

BAY OF ISLES COMMUNITY OUTREACH (INC)
AND
THE MENTAL ILLNESS FELLOWSHIP
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

FEASIBILITY STUDY

The investigation and identification of the need
for mental health services
for
Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO)
and
Drive-In, Drive-Out (DIDO)
employees who are working in the mining industry
in the
South Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Feasibility Study has been conducted on behalf of The Bay of Isles Community Outreach Inc. (BOICO) and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Western Australia (MIFWA) from August – December, 2011 in the South Eastern Goldfields region of WA. BOICO and MIFWA gratefully acknowledge the support of the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). A number of individuals, organisations and on-line support communities were interviewed, in addition to a comprehensive review of relevant submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of Fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) and Drive-in, drive-out (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of study participants and others involved.

The study was specifically initiated to investigate, identify and assess the need (if any) for mental health services for the Fly-in, Fly-out (FIFO) and Drive-in, Drive-out (DIDO) employees working in the mining industry in the region.

Specifically, the study found that:

- i There was a need for longitudinal research into the normalization effects of the FIFO/DIDO working arrangements;
- i There was an opportunity to adapt the existing peer-based group program within the Well Ways suite of programs delivered by MIFWA to FIFO/DIDO and fully residential mining individuals and/or their families;
- i There was a further opportunity to develop and extend the Family Support Program run by MIFWA to the region;
- i There was a potential need for BOICO (Inc) to develop the capacity of its employees by professional training for outreach service to the communities and towns within the region;
- i There was an identified need for both Government and Industry to provide better baseline data, information and statistics on the number of employees and families involved in FIFO/DIDO and fully residential mining in the region;
- i There was also the propensity for MIFWA to develop and extend the Family Support Program to the South Eastern and Southern Corridor of Perth where there appears to be a significant growth of resident FIFO families;

And finally:

- i There was a distinct opportunity for MIFWA and BOICO (Inc) to develop an integrated model of service provision for the mental health needs of FIFO/DIDO and fully residential mining workforces and their families, by better utilising information and communication technologies and existing on-line support communities in adapting their services for the region.

A full list of the findings, recommendations and conclusions can be found in this report. We commend you to this Feasibility Study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE STUDY	5
1. BACKGROUND	5
1.1 Scope.....	5
1.2 Context.....	5
1.3 Funding.....	5
1.4 Time Frame.....	5
1.5 The Researcher.....	5
2. INTRODUCTION	6
2.1 BOICO.....	6
2.2 CRC.....	6
2.4 DUO.....	6
2.5 EAP.....	6
2.6 FaHCSIA.....	6
2.7 FIFO.....	6
2.8 Family Support Program.....	6
2.9 ICT.....	6
2.10 NBN.....	6
2.11 MIFWA.....	6
2.12 Normalisation.....	6
2.13 S.E.Goldfields.....	6
2.14 Well Ways Suite of Programs.....	6
3. METHODOLOGY	7
3.1 Conversations with the Well Ways Reference Group.....	7
3.2 Documented Conversations.....	7
3.3 Document Analysis.....	8
4. FINDINGS	11
4.1 Educators.....	11
4.2 FIFO Support Groups.....	12
4.3 Community Health and Support Organisations and Facilities.....	16
4.4 Miners.....	18
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	22
5.1 Longitudinal Research into the ‘normalisation’ effects of the FIFO/DIDO working.....	22
5.2 Well Ways Suite of Programs and the Family Support Program.....	22
5.3 BOICO Outreach in the S.E. Goldfields.....	23
5.4 Esperance Baseline Information.....	23
5.5 MIFWA and the Metropolitan Area of Perth, WA.....	23
6. SUMMARY MODEL OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	23
7. CONCLUSIONS	25
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
9. APPENDICES	27
APPENDIX 1.....	27
APPENDIX 2.....	28
APPENDIX 3.....	29
APPENDIX 4.....	30
APPENDIX 5.....	31

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: STUDY AREA	5
FIGURE 2: THE STUDY PROCESS	10
FIGURE 3: SUMMARY DIAGRAM OF THE INTERACTIONS (A)	20
FIGURE 4: SUMMARY DIAGRAM OF THE INTERACTIONS (B)	21
FIGURE 5: SUMMARY MODEL OF THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES	24

THE STUDY

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 SCOPE

The scope of this Feasibility Study has been to assess the extent, identification and need, if any, based on the growing FIFO/DIDO workforce in the South East Goldfields region of WA for mental health services.

1.2 CONTEXT

The research context of this Feasibility Study is the South Eastern Goldfields region of WA. (See Figure 1 below).

1.3 FUNDING

This Feasibility Study has been funded by MIFWA through FaHCSIA for BOICO to initiate and undertake a preliminary study of the mental health needs and/or effects of Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) and/or Drive-In, Drive-Out (DIDO) workers.

1.4 TIME FRAME

The timeframe for the conduct of this Feasibility Study has been over the period August - December, 2011.

1.5 THE RESEARCHER

The consultant used for this study and engaged by BOICO and MIFWA is independent, a mixed-method researcher holding a PhD, and has been contracted for the entire study period.

Figure 1: Study Area

South Eastern Goldfields of WA

[\[http://www.sydney-australia.biz/maps/wa/south-central-wa-map.php\]](http://www.sydney-australia.biz/maps/wa/south-central-wa-map.php)



2. INTRODUCTION

A number of individuals and organisations have been involved in this study. There are specific funding bodies and programs that need to be acknowledged. In addition, there are specific programs and a number of concepts that are important. As a result of this research, for the purposes of this document, the following acronyms are used throughout this report.

2.1 BOICO

The Bay of Isles Community Outreach (Inc.); a not-for-profit non-government organisation providing mental health outreach services to Esperance and the South Eastern Goldfields region.

2.2 CRC

Community Resource Centres, funded by the WA Department of Regions and Lands.

2.3 DIDO

Drive-In, Drive Out worker involved in the mining (resources) sector.

2.4 DUO

The peer-based group program within the Well Ways suite of programs delivered by MIFWA to families of people with a mental illness and alcohol and other drug issues.

2.5 EAP

Employee Assistance Programs run by mining and resources companies as part of their human resources component of employment.

2.6 FaHCSIA

The Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.

2.7 FIFO

Fly-In, Fly-Out worker involved in the mining (resources) sector.

2.8 FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Family Support Program (that is funded by FaHCSIA) delivered by MIFWA in the Perth North Metropolitan Region to support families where there is mental illness present.

2.9 ICT

Information and Communication Technologies; such as internet applications, email, Skype, Facebook, social networking and telecommunications.

2.10 NBN

National Broadband Network, funded by the Federal Government.

2.11 MIFWA

Mental Illness Fellowship of Western Australia, Perth.

2.12 NORMALISATION

The concept of normalisation is taken to mean adjusting to society, and, as such, hiding a problem/disability or illness.

2.13 S.E.GOLDFIELDS

The South East Goldfields extends from the town of Norseman at the northern point, through to Esperance in the south, to Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun in the south west, and to Lake King/Hyden at the furthest north western point of the region.

2.14 WELL WAYS SUITE OF PROGRAMS

The Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs (that are funded by FaHCSIA) delivered by MIFWA for families and friends of people with a mental illness.

3. METHODOLOGY

Some specific project protocols were established to address the scoping of the research, the subjects for the study and the reporting of the data.

