Reality Street Snapshot

Report One

More Than Talk Education Research

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March 2017

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MAOA

Midwest Aboriginal Organisation Alliance

This snapshot takes a close look at a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Geraldton by examining the lived experiences of some its residents. It offers an initial reference point for examination and planning of community engagement in suburb strategic planning and development.

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Acknowledgements

Ethical Approval

Ethical Approval for the More than Talk (MTT) Education research was granted by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC).

Terminology

In this document the term 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the CGG region the Wilunyu peoples of Western Australia on which this research was conducted.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CGG	City of Greater Geraldton
DoH	Department of Housing
MAOA	Midwest Aboriginal Organisations' Alliance
MTT	More Than Talk: an Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal partnership for action
WAAHEC	Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee
WACRH	Western Australian Centre for Rural Health

Suggested Citation:
Green C., Papertalk L., Bentink S.J., Schrader P., Thompson S.C. (2016) Reality Street Snapshot. Report One: More Than Talk: partnership to improve Aboriginal education outcomes.   Western Australian Centre for Rural Health, University of Western Australia, Geraldton, December 2016.

1   Introduction

The More Than Talk (MTT) Education Research Project aims to improve Aboriginal engagement/ outcomes in education, achievement and school completion. The socioecological model describes many influences on child development and education, including physical, social, institutional and cultural environments, the combination of which can create complex, dynamic and long-lasting impacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A recent meta-analysis found children's educational outcomes are associated with aspects of their neighbourhood environments, including poverty and social disorganisation. (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016). Children's neighbourhood environments should be considered when exploring improvements in education.

This Reality Street Snapshot is the first in a series of reports and forms part of the MTT Education Research Project's community outreach initiatives. It identifies potential issues impacting on children's home environments through exploring the lived experience of residents of a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Geraldton.

The purpose of the study is, through structured interviewing, to provide an opportunity for residents of a disadvantaged neighbourhood to voice their perspectives of their lived experience of their neighbourhood and how it impacts on their lives.

The target street neighbourhood in this Snapshot will be referred to as 'Reality Street'. Participant references to the street name within the transcriptions have been replaced. All other mentions of surrounding street names will be referred to as "Opposite Street".

2   Research Design and Methods

The target neighbourhood for this study was selected because:
1.   it had been identified as a disadvantaged area by the MTT Project's first case study
2.   it had a similar reputation among the local Geraldton community and
3.   it had close proximity to a local primary school.

The neighbourhood is located in the north-eastern Champion Bay Ward and is one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in the Geraldton area, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-economic Indexes for areas (ABS 2011; CGG 2016).

At the time of data collection in early 2016, the target neighbourhood's physical environment, on the street and immediate surrounds, included several reasonably maintained houses. However, walls and fences in the neighbourhood were generally heavily vandalised and defaced with graffiti, many vacant houses and units were boarded up, there were unswept roads, no paved footpaths and accumulated rubbish in yards. There were also several vacant blocks with rubbish and vegetation within the area, some as a result of housing being demolished.
A qualitative approach was employed for this Reality Street Snapshot. Questionnaires were developed for structured interviews to collect perspectives and experiences of residents of the target neighbourhood. Questionnaire development was informed by issues of interest from the CGG with

respect to the snapshot neighbourhood suburb. The interviews comprised nine sections to explore participants' views of living in the area.

During early 2016, interviewers visited each residential dwelling in the neighbourhood to engage with residents. The participant selection process was systematic and opportunistic. Inclusion criteria for participants required they lived in the neighbourhood, and give voluntary informed consent to the interviews. Efforts were made to include carers with children as questions had an overall focus on school-aged children. Residents were given a sheet containing the interview questions and the data collection process. Those who agreed to being interviewed signed an informed consent form, including consent for the interview to be audio recorded. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim before coding and extraction of key themes.

3   Participants and Neighbourhood

Thirty residences were visited and 17 participants (eight males, nine females) were interviewed. Table 3.1 records the number of participants according to Aboriginality, tenancy and gender – the largest group was Aboriginal residents of State housing.

Table 3.1: Cross tabulation of participants by Aboriginality, tenancy and gender.

Cultural Identity	Tenancy Type		
	Home owner	Private Rental	State Housing
Aboriginal	2 (1 male, 1 female)	1 (1 female)	12 (5 male, 7 female)
Non-Aboriginal	1 (1 male)	0	1 (1 male)

This Snapshot was interested in the number and living arrangements of children in each participant household. Table 3.2 and Box 3.1 outline aspects of the living arrangements of participants with children.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of living situations of participants with children in their care.

Participant's Child Care Resposibility	Total Count
Number of participants living with children	7
Number of children	19 (in 6 households)
Number of children of school age (4 – 16 years)	2 (1 male, 1 female)
Number of children attending local primary school	

Box 3.1: Points of interest related to Children Living with Participants

- None of the homeowners had children living with them.
- Only one male participant had children living with him. He lives with his partner/ their mother. Aside from this one participant, all children documented through the interviews were those living with female Aboriginal participants.
- The one participant privately renting was a female Aboriginal, with 4 children who all attend the local primary school. All other participants with children were living in state housing.

