Regional Visit Report

Esperance and Goldfields (Esperance, Norseman, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Coolgardie)

16 – 19 May 2016

Facts about children and young people in Esperance and Goldfields

Esperance

• The population of children and young people (0 to 17 year olds) in the Statistical Level 2 area of Broome as at June 2013 was estimated at 3,099. By age groups:

  0 to 8 year-olds: 1,459
  9 to 14 year-olds: 1,042
  15 to 17 year-olds: 598

• As at the 2011 Census, there were 230 Aboriginal children and young people in the Esperance area, representing 7.5 per cent of the total 0 to 17 year-old population of 3,046.

• The birth rate in Esperance has remained relatively steady. In 2011 there were 169 births and 174 in 2014.

• Esperance Senior High School has 985 students, including 120 Aboriginal students. It offers a comprehensive secondary education from years 7 to 12 and has a number of programs, including a Clontarf Football Academy engagement program for Aboriginal boys and a ‘Follow the Dream’ aspirant program for Aboriginal students.
The co-educational Esperance Christian Primary School caters to students from kindergarten (three and four year-olds) to Year 6. It is owned and operated by Adventist Christian Schools (WA).

**Kalgoorlie-Boulder**

- The population of children and young people in the Statistical Level 2 areas of Kalgoorlie, Kalgoorlie-North and Boulder as at June 2013 was estimated at 8,814.\(^5\)
  
  By age groups:
  - 0 to 8 year-olds: 2,231
  - 9 to 14 year-olds: 3,816
  - 15 to 17 year-olds: 2,767

- As at the 2011 Census, there were 848 Aboriginal children and young people in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder area, representing 10 per cent of the 9 to 17 year-old population of 8,473.\(^6\)

- The birth rate in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder area has remained steady. In 2011 there were 582 births and 608 in 2014.\(^7\)

- St Joseph’s School Boulder is a Catholic primary school with more than 240 students from pre-kindergarten (three year-olds) to Year 6.

- Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School provides a full range of lower secondary courses to students in years 8 to 10. It caters to students from a diverse range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

**Norseman and Coolgardie**

- The population of children and young people in the Statistical Level 2 area of Kambalda-Norseman-Coolgardie as at June 2013 was estimated at 1,486.\(^8\)
  
  By age groups:
  - 0 to 8 year-olds: 764
  - 9 to 14 year-olds: 506
  - 15 to 17 year-olds: 216

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\(^5\) ABS Estimated Resident Population custom report June 2013.

\(^6\) Census Community Profiles, Kalgoorlie, Kalgoorlie-North and Boulder

\(^7\) ABS Births 2014

\(^8\) ABS Estimated Resident Population custom report June 2013
• As at the 2011 Census, there were 216 Aboriginal children and young people in the Kambalda-Norseman-Coolgardie area, representing 14.8 per cent of the 0 to 17 year-old population of 1,451.9
• The birth rate in the Kambalda-Norseman-Coolgardie area has decreased slightly. In 2011 there were 89 births and 77 in 2014.10
• Norseman District High School has 199 students from kindergarten to Year 12. Students in years 11 and 12 access a variety of courses, including Vocational Education and Training.
• Coolgardie Primary School has learning programs for children from years 1 to 7. Built during the gold rush era, it celebrated its centenary in 1994.

Who did the Commissioner meet?

The Commissioner travelled to Esperance and the Goldfields with the WA Young Person of the Year, Preston Culbong, who spoke to students at the schools they visited and attended all of the meetings with the Commissioner.

In Esperance, the Commissioner:

• Visited Esperance Senior High School, meeting with deputy principal Ken Duffy, staff and students.

• Attended a children’s and family services meeting that included representatives from the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Escare Inc., Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Centrecare, Our Lady Star of the Sea School and Esperance Primary School.

• Attended a youth service providers meeting. In attendance were representatives from Bay of Isles Community Outreach (BOICO), Escare Inc., Esperance Goldfields Surf Life Saving Club, Youth Justice Services, Youth Care, Shire of Esperance and DHS Centrelink

• Met with Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) board member Mark Brown, who briefed him on the Authority’s work in guiding implementation of the National Quality Framework for Young Australians.

• Met with Shire of Esperance executives, comprising chief executive officer Matthew Scott, shire president Victoria Brown, deputy shire president Natalie Bowman, director of external services Terry Sergeant and community support officer Lynda Horn.

• Met with magistrate Nick Lemmon.

