

Screen Currency 2026

Understanding the value of
Australian screen and games

A study in 5 reports with
supporting case studies

 Case study

Little J & Big Cuz

TV Series • Released 2017

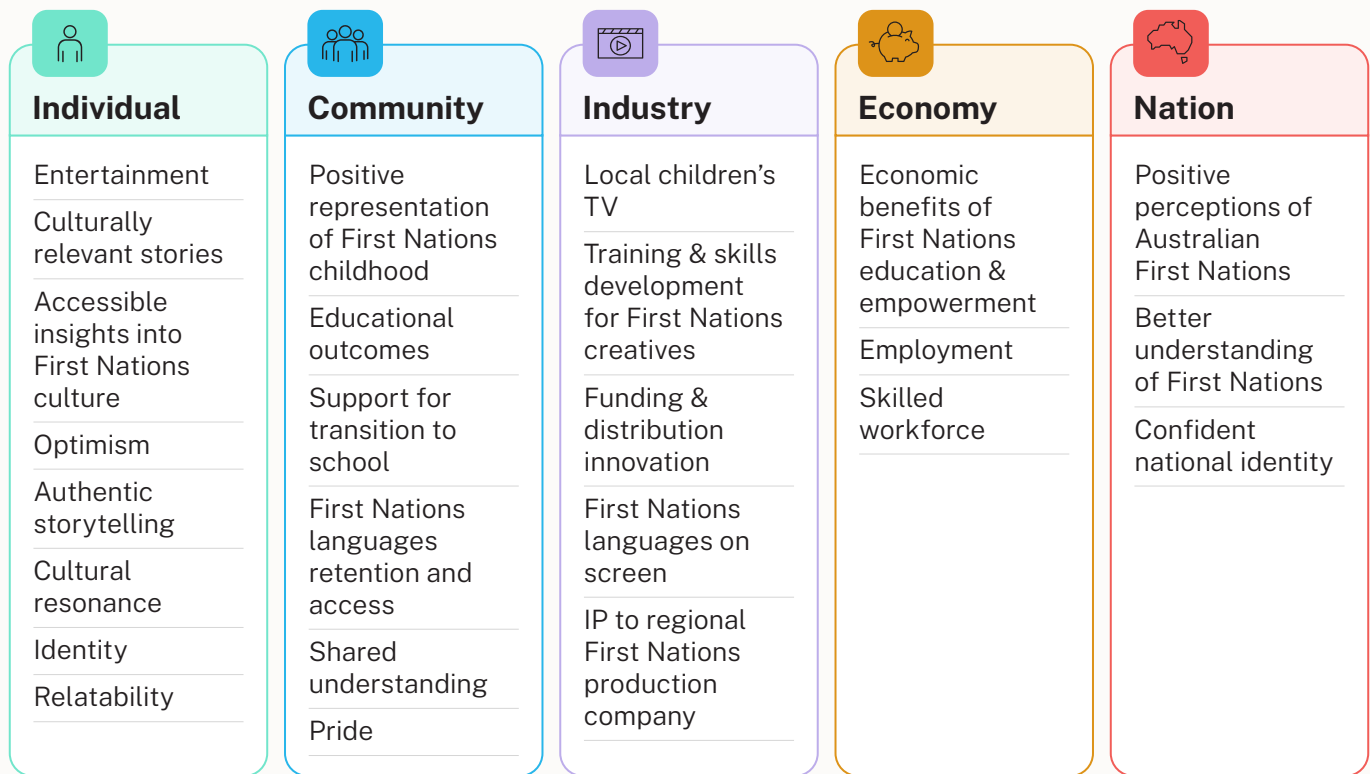
Ned Lander Media and Ramu Productions



Australian Government



Introduction



Little J & Big Cuz (2017–) is a multi-award-winning contemporary children's animated series that first aired on NITV.

Created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and animators from communities across Australia, the series follows the everyday adventures of 5-year-old Little J and 9-year-old Big Cuz, 2 cousins who live with their wise Nanna and the endearing Old Dog. Initially created to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's school readiness and two-way learning between local First Nations communities and schools, the series has attracted a loyal following among both First Nations and non-First Nations children, parents, carers and educators.

The series demonstrates how value can be generated through the production process, while also delivering meaningful social impact, when initiated by partners with an explicit social objective – to help First Nations kids transition into primary school.