4 Key Findings

This section presents some of the key findings identified from interviewing residents living in the target neighbourhood. Resident concerns centred on:

- Neighbourhood changes
- Neighbourhood likes and dislikes
- Neighbourhood population
- Housing issues
- Road/Streetscape issues
- Antisocial behaviour, crime & law enforcement
- Children and young people
- Neighbourhood solutions and ideas

Resident Identified Issues

The neighbourhood we live in has an impact on how we respond to many of life's challenges, and our social and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, in the first interview question researchers invited residents to talk about neighbourhood issues important to them. The main issues identified in this process included:

Mix of residents/tenants

When participants spoke of the mix of residents/tenants living in the neighbourhood, they referred to the Department of Housing (DoH) tenancy selection and processes which many believed contributed to issues experienced in the neighbourhood. Participants expressed they wanted the neighbourhood to be safer environment for the high number of older residents in the area.

Housing Issues and role of Department of Housing (DoH)

Participants raised housing issues including the types of available housing, high-density housing, maintenance and repair issues, lack of security, vacancies, pensioner units, and the practice of placing Aboriginal families together (including choice of offer). Additionally, many of the participants were of the opinion that practices of the DoH have not improved, and may have contributed to, the deteriorating housing and tenancy issues in the neighbourhood.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood had been experienced by participants, directly or indirectly, including drug/alcohol related issues, fighting, burglaries, vandalism, high noise levels and property damage. Generally, participants felt that their neighbourhood was a troubled area where they could not rest, were frightened to sleep, and not a good environment for them or children.

Lack of footpaths

The lack of footpaths was a concern, as children walk and play on the road, wheelchair-bound residents are forced to use the road, and poor road conditions hamper safety for residents.

Roads

The lack of footpaths means that the neighbourhood road is used by both vehicles and residents, creating dangerous road safety conditions. Additional road hazards are the consistent presence of broken glass, syringes and general rubbish. The single exit and entry point (no through-road) is of general concern, especially for community safety when residents feel 'trapped' in the neighbourhood.

Parks

The number of parks in close proximity to the neighbourhood is limited; there is a brick wall at the eastern end limiting access to closest park and playground. The participants felt this contributed to a lack of space for the children and young people to play safely.

Children

Children featured heavily in participant's responses to issues in the neighbourhood. The concerns centred on the well-being of children as they walked to school past people who were drinking heavily and the lack of safe recreational activities. Other issues raised were around children being unsupervised on the streets, damaging property and use of gings [slingshots].

Youth/young people

Issues related to many youth and young people walking the streets "all hours of the night", hooning and connected to neighbourhood anti-social behaviour. There is a high number of youth living in the neighbourhood and surrounds, and several participants believed that a drop-in centre or youth outreach service was needed.

Street/house rubbish

The amount of street rubbish and household rubbish was raised by a number of participants, who expressed that local residents, CGG and DoH should clean up the neighbourhood, assist with tenants' rubbish bins and undertake road sweeping.

WA Police

The issues related to WA Police Geraldton included poor incident response time, lack of street patrols, lack of monitoring of property, resident safety, and failure to assist in controlling an unacceptably high level of anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood.

School

Participants with children attending school spoke of having a good relationship with their local primary school. However, one grandparent spoke about the level of bullying towards her grandchildren at school, and the perceived repercussions if she approached the other parents/guardians about their children's behaviour towards her grandchildren.

4.1 Neighbourhood Changes

Some participants, who were long-term residents, described that adverse changes had occurred in the neighbourhood over the years. They spoke of how their neighbourhood was different in the past, and why they had chosen to live here:

> "…this area here used to be one of the best area in Geraldton so I was told many years ago quite a few years ago [Reality Street] now it's um hell well not quite but it's bad…"   (Participant 12BW, Geraldton 2016)

> "…I really wanted to come to live here in the beginning because it was one of those quiet locations …things was nice and quiet back in those days… there was old people walking around with their dogs , there was lots of trees around there's bird life…"   (Participant 03BW, Geraldton 2016)

Additionally, there was a strong feeling that the target neighbourhood was generally stigmatised and neglected:

> "… yeah oh it's [Reality Street] because people don't give a shit, you know. That's the attitude - no way that's [Reality Street]…"
> (Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)

4.2 Neighbourhood Likes / Dislikes

In order to understand what residents felt about living in their neighbourhood they were asked what they liked and/ or disliked about living there. Their responses are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Residents likes/dislikes about living in the neighbourhood

Likes	Dislikes
Close to beaches Close to town Gardens – have beautiful own garden Family close by Close to shops Everyone looks after each other Sense of community Wildlife – birds Quietness – when quiet Neighbourhood feeling Close to services	No parks closer Drinking (street and general) Burglaries/break-ins People walking streets all night No bus service Taxis won't come into street Rubbish on streets – syringes etc. Vandalism DoH – not cleaning up Rubbish bins needed Older people/Pensioners not cared for Feeling trapped Isolation / Dead end of the world Being forgotten about (by services) No choice due to social housing available

Several neighbourhood residents stated they did not like anything about their neighbourhood and only live in the area because they had no choice in housing available - they had to accept the DoH placement, or they would be put back to the bottom of the housing waiting list. Additionally, two residents spoke of hoping to transfer out of the area.

