Attracting and retaining mobile skilled workers: benefits for rural communities

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Abstract

Today's rural workforce is highly mobile. GPs, teachers and administrators no longer spend their working lives in one country town. In addition a range of groups such as sea/tree changers, seasonal workers, executive staff suffering from high levels of stress and 'grey nomads' are moving to rural areas, often only to move on again after a few years. Other factors, such as the resources boom, changing industrial laws and the economic crisis have also had an impact on the availability of highly skilled workers to practice in rural commuities.

Work by Florida (2003) on the Creative Class suggests regions should try to target people such as professionals to come and live and work because of their ability to boost economic activity, but there is no research on capturing advantages from highly skilled people who transit through communities and regions.

This paper presents preliminary findings from a research project on the benefits to rural communities of mobile skilled workers. A case study approach was adopted, with the current findings based on three sites in Australia, one each from Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania.

The preliminary findings presented here have identified a number of benefits flowing from the presence of mobile skilled workers that cover social, economic and environmental factors. The practical implications of these findings are discussed as they apply to Australia and beyond.

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Introduction

Over the past 50 years rural communities in Australia have witnessed the movement of people, particularly youth, toward urban areas. This drift has led to the demise of some communities and stagnation of many others. There has been a number of studies reporting on this phenomena, however little has been done to reverse the trend. Recently the prolonged drought and resources boom exaserbated the movement of professional and other highly skilled people from rural communities with skilled workers leaving rural areas for well paid work in the mines.

These factors have impacted on the attractiveness of rural communities for professionals. While professionals may wish to live and work in rural areas many factors conspire against them making the move. Yet it is in rural communities' interests to attract and retain highly skilled workers, it has been suggested, as they have the ability to boost economic activity (Florida 2004) through their ability to build and inspire community development, the introduction of new ideas, their leadership and ability to attract other professionals so that rural communities can be sustainable.

However there is little research that has investigated the effect and benefits of highly skilled people who transit through communities in regional areas. This paper reports on a study investigating how rural communities can gain advantage from skilled workers who move through a community. It addresses the questions "What benefits can flow to rural communities from highly skilled but mobile workers, beyond the practice of their skills during their stay in the community?" and "What benefits can accrue during the workers' stay?"

Background to the project

This project evolved from a workshop conducted at SEGRA06 in Launceston. The workshop joined academics, local government participants and funding bodies to look at current issues worthy of investigation. The mobile skilled workforce: optimising benefits for rural communities was successful in obtaining Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) funding.

Within our community some people choose to adopt a 'walk-about' lifestyle whether it be to pursue employment opportunities or to improve the lifestyle of their current situation. Lifestyle mobile workers are more likely to have come from further afield, often driven by the natural environment and the attraction of a safe place to raise a family (HallAitken 2007). It is not uncommon for lifestyle mobile workers (including retirees) to have prior knowledge of the rural area because they had spent holidays there (HallAitken 2007; Rodriguez 2001). For some mobile workers the driving force for their move is generally not higher income with some workers taking a reduction in salary, but that this was compensated by better quality of life.

Previous research has identified and examined a number of mobile skilled worker types. These include seasonal workers, professionals and retirees. Seasonal workers are largely (but not always) driven by employment/financial reasons while professionals are driven by employment or a combination of lifestyle and employment reasons, and retirees by lifestyle reasons (HallAitken 2007).

At a national level, skilled workers are more likely to migrate to places with low unemployment and high real income, such as mining towns, while older people (over 55) are moving out of such places into high unemployment and low real income areas (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research 2006). This explains the link between high unemployment and rapid ageing, in certain regions. Such regions are also likely to have no or limited university or TAFE courses, meaning that many of the skill requirements will need to be met by migration.

The tourism and agricultural industries tend to have a large demand for seasonal workers and much of the research refers to seasonal workers with a lower skills base, and to issues impacting on their work and family life (Kilpatrick and Bound 2005). However not all people working in these industries are necessarily lowly skilled. They may be working outside their area of skill picking up itinerant work to assist their own travel or lifestyle motivations.

Professional skilled workers include those in the health, education and police services as well as entrepreneurs who have a diverse range of skills. The shortage of medical practitioners in rural areas has led to research on locums (Hall et al. 2007), as well policy to attract overseas trained medical practitioners and specialists seeking residency in Australia. Overseas practitioners are required to serve a period of time in a rural area through the Rural Locum Relief Program or other rural Recruitment schemes (Han and Humphreys 2005; Wilks, Oakley Browne, and Jenner 2008).