3.1 CONVERSATIONS WITH THE WELL WAYS REFERENCE GROUP

Firstly, the scoping of the study was outlined by both the funding and supervising body in a formal meeting at the outset of the research. The Well Ways Reference Group in Esperance was deemed to be the supervising body that the researcher was required to report to during the interim. A Letter of Introduction for the research is found at Appendix 1.

3.2 DOCUMENTED CONVERSATIONS

As the research was at feasibility stage only, research ethics were deemed to be not necessary. However, the researcher provided a guarantee that respondents or interview subjects would not be identified by name, position or context, and that all subjects could be provided with a final copy of the report on request.

3.2.1. Benchmarking

The researcher provided guarantees that subject's names, their positions and the organisations who participated in this Feasibility Study research would be reported anonymously, therefore guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality. From the outset of the research, there was no intent to identify participants.

3.2.2 Conversations

The original scoping of the research included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Shortly after this Feasibility Study began, the Australian Government announced a House of Representatives Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia.* [<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>]

In respect to the access to interview subjects, there were many challenges presented by geographic location, as the researcher was based in Esperance. The original proposal was to interview subjects in the immediate area (Esperance, Norseman, Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun). However, given the context and timing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, and the access that the researcher had to on-line FIFO/DIDO support groups and subjects in the Perth metropolitan area, the research parameters were changed.

3.2.3 Interviews

Conversations were held at various intervals of the research with the members of the Well Ways Reference Group in Esperance. This was preceded by discussions with the MIFWA Executive Officer and the studies' Project Manager, a member of the local Esperance Well Ways Reference Group.

3.2.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

A meeting was held in Midland, WA in the early research stages with the Manager of MIFWA's Family Support Program in order to ascertain its objectives.

The reason for including and discussing the functions of the Family Support Program operating in the metropolitan area were:

- (i) To ascertain the extent of coverage of the Family Support Program and any likely interface with Well Ways suite of programs and the DUO program;
 - (ii) To determine the extent of coverage of the Family Support Program in the outer suburbs of the Perth metropolitan area, as the FIFO Families Support Group has members mostly in the South Eastern Metropolitan corridor;
- And,
- (iii) To identify if the Family Support Program objectives could be applicable to this study's outcomes and recommendations.

3.2.5 Structured Interviews

Due to the geographic distance, some interviews were conducted over the telephone. The researcher provided responders with a set of questions by email prior to the interview and then telephoned the respondent. Telephone conversations generally lasted 30 - 45 minutes.

3.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

As a study procedure, the researcher searched the internet, paying particular attention to on-line blogs, submissions to the House of Representatives Parliamentary Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, and any published papers, by noting and documenting appropriate research and information available on FIFO/DIDO working arrangements.

3.3.1 On-Line Blogs

Both FIFOFamilies.com [www.fifofamilies.com.au] and mfmatters.com incorporate an on-line blog on their website. Weekly checking of these blogs during the research time period was conducted. The websites that were accessed can be found in the bibliography at the end of this research.

3.3.2 Written Submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on regional Australia Inquiry

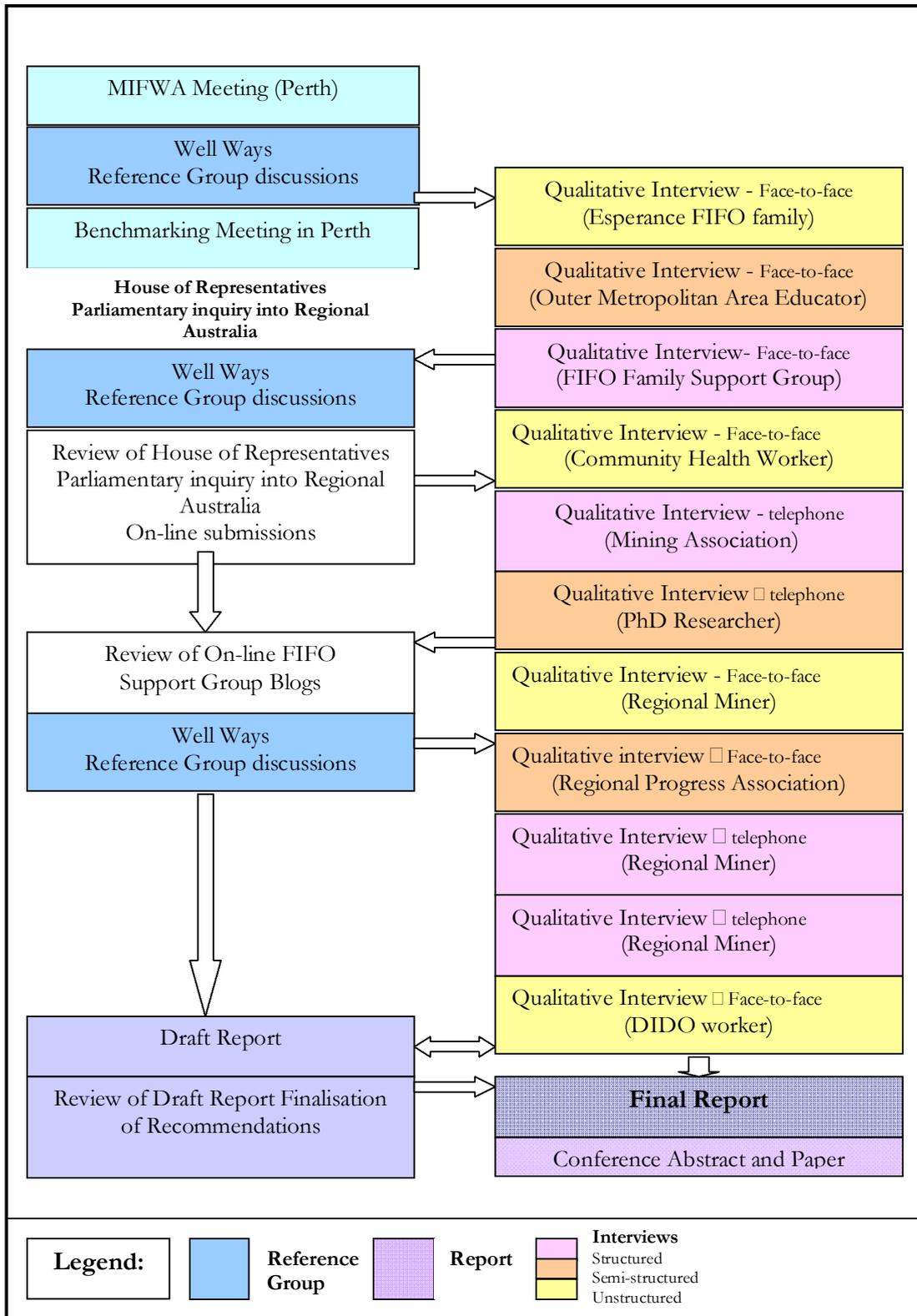
Submission papers that were deemed relevant to the region and the study were downloaded by the researcher during the time frame of the research. In addition, the researcher was also forwarded by email the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA's written submission by an interview subject, and also the FIFO Families [www.fifofamilies.com.au] submission.

A full list of submission papers studied can be found in the bibliography and in Appendix 5.

