



what we heard

Listening to the Geraldton Community
March 2020

About this document



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The intention of this document is to build a Geraldton community where every young person is safe and has a chance to thrive. We welcome the use of this material for anything that is in line with that goal; and respectfully request that appropriate acknowledgement be given, and we be advised of this, so we can know how it is being found useful.

We welcome opportunities to discuss the content of this document:

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Contents

CEO Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	7
Who is Fusion?	8
Fusion in Geraldton	8
The Background to this Listening Project	9
Methodology	11
What we heard	15
Young people	16
Families	18
Housing and Homelessness	23
Mental Health, Suicide and Well-being	25
Influence of Alcohol and drugs	30
Cultural Considerations	31
Reflections on what we heard	33
What could be in Geraldton?	37
How might this be?	41
Can the coronavirus situation help us?	42
Building Community	43
Fusion's Commitment	45
Conclusion	47



*Fiona Gunnion
Chief Executive Officer, Fusion Australia Ltd.*

CEO Foreword

Fusion Australia is committed to the delivery of quality youth and community work that is responsive to the local areas in which we work across Australia including Geraldton. We are committed to training and equipping people to be able to work for transformation and we want to share what we have learnt along the way. So, it is our pleasure to **share the “Geraldton Listening Project Report” with you and your teams.** We believe that the way to really transform communities is in partnership with other organisations and individuals. We hope that you find the information within these pages useful for your work alongside those in this region.

Fusion has a long history in Geraldton, but as we came to a period of review and planning, we decided to stop and listen before jumping into action. We could have rolled out programs that Fusion is having success with elsewhere or run a whole lot of projects that the local team were interested in running. But this is not what we decided to do as we wanted to engage in a bigger narrative of what Geraldton is and what it could be if all of Geraldton were to thrive.

One of Fusion’s strategies is to engage with the issues that impact on the lives of individuals, families and our communities and work to advocate for change, for and alongside those who are impacted, so they can thrive. The alongside part is really key – we don’t want to be doing it for people but with them. To really be able to engage and understand we need to leave aside what we think and really listen, listen deeply. As the Dalai Lama said, “When you are talking you only repeat what you know, but when you listen, you learn something new”. And that is what the team have set out to do. To listen, gather stories and through this report attempt to make sense of what they have heard through themes that fit together to tell a bigger story. The purpose of this report is not for Fusion to say what we think Geraldton needs, although we will name some of the ideas of how we plan to respond to what we’ve heard and give some broader recommendations. The purpose of this report is to share what we’ve heard from you, those who live and work here, as we’ve attempted to listen deeply to learn something new.

We hope that within these pages you will see glimpses of the Geraldton you love, whilst also learning something new as you read what we have learnt as we listened. We hope that you are encouraged by the dreams of the young people and what they see Geraldton could be. We hope you are challenged by the impact that Domestic and Family Violence and mental health issues are having on many of our young people and families. We hope you have a greater sense of the story of Geraldton as told by its people and made sense of in this report by our team, and we hope together we can continue to work to strengthen the beautiful things of Geraldton and tackle the challenges so that together we can all thrive.

Executive Summary

Fusion started this listening project (research) following the sad closure of Cameliers Guesthouse, wondering what else Fusion should be involved in? We imagined it might be something with youth, since we are a youth and community organisation.

As we have listened to a wide range of people, it is clear that Family Violence is very prevalent in our community (a scourge many said), and impacts every level of society, in particular, preventing many of our young people from thriving.

There are many compassionate people already working at this, but repeatedly people have said we've got to find new ways to work together. We don't have the solution for what that looks like, but want to advocate far and wide that as all levels of government, non-government organisations, businesses, schools, church, and regular folks we need to find a new way to work together to solve this so that the next generation are not repeating this and Geraldton becomes known as THE place to bring up a family.

Introduction



Who is Fusion?

Fusion Australia is a youth and community movement of people motivated by Christian values and the belief that people matter. Led by a group of local young adults committed to seeing the lives of socially-at-risk young people transformed, Fusion began as a grass-roots movement in Hornsby, Sydney in 1960.

The team connected with young people in culturally relevant ways, including founding a drop-in centre called **"The Attic", where the team built relationships with young people**. Soon the team was connecting with young people in schools, running regular Day Trips, and, during the Easter Bike Races at Bathurst, the team hosted a drop-in centre with live rock music every night. In the early hours of the morning, bikies could be seen talking to team, exploring who they were and who they wanted to be.

In the **early 60's the team began training that eventually transformed into** a Diploma in Youth and Community Work (Christian) that continues today. Centres began in Tasmania, Perth and Melbourne. As centres were established in areas of need, new and creative ways of engaging young people emerged: establishing community centres, youth housing, job creation schemes, art therapy with socially isolated women and single mums and a national radio program.

In 1980 Fusion became a national organisation with centralised training, a national advocacy voice and five-year plan. The mid-**80's** saw Fusion spread out across Australia, taking to the streets and developing a voice. Festivals and street performances were used to engage the media and launch white papers focussed on poverty, youth homelessness, youth suicide, unemployment, the failure of education for the non-academic, and the history of colonisation.

After the year 2000 Sydney Olympics, where Fusion was at the forefront of helping local communities to celebrate through open crowd community festivals, that give people a taste of community life where **everyone is welcome and appreciated, Fusion's work expanded internationally** – particularly through these festivals in local communities around major global sporting competitions – Summer & Winter Olympic Games, Soccer World Cups, Cricket & Rugby World Cups and more.

Since 2001, Fusion has taken young people from across Australia on a Pilgrimage to Uluru, which is a journey to the heart of Australia, and a journey to the heart of these young people. The experience of engaging with Aboriginal communities along the way, the bus trip and Uluru itself has transformed many young people who have gone home to be ambassadors for reconciliation in their own communities.

Fusion continues to connect and mobilise people, advocating, training and responding to the needs of young people. Today, Fusion continues to adapt and develop, working to see transformed communities where young people thrive both in Australia and around the globe in more than 15 countries.

Fusion in Geraldton

In 1981 the Fusion Team Leader in Perth began building relationships with the local Christian Churches in **Geraldton**. In 1982, the **Geraldton Ministers' Fellowship invited Fusion to come to Geraldton and to assist** the Geraldton Christian Churches in arranging family friendly activities as a part of the annual Sunshine Festival. Then in 1983, a call came asking if Fusion would be interested in taking on Cameliers Guesthouse to serve the needs of homeless people in Geraldton.

Thus, began the journey of almost 40 years that has included running school seminars in local high **schools, youth day trips, street work on Friday nights, Flynn's Youth Café on Lester Avenue, the** Pilgrimage to Uluru, Sleep in Your Car and running Cameliers Guesthouse.

Cameliers was the most obvious and longest running work of Fusion in Geraldton, providing a much-needed accommodation option for a range of people with a need for low-cost accommodation including those exiting out of prison, those needing an alternative after an incident of family violence or those

experiencing homelessness. Cameliars initially started without any government funding and existed entirely on the generosity of many people that volunteered their time and energy. In **the 90's a small** allocation of around \$20,000 p.a. government funding was provided to subsidise crisis beds.

Throughout our time at Cameliars we could see the growing needs for this form of accommodation and that the location and physical constraints of the 100+ year old building was limiting what we could do. So, in 2004 we began negotiations with the Department of Housing to explore options for the development of a purpose-built facility – the Fusion Village Project. Land was secured and discussions began around the funding of the project. These discussions and the subsequent tweaking of plans and target groups continued for many years.

Alongside this, in 2007 the State Government announced the construction of new Community Supported Residential Units (CSRU) for mental health clients. Because of our long working relationship with the Midwest Mental Health Service through Cameliars, we were encouraged to apply for the management of these facilities. We subsequently were successful, and the units (Ngurra Nganhungu Barndiyigu – our place for getting better) opened in November 2007.

By this stage our discussions with the Department of Housing around the Fusion Village Project were bringing positive feedback and we had locked in other sources of funding through the Midwest Development Commission and the National Rental Affordability Scheme. By 2012 design work had been completed and all Council Development Plans had been approved and we were ready to go. However, in November 2015 we received communications from the Development Committee at the Department of Housing informing us that the proposed Fusion Village did not meet their requirements and that funding would not be made available. Given the thousands of hours of work and negotiation with the Department that had gone into the project, this was a major blow to our local team.

The Background to this Listening Project

As we rolled into the 21st century, at Cameliars we began seeing increasingly complex clients, with the effects of Ice usage making things even more challenging. In addition, we were facing a decrease in the number of people willing and able to volunteer their time to serve at Cameliars, given the drug and mental health challenges faced by many of our guests. In addition, increasing levels of compliance, together with significant increases in both utility levies and our lease payments on the building, all made things even tighter financially.

