



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Aurukun Local Commissioners' report

We are in our sixth year of operation and are happy that we have been given the opportunity to work for the Commission for another year.

At the beginning of 2014 we welcomed Local Commissioner Thomas Toilkalkin to our team which now consists of seven Local Commissioners. It is good to have new blood and new ideas to tackle the issues in our changing community.

Every year we have found different problems to concentrate on. This year we have concentrated our efforts on conducting more conferences without the assistance of Commissioner Glasgow. As a result we have found that the community is showing greater respect for us as leaders. We have conducted crucial mediations at the request of our community and this has demonstrated their faith in us. In off-conference weeks we have held meetings with stakeholders in regard to some of our community members. Although the stakeholders differ from meeting to meeting, an example of those we engage with are the police, Wellbeing Centre, MPower and staff from the hospital. Discussions are held to create a holistic approach to case management and get everyone on the same page. We bring an in-depth knowledge to the table about each community member. As a result some clients are now 'mapped' for their mental health issues. This mapping helps us to proactively anticipate when a client is likely to be a danger to him/herself or the community, and we can act upon that likelihood. We also assist offenders returning to community by linking them with appropriate service provision. Everyone works together to resolve issues affecting the client's welfare. Communication has been enhanced and there has been an improved atmosphere which has also promoted the ability of the community to function at a more cohesive level.

### ***We are not selling false hope***

When performing our jobs as Local Commissioners we have continuously spoken with our community members to explain that we are here to assist them. These people are well known to us and we see them every day. Every day we continue to learn how to apply the Commission's decisions with consistency and fairness. We have found it is best to speak within and outside of the community with heart and soul, and in a language that reaches across the divides of education, social standing and race.

It has been and still is difficult, just as all change is difficult, but it is also simple. It was simple to make the decision to become a champion for our people and give back to our community. Now we simply want to share our knowledge and continue to encourage as many people as we can to strive for a better life for themselves and their families. We are not selling false hope. We are offering a chance to change.

We have seen the worst of people. We have seen violence, crime, addiction, neglect and abuse, yet we remain hopeful. We remain faithful to our community, and open to seeing the best in people, regardless of what they have done or are doing. We stay open to believing that no matter how hard the climb, or how frequently we may lose our way, there is always a light to show us a path forward. We all go through life discovering the truth about who we are, and determining who has earned the right to share our personal space. Along with Commissioner Glasgow there have been people we have worked with that have shown us the way forward. We have in turn allowed them to share our personal space. We have welcomed them to share in our work and allowed them into our hearts.

Our challenges this year have been many. We are still experiencing fluctuating school attendance, and there is improvement needed. We are hopeful that the introduction of 90 percent income management will assist us to improve this school attendance, however, we are also aware that new strategies will have to be introduced as well. We have conferenced some clients on many occasions and yet still they demonstrate minimal improvement.

Mental health assistance for our young people is still very lacking and is much needed, especially for those engaged in drug and alcohol abuse, and for those that have suffered prolonged domestic violence.

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During the year we waited to see improvements for our children, for those suffering abuse and those parents who desperately needed help to be better parents. We provided honest information and straight talking directly to Commissioner Tim Carmody, QC for the Queensland Child Protection Commission Inquiry in the previous year, but we still have insufficient resources and exhausted workers trying to manage an unmanageable situation.

It must be stated that we are finding good service delivery is still a challenge, though highly funded and resourced. We have limited referral options and limited faith in some service providers. We are tired of talking and waiting to get improved service delivery. It would seem to us that there are no ears to listen.

Yet we are encouraged by big picture changes with both levels of government promising change that would close the gap and recognise Indigenous leadership. We are hopeful that talk will become reality, but we are concerned that only 12 month extensions for the Commission have limited our capacity for long term planning. Only the ability to plan for long term changes will show our true capability. We know how hard politics can be and how difficult it is to manage the expectations of the community because we live it every day. We need solid ground upon which to move forward, share our successes and failures with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, and be given enough space and time to initiate, adjust and expand upon new strategies.

We are a strong team, proud of our achievements and in awe of the way our journey continues to unfold. Daily we are working alongside the community to celebrate and share in the good outcomes. The road has been marked with many milestones, but it is not only the rocks that we identify as the milestones. Little pebbles and grains of dirt are all as important as the rocks. One cannot exist without the other. As Local Commissioners we cannot exist without our community support, our family support, and our determination. Together they assist us to reach and pass the milestones along our journey.

Despite our challenges this year we have remained focused. We are not yet at the end of our journey, but we could never have imagined the changes in the community and ourselves that have occurred along the way. We have continued to gather the rocks, pebbles and dirt to reach the milestones that will bring our people along to a better life.

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