4.3 Neighbourhood Population

Participants were concerned that placing a high number of Aboriginal housing tenants together in the neighbourhood created 'urban reserves' or a little 'community':

> "*…suddenly you know they just started filling up the location with you know with Aboriginal tenants, and we know as Aboriginal people, that we lived in a reserve style for years. We lived in… I lived in you know on a reserve, and I know Aboriginal people don't like living together …it creates lot of problems and what I see at the moment is that this [Reality Street] is being created as a town base reserve…*" (Participant 03BW, Geraldton 2016)

"They shouldn't put you know all Aboriginals together..."
(Participant 01BW, Geraldton 2016)

Many participants believe the tendency to place Aboriginal tenants in the area as a major contributing factor to anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood:

"I reckon should separate them there are too many Aboriginals bunched up in one little area. [It] causes a lot of trouble, arguments and stuff like that there ..."   *(Participant 05BW, Geraldton 2016)*

"Because everyone's together …people start arguing and kids start bitching at each other, everyone gets together and starts drinking, drugs and then they all go visit each other's house and then you're in trouble with Homes West because one place gets out of hand..."
(Participant 08BW, Geraldton 2016)

"… I just think they should stop gathering all the all Aboriginal people together because it causes the problems… if they was to just part them out kind of thing not like is a little community around here and its bad..."
(Participant 13BW, Geraldton 2016)

"I can't understand why Homes West put all the Aboriginals together. I don't know why they must think we can get on with one another, but surely they got a history and that many reports of the social anti-social behaviour, so what's that's telling you…"   *(Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)*

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4.4 Housing Issues

The DoH is the WA Government's housing authority responsible for leasing public housing, including in the target neighbourhood. Participants raised a number of issues relating to the public housing in the neighbourhood, including:

- Tenancy selection
- Vacant dwelling issues
- Lack of home security
- High-density housing, due to the high number of units compared with houses

Participants gave their perspectives on the role of DoH in relation to these issues. Some participants were of the opinion that the actions of DoH did not improve situations, and may even contribute to situations deteriorating.

4.4.1 Tenancy selection

Several participants were concerned that the neighbourhood was seen as a 'dumping ground' by DoH for Aboriginal tenants:

> "*Ministry of Housing has just used [Reality Street] as a dumping ground for the Aboriginal people…*" (Participant 02BW, Geraldton 2016)

> "*Kick all the bad tenants out … um well, it's like the Housing Authority every time you talk to them they say no. If you say about the coloured people, they say nah we only deal with one colour and that's it… they don't put any other colour in here…*" (Participant 12BW, Geraldton 2016)

> "*Homes West gotta really pick who they really who they put in place and not to be putting Aboriginal all together. That's the first one, not putting Aboriginals all together like they living in a community…*"
> (Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)

Most of the neighbourhood issues were seen to be coming from DoH tenants:

> "*Well it's mainly Ministry of Housing…cause all the tenants are from Ministry of Housing on [Reality Street]…so yeah we have lot of issues and it's just a losing battle with the Ministry of Housing…*"
> (Participant 02BW, Geraldton 2016)

4.4.2 Vacant Dwelling issues

Vacant DoH houses pose a safety concern with the possibility of children or others setting vacant houses alight and harming themselves, as well as the high level of vandalism when houses are unoccupied:

> "…empty houses - Homes West leave empty housing for months. I scared that the kids going to get in there one day and start a fire …they not coming and doing the house straight away, they leaving empty. They leaving the furniture for months until kids get in there and smash it up or the kids get in there and start a fire, which they already started a fire on the vacant block … might get trapped in…"   (Participant 08BW, Geraldton , 2016)

> "Well they should just put tenants straight in and there's less damage to State Housing, cause soon as a person moves out - it happened about probably about two months ago, this old lady was moving out over in [Opposite Street] as she was moving out her front window was getting smashed … so what Homes West needs to do soon as the person moves out put people in and work around them people, even though need the bodies in the houses there's houses that are vacant here…"
> (Participant 11BW, Geraldton 2016)