When a major fundraising campaign and approaches to all levels of government furnished no additional funding or support, it became clear that we could no longer continue to run Cameliars Guesthouse. So, sadly in August 2018 after 35 years we closed the doors of Cameliars. We ceased taking new residents at that point; and then had a transition period, during which we assisted each of the longer-term residents, for whom Cameliars was very much their home, with finding suitable alternative accommodation, if that was what they wanted (most did).

Through all of this, we have continued to operate the funded 14-bed CSRU, providing much needed accommodation support for some of our most vulnerable community members, who are not able to live independently.

In recent years our Youth Work has been more project based rather than regular programs. We have seen groups of young people supported by caring adults, participate in the annual national Fusion Pilgrimage to Uluru – combining with our Perth Youth Work team to fill a bus. We have also in recent **years arranged a night to “Sleep in your Car”**, raising funds in partnership with other local agencies, in support of youth homelessness.

Each of these ongoing spheres of activity speaks to our belief in a society where every person matters.

Given the closure of Cameliers and the non-funding of the Fusion Village Project, even after years of close consultation, we felt it was important to pause and to spend 2019 talking to people, listening and reflecting. Out of that time of listening we would then develop our plans for the next phase of Fusion serving the community in Geraldton. Herein we share with you the summary of that year of listening and offer some suggestions for ways forward into the future.

Despite the natural beauty of our beachside city, there are certainly some large social challenges that we face as a community. However, it is our belief that there is an opportunity for Geraldton to become a stand-out community that provides a model of hope for others around the nation. Our isolation rather than a problem, could well be the thing that helps bring us together and builds a sense of connectedness and true community. But if that is going to happen, it will take all of us – all of us putting aside the me and my approach to community and starting to see each other as partners in building a bright future.

We are committed to doing what we can. This is your invitation to join us.

Methodology

At times throughout this past year, we have referred to what we have been doing as a period of listening and at other times as a research project.

Whilst what we have done is broadly social research, the dedicated folks at the Western Australian Centre for Rural Health (WACRH), who do lots of fantastic social research for our region, have helped us to see that in a formal sense what we are doing is **not research ... so therefore we have avoided describing this report as a "Research Report". However, that brings greater freedom, as we are not constrained within** the boundaries that those engaging with formal research might find themselves needing to operate (there is a good reason for those boundaries which gives a rigour for their research!).

Our primary tool has been talking with people. Our earliest conversations set out to be interviews with set questions, but soon we realised that the gems came more as we simply let the conversation flow, and **we heard people's hearts.**

The process has in fact been a privilege, as many people have let down their guard, often speaking not with their organisational hat on, but simply as people. Again and again, we found a common thread of compassion and a longing to care for those who are hurting and, in some way, less fortunate in our city.

Because of this style, for the most part we have not attributed quotes to specific people in this report.

Along the way we became aware of many more people we could talk with, and we are sure there are many more who would have had something very worthwhile to share, and may even have expected to be included in such a report as this. We would still love to catch up with you and hear your story as part of our ongoing commitment to listening to our community.

This listening process has been supplemented by surveys of young people, and those with a heart for young people. We have also sought out helpful statistics, to sit alongside the anecdotal evidence and **"gut feel" that people offered.**

The surveys were often filled out by young people in a school setting – and done on an opt-in basis, meaning that we have not got a comprehensive picture of every young person, but only those who when given the opportunity felt safe enough and chose to take it up. Most took it seriously, whilst a few did not, and where we suspected that, we chose to not include their answers.

If there is a bias in our work, then we expect that it is that we have tended to gravitate towards seeking the compassionate side of people and to seeing the best in people and situations.

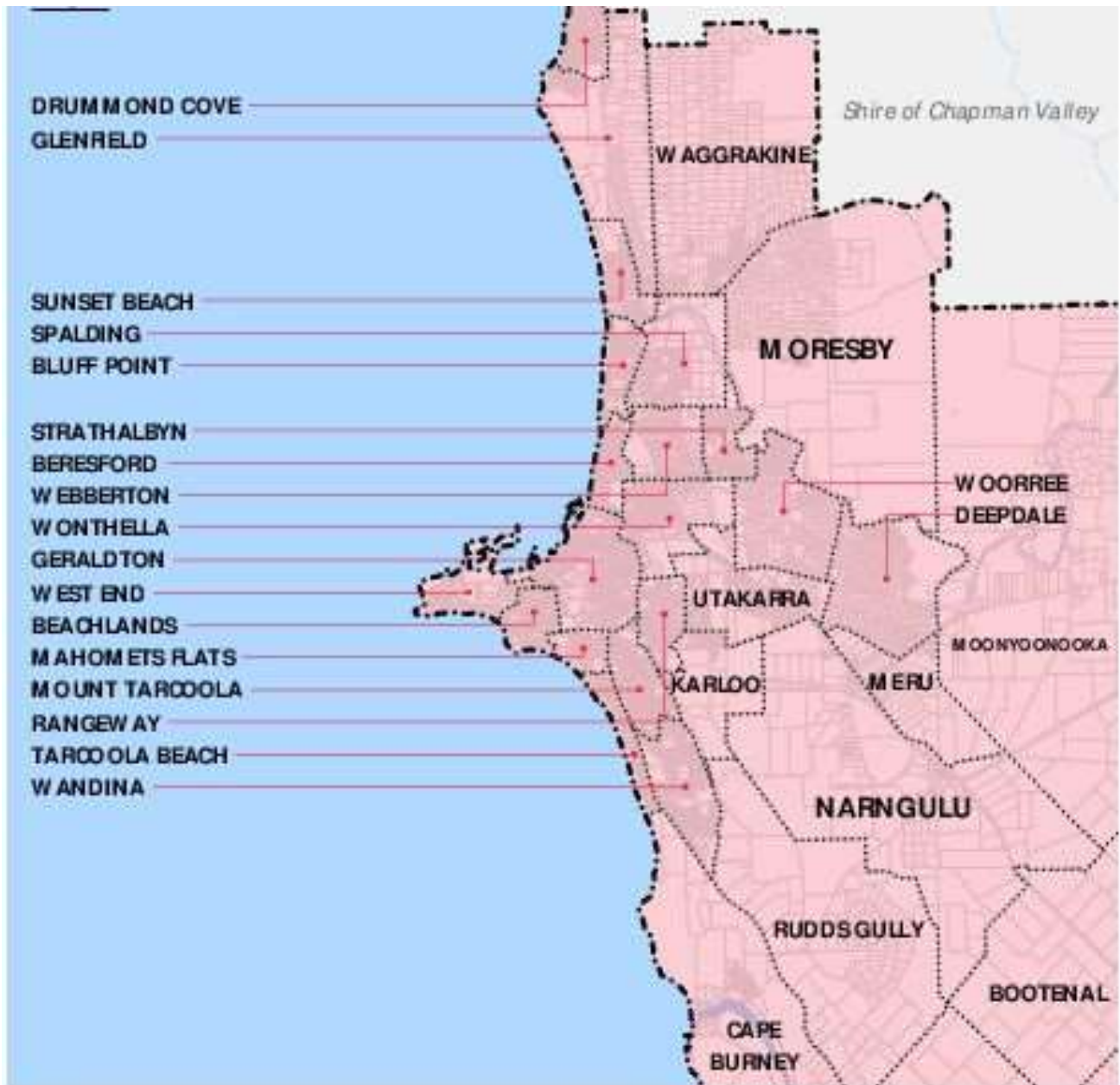
We are aware that the social dimensions of life do not happen in isolation but take place in a wider dimension of what makes up life – in particular economic, environmental and transport, to name but a few. We are thankful that The Council of the City of Greater Geraldton prepares strategic plans¹ and that the Council, together with the Midwest Development Commission, Regional Development Australia Midwest Gascoyne, The Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Pollinators, co-operating together as Progress Midwest are preparing jobs and growth plans for the region.²

Finally, our scope has been limited to the residential city of Geraldton – we have not included Mullewa or Greenough (within the City of Greater Geraldton) or the nearby towns of Northampton or Dongara.

¹ https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/profiles/cgg/assets/clientdata/document-centre/planning/strategic_document/local_planning_strategy.pdf

² <https://www.progressmidwest.com.au/>
<https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/documents/815/geraldton-jobs-and-growth-plan-2020-2023-growing-the-capital-of-the-midwest>

This scope is shown in the map³ below as well as the aerial photograph⁴ on the previous page. And for an interesting comparison, on the page over is how the City of Geraldton looked in 1950⁵ – clearly there have been a few changes!



