



## Regional Visit Report

### Mullewa

28 August 2017

#### Commissioner's comments

I had the pleasure of meeting with some passionate students and stakeholders recently in Mullewa, who shared openly with me their visions to strengthen the lives and opportunities of children and young people within their community.

On this visit, I heard from many students about the positive aspects of life in their small community, and the things that they enjoyed about living in Mullewa. I also heard concerns from both students and stakeholders about the lack of opportunities for children and young people and the disadvantage that some children and young people experience. I saw opportunity for organisations, community groups, community leaders and dedicated volunteers to create collaborative partnerships and share resources to help ensure children and young people in Mullewa can grow up healthy, happy and well.

It is clear to me through my work that many of the smaller regional WA towns are facing unique challenges; with agriculture and job opportunities changing, population sizes decreasing, and resources and services becoming more limited as a result. Service providers, decision makers and community members need to recognise the impact these changes have on children and young people, and ensure that there are strategies in place to promote positive outcomes for children and young people.

I encourage service providers, decision makers and community members in Mullewa to consider what local children and young people are saying about their experiences and ideas for change, and work in consultation with them to make decisions about the community.

I thank everyone for their time in meeting with me, and their willingness to share their thoughts about life in Mullewa. This feedback is always important to me in informing my work and advocacy, and it will inform my future discussions with government and other stakeholders to promote better outcomes for children and young people across the State.

**Colin Pettit**

**Commissioner for Children and Young People WA**

## Who did the Commissioner meet with?

In Mullewa the Commissioner met with:

- Staff and students Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School
- Staff and students at Mullewa District High School
- Service providers from government and non-government agencies, including the City of Greater Geraldton, Western Australian Police, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School, Shooting Stars program (based at Mullewa District High School), Department of Communities – Child Protection, and a community member.



Commissioner Colin Pettit with students from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School.

## What the Commissioner heard from children and young people in Mullewa

The Commissioner spoke with a group of primary school-aged children at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and high school students at Mullewa District High School. The students had many positive things to say about growing up in Mullewa.

They said the good things about living in Mullewa included:

- It is a small town where everyone knows everyone else, which meant there was more connection between people.
- That you lived close to your extended family and could see them every day.
- Being able to live near extended family meant that Aboriginal young people could learn about their culture and go out bush with their family.
- Everything is close so children young people can walk to everything really easily.

- The town felt calm, quiet and safe.
- There is less traffic and congestion than bigger towns or cities.
- There is freedom to do what you want and not as many rules.
- There are some events such as the Mullewa show and the rodeo, which are fun to go to.
- There are some sports, like an under 10s football club and tennis club, and other things for young people to do, like going to the youth centre or playing or watching sports at the Recreation Centre.
- Kids can go to the local shire meetings to put in requests at the meetings for things in their area.
- Some community change has happened, including some art projects that have been undertaken.

Students shared their thoughts about some of the things in Mullewa that they thought needed changing to improve the town for children and young people, including:

- There weren't a lot of people living in Mullewa, which meant there weren't many shops or supermarkets, and not much to do. Students wanted more shops and more people living in Mullewa.
- Students would like to see a greater range of activities for children and young people, as this would help relieve boredom and prevent them from being on the streets. Their ideas included: more playgrounds, mini-golf, a BMX or motocross track, a waterslide, a bowling or ten pin bowling club or lanes, more live entertainment, comedy and music events, or more regular events like the rodeo and the Mullewa show.
- There weren't enough sport opportunities in Mullewa, and students wanted more people to play sports, and also needed adults or volunteers to help coach teams. The sports they were interested in having were: a woman's football team, football and midnight basketball.
- Some students at the primary school said some theft had occurred in town, and some sports equipment had been stolen from their school. They thought more police were needed.
- Students wanted to see more job opportunities in town or work training opportunities, such as apprenticeships or school-based training for students to help them get experience.
- Students wanted to see better educational opportunities – particularly for high school students, as the local high school didn't have ATAR subjects, meaning that students either missed out on this or had to go to high school in Geraldton. They also wanted more learning resources available to help them with their learning and education.
- Students at the high school wanted more cultural events and activities in

town, and thought that most young people didn't know about Aboriginal history, and they wanted to learn about their own cultures.

