



Government of **Western Australia**
Pilbara Development Commission



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The Principal Research Officer
Community Development and Justice Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Western Australian
Perth WA 6000

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Submission to the “Inquiry into the Adequacy of Services to Meet the Developmental Needs of Western Australia’s Children” of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee

Closing date : **27 February 2009**

This submission is prepared by the Pilbara Development Commission and provides the Commission’s response to this inquiry.

The Pilbara Development Commission is a Western Australia State Government statutory authority established under the Regional Development Commissions Act (1993), with a broad mandate to address the economic and social development of the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The Pilbara is an isolated region in the north west of WA, encompassing 507,896 square kilometres from islands off the coast to the Northern Territory border. It comprises four local government authorities, four main population centres, eight smaller towns, a number of discrete Indigenous communities and pastoral leases. The region is semi arid and is challenged by a number of climatic and geographical conditions. The overall region is larger than some Australian States.

The Pilbara has low levels of unemployment¹ however, due to its remote location, it is a high cost area in which to live. Most families have both partners engaged in the workforce which is largely based around mining. While the Pilbara is often depicted as a place of transient workforces with few long term residents other than Indigenous families, ABS data² shows that it is a region of higher than average numbers of families with dependant children, where the average age of the population is pre-pubescent.

The Commission, Child Care and and Early Learning

The Commission has identified child care and early childhood development as a priority area for the Pilbara and has been working with key stakeholders to identify and initiate a range of strategies to address the issues and needs in the region.

For example, the Commission created the Kids Matter[®] Family Day Care Program³ in 2005 to encourage more people to provide family day care services to assist in addressing the chronic shortage of child care places across the region. Family Day Care is the fastest way of creating additional child care places and the Commission has worked to promote and advocate for quality, licensed care that provides strong early learning opportunities and outcomes – eg one new family day care provider established under the Kids Matter[®] program provides a bi-lingual, Montessori based child care service. The service won the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s micro-business award in 2008.

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Kids Matter® has been in operation since 2005 and been the catalyst for up to 16 new family day care services with the potential to provide up to 105 child care places in the region with a further 6 prospective family day care providers undertaking the licensing process. In 2008, the Program was a finalist in the State Governments WA Premier's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management.

As a result of the breadth of issues raised in the region, the Commission has also established a working group of key stakeholders to develop strategic level responses to issues relating to early years development, care and learning. The Pilbara Early Learning Alliance⁴ which is in the process of being incorporated comprises senior representatives from industry (BHP Billiton, RioTinto, Woodside etc), Australian government (ICC, DEEWR), WA state government (PDC, Department for Communities) and non-government / private organisations. Since its establishment the Alliance has provided input to state based reviews of legislation and practice relevant to this inquiry and has been a permanent agenda item on the State Government's Ministerial Council on Childcare.

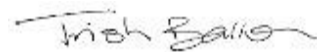
In addition, once PELA is incorporated, the Commission is planning to source funding for a PELA project that will undertake a map and gap analysis of prenatal, pregnancy and early years services and programs across the region, to identify the services and programs that could be made available and to source funding to support the delivery of programs and services for the region.

Unfortunately, attempts from this region to input into the national agenda have been largely unsuccessful and there is no mechanism to provide ongoing feedback or input. The previous Ministerial Advisory Committees have utilised only 'peak bodies' and the discrete issues that impact remote regions such as the Pilbara are overshadowed by the weight of metro-centricity.

The issues for early childhood care and learning in rural, regional and remote Australia will not abate unless and until legislation, policy, funding and resources take into account and reflect the needs and do 'what it takes' to provide and enable substantive equality. One of the more obvious examples is that of Indigenous children living in remote communities in the Pilbara region who have little or no opportunity to develop their potential at an early age and benefit from and participate equally in the limited programs available in the region, let alone be provided with dedicated programs that respond to their specific needs.

This submission is made to the Committee incorporating the information and needs of the Pilbara with the expectation that it will be accepted as a serious effort to increase the region's capacity to care for its children. This inquiry has absolute relevance to the Pilbara region, to the Pilbara Development Commission and Pilbara Early Learning Alliance.

