



Regional Visit Report

Newman, Meekatharra, Cue, Mount Magnet and Moora

25–29 March 2018

Commissioner's comments

In my recent visit to Newman, Meekatharra, Cue, Mount Magnet and Moora I met many young people who were passionate about making their communities a better place for all.

The young people I met with from the schools I visited in the Pilbara and Mid West spoke positively about their communities and the people supporting them, recognising the uniqueness of their local environment and their sense of community. They also were clear on the issues affecting their towns, particularly the accessibility of facilities and organised sport and caring for the environment. The young people I met with also spoke about their desire to help families who were struggling.

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, particularly around the services and infrastructure that they need.

In every community it was apparent that many children and young people are doing well. However I also heard concerns about smaller groups of children and young people who are seriously affected by disadvantage and family dysfunction.

There needs to be continued effort to collectively address areas of disadvantage within communities and to ensure that programs supporting children and young people are working in an integrated manner to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

I will endeavour to use these insights to accurately inform government and the community about what we need to do to strengthen children and young people's wellbeing in these communities.

I thank everyone who took time to meet with me and discuss local children and young people's wellbeing.

Colin Pettit

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA



Commissioner Colin Pettit with students from Newman Primary School.

Who did the Commissioner meet with?

In Newman the Commissioner met with:

- Staff and students at South Newman Primary School.
- Staff and students at Newman Primary School.
- Staff and students at Newman Senior High School.
- Service providers for children and young people (and their families) from government agencies and non-government organisations including WA Police, World Vision, the Newman Women's Shelter, Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation, Department of Communities, Australian Army (Cadets), and the Aboriginal Men's Healing Centre.
- Director of Technical & Development Services, Co-ordinator of Youth Services and the Manager of Community Wellbeing at the Shire of East Pilbara.

In Meekatharra the Commissioner met with:

- Staff and students at Meekatharra District High School.
- Mid West-Gascoyne Superintendent and Officer in Charge for Meekatharra from WA Police.
- CEO and the Community Development Services Manager at the Shire of Meekatharra.

In Cue the Commissioner met with staff and students at Cue Primary School.

In Mount Magnet the Commissioner met with staff and students at Mount Magnet

District High School.

In Moora the Commissioner met with:

- Staff and students at St James Residential College.
- Staff and students at Moora Primary School.
- Staff and students at St Joseph's School.
- Staff at Midlands Senior High School.
- The Clerk of Courts and Director of Magistrates Court and Tribunals.
- The Deputy CEO of the Shire of Moora and a Councillor from the Shire of Dandaragan.



Students from Moora Primary School with Commissioner Colin Pettit.

What the Commissioner heard from children and young people in Newman

Good things about living in Newman included:

- That there were lots of activities for young people, including the opportunity to play regional sports.
- The local environment including the accessibility of the bush and native animals and the opportunities to go camping.
- That they have lots of friends, including the freedom of living in a smaller community where you know most people.
- How easy it is to get around locally because everything is so close.

Things that they would like improved were:

- Community safety was front of mind for young people, as well as housing accessibility for some people in the community.
- A museum, like SciTech, for young people to explore as the old museum closed. More community based activities like parades and markets.
- Bullying in schools, such as exclusion of others, rumours and teasing, needed to be addressed more and the young people affected need support. One idea was a community garden where people can gather, contribute and share.
- More options and facilities for teenagers, including the affordability of access to the pool and gym. The public basketball court (half court) and netball court could be better maintained.
- More opportunities to study the subjects you are interested in at school for all students. More opportunities and pathways to employment and careers after school (beyond mining) and more local employment for young people still at school e.g. IGA.
- Greater accessibility to other locations such as Perth through cheaper flights.
- Clean up of the rubbish around town including clean up days and the provision of a recycling facility/option by the town.



Commissioner Colin Pettit with Newman Senior High School students.

What the Commissioner heard from children and young people in Meekatharra, Cue and Mount Magnet

Good things about the Mid West included:

- The towns are small so you know everyone and where everything is, the freedom of being able to walk around town.
- Going out bush, especially with family, and all the local wildlife.
- Local parks, skate parks and pools (where the pools were affordable for entry) and “no school, no pool” programs that give you access to the pool for attending school.
- Time spent playing with pets after school.

Things that they would like improved were:

- Facilities at the local pools, including water slides/water features and access to water parks/facilities in towns that didn't already have a pool. One suggestion in Cue included adding a flying fox/tree rope to swing into the dam.
- Having organised sports to make the most of local facilities and engage children and young people more. Suggested sports included football, basketball, soccer and netball for both boys and girls.
- Sun protection covers/indoor facilities were important to young people so that places would be accessible and safe in the heat.
- Having local further education opportunities like TAFE and apprenticeships, and pathways into employment, instead of having to go to Geraldton or Perth away from family.

What the Commissioner heard from children and young people in Moora

Good things about Moora included:

- The smaller schools so you get to know everyone and small town meaning you can walk around.
- The sense of community in town where everyone supports each other and is friendly and welcoming.
- The large number of organised sports for young people to get involved in.
- The opportunities for excursions through the schools and hostel.
- The local swimming pool.
- For students at St James College, their positives included supportive and caring staff who helped to make the hostel a family-like environment, taught socialisation and life skills and assisted with homework, sporting commitments and participation in the community.

Things that they would like improved were:

- Access for people with disabilities, at the pool and around town.
- Increasing the size of the local library and adding a museum for young people.
- Stop using plastic bags and focus on the environment, clean up days and recycling. This included cleaning up parks and making them safe to play in.
- The price of food locally, particularly basics like bread, fruit and vegetables.
- The cost and accessibility of education locally, including keeping the Moora Hostel open.
- For students at St James College, they were concerned about mixed messaging on the future of the hostel and why it was being closed. They believed there was a lack of support and pathways in terms of possible relocations, continuation of ATAR studies and disruption to studies generally. They were also concerned about the future pathway for younger siblings, the greater impact of the hostel closing on the Moora community, and the perceived lack of viable options for them.



