

# **QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY: FLY IN, FLY OUT AND OTHER LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING WORK PRACTICES IN REGIONAL QUEENSLAND**

## **Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee**

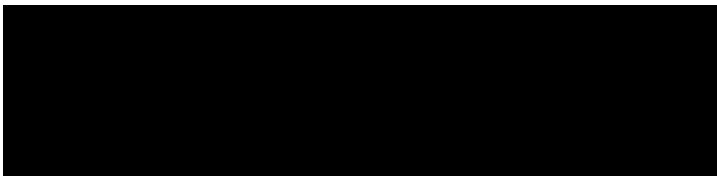
**Submission from FIFO Families Pty Ltd and Creating Communities Australia Pty Ltd**

May 2015

### **Contacts**

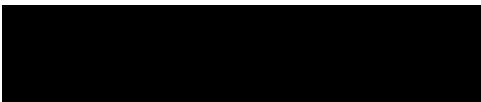
Andrew Watt

Creating Communities



FIFO Families

Founder and Director



Andrew Watt and Nicole Ashby are able to appear before the committee upon request, however travel costs will need to be covered.

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 About Creating Communities

Creating Communities is a multidisciplinary social and communications planning firm, formed in 1992. We aim to improve the way our clients connect with their communities by realising the potential mutual benefits that sit at the intersection of the interests of people, community, industry and government.

Creating Communities provides a solutions-driven approach to workforce mobility, through a range of specialist services that support employees, employers, host and source communities to grasp opportunities that make the Fly In, Fly Out (FIFO) choice work.

Creating Communities has undertaken extensive research into FIFO for various resource companies and also completed work on FIFO related issues for the Western Australia Chamber of Minerals and Energy (CME) and Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA), including authoring the reports:

1. A Matter of Choice - Capturing the FIFO Opportunity in Pilbara Communities (CME and PICC, 2012)
2. Heading North – the Importance of Labour Mobility in Developing Northern Australia (APPEA, 2014)
3. WA Parliamentary Inquiry into mental illness in fly-in fly-out workers - Submission and appearance (2014)

[www.creatingcommunities.com.au/about/services/fifo](http://www.creatingcommunities.com.au/about/services/fifo)

### 1.2 About FIFO Families

FIFO Families was established in July 2010 to assist in supporting FIFO workers and their families. We also work and engage with resource industry companies to help educate, support and assist their FIFO workforce and families. One of our aims is to ensure that those who choose to live a FIFO lifestyle can have a positive and rewarding experience where possible.

FIFO Families is currently partnering with companies such as Rio Tinto, Origin Energy, Shell, BGC Contracting and John Holland to name but a few. The FIFO Families database includes some 16,000 FIFO workers, partners and families.

Nicole Ashby, founder and director, is regularly sought after by media, is a regular keynote speaker on FIFO related topics and is regarded as an authority in this area.

[www.fifofamilies.com.au](http://www.fifofamilies.com.au)

### 1.3 Our Philosophy on Long Distance Commuting / FIFO Workforce Models

Creating Communities and FIFO Families have a view that long distance commuting work models are neither purely positive nor purely negative for workers, families or host and source communities. Varying work models have their inherent advantages and disadvantages.

What is key is how workers and their families can be supported to adapt to any change in work-life arrangements to enable personal, familial and community benefits, as well as to best ensure FIFO work arrangements are of benefit to source and host communities, rather than create negative impacts.

FIFO work practices have evolved over time and created a cost effective approach to quickly and efficiently mobilising skilled workforces to undertake key project work.

While FIFO employment is much talked about and achieves significant media coverage, it is generally not well understood. There are many statements made, views given and assertions proffered without any real basis of fact or research.

The reality is that this work model has increased over time due to a number of factors, such as:

- Workers choosing to access work in remote locations, without having to move their family away from social, family or community networks and services.
- The decrease in travel costs.
- The increase in access to communication, thus breaking down issues of isolation, which was previously a barrier to taking on this work model.
- The increased work choice it provides.
- The ability for companies to attract and retain skilled workers by providing both residential and FIFO work options, allowing families to decide where they wish to live and who they choose to work for.

