

# LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK



The first week in May saw the culmination of months of planning with the commencement of the 2016 Local Commissioners Development Week. The Commission's Development Week is an important annual event for which the Local Commissioners travel from their communities to Cairns to participate in an intensive program of seminars and workshops. The week provides an opportunity for Commissioners to gather together, share experiences, learn from each other and undertake training and development. Agenda items include updates on Commission processes and procedures, information sessions and presentations by expert professionals on particular issues of interest and relevance to the communities as identified by the Commissioners.

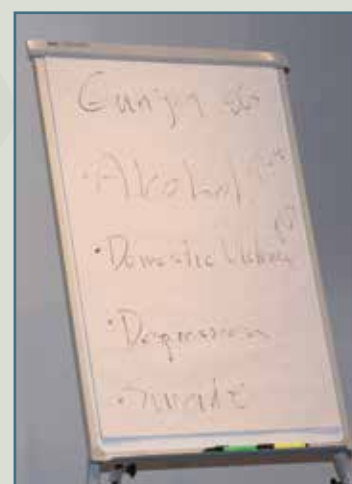
On Tuesday 3 May Commissioner David Glasgow opened the proceedings with a welcome and official introduction of the newly appointed Local Commissioners from Hope Vale and Coen. Registrar Maxine McLeod followed with a summation of some of the more significant developments in the Commission's operations for the preceding 12 months including the upgrade of the Commission's database, the commencement of income management in Doomadgee, the addition of DVBs and DVOs as a trigger for conference, and the receipt of the first notifications from the Childrens Court.

Client Manager Camille Banks addressed the group outlining a series of initiatives aimed at improving engagement between Commission clients and community service providers. Camille outlined plans to conduct a review of service provider reporting protocols, and introduce an alternative framework to enable the capture of information on engagement with clients which occurs on a more casual basis.

Detective Senior Constable Mick Dwyer from the State Crime Command Drug Squad addressed the Commissioners with a presentation on the prevalence of crystal methamphetamine, or 'Ice', in the Cape York communities. Detective Dwyer provided insight into the manufacture, supply and distribution of the drug throughout the Cape and Cairns, provided advice on particular behaviours to look out for in users, and encouraged Commissioners to report any activity suspected of being related to drug use or distribution to Crime Stoppers. Commissioners were left reassured that despite the ease of access to methamphetamine the cost of the drug, in comparison to that of cannabis, remains prohibitive.

DCCSDS representatives Deb Hall, Carita Johnsson and Tracy Cerreto discussed the issue of the decline in the number of Child Safety reports notified to the Department and provided an update on reforms in child protection. Additional staff, intensive training and development, early intervention, building partnerships and support for at risk families were listed as measures aimed at ensuring children remained safe in the community.

Dr Ernest Hunter held a captive audience as he walked through a brief history of the problems in Indigenous communities during the 1970's alcohol abuse, 1980's cannabis use and 1990's depression, each of which led to clear and increasing 'waves' in the number of suicides. Dr Hunter spoke of the enormous social changes that had resulted from the decline in jobs, and the urban drift of Indigenous people from outback stations to towns around the same time as the change in laws relating to Indigenous access to alcohol. He pointed to the 15 year intervals between peaks in the number of suicides as the children who grew up in families affected by the changes reached the age of suicide risk. Dr Hunter relayed findings from investigations into the suicides of five children in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, all of which revealed a lack of involvement from parents and a lack of engagement with school. Dr Hunter communicated the important and very clear message that disconnected kids are kids at risk, and that connection to family and school is paramount in the prevention of suicide.





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Sue Rayment-McHugh and Dimity Adams from Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS) spoke about the Neighbourhoods Project which was developed as an outcome from the Smallbone Report into Youth Sexual Violence in Aurukun and West Cairns. The project brings together a team of researchers, practitioners and community members with the aim of preventing youth sexual violence and creating safer schools, safer public spaces, safer homes and a safer service system.