3.3.3 Research Papers

The researcher accessed some specific research papers by being referred to a number of papers by interview subjects during the process of the study. In addition, an internet search identified current and past PhD work relating to the FIFO/DIDO phenomena. A list of these papers can be found in the bibliography at the end of this report. The overarching objective of the research was to determine, from multiple and diverse anecdotal perspectives (individuals, families, miners, mining associations, health workers, community workers and educators), and proven by any statistical research, the extent of issues related to lower end of the mental health spectrum disorders that may be arising in FIFO/DIDO workers generally, and also by any specific evidence in this region. Figure 2 diagrammatically represents the research process. In summary, nine (9) people were interviewed, nine (9) submissions were read; three (3) regional miners were contacted for contributions, three (3) papers associated with academic research were reviewed, additional to the two (2) on-line blogs that were monitored. One mining association was interviewed and one Progress Association was contacted for comment. (See Appendix 5 for a full list).

Figure 2: The Study Process



4. FINDINGS

From many perspectives, the anecdotal evidence, that is supported in part by written submissions and academic research undertaken (some of which is published) there appears to be preliminary evidence of lower end of the spectrum mental health disorders evident in the FIFO community of the S.E. Goldfields region. The same conclusions should not be drawn about the DIDO community because of the focus of this research being predominantly based on FIFO mining, and workers employed on FIFO arrangements. Some specific perspectives of interview subjects are outlined and documented in the section below.

4.1 EDUCATORS

During the discussion with an educator, from their perspective, it was noted that school-aged children living in FIFO/DIDO families are not statistically identified as living in these arrangements in any school census counts. Therefore, conclusions about the impact of FIFO/DIDO working arrangements on the children of parents who are working in these arrangements cannot be drawn, and nor can they be statistically proven as the comments are anecdotally based. Some lower end of the mental health spectrum disorders became evident in the discussion, yet they cannot be reported in any meaningful way.

There is anecdotal evidence of anxiety being present when the away FIFO partner is about to leave for work, is away at work and also when they return from FIFO work. There is also anecdotal evidence that older children take on roles akin to a "parenting/carer" role with their siblings in a FIFO family, and with their own parent who is not working away.

In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the anxieties found in primary school aged children are manifested more often in disruptive behaviours at school, and in other areas such as with regard to the inability for an away FIFO parent to attend sporting events and school functions. Moreover, the not away FIFO parent is seen to develop stronger social support mechanisms with other parents who have, or are involved in similar working arrangements.

Sibbel's (2001) research does not appear to support these contentions. It is noted that:

Sibbel found no differences between non FIFO and FIFO primary school aged children on measures of psychological wellbeing. Issues included the FIFO parent missing special events such as birthdays and school or sporting functions, inconsistency in household routines and roles when the FIFO parent was home and away, and differences between the FIFO and at home parent's behavioural expectations.
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Sibbel, 2011, Submission 122 [Accessed 27 October, 2011]

The initial and preliminary findings of some more recent research (Watson, 2011) indicate some contrary findings:

*73.5% of adolescents are sad when the FIFO parent returns to work;
43.1% felt nervous or anxious when the FIFO parent returns to work;
45.6% worry about the FIFO parent's safety at work;
54.1% do not talk about their experience of the FIFO lifestyle with their friends;
42.7% state it is more difficult to talk about things that may be "bothering" to the FIFO parent when the parent is at work; and
86.8% communicate with their FIFO parent (when the parent is at work).
The telephone is the most frequent means of communication for the FIFO parent and adolescent, with email (84.3%) SMS (34.5%) and Facebook (25.8%) also used.
<http://eastern.innpycommunity.com.au/news-and-views/local-news/FIFO-research/7598427/>
Watson, 2011 [Accessed 15 October, 2011]*

However, Sibbel (2011) further indicates that it is to be noted that there has been limited research undertaken with children of FIFO parents. Scott (2011) calls for more research into the effect of FIFO on children and specifically notes in her submission:

*"The effects and isolation of mothers of new babies, who have a FIFO partner, and: Increased school absences either when a parent returns home on leave or because a young person is left home to attend school whilst the parent works."
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Scott, 2011, Submission 88 [Accessed 27 October, 2011]*

Scott's (2011) comment supports some of the anecdotal evidence of the Educator who was interviewed in the early stages of this study.

4.2 FIFO SUPPORT GROUPS

There are predominantly two on-line professional social support groups for FIFO/DIDO employees and families working in the resources sector in Australia. Mining Family Matters has an on-line presence and operates out of South Australia as mfmatters.com. The other, which is newer, FIFO Families Pty Ltd [www.fifofamilies.com.au], was established to cater to the growing FIFO population in Western Australia. The FIFOfamilies.com has also been established in a predominantly on-line mode. Interviews were held with both of the on-line support groups.

In a face-to-face interview with FIFOfamilies.com, whilst the respondent was initially skeptical about the researcher's line of enquiry, the discussion, although structured, became more informal as it progressed. The discussion focused at length on the development of this on-line support group that had arisen out of family situation of the Director as the wife/partner of a FIFO worker. Issues canvassed included the need for a social support network for the not away FIFO partner, the increasing propensity for not away partners to establish a social network of support, and the need sometimes for individuals to have a "sounding board" when the away FIFO partner is not in contact or in a situation where they are out of contact.

The four key issues that were raised were those of *isolation, trust, loneliness* and *resentment*. *Trust* and *resentment* figured prominently in the context of discussions about the away (FIFO) partner. The not away partner was deemed to more likely have issues with *loneliness* and *isolation*. Focusing on family functionality was seen as the key issue for people (couples) in FIFO working arrangements to having a successful relationship with each other and any children. The FIFO roster was seen as the mitigating issue for most FIFO workers. If it was a roster deemed by the family to be "family friendly", then it was suggested that most people were seen to be able to cope with many of the stresses of the FIFO working arrangement.

When discussing mental health, the interviewee did not address any specific issues. The researcher presented the Director with the page of a Family Needs Assessment document (used in MIFWA's Family Support Program), aimed at the investigation of signs of distress in children. On presentation of this document, and an elaboration of the concept of Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) at the prompting of the researcher, the interviewee acknowledged that children may present with this disorder, because the away parent (FIFO worker) may have to re-establish lines of authority in family situations when they have been absent at work.

Further to the interview, FIFOfamilies.com made a submission to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of "fly-in, fly-out" (FIFO) and "drive-in, drive-out" (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, confirming and documenting that research over the past ten years has shown that the four most pressing issues facing FIFO partners are:

- 1. *Isolation*
 2. *Loneliness*
 3. *Trust*
 4. *Resentment* □
- <http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Asby, 2011, *Submission 48*, pp. 2-3 [Accessed 15/10/2011]

Further, the interview focused on the discussion of the development of many more FIFO Family on-line social networks that have been initiated in the Perth metropolitan area, following the establishment of FIFOfamilies.com, primarily for not away partners in FIFO/DIDO working arrangements to share common experiences, meet socially in various metropolitan localities, and also provide each other with a valuable and extended support network, that wasn't necessarily available through any families or extended family members.

The respondent was not aware of any regional FIFO support groups, yet did point out that Mining Family Matters <http://miningfm.com.au> had been established some time before in South Australia. This was confirmed in a subsequent interview with Mining Family Matters.

