



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Aurukun Local Commissioners' report

In our report last year we outlined the matters which were of concern to us and said, "We hope to make Aurukun a safer and more stable place for us to live and work". That was our hope but it did not happen.

We have tried hard to get the kids back to our primary school, but in terms 3 and 4 of 2015 primary school attendance did not improve. Those students who did attend, however, did so more regularly, and disruption in the classrooms and in the school grounds was much less.

In 2016 with the commencement of the new Principal and staff, attendance did improve from the previous year. Unfortunately when those students who rarely attended did show up, they caused disruption to classes. Queensland Education needs to consider the engagement of behavioural management teachers to make sure the children are ready to learn before they are placed back in the classroom. The School Case Managers need to be out in community in the early morning to encourage children to attend school. A school bus would greatly assist, particularly in the wet season.

In May the Government temporarily closed the school without any community consultation leaving parents and our community members confused and angry. The closure seemed to us to be a knee-jerk reaction to the serious problem of violence within the community, and was done with little regard for the rights and needs of the children. Whilst the school itself had some problems, it seemed to us the school and its children were being blamed for the conduct of the adults in the community and the failure of the police to keep peace and order.

For years we have been told that successive Governments were going to do something about the disengaged young people in Aurukun. We have also heard that new programs would be available for the 40 or so youths under the age of 16 who were not attending boarding school. The closure of the Alternative Secondary Pathway (ASP) program in January of 2015, and the late handover of responsibility to a new provider compounded the problem last year.

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A number of agencies have been working in the area of disengaged youth, attempting to re-engage them in schooling or into other alternative training programs. Some of the youths have returned to school, but have been suspended or expelled in a short period of time due to their unacceptable behaviour. A number of our young people have also travelled to South Australia to train in meat processing with a local abattoir. Not all of them have been successful, but there have been some positive outcomes.

During the last six months of 2015 the community witnessed numerous outbreaks of fighting due to inter-clan disputes. Wilful damage was caused to DHPW property, Aurukun Shire Council property and community personal property. The cost of repairing the damage just to the housing alone was enormous and amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) has appointed a sergeant from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to run the PCYC in Aurukun. PCYC have been running sporting activities and attending the school to run sessions with the students. The building works to the PCYC facility are currently being completed.

The Restorative Justice Program (mediation program) has been a disappointment to us. In our view those responsible for mediation should be more assertive and go out into the community to actively encourage immediate resolution of disputes before they fester and become larger problems. During the six month period when mediation was needed on a daily basis because of the feuding the employees were frequently not in the community, or they did not feel like they were in a position to be able to run mediation between the feuding clans.

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To alleviate overcrowding in houses, the Aurukun Shire Council has made new housing available and a number of houses are currently being built. Overcrowding, however, is still an issue due to the number of houses damaged during the fighting.

The effectiveness of some government and non-government service providers continues to be problematic in our community. The first consideration of these agencies should be the needs of the community and finding the appropriate way to engage with our people. We encourage service providers not come to our community with their own agendas, but to listen to our people and consider their ideas.

In March 2016 three of us Local Commissioners were re-elected to the Aurukun Shire Council, and one of us was newly elected as a Councillor. We continually endeavour to be across all aspects of our community and would like it recognised that we are here to guide and assist community members and service providers.

We would like to express our appreciation to the clients who have worked with us to make constructive changes in their lives, and to our partner agencies who have worked with us to improve our community.

Aurukun Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Sarah Wolmby, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta and Leona Yunkaporta.

