



## Children's Ground

### Submission

### Productivity Commission into 'Human Services Reform'

This paper outlines an overview of Children's Ground System, as an alternative approach to current systems that have failed First Nations people to date.

Submitted: July 14 2017



## Submission relevance

This submission to the Productivity Commission outlines the Children's Ground System as an alternative approach to current systems that, to date, have failed people experiencing entrenched generational disadvantage in communities across Australia – this includes, but is not limited to many First Nations people and communities.

This paper provides a brief overview of the Children's Ground System, which was designed and has demonstrated how to "...put the people who use human services, such as health care, social housing and family and community services, at the heart of service provision<sup>1</sup>", which is central to the Human Services Reform Productivity Commission.

This paper is particularly relevant to the following focus areas of the Human Services Reform draft report, June 2017:

- Creating a system around the people who are the users of that system
- Community led decision making (user choice)
- Prevention and early intervention
- Integrated service delivery
- Outcomes, not output based delivery
- Genuine community engagement
- Place-based approaches
- Planning, evaluation and feedback systems
- Service delivery in remote Indigenous communities
- Cost-effective upstream, outcomes-based funding

The Children's Ground System is already responding to many of the issues and concerns outlined in the Human Services Reform draft report. The impact of the Children's Ground System can be evidenced by our work over the past four years in Kakadu West Arnhem, and our growing work in Central Australia and other parts of the Northern Territory's Top End.

More detailed information can be requested as needed.

## Submission Context – the current system

As identified by the Productivity Commission, the current service systems are broken. Over decades Human Services have become increasingly fragmented, resulting in a piecemeal approach of fractured service and program delivery. In some areas the impact of this has been catastrophic for children, families and communities – it has resulted in increasing complexity of the issues people are experiencing, and a service system that cannot keep pace with changes in families, communities, society and government.

Many government and non-government services have wonderful visions that start with a focus on people and outcomes. Realising this vision is compromised by the way the funding and service system functions. Funding is influenced by political cycles, constant changes in senior government ministers and staff and policy platforms. Coupled with competitive and short-term funding allocations, services are forced to focus on survival - being reduced to competing for funding for

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<sup>1</sup> Human Services Reform draft report, June 2017, pp 3.

siloed programs that allow them to deliver only specific and discrete outputs, rather than a focus on prevention, long or even short-term outcomes. Too often this environment means that organisations are adjusting to fit into Government priorities for financial survival rather than community priorities. This is an entrenched pattern across service sectors and systems.

Extremely targeted and limited funding allocations, are resulting in constant referrals of people between services and systems. The current system is 'problem' oriented. As new problems are identified and create political pressure points, more programs are created in response. Political cycles means that governments are reluctant to create change, even when they recognise things are not improving, due to the risk of media attention. Poverty and disadvantage becomes a full time activity to navigate. Complex economic and social disadvantage requires engaging with multiple government and non-government services to have needs met. People are required to 'share their story' with every new service and undertake additional assessments to meet strict criteria. The lack of continuity and coordination in service delivery is a major issue. Dealing with people as 'problems' rather than as valued members of society with capability and aspiration is also a serious issue. There is an industry in despair that is not redressing inequity. The solution is not just about what is delivered, it is how it is delivered.

Our major service sectors of education, health and wellbeing and social support cater to the mainstream but are failing those at the margins of economic, cultural and social privilege. Human Services too often respond to and fund the reactive crisis that ensues from failed outcomes in education, health and economic inclusion. Rather than redress inequity, the person is defined by their problem. Rather than recognise the need to fix the system, our efforts are driven towards fixing the individual. The existing system fails to focus on creating the conditions for prevention. The evidence for the effectiveness and efficacy of prevention rather than treatment is clear, in respect of both cost and social impact.

As identified by the productivity commission, there has been a failing in the Human Services arena. Children's Ground was created to redress this failing. After decades of work in trying to reform the current system, it was decided that a whole new approach was needed.

### An overview of the Children's Ground System

Children's Ground is a system designed to respond to communities experiencing intergenerational inequity. Children's Ground was born out of the deep injustice and hope of Aboriginal people living in the unacceptable economic poverty and inequity, however, is an approach that can work with any people and communities living with poverty and inequity.

