



Children's Ground

Research & Evaluation Framework

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About Children's Ground

Introduction and background

Children's Ground was born out of the deep injustice and hope of First Nations 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 for over 230 years but ever present in the lives of people today.

The Children's Ground Approach (CG Approach) was designed with First Nations 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.

The CG Approach is a bold 25-year approach to address deep and persistent disadvantage by responding 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's is:

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 equality and safety and to grow into adulthood happy and healthy, and with agency over their social, cultural and economic future.

Children's Ground is the first organisation of its kind in Australia. We have designed a system to effect and evidence real change with communities where every child and family experiences profound challenges. Underpinning change in key social determinants across whole communities are the dual principles of self-determination and human rights.

The CG Approach is informed, though not limited, by the leading national and international evidence. It 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

By combining local cultural knowledge systems and leading Western international and national evidence and practice we are able to integrate the best of old and new knowledge and evidence. We contextualise both knowledge systems to shape innovative opportunities that are congruent with the aspirations, desires and solutions of First Nations families and communities.

Children's Ground in communities

Children's Ground is an intergenerational approach recognising the interconnectedness across generations that is a hallmark of First Nations societies. Stage One of the CG Approach involves an intergenerational focus on the learning and wellbeing of children aged 0-8 years – engaging children in their early learning, family health promotion and prevention, community governance, family employment, creating safe places for children and the whole community and facilitating positive social environments.

As children grow, the CG Approach grows with them. Stages Two to Four of implementation involve focusing on older children up to the age of 25 years. Recognising that change for children cannot be created in isolation, the CG Approach involves working with each child, their families and the wider community.

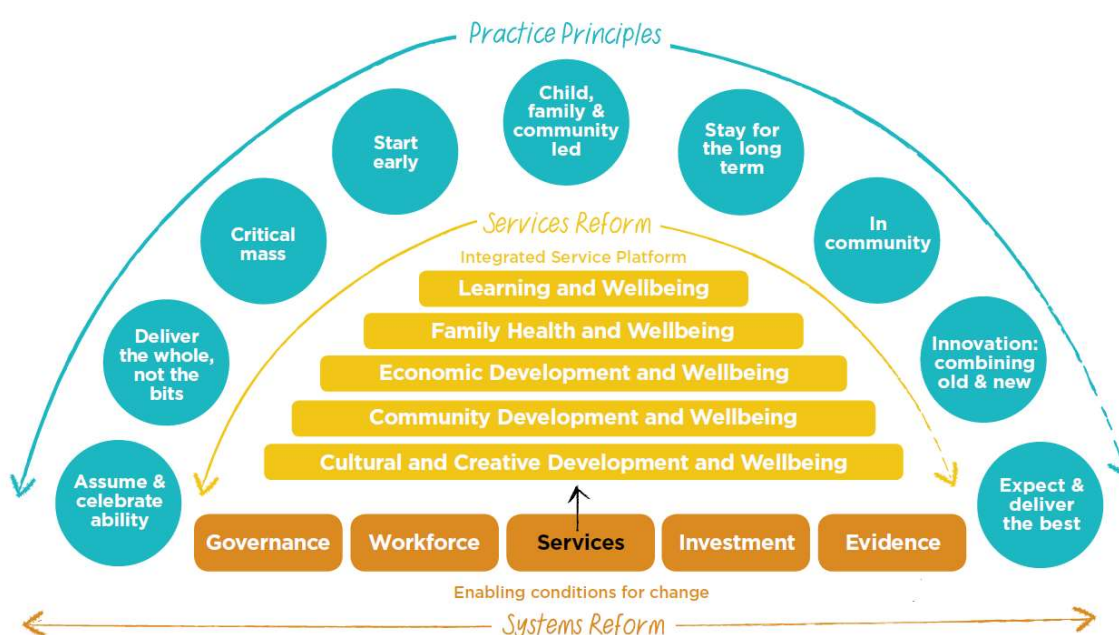
Children's Ground has created a reform agenda to achieve long term wellbeing for all children and families through access to high-quality education, employment and health, and celebration of social, cultural and economic inclusion. The system is underpinned by three reform areas that all inter-relate: five areas of system enablers; an integrated service platform; and practice principles that guide all practice and implementation. These areas are a critical focus for the evaluation and include:

- **Five systemic areas create enabling conditions for change:** Governance; Employment; Services; Investment; and Evidence.
- **An integrated service platform:** Learning and Wellbeing; Family Health and Wellbeing; Community Development and Wellbeing; Economic Development and Wellbeing; and Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing.
- **Nine practice principles guide how Children's Ground works with the community:** Start early; Critical mass (work with everyone); Child, family and community-led; Deliver the whole, not the bits; Innovation - combining the best of the old and the new; Assume and celebrate ability (strengths-based); Expect and deliver excellence; and Stay for the long-term.