The preference for FIFO work is particularly evident with employees involved in the construction phase of a project, where a worker may only be required to perform their specialist trade for a few intensive weeks or months at a time. It is not viable or appropriate for a company to only offer residential employment that would require the employee to move themselves or their families to a new town and change their preferred lifestyle for such a short period.

There is great sophistication in the logistical management aspects of FIFO employment including well organised travel arrangements, shift rostering, accommodation and workplace training. Unfortunately there is far less sophistication applied to the essential social planning and community development support related to this work practice. This is particularly evident in a lack of systemic and strategic level of worker and family support, which is needed to ensure that significant lifestyle changes are planned for and effectively managed. There is currently little evidence of any comprehensive approaches to ongoing workforce induction, support and monitoring to ensure each worker is productive, safe and healthy. Similarly, there is insufficient consideration or investment in supporting partners and families in ensuring this workforce model becomes a positive choice for them and their communities.

With the current down turn in the resource sector, of more recent concern is the lack of evident support for workers to transition out of FIFO work. This is particularly apparent with large-scale retrenchments, where workers are often given little or no notice of the cessation of their employment. Any failure to prepare workers for the potential of such a significant and impactful life event can have a large personal cost.

However within these challenges, there is an inherent opportunity to make changes that will impact positively on the lives of FIFO workers, their families and their communities – both source and host. The greatest untapped prospect is to engage experts in social planning and community development in order to establish strategies that ensure that workers, their families and the communities in which they live and work, generate benefit and reduce any potential harm from FIFO.

This paper will outline the key findings of research and engagement undertaken by Creating Communities in partnership with FIFO Families and will describe the proposed recommendations. These recommendations will create mutual benefit for all while simultaneously reducing negative impacts on workers' health.

## 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND EXPERIENCE

### 2.1 Research and Engagement conducted by Creating Communities and FIFO Families

FIFO Families and Creating Communities have been working together for the last three years and have recently conducted two large surveys related to long distance commuting workforces and their partners/families.

The FIFO<sup>1</sup> workers survey was completed in 2013 and included responses from 800 workers. This gave unprecedented access into the opinions and insight of the FIFO workforce across all sectors and states and territories.

**NOTE:** The detailed findings of this report can be supplied to the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee upon request.

The second survey included responses from over 1,200 partners of FIFO workers from all over Australia and again is representative of all industries and states and territories.

This survey was completed in 2014, preliminary findings have been developed and the final report is available upon request.

Both surveys included workers and their families from around Australia, with representation from Queensland being second only to Western Australia. The results are detailed below in Section 2.2 of this submission.

In addition to these surveys Creating Communities have completed many major projects with resource companies, industry groups and local governments in relation to FIFO, accommodation, lifestyle, community impacts and host and source community considerations.

The Creating Communities team also has a huge depth of experience in the areas of social planning and community development, which provides a unique perspective on FIFO and the associated challenges. Many of these projects include engaging directly with FIFO workers and key stakeholders in relation to FIFO. Although this work is generally confidential as it is commercial in confidence (unlike the research described above), the recommendations below have been formulated on the basis of this collective experience.

FIFO families have extensive experience in the field of transient workforce engagement. FIFO Families have nearly 16,000 thousand FIFO workers and families on their database. FIFO Families engages with workers and their families on a daily basis through the numerous groups, meetings and events, which are part of the service they provide. This means that over the years, FIFO Families has spoken to thousands of people who work FIFO or are involved in the FIFO industry. The information gathered through this grass-roots engagement has also been taken into consideration when providing the recommendations below.

### 2.2 Findings of the research (Workers)

Below is a short summary of the findings from research we have undertaken with workers that we believe are particularly relevant to the current inquiry:

#### Demographics and general satisfaction

- Most are male (80%), aged between 25 to 44 years old (78%), and living in a couple household with children living at home (70%).