The Children's Ground System was designed as a place-based platform of prevention and long-term change. It recognises it is the conditions within which many are being born and raised that will determine their opportunity and choices and ultimately enable or prevent generational change. Most importantly, systems and services must respond to the people for whom they are intended and therefore the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation must also be held by the people.



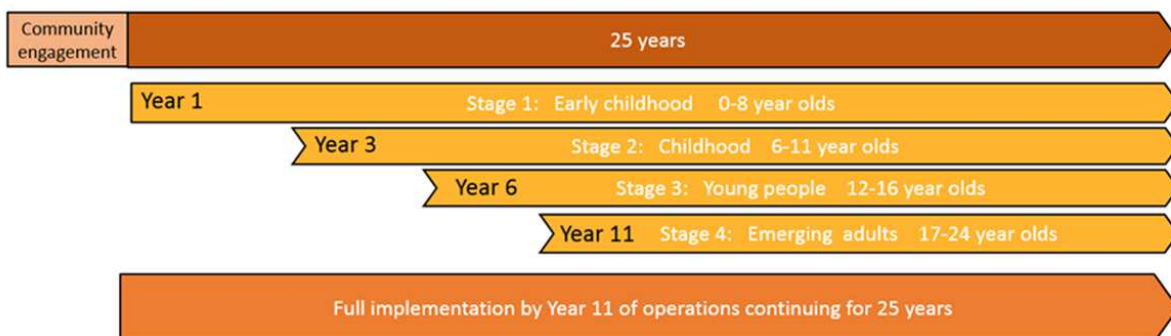
The Children's Ground System works intensively with children, families and communities from a platform of holistic prevention and early intervention across social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing.

The Children's Ground System was designed with Aboriginal people. It has been developed with reference to, but not limited by, a robust evidence base from leading national and international experience. Global evidence supports our guiding principles that long term change can only occur through the agency of local children, families and communities and that key social and cultural determinants, including health and education, are critical to future social and economic wellbeing.

The Children's Ground System responds to all key social and cultural determinants recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which underpin all key areas of life and wellbeing. Extreme disadvantage and economic poverty is preventable, and the Children's Ground System is a system of prevention for whole communities. 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 the social and cultural determinants across whole communities are the dual principles of self-determination and human rights.

Children's Ground was designed with and for those children, families and communities which find themselves the most excluded and economically disadvantaged in our current society. For such communities, this requires long-term, consistent and continuous investment and commitment. For Children's Ground this commitment is 25 years over which the System is implemented in a phased approach (see Figure one), starting in early childhood and following children into adulthood, alongside support for their families and community.

**Figure one: Children's Ground 25-year approach**



### Community Engagement

Children's Ground does not start working with a community without an unprecedented period of community engagement, referred to as 'Walk, Talk and Act'. The Walk, Talk and Act phase works with community leaders and Traditional Owners, and families to share what Children's Ground is about, the System and to discuss what it could look like in their community.

Walk, Talk and Act is:

- **Tailored** to the needs and wishes of the community and what would work best in each location
- **Led by First Nations people** from within, or known to, the community in people's first language where possible
- Informal and conversational
- **Family and community orientated**, involving some larger meetings as well as smaller family-by-family discussions in people's homes or places they feel comfortable
- **Inclusive**, engaging with every family and individual in the community about Children's Ground
- **Active**, in the delivery of early childhood activities as a point of engagement, purpose, response to need, and focus of our operations and strategic platform

Walk, Talk and Act also includes visits to families; many days of family mapping; planning early years sessions and determining what people wanted in an early years language and culture activities; visiting country and choosing important places to visit with children; talking to stakeholders; supporting events with other stakeholders; going to meetings with family members; and the all-important building relationships, while building the momentum of Children's Ground.

The duration of community engagement is dictated by the community leaders themselves. At the conclusion of the community engagement phase Children's Ground will begin working with the community if invited to do so by the community leaders and Traditional Owners, and families.

Once invited in, we work with each child in every family in a community to realise their aspirations for the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of the next generation.

The communities we work with have and continue to inform the Children's Ground System. We believe in harnessing the ability of the community, responding to their cultural landscape, and social and economic environment. None of this is possible without genuine community engagement and significant systems reform.

