

CAPE YORK WELFARE REFORM

Consultation Report

Report to

**The Honourable Curtis Pitt MP
Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships**

and

**The Honourable Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs**

BACKGROUND

The Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) Trial (the Trial) commenced in July 2008 under a tripartite agreement between the Australian and Queensland Governments and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYI). The trial aims to restore positive social norms, re-establish local Indigenous authority, enable children to achieve their full potential, support engagement in the real economy, and move individuals and families from welfare housing to home ownership. The trial operates in Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge with the support of local stakeholders.

Key components of the trial include:

- The Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) is a statutory body established under the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* (the Act), which will expire on 1 January 2012. The FRC operates to restore local Indigenous authority and restore positive social norms, through attaching behavioural obligations to receipt of welfare payments. The FRC Commissioner and Local Indigenous Commissioners hold conferences with local people, who are ‘notified’ to the FRC for failing to enrol and send children to school, coming to the attention of the Department of Communities for a child safety matter, being convicted of an offence in the Magistrates Court and failing to remedy a breach of a tenancy arrangement.
- The provision of a range of community services and educational, economic development, employment and housing initiatives. The operation of wellbeing centres; parenting programs; anti-violence, drug and alcohol services; and school Attendance Case Managers are particularly critical to the successful outcomes of FRC clients. Other funded activities focus on school and working age populations and social housing tenants in the four communities.

Analysis by the Trial partners’ suggested there would be benefit of extending the Trial for a year beyond its original end date of December 2012. Reasons for considering an extension include this would enable consolidation of programs that support the safety, wellbeing and welfare of the people in the Trial communities, in particular, women and children.

An extension would also provide adequate time for programs to take effect given earlier delays in planned service provision which delayed the commencement of the Trial. For example, CYWR Wellbeing Centres, which are crucial to FRC client referrals, required the construction of facilities and staff accommodation and staff recruitment before services could be delivered. These services commenced at various times in each community between October 2008 and April 2009.

An extension would also provide adequate time for the results of the independent evaluation to be considered in determining the future arrangements of the Trial.

Trial partners conducted consultation to inform partners of stakeholders views about an extension. This consultation process was led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait

CAPE YORK WELFARE REFORM TRIAL EXTENSION – Consultation Report

Additional stakeholders consulted included the service providers in the Trial communities, the FRC Commissioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and staff and Cape York regional organisations.

Key stakeholders consulted include Mayors and community leaders, community justice groups, and community members, service providers, relevant Queensland and Australian Government agencies, FRC Commissioners and staff, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian and relevant unions. A list of stakeholders consulted is provided at Appendix 2.

The FRC staff, Commissioners and Local Commissioners were consulted. The Local Commissioners were consulted in separate teleconferences in their community groupings. David Glasgow, Commissioner, Rod Curtin, Deputy Commissioner, Tammy Sovenyhazi, Registrar and Sharon Newcomb, Principal Case Manager and representatives from the tripartite partners also participated in the teleconferences. All the Local Commissioners currently actively sitting at conferences provided feedback.

OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

Key outcomes from the consultation include:

- a. The Trial is seen as having a positive effect on behaviour of community members, with community members seeing more children going to school, people regularly paying rent and communities generally quieter, than before the Trial commenced.
- b. The Trial has been a key driver of improved school attendance and school readiness in the communities. The focus on school attendance and valuing education needs to continue. The value of the opportunity products aimed at schooling and education, including Student Education Trusts, was widely accepted and supported.
- c. While it has taken community members time to realise how the FRC worked, people now understand how the FRC can assist in addressing their problems.
- d. People know now where to access help. The Trial has created new avenues including the FRC, the local program offices and the village opportunity hubs, for people to seek assistance.

The predominant themes from the community consultations are:

- “we are on the way, but we are not there yet” (Aurukun leader)
- “we are not yet at the top of the hill but we are getting there, we need some more time” (Hope Vale FRC Commissioner)
- “communities have been in the process of developing welfare reform and it has taken time to put things together” (Aurukun Councillor)
- “[if the Trial were to stop] it would be like the other government services – we just get used to them and then they are taken away” (Mossman Gorge community member).