Teachers including those from TAFE, Adult Learning programs and University academics are a group of professionals who have options to choose work in rural areas. Schools have been identified as important in community renewal (Kilpatrick et al. 2002; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2001) as they not only provide skilled people who develop important partnerships but also the infrastructure to support renewal programs (Kilpatrick and Loechel 2004).

The police service now relies to a much greater extent on reaching out to the community and undertaking education and partnering programs to assist communities in dealing with crime and security issues. Management and leadership skills are emphasized in the modern police service. Mobility is seen as being part of the process of promotion in the service opportunities in rural areas can facilitate a young officer's rapid progression (HallAitken 2007).

In the private sector entrepreneurs avail themselves to opportunities for new enterprises and test new ideas in rural areas. Kalantaridis & Bika (2006) report on in-migrant entrepreneurs to rural Cumbria in the UK. This group could constitute part of the mobile workforce, in that not all will remain in rural areas, depending on the success of their venture. Compared with local entrepreneurs, they found in-migrant entrepreneurs have relatively high levels of education, many have come from managerial backgrounds, and have significantly higher level of managerial experience, qualifications and training.

The 'grey nomad' phenomena of retirees engaging in travel is well documented. A number are involved in voluntary or paid work during their travel to supplement their income or enable them to travel more extensively. Many will volunteer in order to stay active or to seek new ideas in their later years. Grey nomads are also recognised as a new group of seasonal workers and have been identified as 'sought after' because they have an established work ethic, their own transport, and mobile accommodation (Onyx, Leonard,

and Maher 2008; Rural Skills Australia 2005). Early retirees also 'reinvent' themselves by moving to a rural community and purchase or establish a business (Curry, Koczberski, and Selwood 2001).

Each of the groups above, while not an exhaustive list of all mobile skilled workers, have been identified as making valuable contributions to the community outside their professional skill areas.

Potential Benefits from Newcomers

The benefits a newcomer can bring to a rural community can be broadly grouped into three categories: economic, social and environmental, although there is overlap between the categories. The migration of any person to a rural community will have an economic impact through their consumption and demand created for services. However professional workers are able to bring new skills and ideas, in doing so they increase the workforces' diversity and dynamism (HallAitken 2007). Further, they arrest the brain drain of the young and other dynamic individuals from rural areas, increase the number of business ventures, offering employment and income opportunities and recruit skilled workers from outside the region, increasing the skills base available to the community (Kalantaridis and Bika 2006).

In-migrants, it is argued, also facilitate the flow of information, particularly from external sources, by drawing on external knowledge and resources. This enhances integration of rural economies in national and global markets. 'It is this 'accumulated capital' of networks and contacts, the result of their distinct (non-local) life trajectories, that make new arrivals sources of innovation and change in the countryside' (Kalantaridis and Bika 2006 p. 126).

The innovation that is experienced in the economy overlaps with the social and cultural benefits that have been identified arising from skilled workers moving into a rural community. In addition to the economic capital they bring, there is also social capital to which they can contribute. Research by Woolcock (1999) and (2001) indicates that social capital comprises three dimensions: bonding (close and often closed networks such as those relating to family or ethnic groups); bridging (ties with a diverse range of individual s and organisations that promote more generalized trust), and linking (ties with individuals or institutions in power or authority such as law and order, government, universities and major businesses). Effective partnerships for community development rely on the development of both internal and external, or horizontal and vertical ties (Taylor, Wilkinson, and Cheers 2008 re health and human service partnerships). Research suggests that rural communities have lower levels of bridging and liking social capital compared with urban communities (Onyx and Bullen 2001; Stone and Hughes 2001). Mobile skilled workers are a potential rich source of bridging and linking social capital.

For mobile workers who are moving to a rural community for lifestyle reasons the environment and culture become important. Curry, Koczberski and Selwood (2001) have identified the role of in-migrant alternative lifestylers in Denmark, Western Australia, who have been involved in the conservation of the natural environment, and environmentally sensitive agribusiness. In turn, this has increased the tourist potential of the region. In another paper Gibson (2002) has reported on the transformation of the music scene of the far north coast of NSW to one of prominence based on musicians moving to the area and the role of educational organizations such as Southern Cross University and the Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA).

There is also the potential for negative outcomes that should not be overlooked in this area. Any migrant has the potential to take the job of a local resident and migrants who appear and are culturally different may encounter resistance from the community or be singled out for racial exclusion. There is also the potential loss that occurs when in-migrant entrepreneurs promote knowledge diffusion outside the locality rather than within it, thus weakening local ties and contributing to exclusion of local inhabitants (Kalantaridis and Bika 2006).

