



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Aurukun Local Commissioners' Report

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*“Bit by bit we can chip away together. Over the past five years we have seen changes in Aurukun for the better, but we still have more work to do. As Local Commissioners we ask you to work with us, walk with us and talk with us. When we achieve one goal we need to set another goal, remain determined and keep moving forward.”*

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Families in Aurukun lived an ideal lifestyle. The roles of family members were acknowledged according to their positions in their tribe, and families lived together in a communal environment. Inclusive in this were child rearing, cooking, hunting and the culture taught by Elders. Family members knew that if they did not carry out their responsibilities the rest of the family suffered. The men were the hunters and the women were the gatherers, gathering berries, nuts and roots. The strength of these family relationships goes a long way to explain the conservation of a distinct culture that has opposed adaptation in spite of government policies. Aurukun family life has many positive aspects which in most cases prevail over the hardships and the pain. In the past, despite the disadvantages in terms of housing, employment, education and training, our families remained strong. Today the housing situation is starting to sort itself out, our new education system (Direct Instruction) is making a difference and the children are showing promise. We thank Noel Pearson for his foresight and unwavering fight to bring this into our community. The Council is working hard to ensure that as many of our people as possible are employed in diverse areas of employment. An overriding characteristic of family is the sense of kinship - the feeling of family attachment, the ability to rely on each other and the spiritual bonding which helps to strengthen our families.

Over the years we have seen many changes in our communities, and an ongoing concern for us is the loss of tradition and culture. The answers to this concern lie with our Elders who have the knowledge, the understanding and the spirit which can draw us back to our traditional ways. We may live in two worlds, however, it is always the traditional ways we call upon when we are unsure, or in times of need. Elders play an extremely important role in our families as role models, care providers and educators. Their guidance is provided throughout our everyday life and their teachings are often done subconsciously; we follow, we observe and we go on to teach our own families.

During the year we continued to receive visitors and inform people of the work we do within our community. Representatives of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation visited Coen and Aurukun in November. The representatives were senior women from their communities and decision-makers. In May 2013 we hosted senior executives and company leaders from Jawun Indigenous



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Corporate Partnerships, and then we were interviewed for the National Indigenous Television program, 'Awaken'. After the interview, we demonstrated the process of conferencing with an actor as a client. We are hopeful that this will illustrate to everyone the serious and difficult work we perform in our role. We want to pass on our knowledge and experience, but when there is no planning and no appointments made, or letters written in advance, it is very hard for us to be available.

At our Local Commissioner Development Week in Cairns we visited the James Cook University and spoke with the staff and students of the Indigenous Student Support Services. We learned that university was accessible to everyone, not just those with good school records, and that there is plenty of assistance to keep students at university when times get tough. Next we travelled to Mossman Gorge and we were inspired by the commitment of Mr Roy Gibson in getting the Mossman Gorge Centre developed and running for his people and others. The Centre has created jobs, protected the environment and showcased the Indigenous culture without interfering with the daily lives of the community. We were welcomed with a smoking ceremony, and although the rains were coming down the beauty of Mossman Gorge shone through. All the Commissioners were taken on a tour of the hospitality training facility and we learnt of the employment opportunities available for our people. We thank the Mossman Gorge community and the centre for hosting all the Commissioners.

We are battlers and must continue to strive for our community. We must look at the positive and must take responsibility for our future. In doing so we should stop blaming outside people. They may be, or can be, a contributing factor but we must take the responsibility to fight for ourselves. That is why we push our children to get a better education. As we are becoming more educated we are becoming more confident, and we are developing the necessary skills to achieve our dreams. Our families suffer breakdowns; our children get into trouble with the law or don't complete school, and this has to stop. We are doing everything in our power to turn this around, however, everyone has to step up to the plate and take their turn to go forward for the betterment of Aurukun.

As Local Commissioners we look at what we have achieved, praising those in the community who have made improvements in their lives. Commissioner Glasgow at every conference ensures praise is always given to those who deserve it. We encourage the media to publish positive stories on Aurukun. The Government agreed to change the school curriculum at the urging of Noel Pearson, and look at the positive change in our children and their self-esteem. With community support and unity, these things can be achieved. With the extension of one more year we will strive to make more positive changes. We say to everyone in Aurukun that only you can make the change. Stop placing the blame elsewhere and start having a good look at yourself. Go out there and make things happen for the good of the community.

**Aurukun Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Sarah Wolmby, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka and Vera Koomeeta**



*Sam Kerindun Snr Business Precinct*