The CG Approach is designed to achieve internal integration of health and wellbeing promotion and prevention, whilst always working collaboratively with the existing local service system to achieve coordinated and seamless delivery of services and supports with children and their families.

Evaluation data from the implementation of the CG Approach to date has demonstrated that reform in systems, service and practice are interconnected and influence each other.

Children's Ground's systems, service and practice reform



Children's Ground's Research and Evaluation

Empowerment through research and evaluation

'Aboriginal people have been researched to death. We want to research ourselves back to life.'

William Tilmouth, Chair of Children's Ground

First Nations people have been the subjects of research and evaluation in different forms since colonisation. In many cases, this research involved collecting data from people and taking it away to be analysed, with no direct benefit for the individuals or communities involved and no feedback on the outcomes of the research.

More recently there has been significant discussion on ensuring research is undertaken in a culturally respectful manner and in a way that benefits both individuals and communities. However, the majority of research and evaluation conducted with First Nations people continues to be driven by government and organisations rather than the communities themselves. This creates a cultural bias which in turn can bring into question the findings of such work.

Indigenous methodology is where the approach to, and understanding of, research processes and practices take Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, values and lived experience as their central axis¹. Walter identifies how mainstream Indigenous statistics focus almost exclusively on items related to Indigenous difference, disparity, disadvantage, dysfunction and deprivation. There is broad agreement on the need for data, which meet Indigenous needs and aspirations. These include but are not limited to data that reflects the embodied social, political, historical, and cultural realities of Indigenous people's lives, as Indigenous peoples, and data that address Indigenous nation building agendas².

Research approaches and methods that empower individuals and communities through the research process as well as the research findings are central to the Children's Ground's research and evaluation approach. Research and evaluation are designed and undertaken with and by Children's Ground's First Nations Community Researchers in each location. This ensures that the evaluation blends First Nations culture and practice with western methods to provide a rigorous and powerful monitoring and evaluation model with First Nations accountability. Using a Participatory Action Research approach and upholding First Nations data sovereignty is a key foundation for empowerment in research and evaluation.

¹ Walter, M., & Suina, M. (2019). Indigenous data, indigenous methodologies and indigenous data sovereignty. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(3).

² Rainie, S. C., Schultz, J. L., Briggs, E., Riggs, P., & Palmanteer-Holder, N. L. (2017). Data as a strategic resource: Self-determination, governance, and the data challenge for Indigenous nations in the United States.

Principles

“Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers...Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs and arts for action by and with the research organisation. Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable...”

Fals Borda³

Children’s Ground has developed high-level research and evaluation principles that sit across the organisation and communities. These principles are the foundation of all our research and evaluation internally and with any external partners. They are grounded in ethical and evidence-based practice that ensure the rights and wellbeing of all First Nations peoples.

1. First Nations peoples right to control and own data, research and evaluation about them and on their country
2. Trust and respect
3. Community leadership and participation from end to end (design, practice, analysis and reporting)
4. Local context and knowledge must be privileged
5. Creating knowledge together through joint research that combines First Nations and Western evidence and research practice
6. Knowledge into action and impact ensuring what we learn is used to improve lives
7. Only undertake research and evaluation that is of benefit to the participants and their communities/groups

In each community and within each external research partnership and participation, these are discussed in terms of local meaning, local processes for implementation and are locally adapted as needed.

Governance and management

Children’s Ground’s research and evaluation is managed and implemented within the following governance and management structure:

Internal management and implementation

- The Children’s Ground Chair (First Nations) is the chair of Children’s Ground’s Research and Evaluation Advisory Group
- The Children’s Ground CEO has overall oversight of research and evaluation.
- The Director, Research and Evaluation manages and directs research and evaluation and is responsible for adherence to quality and standards.
- In each community the First Nations Community Governance group advise, approve, develop and monitor evaluation and research undertaken.

