

**SERVICES TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE SHIRE OF
WILUNA**

MAPPING AND GAP ANALYSIS

FINAL REPORT

November 2004

**PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS
FOR THE**

SHIRE OF WILUNA



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Refer Attachment 1.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This report has been developed by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) in response to a request from the Shire of Wiluna and the Department of Local Government and Regional Development (DLGRD) to undertake a service mapping and gap analysis project in Wiluna. The project was seen as part of a long-term process to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the region.

The aim of the project has broadly been to:

- Provide an overview of existing programs and services available to Indigenous people in the region under the key themes of:
 - Health and Community Services
 - Housing and Infrastructure
 - Justice, Safety and Security
 - Education and Training
 - Income and Employment
 - Land, Heritage and Culture.
- Identify potential strengths, shortfalls and inefficiencies in service delivery.
- Collate and present available statistics and quantitative data on the Indigenous population in the region in order to assist resource allocation and promote local resource needs.
- Promote a multilateral and targeted approach to issues in the region.
- Develop an action plan agreed by stakeholders to improve outcomes for Indigenous people.

The project commenced in late March 2004 with a series of regional consultations carried out by Perth-based DIA staff.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Overview Of Wiluna

The Shire of Wiluna covers an area of 184,000 square kilometres of predominantly mining and pastoral land. It lies on the western edge of the Western Desert, which also extends across the Northern Territory and South Australia. The town of Wiluna was founded in 1896 and is the major commercial centre in the Shire. The town lies some 966 kilometres northeast of Perth and is rated as “very remote” according to the Australian Census classification of remoteness.

The region has a rich Indigenous history (see below) with the first European contact into the area being through John Forrest in 1875. Gold was discovered in the area in the 1890s, which was the catalyst to the establishment of the Wiluna township. The resultant gold rush peaked in the 1930s when the town had a population of more than 9,000.

After World War II underground mining in the area ceased and gold operations were minimal. By 1963 the population had reduced to around 90 people. In 1981 gold mining operations recommenced and continue today with the operation of the Wiluna gold mine by Agincourt Resources Ltd and the Jundee operation about 55 kilometres northeast of Wiluna by Newmont Australia. There are also significant nickel and lead operations in area.

3.2 Summary of Population and Demographic Characteristics

The population of Wiluna on the night of the 2001 Census was 1644 people. This is compared to the estimated resident population in 2002 of 925¹. The discrepancy between these two figures is likely due to the large fly in fly out contingent of mining workers. Thus the Census figures are significantly influenced by this sector of the community. Attachment 2 provides a discussion of the complexities in estimating population figures for Wiluna and presents a summary of data estimated from Census and other sources.

After increasing significantly, between 1993 and 1996, the population of Wiluna has declined in recent years although there are signs that the resident population is again increasing. There are 193% more males than females in Wiluna and the median age of the population is 33 years.

Socio-economic indicators suggest that there are very high levels of disadvantage in Wiluna. These indicators also highlight the stark contrast between the disadvantaged and the relatively well-paid industry workers. For example; the median individual income for Wiluna is \$1,400 to \$1499 compared to the State and regional median figures of \$300-\$399. The median individual income for Indigenous people in Wiluna is \$120-\$199 (refer Attachment 2).

The influence of the fly in – fly out mining population on official statistics is important as although this sector of the population do not use the services or facilities of Wiluna, their presence distorts demographic data and effectively masks the true level of disadvantage experienced by much of the permanent resident population.

3.3 Indigenous History of the Wiluna Area

Anthropological research indicates that several thousand Indigenous peoples have occupied the area now known as Wiluna for at least 10 000 years². The Martu and Ngaanyatjarra peoples are predominant amongst the resident Indigenous population with strong links also to the Goldfields (Wongi) and Mid West (Yamatji) people. The

¹ The estimated resident population is generally the official government population estimate.

² Tonkinson, R. (1974) The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade, Cummings Publishing Company Inc, Phillipines, 13

following Tinsdale tribal groups are also represented in the Wiluna area: Kartudjara; Keiadjara; Madoitja; Nana; Ngaiawongga; Ngarlawongga; Pini; Potidjara; Waljen and Wardal.

In Wiluna, “Mandjildj is by far the predominant dialect, though Gadudjara, Budidjara, Bidjandjadjara, Giyadjara and Wanman are also represented” (Sackett, L 1977, p 90). The Indigenous people of the area speak closely related dialects of the Pitjandjara language, which testifies to the density and widespread nature of their network of communications.

Western Desert peoples are traditionally highly mobile in order to cope with recurring droughts. Territory was generally defined through possession of waterholes, which then served as a locus for their movements. Western Desert tribes traditionally had limited material culture, a condition well suited to their pressing needs for mobility³.

Wiluna occupies a very important position in terms of Indigenous culture in the Western Desert region. It has traditionally been a major Law centre and plays a pivotal role at Law time with people travelling from as far away as Docker River to conduct rituals in and around Wiluna⁴. The resident population therefore has constant contact with Aboriginal people from throughout the Western Desert region. There are also movements back and forth of large sections of the populations during the summer ritual season.

Indigenous peoples of the Western Desert began visiting and residing in the Wiluna town in the late 1940's. Contact commenced with the exchange of labour and rations and continued following the establishment of the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission in 1957. According to Sackett (1978), the aim of the mission was to replace the Indigenous belief and value system with Christianity. Indigenous children were separated from their parents and friends and placed in mission facilities, in an environment that discouraged contact and the sharing of information, practices and beliefs.

In reviewing the outcomes of this process, Sackett (1978) observed that, “the [Wiluna] program has been much less a success than the missionaries had hoped ... rather than creating Christian Aborigines, it has acted to produce a number of persons whom demonstrate a commitment to neither the traditional system nor the one offered in school.” The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has, however, had a strong influence on Wiluna with many people having attended the Church school at Karalundi and continuing to practice Christianity.

The commencement of contact in Wiluna, as elsewhere, represented the commencement of a series of ongoing tests of the capacity of the local Indigenous peoples to maintain their land, heritage and culture within a foreign hegemony. The introduction of non-restrictive drinking rights for Indigenous people in Wiluna in July 1971 had long-term health and economic implications, but also impacted adversely on

³ Birdsell, J.B (1976) in Peterson, N. (ed) (1976) Tribes and Boundaries in Australia Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Canberra, Humanities Press Inc, NJ, USA, p 95

⁴ Sackett, L. (1977) ‘Liquor and the law: Wiluna, Western Australia.’ In M.C Howard (ed), “Whitefella Business”: Aborigines in Australian Politics. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, p 37-48

the maintenance of internal group culture and heritage. These threats are further compounded by the deleterious impact of poor environmental health conditions as well as low rates of education and employment, which not only put internal culture and heritage at risk, but also impede the ability of Indigenous people in Wiluna to contribute to and benefit from broader community development.

3.4 The Indigenous Population Today

Anthropological studies indicate that cultural rites and practices in Wiluna (such as collective initiation) have been adapted to meet the pressures outlined above in a manner that is both pragmatic and successful (Sackett, 1978), while others (Berndt and Berndt 1970) indicate that Indigenous cultural traditions have degenerated under the pressure of occupation.

Indigenous society is built around a complex web of traditional laws, family ties, cultural and kinship obligations. This is a strength that has assisted Aboriginal people to survive the impact of colonisation and also a complication with which policy makers and service providers must work. The population of Wiluna has maintained strong connections to land and to traditional practices. Customary law, including payback, is regularly practiced and forms an integral part of the community environment. Wiluna also remains an important regional location for traditional practices and ceremonies.

Approximately 22.3% of the Census population (363 people) identified as Indigenous (and presumably a much higher proportion of the resident population). Significantly, Indigenous people represent 75% of the population aged under 18. The Indigenous population predominantly live in and around the Town of Wiluna and in the communities of Kutkabubba (population 53⁵), Bondini (90), Windidda (50), Emu Farm (8) and Ululla Station (18).

Over 52% of the Indigenous population in the Western Desert Region is between 0-24 with a median age of 23⁶. The median age of the Indigenous population is 10 years less than the non-Indigenous population, which is rapidly ageing. The young age structure implies a growing demand for housing and facilities, childcare, schooling and employment.

The Indigenous population of Wiluna is characterised by poor health and living standards; poor educational outcomes; low employment and income levels; high levels of contact with the criminal justice system and with a significant proportion of the population dependent upon welfare.

In the order of 30% of Indigenous families in the Wiluna area are single parent families, 62% are unemployed (when CDEP is included), 21% live in improvised dwellings and the median individual income is between \$120 and \$199 per week.

⁵ Populations taken from 2003 Environmental Health Needs Survey.

⁶ ATSIC Western Desert Regional Council Strategic Plan

4.0 CURRENT SERVICES – STRENGTHS, GAPS AND ISSUES

4.1 HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody described the health status of Aboriginal people as worse than any other population for whom records exist. Higher rates of mortality, morbidity, disease and injury can be directly linked to the socio-economic position of Aboriginal people with people at the lowest socio-economic levels experiencing the highest rates of illness and disease⁷.

The Western Desert ATSIC Regional Council Plan also noted the “high number of chronic diseases in the region including diabetes, renal failure, hearing and eyesight problems, respiratory infections, genitor-urinary and parasitic conditions.” Attachment 2 provides further comparative health statistics.

Many of the key determinants of Aboriginal health are outside the immediate influence of the health care system. The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey⁸ documents the following four resource domains for healthy child development:

- Adequate physical environment to meet the basic necessities of living;
- The levels of family income available to support the development of children;
- The creation of human and psychological capital (e.g. good health, education and parenting skills) available within the family to support child development; and
- The social capital (e.g. cultural heritage and traditions, safe communities) available to individuals in the community and wider society.

The data presented and the consultations undertaken as part of this report suggest that there are significant gaps in each of these domain areas in Wiluna.

Although interrelated, the key health and community services issues raised in consultations fall into the following categories:

- Primary Health Care and Provision of Medical Services
- Health Promotion and Nutrition
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Mental Health
- Family and Social Support

4.1.1 Primary Health Care and Provision of Medical Services

Health services in Wiluna are provided through the Ngangganawili Aboriginal Community Controlled Health and Medical Services Aboriginal Corporation (NAMS). NAMS is unique in Western Australia in that, as an Aboriginal community

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003), “The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.”

⁸ “The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People” Volume 1; June 2004.

controlled organisation, it is also the sole provider of health care services to the residents of the Shire of Wiluna, including contracted services to the local mining industry. It also provides outreach services to the communities of Ululla, Windida and Kutkbubba.

The NAMS 2003-2006 Business Plan describes the services provided by the organisation as:

1. Clinical Services
 - Medical consultations at the clinic
 - Specialist services including paediatrician, gynaecologist, ear, nose and throat, optometrist, ophthalmologist, visiting physiotherapist / podiatrist / dietician
 - Opportunistic screening
 - X-rays.
 - Immunisations
 - Weekly health checks at school⁹
 - Fortnightly mobile clinics to Ullula, Kutkububba and Bondini
 - Mobile monthly clinic to Windidda.
2. Alcohol and Substance Misuse Counselling
3. Sobering Up Centre
4. Community Aged Care Packages
5. Home and Community Care (HACC)
6. Night Patrol Program
7. Sexual Health Program
8. Environmental Health Program
9. Health and Nutrition Program
10. Parenting and Early Childhood Development Project
11. Safe House.

Attachment 3 outlines the general program and funding information provided by government and community agencies in the Shire of Wiluna. NAMS forms an effective “one-stop shop” for health and related services and receives funding from many sources including¹⁰:

- Federal Department of Health and Ageing (Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health)
- Office of Aboriginal Health (State Department of Health)
- Family and Children’s Services
- Drug and Alcohol Office (State Department of Health)
- Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation.
- Mining Industry contracts.

⁹ It is noted that the school has raised concerns at the lack of such checks on a regular basis (discussed further below).

¹⁰ Further information can be obtained from the attached program spreadsheet or the Ngangganawili Business Plan.

Wiluna is supported through access to the Meekatharra hospital and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Wiluna also has a sub-centre of St Johns Ambulance.

Wiluna has historically been administered from a State health point of view from Kalgoorlie as part of the Goldfields South East Health Region. Following a review of administrative boundaries, Wiluna now falls within the Midwest and Murchison Health Region administered from Geraldton/Meekatharra. In reality, responsibilities and funding are split between the two regions due both to historical associations and to resource issues. This split of responsibilities has considerable potential for confusion, however, there appears (at least among those directly involved) to be a clear division and understanding of respective responsibilities and service arrangements.

A Memorandum of Understanding has recently been signed between NAMS, the Midwest and Murchison Health Region – Murchison District, the Goldfields South East Health Region and the Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice (EGMDGP) to clarify the current working arrangements. These are summarised in the following table:

Type of Medical Service	Responsible Region	Frequency of Service
Child Health Screening	Murchison	3 times per year (increasing to monthly)
Occupational Therapy	Murchison	Second monthly
Speech Pathology		Second monthly
Mental Health	Murchison	Weekly
Podiatry	Murchison EGMDGP	Monthly (alternating months)
Nutrition service	EGMDGP Murchison	Monthly (alternating months)
Meekatharra Hospital	Murchison	N/A
Patient Assistance Transport Scheme	Murchison	As required
Ears, nose and throat	Murchison	4 times per year (for 2 days)
Audiology	Murchison	4 times per year
Public Health services	Kalgoorlie	Monthly
Trachoma Screening and treatment	Kalgoorlie	
Immunisation	Kalgoorlie	
Ear health screening	Kalgoorlie	
Notifiable diseases and STIs	Kalgoorlie	
Lifestyle disease support (e.g. diabetes, health promotion)	Kalgoorlie	
Physiotherapy	Kalgoorlie (being negotiated)	
Ophthalmology	Murchison	1.5 days twice annually

As discussed in Section 5.0, Wiluna has suffered from considerable uncertainty as a result of a confusing array of administrative boundaries and service centres. This has also been reflected in the health portfolio. Under the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Strategy and associated Joint Planning Forum, Wiluna has been on the periphery of regional health planning processes based around the Goldfields and the Mid West. The Goldfields Aboriginal Health Plan notes that for a number of reasons (including remoteness), Wiluna was unable to participate in the regional planning process. In actuality, Wiluna has much in common with other desert communities based in the Pilbara, Central Reserves and Eastern Kimberley. For this reason a “Central Desert Regional Aboriginal Health Planning Forum” has recently been established to represent the interests of the region’s four Aboriginal health service providers: Ngangganawili (Wiluna), Ngaanyatjarra (Warburton), Puntukurnu (Jigalong) and Palyaltju Maparnpa (Balgo). The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health has provided \$192,000 to facilitate this forum and a central desert health planning process.

Wiluna appears to be well serviced with regard to health services. NAMS is consistently acknowledged as a very efficient and proactive organisation that takes a holistic approach to Aboriginal health needs. However, some concerns were raised in consultations that can be summarised as:

- Community partisanship has led to inequitable access to the clinic (some people won’t use the facility);
- Outreach services to communities such as Windidda and Kutkububba were irregular at best¹¹.
- Regular screening and health education at the school was not occurring¹².
- NAMS needs to focus on its core business, which is the delivery of health services rather than being distracted into other service areas and community issues¹³.
- NAMS (with the support of State and Federal health agencies) needs to be more active in health promotion and disease prevention rather than just treatment.
- There needs to be better integration of environmental health resources, which are currently split between NAMS and the Shire.

Interestingly, NAMS has been able to attract significant resources and according to NAMS’ Health Services Manager, funding is not an issue. The split of responsibilities between the Goldfields and Murchison Health regions seems to facilitate access to funding in the sense that what can’t be provided by one can usually be sourced from the other. In addition, Aboriginal specific programs are available through the State and Commonwealth Aboriginal health offices. Generally, a very flexible and proactive approach has been adopted to health in the region with the

¹¹ Advice from NAMS indicates that scheduled visits depend upon community numbers and the frequency of community member visits to NAMS in Wiluna.

¹² There are conflicting stories as to why this is not occurring and this needs to be resolved by the school and NAMS.

¹³ It should be noted that this was also described as a strength by some as a holistic approach to health issues is necessary in remote areas. NAMS also has to fill the void when no other service is available.

health providers and funders showing a willingness to address issues that lie outside the normal health portfolio.

Importantly, the current clinic and administrative centre for NAMS is inadequate. This has been acknowledged and funding has been committed by the Commonwealth for a new clinic, which will resolve this situation. NAMS has appointed Relspree Pty Ltd to undertake some work with the community to encourage community involvement in the development of the new facility.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- NAMS and the Wiluna School give priority to reconstituting regular health screening and health promotional work at the school.
- Ongoing support is provided to the Central Desert Regional Aboriginal Health Planning Forum and that agencies consider the implications of this model for future service planning and delivery.
- NAMS review the adequacy of current services provided to outlying communities and ensure that all residents have equal access to the services and facilities provided by the clinic.

4.1.2 Health Promotion and Nutrition

As articulated by one of the medical staff interviewed at the clinic: the key to addressing the considerable health problems of the resident population of Wiluna lies not in primary health programs or health facilities but in prevention and in the changing of behaviours. This relates both to the adequacy of the health environment (see also Housing and Infrastructure) and to the level of health awareness and education of the population.

