



Children's Ground

An introduction

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Introduction and background

Children's Ground (CG) was born out of the deep injustice and hope of Aboriginal people living in the unacceptable economic poverty and inequity in Australia. People have endured generations of violence and trauma that has been perpetuated through the process of colonisation, taking form and shape in different ways over 230 years but ever present in the lives of people today.

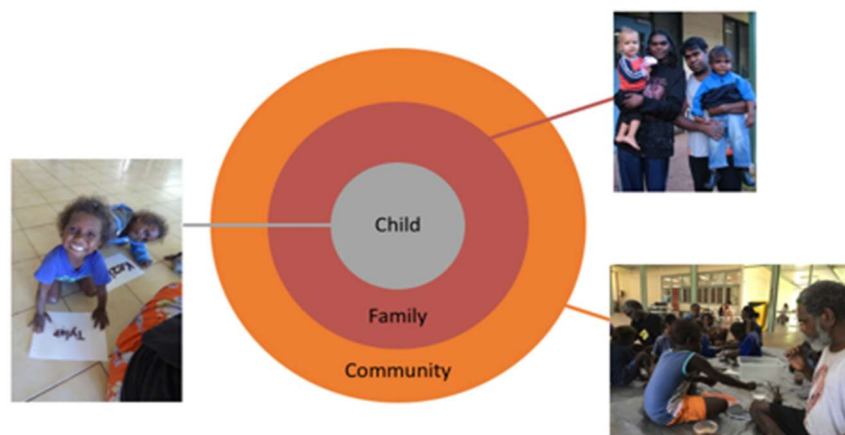
Children's Ground was designed with Aboriginal people to respond to a system that has failed not only First Nations peoples but all children and families who are experiencing extreme hardship. It recognises that all children are able but it is the conditions within which people are born and raised that will determine their opportunity and choices.

Overview - Children's Ground

Children's Ground is a new system developed to respond to the social, cultural and economic determinants for long term wellbeing of children and families, where intergenerational poverty and inequity are devastating.

Children's Ground has responded to key failings in the current system and has five reform areas: Governance, Workforce, Investment, Evidence and the Integrated Service Platform. The integrated services platform encompasses the areas of Learning and Wellbeing, Health and Wellbeing, Culture and Wellbeing, Employment and Wellbeing and Economic Development and Wellbeing.

Children, their family and their community



Every child has the right to exercise their brilliance.

Children's Ground is the first organisation of its kind in Australia. We have designed a system to effect real change with communities where every child and family experiences profound challenges.

Children's Ground works across whole communities experiencing intergenerational trauma and entrenched and extreme socio-economic stress. Where we work, every child and family faces complex and extraordinary hardship, impacting on their education and their future. Every child we work with faces the likelihood of hospitalisation by the age of two. Many will have hearing loss and

other physical and health barriers that impact on education and future wellbeing. Family death is common. Most witness (and some are victims of) violence. Unemployment or underemployment is common in their families. Many face a common trajectory that will result in one or more of the following; long term disability, incarceration, subject to child protection, mental health issues include depression, anxiety and suicidal behavior, early death. Most will be exposed to serious alcohol and other drug use. Nearly all will be living under the poverty line and experience overcrowding or homelessness. Through their life they will experience racism and will face cultural barriers in a range of areas that will exclude many of them from education, employment and other opportunities.

All of the children we work with speak English as a second third or fourth language. Their first culture is an Indigenous culture and one of the First Nations in Australia. They are raised within the laws and customs of their first culture. These laws and customs differ from Western traditions and systems. The children and the families continue to practice and recognise these laws and knowledge systems.

The current mainstream social, educational and economic systems are not equipped or designed to work with children who face complex social-economic disadvantage challenges and cultural minority status. These challenges are compounded and more complex for a child from a First Nation culture and language. For example, children we work with have not had early childhood learning opportunities and are not engaged or are failing in the mainstream education system. Mainstream systems respond to these children and their families after problems arise and apply a deficit approach. They focus on crises and remedial responses rather than focusing on prevention and creating opportunity and access.