---

<sup>1</sup> In this case FIFO is used to refer to long distance commuters, including Bus-in, Bus-out (BIBO) and Drive-in, Drive-out (DIDO). BIBO and DIDO workers comprised about 15% of the sample, while the remaining 85% worked as FIFO.

- 62% are satisfied with their life working FIFO.
- The following factors have been found to be correlated with satisfaction with life working FIFO:
  - Do not have children
  - Work in the mining sector (i.e. not oil and gas or construction)
  - Attending a formal induction into FIFO Lifestyle (of which a very small percentage have had the opportunity to do so)
  - Feeling their company understands their own needs and needs of their families
  - Feeling they belong with their company
  - Have a strong sense of loyalty towards their company
  - Feel their company has been loyal to them
  - Originally intended to work FIFO long term
- The average male Body Mass Index (BMI) is 28.8 (i.e. overweight). This is higher than the Australian male average of 27.9 (ABS. Australian Health Survey 2011/12). The average female BMI is 26.9 (i.e. overweight), which is slightly lower than the Australian female average of 27.2 (ibid).

### Rosters

- A wide variety of roster arrangements were mentioned. The most common rosters were:
  - 14 days on, 7 days off (18%)
  - 8 days on, 6 days off (17%)
- Majority of respondents (81%) noted that their roster arrangements change regularly.
- The most commonly mentioned (preferred) ideal rosters arrangements were:
  - 14 days on, 14 days off (27%)
  - 7 days on, 7 days off (27%)
  - 14 days on, 7 days off (19%)
  - 8 days on, 6 days off (19%)

### Induction – A Preventative Approach

- 79% agree that in general, a FIFO induction program/s would assist workers in being more productive and safer, while only 7% have attended such an induction.
- 84% agree that an induction into FIFO lifestyle should be provided to assist employees to adapt to FIFO work and lifestyle, while only 7% have attended such an induction.
- 90% agree that an induction into FIFO lifestyle should be provided to partners and family members of FIFO workers to understand and effectively manage their lifestyle, while only 2% of workers' families have attended such an induction.
- 36% do not believe their companies understand the needs of FIFO workers and 42% do not believe their companies understand the needs of FIFO workers' families.
- According to FIFO workers the top five (5) things an effective induction process should include are (open-ended results, grouped into themes):
  1. Family – effects on family/relationships
  2. General Lifestyle
  3. Dealing with Isolation
  4. Mental Health and Stress
  5. Facilities / services / accommodation / layout of their accommodation village

### Travel Time – During Work Hours

Creating Communities gathered information regarding the daily travel times for workers while on roster. The following is a summary of this information:

- Majority of respondents (71%) spend between 15 to 30 minutes travelling to and from their accommodation to their work site per day.
- A quarter (25%) of respondents travel between 1 and 2 hours to and from their accommodation to their work-site per day.
- The remaining 4% travel 2 or more hours to and from their accommodation to their work site per day.
- Majority of respondents (72%) travel to and from their work site out of hours and in their own time

## 2.3 Findings of the research (Partners and Families)

Below is a short summary of the findings from research we have undertaken with partners and family members of FIFO workers that we believe are particularly relevant to the current inquiry.

**NOTE:** When referring to ‘respondents’ in this section, this means the partner of the FIFO worker and when referring to ‘partner’ this is the FIFO worker:

### Demographics

Demographics:

- The majority of respondents’ (88%) partners work in FIFO (fly-in, fly-out) arrangements
- The remainder are in DIDO (drive-in, drive-out, 8%) or BIBO (bus-in, bus-out, 4%) arrangements
- The majority of respondents (93%) are female, with 7% being male
- The majority of respondents (84%) are between the ages of 25 and 44 years
- The majority of respondents (79%) describe their household living arrangement as “couple with children living at home”
- The majority of respondents (77%) have between 1 to 3 children, a smaller number (13%) have no children and 10% have 4 or more children
- A third of the respondent’s children (33%) are under 4 years old, just over a quarter (26%) are 5 to 9 years old, 18% are 10 to 14 years old, 12% are 15 to 19 years old, and 12% are 20 years old or above
- Over half of respondents’ partners work in the mining sector (53%), a quarter work in oil and gas (25%), and a smaller proportion (17%) work in construction
- The majority of respondents’ (69%) partners have worked FIFO between 2 to 9 years. 16% have worked 1 year or less and 15% have worked FIFO for 10 or more years