> "For starters this one next door, they need to either put someone in there just knock the bloody thing down because every time they fix it up it's getting damaged again and we been woken a couple of nights you know like about 3 o'clock in the morning a couple of times through them just smashing the fences… young fellas smashing the fences and that and being drunk and that…"   (Participant 17BW, Geraldton, 2016)

One participant raised concerns of squatters in the vacant houses:

> "…people been squatting there now …you see them late at night leaving there or going there…"   (Participant 08BW, Geraldton 2016)

4.4.3 Lack of home security

The lack of security measures for houses was raised by several participants, especially the need for better security on doors and windows:

> "…more security - more security on the houses …that was one of the biggest things, was security around this place…"
> *(Participant 04BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> "… I think they should need proper security on their housing … for like, their fly screen doors and their windows. I think they need to be secured properly and I think they need to make sure that like you know the people's front lights and that works properly because I put a light globe in and mine just smashed and there was like you know and they come out and they reckon nothing was wrong with it but we put two in and they just exploded so yeah and like my back doors I can't lock my fly screen's properly and I have had them out here three times to fix them so … and I think they need their fences to be a bit taller like mine like you can see next door here but only because they put that new fence up and I use to see straight across and people could see into my yard …"
> *(Participant 18BW, Geraldton 2016)*

Participants also raised issues about the DoH maintenance request process after a house break-in or burglary:

> "I put it down within the 24 hours. I took two days, so if I didn't get anyone to camp here - I got a couple of my nephews, like I said - they would've came in and just wiped me all out you know. They could've just marched all the furniture out sort of thing… and I rang Homes West from Perth and it's not a 24 hour emergency was something like that. You got to wait till the 24 hours or 48 hours and if I didn't have anyone here they would of wiped my house out took everything…"   *(Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.4.4 High density housing

Several participants were concerned about the high density housing in the neighbourhood, with some calling it "overcrowding":

"*…there are so many units here …I think there are too many units here and there's not enough housing. That's what's making [Reality Street] so (crowded)…*" (Participant 06BW, Geraldton, 2016)

"*…I suppose more housing for the people too overcrowded in the houses…*" (Participant 05BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*…better and proper houses…I mean they all like there so many units and everybody is living with everybody there is so many people in this one area…*" (Participant 06BW, Geraldton 2016)

Concerns were raised that this overcrowding contributed to social tensions:

"*…too many Aboriginals bunched up in one little area causes lots of trouble arguments and fights and stuff like that there…*" (Participant 05BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*…everyone's together starts and people start arguing and kids start bitching…*" (Participant 08BW. Geraldton 2016)

"*…just smashing the fences young fella's smashing the fences and that and being drunk…*" (Participant 17BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*.. Stop gathering Aboriginals together because …they just argue with one another…*" (Participant 13BW, Geraldton 2016)

4.5 Road and Streetscape Issues

The participants raised concerns about street rubbish (including needles), footpaths, street signs, and the single entry-and-exit point into Reality Street. Participants felt that CGG should be responsible for many of the issues in Reality Street:

> *"… I reckon they should like as well as make the tenants clean their place you know and as well as the Shire Department cleaning the outside, 'cause there always broken bottles on the road. There paper and stuff, and I see people cleaning them their selves sort of thing and those units over there, it is dark as, yet this one here they got a big light that stays on all night. But that one over there is very dark - no lights on it at all…"*
> *(Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> *"…I think this council is responsible for needles that left around… sweeping up the roads…vacant blocks also is a fire hazard…"*
> *(Participant 02BW, Geraldton 2016)*

One resident raised the question of "whose responsibility is it?"

> *"…and you know pick up their rubbish and look after verges, 'cause everything you sort of say to the Housing authority, they just say oh that's the Shire's problem or that's your home - if it's rubbish that's the Shire problem or … that's not our problem, that's Shire problem. Everything sort of a problem …that's what it seems like anyways …"*
> *(Participant 12BW, Geraldton 2016)*

The absence of footpaths was seen to be creating unsafe street environment:

> *"…there no footpaths along here no footpaths so everybody's walking on the road and when you driving they won't get off either you know…"*
> *(Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> *"…but I think that footpath would be good … yeah nah that would be alright yeah but yeah the footpath we badly need one around here cause I walk with the boy my boys and car drive along here with no lights on at night time and we have to jump of the road and that like when you pushing the pram its night then a night here… no its terrible to …"*
> *(Participant 18BW, Geraldton 2016)*

The neighbourhood road having a single exit and entry point (no through-road) was of particular concern as residents "felt trapped", especially during times of public anti-social behaviour:

> " *…yeah why they haven't got another way out you know because then if the anti-socialism thing here it makes it hard for people to get out of here what if the tenants themselves feel if they wanted to get out you know? They gotta be throwing things around you know, you would be able to get out but I have to like walk or run out you know - just grab the keys and get in my car and drive and then this wall that's blocking it there no other road and there's other people are bringing it in here as well and people think it the people that live here you know …*
> *people are coming in cars skidding around you know …*"
> *(Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.6 Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Law Enforcement