As outlined above and in Attachment 3, the treatment and management of preventable diseases and injury consume considerable time and resources. Most medical presentations are due to lifestyle issues influenced by poor nutrition, obesity, poor personal and domestic hygiene or alcohol abuse.

Forty percent of Aboriginal people over 40 in Wiluna have diabetes¹⁴, which eventually creates huge downstream costs to the community and to government. NAMS has recently received funding for a dialysis service, which while badly needed, is symptomatic of the long-term impact of lifestyle issues on the population and of the significant costs to Government of preventable diseases.

It should also be noted that the impoverished position of much of the population means that many people do not have access to the basic infrastructure required for healthy living. Access to refrigeration to maintain fresh food and medicines is often

¹⁴ Nganganawili Clinic – personal communication.

the exception rather than the rule. Many people have only one set of clothes and although washing facilities are available at the HACC and the Women's Centre, not all people have access to these.

The "National Framework for the Design Construction and Maintenance of Indigenous Housing" has as a core principle that houses will be designed, constructed and maintained to support nine key healthy living practices essential for good health. As discussed in 4.2, the maintenance of housing to this standard is largely absent within public housing in Wiluna.

In addition, the lack of facilities such as drinking fountains around the town means that people, particularly children, go to the shop and purchase soft drinks when thirsty. This is exacerbated by the quality and temperature of the drinking water available (see section 4.2.2) and a lack of refrigeration in most houses. The first indicator of dietary quality used in the recent WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey is whether water was usually drunk when thirsty.

NAMS points out that individuals must take responsibility for their own health and for the health of their families. For this reason, the clinic staff takes an individual approach to patients and take every opportunity to promote healthy living practices and to reinforce good eating habits. This approach is supported. It is suggested, however, that it needs to be supported by a concerted campaign at a community level to educate residents, prior to presentation at the clinic, about healthy living practices.

This approach needs to be supported by all service providers in the community including the Shire, the school and businesses such as the stores and the hotel. To be effective it also needs to focus on particular target groups where it is likely to have the most effect such as maternal and child health.

It is understood that the current Health and Nutrition Coordinator position based in Kalgoorlie is vacant and that efforts are being made to fill this position. Nutrition and health promotion are a priority for the Office of Aboriginal Health, however, there are no such programs funded in Wiluna. It is anticipated that funding support could be available through this area if deemed a priority by local stakeholders.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that:

- That a concerted health and nutrition promotion program be implemented at Wiluna to complement the individual approach adopted by NAMS and that this be supported by the DOH, the Shire and relevant business interests.
- That community housing and facilities be reviewed to ensure that the basic facilities and skills are available and maintained in order to promote healthy living practices including the availability of quality drinking water.

4.1.3 Alcohol and Drug Abuse

By far the most consistent issue raised in the consultations for this report was the wide spread and deleterious effect of alcohol consumption on individual and community life in Wiluna. Excessive and long-term abuse of alcohol was seen as having a major impact on anti-social behaviour, crime, child neglect and family violence. In the longer term, abuse of alcohol was seen to be detrimental to individual health and employability and leading to considerable expenditure on services seeking to manage the problem.

The abuse of alcohol was seen as tearing at the fabric of Aboriginal values and society by bringing everyone down to one level. Elders, men, women and youth are all affected with a subsequent loss of identity and respect. NAMS indicated that Wiluna tended to have far worse health outcomes than most remote communities because of its access to alcohol.

Drug-use indicators prepared for the Drug and Alcohol Office indicated that the rate of alcohol consumption for the Midwest – Murchison region was 89% more than the State average and alcohol related costs were 138% more than the mean per capita State cost.¹⁵ It is also reported (anecdotally) that the Wiluna Club Hotel has the highest turnover per capita of any licensed premises in Western Australia.

The problems caused by alcohol in the Wiluna community have long been recognised. Sackett (1977) noted how the introduction of non-restrictive drinking rights on 1 July 1971, led immediately to “increased fighting; a decrease in spending on essentials such as food; and a general deterioration in ritual activity, camp appearance (owing mainly to broken bottles) and health”. He also noted that the acceleration in the number of arrests for alcohol related offences from two in June (prior to drinking rights), to 15 in July and 29 in August of 1971. As discussed in Section 4.3, alcohol continues to be a major factor in the continuing high rates of contact between Aboriginal people and the criminal justice system in Wiluna.

There are reports of Cannabis and petrol sniffing in Wiluna, however, alcohol is seen as the major drug problem in the town. Petrol sniffing is seen as an emerging concern that affects a small group of core sniffers. It particularly affect those children (13-16) who have dropped out of the school system but are not yet old enough to gain access to alcohol. It is also reported that it is occasionally a problem among older kids who turn to petrol when there is no money to buy alcohol. This problem is exacerbated by the number of old and abandoned car bodies around the town (see also Section 4.2.4).

NAMS receives funding to run the Wiluna Sobering Up Centre, the community patrol and for a Substance Misuse Counsellor. Each of these services is a direct response to assist in managing alcohol abuse within the community. It should be noted that the Patrol funded by DIA, has not been active for some time due to the breakdown of the bus. A new bus funded by the Lotteries Commission has recently been acquired.

¹⁵ Unpublished data from Office of Crime Prevention, State Government of WA (2004)

The opening of the Sobering Up Centre in 1996 was credited with a significant reduction in alcohol related injuries and arrests over the proceeding few years. It was suggested by some that the Sobering Up Centre was now not as well used as in previous years because the Police now tended to take people directly home (which may create its own problems in terms of family violence). Figures provided by the Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO) would seem to support a fall off in admissions although this has fluctuated significantly over the years of its operation (see also discussion under Section 4.3 and Attachment 2). This could be due to many factors including the level of activity of the Patrol, WAPS policy, individual preferences, as well as the level of community drunkenness. It is suggested that the WAPS, NAMS and other stakeholders should meet on a regular basis to review the use of current resources and to ensure the best use of WAPS, patrol, sobering up centre and other support services. Protocols need to be established to maximise the use of available resources and to minimise the risk of harm to the individuals and their families when affected by alcohol.

DAO has indicated that a community advisory committee comprised of key stakeholders including representatives from the Community Drug Service team and/or other local drug and alcohol services, WAPS, Health and relevant community groups is to be established for the Sobering Up Centre. This committee would appear to be an appropriate forum to progress these matters.

The Alcohol and Substance Misuse Counsellor employed by NAMS is seemingly doing a great job under extremely difficult circumstances. He works from the Sobering Up Centre and takes a proactive approach to counselling sessions with individuals as well as providing presentations to the school and small groups. Bush camps are also run which are very well received and which remove people from the town environment leading to renewed spirit, identity and respect¹⁶. His work and background as a Seventh Day Adventist Minister has enables him to gain the respect and trust of the community. The position receives support directly from DAO in Perth and also through Compari, the Community Drug Service Team based in Geraldton.

Importantly, substance misuse counselling leads to a variety of other service needs. Issues of sexual abuse, family violence, anger management, mental health problems are constant concerns and which need specialist support. Additional support and training is required if the Substance Misuse Counsellor is expected to deal with these issues and to respond appropriately.

The Wiluna Agreement

One response to alcohol problems in Wiluna was the signing of the “Wiluna Agreement” in 1996. This was a community driven attempt to restrict access to and the harm caused by alcohol in the community. The Agreement appears to have been effective in reducing alcohol related harm in the community. The most recent version of the Agreement (December 2002) effectively agrees to the following:

¹⁶ Some concern was expressed that vehicles used for these camps may no longer be available putting at risk this valuable initiative.

- Restricted hours for purchase of take-away liquor;
- Restriction of take-away liquor to canned beer and light UDL cans (Saturday mornings only);
- Restriction of liquor sales in the public bar to open cans of beer only;
- Reinforces the provisions of the Liquor Licensing Act relating to the sale or supply of liquor to drunken persons and juveniles.

The Agreement remains an informal document that has the support of the WAPS, the publican and the community. General feedback has been that the Agreement is positive and that there had been significant improvements since it had been in place. Wiluna appears to be relatively well off compared to some towns in that it has only one licensed liquor outlet (the Wiluna Club Hotel) and has the active support and cooperation of the resident publican. Having said that, all people consulted were unanimous in their views that alcohol was still the major problem in the community and this is supported by the alcohol data relating to police and medical services.

Major issues raised include:

- Reports of children accessing alcohol in proximity to pub.
- Street drinking and subsequent anti-social behaviour.
- Consistent violence and serious assault directly linked to alcohol.
- High levels of family violence and sexual assault (not always reported).
- Child neglect
- Damage to property
- Elder abuse
- Driving offences
- Flow-on effects in terms of poor health, high housing maintenance, low school attendance, poor training and workforce participation and strained community relations.

Of concern are reports of the impact of alcohol abuse on third parties in particular the children, parents and grandparents of those drinking to harmful levels. Income (largely CDEP or Centrelink benefits) is generally expended within days of receipt and it is generally spent at the hotel. The consequence is children without supervision while their parents are drinking and without food when the money runs out. Pressure is applied to those family members who still have money to hand it over to also be spent at the hotel. From reports, it seems that it is not uncommon for family members and the elderly to be threatened or bashed in order to access their money for alcohol. The author was told of a recent event where one elderly lady was caught shop lifting for food in order to feed herself and her grandchildren because she had been forced to hand over her fortnightly benefit to her own children to be spent at the hotel. The traditional system of reciprocity, so integral to Aboriginal society, would therefore appear to be being abused by heavy drinkers to the detriment of both drinkers and non-drinkers in the community.

A number of reports were made of young children wandering the streets at night without supervision and of being left alone for days while adults were on drinking binges. Occasions of neglect, abuse, antisocial and criminal behaviour peak at times when money and subsequently alcohol is available. This is supported by information

from WAPS that shows that the Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights following payday are the worst in terms of alcohol related charges. NAMS also “gears up” at this time each fortnight for the inevitable influx of clients.

The Wiluna Agreement has been reviewed a number of times since it was originally signed in June 1996. Restrictions to take-away hours have been relaxed during this time which was felt by some to be a “watering down” of the original intent. Concerns were also raised that being an informal Agreement, its effectiveness was vulnerable to changes in key personnel within the community (e.g. publican, WAPS, community leaders).

The current Agreement is due to be reviewed. One option available to stakeholders in Wiluna is to formalise the restrictions through a Section 64 Inquiry under the *Liquor Licensing Act 1988* (the Act). A primary objective of the Act is “*to minimise harm or ill health caused to people, or any group of people, due to the use of liquor*”. The Director of Liquor Licensing has powers to impose conditions on a licence that are in the public interest and which reflect local issues in accordance with harm minimisation principles.

The benefits of such an Inquiry would include the establishment of a statutory (and therefore enforceable) basis for the Wiluna Agreement; a process for the conduct of hearings and presentation of evidence; an opportunity to examine the outcomes from accords in other areas; and the independent development of an evaluation framework for the level of alcohol related harm in the community.

It is recognised, however, that given the apparent level of cooperation that currently exists in Wiluna, stakeholders may prefer to maintain the current community driven and voluntary approach. If so, it is recommended that the next review of the Wiluna Agreement actively involve both the Office of Drug and Alcohol and the Director of Liquor Licensing (at an informal level) to examine opportunities and options to strengthen the operation of the Agreement. It is also suggested that an appropriate evaluation framework be established and that a formal steering committee be convened to oversee and monitor its effectiveness. Importantly, an appropriate balance must be achieved between restrictions, which reduce alcohol related harm in the community, and a too heavy-handed approach, which may simply shift the problem elsewhere. It is understood that a previous attempt to restrict liquor sales to low alcohol beverages led people to travel to Meekatharra with subsequent increased risks associated with travel.

The restriction of access to alcohol will not, on its own solve the problems so prevalent in Wiluna. The health promotion approach advocated above needs to include a targeted education program aimed at responsible alcohol consumption. There also needs to be something else to do. Meaningful employment, activities for youth as well as community facilities and events, which are discussed further below, all need to be part of a coordinated strategy to tackle these issues.

Alcohol and the Welfare System

Irrespective of what measures are put in place to restrict access to alcohol; to provide counselling and education; or to create alternative activities, there is an obvious and

urgent need for more fundamental reforms to deal with chronic alcoholism and problem drinkers.

The Aboriginal population of Wiluna is characterised by chronic homelessness; poor health and wellbeing; a lack of care for the elderly and infirm; neglect of children; poor educational outcomes; alcoholism, violence and poverty. If the welfare system is designed to ensure that those most in need have access to the basic necessities of life including shelter, clothing, food and education, it is not working.

Much has been written in recent times, including that by Noel Pearson, about how the traditional welfare approach has promoted passivity among the Indigenous population and of the urgent need for fundamental reforms to tackle the “automatic and unconditional welfare payments” which contribute to substance abuse and social disintegration.

The Commonwealth Government is currently promoting a new service paradigm based on shared and reciprocal obligations between government and communities through Regional Partnership Agreements and Shared Responsibility Agreements. Such agreements have the potential to assist in managing income and alcohol problems on a voluntary and cooperative basis. In cases of chronic alcohol addiction, however, and where individuals consistently fail to meet such responsibilities, there is a need for appropriate sanctions in order to break the cycle of welfare payments, substance abuse, violence and neglect. Importantly, such sanctions should not deny people access to welfare but ensure that it is achieving its intended purpose. They should also be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner and therefore not target Aboriginal people specifically but all those people who fail to meet their obligations.

The bottom line in a place like Wiluna is that a large proportion of Centrelink and CDEP payments received by many local residents go to the Wiluna Club Hotel for the purchase of alcohol. In addition, a number of people commented that many cash payments received as a result of native title agreements end up in the same place.

Alcoholism is an addiction. There are numerous programs and strategies in place to deal with the consequences of that addiction and to tackle its underlying causes. However, the welfare system, despite its crucial place in alleviating poverty, can also contribute to the problem. As one respondent stated, “for some people you might as well just hand out free grog.” For example, according to NAMS, the result for many families of the \$600 per child family payment that went as a lump sum into many bank accounts in June 2004, was further binge drinking and undoubtedly the opposite effect then intended for community children. Centrelink also advised of reports of increased crime and domestic violence in some areas as well as reports of increased drug trafficking, binge drinking and gambling¹⁷. The Magistrates Court, which was due to be convened in Wiluna that day, was cancelled due to a lack of sober offenders and the Royal Flying Doctor Service was kept busy evacuating the victims of violence and alcohol related injuries.

¹⁷ Centrelink also pointed out that in Moora, the community organised a bus to take people to Perth for shopping in order to encourage the use of the \$600 family payment on food, clothing and other necessities.

This issue raises all sorts of political, ideological and legal questions about civil liberties, the rights and responsibilities of individuals and about the responsibilities of governments. However, unless it is dealt with in a sustained and systematic way, stakeholders will continue to tinker around the edges with good intentions and even good programs while the downward spiral continues.

A number of people use direct debit arrangements either through the CDEP organisations or through Centrepay to pay rent, utilities and even food bills at the store. It is suggested that the use of direct debits for housing, essential services and food be increased and that appropriate safeguards be put in place so that such arrangements cannot be easily cancelled. At the moment, it is understood that direct debit arrangements can be cancelled unilaterally and on the spot, despite the rigmarole involved in obtaining the original agreement on this process by agencies such as DHW and their agents. Consideration should be given to making such arrangements mandatory for those individuals with a history of addiction and/ or debt problems.

Ironically, direct debit is favoured by a lot of Aboriginal people who see it not just as convenient but also as “culturally appropriate” because it assists in overcoming family pressures for money and the abuse by heavy drinkers of traditional practices of reciprocity.

A number of stakeholders consulted in Wiluna long for a change in the way welfare benefits are paid so that access to the basic necessities of life are guaranteed through some sort of system of vouchers for food and other necessities. The provision of food vouchers instead of cash welfare payments has also been proposed in a recent report done for the Menzies Research Centre¹⁸. It was seen as a legitimate response to “communities where the power of alcohol is greater than the love of children, where there is third generational welfare dependency, serious ill health from substance abuse, family violence and child neglect – if not abuse.”

As acting Chair of ATSIC, Lionel Quartermaine, advocated for a form of “smart card,” which could only be used for buying food, clothing, shelter and education for children. In addition, the House of Representative Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Affairs has raised the matter of food vouchers being provided in lieu of Centrelink payments as a way to combat binge drinking and substance abuse issue in its “Many Ways Forward” report of June 2004.

Advice from FACS is that the relevant social security and family assistance legislation contain the fundamental principle that a person’s entitlement to welfare payments is inalienable. Once a person has met the legislated criteria for entitlement and payment they have a right to full benefit of that payment. Thus, with very limited exceptions, the recipient of payments cannot be directed on how it should be spent. To depart from this principle would require legislative amendment and a significant change to the nature of the social security system.

The Cape York Peninsula Substance Abuse Strategy (August 2002) takes a refreshing and pragmatic approach to the chronic problems caused by alcohol in that region. It documents similar links between substance abuse and violence, poor health, contact

¹⁸ Beadman (2004) “Do Indigenous Youth Have a Dream”. Menzies Research Centre Ltd.

with the criminal justice system and with the destruction of Aboriginal culture to those in Wiluna. Importantly, it documents six key strategies to tackle these issues:

1. Rebuild a social, cultural, spiritual and therefore legal intolerance of abusive behaviour.
2. Control availability and supply.
3. Manage money
4. Treatment and rehabilitation
5. Fix up the home and community environment.