The development of a national animated program for First Nations children was a first, and required a range of partners, collaborations and training to build finance and the required teams. To ensure cultural relevance and resonance for First Nations kids and communities, stories are drawn from the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers from all over Australia, many of whom were first-time writers for children's animation and developed skills through the program.



Voiced in 17 First Nations languages.¹



Financing the series required extensive coordination between several funding partners, exposing a significant barrier to children's TV production. The series' first commissioner, National Indigenous Television (NITV) was unable to meet funding prerequisites, prompting producer Ned Lander to broker a partnership with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) that enabled them to meet requirements. The series has since continued to innovate in distribution, including expansion into the US market, demonstrating the importance of funding and diversified pathways for sustaining Australian children's content.

Since its release, *Little J & Big Cuz* has achieved significant success among First Nations and mainstream audiences. By its second season, it had reached a multiplatform audience of approximately 1.5 million viewers across Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) platforms, while simultaneous release on ABC and NITV of Season 4 helped maintain strong engagement with First Nations communities and broaden its audience.

Translation of the series across 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages has deepened cultural connection, improved accessibility and supported skills development in communities, including remote areas. Community screenings and local engagement activities have fostered a strong sense of ownership, with audiences seeing their stories, languages and experiences reflected on screen. With a fifth season now in pre-production, the program continues to demonstrate how children's television can support long-term cultural, social and industry development.

Creation

Companies involved

Production company: Ned Lander Media & Ramu Productions

Commissioners: Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Kids and National Indigenous Television (NITV)

Ned Lander Media was established in 2009 by producer Ned Lander, former Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) Commissioning Editor and General Manager, SBS Independent. It has a commitment to diversity and tackling complex subjects in powerful, accessible and joyful ways.²

Ramu Productions is an Australian First Nations-owned and managed content production company based in Broome, Western Australia. They describe themselves as specialising in “telling Indigenous stories through an Indigenous lens” and pride themselves on “training and developing Indigenous filmmaker.” Their main focus is producing drama and children’s content.³

Little J & Big Cuz was commissioned by the ABC and NITV, reflecting their commitment to commissioning culturally specific Australian children’s content. The involvement of NITV was particularly significant in supporting First Nations-led storytelling and ensured the series maintained cultural authenticity, while the ABC provided a national platform capable of reaching broad family audiences across Australia.



7 funding partners,
2 broadcasters

Origin story: the idea and initial development

The first Australian animated children’s series with First Nations children at the centre, *Little J & Big Cuz* was developed in response to a lack of culturally specific TV content for First Nations audiences. Its origins were in collaboration with ACER, which had identified that educational television programs could help improve children’s transition to school. ACER’s research had shown that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia are twice as likely to be identified as developmentally vulnerable, but only half as likely to have access to the kind of early years education programs crucial to preparing children for school” and that “educational TV programs can play a role in improving school readiness by building literacy and numeracy skills, self-esteem and an understanding of school expectations.”⁴ Their idea was to create a TV program for 4–6 year-olds and outreach material for families, to encourage social and behavioural change to support school transition and life-long learning.⁵

The journey from idea to actual TV program, however, was not easy. It took Lisa Norris, Director of the ACER Foundation, and Ned Lander Media more than 8 years to bring *Little J & Big Cuz* to Australian screens.⁶ While the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care supported the project, development could not commence until there was sufficient financial backing. Screen Australia supported script development and production investment came from NITV, ACER, Screen Australia, Screen Tasmania, Film Victoria and Dusseldorp Forum.⁷



The creative process

With funding in place, finding First Nations writers, a director and an animation team fell to Lander. The characters began to take shape at writers' workshops in Alice Springs, Sydney and Melbourne in 2013, that brought together First Nations educationalists, writers and directors including Priscilla Reid-Loynes, Leah Purcell, Margaret Harvey, Adrian Russell Wills, Bruce Pascoe, Erica Glynn, Danielle MacLean, Dot West, Beck Cole (who was also voice director) and Jon Bell. The writers were supported by highly experienced children's writer and script producer Clare Madsen. The educational content of storylines were aligned with the Australian Early Years Learning Framework.^{8, 9}

According to director Tony Thorne, "Directing and designing *Little J & Big Cuz* was a unique challenge and required a new approach to children's TV in Australia. Never before had an Australian animated show targeted an Indigenous 4–6-year-old audience. As an Indigenous person this seemed wrong."¹⁰

