



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Coen Local Commissioners' report

In our last year's Coen Local Commissioners' report we spoke about the importance of working collaboratively with all stakeholders. Working collaboratively continues to be a crucial element of our work. We need to continue to encourage our partners to work with each other and with us to engage our people in community programs. As Local Commissioners we also believe we have a responsibility to ensure that our clients have the opportunity to receive quality services, and that stakeholders have an obligation to ensure they are providing quality services to the community.

Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Apunipima) has recently taken over the Wellbeing Centre in Coen and we can report that this changeover was managed well with a very smooth transition. Importantly, the wellbeing services continued with minimal interruption during this time and for that we are grateful. Apunipima officially commenced on the 1st of April 2017 with many of the Royal Flying Doctor Service staff being retained, which assisted with the transition process. We are happy with the progression of the service since that date, despite initial teething problems being experienced with new IT processes and new procedures to become familiar with such as Apunipima's specific care plan, 'Model of Care'. Under this model the Wellbeing Centre comes under the banner of 'Primary Health Care', and therefore Wellbeing Centre staff are seen as health workers and will be supporting all areas of Apunipima. Wellbeing Centre staff members have commenced training to develop their expertise in this field. We look forward to seeing this new way of care improving connections, and we trust it will assist in working toward a better future for the community.

Government Champion and Ministerial Champion visits have assisted the community with progressive improvements. In previous years we have experienced too much red tape before issues were resolved. This direct link to access State Government intervention has been a very positive step for Coen with a newly approved domestic violence shelter, ambulance station, lights for the football oval and the lack of housing and overcrowding in our community being highlighted with the relevant Government department. In addition, there are new shop owners in Coen which has seen the shop fully stocked on a continuous basis. The new shop owners have also been more than willing to order items for customers that they don't usually stock on their shelves. Access to a wider range of products and consistency in product availability has seen a happier community.

The Department of Housing and Public Works, Housing and Homelessness Services have employed a new housing officer to assist local community members with sorting out maintenance on existing dwellings and correctly recording housing applications. These applications have increased and demonstrate the urgency of required housing in Coen. Overcrowding is still an issue which contributes to domestic violence incidents, school absences and tired children in the classroom.

Coen school attendance is outstanding and continues to be in the high 80 to low 90 percent range. Coen does, however, still need to address some of the more common absences that occur year after year. Some of those recurring absences are as a result of carers taking their children out of school to accompany them on family medical support visits to Cairns, for work training purposes and out of community funerals. All of these events can cause longer than required absences from school.

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Earlier this year a new 'Parents Action Group' was formed to initiate a community action plan to identify and resolve gaps in communication between the school and the community. This group started out strong with a lot of enthusiasm, but as the year has moved on the group seems to be missing the required enthusiasm due to the lack of a motivated leader to drive the group.

The occurrence of new teaching staff moving into a remote community has always presented a challenge for the community. Teachers must find a way to adapt, learn about the culture and settle into life in a remote area. For parents, students and the wider community it is very frustrating when routines and teaching staff change on a two yearly basis. The transition unsettles routines with new teaching styles being introduced to students who must then adapt to the change. This year in particular has been more difficult than other years perhaps due to teachers being more unsettled this year than in the past. The community is currently finding solutions and adapting to the interruptions and changes that have taken place. This is another challenge for our community and although it has been a tough year, we look forward to further strengthening the relationship between the school and our community.

This year we have received some heartfelt feedback from services and community members about the strength and advice that we have been able to offer. We have been told that we are an approachable and trusted group that assists in times of need. We have been here since 2008 and our presence is appreciated and welcomed by the community. We are motivated by this to continue with our work as Local Commissioners.

We are pleased to continue serving our community. We feel that Coen has come a long way with Welfare Reform and we are looking forward to continuing to strengthen our focus on the education of our future generation. We feel it is important for our community to develop confidence in our ability to determine our future and to develop alliances with those who can lead us to a better future.

Coen Commissioners Peter Peter, May Kepple, Garry Port, Elaine Liddy, Alison Liddy and Maureen Liddy.

