook kangaroo tail and barramundi in ground ovens and teach bush medicine.
- Three First Nations staff attend the LEGO SPIRIT international gathering in British Columbia, sharing Arrernte approaches to early years education and maternal child health with Indigenous leaders from across the world.
- In Marlkawo, the first dry season cultural camp sees families walk to a waterfall, gather to honour ancestors before swimming, and guide children in storytelling and learning on their traditional lands.



International Youth Day sees young people in the Top End lead storytelling through photography, sharing their aspirations and future pathways.

## August

- The Utyerre Apanpe First Nations Educators Forum convenes on Larrakia Country, bringing together more than sixty educators from twenty Nations to advance a national First Nations led education pathway (Learn more on page 52).
- A cohort of staff present at the Puliima National Indigenous Languages and Technology Conference in Garramilla, contributing to national conversations on language revitalisation and education reform.
- Our Maternal and Child Health team strengthens safe sleeping education across community, supporting families to use traditional urtne and coolamon baskets alongside practical guidance for newborn care (Read more on page 84).



## September

- Thipe-akerte: About Birds opens at Watch This Space, featuring the work of the late Mrs T Ryder alongside sculpture and paintings from her family.
- During National Child Protection Week, families gather in Mparntwe to share food, honour those in Sorry Business and centre culture and family as the foundation of child safety, joined by the Federal Minister for Social Services, Tanya Plibersek.
- At the We Are More gathering in Mparntwe, we contribute to national dialogue on transforming learning systems.
- It's Marlkawo's fourth cultural camp of the dry season, and children are mapping kinship connections, swimming in local waterholes, collecting bush foods and learning language through community led sessions on Country.



## October



- William Tilmouth speaks with ABC Radio National about community led reform and our 25-year Approach.
- In Marlkawo, young people repair water systems, repaint community signs and keep shared areas clean, alongside early years sessions focused on reading, cooking and drawing.
- Research and Evaluation team members attend the Australian Evaluation Society Conference in Canberra through the AES Scholarship program.
- In Central Australia, children are building strong Western learning skills alongside cultural knowledge, using yerrampe (honey ants) as the focus for structured learning. Children count and measure the ants they collect, then return to the learning space to draw, sequence and write short stories in English, strengthening literacy and numeracy through real world experience (Read more on page 82).

We release our 2026 Ampe-kenhe Art Calendar, featuring works by young artists sharing Country through their own perspectives.

## November



- Central Australia staff attend the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education in Aotearoa, visiting a Māori immersion early years centre and presenting the Children's Ground Approach to global Indigenous educators.
- In West Arnhem, early years children work side by side to paint a large Kunwinjku freshwater crocodile, learning language as they shape modjarrkki across the canvas (Read more on page 90).
- The 15 Mile Young Alidju Group walk across the floodplains at Fogg Dam, collecting lily pad pods, identifying buffalo and geese, and discussing seasonal knowledge and harvesting practices on Limilngan Wulna Country.

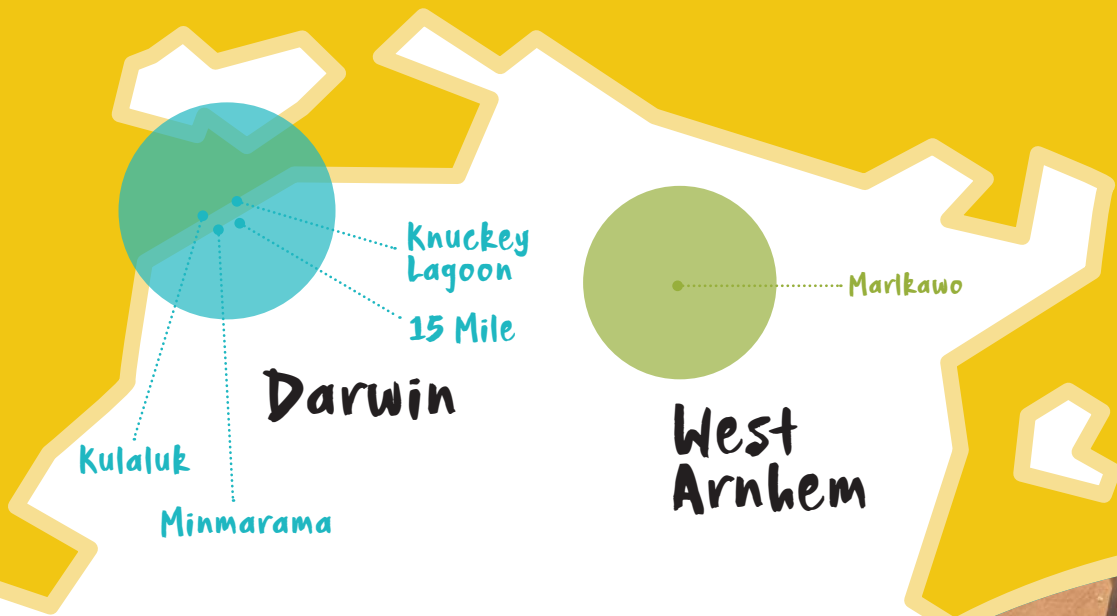
## December

- Founding Chair William Tilmouth receives the 2025 Australian Human Rights Medal, recognised for decades of leadership grounded in cultural authority and commitment to children and community (Read more on page 15).
- Across all communities, families gather for Christmas celebrations where children receive their learning reports and reflect on a year of growth in culture, language and confidence.



# Where we work



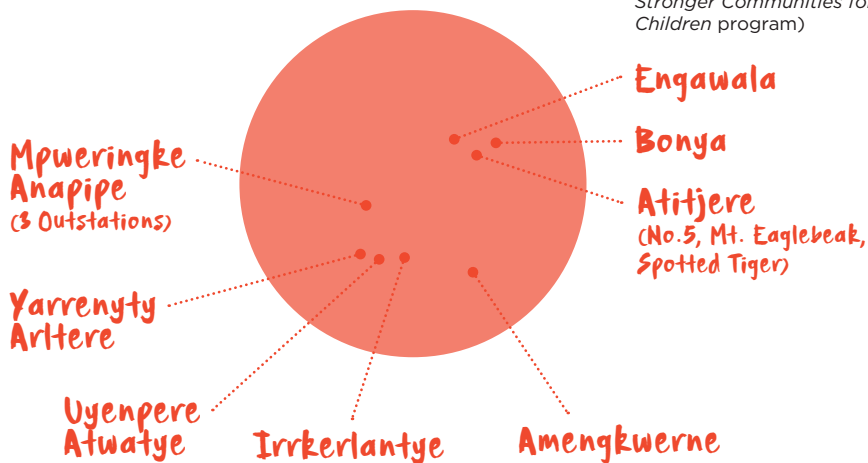


# Northern Territory

## Central Australia

### Plenty Highway Region

(Australian Government Stronger Communities for Children program)



# Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe



In Central Australia, communities deliver Children’s Ground on Central and Eastern Arrernte and Western Arrarnta Country in and around Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

## Five communities lead the Children’s Ground Approach in Central Australia:

- Mpweringke Anapine (Consisting of three Outstations north of Mparntwe)
- Uyenpere Atwatye (Hidden Valley Town Camp, Mparntwe)
- Irrkerlantye (White Gate Town camp, Mparntwe)
- Yarrenyty Arltere (Larrapinta Valley Town Camp, Mparntwe)
- Amengkwerne
- Children’s Ground is also the facilitating partner for the federally funded Stronger Communities for Children program along the Plenty Highway in the remote communities of Engawala and Atitjere (220km+ north of Mparntwe).

## Progress in implementation and delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach (CGA)

2025 marked 9 years of delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach in Central Australia, showing progression from establishment to sustained, community led delivery.





## Regional summary

Nine years into delivery, the Children's Ground Approach in Central Australia continues to strengthen as a whole of community, whole of life system grounded in cultural authority, family responsibility and connection to Country.

Children continue to grow up surrounded by family and community, moving between learning, care, cultural responsibility and daily activity in environments where they are known and supported. Leadership has strengthened across generations, with Elders guiding direction and younger leaders stepping into responsibility across learning, health, employment and community life.

Extended hours delivery has expanded across communities, creating consistent opportunities in the afternoons, evenings and weekends. These periods remain critical for children and young people, providing structured activity, connection and support at times when community stress can be high. Engagement of men and young people in employment has also increased, strengthening participation and leadership across community.

Central Australia continues to share its work beyond the region. Language, music and cultural practice are presented across the Northern Territory and nationally, while First Nations staff participate in international exchanges. At the same time, next generation Elders continue to strengthen in their roles, carrying cultural authority forward in community life.

# 1064

children, young people and adults engaged with Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe in 2025.

## Highlights

- Extended hours delivery established across communities, creating opportunities beyond standard service hours
- Increased participation of men and young people in employment
- First Nations staff sharing knowledge and practice nationally and internationally
- Next generation Elders strengthening leadership following the passing of senior leaders
- Children continuing to grow up on Country, supported by family, culture and community, building foundations for long term wellbeing

## Challenges

- Lack of government action on community infrastructure continues to limit full place based delivery
- Two years ago Children's Ground secured a commitment to independent funding for a quality intergenerational community centre for children and families, as well as a youth facility. Approved and fully funded intergenerational and youth centre at Uyenpere Atwatye has not progressed due to lack of Territory and Australian Government approvals.

### The impact of this is:

- Delivery continues into community rather than from within it, limiting consistency and governance
- Restricted access to safe, dedicated spaces for children and young people, particularly during afternoons, evenings and weekends
- Reduced capacity to realise full cultural, employment and community outcomes of an integrated, place based approach
- Community led delivery provides local employment, safety and activities for children, young people and families in their own communities, with limited Government support constraining sustainability, scale and integration with broader service systems



# Learning and Wellbeing

Learning in 2025 continued to combine rich Learning on Country with Western based learning, delivered in-community, at our learning Hub in town and out on Country. Guided by Arrernte knowledge systems, learning stayed grounded in First Language and culture, family and responsibility. Adapting to seasonal change, Sorry Business and community priorities allowed children and families to stay connected and engage throughout the year.

Across the year, children and families travelled regularly for learning, supported by increased access to transport and flexible delivery. Learning took place on Country, at outstations and within community spaces, supporting continuity while respecting cultural obligations and community life. Early years learning remained a strong focus, with play based sessions building communication, routine and social confidence, supported by daily learning in First Language and multilingual resources developed by First Nations educators.

As children grow older, learning expanded through primary aged learning and extended hours activities. Children strengthened literacy and numeracy and on Country experiences, observation and problem solving, while older children increasingly supported younger ones, building leadership and confidence across age groups.

[Visit Appendix B \(page 82\) to read more about Learning and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.](#)

## In practice

- Learning planned around where families are, with sessions delivered in town, on homelands and on Country
- Extended hours learning supporting engagement after school, in the evenings and on weekends
- Literacy and numeracy through practical tasks such as counting, sorting, storytelling and shared reading
- Older children taking on roles within sessions, supporting younger children and helping lead activities

38

children (6-11 years) engaged in primary aged learning support

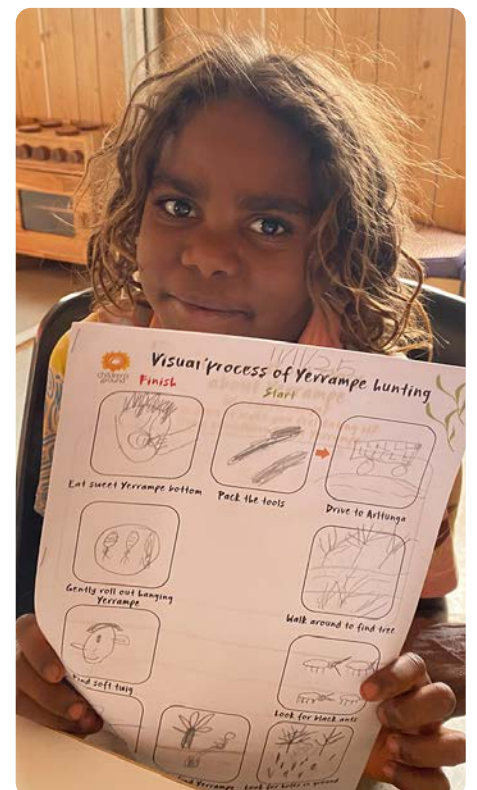
152

children (0-5 years) engaged in early years learning (alongside 255 family members, 18+ years)

*Without Children's Ground, there wouldn't be an early learning program out in community, and children... would just be sitting at home and not learning or have opportunities to be out on Country.*

**Fiona Turner**

Senior Arrernte Educator/Teacher Specialist





# Health and Wellbeing

Health delivery in 2025 delivered early intervention, health access, chronic health support, prevention and continuity of care. Prevention and health literacy continue to be a key focus with health and wellbeing carried through everyday routines and community life to support families, from pregnancy through early childhood and across the life course. Traditional healers, First Nations health workers and Western trained practitioners brought together cultural and Western health expertise.

Health promotion was embedded into daily learning and community activity, with children practising routines such as hand washing, face washing and skin checks in familiar environments. Families participated alongside children, reinforcing these practices at home and in community.

Maternal and Child Health remained central. Weekly Menhenge nhenge sessions provided a consistent space for mothers, babies and caregivers to connect and access support. Cultural practices such as baby smoking ceremonies and bush medicine baths were delivered alongside clinical care access, supporting families in ways that

reflected both cultural and Western Maternal and Child Health expertise.

Our nutrition program continues to be foundational to child health promotion and prevention.

The partnership with Orange Sky has provided two trucks run by Children's Ground and staffed by local community members. This in-community laundry service is in constant demand and is an entry to broader health promotion discussions, providing critical hygiene in communities of high overcrowding.

Our social and emotional wellbeing staff provide support

for children, adults and families in response to trauma, emotional wellbeing and social supports.

Partnerships with local health providers has been instrumental, increasing access and engagement in health services and early intervention.

**Visit Appendix B (page 84) to read more about Health and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Weekly Menhenge nhenge sessions supporting maternal and child health
- Daily nutrition program
- Health promotion embedded in daily routines and learning environments
- Community based partnerships supporting healthy homes and infection prevention
- Health staff working alongside families to support access to services, follow up care and ongoing support
- Social and emotional wellbeing

907

people (all ages) engaged in health promotion and support (incl. 275 children aged 0-8 years)

743

people (all ages) engaged in nutrition education and increased nutritional intake (incl. 172 children 0-5 years)

60

children (0-3 years) and 137 adults (18+ years) engaged in maternal and child health promotion

532

people (all ages) engaged in social/emotional wellbeing promotion and support

234

people (all ages) were supported to engage with clinical health



# Economic Development and Wellbeing

Employment continued to strengthen through roles that are grounded in community, culture and long term participation. First Nations employment expanded across learning, health, men's and youth programs, community development and operational roles, with a growing focus on youth employment.

A local long term workforce, arising from and supporting the talent in community is our goal. Increased employment of men and young people was a highlight. Flexible structures supported people to remain engaged in work during periods of Sorry Business, poor health and caring responsibilities, enabling sustained participation rather than short term engagement.

Connection to Country, language and leadership remained central. People built skills through structured training, on the job learning, mentoring

and increasing responsibility, while contributing directly to outcomes for children and families. Employment also supported reconnection to homelands and language, linking economic participation with cultural responsibility.

Economic wellbeing was further supported through practical skill building, including financial literacy activities focused on income, superannuation and essential services, strengthening confidence and decision making in everyday life.

Visit [Appendix B \(page 86\)](#) to read more about **Economic Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Community members employed across learning, health and program delivery roles
- Work structured to allow participation during periods of cultural obligation and family responsibility
- Staff building skills through formal training, day to day delivery, reflection and increased responsibility
- Financial literacy support linked to everyday decisions such as budgeting, bills and household needs

84

local community-based local Nation staff were employed at Ampekenhe Ahelhe in 2025

89

First Nations staff, local and non-local, were employed with Ampekenhe Ahelhe in 2025

*Without the local First Nations people, the children wouldn't have the knowledge or feel belonging to the community in which they live. Without language and culture, they would be lost*

Loveleen Kaur and Susan Walker  
Administrative Coordinators





# Community Development and Wellbeing

Community Development and Wellbeing focused on strengthening spaces for connection, decision making and shared responsibility. Family nights, gatherings and governance discussions remained central across town camps, homelands and community spaces, bringing together children, families and Elders.

Intergenerational family and community centres are at the heart of the Children's Ground Approach. While we continue to struggle with infrastructure, in each community this space of safety and inclusion is created as part of our key principles and delivery. This provides an environment for engagement, community decision making and integrated responsive service access and delivery.

These spaces supported connection during periods of pressure, including times of Sorry Business, and ensured that community voices continued to guide planning and delivery. Leadership was strengthened across generations, with Elders guiding discussions and young people participating in community events and responsibilities.

Key to community development and wellbeing is local governance.

Each community governs the Children's Ground Approach for their community, captured in community plans. Regular governance meetings in community have made sure we are on track against community priorities. We focus on safety, wellbeing and inclusion, and we celebrate culture.

Place based work also supported improvements in living environments, reinforcing the connection between community spaces, wellbeing and collective care. Through shared activity and governance, community members continued to shape how programs are delivered and carried forward.

**Visit Appendix B (page 88) to read more about Community Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Community governance meetings
- Place based delivery – safety and bringing everyone together
- Family nights bringing together children, families and Elders through shared meals and activities
- Community members contributing to planning through discussions, meetings and informal conversations
- Young people supporting setup, activities and younger children during community events
- Elders guiding conversations and decision making in community spaces

# 116

First Nations community members (16+ years) engaged in governance and decisionmaking

*We are proud to be making a change for the future, and keeping culture strong, and supporting the younger ones to learn traditional ways on country*

**First Nations men**  
Artwemape (Men's Space)





# Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing

Our cultures have always had creativity at the heart of learning, health and wellbeing. Music, song, painting, dance, language and being on Country. The 'Ground' for our 'Children' is everything.

Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing underpins all delivery. It is in our Learning on Country, our health knowledge systems, our workforce and talent, and in building identity and safety for our children, families and communities. This year it was everywhere!

Across the year, children and families took part in activities including music making, bead and jewellery creation, clapstick making, clay work and painting. Materials were often collected on Country, such as seeds, wood, ochre and clay, linking creative practice directly to place and reinforcing cultural knowledge through hands on experience. These activities supported children to learn language, story and process while building confidence and skill.