- The old park needed to be renovated to remove the graffiti, and could include new things to play with or on.
- Many children and young people lived out of town on farms. This was isolating for the students in terms of seeing friends or taking part in activities, and also they didn't have access to internet or NBN out of town, which meant it was hard to complete homework and more boring.
- More books for young adults were needed at the library.
- Students wanted to see more health professionals and doctors in the area, who stayed for longer. Some students commented that teachers and nurses often come to Mullewa as part of their student practicums, but then leave.
- Many of the roads needed doing up, and there were dangerous sections of roads around Mullewa that needed to be fixed.
- Some students wanted to see a train between Geraldton and Perth, which would make travel times quicker and easier.

## **What the Commissioner heard from service providers and community members**

### **Population decrease and general resources**

- The population of Mullewa has halved in the last 20 years, and is continuing to decline.
- There are very limited resources and facilities in town and due to the proximity to Geraldton, people are expected to drive the one hour's distance for grocery shopping, services, entertainment etc. This can be difficult for families without access to a car or transport.

### **School and education**

- The only high school in Mullewa has been classified as a limited subject school. Many families are choosing to send their children to high school in Geraldton, with children and young people either travelling daily or boarding in town.
- Literacy and numeracy was an issue for many students and adults in Mullewa, and stakeholders thought an adult literacy program might be helpful.
- School attendance was a significant issue at both schools, particularly for Aboriginal families. Social workers based at the schools to work alongside families could be helpful to improve attendance.
- Aboriginal children and young people often had a lack of awareness and

understanding about their culture, and stakeholders wanted to see better education for children and young people on this.

### **Families**

- A range of issues were reported for families in Mullewa, including drug and alcohol issues, domestic violence, gambling, mental health, welfare dependency, transiency and need for parenting support.
- Stakeholders wanted funding and support for parenting programs and clinical psychologists or social workers who could work with families to develop their parenting skills.

### **Early years supports**

- Stakeholders were concerned there were no early childhood services in Mullewa, which meant children were missing out on early screening, assessment and advice for early childhood issues like hearing, autism, disabilities or other learning difficulties, or were getting it too late, or received assessment from new graduates with little professional experience to deliver a quality service.
- Stakeholders wanted more investment in early years' assessment and services so that children could get the support and assistance they required before issues escalated, and perhaps mentoring for the graduate professionals who are providing these services.

### **Recreation and community involvement**

- There is a lack of activities for children and young people in town – the only significant facilities are a small youth centre that offers a limited number of activities to young people aged 12 and over, a recreation centre and swimming pool.
- There are very limited sporting activities, dancing, music or drama activities available for children and young people, and they have to go to Geraldton for this.

### **Employment**

- There is a lack of employment opportunity for young people, and chances of young people finding jobs and living in Mullewa once they've finished school is unlikely.
- Due to the change in agriculture in the area, there are less labour jobs required and more skilled workers required.

### **Service provision**

- Professional health services were delivered on an ad-hoc basis in Mullewa, with only sporadic visits from health professionals such as Occupational Therapists etc., and sometimes not going ahead as planned.

- Stakeholders wanted better coordination of services, so that they could plan for visits from service providers, and have more consistent support available to them.
- There are no Aboriginal service providers or services in the area that are culturally appropriate, as funding for previous programs has been cut.
- Stakeholders wanted to see culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal families in the area.
- A new program is about to start up to support young men over a 15-week period with life skills and employment.

## **Facts about children and young people in Mullewa<sup>1</sup>**

### **General population**

- The total population of Mullewa is 447.
- Children and young people aged 0 to 19 years make up about 27 per cent of the population.
- The highest concentration of children and young people is in the 0 to 9 age bracket.
- Just over 30 per cent of the town's population is attending school. Of these, 31 per cent are at primary school and just under 9 per cent are at secondary school. Most students (primary and secondary) attend government schools.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people**

- Of the total population, 153 (34%) of people in Mullewa are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander . It's not possible to breakdown what proportion are children and young people.
- In the 'Geraldton East' area, there are 2,436 Aboriginal children and young people aged between 0 and 19.



<sup>1</sup> Source: 2016 Census QuickStats, ABS, [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC51039?opendocument](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC51039?opendocument)