The series set out to make First Nations children's content that prioritised entertainment, humour and emotional engagement alongside learning. Lander observes, "There's a general thing that happens with First Nations content: people kind of see it as wholemeal bread, rather than what we all secretly want out of television and screens generally, which is entertainment and escapism and pleasure and engagement."¹¹

The writers' room was designed as a culturally safe and collaborative space, enabling stories from lived experience. Reflecting on West's contribution, Lander notes that "she wanted to write a story coming from the place of strength and of what the knowledge was."¹²

“[Clare Madsen] was very particular about how they operated [the writer's rooms], really creating open spaces for the generation of ideas and stories and trust and quite personal, difficult things [to be shared].”¹³

– Ned Lander, producer

Location

The series was intentionally designed to embed First Nations perspectives and cultural knowledge. Through its settings, characters and storytelling, *Little J & Big Cuz* presents culture not as something separate from daily life, but as something lived and continually learned through family, school and Country. Lander explains, "The episodes reflect Indigenous cultures and ways of learning through Little J's world, which is centred around his Nanna's backyard and Ms Chen's classroom at school ... The stories take place in the Saltwater, Desert and Freshwater Countries that surround Nanna's house. With the help of Nanna and their teacher Ms Chen, Little J and Big Cuz find out about their culture and Country and explore their own identities in the process."¹⁴

The series needed to look and feel real and relatable to their target audience. As Thorne recalled, "colour in the landscape was a crucial part of designing a recognisably Australian setting and for this I looked to artists like Albert Namatjira. The home and school environments had a lot of Indigenous input to give a believable contemporary feel and for detail in the landscapes. Native vegetation was always referenced."¹⁵

Casting

The cast is also First Nations-led and features some of Australia's leading First Nations actors including Miranda Tapsell as Little J, Deborah Mailman as Big Cuz and Aaron Fa'aoso as Old Dog.



"It's extremely important that our children are represented on screen, [...] that their experiences are represented and that a reflection of themselves is shown to them. It's empowering. And our kids need to be empowered and they need to have a sense of belonging."¹⁶

– Dot West, Noongar cultural leader, writer and script editor

Production

Cast and crew metrics

The following IMDb sourced metrics illustrate the breadth and structure of the production workforce required for a program such as *Little J & Big Cuz*.¹⁷

Producers:	11
Directors:	3
Writers:	14
Animators:	44
Composers:	2
Cast:	12
Crew:	165
People with multiple roles:	21

Production financing: investment and presales

ACER provided early funding, workshops and educational distribution guarantees to support development. Financing production of the series required complex structuring across philanthropic, educational and public funding sources, alongside securing broadcast partners (initially NITV, later co-commissioned with ABC), with significant legal and administrative coordination for a small production operation.¹⁸

Requirements to attach a distributor and secure advances were challenging given limited international sales prospects. International sales have occurred primarily to smaller First Nations and educational networks rather than major commercial territories, reflecting both the show's cultural specificity and children's TV market dynamics.¹⁹

When NITV were unable to find funding to meet Screen Australia's minimum licence fee threshold, Lander proposed a workaround. "It was in the early days and the proposition was that we find a way for ACER to...act philanthropically to support the development of this [show]."²⁰ This allowed for a commercial arrangement to be made with NITV instead of an equity investment. "That's how we did it and that was really just through knowing all the different parameters and knowing how they could work" said Lander.²¹

Direct supports

Screen Australia

- S1 2013/14 First Nations Department Development funding: \$28,596
- S1 2014/15 First Nations Department Production funding: \$820,694
- S2 2017/18 Children's TV Drama Production funding: \$500,000
- S3 2019/20 Children's TV Drama Production funding: \$500,000
- S4 2021/22 Children's TV Drama Production funding: \$265,000

Screen Tasmania funded an episode of the first season (about Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practice) to be revoiced in the reclaimed Tasmanian Aboriginal language *palawa kani*. Screen NSW funded an episode to be revoiced in Wiradjuri and contributed \$38,000 to Season 2 through the Made in NSW – Local Fund.²²

“The work involved in receiving financing from 2 state bodies, a federal body and then multiple broadcasters and distributors and so forth...it's a huge amount of legal work to do for, basically, a little kids' show, you know what I mean?”²³

– Ned Lander, producer



“It's not that we're deluded and we think that we are going to make big sales overseas. I've worked with First Nations creatives for decades and only certain First Nations content sells overseas. It tends to be work that appeals to what a non-First Nations audience wants to feel when they watch it, rather than the experience of the First Nations people who've created it.”²⁴

– Ned Lander, producer

Training and skills

Prior to *Little J & Big Cuz*, almost all of the writers had never written for children's TV before. Since then several have won Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Awards for their work on the series and have had substantial career progression, including acclaimed writer Sam Nuggin-Paynter and First Nations director Tony Thorne.

