

# Community operations Aurukun



***FRC operations in Aurukun were undertaken by Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta and Keri Tamwoy, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Bryce Coxall. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.***

## **Aurukun Commissioners' report**

We continued this year to strengthen engagement between the FRC and key government agencies and support services in Aurukun as we believe it is through these relationships that our clients will benefit. Our relationship with service providers has never been better and we believe this is resulting in improved support for our clients despite the COVID-19 restrictions affecting service delivery. We are glad to report that as at the end of this financial year, the environment in community seems to be getting back to the pre-COVID normal.

## **Significant achievements**

We report what we consider to be significant achievements for the 2021-22 financial year. These achievements are due not only to our efforts as Local Commissioners, but also the support we are provided by Commissioner Williams, Deputy Commissioner Curtin, Local Registry Coordinator Bryce Coxall, and the registry staff in Cairns.

- We believe the best indication of client engagement for us is the number of agreements that were signed with clients compared to the number of orders that were made for clients. 2021-22 saw 136 family responsibilities agreements compared to 123 during the 2020-21 financial year, an increase of 11 percent.
- In 2021-22 we only ordered 40 clients to attend support services compared to 58 in 2020-21, a decrease of 31 percent. This number was significantly down as most of our clients are choosing family responsibilities agreements to seek support.
- The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) continues to provide financial security for many families with 79 voluntary income management agreements for the card in Aurukun compared to 69 in 2020-21, an increase of 14 percent.

## **Challenges**

### ***Impact of COVID-19 and the introduction of ICM***

The last 12 months has been challenging for us, but we continued to work hard to support our clients and community to ensure we are all heading in a positive direction. COVID-19 was the biggest challenge with many organisations not travelling into Aurukun to provide face-to-face support services. The lack of hands-on wellbeing services resulted in increased pressure on our community. Even though our conferencing was delayed in 2022 until March due to the spread of the Omicron variant, we are proud to say that our operations continued throughout this period with the implementation of an Intensive Case Management (ICM) framework as a way to support community members on the ground when other services could not.



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## ***COVID-19 vaccinations***

As stated, our biggest challenge throughout the year was the COVID-19 pandemic – not just for our operations at the FRC, but the impact it had on the greater community. Many Aurukun community members had a fear of vaccinations, and Queensland Health worked well with the community to educate them and reach a 90 percent double vaccination rate. We know this saved countless lives. As FRC Commissioners we were amongst the first to get vaccinated and wherever possible we encouraged community members to do the same, including providing information to our clients during conferencing.

## ***Community unrest***

In early February Aurukun saw significant community unrest between two feuding families which resulted in arson, and one house being completely burnt to the ground. The situation had the potential to further escalate due to retaliation. At the FRC we immediately began work with affected families. Two of the most impacted families opted into our ICM framework. We facilitated a forum to link the families in with service providers and we continue to monitor their progress and encourage them to engage with these services. We would like to thank the police in Aurukun during this time who provided great support to the FRC and local families. Their timely and committed intervention assisted in avoiding escalation of the unrest.

## ***School attendance and youth crime***

Aurukun school attendance figures are at an all-time low, with previous issues affecting attendance compounded by the fear of COVID-19. Low school attendance has led to non-attending children out on the streets, creating mischief with break and enters and vandalism to property. This group of disengaged youth continue to be the primary age group where community unrest begins. We see the only way to tackle this issue is for the FRC to have the Childrens Court trigger reinstated so that we can begin working directly with the youth and their parents/carers to promote positive change.

## ***Sorry business***

Consecutive weeks of sorry business have also had a huge impact on school attendance. We are currently working with DSDSATSIP and the Aurukun Shire Council on a community sorry business protocol. The protocol will provide clear guidelines for families around what is expected in relation to school attendance during sorry business time. It's a very sensitive topic but a huge issue that needs to be addressed if we are going to see school attendance improve.

## ***Other community matters***

### ***Cashless Debit Card***

We continue to share information on the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and work with community members to ensure they have current details and knowledge on the benefits of voluntary participation. We have noticed an uptake of clients who were previously given an income management order now signing up to a voluntary CDC. That is proof that even community members originally ordered onto the CDC by the FRC recognised the benefits that the card offers and translated that into participating on a voluntary basis. Many residents in Aurukun's aged care facility are also voluntarily participating in the CDC, reinforcing the importance of the CDC in protecting vulnerable community members' money.

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## ***Aurukun Justice Group***

We were pleased to see the Aurukun Justice Group fill two vacant positions to allow for the mediation service to become operational again. Michael Quinn and Katherine Gardiner are leading the mediation team and we are excited that they have already reached out to work closely with us. The mediation service is vital for Aurukun to defuse family disputes that can lead to whole of community unrest, and we will endeavour to continue to enhance our relationship so that we work together to maintain a healthy community environment.

## **FRC Future Directions Review**

Again, we are being subjected to a review of our operations in Aurukun, commissioned by DSDSATSIP. These reviews, which we have been the subject of numerous times, bring unnecessary stress and impact upon our operations. Originally, we were told the review would be held in November 2021, and with minimal contact or information on the review it was frustrating that nothing happened on the ground in Aurukun until May 2022.

We were happy that the reviewers took the time to come and observe an FRC conference, had lunch with us and consulted with us to get our perspective on the FRC and how it can be improved. We remain sceptical as to whether (and what) changes may occur from this current review, as previous reviews have neither guaranteed lengthy extensions, nor altered our processes.

Many of us have been with the FRC since its inception and have remained consistently in the service of our community through the many ups and downs over the last 14 years. At times our work is hard to capture in data alone, but we know the Aurukun we live in today is a very different Aurukun to the one we lived in before the FRC began in 2008. We hope that the review will capture that and the important role the FRC plays in Aurukun.

## **The next 12 months**

We are happy to report that on 5 May 2022, three new Local Commissioners were appointed to Aurukun – Dereck Walpo, Kemuel Tamwoy and Waynead Wolmby. We welcome our new brother Commissioners and look forward to them joining us as decision-makers in the next financial year following induction and training.

We eagerly await the outcome of the FRC Future Directions Review to see what the future is for the FRC. While we wait, we will continue our work in community to improve the lives of our community members. We will continue to promote the CDC and refer our clients on a case-by-case basis for support. We intend to grow our ICM framework to include more clients and their families as it appears already, in a short time, the framework has been effective in promoting positive change. The antisocial issues which Aurukun has suffered from for many years are never going to be fixed overnight, but we are committed to supporting our clients to make the changes necessary to improve their lives and protect the children of Aurukun.