Arising from three decades of experience and leading practice, Children's Ground is designed to reform both education and the systems that sits around the life of the child, family and community. Leaders in our organisation who are First Nations, are the ultimate experts in the situation that faces their people.

Families want the next generation to enjoy a better future. Given the issues are community wide, working on a case management reactive model (current system) will not change the status quo. Instead we work with whole communities to shift them from environments of complex socio-economic disadvantage to communities where opportunity and wellbeing are the norm. We work with a critical mass of children and their families to create long term change. We work with the child, in the context of their family and community. We believe in and harness the ability of the community, responding to their cultural landscape, and social and economic environment. High quality resources, people and services build on local strengths and capacity to break the cycles of fractured service delivery and intergenerational economic poverty to equip children for opportunities locally, nationally and globally. We assess the economic landscape and implement pathways for children so that they can succeed. The outcome is for a child to have a strong sense of identity and internal wellbeing, with the knowledge and skills for their local and global reality. If enough children across a community enjoys this reality, the community will change over time.

The Children's Ground Approach responds to the key determinants recognised internationally as underpinning health, education, wellbeing and economic independence. Extreme disadvantage and economic poverty are preventable. The system of CG is a system of prevention for whole communities. It is designed to prevent child trauma, risk and removal, incarceration, ill-health, early death, family violence and unemployment. It is designed to achieve equity so that all children can grow to adulthood and enjoy opportunity, express their talents and be included and contribute to society. It is designed so that all children can grow with a sense of identity and place for themselves and others, with access to quality health, wellbeing, education and economic independence.

Underpinning change in each of these social determinants across whole communities are the dual principles of self-determination and human rights.

People who live with extreme social and economic disadvantage have less choice, less opportunity and less political voice. A key design of Children's Ground is to create the environment in which people have choice, are provided with the key information and resources to exercise this choice and are then supported to be the key agents of change. This empowerment approach is necessary to achieve any change.

Inclusion and safety are expected within a Children's Ground environment. While creating an environment of empowerment, how this empowerment is exercised is critical. As a community placed based approach, self governance means the voice of all people within that community are regarded as important, while still recognizing local governance structures. This requires shared understanding, sophisticated communications and decision making processes that are transparent, inclusive and collective. Empowering people in their decision making requires strong enduring principles that adhere to basic human rights for all.

Children's Ground is informed, though not limited, by the leading national and international experience. Children's Ground aims to inform leading practice to achieve the eradication of extreme economic poverty and celebrate social, cultural, political and economic inclusion.

As a 25 year approach, Children's Ground has short and medium-term indicators that are the building blocks to long term change. Reaching these targets, the first being quality early childhood, are a necessary pre-cursor to future targets being met. As a result, implementation is staged, monitored and evaluated. This allows the setting of short term realistic operational and financial goals within an ambitious agenda.

Children's Ground is a system that can be implemented by any organisation or group of organisations including in partnership with Government services. The system is designed to achieve sustained long term change with whole communities facing extreme inequity. The long term strategy is for the system to be adopted as the mainstream Government approach backed by evidence and delivering economic efficiencies and social and cultural outcomes.

Children's Ground: Reforming the System

Children's Ground has created a reform agenda to achieve long term wellbeing for all children and families through access to quality education, employment and health, and celebration of social, cultural and economic inclusion. The system is underpinned by three reforms, that all inter-relate: systemic, strategic practice principles and service reform.

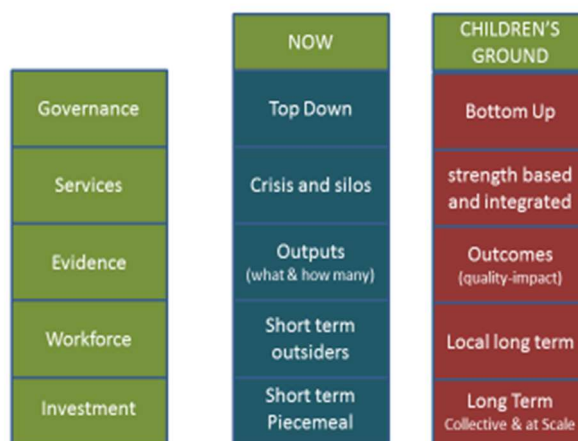
Systemic Reform

To change the status quo Children's Ground has reformed five key areas to redress the current system failings, and to evidence a new system to achieve long term impact.