Yours sincerely



Trish Barron
Manager Social Development

26 February 2009

Inquiry into the Adequacy of Services to Meet the Developmental Needs of Western Australia's Children

(a) whether existing government programs are adequately addressing the social and cognitive developmental needs of children, with particular reference to prenatal to 3 years;

In regions such as the Pilbara there are significant issues with children accessing quality early learning and development programs. There are substantial gaps in access to child care and early learning opportunities in all major towns which increase in smaller towns to being almost nonexistent in Indigenous communities and on isolated pastoral stations.

The limited access to quality, affordable accommodation in the region is creating difficulties in attracting high quality professionals in the health and early years development sectors into the Pilbara. Low salaries and the high cost of living is also impacting the attraction of people into the child care, education and allied professions and most non government agencies that are funded by government to deliver a range of critical early years programs and services struggle to retain employees as they are not allocated sufficient funds to cover the additional costs.

In the Pilbara most parents who can obtain care (even if it is unlicensed), engage in the workforce and, even with the current downturn, there is still a significant need for greater numbers of workers. The highest demand for care is the 0 to 3 and up to 5 years age range as parents (particularly mothers) need to return to work to ensure family finances and personal career prospects are not eroded.

Over the next two years two new child care centres will be established in Port Hedland and Newman by BHP Billiton to be managed by the YMCA. These centres will have access to housing for qualified staff, provided by BHP Billiton. Whilst the new Centres will provide relief to the demand for additional child care places and will offer specialised early years programs, there is concern that other not for profit, community based child care Centres will be impacted as their qualified staff are attracted to better pay and conditions offered by the YMCA.

Another two Centres are planned, one in Port Hedland and one in Karratha, funded through the Australian Government's Early Learning and Care Centres program and will be built on school sites. Both Centres are likely to struggle to attract and retain qualified staff unless some affordable housing is made available. The inability to attract and retain qualified staff will impact the delivery of quality early years development programs.

The major resource companies in the Pilbara are working toward providing employment for local Indigenous people. However, child care places have been in shortfall in the region for a long period of time and formalised care for children in Indigenous communities is generally not available.

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) operate in two of the towns that have high populations of Indigenous people ie, South Hedland and Roebourne, however they offer limited if any early years programs, very limited parent support programs, places are limited and attracting and retaining child care workers is problematic. There are two mobile services that provide services to some isolated communities, however, given the size and remoteness of the region this is inadequate and difficult to deliver.

The most lacking in formalised child care and early years programs are remote Indigenous communities, almost to the point of negligence. There is an immediate and urgent need for Indigenous communities to be better resourced to enable the delivery of more formalised, flexible early years programs specifically developed for Indigenous children.

(b) how to appropriately identify developmentally vulnerable children;

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is one way in which developmentally children can be identified. The AEDI has been undertaken throughout the Pilbara and clearly demonstrates the incidence of poor early childhood development outcomes is significant in a number of places within the region. Poor result areas on the AEDI are indicative of the lack of supports, services and systems available to many infants and young children in the region.

However, one major issue is that the AEDI is not normally undertaken until children are entering school for formal education and in some cases, developmental delays are already in train and difficult to remedy with limited resources in the region. Testing of children at an earlier age is required to ensure that every possible intervention can be made to address issues of impairment and or delayed development.

The education system could play an important role in providing young men and women with information regarding the importance of nutrition and avoidance of drugs and alcohol to the development of a young child. A cutting edge campaign of a similar magnitude to that of the early AIDS or Anti Smoking campaigns is required and should be directed at children in the last years of primary school to be effective. School curriculum could also include information through health, social or biology studie.

The health system is another identification vehicle given its association with prenatal / foetal / infant development. From the time an expectant mother presents at the doctor for confirmation of pregnancy and throughout the health checks (ultrasound etc) which occur during pregnancy, information should be collected and counsel provided with information on the importance of proper pregnancy management and the implications of poor nutrition and behaviours.

