



Community operations Hope Vale

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

Hope Vale Commissioners' report

As we look back at the 2022-23 financial year, we are greatly encouraged with the outstanding achievements we report for our community.

Significant achievements

With the support of our Local Registry Coordinator, Josephine Pinder, and registry staff we list some of our achievements for this financial year. Even though some of the statistics reported are small in number we believe in early intervention as a way to support families and children.

- In the 2021-22 financial year we recorded the highest conference attendance rate since the commencement of the Commission (76 percent). With conference attendance reaching 81.6 percent in 2022-23 we have once again surpassed that figure. We are very proud of this increase as we believe it demonstrates our clients' willingness to embrace the opportunity to discuss their matters with us and it is this engagement which leads to positive outcomes.
- In 2022-23 33 family responsibilities agreements were entered into compared to 9 in 2021-22 an increase of 267 percent. The increase of family responsibilities agreements is a positive indication that clients acknowledge that change is required to improve their circumstances and those of their children.
- Voluntary income management agreements are another tool embraced by clients with a rise from 14 in 2021-22 to 21 in 2022-23, an increase of 50 percent from the last financial year. We commend our clients for their ability to make meaningful decisions for themselves.
- Self-determination and continued willingness of FRC clients to seek support is confirmed by the 100 percent increase in voluntary case plan agreements from the 2021-22 financial year to this financial year, increasing from 4 in 2021-22 to 8 in 2022-23.

Challenges

Youth crime

Unfortunately, this year Hope Vale has experienced an escalation of anti-social youth behaviours leading to an increase in reported (and unreported) offending including break-ins, vandalism, and disengagement from school. The break and enters are placing the community in jeopardy of losing support services affected by the crime. Mediation utilising the traditional lore process has occurred with families in an attempt to provide support in dealing with the crime issue, with some success advised by the Mayor of Hope Vale.

The FRC attended a youth meeting on 23 November 2022 called by the Thurrpiil Community Justice Group and hosted by the Mayor of the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council (HVASC) following growing concerns regarding youth issues generally. The meeting was attended by senior members of HVASC, government officials, service provider partners and members of

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the community. Numerous strategies, actions and solutions were discussed, and we were able to provide clarification on the limitations of our jurisdiction to deal with children who have been convicted before a Childrens Court. Participants at the meeting expressed their support for the reinstatement of the Childrens Court trigger which the Family Responsibilities Commission has been unable to enact since 1 July 2016 due to an oversight of the legislative amendments to the *Youth Justice Act 1992*. The Childrens Court trigger would allow Local Commissioners to speak with the parents and carers of offending children to address their behaviours.

In 2023 youth crime remained prevalent and in February 2023 the Justice Group brought community members and stakeholders together to address the issue. A contributing factor to the crime rate were children from families experiencing domestic violence incidents, drinking and partying, with parents not taking responsibility for their children and even denying their children's involvement in the crime. Long-term disengaged high school students have also been reported to be enticing primary school students out of class reinforcing our belief that these disengaged school students would benefit from a bridging program to enable them to re-enter mainstream schooling.

Our Local Registry Coordinator commenced discussions with representatives of the Hope Vale Foundation highlighting the need for an educational bridging program in Hope Vale for long-term disengaged high school students. Further discussions and planning for a bridging program continued at a meeting facilitated by the Cooktown State School. Those who attended included the Rinyirru (Lakefield) Aboriginal Corporation, a Regional Youth Support Coordinator from the Youth Engagement Team of Education Queensland, the Hope Vale Foundation and members of HVASC. The Hope Vale Foundation informed of their capacity to establish and fund a bridging school program in Hope Vale and advised that they were currently seeking suitable premises to conduct classes. Discussions included what would constitute a culturally appropriate program which would include literacy and numeracy, on country activities linking in with traditional owners and ranger groups, horticulture, sports, art, and work readiness activities.

School attendance

Ensuring children attend school on a consistent basis is a high priority for us Hope Vale Local Commissioners. Developing a school ready routine is of major importance in getting children to school and we believe is best established at a young age. We are happy to report that some strategies and projects have been implemented to assist with developing school ready routines for parents and young children. In September 2022 the Partnerships Facilitator (Early Years) from the Department of Education, and our Local Registry Coordinator joined forces to host a kindergarten open day at the George Bowen Memorial Kindergarten. The event was planned to bring together parents, children, and service providers and was well attended. Attendees were welcomed to the event by FRC Local Commissioner Priscilla Gibson and Mayor Jason Woibo who assisted in showcasing the facility and the resources available. Commissioner Priscilla Gibson has had a long association with the facility and her qualifications in early childhood education were an integral part of the establishment of the kindergarten. Service providers were very keen to meet parents and children and present information relating to the multitude of services they provide. Children received care packs which included nutrition tips, water bottles, shirts, hats, and story books.

The event achieved its intended outcomes including an increased number of enrolments for 2023. Unfortunately, it was reported that even though enrolments had increased the attendance rate was not satisfactory. To encourage kindergarten attendance and commence the enrolment



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process for 2024 an 'Early Years Community Event' was held in May and extended to include children up to 5 years old. The event was not well attended, reinforcing that further engagement is needed to instil the importance of education commencing early in a student's life to establish a love of learning.

The HVASC, community members and service providers raised concerns about long-term school absences and the correlation between disengaged students, reduced opportunities, increased risk of substance abuse and youth crime. This led to the creation of our Elevated School Response (ESR) strategy, a grass roots project as an early intervention approach to support families and improve future economic opportunities for the children of Hope Vale. ESR commenced in week 1 of Term 2 2023. FRC Local Commissioner Robert Gibson and the Good to Great Schools Student Case Manager conducted home visits to meet with families and to have conversations to identify barriers to improving school attendance or engaging back into the school system. Data was collected and monitored weekly. We are happy to report that by week 7 of Term 2 the project was showing signs of success. School attendance will be monitored and ESR implemented as needed.

Other community matters

In September 2022 we met with a team of 30 members of the Far West Coast Community Partnerships team, Guugu Yimithirr Alliance members and Cape York Partnership O-Hub staff in Hope Vale. The group included youth workers, education specialists and support members and community leaders. With the Cashless Debit Card being abolished in their regions, the focus of the group for this trip was on education, to learn from Cape York how we have tackled the "wicked" problem of school non-attendance, how to support the educational needs of their children and the impact disengagement from education has on social variants – health, housing, employment, and justice. This group are incredibly passionate. They had done their research and asked very relevant and focussed questions and left having established some theories to enable future progress. They will be the ones to make the changes in their communities to aspire to a different future.

Local Commissioner Selina Kerr-Bowen's talents extend to events coordinator and two events which are now highlighted as annual events in the Hope Vale community calendar are International Women's Day in March and Mother's Day lunch in May. The women of Hope Vale are treated to lunch, entertainment and given the opportunity to share their stories with family and friends.

The next 12 months

The FRC has evolved over the past 15 years. We pride ourselves on offering a safe space for our clients to discuss matters without judgement, enabling clients to consider options to address priority needs. With positive statistics reported in our 2022-23 data, we will endeavour to maintain and build on the progress we are making to take our community into the future. A priority for us is the reinstatement of the Childrens Court trigger, a tool we are currently unable to utilise, which would enable us to guide and assist our youth on their journey into adulthood.

Our vision is to promote the work of the FRC within our community, regionally and to all government levels. An expansion of FRC into other communities and troubled suburban areas in Queensland would be testament to the progress we are proud of.