Discussions mostly centred on acknowledging and addressing anti-social behaviour and challenges in Reality Street. The presence and efforts of the Western Australia Police Force in Geraldton was a frequent topic, with residents voicing concerns of long response times to reported incidents, and the need for a larger presence in community policing. Another common concern was the impact of drugs and alcohol abuse on the neighbourhood:

"*I reckon they should put a police camera on the top of [Reality Street]… right at that light there cause that's were all the fights are normally are… gives them a bit of security they can see who's there smashing and bang they don't have to rush out here you know by the time they get out here they already got the person on the camera which is the sensible way to doing it I think…*" (Participant 11BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*…I had a couple of incidents that someone broken the back window the slide window through the kitchen but never got in and then other incident when I just went away for Christmas I had to cut my holidays short because someone broke in and this time they took a few things… nobody gives a damn… the police didn't even take any finger prints, didn't even care I don't think…*" (Participant 16BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*…the police need to start coming down on the drugs , getting the drugs off the streets cause that's what making it worse …*" (Participant 15BW, Geraldton 2016)

"*I think there should be more policing patrol…let the kids be aware that the cops are patrolling here…*" (Participant 06BW, Geraldton 2016)

4.7 Elderly/Pensioners

Previously, DoH units off Reality Street have housed pensioners and elderly residents. The participants interviewed raised concerns for this group: (i) the heat impacts due to lack of air conditioning, and (ii) the lack of transport options following the withdrawal of the bus service and reduced taxi services to the area:

> "*…some of these units are very hot and the elderly, I know people older than me, that are suffering and they can't really afford their own air conditioners…*" *(Participant 11BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> "*…there's just a lot of these old people the bus route that was taken from here around this area needs to be put back here because a lot of the old people they got to walk…a fair distance just to the bus stop and a lot of the old people in pensioner flats they can't walk big distances…*" *(Participant 04BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> "*…we need the bus and the taxis don't come down here night time…it's just like you know there's like old people …*" *(Participant 18BW, Geraldton 2016)*

One participant, after discussing these issues with other residents, suggested the possibility of moving younger people from the units and place the older people back. This was seen as a way of settling the street back to the way it was in order to increase safety for older residents:

> "*…let's move all of young people out of these pensioner units …and put up the old people back and that could be a safe environment for the old people but right at the moment it's not, the old people don't walk anywhere, the buses don't come…*" *(Participant 03BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.8 Children and Young People

Census 2011 data demonstrated "Reality Street" suburb had higher proportions of children (0-10 year old) and youth/young adults (14-26 year old) compared with the wider Geraldton population, at 17.9% vs 16.0% and 19.2% vs 18.1%, respectively (ABS, 2011). Participants were concerned about the behaviour of children and young people, especially what was seen as dangerous and anti-social behaviour, with potentially serious consequences. It was not clear whether the children and young people concerned lived in Reality Street or in surrounding areas.

4.8.1 Consequences of behaviour on services to the area

The withdrawal of the public bus service into Reality Street was attributed to the behaviour of children and young people:

> "*…we don't have public transport that don't come into [Reality Street] anymore that's all being stopped because the kids with gings and throwing rocks at the bus going through…*"
> *(Participant 02BW, Geraldton 2016)*

> "*…like the bus a young boy chucked a cup of soup on the bus you know they gotta walk to [a street 2 blocks away]*"
> *(Participant 18BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.8.2 Consequences of behaviour on neighbourhood safety

Participants are witnessing children damaging vacant houses and lighting fires on vacant blocks:

> "*…until the kids get in there and smash it up or the kids get in there and start a fire. Which they already started a fire on the vacant block over there. They start a fire and might get trapped in it…*"
> *(Participant 08BW, Geraldton, 2016)*

> "*…children been in there and burnt the place nearly set the whole house alight because of the tall dry grass …*"
> *(Participant 02BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.8.3 Consequences of behaviour on neighbourhood security

Participants spoke of the younger people dumping stolen cars and breaking into houses on Reality Street:

> "*…any of the young fellas steal cars they come here and drop them off… we ring the police and tell them how many kids, mainly all the young kids… young kids breaking into houses. They broke into the house straight across the road there in broad daylight…*"
> *(Participant 06BW, Geraldton 2016)*

4.9 Neighbourhood Solutions /Ideas

One of the strengths from the Reality Street Snapshot was the solutions/idea's response from neighbourhood participants to make their neighbourhood a better place to live. Some main themes were around housing, the road, footpaths, antisocial behaviour and lack of safety. Although there were opinions that the DoH, CGG and WA Police should take action to improve these aspects in the neighbourhood, several of the residents felt they had a place in improving their neighbourhood and offered solutions and idea's especially around beautification and environmental health issues.
The residents felt this was important in moving forward with many of the issues discussed about their neighbourhood.

