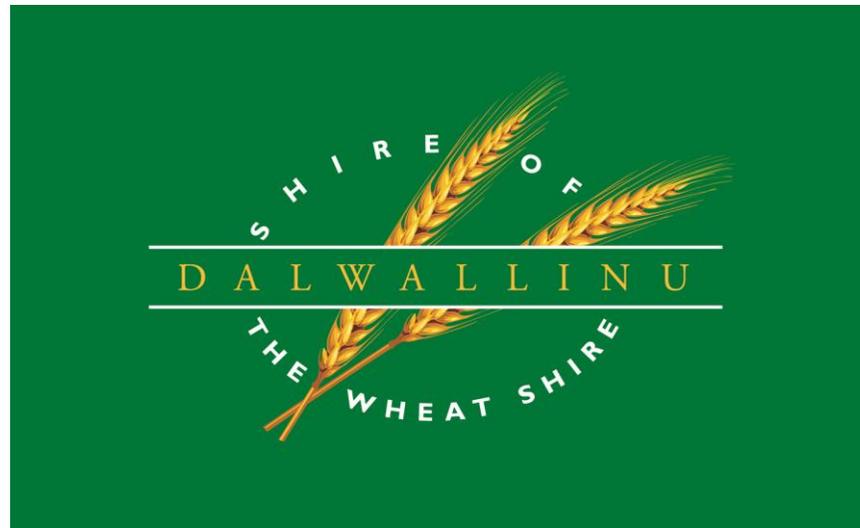


Regional Repopulation Pilot Project Report

November 2010 to March 2014



The purpose of this report is to document the origin, the process and the progress of this project. The project is not over. It cannot be seen as a success or failure as its full potential has not been realised. The project is about creating opportunities for a diverse range of people to live, work and play in a vibrant and welcoming community.

This report was presented the Hon Tony Simpson MLA, Minister for Local Government; Community Services; Seniors and Volunteering; Youth – in Dalwallinu on 26 April 2014





Introduction to the Shire

The Shire of Dalwallinu is situated 252 kilometres north-northeast of Perth on the Great Northern Highway (National Highway 95). It is an agricultural, mining and tourist service centre and on the southern access boundary to the Mid West mining projects. Dalwallinu is its administrative centre.

Other townships in the Shire are: Pithara 12kms south, Kalannie 53kms east, Wubin 21kms and Buntine 36kms north.

This Shire, like many regional areas, suffers from a decline in population and the under-utilisation of both State and Local Government infrastructure such as schools and recreational facilities.

This overall population decline is mostly attributed to labour savings associated with the increase in the size of farm enterprises. Highly productive modern farming technology has been adopted, using larger grain farming equipment which needs fewer operators. Also families are smaller. However, in the town of Dalwallinu, and to a lesser extent Kalannie, the growth in light industry and services to agriculture and mining ensured population within the towns stabilised. This meant more employment opportunities. It also provided the opportunity for a pilot Repopulation Plan.

Shire President Overview

While the Shire's agricultural and light industry production was increasing, the population was declining. It became necessary to challenge the relentless urbanisation of the Western Australian population to metropolitan Perth – even in a very small way.

Sustainable agriculture and the rural environment require viable and sustainable communities. Not only to manage technological advancement of agriculture, but to manage at a local level the environment that sustains its productivity, particularly grain production.

When Council was approached with a request for a community initiated project it seized upon the opportunity because of unsuccessful lobbying to gain taxation relief to provide compensation for the cost of rural living and to reverse the population decline. This request was a do-it-yourself proposal based on the reality of increasing population when increased employment opportunities were driven by economic development. This was happening due in part to a marketing strategy that emphasised the importance of the Shire's strategic location and economic future by providing agricultural, mining, tourist and other services on a national highway.

The Regional Repopulation Pilot Project report provides details of how the project sought to gain, and then retain, culturally diverse new residents to the Shire of Dalwallinu. It involved providing highly interactive English language courses to match the new resident's specific needs.