Children's Ground has created a reform agenda that works at three levels, that all inter-relate; Systemic Reform, Strategic Reform 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 (see Figure two). The key outcome is to influence policy reform to create broad scale change in life opportunity for those

disadvantaged by the existing system (Note: this relates to the Socioeconomic and Political aspects of the WHO framework).

**Figure two: Children’s Ground systems reform**

**Children’s Ground has redesigned each key part of the system**



The five key areas of systemic reform are:

1. Governance
2. Integrated service delivery
3. Workforce
4. Evidence
5. Collective investment

Each of these is described in detail below.

**Governance**

Consumer Governance is the key foundation of the Children’s Ground System and necessary in growing the next generation of young leaders – which is a key objective of community governance.

This is best achieved through the daily engagement and relationship with users of the services and through grass roots front line user committees. In short it is how the initiative operates on a day to day level with the community.

Sustainable and effective governance will only be achieved through a strong relationship between the people, program and service delivery. Operations must emerge and develop as part of the community itself.

First Nations communities have their own governance structures that have matured over 60,000 years and still form the underlying social and political structures to everyday life. This cultural governance co-exists with Western legal and governance structures. A key feature of many cultural

governance systems is that of collective decision making that lays within a complex structure of land and kinship relations and responsibilities. This governance informs law, education, health and society.

Within the Children's Ground System First Nations systems of governance are respected. The model created is the coming together of local community expertise and solutions, with external expertise in the areas of education, early childhood and community development. The vision of the local users is paramount in this relationship.

- Children's Ground's two tiered governance structure enables community ownership and direction in communities, while providing impartial corporate governance at the organisational level.
- Corporate governance is strong in financial, legal, corporate and strategy functions. Community governance is strong in cultural knowledge and practices and program decision making.
- Weekly/Fortnightly community meetings is the key decision making, communications and engagement with local people. The community meetings facilitate local governance and leadership. Deliberate conversations are held with those who miss meetings or have a quiet voice – the approach aims to ensure everyone's voice is heard.
- Daily informal interactions provides cultural direction and advice, raises ideas, and contributes to the development of Children's Ground. Key ideas are taken back to the Community Meeting for discussion
- Elders and senior cultural people hold the legacy and continue to live by traditional governance structures. They are both actively involved in guiding the local Children's Ground System, and are directly consulted on all significant decisions, particularly in relation to any activities that involve being on their custodial lands.
- The Children's Ground System engages local people (users) in all aspects of the service including; policy development, program and services design and development, evaluation, community needs assessment, research, fundraising and management.
- Ensuring community/user ownership and direction at the service delivery level while providing transparent and robust organisational governance at the strategy level requires blending formal corporate governance with strong local community ownership and engagement.<sup>2</sup>
- Time is taken to ensure that key decisions are informed by both levels of governance, balancing local priorities and organisational viability.

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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.*

people have choice, are provided with the key information and resources to exercise this choice and then supported to be the key agents of change. This empowerment approach is necessary to achieve any change in the social determinants for health and wellbeing.

### ***Integrated Service Delivery - Service Reform***

The Children's Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform is a place based, integrated approach. It is about what we do and how we do our work with community, families and children.

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 poverty. We respond to the multi-level influences on children's development from pre-birth to 25 years.