While the literature identifies potential economic, social and environmental benefits arising from skilled workers there has been little research undertaken specifically in the area of mobile skilled workers. This research sought to investigate the question: how can rural communities capture maximum benefit from professional and other highly skilled workers in the context of an increasingly mobile and transitory workforce? In particular this paper addresses the question: what benefits can flow to rural communities from highly skilled but mobile workers, beyond the practice of their skills during their stay in the community? What benefits can accrue during the workers' stay? What legacy can remain after the worker has left? The following section provides a profile of the three communities investigated in the study.

The study

Six sites were chosen for the study that would provide diverse rural communities. This paper reports preliminary results from the first three sites in Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland.

The Tasmanian site is located centrally, and comprises two adjacent small population centres. The site is part of a larger Local Government Area, with a total population of 12 091 people. The site has a largely Anglo Saxon and aging population. The towns are well known for their significant heritage buildings and associated tourism industry, as well as fine wool production and forestry activities. There is a strong sense of community pride, and the site has been a former Tidy Towns competition winner.

The Queensland site is located centrally on the eastern coast, the region has an estimated population of 13,500. There has been a steady increase in population in recent times although the population is aging. The local economy is largely driven by agriculture, mining and tourism.

The New South Wales site is located inland from the coast in the north of the state. The site has an urban population of approximately 2,100 and is located within a Local Government Area with a population of approximately 9,000. The area relies largely on the agriculture and forestry industry for employment although tourism is becoming an important part of the economy. The area is aging and has a relatively high unemployment rate.

Mobile workers included in the study ranged in age from 26 to over 65 years and covered the groups of highly skilled retirees, employees from the government sector (local government, education and health workers), and small business operators

engaged in retail, tourism and hospitality. These workers are variously leaders of, and participants in, a range of community activities.

Methodology

An exploratory research methodology was utilised to collect data for the project. A total of 44 in-depth interviews were undertaken across the three sites. Respondents were selected based on a snowball sampling method. Nine key informants drawn from local government and agencies were used to identify thirty five mobile skilled workers who had entered or passed through the community in the past three to five years. Mobile workers were also asked to recommend people who were new to the community. A set of questions was used to guide the interviews which were conducted at a time that was convenient to the respondent and lasted between 40 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Analysis was undertaken by the identification of key themes with the assistance of NVivo qualitative analysis software.

Findings

The findings from the study will be reported based on the three broad themes identified in the literature: economic, social and environmental.

Economic Benefits of Mobile Skilled Workers

From an economic perspective a clear contribution made by mobile skilled workers is the injection of money into the community. This was apparent in Tasmania where mobile skilled workers bought or leased property and undertook refurbishment. In some cases they restored historic buildings and maintained culturally significant properties. They also attract visitors to the town by promoting their business outside the area, raising interest and awareness of the town and build tourism potential. Another economic benefit flowing from mobile skilled workers was the employment and income they generated for the local community by employing full-time and part-time staff. Some of these staff are juniors who obtain experience and training as well as their income.

The study also identified a number of less obvious economic benefits such as establishing networks and organising meetings that have an economic development focus. They were also instrumental in establishing alternative business ventures such as farmers markets, re-vitalising the show and running farm tours. Importantly, mobile skilled workers may also be risk takers who will take on a project that local people would not attempt as is evident in the following sections.

Employ Locals
Many mobile skilled workers who operate businesses will employ local people because they realise the value of keeping money in the local economy and utilising local employees. This was seen as a particular benefit when part-time work was made available to school aged children as it was an opportunity for them to earn money after school and further their education.

Choice and Diversity

In many cases mobile skilled workers bring choice and diversity to a community. If they establish new businesses, they tend to differ from existing businesses and add to the variety of products and services on offer. New businesses may be supported by not only the community but also by the extended families of those living in the community. For example in the NSW site one business found that a large proportion of sales were to the visiting family and friends of the locals in the town.

Diversity was also noted among mobile skilled workers who came from different cultures. They organise activities that are new to the community or may employ and introduce different management practices that have not been previously been used. Mobile skilled workers from different cultures also add to the diversity of a community by organising new and different events that can become important to the town. In NSW mobile skilled workers were involved in the establishment of a farmers market, revitalisation of the show and a concert in the park while in Tasmania it was a men's shed and in Queensland a revitalisation of the local Show.