Whilst discussing the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) when interviewing the Director of Mining Family Matters, it was noted that many of the relationship issues that either impact on the family or are manifested in individual behaviours within families in FIFO working arrangements, more advanced access and use of ICT has ameliorated some of the effects of isolation and loneliness in the not away partner.

On-line technologies such as Skype, Facebook and email are facilitated by much improved internet access at mine sites, therefore enabling the away FIFO partner and/or parent to have better and more meaningful interactions. Skype particularly was seen to have been used positively to effect good communication between families working in a FIFO situation. The way Skype was used in one family created a positive communication dynamic for the away FIFO partner, ranging from the facilitation of a Skype session of Lego building for one child, to a "fatherly chat" to two small children whilst their mother vacated the room, to a general chat between two partners using the technology. Skype is used instructively, for educative relationship reasons, for family/children disciplinary purposes, for social chatting and for communication about special events such as birthdays and family celebrations.

The Director of Mining Family Matters indicated that they also publish material online, citing a document titled *The Survival Guide for Families* [<http://miningfm.com.au/contact-us/survival-guide.html>] which has sold 28,000 copies since being placed on-line in 2010. In addition, their on-line blog enables people to access a chat forum, a monthly on-line magazine as well as services such as a psychologist who uses a question and answer (Q & A), to address hot topics and provide generalised feedback to the on-line FIFO/DIDO community about problems. One of the most recent posts from the psychologist is a piece on adolescents and FIFO working arrangements [<http://miningfm.com.au/ask-our-experts/psychologist.html>].

There was also comment about the importance of normalising matters in FIFO families with regard to relationship behaviours, routines and ways of working. An example was cited in a FIFO family situation that instead of the not away parent using a countdown about the days until the away FIFO partner returned home, the family discussion was centred on "when the away partner came home from work" instead. Using a "countdown" approach to the away partner's return was said to be potentially prolonging non-normal working arrangements for the children of the family.

The normalisation of family life, including the working arrangements, was seen as critical to ensuring that anxieties, disruptions and worries were confined to small day-to-day matters for which a strategy was usually in place to contain them. These strategies, more often than not, were enabled and facilitated by good ICT interfaces such as Skype, Facebook and email, implying that good communication technology interfaces on mine sites and in homes was beneficial.

Whilst it may be anecdotal, the evidence that has been gathered both from the written submissions made to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of "fly-in, fly-out" (FIFO) and "drive-in, drive-out" (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, and also in many of the discussions, have centred on the importance of family cohesion for those in FIFO/DIDO working arrangements.

A quote that is worth noting about the perception of family cohesion being disrupted by FIFO working, from a resident of the Goldfields-Esperance region is found in Submission 39 to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on regional Australia's *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*.

Indeed, some years ago I ran into an old friend who was working as a registrar of the Family Court who queried me about FIFO on the basis that there seemed to be a very high preponderance of FIFO workers involved in matters before the Court. Indeed, there were often whole days where every case involved a FIFO relationship breakdown.
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Browning, 2011, Submission 39, p.2 [Accessed 15/10/2011]

Another telling comment from one of the unidentified discussants in this study was:

*"FIFO - yeah, Fly In, F*** Off and Facebook; that's what happened when family relationships breakdown as a result of this way of working." (Miner 1)*

It is to be noted in the FIFO Families.com submission to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*; that, although in the interview that the researcher had with them, there was little acknowledgment of mental health issues, the respondent further states:

FIFO Families members openly share their experiences of being a FIFO partner and the experiences seem to replicate and are shared by so many partners/families. The main impacts on the non FIFO partner are feeling isolated, lonely, highly stressed and at times exhausted from being the sole carer for children whilst the FIFO parent is working away. There can be a feeling of disconnect between the FIFO worker and partner at home and also between the FIFO worker and children. This disconnect has the potential to seed family breakdown.
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Ashby, 2011; Submission 48, pp. 3-4 [Accessed 15/10/2011]

Further, Ashby (2011) cites statistics from another source about mental health issues in the FIFO community:

At the end of last year, the Australasian Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health reported that the rate of suicide of male miners is 4 times [four] greater than that of the general male population. This figure is staggering and worth investigating on its own merit. The common thread between people who attempt and who commit suicide is that they feel isolated. It is not only the non- FIFO worker that feels this level of disconnect and isolation but also the FIFO workers themselves.
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Ashby, 2011 Submission 48, p. 4 [Accessed 15/10/2011]

In an analysis of the on-line blogs associated with mfmatters.com and fifofamilies.com, during the period of the research, no on-line discussion has or can be identified with mental health issues; most on-line "chat" was about meeting up and the next social event. More focussed on-line discussion was about practical survival strategies; hence the previous reference to the Survival Guide for Families document, that evolved out of on-line blog information on the miningfm.com website [<http://miningfm.com.au/contact-us/survival-guide.html>].

Further, an assumption can be made that the on-line forums are most likely far too public for mental health issues to be raised, in an industry where most people and their families are financially benefiting from the FIFO lifestyle. Concerns are noted in the submission by Mining Family Matters (miningfm.com) the House of Representative's Sanding Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of "fly-in, fly-out" (FIFO) and "drive-in, drive-out" (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia.*

"Families chatting on the Mining Family Matters website generally acknowledge the benefits of FIFO/DIDO as improved household income, greater opportunities for the miner to participate in daily family activities during rostered time off, career stability for the partner at home and better health and education offerings and public infrastructure in cities and larger regional centres.

That's not to say FIFO/DIDO families don't accept that there are challenges. I actually decided to establish Mining Family Matters after struggling to find resources to help my children cope with regular separation from their dad when he started working FIFO.

Other pressures regularly raised by families on the website include consistency and unity with parenting, arguments over prioritising time together, loneliness and insecurity when separated (especially in the early days), mood swings, and the need for strong communication and family goal setting. But overwhelmingly, mining families are aware of the issues and keen to work out strategies to ensure their relationships remain healthy.

<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>

MFM, 2011, Submission 28, p.2 [Accessed 15/10/2011]

4.3 COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND FACILITIES

During the research, discussions with community health individuals and the other associated community workers in the region noted that FIFO, DIDO and fully residential mining workers present a variety of challenges to the towns in the region. Due to the time and geographic limitations of this study, only two community workers were interviewed. Both raised issues of concern with substance use and/or overuse of prescribed medication to treat mental health problems.

Specifically, it was identified in the community health sector in a predominantly FIFO environment, that the over consumption of alcohol was considered as a health concern for individuals and a safety concern for employers.

In the other community, there was anecdotal evidence that mining employees (those who were living in the town and being transported by bus out to the mine site) were being encouraged not to attend work (in other words, to "blow a shift" so they didn't "blow on site"). This was also confirmed in discussions with a DIDO worker.

Moreover, there were concerns raised in one of the towns, by community workers, that non-working partners of residential mine employees were lacking adequate support groups to cope

with both their social isolation and any parenting responsibilities they had. This was seen to manifest in the overuse or dependency on prescription medication to treat anxieties.

In relation to this perceived concern for mental health and mental health issues, three specific recommendations made by the National Rural Health Alliance (Inc.) submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia* [NRHA, 2011, Submission 119, p.13, <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>; Accessed 25/10/2011] :

Research into the impact on communities that are sending large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers to mine sites should include impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of these workers and their families.

