



# Community operations Hope Vale

***FRC operations in Hope Vale were undertaken by Local Commissioners Victor Gibson, Priscilla Gibson, Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral, Cheryl Cannon, Selina Kerr-Bowen and Robert Gibson, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Josephine Pinder. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.***

## **Hope Vale Commissioners' report**

Our role as Local Commissioners and Elders is to provide our community members and families access to support services that help them build capability and take responsibility for their lives and their children's lives.

### **Significant achievements**

With the support of our Local Registry Coordinator, Josephine Pinder, and registry staff we list some of our achievements this financial year.

- Client attendance at conferences and hearings has increased by 14 percent from the 2019-20 financial year – recording 64.5 percent attendance for 2020-21. Clients who were once reluctant to come to conference are now presenting, and younger clients are embracing the conferencing process.
- Agreements for case plans have increased by 340 percent. This increase demonstrates our clients' willingness and motivation to enter into joint decision-making – partnering with us to improve their situation.
- Referrals to support services under a Family Responsibilities Agreement or Order have doubled from 29 in 2019-20 to 58 in 2020-21.

Building upon our achievements from 2019-20 we continue to notice signs of change amongst our clients and the broader Hope Vale community. This is evidenced by a decrease in Child Safety and Welfare notices, District Court notices, Housing Tenancy notices and School Attendance notices within jurisdiction received for this reporting period. Our community is proud of our local school. The Hope Vale Campus of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) continues to be ranked highest in the State in terms of primary school attendance. This is consistent with a decrease of 16 percent in the number of School Attendance notices received for unexplained absences. We are delighted to report that the five children with the most improved attendance in Term 4 were children of FRC clients who had attended conference at the end of Term 3 and the beginning of Term 4. We provided intensive support to these families and worked collaboratively with the school to achieve this positive outcome.

The number of clients placed on CIM decreased by 40 percent during this reporting period. This reflects a more collaborative approach to conferencing. CIM orders are imposed as a last resort, and providing our clients are engaging with support services and/or showing progress with their goals, income management as a voluntary option is preferred. The drop in CIM is indicative of the progress our clients are making.

### **A growth in referral pathways**

Together with the assistance of our Local Registry Coordinator, Josephine Pinder, we have partnered with additional service providers. The Cooktown District Community Centre and Life Without Barriers now provide a range of programs to FRC clients. As privacy and confidentiality are paramount, and Hope Vale is a small community, we also offer clients the choice of attending counselling services in either Hope Vale or Cooktown.

For the past year we have frequently invited support services, school personnel and notifying agencies to attend our conferences with relevant clients so that a more informed assessment of their requirements

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could be made, and appropriate referrals progressed. Many clients have complex needs which are best addressed using a holistic approach. We have committed to continually reflect on new ways to provide support to these clients whilst affording them respect, flexibility and engagement. The pathways of clients to treatment services are individualised because we believe that each should be tailored to the client's personal circumstances to achieve the best outcomes.

## Challenges

After COVID lockdown the community was faced with a rise in disengaged students from the Cooktown State High School and students who did not return to boarding school. COVID lockdown disrupted the school routine, and some students are still suffering the consequences. Service providers are working to support these students and their families to re-enroll and re-establish consistent engagement with their education.

The December/January school holidays was a period of unrest in the community with a rise in youth fighting. The children participating in the fighting included some as young as five years of age. It is believed that the COVID environment contributed somewhat to the unrest as sporting programs were disrupted which left children at a loose end. Screen time and the use of social media was increased. The community, Justice Group, police and Elders came together for mediation sessions to address the source of the issues and the gap in availability of activities.

## Other community matters

The Hope Vale Campus of CYAAA worked hard to implement successful strategies to encourage good school attendance and behaviour. A positive behaviour matrix was developed (Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful) for students to identify the meaning of these behaviours and act accordingly.

Recently introduced incentive initiatives demonstrate that well-designed rewards encourage student achievement at relatively low cost. CYAAA introduced a uniform competition for students who came to school every day in full uniform with the opportunity to win a bike. Further incentives included children with 100 percent punctuality and attendance going into a draw to win weekly prizes. Prizes from local businesses included grocery vouchers, meat trays and free coffee for a week. These incentive programs play an important role in encouraging our children to maintain regular attendance. Without our children having a seat in the school room, we cannot educate them and help them to reach their full potential.

Hope Vale CYAAA Homework Club commenced in week 3 of Term 1 2021. The club provides homework support to students, and although attendance has been low, school staff hope to boost numbers in the coming terms. The school encourages parent/carer involvement and utilises the electronic noticeboard erected outside the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council office to promote school events.

## The next 12 months

Our priority for the next year is to continue to find solutions, as part of the broader community, to address the increase in antisocial behaviours of young people. We believe the return of the Children's Court trigger will help us work collectively with parents, the police and our youth, to find these solutions. The community of Hope Vale has a long and proud history of economic participation and development. We are keen to identify more partners who can support Hope Vale youth to transition from school to work, and offer our community members welfare-to-work opportunities.