



# Community operations Aurukun

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

## **Aurukun Commissioners' report**

Each year we strive to bring positive changes to the lives of our community members in Aurukun. Our goal is to preserve our strong culture and support our youth in becoming the leaders of tomorrow. This crucial work requires dedication and perseverance as we continually strive for the quality of life our community deserves. We have adapted our methods to achieve meaningful results for the people of Aurukun. Collaborating with agencies, local council, police, Aurukun State School and health services enables us to engage with families early on and provide support through our Client Engagement (CE) approach. CE has become a cornerstone of our work, alongside conference. The community's increasing willingness to engage with us reinforces our determination to continue this important work.

## **Significant achievements**

- The number of family responsibilities agreements entered into by clients to attend support services continued to increase from 155 in 2022-23 to 177 in 2023-24. This is a positive indication that clients acknowledge that change is required to improve their circumstances and those of their children.
- Voluntary agreements for a voluntary case plan increased by 392%, from 12 in 2022-23 to 59 in 2023-24.
- The increase in voluntary agreements can, in part, be attributed to our new CE approach. Since we have started to collect data, between January to June 2024, we have undertaken 267 client engagement activities outside of conference.

## **Challenges**

### ***Aurukun State School***

Our collaboration with the Aurukun State School through the Elevated School Response (ESR) strategy aims to enhance student engagement and attendance. However, the school has faced significant challenges over the past 12 months due to a severe shortage of teachers. At times the school has operated with up to ten teachers fewer than required, impacting the educational opportunities available to our children.

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The consistent shortfall in teacher numbers has created substantial gaps in education delivery which is a significant concern for the future of our students. On top of classroom responsibilities teachers are also taking on additional roles, such as driving school buses, to ensure students are collected for school. This is indicative of their dedication but also highlights the extent of the support needed. Several students who are children of our clients have been identified with learning difficulties requiring extra support. The current teacher shortage makes it difficult to provide these students with the support they need.

We deeply respect and admire each teacher who has joined our community to share their knowledge and skills with our children. Their commitment and efforts to cover the shortfall and go beyond their teaching duties are truly commendable. It is for this reason we urge the government to take immediate action to address these pressing issues and resolve the teacher shortage at the Aurukun State School.

## ***Domestic Violence***

The Aurukun community faces high rates of domestic violence. Our work involves engaging with perpetrators, victims and their families, to address and reduce the prevalence of this significant issue. However, there are critical gaps in support systems available to our community.

- Currently there is no perpetrator program in Aurukun for us to refer clients to. This absence severely limits our ability to intervene and effectively support behavioural change among perpetrators.
- Men in our community do not have access to a Men's Shed or any dedicated space where they can seek respite from overcrowded family homes. This lack of private space contributes to stress and can exacerbate domestic tensions.
- To truly make a difference we also need culturally appropriate programs to address the root causes of domestic violence and provide support in ways that are meaningful for community members. We believe access to such programs could significantly improve the lives of the people in Aurukun, fostering a safer more supportive environment for everyone.
- It is distressing to witness our community members engaging in harmful behaviours and facing incarceration. We firmly believe the number of incarcerations could be reduced if programs to support and educate perpetrators were available. An "On Country" program which integrates our cultural practices and provides practical support is essential for meaningful change.

## ***Alcohol in community***

The pervasive presence of alcohol in Aurukun has had a profoundly negative impact contributing to a range of social, health, and economic issues. Additionally, there is a significant lack of referral pathways for those drinking excessively making it challenging for the FRC to find appropriate support and interventions. Our police work tirelessly to prevent alcohol being brought into the community, yet it continues to find a way in. Addressing alcohol abuse through culturally sensitive prevention and rehabilitation programs is essential to mitigating its detrimental effects and promoting a healthier, more resilient community.



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## Other community matters

### ***Aurukun State School Awards – November 2023***

Each year Aurukun State School celebrates its achievements with a vibrant awards ceremony, where we present awards to top attenders across various year levels. The 2023 Wik Awards, a highlight of the school calendar, occurred on 29 November 2023.

Elders and community members captivated attendees with a display of traditional Wik dance. Amidst the festivities, a tribute was paid to those returning to the Aurukun community from boarding schools, after graduating from Year 12, underscoring the school's commitment to nurturing a student's journey to success. Then Aurukun Mayor, Keri Tamwoy, expressed her wish for every student to reach the pinnacle of their educational journey. Local Commissioners Doris Poonkamelya, Dereck Walpo, and Edgar Kerindun rewarded students with FRC medals. The evening finished with a delightful surprise: a video featuring teachers and staff in a "Tik Tok" style compilation, eliciting laughter and cheers from the children. The enduring partnership between the Local Commissioners and the school was evident, as they proudly reaffirmed their commitment to fostering excellence within the Aurukun community.

## The next 12 months

As we look forward to the next 12 months our commitment to the Aurukun community remains unwavering despite the inevitable challenges of our advancing ages. Our goal is to strengthen our team through the recruitment of new, younger Local Commissioners, thereby enhancing our capacity to make a meaningful impact. This infusion of new members will provide the FRC with fresh perspectives and the strength needed to continue this vital work.

Through the ongoing CE approach supporting our clients outside of conference, we will continue to assist community members with the incremental changes that our people are ready to make. Over the past 12 months we have observed positive changes attributed to our evolving approach, with more individuals than ever before seeking our help.

### ***Focus areas for the upcoming year:***

- Our focus on education remains unchanged. We will work diligently with the children of Aurukun to ensure consistent school attendance and support their educational journey from their early years through to the achievement of their Year 12 certificate.
- We will continue to encourage and support employment opportunities for our people, helping them to achieve their personal and professional goals.
- We are committed to continuing to support our people within the justice system. Our efforts will focus on reducing incarceration rates and alleviating the financial burden associated with the legal process.

In the coming year we will build on the progress made, drawing on the strengths of our team of Local Commissioners. Our commitment to education, employment and justice system support remains steadfast. By continuing to engage with the community and adapting our approaches we are confident in our ability to foster positive change and enhance the wellbeing of Aurukun community members.