



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Doomadgee Local Commissioners' report

In our role as Doomadgee Commissioners, we have embraced the powers of income management and we feel we have developed a very positive relationship with our clients to successfully implement the money management strategy. Currently we have 59 clients on the BasicsCard including voluntary income managed clients, and all of the cards have been well received due to the hard work and support we have offered to these community members. Clients continue to attend conference even when they are not listed, and we see this as proof of our excellent and developing relationship with the Doomadgee community. Clients are visiting the FRC for a range of support options and we are always more than happy to assist where possible.

The FRC has now been operating for three years in our community and we can see the positive improvements in a number of families we have been working with. Many of the clients and their families who were the first to attend the FRC on day-one have now completely turned their lives around. Their children have demonstrated significant and consistent improvements in their school attendance, and these children are displaying social behaviours which are considered far more acceptable. Many of our clients have taken up leadership roles within the community by accepting employment at the school, are taking their role as parents more seriously and now acknowledge the positive effect this behaviour has on other community members. These changes are what drive us to continue our work.

In the last financial year we conducted 836 conferences for Child Safety and Welfare and School Attendance notices. The majority of our work was School Attendance notices and we took pride in addressing each and every one of these, as education is the only way forward for the Doomadgee community. We have supported a number of families in huge improvements with their children's attendance, and it is frustrating that bigger community issues, which are out of our control, continue to impact the overall school attendance.

We, together with Deputy Commissioner Curtin and Local Coordinator Bryce Coxall, worked closely with My Pathway and the school which resulted in parents being able to conduct their work hours on the school grounds, supporting their children and the school staff. My Pathway currently has 20 clients completing work hours at the school. The time that parents spend at school is very positive and helps in addressing a wide range of issues such as school attendance, children trying to leave the school grounds, student behaviour, support for teachers, and most importantly strengthening the relationship between the school and community.

We continued to refer our clients to services such as the Wellbeing Centre, Save the Children and Community Health for extra support, but we have been disheartened by the lack of engagement by these services. Our clients report little or no contact. We see this as a large hole in the overall goal of empowering our community members for a stronger Doomadgee. It's frustrating when our clients are expressing the need for help, but the services are not supporting them. We do note that the Wellbeing Centre does not have adequate facilities to allow a private space for meeting with clients and that, along with the centre's location in community, limits the ability for best performance service delivery.

The overall Doomadgee school attendance figures showed an improvement from 49.6 percent in term 2 2016 to 56.1 percent in term 2 2017. Our primary school attendance showed an improvement when comparing term 2 school attendance data from 2016 and 2017, with some year levels experiencing above 70 percent attendance on occasion. Our secondary school attendance also improved across the same period, although for the cohort they are the lowest attendees in the school. There is no support for this age group of students to transition to boarding school which we see as the only option for our children to further their education. The school appears to not currently have the capacity to provide the transition support required. We see the need for a fulltime position to be created with the intent of solely providing support for this age group of children. The main focus should be linking families with boarding schools across the state. Unfortunately there is an insufficient number of alternative pathways available to students, such as vocational training.

School attendances for some families in the community who do not fall within the jurisdiction of the FRC have been extremely low, due (we believe) to our inability to conference them. As a result of the poor attendance

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of children (many of whose parents/carers are not in receipt of welfare payments) the Doomadgee State School issued letters to some families warning of potential prosecution under the *Queensland Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*.

The school continues to provide a friendly inviting place for children and parents. Doomadgee State School has recently integrated a reading hour each morning where every staff member on the school grounds goes into a classroom and does one-on-one reading with the children. All service providers in the community are invited to participate in this activity. The school, along with the Student Attendance Officers, provide a bus run with up to three buses collecting children from their houses each morning. This service is essential and has had a great impact on increasing attendance numbers.

Lack of employment and housing continues to slow our community down with severe overcrowding in the houses, and lack of opportunity on the employment front. We would love to see more projects in our community to offer employment options for our clients. We see tourism as a huge untouched market opportunity for Doomadgee. One of the recent projects which has been implemented in the community is a new airport terminal providing a comfortable and cool place for travelling community members and visitors. The Doomadgee Rodeo grounds are also currently undergoing works with new grandstands, fencing and more. This will be the heart of the community come rodeo season, and we will be proud to invite people from outside to participate and enjoy our local rodeos.

We recently had the official opening of our new Doomadgee Business Hub which was constructed in early 2016. Minister Coralee O'Rourke, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland, and Government Champion Barry Broe attended the opening. During the Minister's visit we took the opportunity to meet with her and her team, and express our concerns and needs for the Doomadgee community.

Sorry business across the community still has a significant impact on school attendance and the attendance of our scheduled clients during conference week. Although we are very supportive of community members taking the time to respect the passing of loved ones, we believe that a clear, structured framework for the handling of sorry business would make it easier for carers of children to identify when it is acceptable, and when it is not acceptable, for children to miss school. This may also reduce the possibility of confusion around the operating hours of local service providers.

Along with the increased number of BasicsCards that have been issued within the community, there has been a reduced number of visits by Centrelink. This has affected our clients transitioning onto the BasicsCard, and has resulted in a lack of support available to assist them to become familiar with the new system. Visits by Centrelink have been up to 12 weeks apart.

In May we all gained new skills and derived great benefit from the training and development that was provided during the Local Commissioner Development Week held in Cairns. The opportunity to share experiences and stories, and obtain new skills by engaging with the Local Commissioners from the other welfare reform communities was invaluable.

We are excited to continue our work and support our community. We recognise the importance of the BasicsCard and see it as one of the most vital tools we can use to change our community for the better. We have clients who have had success with the BasicsCard and have completely turned their lives around. Some of these clients have had such big improvements that we have offered to remove them from the BasicsCard, but they are choosing to remain on it. It's these stories that strengthen our belief in the power of the card, and the positive effects it is having at the individual and community level.

Doomadgee Commissioners Christopher Logan, Elaine Cairns, Karen Jupiter, Kaylene O'Keefe, Eleanor Logan, David Gallagher and Guy Douglas.