Music and performance were shared beyond daily sessions through public platforms and events. Arrernte children's songs from Ampe mape Alyelheme were performed on ABC Education, and live performances

took place at events such as NAIDOC Week Open Day, sharing language, music and storytelling more broadly.

Visual art was also shared through exhibitions and community events. The Thihe akerte: About Birds exhibition at Watch This Space Gallery featured works by the late Mrs T Ryder alongside artworks by family members, reflecting intergenerational knowledge through art. Community celebrations brought together music and dance, making, creating space for children, families and Elders to share culture together.

Through these activities, cultural knowledge, language and responsibility continued to be strengthened. Children learned by doing alongside family, Elders and artists - celebrating identity and connection to Country.

**Visit Appendix B (page 90) to read more about Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Embedded across the Children's Ground Approach
- Art, music and cultural practice embedded in daily learning and community life
- Public sharing of language and creative work through performances and events
- Development of First Language resources including digital books



613

children and adults engaged in cultural learning and wellbeing

*We're making a positive change with young people*

**Roland Ferber**  
Youth worker



# Stronger communities for children – Plenty Highway

Children's Ground is the facilitating partner for the Australian Government's Stronger Communities for Children (SCfC) program on Plenty Highway.

Co-ordinated by Children's Ground and directed by the Local Community Board, the program concentrates on strengthening the new generation's cultural knowledge, health and wellbeing, increasing employment, education and enterprise possibilities in the region. We apply the Children's Ground principles and practice to this growing program.

In 2025, the strength and leadership of young people was a major highlight. Children, young people, families and Elders came together through sport, learning on Country, cultural practice and leadership. Having a regional hub has made an enormous difference, supporting local governance and creating a space for intergenerational activities for children and adults, strengthening relationships and community pride.

A visit by the Children's Ground Board brought leaders, families and young people together on Country to share priorities and long term vision, focusing on governance, employment and delivery grounded in cultural authority and community decision making.

Young people remained strongly connected through football, camps and local activities. The growth of the Plenty Highway Pinktails and Redtails football teams reflected strong participation and youth leadership in organising travel and training.

Learning on Country remained central, with children and young people engaging in bush medicine, hunting, bush walks and creative activities. Early learning was supported through playgroup environments, with older youth contributing to activities and care.

Health and wellbeing were strengthened through physical activity and early support. Workshops addressed alcohol, drug, tobacco and domestic violence awareness, while sport supported fitness and confidence. Mums and bubs gatherings created space for connection and early childhood support.

Leadership and shared responsibility were evident throughout the year, with regional gatherings supporting planning and decision making, and young people stepping into leadership through events and community activities.

## In practice

- Football programs supporting participation, travel and youth leadership
- Learning on Country through bush medicine, hunting, bush walks and making
- Playgroup sessions supporting early learning through culture, play and shared care
- Right Tracks workshops addressing alcohol, drug, tobacco and domestic violence awareness
- Mums and bubs gatherings supporting early childhood and family connection
- Youth leadership in organising activities, travel and participation
- Regional governance gatherings supporting shared planning and decision making



# 63

community-based First Nations staff were employed from SCfC communities in 2025.





# Wurdurd Garriyigarrmerren



In the Top End of the Northern Territory we are led by the community of Marlkawo on Bolmo Country in West Arnhem Land.

Marlkawo is a small and extremely remote community, with Maningrida over three hours away by road. Traditional Owners chose to establish Children’s Ground so families could return to Country and access learning, health and support within their own community. Over the past eight years, this vision has been realised, with families re-establishing themselves on their traditional lands and returning home permanently.

Through sustained effort, housing has been revitalised, living and learning spaces created and a permanent base established for community life. This has been a determined journey, shaped by family, loss and the realities of remoteness, with growing strength in young people carrying forward culture and responsibility.

## Progress in implementation and delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach (CGA)

2025 marked 8 years of delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach in Marlkawo, showing progression from establishment to sustained delivery with increasing community leadership.





## Regional summary

Delivery in Marlkawo continues to be shaped by return to Country, with families re-establishing themselves on their lands and building a place where children can live, learn and grow on and through Country.

This was the vision of Traditional Owners, to bring families back to Country and ensure access to learning, health and support in place. That vision has taken form through rebuilding housing, creating living and learning spaces and establishing a permanent base where families can return home.

A dry season model guides delivery. During the wet, families relocate and access support from Darwin, Gunbalanya and Kakadu. During the dry season, families return to Country to work, learn and revitalise wellbeing. Families spend extended periods on Country, where culture and learning camps create rhythm. Everyday community life carries learning, health, governance and shared responsibility. Children are surrounded by routines and engaged adults, with early learning, shared meals, time on Country and creative practice together.

Community Development coordinators live in Malkawo during the dry season, working with families to coordinate delivery. Learning, health and program staff from Darwin provide regional support through visits.

Malbak Aboriginal Corporation, established through the support of Children's Ground and the vision of community, has developed its enterprise focus to build long term economic opportunity on Country.

91

children, young people and adults engaged with Wurdurd Garriygarmmerren in 2025.

## Highlights

- Six culture and learning camps providing intensive learning across the dry season
- Families returning to Country for extended periods, strengthening connection to culture and wellbeing
- Bininj educators, Community Leads and staff carrying planning, delivery and reflection across all areas of work
- Early Years learning led by First Nations educators
- Governance meetings strengthening shared decision making and accountability
- Community development work engaging young men improving housing, learning spaces and environmental health while creating local employment
- Children growing up on Country within consistent routines, supported by family, culture and daily responsibility, and away from the stress of larger communities.
- Ongoing coordination to access clinics, medication and external health services across distance
- Growth and development of Malbak Aboriginal Corporation
- Fulfilling the wishes of the old people who said 'the country was waiting for families to return.' Now the families have returned.

## Challenges

- Extreme remoteness limits access to infrastructure, services and consistent supply chains
- Wet season isolation restricts year round delivery and requires a seasonal model



# Learning and Wellbeing

Learning in 2025 was shaped by everyday community life and extended through a dry season cultural camp model. While six camps were held on Country across the year, learning also took place daily within community through early years routines, shared activity and time spent together.

Learning was guided by Bininj knowledge and leadership, adapting to seasonal conditions, travel across homelands, limited infrastructure and the need to respond to weather and access on Country.

Early years learning continued to build on foundations established in previous seasons. Children engaged through the Balabala Learning Centre, where reading, writing, counting and naming animals in local language and English were embedded into daily routines alongside art, drawing, sensory play and shared meals. Morning breakfast programs supported early learning through books, conversation and creative activity, helping children settle into familiar rhythms.

Learning on Country strengthened this everyday learning. During dry season camps, children and families travelled to cultural sites, rivers and homelands.

Learning took place through observation, listening and direct experience, with Elders and Community Leads sharing stories and knowledge connected to place. Bush food collection, fishing and cooking supported understanding of environment, seasons and responsibility for Country.

Western learning was integrated alongside cultural knowledge, with literacy and numeracy practised through reading, writing, discussion and counting. Cultural mapping introduced observation, recording and mapping concepts, including GPS alongside storytelling and art.

Across the year, learning was led by Bininj educators, who carried responsibility for planning, delivery and learning spaces, with many stepping into head educator roles and leading with confidence and authority.

Visit [Appendix B \(page 82\)](#) to read more about Learning and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.

## In practice

- Early years learning delivered from the Balabala through breakfast, reading, creative activity and play based routines
- Learning on Country through bush trips, fishing, cooking and time with Elders and Community Leads
- Cultural mapping combining storytelling, art and GPS recording on Country
- Literacy and numeracy practised through reading, writing, counting and conversation in daily activity



29

children (0-15 years)  
engaged in learning

38

family members (18+ years)  
engaged in  
early years learning



# Health and Wellbeing

Health in Marlkawo was carried through daily routines including hygiene, nutrition and support to attend clinics and access medication within community life, on Country and supporting community leaders who have had to relocate to Darwin for health reasons.

Daily breakfast programs formed a consistent starting point. Children gathered to eat together, establishing routine while reinforcing hygiene practices including hand washing, face washing, teeth brushing and care of personal items. A 'Healthy Routines' box provided the materials needed to support these practices in a remote setting.

Food and nutrition were supported through shared cooking and meals across community life and time on Country. Meals were planned and prepared collectively, including during bush trips where food and equipment needed to be packed and transported. Fish, turtle and bush foods such as green plums were collected and prepared as part of daily eating, reinforcing knowledge of season and care for the body.

Physical wellbeing was shaped through daily activity, with swimming, walking, play and informal sport carried throughout the day.

Marlkawo families live with a range of chronic health issues and access to health services is critical. This involves coordination with Red Lily Health, clinics in Gunbulunya and Jabiru and specialists services in Darwin. There are no clinical health services within three hours of Marlkawo. Health promotion, prevention and management of skin issues such as wound care, scabies and boils are supported by the team.

Environmental health was maintained through a zero waste system, rubbish removal, composting and upkeep of water systems and community spaces.

[Visit Appendix B \(page 84\) to read more about Health and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.](#)

## In practice

- Being on Country, settling spirit and promoting cultural and emotional wellbeing
- Healthy Routines box used daily to support hand washing, teeth brushing and personal care
- Food planning and packing for bush trips to ensure safe storage, transport and preparation on Country
- Coordinating travel to Maningrida for clinic visits and medication collection
- Coordination with Darwin health teams through community visits and online follow up
- Health management of chronic illnesses as well as preventative measures such as skin health and nutrition
- Zero waste system implemented, including rubbish removal, composting and separation of waste streams

80

people engaged in health promotion and support (incl. 30 children aged 0-15 years)

50

people (all ages) engaged in social/emotional wellbeing promotion and support

63

people engaged in nutrition education and increased nutritional intake (incl. 26 children 0-15 years)

29

people (all ages) who were supported to engage with clinical health





# Economic Development and Wellbeing

In 2025 we focused on strengthening employment, role sharing and sustainability within our seasonal, remote delivery model. Work was shaped by the realities of dry season operation, with roles structured to be carried locally, shared across the team and sustained over time.

Marlkawo is a small homeland operation that is led by Bininj staff who hold core roles across delivery, learning, culture, health and wellbeing. Marlkawo staff have established themselves over many years as skilled educators and practitioners, combining Bininj and Western expertise. During the dry season, key employment opportunities allow families to sustain themselves on Country.

Economic wellbeing is being developed through Children's Ground and the development of Malkbak Aboriginal Corporation with a focus on enterprise.

Many Marlkawo staff are highly skilled and in demand across the region.

There is high mobility and a flexible employment model to support responsive employment. Despite limited resources, it also allows for a range of community members to engage in some employment over the Dry Season. Training and skill development focused on administrative tasks, digital tools and planning processes. Building these skills supported self determination and reduced reliance on external coordination.

Visit [Appendix B \(page 86\)](#) to read more about **Economic Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Bininj staff carrying education, camp coordination and daily operations on Country
- Development of Head Educator, Community Development and operational roles based on existing capability
- Roles shared across staff to maintain delivery during and between camps
- Training in administration, digital tools and planning to support independent delivery
- Adjusting responsibilities and workloads to manage fatigue and sustain participation

**27**  
local community-based local Nation staff were employed at Wurdurd Garriygarmmerren in 2025

**28**  
First Nations staff, local and non-local, were employed at Wurdurd Garriygarmmerren in 2025





# Community Development and Wellbeing

Community Development and Wellbeing is underpinned by the power of being on traditional lands, fully place based and families leading through Bininj governance. Programs are planned, delivered and reviewed with confidence, holding decision making and accountability within the community.

Governance processes were active throughout the season, with meetings held during each camp to support planning, set up and reflection. These spaces were used to review what was working, identify where changes were needed and agree on next steps together. When things did not go as planned, the team reflected and adjusted their approach. When things went well, achievements were recognised and built upon, strengthening collective ownership of outcomes.

Community Development work also focused on building local capacity to support this leadership. Staff strengthened skills in note taking, meeting participation and data entry, contributing to governance processes and program coordination. The community development positions (non-Bininj) supported the planning, delivery and logistics, as well as local employment.

Place making remained central to this work and continued to be led by young men.

Maintaining housing, water systems, kitchens and shared spaces supported health, safety and daily functioning. A growing Place Making team carried this work across the season.

Marlkawo is the Children's Ground Approach in practice in a small homeland model. Integrated delivery across health, learning and culture, local employment, place based, and led and delivered by local families. With almost no government funding, families have developed their community to be a place they can return to in the dry season, live on Country, undertake their cultural responsibilities to Country and create a place for children and young people to connect, be secure, safe, learn and be healthy.. The end of year Christmas party was planned and delivered entirely by the Marlkawo team, with responsibilities allocated across placemaking, education, leadership and coordination..

Visit [Appendix B \(page 88\)](#) to read more about **Community Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Governance meetings held during each camp for planning, setup and reflection
- Staff undertaking note taking, data entry and meeting coordination as part of delivery
- Place making work maintaining housing, water systems, kitchens and shared spaces
- Community events planned and delivered by local staff with defined roles across teams
- Ongoing coordination with Malbak Aboriginal Corporation and other regional organisations

# 28

First Nations community members (16+ years) engaged in governance and decisionmaking.





# Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing

Across the dry season, children, families and Elders spent time on Country visiting significant places, making art, collecting materials and sharing stories, with creative work happening alongside daily community life and learning.

Visual art featured regularly throughout the season. Children and educators worked together on painting projects that reflected animals, stories and knowledge connected to place. Art making took place in shared spaces, including the early years balabala, where painting and decoration became part of how children related to their learning environment. Language was used throughout these activities, with repeated use supporting familiarity through watching, learning and doing as the key learning practice.

Creative practice was closely tied to being on Country. Time spent travelling to significant sites and homelands created space for observation, listening and quiet learning. Children listened as Elders spoke about places, animals and history, and creative activities followed these visits through drawing, painting and photography. Cultural burning supported safe access to places and reinforced knowledge about caring for Country.

Photography and visual documentation supported reflection and storytelling across camps. Children and staff took photos during activities and time on Country, contributing to a shared visual record of the season. These images were later brought together and revisited, supporting memory, conversation and connection between camps.

Creative preparation also formed part of community celebration. Decorations and visual displays were made collectively, with children working alongside educators and family members. This work came together at the end of year Christmas party, marking the close of the season and reflecting shared effort across time on Country.

**Visit Appendix B (page 90) to read more about Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Painting and drawing reflecting animals, stories and knowledge shared on Country
- Art and decoration shaping the balabala learning space
- Creative work following visits to cultural sites through drawing, painting and photography
- Cultural burning enabling access to sites and reinforcing care for Country
- Photography used to document activities and build a shared record across camps
- Collective making of decorations and displays for community events



67

children and adults engaged in cultural learning and wellbeing



# Garramilla



In the Top End of the Northern Territory we are also led by communities on Larrakia Country in Garramilla (Darwin).

## Four communities lead the Children’s Ground Approach in Central Australia:

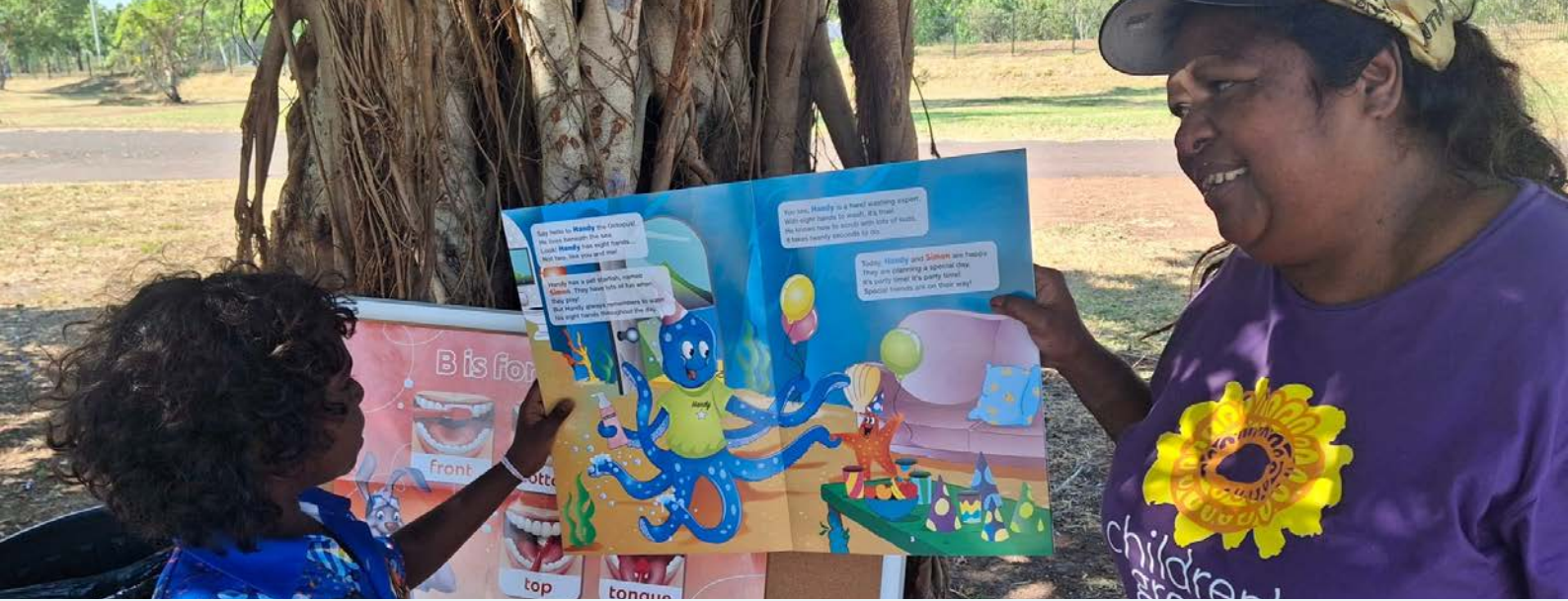
- Knuckey Lagoon
- 15 Mile
- Minmarama and Kulaluk

Darwin communities continue to live with the impacts of forced removal, displacement and mission and settlement policies that separated families from Country, language and cultural authority. These histories shape present conditions, with many families maintaining and rebuilding cultural knowledge and connection within urban and peri urban settings.

## Progress in implementation and delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach (CGA)

2025 marked five years of delivery of the Children’s Ground Approach in Darwin, with steady growth in community led delivery, local governance and First Nations leadership across learning, health and community life.





## Regional summary

In 2025, Darwin focused on strengthening place based delivery. Local leadership remains strong and committed to a 25 year vision.

