



# CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

## Doomadgee BasicsCard

As reported in the Commission's Annual Report 2014-15, although the use of income management for Commission clients in Doomadgee was agreed to in principle by the Queensland Government, authority had yet to be provided from the Australian Government who were in the process of reviewing the Forrest Report recommendations in regard to the Healthy Welfare Card. The Commission has always been of the view that income management is an essential element to continuing successful operations in Doomadgee. Following authorisation from the Australian Government in March 2016, the Doomadgee Commissioners commenced using income management as a conferencing tool in April 2016 – term 2 of the school year. The Doomadgee Commissioners have taken a moderate approach to introducing income management to the community, initially concentrating on those clients who would be more receptive to the benefits of financial management. The Commissioners explained to those clients the advantages of income management as a means of managing their money to meet essential household needs and expenses, thereby assisting in stabilising their home situation and better providing for their children. The first clients in the community to be income managed, therefore, commenced their orders in the spirit of an agreement. Implementation of the first BasicsCards occurred seamlessly with Centrelink visiting Doomadgee to issue the cards as soon as the Commission notices were received. With the BasicsCard quickly established in the community, the Doomadgee Commissioners have commenced extending income management to clients who have demonstrated a resistance to fulfilling their responsibilities for the children in their care. The Commissioners, while acknowledging that income management is not the solution to all community woes, look forward to utilising the tool to support people and children at risk, promote socially responsible choices, and as an incentive to meet individual and community obligations.

Initial consultations held with the Doomadgee community prior to the introduction of the Commission in 2014 resolved that the Commission would conference on the two triggers of Child Safety and Welfare concerns and school attendance only. Following the March 2016 commencement of income management in the community, the Local Commissioners expressed a view that local authority would be enhanced with the addition of further conferencing triggers including domestic violence and Youth Justice matters. The inclusion of these additional triggers is viewed as an opportunity for early intervention in breaking the cycle of domestic violence together with the associated impact on school attendance and family wellbeing, tackling youth dysfunction, and reducing offending. Doomadgee Local Commissioners have expressed the wish to eventually have the authority to conference community members on the full range of notification triggers available to the other welfare reform communities, a change which would require community consultations.

## Childrens Court notices

In September 2015 the first Childrens Court notices were received from DJAG. Following the receipt of these initial notices, the Commission became aware that in many instances the notices lacked the appropriate information to confirm jurisdiction such as relevant information about the child's parent/carer. The Commission commenced discussions with DJAG and DATSIP to improve the notification process to allow the Commission to more easily determine jurisdiction. As a result of these discussions, and other discussions held in regard to changes to improve the efficiency of the FRC Act, the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2015 was introduced to Parliament and passed on 1 December 2015. Clause 6 of the Bill enabled the provision of the address of the child, or any parent of the child.

The Commission, whilst continuing to liaise with DJAG's Youth Justice in regard to the timely receipt of Childrens Court notices, was advised that effective from 1 July 2016 the *Youth Justice Act 1992* (YJ Act) was amended by the *Youth Justice and Other Legislation Act (No.1) 2016* and *Youth Justice and Other Legislation Act (No.2) 2016*. One of the key policy changes to be effected by these amendments was to prohibit the publication of identifying information about all children dealt with under the YJ Act.

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The Youth Justice Practice team have contacted the Commission and confirmed that the effect of the amendments is that notices are unable to be provided to the Commission, as publication of identifying information is prohibited under s301 of the YJ Act.

This has raised immediate operational implications for the Commission. As an example, it has been noted that the Commission will not receive notices in relation to the young people charged with offences relating to the recent assaults and car-jacking in Aurukun, as they have not yet appeared before the Childrens Court. The Commission will liaise with DATSIP's legal policy officers to assist with the best legislative construction to overcome this issue.