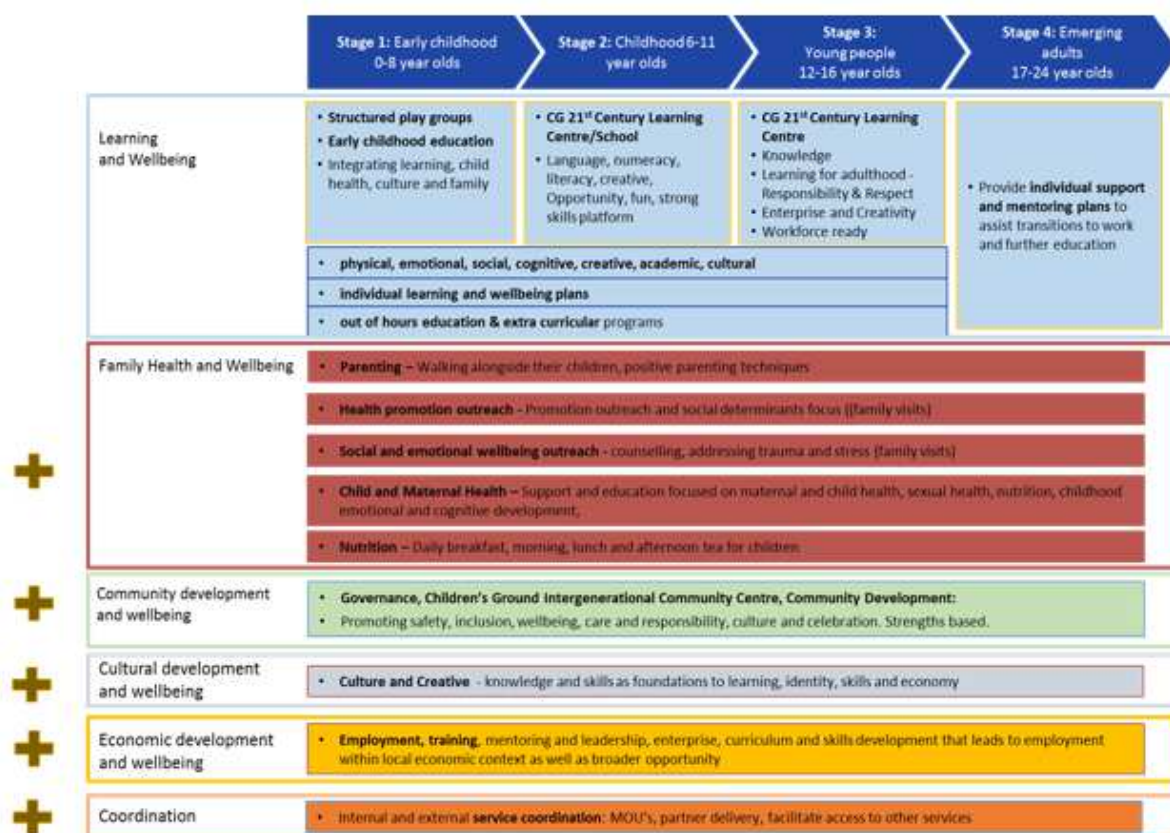
In simple terms, we make sure children and their families have the sort of opportunities that most Australians enjoy: a quality education, creative and cultural life and agency in their health and wellbeing. This approach is place based, allowing communities to shift from having little or no access,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

Our Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform has five operational areas (see Figure three):

1. **Learning and Wellbeing** (education): starting with a focus on early years learning, and building towards primary and secondary school education, and post-secondary vocational training
2. **Family Health and Wellbeing** (preventative health, physical health and social/emotional health): an emphasis on primary health and healing, maternal, child and family health
3. **Community Development and Wellbeing** (society, governance, culture and environment): a focus on integrated community/family centres and community safety, building the social capital where people live
4. **Economic Development and Wellbeing** (employment, training and enterprise): through the creation of a local workforce, a curriculum and learning platform designed for future employment, support for transition to work, micro-financing and enterprise development.
5. **Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing** (embedded across all areas): to ensure children grow with a strong sense of identity and belonging as well as the knowledge systems and skills of their first cultures (critical to future wellbeing)



**Figure three: Children’s Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform.**



Within this framework, Children’s Ground service delivery 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.

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.<sup>3</sup>

The Children’s Ground System 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

In addition, inclusion and safety are the key human rights 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

<sup>3</sup> Altyerre (Arrernte), Jukurrpa (Walpiri), Tjurkurpa (Pitjantjatjara), Man-garre (Kunwinjku), An-garre (Gundjehmi).

within that community are regarded as equal. This requires agreement from all involved, sophisticated communications and decision making processes that are transparent, inclusive and collective.

From the beginning, the Children's Ground System is delivered by a multidisciplinary team, in a place-based manner that localises the model 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.

High quality resources, people and services, delivered over the long term, are building on local strengths and capacity to break the cycles of fractured service delivery, fragmented systems and intergenerational poverty, to equip children for opportunities locally, nationally and globally.

Using best available evidence and innovation (both Western and First Nations approaches) Children's Ground aims to inform leading practice to achieve the eradication of extreme economic poverty and celebrate social, cultural, political and economic inclusion.