Learning, health and community development were locally led and planned to respond to the different realities and priorities in each community. Darwin is the least resourced in relation to the Children’s Ground Approach and the most complex due to colonisation. We remain in the early stages of the Approach as we continue to learn and grow.

Children are growing up within consistent relationships across early years sessions, extended hours programs, time on Country and community gatherings. Families are actively involved in planning, attending sessions and shaping how learning is delivered. Communities strengthened decision making through partnerships, reference groups and local meetings. These processes led to practical outcomes, including new playgrounds planned at Knuckey Lagoon and 15 Mile, showing how priorities translate into changes in community spaces.

Hosting Utyerre Apanpe on Larrakia Country demonstrated immense cultural responsibility and the capacity to lead and host at a national level. Cultural practice continued through art making, weaving, song, language and time on Country. Employment and leadership strengthened, with more roles held by people from community and First Nations staff taking on greater responsibility across learning, health and community development.

347

children, young people and adults engaged with Children’s Ground in Garramilla in 2025.

## Highlights

- Community led governance translating into visible changes in community spaces and priorities
- Extended hours and after school delivery strengthening consistent engagement for children and young people
- Increased First Nations leadership across learning, health and community development
- Employment growing within communities, strengthening delivery through local knowledge and relationships
- Cultural leadership demonstrated through hosting and ongoing practice across communities
- Young people taking on greater responsibility and participation in community life and decision making

## Challenges

- Urban and peri urban settings limiting consistent access to Country for learning and cultural practice
- Coordination required across multiple communities, organisations and governance structures
- Maintaining consistent engagement across different locations and changing attendance patterns
- Growing workforce responsibilities requiring continued support and development
- Ongoing need for investment in community spaces to support delivery and participation



# Learning and Wellbeing

Learning and Wellbeing in Darwin was delivered through place based practice shaped by local leadership and family involvement. Learning took place through early years sessions, after school and extended hours programs, on Country and within community facilities.

Early years learning focused on building foundations through play, routine and language. Children participated in regular sessions supported by families, with learning plans developed alongside parents and carers. Storytelling, creative activity, shared meals and sensory play supported literacy, numeracy and communication, while reinforcing identity and belonging. Families attended sessions and contributed to planning, supporting continuity for children.

As children grew older, learning extended beyond the school day. Extended hours programs operated in the afternoons and school holidays. Young people took part in filmmaking, photography, creative projects and homework support, building literacy and digital skills alongside cultural learning.

Programs such as Spark Box supported reading, writing and problem solving through culturally relevant digital content, while physical activities supported engagement.

Learning was closely connected to place. Children and young people spent time near the ocean, along creeks and in bush areas. Identifying plants and animals and caring for waterways supported observation, classification and counting, linking cultural knowledge with science and mathematics. Collecting bush medicine and learning seasonal knowledge supported discussion about change, cycles and environment, guided by community members.

[Visit Appendix B \(page 82\) to read more about Learning and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.](#)

## In practice

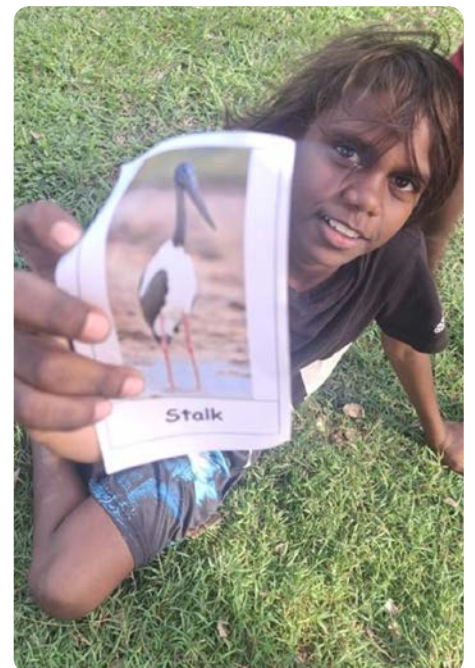
- Early years sessions co planned with families, including learning plans developed with parents and carers
- Extended hours programs operating in afternoons and school holidays across multiple sites
- Use of Spark Box to support reading, writing and problem solving through digital content
- Filmmaking, photography and creative projects used to build literacy and engagement for older children
- Learning activities on Country including plant and animal identification, bush medicine collection and waterway care
- Homework support integrated into after school and extended hours delivery

37

children (0-5 years) engaged in learning (alongside 60 family members, 18+ years)

*I hope the next generation carry on the culture and stories that I'm giving them. I want to see them teaching culture and speaking the language.*

**Jacqui Goodman**  
15 Mile Community Leader





# Health and Wellbeing

Health and Wellbeing focused on health prevention and promotion, health access, early support and chronic health management support. Children and families building health knowledge through daily routines and engagement.

Children practised hand washing, face washing, teeth brushing and personal care during sessions and meals, with families participating alongside them.

Health promotion was led within community, including targeted work by the Health Promotion Lead at Minmarama, supporting oral health through structured activities and daily routines. Health staff worked with parents and carers during sessions, providing guidance on nutrition, child development and oral health, with follow up and referral organised where needed.

Food and nutrition were supported through cook ups and shared meals, including fish and crab from local waterways, linking food preparation with knowledge of place and season.

Physical activity was embedded across programs, including basketball, fitness sessions and boxing workshops for older children and young people.

Health access was supported through partnerships with Danila Dilba and Territory Health services.

Chronic and acute health support was provided, linking and supporting early intervention, appointments and health literacy.

[Visit Appendix B \(page 84\) to read more about Health and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.](#)

## In practice

- Hygiene routines integrated into session transitions such as arrival, meals and pack up
- Health Promotion Lead using song, storytelling and group discussion
- Health discussions integrated into sessions as well as targeted group and individual sessions.
- Referrals organised during sessions with follow ups tracked.
- Food prepared in group settings with children participating in cleaning, cooking and serving
- Physical activity structured as part of session flow rather than stand alone programs
- Staff rotating across sites to maintain continuity with the same families

312

people engaged in health promotion and support (incl. 88 children aged 0-8 years)

256

people engaged in nutrition education and increased nutritional intake (incl. 42 children 0-5 years)

57

people (all ages) engaged in maternal and child health promotion

82

people (all ages) were supported to engage with clinical health

244

people (all ages) engaged in social/emotional wellbeing promotion and support





# Economic Development and Wellbeing

In 2025 Community Leads continue to support local employment in their communities. Local knowledge, language and relationships shaped how programs operated, supporting delivery and integration across early years, health, community development and extended hours.

Local community employment remained steady this year. Educators, youth workers, health promotion staff and community support workers worked within their own communities, allowing programs to respond to family responsibilities, cultural obligations and local conditions. This supported engagement, particularly in extended hours delivery .

The recruitment in local community evaluation and research officer roles was a highlight. This progressed local ownership in evaluation design and delivery with the evaluation framework being culturally translated by cultural leaders.

The strength of young people in employment and leadership is growing and exciting, especially at 15 Mile. Across the communities there is balance of senior people and young people working together for community.

**Visit Appendix B (page 86) to read more about Economic Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Community staff planning sessions based on attendance, age groups and available resources
- Recording attendance, completing data entry and contributing to reporting
- Staff confidently working across multiple roles within sessions to support flexible delivery
- Coordination across sites to organise coverage, transport and program delivery
- Community staff contributing to evaluation through leadership, design, data collection and feedback
- Senior staff overseeing delivery

22

local community-based local Nation staff were employed at Children's Ground Garramilla in 2025

45

First Nations staff, local and non-local, were employed at Children's Ground Garramilla in 2025

*Taking our children on Country is about connection to our land, and to our culture. Out there, the little ones learn by doing, strengthening their confidence and developing their First Languages.*

**Jackie Treves**  
Minmarama/Kulaluk Community Lead





# Community Development and Wellbeing

Across Darwin, community development was reflected in how decisions were made, organised and carried through local structures, gatherings and shared responsibility. People contributed through meetings, events and day to day coordination, shaping activities and responding to priorities within their communities.

Family nights, community events and informal gatherings were used to organise activities, share information and coordinate responses. These settings brought together children, young people and adults, with children taking on helping roles alongside participation in play and conversation.

Governance operated in different ways across communities. At Knuckey Lagoon, regular meetings and house to house engagement led to the formation of a reference group with Yilli Housing, supporting coordinated action on housing and infrastructure. At 15 Mile, governance included sector meetings and youth participation, with peer interviewing used to gather input that informed after hours programs. In Minmarama and Kulaluk, work continued alongside the Gwalwa Dariniki Association, supporting alignment between community priorities, cultural authority and program delivery.

Hosting a national forum on Larrakia Country brought these approaches together. Over two days, Darwin communities welcomed First Nations educators and leaders for Utyerre Apanpe 2026 with customary welcome, cultural leadership and safety. Families and staff carried responsibility for hosting, while community leaders shared song, dance and knowledge on Country. This reflected governance in practice, with leadership expressed through cultural authority, coordination and shared responsibility.

Place based community planning led to practical outcomes, including plans and funding for new playgrounds at Knuckey Lagoon and 15 Mile, and strengthened the way communities plan, decide and act together.

**Visit Appendix B (page 88) to read more about Community Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Family nights and gatherings used to organise activities and coordinate community priorities
- House to house engagement supporting participation in governance processes
- Reference group meetings with Yilli Housing to progress housing and infrastructure actions
- Peer interviewing led by young people to inform program decisions
- Elders guiding gatherings and decision making through cultural authority
- Community members coordinating hosting, logistics and delivery for large gatherings such as Utyerre Apanpe

# 29

First Nations community members (16+ years) engaged in governance and decisionmaking.





# Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing

Cultural and creative work was embedded in daily programs in 2025, with children, families and Elders making art, weaving, singing, dancing and spending time on Country as part of regular activity.

Creative practice took place across early years sessions, extended hours programs and community gatherings, linking cultural knowledge with how children participate across the day.

Visual art and making were consistent across communities. Children and families worked with painting, drawing, clay and construction activities, including family painting sessions, mural work during NAIDOC Week and projects such as dollhouse making and cubby building. These activities supported expression of identity and connection to family and place within shared settings.

Weaving was led by women and Elders, with pandanus collected, prepared and dyed on Country before being worked in community. Children spent time observing, handling materials and practising alongside experienced weavers, with knowledge shared through process, repetition and conversation.

Song, dance and language were shared through everyday activity. Language was spoken during time on Country and while making, walking and sitting together, with words connected to place, plants and animals used in context. Songs and storytelling were part of early years and extended hours sessions, supporting familiarity through repeated use.

Time on Country supported this work across the year. Children and families travelled to coastal areas, creeks and bush sites, where knowledge was shared through observation, story and presence.

**Visit Appendix B (page 90) to read more about Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing at Children's Ground.**

## In practice

- Art activities set up within sessions with shared materials for group work
- Weaving led by Elders and senior women, with pandanus collected and prepared on Country
- Language shared through naming, instruction and conversation during activities
- Song and storytelling led by community members in group sessions
- Time on Country planned around access and conditions, with learning continuing in community



*We have a lot of programs here, and activities. We have Women's Group and Men's Group. They keep us busy... all the kids are coming to the programs. They're not indoors all the time.*

**Aida Goodman**  
Community Activities and Support Worker

157

children and adults engaged in cultural learning and wellbeing



# Children's stories

All these stories have been shared with the permission of families.



## Four year old Kysaiah has been part of Children's Ground since he was a newborn

In 2025 he attended sessions consistently and his growth has been clear each week. His confidence has expanded as he speaks more freely, laughs easily and takes positive risks in learning.

Kysaiah has developed a strong interest in counting and loves practising numbers during play. He proudly names animals in English and Western Arrarnta, moving between languages with growing confidence. His language development reflects the cultural strength around him and consistent learning across home and Children's Ground sessions.

On Country, learning is grounded in family. With his mother, grandmother and great grandmother, Kysaiah learns plant names and how they are gathered and prepared as bush medicine, observing and trying each step.

At Hugh Riverbed, he joined older children clapping rocks and singing Alkere. He is building independence in self care and supporting others.

Across 2025, Kysaiah's confidence, independence and cultural pride have strengthened.



## Four year old Ovaida has been attending Children's Ground in Darwin since she was one

Over the past year her confidence in group spaces has grown, moving from watching on the edge to entering the hall, seeking out friends and starting play.

She is drawn to creative experiences, especially painting and water play, where she experiments and shares ideas. Through drawing, painting and using small tools her fine motor skills have strengthened, with greater control and attention to detail. She is also showing growing interest in books, choosing more complex stories and retelling them in her own words.

Ovaida contributes to the shared environment, helping with cleaning and packing away. A highlight this year was riding a horse for the first time, encouraged by her father Darryl, who rode as a young man and attends sessions, alongside her nana and aunty who support her each day.

This year shows Ovaida stepping forward with confidence, supported by strong family connection and participation in community life.



Five year old Dante has been part of Children's Ground in Darwin since he was two.

He attends with his mum, Tamika, and baby sister, learning within a strong family environment. He moves through sessions with confidence, greeting educators and settling quickly.

Dante brings energy to each day, enjoying movement and outdoor exploration. He is building focus during painting and sensory play. On Country, he enjoys being near the water, spotting freshwater crocodiles and magpie geese. He follows daily health routines independently and encourages others.

Across the year, Dante has shown growing confidence and responsibility.



One year old Quandre learns with Children's Ground alongside his family.

In 2025 he continued building confidence through everyday experiences grounded in culture.

Quandre follows his family during hunting trips, watching how people walk, search and work together. These moments help him understand his place within family and Country. At McGrath's Dam, he ground ochre with his nanna Allison, copying her actions.

He is developing routines, learning to blow his nose, wash hands and care for sores.

Surrounded by mothers and grandmothers, Quandre grows within strong family care each day.



Five year old Azikel has been part of Children's Ground for one year.

Attending consistently throughout 2025, his engagement has supported steady growth in confidence, cultural knowledge and social connection.

At Ltyentye Apurte, he showed pride in his learning during a visit to Keringke Art Centre, identifying animals from Country and practising their names in Arrernte with his mother, a cultural educator.

On Country, he joined his first hunting trip, listening to knowledge about bush animals and their uses, and participating with enthusiasm.

This year he also began transition to school, supported by his mother, educators and the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team.

Azikel continues to grow as a confident young learner connected to culture and community.

# Research and evidence

Children’s Ground recognises the history of First Nations people being positioned as subjects of research rather than leaders of it. Our approach is participatory, grounded in cultural authority and community governance. Research and evaluation are conducted by First Nations people with First Nations families, working alongside Western trained staff where appropriate.

First Nations leadership shapes the design, implementation, analysis and communication of all research activity. Evidence is generated through lived experience, cultural expertise and long term community partnership. This approach ensures that findings, learning and knowledge remain accountable to families and strengthens self determination at every stage.

In 2025, Children’s Ground continued to embed research within national reform conversations, contributing rigorous, community grounded analysis to policy and systems change.

## Apmerengentyele – Our Systems, Our Children, Our Safety, Our Wellbeing

This year Children’s Ground published its first peer reviewed journal article in *Genealogy* as part of the special issue – Self Determination in First Peoples Child Protection. Titled *Apmerengentyele – Our Systems, Our Children, Our Safety, Our Wellbeing*, the paper presents a First Nations rights - based analysis of Australia’s child protection system and calls for structural reform grounded in self-determination and culture.

The article outlines how current child protection systems were established within a legislative framework that sought to achieve genocide, assimilate First Nations children and undermine culture, language and identity. It argues that the ongoing overrepresentation of First Nations children in out of home care reflects systemic failure and structural racism rather than inherent risk and protective factors within families.

Drawing on First Nations knowledge systems and cultural law, the paper centres First Nations systems of child wellbeing and safety as leading practice. It affirms that safeguarding children requires placing decision making authority into the hands of First Nations families and communities, strengthening cultural determinants of wellbeing, and fully realising mechanisms such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

This publication strengthens Children’s Ground’s contribution to national reform conversations and affirms that First Nations systems provide the foundation for child safety and wellbeing.

Read the article at: [www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/9/3/95](http://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/9/3/95)

The screenshot shows the front page of a journal article. At the top left is the *genealogy* logo, and at the top right is the MDPI logo. The article title is *Apmerengentyele—Our Systems, Our Children, Our Safety, Our Wellbeing*, with authors William Tilmouth, Veronica Doolan, Jane Vadiveloo\*, and Jen Lorains. The article is categorized as a 'Perspective'. Below the title is a 'check for updates' icon and a list of dates: Received 3 March 2025, Revised 4 September 2025, Accepted 4 September 2025, and Published 9 September 2025. The citation information includes the authors' names, the year 2025, the article title, the journal name *Genealogy*, volume 9, issue 3, and the DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy9030095>. A 'Correction Statement' notes a minor change to the title. The abstract discusses the historical and cultural context of child protection in Australia, highlighting the impact on First Nations children and the need for a rights-based approach. The introduction begins by discussing the overrepresentation of First Nations children in out-of-home care. The page number 95 is visible at the bottom left, and the DOI is at the bottom right.

## Research informing policy reform

In 2025, Children’s Ground applied its research and evidence to national and Territory level policy reform processes.

Children’s Ground made a submission to the Department of Social Services consultation on a proposed new national approach to programs for families and children. The consultation seeks to consolidate five existing programs into a single national program focused on strengthening outcomes for children and families. Our submission emphasised that flexible, place based and culturally determined delivery is essential to achieving meaningful outcomes. It reinforced that empowerment of parents and caregivers requires investment in community led systems grounded in cultural authority and long term relationships.

Children’s Ground also contributed to a sector submission led by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory regarding proposed amendments to the Care and Protection of Children Act 2007.

This submission affirmed that the rights of First Nations children are fundamental human rights. It called for legislation that protects every child’s right to safety, dignity, culture, identity and family, and for decision making frameworks that place their best interests at the centre. It emphasised that safeguarding children requires strengthening culturally informed authority within families and communities, ensuring that child protection responses uphold both the inherent rights of children and the collective responsibilities that sustain their wellbeing.

Through these formal contributions, Children’s Ground advanced a clear position: lasting reform must be grounded in evidence, cultural governance and the full realisation of the human rights of First Nations children and families.

*They’re the ones we’ve got to look after because they’re the opportunity we have. Families and communities come together for their kids’ sake.*



**Veronica Turner,**

Co-Director of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children’s Ground Central Australia)



# National leadership and systems reform

Historically, the voices of those in community who speak English as another language and who do not have the economic, cultural or political power, are not heard.