Of particular interest to this discussion is the issue of money management. The strategy proposes both voluntary family income management and compulsory “income management orders” in cases where for example: individuals are not applying income for the benefit of children and those under their care; or where individuals are indulging in behaviours that are self destructive or harmful to others.

Under the Cape York Partnerships initiative a trial Family Income Management (FIM) project is being implemented in Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge. FIM is sponsored by FACS and the Westpac Banking Corporation and aims to improve the management of family income by building understanding of individual and family responsibilities and through the prioritised and planned use of financial resources. One of the early reported successes of FIM is that “*less is spend on alcohol and gambling with more on essentials and homes*”¹⁹. FIM has now become the “Indigenous Financial Management (IFM) Initiative and \$4.4 million has been allocated by the Commonwealth Government for projects in other sites around Australia.

The Northern Territory Government has recently released a draft Alcohol Framework²⁰ in order to reduce alcohol related harm in the community. Relevant recommendations from that review include proposals to:

- Empower especially convened “alcohol courts” to make orders to prohibit individuals from accessing alcohol; requiring a person to undergo assessment or treatment; and restricting the ability of a person to manage their financial affairs.
- Provide support to families of drinkers to protect their money from requests or demands through initiatives such as Centrepay.

The Court would therefore appear to have an important role in potentially enforcing requisite management of income (either through quarantining or through the use of third parties) and treatment in cases of problem drinking. Although the Court cannot override the inalienability principles in relevant social security legislation, the court is in a strong position to gain the consent of offenders for the management of their income as an alternative to other sentencing options.

¹⁹ www.capeyorkpartnerships.com/project/families/fim (August 2004)

²⁰ Northern Territory Government , “Northern Territory Alcohol Framework, Final Report” www.nt.gov.au/alcoholframework (July 2004)

It is suggested that the Cape York and Northern Territory initiatives provide a basis for a coordinated approach to these issues in Western Australia and particularly in a place like Wiluna. Significantly, such an approach requires the support and cooperation of the Court system; Federal Government agencies such as Centrelink and FACS; adequate financial management support²¹; and access to adequate drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities.

Both the Federal Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination and FACS have expressed preliminary interest in working with the State Government to progress these issues.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Wiluna Agreement be reviewed with the involvement of the Office of Drug and Alcohol and the Director of Liquor Licensing, either at a formal or informal level, in order to strengthen its operation and to establish a formal review and evaluation framework.
- The responsible consumption of alcohol be included in the health promotion approach advocated above. This approach should investigate the development of a code of conduct for drinking that is endorsed by Wiluna elders and which seeks to promote improved social standards and limit the anti-social consequences of drinking.
- A priority be given to the development of training and employment activities as well as community events and activities in order to provide alternate activities for those with substance abuse problems.
- Increased support and training be provided to the Substance Misuse Counsellor in order to ensure that he is adequately equipped to deal with the myriad of often urgent issues that emerge in his role.
- A concerted effort be made to remove the discarded car bodies from Wiluna and surrounds in order to both improve community amenity and to reduce access for petrol sniffing.
- Alternatives to lump sum payments of CDEP, Centrelink and other forms of income be investigated for those individuals and families with a history of alcohol and drug abuse and of failing to care for their families.
- Prior to the next lump-sum family payment due in 2004/05, Centrelink encourage communities to organise community events and transport for shopping expeditions to regional centres in order to promote the purchase of bulk food, clothes and household goods.

²¹ It is noted that the approach being adopted in Cape York is reliant upon strong support from financial institutions. The absence of such institutions in Wiluna may create an additional complication.

- Voluntary and compulsory management of income be considered for individuals and families with a history of substance abuse and neglect of responsibilities. In this context the initiatives emerging from the Cape York Peninsula Substance Abuse Strategy and the Northern Territory Alcohol Framework should be examined for their applicability in Western Australia.
- Wiluna be considered for the expansion of the Indigenous Financial Management Initiative and that this be supported by the State and Commonwealth Governments.

4.1.4 Mental Health

The alarming rate of suicide and self-harm amongst Aboriginal people has been well documented through the work of the WA Youth Suicide Advisory Committee (YSAC). The Committee found that the rate of suicide among Aboriginal youth is double that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts²². Risk factors include depression, substance abuse, exposure to domestic violence, child abuse, early school leaving and experience of discrimination and unemployment. All of these risk factors are prevalent in Wiluna.

A number of stakeholders consulted as part of this report expressed concern at the mental state of many Aboriginal youth variously described as a sense of hopelessness, apathy and emotional dysfunction. This influences their ability and motivation to learn and contribute positively to the community and increases the risk of substance abuse and anti-social behaviour. The Principal of the Wiluna Remote School spoke of the emotional damage and poor social and behavioural skills that most students bring with them and which mitigate against effective learning.

As stated in the YSAC's Report: *"the ability of families, schools and communities to rear children successfully is supported by the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well being of the whole community."* This 'ability' was seen to be adversely affected by the history of the State's colonisation and the detrimental effects of the forced removal of children from their parents. In Wiluna, these historical factors together with all of the risk factors outlined above combine to create an environment with significant mental health challenges.

Mental health services are provided through the Murchison District of the WA Country Health Service. A mental health specialist visits once per week. In addition, the School is provided with support from a psychologist based in Kalgoorlie who visits once or twice per month. There is therefore a mismatch between the apparent significant extent of need and the resources available to address these problems (as one person stated "those involved do a great job but we need ten more of them"). This is particularly important if a proactive approach is to be taken to tackle mental health issues rather than just the management of particular individuals or problems. Such an approach needs to address the risk factors faced by vulnerable youth and to

²² *"Recommended Policy and Programs for Preventing Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour Among Aboriginal Youth in Western Australia"* (1998)

promote improved life skills, decision-making and positive school experiences as well as to promote a sense of identity and self – worth.

The need for this community development work is discussed further below and the responsibility goes across a number of government portfolio areas. There would therefore appear to be opportunities for resource sharing and cooperative strategies to address this need involving DOH, DCD, FACS, DOET and the Shire.

The Murchison District of DOH runs a successful “Men’s Health Program” in Meekatharra. This program was seen, by a number of people interviewed in Meekatharra, as a very positive initiative for the men involved, including improved self esteem and anger management, and to have encouraging flow-on effects for the partners and children of the participants. It is understood that it is proposed to extend this program to Wiluna in 2004/2005 and this is strongly supported.

FACS has committed funding for a youth mentor program that seeks to train and support positive members of the community to address community issues and improve outcomes for young people through mentoring. This is another positive initiative but one that is dependent upon the availability and commitment of positive role models.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- That relevant agencies review the resources currently available for mental health services to Wiluna with a view to enhancing current service levels. In recognition of current fiscal constraints and the across portfolio nature of the issue, it is also recommended that agencies such as DOH, DCD, FACS, DOET and the Shire discuss options for the joint resourcing of a community development and prevention approach to mental health problems among Aboriginal youth.

4.1.5 Family and Social Support

The category of family and social support covers a wide range of activities and issues. It includes the provision of support and services for the elderly, the young, the disabled and the impoverished. It is an area that overlaps the responsibilities of many government agencies and an area of particular relevance to Aboriginal people in Wiluna.

Despite the relative strength of its culture, Indigenous society and its traditional values and laws is struggling to come to terms with the sustained and growing problems of social disorder, substance abuse and violence that is characteristic of life as an Aboriginal person in Wiluna. Government is also struggling to come to terms with this complex and urgent problem. Social support programs have historically focussed on treating the effects and symptoms of disadvantage rather than tackling their causes through targeted preventative approaches.

Encouragingly, in the post Gordon Inquiry environment, there is a renewed focus on the social problems prevalent in Aboriginal communities such as family violence, sexual abuse and family dysfunction. Significant resources have been allocated to agencies such as DCD and DOJ to tackle these issues and to work with families and other stakeholders with an intervention and prevention focus. There does not, however, appear to be a good understanding between stakeholders of the various emerging initiatives and there is the potential for duplication of effort if implementation is not well coordinated. For example: DCD have a “Strong Families Coordinator” based in Geraldton and a Child Protection Worker based in Meekatharra. Both roles work with families and individuals in at-risk situations. In addition, DOJ has a Primary Crime Prevention Officer based in Meekatharra and a Regional Program Development Officer (Geraldton) whose role includes prevention of abuse and family violence. DCD has also recently advertised a “Community Capacity Builder” who will be based in Meekatharra but who will also service Wiluna. The Shire has recently established a “Community Development Officer” position. FACS has allocated significant resources to support early years strategies and a youth mentor project through the NAMS.

As discussed in Section 5.0, Wiluna suffers from a lack of structured coordination mechanisms. Cooperation between agencies and service providers is personality driven and is therefore ad hoc and vulnerable to changes in personnel. This particularly affects the area of family and social support where there are many stakeholders, a myriad of funding sources and a number of new and emerging initiatives.

The Women’s Centre provides activities such as painting, sewing, screen-printing and bush outings. It also provides a haven for women needing time out from the domestic scene. A new family centre has been funded by FACS and will be built adjacent to the women’s centre. It is understood that this will be the home of the early years program and will provide facilities and activities for young children and family members. The need for programs and activities that also target the men was raised by a number of people and the proposed expansion of the Meekatharra Men’s Health Program is discussed above.

In addition, a number of specific concerns and issues were raised relating to family and social support. These include:

- Early childhood development programs were seen as vital in order to prepare kids for school. The existing program run through the NAMS and funded jointly by DCD and FACS had suffered from fluctuating support and the lack of a permanent home²³. The recent loss of the coordinator has also been a set back.
- There is insufficient support for improving parenting skills and in providing an appropriate environment for childhood development.
- Homemaker-style programs are needed to help people manage basic domestic and household duties (see also Housing and Infrastructure).

²³ This program will be based at the new family centre which should solve this problem. The “Best Start Coordinator” position is currently being filled.

- There are limited programs and activities for youth and thus high levels of boredom, substance abuse and anti social behaviour. The Shire Community Recreation and Development Officer had apparently been doing some very good things with increasing community support but has now left²⁴. There was concern expressed that this position had not received sufficient support from the Shire which had contributed to a turnover of staff and a loss of focus.
- There is a need for a safe refuge for women and children affected by or at risk of family violence.
- There is a lack of positive role models for Indigenous youth²⁵.
- Service providers had not worked together to make the best use of available resources. For example: ATSIC had funded a large indoor recreation facility (that now needs repairs and maintenance) in isolation of the existing outdoor courts and recreation centre operated by the Shire.
- There is a need for a more cooperative and coordinated approach to address issues of truancy and school retention (see also Education and Training section).
- DCD was reported as being reticent to become involved or to intervene in allegations of child abuse and/or neglect. The desire and need to work with relevant families is supported, however, concern was expressed that sometimes children were left in at-risk situations while this occurred. It should be noted that DCD state that many allegations are unsubstantiated leaving them in a very difficult position.
- It is difficult for service provider staff with family connections to the area to deal with sensitive issues like child and sexual abuse in the local community.
- With the exception of the HACC centre at the NAMS there is little provision for residential aged care. People have to travel to Meekatharra (for respite) and to Kalgoorlie or Geraldton for full-time care²⁶.
- There are no banks in Wiluna, only an agent at the post office and an ATM at the Hotel. Many young people do not have bank accounts and therefore use family accounts for direct crediting of allowances and benefits. It was reported that this sometimes leads to the inability of young people to access their Centrelink benefits.
- There is a low level of financial awareness among many Aboriginal people which contributes to poor budgeting, their ability to save money and their vulnerability to exploitation by others.
- Concerns were expressed that the store has in the past provided an informal line of credit, which has lead to debt problems. In addition, there is an alleged practice of allowing people to book up debts under other people's names leading to further problems and conflict.
- Services for people with disabilities are provided through a Local Area Coordinator based in Geraldton. A more localised and responsive service is needed²⁷.

²⁴ This position has been replaced by a Community Development Officer who is currently progressing a number of initiatives in this area including a proposed skate park and BMX track.

²⁵ A Youth Mentor Program is proposed by FACS to be implemented through the NAMS.

²⁶ It is understood that land has been allocated to Ngangganawilli for an aged care facility, however, there is a stalemate between Ngangganawilli and DHW regarding layout and design of the facility.

²⁷ DSC has recently completed a review of disability services for Indigenous people which also identified this issue.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Agencies involved in the area of child abuse and neglect including DCD, DOH/NAMS, WAPS, DOJ and FACS develop a protocol which clearly outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder and establishes a set of cooperative and unambiguous procedures to deal with allegations.
- DSC review the adequacy of current services for people with disabilities with a view to improving coverage of Wiluna and Meekatharra.
- Relevant stakeholders including DHW, FACS and NAMS revive the aged care facility proposal with a view to overcoming current impediments to progress.
- Opportunities be explored to improve access to banking services and to develop appropriate financial education and support mechanisms. This could be pursued as part of the new Telecentre by the Shire and the DLGRD.
- The Shire to work with the Department of Sport and Recreation, DCD and other stakeholders to develop facilities and activities for Aboriginal youth. Consideration should be given to a youth drop in centre either using an existing or purpose-built building.
- DCD consider supporting the Shire through the Helping Young People Engage Program (HYPE) and consider the establishment of a Youth Advisory Committee.
- As part of planning for the new family centre, consideration be given to establishment of a women's and children's refuge.

4.2 HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The key housing and infrastructure issues raised in consultations fall into the following categories:

- Housing and Tenancy Support
- Essential Services and Environmental Health
- Transport Issues
- Community Facilities and Amenity

4.2.1 Housing and Tenancy Support

The lack of adequate housing and accommodation for Indigenous people living in Wiluna was second only to alcohol as the major issue to be confronted to improve outcomes in Wiluna. The situation was described by OATSIH as follows: “*A serious shortage of housing for the local Aboriginal people has resulted in a large population un-housed and living in humpies of iron or tarpaulins, in car bodies, caravans and shelters of all descriptions.*”

There are 21 “public” houses in Wiluna that are managed by Marruwayura on behalf of DHW. Eighteen have been leased formally to Marruwayura and three are maintained on a contractual basis. They remain DHW assets.

In addition to the housing stock in Wiluna, Marruwayura is responsible for the management of houses at Bondini (14) and Kutkubabba (9). It has also been involved in housing construction at part of the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) project at Bondini.

Marruwayura is funded through the Management Support Program (MSP), which is responsible for housing renovations and community management of rent collection and tenancies. The MSP has a workforce of 1 MSP Supervisor, a support contractor and 4 MSP workers (unskilled CDEP workers).

The housing and accommodation situation at Wiluna is characterised by overcrowding, homelessness²⁸, the substandard and potentially hazardous condition of housing stock and a lack of responsiveness from mainstream service providers.

The Manager of DHW in Geraldton²⁹ described the identified housing need in Wiluna as “anecdotal.” This refers to the fact that there is only one person on the housing waiting list for Wiluna. The 2001 Census found that 21% of Wiluna residents

²⁸ The WA State Homelessness Strategy (2002) “Putting People First” (www.homeless.dhw.wa.gov.au) (August 2004) defines a person as homeless if he or she “*has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. Inadequate housing is defined as follows:*

- Damages, or is likely to damage, the person’s health; or
- Threatens the person’s safety; or
- Fails to provide access to adequate personal amenities and the economic and social support that a home normally affords.”

²⁹ It should be noted that responsibility for Wiluna was transferred from Geraldton to Kalgoorlie in July 2004.

occupied improvised dwellings. Over the past 12 months NAMS has purchased more than 40 tents to “house” homeless people on the outskirts of town.

Of the 18 houses surveyed as part of the 2003 Environmental Health Needs Survey, four were unoccupied due to repair needs and the remaining 14 houses held a usual population of 186 people (more than 13 per house or 4 per bedroom). In addition: 11 houses required major repairs or replacements to doors, eleven houses to windows, 4 houses to the roof and three required replacement hot water systems. Thirty percent of occupied houses had evidence of water ponding.

In September 1998, the Shire Environmental Health Officer undertook a similar survey of public housing in Wiluna. His report documented comparable states of overcrowding, disrepair and concerns regarding hygiene. In addition, the 1998 investigation recorded comments made by people occupying the houses including:

- “We have been here a long time and have never seen the Homeswest man inside our place;
- We report things that are wrong and they never get fixed;
- When people come to fix something, they don’t do all the things that we have reported, just what’s on their list;
- Windows are just falling out. Have stopped reporting this problem as Homeswest charges us with the fixing;
- When I come to this house first time, we had many problems not fixed from the last person here. Reluctant to tell Homeswest as we will be charged for the fixing;
- We have not applied for our own house because we know there are none around; and
- We can’t get a Homeswest house because we owe them money already.”

All of the above problems have been highlighted during the consultations for this report as ongoing concerns. As one person stated, DHW’s response to the unacceptable standard of housing and the problems identified in 1998 seems to have been to “flick the problem to the community and to Maruwayura”. Maruwayura does not have the resources, the expertise or the mandate to deal adequately with these issues. It does, however, cop much of the flack for a lack of responsiveness to the housing needs of the population.

On 22 July 2004, at the request of NAMS, the Shire Environmental Health Officer inspected a number of houses in Wiluna and Bondini. That inspection documented major water leaks and subsequent water damage; dangerous electrical installations (in one case resulting in a Notice declaring the house unfit for human habitation); blocked plumbing, loose or jammed doors and raw open sewerage.