9 Census Community Profile, Kambalda-Norseman-Coolgardie
10 ABS Births 2014
- Visited Esperance Christian Primary School, meeting with principal Anne Tonkin, staff and students.

In Norseman, the Commissioner:

- Visited Norseman District High School, meeting with principal Bruce Nind, staff and leadership students from years 5 to 12.
- Met with Shire of Dundas chief executive officer Doug Stead and shire president Jacquie Best.

In Kalgoorlie, the Commissioner:

- Visited St Joseph’s School Boulder, meeting with principal Miranda Swann, staff and students.
- Visited Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School, meeting with principal Ian Masarei, staff and students.
- Attended a not-for-profit youth network forum. In attendance were representatives from the Shire of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Headspace Kalgoorlie (Hope Community Services Inc), BEGA Garnbirringu Health Service, YMCA, Centrecare, WA Primary Health Alliance, Life without Barriers and Anglicare WA.
- Met with Trevor Donaldson, a proponent of an Aboriginal youth safe house to be established in Kalgoorlie-Boulder for young people aged between 12 and 20.
- Met with district directors and managers of youth services. In attendance were representatives from the Department of Health, Department of Education, WA Police, Youth Justice and the Department for Child Protection.
- Met with the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder Youth Council.
- Met with magistrate John O’Sullivan and Aboriginal court officer Murray Stubbs.

In Coolgardie, the Commissioner:

- Visited Coolgardie Primary School, meeting with principal Tony Scafidi, staff and students.
- Visited the Goldfields student engagement centre.
- Met with Kalgoorlie Police representatives, including Assistant Commissioner Regional WA Murray Smalpage, Superintendent Daryl Gaunt and Inspectors Hamish McKenzie Denise Farrell and Tony Colfer.
- Met with City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder chief executive officer John Walker and mayor John Bowler.
What the Commissioner heard from service providers

Esperance

The Commissioner was told about the many positive aspects of life for children and young people as well as some of the challenges and areas that could be improved.

Services

- There is strong collaboration between organisations.
- Further work could be done to improve the coordination and case management of services to individuals. There is a need to strengthen links between services for early years and families.
- There is a lack of early intervention and prevention services with the focus on issues once they are at the severe and persistent stage.
- Services based in Kalgoorlie that provide only visiting services to Esperance result in delays and people do not get the services when they need them.
- Funding must be sustainable and longer term to attract and retain staff and to provide a consistent service to clients.

Particular gaps identified:

- **Mental Health.** Headspace in Kalgoorlie has been very successful. Over-the-phone contact for Esperance residents is not effective. Need outreach to engage with young people in the community, particularly Aboriginal mental health workers.
- Lack after-hours counselling and mentoring on the ground in situ.
- There is a gap in mental health services for the five to 12 year-old age group.
- **Housing.** Lack of affordable housing that is getting worse. Overcrowding underpins many other problems, including children’s exposure to alcohol and drug use, violence and mental health problems.
- Safe emergency accommodation is required for kids, particularly 14 to 18 year-olds.
- **Substance use.** Methamphetamine is a big problem in the Esperance area.
- **Child Development.** In very young children, developmental issues are not being picked up until school.
- Day cares/playgroups not being accessed, resulting in a decline in language and physical development.
- **Parenting.** Need for programs suitable to the cohort of parents who are struggling, e.g. 123 magic. Lack of early intervention and need for one-on-one, instead of group, programs to better engage these parents.
- **Transport.** Lack of transport from areas to town reduces access to services.
- **Justice.** More options to deal with youth crime, including increased options when no responsible family member can be identified and a safe house for kids when home is not safe.
Activities

- Lots of activities with 107 clubs in Esperance offering a big range of activities.
- Non-sport activities are needed. There is a lack of arts opportunities for young people.
- Youth want a space to hang out, serviced by organisations that can assist with issues and provide outreach and engagement activities.
- Limited options for kids without parents to access activities.
- Sports programs cannot work in isolation. They need to be integrated into the community with people on the ground to help.

Education

- Further education in Perth is not financially viable for many families and children miss out on obtaining further qualifications.
- A small number of children with unstable home lives and no modelling at home cannot see the end-game purpose of school. This often results in behaviour issues or disengagement from school. Alternative education programs for 13 and 14 year-olds are needed to keep these young people engaged in education.
- Protective-behaviour education must be delivered more consistently to an appropriate standard to all children and young people.
- Not as many meaningful opportunities for young people with disabilities.
- The Department of Education needs to follow up on kids not turning up at school.
- A youth summit hosted by the Shire produced good information and the challenge is for the Shire to deliver on outcomes in a financially challenging environment.
- The Shire has plans for a youth precinct near the town centre to engage more with young people and the wider community.
- Pressure of volunteering on families is high as there is a limited pool of people and many organisations seeking volunteers.
- Volunteers are also deterred by the Working with Children Check process and practical assistance is needed to deal with this issue of children’s safety.