### **Workforce**

Underpinning everything that is important in service delivery in remote Indigenous communities, is employment of a local First Nations workforce - therefore it is a significant focus for Children's Ground.

- Children's Ground is creating a high quality, sustainable local workforce where cultural and community experts work alongside sector experts.
- First Nations employment ensures people are engaging in culturally respectful and safe services and environments
- Employment is flexible and responsive
- Employees have access to microfinancing opportunities and financial literacy support

Children's Ground is realistic about employment being affected by the stress and trauma experienced by First Nations people. For people with little or no work history coupled with other significant challenges, successfully moving into sustainable employment can be difficult.

Many First Nations people experience structural, cultural, social and relational barriers to engaging in and sustaining employment. At Children's Ground, many employees are experiencing employment for the first time. Children's Ground begins with removing the structural barriers to employment, with the aim of supporting the reduction of other barriers that impact engagement in employment.

### **Evidence:**

In relation to the long-term impact of early childhood learning for First Nations children and community development and empowerment efforts in remote communities, there is a paucity of rigorous research and evaluation being undertaken in this area in Australia. Researchers, services and governments in Australia are needing to continue relying on overseas research that is decades old and conducted in vastly different contexts.

The distinguishing feature of Children's Ground's evaluation work is that we are generating evidence to understand the impact, not only of participation in early childhood education, but also the relationship between this and wrap-around family support; for family engagement in their children's learning, child and family engagement in health and social/emotional wellbeing services, and in employment, as well as the impact of environmental health and community empowerment approaches – all of which are part of the social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing. This is of significant research interest in relation to the impact of effective integrated service delivery for children, in relation to early learning dosage and wrap-around supports.

- A longitudinal evaluation, across a generation to evidence impact, has been embedded within the Children's Ground System from the beginning.
- A commitment to gather, act on and share evidence of the educational, social, health, economic and cultural impact of our work in paramount.
- Evidence creation is driven by both First Nations and Western researchers and methods.
- Teams of First Nations Community Researchers lead local evaluation and research priorities.

Co-creation of knowledge about the impact of Children's Ground is imperative and consistent with the Children's Ground principles. First Nations communities leading the way in research and evaluation is a critical contribution to individual and community agency over their own lives and priorities. It is also a critical contribution to the Australian evidence-base in relation to how First Nations people lead research locally, from identifying research and evaluation priorities, through to designing methods, undertaking the research and presenting and reporting findings to their community and broader audiences.

#### ***Collective Investment:***

The Children's Ground 'collective investment' funding model has created the authorising environments for systems change. This has enabled Children's Ground to overcome fragmented and fractured service delivery experienced by other systems, to reduce barriers to employment for First Nations people, to undertake outcomes-based service delivery and evaluation, and to ensure that the community and their immediate and long-term needs and aspirations are central to everything at Children's Ground.

- The outcomes based collective investment model includes philanthropic, government, corporations and communities collectively funding community operations.
- It enables innovation and flexibility to deliver change.
- Communities are deciding how resources are used for programs and activities.
- Children's Ground staff are working towards outcomes, rather than outputs, which requires a flexible and responsive approach – and the ability to prioritise relationship building with First Nations people, which is critical to active engagement and positive service experiences.
- Children's Ground closes the loop between funders and communities. Funding partners visit communities to see the change they are funding and meeting the First Nations people leading the change.

A focus on outcomes rather than outputs is not achievable without visionary funders who commit to funding models that recognise that future human capital will only be created through responsive, flexible and innovative service delivery. Program delivery that can respond to a child/family or individual's foreground or presenting issues, whilst holding the long-term focus on addressing the background causal issues and circumstances is crucial. This can only be achieved through people in

services having strong and enduring relationships with people, which take time to develop – time that is not afforded staff in current service systems.

***In summary***

All of the system reform areas above are inter-related. A system with the right governance arrangements; an integrated approach to learning, wellbeing and development; strong evidence of efficacy; the right workforce; and matched investment which is focused on outcomes, are the pre-conditions required to create a different future with children, families and communities experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage.

