

Community operations Coen



FRC operations in Coen were undertaken by Local Commissioners May Kepple, Elaine Liddy, Alison Liddy, Maureen Liddy, Ramana Walker and Naomi Hobson, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Kate Gooding. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Coen Commissioners' report

Last year we sadly reported on needing to change our strategy to allow us to continue to engage with our clients through the waves of sorry business affecting our community at the time. Many conferences needed to be postponed and, recognising it was important for us to continue to work with vulnerable community members, we had to adopt a completely different approach outside of the formal conferencing environment. This year we are proud and delighted to report on the successes and positive outcomes achieved through that innovative approach, so much so, that for us, it has developed into a whole new way of working, through Client Engagement (CE) outside of conference. This approach has been widely accepted by community members with the majority of clients seeking support opting into voluntary agreements for both case plan referrals and voluntary income management.

Significant achievements

- Voluntary agreements for voluntary case plans continued to provide a pathway to access support services through the CE approach with 31 agreements signed in 2023-24, an increase of 11% from 2022-23.
- There was also a corresponding increase in voluntary referrals from voluntary case plans increasing from 30 in 2022-23 to 40 in 2023-24, an increase of 33%.
- Voluntary agreements for voluntary income management remained consistent through the CE approach with 25 agreements signed in 2023-24, the same number as in 2022-23.
- Conference attendance rose to 87.9% this year, topping the previously recorded highest ever conference attendance of 75.9%.
- Two new Local Commissioners for Coen, Ms Naomi Hobson and Ms Ramana Walker, commenced appointment to the Commission on 1 July 2023.

Challenges

Local Commissioner availability

Although we have seen success in our new approach to CE, it has been a challenging phase to keep a consistent panel of Local Commissioners for the higher-level matters that require a formal conference setting. The challenge is due to the very sad and ongoing sorry business that has affected our community, as well as our employment commitments where many of us have other significant leadership roles in the community. We are finding priorities in our usual employment and our roles as Local Commissioners, are often clashing. We would like to see more Local Commissioners join the FRC to support our work in Coen. We value gender diversity, but our conferencing panel currently consists of all female Commissioners. It is important that we find male leaders to join our team, so we can best support the needs of our male clients in a culturally appropriate and inclusive manner.



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Other community matters

School attendance

The Coen Campus of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) end of year School Awards event was held on Thursday 30 November 2023. FRC Local Commissioners Elaine Liddy and Ramana Walker attended the event and assisted in presenting the school awards. The FRC contributed 16 awards for students with over 90 per cent school attendance, and a further 10 awards for students with the most improved school attendance. CYAAA Coen Principal Ben Foran finished in the role at the end of Term 2 2024, with recruitment taking place during Term 3. We may see the unintentional disruption having an effect on attendance for the upcoming term.

Voluntary engagements

The focus on CE outside of the conference setting has resulted in a high number of positive interactions between the FRC and clients. This has resulted in a total of 55 client engagement activities outside of conference, resulting in the signing of 25 voluntary agreements for voluntary income management and 31 voluntary agreements for voluntary case plan referrals. These are very high levels of engagement for a community of Coen's size. This outcome can be equally attributed to the willingness of our clients to assume personal responsibility and self-determination over their own lives, and their trust and respect for our role as Local Commissioners, built up over many years of hard work, and maintaining our high professional standards and conduct.

Inter-agency collaboration

There is no doubt that the successes the FRC can report on in Coen are bolstered by the positive working relationship between the Commission and other local agencies and the collaborative relationship that exists between all stakeholders. We believe that the way the various groups come together through regular inter-agency collaboration with a shared vision sets an example of what can be achieved when forces combine to work together toward a common goal.

The next 12 months

We will continue to build on our successes engaging community members in a voluntary capacity as our Local Commissioner role evolves to increasingly support clients outside of conference. We believe personal responsibility is the best way forward for positive behaviour change and voluntary engagement is the best indicator of a person's willingness to take that step.

As our voluntary engagements and resulting voluntary referrals increase, so too does the need for additional support services. The capacity of existing service providers does not match the current demand for services. As in previous years we call for additional services in the areas of mental health, domestic and family violence and children and youth support services.