Through both our research and in our leadership development, we aim to empower our young people and adults in all arenas to share their voice. We are excited by the leadership shown across generations and that the future of Children's Ground will be in the hands of community for generations to come.

## Utyerre Apanpe 2025: Advancing a national First Nations education system

In August, more than sixty First Nations educators and leaders from across twenty Nations gathered on Larrakia Country for the Utyerre Apanpe First Nations Educators Forum.

Over two days, Elders, cultural professors, senior educators and emerging leaders came together to strengthen language, share knowledge and advance the design of a national First Nations led education system. The Forum focused on shaping a national learning pathway for children, building a national body of educators to uphold cultural and professional standards, and laying foundations for long term governance.

This work builds directly on the M.K. Turner Report and moves into the next phase of implementation.

Educators are establishing the structures required to sustain reform for generations.

At the close of the Forum, Utyerre Apanpe released a public statement affirming its role as a national body of educators upholding standards of cultural and professional excellence. The statement called on governments to move beyond recognition and commit to implementation and lasting investment.

Education belongs to First Nations people. Through Utyerre Apanpe, educators are advancing a national pathway grounded in cultural authority, language and community governance.



## National engagement and policy influence

Throughout 2025, Children's Ground remained in active dialogue with Federal and Territory governments, engaging Ministers, departments and advisers on education reform, prevention investment and long term systems change. This work includes formal meetings, briefings and on Country discussions.

In February, Children's Ground leaders travelled to Parliament House in Canberra to advance national reform priorities. Chair William Tilmouth and CEO Jane Vadiveloo attended the Apology to the Stolen Generations Anniversary Breakfast, where William was invited to sit at the Prime Minister's table, representing both the generations who were removed and the ongoing leadership of Children's Ground. Survivors spoke with dignity and strength, reinforcing Parliament's responsibility to deliver structural change.

Leaders met with Ministers and senior officials to progress discussions on First Nations education reform and coordinated prevention investment.

In September, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, Federal Minister for Social Services, visited Mparntwe during National Child Protection Week. She met with Elders, families and young people to hear directly about community led prevention, First Language early learning and intergenerational leadership. Leaders emphasised cultural authority as the foundation for protecting children and the importance of sustained investment in early years and family wellbeing.

These discussions are part of sustained national advocacy to shift power and investment toward First Nations designed and governed systems. Children's Ground continues to press for coordinated, long term commitments that enable communities to lead education, prevention and family wellbeing on their own terms. The safety, dignity and futures of our children depend on structural reform that places cultural authority, decision making and resources where they belong.



## Shaping national dialogue

National conversations about First Nations children, education and reform were strengthened in 2025 by the leadership of Children's Ground. Our leaders brought community experience and cultural authority into public debate, contributing clear positions on education reform, child protection and government accountability.

A significant national moment was Chair William Tilmouth's interview on ABC Radio National. Speaking to audiences across the country, he addressed intergenerational responsibility, cultural authority and the structural reform required to secure the futures of First Nations children. He called for governments to place decision making authority with communities and to invest in systems designed and led by our people.

The release of the 2025 Closing the Gap data generated national coverage of our response. We spoke directly about the results and the need for structural investment in community led solutions. Coverage across Indigenous and mainstream outlets amplified the call for coordinated, long term funding for First Nations designed education, health and wellbeing systems.

National Sorry Day, NAIDOC Week and Human Rights Day were key moments in the public calendar.

On each occasion, we spoke to the rights of First Nations children and the responsibilities held by governments and institutions. Commentary centred on prevention, cultural authority and community governance as essential components of solutions and reform.

During National Reconciliation Week, we convened national webinars on reconciliation in the workplace and truth telling in the classroom. Educators, corporate leaders and community members engaged in practical discussion about responsibility and institutional change.

Across broadcast media, public commentary and national forums, we contributed leadership that centred the rights, dignity and futures of First Nations children and families.



## Leadership across national and global forums

In 2025 Children's Ground leaders contributed to national and international gatherings advancing reform in education, wellbeing and cultural governance.

First Nations staff presented at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education in Aotearoa, sharing the Children's Ground Approach with Indigenous leaders from across the Pacific and North America. Participation affirmed the global relevance of education systems grounded in language, culture and self determination.

Our team also participated in the LEGO SPIRIT gathering in British Columbia, held across the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, Lil'wat and Tsleil Waututh Nations. We joined First Nations leaders from Australia, Canada, the United States and Aotearoa to exchange knowledge on early years education and maternal child health. Arrernte approaches to learning, culture and care were shared in dialogue with international partners, strengthening relationships and contributing to shared thinking on community led systems.

Leaders presented at the AIATSIS Summit and the Puliima Indigenous Languages and Technology Conference in Garramilla, contributing to national dialogue on language revitalisation, cultural governance and the rights of First Nations children.

Through the Australian Evaluation Society Scholarship program, members of the Research and Evaluation team attended the AES Conference in Canberra and connected with emerging First Nations evaluators through the Gilibanga Network.

We co-hosted an ALIVE symposium focused on mental health, contributing expertise on culturally determined approaches to social and emotional wellbeing. Leadership also delivered a keynote address at the INSPIRE Conference for early educators, sharing the Children's Ground Approach with sector leaders committed to rights based reform.

Earlier in the year, Children's Ground participated in the We Are More gathering in Mparntwe, a national forum bringing together practitioners, young people, First Nations communities and education leaders to transform learning systems.

Across these national and international forums, the Children's Ground Approach influenced reform conversations in education, wellbeing and governance. It continues to inform how systems are being reshaped to serve First Nations children and families across Australia and beyond.



# MK Turner Alliance: Advancing legislative reform for a First Nations education system

In 2025, Children's Ground continued its leadership in national education reform through the MK Turner Report Alliance for First Nations Education Policy and Systems Reform, referred to as the MK Alliance.

The Alliance is an organisational group of stakeholders committed to advancing the recommendations of the M.K. Turner Report. It exists to progress legislative, policy and investment reform required to establish a First Nations Education System in Australia. Children's Ground serves as the secretariat, working alongside founding members the Stronger Smarter Institute, Batchelor Institute, First Languages Australia and RMIT.

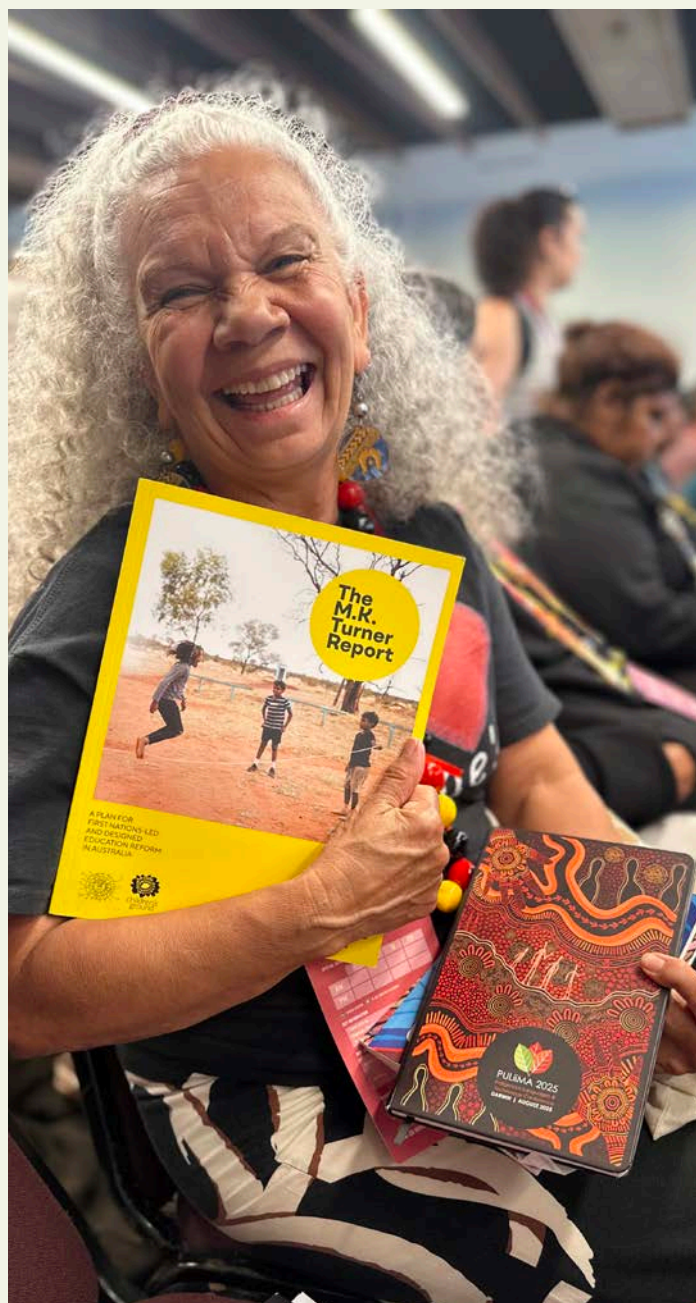
The Alliance provides structural support to Utyerre Apanpe, the national network of First Nations educators, ensuring that policy reform and government advocacy are grounded in cultural authority and educator leadership. Its purpose is to compel the Australian Government to legislate, resource and implement a First Nations Education System designed and governed by First Nations people.

## Progress in 2025

- Throughout the year, the Alliance moved from foundational planning into detailed policy development and coordinated national advocacy.
- A central focus was the development of the Roadmap to Reform, a national discussion paper outlining the legal and policy pathways required to establish a First Nations Education System. The Roadmap articulates mechanisms for legislative recognition, governance authority and sustainable investment, and is designed to guide negotiations with government.
- The Alliance expanded its membership with the inclusion of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council.
- The participation of a national peak body strengthens the reform agenda and ensures broader national representation in shaping systemic change.
- Curriculum reform was a further area of focus. Members progressed discussions on pathways toward national accreditation of a First Nations curriculum through ACARA. Existing frameworks were examined as precedents to inform the development of a sovereign First Nations curriculum framework grounded in cultural authority and community governance.
- The Alliance also explored international accreditation pathways through the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium. This work considers how global Indigenous accreditation mechanisms can support recognition of First Nations education authority beyond the Australian state, strengthening sovereignty in education governance.

The work of the MK Alliance reinforces that education reform requires legislative authority, structural investment and national coordination. It builds the architecture required for a First Nations Education System that is enduring, governed by First Nations educators and accountable to community.

We recognise the First Nations learning and education undertaken and led by Elders and cultural practitioners across all Nations. We honour the leadership of those who have come before and those who are emerging. Generations of leadership across communities, schools, educational bodies, colleges and institutes continue to shape this movement. We acknowledge those leading practice in First Nations led education and the many emerging schools, learning centres and visionaries advancing this work across Australia.



# Governance

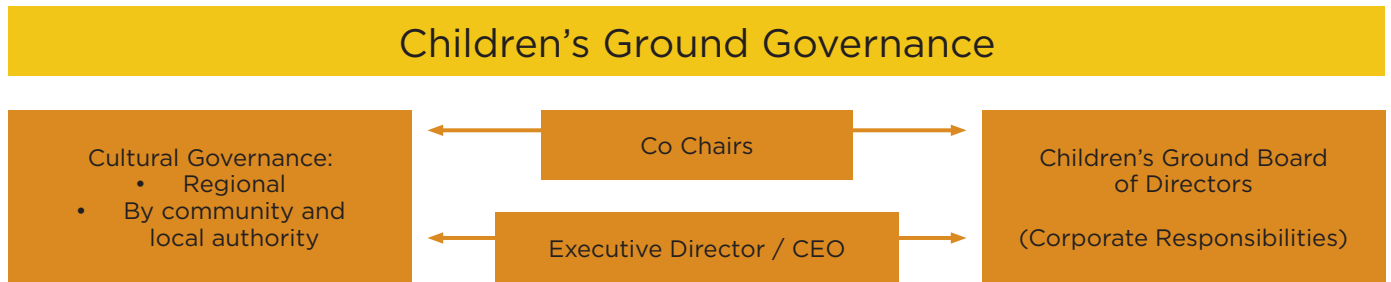
## A First Nations Governance structure: recognising First Nations and Western standards

Balancing cultural and corporate governance ensures we have the cultural integrity, community leadership and organisational quality and standards to achieve real change. Children's Ground is an Aboriginal Community Controlled and Owned Organisation. This is held in place by two governance structures that work in partnership. Not only is our board a First Nations majority board, it is our community based governance that ensures cultural authority.

Our Cultural Governance Committees have 100% First Nations membership. They represent each community and region, recognise the enduring customary laws from the land and sea, and provide both local and national leadership. First Nations Governance comes from the land and sea. Nothing can replace this authority which is our cultural law.

Our national Children's Ground Ltd. Board has over 50% First Nations membership and directorship. It provides the governance function as required under legislation and common law principles.

First Nations governance and Western corporate governance are equally important.



## First Nations Governance and Authority

First Nations Governance systems come from the land. They are complex, sophisticated and relational, rather than hierarchical. They are collective and are underpinned by land, law, language, culture and kinship. They include customary law, governance policies, practice, conventions and standards.

Children's Ground's First Nations Governance structure ensures self determination and decision making is held in the communities who lead Children's Ground. This is specific to each region and each community and based on First Nations Governance principles and practice. Members are from these communities and provide local leadership and ensure cultural integrity is upheld within the Children's Ground Approach.

First Nations Governance and local authority include all First Nations people from the communities who lead Children's Ground, and who have participated in delivery, decision making and governance meetings. Here we are naming key Elders and senior cultural authorities and representatives of next generation leaders who have been instrumental to our local leadership and the integrity of our work in 2025. Please see our list of staff which includes a broader list of First Nations community members who have contributed to governance this year.

### Central Australia

#### Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme

*Everyone Being Responsible*

Alison Ferber	Fiona Turner
Amanda Turner	Freda Johnson
Andrew Davis	Harry Hayes
Angelina Hayes	Janella Ebatarinja
Bianca Turner	Laurence McLaughlan
Blanche Ebatarinja	Marita McMillan (Co-director)
Bradley Turner	Marlene Rubuntja
C Turner (Director of Apmereenge-ntyele)	Michael Gorey
Carlita Davis	Nakita Ferber
Cassandra Neil	Nanette Sharpe
Cathy Turner	Natassia Gorey-Furber
Dorrie Campbell	Patrick Ferber
Dulcie Sharpe	Roland Ferber
Edmond Doolan	Susan Chalmers
Eva Hayes	Veronica Ross
Faye Ebatarinja	Veronica Turner (Co-director)
Felicity Hayes (Co-director)	William Lowah

### Top End

#### Karridjarrkre manborlh mankudji

*Walking together on one path*

##### Marlkawo

Alio Guymala	Kamahl Hunter
Angela Bangarr	Kaylene Djandjomerr
Annie Cameron	Kimberley Namarnyilk
Antonia Djandjomerr	Lee Nabarlambarl
Cecily Djandjomerr	Lindsay Whitehurst
Christianna Djandjomerr	Raymond Guymala
Christine Alangale	Roxanne Naborlhborlh
Djaykuk Djandjomerr	Shirley Djandjomerr
Duane Djandjomerr	Sonya Nango

##### Garramilla (Darwin)

Jackie Treves	Phillip Goodman
Jacqueline Goodman	Talitha Goodman
Kathleen Thomsen	Tamika Lawford
Pauline Grant	

**Please note:** some names are not fully printed due to cultural protocol.

*Our communities are engaged, taking ownership, and leading the way.  
The participation of community guarantees success. Communities have  
never had opportunities like this before.*

**William Tilmouth,**

Co Chair and recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Award

## Board of Directors

The Children's Ground Board of Directors consists of 65% of First Nations people. Our highly skilled board includes expertise in cultural knowledge and governance, legal, health, education, financial management, people and culture, human rights, not for profit leadership, research, the arts, investment and business development.

Board Directors are highly qualified and experienced in their respective fields and have the commitment and passion required to lead Children's Ground alongside our First Nations Governance structures.

### **William Tilmouth**

Non-Executive Director, Arrernte man, founding Co Chair of Children's Ground, Board Chair and Co Chair of Research Advisory Group.

### **Evelyn Schaber**

Non-Executive Director, Arrernte woman, Co Chair of Children's Ground, BEd, BTeach, Senior Aboriginal Educator

### **Dr Jordan Cory**

Non-Executive Director, Kamilaroi woman, BSc, MBBS, GDip Surgical Anatomy, 2020 Fulbright Future Scholar, MPH '21 Candidate, Harvard University. Member of the Research Advisory Group.

### **John Lochowiak:**

Non-Executive Director, Pitjantjatjara man, BA of Education.

### **Annalee Stearne**

Non-Executive Director, Nyungar woman, Post Grad Dip Public Health, Health Sciences; Grad Dip Secondary Education, Education; BA Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies. Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee.

### **Joanne Willmott OAM**

Non-Executive Director, Wakka Wakka woman, activist and educational specialist.

### **Roxanne Naborlhborlh**

Non-Executive Director, Bolmo woman, Community and Cultural leader, Director of Malbak Aboriginal Corporation

### **Jane Vadiveloo**

BSc, MPsych (Forensic), Executive Director, member of the Finance, Audit & Risk Subcommittee, member of the Partnerships, Investment and Communications Subcommittee.

### **Kon Karapanagiotidis OAM**

Non-Executive Director, LLB, BSW, BBSC, MED, MDevStuds, member of the Partnerships, Investment and Communications Subcommittee, and member of the People and Culture Subcommittee.

### **Amy Poynton**

Non-Executive Director, BA, MBA, Chair of the People and Culture Subcommittee, member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee.

### **Josie Rizza**

Non-Executive Director, CA, BEc, GradDipAppFinInv, GAICD, member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee and member of the Partnerships, Investment and Communications Subcommittee.

### **Clive Ringler**

Non-Executive Director, BEc, MCom, ASX Accredited Adviser, Level 1 & 2, Board Deputy Chair, Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee.

### **Board and subcommittee non-voting members**

#### **Mr Tony Lawler**

BPharm, JP, Member of Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

#### **Ms Cindy Wei**

External member of the Partnerships, Investment and Communications Subcommittee.

*A key responsibility is representing our communities with integrity and accountability. Maintaining strong engagement with children and families, listening to what people are saying, understanding their priorities and needs, and making sure those voices are carried into governance and decision making.*

---

**Evelyn Schaber,**

Co Chair

## Research Advisory Group

Our Research Advisory Group is made up of respected researchers and academics with extensive experience. They provide valuable guidance to monitoring and evaluation activities carried out by our Director of Research and Evaluation and community researchers in each site.