Norseman

Service providers identified a range of challenges in the community and spoke about many positive strategies being developed as well as gaps in services and supports.

- The Shire’s Community and Development Officer and Youth Officer have been very positive for children and young people.
- Strengths include that the town is well maintained, has some interesting history, welcoming of new people and willing to help people in need.
• There is a lack of after-school entertainment. Children have to make a three-hour round trip to Kambalda to attend sports training after school or play at weekends.
• The Shire is taking more responsibility for coordinating services within the area although the local provision of services is limited with only some services visiting from Kalgoorlie and Esperance.
• Need to ensure remote schools are resourced appropriately – e.g. they have to choose country week vs careers when kids really should attend both.
• School plays an important support role for families but some parents have not had a good experience of school. This, combined with a lack of employment for adults, increases disadvantage and contributes to lower expectations for students – few have ambitions for the future.
• Earlier support for parents is needed. A play cafe, Niniwans, ceased due to funding.
• A small group of very young children has been causing significant problems in town.
• Drugs and alcohol are a problem.
• A strong families program is needed to deal with dysfunction at home.
• There is potential for traineeships with mining companies that are committed to helping local people.
• Lots of good ideas for building tourism, including cultural tours as there is considerable through traffic with the eastern States.

Kalgoorlie-Boulder

Kalgoorlie as a major regional centre provides extensive outreach services to communities over a large geographical area. Issues identified by service providers included:

• Need for mapping of current services and resourcing what is needed.
• Need to build local resources workforce, particularly in outlying areas.
• Sustainable models of funding services need to be established to provide consistent service.
• Need funding sources that support community-based initiatives and have some flexibility.
• Children in isolated communities do not receive enough attention. Visiting services are not ideal as they often fail to engage sufficiently to identify and address issues.
• Small group of high-risk young people not attending school and engaging in serious drug use, antisocial and criminal activities, often from a very young age. Services are having a limited impact on this group.
• Youth crime prevention officers have a positive role but there are limitations in services to support their work.
• No after-hours services available and police need support to manage after-hours issues.
• Need for more effective options to address criminal activity as the current system is not working and kids are just cycling through Banksia Hill.
• Need a safe house for kids when it is unsafe at home but this is only part of the solution – need follow-up and through-care services that support families to provide safe homes for kids.
• FASD is a significant contributing factor in risk behaviours in young people.
• Lack of hope for the future. Need opportunities to build skills and have something positive to do.
• Access to services for under 12 year-olds is extremely limited.
• Access to diagnosis and post-assessment services is a problem. The delay in diagnosis in young children increases the severity of problems later in life.
• Some parents (some of whom may be affected by FASD) experience difficulties in looking after themselves.
  o Need to work with each family to access appropriate help, including practical assistance such as transport to services.
  o Need to build value and skills so they can get out and do something
  o Aboriginal leaders must reinforce the importance of looking after family.
  o Work with strengths of people in the community - it is not always about more money as people will help each other.
• Clinical modelling is needed and services need a shared-assessment approach to assist with service consistency and through care.
• Suicide of children and young people continues to be a significant issue. Levels of despair and impulsive behaviours are factors. Kids need to be given hope.
• Need for culturally appropriate services and supports, including:
  o carers for children who can undertake cultural education programs on land
  o increased involvement of Aboriginal people to lead community-based solutions
  o better use of Aboriginal school liaison officers to keep kids in school and support the family to encourage the kids
  o need for advocates, role models and mentors to support Aboriginal children and young people
  o need to understand that culture is different for everyone and really work in a way that is culturally appropriate to the individual
  o Department of Aboriginal Affairs is re-establishing an office in Kalgoorlie, which could be a conduit for Aboriginal people to raise issues and support service development. It would need to utilise local people to understand and coordinate services.
• Lots of families experience money difficulties, increasing pressure at home.
What the Commissioner heard from children and young people

Esperance

Children and young people who met with the Commissioner were very positive about life in Esperance. There was room for improvement but there were also plenty of opportunities. Particular highlights were:

- Education facilities were very good. Peer leader programs were helping Year 6 students transition to Year 7, helping them to settle down. Option for out-of-town kids to live in the hostel was good.
- Theft level was low – no one steals things like bikes or skateboards.
- Beaches were lovely and they loved swimming.
- The community helped each other and they liked the way people treated each other.
- New things were being built – a new foreshore, new parks and playgrounds for the disabled.
- Trees along the roads so it is very green.
- Happy that Esperance is not too crowded.
- They like the wildlife, birds, rabbits, snakes, the weather and sunsets.
- They like that tourists come as it is nice that people appreciate their area.
- Happy to welcome lots of different nationalities.
- Close enough to Albany and Kalgoorlie.

The children and young people also identified a number of challenges and some ideas on how to improve the Esperance area:

- More activities to help people get to know each other.
- Kids suffering from depression and had no one to turn to out of school like chaplains or out-of-school places. Need services for kids who wanted someone to talk to and young people needed to know about them.
- Difficult to get jobs on leaving school. Even after-school work is limited, which reduces the opportunity to get work experience.
- Need more tutoring to help kids not doing well at school.
- Have to go to Perth for university and not all families can afford this.
- Sometimes transport is a problem for those who do not have family to drive them to things.
- Need to improve maintenance of facilities (‘oh, I’m not going to do that, it looks dodgy’).
- Improve access to facilities because of high demand. Some sports are competing to access venues and ovals. An indoor stadium would be good.
- More activities for girls.
• Need for cancer treatment in Esperance and a bigger hospital to treat more people. People have to go to Perth for some treatment and have to wait a long time for it.
• Need to help people who are poor. Many people in Esperance do not have food.
• Hear about people who are dealing drugs and their houses burn down. Efforts should be made to help take drugs out of Esperance.
• Need a new tourist attraction to make up for the loss of the tanker jetty.
• Build an aquarium to see what fish we have around here.
• Need to look after the natural environment. More rubbish bins are needed to reduce litter.
• Need to get people wearing helmets for bikes/skateboards, and more places to ride bikes safely. Some pavements are too narrow to ride on safely.
• Moped riding is dangerous for some people.
• Later start-time at school for older kids.
• Lessen speeding by imposing bigger punishments.
• Need to help parents who are not looking after their children.
• Enact a new law with severe punishments to make people do what is right for children.

Norseman

Young people were also positive about their town and local area, particularly the natural environment, which provided many opportunities for recreation. Highlights were:

• Access to the bush, which is great for adventures, and the wildlife, such as kangaroos and camels.
• The oval for playing football.
• Riding motorbikes at the salt lakes.
• Playing games at the park.
• The swimming pool in summer, the skate park and the youth centre.
• The local Aboriginal culture. The Ngadju people had cultural dancing events and Aboriginal cultural tours to Peak Charles and the Fraser Range.

What they wanted:

• A cinema and a heated swimming pool.
• More people to live in Norseman so there would be more local sports teams and they would not have to travel so far to compete and play.
• For small towns to get as many opportunities as big towns.
• To see what future opportunities there were as this would inspire kids to learn.
Kalgoorlie-Boulder

Children and young people in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Coolgardie enjoyed the friendly environment of their towns, the opportunities available with the area’s larger population and tourism that saw many more people travel through the area. Highlights were:

- Meeting new friends – people from many countries.
- Lots of food and things to do.
- Many friendly and helpful people.
- An interesting history.
- The town is smaller. It is easier to move around and you cannot get lost.
- Famous for its mines and the biggest mine in the world.
- Interesting cultures.
- The Boulder markets.
- Lots of bush and open space for activities.
- The Kalgoorlie Girls Academy helps girls meet new people from different backgrounds.
- Boys have the Goldfields Football Academy.
- The local council runs good events at times.

Improvements were needed to deal with some social problems and to enhance available services. They included:

- 24-hour solar lights for turf.
- Reduce the number of homeless people, burglaries and fires.
- More shops, entertainment areas and places to relax.
- More activities and advertising to attract tourists, such as bush tucker tours.
- Ban smoking.
- Lower prices on food for needy people. Healthy food should be more affordable.
- Labels of Australian-made food should be easily identifiable.
- More family activities and entertainment.
- More sports clubs and sporting facilities, a better skate park, basketball courts, softer ovals and a water park for kids.
- Better park facilities – swings, climbing frame, trampolines, Whizzy Dizzies, giant platforms into sponge pits and flying fox zip lines, slides into sponge mazes. Cemented basketball hoops in smaller parks.
- Need parks like Hammond Park, which is great but gets too busy.
- Oasis playing fields need nets behind the soccer goals.
- Reopen bowling alleys.
- More activity-based youth centres.
- Leadership skills training.
- School holiday programs and more non-school public activities.
- More high schools and fixing buildings at existing schools.
• More head-to-head high school competitions.
• Less violence.
• Footpaths on both sides of streets.
• More charities around town.
• Weekend transport (after school is okay). More into town and between communities (e.g. Coolgardie).
• Need more money to make Coolgardie look nice again, including more trees.