## Child Safety and Welfare notices

The Commission has reviewed trends in the numbers of Child Safety and Welfare notices received this financial year and can report that there has been a significant reduction in notifications received. All welfare reform communities, with the exception of Mossman Gorge, have experienced a reduction in notices. Of particular note are the large reduction in notices for Aurukun and Hope Vale of 75 and 47 percent respectively. The Commission has been advised by DCCSDS that they attribute the decline primarily to a change in QPS policy for reporting child concern matters to DCCSDS. QPS have advised that the reporting of child harm was changed in direct response to the Carmody review and in line with the submissions forwarded by DCCSDS to that review. The reduced reporting in Aurukun and Hope Vale has been identified by QPS and they advise that strategies are being put in place to deal with it. As reported in last year's Annual Report, the community-based intake service known as Family and Child Connect (FaCC) is currently being rolled out in Queensland. FaCC is intended to be an additional pathway for referring concerns about children and their families. The service is designed to support vulnerable families by assessing their needs and referring them to the most appropriate support services. FaCC will assess whether more serious matters should be referred on to DCCSDS for investigation and action. The FRC Act states that Child Safety and Welfare notices are to be provided to the Commission from the child protection chief executive. This stipulation poses a legislative barrier to receiving notices from FaCC, a non-government organisation, in regard to less serious child and family matters. As the FRC Act states in s5, "The FRC Act is to be administered under the principle that the wellbeing and best interests of a child are paramount", and s5(2)(a)(i), "... the Commission should deal with the matters to which the notice relates in a way that facilitates early intervention...". The Commission has raised concerns with both DATSIP and DCCSDS regarding how the FRC will receive notices and continue to assist with early intervention strategies. Although FaCC is yet to be established in the Cape or Gulf communities, Cairns has established a FaCC service and Mossman Gorge falls within that FaCC catchment area. The Commission will continue to liaise with both DATSIP and DCCSDS to source a solution to ensure the Commission is able to continue to support families with early intervention strategies.

## Domestic violence

Following the introduction of the domestic violence trigger to the FRC Act, it was clear that appropriate training would be required for the Local Commissioners to increase their awareness of issues surrounding domestic violence, and also to enhance their capability to conference community members on domestic violence matters. During the Local Commissioner Development Week in May 2016 training was provided by White Ribbon Australia and the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service.

As the name of the aggrieved is not currently included in the information received from DJAG, in order to obtain sufficient information to allow the Local Commissioners to effectively conference, extra time is set aside during a conference week to establish the facts of each DVO and how the Local Commissioners wish to deal with each particular case, bearing in mind individual, family and community pressures.



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On 6 November 2015, the Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee tabled its Report No. 9 on the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2015. Recommendation 2 stated:

“The Committee considers that the availability of such domestic and family violence specific support services is vital if the FRC is going to be able to play an effective part in tackling domestic and family violence in *welfare reform community areas*.”

At the present time the Commissioners are referring clients to the Wellbeing Centres who have advised they have minimal specialist capacity to support clients in regard to domestic violence matters.

The Commission considers that priority must be given to meeting the challenge of this new referral option by DATSIP sourcing appropriate counselling services to treat both the perpetrator and aggrieved. It is understood that DATSIP is working with DCCSDS to identify appropriate services based on need. The Commission looks forward to discussing with DATSIP what service options will be sourced in the near future.

## Aurukun

The community of Aurukun has experienced a tumultuous 12 months. The importation of alcohol has resulted in violent and drunken behaviour, fighting and damage to property. Many nights of uncontrolled loud music have resulted in domestic disturbances and poor school attendance.

The community disturbances in November 2015, reported as riots, resulted in the looting of the store, damage to more than 30 homes making them uninhabitable, extensive property and vehicle damage and culminated in the violent death of a community member. Police reinforcements were brought in over the period to stabilise the community at considerable cost to the State Government.