³ Localities and Suburbs of the City of Greater Geraldton (Scale 1:750,000), produced by the City of Greater Geraldton, Map 002, 9 May 2016.

⁴ Aerial Photograph used with permission from the City of Greater Geraldton in the document: https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/profiles/cgg/assets/clientdata/document-centre/planning/strategic_document/local_planning_strategy_-_part_2_local_profile_context_report.pdf
Maps Only - Revision 4, November 2015, Map 2: City of Greater Geraldton Aerial

⁵ Shell Touring Service "Geraldton" Map, prepared by Geraldton Municipal Council, 1950, printed by Geraldton Newspapers Limited, and provided for this Report by the Barnes family of Sydney, having been purchased from Four Ways Service Station, Durlacher Street, Geraldton quite some years ago!

What we heard

This Bench was made for
the Community by the
Community.

Sit down, Have a chat
and Relax.

You are Not Alone.

"Without a Sense of
Caring, there Can be no
Sense of Community
If you need Support

Please call
Lifeline 13 11 14



Young people

As we started our listening project, we had some questions we wanted to check out about young people: were they feeling safe?
was transport what stopped them participating in sports and other activities?

We conducted a survey of about 300 young people, and the results showed surprisingly that about 80% said they felt very safe or somewhat safe at home. And only a few felt very unsafe.

We wondered if that was a true reflection, or if it was a reflection of the group of young people who chose to complete the survey?

As we engaged with school leaders, a different picture began to emerge, particularly at our two public high schools – a significant proportion of young people are bringing trauma with them from home that is severely impacting their ability to engage well with education.

Here are some quotes that one of the local school chaplains recorded they were told by students:

- Got home from school, mother yells at me for being late.
- Dad has a go at me for being early and asks why I have no friends. I think I have no friends because me and my house are messy, dirty, and smelly,
- **I want to have a shower, but it is cold water only because mum and dad didn't pay the bill.**
- Told to make my own dinner, no food in the fridge.
- I tried to do my homework and practice my reading, but dad and his mates were drinking loudly.
- I try and sleep, but my baby brother cried all night.
- **I finally get to sleep, and I'm woken up by arguing.**
- **It's morning and no one wakes me up to go to school.**
- There is no food in the house to eat for breakfast or take to school.
- **My uniform is dirty and I'm embarrassed.**
- **It's cold and I don't have a school jumper or a note to say why.**
- Some older kids follow me to school, and I feel unsafe.
- I get to school, and I have no one to hang with before the bell goes.
- **I don't have anything to write with because my family spend their money on alcohol and drugs and stuff for my baby brother.**
- **I can't do the work because I can't read all of the big words.**
- The bell goes for recess and I have no food or friends to sit with.
- I am still cold from no jumper and walking in the rain.
- **I have no energy to say or do anything because I haven't eaten for ages and I have not slept.**
- I get horrible looks from others who I think are judging me for being a loner, having no things and a messy look. **They've probably seen my house and my parents. I'm embarrassed to be me.**
- Kids walk past, bump and push me. Some on purpose and some deliberately.
- **Another kid with a big group of people walk past and call me 3 horrible things...I don't want to repeat them... that's it...**
- I start think about what I am supposed to for a job after school, I am worried.
- I go to bed thinking about tripping over in front people at school.
- I walk to school in the rain.

Behind each of these statements is a level of pain and trauma that **doesn't seem normal for a young person** to be carrying.

For these young people who are making it to school, a number of people within and without the school system indicated that we need more schools to work with young people with trauma – that will be a win:win – a win for those students and a win for the non-traumatised students too.

It also became apparent as we listened to a range of people in the community that there are also a significant group of young people who are not even making it to school.

In other words, there are quite a group of young people who are not having the chance to thrive.

The public high schools have expanded their student services teams to work with these challenges and are partnering with other organisations to care for these young people.

We will pick up more of this in the next section on families, and then in the reflection section.

In our survey we did ask other questions and found that a significant number of young people are concerned about the prevalence of drugs in the community, as well as bullying and racism.

As well, up to a third of the young people we surveyed said they have no one to talk to about what life is really like – in other words, for those young people they might feel safe, but no one really knows what life is really like for them.

We also asked the young people about their dreams and have recorded some of those in the later section on dreams.

Families



Here are our friends & colleagues Phiona & Chris Hamilton with their new-born baby Theodore – he is 4 days old in this photo – and will be 14 days old when this report is released. There is much hope and expectation for his life, and he is loved and supported by many friends here in Geraldton. This story is repeated in many ways approximately 500 times a year across our city.

Here is the story from a member of our community that we listened to recently:

I am a survivor of domestic violence. I stayed with my abuser - my husband - for almost 17 years.

Looking back, I can see my husband displayed abusive tendencies on our 2nd date. I never wanted to see him again after that night & distanced myself from him for a time, but he assured me that alcohol consumption was the root cause of his bad behaviour. He never drank again during our relationship.

Alcohol consumption was not the cause of his abusive behaviour.

I stayed because there comes a point when you realise things are not 'right', but you are stuck; trapped might be a better word. As I was punched and kicked one Boxing Day, I was keenly aware that I was newly married, with a mortgage, & pregnant. I didn't want to leave my husband after just a few months of marriage. I involved relationship counsellors & he promised me he wanted to be a better person. He behaved himself for a while, but it never stuck.

Suddenly you are 10 years down the track. Babies have been born; family members have died. Generally speaking the situation on the home front is more peaceful because you've learnt how to toe the line, how not to push buttons & to shut up when a fist is held up to your face & then put through a door....have I really been doing this 10 YEARS?

Another child. Another death. Job stress, financial stress, all the supposed causes of setting off his temper & therefore his abusive behaviour.

12 years. If I leave now, I'm robbing my young children of a father, this is what society tells me. If I leave now, I'm going to have to share custody with **an angry, highly combative man & I won't be there to protect my children from his temper**. For some reason the courts believe that an abusive man will suddenly become a **non-abusive parent in the absence of his wife ... victim blaming at its finest**. I don't want my children raised in a separated home, so I choose for them, a toxic & abusive home instead.

Why? Why do I make this awful choice for them?

Because who wants to admit that their husband is never happy to see them? Not sometimes; never.

Who wants **to admit that they can ruin their husband's day just by getting out of bed in the morning?**

Who wants to admit that, instead of being caring & concerned, your husband screamed at you on the phone whilst you were laying sick in hospital?

When you're 15 years in, **it feels like your fault that they cannot love you ... that they don't even like you**, that apparently you are responsible for every bad thing that has ever happened to them. I only have to hang in there a few more years and then my youngest will be a teenager & maybe it won't hurt them so much when their parents finally call it quits.

Except while I wait, one of the children gets hurt at my husband's hands ...

There needs to be more education on psychological abuse. Coercive Control is insidious & dangerous. The majority of people who are in abusive relationships experience more emotional & verbal abuse than physical because the consequences of physical abuse are harder to hide.

When I filed for an FVRO there was paperwork with it listing examples of what constitutes abuse in the eyes of the law/court. There were several things listed on there that, in the context of everyday life, I had never considered abuse, but when combined with all the other boxes I could tick, when you tally up how frequently ALL of it happens....it paints a very tragic picture.

An example - It is considered abuse to force a child to comfort a person who has been abused or forcing them to clean up after an incident of abuse i.e. something got smashed or broken. My children were constantly forced - by my husband - to hug me and comfort me after my husband had reduced me to tears through prolonged verbal abuse. He NEVER apologised for his behaviour. He forced the children to.

That's another area we need to educate people on; when the presentation of abuse is atypical.

I did not realize for a long time that I had been experiencing financial abuse from the very beginning of my relationship with my husband. He did not withhold finances, as is the typical model of financial abuse. He spent all of his money and well beyond his financial means, incurring momentous debt, but I had to manage the bank account. I had to make sure bills still got paid & that his finances stayed in the black, but I was not allowed to control his spending. If a bill bounced it was my fault because I had not managed the bank account properly. It was very, very stressful. During the years of our marriage my husband earned between 80k-180k per annum. He is over 600k in debt, some of it forced joint, and his only asset is a house worth \$300k ... it took me too long to figure out that this constant state of unnecessary debt was financial abuse.