Social/Cultural Benefits from Mobile Skilled Workers

A range of benefits relating to social/cultural factors were evident from the study. A clear benefit was the way that skilled mobile skilled workers assist communities in building capacity. This was evident across the three sites with mobile skilled workers making contributions by being active on local committees, boards, show societies and associations. The mobile skilled workers also volunteered their services to local organisations such as fire, ambulance and police liaision services. Their contributions drew on their professional skills and experiences outside the community to provide new perspectives for the community. By drawing on their their existing networks and enthusiasm they were able to train, educate and deliver benefits for needs that were identified. This led to a sense of pride for the community.

Use of professional skills
Mobile skilled workers were found to draw on their professional skills to assist communities in many ways. For example when preparing grant applications mobile skilled workers used their previous experience in dealing with government to present a professional presentation and arguments for community support an funding. They also have the confidence to approach people for donations and grants. A new manager opened up an organisation to the community and introduced new programs that may not have been considered before.

> *"One of the first things I saw is the way we would decide on what service we'd provide for people was pretty much who came in the door and what we stored we'd give to them. We sort of just plugged in, we'd do a couple of things that you could fit in that pigeon hole and that was it. Whereas and a lot of the service we were providing was only around …town and I just had an idea that there must be a lot of people who are living with a lot more remoteness in the different valleys who were quite isolated, maybe elderly or had a disability that we weren't reaching - one because, they didn't know we were here and two they just didn't understand that maybe help was available. And so I thought, one of the things we do in development is a Conformability and Capacity Assessment. Which is*

> *to not look at the risks but look at where people are actually*
> *vulnerable and then look at what capacity you have to deal with*
> *those vulnerabilities and work out what your program would be from*
> *there. So that was something that I wanted to do"*

The local communities can also draw on the skills and experiences of mobile skilled workers to assist them in specific projects related to their skills. For example in NSW a number of newer residents who had experience in the film industry were enlisted to assist in the development of a centenary anniversiary film for the local government. The successful project led to the submission of other grant applications for local films.

New Perspectives
Mobile skilled workers brought new perspectives to the community. As one key informant who had observed many new mobile skilled workers come to the community explained:

> *"...when people come who are new to an area, they see it with*
> *different eyes and they see things that are not working, I think, often*
> *more clearly."*

The mobile skilled workers we interviewed were found to be prepared to speak out and challenge ideas that were being presented to the community and by expressing their concerns. Many of their ideas were presented as if they were contrary to the current thinking but the mobile skilled workers saw their ideas as practical solutions to problems. It was also found that some mobile skilled workers would accept or adopt a position that had been rejected by the community and turn them around. In one site a mobile worker employed two local people who others in the community would not employ. The ideas are based on a *"more worldly perspective with the bigger picture in mind"* or it may be that they are *"lateral thinkers that come up with ideas outside the box."* In addition to the mobile skilled workers new perspectives were also apparent from spouses, partners and family members that accompanied the mobile skilled workers. These people added to the pool of ideas as they were often included in the discussion of issues at hand.

While some of the ideas and new perspectives can create unwanted change for residents or employees (see negative consequences below) others have the effect of mobilizing people into action and in doing so galvanise the community. This was evident where a number of mobile skilled workers had established businesses that had become 'show pieces' for their community- in Tasmania it was where mobile skilled workers had undertaken renovations to historic buildings, while in NSW a restaurant/B&B was showcased by the LGA. It was apparent that as residents came to know the mobile worker they started to ask them about their background and sought information, ideas and asked for advice.

Use of Networks and Social Capital
Many mobile skilled workers explained how they managed to get their ideas off the ground by talking about contacts they approached or drew on for support. They include personal contacts through to contacts within governments and agencies. It was apparent that local government and health service contacts were particularly important in supporting and assisting many of the projects discussed by mobile skilled workers

we interviewed. The mobile skilled workers also made use of their contacts to help facilitate activities by getting them to do things for the community, such as attend a function, or talk to the community about issues or problems the town may be facing and then develop plans to address them. They also develop both formal and informal partnerships with people from other organisations within the commuity and facilitated partnering between organisations.

In addition to knowing the contacts, success for the projects was dependent on the skills of the mobile worker. In particular, where funding was involved, the ability to write letters and grant applications, lobby, make presentations, discuss ideas and work with the media were important skills that received mention. Other skills included a knowledge of the legal system and practices.

