



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Coen Local Commissioners' report

In the beginning it was nerve wracking going to conference. Our clients viewed it as a 'second court' and we had to spend a lot of time explaining that we were not there to punish them further, but we were there to help them to improve their lives. We feel the Commission in Coen has reached a turning point. We are now viewed as a 'fair' organisation and we have a voice in the community. Things have slowly changed, and now when kids are in trouble our families come and talk to us to keep them out of trouble, so they understand that they can trust us to point them down the right path. We explain that in the end we are all responsible for ourselves, and asking for a guiding hand, or admitting that there are bad things happening in your life is not shameful.

This year we have been involved in supporting, understanding, and working together to reach a common goal. That common goal is to ensure that we all do our best to keep our children safe, linked to culture, happy and educated. We believe that these goals also require another ingredient and that is empowerment. We have learnt that empowerment can be gained in many different ways. As Local Commissioners we are not only able to offer this empowerment in our traditional ways to family, but also through our second relationship to our community as Local Commissioners in conference sittings.

Local Commissioner Elaine Liddy has been instrumental in establishing the Lama Lama Rangers who live and work on the Lama Lama homelands of Port Stewart. Through her involvement as a Ranger, and now a fulltime Cultural Heritage Adviser, she devotes her spare time to the care of her homelands, and to passing on tradition and culture to future generations. A Cultural Heritage Adviser is a person who has extensive experience and knowledge in relation to the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage, and is also able to assist with cultural heritage management plans. Together we now engage our children in the Junior Ranger Program, and when high school students return home we try to take them out on country, rather than have them stay in town.

The Junior Ranger program is about educating our youth in sustainable natural resource management. The program aims to mix Indigenous values for looking after country with student education. We care deeply for our children and the education they must receive to make their way in the world. We believe that by working with Indigenous Rangers, our youth will develop a deeper understanding of their culture, and this pride will show them the right way to live their lives.

This year has been one of maintaining our school attendance at between 85 and 92 percent, taking into account the usual cultural requirements of funerals and sorry business. The kids have picked up their game in relation to their uniform consistency and now we are seeing them pushing themselves to reach a new



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school readiness standard of arriving at school with not only their uniforms on, but their lunches, a water bottle, and a hat on their head. The school has reported a general increase in community involvement, in particular with the Elders. Our youth are again throwing down aces, this time quite literally as they were taught tennis this last year. We have also noticed that Transitional Support Services are back in force this year and have started talking to our children about what they need to do in order to improve their chances of getting a place at a boarding school.

As reported in last year's Year in Review, the Wellbeing Centre and service providers in Coen are accepted as part of the community, and the Wellbeing Centre staff are very supportive of our clients. The local police and some services are even working after hours to accommodate the community's needs. That is good, as problems do not disappear when the sun goes down.

Sometimes it is necessary to guide with a firm hand, and our firm hand is Conditional Income Management.

We have a voice

We have found that within the last year we have viewed Conditional Income Management more as a tool to empower. This form of empowerment we believe is not understood by most clients at the time of the decision to income manage them, but within time they understand that reducing financial stress personally, and within the family, is an empowering experience. When a client starts to walk the right path, they sometimes wish then to remain on income management. They also occasionally return to the Commission requesting income management. When clients request an amendment or end to income management, that in itself can be an empowering act largely due to the improvements experienced in their lives.

We are still facing challenges in our community. Some of our high school students act purposefully to become suspended from school as they wish to be with their friends. We also become very frustrated with community members who create trouble, but are not within the jurisdiction of the Commission. Our people view the Commission as having proved its success in the community; they trust us and feel these trouble makers should also be brought before the Commission so their behaviour can be addressed.

We look forward to continuing our roles within the Commission. The experience we have gained has empowered our voice as Elders to sing loudly within our community. We have a vision that the next generation of Elders will find their voice too, and join us in song.

Coen Commissioners Peter Peter, May Kepple, Garry Port and Elaine Liddy



Coen Police Station