



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Hope Vale Local Commissioners' report

The past twelve months have proven successful for the community of Hope Vale, and we are proud to see our clients continue to better their lives with our guidance and assistance. Many have demonstrated a noticeable change in their lives by giving up alcohol and drugs and ensuring their children attend school. Behaviour at school has also improved in many instances. The past year has also been successful for the Commission with the appointment of two new Local Commissioners in Cheryl Cannon (August 2014) and Selina Bowen (May 2015) boosting Local Commissioner numbers to seven. The recruitment of the additional Local Commissioners has allowed for greater flexibility in convening our regular fortnightly conferences.

At the beginning of 2015 we farewelled our Local Coordinator, Ray Lennox, who worked with us since March 2012. Ray has moved on to 'greener pastures' and looks forward to spending quality time with his partner and young son. We welcomed Francesca Adams to Hope Vale as the new Local Coordinator and she brings with her years of experience working for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in various locations throughout Queensland. Francesca has also worked closely with numerous Indigenous communities delivering the Remote Indigenous Justice of the Peace Program and providing an administrative support role to Community Justice Groups.

We would like to commend the Principal at our school in Hope Vale for his tireless commitment to the children of our community. He and his team juggle many hurdles daily in providing education to our children. They work with us to increase school attendance and deal with behavioural issues. We have utilised the expertise and knowledge of school staff during the conferencing process to tackle these issues. The school staff, including the Attendance Case Managers and Behaviour Teachers, assist us to highlight in conference the reasons behind the recording of non-attendance due to late arrivals, walk-outs or sick notifications. They work with us to improve a child's behaviour and have initiated a reward program for improvement in positive behavioural change. Regular meetings were scheduled throughout the year to discuss particular children's non-attendance and the avenues to bring their parents/carers in for conference.

Our secondary school aged youth continue to be a challenge in our community with over 30 of them awaiting the opening of the Holy Spirit College in Cooktown. The Holy Spirit College is a Catholic co-educational Special Assistance School due to open in 2015 which aims to foster a culture of inclusion whilst providing for the educational needs of students "...regardless of their abilities, backgrounds and aspirations". Hope Vale has experienced many of its local disengaged students between the ages of 12 and 18 years resorting to crime as they are not able to attend a school facility on a daily basis. Once the college is opened and able to host these disengaged youth, hopefully they will successfully adjust to school life as week day boarders and take advantage of this second opportunity in the education system, returning to the mainstream schooling option when able.

Our community is assisted by many government and non-government service providers, however, we have observed that coordination of services and inter-agency cooperation has proved problematical. We consider this is a major challenge for us, and we have worked with various agencies to initiate ways of working together for the benefit of the community by improving referral pathways and encouraging regular meetings to build a greater understanding of what we, as a community, need to provide for our people.

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Some of the local community initiatives we support and commend include:

- the Hope Vale Banana Farm and Market Garden providing employment for many locals
- the upgrade of gazetted roads to provide safer access for our community
- My Pathways who work collaboratively with the Hope Vale Foundation and Congress to increase employment opportunities for locals
- the Hope Vale Men's and Women's Groups who have continued to meet on a weekly basis and encourage the health of the community
- the Hope Vale Cultural Centre which provides a gathering point for Elders to apply their cultural knowledge in artwork and
- the Indigenous Knowledge Centre which safeguards much of Hope Vale's local history for our younger generations.

Our attendance at the annual Local Commissioners' Development Week was a huge milestone for us. We met and heard from six new Local Commissioners from Doomadgee. The week was jam-packed again with external visits to Quigley Street Rehabilitation Centre, Peace Lutheran College and Lotus Glen Correctional Centre where we were overwhelmed to discover the number of Hope Vale men in residence. The looks on their faces when they saw us was wonderful and we all quickly caught up on local 'yarns' and provided family updates. During the remainder of the week we heard from many stakeholders including the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability services, Centrelink (ABSTUDY overview), Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (new changes for clients on Centrelink effective from 1 July 2015), Cape York Partnership (Empowered Communities), Cape York Land Council (land disputes) to name a few. Once again this week provided us with many opportunities to liaise with stakeholders and to have lengthy discussions and debate relevant issues with our fellow Commissioners.

As we approach the end of another financial year during which we have conducted numerous conference sittings we wish to highlight what we consider to be our major achievement. We have been able to convene conferences 'on our own'! Commissioner Glasgow has given us the opportunity to sit alone without him in attendance (as provided for in the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008*) and during a recent visit by Commissioner we considered it a huge compliment when he left the room and allowed us to take the reins!

We wish to conclude on a positive note for the year by commending one of our clients who has achieved

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major positive changes in their life. The client has demonstrated their capability to make life changes and take on responsibility for their family. This particular client now knows that there are numerous support mechanisms available in the community

(aside from the FRC) and that these support mechanisms are available to any person wishing to achieve their goals. The client's positive outcomes through FRC conferencing, and also the positive outcomes of many of our other clients, have been possible through us inviting service providers to conference and encouraging their holistic treatment of the client. We would like to pass on our thanks to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, the Department of Housing and Public Works, the Hope Vale Community Justice Group Coordinator and clinicians from the Wellbeing Centre.

Hope Vale Commissioners Brian Cobus, Victor Gibson, Doreen Hart, Ivan Deemal, Erica Deeral and Cheryl Cannon