

WA Parliamentary Inquiry into Mental Illness in Fly-In-Fly-Out Workers

Education and Health Standing Committee

DISCUSSION PAPER

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Question:

Are we dealing with the symptom or the cause?

Summary:

Employers require a workforce to create the return for shareholders, thus Transient Workforce Accommodation (TWA) will always have a place, as all mining operations are not based within or near existing townships.

To assist those prone to Mental Health or as a simple alternative to isolation, communication, lack of family or social support there should be a different accommodation structure or a choice, focused on eliminating isolation and communication issues and returning the community of family and social support.

The choice should be a completely Integrated Workforce Accommodation (IWA) that is family friendly, community focused, with roster and lifestyle balanced. With economic realism for company, community and economy.

Background:

Globalisation

1. With the introduction of the Economic Globalisation Model (EGM) of the 1970 decisions where being made on a purely economic rational, completely ignoring issues of social or environmental impacts of such decisions. This was most widely observed by the closing of profitable bank branches from many communities on the basis of not being profitable enough.
2. Since the 1970's with mining companies have been moving away from township ownership (mine based communities) as the economics for providing genuine community housing was prohibitive, under the globalisation paradigm.
3. Thus the introduction of a scaled back accommodation model (TWA) was introduced to minimise this cost of having a workforce to create the return for shareholders.

Communication (World Wide Web)

4. In the 1990's the World Wide Web (WWW) became a house hold name, via Myspace (2003), Facebook and later Twitter, Instagram and many others. This encouraged non personal interaction, which was "promoted as healthy" as people of similar beliefs (homogenous) could find each other, thus opening up their world. However, time has now proven that it has also narrowed many people views as they do not interact with non-compatible views, giving some roundedness to a conversation. An example here is terrorism; this has explored due to the

ease of finding likeminded and the narrowing of information via the decreasing personal interaction with others.

Personal Technology

5. The introduction in the 2000's of the "I" generation or the proliferation of the iPod, iPhone, iPad and Wi-Fi now accelerated the "WWW" interaction which further compounds the lack of personal one on one or one on many interaction skills, thus enhancing the isolation and narrowing of communication skills, whilst living within a populated township.

The analogy that comes to mind here is the throwing of the rock into a pool of water. The rock hits the surface of the water creating the splash and the rock sinks to the bottom of the pool never to be considered again. The ripples of the thrown rock continue to fill the pool until they reach the edge, creating havoc for the insects seeking water, creating water to overflow from outlet, reducing the capacity of the pool by the size of the thrown rock and killing the unseen frog at the bottom of the pool. Yet, at the start it was just a rock being thrown for a reason, which we no longer seem to be aware of.

Economic Correction

6. The introduction of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) economic theory created a counter movement to the "EGM", which asked corporation to consider the Social and Environmental impact of their economic decisions (consider before throwing the rock). This has led to the consideration of "Capital Movement" and the effects on corporation, community (social) and environment.

Community, the real support...

7. A **local community** is a group of interacting people sharing an environment. In human communities, intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks, and a number of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness.¹
8. Community, undervalued by the economic fundamentalists and thus the "EGM".
9. Community, misunderstood by the people living within them and thus not defended strongly enough, from the "EGM", "WWW" and "I" generation as hindsight is unfortunately hindsight.
10. **The breaking down of the community hub is the cause**, as community in the past was the support for interacting people, who all had a vested interest in their environment and the intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks, and a number of other conditions that may be present and common that affected the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness. A self-managing mental health structure, which needs support and protection.
11. This incorporates Local Government, however point 8 and 9 is also true of many councillors on local council.
12. Our action from the past have undermined the very support, that communities offer and we now look to treat the symptom, rather than rebuild the communities.

State Government Initiatives

13. Act-Belong-Commit is a community-based health promotion campaign that encourages people to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing. This evidence-based campaign was developed primarily from research undertaken by Curtin University into people's perceptions of mental health and the behaviours they believed protected and

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_community

promoted good mental health. Following a successful pilot phase in six regional communities in Western Australian (2005–2007), the campaign was expanded state-wide.²

14. Royalties for Regions is a political policy formulated by the National Party of Western Australia in 2008 which involves the redirection of Western Australian state government spending from the major population centres, particularly Perth, into the rural areas of the state. This spending would be funded by setting aside 25% of the state's mining and petroleum royalty revenue. The main policy features
 - a. 25% of all royalty payments to the state to be set aside for reinvestment into regional WA
 - b. Funds to be held in a special investment fund (SIF), capped at AU\$1 billion annually
 - c. Disbursements from the SIF to be over and above consolidated revenue allocations for the regions
 - d. SIF funds to be distributed on an agreed formula to:
 - i. Regional councils for local projects;
 - ii. Regional projects developed and prioritised with the involvement of Regional Organisations of Councils and Regional Development Commissions;
 - iii. Statewide projects developed and prioritised by the Regional Development Council; and
 - iv. State Government initiatives that boost and leverage regional growth and investment,

In 2006-07, the state received royalties totalling \$2.1 billion (2007-08 forecast: \$2.5 billion, 2008-09:\$2.7 billion). This data suggests that \$675 million of annual funding could be assigned under the policy. According to the Western Australian Department of Regional Development, Royalties for Regions delivered \$3.67 billion to regional areas between December 2008 and June 2014. In 2013-14 \$1.06 billion was invested.

