



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Hope Vale Commissioners' report

We have been working hard over the last 12 months to try and increase our school attendance here in Hope Vale. Our then FRC Local Coordinator, Matt Thompson, also joined with us in these endeavours, assisting with initiatives including Walk to School on Friday mornings and school barbeques. We would like to thank Matt for his contribution. Matt's partner obtained the principal's position in Coen, and they both moved there at the end of 2018. Since then we have had Brenden Joinbee assist us as Local Coordinator. Brenden has fitted in very well with us and we have gone from strength to strength. The published school attendance statistics for Term 1 2019 have shown an attendance rate of 84.1 percent, the highest attendance for the CYAAA Hope Vale campus since Term 1 2015. We have been working with the school which provides us with a list of the lowest attenders, and we schedule the parent/carers of these children for conference if they fall within our jurisdiction.

The school had a new principal, Mr Glenn White, commence this year. He has initiated a community school improvement partnership with service providers to develop strategies for assisting to improve attendance. Principal White has reported that 95 percent attendance was achieved on one Friday. It is believed that this is the highest percentage in the school's history. To maintain this increase in attendance the school is considering trialling a shorter school day on Fridays which it is hoped will also improve the student/teacher ratio.

The community is to be commended for the school attendance result as there has been a lot of bad weather this year with an extremely heavy wet season. Both Cooktown and Hope Vale were isolated due to this severe weather, with the bridge over Isabella Creek damaged. One of our conference sittings was cancelled due to the flooding. As a result of the severe weather, disaster payments were received by community members, many of whom then unfortunately travelled into Cooktown to drink and gamble.

We believe there are presently more children attending boarding school outside the community than there has been in the past. We have noticed that more of our Hope Vale students also appear to be staying at boarding school.

Concerns were raised by the community regarding a gambling game called 'Ping' being played by the Hope Vale students. The school and community together have addressed the problem and it would appear that it has now been resolved. We are happy to see the whole community responding to local issues and collaborating to resolve them. We see this as evidence of the community's Indigenous leadership and responsibility coming to the fore.

The CYP Strong Families Parenting Program has transitioned to Gungarde Community Centre Aboriginal Corporation. This service is located in Cooktown. Parenting support is to be provided by Gungarde's Family Wellbeing Service which provides support to families, focussing on early intervention and keeping children at home safely with their parents. Although Gungarde are not resident in Hope Vale they plan to be in the community at least one day per week to visit clients in their homes if required. We are hopeful that the community will embrace this change to enable effective service provision for parenting assistance to continue into the future. We have concerns, however, about the removal of the parenting program from Hope Vale itself and several community members have already expressed their reluctance to travel to Cooktown to receive assistance.

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During World War II (1942) the Hope Valley and Cape Bedford people were evacuated south because of their German missionary and lugger connections with the Japanese, with many being sent to Woorabinda near Rockhampton. Pioneers Ernest McGreen, Jack McIvor, Fred Grogan, William Wallace, Jim Hart, Colin Jack and Jack Jerry were the first people to return and assist with the re-establishment of Hope Vale as a Lutheran mission in September 1949. Four further groups of males returned throughout that year, with the remaining families arriving home in 1950. This year the community had a celebration to mark the 70th anniversary of the return of the first community members from Woorabinda.

Overall this has been a difficult year for us with the uncertainty we have faced. We are now told that hopefully we as Local Commissioners can be extended to June 2020. Although that news is some comfort, we feel it does not give us the full support we deserve. We see a shift in perception in the community with clients more willing to engage with us. They even approach us outside of the conferencing environment and voluntarily come in when we are sitting in conference to seek assistance. Clients are starting to request voluntary income management. For us, we know that that is a step forward in taking responsibility. We feel that the Commission should have a permanent presence in Hope Vale after the advances we have achieved with and for the community. We seek the State Government's support going forward with our vision for Hope Vale. Meanwhile, we will continue our work and will dearly miss Commissioner David Glasgow when he departs. He has been a great mentor and friend to us since 2008. We wish him the best in his future retirement and we'll think of him often.

**Hope Vale Commissioners Victor Gibson, Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral, Cheryl Cannon and Selina Bowen.**



*Hope Vale Commissioners Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral and Cheryl Cannon with Kaysharn Deemal and Casiarna Bowen at the CYAAA Hope Vale campus school awards*