The Commissioner also met with the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Youth Council, an impressive group of young people who talked about their work. The Council provided a copy of the three-year Youth Strategic Action Plan for 2014–2017, which sets out the aims, goals and actions to make Kalgoorlie-Boulder a great place for children, young people and the whole community.

Council members highlighted a number of key issues identified in the plan:

• Public transport is quite limited in terms of times and routes, making it difficult for young people to get about, particularly those who live farther out.
• Street lighting is not very bright and that scares young people walking home after sport and other after-school activities as it gets dark very early in winter.
• Lots of events but nothing regular and the movies are expensive. A variety of activities is needed. The spot program was great where they had a $20,000 budget to provide after-school activities. They are currently looking for funding to repeat the program.
• Help for disadvantaged kids is important, including:
  o Free events
  o Movie nights
  o Graffiti wall at the skate park for urban art work, and
  o Free wifi.

The Council members also spoke about the benefits of sitting on the Council:

• Having your voice and ideas heard.
• Older people think they know what kids need. If kids have a voice then people will learn what kids really want and need.
• Being connected to all young people and it is good to have people from different backgrounds.
• Members get access to other opportunities like the youth parliament in Perth. They also learn lots of useful skills and qualities.

Nominations were being sought from young people aged 12 to 25 years. Elections were held by the existing youth council. Candidates must be enthusiastic, have organisational skills and be motivated to help make the area better for young people.
Commissioner’s comments

The opportunity to visit regional communities is a delightful part of my work. Meeting with children and young people and service providers always inspires me with the positive enthusiasm many people have for the communities they live in and their willingness to work to make places better for everyone. The level of voluntary work and community engagement is usually a hallmark of regional communities and all of the communities I visited on this trip had some outstanding examples of this, which is also reflected in the views of the children and young people I met with.

The regional visits are also a very important part of my work to ensure that I understand the challenges communities face and the particular issues children, young people and their families in these areas experience.

On this trip, I was able to meet with people from four very different communities, Esperance, Norseman, Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Coolgardie. Each had some unique differences but also a lot of common challenges.

Provision of services to regional areas is always a significant challenge and the smaller and more isolated the community the greater the challenge is to overcome, despite the significant levels of disadvantage that may exist.

In every community it was apparent that most children and young people are doing well and making the most of the opportunities that their community has to offer. Further work to support access for children and young people in these areas to education and employment and ensure the best opportunity for them to reach their potential is vital. This includes providing child development services in a timely fashion to identify and address areas of disadvantage, ensuring schools are appropriately resourced to maximise each child’s learning potential, and providing access to further education and training opportunities to improve employment prospects beyond the school years.

I also heard about a smaller, but significant, group of children and young people in each community who are seriously affected by disadvantage and family dysfunction. Clearly, services and supports are needed to provide a greater impact in addressing the needs of these families to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. We also need to see improved options to provide for crisis services, such as safe houses and accommodation services, and diversionary activities to keep children and young people out of drug use and criminal activity and keep them engaged in education to break the cycle of disadvantage in this generation.

Service providers indicated to me that while we need to ensure the right level of funding and mix of services, it is also important to ensure good service coordination and case management of individuals and families. I will be including these issues in the advocacy work of my office as I continue to liaise with government and service
providers to advance the wellbeing of children and young people from across our regional areas.

I encourage local community decision makers and service providers to reflect on the views of children and young people in their communities outlined above, and continue to explore ways to include children and young people in decision-making processes to build their engagement as civic citizens and ensure services and facilities are targeted to their needs.

**Colin Pettit**

*Commissioner for Children and Young People WA*

Commissioner Colin Pettit and WA Young Person of the Year Preston Culbong with students at Coolgardie Primary School.

The Commissioner and Preston are pictured with students at St Joseph’s School Boulder (left) and Esperance Christian Primary School (right).