

Community operations Aurukun



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

Aurukun Commissioners' report

This past financial year we have had to pivot and change the way in which we work with our community members to stay current and relevant to their needs. Introducing Intensive Case Management (ICM) and Elevated School Response (ESR) initiatives have allowed for earlier intervention prior to proceeding to the traditional conference setting, or as a complementary approach to the traditional conference setting. Strengthening our relationships with local service providers is paramount for the effective delivery of services to those most at risk. Monthly interagency meetings between government and non-government agencies and working together, as opposed to working in silos, has allowed the community to benefit from early intervention. Most of us are in our senior years and four of us have been with the Commission since 2008, but we are proud to say that we continue to deliver the support necessary for Aurukun families.

Significant achievements

- We believe that engagement with our clients is the foundation to their success. It is for that reason we are pleased to report our conference attendance in 2022-23 increased from 57.1 percent in 2021-22 to 66.4 percent in 2022-23, an increase of 9.3 percent.
- The number of agreements entered into by clients to attend support services continued to increase from 136 in 2021-22 to 155 in 2022-23, with orders for clients to attend support services dropping from 41 in 2021-22 to 7 in 2022-23.
- The number of voluntary engagements from community members with 12 voluntary case plans and 45 voluntary income management agreements. We believe these statistics reinforce our belief that clients are willing to engage with us.

Challenges

Drugs, alcohol and community unrest

Drugs and alcohol continue to make their way into our community. They are unwanted and continue to disrupt the lives of community members, and most disturbingly, the lives of our children. Domestic violence orders and breaches and child safety notices have both increased in comparison to last year and show a correlation between the two. Alcohol fuelled violence causes local services in Aurukun to close due to safety risks, stopping the sale of food and petrol at times. These are real issues that need real solutions. More referral pathways such as alcohol and drug programs and perpetrator programs for domestic violence offences are needed to improve outcomes for our community members.



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School attendance and youth crime

Aurukun school attendance has, as in previous years, been our focus. Term 4 of 2022 was a very low period. A problem with the computer program providing school attendance data led to invalid notices being received by the Commission. As a result, for a short while we were unable to conference families for non-attendance of their children at school (see Challenges and outlook section for further discussion). It was reported that many of those children not attending school regularly due to community fighting were also breaking into and vandalising properties. Of significance, in November 2022 was the theft of a Queensland Health vehicle by two teenage boys, resulting in a “Code Black” being declared at the hospital with all outreach services for the community suspended for a time.

Due to the abysmal school attendance in Term 4 2022, January 2023 saw the implementation of our ESR strategy, working with the Aurukun State School and community families in supporting children back to school and overcoming obstacles hindering them from attending. Working collaboratively with the school and the Aurukun Paamp School Board to improve school attendance is providing us with renewed energy and hope to improve opportunities for our children.

The FRC continues to advocate for the Childrens Court trigger to be reinstated to allow us to work with our youth and their caregivers to intervene early and to effect real change.

Sorry business

Sorry business protocols are complex and unique to our community. At times there are many families affected by sorry business concurrently. One of the impacts of sorry business is that children do not attend school while the family is in mourning. Last year in conjunction with the Aurukun Shire Council and the Aurukun State School a flyer was devised to outline the protocols of sorry business. Sorry business is a delicate matter that we approach cautiously in order to balance the community’s need for appropriate cultural mourning obligations, and the children’s need to have consistent education. The FRC in Aurukun continues to deliver the message that children need to continue to learn, whilst also respecting the family and their loss.

Employment opportunities

Employment opportunities continue to challenge our community, with Blue Cards hard to obtain with their rigid requirements. It is a challenge for our people to obtain identification documents making it hard to create accounts such as ‘My Gov’. Greater training options with real jobs as an outcome is what we are hoping to see in Aurukun so that our young people will have opportunities for a better future. We hope the Australian and Queensland Governments continue to deliver on their promise of real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions by replacing the previously existing Community Development Program (CDP) with a new program. We have hope that changes are coming for our people to secure new opportunities.

Other community matters

Cashless Debit Card – enhanced Income Management

The uncertainty in regard to the future of the Cashless Debit Card during this reporting period caused community members to be nervous about their ability to continue voluntary income management arrangements. Fortunately, the decision was made by the Australian Parliament

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to continue income management in the FRC communities, with a change from the Cashless Debit Card to the enhanced Income Management SmartCard. Enhanced Income Management however specified that community members participating in the arrangement could not purchase cigarettes on the SmartCard. This has caused some concern however we are happy to report that community members continue to volunteer for assistance in managing their money. Clients will at times ask other services to assist them in filling in an application for voluntary income management so that their families won't be aware they have volunteered, therefore avoiding pressure from family members or partners regarding their decision. We are truly grateful for the continuation of income management for our community as we see daily the positive effect it has on families.

Aurukun Justice Group

Mediation is an essential service in Aurukun, connecting families on a neutral, safe platform. The service is community led by local respected Elders who consider culture and clan complexities in conducting mediations. This service is invaluable to our community. The FRC in Aurukun works with the Justice Group on many levels and we feel that their contribution to our work strengthens our professional working relationships. The Aurukun Justice Group aim to de-escalate community conflict prior to real damage being inflicted on inter-family and clan relationships. Conflict is contagious and draws in the entire community at times resulting in violence, vandalism, closure of services and even death of community members. We express our gratitude to the Aurukun Justice Group for the essential service they provide to the community.

The next 12 months

As we look to the future we do so with the same determination as in previous years. We understand that our future is determined by powers outside of the FRC, and although this makes us nervous at this time of year, we stand united.

We stand united to deliver better outcomes for our families and our community. We will withstand adversity and work on our plans for the years to come. Having just reviewed and consulted on the new 2023-27 strategic plan for the FRC that will be implemented on 1 July 2023, we are hopeful that our future is strong and so is our community. Working from a model of self-determination and innovation, we plan to continue our work both in conference and outside of the conference model, where we can reach a wider audience of people looking for support on a voluntary basis to improve outcomes.

ESR will be a key focus with extra resources made available for us to complete this vital part of our work. Advocating for more appropriate support services for community members will also be a focus for us. We are committed to connecting people to supports that will give them real and measurable outcomes. That's our focus for 2023-24.