My husband did not prevent me from working in the typical fashion we are taught. He would agree to employment or business ventures, spend ridiculous amounts of money setting up these opportunities, and then when I was off and running & trying to earn money & contribute to household finances, he would start putting pressure on me to quit. He secured a \$100k loan to purchase a small business for me to run but then pressured me to not attend & run the business myself, forcing me to pay staff wages that we could not afford. Our business collapsed in a year. From the outside looking in it looked like I was inconsistent, incapable & a quitter, whilst he continued to be the backbone of the family with steady employment & providing steady income.

Remember this person is not a random stranger or someone I just met. He is my legal husband. Realistically; who is going to tell my husband that he cannot bully or coerce me into sexual acts? Who is going to stop him from holding me captive in a room when he's angry? My children could not, I could not. None of the Drs, Pastors, Reverends, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists or police that I spoke to ever did ...

Our police & justice systems need to understand that most abusers have NOT lost control in a fit of rage....they are in fact very much in control of their anger, which is why it predominantly happens within the secrecy & 'safety' of your own home.

I do not fit the stereotype for a victim of domestic violence; I am a highly educated Caucasian woman.

I have friends that I have made throughout my 28 years as a mother, 6 of those friends – I have learnt along the way – were also experiencing domestic abuse & intimate partner violence.

7 of us, all mothers.

Our ages vary from late 20's to late 40's.

5 of us have a university education.

6 of us are Caucasian.

Of the 7, only ONE of us is Indigenous, did not graduate High School & her abuser has also been a substance abuser for the past 40 years ...

Education on all fronts is key. But the right sort of education & from a younger age. Our children become the men & women of tomorrow & we are not teaching them enough about what is right & what is wrong within the bounds of a relationship. Every time we inadequately deal with a domestic violence situation, we tell an abuser "your behaviour is acceptable" and we tell a victim "what is happening to you is acceptable, it's not our place to interfere". A man assaults a strange woman in the street – it's a crime. A husband assaults his wife in the home – it's a private matter to be sorted out by the couple. That's the barrier we still have to break.

In the context of the current climate in Australia right now; self-isolation or a lockdown scenario are going to be a living nightmare for the most vulnerable in our society – the victims of domestic violence, whose only way to stay safe is to avoid home as much as possible. Where are they going to go? And who is going to help them in the midst of a violent event? Just as those with comorbidities & existing health conditions are going to get lost in the health system in the face of Covid-19, those experiencing domestic violence are going to be very low priority for the police as they deal with the fallout of heightened community panic.

Sadly, her story is repeated 3,000 times across our Midwest region every year. And some estimates say that the prevalence is 5 times the actual reported statistics – this is a frightening rate of incidence!

And sadly, in Geraldton **we are not alone** ... thankfully nationally overall the figures are slightly better than our figures ... **in other words we are worse** than the national average!

Violence takes many forms and includes ... **physical, verbal, emotional, coercive control and more.**

Within many of the relationships which are at the core of any society there is enormous pain, suffering and trauma, rather than love and nurture.

Whilst more prevalent in some sectors of our community than others, family violence crosses all boundaries of race, colour, language, gender and socio-economic status.

How can this be?

We are not new in hearing these things and reporting on them.

There have been many organisations speaking about this over quite a period of time and attempting to rectify this situation. For example:

- Many of our leading businesses and organisations have signed up to the Community Respect and Equality Program (CRE), **whose tagline is "Say no to violence."**⁶
- Last year our Police Force put two additional police officers to specifically tackle this.
- Freedom from Fear Action Plan 2015⁷ in Western Australia which had 20 actions across 5 priority areas aiming to increase the safety of women and children who are at risk of experiencing family and domestic violence. A new plan is currently being prepared.⁸
- Recently Desert Blue Connect started a **Men's** intervention Service and they are seeing about ... 38% of all male perpetrators.

These are all good things!

One community leader said that family violence is like an octopus – the specific act of violence is the head of the octopus, but the impact is like the tentacles getting into every corner of life.

Family is the single most important influence in a child's life. From their first moments of life, children depend on parents and family to protect them and provide for their needs. Parents and family form a child's first relationships. They are a child's first teachers and act as role models in how to act and how to experience the world around them. ... Every parent knows that it's sometimes difficult to do this important work without help, support, and additional resources.⁹

*The causes of family violence are complex and include gender inequality and community attitudes towards women. Factors such as intergenerational abuse and trauma, exposure to violence as a child, social and economic exclusion, financial pressures, drug and alcohol misuse and mental illness can also be associated with family violence. These factors can combine in complex ways to influence the risk of an individual perpetrating family violence or becoming a victim of such violence (State of Victoria 2016).*¹⁰

There is also a "National Plan 2010-2022 ... change the factors". In the Foreword it says:

One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15. Almost one in five have experienced sexual violence. It is time for that to change. The National Plan is underpinned by the belief that involving all governments and the wider community is necessary to reducing violence in the short and longer terms. No government or group can tackle this problem alone.¹¹

⁶ <https://communityrespectandequality.com.au/>

⁷ <https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FFFActionPlan2015.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/wa-have-your-say/family-and-domestic-violence-strategy/>

⁹ <http://www.smartbeginningsmhc.org/Why-is-family-support-important-.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-australia-2019/contents/table-of-contents> Page 56

¹¹ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/national_plan_accessible.pdf Foreword

While living free from violence is everyone's right, reducing violence is everyone's responsibility. And this is a complex problem, long term.

By nurturing and teaching children during their early years, families play an important role in making sure children are ready to learn when they enter school. Children thrive when parents are able to actively promote their positive growth and development.

We heard one community leader say that there are kids in pre-school **who can't count or know their colours – they're behind already at that stage** – and have almost no hope with their education.

Another community leader said that “we need to start at -9 months if we're going to give kids hope.”

Dr Sandra Thompson, the Director of WACRH says **“WACRH staff share a common vision of a world where every child, woman and man can fulfil their potential – and this depends upon them feeling safe, valued and having opportunities. This has to start in our homes and local communities.”**¹²

We'll pick this topic up again in our section on Reflections.

¹² <https://storage.googleapis.com/stateless-communityrespectande/2018/11/3e038e33-1-cre-booklet-min.pdf> p 13

Housing and Homelessness

Fusion has been part of caring for those experiencing homelessness since the early 1980s, through Cameliers Guesthouse. And as has been said earlier, we were very sad to see it close in 2018.

A casual glance at Geraldton may lead one to believe that homelessness is not a large issue, with not many rough sleepers highly visible at night in the city, and only a few during the day.

However, homelessness is much more complex than simply rough sleeping. The hidden homeless in Geraldton are young people who find they are unable to live at home anymore, families who are “blacklisted”¹³ and cannot get somewhere to rent, people needing somewhere else to live after family violence, people visiting town for medical treatment or for a family funeral.

These people may be couch surfing with friends; adding to an already overcrowded house with another family; staying at the Batavia Motor Inn, **where Pedro prides himself on being the “caretaker”**; living in a boarded up house **with a “loose” board**; sleeping on the beach; and many other creative alternatives.

With the closure of Boomerang Hostel, Cameliers Guesthouse, and the Sobering Up Shelter in the past few years, there is a critical lack of short-term options for people.

There are many reasons that can lead a person to be homeless. Often, many of the other factors that we touch on here in this report are present when people are homeless – mental illness, family violence, alcohol and drug abuse. And anecdotally if these aspects are not the cause of someone being homeless, if someone is homeless for more than 6 months, then sadly it is highly likely that they will experience these things. Often also it can be generational where people simply do not know what it looks like to care for a house.

Across the State of Western Australia, on Census night in 2016 there were an estimated 9,005 people who were homeless. With the City of Geraldton **having about 1.5% of the state’s population, then it is** estimated that we have at least 150 people who are homeless here, particularly as a regional hub that attracts people seeking a range of services.

Recently the WA Government released the Homelessness Strategy for 2020-2030, All Paths Lead to a Home¹⁴. The vision is **“that everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.”**¹⁵ A key priority is known as Housing First – this simply means a goal of ensuring safe and stable housing for people, without preconditions or judgment, and then bringing other support services around that individual or family, to help address other needs.

There are a group of government and non-government agencies that are co-operating together in Geraldton to tackle the issue of homelessness. After maybe 10 years of not seeing much change, except for losing valuable services, there is currently high energy as a result of positive testimony out of Perth from the 50 Lives 50 Homes Strategy led by Ruah Community Services – which has had good success at housing some long term homeless people. The current plan is to do a **“census” known as Connections Week** later this year, to get some new baseline data on the extent of homelessness. That is a key part of a goal to end homelessness! If this sounds a lofty goal, there are numerous international examples of cities that have aimed for this and functionally achieved it.