### Impact of FIFO on quality of life and relationships

Impact of FIFO on quality of life:

- The majority of respondents rate their quality of life overall as good (55%) or excellent (15%)
- One quarter of respondents rate their quality of life overall as fair (24%) and a small proportion (6%) as poor
- Half of all respondents rate the overall impact that FIFO has had on their quality of life as being positive (somewhat positive 37%, very positive 12%)
- Around one third of all respondents rate the overall impact that FIFO has had on their quality of life as being negative (somewhat negative 27%, very negative 4%)
- Only 20% of respondents consider that the overall impact that FIFO has had on their quality of life as being neither positive nor negative

Impact on family relationships:

- Most respondents (68%) consider that FIFO has had an impact on their relationship, with an even proportion considering this impact to be positive and negative.
- One third of respondents rate the impact on their relationship with their partner as positive (9% very positive and 25% somewhat positive)
- Similarly, one third of respondents rate the impact on their relationship with their partner as negative (5% very negative and 29% somewhat negative)
- 39% of respondents consider that FIFO has had a somewhat negative (34%) or very negative (5%) impact on the connection between their child/children and their partner.
- A further 39% of respondents consider that FIFO has had neither a positive, nor a negative impact on the connection between their child/children and their partner
- 22% of respondents rate the impact as being somewhat positive (17%) or very positive (5%)

## Rosters

Rosters came up most frequently when respondents were asked about the main things that would improve their lifestyle as a partner of a FIFO worker. The comments have been themed and broken down as follows:

- Better/different roster (109 respondents)
- Shorter roster (46 respondents)
- Equal time roster (32 respondents)
- Family friendly roster (30 respondents)
- Consistent roster (11 respondents)

The following points summarise the worker roster arrangements as reported by the partners of FIFO workers:

- The most common rosters workers are currently working are:
  - 14 Days on, 7 days off (23%)
  - 8 days on, 6 days off (14%)
  - 21 days on, 7 days off (11%)
  - 28 days on, 7 days off (11%)
- The largest group of respondents (39%) stated that their partner's company does not offer a family friendly roster
- The most common ideal roster arrangements identified by partners:
  - 7 days on, 7 days off (26%)
  - 14 days on, 14 days off (18%)
  - 14 days on, 7 days off (16%)
  - 8 days on, 6 days off (15%)
- Most respondents (87%) also felt their partner was not given a choice in roster arrangements

## Community Involvement

- The majority of respondents (57%) and their partners (the FIFO worker - 73%) are not involved in any clubs or organisations
- In contrast, the majority of respondents' children (68%) are involved in a club or organisation
- Of those who were involved in a club or organisation, the most common type was a sport club/organisation
- The most common initiatives that would encourage respondents and their family members to be more involved in organised sport and recreational club activities are:
  - Provision of crèche/child care services at the venue (33%)
  - More casual activities - e.g. drop in activities, rather than playing a full season (32%)
  - Playing at a more suitable time (18%)
- The majority of respondents state that there has been no change in the level of family involvement in voluntary activities for community organisations or clubs since their partner commenced FIFO work (53% respondent, 59% Partner (FIFO Worker) and 80% child/children)
- Around one third of respondents and partners had decreased involvement in voluntary activities since the partner commenced FIFO work

## Lifestyle/Drugs/Alcohol

- Just over half of all respondents (54%) rate there being no change to their level of alcohol consumption since their partner commenced FIFO work
- The majority of respondents consider their partner's level of alcohol consumption to have changed since commencing FIFO work (33% increase and 31% decrease)
- Almost all respondents rate there being no change to their own (94%) or their partner's (89%) level of drug consumption since their partner commenced FIFO work.

## Induction – A Preventative Approach

- When their partner started working FIFO only 6% of respondents were offered any information about how to transition their lifestyle to make the most of FIFO. Most of this information consisted of

written information and only a very small proportion were offered or attended an induction into FIFO lifestyle.

