



Community operations Hope Vale

FRC operations in Hope Vale were undertaken by Local Commissioners, Priscilla Gibson, Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral, Cheryl Cannon, Selina Kerr-Bowen, Dora Gibson and Robert Gibson, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Josephine Pinder. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Hope Vale Commissioners' report

In commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Family Responsibilities Commission's operations in the Welfare Reform Communities in 2023, we found ourselves along with the Hope Local Registry Coordinator not only reflecting on past achievements but also charting a course for future endeavours. Energised by a renewed sense of purpose we resolved to uphold and expand upon the transformative work already underway within the community.

Significant achievements

- The number of family responsibilities agreements entered into during conference remained steady at 30. This number is significant as it is consistent with the 33 family responsibilities agreements entered into in 2022-23 despite the number of conferences held decreasing from 196 in 2022-23 to 165 in 2023-24.
- The number of voluntary agreements to attend a support service signed outside of the conference setting has increased by 238% from 8 in 2022-23 to 27 in 2023-24. The number of voluntary income management agreements entered into outside of the conference setting remained steady with 19 agreements entered into relating to 19 clients.
- We believe the number of voluntary agreements for case plans and voluntary income management are the result of our hard work engaging with clients outside of the conference setting. We have recorded 122 client engagement activities.

Elevated School Response

In previous years it was recognised that students were not adequately prepared to start school by week 1 of Term 1 and needed support to transition into the new academic year. Our Elevated School Response (ESR) strategy involved an early outreach to families at the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024 to assist with pre-term preparation.

Referrals to the Cooktown District Community Centre pre-readiness program for parents with children aged 0-5-year-olds significantly supported the enrolment process, orientation and transition to kindergarten or Prep for both parents and children alike. The program offered guidance and support to navigate through paperwork, deadlines and requirements, easing the stress of enrolment.

Providing comprehensive support to parents and children during the critical transition period to kindergarten or Prep, empowers parents with the knowledge and skills to better support their child's educational journey and contributes to a smoother and more successful start to formal education.



Challenges

Domestic and family violence

In the 2023-24 reporting period the FRC in Hope Vale received 65 Domestic Violence Order notices and 37 Domestic Violence Breach notices. This resulted in us holding 53 conferences to deal with these matters, with 26 referrals made to support services including the Wellbeing Centre, Cooktown District Community Centre, MPower and My Pathway.

Over the years we have seen the devastating impacts of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) throughout our families and community. It needs a whole-of community response. The Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council has partnered with Work Haven to develop a DFV Action Plan as part of the Local Thriving Communities Program.

The FRC in Hope Vale participated in a series of consultations to inform the development of the Action Plan. Our work as Local Commissioners provides us with a unique insight into the prevalence of DV in our community. We were able to share these learnings and help shape the strategies needed in the local Action Plan, whilst identifying the infrastructure required to support victims and perpetrators.

Disengaged young people

Long-term disengaged students remain a concern. This has led to an increase in referrals we made to service providers to address this issue. In 2023-24, 13 voluntary referrals and 5 conditional referrals were made to support clients and their families to address underlying causal factors leading to their children's disengagement from the school system.

When we had the opportunity to meet the Assistant Minister for Clean Economy Jobs, Shane King MP and Government Champion Mike Kaiser during their recent visit to Hope Vale, we used it as an opportunity to raise this issue. When chronically disengaged students are not attending school, they are often roaming the streets instead. One idea raised was for the establishment of a transition hub in Hope Vale to serve as a supportive environment to help these children catch up on their schoolwork and aid their transition back into the classroom.

We also used the opportunity to again advocate for the reinstating of the Childrens Court trigger. Our inability to use this trigger for the past eight years has severely impacted our ability to deal with youth in our community. By drawing attention to the types of offences being committed by young people, we emphasised to our visitors the need for targeted interventions and support systems that can effectively address the root causes of youth crime.

Addressing the needs of long-term disengaged school students, and those that go onto offend, requires a multifaceted approach. There must be ongoing collaboration between educators, families and support services to provide targeted interventions for at risk students and foster a positive school environment that promotes engagement. This will remain a focus of ours into the next reporting period.



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Other community matters

NIAA consultation

Throughout 2023-24 we have been actively involved in consultations initiated by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). These consultations encompassed the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) survey and the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) consultation, signifying a commitment to engaging local voices in policy development and decision-making processes.

Since April 2023 we have participated in the CEP survey conducted by NIAA. This survey served as a mechanism for gathering feedback and insights from Indigenous communities on the effectiveness and impact of the CEP initiatives. Our involvement in the survey reflects our dedication to representing the interests and perspectives of our community members in shaping government programs and policies.

In addition to the CEP survey, we were then invited to engage in the RJED consultation. This consultation aims to solicit input from Indigenous communities, including Hope Vale, on strategies and initiatives to promote economic development and create employment opportunities in remote areas. Throughout the consultations we highlighted how disheartening it is for qualified local tradespeople who are ready and willing to work, when external contractors are brought in instead to work on local job sites. This practice can have implications for the community, including economic concerns and a potential lack of connection between the project and the community it serves.

The next 12 months

Positive outcomes from the Client Engagement approach, together with active participation in various consultation processes, shows our involvement and commitment to understanding community needs and working towards positive outcomes. Our contributions through participating in consultations and meetings with government representatives are valuable in shaping policy and program decisions that can have long-term benefits for the community. Our roles as Local Commissioners and these collaborative efforts will hopefully lead to meaningful improvements and positive impacts for everyone involved.