Given the impacts of FIFO practices on both the families and communities involved, increased family support should be provided and greater attention given to community development and sustainability in areas where the practices are common.

Companies that engage in large-scale FIFO work practices should give detailed attention to the impact on the families involved and be responsive to the needs and circumstances of specific individuals and families.

These recommendations are consistent with the anecdotal evidence that has been gathered and emerged from the discussion in this research.

Concerns related to of qualified professionals and the availability of professional services to communities in the region can be noted by the following quote from a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on regional Australia's *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, by a small community association at the far north eastern end of the S.E Goldfields region.

Other mines have on-site physio's, and staff benefit in terms of better health and the mines potentially gain better productivity and less loss of injury recovery time if there is regular physio available but so far this offer has not been taken up. Similarly our town can provide mental health counselling and some other respite/ care services part time as well.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>
Mouritz, 2011, Submission 7, p.2 [Accessed 18/10/2011]

With regard to any discussion about the availability of mental health services and the mental health outreach services in the wider community in the region, such as Esperance, and more poignantly in towns such as Hopetoun, Hyden, Norseman and Ravensthorpe, there is currently limited capacity for the delivery of such services by BOICO. Any workforce growth associated with the resources sector, in these places, will require sounder planning. Any proposed delivery of mental health outreach services to a FIFO/DIDO workforce and/or community should be considered on the basis of the provision of specific baseline data. Statistics and information in relation to the extent (how many) and the nature (predominantly

what demographic) of the FIFO/DIDO and/or residential workforce in any given locality or town, is essential for the region, to better target any service delivery.

4.4 MINERS

Three structured interviews were conducted with mining organisations operating in the S.E. Goldfields regional resources sector. In addition, a resources sector industry body/professional association headquartered in Perth which covers Western Australia, was canvassed for opinions. Common threads emanating from the discussions are listed in point form below, in no specific order of importance or sequence.

- i FIFO and DIDO and/or a combination of these work arrangements were important to the resources industry and the Australian economy.
- i Most miners would prefer to have "families" residential in the local community for issues relating to family stability, a happy workforce and a better localised lifestyle. This is synonymous with the "happy wife/happy life" phrase that is commonly used by the resources industry workers.
- i The 457 visa workers that were predominantly residential to the community, in which a mine was operating, also presented challenges to the existing EAP (employee assistance programs). This is because of the nature of the non-employed partner and their professional or lifestyle expectations in a regional /small town setting. Some of the issues were related to the availability of suitable employment, education or recreational facilities whilst others related to the lack of family support and social and retail infrastructure.
- i Drug and alcohol abuse or overuse was discussed generally. Some of those interviewed indicated that they believed that in the resources industry, abuse, misuse and overuse of both legal and illegal substances was better contained under the current testing regime that was in force in all mining companies. It is questionable for those in the industry to draw conclusions such as these.
- i A current practice of managers or supervisors to avoid Occupational Health and Safety concerns amongst FIFO/DIDO and other resource sector employees is to advise them not to present for a shift if they are deemed to be likely to "blow over" (record an unacceptable test reading).
- i Partners/spouses, families and FIFO/DIDO workers themselves sought out "family friendly rosters" as much as possible, and therefore it was in the interests of mining companies from a workforce attraction and skilled employee retention perspective, to develop shifts and rosters to suit their workforce, keep the staff (and often, therefore, the family) happy when working in a FIFO/DIDO arrangement.
- i Mental health concerns were minimal; however it is to be noted that in some instances, employers had sought assistance for some of their staff from local GPs and also local community support services.
- i Isolation of spouses/partners, whether they were residential or in FIFO arrangements locally based or in other places, was considered an important factor in creating a set of anxieties that were seen as nominally discrete to the FIFO family.
- i Access to go ICT support, including mobile phone coverage for regional areas (especially for DIDO workers) and improved access to satellite technology was seen as important for both safety and operational reasons. Moreover, ICT was seen as critical in enabling more conducive communication between families involved in FIFO/DIDO working arrangements

These points can generally be considered consistent with both published and unpublished research studies into FIFO (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; and Sibbel, 2001). Moreover, they are supported anecdotally by discussions held with a Director of one of the on-line FIFO and mining family support groups. In addition, the emphasis on ICT as an enabler and facilitator of better communication between the sector families was an emerging theme as the study progressed.

With regard to the nominal notion of the mining resources industry being male dominated, it was interesting to note that better communication between individuals and families and more realistic provision of counselling, psychological and mental health services should be considered. In a recent publication specifically related to work with the mining resources sector and occupational health and safety, Dr Jennifer Bowers (2011) notes that:

"Alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, social isolation and the risk of suicide often go unaddressed in favour of other, more mundane things like employment, decent housing and access to medical and education services. Men, in particular, are at risk as they naturally tend to be stoic. The mining industry, where we've been doing work recently, is pretty blokey and macho, and mental health is not really something men talk about."
(Bowers, 2011)

The mental health challenges facing rural and remote Australians are real and potentially more destructive than in metropolitan areas, thus underlining the need to be more proactive in and around an industry such as mining where the culture of the resources sector is underpinned by *blokey* and *macho* behaviour. The need to be more aware of the impact of FIFO/DIDO working arrangements and the effect on families should not be underestimated.

The FIFO phenomena has also been somewhat negatively portrayed in the industry and the press with economic undertones as *FLY IN and FLY OVER*, which according to industry sources that were interviewed, implies that there is a lack of economic commitment which the workers and the mining companies themselves using these working arrangements, have to regional communities. All companies interviewed indicated a preference for a residential workforce, but noted that with the skill requirements, and labour shortages, it was often not a feasible option. A combination of FIFO/DIDO/residential was seen as a viable option.