³ Fals Borda, O. and Rahman, M.A. Action and Knowledge, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland. 1991

- The Research and Evaluation team provide the central coordination for all activities related to monitoring and evaluation.
- Within the Research and Evaluation team, First Nations Community Researchers/Evaluators inform the design of all data collection tools, jointly analyse quantitative and qualitative data and contribute to reporting and dissemination of findings.

Families and the wider community are intimately involved in each stage of the evaluation, with the Community Research Team working with the community to engage and report on the evaluation. The wider community will receive regular feedback on evaluation activities and findings.

Community and cultural governance

All research and evaluation activity and reporting are overseen and approved by the regional or community and cultural governance groups/committees. These groups consist of local Traditional Owners, community and cultures elders and leaders, emerging leaders and the Community Researchers/Evaluators. Members of these groups are also part of the family groups engaging with and leading Children's Ground in their community.

First Nations Community Researchers/Evaluators

Community Researchers/Evaluators in each location lead the development and implementation of daily and annual data collection tools. They also undertake analysis with the Research and Evaluation team and contribute to reporting and presenting evaluation findings.

Community Researchers are part of the Research and Evaluation team. The First Nations researchers/evaluators bring knowledge of language, cultural practice, the local communities and Children's Ground's activities and operations. Western researchers/evaluators bring expertise in western style methods and approaches. The team work collaboratively to build a culturally safe and unique style of research and evaluation that combines the sophistication of First Nations knowledge and culture with the best of western research and evaluation techniques to ensure the best possible product.

In each region Community Researchers are employed from different cultural and language groups, which enables families to engage in research and evaluation in their first language and with people they are familiar and comfortable with.

Research Advisory Group (external and quality control)

Children's Ground's Research Advisory Group (RAG) was established to provide advice and assist in ensuring that the research and evaluation agenda and products are rigorous and robust. Members of the RAG were selected based on a balance of knowledge and expertise in early childhood development, education, health, community development, economic development, human rights and First Nations knowledge systems as well as expertise in various qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation techniques.

The RAG meets twice a year and on an as needed basis. The RAG is Chaired by Children's Ground's Board Chair, Mr William Tilmouth or the CEO, Jane Vadiveloo, and is supported administratively by Children's Ground's Director, Research and Evaluation.

Current membership of the Research Advisory Group is as follows:

- A/Prof. David Thomas, Head, Tobacco Control Research Program, Menzies School of Health Research
- Prof. Fiona Arney, Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
- Prof. Komla Tsey, Professor, Education for Social Sustainability, Cairns Institute, James Cook University
- Mr Matthew James, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Dr Sally Brinkman, Co-Director, Fraser Mustard Centre, Telethon Institute
- Prof. Sven Silburn, (ret. previously) Director, Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research
- Dr Tim Moore, Senior Research Fellow, Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Approaches to research and evaluation

Longitudinal

In each community the evaluation is undertaken over a period of 25 years. This includes a combination of daily data collection and annual/biennial summative data collection. It also includes cross-sectional analysis of repeated observations at key points in time, as well as longitudinal analysis by individuals for cohort and population analysis.

The advantage of a longitudinal study is to be able to observe change over time which is particularly important when working to determine factors that influence long term impact. There are a number of advantages to undertaking a longitudinal approach that have been demonstrated through these studies, including:

- Tracking change over time.
- Measuring individual patterns of change.
- Informing adjustment over time in the approach and practice.
- Avoiding recall bias.

Importantly, Children's Ground is evidencing whether the CG Approach produces sustainable long-term outcomes for children, families and communities. These findings aim to contribute to national and international policy and practice.

Community Led Research

Our research and evaluation are driven by the community, as agents of change and expertise, supported by processes that will assist in articulating and creating the change they are wanting, through action and research.

Children's Ground recognises the key elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR) which include:

- **Participation:** Users are researchers and evaluators and the research respond to the social, cultural and historic environment.
- **Action:** What changes we are making, and how we are making them? Tracking change, understanding change; building new knowledge – using our experience, history and goals; engaging with the diversity of knowledge, experience and understanding that surrounds us.

- **Evaluation/Research:** Community driven data, evaluation and research practice – to record, interpret, communicate, learn and develop.