- The majority of respondents (80%) stated that they would've attended a FIFO lifestyle induction workshop or meeting if it had been offered when their partner was starting FIFO work



## 3. MENTAL HEALTH

### 3.1 Social Factors which Contribute to Stress and Mental Health Issues with FIFO Workers

Based on our experience of working in the FIFO industry these are some of the social factors that have been found to contribute to stress and mental health issues amongst FIFO workers:

- Managing the multitude of life changes associated with FIFO work.
- Challenges in transitioning between home and work life.
- Separation and isolation from family and friends.
- Strain in maintaining regular meaningful communication (and therefore strong relationships) with family and friends.
- Challenges in maintaining connection to the broader community (such as sporting or social groups, volunteer work arrangements).
- Fatigue and stress associated with long working hours and long work swings.
- Lack of knowledge about how to plan for work/life changes, and where to get help when it is needed.

### 3.2 Records of Mental Health Incidents On-site

Mental health stressors, mental illness and suicide have been a concern of FIFO Families over the past four years. This information comes from a grass roots level, from people who have experienced it in one way or another and have shared their experience with FIFO Families.

These concerns have been shared with political leaders as well as government agencies. FIFO Families have come to learn that some suicides on site are not recorded as such. Recording a suicide would be effective so that data can be tracked and compared to the rest of the population and to identify if there is in fact a higher incidence within the resources sector.

The recommendations below are aimed at understanding and addressing key issues, as well as generally improving the satisfaction, productivity and safety of workers and families.

There is recent and valid research showing that, FIFO rosters, in particular longer rosters and where workers are away longer than home, as having potential adverse effects on one's mental health and well-being. The biggest stressors for employees are isolation from families due to "length of swing" and missing special events (e.g. anniversaries, Christmas, birthdays etc) are common stressors for families, along with financial pressures. These findings are also replicated by FIFO Families' own research.

### 3.3 The effect of Rostering Practices on Workers and Families

At FIFO Families, we see families impacted the greatest when the roster is long (3 weeks plus) or the worker works away longer than they are home (e.g. rosters of 4/1 and 3/1 weeks present far greater challenges for workers and families in contrast to a family friendly roster of 8/6 days).

Equal time or shorter rosters, are more often than not, preferred by couples and families and we are seeing these become more commonplace in mining, particularly in Queensland. Oil and gas already utilise equal time on to off rosters within Australia.

Working for longer than two weeks continuously on roster (for 10 to 14 hour days) can impact individuals in terms of fatigue and exhaustion. This creates a significant safety risk. Again it is important to acknowledge the travel time to site and home from the airport as this can have potential for further impact fatigue and increased risk not only to the worker, but other road users.

### 3.3 The Implications of Travel

#### Diversity of Travel Regimes

Workers are exposed to a varying number of different travel arrangements. Some may have to drive a couple of hours to site to start their rotational roster and others may fly interstate or internationally before they begin their rotational roster. Some workers have the travel time included in their working arrangements but for many, they don't. Depending on the length of travel before and after work, individual's fatigue management can be affected. Some companies address this by having a "door to door policy" to ensure worker fatigue and safety is managed whilst other companies do not offer this.

#### Travel Risks

The duty of care of the company in relation to travel out of work time seems to be in a grey area for some companies. Some companies do have a door-to-door policy. For example Rio Tinto in Western Australia, run flights out of one regional town in the South West of WA (approximately a 3 hour drive from Perth) direct to Perth airport.

In April FIFO Families ran a workshop in Albany, WA (Albany is a 4.5 hour drive from Perth). Some workers who attended this workshop expressed concern for their own safety as they work for 8 days, are flown in and then choose to drive straight home to Albany after midnight. If workers felt tired, some would pull over to have a power nap. We have heard many similar stories and from some workers who have worked on a 2, 3 or 4 week roster.

Such a practice not only puts the worker at risk, but also all others that are using the roads.