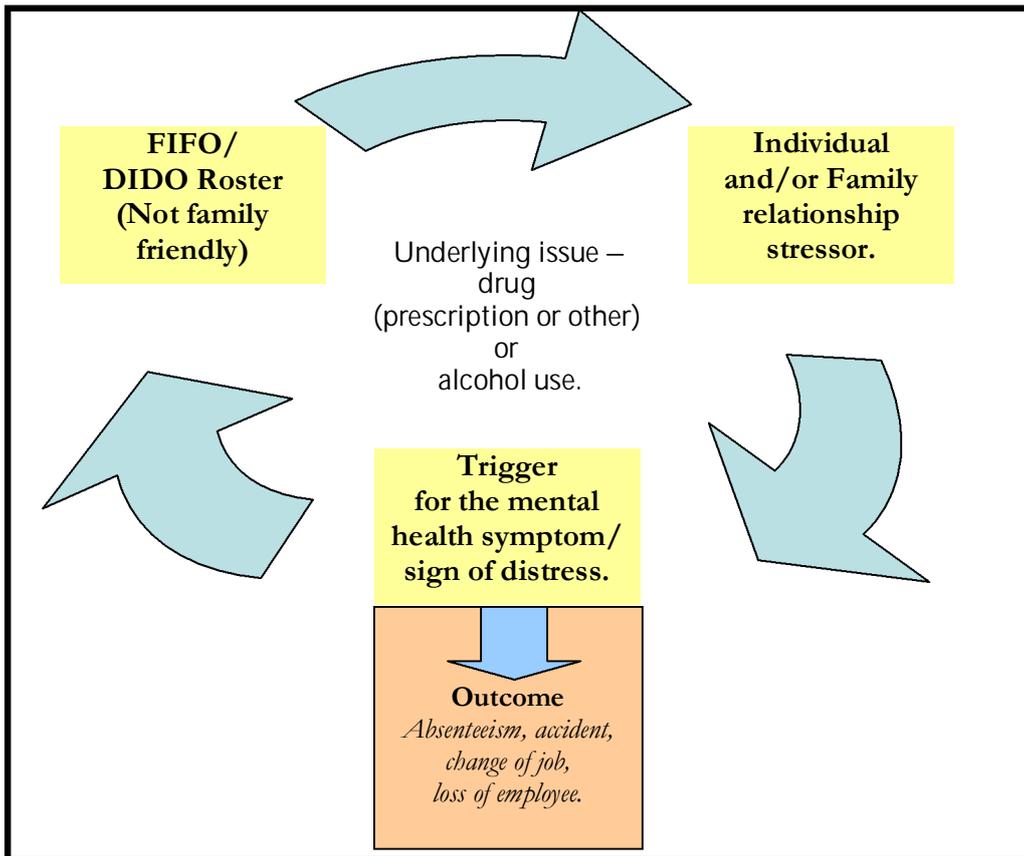
SECTION SUMMARY

In summary, the model diagrammed in Figure 3 below represents how the researcher perceives the impact of rosters on relationships and families for those who are involved in FIFO/DIDO working arrangements. Lower end of the mental health spectrum disorders (worries, anxieties and depressions) are seen to be a result of the pressures that rosters, which were not family friendly, place on the ability of individuals and families to cope with the stresses that FIFO, and to some extent, DIDO working arrangements, evoke.

Individuals, both the working away partner and the not away partner are sometimes at risk to drug (prescribed and unprescribed) and alcohol abuse, misuse or overuse. This, of course, presents challenges to mining work places, family or partner relationships and communities that do not have the necessary social support and service infrastructure to cope with issues such as these, and any associated mental health implications.

In addition, with the impact, there is a potential economic cost to the miner with absenteeism, turnover and relocation; an economic and social cost to the individual and family; and a wider social cost to the community. These relationships are diagrammed below.

Figure 3: Summary Diagram of the Interactions (a)
between FIFO/DIDO work arrangement rosters
and
individual/family relationship stressors and triggers.

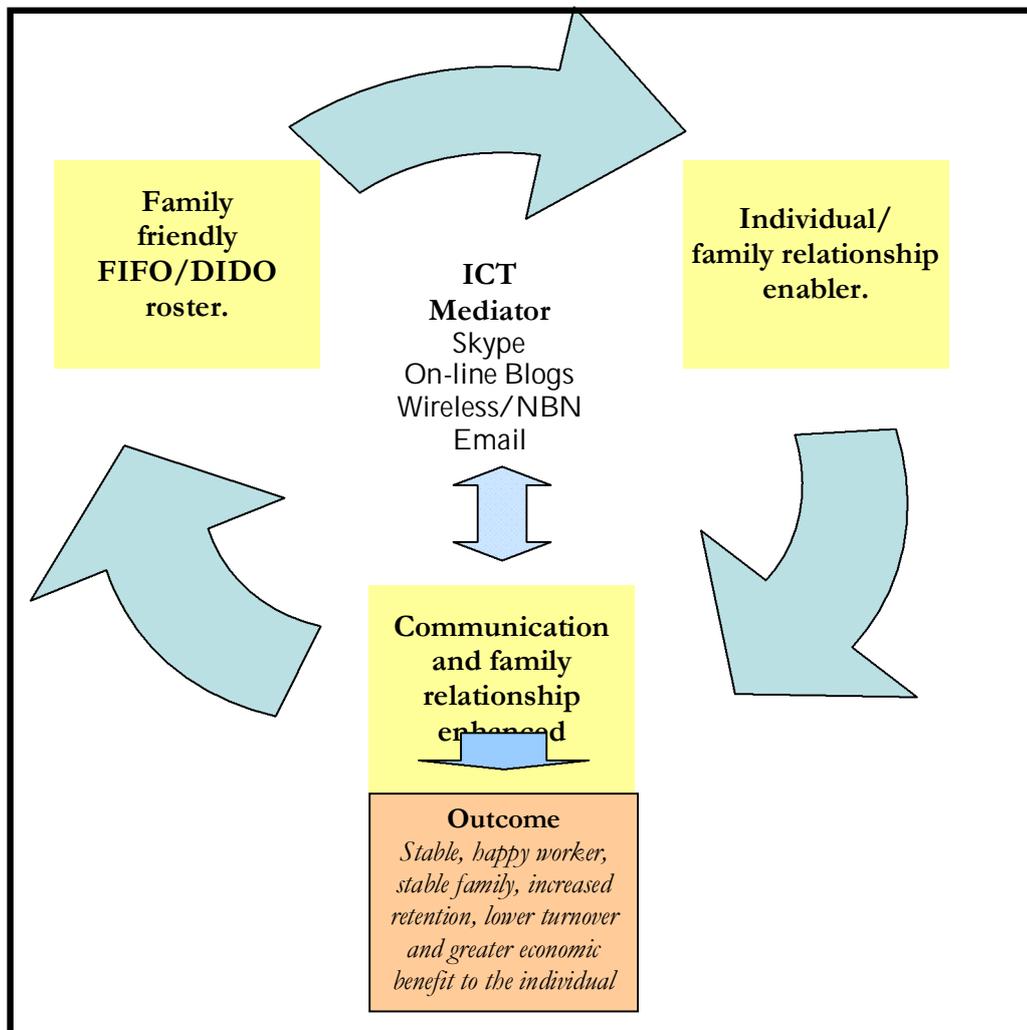


Apart from the economic costs, at a community level, any resultant mental health disorder has enormous consequences for individuals and families. It is therefore imperative to consider how any early intervention strategies aimed at normalising individual and family relationships can be enhanced for the FIFO/DIDO working arrangements. Much of the discussion with miners and the on-line support groups centred on the importance of communication to family life.

The model in Figure 4 below diagrammatically represents how the researcher perceives the impact of family friendly rosters on assisting to enable improved relationships for individuals and in families for those who are involved in FIFO/DIDO working arrangements. Most critically, the improved use of ICT and better access to IT facilities are seen as important to mediating family relationship communication for people in FIFO/DIDO working situations.

Figure 4: Summary Diagram of the Interactions (b)

between FIFO/DIDO work arrangement
family friendly rosters
and
individual/family relationship enablers and enhancers.



With what is perceived a family friendly roster (many such variations can be noted, such as 2 weeks on/2 weeks off, 8 days on/6 days off, 9 days on/5 days off), family relationships are enhanced. Time away on-site can be improved and relationships are also potentially enhanced by the increased availability and use of better ICT such as Skype, on-line blogs, social networking, and email. The roll-out of the National Broadband Network (NBN) that was identified as a critical infrastructure by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy (WA) in their submission to the House of Representatives Parliamentary Standing Committee on regional Australia *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia* was seen as critical to improving remote communications and the access to technological facilities. This also includes facilities at Community Resource Centre³ (CRC³).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sets of recommendations are made as a result of the discussions, investigations and research, In addition, a summary model of proposed service delivery is diagrammed in Figure 5.

