



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, Kathryn (Dora) Gibson and Robert Gibson, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Kate Gooding. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Hope Vale Commissioners' report

This year we embraced the Client Engagement approach and changing needs of our clients with increased voluntary engagements outside of the traditional conference setting. We built on our capacity to assist community members to implement positive behaviour change and to take up responsibility for themselves and their families through voluntary income management and voluntary case plans, as evidenced in the statistics and report that follows.

Significant achievements

- In 2023-24 with the implementation of client engagement at the start of the 2024 calendar year, we recorded 122 client engagement activities for the remaining six months of the financial year relating to 60 clients. There has been a significant increase in client engagement activities this financial year with 502¹ interactions relating to 162² clients
- The number of voluntary agreements to attend a support service has increased to 40, a significant increase from previous years with 8 in 2022-23 and 27 in 2023-24
- These voluntary case plan agreements comprise 41 voluntary referrals to service providers
- A significant number of these voluntary referrals, 35 of them have been made in this calendar year since 1 January 2025
- The number of voluntary income management agreements remained steady at 21, compared to 19 in 2023-24.

Elevated School Response

The Elevated School Response (ESR) strategy was designed in alignment with the FRC Strategic Plan 2023-2027 to meet the objective: Support the restoration of socially responsible standards of behaviour and local authority in welfare reform communities. This was achieved by implementing the strategy to continue to implement proactive and agile responses to changing community needs that reflect all functions of the FRC Act. The aim of the ESR strategy is to encourage school engagement and improve attendance for children residing in Hope Vale with the purpose of investing in education to build a strong foundation for children and communities, in turn contributing to achieving some of the socio-economic targets outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

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1. This figure records the total number of all client engagement activities undertaken in Hope Vale by the FRC to support clients outside of conference. These include both contact and non-contact activities. Of these, 15 instances were related to administrative support including preparation for upcoming client engagements and 106 instances involved unsuccessful attempts to engage with a client for the following reasons: medical, no longer living in community, not suitable time, out of the community, in prison, sorry business, substance affected/aggressive and unable to locate.
 2. This figure records the total number of Hope Vale community members identified with a client engagement activity outside of conference inclusive of contact and non-contact activities.

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The ESR was facilitated as a strategy for driving self-determination. It serves as an early intervention strategy to empower families to take personal responsibility, and to achieve better outcomes for children in the community. The ESR strategy focused on specific target groups including children with 60 to 80 per cent school attendance who could benefit from additional support to improve their school attendance, and children who are disengaged from school. Focusing on these target groups aims to support progress towards achieving the Closing the Gap outcomes, enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their full learning potential and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to engage in employment or education.

The ESR strategy also specifically targeted children eligible for kindergarten and prep in 2025. Enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to participate in early childhood education and care is vital for supporting future development and helping children to be strong members of their families and communities. Early childhood education supports cognitive development and social and emotional maturity and can improve a child's lifelong outcomes across health, education and wellbeing. The FRC has been informed the Hope Vale George Bowen Memorial Kindergarten is at full capacity, with 25 children enrolled. Additionally, the FRC assisted in supporting enrolments for children eligible for Prep, with all 27 eligible children being enrolled into early education. To support this transition to schooling and strive towards better outcomes, there were multiple referrals to a prep-readiness program through the Cooktown District Community Centre to assist in establishing school-ready routines. This worked towards achieving a key outcome of improved access to and early engagement in early childhood education. Focusing on this target group supports efforts to achieve the Closing the Gap target to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling early childhood education to 95 per cent.

Challenges

Disengaged youth and lack of appropriate youth programs

Disengaged youth remains a concern in Hope Vale. Due to the lack of community-based, targeted youth programs, we have been focusing on support for clients and their families to address the underlying causal factors leading to their children's disengagement from the school system. There are further concerns that some of these disengaged young people are participating in youth crime within the community and becoming at-risk of entering the criminal justice system.

There is a need for targeted interventions and support systems that can effectively address the root causes of youth crime. We have been advocating for a youth hub for disengaged youth to attend, where they can be supported with finding suitable pathways towards training, employment and opportunities. We have also been advocating for On Country programs for young people with targeted interventions focused on self-determination, cultural connection, and resilience, whilst also addressing trauma and promoting healing.