The inadequate standard of housing is therefore a long standing and continuing problem with no signs of improvement. The focus of MSP has been on housing upgrades and on training and employment opportunities for community people. Maruwayura is not funded to provide a regular repair and maintenance service and is struggling to manage its existing workload. Turnover of trainees is high and the pool of people with the skills and aptitude to add value (rather than divert scarce resources) is limited. There is general satisfaction with the quality of work performed in terms

of housing upgrades³⁰, however, by the time the MSP team is part way through the upgrade program, the first houses are in a state of disrepair. This reflects both the lack of systematic repairs and maintenance and the pressure on housing stock caused by overcrowding, problem tenants and third party vandalism.

MSP, is at best, a supplementary program to support a regular and responsive repair and maintenance regime. However, in Wiluna it is being relied upon as the front-line of service delivery. Marruwayura complain of a lack of support from DHW and feel that Wiluna suffers from being “out of sight and out of mind”. Houses were not upgraded to standard before taken over by Marruwayura and according to Marruwayura it has long-standing unpaid invoices for the work it has carried out on behalf of DHW.

Significantly, all 21 public houses in Wiluna have been funded through ‘Fund 6’ or Aboriginal specific funding. These funds are usually preserved for remote communities that cannot access mainstream (‘Fund 1’) housing. Wiluna is a mainstream town, the houses are DHW assets and yet they have been built with Aboriginal specific funding through the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate. It is noted that the Draft Regional Housing and Infrastructure Plan for the Western Desert Region identifies a need for 30 additional houses in Wiluna.

Fund 1 housing is prioritised according to waiting lists. For a number of reasons Wiluna is not recognised as a priority through this system. These reasons include:

- The shortage of houses means people don’t bother to register (catch 22);
- People don’t know how to get on the wait list;
- Inaccessibility of DHW – the nearest office is in Meekatharra;
- People are ineligible due to past debts;
- People prefer to stay with relatives and/or are transient;
- People prefer informal accommodation (e.g. camping), which supports a more traditional lifestyle and avoids financial commitments.

Whatever the reasons, the fact is that there is a public housing problem to which the mainstream public housing system is not responding. The result is enormous pressure on a community organisation, inequitable service standards for the residents of the housing and a subsequent negative impact on the health and well being of the Wiluna population.

Other major housing issues raised in consultations include:

- Many housing occupants are traditional desert people and lack the knowledge and skills to adequately manage day-to-day household duties and maintenance of hygiene³¹.

³⁰ It should be noted that the Shire EHO, in his report of 22 July 2004, expressed concern at the standard of some workmanship.

³¹ It is noted that Marruwayura has recently used funding from the rental account to appoint a position to provide this sort of support. It is also understood that the DHW Regional office had previously had an arrangement with the NAMS to provide materials and support and that this had now ceased.

- Housing design and construction is not suited to community needs and exacerbates high maintenance costs.
- The MSP workforce is at times undertaking, through sheer need, electrical, plumbing and gas installation and repair work for which they are unlicensed.
- The relationship between the housing need in Wiluna and that of the outlying communities needs to be considered. Ten new houses have recently been built at Bondini and many people wish to live away from town. There are also empty (but trashed) houses at Desert Farm.
- Overcrowding and homelessness contributes to poor educational outcomes for children and increases the potential for sexual abuse and violence.
- The process of allocating new houses was questioned as some people felt preference was given to “low maintenance” clients.
- Camping on the fringes of town, although a preference for some, was seen as a health risk due to a lack of waste disposal facilities, drinking water and shelter from heat and cold. NAMS highlighted the absurdity of a situation where thousands of dollars are spent evacuating a critically ill person from Wiluna to hospital and then returning them home “to a humpy under a gidga tree”.
- Problems with rent collection are exacerbated by the inability to maintain people on direct debit arrangements.
- There is a lack of GEHA housing and other short-term “worker” accommodation. This exacerbates problems with recruitment and retention of staff in the area. This problem is aggravated by the fact that many government agencies with employees eligible for GEHA housing provide services through community organisations, the employees of which, are not eligible for GEHA housing³².

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- DHW acknowledge the current unsatisfactory arrangements for the provision of public housing in Wiluna and act urgently to ensure that:
 - Immediate housing repair needs are assessed and fixed.
 - An effective and responsive housing management and repair and maintenance system is put in place on an ongoing basis.
 - The role of MSP is reviewed and that sufficient resources and support are provided to Marruwayura to fulfil its role.
 - A thorough review of housing and accommodation need is undertaken incorporating existing DHW tenants, those living in improvised dwellings around town and those living or wishing to live in discrete communities outside of town.
 - This review is supported by the prioritisation of Wiluna for urgent additional housing.
 - Those eligible for DHW housing are registered on the waiting list and access mainstream housing funds.

³² It is understood that GEHA may make exceptions when there is available excess housing stock – a situation very unlikely in Wiluna.

- The current initiative to provide “homemaker” skills is supported and that DHW, NAMS and Marruwayura explore options to increase the level of support available.
- The Aboriginal Tenant Support Scheme and the Supported Housing Assistance Program be implemented at Wiluna to provide increased support to tenants and families occupying DHW rental properties.
- Government agencies and service providers assess current and future GEHA requirements and liaise with DHW to ensure adequate accommodation for employees.
- GEHA consider reviewing its policies regarding housing for non-government workers in cases of extreme remoteness and where government services are effectively outsourced to community organisations.

4.2.2 Essential Services and Environmental Health

Power

Wiluna has a new power station that became operational in January 2004. It is understood that it had some problems within a few weeks of its completion at a time of very high power demand during particularly hot weather. This necessitated using the old power station to assist in meeting the increased load.

Western Power advises that the power use during this time was outside its demand forecasts and therefore, of the initial capacity of the new station. Western Power is currently working with State West Power (the Independent Power Producer for Wiluna) to address the issue and advise that the new station will have sufficient capacity by next summer.

The old power station is due to be removed and the site cleaned up early in 2005.

Sewerage

The inadequate sewerage disposal system has been a major issue for many years in Wiluna. The Wiluna Shire and the Department of Health have identified it as a public health risk and the Office of Aboriginal Health advise that discussions have been ongoing for some 15 years. It is old, inefficient and the sewerage ponds, which are in close proximity to the town and the school, represent a direct health hazard. It is apparently common for children to swim in the ponds, despite warnings and fencing.

The Water Corporation has prepared plans to upgrade the wastewater system and have provided a commitment to take over and upgrade the system conditional on receiving Regulatory approvals and State Government CSO funding support. Unfortunately, this has not progressed as rapidly as stakeholders would like. The Corporation assessed the condition of the existing assets in November 2004 to more accurately

determine the scope (and cost) of upgrading required to bring the scheme up to an acceptable standard. The reticulation was found to be in a good condition. The effluent ponds and septic tanks have also been cleaned of excess sludge and this has reportedly improved the performance of the system. The next phase is for the Corporation to prepare a submission to Cabinet seeking State funding support for the proposal. When State support is granted the Corporation will progress design and construction.

Completion of the capital upgrade will take approximately 2 years to complete as:

- The job is larger and more challenging than first thought which has caused some delays with the design work.
- The lengthy approval process associated with native title, heritage and environmental clearances.
- The need to obtain Government approval for the associated Community Service Obligation (to be progressed concurrently).

Water

Two major concerns have been raised about the water supply at Wiluna. Firstly, the water has very high nitrate content. The Water Corporation is in the process of installing a reverse osmosis system that will improve this situation. This is proposed to be delivered in two stages. The first stage will fully utilise the existing bore water source and reduce nitrate level from current 20ppm to 15ppm. The second stage requires an increase in the number of bores from the current 3 in order to provide enough source water for the desalination process to reduce nitrate concentration below the National Health Guideline of 10ppm. Exploration bores have been drilled, but are still being assessed for suitability. It is understood that high nitrate levels pose a particular health risk for infants. As an interim measure, the Water Corporation supplies free bottled drinking water to the Health Nurse on demand to distribute to mothers with young children. However, according to NAMS, this practice is irregular.

The second issue relates to water temperature. NAMS expressed concern that in the hottest summer months the tap water is sometimes not only too hot to drink but too hot with which to bathe. This has a direct and obvious impact on health, hygiene and well-being. It also raises the risk of bacterial and amoebic contamination.

The Water Corporation has insulated a section of supply main (that runs above the ground). At the time of writing a summertime water temperature assessment had yet to be carried out.

Environmental Health Services

The Shire of Wiluna shares one Environmental Health Officer (EHO) with the Shires of Meekatharra, Mt Magnet, Sandstone and Murchison through the Murchison Regional Health Scheme. NAMS also receives funding (approximately \$100,000 pa) for the provision of an environmental health program that employs an Environmental Health Worker (EHW).

The EHO currently spends four days per month in Wiluna. However, it is understood that this is to be increased to 9-11 days per month. According to the existing EHO, Wiluna needs a full time EHO to adequately deal with the environmental health issues within the Shire. His time in Wiluna is generally spent in the town and he rarely gets the opportunity to travel to the outlying communities. There needs to be a close working relationship between the Shire EHO and the EHWs at NAMS, however, this is difficult given the time spent in the town.

It is understood that attempts have been made to access the EHO program administered through the DOH in order to improve resourcing in this area. The Office of Aboriginal Health has recently contributed \$30,000 towards a position dedicated to Indigenous environmental health and that this position will work within the Murchison Regional Health Scheme and improve servicing to Wiluna in this area.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Every effort is made to expedite the decommissioning of the existing sewerage system and the construction of the new system. If necessary, options should be explored to reduce the most immediate environmental health risks in the interim period.
- The Water Corporation give priority to addressing the high nitrate levels in the drinking water and that the advice of health authorities be sought on the need for interim measures such as the provision of bottled water.
- The Water Corporation assess the effectiveness of the insulation in reducing water temperature and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to address this issue in the long term.
- DOH, the Shire of Wiluna and NAMS review the adequacy of current environmental health services and the use of current resources with a view to ensuring adequate service levels, complementarity of programs and the best use of any new available funding.

4.2.3 Transport Issues

The Wiluna to Meekatharra Road

A major issue for Wiluna is the future of the Wiluna to Meekatharra road (the Goldfields Highway). The road forms a major link between Wiluna and service agencies located in Meekatharra. It is the only unsealed section of the Highway and has high dust levels when dry and is subject to road closures when wet. It carries significant levels of traffic including multi-trailer road trains. This unfinished section of the Highway:

- Increases Wiluna's remoteness from services such as the Meekatharra hospital.

- Creates a disincentive for service agencies that visit Wiluna from Meekatharra and Geraldton.
- Creates an Occupational Health and Safety concern for service providers.
- Requires a high level of maintenance and re-sheeting.
- Provides an impediment to tourism and economic development in Wiluna.

A secondary impact of the unsealed Highway is that many stakeholders in Wiluna, including the Shire, are increasingly looking to Kalgoorlie as the major service centre and aligning more with the Goldfields rather than the Murchison region. This is discussed further in Section 5.0, however, the attraction of the sealed road between Wiluna and Kalgoorlie is a major contributing factor.

It should be noted that the sealing of the section of the Goldfields Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra is an election commitment of the current Government. Main Roads WA advise, however, that no action is likely in the near future as no money has been allocated in the Budget forward estimates (the estimated cost of the commitment in 1998/99 was \$68 million³³). However, some funds have been allocated to seal a 5.5 km overtaking section of the Highway, which has now been completed, and potentially a further 5.5 km section in 05/06.

It is understood that the Wiluna to Meekatharra road is competing with other potential road sealing works in the region. Transport interests are apparently lobbying to seal a northern link, which would then provide a sealed route between the Goldfields and the Pilbara.

The proposed new Magellan lead mine, 35 km east of Wiluna, will add increased impetus for the sealing of the Wiluna to Meekatharra road as the workforce will be flying in and out of Wiluna. Magellan will also need to transport product west on the road to Geraldton. It is understood that the proponents of the mine have been actively lobbying the State Government for this work to be completed.

Bondini Community Roads

A further issue relating to roads is the Bondini community roads. These roads are being upgraded and sealed as part of a \$2.46M National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) project. The project managers have written to the Shire of Wiluna seeking Shire involvement in the maintenance of approximately 400m of road once the capital works are complete. The proposal is consistent with efforts to normalise service delivery to Aboriginal communities and with the aims of the Town Reserves Regularisation Program³⁴. It is understood that the Shire is not supportive of taking over responsibility for the roads but is willing to look at a form of maintenance agreement³⁵ with Bondini that would ensure full cost recovery. In the long term, it is suggested that these roads be fully regularised by direct vesting in the Shire to enable inclusion in the Shire road inventory. The road will then attract Commonwealth Grants Commission funding.

³³ MRWA advise that this estimate is likely to be reduced given current information to around \$45M.

³⁴ The TRRP is managed by DHW and is seeking to upgrade essential and municipal infrastructure in town based communities and to resolve ongoing maintenance responsibilities.

³⁵ Similar agreement have been negotiated in Derby- West Kimberley, Wyndham - East Kimberley and East Pilbara Shires.

Public Transport

There is no public transport in Wiluna, although various service agencies such as NAMS provide transport for clients. A lack of transport was not raised as a major issue in consultations for this report although Centrelink referred to the fact that many people do not have transport and that this impacts on their ability to access services and particularly to travel to major regional centres and return for shopping. Socio-economic data³⁶ show that there are only 12 motor vehicles per 100 people in Wiluna compared to a State average of 74 and a Mid-west regional average of 70. This would indicate a heavy reliance upon other forms of transport (and also possibly a high number of unregistered vehicles).

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The importance of sealing the Wiluna to Meekatharra Highway for current service access and for the future development of Wiluna be recognised and that this work should be programmed as soon as possible.
- The maintenance of the Bondini roads be resolved in two stages, involving firstly the negotiation of a service agreement between the community and the Shire and, secondly through the vesting of the road as a Shire road.
- DPI, in conjunction with the Shire of Wiluna, review the adequacy of public transport in Wiluna and develop a strategy to improve the availability of transport to those in need.

4.2.4 Community Facilities and Amenity

As a visitor to Wiluna, one thing that stands out is the shortage of basic community facilities in the centre of town. Aboriginal people consulted as part of this report also raised this issue consistently. Key issues included the need for:

- Public toilets near the centre of town³⁷.
- Drinking water fountains.
- Public seating for old people.
- Visitor and short stay accommodation.
- Picnic / short stop facilities with tables, shade and shelter.
- Laundry facilities
- Grassed playground areas.
- Tree planting.
- Removal of rubbish and car bodies from around town.
- Barriers to prevent vehicles driving off roads and creating dust.
- A swimming pool.

³⁶ Unpublished data from Office of Crime Prevention, State Government of WA (2004)

³⁷ The Shire has recently constructed toilets near the oval but these are considered too far away.

- Recreational facilities for youth.

It is suggested that these issues should be addressed (and some are) by the Shire in cooperation with relevant agencies and funding bodies. It is noted that considerable work has been done on a proposed multi-purpose recreational centre including a swimming pool. A number of people (including Shire staff) were frustrated that funding had not yet been obtained for this proposal. It is understood that a number of stakeholders, including the Department of Sport and Recreation are supporting the proposed pool and that funding is likely to be obtained during 2004. It has been demonstrated that pools have significant health, recreational and educational benefits in Aboriginal communities³⁸ and the proposal is strongly supported.

The Shire is also progressing a proposal to develop a skate park and BMX track in conjunction with Marruwayura. The project aims to provide education and training and encourage a more positive community attitude through sport and recreation activities. Again a worthy proposal that has strong community support.

A general community clean up and greening program would also be of great benefit. CDEP was criticised by some as not providing meaningful tasks to occupy participants. This activity would therefore seem to be an ideal opportunity for the effective use of CDEP with the support and supervision of the Shire.

Visitors' accommodation is currently restricted to the Hotel/Motel and associated caravan park. There are also a number of dongas that are let privately and some rooms near the shop. All provide very basic accommodation. This was reported as a disincentive for people travelling to Wiluna and importantly, to their staying for any period of time. A number of service agency staff prefer to stay in Meekatharra and travel to Wiluna for the day. Given the amount of drive/fly in and out of town for the delivery of services, the provision of appropriate visitors accommodation is crucial in order to encourage greater visitation and also to attract and retain suitably skilled people in Wiluna.

It is understood the DHW has entered into joint venture agreements with a number of local governments to built accommodation facilities on a cost share basis, with the Shire generally taking responsibility for ongoing management. Such a model may well be worth exploring in this case. Private sector support could also be pursued.

As discussed, Wiluna does attract a fair amount of through traffic as an entry/exit point for the Gun Barrel Highway and the Canning Stock Route. This is expected to increase in the next few years. The provision of attractive amenities including shade, shelter and picnic facilities may encourage such travellers to spend a longer time and more money in Wiluna. Such amenities would presumably need to be situated near the main road and shops.

Laundry facilities are available at the HAC centre and the Women's centre. These are not accessible to all residents and the need for centralised "public facilities" was raised by a number of people. Such facilities must be well-managed and run as far as possible on a cost recovery basis.

³⁸ Refer research by The Centre for Child Health Research at UWA.