Enthusiasm

Mobile skilled workers were found to be extremely enthusiastic and keen to improve their town. The enthusiasm was evident from conversations with both key informants and mobile skilled workers themselves. New, and young people were perceived as being enthusiastic as a Tasmaninan key informant noted about a new teacher - *"all young teachers bring in a certain amount of enthusiasm."*

Many mobile skilled workers talked about how their enthusiasm becomes infectious. For one worker in NSW they found their enthusiasm was an attractant to those in the community who want assistance with projects or ideas. They also found that people came to them for their opinion on potential projects. Another worker in Tasmania, who had since left the village, had been so enthusiastic about tree pruning that it prompted a general movement in the village that *"took off"* and the *"ripples still continued after she'd gone"*.

Mobile skilled workers enthusiasm is evident in the way they through themselves into many projects for the town. They are often on multiple committees and involved in many of the town's activities. Many drew inspiration on personal skills that they had such as an *'interest in computers', 'a master of ceremonies', 'extensive business experience'* and a willingness to share their knowledge, become involved in activities in the town and because of the type of person they are: *'...he is like that and is prepared to take the time and he's got the contacts and he was in it at [another town] and it just appealed to him"*.

Education and Training

There were a number of examples from the sites where mobile skilled workers provide education and training. This came about because of a perceived need for training or because the mobile worker had specific skills that they could contribute to the community.

The type of education can be different from traditional education. A mobile worker family instigated a farm visit as a result of their children observing that many of their school friends did not have an understanding of how a farm worked. The parents approached the school and a visit was organised that showed the children over the farm and what was involved in growing and distributing the produce to market.

Mobile skilled workers also encourage students to consider other educational opportunities and life experiences when they talk about their experiences. In Queensland a mobile worker told the story of how they had talked to students about their own children's experiences of being a youth ambasador and rotary exchange student and how they encouraged students to go to University and have aspirations to further education and travel. Another mobile worker in Tasmania told of how they encouraged a trainee to return to school to continue their education.

Identify needs
The mobile skilled workers interviewed in this study demonstrated through their actions their ability to identify needs which in turn became a benefit to the community. A range of community centres, activities and projects were developed by this group of mobile skilled workers. They ranged from community and seniors centres to numerous youth projects, mens sheds, futures committees, local newspapers, opportunity shops and revitalisation programs for local shows. While this list is not exhaustive the projects were all developed through the mobile worker interacting and engaging with the local community. A key theme was that mobile skilled workers were involved in partnering with groups to identify needs then working with them to obtain funding and organisation the activities.

In addition, a number of mobile skilled workers felt there was a need for local government employees and councilors to be more involved in the local community and the issues facing the community. Part of this call was for greater support and recognition of the role community organisations play in the communty and for the work undertaken by the volunteers that were assisting the community. Simple things, such as stationary and postage was one example of such assistance. Another example was how a hospital was able to support a men's group by making soup and a bread rolls available to participants. The group provided much needed support for men in the community and assisted in the wellbeing of the community.

Fill Gaps
In addition to mobile skilled workers identifying needs in a community they also fill gaps. While there are obvious areas that a mobile worker fills, such as a new doctor filling an unfilled position, the focus of this research included non-work roles that the mobile worker filled. The presence of mobile worker in a rural community often means they are enlisted, or volunteer, to provide services that are needed. This could be in one of the local organisations, such as the local fire brigade, or organising an Anzac day ceremony because there is no one else available to undertake the task.

As part of the gap filling process many of the mobile skilled workers interviewed in this study were making contributions to the health and wellbeing of the community. New projects that were identified included a senior centre, writing grant applications, men's shed, a youth woodworking program for boys, a seniors painting and craft activity, sessions that were theraputic, raising issues of risk (such as fire). In addition mobile skilled workers filled health profession positions or were involved in activities that supported the wellbeing of the community.

Develop Pride
People from outside the local community were seen as having different approaches which are look upon favourably by the local community. This is especially apparent

when the newcomer integrates strongly into the community. As a result pride is developed because the locals feel as if their town is important enough to attract outsiders. As one mobile worker reflected:

> *"Even if they don't come to you and say that how good it is, I think they appreciate the fact that you are quiet something different and new."*

Environmental Benefits from Mobile Skilled Workers

Many of the mobile skilled workers interviewed were involved in environmental efforts which focused on beauitifying their towns and villages. Groups such as 'Land Care', Tidy Towns or similar were seen as avenues for improving the local environment. Their interests were broad and covered the natural through to the built environment. The mobile skilled workers volunteer their time to assist in environmental activities such as clearing rivers, revegitating river banks, looking after town gardents and providing their expertise in the planning of the environment.

