



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Coen Commissioners' report

As another year passes, we take this opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been achieved in our community. We can advise that Coen children attend school regularly; service providers report positive outcomes in their work with community members; the upgrade of the local football facilities has commenced; and the construction of two new teacher residences has been completed. In addition, on 6 March 2018 the new Coen Women's Support Centre, *Kiincha Ukulngumka*, was officially opened by Government Champion Katarina Carroll. The Centre, run by the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation, is an emergency shelter for women and children seeking refuge from domestic violence.

In this past year we have received notification of 24 domestic violence orders and 12 domestic violence breaches in Coen. We believe that overcrowding caused by a shortage of housing in the community is the root cause of a significant number of those domestic violence (DV) incidents. We are committed to helping to address this situation by referring clients to the Wellbeing Centre (WBC) for DV programs, following up on client applications for housing, and volunteering at the Women's Support Centre.

Each year in our annual report we have highlighted the importance of working collaboratively with all stakeholders (those within the community and visiting services) to ensure open and effective communication. Working on partnerships and breaking down barriers to ensure the community's needs are met, and our people receive quality service, continues to be a significant part of our role. We consistently work closely with the Coen Campus of CYAAA to address absence and behaviour matters, and with the WBC and Cape York Partnership to support mutual clients. We would especially like to extend our thanks to the Coen Police who assist in delivering notices to FRC clients who have been scheduled to attend conference with us.

Apunipima Cape York Health Council has now been servicing the WBC in Coen since April 2017. The team's unwavering commitment is recognised and appreciated by all service users. The WBC delivers programs in response to specific community requirements, making it easy for us as Local Commissioners to refer clients to appropriate programs. Attendance is good, with the Men's Group currently recording thirty community members. On occasion we have found that our clients have already engaged with the WBC staff prior to attending conference, whilst for others a firm word at conference can assist them to make that connection.

We continue to take great pride in the school attendance rate in Coen with term 1 2018 recording an outstanding attendance of 93 percent. Our community consistently records high attendance at school with absences generally being as a result of families taking their children out of school to accompany parents on family medical support visits to Cairns, training for parental work purposes, or travelling out of community for funerals. CYAAA Principal Monica Hurrell reported:

"Families in Coen communicate well in relation to school absences by following up with medical certificates or requesting work for students. This is a direct result of the commitment of the Local Commissioners."

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One area of concern that we feel needs further attention is the lack of resources to assist our students in completing applications and preparing for boarding school. We note that TSS do assist students and families in Coen with boarding applications, however, we feel that it would be helpful if TSS had earlier and more consistent communication with the community in regard to their expected visits and the timelines required to remit applications. A whole community effort is needed to coordinate successful school transitions. We are expecting an increase in the number of students transitioning to boarding in 2019, and assisting parents and carers to complete the lengthy and complex applications is placing pressure on local services. Of further concern is the lack of services to address drug and alcohol issues. This is problematic for us as DV incidents in the community are often fueled by alcohol, and whilst short term support is available there are no resources for long term clinical rehabilitation. We would like to see services to specifically address the issue of chronic substance misuse made available in Coen.

In a further success for the Aboriginal people of Coen, a consistent push over many years by Commissioner May Kepple and her sister Marilyn has finally borne fruit. In 2016 funding was granted to the Moomba-Awu Aboriginal Corporation (Moomba-Awu AC) to commence the 'Healthy Country Plan' on Merepah Station. Moomba-Awu AC is supported by the Indigenous Land Corporation to ensure the 'Healthy Country Plan' is actioned. The corporation now has a fully functioning Board of Directors of which Marilyn Kepple is Chair and Commissioner May Kepple is one of eight Directors. Their vision is simple - caring for family to create a better future through employment and healthy outcomes on country. The foundations have been laid and their journey has just begun.

We have seen our community come a long way over the past ten years through Welfare Reform. There have been many successes and quite a few challenges along the way. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our focus on the education and employment of future generations.

Coen Commissioners Peter Peter, May Kepple, Garry Port, Elaine Liddy, Alison Liddy and Maureen Liddy.

From left to right: Patricia Clarmont, Doris Harold, Coen Government Champion Commissioner Katarina Carroll and Donna Johnson, at the official opening of the Coen Women's Support Shelter - The Ann Creek & Doris Harold Building

