



Alex Mickle hopes to bring benefits to the mental health of miners through a project creating sculptures. Picture: Mogens Johansen



Pressure wave art used for wellbeing

| John Ely

A project creating sculptures using the pressure waves of explosives is bringing benefits to the mental health of miners, according to the artist.

Coming to Kalgoorlie-Boulder for The Regional Arts Australia Summit: Arts & Edges, the Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA project, in conjunction with Rio Tinto, will feature a masterclass for senior art practitioners.

The artist behind the project, Alex Mickle, said the collaborative art project at Rio Tinto's Paraburdoo mine in the Pilbara had helped to bring mine site workers together.

"We all had to drag in different departments in the mine who would normally never work together, so we had drill and blast engineers, plant and maintenance, transport, health and safety," he said.

"All of those guys then had to get together and say, 'actually how are we going to do this'."

A Parliamentary inquiry into the mental health of WA's fly-in, fly-out workers was launched this week.

Mickle said those working in remote mining areas could experience a lifestyle that was "all about work."

"It's just one long shift then dinner, then breakfast, then back into it," he said.

"Anything that kind of breaks that up a little bit has got to help your sanity.

"This whole project is to trial and see if art can be used as an intervention to increase happiness and community wellbeing."

Mickle said minesite workers were "the perfect fit" for addressing mental health issues.

"They're socially isolated, there's boredom, in a lot of towns ... there's social problems you don't really see or read about that often," he said.

"Art is just one way of trying to address these issues.

"At the end of the day there prob-

ably needs to be a raft of strate-

gies." To engage both resident and FIFO miners on a single project, Mickle said he knew he would need something special.

"How do you get a bloke who's just spent a couple of hours working out in the sun to then spend a couple of hours on his downtime to

build a big steel sculpture?" he said.

"And that's where the idea of blast forming first arose.

"It's something I thought would be attractive to those guys and that a lot of people would broadly be interested in."