## 4. STRATEGIES TO OPTIMISE THE FIFO EXPERIENCE

### 4.1 A Holistic Approach to Managing the FIFO Experience

It is our firm belief that the best approach to optimising the FIFO experience for the worker, their family and their community, is to take a proactive and holistic approach to planning and delivering this experience.

A proactive approach should be taken and focus on understanding the needs of workers and their families, and providing a supportive environment and the tools to manage the challenges to enhance the positive aspects of FIFO working practice. This will lead to workers and their families being better prepared for the challenges of FIFO work and impact positively on the prevention, or early identification of mental health problems. In doing so, everyone benefits – the workers, their families, the company and the wider community.

Currently there is little evidence of a holistic approach to preparing FIFO workers and their families for the unique challenges that FIFO work can bring. Some companies and organisations undertake some induction and support for their staff, but it is often spasmodic and superficial at best.

In addition governments have taken little systemic action in developing a cohesive approach in working with companies to ensure FIFO work practices include proper social support and the implementation of an appropriate strategy to ensure the effective integration in host communities.

The predominant method of social intervention that is used in relation to FIFO workers’ and their families is the use of Employee Assistance Schemes, which provides free counselling support. Such an approach becomes reactive rather than preventative, with workers and their families often either:

- Not being aware of the service.
- Accessing the services too late, and only once issues have reached crisis point.
- Not feeling comfortable in accessing the service due to stigma or fear that others might find out, which can affect their standing.

Therefore, Creating Communities and FIFO Families recommend that the following simple model be adopted by all stakeholders involved with FIFO workers and their families. This model takes a systematic and preventative approach, rather than the reactive approach that currently predominates.

#### FIFO worker and family change management model and associated solutions:

RESEARCH	➔ SOCIAL PLANNING	➔ INDUCTION/ ONBOARDING	➔ SUPPORT
Workforce research, engagement and modelling	FIFO village community development planning, implementation and activation	Pre-induction awareness training – supporting informed workforce decision making	Membership support services for workers and their families
Worker/resident satisfaction surveys	Attraction, retention and productivity strategies	Induction for workers and families into FIFO lifestyle	FIFO worker and family events (local and regional)
FIFO village reviews and audits	Accommodation and facilities design advice	Induction into village life	Site visits to promote social support services
Social Impact Assessment	Social Impact mitigation strategies	Induction into host community life	Social services advice and links
Demographic profiling		Community integration planning	Effective communication mechanisms & technologies

## 4.2 Preparing and Managing a FIFO Lifestyle

Induction of FIFO Workers is a service which FIFO Families have been providing for some time, and with the assistance of Creating Communities, has the opportunity to extend as part of a comprehensive social planning approach to create sustained benefit for workers, their families, their communities and employers.

Our team have identified that there has been a substantial gap in terms of workers, their partners and families not having been made aware of, or prepared for, the challenges of the FIFO lifestyle before they begin.

Creating Communities and FIFO Families firmly believe (and the data supports this understanding) that if workers, together with their partners and families, attended an induction before commencing FIFO work, as the following benefits would arise;

- Increased levels of resilience amongst FIFO workers and their partners/families.
- Lower incidence of mental illness and suicides
- Increased retention.
- Increased safety levels.
- Increased productivity.
- Increased engagement and benefit to host community.

Much time, effort and money is put into job induction training of FIFO workers but little, if any, consideration is given to inducting workers into the lifestyle. If this was part of company or even industry policy, it would be a win-win for not only the companies (in terms of profits) but also for the FIFO worker and their partner/family.