PAR respects the knowledge and experience of local people and provides them with agency over research and evaluation processes. It is a collaborative approach where professionally trained researchers work in partnership with local people to design, undertake and report on implementation of the CG Approach. Importantly, it also provides for action learning in real time, where the findings from research and evaluation are reviewed and inform any adjustments to the approach and practice.

A core element of our PAR approach is First Nations Community Researchers/Evaluators in each location. To date, the process of building Community Research teams has occurred differently in each location. Local responsiveness to implementing a PAR approach has been critical in engaging First Nations staff and families in monitoring and evaluation.

Constructivism

We take a constructivist approach to evaluation through the assumption that there are many different ways to interpret the extent and impact of a policy, program or project and that the evaluator must gather together understandings and experiences from a diverse range of perspectives.

A key element of this approach is triangulating all sources of quantitative and qualitative data to enable a 'shared truth' to be identified. The outcome will be a robust representation of the scope and impact of Children's Ground and outcomes in the community.

First Nations data sovereignty

Prioritising First Nations data sovereignty is implicit in all research and evaluation that is undertaken at Children's Ground. First Nations data sovereignty is the right of First Nations peoples to determine the means of collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of data pertaining to the First Nations peoples from whom it has been derived, or to whom it relates. First Nations data sovereignty centres on Indigenous collective rights to data about our peoples, territories, lifeways and natural resources^{4 5}.

In practice this includes but is not limited to the collection of data that reflects priorities and aspirations of First Nations participants, the creation of relevant and holistic evidence framed to capture meaningful data for First Nations lives and the ability of data to reflect diversity within communities. This requires data collection to be undertaken with First Nations participation and control at all stages of data creation alongside upholding First Nations rights to data collection, ownership and application at all stages.

⁴ Kukutai, T. & Taylor, J. (2016). Data Sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples: Current practice and future needs




⁵ Snipp, M. (2016). What does data sovereignty imply: what does it look like?

Children's Ground Longitudinal monitoring and evaluation Framework

Outcomes and indicators

Over 25 years Children's Ground is monitoring and evaluating impact and change across nine long-term outcomes. These outcomes can only be achieved by working in partnership with other service providers including schools, health clinics, employment agencies, housing services, etc.

Children's Ground's high-level outcomes evaluation framework

Aspiration	Children are thriving – engaged in life, brimming with laughter, pride, confidence, and opportunities			
Outcomes 	Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning	Children are healthy	Children know their history and feel confident in their cultures	Children are happy
Aspiration	Families feel strong, supported and confident about their children's future; feel valued and are involved in their children's learning, wellbeing and development			
Outcomes 	Families are involved in their children's learning, wellbeing and development		Families are socially and economically strong	
Aspiration	Communities care for each other and provide a safe environment for every child. They enjoy economic, cultural and social strength and opportunity.			
Outcomes 	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	

Children's Ground has short and medium-term indicators that are the building blocks to long term change. Progress indicators are attached to each outcome to measure process and short and long-term impacts. Appendix 1 outlines a selection of high-level indicators and data in relation to each long-term outcome. However, these are adjusted in response to local contexts particularly where some may not be available for small geographical areas.

Monitoring and evaluation is a phased approach and grows in line with each implementation stage. This allows the setting of short-term realistic operational and financial goals within an ambitious agenda.

The impact of the CG Approach can only be truly assessed over a generation - when a critical mass of the generation of children growing up with Children's Ground are young adults and become the majority of families who have experienced positive education, health and wellbeing from their earliest years, and have built agency to enjoy social and economic opportunities.

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks in each community are reviewed regularly by the Research and Evaluation team and leadership in each community as they build their local evaluation from the ground up, based on the overarching framework that ensures consistency across communities, with

local adaptations as needed. Any substantive adjustments through this update process to evaluation and data collection protocols will be re-submitted for further ethics approval.

Evaluation questions

In each community the evaluation measures change for First Nations children, families and communities and analyses the extent to which Children's Ground has impacted this change.

The overarching question for evaluation is:

What is the difference Children's Ground has made?

Within this question, the objectives of this longitudinal evaluation are to:

- Determine the change in the Children's Ground community over time (summative evaluation)
- Determine the impact over time of Children's Ground for First Nations individuals, families and community (summative evaluation)
- Analyse and evaluate Children's Ground's model, system and practice (developmental evaluation)
- Document the story of community guided and conducted evaluation

While the first objective of this evaluation is to explore the change in the community generally, the second objective seeks to determine the extent to which Children's Ground has contributed to this change.