5.1 LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH INTO THE 'NORMALISATION' EFFECTS OF THE FIFO/DIDO WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

It is proposed that a regionalised (S.E. Goldfields Region and/or the whole of Goldfields – see Submission 14 to the Parliamentary Inquiry) longitudinal study is conducted over a time period of three (3) years. This would be aimed at assessing the psychosocial impact of long term FIFO and/or DIDO employment on the mental health of employees in the sector.

This research should consider:

- (a) At what point anxiety and depressions become apparent, and what triggers the progress on the continuum from sad, worried, anxious to clinically depressed.
- (b) At what point the effects of the FIFO/DIDO lifestyle is 'normalised' within the FIFO/DIDO family;
- (c) What parts of the family is most at risk (therefore determining those most needing support) the FIFO/DIDO worker, the not away/not working partner, the child/children or the family unit as a whole;
- (d) How does ICT assist the FIFO/DIDO worker, the not away/not working partner, and the family unit as a whole in terms of coping, and enabling communication with regard to family relationship support and potentially, the delivery of mental health services?
- (e) What mental health disorder(s) in the longer term become apparent?

Underpinning this research, there should be a consideration of how the application of the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs, including DUO and also the Family Support Programs that MIFWA are currently hosting could be adapted and delivered in the region.

5.2 WELL WAYS SUITE OF PROGRAMS AND THE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

It is proposed that an adapted Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs should encompass the 'family' aspects of the Family Support Program run by MIFWA that is already in operation in the North Eastern Suburbs. These programs should target specific communities in the S.E. Goldfields, dependent on the nature of the mining (resources) sector local workforce (e.g. FIFO/DIDO and Residential).

5.2.1 Hopetoun

A predominantly DIDO workforce (many residents are driving to a lithium mine north of the town) and a residential workforce (others families are residing in company houses within Hopetoun and are 'bussed to work'). There is a perceived need for mental health support for the young parents (particularly for the non-working spouse) who are often isolated, anxious and have been noted by community workers to be seeking medication to relieve symptoms of lower end of the spectrum mental health disorders.

5.2.2 Ravensthorpe

With the forthcoming development of Phillips River Mining operations, workers will either be residential (as is desired by the mining operators) or FIFO if a local workforce is not available. It is important that the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs is delivered as an outreach service into Ravensthorpe. This would be for access by camp employees and predominantly available at the beginning or end of shifts, or by agreement (and contract) by Carer facilitators as service providers for mental health.

5.2.3 Norseman

With the perceived and potential longevity of the existing gold mining operations in Norseman, and the development of smaller mines to the north and to the south east of the town, there appears a three fold approach to the provision of services in Norseman:

(a) Servicing the existing FIFO workforce that is flown into Norseman via Esperance Airport (some 25kms from Esperance) and driven to Norseman, by initiating the DUO program in the community.

(b) Servicing the proposed growth of a residential workforce (e.g. incoming 457 visa families). This is based on the assumption by a Mine Manager that many of the non-working spouses could be semi-professionals and/or have young families. This proposed servicing would use an adapted Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs that interface with the Family Support Program counselling.

(c) Servicing a potential growing DIDO workforce in the community by using the Well Ways suite in combination with the Well Ways DUO program.

5.3 BOICO OUTREACH IN THE S.E. GOLDFIELDS

It is proposed to develop the capacity of BOICO employees to service the outreach to the communities of Norseman, Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun. This would involve training of staff, developing an integrated model of service delivery, adapting the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs, specifically to more fully integrate DUO and the Family Support Program as an appropriate strategy.

5.4 ESPERANCE BASELINE INFORMATION

It is proposed to find some specific baseline information and easily accessible data relating to FIFO/DIDO employees and families in Esperance. Statistical information is important for strategic planning purposes, and presenting the case for adapting the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs with the Family Support Program and extending this into Esperance. There is anecdotal evidence that a number of workers in Esperance are FIFO or DIDO but don't necessarily publicly identify that they are in these working arrangements.

5.5 MIFWA AND THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF PERTH, WA

Investigating with MIFWA as to whether the Family Support Program currently being delivered in the North Metropolitan Area of Perth can be extended by accessing increased funding and complimentary services to extend provision in the South Eastern and Southern Corridor of Perth, where there appears to be a significant growth of resident FIFO families.

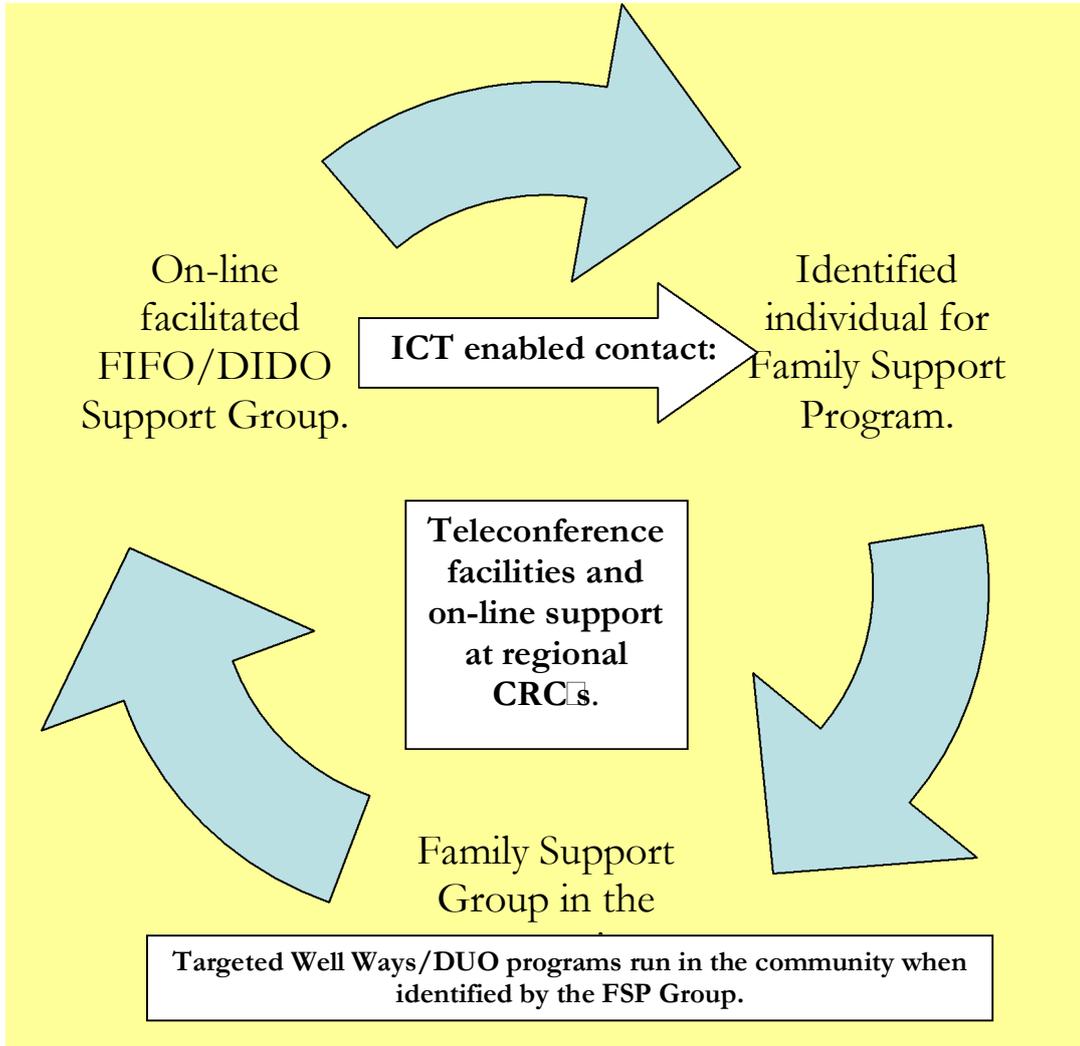
6. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Family Support Program, adapted to incorporate parts of the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs, and specifically its DUO component, offered by MIFWA currently in the North Metropolitan region of Perth, has the propensity to deliver to the mining sector a support intervention to assist in ameliorating some of the long term effects of FIFO/DIDO working arrangements on the family unit.

