



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Aurukun Local Commissioners' report

After many years of steady success the past year, and in particular the past six months, has been a time of disappointment for us with a decline in school attendance in terms 3 and 4 of the 2014 school year, and continuing anti-social behaviour such as fighting and damage to property as a result of sly grog and drugs entering our community. Distressingly in the last two terms of 2014 attendance at the primary school dropped by 5 percent on attendances in the previous year. Although attendance has improved with the new Principal in 2015 to 62 percent in term 1, and running at approximately 60 percent in term 2, there is room for considerable improvement. We have been conferencing the carers of children with poor attendance regularly, but night time disturbances including fighting, loud music and partying into the early hours continue to disturb children's sleep and seriously affect school readiness.

Notwithstanding these problems we have a core of about 50 percent of children attending school each day who are progressing well with their education. School Attendance Officers now need to pay attention to the children who are not attending regularly, and those who have not attended school all year, not just the core attendees.

The Department of Education and Training's decision to close (without community consultation) the Alternative Secondary Pathway (ASP) program for 2015 shocked us. Although this program was of questionable value in our view, to leave these young children without support at all was unacceptable. The Department agreed more appropriate solutions were needed to adequately provide for those compulsory secondary aged youth not attending boarding school, however, due to the late handover process from ASP to Cape York Partnership many of the youth were without support over a considerable period of time. Cape York Partnership recruited staff to work with these youth in term 1 and prioritised assistance in returning children to boarding school.

Coupled with the confusion and disorganisation within the ABSTUDY administration in dealing with applications in late 2014 and term 1 of 2015, many boarding school students were left in the community for much of term 1. Consideration is currently being given to having Distance Education available for these children provided from the building where the ASP program had previously operated.

### ***We hope to make Aurukun a safer and more stable place to work and live***

Policing and the maintenance of law and order in community have deteriorated since the commencement of 2015. February saw the change-over of the entire complement of police officers in Aurukun. With the exception of the new Senior Sergeant few, if any, of the replacements have had any experience of functioning in an

Indigenous community. Maintenance of a functioning and safe community is our primary objective; we are not served well by such a significant change. Better planning and an organised orderly changeover is a priority for us.

We have held meetings with the new Officer-in-Charge who has outlined plans for his new and inexperienced officers to have more community involvement and consultation and to assist our community to implement a safety plan that we can all agree upon. We are encouraged by this proactive approach to policing. Our experience with the Aurukun Safer Streets Safer Community Committee, however, has been disappointing with few practical changes completed on the ground and too much talk. A police Sergeant returned recently and is again operating temporarily in community as the Coordinator of the Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC). The lack of certainty of this position being a permanent one is of considerable worry for us. We have been advised that funding has been approved for construction work to commence on renovation of the PCYC building in the next financial year.

The parenting program (Triple P) delivered by the Opportunity Hub has not delivered success with regard to referrals of FRC clients. This has been very disappointing for us and the parenting staff. In our view an appropriate program should be implemented suitable for Aurukun which will support and enable parents and carers to appropriately raise the children in their care.

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Like many service providers operating in Aurukun, the Wellbeing Centre continues to experience difficulties in engaging and maintaining the services of clinicians and staff. The entire staff of the Aurukun Wellbeing Centre was changed in the first five months of 2015, and the manager will leave in July 2015 to take up duties elsewhere.

It is a matter of considerable disappointment to us that the Government has not as at June 30, clearly indicated that the recommendations of the Special Task Force on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland will all be implemented with immediate effect. Commissioner Ada Woolla served on this task force and has a personal and vested interest in the outcomes.

The Newman Government adopted the recommendations of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry which we welcomed. The safety and wellbeing of our children is our primary concern. We want matters dealt with promptly and initially by the community as recommended by Commissioner Carmody. We hope the present Government will proceed promptly with the establishment of the community groups charged with this responsibility.

We are encouraged by the progress being made by the Griffith University Neighbourhoods Project with on-the-ground implementation on a range of prevention activities aimed at increasing children's safety.

The work carried out by Cape York Employment (CYE) since it commenced operations in 2013 has assisted our people and our environment. Employment of our people in real jobs is a genuine challenge and is vital to transitioning our people out of a welfare mentality. Equally important, it is necessary for our people to accept their responsibilities to comply with their obligations. We have noted in conferences over the past 12 months that clients are now more aware of their responsibilities for reporting and attending training. The work programs organised and supervised by CYE have brought about change in the community which is now cleaner and tidier. Activities organised by CYE include the external painting of the Justice Group building, landscaping and gardening.

The Restorative Justice Program (a mediation program between victims of crime, offenders and the community to discuss and resolve an offence) commenced this year, initially with limited success and acceptance. Since the engagement of a local person, and the assistance of the Justice Group, there has been improvement in community understanding of the processes involved and what can be achieved through mediation. Only time will tell if the funds allocated to this program were well spent.

Queensland Health is yet to explain to our community how, in the period between December and January (six weeks), it hired an unqualified professional to work in the Medical Centre. This person provided medical care and medications to many men, women and children in our community before the fraud was discovered. What followed was a complete change of medical staff, with the welcome exception of Josh Stafford who continues as Director of Nursing of the Clinic.

Another continuing disappointment is Queensland Health's inability to service Aurukun with a mental health professional trained to help children and the young. Funding has been available for the past year, however, the position has remained without a permanent appointee leaving our children deprived of help.

The Aurukun Shire Council (of which three of us are Councillors) has worked to improve the lives of, and facilities available to, our community. This task over the past seven months has been made much more difficult with the failure of some of our Government departments and service providers to deliver effective services. This failure can be attributed in the main to difficulties in retaining and recruiting appropriate staff.

We hope for the engagement of a school nurse later this year, a revitalised Wellbeing Centre, a proactive and appropriate Parenting Program, improvement of law and order in community and a commitment by community members and Government organisations to work together to make Aurukun a safer and more stable place to live.

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