Evaluation method

Developmental evaluation

The Children's Ground Evaluation framework has been developed around a developmental evaluation approach which allows for innovation and change over the life of the evaluation and is most appropriate for situations of high complexity.

Developmental evaluation informs and supports innovative and adaptive development in complex dynamic environments. It brings to innovation and adaptation the processes of asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and regularly gathering and reporting evaluative data internally with timely feedback to support activity, model and systemic development, in and across communities.

In line with Patton⁶ our developmental evaluation data is used to:

- Make decisions about the next step, or the next question to ask
- Modify strategy
- Modify the strategy's implementation
- Abandon aspects of the strategy that are not showing results

⁶ Patton, M. Q. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford Press.

Our developmental evaluation is capturing the process and adaptation of the implementation of the CG Approach.

Summative evaluation

Elements of summative evaluation are used to look at the change within the community and determine the overall impact of the CG Approach. Summative evaluation determines what has been achieved in respect to both process effectiveness and impact. Questions focus on the extent to which short, medium and long-term outputs and outcomes have been achieved and what difference they have made, at what cost and what has been learned of relevance to other services, programs and systems change including policy.

Using both developmental and summative elements enables us to link the implementation processes with the intended outcomes of the CG Approach.

Process and impact evaluation

Children's Ground's longitudinal monitoring and evaluation assesses both process and short, medium and long-term impact (change).

Process indicators relate to:

- Increased access and opportunity, such as establishing safe environments, high quality early childhood learning, first culture privileged in learning, health and wellbeing services, employment and community events and celebrations.
- Frequency and effectiveness of service delivery and connections.
- The quality of integrated service delivery, internally and externally with other local services.

Short and medium-term impact indicators relate to:

- Levels and patterns of engagement and participation in early learning, health promotion, employment and family perceptions/feelings of safety, of children's learning, health and wellbeing and cultural learning and connection.
- Differences in engagement patterns for children, young people, adults, families and the whole community, pre and post the CG Approach.

Short and medium-term progress indicators are building blocks for long-term change. They are in place from the outset and emerge throughout operations in relation to the local context and implementation. Key progress indicators are monitored across the phased implementation of the CG Approach, as the approach grows with children from their early years as they become young adults and families. They measure progress made over time about the effectiveness of the CG Approach in addressing the social and cultural determinants of health, wellbeing, learning and life.

Qualitative and quantitative data

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches are used throughout our evaluation.

Quantitative data is collected daily about engagement and participation in early learning, family health, employment, family/community events, etc. These data are monitored regularly by staff and the Research and Evaluation team to inform planning and practice. Quantitative data is also

collected annually as part of our point in time summative evaluation. This includes data about children's learning, health and wellbeing and child and family experiences of the CG Approach.

Qualitative data is gathered in structured and unstructured ways through interviews, focus groups, staff reports, staff reflection workshops and informal conversations with families and staff.

Qualitative data is collected throughout the year and annually for our summative evaluation.

Quantitative data provides a broad understanding of Children's Ground's reach, growth, effectiveness and achievements, and enable comparisons over time. Qualitative data provides a deeper understanding of the impact of the CG Approach and enables greater understanding and clarity in relation to cultural-based measures and outcomes.

Data collection and analysis approaches

Over time different data collection and analysis approaches are used in evaluating the CG Approach. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Participant data**, including activity engagement forms, interviews, surveys, focus groups and media techniques. Participants engage in the evaluation as individuals (children, young people, adults), families and community members. Children's Ground staff and staff from other organisations are also participants of the evaluation⁷.
- **External administrative data**, seeking to access and use external data sources to understand community and population level change over time and seek to use external administrative data as a baseline in each community and as point in time comparisons.
- **Most Significant Change (MSC)**, which asks the question of what the most significant change for community members has been. This technique seeks to understand the story from the participant's perspective, rather than being prescriptive about what is measured.
- **Contribution Analysis**, as a structured approach to understanding to what extent observed outcomes are a consequence of a particular activity, as opposed to other factors.
- **Appreciative Inquiry**, focusing on what works (strengths-based) and exploring what's possible if those strengths were enhanced. It asks questions such as what is possible? How do we build on what we have to make that a reality?

The dynamic and innovative nature of the CG Approach requires flexibility and adaptability in our monitoring and evaluation. These tools are used as part of key informant interviews, surveys and focus groups, as well as other approaches as the need is identified.