Dissenting Views

CAPE YORK WELFARE REFORM TRIAL EXTENSION – Consultation Report

Five Queensland unions were consulted and all stated their support for the Trial to continue (with the exception of one which wanted to ensure members were consulted before providing a position) based on the positive outcomes being achieved for children in the Trial communities.

Independent Schools Queensland and the Catholic Education Council were also consulted and raised no issues for their representative schools if the Trial was to be extended.

Government Champions were consulted and their support officers participated in the consultation process. The Champions were supportive of the Trial continuing noting the positive changes being made in relation to school attendance, people seeking assistance for problems through the services offered and the increased number of services in the Trial communities.

RESPONSES BY KEY QUESTIONS

What have been the benefits of CYWR?

The overwhelming majority of those consulted outlined the benefits of CYWR to be the improved situation for children of the community, the programs that are assisting people with financial and personal problems and the improvement in the general atmosphere of the communities.

All consulted agreed that school attendance had improved. In Coen where school attendance has always been high, school readiness has increased – for example, on the day that the consultation team visited Coen all children at school that day had a packed lunch. All agreed that the educational opportunities provided through the trial, including Student Education Trusts had benefited families and children. People were also supportive of the Direct Instruction method of teaching where it had been introduced through the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy.

Other benefits cited by those consulted in the communities included that the communities are quieter now with less partying (Mossman Gorge), more men are becoming actively involved in supporting their families and children (Mossman Gorge, Hope Vale and Coen), community members have more confidence in themselves and are making changes (Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge) and the Basics Card is ensuring money is available for food for the family (Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge).

Government agencies and non-government organisations involved in service delivery in the communities reported that the services provided through the Trial have supported community members to be able to better manage finances and care for their children.

Are social norms changing?

Responses to this question included:

People in Coen and Hope Vale commented that the FRC is seen as a “toothless tiger”, and should be able to intervene in a preventative way, including at courts.

There was some confusion about the length of orders made, why some people were on income management and views that the FRC is seen as ‘double punishment’. An example provided is when a person is convicted for an alcohol carriage offence and receives a penalty or a fine and they come before the FRC (as a result of their conviction in the Magistrates Court) which may then order income management (where Centrelink manages a percentage of their welfare payment on a Basics Card which can only be used to buy essentials such as food, clothing or petrol) as a result.

Community members in Coen, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge in particular, felt that income management was a positive thing and that money is always available for food and medications. Hope Vale raised criticisms of income management including that it limits money for travel and the amount of spending money available for children at boarding school. Hope Vale councillors also raised the issue that having people on income management is another form of dependence.

Mossman Gorge and Coen service providers felt that increased communication from the FRC regarding outcomes of interactions with clients would be beneficial.

Explanations offered by service providers for the negative views about the FRC included that:

- Those that have been personally affected by the FRC may have responded negatively, particularly in Hope Vale.
- If people are negative about the FRC it shows that people are being expected to make behaviour change and this is an uncomfortable process for many.

What would happen to the community if CYWR stopped?

Overwhelmingly those consulted felt that the journey of CYWR had not reached a point where the momentum created to date could sustain ongoing positive changes in the communities.

Common comments included that the communities would go backwards, that the community would revert to the “old” days where drinking and children not attending school, or falling asleep at school.

The community is in the process of developing CYWR and it has taken time to put things together.

A key theme of the discussions was that a long term view must be taken in relation to the Trial and that things won’t change overnight. It was made clear to the consultation team that communities feel that programs are regularly implemented by government and when they don’t work quickly then the programs are stopped. Stakeholders were concerned that this would decrease faith in the government and reinstate the distrust that communities have for government. A point raised in

in place the enablers for home ownership, and implementation of supported self help programs to address gambling, family violence and child reunification) and a focus on economic opportunity initiatives and improved employment.