Where it can be demonstrated that parental actions could or have contributed to developmental delays or poor health outcomes, more direct intervention needs to be taken to raise parental awareness and to address culpable behaviours. This should also be the trigger point for the provision of foetal or infant early intervention to minimise potential health issues (eg treating for drug dependency) and to address potential long term harm (eg early learning programs).

Whatever the vehicle/s, a collaborative approach between agencies and organisations is required to ensure effective outcomes. The Commission also considers that there is a need for a National Framework, policies and guidelines for States to adhere, with the flexibility and appropriate funding attached that demonstrates the importance and priority of the issue.

(c) which government agency or agencies should have coordinating and resourcing responsibility for the identification and delivery of assistance to 0-3 year old children;

A robust, coordinated approach by all Federal and State agencies responsible for the early development of foetal, infant and child health is required, including Health, Child Protection, Education and Community Services. However as "joined up" government is too fractured and has not always been affective, and given the critical importance of identifying and addressing the needs of 0-3 year olds to their future development and growth, consideration should be given to establishing a single agency that takes the lead role and works in collaboration with other agencies to manage this important responsibility.

In the case of the former, identification of issues in pregnancy and infancy would need to be the responsibility of Health Departments through hospitals emergency, maternity and paediatric wards, together with child health nurses. GP's and obstetricians would also play a role in early identification. Once identified as 'at risk', infants and children would require intervention by child

health workers, child protection officers, early childhood development specialists etc and parents would need support from relevant professionals. Where possible this should also trigger coordination and collation of information that can follow the child through its formative years to ensure ongoing support or interventions by early childhood development specialists and health professionals and to ensure that parents are receiving the best support and information.

(d) what is the best model to ensure interagency and intergovernmental integration of developmental programs delivered to 0-3 year old children;

Single agency model at National and State levels would be a preferred model. If not then high level intergovernmental working group including Health, Child Protection, Education, Community Services and other relevant agencies. However, at all points this group should report to the Commissioner for Children and Youth or other one stop body which oversees but is external to all departments. This would be the safeguard to ensure that the child's development and care needs are the primary consideration at all times.

Wherever the focus and funding are given to child protection, there is not enough energy and resources going into the prevention. Parenting programs, early childhood education and care are the point at which a positive effect can occur and real prevention of damage to children can be put in place.

More effort needs to go into ensuring that pregnant women, infants and young children are afforded access to the same programs and services to that of the metropolitan area. Some agencies with the responsibility of delivery these services into the region have limited staff and no regionally based management to oversee the delivery of programs and identify any gaps in the system or urgent requirements. Most communities are made aware of some government the department's services through word of mouth, by other agencies or by deliberate promotion by the departments. Every community in the region should be entitled to have access to government funded programs and services and more funding and assistance needs to be made available locally to ensure that this is achieved.

(e) how to best prioritise the resources available for meeting the needs identified;

The indicators captured in the AEDI which signify the highest needs should drive the allocation of resources. Children from areas where the least amount of services currently exist and where the most significant potential improvement to outcome indicators could be achieved should have first priority.

Regions which have the highest demand on the Department for Child Protection intervention services would also be a good indicator of where significant amounts of resourcing are required for parenting, Best Start, early intervention, early childhood learning and care.

(f) what is the most appropriate measure of program outcomes;

- Improvements in the AEDI indicator results
- Significant reduction in foetal and infant mortality and development delay as a result of prolonged, high impact, public education campaign/s on the best management of pregnancies, particularly those that could be impacted by poor parental behaviours.