The five key areas are:

Children's Ground has redesigned each key part of the system

- Governance:** community/user ownership and direction at the service delivery level & transparent and robust organisational governance at the strategy level; blending formal corporate governance with strong local community governance.¹
- Approach (services):** Our *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform is an integrated approach to delivery that supports the individual, family and community (see below Service Reform)
- Evidence:** A longitudinal study, across a generation to evidence impact, guide development and ensure that a commitment to gather, act on and share evidence of the educational, social, health, economic and cultural impact of our work.
- Workforce:** Creating a high quality, sustainable local workforce; a workforce where cultural and community experts work alongside sector experts; ensuring the approach is informed by the local and international best practice expertise.
- Investment:** An outcome based collective investment from community, government, corporations and philanthropists enabling innovation and flexibility to deliver change and provide long term secure funding.



These reforms are the pre-conditions required to a system of equity, inclusion and quality.

¹ Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure, 2010 stated: *A clear message from the recent past is that policies and programs must be targeted to local needs, in close engagement and active partnership with the people they are designed to assist...Key challenges to effective service delivery include: identifying a range of suitable governance and decision-making processes that effectively balance the variety of Indigenous governance styles with governments' responsibilities for properly managing public funds. These governance approaches should be designed to empower Indigenous people and communities, including equipping them with relevant skills, so that they can progressively take meaningful control of their futures.*

Strategic Practice Principles

Children's Ground is a generational approach, underpinned by nine strategic practice principles, all of which are instrumental to achieving change:

Principles	
Start early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin in the early years • Maternal, early childhood & sexually active young people • Prevention focus in all that is delivered
Stay for the long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-birth to 24 years - all major risk transition periods • Build whole of community change across a generation • Long term economic, social and cultural wellbeing
Child, family & community led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance by local people who design, delivery & evaluate • Family are fully involved • Place based and intergenerational approach – delivering where and how people live
Critical mass (work with everyone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and know all children and community members • Engage enough children and families (critical mass) to enable wide spread shift from inequity to opportunity
Assume and celebrate ability (strength-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the ability of children, families and community and build upon this strength • Recognise the First Cultural knowledge and expertise • Responsive to each child and family and community
Deliver the whole, not the bits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate <i>Learning, Wellbeing and Development</i> incl. key areas of education, health, governance, culture, society (community), employment, enterprise and wellbeing. • Intergenerational and placed based
Innovation –the best of the old & the new	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine both the old and the new to create innovation • First Nations knowledge systems • Leading practice & global innovation
Expect and deliver the best (excellence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit and train a high quality workforce • Provide the best resources and services to deliver quality • Expect/encourage the best of all people • Meet key human rights instruments & principles
In community (place-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering where people live • Bringing everyone together where people live. • Building upon the social, cultural and economic capital for the whole community

Community agency is the single most important principle and practice in our model. It is only by securing the consent, support, and active involvement of the community, in the governance, design, delivery, and evaluation of responses, that enduring change will be achieved.

Service Reform

Service Reform looks at how we integrate key service and operations. It relates directly to one of the key Systemic reform areas and Strategic practice principles, *Integrated Approach*. It is about what we do and how we do our work with community, families and children.

Our *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform has five operational areas:

1. Learning and Wellbeing (Education)
2. Family Health and Wellbeing (Health)
3. Community Development and Wellbeing (Society, Governance, Culture and Environment)
4. Economic Development and Wellbeing (Employment, Training and Enterprise)
5. Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing (Embedded across the other four areas)

The Children's Ground Integrated *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform tackles the social, structural and economic determinants and inequities that currently underpin the devastating life experiences of children living in communities of extreme economic poverty. We respond to the multi-level influences on children's development and life from pre-birth to 25 years.