Evaluation populations

Our monitoring and evaluation tracks children longitudinally, year on year to follow their engagement and progress in learning, health and wellbeing. It also tracks engagement and changes for adults across indicators of health, economic and social wellbeing.

Data analysis occurs by individual, within family groups, households and community level to understand the impact of family empowerment, employment, health and wellbeing on children's development. Analysis also includes internal comparisons of sub-populations and cohorts over time

⁷ In accordance with our ethics, each evaluation participant is asked to provide informed consent both to be interviewed and for the Community Research Team to access and analyse administrative data sets.

and building towards external comparison groups. Analysis of data for young people and adults will be collected and tracked as the children beginning with Children's Ground enter these stages of life.

A core principle of Children's Ground is 'engaging a critical mass'. This is defined as 75% of children and their families within the community. This means it is critical for us to understand population numbers in each community, by key age groups from early childhood to young people and adults as the children grow.

Historically, data capture in First Nations communities face a number of challenges which has led to compromised demographic information as reported in official statistics such as the ABS. Mobility presents one challenge as does the small population size. Cultural, logistic and language barriers contribute to challenges in collecting data that is meaningful and representative of community demography. Evaluation of the impact of whole of community systems change within mobile First Nations communities requires multiple robust and flexible approaches to data collection, analysis and reporting.

Over the 25-year period of the evaluation people will move both temporarily and permanently in and out of community geographic boundaries for many reasons. To genuinely understand family mobility and subsequently the reach and impact of the CG Approach, we seek to understand the extent to which children, families and community members are living in community with access to Children's Ground. To achieve this, we build population lists with each community and map mobility.

Leaders and families in each community use a culturally and geographically based 'residency status' based on individual and family mobility. This enables each community to understand their service and participating populations at points in time and to monitor the reach and engagement of Children's Ground based on children and families present within communities for the majority of a quarter and year.

Reporting and dissemination of findings

Children's Ground's evidence and experiences are reported internally and externally in a range of ways and targeted to different audiences.

Internally the Research and Evaluation team provide regular data snapshots to staff in each community which are used to inform planning and family engagement. The local Community Evaluators/Researchers and staff talk with families about data collection, provide data updates and bring families on the journey about the importance of evidencing Children's Ground.

The following external reports are disseminated publicly.

- **Community Reports:** Each year First Nations staff and leaders write a Community Report to share with their families and communities the achievements, progress, changes and family stories from Children's Ground throughout the year. Community Reports celebrate the life, ability and culture of each community, report to each community, other communities and funders through the voice of local First Nations people.
- **Progress and Evaluation Reports:** All evaluation reporting provide progress against the Children's Ground Outcomes Framework, in respect to process and impact. Biennial progress and evaluation reports are undertaken in each community/region, with the initial report

determined by the point in which a community moves from the Walk & Talk community engagement phase and into implementation of the CG Approach. In addition to internal data sharing, these reports ensure we are providing regular and extensive updates about the progress of operations within each community, and the extent to which we are working towards achieving the long-term outcomes for children, families and the community. Triennial systems level evaluation reporting complements biennial community evaluation.

- **Annual Reports:** Each year an organisational Annual Report is released. This is a statutory obligation that ensures we provide transparency on our operations and financial management. It also provides operational and strategic updates for each Children's Ground region throughout the previous year.
- **Funding Reports:** Reporting progress and outcomes to our funding partners. This ensures we are meeting the funding objectives and accountabilities and brings our family of funding partners on the journey of Children's Ground's progress, achievements and emerging evidence of impact and change.
- **Presentations and papers:** Staff present at local, national and international conferences to share their work and evidence of Children's Ground's impact and effectiveness. Articles for books and publications are also completed by staff upon request. Submitting papers to academic journals will also be a form of disseminating findings and evidence.
- **Frameworks and other publications:** Relevant practice and systems frameworks are developed and released to share the CG Approach and evidence broadly to communities, governments and other interested audiences.

Children's Ground also communicates evidence and experiences regularly through social media and quarterly newsletters.

Reports and presentations disseminated publicly are approved by the relevant community governance groups in each region/community.