As part of the delivery of Season 5, Lander is currently mentoring Jodie Bell at Ramu Productions in Broome to transition the production of *Little J* to a First Nations-led model, including the transferring control of intellectual property for subsequent seasons. Writer and First Nations cultural leader Dot West (Director of Goolari Media and Ramu Productions) will also become script producer.²⁵

Economic impacts

At its peak, the first season of *Little J & Big Cuz* employed approximately 40 people and 2 animation studios – 12 Field in Melbourne and Blue Rocket in Hobart – with production completed in January 2017. Additional employment was generated through the creation of First Nations language versions, extending the project's workforce and cultural reach.

Despite critical success, broadcaster support and sustained community impact, the longer-term economics of the series has faced ongoing challenges. Shifts in commissioning priorities and modest international returns have limited long-term financial sustainability, requiring ongoing personal commitment and financial risk to sustain production.²⁶

While limited merchandising, including books and small product runs, has performed strongly within the niche audience for the series, it has not scaled as a major commercial revenue stream. This is consistent with the series' educational and cultural focus.²⁷

Innovation

"Each storyline of the first season is aligned with the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)²⁸, guided by a team of Indigenous educators led by Priscilla Reid-Loynes. Reid-Loynes also wrote extensive teaching resources for preschools, assisted by a team of primary educators led by Deborah Cohen. This included "more than 300 resources for students up to Year 2 in line with the Australian curriculum and designed for in-classroom use."²⁹

Each episode in Season 1 was accompanied by online resources including games for the children and suggestions of teaching approaches for early childhood and junior primary educators. An eBook has also been developed for use in classrooms.

These materials were developed with the children and educators in mind and are intended to be easy to use and inspiring. They are available free of charge from www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au.

One of the goals the producer set was to create a show that would connect with First Nations children from any part of Australia. Animating the series allowed it to be revoiced into multiple First Nations languages, working with translators and actors from remote Australia. The first season of *Little J & Big Cuz* was revoiced into Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara from Central Australia, Djambarrpuyngu from Arnhem Land and Yawuru from Broome. In the North West, local cast were directed in Walmajarri and in Tasmania the show was revoiced in the reclaimed language *palawa kani*. Animation also allowed the characters to move between saltwater, freshwater and desert country, giving First Nations audiences a connection to land recognisable as their own. Nanna is shown as a friend of all Nations but not identified as from a specific Nation herself.

The series is now voiced in 17 languages, offering unique opportunities for both language education and community ownership of the series. The series remains actively used in schools and language programs, supporting language maintenance and cross-community engagement.³⁰

Community preference for easy access led to selected language versions being made available on YouTube, generating strong engagement relative to community size and highlighting the importance of accessible multi-platform distribution.³¹

Dissemination

Distribution

First release platform:	NITV
International distributor:	FNX

NITV was attached as the primary broadcaster for *Little J & Big Cuz* from the outset, and premiered on 28 April 2017.³² The series has since been distributed across a range of platforms including NITV, ABC TV and iview, Netflix and YouTube, expanding its accessibility to Australian and international audiences.

While the series was not initially expected to have a significant international market, it later gained international exposure through distribution in North America. In 2023, *Little J & Big Cuz* was among several Australian First Nations titles acquired by First Nations Experience (FNX), a US-based channel dedicated to Native American and global Indigenous content. The agreement included the relicensing of the first season and the first-time licensing of Season 2 and 3 across 29 US states.³³

The series was also selected to screen at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival, further demonstrating its international cultural and educational relevance.

Exhibition

NITV planned a complex marketing strategy for the series including cross-network support, paid promotion and SBS exposure.