Commissioner Colin Pettit with students from St Joseph's School in Moora.

What the Commissioner heard from service providers and community members in the regions

School and education

- Employing and retaining teachers, particularly specialist teachers (for high school) was consistently identified as a concern by schools.

- The lack of incentives for regional teachers, including housing, was identified as a barrier to retaining staff.
- More comprehensive training is required for educators to handle instances of difficult behaviour management issues with young people resulting from fatigue and disrupted home lives.
- Services to children and young people such as youth centres need to coordinate with schools to ensure that young people are getting positive outcomes and engaging in education.
- A lack of local further education opportunities such as TAFE and apprenticeships was identified.
- Students who have had a disrupted education require additional support to catch up which requires a targeted approach.
- Opportunities for young people to have a voice and build and demonstrate leadership in their communities were limited, avenues to express their voice should be explored.

Families

- School attendance is an issue, even when some students attend they are too tired and hungry to learn because of poverty at home or issues at home leading to children and young people walking the streets at night. Programs to support the families are also essential. Everyone needs to come together to support the children, including the services and the families. Children need to have a safe home life where they get enough food, sleep and encouragement to go to school and learn.
- Grandparents caring for grandchildren need a lot more help to get the support they need to provide effective care.
- A number of families were deemed to be in a cycle of disadvantage as some young people then committed crimes to get the clothes, toiletries and food they needed to survive.
- Placement and support of young people in care was identified as an issue, particularly for young people aged 14+ years.
- Housing for families, including availability and affordability was raised as an issue in most areas.

Youth justice

- There is a lack of locally based diversion programs meaning children and young people are unnecessarily transferred to Banksia Hill in Perth or have to travel to attend programs which they struggle to do without transport support.
- A lack of community contact or visits when young people have to leave their

local area for justice matters is a concern for their wellbeing.

- There was a need for safe houses where children can go to until a safe adult can be found.
- A lack of responsible adults who can support the bail/release of children and young people is an area of concern. Support for families is an essential element of supporting children and young people.
- Drugs and alcohol were identified as issues for children and young people, including those under the legal age of responsibility who aren't tracked in statistics.

Recreation and community involvement

- The accessibility of facilities such as pools and recreation centres/gyms was raised as an issue where entry fees are too high. The need for facilities to be open at times when young people want to access them was also identified.
- There needs to be specific engagement with teenagers who often fall outside the catchment ages of various sports and who want targeted activities and options. There also need to be options beyond just sport.
- Young people need to be supported to have a voice in the community through consultation and engagement, for example through an advisory committee which engages a broad spectrum of children and young people.

Employment

- Local employment opportunities for young people are limited both during schooling and post-schooling.

Service provision

- Need more holistic programs that address the underlying causes of disadvantage; this will require increased collaboration between agencies and organisations.
- There needs to be a focus on driving outcomes from service contact and developing young people rather than just occupying them.
- Community networks and service providers in towns need to work together better. Not all organisations take a strategic, integrated and coordinated approach to service delivery.
- As with education, concerns about attracting and retaining staff were voiced in relation to health workers particularly child health staff, speech pathologists, psychologists, and occupational therapists. This has a knock on effect of creating waiting lists and delaying support for children and young people.
- Behaviour management issues need to be addressed but also supported by service providers; instances of both allowing anti-social behaviour to continue

and disengaged and struggling young people being further isolated due to bans for poor behaviour were both raised.

- More support to undertake assessments for children and young people with disabilities, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, is important to ensure that these young people are not disadvantaged or waiting six months or more for the support that they need.
- Different regional/district reporting areas and definitions of youth were seen as an obstacle to coordinating services to support children and young people and their families.
- A lack of after school care and homework support groups for children and young people was identified.

Facts about children and young people in Newman, Meekatharra, Cue, Mount Magnet and Moora

Newman:

- Around 1,333 children and young people aged 0 to 17 years live in Newman.¹
- At the 2016 Census there were 289 Aboriginal children and young people aged up to 19 years in Newman, representing 25 per cent of that age population.²
- The birth rate in Newman decreased between 2011 (114 births) and 2016 (79 births).³

Meekatharra, Cue & Mount Magnet:

- Around 542 children and young people aged 0 to 17 years live in the greater Meekatharra area.⁴
- At the 2016 Census, there were 345 Aboriginal children and young people aged up to 19 years in the greater Meekatharra area, representing 58 per cent of that age population.⁵

¹ ABS Community Profile, Newman, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

² ABS Community Profile, Newman, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

³ ABS Births 2016.

⁴ ABS Community Profile, Meekatharra, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

⁵ ABS Community Profile, Meekatharra, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

- The birth rate in the greater Meekatharra has decreased since 2011 (62 births) with 51 births recorded in 2016.⁶

Moora:

- Around 1,101 children and young people aged 0 to 17 years live in Moora.⁷
- At the 2016 Census, there were 155 Aboriginal children and young people aged up to 19 years in Moora, representing 13 percent of that age population.⁸
- The birth rate in Moora has decreased since 2011 (97 births) with 68 births recorded in 2016.⁹



Commissioner Colin Pettit meeting the students from South Newman Primary School.

⁶ ABS Births 2016.

⁷ ABS Community Profile, Moora, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

⁸ ABS Community Profile, Moora, Statistical Area Level 2 as at the 2016 census.

⁹ ABS Births 2016.