



# CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

## Challenges

### Community expectations

The Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation 2012 (the Evaluation) sought to evaluate the successes thus far of the CYWR trial, and in so doing, researched community opinion in the four CYWR trial communities. Community opinion is derived from what expectations the community had and continue to have of the Commission and the trial generally. Aside from the outcomes delivered by the Evaluation which reflected that the communities felt their situation was improving because people were making an effort to improve, that leadership in the communities was strengthening, that the BasicsCard had a positive impact upon children's wellbeing, and that the Commission had made inroads into school attendance, the community also quite rightly expressed an expectation that the Commission would continue to deal with disengaged community members. Many of these disengaged community members have thus far demonstrated entrenched dysfunctional behaviours despite the efforts of the Local Commissioners. The Commission's challenge has been to develop new strategies and initiatives to aid in re-engaging these community members. The Commission has proffered draft initiatives to the Australian and Queensland Governments in an effort to reflect and meet changing community values and to augment its work into the future.

The Queensland Government is presently conducting a review into the Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs) operating in 19 discrete Indigenous communities across 15 Local Government Areas. The Review's paramount consideration is the safety of community residents, particularly women and children. The Review will also consider the need to increase school attendance and reduce child protection notifications. Each community has been asked to develop a community proposal which outlines its preferred way of managing alcohol misuse and alcohol-related harm. Councils and Community Justice Groups have been asked to work together with other key stakeholders, including the Local Commissioners, to develop their community proposals. Developing a community proposal will be a challenge, and the Commission is anticipating it will play an active role in supporting the Local Commissioners working with other community leaders and stakeholders to develop community proposals.

A notable challenge reported in our 2011-12 Annual Report was the increase in online social networking amongst children and adults. The pervasiveness of social networking continues to concern the Local Commissioners as, although having many positives, social networking also has many negatives - notably cyber-bullying and harassment. Cyber-bullying behaviour takes several forms which include publicising private instant messages, text messages or emails, posting threatening messages, posting photos that will cause embarrassment and spreading rumours. Community families, like many families throughout mainstream Australia, who are already struggling to improve the attitude of their children toward schoolwork, now find they are facing the additional challenge of diverting children from social networking sites so they can spend valuable time on their homework.

### Education

School attendance statistics provided by the Department of Education, Training and Employment since the commencement of the CYWR trial illustrate that school attendance for the 2012-2013 fiscal year has remained relatively stable. The Local Commissioners in conjunction with the SCMs continue to support and assist families and students to address absences related to various factors including funerals, public holiday periods and sporting events.

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CYAAA operates in Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale in a partnership with Education Queensland. The Academy's purpose is to assist Cape York children to achieve academic results consistent with mainstream school students, whilst nurturing cultural identity and values. The drive is to develop the student's capacity to successfully transition to secondary school, train for employment and prosper at tertiary education where desired. The CYAAA curriculum teaches mainstream English literacy and numeracy utilising a Direct Instruction method. Direct Instruction identifies and specifically targets each child's academic level. Weekly testing is conducted to ensure children have mastered the required level before progressing further. CYAAA report significant progress in literacy and numeracy achievements:

*"The evidence to date indicates that there have been clear improvements in student learning, engagement and behaviour in the CYAAA campuses. While it is still too early for a definitive analysis, externally benchmarked reading tests administered in the schools demonstrate early patterns of improvement across several cohorts."*

Some mainstream secondary boarding schools report that the Academy students are doing exceptionally well, while others acknowledge that a number of students are not yet at mainstream primary school standards. In view of the fact that the Academy commenced in Aurukun and Coen in 2010, and subsequently in Hope Vale in 2011, it can be expected that a true measure of the Academy's success will not be evident until students currently in years 3 or 4 have transitioned to year 7.

## **Administrative challenges**

The Commission has been constrained by legislative timeframes since its commencement in 2008. The nature of its impermanence has in the past created its own administrative challenges. In the fifth year of operation with only a committed one year extension, and having already established a continual improvement process in all aspects of operational management, there is no perceived advantage to varying current processes. The Commission will continue to monitor its operational frameworks to achieve best practice and responsive strategies.

## **Changes of key staff in the Cape York Welfare Reform trial communities**

The Local Commissioners have proven themselves to be successful both personally and professionally in their communities. Many of the Local Commissioners are Elders, some of whom work full-time, and some who look after extended families. Their dedication is evident in circumstances where they live their lives in the communities in which they have made recommendations and decisions about their friends, neighbours, and in many cases their families. The Commission has identified a clear need to recruit another generation of leaders into the CYWR trial, to expand upon the age and gender demographic, sustain the momentum and passion for reform and ensure innovative solutions. The youth of the CYWR trial communities require relevant role models to support, lead and inspire them to engage in mainstream society. The challenge remains, with only a defined extension until January 2015, to identify and nurture new leaders with a passion to continue the work of welfare reform. The challenge of identifying and recruiting future Local Commissioners is further complicated by the heavy demand placed by others in the community on these few select individuals who have demonstrated their ability and willingness to step forward and actively participate in a vision for the future.



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## Outlook

### Future of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial communities

The outlook for the Commission rests strongly with its ability to shape its service delivery to meet the ever changing needs of the communities. As with mainstream communities, the CYWR trial communities live in a rapidly changing world. To meet the fluctuating needs of society, it is necessary to discern what has worked in the past, what has not worked, and importantly what is possible; to expand the boundaries and open new doors.



*Noel Pearson addressing the Local Commissioners at the Local Commissioner Development Week in May 2013*

Of particular importance to the outlook of the CYWR trial communities is the need to re-engage secondary school students in education. The communities of Aurukun and Hope Vale report a significant number of disengaged youth of high school age who have returned to community but have not re-enrolled in school. They participate in dysfunctional behaviour which is largely due to boredom. These youth feel disengaged from mainstream society and also from their own communities. The Local Commissioners wish to engage more effectively with these students, to encourage their education, divert them to vocational education if practical, and otherwise strengthen partnerships with boarding schools and transition organisations.

The Local Commissioners have further expressed a desire to expand their community assistance to offer real support to parents with ABSTUDY preparation so that students are prepared practically and psychologically for boarding schools, to offer support to graduating students in their transition to employment by providing connections to work experience opportunities and to source vocational training opportunities to make youth work-ready in the real world.

The future of the CYWR trial communities is enmeshed with its fluctuating populations. Juveniles commit crimes and are sent out of community. The majority of property damage, for instance, is caused by disaffected youth in the communities, yet the Commission is unable to act upon Children's Court convictions. A notification to the Commission for juveniles convicted or cautioned by the police would allow the Local Commissioners to effect early intervention. Adults likewise commit crimes and are sent to jail, only to return to a community ill-prepared to offer any assistance with their rehabilitation. The Local Commissioners would like to be able to assist those community members released from jail with their integration back into the community.

The Local Commissioners are witnessing a shift in community values and its resultant needs. New questions arise as to what is best for their communities and a holistic approach to provide services outside of the legislative framework of the Commission is sought to galvanise upon the momentum of welfare reform.