Suggestions for neighbourhood improvement:

- Tenancy house beautification program (reward – voucher system),
- Backyard beautification process
- Public areas for recreation and meetings
- Youth drop-in/outreach centre
- Vacant block management

Infrastructure suggestions:

- Footpaths
- Street light security
- Security cameras
- Street sweeping
- Speed bumps
- Street signs

5   Discussion

The Reality Street Snapshot explored the issues impacting on children's home environments through exploring the lived experience of residents of a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Geraldton. it was developed by the first author, an Aboriginal researcher, and the second author, an Aboriginal research assistant. A series of discussions with Aboriginal CI's, other Aboriginal community members, including MAOA members, ensured that the concept for the Reality Street Snapshot was culturally secure and sound. Additionally, the involvement of an Aboriginal research assistant who resided in the local research suburb, contributed to acknowledging and following Aboriginal ways of working. Furthermore, the lived experiences captured through the interviews have been deemed of value and acceptability by the residents who provided a high response rate of consent to participate in the Reality Street Snapshot.

As neighbourhood environments influence children's schooling (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016), efforts to improve educational outcomes must also examine and, where necessary, improve the environments where children live. This study provides an opportunity for residents of one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Geraldton to share their perspectives and opinions of living in their neighbourhood. This valuable insight offers important messages for service providers. Firstly, there is information of *what* residents believe need to be addressed. Secondly, residents' values, feelings and opinions are conveyed, which are important for *how* service providers engage with residents. Thirdly, the combination of (i) willingness to engage with service providers and assist in the process of neighbourhood improvement, and (ii) frustration about the extent and duration of problems and perceptions of inaction by service providers indicates *when* service providers should engage with the residents – as soon as possible. Service providers should quickly initiate conversations with residents, build relationships and have ongoing two-way communication with them to identify problems and determine solutions. Resident engagement and "buy-in" is vital to any lasting change – doing things "with the community", not "to the community".

Improving the disadvantage existing in neighbourhoods can potentially improve children's education, but there are multiple other benefits. Neighbourhood disadvantage is associated with a multiple other issues: poor mental health, low physical activity levels, low levels of physical health and self-rated health, higher levels of domestic violence and higher prevalence of smoking (Vinson 2007; Jokela 2014). Interventions that target disadvantage can have multiple potential benefits which improve the lives of residents and the whole community.

Different approaches to "neighbourhood renewal" exist. One of these involves (a) upgrading housing and the physical environment of a disadvantaged neighbourhood, and (b) relocating public housing residents to other neighbourhoods, reducing concentrations of public housing and increasing "social mix". The theory is that disadvantaged residents would benefit from a different physical environment. However, there are several arguments against this approach: (i) there is a lack of accurate evidence, (ii) benefits have been mixed, (iii) it does not address the causes of resident disadvantage, and (iv) relocated residents experience alienation in the new neighbourhood and dislocation from their usual social network and supports (Bohl 2000; Cheshire 2007; Atkinson 2008; Darcy 2010; Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire 2015). A recent example of a social mix program is the relocation of Aboriginal public housing residents as part of the WA New Living Program, in which the involved Aboriginal residents described mixed experiences (Walker et.al. 2007). Some residents felt an improved sense of safety following relocation, but others felt disengaged by being separated from support networks, community and familiar services, and others reported the crime had not improved (Walker et.al. 2007) Another problem with social mix/tenure diversification programs is the "gentrification effect" – higher-income residents outside the neighbourhood moving into the newly-beautified neighbourhood, increasing demand for housing, thereby displacing low-income residents out of the neighbourhood (Bohl 2000; Cheshire 2007; Walker et.al. 2007; Atkinson 2008; Darcy 2010; Pawson, Hulse &
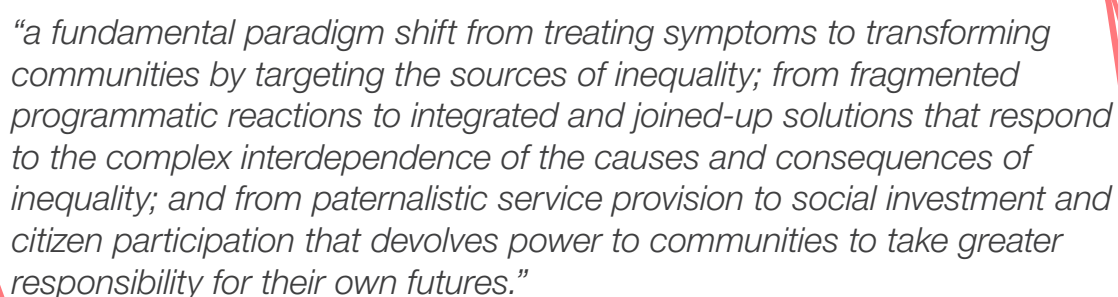
Cheshire 2015). When substantial gentrification with resident displacement occurs, it impacts the perceived benefit of the neighbourhood program in a couple of ways. Firstly, less of the original residents receive the benefits of upgrades to housing and the physical neighbourhood environment. Secondly, when neighbourhood-based data is used to assess the program's impact, for example employment or crime data, changes to the neighbourhood population mean the measured effect will likely overestimate the program's true impact (Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire 2015). Any improvement in employment or crime, for example, may be less a result of the neighbourhood program, and more attributable to higher-income residents moving into the neighbourhood at the expense of lower-income residents, who are displaced to other neighbourhoods having received little benefit.