**Strategic Reform**

One of the most important features of the Children’s Ground System is not necessarily ‘what’ is delivered, but ‘how’ it is delivered. This is what distinguishes Children’s Ground from many other service systems and approaches. The ‘how’ includes; consumer control and agency, integrated service delivery, acknowledging and using First Nations health knowledge and practices and importantly, services are delivered in a flexible, responsive and timely manner.

For Children’s Ground ‘how services are delivered’ is what makes the difference for children, families and the community. Therefore, the Children’s Ground inter-generational approach is underpinned by eight strategic principles, all of which are instrumental to achieving generational change (see Figure three).

***Figure three: Children’s Ground principles***

<b>Start early</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin in the early years - the most critical development period and engage parents</li> <li>• Maternal health including pre-birth and sexually active young people</li> <li>• Prevention focus in all that is delivered</li> </ul>
<b>Stay for the long term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow with the children from 0 to 24 years - supporting all major transition periods</li> <li>• Stay with the community for a generation to achieve long term change</li> <li>• Strategically support long term economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the community</li> </ul>
<b>Critical mass</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the community (geographic and cultural)</li> <li>• Actively work to support and know all children and community members</li> <li>• Engage enough children and families across the community to create a critical mass to enable wide spread change from disadvantage to opportunity</li> </ul>

<b>Assume and celebrate ability (Strengths Based)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise the ability of children, families and community and build upon this strength - engaging ability and passion, developing skills and opportunities</li> <li>• Recognise the strength of community and culture</li> <li>• Provide personalised plans with each child and family</li> </ul>
<b>Deliver the whole, not the bits (integrated service delivery)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver all elements as a whole system</li> <li>• Integrated <i>Learning, Wellbeing and Development</i> platform integrates key areas of education, health, culture, society (community), employment, enterprise and wellbeing. These are delivered from an intergenerational, placed based platform</li> </ul>
<b>Expect and deliver excellence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit and train a high quality workforce</li> <li>• Provide the best resources and services to deliver quality</li> <li>• Expect/encourage the best of all people involved (staff, children, families)</li> <li>• Integration of key human rights instruments and principles such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, consumer agency</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation –the best of the old &amp; the new</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine both the old and the new to create innovation</li> <li>• First Nations knowledge systems refined for over 60,000 years</li> <li>• Best practice global innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Child, family and community led</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance by local people is the key</li> <li>• Communities govern, design, delivery and evaluation</li> <li>• Recognise local governance systems</li> <li>• Family are fully involved in their children’s learning, wellbeing and development</li> <li>• Place based and intergenerational approach – delivering where and how people live</li> </ul>

These principles are core to the Children Ground System operations and vision – they are evident in all areas of the organisation from service delivery through to the systems change approach.

## Children's Ground: Themes arising from the Productivity Commission Human Services Reform report

### ***Community led decision making (user choice):***

Children's Ground has designed a model of governance with and for the use of local communities, because community agency is the single most important principle and practice in Human Services. Local knowledge, ownership and aspirations must be integrated into service delivery and governance. Local community governance groups must be responsible for the delivery, management and local relevance of programs within a community. It is critical to long term success, and reflects global best practice in community development and poverty alleviation. This is rarely achieved singular governance mechanisms such as boards or even community advisory committees. It requires multiple governance mechanisms that recognise users, cultural governance and community governance.

Self-governance is not only an exercise in ensuring local people using a service can articulate their solutions and exercise their decisions. It is equally important to provide the support, resources and information within which the best decisions and solutions can be reached.

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.

### ***Prevention and early intervention:***

A focus on prevention, rather than treatment and crisis must be central to Human Service reform. A focus on ability rather than disability, opportunity rather than remedial interventions are critical to Human Service reform.

It is possible to establish strong foundations for children, young people and adults to have agency over their own health, learning and wellbeing, which will reduce the downstream impact and cost of preventable negative issues and life circumstances.

Supporting children in their earliest years, and their families, is the ultimate form of prevention. However, it is just not in the early years that prevention matters. The 25 Year approach of Children's Ground recognises prevention must be a focus through the key life stages into adulthood, to ensure economic, social and cultural wellbeing in the long term. Most importantly first culture is critical in any human services system and will protect children's self-identify and lifelong social/emotional wellbeing.