Our 25-year longitudinal evaluation enables us to build the evidence base to influence policy aimed at ending intergenerational disadvantage in the long term.

Our Research Advisors are:

**Professor Fiona Arney**

Director, Positive Futures Research and Arney Chong Consulting.

**Professor Sally Brinkman**

Professor of Education and Paediatric Epidemiology. University of South Australia.

**Mr Matthew James PSM**

Semi retired, former Deputy CEO of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

**Dr Tim Moore**

Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

**Professor Sven Silburn**

(ret. previously) Director, Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research.

**Professor Naomi Sunderland**

Director, Creative Arts Research Institute, Griffith University

**Professor David Thomas**

Head, Tobacco Control Research, Menzies School of Health Research.

**Dr Jordan Corey**

*Children's Ground Board Representative*  
BSc, MBBS, GDip Surgical Anatomy, MPH '21 Candidate, Harvard University, 2020 Fulbright Future Scholar, Director of Children's Ground Board.

**William Tilmouth**

*Children's Ground Board Representative*  
Arrente man, founding Chair of Children's Ground, Board Chair and Chair of Research Advisory Group.

**Convenor**

**Jen Lorains**

Director, Research and Evaluation - Children's Ground.

## Our Elder and Patron

**Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO**

Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin is a Senior Wurundjeri Elder of the Kulin Nation.

Born in Healesville, Aunty Joy's family never left Wurundjeri land. She is the senior custodian of these lands and is the great-great niece of William Barak, Ngurungaeta of the Wurundjeri-Willam clan.

Aunty Joy has had numerous government appointments, including as a member of the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria and of the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal.

In 2006, she was made an officer of the Order of Australia for her service to the community through significant contributions in the fields of social justice, land rights, equal opportunity, the arts and reconciliation.

We are honoured and proud of Aunty Joy's guidance, support and Eldership of Children's Ground over many years. We are honoured to work on her lands in Naarm.

# Ambassadors

Children's Ground ambassadors use their voices and incredible talent to support our work, and platforms to grow our profile, further our reach and add weight to our advocacy and fundraising.

Through their public position in the community, this fantastic group of people advocate for change for First Nations families.

We also recognise the countless other people, organisations and businesses of prominence who use their platforms to support Children's Ground and First Nations justice.

Our influencers, ambassadors and supporters are a key part of the Children's Ground family.



## Dan Sultan

An Arrernte/Gurindji man, Dan Sultan is a musician, writer, performer, artist and six time ARIA Award winner. In 2025 he continued his support of Children's Ground during our Wear it Yellow campaign and by sharing our approach with his online fanbase. It's a privilege to have Dans ongoing support.



## The Teskey Brothers

Internationally recognised musical duo The Teskey Brothers have won hearts representing Children's Ground on a global stage. They continue to be incredible supporters of our Approach, regularly advocating for our work at their live concerts.



## Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson

Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson is an Iñupiaq filmmaker and educator whose work has been critically acclaimed in the US, Canada, Australia and Europe. Her *History of the Iñupiaq* documentary series is the first Native produced and directed documentary series in Alaska. Since 2007, Rachel has been an adviser and program designer of educational initiatives and reforms in Australia and Alaska.



**Shane Howard**

Shane Howard is one of Australia's most influential writers and singers and a proud Ambassador of Children's Ground. Shane continues to tour nationally, championing First Nations rights and environmental justice.



**Corinne Grant**

Corinne Grant is a practicing lawyer, author, accomplished emcee and performer. Corinne is a passionate defender of human rights, including the rights of First Nations people and those seeking asylum. She was a recipient of the John Gibson Memorial Award for Refugee Law while studying at the University of Melbourne.



**Dr Jan Owen AM**

Jan Owen is a social entrepreneur, innovator, influencer and author. In 2000, Jan was awarded membership to the Order of Australia for services to young people, including as CEO of the Foundation of Young Australians.



**The Cat Empire**

Australian icons The Cat Empire continue to be global Ambassadors for Children's Ground, a position they've held since 2019. Founding members Felix Riebl and Harry Angus are using their profiles and platforms to share the Children's Ground story.



**Pat Cash**

Pat Cash is an Australian tennis champion, winning Wimbledon men's singles and reaching a world ranking of No.4. He co founded Planet Ark and Do Something, and has spent decades working internationally. He is now an advocate for social justice for First Nations peoples, including Arrernte Elders in Alice Springs.

# Thank you to our team



We recognise our incredible team. 70% of our staff are First Nations. We prioritise employment from within community with a flexible employment approach.

Local First Nations staff hold multiple roles in governance and delivery and are the drivers for change. Our broader team compliment this expertise with talent, passion and sector expertise. It is an amazing team.

## Staff

Aaron Rankine	Billie Jo Liddle	Devena Lankin	Howard Veatupu
Abby Duncan	Billy Spicer	Dianne Williams	Hugo Cisterne
Adam Grieve	Blanche Ebatarinja	Dimitrius Brian	Isabella Rhodes
Aengus Cassidy	Bradley Turner	Dominique Mercuri	Jacinta Willis-Thompson
Aida Goodman	Brenda Tilmouth	Donelle Fraser	Jack Namarnyilk
Aino Koskinen	Brendan Williams	Donita Bloomfield	Jacqueline Goodman
Alanah Jack	Brianna Webb	Donna Mulladad	Jacqueline Treves
Alastair Blackburn	Bridgette Beer	Dorothea Campbell	Jacquelin Pereira
Albina Borodina	Brigitte Johnson	Duane Djandjomerr	James Alberts
Alcoota School	Caitlin Foster	Dulcie Sharpe	Jamie Webb
Alex Petrick	Carlita Davis	Earl Hayes	Jana Harmer
Alice Di Giacinto	Carol Turner	Edwina Koimala	Jane Vadiveloo
Alicia Williams	Caroline Holliday	Elizabeth Ross	Jane Young
Alison Ebatarinja	Cassandra Neil	Elsie Harbour	Janella Ebatarinja
Alison Ferber	Cassandra Trevilyan-Hayes	Enid Woodroffe	Janice Turner
Alvin Manfong	Cassie Oblowitz	Eric Petrick	Janisa Ryder
Amanda Sutherland	Cathy Turner	Erin Reilly	Jason Haines
Amanda Turner	Cecilia Schaber	Esau Lawrence	Jeannie Ross
Amarlie Briscoe	Cecily Djandjomerr	Ethan Nabalwad	Jeff Tan
Amber Thompson	Chantelle Glegg	Eva Hayes	Jennifer Lorains
Amelia Turner	Cheryl Keighran	Evonne Papadopoulos	Jennifer Wallace
Amunda Gorey	Chloe Wallace	Faye Ebatarinja	Jessica Brown
Anastasia Goodman	Chris Bird	Felicia Gomez	Jessica Kragh
Andrea Rogers	Christeanna Fly	Felicity Hayes	Jessie Bartlett
Andrena Webb	Christian Lugnan	Fiona Turner	Josephine Bundy
Andrew Davis	Christianna Djandjomerr	Fletcher Barnes	Josephine Corporal
Andrina Williams	Christine Bloomfield	Flint Djandjomerr	Josh Cameron
Angela Bangarr	Christine Doolan	Frances Hoosan	Josie Ebatarinja
Angelina Hayes	Christopher McMillan	Frazer McKinlay	Joy Turner
Anjali Ali	Cindy Gibson	Freda Johnson	Joyce Djogibar
Anna Wilson	Clare McVeigh	Gabriel Friel	Judith Cleary
Annabelle Gray	Colleen McLean	Gabriel Turner	Julia Mitchell
Anneke Barnes	Corey Lisle	Gae Constable	Julie Hayes
Annie Cameron	Cornelius Ebatarinja	Gayleece Webb	Kamah! Djandjomerr
Antoinette Furber-Gorey	Cristina Nobleza	Georgie Mattingley	Kanethia Young
Antoinette Glenn	Damien Sailor	Georgina Blue	Karen Gregory
Ashley Webb	David Blue	Georgina James	Kate Borland
Audrey Inkamala	David Holmes	Grace Bidner	Kate Mugavin
Barbara Petrick	David Rankine	Grace Gorey	Kathleen Bloomfield
Barbara Tilmouth	Debbie Smith	Hannah Moffatt	Kathleen Thomsen
Bernadette Wheeler	Deborah Wood	Harry Hayes	Kaye Namundja
Bessina Cameron	Delores Furber	Hayley Causer	Kaye Pedersen
Bianca Turner	Demi-Lee Braun	Hayley Otter	Kaylene Webb
Bianca Vasiliadis	Desdemona Shee	Holly Cunningham	Keenan Bird

Keisha Nagurrurrba  
Kelli Tranter  
Kenny Martins  
Kevin Bird  
Kevin Bloomfield  
Kevin Webb  
Kiann Kennedy  
Kim Hopper  
Kimberley Namarnyilk  
Kingsley Tilmouth  
Kyesha Webb  
Kylie MacFarlane  
Kynan Madrill  
Lachlan McKenzie  
Lala Young  
Lam-Vy Phan  
Latania White  
Laurel Milera  
Lawrence McLaughlan  
Lawrence Rice  
Lawrence Treves  
Lee Nabarlambarl  
Lekita Malbunka  
Leonie Sheedy  
Leroy Petrick  
Lester Lionel  
Lily Murphy  
Lindsay Anderson  
Lindsay Whitehurst  
Lisa da Costa-Alves  
Lisa Grieve  
Lisa Stefanoff  
Lorrelle Shadforth  
Louis Razuki  
Louise Webb  
Lucas Ross  
Lucia Zimbardi  
Luke Roberts  
Magdalene Palmer  
Maisie Rogers  
Manjusha Sathiananthan  
Margaret Lewis  
Maria Ross  
Maria Suhr-Hansen  
Marie Ross  
Marie Ryder  
Marisha Gibbs  
Marita McMillan  
Marlene Doolan  
Martina Kovacova  
Maryanne Tilmouth  
Matt Watson  
Matthew Ferber  
Maxine Ferber  
May Nabarlambarl  
Meagan Fowler  
Megan Hoosan  
Megan Mundy  
Melissa Kean  
Michael Gorey  
Michael Hagan  
Michelle Drover

Michelle Poke  
Milyika Scales  
Miranda Blackman  
Mitchell Doolan  
Monique Liddy  
Myles Turner  
Nakita Ferber  
Nancy Tilmouth  
Nanette Sharpe  
Narelle Sese  
Narelle Shanahan  
Narlita Phillips  
Natassia Gorey-Furber  
Nathan Agius  
Nathan Millard  
Noel Woolley  
Oliver Hunter  
Pamela Lynch  
Patricia Drover  
Patricia Pearce  
Patricia Webb  
Patrick Bloomfield  
Patrick Ferber  
Paul Williams  
Pauline Grant  
Peppi Drover  
Peter Lowson  
Philip Parsonson  
Philly Bartlett  
Phyllis Stevens  
Preston Bloomfield  
Priscilla Williams  
Purina Anderson  
Quitaysha Thompson  
Rachael McDonald  
Raelene McMillan  
Rainer Cook Tonkin  
Raylene Rankin  
Raymond Ebatarinja  
Raymond Guymala  
Raymond Junior Reiff  
Rebecca van Essen  
Rebecca White  
Renita Webb  
Rhonda Inkamala  
Richie Nabarlambarl  
Ricki-Lee Tilmouth  
Riley Williams  
Robert McKenzie  
Roberta Nabarlambarl  
Rodney Angelo  
Rodney Moss  
Roland Ferber  
Rosalie Riley  
Rosslyn Campbell  
Roxanne Naborlhborlh  
Safiah Rind  
Samantha Jeffree  
Sandra Peckham  
Sara Palmer  
Sayuri Fonseca  
Sazkoda Dunn

Sebastian Galbirrbirr  
Shane White  
Shantelle McCormack  
Shanton Nabarlambarl  
Shantonelle Koimala  
Sharna Dakgalawuy  
Shaylee Rankine  
Shaylene Carter  
Sheldon Kernan  
Shen Cristobal  
Sheniqua Anderson  
Shirleen Hayes  
Shirley Djandjomerr  
Shirley Turner  
Shoshana Hayes  
Solomon Yabio  
Sonya Nango  
Sorrell Ashby  
Stacey Campton  
Stacey Hughes  
Stacey Nawirridj  
Stephanie Armstrong  
Stephanie Van Son  
Stephen Iles  
Susan Collins  
Susan Walker  
Sylvia Champion  
Talayah Kunoth  
Talia Liddle  
Talitha Goodman  
Tamika Lawford  
Tania Phillips  
Tara Liddy  
Tara Smith  
Tasma Maralngurra  
Taylah Turner  
Tenika Greig  
Terence Coleing  
Terracia Namarnyilk  
Tilly Riches  
Tim Coad  
Timothy-George Thomaidis  
Tony Schaber  
Tylah Saunders  
Ukanji Burchill  
Veronica Dobson  
Veronica Doolan  
Veronica Lynch  
Veronica Ross  
Veronica Turner  
Vienna Buramura  
Vincent Haines  
Vito Lucarelli  
William Lowah  
Wilton Manakgu  
Yordanka Berg Blanc  
Yuk-King Ida Lau  
Zachary Harvey  
Zane Bundy  
Zekiel Dempsey  
Zephaniah Neil-Kunoth  
Ziah Webb

## Volunteers

Amanda Sutherland  
Carolyn Pickett  
Geoff Brooks  
Lisl Dubsky  
Naomi Salim  
Phoebe Snep  
Riordan Jones  
Susan Lowes



# Supporters and partners

Thank you to our fantastic supporters and partners who continue to make it possible for us to deliver the Children's Ground Approach including following organisations, departments and individuals and many others who provided financial support, in-kind support and supported Children's Ground this year.

We extend enormous gratitude to you all.

## Philanthropic and corporate partners

Alex McCabe  
Alexandra Burt  
Anglicare  
APS Foundation  
Arrpwere Group  
Ausmed Education Pty Ltd  
Australian Communities Foundation  
B B & A Miller Fund  
Benjamin Duncan Foundation  
Bespoke Letterpress  
Beverley Jackson Foundation  
Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation  
Catherine Salisbury  
Clayton Utz Foundation  
Day Family Foundation  
Deb Sestak  
Deborah Sauviat  
Denbigh Foundation  
DGB Health  
Donkey Wheel House  
DoTERRA Healing Hands Foundation  
Dubsky Lang Foundation  
Echelon Resources  
Eisen Family Private Fund  
Emma Mattiske  
English Family Foundation  
Epic Systems  
Equity Trustees Charitable Foundation -  
Armour Family Endowment  
Equity Trustees Charitable Foundation -  
The John & Betty Laidlaw Legacy  
Fair World Foundation  
Fenner Conveyors  
Fiona Cameron  
Fluer Studd  
Future Generations Australia  
Gandel Foundation  
Good2Give  
Goodman Foundation  
Graf Family  
Harry Cohny Charitable Foundation  
Highgate Foundation  
Igniting Change  
Isaacson Davis Foundation  
Jane Strangward & Julian Rzesniowiecki

Jansen Wolf  
Joanne Parkinson Foundation  
John Auer  
John and Anna Woods Memorial Fund  
Johnson & Johnson  
Judy Avisar  
Julia Martin  
Karen Ashbury  
Ken & Carol Klooger Family Foundation  
Keo Charitable Foundation  
Kindred Spirits Foundation  
Laser Building Services  
Lesley Griffen  
Liisa Pallandi  
Market Lane Coffee  
MECCA M-POWER  
Michael & Jen Harvey  
Modara Pines Charitable Foundation  
Moose Happy Kids Foundation  
Ntegrity  
Olga van der Harst  
Oscar Hatten  
Patagorang Foundation  
Patrick O'Leary  
Paul Ramsay Foundation  
Payton Foundation  
Peter Newman Foundation  
PMF Foundation  
Polese Foundation  
Power and Water Corporation  
Ramses Foundation  
River Capital Foundation  
RMIT University  
Ryan Cooper Family Foundation  
Sage Foundation  
Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview  
Sara Longwood  
Sincerely, Underground  
Social Research Centre  
Spotlight Foundation  
Stacey Campton  
Stephen Farrell  
Stephen Ring  
Stevens Graham Family Trust  
Stuart Brown & Lisa Banks  
Tetra Tech International Development  
The Anderson Family  
The Australian Online Giving Foundation (AuOGF)

The Bowden Marstan Foundation  
The Brentnall Family  
The Capricorn Foundation  
The Carter Family  
The Fellows and Vance families  
The Grace and Emilio Foundation  
The Hoffman Foundation  
The Ian Potter Foundation  
The Maria Vasas Foundation  
The Mind Clinic  
The Orloff Family Foundation  
The Resilience Project  
The Snow Foundation  
The Stewart Foundation  
The Tony Foundation  
The Worth Foundation  
Tom Crago Foundation  
Utopian Fund  
Virgin Unite  
Wendy & Paul Bonnici and Family  
Wolf Foundation  
Women of the University Fund  
Yarn Marketplace



## Government funding

Australian Government Department of Social Services  
Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing  
Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources on behalf of the Attorney-General's Department  
Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency  
Australian Government Department of Education  
Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations  
Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts  
- Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA)  
- Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS)  
National Disability Insurance Scheme  
Northern Territory Government Department of Tourism and Hospitality - Community Benefit Fund  
Northern Territory Government, Territory Families, Housing and Communities  
Northern Territory Government, Department of People, Sport and Culture

## Partner funders

Alice Springs Town Council  
Alive National Centre for Mental Health Research Translation  
Batchelor Institute of Tertiary Education  
HeartKids  
RMIT

## Pro bono and in-kind support

8CCC  
Alex McCabe  
Allens  
Amy Tennent  
Anaconda Australia  
Anson Australia  
Arnold Bloch Leibler  
Austin Legal  
Beci Orpin  
Birth & Beyond  
Bowden McCormack, Lawyers + Advisers  
Carly Taylor  
Clayton Utz  
Coles  
Coolamon Community  
FAIRGAME  
Good360  
Goodera  
Google Sydney  
Grill'd  
Herbert Smith Freehills  
Igniting Change  
Indigenous Literacy Foundation  
Justice Connect  
K&L Gates  
King & Wood Mallesons

KOGO  
Landers & Rogers  
Light Warrior  
Louise Dorrat  
Maddocks  
Magellan Logistics  
Makinson d'Apice Lawyers  
March Studios  
Market Lane  
MECCA M-POWER  
Merry People  
Michael & Jen Harvey  
Michelle Wall  
Nappy Collective  
OzHarvest  
Peterson Haines  
Pinchapoo  
Point of Rental  
Povey Stirk  
Repro  
Share the Dignity  
SOURCE  
Thread Together  
Triptic  
University of Melbourne  
White & Case  
Who Gives a Crap  
Wild Earth  
Yogi's Way

## NT and national organisational partners

### *Supporting delivery in community*

ABC  
Alcoota School  
Alice Springs Desert Park  
Alice Springs Desert Festival  
Alice Springs Language Centre  
Alice Springs Telegraph Station  
Alice Springs Town Council  
Anglicare NT - Communities for Children  
Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC)  
Arrernte Language Centre  
Atitjere School  
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education  
Blue Earth  
Bonya School  
Central Australian Aboriginal Congress  
Central Australian Women's Legal Service (CAWLS)  
Central Land Council  
Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics: CALL  
Charles Darwin University  
Child Friendly Alice  
Connected Beginnings  
Daniila Dilba Health Service  
Darwin High School  
Deadly Vision  
Deckchair Cinema  
Desert Knowledge Australia  
Employment Assistance Services Australia (EASA)  
Family Planning NT  
Food Bank  
GIVEIT

Gwalwa Daraniki Association  
Happee Ears  
Headspace  
Hearing Australia  
HK Training and Consultancy  
Hoops4Health  
Howard Springs School  
Indigenous Community TV  
Ingerkerke Outstation Resource Centre  
Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation  
King's Narrative  
Larapinta Child and Family Centre  
Larrakia Nation  
Legal Aid NT  
Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation  
Lutheran Community Care  
Mental Health Association of Central Australia  
Northern Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency  
Ninti One  
Northern Land Council  
Northern Territory Community Health  
Northern Territory Police  
Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council  
NT Writer's Centre  
Olive Pink Botanical Gardens  
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College  
Orange Sky Laundry  
Parrtjima  
Penangke Consulting  
Purple House - Western Desert Nganampa  
Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku  
Rainbow Gateway  
Relationships Australia  
Right Tracks Program  
Sadadeen School  
Services Australia  
St. Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre  
Tangentyere Council  
The Salvation Army  
Top End Women's Legal Service  
Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation  
Watch This Space  
Women's Safety Services Central Australia  
Yarrenyty Arltere Artists  
Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation  
Yipirinya School  
YMCA Palmerston  
YouthWorx NT



# Financials

## Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

### Directors' Report

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

The Directors present their report on Children's Ground Limited for the financial year ended 31 December 2025.