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- Significant improvements in children with early developmental issues through the application of appropriate interventions.
- Significant improvement in parental involvement/understanding of the importance of 0-3 development programs
- Greater awareness and demand for delivery of government funded programs and services available for 0 – 3 in regional WA
- Significant increase in the number of communities, and particularly Indigenous communities, accessing government funded programs in regional WA

End Submission

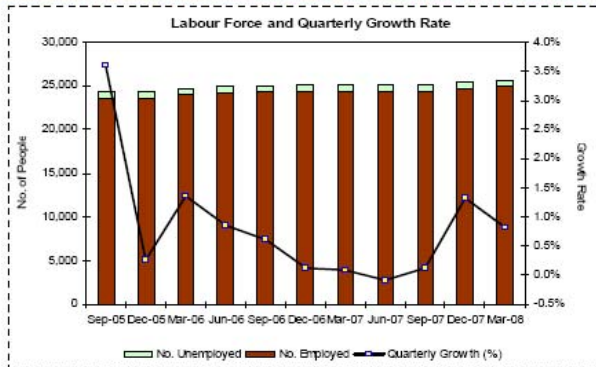
References:

- 1 Attachment: Pilbara Labour force statistics (DLGRD)
- 2 Attachment: ABS data presentation
- 3 URL: Kids Matter® (a finalist in the Premier's Awards for Public Sector Management 2008)
www.pdc.wa.gov.au/projects/current-projects/childcare-in-the-pilbara/kids-matter-®.aspx
- 4 URL: Pilbara Early Learning Alliance
[www.pdc.wa.gov.au/about-us/news--events/pilbara-early-learning-alliance\(pela\).aspx](http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/about-us/news--events/pilbara-early-learning-alliance(pela).aspx)

http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/15895/cp_assesment_substance_abuse.pdf


 Department of Local Government and Regional Development
 Government of Western Australia
www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au

Regional Statistical Summary
Pilbara Labour Force – March Quarter 2008



Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

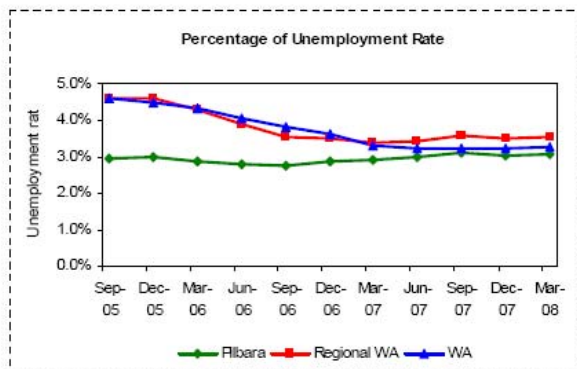
The labour force (total persons employed and unemployed aged 15 and over) in the Pilbara Region, in the March quarter 2008, totalled 25,654 people. This represented an increase of 0.8 per cent from the previous quarter total of 25,445. From September quarter 2005, the labour force in the Region steadily increased from 24,293 to 25,654 in March 2008 quarter (5.6 per cent increase).

Of the total labour force in the March quarter, there were 24,871 people employed and 783 people unemployed.

Quarter	Sep-05	Dec-05	Mar-06	Jun-06	Sep-06	Dec-06	Mar-07	Jun-07	Sep-07	Dec-07	Mar-08
No. Employed (#)	23,573	23,631	23,973	24,197	24,360	24,359	24,367	24,329	24,329	24,671	24,871
No. Unemployed (#)	720	725	712	699	687	719	735	751	784	774	783
Labour Force (#)	24,293	24,356	24,685	24,896	25,047	25,078	25,102	25,080	25,113	25,445	25,654
Quarterly Growth (%)	3.6%	0.3%	1.4%	0.9%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%	-0.1%	0.1%	1.3%	0.8%

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and DLGRD.

When compared to the same quarter of the previous year, employment increased by 2.1 per cent from 24,367 to 24,871. Over the same time frame, the number of unemployed increased by 6.5 per cent from 735 to 783 people.



Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The unemployment rate in the Pilbara is lower than the State and regional averages due to strong demand for labour in the mining sector. In the March quarter 2008, the Pilbara's unemployment rate was 3.1 per cent compared to the level of 3.5 per cent for regional WA and 3.3 per cent for the State.

The Region's unemployment rate has stayed relatively constant since September quarter 2005, ranging from a high of 3.1 per cent (March 2008 quarter) to a low of 2.7 per cent (September 2006 quarter).

