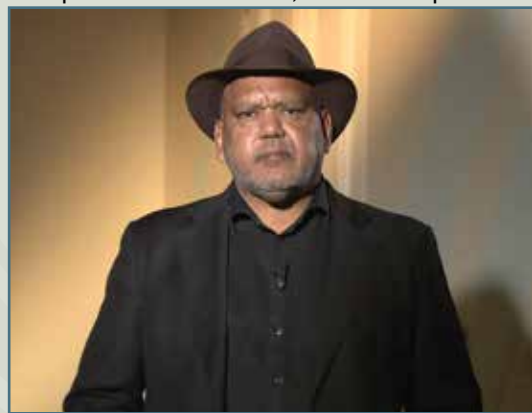




LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK

The uncertainty over the future of the Commission, and the anticipated appointment of a successor for Commissioner Glasgow's position led to a decision to hold the annual Local Commissioner Development Week later in 2019, in the hope that some clarity around the future would have been available to relay to the Local Commissioners. As it happened, the gathering was timely as it was during this week that the Queensland Government tabled the 2019-20 budget and the Commission Registrar, Maxine McLeod, was able to announce to the Commissioners that it included a commitment to continue funding the FRC for a further year to 30 June 2020.

Noel Pearson, Founder of CYP, was officially invited to open the conference, but due to personal commitments was unable to attend. In Mr Pearson's absence, CYP's Chief Executive Officer, Fiona Jose, welcomed the Commissioners and presented a 30-minute pre-recorded video by Noel Pearson. It is no exaggeration to state that the Commissioners were enthralled by his address which was both powerful and emotional. The room remained silent as Noel commended the Commissioners for taking responsibility for self-determination in their communities and encouraged them to continue to build on the successes of the previous decade.



Noel Pearson's pre-recorded address

"The greatest asset and the greatest strength that any individual or community or family can have – the greatest strength is self-reliance and responsibility. You want to talk about assets, you want to talk about working with people's strengths – start with their own responsibility. It is the greatest power. You want to lift a family out of misery - out of poverty? Then work with their responsibility..... You look all over the world – you look in the mainstream – you look in the third world. You look in societies that are strong and prosperous – you see people taking responsibility. It is the greatest, and sometimes it is the only asset that poor people have. But you can build great things with that asset."

Noel Pearson

Much of the first day of the Development Week was taken up with necessary discourse in relation to the past, present and future of Welfare Reform and the FRC. Representatives from DATSIP, CYP representing the Institute and DPMC delivered presentations on policy, future direction and the implementation of the Queensland Government Local Thriving Communities model.

One of the most critical issues affecting Aboriginal people in recent years is the rate of suicide and self-harm, particularly among children and youth. In early June *The Australian* reported that 79 Indigenous people had committed suicide this year, 20 of them children. Described as an "unspeakable tragedy" by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, it seemed fitting that a proportion of the week dedicated to the personal and professional development of Local Commissioners as community leaders be committed to providing training in suicide intervention and prevention. Registered trainers from LivingWorks Australia conducted a safeTALK workshop designed to teach participants how to provide practical help to people with thoughts of suicide and contribute to building suicide-safer communities. A further presentation informed

LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK



the Commissioners about a pilot Indigenous Network Suicide Intervention Training (INSIST) program developed by researchers at the University of Queensland Rural Clinical School.

Lloyd Biehler, a Pastor and Police Liaison Officer since 2003 spoke of his work helping Cape York community members who have become itinerant in Cairns to return to their homelands. The Return to Country program assists homeless individuals with referrals to alcohol rehabilitation facilities, the provision of clothing and hygiene packs, booking subsidised flights, transport to the airport and liaison with Community Justice groups around parole requirements and permission to return.

On a lighter and more positive note the Commissioners enjoyed a visit to and tour of the new AFL Cape York Girls House at Redlynch. Scenically located between sugar cane fields and mountains, the facility was opened in early 2019 and provides boarding for up to 40 young girls from Cape communities in a culturally appropriate, safe and secure residential environment. The Commissioners were very impressed and looked forward to sharing the message of the opportunities available at Cape York Girls House with the young women back in their communities.



AFL Cape York Girls House

Apunipima Cape York Health Council CEO Paul Stephenson gave a comprehensive presentation on the history and more recent expansion of the organisation. Paul outlined the transition to a model of care that combined social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing with primary health care. Paul acknowledged the past decade of hard work and challenges faced by the Commissioners, describing the FRC as one of the best examples of self-determination he had seen in many years working in health in Cape York, the Torres Strait, west to Mt Isa and the Gulf and Darwin.

"I have been an advocate of what I consider to be one of the best examples of self-determination – this Family Responsibilities Commission – it is community driven."

Paul Stephenson

There was a sad note to the conclusion of the 2019 Development Week. Former Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin said his farewells to the Commissioners with whom he had worked so closely for eight and a half years. Further, the 2019 Local Commissioner Development Week was also to be the last for Commissioner Glasgow as his retirement date nears. Local Commissioners and dignitaries present at the conference acknowledged Commissioner Glasgow's highly esteemed leadership of the FRC both in the Cairns Registry and in the communities. He will be sorely missed by staff and Commissioners alike.