In simple terms, we make sure children and their families have the sort of opportunities that most Australians enjoy: a quality education, creative and cultural life and agency in their health and wellbeing. This approach is place based, allowing communities to shift from having little or no access, to having agency over a range of opportunities that support culture, safety, learning, health, economy, skills development, fun and celebration.

Children's Ground combines local cultural knowledge systems and leading international and national evidence and practice. We bring together this evidence, contextualise it and integrate it with cultural knowledge to shape innovative opportunities that are congruent with the aspirations of parents and their community.

The service system is designed to create a safe environment for children and families. This is achieved by regarding and respecting the individual as well as their culture and identity. The culture and identity of a child is fundamental to their learning and wellbeing.

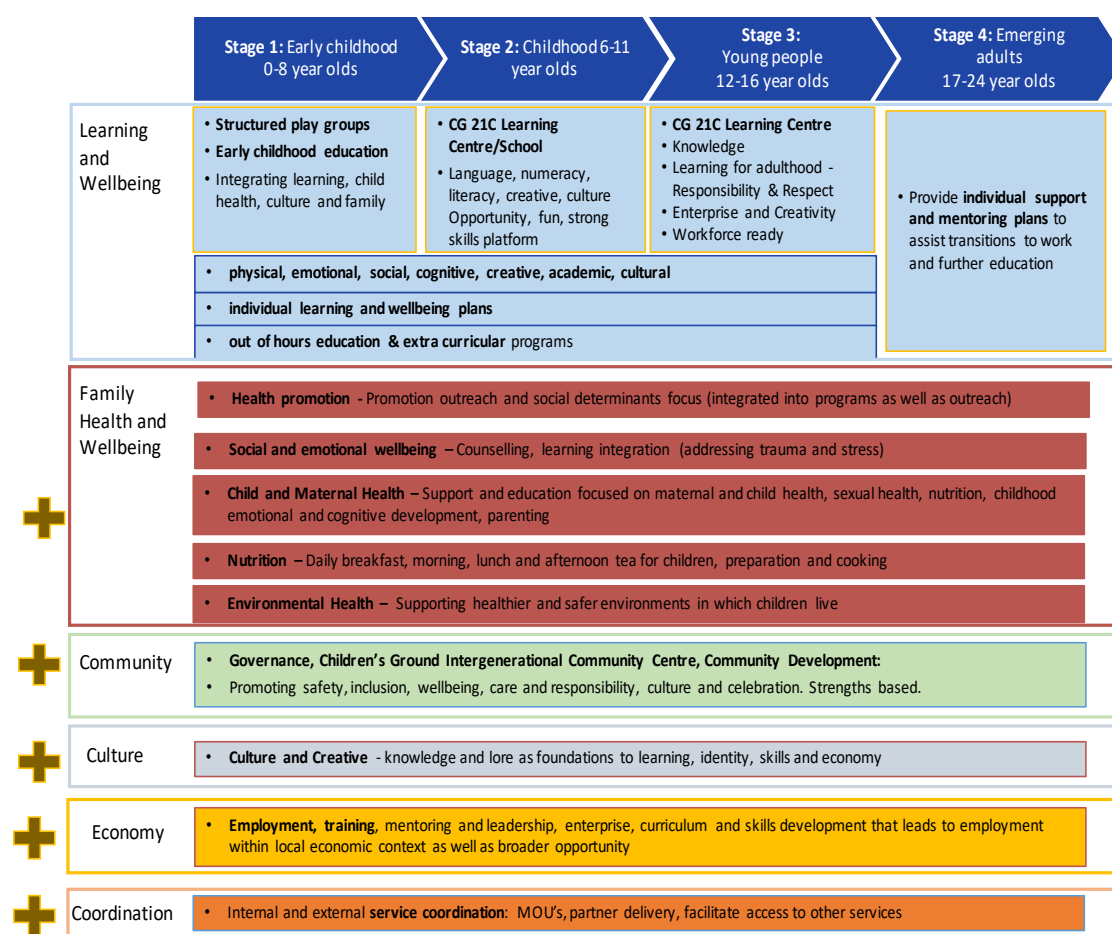
We recognise that the Aboriginal world view connects the development of the person to the land and the people in a sophisticated system that combines education, health, wellbeing, society, law, philosophy, environment and culture. This is known by different names in different Aboriginal nations and languages.²

