



Community operations Aurukun

FRC operations in Aurukun were undertaken by Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta and Keri Tamwoy, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Bryce Coxall. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Aurukun Commissioners' report

This year we worked hard to strengthen engagement between the FRC, key government agencies and support services in Aurukun to work collaboratively to better support community members and their families.

Significant achievements

With the support of our Local Registry Coordinator, Bryce Coxall and registry staff we set priorities for the year and have achieved some quite significant progress:

- 123 Family Responsibilities Agreements entered into with our clients expressing a willingness to attend support services (a great increase from no agreements recorded in the 2019-20 financial year)
- 234 referrals to support services under a Family Responsibilities Agreement or Order (an increase of 29 percent from the 2019-20 financial year and the most referrals made by us annually since the 2013-14 financial year)
- 165 clients referred to support services under a Family Responsibilities Agreement or Order (an increase of 23 percent from the 2019-20 financial year) with 36 new clients being supported by the FRC and our partners in community
- 69 VIM agreements entered into by self-referring community members (the highest number of VIMs entered into by Aurukun community members in the history of the FRC).

Linking with partners and clients to deliver an intensive case management approach

The increase in our workload caused by a greater willingness of our clients to accept support from the FRC has meant there has been an increase in the demand for services to be delivered by our partners. We have strengthened our relationships with key partners like the Wellbeing Centre, Cape York Partnerships O-Hub, Aurukun police, Child Safety and Housing and have taken a more intensive and collaborative case management approach with our clients. Where it is appropriate, we invite relevant services and agencies to attend conferences to meet with members of the client's family and/or clan so issues can be discussed in a safe and culturally relevant environment. By having the service providers present, the client can form a relationship straight away and they are less reluctant to attend future sessions for support.

Challenges

Unfortunately, Aurukun continued to experience sporadic community unrest with large groups fighting on the streets (often with weapons) and arson attacks. The unrest impacted on service provider operations, contributed to poor school attendance, and modelled anti-social behaviours for impressionable young people. The police continue to work hard to identify the underlying issues causing unrest and de-escalate the situation to prevent widespread violence.

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We believe there is a connection between this instability amongst family groups and incidents of domestic and family violence. The number of notices for domestic violence received by the FRC increased from 137 in 2019-20 to 209 in 2020-21. We continue to prioritise these clients for conference because of the impact their behaviours have on vulnerable people like children, women and Elders, but without increased services for perpetrators and victims we are limited in our referral options.

Sadly, we have also seen a great deal of sorry business this year with the passing of several significant community members. This places further stress on families and has a flow-on effect on school attendance and the delivery of services, including FRC conferences due to the suspension of operations to show respect for grieving families.

Other community matters

The school in Aurukun has always played a pivotal role in our community. Although attendance is lower than what we would like to see, there have been some positive developments. In 2021 we saw a 60 percent increase in enrolments for preps and the re-engagement of 40 children previously disengaged from the school. The FRC is working with the school to prioritise families for intensive case management with service providers to aid their re-engagement. The school has implemented a 'Wellbeing Room' which supports student induction and transition into classes.

Encouragingly the Year 6 cohort has been the highest attending year level and is consistent with the school's emphasis on boarding school readiness for high school. The Transition Support Officer employed by Education Queensland worked hard with the students, their families and support services during the school holidays to ensure the entire cohort of enrolled boarding school students left Aurukun on time to begin the school year.

In December 2020, the Aurukun school Principal was transferred to another location. A drawn-out recruitment process followed, resulting in the school operating throughout the first semester of 2021 with the position filled in a temporary acting capacity. The position of Principal not only performs a key leadership role within the school to set strategic priorities and drive outcomes for students, but it is an important pillar within our broader community. We noted the community's anxiousness surrounding the uncertainty of the Principal's position for at least half of the 2021 academic year, and the destabilising impact this had on the school's operations.

The next 12 months

Whilst many challenges remain, we know that the Aurukun we live in today is a very different Aurukun to the one we lived in before the FRC started in 2008. We are grateful to the Queensland and Australian Governments, and the Cape York Institute for the opportunity to be Local Commissioners and to work for a better future for our community and our people.

We hope the future will see the FRC recommence receiving notices from the Children's Court¹ relating to young offenders from our community. We can then provide support to them and their parents to overcome barriers impacting on their ability to become socially responsible and productive members of our community, like their Elders before them.

1. Section 43(1)(b) of the FRC Act provides for the provision of notices from the Children's Court to the Family Responsibilities Commission for a child, or their parent, who lives or has lived in a welfare reform community. The FRC ceased receiving notices and thus is unable to conference young people and their parents after 2015-16 because of consequential amendments to the Youth Justices Act 1991.