It was social events that involved the whole community that would have a galvanising impact on their social inclusiveness and awareness of community engagement. Other support was required on the road to their Australian Citizenship Ceremonies.

This report documents the disappointments and successes in a turn-a-round from what was thought possible to what was eventually achievable.

Cr Robert Nixon



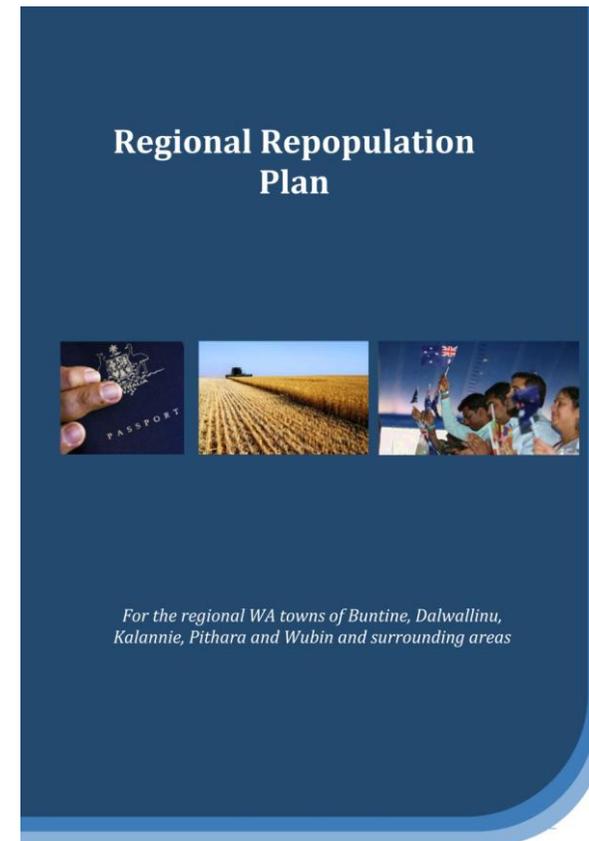
The Origin of the project

The concept of the Regional Repopulation project originated from a local community member, Stuart McAlpine, becoming disheartened with the decline in population within his home town of Buntine. Realising the need to repopulate Buntine and identifying a number of skills shortages within the region Stuart recognised a gap between a large number of workers in the metropolitan area and the current shortages in the Northern Wheatbelt.

After making contact with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre and the Office of Multicultural Interests, Stuart presented a concept plan to the Shire of Dalwallinu at the November 2010 Full Council meeting.

Council saw the validity and community passion imbedded in the concept and provided support by way of administration. Already, to address population decline, Council had been lobbying, and in fact continues to lobby for income tax zone rebates. With sufficient value such rebates could provide incentives for living in a regional area and relief from the increased cost of living. Given the circumstances, the Regional Repopulation concept provided a more realistic opportunity to repopulate the Shire.

In February 2011 the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee was formed. The first meeting was held in the Shire of Dalwallinu Council Chambers in March 2011. The minutes show that it was attended by Stuart McAlpine, who was elected Chair, Shire President Cr Robert Nixon, Councillor Ian Hyde, former Councillor Bill Dinnie and the former Shire Economic Development and Marketing Officer, Richard Milloy.



Minister Castrilli the then Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests supported the formation of a committee of Government Departments and relevant organisations who formed the Perth Working Group. This group acted as a resource which offered assistance and information to progress the project.

The project was launched in Dalwallinu on 11 October 2011 by the Minister. This event was also attended by members of the Perth Working Group, Dalwallinu Shire Councillors and the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee, Shire executive officers and the media.

The Beginning

A survey of local businesses conducted between November 2010 and February 2011 found there was a shortage of labour. Population attraction and retention was recognised as an important factor in rectifying this and also for creating future business opportunities.

It was recognised that an increase in population, especially the attraction and retention of families, would also support the sports clubs and organisations that rely on volunteers. It is critical that enough volunteers are available for emergency services to support a 7187km² area that includes a national highway. An influx of children would secure the future of the Dalwallinu, Kalannie and Buntine schools that were all experiencing a decline in student numbers. At the time of writing, the future of Buntine School with just ten students is still not secure.