Research and evaluation safety and ethics

In each community Children's Ground applies to the relevant local body for Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval. This is for our longitudinal evaluation and any research undertaken internally and/or with external partners.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies produces the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012). The Guidelines apply to all research with First Nations people and communities. The Guidelines should inform all steps in the research process including conception, design, conduct, reporting, and dissemination of findings. The Guidelines apply to all researchers, whether they are First Nations people, other Australians or international researchers.

The guidelines stipulate that ethical research with First Nations people and communities should:

- improve the way all researchers work with First Nations people and their communities
- develop and/or strengthen research capabilities of First Nations people and their communities
- enhance the rights of First Nations peoples as researchers, research partners, collaborators and participants in research.

By operationalising our research and evaluation principles Children's Ground ensures that ethics are being adhered to, that research and evaluation is safe for all involved and that First Nations people, approaches and voice are privileged in all data collection, analysis and reporting.

The physical, emotional and cultural safety of both participants and researchers is paramount to our research and evaluation. First Nations data safety and sovereignty is also critical to our approach.

Physical safety

The data collection process involves the Community Research team first talking with communities about any research and evaluation before seeking permission to return and undertake the data collection. This will give participants time to determine where they would like to be interviewed and who they would like to be present. All interviews are conducted where the participant feels most comfortable. To ensure physical safety, when interviews are not being undertaken within Children's Ground activities and environments, the Community Research Team always work in pairs.

Emotional safety

Participating in research and evaluation can be both intimidating and emotionally draining. Children's Ground seeks to minimise any negative emotional impact of research and evaluation by ensuring informed consent, providing counselling, other social/emotional support and service connections and support if needed – for research/evaluation participants and the staff team.

Informed consent: In accordance with our HREC approved ethics, informed consent is obtained from all participants in first language so they understand both their rights as part of the evaluation and what will happen with their information. Community Researchers/Evaluators ask directly and are encouraged to look for signs of whether someone is uncomfortable with a particular discussion and to move on. In the case of interviews with children, consent will be requested first from the primary care giver with verbal consent also from the child to undertake the interview.

Counselling and social/emotional wellbeing support: Should it be required, social/emotional support will be available from Children's Ground's Social/Emotional Wellbeing practitioner or from external services if required. This is for participants and research team members.

'No interview without service': We recognise that interviews can be a time when community members may raise issues or worries. Interviewers will be coached in how to handle any such situations at the time and the processes for ensuring the participant is supported by relevant Children's Ground staff or external services after the interview.

Support for researchers/evaluators: To support the emotional wellbeing of the Community Evaluators/Researchers, the core components of training and preparation include building leadership and ownership over research and evaluation, building confidence to lead interviews and family engagement and First Nations and western research/evaluation staff learning from each other the best approaches. Workshops and training with the team involve designing data collection tools together, role playing and practicing interviews and surveys, discussing professional boundaries, evaluation integrity and reinforcing the importance of confidentiality in the information they collect through the interview process.

Each of these are important supporting structures and processes to support the emotional wellbeing and safety of research/evaluation participants and staff.

Cultural safety

The design of the evaluation team seeks to support many First Nations evaluators to support cultural safety and cultural representation across clan and language groups.

The Community Research/Evaluation team is designed to have a wide range of local people working together on research and evaluation to provide not only emotional support but also cultural safety and support. With the community research team leading the design and implementation of data collection with western staff, it ensures participants have the opportunity and right to engage in their first language and to ensure culturally appropriate collection to support cultural safety and to respect and honour people's cultural life.

Data safety and sovereignty

Children's Ground has clear policies and procedures in place in relation to data ownership, collection, storage and access. These processes continue to be determined with community members to ensure agency over all data that is collected and how it is stored and used. Children's Ground data retention policies adhere to national regulations and compliance and data storage, access, use and disposal adhere to our HREC approved processes.

The following key areas are important elements of data safety and sovereignty.

De-identified data: All data collected by Children's Ground through research and evaluation is de-identified such that any information in any reporting cannot identify an individual or family. We recognise that in small communities it may be possible for some community members to identify others. Participants will be informed that where possible we will ensure their anonymity however, if there is any possibility of them being identified, all information in the interim and annual reports relating to them will be provided to them for review prior to finalising the report. Should the participant feel uncomfortable with the way in which the data is portrayed, the research team will work with that individual to revise the report in such a way that they are comfortable. Participants are also able to withdraw at any time from the evaluation and, where possible, their data will be removed.