#### (a) General information

##### Directors

The names of the directors in office at any time during, or since the end of, the year are:

<b>Names</b>	<b>Position</b>
William Roy Tilmouth	Co-Chair
Kon Karapanagiotidis	Non-Executive Director
Clive William Ringler	Non-Executive Director
Josie Rizza	Non-Executive Director
Amy Poynton	Non-Executive Director
Jordan Cory	Non-Executive Director
John Lochowiak	Non-Executive Director
Annalee Stearne	Non-Executive Director
Joanne Willmott	Non-Executive Director
Jane Shanthini Vadiveloo	Chief Executive Officer
*Evelyn Schaber	Co-Chair
Roxanne Naborlhborlh	Non-Executive Director

\*Evelyn Schaber elected as Co-Chair 8th December 2025.

All Directors have been in office since the start of the financial year to the date of this report unless otherwise stated.

##### Principal activities

The principal activities of Children's Ground Limited during the financial year was to deliver the Children's Ground Approach, led by communities to achieve long term equity and justice. Such activities included early years learning and care, child and family health and wellbeing (including nutrition, social and emotional wellbeing, maternal and child health, family health promotion, environmental health), community development, cultural and language revitalisation and development and employment and economic development services.

No significant changes in the nature of the Company's activity occurred during the financial year.

##### Government Funding 2026

In the next calendar year (2026) Australian Government contracts to the value of \$4.8m annually will cease. Most cease on 30th June and the remainder on 31st December 2026. As at 20th April there has been no contract renewals. Children's Ground continues to negotiate with the Australian Government.

# Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

## Directors' Report

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

### Meetings of directors

During the financial year, 5 meetings of directors were held. Attendances by each director during the year were as follows:

Directors' Meetings		
	Number eligible to attend	Number attended
William Roy Tilmouth	5	4
Kon Karapanagiotidis	5	3
Clive William Ringler	5	5
Roxanne Naborlhborlh	5	3
Josie Rizza	5	4
Jordan Cory	5	5
John Lochowiak	5	3
Jane Shanthini Vadiveloo	5	5
Amy Poynton	5	5
Evelyn Schaber	5	3
Annalee Stearne	5	4
Joanne Willmott	5	3

### Auditor's independence declaration

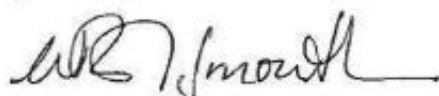
The auditor's independence declaration for the year ended 31 December 2025 has been received and can be found on page 7 of the financial report.

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Board of Directors:

Director: Jane Vadiveloo



Director: William Tilmouth



Dated this .....24th..... day of .....April..... 2026

# Financials

## Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

### Directors' Report

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025



I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, during the year ended 31 December 2025, there have been:

- (i) no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in Division 60.40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and
- (ii) no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Saward Dawson

Matthew Crouch  
Partner

Blackburn, VIC

Dated: 27 April 2026

# Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

## Statement of Income and Expenditures and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 \$	2024 \$
Revenue	2	17,217,550	14,262,835
Employee benefits expense		(12,065,620)	(8,982,746)
Superannuation contributions		(1,292,803)	(939,701)
Motor Vehicle Expenses		(458,747)	(344,326)
Travel and accommodation		(417,168)	(252,500)
Client Support Consumables		(403,295)	(286,395)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(400,674)	(415,575)
Computer expenses		(278,019)	(225,451)
Professional fees		(142,540)	(472,466)
Asset Purchases < \$1,000		(141,132)	(44,374)
Client Service Support		(126,425)	(192,648)
Utilities and cleaning		(122,719)	(168,848)
Repairs and maintenance		(103,566)	(162,752)
Advertising and Promotion		(88,658)	(106,935)
Training and development		(70,856)	(32,324)
Printing and stationery		(59,599)	(63,465)
Telephone and fax		(47,961)	(44,971)
Insurance		(46,898)	(48,994)
Rent	3	(38,611)	(55,210)
Interest expense on lease liability		(20,440)	(20,772)
Other Expenses		(372,895)	(336,919)
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for the year</b>		<b>518,924</b>	<b>1,065,463</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year</b>		<b>518,924</b>	<b>1,065,463</b>

Note 3 provides a breakdown of more details on expenses.

# Financials

## Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

### Statement of Financial Position

As at 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 \$	2024 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	6,846,227	5,990,209
Trade and other receivables	6	338,526	251,335
Inventories		29,644	34,168
Other assets	7	276,028	170,277
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		<u>7,490,425</u>	<u>6,445,989</u>
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Right of use asset	8	223,370	218,862
Property, plant and equipment	9	2,316,248	2,123,912
Intangible assets	10	88,710	49,631
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		<u>2,628,328</u>	<u>2,392,405</u>
TOTAL ASSETS		<u>10,118,753</u>	<u>8,838,394</u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liability	8	90,922	57,746
Trade and other payables	11	897,603	649,993
Other liabilities	12	2,307,265	2,107,235
Employee benefits	13	862,258	621,245
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>4,158,048</u>	<u>3,436,219</u>
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liability	8	168,673	190,490
Employee benefits	13	211,669	150,246
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>380,342</u>	<u>340,736</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES		<u>4,538,390</u>	<u>3,776,955</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>5,580,363</u>	<u>5,061,439</u>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Retained surplus		<u>5,580,363</u>	<u>5,061,439</u>
TOTAL EQUITY		<u>5,580,363</u>	<u>5,061,439</u>

# Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

## Statement of Changes in Equity

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

### 2025

	Retained Surplus	Total
	\$	\$
Balance at 1 January 2025	5,061,439	5,061,439
Surplus for the year	518,924	518,924
Balance at 31 December 2025	<u>5,580,363</u>	<u>5,580,363</u>

### 2024

	Retained Surplus	Total
	\$	\$
Balance at 1 January 2024	3,995,976	3,995,976
Surplus for the year	1,065,463	1,065,463
Balance at 31 December 2024	<u>5,061,439</u>	<u>5,061,439</u>

# Financials

## Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

### Statement of Cash Flows

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	2025	2024
Note	\$	\$
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES:</b>		
Donations, grants and other income received	17,878,691	15,398,381
Interest received	208,750	173,343
Interest paid	(20,730)	(20,772)
Payments to suppliers and employees	(16,607,110)	(13,251,805)
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	16 <u>1,459,601</u>	<u>2,299,147</u>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES:</b>		
Proceeds from sale of property, plant and equipment	38,413	-
Donations received for purchase of property	-	100,000
Payment for intangible asset	(62,345)	(34,205)
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	(502,257)	(606,652)
Net cash provided by/(used in) investing activities	<u>(526,189)</u>	<u>(540,857)</u>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES:</b>		
Payment of lease liabilities	(77,394)	(46,179)
Net cash provided by/(used in) financing activities	<u>(77,394)</u>	<u>(46,179)</u>
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held	856,018	1,712,111
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year	5,990,209	4,278,098
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	5 <u><u>6,846,227</u></u>	<u><u>5,990,209</u></u>

# Children's Ground Limited

ABN 74 154 403 086

## Directors' Declaration

In accordance with a resolution of the Directors of Children's Ground Limited, the directors declare that, in the directors' opinion:

1. The financial statements and notes, as set out on pages 8 - 34, satisfy the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and:
  - a. comply with Australian Accounting Standards applicable to the entity; and
  - b. give a true and fair view of the financial position of the registered entity as at 31 December 2025 and of its performance for the year ended on that date.
2. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the Company is able to pay all of its debts, as and when they become due and payable.


This declaration is signed in accordance with subsection 60.15(2) of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2022*.

Director: Jane Vadiveloo



Dated 24/04/2026

Director: William Tilmouth



Dated 24/04/2026



**Children's Ground Limited**  
**ABN 74 154 403 068**

## **Report of the Independent Auditor on the Summary Financial Statements**

### **Opinion**

The summary financial statements, which comprise the summary statement of Financial Position as at 31 December 2025, the summary Statement of Income and Expenditure and Other Comprehensive Income, summary Statement of Changes in Equity for the year then ended, summary Statement of Cash Flows, summary Directors' Report, and Directors' Declaration, are derived from the audited financial report of Children's Ground Limited for the year ended 31 December 2025.

In our opinion, the accompanying summary financial statements are consistent, in all material respects, with the audited financial report.

### **Summary Financial Statements**

The summary financial statements do not contain all the disclosures required by the Australian Accounting Standards and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. Reading the summary financial statements and the auditor's report thereon, therefore, is not a substitute for reading the audited financial report and the auditor's report thereon. The summary financial statements and the audited financial report do not reflect the effects of events that occurred subsequent to the date of our report on the audited financial report.

### **The Audited Financial Report and Our Report Thereon**

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on the audited financial report in our report dated 27 April 2026.

### **Board's Responsibility for the Summary Financial Statements**

The board is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the summary financial statements.

### **Auditor's Responsibility**

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on whether the summary financial statements are consistent, in all material respects, with the audited financial report based on our procedures, which were conducted in accordance with Auditing Standard ASA 810 *Engagements to Report on Summary Financial Statements*.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Saward Dawson'.

**Saward Dawson**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Matthew Crouch'.

Matthew Crouch  
Partner

Blackburn, VIC  
Dated: 29 April 2026

20 Albert St, Blackburn VIC 3130  
PO Box 1212, Blackburn North VIC 3130  
[contact@sawarddawson.com.au](mailto:contact@sawarddawson.com.au)  
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# Appendices



# Appendix A

## Children's Ground

Children's Ground was founded by community Elders and leaders from Central Australia and was then incubated by the Australian Government as a model of innovation to achieve systems change in 2011.

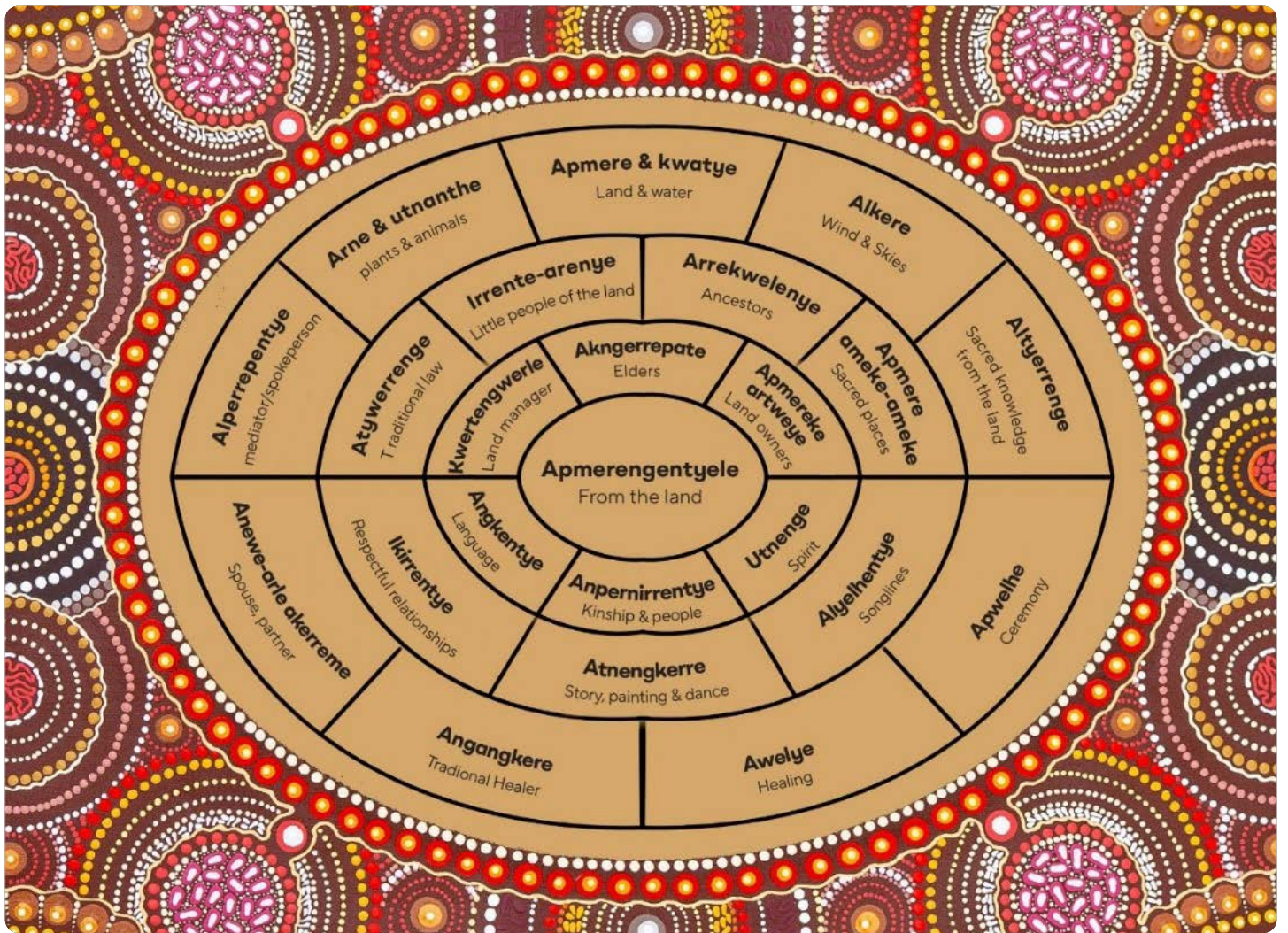
Children's Ground is known as Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (figure. 1) in the Arrernte language of Central Australia and Wurdurd Garriygarrmerren in the Kunwinjku language of West Arnhem. The Children's Ground Approach is a First Nations system, led and championed by Elders and governed community by community.

We have the most evolved systems of knowledge and practice in the world, and our strategies hold the solutions to our future.

Our children, families, and communities are the experts. Our history, our Culture and our knowledge inform our way forward. We are reforming core economic, social and cultural systems to privilege First Nations experience and achieve essential, lasting change. We are investing in prevention, early intervention, empowerment and the future of our children, and we're complementing this with Western and global practice.

**Figure. 1: Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe.** Painting design by Jane Davis, painted by Amunda Gorey (2011). Painting interpretation by Jane Davis and Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme (First Nations Community Governance Group).





**Figure. 2: Apmeregentyele.**

All First Peoples hold a world view, law and knowledge. We share the foundation of the land and seas as where we come from, who we are, and our responsibility through life. At Children’s Ground this has been articulated by Dr M.K. Turner as Apmeregentyele (figure. 2), meaning ‘from the land’.

Apmeregentyele defines the Arrernte world view – including governance, laws and kinship – and articulates the interconnectedness of our systems of knowledge that encompass education, health, economic, environmental, scientific, social systems and more.

Beginning with the knowledge and authority of our Elders, our system empowers and connects individuals to their responsibility to the whole community.

At Children’s Ground we place children at the centre of our intergenerational structure and future, and uphold our commitment to their safety, their identity and to ensure they grow up proud of who they are as First Nations people. As a First Nations approach our work includes everyone across generations, as we re-strengthen our people, our communities, and strive for true self-determination and generational transformation.

This is our solution. The evidence is showing it is working. With the right support we can break the cycle that has condemned generations of children to economic poverty, child removal, hospitalisation, incarceration, chronic health issues and early death, and excluded them from education.

We are replacing this system with health that is accessible, education systems that work, employment opportunities and a celebration and centring of our culture, knowledge and identity.

Our children deserve the freedom to live as First Nations children with every opportunity in their local and global environment.