We envisage this to be represented procedurally as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Summary Model of the Research Outcomes

**Model showing Family Support Program adapted to apply to the context of a
FIFO/DIDO
On-Line Support Group**



7. CONCLUSIONS

The research is limited in its scope. The concept of a Feasibility Study is to undertake some preliminary research and gather information to ascertain whether there is a need to proceed to more thorough investigations, so as to develop interventions based on data that is more comprehensive. This would provide better evidence and more information to MIFWA and BOICO in using statistical evidence for the promotion and development of more robust mental health services in the community.

Increasingly, baseline data will be needed to develop appropriate interventions into an "unidentified" FIFO/DIDO community within the region. There is little accurate statistical data on the proportion of the Esperance population and region that are employed under FIFO/DIDO working arrangements. Moreover, miners cannot (or will not) provide accurate statistics on their FIFO/DIDO work forces for fear of upsetting local communities and decision makers whose livelihoods prosper much more under residential arrangements.

Earlier research studies have confined discussions to the positive benefits of FIFO (a number of unpublished academic papers have been read or cited in this study). With an increase in the number of FIFO/DIDO people in working arrangements and more public awareness of lower end of the spectrum mental health disorders in the community, combined with more structured Employee Assistance Programs offered by resources companies, there is scope for MIFWA/BOICO to be more actively involved in promoting the Well Ways suite of evidence based peer education programs and Family Support Programs as part of wider community support for individuals and families.

Whilst it may be anecdotal, evidence has been gathered both from written submissions to the House of Representatives Sanding Committee on regional Australia's "Inquiry into the Use of 'fly in, fly out' (FIFO) and 'drive in, drive out' (DIDO) Workforce Practices in regional Australia, and in discussions centred on the importance of family cohesion in the FIFO/DIDO relationship. It is useful at this point to acknowledge the perspective of emerging researchers in this area (Bowers, 2011):

"We know there's a need for more information and research on mental health in these sectors. The research that currently exists is qualitative and is derived from very small sample sizes compared to the size of the workforce."

Finally, what is clear is that in an analysis of the growth and preponderance of the FIFO phenomena has lead to a sense of "normalisation" of this way of working; perhaps papering over the cracks in internal family relationship dynamics. We question why there has been the need to develop the on-line social support groups such as Mining Family Matters [miningfm.com.au] and FIFO Families [fifofamilies.com.au] in the last two years.

We propose to develop evidence based research, in combination with the practical use of the facility of ICT to more actively engage with FIFO/DIDO workers, their families and local communities to deliver more strategic mental health outreach services to the region.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Letter of Introduction



2 August 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter is to introduce Dr Patricia Thomson who is contracted to conduct a feasibility study on behalf of the Bay of Isles Community Outreach Inc (BOICO), Esperance and in collaboration with the Mental Illness Fellowship of Western Australia (MIFWA). This study seeks to investigate and identify mental health services provided for employees within the mining industry, and their families.

Your participation in this ground breaking study is important for the South East Goldfield's region, and all rural and remote mining sectors. It is anticipated that this study will provide sound evidence for the development of appropriate services for this specific demographic of Australians that may assist with education, information, support and improved networks with others.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Pam Gardner
Project Manager
BOICO Board

Veronica Young
Chairperson
BOICO Board

APPENDIX 2

- Terms of Reference -
Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO)
workforce practices in regional Australia.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ra/fifodido/tor.htm>

Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on regional Australia will inquire into and report on the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia, with specific reference to:

- i the extent and projected growth in FIFO/DIDO work practices, including in which regions and key industries this practice is utilised;
- i costs and benefits for companies, and individuals, choosing a FIFO/DIDO workforce as an alternative to a resident workforce;
- i the effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;
- i the impact on communities sending large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers to mine sites;
- i long term strategies for economic diversification in towns with large FIFO/DIDO workforces;
- i key skill sets targeted for mobile workforce employment, and opportunities for ongoing training and development;
- i provision of services, infrastructure and housing availability for FIFO/DIDO workforce employees;
- i strategies to optimise FIFO/DIDO experience for employees and their families, communities and industry;
- i potential opportunities for non-mining communities with narrow economic bases to diversify their economic base by providing a FIFO/DIDO workforce;
- i current initiatives and responses of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments; and
- i any other related matter.

APPENDIX 4

**Copy of Questionnaire Used For
Minerals and Energy Industry/
Professional Association and Questionnaire Used For Miners**

1. What issues in terms of lower level anxieties are important to acknowledge as being evident in the FIFO/DIDO workforce?

2. In regard to a FIFO workforce, what issues would you think important in family support?

3. Where do you think most of the support would be needed:

- For the FIFO worker
- For the not away partner
- For the children
- For the family unit as a whole

4. What/if any employees assistance programs do you have in place/or intend to put in place to support FIFO employees?

5. What community programs would be of benefit to both FIFO and DIDO workers in your community?

6. Do you think formalised support programs, some of which are being run by the FIFO Families.com organization out of Perth with mining companies, would be useful?

**Thank you very much for participating in this discussion.
All responses will be reported anonymously.**

APPENDIX 5

Full List of Research Subjects and Submissions

RESEARCH SUBJECTS INTERVIEWED

Who	By Method
DIDO Individual	Face-to-face Interview
Educator	Face-to-face Interview
FIFO Family 1	Face-to-face Interview
FIFO Family Support Group (on-line)	Face-to-face Interview
Health Support Group	Face-to-face Interview
Mining Association	Telephone Interview
Miner 1 (including Safety Officer)	Face-to-face Interview
Miner 2	Telephone Interview
Miner 3	Telephone Interview
Mining Family Support Group (on-line)	Telephone Interview
Progress Association	Face-to-face Interview

SUBMISSIONS REVIEWED

Submission No:	By Whom
Submission 7	Hyden Progress Association, Hyden, WA
Submission 14	Kalgoorlie Chamber of Commerce and Industry, WA
Submission 28	Mining Family Matters, Aldgate, SA
Submission 39	Browning, P; Kalgoorlie-Esperance, WA
Submission 48	FIIFO Families, Pty Ltd, Hamilton Hill, WA
Submission 88	Commissioner for Children and Young People, WA
Submission 99	Chamber of Minerals and Energy, WA
Submission 119	National Rural Health Alliance, Deakin, ACT
Submission 122	Sibbel, A; Perth, WA