Funding grants of between \$2,000 and \$25,000 are available to local governments and community groups for capital works that provide facilities for public use. The Department of Local Government and Regional Development (DLGRD) administer this program as the “Community Facilities Grants Program”. Private sector support through the mining industry may also be possible.

A Telecentre has recently been established in Wiluna with support from the DLGRD. The Telecentre has been strongly supported by the Shire and provides important Internet, computer and video conferencing facilities. It also has the potential to be utilised for a broad range of services such as banking, Centrelink and training. It is noted that the Telecentre has had some early problems with a rapid succession of coordinators in its first few months of operation but currently appears to be receiving strong support from DLGRD and the Shire. One issue raised in consultations is that its present location, near the Shire building, is not central and may impact adversely on its utilisation. The Telecentre has considerable scope to become a major hub for future community development initiatives and to provide valuable support for training and education programs.

The lack of facilities and activities at Bondini and the other discrete communities in the Shire of Wiluna has also been raised. The Community Layout Plan for Bondini identifies future sites for an oval, basketball court and other communal facilities. Although the need is there, thought needs to be given to ensure the best use of facilities and services that may be available or be planned in Wiluna only 2.5 km away.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Shire of Wiluna in consultation with the Wiluna community review the adequacy of current community facilities, including those raised in section 4.2.4 of this report and gives a high priority to addressing these issues.
- The Wiluna Shire, DHW and the Mid-West Development Commission explore joint venture and other options for the establishment of a permanent visitors accommodation facility.
- The Wiluna Shire initiates a community greening and clean up program and that this is supported by CDEP.
- Funding bodies and other service agencies give a high priority to the proposed swimming pool complex for its proven health, educational and social benefits.
- The Telecentre be recognised as a significant asset to the Wiluna community and that agencies cooperate to maximise its potential.

- The future development of Bondini is planned in conjunction with the Shire of Wiluna to ensure a coordinated and efficient approach to the provision of services and facilities.

4.3 JUSTICE, SAFETY AND SECURITY

Wiluna has an infamous history associated with Aboriginal community and police relations, which relates to the high level of offences and arrests that were highlighted at the time of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). A study released by the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1994³⁹ showed that the Police laid 1071 charges involving 297 individuals to the 31 August that year, in a town with a population at that time of 250. It reported that on an average night, 10% of the town's population was in the lock-up.

Much has changed in the past 10 years, public drunkenness is not a criminal offence, police meal allowances have been discontinued⁴⁰, the Wiluna Alcohol Agreement implemented in 1996 and the sobering up centre was opened in 1997. Community / Police relations have also improved with the introduction of a more community centred policing approach and the appointment of Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers. The number of offenders arrested in 2002 was 168, for a total of 238 offences. The principal offence categories for which people were arrested were offences against the person, mainly assaults (36.9%), offences against good order (23.2%), driving and traffic offences (17.9%) and burglary (10.1%)⁴¹.

The WAPS described Wiluna as unique in terms of the required approach to policing. It is a mainstream town with the associated physical and administrative infrastructure, however, it has much in common with remote Indigenous communities with many traditional people maintaining strong cultural links and beliefs. A flexible approach is therefore required, which accommodates customary law practices and which develops relationships with community leaders.

Generally, those consulted expressed satisfaction with the current policing approach as a welcome change to what was described as the "wild west" scenes of the past. The Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers are seen to be providing an important link with the community and facilitate a flexible and mediated approach to policing. There is a view that the community policing approach could go further with a more proactive approach in the community and increased cooperation between the WAPS, the school, the Shire, community groups and other service providers.

Despite improvements in the approach to policing, Wiluna continues to have rates of recorded crime higher than those of the region and of the State for all offence categories except burglary and other theft (theft other than vehicle theft)⁴². In 2002, the most commonly recorded offences were against the person (38%), other theft (20%) and property damage (15%).

Of immediate concern is the frequency of violent crime (recorded as offences against the person) including murder, attempted murder, wounding, sexual offences and assault. The vast majority of these crimes are within the Aboriginal community meaning that Aboriginal people are also over-represented as victims of crime. WAPS

³⁹ "Counting the Cost of Policing in Wiluna 1994", Aboriginal Legal Service.

⁴⁰ The meal allowance was highlighted by the RCIADIC as an incentive for arrests by police.

⁴¹ Unpublished data from Office of Crime Prevention, State Government of WA (2004).

⁴² Unpublished data from Office of Crime Prevention, State Government of WA (2004)

advise that 99% of such crimes are alcohol related and that alcohol is a factor in 70 - 90% of all charges in Wiluna. According to the Magistrate of the Carnavon Court, Wiluna stands out among the 12 towns visited as part of the remote Court circuit for the level and seriousness of alcohol related violence in the town.

Since 1996, crime rates for offences against the person, non-residential burglary, property damage and drug offences have generally increased, while residential theft, vehicle and other theft have either decreased or remained relatively stable⁴³. It therefore appears that while the overall number of charges and arrests has decreased, the seriousness of crime is increasing, as is its potential for negative social impact.

The Sobering Up Centre appears to have had a highly positive impact on arrest rates. In its first year of operation it is reported that there was a 33 per cent reduction in alcohol-related injuries, a 90 per cent reduction in arrests for damage offences and a 67 per cent reduction in arrests for assaults.⁴⁴

Data provided by the Drug and Alcohol Office shows that the number of admissions to the Sobering Up Centre has fallen off considerably since a peak of 2215 in 1997 to 928 in 2003. This issue is discussed in Section 4.1.3, however, it is clear that the Sobering Up Centre continues to provide an important option for dealing with intoxicated persons.

Interestingly, in 2001 there were 219 offences recorded in Wiluna, yet there were 712 admissions to the police lock-up⁴⁵. This indicates that despite reductions in the number of offences, high numbers of predominantly Aboriginal people (98%) are still being detained by police. Further analysis needs to be done on the reasons for this as people may be being detained in the lock-up for issues such as drunkenness while the Sobering Up Centre is being under utilised.

Another issue highlighted by these statistics is that arrest and charge rates show only a proportion of the law and order problems in Wiluna. Given the number of people detained but not charged, others picked up by the community patrols, taken to the Sobering Up Centre or returned directly home, there obviously remains a significant social and potentially anti-social problem.

Major law and justice issues raised can be summarised as:

- The community patrol (when operating) is not as effective as it could be. The patrol needs to involve more women in its operations and suffers from a lack of resources.
- There is a lack of positive interaction between police and Indigenous youth.
- Traditional law is still strong but respect for elders is declining, especially fuelled by alcohol.
- Parents are not accountable for their children who are allowed to run amok.

⁴³ Unpublished data from Office of Crime Prevention, State Government of WA (2004)

⁴⁴ Health Department of Western Australia Annual Report 1996/1997.

⁴⁵ Regional Chart Supplement to "Aboriginal Involvement in the Criminal Justice System , A Statistical Review, 2001.

- Many school-aged children are getting into trouble when they should be at school.
- There is a lack of sentencing options for people to perform community based orders (CBOs) in Wiluna due to supervision problems. DOJ do not have a permanent presence in Wiluna and rely on Maruwayura who have limited skills and resources⁴⁶.
- There is a lack of suitable facilities for interview, supervision and/or case management of offenders⁴⁷.
- Many people have outstanding fines and charges from other places and get picked up on bench warrants in Wiluna, which adds to the workload of justice agencies and the ALS.
- The majority of juvenile crime is caused by a small core group of offenders who tend to compete to outdo each other.
- Similarly, a small group of 20 – 30 year olds are responsible for most of the serious offences.
- Family violence and child abuse are major issues but potentially under-reported and leading to few charges.
- There is a need for a safe house / refuge as currently victims are supported to leave town or to stay in a motel.
- There are alleged problems with restraining orders which can be abused by women who get their men locked up (can be between 2 days and 2 weeks) so they can go out on the town.
- There is a high level of unlicensed driving and driving unlicensed vehicles. This leads to fines, fine default, CBOs and imprisonment.
- There have been a number of near misses involving unlicensed vehicles driving dangerously and on footpaths with insufficient action by authorities.
- The cycle of alcohol abuse is frustrating for police, magistrates and DOJ officers. Same offenders get drunk and offend and have little chance of rehabilitation.
- ALS, which services Wiluna from Meekatharra (as well as Mt Magnet and Cue), has limited resources to service clients. Court is held every 2-3 weeks at which time there may be 30 clients in a day, each having multiple charges.
- Community safety and crime prevention is a whole of community issue that cannot be left to the WAPS and justice agencies. It was felt that instability in the Shire has been an impediment to such an approach.

Importantly, despite Wiluna's relative remoteness, it is the only Court on the Carnarvon circuit that does not have access to video conferencing facilities. This means that there is an increased reliance on Justices of the Peace and increased potential for offenders to be held in custody for unnecessarily long periods pending access to a Magistrate.

It should be noted that local governments are eligible to apply for grants to partner with the State Government in the provision of community safety and crime prevention

⁴⁶ DOJ has recently been allocated additional resources under the Juvenile Justice Strategy. A community Supervision Agreement Officer and a Community Conferencing Coordinator will supplement resources currently available to Wiluna (see Attachment 4).

⁴⁷ It is understood that DOJ currently use the DCD office when available which may be moving to the new family centre.

initiatives. The Office of Crime Prevention (OCP) will give funding priority to those local governments who have entered into Community Safety and Crime Prevention Agreements with the State Government. It is understood that the Meekatharra Shire is working with OCP on such an initiative. It is suggested that the initiative provides an opportunity for stakeholders in the Shire of Wiluna to access funding and support to tackle crime and safety issues in a coordinated and strategic manner.

In addition, the Aboriginal Policy and Services Directorate at DOJ and the Western Desert ATSIC Regional Council have prioritised Wiluna for the development of an Aboriginal Justice Plan. These plans are developed under the auspice of the State Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)⁴⁸. A consultant has been engaged to develop this plan which will build on the analysis and recommendations contained in this report.

It is suggested that the development of Aboriginal Justice Plans and the potential development of Community Safety and Crime Prevention Agreements should closely dovetail in order to make best use of available resources and to provide a coordinated interagency approach to justice and related issues.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The proposed Aboriginal Justice Plan incorporate the recommendations from this report and progress the development of equitable justice outcomes in Wiluna.
- DOJ and the OCP work together to ensure that the complementary aims of the Aboriginal Justice Plan and the proposed Community Safety and Crime Prevention plans are reflected in a close working relationship that ensures the most effective use of resources.
- The Shire of Wiluna consider partnering with the Office of Crime Prevention to develop and implement a community safety and crime prevention plan for Wiluna. This plan should complement the Aboriginal Justice Plan and focus on Aboriginal people as victims of crime and not just as perpetrators. Initiatives to minimise the harm caused by alcohol in the community should be given a priority.
- The WAPS expand its community policing approach and consider supporting community initiatives such as blue light discos, a Police & Citizens Youth Club and increased levels of engagement with key community stakeholders to address issues of truancy, crime prevention and the appropriate utilisation of community facilities.

⁴⁸ The AJA provides a framework for improving justice related outcomes for Aboriginal people. It is a partnership between DOJ, WAPS, DCD, DIA, ATSIC and the ALS and seeks to develop safer communities, reduce the number of victims of crime and reduce contact with the criminal justice system.

- The Department of Justice and the WAPS review the options available for local supervision of community-based orders in order to ensure appropriate supervision and to maximise the number of local offenders serving their sentences in Wiluna.
- DOJ and DCD liaise to ensure that a suitable facility is acquired for the effective case management of offenders.
- WAPS act to deal with the apparently large number of unlicensed and unregistered vehicles that are causing a danger to public safety.
- Priority be given to the provision of a video link to the Carnarvon Court in order to expedite the hearing of charges by the Magistrate and to promote equitable justice outcomes.

4.4.1 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Indigenous population generally is characterised by lower levels of access to education, lower attendance levels and poor educational outcomes. National literacy and numeracy benchmarks highlight the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students⁴⁹.

A recent report on capacity building by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs⁵⁰ highlighted the importance of education, particularly primary literacy and numeracy, as building blocks to further education and for the ability to function effectively in Australian society. Importantly, the Committee also acknowledged that “education must engage people and be meaningful in order to improve attendance, uptake and outcomes.”

The framework for improving Indigenous education outcomes in Western Australia is provided through the “Aboriginal Education Strategy – Creating the Vision, 2001-2004.” This strategy has nine key focus areas including:

1. Access and participation
2. Conductive hearing loss
3. Attendance
4. Literacy
5. Numeracy
6. Culturally inclusive curricula
7. Aboriginal employment and professional development
8. Involvement of Aboriginal parents and community in educational decision-making
9. Cross portfolio initiatives and intersectoral collaboration.

The Aboriginal Education Strategy outlines required outcomes in each of the nine key focus areas and allocates responsibilities for these to the central and district office levels of the Department of Education and Training (DOET), the schools and the community.

The following sections of the Report explore the difficulties in achieving educational outcomes in Wiluna and emphasise the urgent need to improve outcomes in this area. The issues and needs in Wiluna relating to education and training fall into the following four categories:

1. Getting kids to school in a fit condition to learn.
2. Keeping kids at school with relevant curriculum and programs addressing special needs.
3. Providing relevant vocational education and training leading to realistic job opportunities and work readiness.

⁴⁹ Council of Australian Governments “Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2003” www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2003 (September 2004)

⁵⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, “Many Ways Forward: Report of the Inquiry into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities” www.aph.gov.au (June 2004)

4. Creating employment and enterprise opportunities that provide an incentive for individuals to gain the requisite skills.

Some of these issues fall within the remit of the education portfolio, however, many are the responsibility of other sections of government and of the community themselves. Tackling these issues and improving the educational outcomes for young people in Wiluna must be a priority for all these stakeholders if the long-term future of Wiluna is to be positive.

4.4.1 The Wiluna Remote Community School

The Wiluna Remote Community School commenced operations in 1901 and is the only school in Wiluna. The school currently has 94 students enrolled of whom 94% are Aboriginal⁵¹. Students range from pre-school age to Year 10. Of note is that 83% of all enrolments are in Year 7 or below (Primary school level).

Although not within the Shire of Wiluna, the Karalundi Seventh Day Adventist School also provides education for students from Wiluna and it is understood that students who go beyond Year 10 will often move to Karalundi for this part of their schooling.

According to the 2001 Census, only 17% of Indigenous students in the Wiluna area attended school beyond year 10 compared to 59% of the non-Indigenous population. Only 5% of Indigenous people have post-school qualifications compared to 59% of the non-Indigenous population. The Wiluna Shire has both a relatively high proportion of people with skilled vocational qualifications (8th highest) and the lowest proportion of people with a post school qualification (refer Attachment 2). This indicates a stark contrast between the relatively highly skilled fly in fly out workforce and the resident, unskilled and predominantly Indigenous population.

The Wiluna Remote Community School struggles to achieve education outcomes. The Department of Education and Training advise that the school is improving and that the current Principal is very committed to Indigenous education. The Principal stated that in his time at the school, “no students have left with sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to read a newspaper”. This was seen to be largely due to constraints outside of the direct education system. Key factors including:

- Family dysfunction.
- A lack of parental and family commitment to education.
- No motivation to learn.
- Peer pressure to do other things.
- A lack of adequate housing and accommodation.
- The influence of negative and the absence of positive role models.
- Students with poor social skills and emotional trauma.
- Substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and violence.
- Poor health and hygiene.

⁵¹ Department of Education and Training ‘School Profile System’, www2.eddept.wa.edu.au (July 2004)

According to the Wiluna School there were “67 incidents of major violence” in the first 6 weeks of term in 2003. Two involved assaults on teachers. This places enormous stress on teachers and staff and it is reported that at one stage, more than 40% of staff were on stress leave⁵².

Fortunately, the school has improved the way it deals with behaviour problems and this has led to a significant reduction in violent incidents in 2004. The new approach involves the enforcement of a strict behaviour policy around what is acceptable in school and a thorough investigation of each incident including counselling about alternative behaviours in dealing with conflict.

One criticism of the school was its approach to the suspension of problem students. This was seen to be shifting the problem from the school to the community and potentially accelerating student’s anti-social behaviour. The school has acknowledged this issue and has instituted a process of “internal suspension,” whereby Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) work with suspended kids inside the school but in isolation from other students. Recent advice from the school Principal is that although the scheme has strong support from parents, it has had problems due to its reliance on AEWs who have either been unavailable or unwilling to manage these students. Additional support may need to be provided to AIEWs to fulfil this role.

Truancy is a major issue raised by a number of stakeholders, however, the extent of the problem is difficult to gauge. The school states that there are a small number of regular truants, however, others in the community complain of significant numbers of school age children not attending school. Anecdotally, it appears that there are a number of school-aged children who are not enrolled in the school and therefore may not be classed as official truants, but with whom the education system is not engaging. Given the transient nature of many families, it may well be that these children are enrolled elsewhere or, not enrolled at all. This needs to be investigated and addressed as a priority. A close working relationship between the school, DOET, WAPS, the community patrol and other service providers is required to ensure that effective strategies are in place to deal with truancy.

A fundamental education issue for Wiluna appears to be the degree of priority given by the community to formal school based learning. Indigenous children are brought up in families that have experienced multiple generations of unemployment, where substance abuse and violence are the norm and where the day to day priority is survival in terms of paying for food, rent, essential services and managing family crises. Schooling, understandably in some ways, becomes a lessor priority, particularly when it is also competing with traditional cultural obligations and practices. One thing everyone agrees on (which is rare in Wiluna) is that this needs to change. Education is seen as fundamental to breaking the cycle of welfare dependence, substance abuse and family dysfunction that are endemic in the community.