This induction should be undertaken at the following levels:

1. **Pre-Induction / General Information on FIFO Lifestyle** – This phase of induction should create a genuine understanding of the challenges and opportunities of FIFO work, what type of personality adapts best to the work, and what you need to do to prepare for the changes inherent in taking on FIFO work. (This stage should encourage those who realise they are not suited to FIFO work to not pursue FIFO work in the first place).
2. **Induction in FIFO Lifestyle for the worker, partner and family (once employed)** - This phase should create a more in-depth knowledge of the strategies to consider to effectively manage the many changes and challenges that FIFO work provides for the worker and their partners, family and friends. This induction should focus on practical approaches to planning and preparing for life ahead from a personal, social and financial basis.
3. **Induction into the FIFO Accommodation** – It is important for a worker to feel comfortable in their new surrounds and be able to easily adapt to the community in which they will be living. It is also crucial for workers and their families to have access to care, understanding and support services while the worker is onsite and at their temporary accommodation. Simple strategies such as a buddy system, personal welcome, village tours and social activities are all crucial to creating social connections and resilience.
4. **Induction into Host Community** – FIFO workers at times experience criticism of the work choice they make from others who feel it is “anti-community.” Inducting workers into the communities in which they will be working and living is important to enable the development of positive connections with the host community and respect for the behavioural expectations of this community. Opportunities to interact with the community to “de-institutionalise” behaviour is an essential aspect to this induction.

## 4.3 Enhancing Support Services

Community support services are needed that adapt to the lifestyle of FIFO workers, their families and their hours of work. Most services are during normal office hours and are difficult for workers or their families to access.

Some key actions that could be taken to better prevent mental health issues for FIFO workers and their families include:

- Development of a state wide strategy for the coordination and development of services across agencies to better cater for the needs of FIFO workers and their families.
- Development of best practice models that engage workers, companies, consultants, communities, non-government and government agencies in a collaborative approach to FIFO workforce and family development.
- Each FIFO village to have its own community development strategy to provide better social support for residents and enhanced connections with their host communities.
- Local Government Strategic Community Plans to include strategies and initiatives related to better planning for the needs of FIFO workers and their families.
- Establishment of induction sessions by trained professionals, with experience in the field (as per above).
- Training of onsite village staff (e.g. Active Lifestyle Coordinators) to have a greater understanding of social planning strategies that create social bonds and connections. This is to run parallel with a focus on physical activity, which while important, isn't accessed by the majority of residents.
- Better awareness of mental health support strategies via increased promotion to workers and their families and the provision of mental health safety officers.
- Resources to be targeted towards organisations that provide networking and social support for FIFO workers and their families.
- Flexible child care options for FIFO families.

## 5. VILLAGE LIFE

Creating Communities has vast experience in working in FIFO Villages. The quality of the living experience varies greatly from one village to another and is dependent on the host employer's commitment to fostering a healthy and active lifestyle and also the competence and capacity of the third party operators that manage the villages on behalf of the companies employing the workers.

The ability of these operators to generate a positive community based living experience is often impinged upon by their capacity, experience and expertise. Most major village management companies come from a catering background and have little or no experience in effective social planning – nor do many engage people with the expertise to do this on their behalf. Many engage Active Lifestyle Coordinators, but they are often only focussed on fitness related activities, not on social planning or community development.

A common refrain from the companies employing the FIFO workers is that the third party providers are responsible for how a village is run and that they are keen for these operators to take a proactive approach to developing a sense of community. However the third party operators state that within the procurement of their services there is little, if any, requirement or compensation for the cost of providing higher quality services and that their contract is very much based on lowest cost models, rather than highest life quality models. The truth likely lies somewhere between the views of both these parties and to break the deadlock it may require some external stimulus or regulation that implores resource companies and their village management companies to meet a standard code of practice as per other sectors where large residential developments are undertaken, such as aged care facilities.

It is important to recognise that many FIFO workers, especially those that are in construction roles spend most of their life either at work or living at a FIFO village. These villages can often be quite institutionalised in their nature and subsequently generate associated institutionalised behaviour. Monotony and perceived lack of lifestyle variety is the greatest issue that influences how FIFO workers perceive their living environment. There is the opportunity for FIFO employers and host communities to promote a more normalised and community based living environment.