Unemployment Rate (%)

Quarter	Sep-05	Dec-05	Mar-06	Jun-06	Sep-06	Dec-06	Mar-07	Jun-07	Sep-07	Dec-07	Mar-08
Pilbara	3.0%	3.0%	2.9%	2.8%	2.7%	2.9%	2.9%	3.0%	3.1%	3.0%	3.1%
Regional WA	4.6%	4.6%	4.3%	3.9%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%	3.4%	3.6%	3.5%	3.5%
Western Australia	4.6%	4.5%	4.3%	4.1%	3.8%	3.6%	3.3%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	3.3%

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



2006 CENSUS DATA



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Growth

	1996	2001	2006	% change from 1996
East Pilbara (S)	6,738	5,580	6,546	-2.8%
Port Hedland (T)	11,945	12,061	11,960	0.1%
Ashburton (S)	7,167	5,715	6,080	-15.2%
Roebourne (S)	13,399	14,405	16,419	22.5%

This compares to 15% growth in WA since 1996.

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“Estimated Residential Population”

figures updated 2007 ABS

Pilbara; percentage of persons actually in the region inclusive of non-resident (Fly – In / Fly – Out workforce participants and visitors) with rates as per Census 2006 (not updated).

Ashburton (25.3%)

East Pilbara (38.9%)

Roebourne (15.2%)

Port Hedland (10.9%)

Total population for the four Pilbara LGA's at 30 June 2007 is 45,277

LGA	2006	2007	% Change*	% FIFO & NR	Person count **
Ashburton	6,080	6,477	6.1	25.3	8,116
East Pilbara	6,546	7,500	12.7	38.9	10,417
Port Hedland	11,960	13,060	8.4	10.9	14,483
Roebourne	16,419	18,240	10	15.2	21,012
Total	41,005	45,277			54,028

* part year only (Census August 2006, ABS update at 30 June 2007)

** using officially released figures from ABS only.



Ageing

- Proportion of people aged 65 years and over is increasing.

	1996	2006
East Pilbara (S)	2.2%	2.5%
Port Hedland (T)	2.4%	3.1%
Ashburton (S)	1.3%	1.7%
Roebourne (S)	1.4%	1.9%
Western Australia	10.4%	12.0%

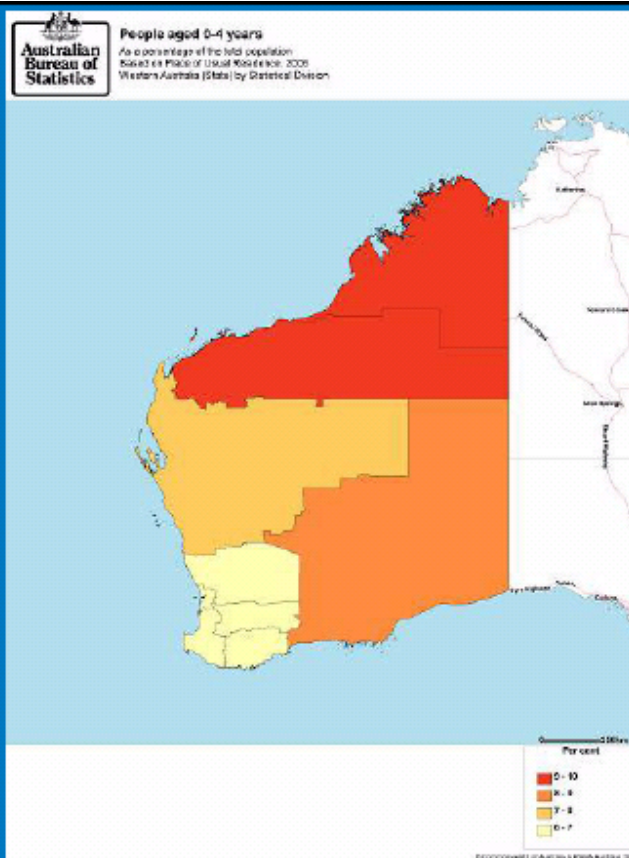
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Under 25 year olds

- Proportion of people aged under 25 is decreasing (but it is still higher than WA).