One of the identified challenges with such a shift in goal from serving to ending homelessness, is agencies working in the field who have **formed their organisation’s identity from serving people who are homeless** and may be reluctant to let that go.

¹³ Blacklisting is the term for being listed on a tenancy database when breaching a tenancy agreement or ending a tenancy with a debt greater than the bond deposited.

¹⁴ <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/media/2156/homelessness-strategy-final.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid, p8.

Whilst such programs focus on long term solutions, at the crisis or short-term end of things there is a very real shortage of affordable accommodation. This is particularly felt in the Aboriginal community at times when family visit for occasions such as funerals. It is also felt with men having nowhere to go in situations of domestic violence.

If rough sleepers are not always so visible, the number of boarded up houses across the city is quite visible. When a range of agencies met in January this year, there was a lot of energy for freeing up those houses as part of moving forward in ending homelessness.

So, homelessness is a complex issue that is prevalent in our community and affects a significant number of people.

Mental Health, Suicide and Well-being

Fusion has been operating in this field for many years, so we didn't go intentionally seeking to listen to people speak in this area – but inevitably it came up because often the issues raised here are linked within an individual person – family violence, homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse.

This comprehensive background is provided by Alison Hilton, Fusion Geraldton's Recovery Services Lead.

Definition

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is 'a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'¹⁶

A National Picture

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being (NSMHWB)¹⁷ provides the most comprehensive (albeit dated) estimates for mental disorders in Australian adults both over their lifetime and in the preceding 12 months. The survey estimated that 45 per cent of Australians had experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime, with 20 per cent experiencing a mental disorder in the previous year.¹⁸

In addition to the NSMHWB, the most recent triennial ABS National Health Survey estimated there were 4.8 million Australians (20.1 per cent) with a mental or behavioural condition in 2017–18¹⁹. This was an increase of 2.6 percentage points from 2014–15, mainly due to an increase in the number of people reporting anxiety-related conditions, depression, or feelings of depression.

When looking by gender and age, as the accompanying graph shows, of particular concern is the peak of 30% for women aged 15-24²⁰.

While this is the most recent available data for mental health prevalence in Australia, it only provides data on people who currently identify as having mental or behavioural conditions, and does not provide data on lifetime prevalence or incidence of mental illness in the past year.

Poor mental health may also be associated with suicidality. According to the ABS, 3,128 people died in Australia from intentional self-harm in 2017, rising from 2,866 in 2016. While suicidality

¹⁶ Mental Health in Australia, A Quick Guide 2019 -

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1819/Quick_Guides/MentalHealth

¹⁷ National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007 -

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4326.0Main+Features32007?OpenDocument> and [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/6AE6DA447F985FC2CA2574EA00122BD6/\\$File/National%20Survey%20of%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Summary%20of%20Results.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/6AE6DA447F985FC2CA2574EA00122BD6/$File/National%20Survey%20of%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Summary%20of%20Results.pdf)

¹⁸ Conducted in 2007, this was the second ABS National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being (NSMHWB), with the first survey conducted in 1997. Originally planned to be repeated every 10 years, the Department of Health has said that there are no plans to fund another survey on mental health by the ABS. Fusion believes that not repeating or updating this survey is really detrimental to the understanding of **Australia's national mental health and well-being** – being able to compare data and see what has changed would be really helpful to the whole mental health sector and governments who need to plan what services are needed.

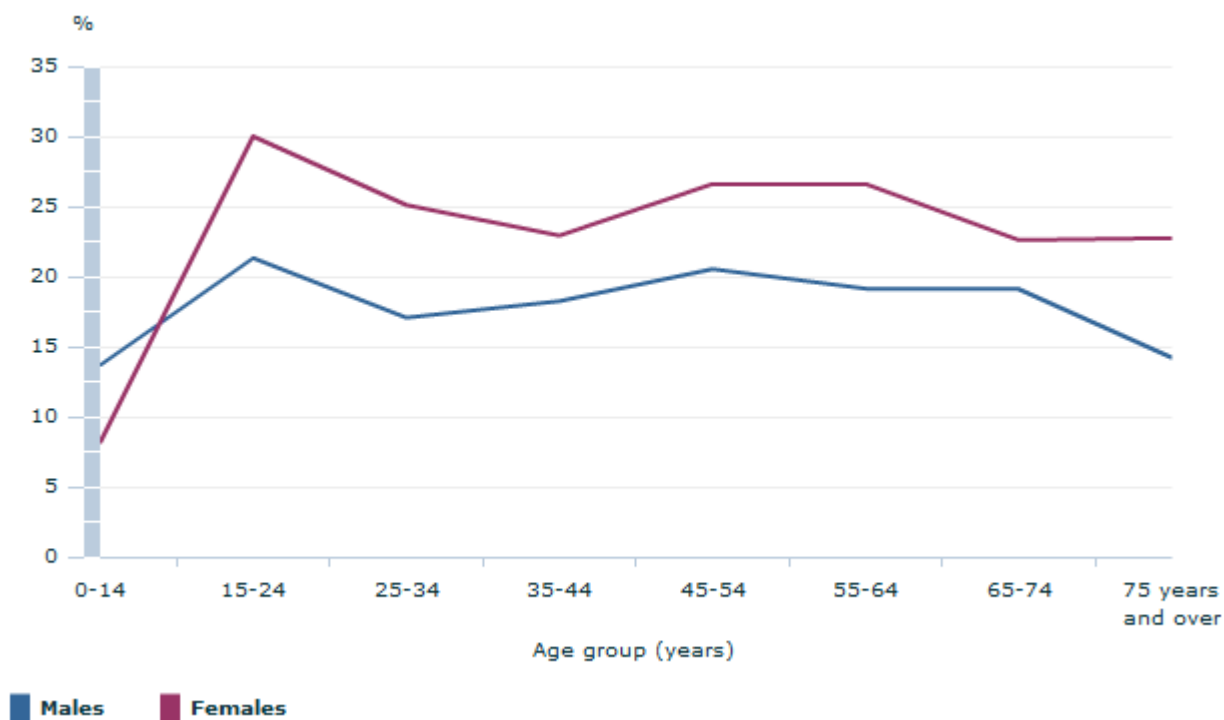
¹⁹ National Health Survey: First Results, 2017-18 -

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.001~2017-18-Main%20Features~Mental%20and%20behavioural%20conditions~70>

²⁰ Ibid.

is not confined solely to people with poor mental health, the NSMHWB estimated that 94.2 per cent of persons who attempted suicide in the previous 12 months had experienced a mental disorder in the same time period.

Proportion of persons with a mental or behavioural condition, 2017-18



Geraldton Mental Health

Geraldton's mental health is in line with national statistics except the suicide rate in line with WA is higher than the national average. In response there is now a suicide prevention trial happening in WA.²¹ Suicide remains the leading cause of death for Western Australians aged between 15 and 44.²²

The most common and significant risk factor associated with suicide is mental illness. Previous Western Australian coronial data found that 35% of men and 60% of women who completed suicide had suffered from a diagnosed psychiatric disorder in the preceding 12 months.²³ The observations of family and friends of those who completed suicide indicate that 57% of men and 66% of women exhibited symptoms of depression in the three months preceding their deaths.²⁴

For the period 2011-2015, suicide was the leading cause of death in the Midwest for 15-24 year olds. The female rate was significantly higher (1.7 times) than the State rate.

For the period 2011-2015, Midwest residents aged 15-64 years, accessed community mental health services at a significantly (10%) lower rate than the State despite having a similar rate of having a

²¹ Western Australia Suicide Prevention 2020 - <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/media/1220/suicide-prevention-2020-strategy-final.pdf>

²² Lifeline WA Fast Facts - <https://www.lifelinewa.org.au/About-Us/Fast-Facts>

²³ The NSMHWB 2007 (op cit.) estimated that 94.2 per cent of persons who attempted suicide in the previous 12 months had experienced a mental disorder in the same time period.

²⁴ Western Australia Suicide Prevention 2020 op cit.

diagnosed mental health problem. Substance abuse disorders (1.1 times) and disorders of psychological development (1.5 times higher) had rates higher than the State rates.²⁵

Trauma impacting mental health

As more research comes to light showing that trauma and in particular complex childhood trauma has a negative impact on long term mental health there is a need to reduce the causes of trauma. Mental health disorders that may be caused by or impacted by trauma include, PTSD, Dissociative disorder, Anxiety, Depression, Psychotic mental illnesses and Bipolar Disorder.

People with psychosis commonly report prior trauma and research is beginning to show the linkage²⁶.