Some of the key actions that can be taken to improve the life of FIFO workers in villages include for example:

- The provision of social activities, events and programs that promote a variety of engagement and social connection between residents, so as to create a supportive community atmosphere.
- Ensure all residents are welcomed to the village and inducted into village life. This includes the provision of a welcome pack, a tour of the village and identification of a village 'buddy' who will help the new resident with the transition to their new community.
- Provide social gathering places and spaces other than just the dining hall (mess) and bar (wet mess). This could include basic amenities such as indoor and outdoor recreation spaces, seating, shelters and lighting that enable residents to engage with each other in a social manner, rather than retreat to their rooms and live in isolation.
- A choice of health and well-being (including fitness) activity options that consider the diversity of the residents, while recognising the small window of time each day in which FIFO residents have to engage in physical activity.
- Ensure there are options for residents to exercise some personal responsibility and choice. This includes the ability to decorate their room, being able to take food back to their room and for residents to take some responsibility for personal tasks such as cleaning.
- Develop a village communication strategy that considers a range of methods including a village newsletter, information updates and promotion of special events and activities.
- Provide a variety of food options (meal times are often the main social outlet and can become a huge focus of a FIFO resident). Ensure the food provides healthy options and has variety from one meal to another.

## 6. HOST COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

There is a significant opportunity to improve the integration of FIFO villages and workforces with host communities. Currently there is a wide variety of expectations, practices and policies across local governments and state governments related to the approval of, planning and development of FIFO accommodation.

With the support of social planning experts who have expertise in working FIFO host communities, such as Creating Communities Australia Pty Ltd, there is the opportunity to develop both guidelines and a legislative framework that encourage a positive commitment from both companies operating FIFO work models and the communities in which they operate to take a positive and proactive approach to the integration of these work forces into local communities. Such a strategic approach, rather than the current ad-hoc situation will better optimise benefits and minimise impacts and communities and FIFO workers.

This approach should be fostered by education, a commitment to seeking a shared understanding and a willingness to collaborate.

In 2012 Creating Communities worked with the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy and PICC member companies (BHP Billiton Iron Ore, Chevron, Fortescue Metals Group; Rio Tinto and Woodside) to develop the report *A Matter of Choice - Capturing the FIFO Opportunity in Pilbara Communities*.

In this report the member companies stated a recognition of their responsibilities to their employees and the communities in which they operate, and a willingness to seek, promote and implement best practice in the development, management and integration of in-town FIFO accommodation facilities and FIFO workforces. While this document had some desired effects there is the opportunity for government to play a much stronger role in partnering with companies to ensure positive planning approaches are undertaken and accountabilities are met.

The joint aspirations of the companies were defined in the document by eight Guiding Principles, these being:

- Carrying out research and consultation to identify the potential economic, social and environmental effects and opportunities for host communities.
- Developing understanding, respect and tolerance of differences in cultures, heritage and faiths, within FIFO and residential workforces, as well as the host community.
- Responding to stakeholder expectations by locating and integrating transient worker accommodation with local neighbourhoods, where appropriate, and investigating the potential for shared use of facilities.
- Providing a safe environment, with access to high-quality amenities and services that will enhance the health and well-being of FIFO employees.
- Fostering mutual respect and a sense of connection between the FIFO employees and the host community.
- Assisting FIFO employees and their families to understand and embrace the lifestyle that may result from long-distance commuting.
- Undertaking planning, implementing and monitoring strategies to manage effects and optimise economic, social and environmental returns.
- Identifying potential collaborations that will mutually benefit the community, FIFO employees and the PICC company.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This inquiry provides a real opportunity to catalyse actions that will generate improved lifestyles for FIFO workers, their families and the communities in which they reside.

The challenge will be for this inquiry to be more than just a “talk fest” which seems to have been the result of other similar forums. It needs to focus on actions that can make a difference.

There is now sufficient research to inform what action needs to be taken to ensure FIFO workers are safer, healthier and more productive citizens, and for host and source communities to derive greater benefits from the FIFO work experience.

The Queensland State Government and its agencies should aim to work in unison with companies, local communities and experts in the field of social planning to not only enable the development of an agreed set of principles and strategies that will better prepare workers, their families and their communities for the challenges of FIFO work, but also to allow them to harness the opportunities that this type of work presents.

Creating Communities and FIFO Families would be well placed to utilise our extensive experience and expertise to assist in this improvement process in the future.