



# Community operations Mossman Gorge

***FRC operations in Mossman Gorge were undertaken by Local Commissioners Karen Shuan, Loretta Spratt and George Ross-Kelly, supported by Acting Local Registry Coordinator Simeon Miglioranza. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.***

## **Mossman Gorge Local Commissioners' report**

This year we set goals and performance indicators for our Mossman Gorge operations to continue refining our conferencing and improve the way we support and communicate with clients. Our significant achievements listed below are a testament to our increased endeavours in this regard.

### **Significant achievements**

- agreements to attend support services increased from 8 in 2019-20 to 26 in 2020-21, an increase of 225 percent
- orders to attend support services decreased from 20 in 2019-20 to 6 in 2020-21, a decrease of 70 percent.

One of the strategies we are working on to mitigate school absenteeism is to encourage parents to bring their non-attending school-aged child to conference. Depending on the student's age and their ability to participate in the process, this initiative can provide young people (in collaboration with their parents and the school) with an opportunity to voice their own needs and identify appropriate solutions toward improving school attendance. This approach is consistent with section 5(2)(b) of the FRC Act which sets out the principles for administering the Act, and makes provision for the Commission to take into account the views and wishes of children where appropriate. This is a collaborative strategy which requires us to work closely with key staff at the Mossman State High School including the Principal, school Guidance Officer, Youth Worker, and Indigenous School Counsellor to coordinate logistics around attendance and transport.

When we see parents making a concerted effort to change behaviours, whether it be in getting their children to school or looking after their family better, we like to recognise and encourage their efforts. Strategies we have used this year include the delivery of incentive hampers to two families each quarter in recognition of their positive action toward change. A family to whom we had recently delivered a hamper, improved their children's school attendance in Term 2, 2021 to 100 percent.

Another strategy which we have adopted this year as a result of working within a COVID environment is to allow flexibility in the conference location to better engage with clients who are too ashamed, or have previously been reluctant to attend the FRC's local registry office in Mossman Gorge. This new approach has seen an increase of conference attendance from 54.7 percent in 2019-20 to 62.9 percent in 2020-21.

### **Challenges**

The overuse of alcohol remains a problem in Mossman Gorge with visitors from the broader Mossman region using the community as a party place. This has long been an issue for us, and Mossman police report there have been many breaches in relation to alcohol. Our Local Registry Coordinator has been meeting with a coordinated group of services in Mossman and Mossman Gorge (including the police) to source a solution to the problem of these 'party houses'. Gambling is also an issue which we believe is contributing to school absenteeism.

Since we commenced our roles as Local Commissioners in 2008, it is within the last two financial years that we have received the highest Domestic Violence Order (DVO) notices – 27 in 2019-20 and 21 in 2020-21. There is little doubt that DVO is directly related to the abuse of alcohol. It is for that reason we have sought and received certificate training in understanding domestic and family violence (DFV) which will assist us

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significantly in our roles and give us a greater awareness and knowledge on how to approach and start a conversation with clients who may be experiencing DFV. We learnt a new term for what many of us have already witnessed or experienced – cultural domestic and family violence – where a perpetrator exercises dominance, control or coercion over a victim who is particularly vulnerable due to their cultural identity or spirituality. This training has been invaluable in giving us a greater understanding of what is happening for the victims and perpetrators of such abuse.

## **Other community matters**

The Mossman Gorge community has been experiencing intra-family non-alcohol related disputes in relation to youth fights resulting from comments or issues associated with social media – Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Our Local Registry Coordinator has referred families to the Mossman Elders Justice Group to participate in mediation. Mossman Gorge community youth disputes can be exacerbated by relatives getting involved, leading to greater and ongoing community conflict.

We held our annual school awards in collaboration with local services. This year the ceremony was hosted by Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Aboriginal Corporation (BBNAC) and we presented awards to students who had overall highest school attendance for the year. A special award was presented to one particular student in recognition of consistent attendance and academic effort at a boarding school. During this community day the first ever 'Colour Run' was held. The event involved support and assistance provided by local services including BBNAC, Apunipima, the FRC, Yalanji Arts and the Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC). The Colour Run is a five-kilometre run for first time runners and athletes and aims to "Bring people together and make the world a happier, healthier place".

## **Next 12 months**

### ***A reduction in local authority***

This year we lost one of our stalwart Local Commissioners with the retirement of Local Commissioner Karen Shuan who has stepped down from her role to work in the cultural heritage section of Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation. Commissioner Karen Shuan has dedicated many years to the community, and we wish her well with her future endeavours. Unfortunately, Commissioner Shaun's departure has left us with only two Local Commissioners to continue our important work in community. Last financial year we sat as a full panel of three Local Commissioners for 79.7 percent of conferences. With the loss of Commissioner Shuan at the end of this financial year we will cease being able to sit throughout 2021-22 as three Local Commissioners. This means the FRC's full local Indigenous authority in Mossman Gorge has been compromised. The reduced Local Commissioner numbers has also left us with insufficient diversity to represent the different family groups of Mossman Gorge and now means we can only hold conferences with the assistance of Commissioner Williams or Deputy Commissioner Curtin. The FRC registry has advised the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships of our situation and requested more appointments to take effect as of 1 July 2021. Unfortunately, no new Local Commissioners for Mossman Gorge have been appointed.

### ***Tackling youth issues***

Going forward we intend to lobby the Queensland Government for the return of the Children's Court trigger to enable the FRC Local Commissioners, together with parents, concerned community members and young people themselves, to find solutions to the increase in antisocial behaviours by our youngest community members.