The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Programme (ASSPA) would seem to have a vital role to play in addressing this issue. The school Principal noted

⁵² Personal communication with Principal of Wiluna Remote Community School.

the potential of this group but also noted that the ASSPA Committee is struggling with a lack of skills and is basically reliant upon non-Indigenous staff.

The school also needs to play an important role in the town and in contributing to community life. A number of people consulted felt that the school needed to be more community focused and to engage more with community leaders and other agencies.

A successful model of collaboration between schools, community, government and resource companies is the Gumala Mirnuwarni program in the Pilbara, which was a response to a need to increase participation in school⁵³. The model is consistent with the “mutual obligation” principle being advocated by the Australian and State Governments. The project involves the provision of mentors, the establishment of “Education Enrichment Centres” for after school study, tutorial assistance, family support and extra curricula activities to build confidence and self-esteem. Such a model (on a smaller scale) may work well in Wiluna, particularly with the support from industry stakeholders with an interest in developing a skilled local workforce.

Many students in Wiluna display major behaviour problems and are attempting to cope with significant social and emotional trauma. Assistance is provided through the mental health nurse in Meekatharra who visits regularly and also through a DOET psychologist based in Kalgoorlie who may visit every 6 – 8 weeks. The issue of mental health and the need for resources commensurate with need has been discussed above in Section 4.1.4. It is clear, however, that significant emotional and social supports are required if students are to engage effectively in school.

The school is located across the road from the Wiluna Hotel. As a consequence, children at the school are constantly exposed to scenes of abuse, violence and anti-social behaviour. The school is also close to one of the town’s sewerage ponds, which is a popular “swimming hole” in the summer months. In addition, the school complains that:

- Drinkers walk past (and sometimes into) the school and tease students for being in school.
- The school is surrounded by fights, shouting and abuse.
- Cans and rubbish (including used syringes) are thrown into the school yard;
- The sewerage ponds make it impossible to use the school after hours due to mosquitoes.
- Cars create dust which inundates the school.
- Students are tempted to leave the school to “rescue some dollars” from relatives for food and other necessities which they see being spent at the Hotel.

The re-location of the school (which consists of predominantly transportable buildings) to a more suitable site, would do much to improve the learning environment and raise the status of education in the community. It is suggested that options be explored to “co-locate” the school to the other end of town near the proposed swimming pool and recreation complex. A clear relationship between the school and the swimming pool has the added benefit of promoting the implementation

⁵³ Also highlighted in “Many Ways Forward: Report of the Inquiry into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities”, *ibid*.

of a community “no school - no pool” policy which has been shown to drastically improve attendance levels in some remote Indigenous communities.

It is acknowledged that the cost of such a move may be prohibitive for DOET, or at best a long term proposition. If considered of sufficient priority, it is suggested that private sector support through the mining sector be sought to support this proposal.

4.4.2 Early Childhood Development

The early and formative years of childhood development are important determinants of future educational outcomes and quality of life. Low birth-weight, stress, deprivation, disease and neglect before the age of three, can have significant negative impacts on health and education outcomes in later life.⁵⁴

It is therefore positive to see a key focus on these issues by agencies such as FACS, DCD, DOH and Health and Ageing. These agencies jointly fund the Parenting and Early Childhood Development Program through NAMS. This program seeks to enhance family functioning, parenting skills and child health and development. In addition, the Western Mining Corporation and Lotterywest have supported funding agencies in the development of the new family centre, which will provide an important focus for this work. The loss of the program coordinator was noted by a number of people as disappointing and again highlights the challenges for towns such as Wiluna in recruiting and retaining suitably skilled and committed staff.

Ongoing funding and support for early childhood development and parenting programs in Wiluna is vital. There also needs to be a close working relationship between these programs and the preschool program run at the school in order to smooth the transition from community based support to a formal school environment.

4.4.3 Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training opportunities are particularly important in places like Wiluna where retention rates are low and the relevance of school in the eyes of many students is questionable. Although Wiluna falls within the Goldfields Education District of DOET, based in Kalgoorlie, the training component is managed by DOET in Geraldton. There is a TAFE campus at Mt Magnet.

TAFE provides a school based traineeship scheme with the Wiluna school. The school has a dedicated TAFE position, which at the time of writing is not filled. Generally, school based traineeships tend to target students at Year 10 and beyond. Given the drop out rate at Wiluna this would mean that most kids do not get exposure to vocational education opportunities before leaving school. The introduction of these opportunities earlier would expose more Indigenous students to relevant and career-based educational experiences. The school and TAFE have recently negotiated a deal to allow students from Year 8 to access TAFE. In 2004, 120 hours of TAFE training is being made available in automotive maintenance and welding.

⁵⁴ “Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators, 2003”, Ibid.

Agincourt Resources, which operates the Wiluna gold mining operation, has provided work experience opportunities at the mine to senior students at the school (+14 years old). This has apparently been well received although suffered from inconsistent attendance.

Central West TAFE currently runs corporate governance programs in Geraldton and Carnarvon and a need for similar programs has been identified in Wiluna. To this end, Central West TAFE is currently developing a tender to offer training in governance, targeting Indigenous councillors and board members, to promote opportunities and aspirations for Indigenous participation in local government and other forums.

Central West TAFE has also been running construction traineeships with a small number of young Indigenous people, working on the NAHS housing project at Bondini and now with the MSP. TAFE also contracts Karalundi Community to run the automotive training program. A mechanic has been employed to provide the training. The program has been operating since June and there are currently approximately 28 people enrolled including many older people from Karalundi. The project is funded until December 2004, at which time Central West TAFE will apply for new funds. It is understood that Karalundi intends to tender to provide the service in 2005. Other training areas supported by TAFE include agriculture, business and mining operations.

Despite the availability of training it is apparent that few Aboriginal people have sufficient skills to make the transition from CDEP and unskilled work to long term and meaningful employment (see also section on Employment and Economic Development). Training needs to move beyond the basic skill level to provide higher qualifications, trade opportunities and eventually employment. There are obvious impediments to this, with training providers already struggling to find suitable trainees with the aptitude, commitment and skills to undertake and complete structured training courses. TAFE advise that in the attrition rate for training programs in Wiluna is in the order of 70%. The reasons for this are many and complex, but include:

- A lack of basic skills such as numeracy and literacy.
- A lack of confidence.
- Other priorities such as family and cultural obligations.
- Alcohol and substance abuse issues.
- Poor health.
- Family dysfunction.
- Peer pressure.
- A lack of incentive to learn.

The last point in this list is important, because if there is a strong incentive to undertake training, many of the others issues would become less significant. At the moment, those who do complete training have generally few employment opportunities and continue to work for basic CDEP wages regardless of qualifications (and often regardless of whether they work). Conversely, there are job opportunities emerging in industry, however, there is a lack of people able to utilise these opportunities. These two apparent conflicting statements indicate that current education and training is not delivering the outcomes required. As noted previously, many of the impediments outlined above lie outside the direct responsibility of the education and training sector and are the consequences of deeply entrenched social problems.

The cost of providing training to remote locations such as Wiluna can be considerable. It is recognised that this is a significant factor in determining what training can be provided. TAFE advise that in such circumstances, profile funded training is usually not viable and that targeted funding sources are often required as a catalyst for other education and training programs.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Wiluna Remote Community School adopt an increased community focused approach to education that promotes the importance of education in the community and encourages the involvement of parents and community leaders in school activities.
- Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers be provided with additional training and support in order to implement the internal school suspension system.
- A closer working relationship be established between the school (with the support of DOET) and other service providers to ensure complementarity of programs addressing early education, parenting skills and social support.
- The ASSPA committee receive adequate support and skills development to ensure that it can fulfil the functions envisaged in the Aboriginal Education Strategy and play a major role in raising the profile of the school and the importance of education in the community.
- DOET examine current reports of large numbers of school truants and work with other agencies in Wiluna to ensure that all children of school age in Wiluna are enrolled in and attending school.
- Reciprocal models such as the Gumala Mirnuwarni program in the Pilbara region of WA be examined with a view to adopting similar practices and principles in Wiluna.
- The Wiluna Remote Community School be moved from its present location opposite the Wiluna Hotel and that it be located in proximity to the proposed new swimming pool and recreation complex. If necessary, private sector support should be sought to assist in meeting these costs.
- A “no school no pool” policy be implemented in Wiluna, once the new pool complex is operational, as part of efforts to combat truancy.
- The adequacy of current mental health support to students suffering emotional and social trauma be reviewed with a view to supplementing existing programs and services.

- The importance of early childhood development and effective family support for education outcomes in later life be acknowledged and that a close working relationship be established between agencies funding the Parenting and Early Childhood Development Project and the Wiluna School.
- The extension of vocational education and training opportunities to students prior to Year 10 be supported in order to expose younger Indigenous students to these opportunities and experiences.
- The education, training, employment and economic development sectors cooperate to develop a comprehensive strategy that ensures an effective pathway from education to employment and wealth creation through improved education outcomes, relevant training, skills development and social supports.

4.5 EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

4.5.1 Comparative Employment Participation and Income in Wiluna

Table 6 of Attachment 2 demonstrates the very different patterns of participation in the workforce between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Wiluna. Indigenous participation is generally limited to unskilled labour or participation in the community services sector.

Nearly half (48%) of the Indigenous people employed in Wiluna are counted within the ABS employment category “Government Administration and Defence”. These people are predominantly participants in CDEP. Once this component is removed, mining is the single biggest industry of employment for Indigenous people (19%) and for the general population (64%) of Wiluna, followed by “Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing” industry (predominantly pastoral), which accounts for 15% of Indigenous employment and 4% of non-Indigenous employment in Wiluna. Figures show that 7% of Indigenous people are employed in “accommodation, cafes and restaurants”.

More than half (55%) of the Indigenous people in Wiluna aged 15 or over earn between \$120-199 per week and 15% earn less than this amount. Another 18% earn between \$200-399 per week. In comparison, just under half the non-Indigenous population (45%) in Wiluna earn \$1 000 or more per week and another 10% earn just under this amount (\$800-999).

The contrast between the employment and income of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations seems even more extreme when judged by the rest of rural Australia. Haberkorn (2003 p. 58) notes that the Shire has the second highest proportion of low household incomes in rural Australia. Indigenous people in Wiluna also earn significantly less than their counterparts in other areas of Western Australia (Attachment 2).

4.5.2 Indigenous Economic Development in Wiluna

Wiluna has a long history of Indigenous economic development ventures with often mixed success. Some of this history is outlined briefly in section 6.0. Perhaps the most significant of these ventures was the Desert Gold farm, which was purchased by the Commonwealth Government in the early 1970’s to provide an enterprise base and employment for the Wiluna community.

The farm included a developing citrus plantation and produced rock melons and vegetables. A variety of non-Indigenous consultants and one local resident managed the venture over the period of its operation. Indigenous community labour was complemented with the introduction of CDEP in the late 1970’s. It is understood that this was one of the first CDEPs in Australia.

The enterprise generated significant income but remained reliant upon government support for operations and capital. The venture suffered due to the ongoing requirement for subsidies, freight costs and distance required to transport;

employee/management conflict; and conflict between family groups within the community. It is understood that the enterprise ceased in 1996 with the demise of the Ngangganawili Community Incorporation (see section 6.0).

The property is now in a state of disrepair and the trees have died, although substantial infrastructure (including sheds, housing and reticulation) still exists at the site. WDPAC has held responsibility for the lease since 2001. The eastern portion of the lease has now been divided into individual lots in order to support potential enterprise developments including tourism and horticulture.

A further enterprise, which commenced in the mid 1970's, was the Emu Farm. It is understood that the initiative initially developed with some success, but management/employee conflict, community infighting, freight problems and the continued requirement for government subsidies led to a similar end to Desert Gold.

In more recent times, there has been further energy and resources committed to assist the Wiluna community to develop the economic potential of the region. For example:

- DEWR, the Mid West Development Commission, the WA Department of Education and Training, the Department of Industry and Technology, funded WDPAC to employ a Community Economic Development Officer (CEDO) at Wiluna to mentor and advise the community on opportunities for economic development. This position was active in promoting a seed collection enterprise through the Mullka Aboriginal Corporation at Ululla Station; a desert timber project; a market garden at Desert Gold (also supported by TAFE); a camel industry feasibility study⁵⁵; and opportunities for participation in tourism and art. Results from the CEDO projects have been mixed and it is understood that funding for this position expired in August 2004⁵⁶.
- In 2003, DEWR funded WDPAC to employ a business consultant to support the Mullka Aboriginal Corporation seed collection and planting enterprise and the Desert Timber projects. The latter did not progress effectively. The contract with the business mentors expired on 26 March 2004 and has not been renewed. The Mullka Corporation has recently signed agreements or completed work with Agincourt and Newmont-Jundee mines and the Nindethana seed corporation. The OAED has also provided assistance to Mullka.
- WDPAC and the Western Desert communities are developing a tourism venture into the Western Desert, focussed around the northern corridor (outside Wiluna) of the region. It is intended that the Martu people will work in partnership with a tourism operator and be directly involved in taking tour

⁵⁵ The Department of Agriculture has undertaken a feasibility study investigating the viability of camels for export or processing in WA. Indigenous people in Wiluna made an offer through the CEDO to be involved in the location and securing of the camel population. The findings of the study suggested that the potential for such a market exists, but that a production system first needed to be developed. A WA Camel Industry Forum was held in Perth in May 2004, attended by representatives of several Indigenous communities in the Wiluna area

⁵⁶ DEWR funded this project under the Indigenous Small Business Fund (ISBF) and although it has funded the project twice it is unable to provide recurrent funding for projects under the ISBF. WDPAC has been advised to consider submitting an application to DEWR for feasibility studies, business plans and/or mentoring for small business opportunities, which would provide employment outcomes for Indigenous people in Wiluna.

groups through and explaining their traditions and the cultural meanings of these places⁵⁷.

4.5.3 Employment Programs and Opportunities

Wiluna like many remote communities and towns has a very limited labour market. When CDEP is included, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people is 62%. In comparison, 99% on non-Indigenous people are employed.

In addition to promoting opportunities through enterprise development, there is a need to maximise opportunities for mainstream employment through the major employers in the region. The following section discusses some of the major employment opportunities in the Wiluna area.

Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)

CDEP is a Federal Government program historically administered by ATSIC and more recently responsibility has shifted to DEWR. Generally, the community is funded to undertake employment projects that relate to community needs and which develop the participant's work skills with a long term aim of transition into the mainstream labour market.

In Wiluna, WDPAC is funded to manage four separate CDEPs. These are at Kutkububba (22 positions), Windidda (32 positions), Ngurra Yuldoo (20 positions) and Marawayura (50 positions - including Bondini).

A number of people consulted as part of this report were critical of the role and function of CDEP in the Wiluna community. Criticisms included:

- Four separate CDEPs is inefficient and reflects divisions in the community.
- CDEP is “sit-down” money because participants get paid whether they work or not.
- CDEP work is mundane and needs to stimulate more interest to engage people effectively.
- There is plenty of work needed around the town which CDEP could be addressing, yet this doesn't happen.
- There appears to be more registered CDEP participants in some places than actual workers.
- CDEP is not developing sufficient skills or leading to improved employment opportunities.
- CDEP is being used as a substitute for real services that should be provided and funded by State and local governments. This also results in workers not being rewarded for the work they do.
- There are inadequate links between CDEP, vocational training and employment.

⁵⁷ www.waitoc.com/members/bcassidy (August, 2004)

A number of these issues are not isolated to Wiluna and are common to CDEP nationally. There appears, however, to be a need for a more focused and strategic approach to CDEP which maximises the use of available resources and provides more meaningful tasks leading to improved employability. This needs to be part of a coordinated approach to education, training and employment in the region which addresses current employment impediments and capitalises on growing labour market opportunities.

Ngangganawili Aboriginal Community Controlled Health & Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation (NAMS)

According to NAMS, it is the largest employer in the Wiluna town (excluding CDEP). NAMS is the only health provider in Wiluna and employs a number of health professionals; administrative staff; health and environmental health workers; HACC workers; patrol workers; carers; the alcohol counsellor; and project coordinators. A number of which are Indigenous people.

In 2002, DEWR provided funding to NAMS under STEP for training and employment opportunities for up to nine Indigenous people in the health industry. Six participants were still in ongoing employment with the Corporation in August 2004 and all participants were local people.

NAMS is also involved with the Mentor Youth Project funded by FACS. The project sponsors community leaders to take a mentoring role with younger people in families, school, business and in the wider community.

The Mining Industry

The mining industry dominates the Wiluna employment sector with 64% of the Shire's population employed in that industry (Attachment 2). The vast majority of this workforce, however, resides in Wiluna on a fly in fly out basis. Although there are some Indigenous people employed, there are very few, if any local Indigenous people.

According to the Bureau of Rural Sciences (Haberkorn et al., 2003 p. 51) Wiluna has the 20th highest rate of regional employment being dominated by a small number of industries. In WA the only other shires with such a concentration of industry are those in the agricultural industry.

In a general sense, the fly-in-fly-out workforce of mining companies is by its nature a temporary and distant relative of town residents. The very different needs and objectives of these populations and the organisations that support them may however, align in terms of sourcing revenue into the town and the creation of training and employment opportunities for town residents.

