

Community operations Doomadgee



FRC operations in Doomadgee were undertaken by Local Commissioners Christopher Logan, Eleanor Logan, Elaine Cairns, Kaylene O’Keefe, Guy Douglas, Isabel Toby and Dawn Aplin, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Brenden Joinbee. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Doomadgee Commissioners’ report

Last year our focus was to enhance our working relationship with the community to create a greater understanding of what we wished to accomplish as Local Commissioners for the benefit of our community members. We will continue to build this relationship, identify gaps in service and advocate for needed changes.

Significant achievements

When this financial year commenced, we set out a number of goals that we wished to achieve. The ones we are most proud of are:

- voluntary income management agreements have increased 100 percent from the 2020-21 financial year
- conference attendance has increased by 2.9 percent from 2020-21 (57.2 percent in 2020-21 to 60.1 percent in 2021-22).

We continue to see our clients requesting to go on the Cashless Debit Card on a voluntary basis, as they recognise the benefits of the card in managing their funds and planning for future needs.

Challenges

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to be a challenge for us during this reporting period. Many community members contracted COVID-19 outside the community and then returned, which led to an increase in community transmission. Our conferencing functions in Doomadgee during 2022 were also curtailed due to the pandemic, only recommencing in March, however, we ensured that we were still available to engage with our clients during this difficult period.

School attendance

Unfortunately, the community transmission of COVID-19 had a huge impact on school attendance as families were reluctant to send their children to school for fear of contracting and spreading the virus further. Staffing levels at the school were severely impacted by COVID-19, affecting the school’s ability to operate to full efficiency. To assist the Doomadgee State School address the non-attendance of Doomadgee children, we have started to participate in the school bus run, when able, to encourage more children to attend and resume their education. It is well known that chronic absenteeism is linked with substance abuse and poor health, as well as low grades and failing at school. School related anxiety then leads to depression and other mental health conditions for our children. Our children deserve to have the same opportunities



Community operations Doomadgee

as children in mainstream society and we believe education and employment are key elements to access these opportunities. We want our children to go to boarding school and continue their education and training outside of Doomadgee in the hope that it will provide a more positive life for them and their families.

Sorry business

Sorry business continues to affect our community. We believe that sorry business protocols must be established with the leadership of our local Council and negotiated with the community and the Doomadgee State School. Until the whole community agrees on a shared strategy to ensure our children, whilst respecting sorry business, do not miss out on too many school days, the school attendance in Doomadgee will continue to be affected.

Lack of trigger notices

Another challenge we have faced as Local Commissioners for Doomadgee is the lack of trigger notices we receive. As we have mentioned in previous reports, we only receive three trigger notices upon which we can act – school non-enrolment, school non-attendance and child safety and welfare. We feel that we are restricted and are doing our job with one arm tied behind our backs. If we received the additional trigger notices that other FRC communities have, we feel we could better meet our clients' needs and address family issues in a more holistic way.

Youth crime

Youth crime continues to plague our community. Children break into properties and destroy buildings. We need more youth support services in Doomadgee to help address delinquent behaviour. If we were able to use the Childrens Court trigger which exists within the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* under section 43, we would be able to discuss these issues with parents/carers and find solutions for the family as a whole, and also the children who are participating in these illegal activities.

Other community matters

Reintroduction of Opal fuel

A positive for our community is that since the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council made the decision to reintroduce Opal fuel to the community, we have seen a significant decrease in the amount of volatile substance misuse by our young people.

Cashless Debit Card

In August we helped facilitate an information day for the community relating to the new Cashless Debit Card (CDC) that was introduced to the community in March 2021. The information day allowed us to discuss the new card with our clients and other community members and gave us the opportunity to not only discuss the benefits of the card, but also answer any questions that people had regarding the CDC and the impact it would have upon them if they chose to participate. As part of the promotion of the CDC the Department of Social Services engaged Lonestar to attend our community and interview clients who were on the card. We are proud to say that these interviews now form part of the Department's promotional videos that run in the Northern Territory.

Community operations Doomadgee



Working with the Police

The police continue to be a strong ally for us in the community. We enjoy working with the police as both of our organisations aim to ensure that our community and our people are safe. We regularly meet with Doomadgee police officers to discuss issues in the community and work with them to find solutions to issues that arise.

FRC Future Directions Review

In June 2021 Minister Craig Crawford wrote to us to advise that the Queensland Government would undertake yet another review of the FRC. In 2014, after an extensive consultation, the Doomadgee community signed up for the FRC. The FRC was proposed as a way to help combat significant challenges in our community including poor school attendance and substance misuse. The Doomadgee community chose the FRC model. We know that having our people lead the change, not government agencies or service providers, is the only way that social reform can work. The FRC is the start of the change that allows our people to lead by re-establishing Elder Authority, instead of having the government make all the decisions in regard to our community. We have given those in our community who are struggling a place to come, talk and seek support, and we have the means to give them that support through referrals to support services, income management, and sometimes by just lending them an ear.

We can see there is much more we could achieve through the FRC if we had the wholehearted support of government. We hope that the outcome of this review will lead to the introduction of the full range of triggers in Doomadgee, and a permanent place for the FRC. Give us the tools to take the FRC as far as we know it can go.

The next 12 months

We are happy to report that on 5 May 2022, three new Local Commissioners were appointed to Doomadgee – Virginia Collins, Lila Cairns and Wendy Taylor. We welcome our new sister Commissioners and look forward to working with them as they complete their induction and training. We are thankful to see our ranks expanding and know that collectively our life experiences and various strengths will build our capability.

Over the next 12 months we will be continuing to work alongside My Pathway to ensure that our community, and especially our young people, have the opportunity to participate in meaningful employment and training. We believe that increasing employment in Doomadgee will lead to increasing community participation and economic wellbeing.

We have a good working relationship with the Doomadgee State School, and we intend to continue capitalising on this relationship by offering whatever assistance we can to encourage parents and students to value education and its role in improving life outcomes. School attendance is frequently influenced by many factors including domestic and family violence, substance abuse and child neglect. We will continue to barrack for the full suite of triggers available to other communities in order to tackle the issues causing school absenteeism.

Our relationship with the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council has strengthened over the past year and we will continue to work with our Council to ensure that Doomadgee has the best outcomes possible.