The initiators of this project were in direct contact with the Perth based Burmese Karen Community with the view to facilitating secondary settlement to the Shire of Dalwallinu particularly to the town of Buntine.

Early in 2011 visits to the Dalwallinu district by representatives of the Karen Community were organised. Business introductions were made and opportunities discussed. The businesses needed an immediate skilled and semi skilled workforce.

A lack of affordable housing was identified as an issue that needed immediate attention. Using Shire allocated time, the Economic Development and Marketing Officer consulted businesses to find job vacancies and to try to place known workers from the Karen community. Local businesses were very supportive of the Project. Although the skill set was not always a perfect fit, jobs, training and accommodation were offered by several of the businesses.

Disappointingly, this secondary settlement proved to be a problem as the people approached had already settled in the city or other regional towns. Difficulties included moving a whole, settled, family. Additionally there were the financial and social implications of changing schools and breaking house rental agreements.

At that time, early 2011, there were some single men but no families willing to relocate to this area. Concurrently, because of an increased demand for fabricated products and equipment, in particular from the mining sector, businesses in the Shire began sponsoring skilled workers through the 457 visa scheme to increase their workforce. The plan evolved as this became the economic driver for the project.

Advisory Committee

The initial function of the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee was to...“finalise the Regional Repopulation Plan and investigate funding needs and options to progress the vision”. The Committee was formed by the Shire of Dalwallinu Council in February 2011 and met monthly and reported to Full Council.

Terms of reference were formulated with the specific objectives, to attract and retain new residents to ‘ensure the Shire’s population and distribution is sufficient to maintain viable communities to fulfil economic, social, and environmental requirements and responsibilities’.

The Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee worked with the outgoing, and later the incoming, Economic Development and Marketing Officer to revise the Regional Repopulation Plan document from an ‘idea’ to a strategic plan.

REGIONAL REPOPULATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose of Committee

To oversee the management of functions pertaining to Regional Repopulation, migrant attraction job training, employment, and retention.

Membership

The Committee shall comprise of five (5) members of Council and/or the community. A quorum shall comprise of three (3) Committee members.

Members: Mr S McAlpine, Crs Nixon, Cr I Hyde, Cr B Dinnie, & Mr R Milloy

Specific Objectives

- a) To establish a committee to pursue the goals of the Regional Repopulation Plan (the plan).
- b) To facilitate the harmonious resettlement of new residents into the community to ensure that they are welcomed as participating community members;
- c) To ensure the Shire’s population and distribution is sufficient to maintain viable communities to fulfil economic, social, and environmental requirements and responsibilities;
- d) To ensure existing assets are maintained, utilised, and enhanced;
- e) To liaise with State, Federal, and non-for-profit agencies as part of the Perth Working Group to further develop and implement the plan;
- f) To ensure the plan achieves pilot project status to enable it to be expanded and adopted on a wider regional basis;
- g) Investigate and obtain funding opportunities to progress the plan;
- h) To liaise with community as well as State & Federal representatives to ensure the initiative has wider community consultation, ownership and support; and
- i) Investigate and obtain training, employment, and accommodation options.

Administrative Arrangements

The Economic Development & Marketing Officer shall report to and administer the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee, and carry out the directives of Council in regard to endorsed Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee recommendations.

Goals and Actions for 2011

Target date	
19 April 2011	To finalise the Regional Repopulation Plan, in consultation with the Perth based Working Group and community;
19 April 2011	To draft a job description for a full-time Project Officer
15 August 2011	To employ a full-time Project Officer
Ongoing	Meet & liaise with the local community, State & Federal manager of parliament, Department of Multicultural Affairs, Department of Immigration & Citizenship, Office of Multicultural Interests, Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Wheatbelt / Mid-West Development Commissions, and other relevant stakeholders
Ongoing	To consult with potential local employees & Mid-West mining companies, at bi-monthly MWCCI functions and other events, in response to recently completed business surveys
Ongoing	To continue development and implementation of project action plans

Workshops and Training

To take advantage of the opportunities offered by an increase in population, the Australian College of Training in conjunction with the Shire of Dalwallinu, conducted a Migrant Training Presentation to introduce training opportunities and incentives for business owners to take on new employees. The presentation focussed on workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. This type of funded training assistance excludes 457 visa holders but was relevant at that time as the focus was on relocating humanitarian entrants and refugees, especially from the Burmese community.