# Appendix A

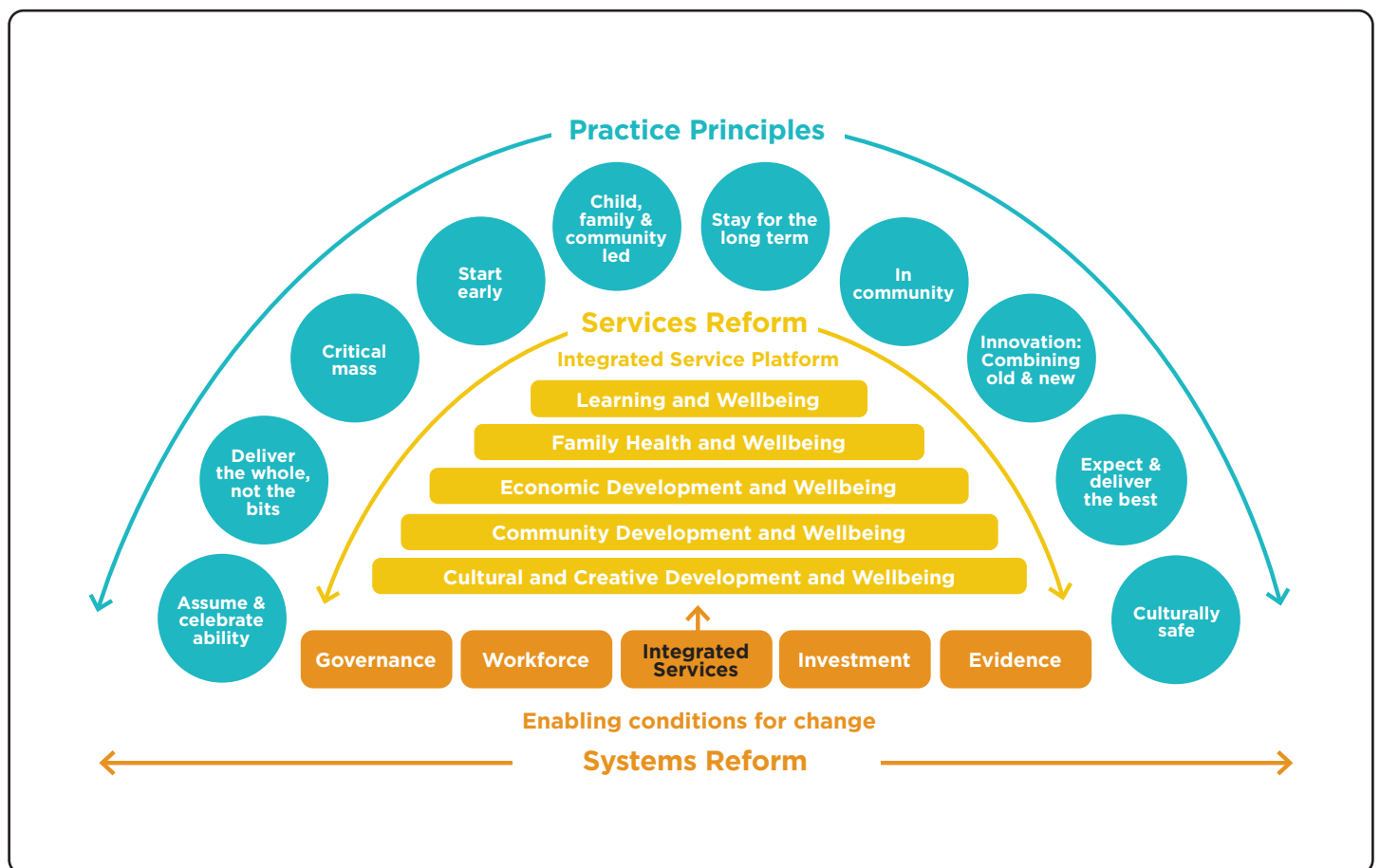
## The Children's Ground Approach

The Children's Ground Approach (CGA) (figure. 3) is a 25-year strategy to achieve systemic and enduring change by addressing the key economic, social, cultural and political drivers that create and sustain complex and extreme inequity. It is guided by Apmerengentyele.

### The CGA is reforming:

- 'How' services are delivered and governed (ten Practice Principles)
- 'What' services are delivered (Integrated and culturally responsive service platform across five key Services Reform areas); and
- System structures that are 'enabling conditions for change' (five System Reforms)

Figure. 3: The Children's Ground Approach



The CGA is underpinned by a robust Theory of Change (figure. 4) that operates across three levels - community, systems and society.

**Figure. 4:** Theory of Change

INPUT	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	IMPACT
The Children's Ground Approach (Practice Principles; Service Reform; System Reform)...	...is implemented in collaboration with communities experiencing extreme inequity...	...to bring about Community, Systemic and Societal change over the course of a generation...	...so that children, families and community enjoy social, cultural, political, economic wellbeing.

Achieving our vision requires a significant change across each of the three levels:

### Community change

- First Nations people in our local communities have access to and/or lead quality, integrated and culturally responsive services that are inclusive and place-based and create safety and wellbeing.
- Every child enjoys wellbeing with their families.
- Whole communities shift from intergenerational inequity to intergenerational opportunity and wellbeing.

### Systems change

- A national integrated service delivery and policy system that meets the long-term needs of children, families and communities and builds on their identity, history, strengths and ambitions. A system that values First Nations knowledge.

### Societal change

- First Nations history and Culture is celebrated as central to Australia's identity.

The CGA's 25-year strategy speaks to the amount of time and dedicated investment it takes to break the cycles of economic, social and cultural disempowerment and exclusion. Fully implementing the CGA over 25 years begins with community engagement, establishing the approach and fostering community growth and empowerment, leading to consolidated and sustained changes.

Simultaneously, Children's Ground undertakes a 25-year longitudinal evaluation within community, building an evidence base of the CGA to influence policy and lobby for change.

Currently, the 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 towards implementing the full CGA in each community as resources increase and enable growth.

Early evidence from our triennial evaluation reports is demonstrating that the CGA is putting key foundations in place to change the status quo.

The Children's Ground Approach is an 'in-community' approach, implementing a bottom-up system, directed and delivered by First Nations people to achieve long-term impact and sustained change. The Children's Ground Approach is about what we do and how we do it.

The CGA is informed by cultural knowledge and practices, as well as national and international Western evidence and leading practice.

First Nations systems of knowledge are placed in the centre, and around this we include Western knowledge, ensuring our children are placed in the best position to succeed.

Implementation of the CGA is phased as children grow. The 25-year approach starts with children pre-birth to eight years and Children's Ground grows with them and their families through to adulthood.

This includes learning for children through primary, secondary and support for tertiary and vocational pathways. As an intergenerational approach, we work with whole communities - from babies to Elders and all of our families in between. This is our strength, structure and responsibility as First Nations people.

On the ground in communities, the CGA delivers services, referred to as the integrated 'Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform' (LWD platform). The platform recognises that an early start in education, health and wellbeing, safety, a healthy family and community environment, cultural identity and economic wellbeing are all critical foundations to a child doing well in life.

The LWD platform integrates the CGA's five key areas of service reform (figure. 5).

The Children's Ground Approach is designed as a partnership approach, and provides a strategic framework for delivery that can be executed by a range of organisations working in a coordinated system that centres the child and the community.

Children's Ground, the organisation, is implementing and evidencing the approach. We do not replicate services, and we work in partnership with other service providers to provide a whole of systems approach, underpinned by the CGA principles.

Over time our aim is to see the CGA as the preferred system being offered to First Nations communities, delivered by organisations beyond Children's Ground.

Designed as a whole of community approach, Children's Ground seeks to engage and walk with the majority, 'a critical mass' (75%) of children within a community. The assumption is that if a critical mass of children enjoy high quality education, positive health and wellbeing and equity in life opportunities into adulthood, whole communities currently experiencing intergenerational inequity can grow into communities that experience wellbeing, justice and opportunity.

The services that are delivered are important, however, how they are delivered is what leads to engagement, empowerment and sustained change and impact.

Our 25-year approach aspires to excellence, recognising that children, families and communities who need the most, deserve the best, that they are the experts in their own lives, and that it is their voice and talent that will create change.



**Figure. 5:** Five key areas of service reform



*There is strength in them (our kids). They might not feel it every day, but they are here. There will be a time when they are heard. Their strength will shine.*

**Melarli Gorey,**  
Language & Culture Standards Practice Coordinator



# Appendix B

## Learning and Wellbeing

### Learning on Country guided by cultural authority

Central Australia

Learning in Central Australia continued to be shaped by cultural authority and connection to Country. A visit to Akarba, west of Mparntwe, brought children, families and educators together on Arrernte homelands after earlier delays due to Sorry Business. Guided by senior Elder Blanche, the day reflected how learning is led by Elders and held within family and place.

Children learned through story, song and direct experience, hearing creation stories in First Language, learning skin names and identifying bush foods and plants. Families cooked and shared food, strengthening intergenerational connections and reinforcing learning as a collective responsibility.

Learning on Country such as this reflects a broader approach across Central Australia in 2025. Education is embedded in cultural knowledge, language and lived experience, supporting children to develop literacy, confidence and identity. These learning environments provide children with foundations that extend beyond the day, strengthening their engagement with learning over time.

### Growing leadership through extended hours learning

Central Australia

Extended hours learning continued to expand across Central Australia, creating new opportunities for older children and young people to engage in learning after school

and during holidays. Activities were shaped by young people, families and community governance, and delivered by First Nations educators and youth workers.

Learning during extended hours included creative projects, physical activities, cultural learning and community events. Older children increasingly stepped into leadership roles, supporting younger ones during sessions and helping to organise activities and family nights.

These learning spaces strengthened responsibility, confidence and connection. By extending learning beyond the school day and embedding it within community life, we are establishing a new level of prevention, access and opportunity. This extends our reach to school aged children and young people at risk, building skill supporting learning and development leadership and future pathways.

### Reading and counting in First Language at McGrath's Dam

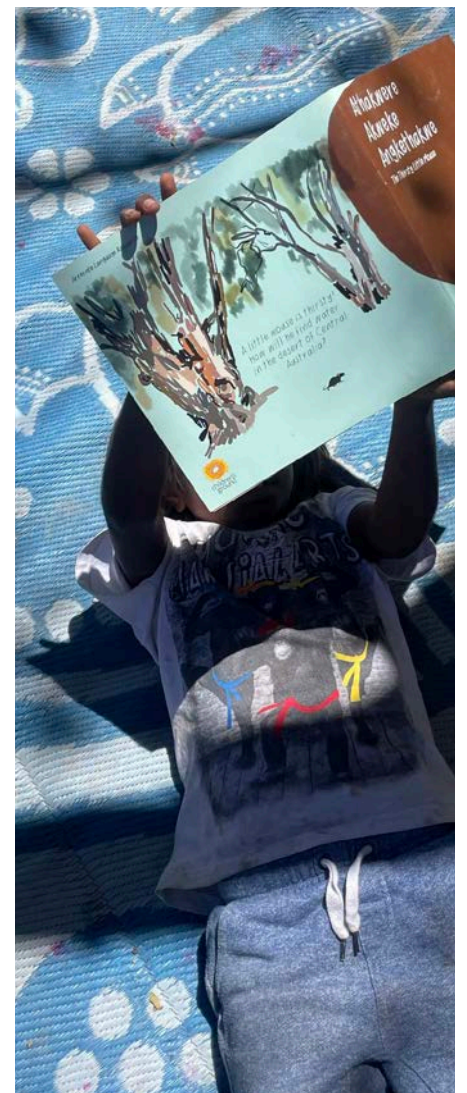
Central Australia

At Uyenpere Atwatye, early years children spent time learning on Country at McGrath's Dam, combining water play with literacy and numeracy. After swimming, children sat together with educators to practise counting in Arrernte using bush food counting cards created by First Nations artists and storytellers.

Children counted aloud in language, identifying familiar foods and learning number patterns through visual and cultural reference points. These sessions supported

early literacy and numeracy while strengthening confidence and fluency in First Language.

Learning in this setting reflected how early years education in Central Australia grows from Country and culture. Familiar environments, trusted educators and culturally grounded resources supported children to engage deeply in learning that felt safe, joyful and meaningful.



## **Bininj educators leading early years learning**

Marlkawo

This year early years learning at Marlkawo was led entirely by Bininj educators, many of whom stepped into head educator roles. Each morning, educators independently ran the early years program from the Balabala, beginning with breakfast, shared reading and creative activities before moving into play-based learning.

Children rotated through reading stations, art activities and counting games, learning animal names in local language and English through books, drawing and conversation. Educators planned the day, prepared learning spaces and guided routines independently, drawing on their own knowledge and teaching practice. The Balabala itself was shaped through a Bininj led design process, strengthening ownership and pride in the learning space.

This period marked a clear shift, with early years education carried confidently by Bininj educators, strengthening continuity for children and reinforcing learning as something led from within community.

## **Cultural mapping supporting learning on Country**

Marlkawo

Children had the opportunity to be involved in cultural mapping activities alongside Community Leads, Elders and visiting specialists. This work was undertaken in partnership with Malbak Aboriginal Corporation and cultural mapping professionals as part of longer term efforts to document Country and support future tourism enterprise.

Children travelled on Country to visit significant sites, where Elders shared stories and cultural knowledge connected to place. Through this activity, children were introduced to mapping as both a cultural and practical process.

They learned how GPS tools are used to record locations, while also listening to stories and observing Country directly.

Children created artworks of native animals linked to the sites visited, contributing to the mapping work through drawing and discussion. Reading, writing and counting were practised alongside this activity. Cultural mapping supported learning that brought cultural knowledge and Western tools together, grounding education in place, purpose and responsibility.

## **Extended hours learning supporting continuity and connection**

Darwin

Extended hours learning played an important role in supporting children and young people across Darwin communities. After school and holiday programs operated regularly, providing spaces where learning could continue alongside wellbeing and connection. Children took part in homework support, creative projects, digital learning, sport and group activities, delivered in partnership with a range of local organisations and community groups.

These sessions supported literacy, numeracy and problem solving through familiar routines and trusted relationships. For many children, extended hours learning provided continuity during periods when school attendance was uneven. Older children also took on responsibility, supporting younger ones and helping set up activities, strengthening confidence and leadership over time.

## **Early years learning grounded in routine and family involvement**

Darwin

This year early years learning focused on building strong foundations through regular, familiar routines supported by families. Children took part in early learning sessions that included storytelling, painting and drawing, water and sensory play, music and shared meals, delivered in community spaces.

Educators worked alongside parents and carers to develop learning plans for each child, supporting early literacy and numeracy through everyday activities such as counting objects during play, talking through routines and sharing stories together. Families attended sessions, helped prepare food and supported children's participation, reinforcing learning between home and community.

These consistent early learning experiences supported children to feel settled and confident, strengthening communication, focus and readiness for ongoing learning.



# Appendix B

## Health and Wellbeing

### Supporting mothers and babies through Menhenge nhenge

Central Australia

In 2025, maternal and child health continued to be delivered through weekly Menhenge nhenge sessions in Central Australia. These sessions brought together mothers, babies and caregivers in a consistent, culturally safe space, supported by a multidisciplinary team that included a First Nations Maternal and Child Health Officer, a midwife and family support practitioners.

Across the year, women accessed health education, developmental checks for babies and practical support around breastfeeding, nutrition and infant care. Cultural practices such as baby smoking ceremonies and bush medicine knowledge were shared alongside clinical guidance, reflecting a two way approach to care that families recognised and trusted.

Menhenge nhenge is a First Nations MCH approach that prioritises cultural safety, prevention and early intervention. By supporting women regularly through pregnancy and early childhood, health teams are supporting strong maternal and child health practices, early intervention, connection to Western health systems, cultural health systems and creating connection and confidence. This is critical prevention at a critical stage of life.

### Strengthening social and emotional wellbeing at Mpweringke

Central Australia

This year social and emotional wellbeing sessions continued at Mpweringke Anapipe.

Each week, children gathered for sessions that used animal based storytelling, music and movement to explore emotions.

Educators guided children to move like atyunpe, apmwe and irreyte, connecting physical movement with emotional expression and understanding. Through story and play, children learnt to recognise feelings, practise self-regulation and express themselves in a safe and supported environment.

By embedding wellbeing into learning children develop emotional literacy early in life. This approach supported calmness, connection and confidence, strengthening foundations that children carry into everyday learning and relationships.

### Orange Sky partnership strengthening healthy homes and infection prevention

Central Australia

Our partnership with Orange Sky Australia supported families across Central Australia with the mobile laundry trucks travelling between communities five days each week. Children's Ground runs the service, staffed by local community. The service provided free washing and drying, strengthening practical foundations for healthy homes and contributing to the reduction of skin infections among children and families.

The truck became a regular and familiar presence in community life. It parked alongside early years sessions, outside town camp spaces and near community gatherings, allowing families to wash clothes while children participated in learning and play.

While cycles ran, staff and families sat together, yarned and shared practical information about skin health, hygiene and caring for household spaces.

Healthy home learning was also embedded into children's play. During visits, children washed their dolls' clothes and pegged them out to dry, mirroring what they saw around them. Through play, children learnt about caring for others and the daily practices that keep babies and families healthy and free from infection.

This partnership reflects how health and wellbeing in Central Australia is strengthened through practical, community based delivery that brings together service access, employment and learning in ways that are grounded in everyday life.



## Strengthening access to food and health care through clinic and shop trips

Marlkawo

In 2025, the approach to clinic and shop trips was reshaped to better support health, food security and continuity of care for families. Trips to Maningrida provide access to groceries, medication and clinic services, but involve a long return journey along a dirt road and had previously disrupted early years programs and placed pressure on staff.

This year, responsibility for these trips shifted to Marlkawo based staff, allowing learning and care to continue in community while improving how health needs were met. Trips were timed carefully around pay days and the end of camp periods, supporting families to access food and health services when they were most needed.

The change also led to the creation of a dedicated Driver role. This role supported clinic and shopping days, travel between Marlkawo and Darwin, and learning on Country trips. Sharing driving responsibilities reduced fatigue, improved safety and strengthened sustainability across the season.

## Maintaining hygiene away from fixed facilities

Marlkawo

Health routines at Marlkawo were maintained even when families were away from established infrastructure. Children were supported to continue everyday hygiene practices,

including hand washing, managing waste and caring for themselves during bush trips and camp life.

These routines required planning and adaptation, particularly when water access and facilities were limited. Staff and Community Leads supported children to practise hygiene in ways that made sense for the setting, reinforcing care for their bodies as part of daily life rather than as a separate activity. This approach helped children stay well during extended time outdoors and supported continuity of health routines across different environments.

## Building healthy dental routines at Minmarama

Darwin

Dental health was supported at Minmarama through regular, child focused activities led by the local Health Promotion Lead. Children took part in dental hygiene sessions that used song, storytelling and group discussion to explore how to care for teeth and gums. These sessions introduced dental health in ways that were fun and engaging for young children.