The Shire of Wiluna receives approximately one third of its income from mining interests in the area. This in itself may present an opportunity to further develop the relationship between the town and the industry, to achieve benefits for all stakeholders.

Mining companies are required under Native Title Agreements to give due regard to Indigenous people and organisations in the region when engaging employees or contractors, provided they are capable of carrying out the work in the manner required. There is, as yet, no comprehensive strategy to support this aim, nor any performance or outcome indicators to report its achievement or otherwise.

Discussions have been held with Western Mining Corporation (WMC), Newmont Australia, Agincourt Resources and Magellan as part of this report. All companies are supportive of Indigenous employment and appear committed to support opportunities at the local level.

There are obviously opportunities for Indigenous employment in the mining industry. There appears to be sufficient good will from mining companies to provide opportunities for local Indigenous people. There is also programs and funding available from government to support traineeships⁵⁸ and work readiness. Success to date, however, has been negligible.

The reasons for this are complex but fall into two main categories:

1. Community

- Underlying social, health and lifestyle issues – including alcohol and drug use.
- A lack of basic literacy, numeracy and work readiness skills.
- Attitude and motivational problems.
- Pressure from family and peers.
- Cultural obligations.
- Criminal records and loss of licences.
- Lack of community cohesion and engagement in available programs and opportunities.

2. Industry / Government

- Job application processes that are daunting for Indigenous people.
- Job standards and entry requirements that may be too high.
- Length and continuity of shift work.
- A lack of peer support and Indigenous role models within the industry.
- A lack of genuine commitment to Indigenous employment outcomes and targets.
- Inconsistent funding support for traineeships (e.g. STEP)

Western Mining have run Indigenous job readiness programs at Leinster with some success. It is understood that some 87% of trainees have been employed either directly by WMC or by contractors. Unfortunately, although there were some participants from Wiluna, none completed the program.

Agincourt, WMC and Newmont have expressed interest in supporting programs to assist the local community and have provided ad hoc support in the past. For example

⁵⁸ WMC noted that it had received good support from DEWR under STEP but were concerned that this is not available in the medium to long term.

WMC has provided support for the establishment of the new Wiluna Family Centre. Agincourt has also provided work experience opportunities at the Wiluna mine for students from the Wiluna school (see also Attachment 3).

A number of respondents mentioned the new Magellan mine, which will commence lead mining operations in December 2004 as a potential employer for Indigenous people. An estimated 90 people will be employed at the site once it is in full operation. The mine site straddles two native title claims that were agreed between the company and claimants prior to the registration of the much larger (current) Wiluna claim. One of the original claimants had as an adjunct to the settlement a 'Heads of Agreement' relating to the right to tender for provision of freight services from the site to Perth. This is yet to occur, as the claimant is without necessary capital, equipment or business expertise. The Office for Aboriginal Economic Development is providing some preliminary assistance to the claimant.

Magellan has consulted with the local community and native title claimants in the drafting of an employment policy which includes: the early notification of local people that job opportunities exist; has provision for training for appropriate applicants; engagement of contracted services such as seed collection and site clean-up and renewal following mine closure; as well as education and information processes for on-site health and safety and cross-cultural awareness.

Newmont has expressed its interest in further engaging the Indigenous community in Wiluna and has invited industry members to participate in this process. The company also held a recent meeting with other industry representatives to discuss the development of an Indigenous Employment Strategy. This is a positive development, which will need the support of all industry, government and community stakeholder to succeed.

It is suggested that to be successful such a strategy needs to go beyond the level of principles and good will and provide specific employment targets and performance outcomes which provide an incentive to private sector companies to overcome the barriers to Indigenous employment outlined above. This approach has been adopted with some success by BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto in the Pilbara.

Local Government Employment Opportunities

The Shire of Wiluna is another important potential employer of Indigenous people both directly and through contractual work. The Shire received funding from DEWR to provide traineeships for five Indigenous people (two mechanical trainees, two horticultural trainees and one clerical trainee). One person has been since appointed as a mechanical Trainee. The successful applicant was not a local (Wiluna) person. DEWR do not expect any additional placements under this funding due to staff changes at the Shire.

The Shire also has a role in facilitating economic development opportunities within the region and it is understood that some discussions have been held with the Mid-West Development Commission on possible options and structures for funding this role.

Cultural Tourism and Arts

A potential and as yet untapped source of Indigenous employment is in the growing market for Indigenous cultural experiences, Indigenous art and participation in mainstream tourism opportunities.

As the “gateway” to the Canning Stock Route and the Gun Barrel Highway, Wiluna is expecting increased traffic and tourism opportunities in the coming years. At this stage the community is not set up to capitalise on this potential or to market its Indigenous “product”.

The WA Tourism Commission has highlighted the possibilities of promoting Wiluna via Indigenous arts and culture. The development of artists groups and the promotion of Indigenous culture and heritage in Wiluna will require adequate infrastructure and support to allow people the time and place to work in the arts as an expression of their culture and as a source of income rather than as a refuge from family and community problems.

Some local Indigenous art is available at the Women’s centre but there is no public facility to display or advertise its availability. Ngaanyatjarra Council has recently agreed to release their building in Wiluna to the community, for the display of art, artefacts and tourist brochures. It is planned that the building, close to the General Store will function as an information / drop-in-centre for the community. With appropriate resources and support, this enterprise could prove highly positive.

A new alliance has been recently established by Central West TAFE, the Shire and CDEP to develop and refurbish Well Number 1 in time for the Canning Stock Route celebrations in 2006. This project will provide training opportunities for the Indigenous community, with funding to be sought for the project from DOET.

The Shire has received funding to employ an Arts Officer to identify and promote cultural activities and traineeships, and is currently seeking to obtain funding for a commercial outlet to show and sell local product. It is also understood that Country Arts WA is in the process of establishing the Mid West as a priority region for the next 3-4 years. This may also create new opportunities for Wiluna.

4.5.4 The Way Forward

Wiluna does not have any long term, strategic approaches in place to improve employment and economic development opportunities from an Indigenous perspective. History shows that where enterprises have been developed in the Shire, they have not been sustainable nor lead to long-term benefits for the community.

More generally, there are difficulties that have prohibited the economic development of the Wiluna community. These are articulated throughout this report in terms of the level of social problems, disadvantage, isolation, community conflict and apathy.

The current environment in Wiluna is unlikely to produce improved skills, employment options or higher incomes amongst Indigenous people in the short term.

While the existing, training projects and employment initiatives are to be commended and form a positive foundation for growth, a broader range of longer-term training opportunities is required to develop the job skills and expectations of young Indigenous people in Wiluna. This is also reliant upon fundamental social reforms required to ensure young Indigenous people are employable.

Existing small-scale projects and partnerships that utilise role modelling and mentoring (such as the Mentor Youth Project run by NAMS) need promotion and support to ensure that the benefits of individual and community engagement and development are shared. New opportunities for small-scale partnerships need to be identified and encouraged through a combination of internal and external advice and support.

Historically, there has been a number of attempts to develop large-scale agricultural businesses in Wiluna. These enterprises had some success, but continually suffered from a lack of community based skills and experience, remoteness and the requirement for external financial support. The failure of business developments, such as the Desert Gold citrus orchard, on successive occasions, also depletes the community's energy to reinvigorate such large-scale enterprises.

The mining industry has the capacity to offer a range of employment opportunities and training services but a strategic approach and long-term commitment is required to produce a positive effect in the Indigenous community. Outcomes and priorities need to be identified and monitored and clear objectives promoted for Indigenous engagement in the Wiluna Mining industry.

At a community level, Indigenous organisations need support to build their capacity to advise on their members' interests and to engage with mainstream representatives to progress their objectives.

There are potential opportunities to utilise the expertise and knowledge of Indigenous organisations in other areas, such as Ngaanyatjarra Services or the Burnna Yurrall Aboriginal Corporation (BYAC) in the Goldfields. Burnna Yurrall aims to broker stable, long term, meaningful employment for local Indigenous people in mining and related industries. In addition to its labour contracting and permanent recruitment service, BYAC provides tailored, accredited training, skills development and work experience and housing management for Indigenous workers and trainees⁵⁹.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- DEWR review the role and functions of CDEP in Wiluna with a view to rationalising its administration and ensuring that participants undertake meaningful and targeted work that addresses community needs and integrates with long-term training and employment strategies.

⁵⁹ For further information of BYAC refer to www.byac.com.au

- Government, industry and community stakeholders cooperate to develop a locally driven Indigenous Employment and Economic Development Strategy for Wiluna. This strategy needs to:
 - Improve education, job related skills and employability amongst Indigenous people;
 - Expand opportunities for employment and training in and around Wiluna;
 - Capitalise on emerging Indigenous economic development and enterprise opportunities; and
 - Seek to overcome current community and industry based impediments to effective employment outcomes.

- A partnership should be established including representatives of local Indigenous organisations, the ICC, the Shire, DOET, DEWR, OAED, MWDC and industry to coordinate the development of this strategy with input as required from the Indigenous Business Chamber of Australia; the Indigenous Mining and Enterprise Taskforce and other groups such as Burnna Yurral Aboriginal Corporation.

- Resource companies operating in the Wiluna area set specific Indigenous employment targets and performance measures as part of their local employment policies and actively support the development of local Indigenous enterprises through positive procurement and contractual arrangements.

- The Shire consider locating a position within its administration with responsibility for working with Indigenous people to identify employment and economic development opportunities and to develop specific projects. This position could be jointly funded by the partners identified above and assist in the development and implementation of the proposed employment and economic development strategy.

- Increased efforts be made to identify and promote the involvement of Indigenous individuals and organisations (from within and outside Wiluna) as role models and mentors in developing youth skills and work ethics.

- All mining personnel working in remote areas with significant Indigenous populations be required to undertake appropriate cross cultural awareness training.

4.6 Land, Heritage and Culture

4.6.1 The Relationship of Land, Heritage and Culture

As discussed in Section 3.3, the Wiluna region has a long and rich Indigenous history. Wiluna today continues to occupy an important position within the Western Desert as a place of cultural significance and the location of important ceremonies and celebrations. Traditional culture and law remain relatively strong and continue to have a strong influence on the day to day lives of Indigenous residents.

Land, heritage and culture are contiguous in Indigenous Australia. For example, the primacy of water in the desert region that surrounds Wiluna is a source of heritage and cultural significance as well as a means of survival for the Indigenous people of the area. There are 431 heritage sites in the Shire of Wiluna recorded on the Register of Aboriginal Sites, which relate to water and gnamma holes.

Other heritage sites recorded in Wiluna relate to mythological, ceremonial and ethnographic activities and include built structures, paintings, engraving, burial sites, archaeological sites (including quarries), campsites and the remnants of tools and hunting equipment. These sites sit amongst numerous mining tenements and pastoral leases. The register records that stock disturbance of heritage sites is a common occurrence as is the damming of waterways, diversion of waters and construction of windmills around water sources of significance. The alteration of such sites and waterways by non-Indigenous landowners and developers is likely to have had an adverse impact on the capacity of local Indigenous people to maintain the integrity of their culture and environment.

Language plays a key role in tying identity to culture and place. In the Western Desert, Indigenous names, places and dialects illustrate a complex network of cultures. Indigenous languages relate people to the land and to other people. The impact of settlement in townsites and the lack of ongoing education and practice in traditional linguistics are also challenges to the integrity of Indigenous heritage and culture.

“To speak our language, even if we only know a few words, gives us a real connection with our land and our culture. We can never get that from English, no matter how well we speak it. Our languages are much more descriptive of the environment and the landscape they developed in. And they’re much more descriptive of relationships in our culture.” Bell, Jeanie (2001) Voices from the Land: 1993 Boyer Lectures, ABC Books, NSW

The primacy of land as a means of physical and spiritual sustenance, communication and learning in Australian Indigenous cultures does not sit well with the Western idea of land ownership as a source of economic security and achievement. The stress between these positions underlies some of the complexities involved in the preservation and maintenance of Indigenous land, heritage and culture.

Map 1 shows the distribution of pastoral, freehold and Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) estates in Wiluna. There are several properties that are Aboriginal owned in the Shire

and several lands and properties currently leased by the ALT. Much of the ALT land in Wiluna is in the process of being transferred to local Indigenous organisations (refer Attachment 4).

Of 23 Native Title Claims currently registered in the Shire of Wiluna, 18 remain active. Two claims have been withdrawn, one struck-out and a further two finalised pre-combination. A combined Native Title Claim over a large area of Wiluna and surrounds (Tribunal No. WC99/24) was registered in April 1997, via the Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation. (www.nntt.gov.au, 12 July 2004) (See Map 1).

4.6.2 Supporting the Relationship to Land and Indigenous Heritage and Culture

Culture is a source of social renewal as well as an indicator of social disturbance. Building the capacity of Indigenous people to maintain or to re-engage in their relationships to place, family and community will reinforce self and group identities, which will benefit the whole community.

The relative strength of Indigenous culture, heritage and connection to land in Wiluna is therefore a strength that can be built upon. Indigenous heritage and culture is a unique and valuable resource, not only for the Indigenous community, but for all Western Australians. However, despite Wiluna being a largely Indigenous town occupying a predominantly Indigenous domain, Indigenous culture appears largely marginalised from mainstream life.

At the current time, there are relatively few community development activities occurring in Wiluna that support maintenance and promotion of Indigenous land, heritage or culture. There are also few models of projects which are led by Indigenous communities to this end or which bridge the divide between Indigenous and mainstream cultures.

Of interest is the work being carried out by Desert Knowledge Australia, which, is working with government, industry and community partners to undertake research on the social, economic and cultural capital of selected desert communities. This research will inform a project to improve the liveability of desert communities by working at a systemic level for increased awareness, integration and capacity of community members.

There appears to be a general commitment by all community and government service providers to improving service and service coordination in Wiluna. This is underwritten by widespread distress at the disempowerment of the majority of the Indigenous population in the Shire, due largely to a combination of past inequities and the current poor state of health, housing and education. It was acknowledged that the manifestation of this disempowerment, in cultural terms, is a dislocation of sorts: from the strengths and traditions of the past and from the possibilities of the future.

Acting through culture, through language, stories and other arts, is both a means to change and an indicator of change. At the current time, the only Indigenous arts

facility in the town is the Women's Centre which provides support to Aboriginal women by offering painting, sewing, screen printing and bush trips (see also Section 4.3.2).

The relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Wiluna was an issue raised a number of times in the consultations for this report. It was generally felt that race relations were strained but that they had improved significantly from a very low base a few years ago. Like, most areas of Australia, however, there is a lack of awareness about Indigenous history and culture and of the historical context of current disadvantage. There are obvious exceptions to this with many long term residents having ongoing close relationships with the Indigenous population.

Concern was expressed about the impact of fly in fly out mining population, who although not closely connected with the Wiluna community, do at times interact (often negatively) with the Indigenous population. A lack of cultural awareness among such workers as well as those employed by government agencies and service providers visiting Wiluna, can contribute to misunderstandings, racist stereotypes and intolerance.

There is very little information available in Wiluna on Indigenous history or on contemporary Indigenous issues. For example, the Wiluna Club Hotel, which is a veritable museum of historic photos and paraphernalia, has few photos of Indigenous people. The prominent of which shows a band of Aboriginal men armed with spears under the caption: "Native Treachery". Similarly, the nearby chronology of Wiluna's history starts with the first white person to come to the area in 1892. The first reference to the original inhabitants of the area in this chronology is to the "first thief caught" post white settlement.

With the cooperation of the publicans, the Wiluna Hotel is perhaps in a unique position to assist in raising community awareness and to promote positive images of Indigenous people both to non-Indigenous people and to Indigenous people themselves.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The strength of Indigenous culture, heritage and connection to land be recognised as significant asset to the Wiluna community and a basis for future socio-economic advancement.
- The Wiluna Shire develop an Indigenous Arts and Culture Policy in conjunction with relevant agencies, Indigenous organisations and representatives in Wiluna.
- That all government and non-government employees seeking to engage and work directly with the Indigenous people and organisations in Wiluna undergo appropriate cross-cultural awareness training.

- The Indigenous history of the Wiluna area be documented and promoted as part of efforts to improve community understanding and racial tolerance.
- The Wiluna Club Hotel and other relevant businesses, support these initiatives by promoting positive images of Indigenous history and positive Indigenous role models.
- DLGRD work with DIA and Desert Knowledge in conjunction with other forums and partnerships to research ways to develop social, cultural and economic capital in Wiluna.

5.0 COORDINATION OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Attachment 3 details the myriad of programs and government-funded services being delivered in Wiluna. This is an extensive but not exhaustive list and it is also subject to constant change in terms of shifting funding priorities; new programs and opportunities; new administrative arrangements and the dynamic status of individual projects. Effective communication and coordination between service providers, funding agencies and the community is therefore vital in order to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of appropriate services. However, as has been indicated a number of times in this report, there is a distinct lack of coordination in Wiluna.

Wiluna is a small town with seemingly more than its share of small town politics. The division and partisanship that is present in the Indigenous community (see section 6.0) adds a further complication for service provision and utilisation. This has resulted in a number of distinct groupings within the community. Interpersonal and inter-organisational conflict is common and cooperation seems to be based on political alliances between individuals and organisations in opposition to other groups rather than progressing a shared vision for the common good.