Key drivers of poverty and disadvantage are lack of education, unemployment and lack of home ownership (Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire 2015). Over the last twenty years in Australia, there has been growing recognition of the need for neighbourhood programs to target these drivers of poverty and disadvantage (Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire 2015). Awareness has also developed that "place-based" activities – improvements to housing and built environment – are insufficient to improve disadvantage, but need to be combined with "people-based" activities:

• Training and workplace preparation programs

• Community groups

• School-based programs

• Crime prevention programs

• Socialisation programs (Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire 2015)

Integrated neighbourhood interventions, or area-based initiatives, use a combination of "place-based" and "people-based" activities to (i) target the drivers of poverty and disadvantage and (ii) reduce the impacts of poverty and disadvantage. Two Australian examples are the "Neighbourhood Renewal program" in Victoria, and the "Community 2168 project" in New South Wales. The unemployment rate for recipient neighbourhoods of the Neighbourhood Renewal program fell twice the amount that Victoria's average unemployment rate fell during the same period (Department of Human Services Victoria 2008). The Community 2168 project saw substantial reductions in most types of crime, with cost-benefit analyses finding savings in crime reduction were greater than the costs of the program (Jaques, Silk & Kemp, 2014).

Klein and Knowles (2005, pp. 3) described the needed change in focus as:

"a fundamental paradigm shift from treating symptoms to transforming communities by targeting the sources of inequality; from fragmented programmatic reactions to integrated and joined-up solutions that respond to the complex interdependence of the causes and consequences of inequality; and from paternalistic service provision to social investment and citizen participation that devolves power to communities to take greater responsibility for their own futures."

It is important for the neighbourhood to receive an effective integrated neighbourhood intervention to assist in improving child education, and reduce the drivers and impacts of disadvantage. An effective program can be delivered using the principles in the Box 5.1 (below).

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Box 5.1: Principles important for Integrated Neighbourhood Interventions (Klein & Knowles 2005; Bauman & Nutbeam 2014; Cheshire et.al. 2014)

1 Target the drivers, impacts and perpetuators of resident disadvantage

- Low social capital, sense of belonging and community participation
- Poor education and skills
- Low employment potential
- Crime and concerns for safety
- Poor access to amenities

2 Combinations of initiatives are used:

- Improve resident housing and neighbourhood built environment,
- Cultivate social capital, sense of belonging and community participation
- Enhance resident education and training
- Facilitate resident employment
- Reduce crime and incivilities
- Improve access to services and amenities

3 Increased partnerships between government, businesses and service providers:

- Improve program planning, co-ordination and delivery
- Implement initiatives that could not be done through a single service provider

4 Community residents participate in different stages of the NRP:

- Identifying solutions to problems
- Planning and decision-making of action taken
- Overseeing implementation of local initiatives
- Involvement in local neighbourhood boards

5 Long-term investment and partnerships are crucial. There is no quick fix:

- Effective implementation of multiple components takes time
- Building relationships to foster resident participation and involvement takes time
- Issues that exist in disadvantaged neighborhoods are deep seated, and influencing the milieu is unlikely to occur in a short period of time

6 Effective and ongoing evaluation informs understanding and decision-making:

- Assists understanding of different factors and mechanisms that influence outcomes
- Informs decisions for continued improvement and effectiveness of programs

6 Priority Recommendations

Gathered from the voice of the residents, the research team recommends the following priorities for service providers and community, to work towards improving this neighbourhood environment. Positive transformative social change can only come from a whole-of-community approach. Priority recommendations in this report are a stepping stone for the neighbourhood, CGG, and service providers to begin a progressive dialogue that will create the foundations for a positive and supportive environment where residents can experience a safe and inclusive lifestyle.

We recommend that:

• A community meeting be held with the neighbourhood residents, WACRH researchers and CGG to discuss findings of this research and local planning issues;

• Neighbourhood residents be engaged in the formation of a neighbourhood Residents' Action Group to move forward on resident issues and solutions;

• A neighbourhood enhancement implementation plan be developed with input from the Resident Action Group with a view to actioning in the short-term findings/recommendations that are readily amenable to action.