Addressing the needs of long-term disengaged school students, and those who are committing crimes in the community, requires a multifaceted approach. Children disengaging from school and becoming at-risk of entering the criminal justice system can stem from complex issues. These can include social and economic disadvantage, lack of access to education and support services, lack of parenting foundations, and family dysfunction such as Domestic and Family Violence.



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Culturally appropriate parenting programs

There is a lack of community-based, culturally appropriate parenting programs in Hope Vale, with the only current referral options being for programs outside of the community. Culturally appropriate parenting programs are crucial because they acknowledge and respect unique cultural values, beliefs and practices that shape cultural parenting and child-rearing. Raising children is viewed as a holistic process, encompassing spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing. Culturally appropriate parenting programs are highly relevant as they emphasise the role of extended family, kin and community in raising children. These programs are designed to be relevant and effective by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, trauma-informed practices and promoting positive outcomes for both children and families.

Domestic and family violence

In the 2024-25 reporting period the FRC received 63 Domestic Violence Order notices and 45 Domestic Violence Breach notices within jurisdiction for Hope Vale. The continuing high prevalence of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) matters in the community remains a grave concern. DFV significantly impacts the entire family and the wider community. Exposure to DFV can profoundly impact a child's school attendance and academic performance, leading to poorer overall outcomes. Children exposed to DFV are more likely to miss school due to trauma, fear and instability at home. The trauma of DFV can also impact a child's ability to focus and concentrate in class. The FRC is committed to addressing DFV by providing relevant referrals to support services, as well as strengthening relationships with DFV service providers, law enforcement, the council and other key organisations contributing towards prevention and early intervention. These connections are crucial for creating a coordinated response to DFV within the community.

Other community matters

Increase in Client Engagement interactions

The focus on Client Engagement outside of the conference setting has resulted in a high number of positive interactions with FRC clients (502 client engagement activities), relating to 162 clients. Voluntary participation in referrals and income management has continually risen, with 41 voluntary referrals to support services and 21 voluntary income management agreements. Our clients increased willingness to accept and engage with supports on a voluntary basis is an indicator of resuming personal responsibility and self-determination over their own lives.

Increased voluntary referrals to support services

There were high numbers of referrals to community support services such as Cape York Partnerships OHub (21 referrals) and the Cooktown District Community Centre (13 referrals) with the remaining referrals consisting of 5 referrals to the Apunipima Wellbeing Centre and 1 referral each to Gungarde and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. These programs offer a wide range of support services, encompassing money management, social and emotional wellbeing counselling, drug and alcohol support, domestic violence support for both perpetrators and victims, as well as men's and women's groups for comprehensive wrap around supports. Although these services exist, the FRC continues to advocate for increased community-based, culturally appropriate services in these areas.

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Improved financial outcomes

Voluntary income management remains an essential tool for our clients, including those who are vulnerable and elderly, in managing personal finances, fostering financial stability and protecting payments. Many community members who participate in voluntary income management also opt into voluntary case plans to Cape York Partnerships Opportunity Hub (OHub). In the 2024-25 financial year, there have been 21 voluntary referrals to the Hope Vale OHub, an increase of 600% from the 3 recorded in the previous financial year and is highest number of voluntary referrals to any support service in 2024-25. By voluntarily participating in these case plans, community members gain access to personalised budgeting assistance and financial counselling tailored to their unique circumstances. Community members participating in income management have an increased ability to prioritise essential expenses, save for future goals, and enhance overall money management skills, leading to better control and stability over their finances. Voluntary income management fosters a sense of empowerment and accountability, empowering community members to take control of their financial wellbeing and make informed decisions about their finances. Overall, voluntary income management plays a crucial role in promoting financial resilience and independence among participants.

The next 12 months

Over the next 12 months our focus will be on improving outcomes for young people within the community. With the resumed powers under the FRC Act and the reinstatement of the Childrens Court trigger, we will be able to support families and intervene when youth crime occurs. Our ESR strategy also supports young people to have access to quality education and provides support to prevent school disengagement, a key factor in youth offending. We will be able to intervene more effectively, provide crucial support and case plan referrals to address the root causes of youth offending.

We will also focus on further developing our Client Engagement approach over the next year. There is statistical evidence through increased voluntary agreements that community members are being empowered to take personal responsibility and restore socially responsible standards of behaviour. We are committed to maintaining this level of engagement with the community to create meaningful, lasting change and ultimately improve outcomes for the people in Hope Vale. We will continue to increase the recognition of the FRC as a model of self-determination.