### ***Integrated services and outcomes-based delivery:***

Overcoming fragmented and fractured service delivery is about both what is delivered and how it is delivered. Integrated service design must be coupled with an approach that prioritises user control and voice, relationships, flexibility and responsiveness.

An integrated service system needs a trajectory over 25 to 50 years with a focus on starting with early childhood and looking towards they key elements that will ensure a child is able to enjoy economic, social and culture wellbeing as an adult. This goes beyond integrating early childhood, education and human services that are common in some integrated services and centres. Human Service Systems must integrate education, early childhood, health, environmental health, employment and economic, community development and empowerment, and creative and cultural

life. Integrated systems must consider the child in the context of family and community – the connection between generations and the interdependence in wellbeing between generations.

Integration is about the service system working in the interest of the community that it services, not in the interest of their singular organisations.

Collective outcomes and collective accountability measures can compel organisations to work together in the interest of the people. The system needs to create the conditions to compel organisations to place the people at the centre of the system and to evaluate success not in terms of organisational viability but in terms of impact at the individual, family and community/population level.

Investment models can create the environment for effective outcomes-based integrated service delivery by moving away from funding that is attached to service targets and outputs.

***Place-based approaches:***

The service system needs to be placed where people live. It needs to be accessible, responsive and engaged with the people it serves. Strong community governance and ownership is central to place-based approaches. In the Children's Ground System, the social, cultural and economic capital of community life is built through the engagement of a critical mass of people who mobilise to change the life course for their children.

***Planning, evaluation and feedback systems:***

Outcomes based longitudinal evaluation can be embedded in Human Services systems. Evaluation should be continuously reviewed and adapted in line with emerging research methods based on national and international best-practice.

Annual progress and evaluation reports produced with community with regular internal reviews and sharing of data can enable community and staff to target their approaches to support greater service participation and impact.

Community planning and regular reporting enables the community to hold the Human Services system to account. Ongoing internal and external review and evaluation allows analysis of whether services are delivering what the community wanted and in the way they wanted it.

***Service delivery in remote Indigenous communities:***

First Nations people and communities 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.

Despite good intentions and significant efforts, many First Nations people have been systematically excluded from service systems for generations, due to explicit and implicit structural, social, cultural and relational barriers. The distrust of services by many First Nations people is understandable. We cannot expect people to engage in services that are not in their first language, that do not respect their cultural beliefs and that operate within structural parameters that are not understanding of or conducive to their circumstances

Human Services are rarely designed with the consideration of First culture, language and society. Remote Aboriginal communities are subject to programs and people which are often foreign in

design, language and culture. Non-indigenous staff are changeable. Access to basic foundational services that are commonplace in mainstream Australia are often lacking.

First Nations peoples have clear aspirations and strategies for achieving change within their communities. It is critical that the system of human services completely reforms the way it works with First Nations Communities. Remote Indigenous communities are largely small populations and distinct Nations and clans. First Nations systems of law and society underpin life.

Remote communities are small enough that the Human Services can be designed with long term, preventative focus that recognises and engages people's strengths and abilities and begins from people's First Culture and Language. Rather than being seen as recipients of Human Services, people should be considered as designers and delivers of services. Children's Ground is designed as a way of implementing a system that places the people in the centre with a 25 year strategy for whole scale, whole of community equity and opportunity. As an intergenerational approach it considers the needs pre-birth through to elders. It is an approach that can delivered by community, for community with the partners of their choice.

It is possible to create a system that secures the long term social, cultural, economic and political wellbeing of remote communities.

#### ***Local Workforce:***

Underpinning service reform in remote Indigenous communities, is employment of a local First Nations workforce. Engaging local people as the key staff as the agents of change shifts the relationship with services from one of dependence and need to one of power and self-determination. The focus should be on building sustainable local workforce which creates empowerment. At the same time it will address long term issues in remote communities including the challenges of workforce recruitment, retention and costly travel and service relevance.

In addition, First Nations employment has benefits well beyond workforce and culturally safe service delivery, including but not limited to financial stability and security and positive role modelling for children.

#### **Summary**

The Children's Ground System comprises a 25-year, intergenerational strategy that focuses on children, their families and the communities in which they live. Through a holistic and preventative approach it tackles the social, structural and economic determinants and inequities to create environments of opportunity.