Wiluna lacks any formal coordination mechanisms other than ad hoc forums, which emerge from time to time around specific projects. This means that cooperation between organisations remains largely personality driven and subject to change with changes in personnel. One thing everyone appears to agree on in Wiluna is that coordination is poor, however, most stakeholders blame someone else for this failure.

The recent history of upheaval associated with the Shire, which has been dismissed twice in recent years, has exacerbated the lack of coordination in the community. Instead of being a forum that provides and promotes leadership, effective decision-making and strategic lobbying at the local level, the Shire has been largely dysfunctional and disrupted by community politics and conflict.

Wiluna is also remote from senior State Government representation and is very much reliant upon community-based organisations for service delivery. By their very nature, the organisations are part of the community and its politics. There is therefore no effective separation between service provision and town-based political decision making.

Another major contributing factor to the poor coordination in Wiluna is that the area straddles a number of government departmental administrative boundaries producing a confusing array of administration and service centres and subsequent reporting responsibilities. These are summarised in the following table:

Administrative Centres of Selected Government Agencies Serving Wiluna

Department	Local Office	Regional/Zone Office
DIA	-	Geraldton
ATSIC / ICC	-	Kalgoorlie (policy) Port Hedland (programs)
DOJ	Meekatharra	Geraldton
WAPS	Wiluna	Geraldton

DOET - Education	Wiluna School	Kalgoorlie
DOET – Training / TAFE	Mt Magnet	Geraldton
DOH	NAMS at Wiluna	Kalgoorlie Meekatharra (split)
EGMDGP		Kalgoorlie
DCD	Meekatharra	Geraldton
DHW		Geraldton / Kalgoorlie (see below)
MWDC		Geraldton
Centrelink	Agency in Wiluna	Geraldton
Sport and Rec		Geraldton
DEST		Kalgoorlie
Ag Dept	Meekatharra	Kalgoorlie
DSC		Geraldton

To add further complication to this picture, DHW has recently transferred responsibility for Wiluna from Geraldton (with a local office in Meekatharra) to Kalgoorlie; DOH has shifted it from Goldfields to Murchison but because of historical associations, the Kalgoorlie office continues to be closely involved (see also section 4.1.1). Even within individual government agencies, some elements of departmental business are administered from one regional centre and some from another. For example, the training component of DOET is managed from Geraldton while the education section is managed from Kalgoorlie. ATSIIC policy support was historically provided from Kalgoorlie while programs and funding was administered from Port Hedland⁶⁰. In addition, specialist Indigenous units such as the Office of Aboriginal Health (DOH) and the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate (DHW), which are based in Perth, play a significant role in service provision. Federal Government agencies such as FACS, OATSIH and DEWRSB also provide funding directly to community organisations.

A Mid-West Regional Manager's forum meets regularly in Geraldton, however, the forum does not include all those with responsibilities for Wiluna. Comparable regional manager's forums operate with the support of DIA in the Pilbara and Goldfields within similar constraints. It is thus very unlikely that all of the senior bureaucrats with responsibilities for Wiluna have ever been in one room.

It is worth noting that the Department of Premier and Cabinet has proposed the formalisation of a number of regional manager's forums as key coordinating groups within the human services sector. These are likely to be based on the State Regional Development Commission boundaries.

Wiluna has historically been administered by the State Government as part of the Mid-West region. It currently falls within the jurisdiction of the Mid-West Development Commission and forms part of the Murchison zone of Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA). Recently, the Shire of Wiluna has applied to WALGA to align itself with the Esperance – Eastern Goldfields local government zone. Increasingly Kalgoorlie is being seen as a more appropriate and accessible service centre for the region. The reasons for this include:

⁶⁰ It assumed that this arrangement will continue under the Indigenous Coordinating Centres.

- Kalgoorlie is closer than Geraldton by road.
- There is a sealed road all the way to Kalgoorlie.
- A lack of access to services from Geraldton.
- Potential tourism opportunities emerging from the Goldfields region.

Although not canvassed specifically as part of this report, it appears that this application is supported by some sectors of the community while other sectors continue to associate more with Geraldton where most government agencies are represented. It was stated by some that this would not be such an issue if the Wiluna to Meekatharra road was sealed (see also section 4.2.3).

It is also of note that following the review of State electoral boundaries Wiluna, which currently falls within the Pilbara District of the Mining and Pastoral Region (local member in Port Hedland), will fall in the Murchison – Eyre District after the 2005 State elections.

Interestingly, people are grappling with whether Wiluna's future lies south or west while its traditional ties lie east and north. It is perhaps symbolic in terms of some of the issues facing Wiluna that while the Shire is turning its attention south to Kalgoorlie, the biggest employer in town and sole health provider (NAMS), is looking east, while much of the community and service providers are still connected west to Geraldton or in some cases to Port Hedland.

Wiluna has much in common with the remote Indigenous communities of the central and western deserts in relation to both service delivery issues and traditional connections. This “community of interest” may provide a useful framework for considering future administrative boundaries and service models. It is understood that the Central Desert Regional Health Planning Forum has written to the Premier seeking recognition of the Central Desert as a region and canvassing the establishment of a separate regional development commission to represent the interests of the region. It is understood that DLGRD are coordinating a response to this matter. This is a significant development and will have considerable relevance to the issue of service coordination in Wiluna.

Despite the obvious advantages of a collective representative body and lobby group for central desert communities, towns like Wiluna will remain relatively isolated from major administrative and service centres, even if a new centre were to be recognised in the new region, due to remoteness and the poor condition of roads.

A further issue in Wiluna impacting on service coordination is the limited number of community based representative groups with the exception of the Indigenous organisations. There is no Chamber of Commerce or local ‘progress society’ to represent community or industry stakeholders. Although the small size of Wiluna and its business interests may not justify a Chamber of Commerce, the absence of similar, smaller scale lobby groups, may contribute to the factionalisation of other community organisations and of Local Government. As discussed in the next section, there is also a variety of Indigenous organisations with competing functions and views.

On the positive side, there are a lot of effective and energetic people doing a lot of good things in Wiluna and there are many examples of this throughout this report. These people, however, are subject to rapid burnout and considerable frustration when having to deal constantly with conflict and competition within the community.

There is now a new Shire Council in place with a new Shire Chief Executive Officer. This provides a tremendous opportunity to make a new start and for the Shire to show the leadership that the Wiluna community needs to move forward. It is hoped that the Shire will take a lead role in the implementation of any recommendations that may be endorsed from this report. To do that it will need support from State and Federal Government agencies, from private sector interests and from the community. It is suggested that the first step in this process should be the establishment of a peak interagency coordinating forum which meets regularly in Wiluna and which is supported by relevant regional managers from State agencies.

There also needs to be a concerted effort to raise the awareness of Wiluna people about the role and functions of local government. It is acknowledged that DLGRD has been doing some work in this area and that the need for such awareness raising, and for increasing Indigenous involvement in local government elections, are key recommendations of a report commissioned by DLGRD prior to the recent local government elections.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- In recognition of the key role required of the Shire of Wiluna and of the past history of disruption, that the Western Australian Local Government Association and the Department of Local Government and Regional Development provide intensive support and training to enable the Shire to fulfil its role.
- That DLGRD continue to work with the Wiluna Shire to increase community awareness about the importance and functions of local government.
- A peak government coordinating Forum be established in Wiluna with representation from key government service agencies. This should be convened by the Shire of Wiluna and be supported by the Department of Indigenous Affairs.
- Relevant State Government Regional Managers and Federal Government agency representatives attend this Forum in its initial stages, and then on a needs basis.
- Non-government service providers and community representatives be invited to attend this Forum on a regular basis as determined and agreed by the forum.
- The Wiluna Coordinating Forum takes responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations endorsed from this report with support from the Shire and DIA.

- Priority is given by this Forum to efforts to rationalise the current confusing array of administrative boundaries and service centres and to improving communication and coordination between stakeholders in Wiluna in order to provide a united and consistent voice to government.
- A series of public forums be held in Wiluna to enable various agencies to provide information on their roles and responsibilities and to more actively engage key agencies in Wiluna issues.
- The Wiluna Coordinating Forum establish a clear reporting relationship with relevant Regional Manager Coordinating Committees - in particular with the Mid-West Region.
- Other committees that may be established around specific functional areas such as the Alcohol Accord, Community Safety and Crime Prevention, School Truancy or domestic violence, should be auspiced by this peak-coordinating Forum in order to rationalise such committees and to coordinate future meetings.

6.0 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

The focus of this report is on government service delivery, opportunities for improved efficiencies and better targeting of resources to meet community needs. Although the process for producing this report did not include a comprehensive community consultation process, attempts have been made to talk to key organisations, incorporated groups and community leaders. Information from other community consultation processes carried out by DCD, DOJ and others has also been utilised in forming recommendations.

A common theme emerging from consultations within the government and non-government sectors was the difficulty many people have had in engaging effectively with the Indigenous community in and around Wiluna. Reasons for this were cited as:

- The absence of a single body representing the interests of Wiluna people.
- Competition between incorporated groups and community power brokers.
- Alliances and factionalism in the community.
- A lack of leadership in the community.
- Existing leaders and representatives being overloaded and burning out.
- Limited capacity of existing groups to engage in new programs and opportunities.
- A history of consultation with limited long term commitment or results contributing to a lack of motivation and apathy.
- Community people understandably focused on day-to-day survival rather than long-term strategies.
- Strong cultural ties and traditional values mean that people have other priorities and obligations.
- Lack of basic skills in the community including English literacy and numeracy.
- Lack of skills within government and the non-Aboriginal community in communicating and engaging effectively with Aboriginal people.

Wiluna has an interesting history which is useful to consider in the context of the situation outlined above and the apparent impediments to effective community engagement. In the early 1970's, following a long history of discrimination and exploitation of local Aboriginal people, efforts were made to develop an economic base for the Aboriginal community and to foster community self determination. The key components of this approach were the acquisition of three significant assets on behalf of the Wiluna Aboriginal community. These being:

1. The Department of Agriculture Research Station which included a 405 hectare block containing infrastructure, fruit trees and crops (now known as the Emu Farm);
2. The Desert Gold Farm containing citrus trees, rock melon plantations and associated infrastructure; and
3. The site of the former Seventh Day Adventist Mission (now the Bondini community).

At the same time the Ngangganawili Community Inc (NCI) was established to represent local family groups and other Aboriginal people who were located in and around Wiluna. NCI was then able to attract Commonwealth Government funding and to obtain and hold property, including those listed above. As Sackett (1978) describes; this imposed “representative council” effectively replaced the traditional Indigenous decision making structure that had operated in Wiluna⁶¹.

The somewhat chequered history of the above enterprises is discussed in section 3.5. It appears that the three different ventures were run as separate entities with separate management structures and each with a separate community workforce. As Sackett (1990) outlines, this led to competition, jealousy and conflict in the Aboriginal community (and among non-Aboriginal managers) and eventually to deeply entrenched community divisions⁶².

The eventual failure of key enterprises such as Desert Gold led to the winding up of NCI in 1996. NCI’s operations and assets were then split into a number of separate incorporations representing local family groups. These were the:

- Kutkububba Aboriginal Corporation;
- Windidda Aboriginal Corporation;
- Marawayura Aboriginal Corporation;
- Ngangganawili Aboriginal Community Controlled Health and Medical Service Corporation.

In addition, MKW Pty Ltd was formed to represent Marawayura, Kutkububba and Windidda for the purpose of managing the former enterprise functions of NCI. These being the Wiluna store, Emu Farm and Desert Gold.

A subsequent split between the MKW Pty Ltd members in 1997 lead to each party going their own way with Marawayura taking over responsibility for the Wiluna store and Bondini; Windidda the Emu Farm; and Kutkububba gaining the Desert Gold Farm.

Since this time other incorporated groups have emerged to represent particular interests and activities including the Ngurra Yuldoo Aboriginal Corporation in Wiluna and the Mullka Aboriginal Corporation at Ululla Station.

In addition, the Western Desert Puntukurnaparna Aboriginal Corporation has a base in Wiluna and provides support for the outlying communities of Windidda and Kutkububba and is responsible for running CDEP. Symptomatic of the divisions in the community is that, despite its relatively small size, it is necessary to run four separate CDEPs due to what one person described as community “infighting”.

⁶¹ Sackett L. (1978) “Clinging to the Law: Leadership at Wiluna” in “Whitefella Business” Ibid, discusses in some depth the consistent failure of imposed representative structures in tradition-oriented communities due to their inconsistency with traditional Indigenous decision-making and value systems. (see also Coombs, 1972)

⁶² For those interested in reading more about this period in Wiluna’s history please refer to Sackett L. (1990) “Welfare Colonialism: developing divisions at Wiluna” in R. Tonkinson & M.Howard (eds) Going it Alone? Prospects for Aboriginal Autonomy. Essays in Honour of Ronald and Catherine Berndt. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 201-217.

There are also 23 different native title claims registered for the Shire of Wiluna, of which 18 remain active. It is said by many that native title has increased divisions within the Aboriginal community through competition between claimant groups and the recognition of those people with traditional associations at the expense of those with significant historical connections. A further concern raised was that the monetary benefits of native title that may be negotiated through agreements with resource companies tend to flow to selected community members and not to the community as a whole.

The growth of Aboriginal incorporated groups is a common phenomenon in Aboriginal communities. There are currently more than 6000 Aboriginal organisations incorporated nationally. Many of these have been established as a result of dissatisfaction and infighting within existing organisations and a perceived need to go their own way often leading to direct competition for resources. The 2002 “Review of the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act*” noted the high degree of suspicion and distrust that often occurs between different groups that can be a consequence of an emphasis, within Indigenous society, on the autonomy of individuals and of locally based groups.

Many of these incorporations are actively competing for resources as well as striving for power and credibility within the community. In consultations, various community members made numerous (off the record) accusations and counter-accusations of incompetence, undermining, betrayal and rorts.

While the background to the current situation in Wiluna assists in gaining an understanding of the current divisions and power struggles within the community, it also brings home the complexities of working in such an environment and the complications that policy makers and service providers must understand and accommodate in their day to day work.

There is no easy solution to such long standing and entrenched attitudes and structural barriers. The recommendations below seek to encourage a pragmatic and achievable approach to improving the current situation in Wiluna. They also seek to build on community strengths including Indigenous people’s continuing strong cultural links. However, they do not represent a panacea for effective community engagement or for creating a unified and homogenous community. The latter is not possible or necessarily desirable.

It should be remembered that Wiluna is not an Aboriginal community. It is a mainstream town with an elected local government and is populated by people from diverse backgrounds and interests. There is a need, however, to ensure that Wiluna’s predominant Aboriginal population is effectively engaged in decision making and in the processes of local government. Government departments and mining companies wishing to work with the Indigenous community need a point of reference in order not to be put off because “it is too hard”. At the same time, these interests need to be aware of the diversity that is the “Indigenous community”; the history of negative

experiences of generations of Indigenous people; and respect the cultural and communication protocols that may exist⁶³.

Ideally, Wiluna needs an affective Indigenous umbrella organisation that represents the interests of all sectors of the community and which has representation and support from each organisation as well as credibility within the community. However, given the history of NCI and the continuing deep community divisions, this may not be possible in the short term. It is therefore suggested (perhaps as an interim measure) that the Shire of Wiluna, which now includes three Indigenous counsellors, establish an Aboriginal Advisory Committee with membership that is drawn from the Wiluna community and representative of the various community groups and factions. This committee could potentially be chaired by one of the Indigenous elected members of Council.

The committee should not be an incorporated group, receive funding or have decision making authority. This would avoid it being seen as being set up in competition with other organisations which are all fighting for survival. It should serve principally as an advisory body to Council for matter affecting local Aboriginal people; as a conduit to the Aboriginal community for matters requiring broader consultation; and as a point of reference for government and private sector interests seeking to engage with the Wiluna Aboriginal community. The added benefits of such a forum include the support that an effective committee could provide to the elected Indigenous Councillors and also its role in raising of awareness within the community of local government structures and processes.

In the south west of Western Australia a number of “Community Action Groups” have been established which have proven very effective in overcoming community dysfunction, factionalism and even family feuding. The membership of these groups is determined around family groupings with support from community elders. Support for the establishment of such groups has been provided by DIA, ATSIC and FACS. This is useful model to consider in the Wiluna context.

Such a forum would need the support of the Shire and agencies such as DIA and the ICC. They would also need to receive intensive support to build their capacity to be effective, to work together and to resolve conflicts. It is suggested that such capacity building work in order to improve governance, develop leadership and improve administration and service delivery should be made available to all incorporated groups in Wiluna⁶⁴.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Shire of Wiluna, with support from DIA and other agencies, establish an Indigenous Advisory Committee with representation from family groups in Wiluna.

⁶³ See also ATSIC, DIA & DPC Citizens & Civics Unit (2004) “Consulting Citizens: Engaging with Aboriginal Western Australians” www.dia.wa.gov.au (September 2004)

⁶⁴ It is noted that TAFE is providing some training in this area.

- DIA, with support from DCD, undertake a family mapping exercise to support the establishment of this Committee.
- Appropriate protocols be established to support the operation of this Committee and to guide effective community consultation.
- That corporate governance, leadership and conflict resolution skills training be made available to the Committee and to all Indigenous incorporated groups in Wiluna.

ATTACHMENTS