NITV developed a family movie slot at 7.30pm on Fridays to set up an opportunity for co-viewing so parents and children could watch *Little J & Big Cuz* together, as well as scheduling it at 4pm on weekdays. The Friday night scheduling “delivered decent audiences to *Little J & Big Cuz* and improved the performance of Friday nights”.³⁴

The first season of *Little J & Big Cuz* accrued a total cross-platform audience view count of 183,492 on NITV. This included its Friday evening broadcast slot (67,415 views), its weekday afternoon slot (26,900), views on SBS OnDemand (55,177) and views on Facebook (34,000).³⁵

Choosing to run *Little J & Big Cuz* Season 1 on the ABC during NAIDOC Week in 2017 amplified its reach considerably. During its ABC run it achieved an average share 45.4% and 46.6% of 5-to-9-year olds. It also reached an average of 21,000 plays per episode on ABC iview and the ABC Kids app – episode 13 achieved 73,100 plays.³⁶

Viewing data suggests there is a sizeable online audience. On YouTube, whole episodes and hundreds of short promotional videos have been viewed extensively. One in-language episode uploaded by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has over 27,000 views.³⁷ The original trailer posted on YouTube in 2017 has over 79,000 views.³⁸ The *Little J and Big Cuz* TikTok page has almost 4,500 followers and 28,900 likes which includes shorts such as a ‘behind-the-scenes’ video about translating episodes into Kuku Yalanji language which has over 8,100 plays.³⁹

Awards

The show has won multiple awards including a Logie Award for Most Outstanding Children's Program, the inaugural Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network Award, an Australian Teachers of Media Award, 3 AWGIE Awards (for First Nations writers Erica Glynn and Samuel Nuggin-Paynter) and was a finalist in the International NHK Japan Prize and Prix Jeunesse.

Renewal

A second season of *Little J & Big Cuz* was greenlit in 2017/18, a third season in 2019/20 and a fourth season in 2022/23 – bringing the series to 50 episodes.^{40,41}

Engagement

Online metrics

Little J and Big Cuz is highly rated by audiences on IMDb.⁴²

IMDb:

8.3/10

Reception

Little J & Big Cuz presents a “gentle way for kids to learn about big topics”, while also engaging, connecting and educating adult audiences within and beyond Australia.⁴³

Australian audiences

Screen Currency audience research reveals that among the general population, 11% of Australians report to have watched *Little J & Big Cuz* in full or partially. Viewership is significantly higher among First Nations communities (33%) and parents with children under 15 (20%) but lower among Australians aged 45–54 (6%), 55–64 (5%) and 65+ (2%).⁴⁴

International audiences

Additional Screen Currency analysis of online comments from viewers outside Australia indicate global audiences are aware of the show, “Wish we could watch this in the UK”.⁴⁵ Some reviews express solidarity with other First Nations and Indigenous peoples around the world, including African cultures, First Nations cultures from North America and Māori culture. On Facebook there were 149 responses to a post about an episode where Nanna explains to the kids that rather than knowing a date, Country tells her when it is her birthday, “When the baby finches leave their nest and when the wattle blooms.” This way of seeing the world rang true for a viewer who noted, “This is exactly like my grandma. Most African cultures also don’t have birthdays [...] It’s amazing how we are so ‘far away yet we are so similar’”.⁴⁶

Regional audiences

Case studies of rural and regional childcare centres conducted as part of a review by ACER showed evidence of improved school readiness.⁴⁷ Remote

Northern Territory (NT) educators also saw children who watched the show in their centre connect with culture and show pride in their First Nations identity.⁴⁸

Online engagement

Online engagement with *Little J & Big Cuz* reflects broad and deep engagement with the show. Viewing data suggests a sizeable online audience.

Facebook, Instagram and Reddit comments about *Little J & Big Cuz* are overwhelmingly positive. Some comments suggest *Little J & Big Cuz* is nostalgic for adult viewers. For example, one commenter who was responding to Big Cuz and Little J making toys from odds and ends around the house wrote, “This is my childhood!” For some it reminded them of their culture and Kin, sharing, “My great grandmother was the same” and “Forever celebrating my nanna. She’s my beautiful strong Aboriginal queen”.⁴⁹

Social and cultural impacts

Entertainment value

People commenting online describe their children’s love of the show, its co-viewing appeal and intergenerational bonding, sharing comments such as:

- “My grandchildren love this show”
- “Me n my kids love this show”
- “Love this show so does my bub”
- “Such a great show. Kids have it on repeat”
- “[...] we watch episodes every day. They just love little j big cuz and all their adventures”
- “I’ll only let my toddler watch a couple of shows and this is always our #1 choice”.⁵⁰



“A gentle way for kids to learn about big topics.”⁵¹

– Online review, Instagram



33% of First Nations Australians have watched the show.⁵²



11% of general population have watched the show.⁵³

Historical and educational value

Little J & Big Cuz was initiated by ACER and the ACER Foundation “to build the school readiness of children, and to support the successful transition to school of Indigenous children.”⁵⁴ Following the rollout of the first season, in 2019 ACER and the Dusseldorp Forum published a study reviewing its success, highlighting the educational value delivered by the series through case studies conducted in 6 locations, 3 in the Northern Territory, 2 in South Australia and 1 in Queensland.