In addition to their time working with the environmental groups the work extends to dealing with the local council on environmental issues such as water quality, advice on heritage issues for town planning.

In Tasmania there was a keen interest in preserving the historical value of the town and the mobile skilled workers were supportive of such efforts because that was the reason they moved to the town in the first place.

Awards for tidy towns create pride and reward effort for activities related to the environment.

> *"And we won two Master Builder Association awards and the Tidy Towns Best Private Heritage restoration in Tasmania.   So it's all been very rewarding."*

> *"The About [name removed] Town group won the "Can Do" Awards and they put money into rejuvenating the river."*

Possible Negative Outcomes of Mobile Skilled Workers

In addition to the benefits outlined above, it became apparent through the research that there were negative outcomes from the presence of mobile skilled workers. Some of these have already been touched on above and relate to the unwanted change that they bring to a community or to becoming involved in too many activities which can impact on their wellbeing.

It was apparent during the interviews that mobile skilled workers can become an annoyance to local organisations because they ask difficult questions and question the way things are done. While their intentions are for the improvement of the community overall, their actions may require traditional practices to be updated and more transparent. As a result they may incurr the wrath of some local people in the

community. One mobile worker described criticism they endured which led them to questioning why they should continue making a contribution:

> *We got feedback about three or four days later, somebody had made the comment to a friend of ours "Oh what was it "[business name's] affair" because we had a successful event. …Yeah these people that don't do anything themselves - they never ever try to make a difference in the town. They criticize and they can't say something nice. So they say something really awful and... I thought, "Why do it?" ...But it... sort of knocks the wind out of you for a little while. …But I mean we always get up and run again.*

Other criticisms that were reported related to the mobile worker taking the job of locals and, in the case of businesses, making profits at the expense of locals.

In situations where mobile skilled workers are employed in managerial roles it was apparent that they are more exacting in following the rules, especially if the existing way of doing things is not up to date. This can create difficulties for the employees who are used to doing the task in a particular way and have done it, in some cases for a long period of time. An example was the new school principal in one of the sites who had to overcome problems with report cards and minor indescretions that staff had been allowed to get away with by the previous principal.

A number of respondents made mention of the difficulties that were encountered when a mobile worker took on too much work. As a result they get "burned-out" and as a result will try to shrink into the background or not *'put their hand up'* or become more *'choosie'* with the tasks they do support.

Conclusions

This research has identified a number of positive benefits communities gain through the efforts of mobile skilled workers. These relate to all elements of the community – economic, social and environmental. Of particular value to the communities was the level of participation that each of the mobile skilled workers had in undertaking activities. The mobile skilled workers we interviewed had been in the communities for up to three years and were strong participants in their communities. Our sample included a diverse range of mobile skilled workers in terms of age and occupation and were considered broadly representative of the mobile skilled workforce. We found they are generally involved in more than one activity and participate for many reasons, to keep busy, to help integrate into the community, because they see a need that they can assist with and because they want to help others.

To maximise the value of mobile skilled workers it was apparent that communities need to make them feel welcome and included quickly.

> *"[A] benefit to me is just sort of being able to feel settled. Very rapidly developing these friendships with really nice people I get along with fantastically. It makes you feel a bit more settled a bit more like home. And it makes it a lot easier just to stay."*

While communities can benefit by developing strategies that will attract mobile skilled workers it is also important to support the workers in their activities. This can include giving recognition and providing trust and support. As one mobile worker commented:

> *"You know, …people look at you and say, "well you're doing this, what are you doing it for?"   It's a suspicious thing.   It's not like; they don't take it in the right way. Some do, I mean there's still an OK response. But it's not like "oh yeah that was really great for the town [so] let's get behind it".*

By focusing effort on the inclusion of mobile skilled workers as a potential group who deliver benefits, a community will be able to take advantage of their skills, new perspectives, social capital, enthusiasm and education. In addition they will benefit from the projects that they identify, the gaps they fill and the resulting pride that is built in the community from their efforts. The economy will benefit through the money that the mobile skilled workers bring to the community and the employment they create while the environment will benefit through their efforts to improve where they live.

The findings from this study are based on the analysis of three sites in the study. Data from an additional three Australian sites and one Canadian site has also been collected. Future research will analyse this data and test the findings noted here, and may reveal additional insights into the possible benefits to rural communities from highly skilled people who move into their communities.

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