Dental routines were reinforced through everyday practice, with children brushing together during sessions and families involved in conversations about oral health. This consistent approach supported children to build routine around dental care, strengthening habits that support ongoing health.

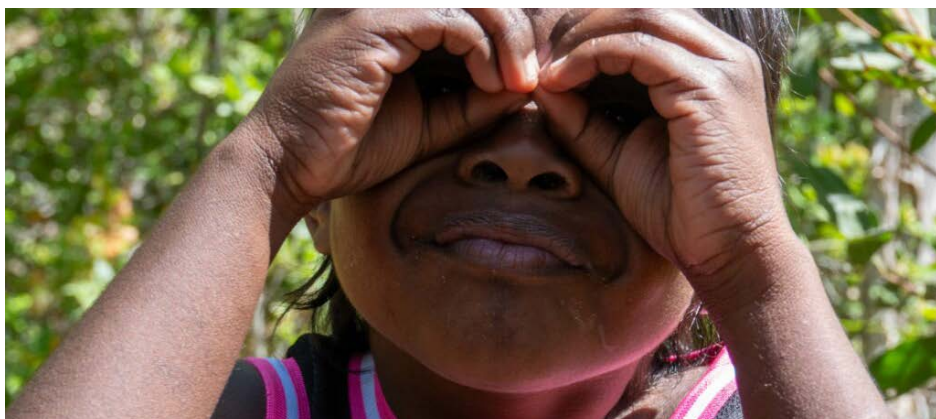
## Strengthening wellbeing through physical activity

Darwin

Physical activity plays an important role in supporting health and wellbeing for children and young people, with this focus strengthening in Darwin during 2025. Basketball, fitness activities and active play were embedded across programs, supporting strength, coordination and emotional regulation.

Targeted programs added depth to this work during the year. Visits from the Gold Coast Suns gave children and young people opportunities to take part in structured AFL activities, practise new skills and spend time with visiting players and coaches. These sessions encouraged teamwork and confidence, while creating strong engagement.

Boxing workshops delivered by BoxFit NT during community events supported older children and young people to develop focus through guided training. Together, these activities created varied opportunities for movement and challenge, supporting wellbeing through consistent participation and shared experience.



# Appendix B

## Economic Development and Wellbeing

### **Building employment pathways through extended hours delivery** Central Australia

Extended hours programs operated across several Central Australia communities, providing after school and holiday activities for children and young people. These programs were delivered by First Nations staff employed in youth, learning and community support roles, creating local employment that responded directly to community priorities.

Adults employed through extended hours delivery coordinated activities, supported young people and worked alongside families during after school sessions and family nights. These roles built skills in planning, supervision and leadership, while offering consistent work that could be balanced with cultural responsibilities and family life.

Extended hours delivery also created early pathways into work for young people. Older children supported activities and younger participants, gained experience of responsibility and teamwork in a supported setting.

### **Building financial confidence alongside employment** Central Australia

Economic wellbeing in Central Australia during 2025 was also supported through practical financial skill building. Alongside employment pathways, adults took part in financial literacy activities that focused on understanding income, superannuation, insurance and essential services.

Participants worked through real life scenarios, gaining skills to lodge tax returns, review superannuation, deal with debts and make informed decisions about household expenses. This support strengthened confidence and reduced stress around managing finances, particularly for people entering or sustaining employment.

This work highlights how economic development in 2025 extended beyond job creation alone. By supporting people to understand and manage their finances, economic participation was strengthened in ways that support longer term stability for individuals and families.

### **Reconnecting men to culture and purpose through employment** Central Australia

Employment in Central Australia continued to support reconnection to culture, Country and leadership alongside paid work. Arrernte men working across Men's and Youth, operational and community support roles contributed to daily delivery while strengthening their own skills and responsibilities within community.

Through these roles, men supported Elders with transport, assisted families, helped maintain community spaces and took part in learning and on Country activities. Employment created opportunities to return to homelands, learn language from senior family members and step further into cultural responsibility while remaining engaged in consistent work.

This reflects how economic development in 2025 was shaped around purpose rather than task based employment alone. By aligning work with cultural roles and community priorities, employment supported stability while strengthening identity, leadership and connection for individuals and families.



## Growing independence through Community Development Officer roles

Marlkawo

Community Development Officer roles continued to take shape at Marlkawo, strengthening local involvement in planning, coordination and reporting. Community staff increased their responsibility for computer based tasks such as Financial Information System (FIS) entries, meeting minutes, presentations and community reports, building skills that support programs to be carried more independently.

This work highlighted both progress and practical barriers. While some staff developed confidence using digital systems, others remained reliant on paper timesheets due to limited or inconsistent access to personal devices. In response, staff identified the need for shared work equipment, such as a dedicated iPad, to support independence without relying on personal phones.

By strengthening administrative and digital skills alongside on Country work, these roles support economic wellbeing through increased responsibility, confidence and long-term employment potential.

## Strengthening employment sustainability between camps

Marlkawo

Employment sustainability was a key consideration during 2025, shaped by the seasonal structure of Marlkawo delivery. Many First Nations staff are highly skilled and sought after by multiple organisations in the region. The two week on for camps and one week off provided opportunity for work to continue in community.

Staff identified opportunities to strengthen continuity by continuing early years, nutrition, health promotion and community development in the weeks between camps. Other activities included preparation, planning, communication with Darwin based staff, logistics coordination and, running programs in community.

Strong community leaders and experience reduces reliance on external coordination and supports self determination.

The potential for community staff to take on greater responsibility during periods when balanda staff return to Darwin was also recognised. While acknowledged as a longer term goal, this approach would support skill development, independence and a more sustainable workforce. These discussions reflect a growing focus on employment models that better align with community capacity and long term economic wellbeing.

## Community led pathways taking shape in practice

Darwin

Employment pathways in Darwin developed through community-based roles that supported everyday work with children and families. A significant step was the appointment of the first community-based Evaluation and Research Officer in the Top End. This role involved attending programs, yarning with families and staff, supporting the recording of activities and contributing to how community experience is reflected in learning and reporting.

Young people were also employed to support after hours programs, including Spark Box sessions that focus on literacy and numeracy through hands on and digital learning. Their work included setting up activities, supporting younger children during sessions, helping prepare shared meals and assisting staff to pack up. Through this regular involvement, young people gained experience of workplace routines and responsibility.

Women working across learning, health and community programs took on paid roles while undertaking training and mentoring. Their work included supporting early years sessions, assisting with health promotion activities and being present during community events, strengthening continuity for children and families.



# Appendix B

## Community Development and Wellbeing

### **Irrkerlantye housing project completed and community momentum continues**

Central Australia

In 2025, the housing upgrades at Irrkerlantye were completed, marking an important step in strengthening living conditions for families who have lived on this Country for decades.

Irrkerlantye is located three kilometres from the centre of Mparntwe on crown land. While Traditional Owners hold native title, residents do not have tenure or access to municipal services. Water continues to be trucked in weekly and power is supplied through a hybrid generator installed in 2023.

Over the past two years, four tin sheds that had housed families for more than 30 years were rebuilt through a community development project funded by the Northern Territory Chief Minister's Office. Community members were employed to work alongside a building contractor, contributing to construction and site works. The new cabins were completed in 2024 and 2025 and include sealed walls, insulation, lighting, fans and piped water and electricity. These upgrades have significantly improved safety and comfort during Central Australia's extreme heat and cold.

The project concluded with repairs and extensions to communal shade structures, and the addition of a shared kitchen and fire pit area. Water and electricity were connected to all living structures, and several community clean ups strengthened pride in place and collective care. For the first time people could turn on a light, boil water for a cup of tea and watch TV in their sheds.

Planning is now underway for a nature based playground to be built by community members for their children, continuing the steady progress driven by local leadership and shared responsibility at Irrkerlantye.

### **Family nights strengthening connection and care**

Central Australia

Family nights continued to be a central part of delivery at Ampekenhe Ahelhe. These regular gatherings brought families together to share meals, spend time with one another and create space for conversation, connection and celebration.

Family nights are attended by children, young people, parents, grandparents and Elders, and often are a chance to share photos on an outdoor big screen of what has been happening in community and on Country. They can be a place where important information and governance is shared. They usually involve a microphone to ensure that people who want to talk get that chance and are heard by everyone.

Family nights also played an important role during periods of pressure, and times of Sorry, providing a consistent and familiar space for families to come together. These gatherings reflect how community development in 2025 focused on strengthening everyday connection and collective care as the foundation for wellbeing.

### **Strengthening community leadership through Apmerengentyele**

Central Australia

In the middle of the year First Nations educators and staff came together during the school holidays for a dedicated day of learning focused on Apmerengentyele. Held at Ross River on Arrernte Country, the gathering created space for reflection, shared learning and strengthening understanding of the knowledge system that underpins an Arrernte worldview.

Apmerengentyele brings together ways of knowing, values and practices that guide how learning, health, care and responsibility are carried across generations. During the day, staff shared knowledge, talked story and reflected on how Apmerengentyele shapes their work with children, families and community.

This gathering reflects how community development invested in strengthening collective leadership and shared understanding. By grounding staff learning in local knowledge systems, the work supported consistency across programs and reinforced a common foundation for community led practice. Strengthening leadership in this way supports children to grow up surrounded by people who carry culture, responsibility and shared purpose.

## Community leadership guiding reflection and decision making

Marlkawo

Community development at Marlkawo was carried through strong and confident First Nations leadership across the six community camps held during the season. Elders, staff and young people contributed to shaping how the program operated, with community voices guiding reflection, planning and adjustment throughout the year.

Regular moments of collective reflection supported this work. During the August camp, a group of eight participants, the majority local Bolmo staff including Elders, community leaders and young people, came together to review how activities were running. Conversations were practical and grounded, focusing on what supported families well and what could be strengthened. Feedback around preparation for bush trips, including food planning and equipment, informed clear changes to how subsequent camps were organised.

Leadership was visible not only in formal discussions but in everyday coordination and communication. Local leaders such as Kimberley Namarnyilk played a key role in holding this work, contributing ideas, supporting planning and speaking on behalf of the program in meetings. Her leadership reflected the broader strength within the Marlkawo team, where responsibility is shared and carried through action rather than position alone.

Across the season, these processes reinforced a way of working where decisions are shaped on Country, led by those who live and work there, and carried forward through shared responsibility. Community voices continued to guide what happens on the ground, strengthening confidence, ownership and direction in how the program is delivered.

## Caring for community spaces through place making

Marlkawo

Place making played an important role in supporting wellbeing at Marlkawo, with local staff leading work to maintain and improve community spaces across the season. A growing Place Making team was employed to carry out practical tasks that supported safety, functionality and daily use of shared areas.

Work included burying water pipes to improve access to clean drinking water, installing railings and fencing to increase safety for children, and upgrading kitchen and office spaces to better support programs and community life. Environmental health activities such as composting, recycling and cultural burning were also undertaken to manage waste, improve access and reduce risk.

Through this work, staff developed skills in construction, maintenance, planning and safe use of tools, while working together as a team. Employment through place making created opportunities to build confidence, take responsibility and contribute directly to the condition of the community.

These projects strengthened the physical environment while reinforcing local ownership of community spaces. Caring for infrastructure, land and shared facilities became part of everyday responsibility, supporting healthier and safer conditions for children, families and staff.

## Hosting Utyerre Apanpe on Larrakia Country

Darwin

In 2025 Utyerre Apanpe was hosted in Garramilla. The gathering was carried through the cultural authority and responsibility of Larrakia Country and the communities who supported it. Over two days Darwin communities welcomed more than sixty First Nations educators and leaders from across the continent, holding the gathering in ways shaped by local protocol, relationships and care.

Elders guided how people were welcomed, how space was used and how the gathering unfolded on Country. Families and staff supported the work of hosting, ensuring visitors were cared for and that the rhythm of the forum reflected local ways of coming together. This demonstrated cultural governance in practice, with leadership carried through guidance, presence and shared responsibility.

During the gathering, community leaders shared cultural song and dance, including expressions of culture that some had not previously felt confident to share in public settings. Being on Country, supported by Elders and surrounded by other First Nations educators, created the conditions for this knowledge to be shared safely and with pride. These moments affirmed the strength of local culture and the importance of spaces where knowledge holders feel supported to lead.

Children and young people were present in and around the gathering, seeing how adults carried responsibility, welcomed others and shared culture. Hosting Utyerre Apanpe supported community wellbeing by strengthening pride, confidence and connection. It showed how Darwin communities are able to lead nationally while remaining grounded locally, carrying culture, authority and care together in ways that hold people and place strong.



# Appendix B

## Creative and Cultural Development and Wellbeing

### Clapstick making led by women at Yarrenyty Arltere Central Australia

Women leaders at Yarrenyty Arltere led a clapstick making process with children, guiding each step from collecting wood to finishing the instruments for use in music and learning. Wood was gathered from the ititja tree, prepared and shaped, then sanded and painted together.

Children took part throughout the process, watching closely, helping with sanding and painting, and learning how tools are used safely. The women worked extra hours to prepare materials so the children could fully participate in the making, sharing knowledge through doing rather than instruction.

Once complete, the clapsticks became part of music sessions, allowing children to use instruments they helped create. This process supported cultural transmission, creativity and confidence, while strengthening wellbeing through shared making led by women and grounded in community knowledge.



### Bringing First Language stories into homes through digital books Central Australia

In 2025, four First Language e-books were released through the Children's Ground digital app, building on previously published physical books from Central Australia. The e-books feature the voices of authors, Elders, artists and children, allowing children to hear family members reading aloud as they follow the text in First Language.

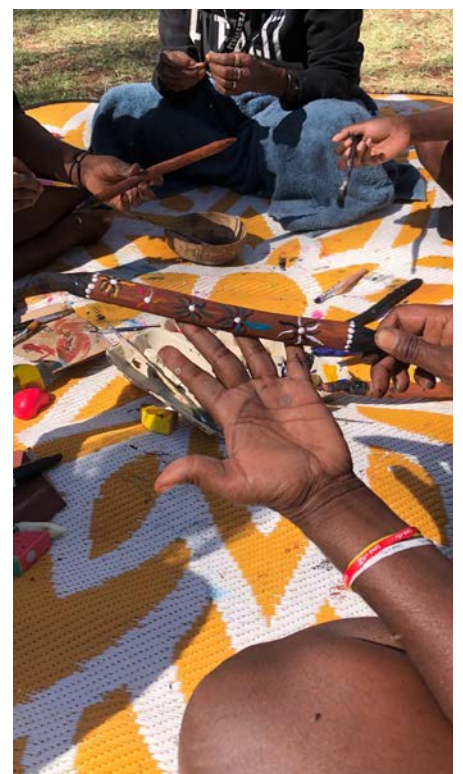
The releases included stories in Central Eastern Arrernte, Akarre Akityarre and Luritja. By combining written text, spoken language and artwork, the books supported early literacy while strengthening connection to language and story at home and in community.

The development process also built local capability. Enterprise and Resource Development staff learnt new digital skills through workshops and created the e-books from start to finish. This work supported literacy, educational outcomes and cultural continuity, while expanding the tools available to carry language and stories into everyday family life.

### Ochre collection and painting on bark using kwatye Central Australia

During 2025, children in Central Australia took part in ochre collection and painting on Country, learning traditional processes guided by First Nations educators and family. Children collected ochre from riverbeds, crushed the stones and mixed the pigment with kwatye gathered from soakage dug in the sand near trees.

Using bark found on Country, children painted with the ochre they had prepared themselves. The process connected each step, from finding water and materials to creating finished artworks, reinforcing knowledge about Country and the relationships between land, resources and creative practice.



## Painting Modjarrkki and sharing language through art

Marlkawo

A significant creative activity during the season was the painting of Modjarrkki, the freshwater crocodile. Early years children and educators worked together to create a large group artwork, using paint to represent Modjarrkki while including the Kunwinjku name and language connected to the animal.

An older reference artwork showing Modjarrkki with labelled body parts supported intergenerational learning. Children added to the painting over time, listening as educators and community members spoke about the crocodile's behaviour, habitat and cultural significance. Painting became a shared process rather than a finished task, allowing children to return to the work, add detail and talk about what they were seeing.

Through this activity children strengthened fine motor skills, creativity and concentration while learning language and cultural knowledge connected to Country. The artwork now remains a permanent part of the early years space, reflecting learning that was built collectively and will be carried forward across the year.

## Collecting pandanus and natural dye on Country

Marlkawo

Creative practice also included collecting materials on Country as part of the making process. Children, women and educators travelled out to gather pandanus and natural dye, learning where materials grow and how they are collected with care.

Time was spent walking, observing plants and talking about season and place. Children watched as pandanus was collected and prepared, learning through proximity and participation. Conversations during this time included stories about Country, family and responsibility, with language shared naturally as part of the process.

Collecting materials supported patience, attention and respect for process, while reinforcing the connection between creativity, land and cultural knowledge.

## Weaving knowledge shared across generations

Darwin

Weaving is an important space for cultural knowledge sharing in Darwin, guided by senior knowledge holder and master weaver Sylvia. Women and children took part in pandanus weaving, learning how fibres are collected, prepared and dyed before being worked into finished pieces. The process began on Country, with pandanus gathered and materials prepared together, before weaving took place in community settings.

Children spent time watching, handling materials and practising alongside women, learning through observation and repetition. Conversations during weaving included stories about Country, family and responsibility, with language shared naturally as part of the process. The time taken to prepare materials and weave slowly supported focus, patience and pride in making.

Weaving with Sylvia supported wellbeing by strengthening cultural confidence and connection across generations. Knowledge was shared in a way that reflected how culture is carried in community life, through time spent together and skilled practice rather than formal teaching.

## Language carried through everyday cultural practice

Darwin

Language was shared with children in Darwin through everyday cultural practice, guided by Elders and cultural leaders. Elders and cultural leaders guided when language was shared and who would speak, with ongoing conversations about language restoration and the realities of working with languages that have few or no current speakers.

Children heard language during time on Country and while making art, weaving, walking and sitting together with family. Words connected to place, plants and animals were used naturally during visits to sites such as Rapid Creek, Ludmilla Creek and Buffalo Creek. Language was also shared through song, movement and storytelling during early years and community sessions, supporting familiarity and connection through repeated, everyday use.

Weaving with Sylvia supported wellbeing by strengthening cultural confidence and connection across generations. Knowledge was shared in a way that reflected how culture is carried in community life, through time spent together and skilled practice. This is formal teaching for Bininj people.



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