Fusion involvement with Mental Health in Geraldton

Fusion has been working with people with poor mental health for over 30 years, starting with residents of Cameliers Guesthouse who were clients of Midwest Mental Health and then consolidating this with the opening of the Community Supported Residential Units (CSRU) in 2007. The CSRU is a Mental Health Commission funded recovery programme that includes accommodation.

Fusion in Geraldton run a programme, the CSRU (Community Supported Residential Units) that supports people with severe and persistent mental illness and is funded by the WA Mental Health Commission. The CSRU works in alignment with the National Mental Health Standards which is based around what is **known as the “Recovery Model”. This model defines recovery as ‘being able to create and live a meaningful and contributing life in a community of choice with or without the presence of mental health issues’.**

As a simpler way to describe this, the CSRU focuses on “what does it mean to find my new normal?” We also believe that recovery is a journey not a finite point of “cure”.

We all go through experiences that mean that life has changed, and we need to navigate these changes and find our new normal. This can be particularly difficult for those experiencing mental illness. People need a safe place to work out what it means to live with their new circumstances, new limits, and new routines as they work on their recovery journey. This is what the CSRU offers its residents.

“Finding my new normal” is a process that includes recognising what has changed, what has been lost, and what is now an added part to life. Then, after recognising these changes, taking time to work out how life will look now and living this out day by day.

Working with a recovery focus **helps Fusion Geraldton and the CSRU participate in Fusion’s vision to see transformed communities where people thrive.** The small changes the individual residents make on their recovery journey help them to work out who they are, find their place in their local community, and start to live well (thrive) no matter what is happening.

We believe working with people to help them to live well no matter what is happening is consistent with our vision to see communities where (young) people thrive.

²⁵ Midwest Health Profile, November 2018 -

http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/fileadmin/sections/publications/Publications_by_topic_type/Reports_and_Profiles/Midwest_Health_Profile_2018.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Resources/Information/Understanding-abuse-and-trauma/What-is-complex-trauma/Complex-Trauma-and-mental-health>
<https://www.blueknot.org.au/ABOUT-US/Facts-and-Figures#176233-mental-health-issues>
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/in-focus/a-word-from-julia-how-child-hood-trauma-affects-our-mental-health>

Mental Health in Geraldton

Due to the hard work of several government departments and local agencies across Australia, slowly the stigma around poor mental health has been lessening, albeit slowly, and people are more open to seeking help. However, the services have not grown at the same rate to support this. In 2019, several agencies in Geraldton had to close their referral systems and shut down wait lists due to not having the capacity to respond quickly enough to the high referral rate.

One of the challenges in Geraldton is a lack of appropriate housing for people with mental health illnesses. This impacts residents of the CSRU when they are ready to take on more independence or when their functionality decreases, or their support needs increase and they need to move out of the CSRU. This can cause what appears to be a bottle neck and limits flow through of clients. The lack of appropriate housing includes a lack of access to higher need supports where cooking and cleaning are included in the service for those who for various reasons are unable to do so for themselves.

One of the great things about Geraldton is the networks and willingness for agencies to want to work together. However, the will sometimes does not match the reality/practicality of working together due to some of the bureaucratic obstacles and the time that processes can take and a fear of double dipping or replicating services. The challenge of working together and competing for tenders creates even greater complexity.

For those that attend, the Midwest Mental Health Network has worked to help mental health agencies become more aware of each other, share and understand referral pathways, vacancy levels and together to highlight gaps in services in town.

There are some major gaps in Geraldton around mental health

Although Geraldton is serviced by Geraldton Regional Hospital, there is no dedicated Mental Health Ward, although it is in the pipeline and supposed to be opening in the mid-2020s and it is difficult to attract and retain appropriately qualified mental health workers to Geraldton. Currently there is no specialised mental health worker on duty at the hospital after 9:30 pm each night.

In the Youth Mental Health there is a gap between Head Space – who specialise in early intervention, prevention and support and CAMS who specialise in Acute mental health and support. Where do young people go who have a diagnosed mental health issue and are relatively stable but need ongoing support to continue to do well? There is also no specialist accommodated mental health support/service for youth for diagnosis, respite, or ongoing care.

A new Step Up, Step Down facility is being built and due to open in 2021. This is being built on the old sobering up shelter site. This programme is, for people who are too unwell to be safe at home but not unwell enough to need a hospital stay or conversely people who are now well enough to leave hospital but not well enough to be safe at home. (hence step up, step down name). Like many services the Step Up, Step Down programme will need to be responsive to our area and clever around transportation as it is not in the CBD or in easy walking distance to the hospital/Midwest Mental Health Services when extra support is needed.

Finding affordable counselling support and support groups including culturally appropriate support both for indigenous Australians and Australians from a CALD background esp. refugees is a challenge in our area.

NDIS – Geraldton is one of the last areas to be implementing the NDIS and no one really knows what this will finally look like in practice. There are particular challenges around negotiating the NDIS for people with a Psycho-social disability (mental illness) especially as mental health is not as static as some of the

physical disabilities. There are many agencies, carers and mental health consumers who are all working hard to support the transition into the NDIS.

Final Thought

Prevention and early intervention around mental health need to be part of a holistic approach to community wellness. There needs to be a reduction in trauma – Domestic violence is a huge contributing factor in children being exposed to and experiencing traumatic events. It has been suggested that a decrease in childhood trauma will decrease future mental health issues.

Obviously, this is not a quick fix, but it is an important puzzle piece in creating both communities that thrive and individuals in our communities who thrive. As more people become open to seeking help earlier, we need enough services to respond to this need.

Having meaningful activity and a sense of belonging is also a key part to improving and preventing mental illness/poor mental health.

Influence of Alcohol and drugs

Many people spoke about how the use of methamphetamines and ice is destroying lives and killing people. And like family violence, the drug use is across all sectors of our society.

As well, binge drinking continues to be a huge problem for many in our city.

The prevalence of Fly-in Fly-out work, with its cycle of intense work, followed by periods of free time was seen by some as a challenge. It is hard for the body to adjust its rhythms with such work patterns, and substances can so easily become an escape mechanism.

Many young people traumatised through family violence, and behind in education from a young age, find the lure of drugs too much to resist.

Many people spoke of the tragedy of the loss of the sobering up shelter – as it provided a much-needed circuit breaker in responding to domestic violence.

We also heard of the life-long challenges that come from babies being born with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD) – which flows through into educational and other challenges growing up.

Sadly, quite similar to FASD, we heard people speaking with concern that they are seeing children who **might be termed “ice-babies”** – impacted in a range of ways through the ice addiction of their mother during pregnancy.

In short, substances, both legal (alcohol) and illegal (drugs) are common and prevalent, and seemingly unstoppable across our community.

Cultural Considerations

Of the 37,158²⁷ people living in the City of Greater Geraldton, 3,600 (9.5%) of them are Aboriginal. Many have been part of caring for this land for thousands of years.

21% of our population were born in a country other than Australia. The Midwest Multicultural Association estimates there are people living here from at least 50, probably 60 different countries



Thus, across our community are those who have recently called Australia home, and those who have cared for the land for generations.

Sadly, many Aboriginal members of our community suffer disadvantage, and one Aboriginal leader said there are some in our community who lack basic human rights of shelter, food and water.

When we look at the family violence statistics, Aboriginal people are over-represented there – and Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised for Family Violence than non-Aboriginal women.

In Greenough Prison about 90% of inmates are Aboriginal.

Geraldton is a meeting point for many Aboriginals because it is the largest regional city and offers services like Centrelink and the courts etc.

When there is a funeral of a member of the Aboriginal community and family come to town, how could they not look after them? But often this leads to overcrowding in houses where there may already be pressures on many fronts.

We spoke with Aboriginal people who are concerned that often Aboriginal people feel caught between really identifying and being Aboriginal, whilst living in modern day Australia.

Cultural Shock is when our expectations **don't match** our present experience – and this is true it seems for many Aboriginal people.

²⁷ 2016 Census figures, as reported in https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/profiles/cgg/assets/clientdata/document-centre/planning/strategic_document/local_planning_strategy.pdf

Recently, the Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service (GRAMS) ran a Family Fun Day – glorious blue-sky day, lots of fun activities for all ages. How wonderful it was to see children of all backgrounds happily playing together and enjoying the day

And then a week later, the **Midwest Multicultural Association held the Harmony Week celebration ...** a different style of event to the Grams Day, but a wonderful expression of culture, diversity and unity.

Last month there was the Yamatji Nation Native Title Determination. The journey took more than 20 years, due to completing claims and involved competing claims who eventually put their differences aside for the purpose of making many claims become one claim. And it is nationally significant as the first time both native title recognition and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement have been determined simultaneously.

The Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance pulls together many organisations serving the Aboriginal community in order to provide greater co-ordination.

Similarly, the Midwest Multicultural Association seeks to link together newer Australians.

Despite these good things, the fact remains that still there is much disadvantage and trauma amongst the Aboriginal members of the Geraldton community.

And more recent arrivals to Australia are also touched by the scourge of family violence – sadly it knows no boundaries.

Reflections on what we heard



A compassionate city

Our city has many natural features which draw people here – particularly the wind and water. There are also many wonderful community events throughout the year that draw people together in a spirit of celebration.

However, just below the surface, sometimes very public, sometimes hidden away, life is a struggle for many and there are a range of disadvantages that people battle and traumas they are working through.

We've listened to:

- Schools who despite their very best efforts, find they still have a significant group of young people who are disengaged from education – and largely through life issues they have brought with them into the school setting.
- Many people who say that in addition, there are a significant group of young people who are not engaged in education or any other pursuit and lack effective parenting or role models.
- Many service providers, who speak sadly of the scourge of family violence, which crosses all sectors of our society; and
- Other service providers who speak of those who simply do not have enough to eat, or somewhere to call home (and yes, sometimes it is from poor choices they have made – or maybe they have never known how to care for a home).

Against these things, across the City there are many compassionate people serving every day, seeking to make a difference in the lives of community members here.

Sadly, people also tell us that often the existing services are full and there is nowhere else to refer people, particularly for counselling and for short term accommodation.

The call by the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) for a 20% increase in community services funding would be very welcome here.²⁸

The sum of our efforts

Even with a District Leadership Group that meets regularly; a housing network with traction towards the goal of ending homelessness; and a Midwest Mental Health Network seeking to link together 28 mental health service providers, we have heard people frequently bemoan that there is not more co-operation and collaboration between different service organisations in Geraldton – be they government or non-government; religious-based or otherwise – that there is too much operating within our own silos. We **need to “talk to each other”** said one leader. Some of this is brought on by the tender processes that mean we each need to compete for limited funding – even though some tenders now require evidence of co-operation and working with others.

There is a famous poem, *“The Ambulance Down in the Valley”*, by Joseph Malins from 1895, which is summarised in this diagram:



²⁸ WACOSS are arguing that the community services sector is at breaking point currently, and they are requesting an overall lift of 20% in funding from the State Government. Needs a link

By and large, much of our compassionate effort is focussed around picking up people at the bottom of the cliff after they have fallen off – families after domestic violence; young people who can no longer live at home; kids who are behind even before they start primary school; those who are homeless for a range of reasons; those impacted by the choice to take illicit drugs or consume too much alcohol etc.

It seems history repeats. Back in 1895, Joseph Malins commented that **"It's plain that a fence is of no consequence if an ambulance works in the valley."**

The scourge of Family Violence

As we quoted earlier from a community leader:

"Family violence is like an octopus - the actual act is like the head, but the tentacles go into everything. If it takes a village to raise a child; then it takes a whole community to respond to this challenge. We've got the resources here, so what is stopping us? Nothing, except we've got to work together, that's the only way, we've just got to work together."

Despite our best efforts, by many people, this is still happening – on average 8 incidents reported to the Police each 24-hour period across the Midwest – and it is across all sectors of our community.

A friend asked me what I was working on, and on hearing then she responded:

"I represent a very privileged group of women - I'm white, middle-classed, tertiary educated, and grew up in a family that loved and provided for my needs as best as they were able.

I am a woman of faith and this brings me comfort and joy in tough times, and provides me with a community of believers who support me and nurture me.

I have a loving husband and beautiful, healthy kids who don't struggle much at school.

And yet, with all my advantages, sometimes I just can't stand my kids! Sometimes I want to run away from everything. Sometimes I want to yell and scream at my husband, and behave in ways to my family that are unkind and nasty and hurtful.

I CANNOT imagine how families without the advantages that I have in life manage when times are tough in their homes. And I wonder, and despair occasionally, about how someone like me can help someone in a situation where parenting and daily living require skills and personal management beyond that which they have learnt or received from their own parents or community?

How can my family and I and my wider community act to give the families affected by violence in Geraldton a chance to thrive and discover a way of living that will help even the most vulnerable to feel they are safe and loved?"

So, how might we together give the families affected by violence in Geraldton a chance to thrive and discover a way of living that will help even the most vulnerable to feel they are safe and loved?

What could be in Geraldton?



As part of our Youth Survey, we asked some young people what their dreams are for Geraldton?

Some of them only thought of the question in terms of themselves, and so we got a bunch of answers which for these young people are good answers:

- I get to swim every day
- A job and a house that I own
- Be a cool kid artist or a cool kid violinist and tell my special somebody that they need more cats
- Become a Buccs player then NBA
- Earn sufficient money
- Get a job and get a full VR gaming set
- I want to be a car mechanic and work on my dream car.
- To be Geraldton's best blade smith.
- To open a business
- To find people more similar

Others thought of the question beyond themselves, and these are some of their answers:

- Every young person has at least one person who knows what life is like for them
- Equality.
- That everyone is treated equal
- Everyone has a roof over their head
- Everyone must be given a chance of a job.
- Everybody can feel safe around town.
- For the bullying to others to stop
- Job for everyone
- Less meth-based crimes in Rangeway
- More activities and places for teenagers to go in Geraldton
- More employment More community events More places to hang out with friends beside the foreshore
- My hope for Geraldton is that people would respect each other, regardless of race or identity.
- That it can be safer so people will want to live here.
- There are no homeless people.
- A friendly community everyone can talk to one another
- Jobs for everyone and less people who steal and do drugs
- More community caring about each other, big activities for everyone to come together.
- That every child feels safe at their own home or school
- To feel safe
- That it will be safer
- Yes, more job opportunities and a better economy
- Closer community where we know everyone and can help everyone
- I would love to hope that those homeless people that sleep outside get a better life in the future and that drugs aren't the issue every time
- That everyone who needs someone to talk to gets that someone.
- To be free of the coronavirus
- To create a safer place not filled with crime and alcohol and drugs
- I hope that everyone gets a home and at least gets fed
- **My dream for Geraldton is to involve Indigenous peoples more. We don't really have any cultural centres; I think that would be great if we had one.**
- To be able to stay and do a University course for being a doctor in Geraldton.
- **That Geraldton begins to include more opportunities for youth within the community to allow more things for young people to do either after school or on weekends.**

And here's a bunch from some of the adults who completed the Survey:

- For Geraldton residents to feel safe again
- Communities feel safe
- Watch the town expand
- I hope that everyone gets a home and at least gets fed
- To continue to be a closely connected community with support services for those in need.
- Have friends and respect for everyone and always wear a smile
- That we intervene for our youth earlier - in the early years. I don't think Geraldton takes this 0-4yo age range seriously enough to make an impact for our youth.
- For the community to come together as one with equality and fairness for all
- That it becomes a city that the people who live here are proud of. That crime rates drop, and people look after the great places we have. That small businesses stop closing and more small businesses open and the big franchises come back.
- More work opportunities and places for youth to hang out
- Everyone has a living wage that can support them and their dependents
- That all children and young people have the opportunity to see what is possible for them regardless of where they come from. Empower them to be able to make positive and healthy choices so they are connected to family friends and community
- To see it as a safe place to live

There is a well-known quote by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female head of state in Africa²⁹:

If your dreams don't scare you, they are not big enough.

As you read our Report, what are your dreams for Geraldton? Are they just about what is good for you, or are they about everyone who calls Geraldton home, including those who are not yet born or living here?

Here's a few thoughts we've had as we've reflected on what we've heard:

What if in Geraldton:

- every person has a safe place to live.
- every child, woman and man feels safe in their own home.
- every young person grows up knowing they are loved and cared for, and has the opportunity to thrive through appropriate education, employment and other pursuits, regardless of their race, heritage, gender, sexual orientation, or family resources?

What if Geraldton becomes known as a peaceful city, where all people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, whether they have called Australia home for many generations or have recently arrived, live together in harmony?

What if Geraldton was the legend on the Australian grapevine as "THE" place of choice where everyone wants to live and raise their family?

What if Geraldton becomes a "must visit" destination for Australians and visitors to Australia, because of its natural beauty, and because people have heard of our community spirit?

²⁹ Ellen Johnson Sirleaf served as the 24th President of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. She was the first elected female head of state in Africa. In 2011, she won the Nobel Peace Prize. This recognised her efforts to bring women into the peacekeeping process.

How might this be?