In response to the current broken systems that have been struggling to create positive reform and change for users, Children Ground was established as a whole new approach to evidence how outcomes can be improved by allocating funds to the right contact and service points within systems.

The Children's Ground System is front loading resources into prevention and early intervention to provide the strong foundations of culture, learning and wellbeing that children and their families



need to secure long term equity. This is in stark contrast to current service systems that focus primarily on treatment and responding to issues, rather than a preventative/opportunity approach.

The Children's Ground approach prioritises relationships and local voice. Developing respectful relationships with all children, their families and the community has been the starting point for staff within the Children's Ground System. Staff are afforded the time to be responsive to people's complex needs and life circumstances. This includes immediate needs (foreground issues) and over time through trust and respect, deeper concerns and issues (background issues). This way of working requires an extremely flexible approach – one that is not afforded to practitioners in the traditional service systems. Understanding for many people experiencing

Staff in services are critical to the effectiveness of the operations and capacity to achieve objectives and improve outcomes. Extensive local First Nations employment within the Children's Ground system sees people engaging in services that are culturally safe, understanding and respectful and that the people have themselves designed. Building a local First Nations workforce requires service delivery and funding organisations to acknowledge, understand and respond to the barriers that many people experience in engaging with and sustaining employment. The Children's Ground organisation has established internal human resources processes that cater for the diverse needs of people looking to engage in employment; from those that are long-term unemployed and only able to work minimal hours to begin, through to those that are looking to work more full-time hours. This is another critical point in service systems that requires focused resources and support, particularly to engage people who are long-term unemployed – for whom the benefits of employment are significant and often life-changing.

Local knowledge, ownership and aspirations are core to service delivery, governance and long term success. The governance and operations of the Children's Ground System places priority and resources on the day to day engagement of users and the importance and ability of users to govern their own affairs. It is critical that key staff across the organisation operate from a relational approach, engaging with and catching the views, ideas and aspirations of users daily. These ideas are fed into the system continuously through daily program practice, strategic development processes, community evaluation and advisory groups.

By focusing resources on integrating services, programs and efforts that work holistically with all people, places and factors that influence child development and community empowerment, the Children's Ground System is bringing together national and international leading practice-based evidence and evidence-based practice, from multiple disciplines and sectors; education, physical health, social and emotional wellbeing, environmental health, community development, employment intergenerational teaching/learning/practice, learning, cultural traditions and creative arts.

Children's Ground is implementing a system of service delivery in which the actual service delivery component becomes effective and efficient. By focusing on reforming and fixing key elements that exist across all systems, and not trying to 'fix the people (users)', the Children's Ground System is reducing many of the access barriers experienced by those living with social, economic and cultural inequality and inequity. Service delivery is effective and efficient because people are engaged, feeling respected, informed about and confident in what they need, and are deciding and driving solutions to health, wellbeing, education and social needs, for themselves, their children and their communities.

The longitudinal evaluation of the Children's Ground System is building an evidence base within Australia, not only in relation to early childhood learning, but the impact of working with all people and environments that influence child development; their families, their communities and services. The evaluation is also evidencing the impact of allocating resources to contact and service points within systems that focus on prevention and the social and cultural determinants of health.

The generation of children growing up with Children's Ground learned about contributing to and leading their own health, learning and wellbeing. For this generation of children, a new 'normal' is developing and it includes; children participating in early learning programs from birth alongside their families; school aged children (previously not engaging in school) having support and opportunities to learn in a different environment that better meets their individual needs; children participating in extended hours learning programs after school and during holiday periods; families involved in setting goals for their children's learning and wellbeing, and playing the important role of teacher for their children; children engaging in important cultural events and activities, such as ceremony and sorry business; children learning on their country, about their country and from cultural/community leaders and their family; children seeing their families engaged in employment; children seeing their families access health and wellbeing services with success because they are adequately informed and supported to do so; children seeing their families advocate for their own needs, such as housing, health and finances. For children, each of these experiences is shaping who they are now and who they will become as adults.

The Children's Ground System is able to be effective through the resilience and desire of people to change their own circumstances and to provide the best start in life for their children. With the shared vision and the right people and resources, the Children's Ground System and approach can be implemented by any organisation or group of organisations to achieve sustained long term change with whole communities facing extreme inequity.