In addition, we suggest that the CGG:

• Undertake a physical streetscape audit of the target neighbourhood;

• Explore options with respect to opening out target neighbourhood to overcome the feeling people have of being trapped within Reality Street and to enhance community safety are considered;

• Enhance community policing and services in the area to reduce drug and alcohol use, violence, vandalism and to enhance community safety;

• Collect and collate information regarding baseline indicators of antisocial behaviour in the precinct, with a view to monitoring following implementation of changes;

• Involve the Residents' Action Group in longer term precinct planning, including around the potential for developing more recreational facilities and developing a local building into a more vibrant and welcoming community centre.
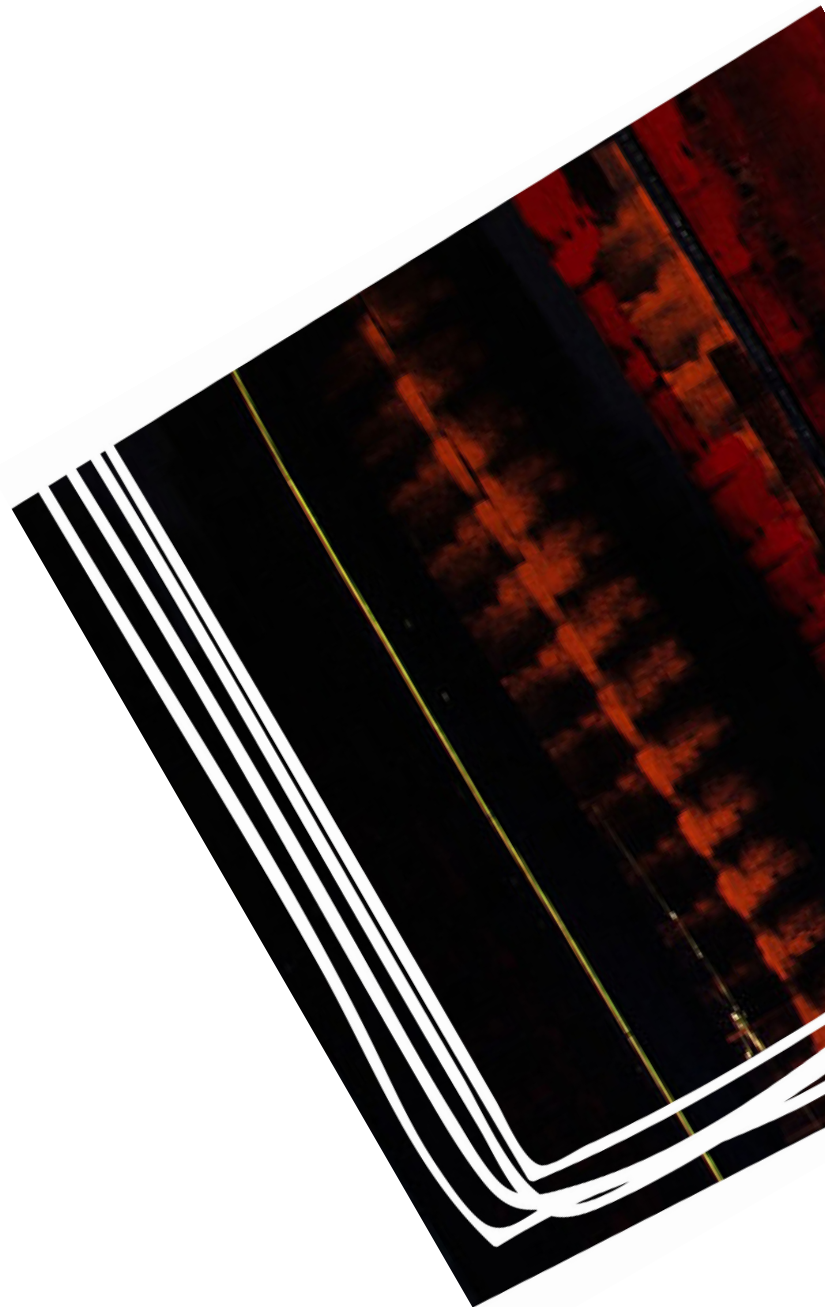
7 Conclusion

This Snapshot takes a close up and personal look at a Geraldton neighbourhood by examining the   lived experiences of the residents, identifying issues influencing the educational development of neighbourhood children and young people.

The neighbourhood story that emerges is one of disadvantage with concentrated social housing and complex social and environmental issues. The residents speak of concentrated social housing creating high levels of anti-social behaviour, unsafe streets and environmental infrastructure issues.

The initial Snapshot findings provides an entry point for addressing the identified issues and challenges in this neighbourhood, including a framework outlining principles for integrated neighbourhood interventions.

This Snapshot can act as an initial reference paper for further examination and planning of community engagement neighbourhood strategic planning and development. It essential to maintain community involvement in the process of precinct improvement and improving social opportunities and cohesion.
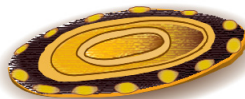
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ISBN 978-0-646-97012-7