

Preamble Noel Pearson



The Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) remains an important innovation. Lessons have been learnt since its inception and key insights are ready to scale.

In 2007, the Coalition Australian government under Prime Minister John Howard enacted complementary legislation to Labor Premier Anna Bligh's Queensland government, which legislated the FRC to mandate family obligations. The Commission tackles the corrosion of responsibility caused by the passive welfare system—by obliging school attendance, children's welfare and other obligations under the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008*.

It uniquely:

1. Joins the power of the federal welfare system together with the state's service delivery system.
2. Gives local leaders—Local Commissioners – the authority to make decisions about interventions and supports that oblige basic family responsibilities. This includes the power to impose Conditional Income Management when needed.

The FRC is one of the crucial pillars of the Cape York Welfare Reform. This reform is premised on the objective that in order to break the cycle of disadvantage and social breakdown – families and individuals need to build capabilities. Capabilities are built through the availability of opportunities and the taking of responsibility. Opportunities are usually provided from outside of the family, but responsibility must come from within. When the two combine, that's when the power of capabilities is engaged. That's when families can rebuild and change the life chances of their children.

Cape York Welfare Reform has proven that babies born at the bottom of Australian society—where disadvantage is entrenched, cyclical and intergenerational—can close the gap by the age of 21. It need not take generations. They do this by being supported by loving families, by getting good early childhood and primary school education, and completing Year 12. They then get jobs or undertake further study or training so that they close the income earning gap as young adults. Then they're ready to start their journey of asset building through home ownership.

In FRC communities we see individuals and families who want a different life trajectory for their children, stepping up to take responsibility. They get their children to school. They are budgeting their money. They are creating safe homes for their children.

Taking responsibility alone is not enough to close the gap. It is necessary, but not sufficient.

The gap truly closes for young people by the age of 21, when individuals and families step up to take responsibility, and opportunities rise to meet them. Crucial opportunities such as access to good schools and employment are required, just as other Australians expect.

The FRC's success obliging responsibility, if met with guaranteed opportunity in return, holds the key through which closing the gap in a single generation will become the norm.

I look forward to working closely with the FRC and its Local Commissioners, to build on its success to date. Further reforms are needed for Australia to break the cycle keeping so many First Nations people, and other Australians too, stuck at the bottom.

Noel Pearson