



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Aurukun Commissioners' report

Commissioner Keri Tamwoy joined our team in January this year and has fitted in very well, offering a new voice and providing fresh ideas on how we might engage with our clients to empower them to seek a better future.

To begin our new year we conferenced 69 clients in the first conference of 2018, all on School Attendance notices. This cohort of parents represented over 60 percent of the student population at the Aurukun State School. It was important to us to do this as we wanted to support the school to achieve the strongest possible start for the year. It was rewarding for us as Local Commissioners for this to be acknowledged by the school staff who expressed in an interagency meeting that the FRC was instrumental in the strong start to the school year.

The school's Student Attendance Officer (SAO) team, which is made up of five community members, has been a huge success in 2018 and they have recently undertaken training to further strengthen their skills. Regular meetings are held between Commissioners and the SAO team to learn from each other and to work together for a stronger community. We as Aurukun Commissioners have shown our 100 percent support to the SAO's, and we have asked them to identify families who are not engaging with them or who are being abusive, so that we can see if they can be conferenced under a more formal process. Aurukun State School has a very positive feel in 2018 and the large number of parents in the school grounds is a direct indicator of the success the school is currently having. Consistent bus runs and community engagement beginning at 7:30 every morning have been very productive and instrumental in the strong start to the school year. The school has made it compulsory for each of their Leadership Team to assist on the bus runs one morning per week. This is a great initiative as it's all about building relationships in our community, and the bus runs provide a very positive way for the school staff and community to interact.

We are happy to see that school attendance as a whole is being addressed by all services across Aurukun, and we attribute this success to the regular interagency meetings we are attending. The interagency meetings have strengthened relationships between service



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providers, making it clear that school attendance is a community wide issue, not just a concern for the school or the FRC. It is hoped that all of these efforts will lift school attendance as we feel there is still a long way to go.

The school has put a huge effort into assisting children to return to boarding school. This builds upon the work by the O-Hub who provided a vital support in assisting families to link in with ABSTUDY and the Transition Support Service while other services were closed over the January period. In the first week of the 2018 school year over 50 Aurukun students left community for boarding school, with more children leaving every week as this work continues. These children are the future of our community and it is exciting for us to see the highest ever number of Aurukun students enrolled at boarding school.

The work performed by the Wik Mungkan Information Knowledge Centre (IKC) has been another success for Aurukun. The State Government provided a \$28,000 subsidy towards the \$120,000 refurbishment by the Aurukun Shire Council. The government, through the State Library of Queensland, funds and facilitates the centre with the Aurukun Shire Council providing management and staff. The centre provides a flexible learning program for children who have been disengaged from school for a long time. Students are attending the IKC and using it as a platform to transition back into school.

We Local Commissioners would also like to recognise the excellent work of the mediation team here in Aurukun. Over the last few months they have resolved many community conflicts that would normally turn to violence. The mediation process is now recognised as a way to resolve family issues and it is exciting for us to see families approaching the mediators for support well before violence and fighting has begun, which in the past was the way families dealt with these issues.

Staff at the Aurukun Wellbeing Centre which is now operated by Apunipima Cape York Health Council have worked tirelessly, however, a shortage of staff has restricted them from operating at their full capacity and this has affected our clients. They continue to be in regular contact with us though, and are doing better every day. They are offering some great support programs and we are keen to see our community members increase engagement with them.

Overcrowding in houses continues to place a lot of pressure on families, but it is exciting to see all the construction currently taking place. Over 30 new homes were completed in Aurukun in the last financial year, and there are plenty more in the building process. These new houses will really lift the spirits of families and take the pressure off overcrowded households, which will result in better living conditions, less domestic violence and a safer place for our children to grow.

The O-Hub (Opportunity Hub) continues to be one of the busiest services in the community. The Aurukun people are taking full advantage of the support offered including the Parenting Program which works one-on-one with families to support them. We are seeing all referred clients engaging well.

In 2017 there was little to no Centrelink support for Aurukun, which made it extremely difficult for community members to manage their finances and take advantage of payments they were entitled to. This workload was pushed onto other services and not completed to a satisfactory



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level. Recently Cape York Employment (CYE) has taken on the contract for the Centrelink office in Aurukun and in a short period of time this has proven to be a huge success. We look forward to the continuation of this service by CYE providing support to our community members.

The large police contingent in Aurukun continues to strengthen our community on a daily basis. We believe it has created a safer Aurukun. The police have been instrumental in almost stopping the sly grog market, with very little sign of alcohol entering our community. They have also seized some large quantities of illicit drugs which would have found their way into the hands of community members. We would like to thank the Queensland Police Service for their continued support.

The 2018 year has seen us taking more responsibility and authority in the running of our own FRC conferences without the presence of Commissioner Glasgow. Commissioner Glasgow has empowered us over the years to take this responsibility and we enjoy taking on this role. This is our community, and our clients seem to respond very well to us holding conferences on our own. They are now showing us the respect that we have worked so hard to earn from our community.

*“I believe that unless Indigenous people remember and explain our past, our ways and our history, you will not understand how we think today. That knowledge is a must if we are to move forward into a real future together.”*

Aurukun Commissioner Ada Woolla, OAM

**Aurukun Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta and Keri Tamwoy.**

*From left to right: Xavein Koowarpata, Gary Pahimbung and Altiyan Kerindun at the Aurukun State School, Wik Awards Mackenzie 2017*

