



# CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

## Challenges and outlook

As stated in the Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation 2012, there is clear evidence of improvement in the wellbeing of residents in the four trial communities, decreasing crime rates, improvement in infrastructure and services, and school attendance rates that have either risen or been maintained. The communities also quite rightly expressed an expectation, however, that the Commission would continue to deal with disengaged community members. In an attempt to engage with these disengaged clients, Commissioners have welcomed the ability to impose income management orders of 90 percent where appropriate. Whether the increased level of income management will have a positive effect will not be known until a sufficient amount of time has passed to provide some evidence. Meanwhile, in an attempt to meet the communities' expectations the Commission continues to seek new strategies and initiatives to aid in re-engaging these individuals.

Disengaged youth of high school age, between the ages of 12 and 16, present a major challenge. The reality of community life is that presently many children become disengaged from the education system after completing year 4 or 5. They then join the older disengaged students who are either not enrolled, or are enrolled at boarding schools, but refuse to return from school holidays or other leave. Several circumstances factor heavily in this disengagement. Of primary significance is substance abuse. Marijuana use is endemic and not exclusive to this age cohort. Bullying of parents and carers by these children has created an atmosphere which has disempowered the family unit.

Dealing with offenders has historically presented numerous challenges for government service delivery. The juvenile justice system emphasises the diversion of young people from the formal criminal justice system. Detention is seen as a last resort because it exposes the young person to a criminal environment. Unfortunately in many remote Indigenous communities not only are disengaged youth equally exposed to a peer group who commit offences in community, but they are also exposed to substance abuse. Local Commissioners feel helpless to reform youth who appear impervious to government and parent/carer control. They feel these children, who wreak havoc in community through property damage, have 'fallen through the cracks'. Where detention and offending behaviour is viewed as a badge of honour, the cycle of disengagement from education and criminal offending is difficult to break.

Local Commissioners consider that upgraded Child and Youth Mental Health services are desperately needed. Local Commissioners are supporting CYAAA and DETE with data to assist the prosecution of parents and carers whose children are not attending school. They also seek training in order to be able to assist with youth justice conferencing. A youth justice conference brings the young offender, their family, the victim (if possible) and a police officer together. The aim of a youth justice conference is to hold the young person accountable for their actions and to involve them in reparation of the damage caused. When conferencing is considered beneficial, it is important that the conference be held as soon as possible so that all parties, especially the offender, are able to focus on the actions committed and the impact of those actions. The Local Commissioners are in the ideal position to mediate and/or conference with an in-depth knowledge of their communities and the families who live in their communities, and would welcome the opportunity to feel more empowered to shape an outcome for their young people.

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. Each community has been asked to develop a community proposal which outlines its preferred way of managing alcohol misuse and alcohol-related harm. A meeting of stakeholders was held in Hope Vale on 20 March 2014. It was indicated by stakeholders that consultations should be conducted with the community members of Hope Vale to determine their views prior to the formation of an

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AMP. The Commission advised those present that it respects the rights of community members to establish their own approach to the AMP. The community of Hope Vale expects to deliver a decision prior to March 2015.

## School attendance

School attendance statistics continue to remain relatively stable while Local Commissioners work in conjunction with the SCMs to address absenteeism. Several factors remain as challenges. Explained absences are principally caused by illness, school approved activities, sporting activities, work experience and funerals. The Local Commissioners, however, challenge the need for students to be absent for a number of days on a passing in community. The Commission's Guideline 5 of 2010 – School Attendance states that funeral leave should be approved for a student on the passing of a family member (e.g. parent, grandparent, sibling or primary carer), and should be limited to the day of the funeral. An absence due to attendance at a funeral that is out of town is not always desirable or necessary and should only be considered to be reasonable if: the deceased person is an immediate family member; the principal is satisfied that the attendance at the funeral is necessary; no suitable child minding options are available to parents within the community; and a reliable method of transport is available to ensure the timely return to the community. In all instances the child's overall welfare should be balanced with his/her educational needs.

School attendance is also affected by factors which are pertinent to each community. In Hope Vale, primary and secondary schooling is affected by a short working day each Friday for many community members. Parents/carers often complete their working day at 1 pm and, together with their children, travel out of community. Community fighting in Aurukun frequently affects primary school attendance, whilst sly grogging causes aggressive behaviours and translates into all night parties and noise during the hours when children need their sleep. Family members are then also unable to take their children to school. A community effort is required to change the community 'norms' which affect school attendance.

## Administrative challenges

The Commission collects and reports on statistics derived from its operations to inform government policy. With the evolution of welfare reform since 2008, it has sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses of its statistical data collection, and to evaluate whether the data in its current form continues to present value. As a result extra outcome actions were added to the CRM database this financial year to reflect more accurately on Conditional Income Management orders. Changes were initially made in the test environment prior to being replicated in the live environment. To provide for more efficient conferencing in school attendance matters, the Commission's Database Administrator created an upload tool from the roll tools provided by CYAAA. The upload tool allows for the import of school attendance data onto each client's conference coversheet in the form of a pie graph. Additional information is also available in regard to week by week school attendance trends which can be uploaded to the coversheets and made available whilst in conference.

The Commission sought legislative changes to the Act in order to enhance its operations in the communities. Subsequent to amendments to the Act which were effective from 29 October 2013, it became necessary to update the CRM database and amend forms to allow for process changes. Local Coordinator consultations were held to identify opportunities to improve processes and improvements were implemented and quality assured.

In line with the Commission's priority to strive for continuous improvement it will continue to review how and what data is collected in order to better inform decision-making and evaluation.