The approach integrates three knowledge and practice systems:

1. Local cultural systems of knowledge (First Nations pre-colonisation)
2. First Nations Leading practice post-colonisation
3. Leading practice globally across cultures

² Altyerre (Arrernte), Jukurrpa (Walpiri), Tjurkurpa (**Pitjantjatjara**), Man-garre (Kunwinjku), An-garre (Gundjeihmi).

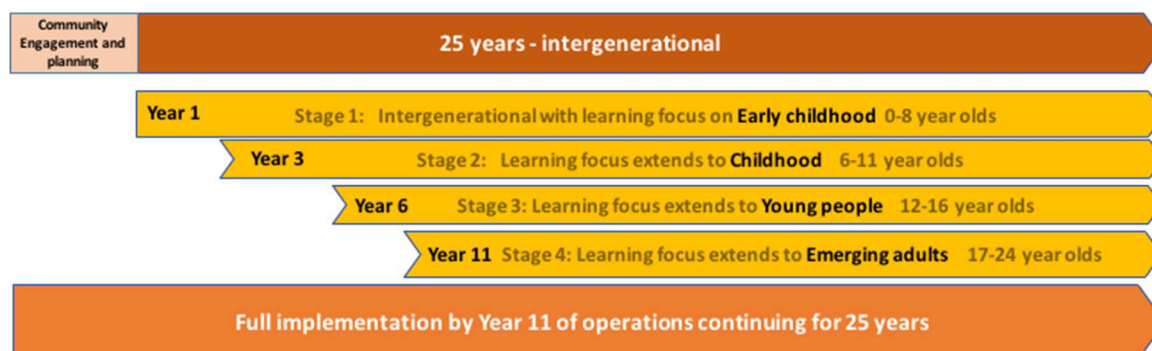
Children's Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform



Community Engagement and Planning (Walk Talk and Act)

The first phase of any work requires community engagement and planning which can take six to 12 months. This is a process with the community, to listen and determine both the interest and ability to partner for long term change. Children's Ground will only work where we have an invitation and agreement with the local community and key decision makers for the region, as well as a shared vision. The community engagement process leads to a decision by the board and the community to move to implementation of Stage 1 of operations and a five-year strategic plan.

Children's Ground 25-year approach



Appendix 1: High Level Outcome, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Key outcome measures sit under each of the nine high level outcomes with progress indicators across a 25-year trajectory

	An environment created with families and communities that realises their aspirations for the next generation of children - to be free from trauma and suffering, to enjoy equity and safety and be able to grow into adulthood happy and healthy, and with agency over their social, cultural and economic future.								
	Children and young people				Family		Community		
Aspirations	Children are thriving-engaged in life, brimming with laughter, pride, confidence and opportunities				Families feel strong, supported and confident about their children's future, feel valued, and are involved in their children's to learning, wellbeing and development		Communities care for each other and provide a safe environment for every child. They enjoy economic, cultural and social strength and opportunity.		
Outcomes: Level 3	Children are healthy	Children are happy	Children know their history and feel confident in their cultures	Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning and are creative problem solvers	Families are involved in their child's learning, wellbeing and development	Families are socially and economically strong	The community values its place and heritage and continues to grow	The community enjoys employment and economic opportunity	The community is safe, inclusive and respects diversity
Outcomes: Level 2	Sustained (and frequent) participation in activities			Sustained (and frequent) employment at Children's Ground			Development of community capacity to guide, inform and co-deliver Children's Ground platform		
Outcomes: Level 1	Participation of children and families in activities				Engagement in employment at Children's Ground				
	Children's Ground platform								
Outputs	Supportive and acceptable services in place								
Activities	Learning and wellbeing	Family Health and wellbeing	Cultural development and wellbeing		Community development and wellbeing		Economic development and wellbeing		