



Community operations

FRC operations in Hope Vale were undertaken by Local Commissioners Victor Gibson, Priscilla Gibson, Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral, Cheryl Cannon, Selina Bowen and Robert Gibson, supported by Acting Local Registry Coordinator Brenden Joinbee and Acting Local Registry Coordinator Josephine Pinder. A report of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Hope Vale Commissioners' report

Our first Hope Vale Commissioners' report presented in 2009 was a short report. We stated that the year had been a challenge, we had seen some improvements, income management was good for some and contested by others, and that we were proud of the work we had done. We have dealt with many complexities and challenges since that time and now here we are, writing our year in review report for the 2019-20 year. We feel very proud that we still sit here, working with our community members to increase our local authority and self-determination. We continue to face much of what we faced in 2009, though the complexity and detail of each challenge changes from year to year. We remain proud of the work we have done, and our commitment remains strong for the future.

The past year has seen our Hope Vale Campus of CYAAA make some very good headway in improving school attendance. Term 4 2019 saw school attendance reach 87.9 percent. Term 1 2020 then reached 88.6 percent. Though we have yet to reach 90 percent or greater as a term average, we look forward to the school achieving that in the near future.

It appears clear that the strategies implemented during the year by Principal Glenn White have worked well to promote student attendance. These strategies include morning pickups which are offered by the school and a walk to school program conducted every second Friday where teachers accompany children to school.

School initiatives which we believe add value are:

- The Adopt-a-Cop program which is building positive relationships between the police and students, school staff, parents, carers, and community members.
- Year 5 Retreat Day which brings children and parents together to partake in organised activities such as team building, discussions on preparation for secondary school, completing scholarship applications, Cape York Partnership (CYP) Leadership Program, setting up student education trust accounts and partaking in the WBC – cultural identity program.
- The incorporation of culture into the school curriculum by teaching the Guugu-Yimidhurr language. The children are taught respect for their clan groups and Elders, which allows them to self-reflect and honour their unique history. Teaching culture in this manner gives the children a way to link the past and the present with meaning through language.
- The CYAAA Behaviour Coach has introduced a handbook 'Face and Creed of School' as a tool to teach behaviour prevention and intervention, providing a vision and set of beliefs to guide the students and school staff in their actions and commitment to learning.

Unfortunately, in March 2020 COVID-19 forced the world into lockdown, and none more so than our Indigenous communities. We learnt a new term – 'social distancing'. During this period Hope Vale saw the arrival of a new police Officer-In-Charge, Amit Singh, who has already demonstrated a strong desire to work with the community and stakeholders to improve behaviours and build a stronger, safer environment.

Whilst many schools around the country were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hope Vale Campus of CYAAA and the Cooktown State High School reopened for Term 2. The schools are

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striving to keep things as normal as possible, offering face to face classes for vulnerable students. We have enjoyed a renewed relationship with the Cooktown State High School, and we are working with the school alongside parents to provide focused support for identified students in need. One of the upsides of the COVID-19 period was that our community students were honoured this year by becoming TV stars for a day, appearing on ABC television singing the 'Coronavirus Song'.

At the end of March concerns were raised when the first of the COVID-19 increased welfare payments (stimulus money) commenced and the community saw a spike in the amount of alcohol being brought into the community. The increase in alcohol consumption has led to an increase in domestic violence incidents. Charges have been laid by police, but offenders will not appear in court until court sittings resume in the future. Excess alcohol consumption has also contributed to noise complaints and disruptive behaviour at party houses in the community despite the social distancing requirements of the Government.

We have committed to continue operating and aiding our community members during the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that it is crucial community members are assisted whilst trying to deal with their continuing challenges in isolation. We perceived that there was a risk to future scheduling of conferences should the current COVID-19 situation worsen and prioritised clients based on child safety and domestic family violence risks which may worsen. Priority has also been given to clients with amend or end applications and voluntary income management clients whose agreements were due to expire in the next three months. Of course, whilst continuing to provide a service to the community, we are practising social distancing and offering every client an opportunity to conference by telephone. This has proven very successful for us with improved overall attendance at conference.

Service providers and many other organisations have been affected by the same complexities as we have in attempting to operate in the COVID-19 environment. The Apunipima Wellbeing Centre continued to provide counselling sessions both face to face and via telephone. COVID-19 has interrupted the delivery of the existing programs such as the Men's and Youth's Groups on country camps, as well as the introduction of a non-residential rehabilitation program to be conducted in community. The CYP O-Hub continued to operate and provide support to community members during this very difficult time. The O-Hub is focusing on providing financial literacy now that there is an increase of money coming into the community, and the Hope Vale Centrelink office has continued to operate during the lockdown period as well.

Pama Futures, a CYP reform agenda incorporating social, economic and cultural development for the people of Cape York commenced the 'Mayi Market', an online food market which has become a big hit in Hope Vale. The Mayi Market offers a choice of family-friendly and healthy boxes of fresh food and produce from local farmers at Cairns prices. This online market has provided our community members with more options for making healthy food choices.

This year we were glad to welcome two new Local Commissioners to our ranks, Robert Gibson and Priscilla Gibson. They bring complementary skills to our work and we feel very fortunate to have such a diverse range of talent within our group.

We are looking forward to next year, under the guidance of FRC Commissioner Williams who has brought us a renewed sense of motivation and purpose. Together with Commissioner Williams, and our Acting Local Registry Coordinator Josephine Pinder, it is time to take the next step in our journey.