Youth violence and dysfunction continued to escalate and in May 2016 resulted in an attack on the CYAAA School Principal who had come to the aid of several teachers in the community. The Principal was assaulted and his car was stolen and damaged. Teaching staff were evacuated from the community due to safety concerns and the school temporarily closed. Two weeks later, shortly after some of the evacuated teaching staff had returned to the community, the Principal was again the victim of a carjacking by armed youths, several of whom were involved in the first incident and released on bail. Extra police were again flown into the community over this period and the second carjacking resulted in the closure of the school until 11 July 2016 (term 3).

The youths involved in the above incidents do not attend school and are unemployed. The Aurukun Mayor urged community members to take control of their youth, citing that the problem was not only a discipline issue but an issue of neglect, and the Queensland Government commenced a period of consultation and reflection to determine the root cause of the unrest. Security assessments and a DET review of the Aurukun CYAAA campus and its Direct Instruction method of teaching followed.

The Aurukun community was placed under further scrutiny this year with the release of a Griffith University report commissioned in 2011 by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The report is an examination of youth sexual violence and abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun. It was received by the Queensland Government in September 2013, however, was not publically released until this year due to a number of factors, some of which were concerns over confidentiality of sources and the resultant impact on continuing work being undertaken in the community. The results of the examination report in detail the scale of abuse and also the passive acceptance of, or resignation to, the problem. As a result, the Queensland Government has set up a steering committee to analyse the findings and take positive action on prevention.

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The Commission considers that determining the root cause of, and addressing the dysfunction in Aurukun is a complex issue involving more than the delivery of its schooling. In collaboration with community leaders and local organisations, the Aurukun Shire Council, Australian and Queensland Government agencies and service providers, the Queensland Government proposed a four point plan on 14 June to build community safety, ensure access to education, strengthen the community and harness jobs and economic opportunities. A Senior Government Coordinator, Brendon McMahon, was appointed on 30 May to ensure effective coordination of efforts across Government agencies and other organisations. This appointment was universally welcomed by the community. Prior to this appointment the Aurukun service delivery system, Government and non-Government, lacked coordination and leadership. The Commission identifies the need for regular meetings of community leaders, service providers and representatives of each clan to work to establish, implement and enforce a realistic and workable community safety plan, community rules of acceptable public behaviour, conduct and values, and programs for community education on health and safety matters.

These objectives will only be achieved, in the Commission's view, after wide community consultation and agreement by the majority of Aurukun's people (including those directly involved in the recent disturbances) and open and frank assessment of policing, schooling, housing provision and maintenance, child safety and the delivery of practical programs targeting offending and anti-social behaviour. Required programs include substance abuse prevention and treatment, anger management, sex offender programs, cognitive skills programs, domestic violence counselling services and programs to deal with gambling addiction. The complex and chronic conditions evident in many of the Commission's clients are most effectively dealt with through a holistic approach and assertive engagement. It is therefore vital that service providers do not operate in isolation.

## Improving service provider engagement

The Commission is partnering with the GYFS Neighbourhoods Project, and the CYP parenting program with the aim of enhancing service delivery provided by CYP Parenting Support Services to the welfare reform communities in which they work, with a specific focus on increased engagement and attendance, particularly in the Aurukun community.

GYFS have provided tailored training to all parenting staff on improving engagement practices. The parenting program in Aurukun will also receive more in-depth training, professional supervision and program development and evaluation services. Similar training on enhancing contextually appropriate engagement strategies will also be provided to RFDS Wellbeing Centre staff.

## Review of reporting framework

The Commission is also undertaking a project to review the existing service provider Monthly Progress Reports, and investigate and determine the most effective reporting framework for the Commission's service system. The aim of this project is to implement a reporting framework that:

- improves the timeliness and usefulness of reports as a tool for conferencing
- enhances the quality of reports to government and thereby enhances the Commission's ability to analyse and evaluate program effectiveness and
- improves service delivery through increased accountability, more productive dialogue, and enhanced professional practice.

Consultation has begun with service providers and Government departments to ensure that the proposed reporting framework will meet their needs.