The study found that early childhood educators and children responded positively to the series, with *Little J & Big Cuz* and its associated resources adding meaningful value to existing early learning programs.⁵⁵ The findings indicated promising signs that the series supported First Nations children’s transition to school, including improvements in pedagogical practice among early childhood educators, greater recognition of children’s strengths, and increased celebration and integration of First Nations cultures within learning environments. The research also identified positive impacts on children’s emotional wellbeing, as well as strengthened pride and cultural identity among First Nations learners.

Social value

Little J & Big Cuz is valued as a kids’ show as much as for its First Nations and educational values. Requests for children’s show recommendations on Reddit frequently mention it with comments such as “Amazing show” and “Oh I love this as well!”

First Nations commenters conveyed feelings of pride and connection through sharing *Little J & Big Cuz*. However, while these public forums are moderated and comments are often removed, casual racism is occasionally present.⁵⁶

Little J & Big Cuz also opens the discussion about social issues and marginalisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often face. For example, in a post responding to questions about the Stolen Generations, the show’s Facebook admin/moderator responded, “...Being a kids show our First Nations writers tread lightly, and hope that conversations like this can start, and continue to educate.”⁵⁷

Comments online from First Nations perspectives highlight the importance of *Little J & Big Cuz* for First Nations representation posting, “It’s so cute our babies have something to relate to and watch that always teaches them about culture”. Commenters also note the show’s real-world impacts, such as when children proudly dress up as *Little J & Big Cuz* characters for Book Week.⁵⁸

Other impacts

The use of *Little J & Big Cuz* as an education aid in schools is often referenced in reviews. Online comments by teachers express pleasure in watching the show with students and excitement for upcoming series. Comments on Instagram also affirm its significance in broader schooling contexts and the appeal of other *Little J & Big Cuz* intellectual property:

“As many would know we kinship school our children at home on Country [...] We spent the morning opening up our box together, reading this beautiful book and it actually rolled into further great yarns especially during NAIDOC week [...] we would recommend to mob and allies as a brilliant resource [...] we really loved this box and opportunity for big yarns with our little people today!”⁵⁹



“It is a cynicism-free zone. It’s something we work with the writers on because adults writing tend to fall into that. And actually a lot of children’s television falls into that.”⁶⁰

– Ned Lander, producer



“100,000% The best kids’ show to ever come out of Australia. Our kids adore it.”⁶¹

– Online review, Instagram



“The response of a community like the Ngukurr community ... up in Arnhem Land, who ... brought it right through the community and through the primary school and the high school and everyone was involved in creating both the translations and the performances and the recording and then a big, you know, premiere night where they got a blow up screen and a hot dog stand and popcorn and the whole thing was fantastic.”⁶²

– Ned Lander, producer

NITV's post-campaign analysis for the first season noted stakeholder impacts and community wins that resulted from the series:

- Parliamentary screening in Canberra
- In-language episodes in NAIDOC Week: Djambarrpuyngu, Pitjantjatjara, Arrernte, Walmajarri, Yawuru and *palawa kani*
- Sydney screening at SBS
- In-language episode launch in Launceston, Tasmania (*palawa kani* episode)
- Partnership working with ACER & SNAICC
- Soft launch at Garma 2016 with kids screening
- Collateral in Indigenous Children's Day showbags
- Educational resource development

- Production and distribution of *Where's Aaron* physical book
- Meeting in Melbourne with Andrew Jackomos, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- Political acknowledgement from Minister of Education Simon Birmingham and Shadow Minister for Education Tanya Plibersek (social media).⁶³

In July 2025 during NAIDOC Week there was a watch party for *Little J & Big Cuz* in Federation Square, Melbourne, "celebrating culture, community and connection". The organisers summed up the series, "With humour and heart, the series offers a proud Aboriginal perspective on learning, culture and Country – perfect for curious minds and big imaginations".⁶⁴



COVID-19 health messages targeting communities used *Little J & Big Cuz* characters⁶⁵



"Bringing ideas from the outside world is what I've often tried to do. It's been really challenging. It's incredibly rewarding. It does foster really sort of meaningful relationships and it's always a battle."⁶⁶

– Ned Lander, producer



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