Together, the Shire, Australian College of Training and the Multicultural Service Centre, made the decision that the next actions should be to visit Katanning, invite people especially the Burmese community to visit Dalwallinu, and hold a Project Launch.

Finding the facts

The Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee visited Katanning in July 2011 to observe the Katanning project. Katanning is known for the success of having more than 30 CaLD nationalities living in harmony.

From the Office of Multicultural Interests Katanning Consultation Report April 2011:

The Western Australian Meat Marketing Cooperative (WAMMCO) employs a significant number of migrants and people from refugee backgrounds. At the time of OMI's consultation, of WAMMCO's workforce of 308, nearly 80% were from CaLD backgrounds, including 65 Chinese, 57 Malay and 46 Burmese workers. The WAMMCO representative identified a need for assistance with issues such as school, banking, children, life skills, acculturation and basic English. WAMMCO currently runs a "work readying" course. (P4)

...In 2010-11, the data showed that there were 150 Family Stream, 96 Humanitarian and 12 Skilled targeted group arrivals in the Lower Great Southern Statistical District which includes Albany and Katanning. (P5 footnote)

The Dalwallinu Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee found the two day visit "extremely beneficial...as it provided exposure to a successful migrant attraction program." It was seen as essential to success that the Shire, the school and the community were supportive of a project such as repopulation. They saw tightly knit family groups and observed the rapid language development of the children in contrast to the adults.

The committee noted the need for English language support, maybe with the use of translators. They also noted the importance of having designated people to assist migrant families. Katanning has both shire employees and community volunteers who work directly with new residents.



Some members of the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee l/r Bill Dinnie, Peter Crispin, Stuart McAlpine, Lois Best, Tess Slot, Cr Ian Hyde and Cr Robert Nixon

Planning Workshop

It was recognised that “the project had reached a crucial stage where it could no longer rely on people’s voluntary work or work that was peripheral to their core business”. The two Committees organised and co-funded a workshop with a private consultancy company, Paddi Brown and Associates, in November 2011.

The pre-workshop briefing package required attendees to prepare by imagining where the project would be by 2017.

What did they see as the “vision of success”. They were asked to think from a variety of perspectives and to reflect on further questions.

Working from those thoughts and questions, the workshop identified major issues which included:

- Accommodation, there is a lack of affordable and available housing. The existing infrastructure needs to be used to advantage.
- Employment needs to be meaningful and regular with opportunities for self employment and shared ownership and cooperative business ventures, especially in agriculture.

- Education needs to be long term and ongoing. There is a need for both adult and children’s education and language support. English language classes would need to be staged, concentrating first on speaking and in particular comprehending the “Dalwallinu dialect”.
- A ‘bridge builder’ group of at least three families – supported and settled – would encourage others to settle in the district.
- Identified challenges included the political situation. There was a need for the value of the project to be recognised by Government in order to obtain the necessary financial support to employ at least one full time person to take the pressure off the volunteer committees and continue to advance the project.
- There was a need for people to keep the community informed so that expectations were realistic and integration smooth.

Attendees found the content re-invigorating and an action plan with a timeline, to be phased in over five years was formulated. The Vision Statement that was developed is “Creating opportunities for a diverse range of people to live, work and play in a vibrant and welcoming community”.

Changes

In November 2011 the Shire Economic Development and Marketing Officer left to take up employment elsewhere. Responsibility then fell to the voluntary Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee to keep the project on track.

In December 2011 a private consultant was employed by the Shire. The consultant’s role was to set up protocols and procedures to advance the Regional Repopulation Project and to ensure positive publicity and community consultation. Funding could not be found for a full time Project Officer so the job description for the liaison officer position was developed.