This was reinforced throughout the consultation, particularly in Hope Vale and Aurukun.

The Mossman Gorge consultation showed that the Trial had increased local employment, with local people employed in a range of Trial initiatives across the community.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATION

The analysis of the consultation and statistical information suggested the Trial needed to be extended. Reasons include:

- Time for consolidation of programs that support the safety, wellbeing and welfare of the people in the trial communities, in particular, women and children.
- Time for programs to take effect given earlier delays in planned service provision which delayed the commencement of the Trial.
- An extension would also provide adequate time for the results of the independent evaluation to be considered in determining the future arrangements of the Trial.

The majority view of those consulted is that the Trial is of benefit and a continuation of the Trial is necessary on the grounds of:

- i. While progress is being made, changes in behaviours are yet to be internalised. A strong theme from the community consultations is that “while we are on the road, we are not there yet and we don’t want our community to go back to square one”. The FRC implementation review, undertaken by KPMG in 2010 reinforced this view - that positive changes are being made but change is fragile.
- ii. Embedded changes in norms requires generational change.

The feedback demonstrated to the consultation team that the initiatives and services implemented as part of the Trial are making a positive difference to community members, particularly to the children of the community and to overall community wellbeing.

Based on the feedback from the majority of those consulted an extension to the Trial, in accordance with the decision made in early May 2011 by the Queensland Government, that is for an additional year (until the end of December 2012) in its current model, is recommended.

APPENDIX 1 – CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

CAPE YORK WELFARE REFORM TRIAL CONSULTATION

Background

The current Cape York Welfare Reform Trial (CYWR) commenced in July 2008 under a tripartite agreement between Australian and Queensland Governments and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYI).

The trial aims to restore positive social norms, re-establish local Indigenous authority, enable children to achieve their full potential, support engagement in the real economy, and move individuals and families from welfare housing to home ownership.

The trial operates in Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge with the support of local stakeholders.

Why we're speaking to you

Your community has chosen to take part of the Cape York Welfare Reform initiative, put in place by the Cape York Institute and the Queensland and Australian Governments.

The trial partners are gathering information to inform a decision to possibly continue the trial and your views about this are important.

What we want to talk about

We want to discuss what you think are the benefits of the trial for yourself, your family and your community

We also want to discuss what you think needs to be improved.

One of the parts of the CYWR is the Family Responsibilities Commission (the FRC) and we want to talk about the role of the FRC and how it works with community members to help address issues.

We also want to seek your views about the Cape York Welfare Reform trial being extended for another year?

What the information might be used for?

The information you provide will help partners determine how the trial should move forward.

The information you provide will not be made public.

The Family Responsibilities Commission

Family Responsibilities Commission (the FRC) has been in place now for nearly 3 years. It works with people to assist them to address behaviour that impacts negatively on themselves, their families and their communities.

What do you understand about the role of the FRC?

Do you know how FRC notifications are received? Do you know who a person comes to the attention of the FRC?

How does it work with community members and families to help address issues?

How could the FRC work better?

How have you and your family benefitted from income management support?

What would happen to the community if the FRC stopped operating?

What would that mean for your family, and in particular, what would that mean for your children?

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What would that mean for your service?

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Community Justice Group Coordinator and members	Child Safety staff	Government Champion Support Officer
Director of Nursing		

COEN

School Principal	Family Income Management Staff	Kindegarten staff
Community Justice Group Coordinator	Queensland Police Staff	FRC Commissioners
Wellbeing centre Local Advisory Group	Government Champion Support Officer	CDEP Staff
Wellbeing Centre Staff	Health Clinic Staff and Volunteers	Cook Shire Council staff

Other Organisations Consulted

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian	Queensland Public Service Union	Queensland Commissioned Police Officers Union
Queensland Nurses Union	Queensland Teachers Union	Independent Schools Queensland
Catholic Education Council	Queensland Police Union	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service