

# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW



## Doomadgee Commissioners' report

As stated in previous annual reports, we firmly believe that children are the future of our Doomadgee community, and we are passionate about ensuring that every child is given the opportunity to receive a quality education. We feel strongly that income management is a tool that supports the continued drive to improve school attendance in Doomadgee. At the end of this financial year there were 49 clients on Conditional Income Management and we have seen first-hand the improved school attendance and living standards that community members on the BasicsCard enjoy. Some of the improvements we have observed include children bringing snacks and lunches to school, children sporting new clothes, clients reporting a reduction in alcohol consumption and a decrease in gambling.

Many clients attend our office during conferencing and throughout the week to request support for a range of matters. We feel this reflects the growing trust and mutual respect between ourselves as Local Commissioners and community members, and we continue to build upon that foundation. Conference attendance rates have increased from 66.4 percent during the last quarter of the 2016-17 financial year to 79.1 percent during the last quarter of this financial year and clients have told us that they feel safe and supported in the conferencing environment. This year has seen us start to conduct conferences without Deputy Commissioner Curtin's presence. Based on attendance and feedback received, it is clear that empowering us to conduct our conferences alone is a positive move.

The FRC has now been operating in Doomadgee for four years. Many of the clients who were the first to attend the FRC have continued to maintain positive change in their lives and within their families. A number of children have moved on to boarding school, and many of our clients have received assistance through our referrals to support services and appear to be taking a far more proactive role in the welfare of their children.

We have identified many issues which must be tackled in order to further improve school attendance. Some of these issues include conflict between families, fighting, sorry business, poverty, isolation, domestic violence and a lack of community leadership. Thanks to the efforts of Deputy Commissioner Curtin and Local Coordinator Robbie Hazeldine, My Pathway participants are now able to conduct their required weekly 20 hours of activity at the school. The time spent in the classroom is invaluable in assisting with a range of problems such as behavioural issues and preventing children from leaving the classroom. The presence of parents provides additional support to the teachers and teacher-aides, and importantly strengthens the relationship between the school and the community.

During the year we have continued to refer clients to support services including the North and West Remote Health (NWRH) Wellbeing Centre for counselling, Save the Children for parenting assistance, and Deadly Doomadgee Homes for support in the wellbeing of the family in the home environment. Clients may also be referred to the Aboriginal Health Clinic as part of the Doomadgee Community Health Service where they have access to a mental health nurse and alcohol and other drug services. It should be mentioned that despite the availability of these services, we still feel disheartened by many clients who report they have received little or no contact from the services. We see this as a work in progress and feel the overall goal of empowering our community members for a stronger, smarter Doomadgee is being compromised by the perceived lack of effort to support people in need of help.



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Doomadgee State School overall attendance increased from 58.9 percent in term 1 2017 to 62.6 percent in term 1 2018. Unfortunately secondary school attendance remains a challenge. There is little to no support for this age group in Doomadgee. The Youth Hub only caters for young people aged 16 to 25, and the Police-Citizens Youth Club has had to cease operations due to the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council Board not extending its lease. There is no Transition Support Service (TSS) to assist students and their families to navigate the difficult application process required for a child to attend boarding school. We believe that at least one full-time TSS officer is required in the community, particularly given that Doomadgee State School provides an education up to Year 10 only. With our support the FRC Local Coordinator has been spending around 10 hours per week to assist Doomadgee families to complete applications and collect the documentation required to enrol at and attend college/boarding schools. We believe that it is largely through our work with the Doomadgee community over the past year that the number of children now attending colleges and boarding schools has increased from less than 20, to more than 40. This highlights that parents and carers now have an acceptance and understanding of the importance of education continuing beyond year 10.

School attendance for some families who are not within the jurisdiction of the FRC has been extremely low and has had a significant impact on the overall attendance percentages. We believe this is due to our inability to conference those parents and/or carers who are not receiving a welfare payment. This year we have worked closely with the School Attendance Officers (SAOs) to target particular cases of chronic truancy and work on individual case plans to encourage these young people back to school. Some of the initiatives that have been implemented through these meetings include regular open days to invite community members into the school, and a career day to educate parents, carers and students on the pathways to various employment opportunities. The SAOs acknowledge the valuable role the FRC plays in encouraging the involvement of parents and carers in their child's learning journey.

The new look Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) team is working closely with the teachers and Indigenous Education Leader (Local Commissioner Chris Logan) to build on existing communication skills and refine their delivery methods in the classroom. Their strategies are having a positive impact and have resulted in a decline in reported behavioural offences. Commissioner Logan has achieved a great level of success in his role as the Indigenous Education Leader, demonstrating high expectations of his own grandchildren's behaviour and attendance, and mentoring other IEWs to lead by example.

Sorry business has again had a significant impact on school attendance. Sorry business also affects the attendance of FRC clients at conference, and the success of the visiting services such as medical specialists and dentists. Although we support community members taking time to mourn the passing of loved ones, we believe that clear guidelines for the management of sorry business need to be implemented for the community. This would assist families to identify when it is acceptable or not for children to miss school, assist services to avoid confusion around opening hours and enable medical specialists to provide valuable eye and ear treatment for school children.

During the year there have been fewer visits by Centrelink and the Income Management Team. This has affected the efficiency of clients transitioning to the BasicsCard, and has resulted in some confusion among clients requiring support in familiarising themselves with the use of the card.

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There have been positive developments in the community with the completion of the airport project, the construction of nine new community houses and new buildings to accommodate services. There has also been a great deal of work done as part of the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council's beautification project.

In May we were given a wonderful opportunity to network, share stories and build on existing relationships when we all attended the Local Commissioner Development Week held in Cairns. We took part in leadership training and consultations with DATSIP who then visited our community in June to conduct consultations with the Doomadgee service providers and community members on the future of Welfare Reform and the FRC.

We are excited at the prospect of continuing our work in supporting the community to achieve successful educational outcomes. We believe that it is important for us to continue to have the BasicsCard as a tool that can be used to shape our community's views on education, and improve the overall living standards of community members. There are several stories of success as a result of the BasicsCard. Some clients have significantly improved the attendance of their children at school and have turned their lives around. In other cases clients have opted to remain on the card to assist them to manage budgets and plan for future household purchases. It is these positive stories that strengthen our resolve to persist with our hard work and we believe that with the support of the FRC, the community of Doomadgee will continue to achieve positive results, now and in the future.

**Doomadgee Commissioners Christopher Logan, Elaine Cairns, Karen Jupiter, Kaylene O'Keefe, Eleanor Logan and Guy Douglas.**

*Boarding school students at the Doomadgee Airport*

*Tyler Diamond, Heidi Diamond with baby Tyzane Diamond, April Peter Snr, April Peter Jnr, Doomadgee Local Commissioner Elaine Cairns, Jakelyn Ned, Selward Aplin and Ann-Janette Aplin*