The communication strategy developed reminded the Committee of the importance of engagement with stakeholders. At all stages to inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Target achieved and role transferred

At a committee meeting in April 2013, Council considered the future of the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee. The population intake had become primarily 457 visa holders and the community proved to be welcoming.

Council resolved;

“That the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee be disbanded, and all its functions fall under the Community Services and Economic Development Committee”.

Council felt that the committee had achieved its initial aims in producing the Regional Repopulation Plan and the employment of a Community Liaison and Support Officer and that further developments could be handled efficiently and effectively through the Community Services and Economic Development Committee.

Resources

Perth Working Group

The Minister actively supported the concept and agreed that the Chair of a committee formed to assist the development of the project should be the Manager of Policy in Office of Multicultural Interests.

Through meetings between Vanessa Harvey, the Manager of Policy, the Chair of Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee and the Shire of Dalwallinu Economic Development and Marketing Officer, relevant people in various Departments and organisations were identified and invited to join the committee which became known as the Perth Working Group. Bi-monthly meetings were held, alternately in Perth and in Dalwallinu. The purpose of the Perth Working Group was to “provide support and advice to the Shire of Dalwallinu’s Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee”. In July 2012, a draft of the Perth Working Group Terms of Reference was drawn up.

At this stage the focus was still on the Burmese Karen community. Because of a lack of both funding and human resources a more culturally diverse group could not be adequately supported at a humanitarian level.

The objective of the Perth Working Group was to provide support and advice in all of the key areas which had been identified previously through the Katanning visit, the Paddi Brown workshop and observation and consultation. Through the Perth Working Group, the Project was brought to the attention of the Department of Local Government’s Inter Agency Settlement Group whose purpose is to improve coordination between Australian and State Government agencies to facilitate a whole of Government approach to settlement services.

Changes

In November 2012, the Perth Working Group made the decision not to meet formally every two months. By this stage all of the government representatives were fully aware of the project and expressed a desire to provide advice and support when required. The repopulation intake had also changed to be predominantly 457 visa holders with different support needs. It was agreed that organising meetings around specific issues and getting the relevant people together would be a more productive and efficient way to deal with the project.



Issues

Changes

- Personnel working within the project changed during the three years since its inception. Coupled with the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee comprising predominately of volunteers there were periods of time that no one was employed by the Shire to drive the project.
- The cohort changed from the planned repopulation comprising of only humanitarian refugees to the majority actually being skilled workers on employer sponsored subclass 457 visas. This required a change in focus as the needs of these new residents are unique.

Social Services

Humanitarian Refugees

- A full range of social services are not readily available in regional towns such as Dalwallinu. There are limited health facilities, especially specific trauma based assistance.
- Centrelink has a ruling of a 26 week wait for benefits if a person moves to a place of perceived fewer employment opportunities. This is the perception of a regional area. It is one of the urban / rural issues currently being considered by stakeholders.

Sub class 457 visa holders

- As temporary residents sub class 457 visa holders do not have access to free Social Services

Sub Class 457

- Because of the complexity of the 457 visa, it was important to establish a strong partnership with the, now, Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The Department of Immigration Regional Outreach Officers are an invaluable resource in ascertaining what is or is not allowed, as it is different for 457 visa holders and permanent residents.
- The proposed introduction of a \$4,000 education fee for the first child and \$2,000 for subsequent children, if imposed in 2015, will have significant impacts on the efforts to retain new residents. Some families, especially those with more than one child, had conducted their own research and chosen to come to WA because the fee was not applicable at that time. Such a retrospective change in a fee structure is therefore particularly destabilising. Some families will decide they cannot afford to educate their children in Australia. If the mothers and children leave the Shire there would be adverse social and economic consequences.

Housing

- From the outset of the project affordable housing was identified as a primary need.
- Options for affordable housing were:
Immediate; renting a room from a family or employer
Short term; investigate options for grouped or high density housing
Long term; building.
- It was identified that the Shire would need to release land in order to start a building program.