Identifiable data: Identified data about child and family engagement is only used within Children's Ground as per policies agreed by the First Nations governance in each community and region and individual child and family approval. Identified data is used by staff and families to inform planning and engagement. Data about individuals' and family health and wellbeing engagement is not shared with anyone outside the relevant staff and each family.

Third party access to the data: Over time Children's Ground will work with external research and evaluation partners to continue progressing and enhancing our data collection, analysis and reporting. All staff, consultants and volunteers who work with our data sign a legally binding confidentiality agreement and any third party data access is approved by the First Nations governance in each community and region. Third party access also relates to external research/evaluation partnerships. All external researchers/institutions working with Children's Ground will sign an agreement that outlines how we will work together, co-ownership of data gathered and usage rights. All partnerships with external researchers/institutions are also approved by the First Nations governance in each community and region.

Data sovereignty: Data gathered belongs to the individual participants and Children's Ground communities. Any individual engaged with Children's Ground can seek access to data collected about them and their family at any time. Families and communities engaged with Children's Ground are owners of the data and not third parties. However, some requests for data from the community may need approval by the First Nations governance in the relevant community/region. This is assessed on a case by case basis.

Our research and evaluation principles and policies ensure data safety and sovereignty for all children, families and communities involved with Children's Ground.

Appendix 1: Children's Ground Outcomes and Evaluation Framework

To create an environment 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, political 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 confident about their children's wellbeing and future. They feel involved and empowered in their children's learning, wellbeing and development and their own ability to create environments of safety		Communities enjoy economic, cultural and social strength and opportunity. Local Governance is strong and inclusive. People care for each other and provide a safe environment for every child.		
HEADLINE INDICATOR	Families are walking alongside their children								
HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES	Children know their history and feel confident in their cultures	Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning & are creative problem solvers	Children are healthy	Children are happy	Families are involved in their child's learning, wellbeing and development	Families are socially and economically strong	The community enjoys, values and expresses cultural life and history and continue to grow	The community enjoys employment and economic opportunity	The community is safe, inclusive and respects diversity
OUTCOME INDICATORS:	% of children engaged in cultural learning, on country with family	% of children receiving age appropriate hours of early childhood learning and school age learning each week	% of children engaged with health promotion	% of children and young people engaged with social and emotional wellbeing	% of families participating in early learning and primary school alongside their children	% of families and households with children where at least one adult is employed	% of community reporting strong cultural knowledge and wellbeing in their community	% of community members engaged in employment (with CG and other)	% of community members engaged in social and cultural events, activities and celebrations

To create an environment 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, political and economic future.

	Children and young people				Family		Community		
OUTCOME INDICATORS continued...	% of parents reporting their children are Learning cultural knowledge appropriate for their age	% of children at or above literacy and numeracy benchmarks appropriate for ESL speakers	Rates and types of morbidity for children (i.e. ears, anaemia, low birthweight, etc)	Children and young people reporting positive social and emotional wellbeing and identify	% of families engaged in teaching children their culture and knowledge systems.	% of families reporting they are economically and environmentally (i.e. isolation overcrowding, physically and emotionally) safe/secure	% of community members engaged in cultural activities, events, learning, teaching (not including outside CG)	Rates of employment for people aged 15 and above within the community and types of employment	% of families confident in the safety of their children at home and in community
	% of children achieving standards for literacy & numeracy in first language	% of children developmentally vulnerable on one/two or more AEDC domains	% of children 'on-track' on the AEDC Physical health and wellbeing domain	% of children 'on-track' on the AEDC emotional maturity and social competence domains.	% of families who report setting goals and supporting their child's learning, health and, wellbeing	% of families engaged with child protection and justice agencies	% of community members engaged in Local Governance and decision making	Rates of Indigenous people aged 18-24 years participating in education, training or employment	% of young people reporting feeling safe and engaged in their community
	% of young people reporting positive connection to their culture and report positive self-identity	Rate of attainment of Yr. 12 or equiv. AQF Cert II or above	Child hospital rates for preventable illnesses and injury	Prevalence of trauma and impact (i.e. rates of suicide, mental illness), etc	% of families who Families report easy and timely access to health and wellbeing services their children need	% of families receiving unemployment benefits	% of community members reporting Local Governance is empowering, based on customary governance and inclusive	% of community members reporting they are economically secure	% of community reporting safety, inclusiveness and diversity in the community