In the section before last, we spoke of an image of a cliff, where there is a choice to be made between building a fence at the top of the cliff and providing ambulances at the bottom to pick people up.

Figuratively speaking, whilst people keep falling, there is an ongoing pressure and need to provide ambulances.

Whilst we continue to average 8 family violence Police reports every night, responding to those incidents will continue to take a lot of energy from a range of services. Building a fence is a longer, slower task.

There are groups working on strategies toward prevention, such as a group of organisations signing up to the CRE (Community, Respect and Equality) program. How might we extend such efforts?

The State Government is currently preparing a 10-year strategy aimed at reducing Family and Domestic violence³⁰, which is good and important. How will that link with other efforts on the ground?

We wonder if to truly build a fence that prevents people from falling off, we may need to build a web of support around families in our community – a web that involves all of us – our 3 levels of government, not-for-profit service agencies, schools, Christian Churches, other religious organisations, community groups, local residents ... **in short everyone!**

But what will help us to work differently, to change the trajectory that we are on?

Can the coronavirus situation help us?

It has been fascinating to reflect on the coronavirus crisis, unfolding as we are completing this report.

We are not even 3 months into the year, and this was not on any of our horizons when 2020 started. And yet something about it has made all of us rearrange our priorities – everyone has been impacted through cancelled business and personal travel; avoiding meeting in person (the release of this report has changed from a public gathering to a live stream as a consequence); Christian Churches will not meet in their buildings this Sunday; cancellation of sporting competitions – some at the point of finals – or midway through finals; there is still the possibility that schools might close; panic buying in shops leading to empty shelves **like we've never seen before ... and we could go on listing the reality that we are all experiencing at this moment as this report is released.**

Amazingly too, our Federal Government has found at least \$20 billion to fight this head on.

This really is a crisis.

Whilst seemingly not as immediate, it could be argued that family violence is destroying more lives than **is forecast to be lost through the coronavirus ... it too is a crisis** – yet not getting the same life altering attention that globally we are giving the coronavirus.

In Chinese, the expression for crisis is 危机 (Wéijī – for English speakers, pronounced way-gee) – and it is made up of two components – 危 meaning danger, and 机 meaning opportunity.

We are certainly in **a crisis ... and there is great danger** – and even more so for the vulnerable in our midst – the aged, the young, those with mental illnesses, those experiencing persistent domestic abuse etc. Past evidence suggests that such disruptions to life often hit the vulnerable members of our community the hardest.

But might this also be a time of opportunity?

³⁰ <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/wa-have-your-say/family-and-domestic-violence-strategy/>

What if we are “forced” to learn new ways to operate – not just in our business and shopping, but in all aspects of our lives? What if we learn new ways to relate together?

Might it be that what seems like a danger, could actually be an opportunity?

If you look at the image on the front cover of this report, did you notice that in the middle of the marble there is a ship? And it is upside down!

Might this virus be the thing that helps us to turn everything upside down, like a big reset, and helps us find a new way of being and living going forward?

And one more aspect of the front cover image, right up the top, the evening star is just starting to shine. The first star of the night, bringing new hope and direction in the midst of the darkness.

Forgive us if it seems that we are suggesting that a crisis can suddenly mean that we solve family violence just like that – we are certainly not suggesting that!

But might it give us new ways of operating together across our community, in our neighbourhoods and in our families? Might it lead many of us to reconsider what we value most?

Already the coronavirus is limiting activities for so many of us in so many areas. These things are being imposed on us because of the crisis at hand.

Might we be so bold as to wonder – are there some self-limiting choices that we might individually and collectively make, that might make a difference in the area of family violence and the associated trauma for our young people?

What if those of us who are inclined when drinking alcohol to drink to a point where we lose control, choose to change that behaviour, for the sake of the young people in our community?

What if those of us who believe we can control things enough that we can indulge in illicit drugs, were to choose for the sake of those who are vulnerable to not practice such indulgences?

We know that with the internet available in our hands, pornography has never been so prevalent and accessible – what if those of us who might choose that as entertainment, might think again about the example it sets for our young males about how to treat females, and so choose differently?

Or what if those of us who like a bit of a flutter, but now find it is starting to control us, might choose to invest both our money and our time in our family and our community?

Building Community

How might this be the moment when we (re)discover how to build community together?

There is a Western Australian from Kalamunda named Peter Kenyon, possibly known to many of us – he has literally helped thousands of communities across Australia to thrive. He is a social capitalist and community enthusiast. Social Capital refers to the connections between us. Bonding social capital is what we have with those closest to us; bridging social capital is when we stretch out to those who we might otherwise not need to – but we choose to because it builds a stronger, more resilient society – it builds a web of support for families. His website, Bank of Ideas³¹, has lots of great resources – simple things we can each do. One list has *158-Things-I-can-do-to-build-social-capital*.

³¹ <https://bankofideas.com.au/handouts/>

Wayne McDonald from Bundiyarra Aboriginal Corporation understands this, and is planning some clean up bins and a BBQ for 4 community hotspots later this year ... what if a whole group of us who don't live there turn up because we simply want to help and build connections and encourage people?

Neighbour Day³² on Sunday 29 March is another good example – taking the initiative to have a BBQ with your neighbours. In the current climate, this might not be so possible right now ...

But here is a suggestion from their working group:

Leave a friendly calling or connection card for your neighbour (in their letterbox or under the front door). Include your phone number and say if ever they feel like some company, they are very welcome to call you for a chat. You could also leave a toilet roll as a very neighbourly gift!



This might also extend to starting a Facebook group or WhatsApp group or other social media way of staying connected with your neighbours at this time – that can continue on afterwards.

We're being encouraged to practice social distancing ... we prefer to think that physical distancing is what is needed now, whilst we need to strengthen our social connections in new fun, creative ways.

Fascinating that the theme for Neighbour day, chosen last year, is Social Connection³³!

Fusion Geraldton is starting a Facebook Group in order to share ideas about social connection, as well as offer a service to connect those needing help, with those in a position to offer help – we are launching it as we release this Report – check out our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/fusiongeraldton/> or go directly to the Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/geraldtoncaringandsharing/>

Let's find new creative ways to be connected at this time – and maybe it will be the reset that we need to see that in Geraldton:

- every person has a safe place to live.
- every child, woman and man feels safe in their own home.
- every young person grows up knowing they are loved and cared for, and has the opportunity to thrive through appropriate education, employment and other pursuits, regardless of their race, heritage, gender, sexual orientation, or family resources.

³² <http://neighbourday.org>

³³ <http://neighbourday.org/home-page/neighbour-day-2020-theme/>

Fusion's Commitment



As a result of this listening process, Fusion commits to:

1. Keep listening, particularly to understand the work of other organisations and help network to bridge the gap between potential silos.
2. Establish a Facebook group from today that will resource people with community building ideas at this time (and beyond the coronavirus) and facilitate connecting people together ... the link is: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/geraldtoncaringandsharing/>
3. Continue to dialogue with local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders and young people about how the annual Fusion national Uluru Pilgrimage might resource young people here to understand Aboriginal culture and so to become ambassadors for reconciliation in our community.
4. Dialoguing with families, community leaders, schools and service providers about our long-established Families Course and how it might be adapted for the various cultures here, and so serve families with resources to build thriving families.
5. Encourage the Midwest Mental Health Network to advocate for another: National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being (NSMHWB) – the last one was in 2007 after one in 1997. It is a very important time series that we need to continue for the mental health and well-being of our nation!
6. Continue to support the local housing coalition with the goal of ending homelessness using the Housing First approach, including the Connections Week later this year.
7. Make available the Fusion Village site in Onslow Street for a suitable housing project that works towards the goal of ending homelessness. We are not actively continuing our own planning for the site, but welcome others to do so and utilise it.
8. Explore with the CRE steering group how we can bring the Christian Churches on board with the goal of saying no to violence.
9. Advocating in networks where we can regarding the scourge and impact of family violence on our community, and the need to all work together to see this change.
10. Help a young person from Geraldton to complete the Fusion Diploma in Youth and Community Work training, that he is currently over east completing, and explore a role for him from 2021 onwards.

Conclusion



We've been humbled by the process of listening to others in our community – there are many wonderful, caring people here – some of whom are paid to care; others of whom do it because that is an important part of being a human!

We've set out a bold vision of what might be – building a web of support together that is going to need all of us, to support families in our community.

Will you dare to believe that together we can change Geraldton?

Firstly, for the sake of the young people who are even yet to be born; and secondly so that Geraldton **becomes the “legend on the community grapevine” as the place to raise your family!**

We believe that we can and look forward to working more closely with others who believe this too.