Shire Building Program

The Shire has built the following properties;

1 x (4x2)

3 x (2x1)

3 x (3 x 1.5)

2 x (3x1)

Tenders will be called in July for the following properties;

2 x (3x1)

At the time of writing there are no vacant rental properties in the towns of Dalwallinu or Wubin. There are 17 names on the waiting list. The Shire, Health Services and many of the businesses have houses which they let to employees. All are occupied at this time.

There are currently 7 houses advertised for sale in Dalwallinu, ranging in price from \$150, 000 to \$290,000; two are advertised in Buntine at \$70,000 and 90,000; one in Pithara \$75,000 and a farm outside Wubin \$320,000. It is known that there are always properties for private sale.

Project funding

In early 2011 an application for Royalties for Regions funding was lodged by the Shire. This proved unsuccessful as it did not accurately fit the eligibility criteria. The application requested \$110,000 for the employment of a Migrant Attraction & Retention Officer. It showed a \$51,000 contribution from the Shire of Dalwallinu for supported housing, vehicle use and audit costs.

In September 2012 the Hon Castrilli, Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests commended the Shire on the initiative in developing its Regional Repopulation Plan, but informed that “no funding is currently available” to support implementation of the Plan.

The Shire of Dalwallinu Council chose to continue supporting the project financially. To date the Shire has funded the running of English classes, the appointment of a Community Liaison and Support Officer, and the allocation of Economic Development and Marketing Officer administration hours, a Contract Project Officer and Community events.

Total Expenditure July 2011 – April 2014 \$139,000

A total of 11 properties have been built with a total contribution from the Shire of \$825,000 which attracted \$2,866,903 in grants and funding.

What did we learn?

- Such a project has to remain flexible and responsive to change.
- There must be a media policy that focuses on the key objectives of the plan
- For any event a press release must be prepared and only a delegated person should make a press statement. In the case of this Local Government Shire that person is the Shire President.
- Nomenclature is vital. Many words are value laden and need to be avoided. The word 'migrant' connotes 'people, all from one country overseas, who don't speak English'. It was therefore decided to use the expression 'new residents' when referring to the 'migrant' cohort in the Shire of Dalwallinu as they come from different countries and from within Australia.
- It is best not to assume cultural knowledge, needs and wants. For example Australian solitary housing is not really attractive to some cultures that would prefer cluster style housing development. Consultation at every stage is most important.
- The rules, regulations and expectations of Australian life need to be pointed out. Many government documents are particularly jargon-ridden and needed a plain English overview.
- Employment, Education and Training and accommodation remain important components in retaining a population.
- Programs that make new residents welcome and to enable them to be part of the community need to be developed

- There is a need to target the residents that match employment needs
- Assistance that meets cultural circumstances and special needs – foods, ESL classes, education and so on – should be offered

Specific to 457 visa holders and dependants

- The primary 457 visa holder must do the same skilled work and stay with the same employer for at least 2 years.
- Secondary visa holders may work anywhere they can find work and may change employer.
- 457 visa holders are considered Australian residents for tax purposes.
- Although full taxpaying employees, both primary and secondary 457 visa holders are considered temporary residents.
- As temporary residents they do not have access to Centrelink benefits, Medicare nor subsidised education.
- A primary 457 visa holder and their dependants must carry their own comprehensive medical insurance.
- 457 visa holders and their dependants are permitted to become Emergency Service volunteers.
- 457 visa holders and dependants can apply for a Tax File or Australian Business Number online as their details are current with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
- Overseas driver's licences can be issued by recognised or unrecognised countries. That fact changes the procedure for obtaining a West Australian licence. Licensing personnel need to clarify individual cases.

Initiatives and Projects

English Classes

In April 2012, the newly appointed Economic Development and Marketing Officer focussed on the needs of businesses and their new 457 visa workforce.

Many new employees are well educated but need assistance with English language skills because of the unfamiliarity of the Australian accent and workplace jargon. Upon investigation it was found that 457 visa holders are not eligible to access the free Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) English classes.

