MEDIA RELEASE
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Benevolent evaluation highlights how community-led programs help children reconnect with school, culture and community

Children, young people and families in Condobolin, Caboolture and Port Augusta are more connected to their communities following the successful completion of the Safer Children, Safer Communities program, delivered by local organisations in partnership with The Benevolent Society (Benevolent) and funded by Westpac.

This work strengthened children's safety, wellbeing and connection to family, culture, education and community.

As a Westpac Safer Children, Safer Communities partner, Benevolent worked with local organisations to fund and coordinate place-based initiatives shaped by local priorities, community relationships and cultural context.

An independent evaluation, commissioned by Benevolent and conducted by Aboriginal-led agency Outpost Consulting, found the program demonstrated flexible, relationship-driven approaches to engaging with children, young people and families who are often disconnected from services.

The evaluation documented significant improvements in school engagement, with one program supporting young people to increase attendance from as low as 11–20 per cent to 96 per cent within several months.

It also highlighted benefits for families and communities, including stronger engagement with schools and services, reduced household stress, improved interagency relationships, greater community cohesion and pride, stronger connection to culture, and local activities that helped address service gaps.

"Children's safety and wellbeing are strengthened when communities are trusted to design responses that reflect local strengths, cultural knowledge and lived experience," said Linda Griffiths, Benevolent's Executive Director for Child, Youth & Family.

"This evaluation demonstrates how sustained relationships, including those with children, families, local organisations, schools, Elders and community leaders, and flexible funding can enable practical, locally-led responses."

Important lessons for future initiatives were also identified, including the need to invest in trusted local organisations, recognise practical supports such as meals and transport as essential to participation, create stronger opportunities for shared learning, and establish evaluation and sustainability planning from the outset.

"The evaluation also highlights the power of partnerships and funding approaches that prioritises localised engagement, adapts to changing local conditions and promotes holistic programs that integrates family and community support" said Kavitha Suthanthiraraj, Westpac's Head of Social Policy and Human Rights.

The program was delivered with community partners including Central West Family Support Group, Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, Mission Australia, Youth Insearch, Port Augusta City Council and Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation.

The results show that when communities are empowered to design local solutions, children thrive.

The evaluation report is available on our website here: benevolent.org.au/our-impact/research-and-evaluation

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MEDIA CONTACT:
E: media@benevolent.org.au

About The Benevolent Society

The Benevolent Society provides integrated support services to children, young people, families, older Australians and carers. Since 1813, our history reflects a passion for helping people live life their way. As one of Australia's first charitable organisations, The Benevolent Society has pioneered positive social change and uses its practice wisdom to advocate for a just, caring society.

Visit benevolent.org.au for more information.