This in part reverses of a large deficit in capital movement away from the Pilbara to other areas of the state and nation.³

Federal Government Initiatives

15. The Australian Government has established the Community Development Grants Programme to support needed infrastructure that promotes stable, secure and viable local and regional economies. The Programme will fund projects including the 2013 election commitments and some identified uncontracted projects from the Regional Development Australia Fund and Community Infrastructure Grants Program. More than \$300 million is available under the Community Development Grants Programme for single year or multiple year projects. Funding for projects range in value from \$2,000 to \$13 million.⁴

BHP Billiton

16. When you look at the BHP Billiton website you quickly note when searching the term community, that their current level of involvement in community development is cosmetic to single interest groups and their needs.

² <http://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/>

³ <http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/royalties-for-regions/>

⁴ <http://investment.infrastructure.gov.au/funding/communitydevelopment/index.aspx>

17. However, BHP Billiton and other FIFO related industries have the capacity to completely change the environment for communities without spending one cent more than currently budgeted.
18. The spend associated with “TWA” needs to be more in balance with “TBL” thinking of economic, social and environmental, thus community focused.
19. The \$30m dollar partnership with St Bartholomew’s, is yet another “HOST” township sponsoring a “SOURCE” (Perth) project, again taking capital from the area to another non connected community.⁵

The Discussion Paper

Comment

20. Is FIFO creating mental health issues or is mental health creating FIFO? A societal question, given we cannot recall all the “rocks that have been thrown without “TBL” being considered”.
21. Independence of the family is now more about “independence” within the family, as FIFO worker, become a non-reliant member of the family’s day to day life. Due to long period away from the family, thus a loss of belonging.
22. Cultural aspirations for greater pay (to support the family) is in conflict with choice for many in the lower educated group. Thus the only way for greater pay is FIFO and the conditions associated with this lifestyle.
23. HOST versus SOURCE community, is also in conflict with a true understanding or empathy with the problem, as the problems for each group is different from the other and the capital movement from HOST to SOURCE is also a strong conflict not addressed within the report (who is getting the benefit economically?).
24. The “at risk” numbers of mental health, support a general societal issue, not just a FIFO only issue. However, FIFO lifestyle is providing the perfect environment for the advancement of poor mental health and this cannot be ignored as anecdotal information is suggesting higher rates within the FIFO lifestyle.
25. The Australian numbers are:
 - a. 600,000 Severe Mental Health
 - b. 1,000,000 Moderate Mental Health
 - c. 2,000,000 Mild Mental Health
26. Suicide is taking as many as motor car accidents and we are spending far more on prevention and companies have far more rules to control motor car accidents, then suicide issues.
27. 67,000 FIFO and ancillary service staff working in this environment that is not healthy for good mental health.
28. BHP Billiton have indicated some sympathy to the issue and maybe best placed to make changes in the near future.
29. Fifo man – gives a great insight into a FIFO experience.
30. The value of community is barely mentioned or valued within the report, despite State and Federal government stated support of community and initiatives.
31. Current written submissions are interest only strong papers, with little to no collective or past reflection or future outcomes that do not align with their own interests (training or services). Whilst this is not bad or inappropriate, it is biased towards dealing with the symptom, not the cause.

⁵ <http://www.bhpbilliton.com>

32. Most papers are looking to provide services at a cost to support or solve the mental health problem via training, thus an economic outcome for some and help for a few.
33. The term "Family Friendly" roster is an oxymoron, if you believe in community being the answer. It should be "Community Friendly" roster, which assists in creating the interacting people sharing environment.
34. Travel in the workers time off, only creates further resentment and thus compound negative thoughts and contributes to poor mental health environment.
35. Pilbara cities or similar initiative get little to no mention; is the government really serious.
36. Negative media, about allowing people with a perceived mental health issue working amongst us, makes it almost impossible to eliminate the stigma of mental health. Recent aircraft crash is "homicide" (pilot kills 180 passengers), but media report mental health issues – thus employer is at fault.
37. Wet Area (licensed liquor sales) is enhancing poor environment for a "at risk" mental health group.
38. The AMWU, suggest that motelling "dissolve[s] the community fabric that exists with more permanent arrangements". This suggests community is an answer.
39. Improved facilities are needed for "WTA" that are more than 45 minutes from a "HOST" town, only.
40. Fatigue and mental health are clearly linked and evidence exists for this.
41. A "Family Friendly" roster cannot accommodate the elimination of fatigue and more time off, whilst a "Community Friendly" roster can, when the community is within the 45 minutes of the mine site.
42. An element of the Maslow Theory is "security" and control gives security. Without control you do not feel secure, thus the environment for poor mental health improves in FIFO camps where residence have little control.
43. Altering motelling, would only be tweaking the symptom and not the cause.

Recommendations

44. That mining camps within 45 minutes of town sites be phased out in favour of workers being housed within the town site.
45. That "Community Friendly" rosters be developed for workers housed within the town site, which encourage family units staying together.
46. That the focus be on strengthening communities, by encouraging interaction with and within the community.
47. The funds spent to maintain a "TWA" within 45 minutes of a town site should be transferred to operational/infrastructure partnerships within businesses and communities.