With fortuitous timing a visiting specialist English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who was approached by Economic Development and Marketing Officer was available to teach. Consequently the, Shire sponsored, English classes were able to begin in June 2012 in both Dalwallinu and Kalannie.



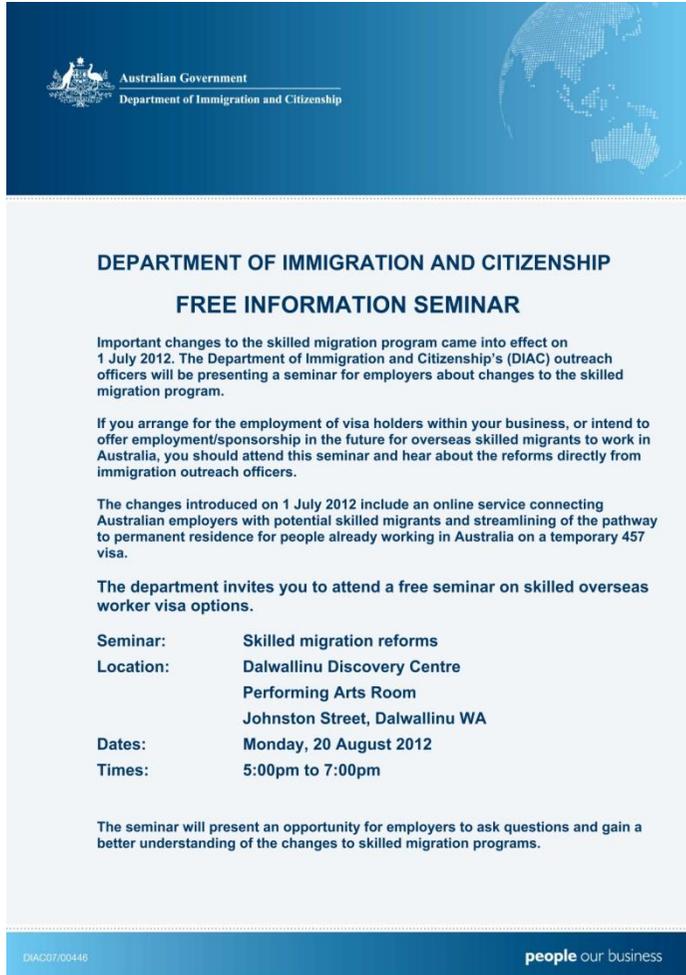
Eventually, because of the number of adult students taking part in the classes, a second teacher was engaged so that two English classes per week could be offered. This enabled one class to be at an advanced level while the other supported conversational English. During 2012/2013, a total of 64 weeks of class were offered. More than 60 students took part, often in consecutive classes.

Initially the classes were free to students and employers. For the final courses a nominal fee was introduced to help cover Shire administration costs and to encourage commitment to attendance.

Employers encouraged their employees to attend and assisted by disseminating course information. Employers expressed their appreciation to the Shire for the classes and have commented on the improvement in levels of English in the workplace.

Immigration Seminar

The Economic Development and Marketing Officer built a strong relationship with the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). In August 2012 a seminar for employers was held.



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP
FREE INFORMATION SEMINAR

Important changes to the skilled migration program came into effect on 1 July 2012. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship's (DIAC) outreach officers will be presenting a seminar for employers about changes to the skilled migration program.

If you arrange for the employment of visa holders within your business, or intend to offer employment/sponsorship in the future for overseas skilled migrants to work in Australia, you should attend this seminar and hear about the reforms directly from immigration outreach officers.

The changes introduced on 1 July 2012 include an online service connecting Australian employers with potential skilled migrants and streamlining of the pathway to permanent residence for people already working in Australia on a temporary 457 visa.

The department invites you to attend a free seminar on skilled overseas worker visa options.

Seminar: Skilled migration reforms
Location: Dalwallinu Discovery Centre
Performing Arts Room
Johnston Street, Dalwallinu WA
Dates: Monday, 20 August 2012
Times: 5:00pm to 7:00pm

The seminar will present an opportunity for employers to ask questions and gain a better understanding of the changes to skilled migration programs.