	1996	2006
East Pilbara (S)	43.4%	38.3%
Port Hedland (T)	42.0%	38.9%
Ashburton (S)	43.2%	38.0%
Roebourne (S)	43.9%	39.5%
Western Australia	37.5%	34.3%

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Median age

	1996	2006
East Pilbara (S)	28	31
Port Hedland (T)	28	31
Ashburton (S)	27	31
Roebourne (S)	28	31
Western Australia	33	36

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Indigenous

- 13.7% of the Pilbara population (5,632 persons) identified themselves as Indigenous in 2006.
 - compared with 3.0% across all of WA.

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Indigenous

- The Indigenous population have a lower age profile and higher household size

	Median Age		Household Size	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
East Pilbara (S)	23	32	5.2	2.7
Port Hedland (T)	24	33	3.3	2.6
Ashburton (S)	26	31	3.4	2.8
Roebourne (S)	23	32	3.8	2.8
Western Australia	21	37	3.5	2.5

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Marriage

- 46.2% of those aged 15 years and over in the Pilbara were married.

	% married	% divorced	% never married
East Pilbara (S)	43.6%	7.9%	42.6%
Port Hedland (T)	44.3%	7.7%	42.2%
Ashburton (S)	50.2%	8.0%	36.9%
Roebourne (S)	47.3%	7.4%	40.7%
Western Australia	49.5%	8.5%	33.7%

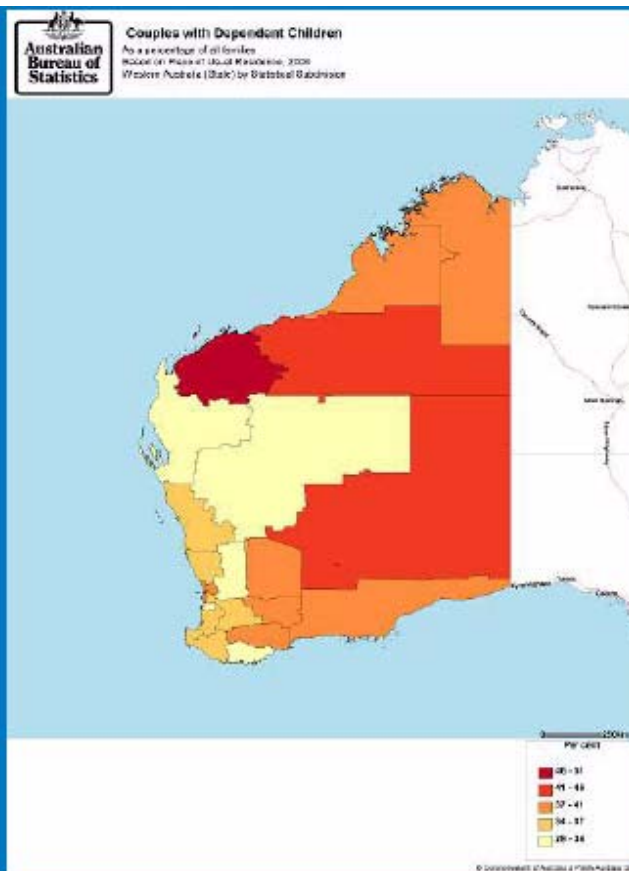
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Couples with children

- Larger proportion of couple families with children in the Pilbara

	% couple families with children
East Pilbara (S)	55.0%
Port Hedland (T)	49.2%
Ashburton (S)	57.7%
Roebourne (S)	54.7%
Western Australia	45.1%

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Unpaid childcare

- A higher proportion of people provided unpaid childcare in the Pilbara than in WA.

	% who provided unpaid childcare
East Pilbara (S)	31.0%
Port Hedland (T)	23.6%
Ashburton (S)	35.3%
Roebourne (S)	31.2%
Western Australia	27.9%

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