A short workshop conducted by DATSIP sought Local Commissioners' views on community priorities, leadership, service delivery organisations and community driven initiatives.

Wednesday was marked as a day dedicated to information and education on domestic violence. White Ribbon Australia representatives Peterson Opio and Liam Dooley conducted a presentation on the role of



White Ribbon Australia, its Ambassador Program and how community leaders can become involved in raising awareness through hosting events. Sandi Baker from the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service then followed with a session providing an understanding of the behaviours and typologies of perpetrators together with an insight into the experience of victims. Of particular value to the Local Commissioners were strategies for dealing

with both victims and perpetrators in conference, and support strategies for both victims and perpetrators when the perpetrator returns to community from prison.

The final session for Wednesday afternoon consisted of a 'round table' discussion where Commissioners had the opportunity to discuss a number of significant issues including school attendance, disengaged youth, lack of employment, parental responsibility and service provider performance. This session provided for an excellent exchange of information and ideas between Commissioners from different communities and assisted in building relationships through shared successes and challenges. Such was the value of the session that the Commissioners requested the opportunity to reconvene and continue discussions the following morning.

Thursday opened with the continuing 'round table' discussions. Hope Vale Local Commissioner Doreen Hart explained the 'Empowered Communities' initiative and its goal of giving communities the right to make decisions in relation to services, service providers and programs to be implemented in communities throughout Cape York. Coen Local Commissioner Maureen Liddy spoke enthusiastically of the collaborative and very successful model of service provision operating in Coen. Led by the Wellbeing Centre, multiple service providers, committees and advisory groups have joined forces to collaborate on shared clients at an individual, family, clan and community level. The various agencies have developed a regular timetable whereby support sessions and activities are scheduled on specific days of the week ensuring consistency in service provision. This combined effort provides support to community members 24 hours a day, and is a great example of community leaders taking control and coordinating services in their own communities.

Kate Skilbeck, Psychologist, facilitated a workshop which built upon the resilience and self-care skills taught in her seminar during the Development Week of 2015. Kate provided the Commissioners with valuable tools and strategies to help in dealing with the particular issues and challenges relevant to their difficult roles in their communities. The Local Commissioners particularly valued the discussion on strategies for coping with family pressures and requests for money.

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Friday saw the Local Commissioners board a coach for a visit to the recently opened Girl Academy at Wangetti. The Girl Academy is a boarding school assisting Indigenous girls with babies to continue and complete their education. Academy Acting Principal Yvonne Gordon gave Commissioners a guided tour of the school and the facilities which allow young mothers and their babies to live and learn together. Feedback and information relayed back to community members by Local Commissioners has already resulted in enrolment applications for the Academy being received from Doomadgee, and an increase in requests for information from other communities.

Continuing north from Wangetti Commissioners and staff travelled to the Mossman Gorge Gateway Centre where they enjoyed a smoking ceremony and praised the strength and assurance of the young man who conducted the ceremony, despite what must have been a daunting task performing in front of a large group of Elders.

The final session of the week was a question and answer session hosted by the Mossman Gorge Local Commissioners in the Gateway Centre's conference facilities. Local Commissioners expressed particular interest in hearing what impact the Gateway had had on the community, how the Commissioners dealt with the specific problems caused by the proximity of the township of Mossman to the Mossman Gorge community and the movement of community members between the two.

After a closing address by Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin, Doomadgee Commissioner Elaine Cairns provided an emotional conclusion to the week by sharing a story of how deeply meaningful the trip to Cairns and visit to Mossman Gorge had been for her personally. She expressed her story through a moving poem which brought many listeners to tears.

This year as in every year, the Local Commissioner Development week has provided an opportunity for the Local Commissioners to come together to support each other, build relationships and share and learn from each other's experiences.

## GIRL ACADEMY

Strength · Knowledge · Future

Our mission is to grow effective and confident mothers, happy + confident children, and provide young Indigenous women with opportunities for growth + success in every aspect of their lives.

*Girl Academy Mission Statement*