DIAC07/00448 **people our business**

This seminar allowed the immigration changes pertaining to 457 visa holders, which came into force in July 2012, to be explained. Immigration Department Regional Outreach officers gave employers the opportunity to ask for clarification and to find how the changes affected their business directly. This relationship proved to be an excellent resource and further information sessions have been held with employees to provide a forum where they could ask clarifying questions.

Language development

Many new residents have expressed a desire to become Permanent Residents.

For most applications, the Immigration Department requires a reasonable band score in the International English Language Testing Scheme (IELTS). In collaboration with IDP Education, the providers of the International English Language Testing System, the Shire of Dalwallinu, organised a Masterclass in August 2012. This was followed by a 6 week class specialising in IELTS preparation.



New Resident Pack

Consultation with new and existing residents found there was a lack of accessible information about goods and services in the 5 towns of the Shire. A directory, which includes information about Shire, health and business services; opening hours; telephone numbers; street maps and other relevant information, was compiled. This directory is placed in a folder which also includes relevant community and Shire information.

The New Resident Pack is kept on the front counter of the Shire Office as that is one of the first points of contact for many new residents. Additionally, posters enquiring “Are you new to town?” are posted around the towns. These posters direct new residents to a local place where they can get a pack.

New Resident Database

The Economic Development and Marketing Officer had previously identified the need to get accurate information about new residents in order to assist Council with accurate statistics. A specific data collection form was created by Economic Development and Marketing Officer and the English teacher. This form was used during class, and distributed to new residents, in order to gather information.

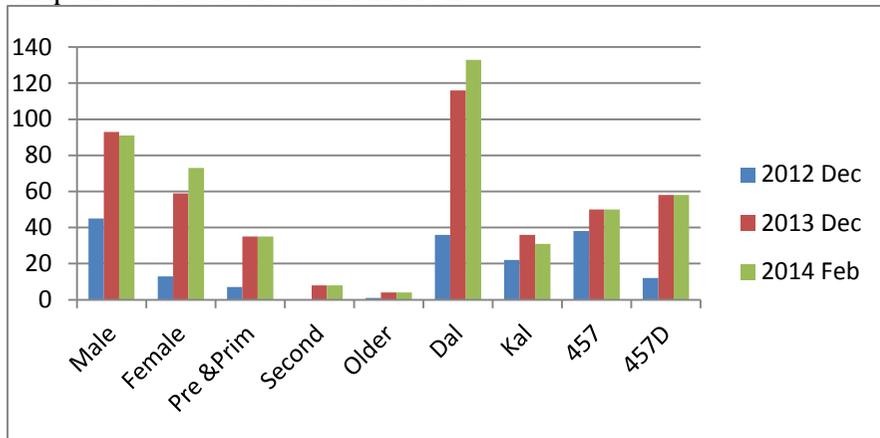
Using the information gathered, the Community Liaison and Support Officer compiled an Excel spreadsheet database. As stated on the information request form, this database is confidential and only statistics are shared. When people are made aware of the reason for such a database, they are usually willing to give their details.

Over time and with constant consultation with school principals, businesses and the community, data categories have been refined. The request for whether rented or owned accommodation has been removed as it was not considered useful data. Information requested now includes the date of arrival in Australia and planned arrival of the family. The date of birth of children was requested by schools so that they could plan ahead.

Twenty new residents are recorded as having arrived on 457 visas between February and December 2011. Initially one family arrived but the majority were the father of a family. The first database in November 2012, recorded fewer than 60 new residents and only basic details. Not all are 457 visa holders many are citizens from other parts of Australia.

Following a DIAC seminar arranged by Economic Development and Marketing Officer held on August 20 2012, there was a notable increase in the relocation of families. In February 2014 the total number of new residents recorded is 165. This figure represents more than a 10% increase in the population in the Shire of Dalwallinu.

Snapshot of database information



Database graph

Showing: Gender; children first grouped by school age - pre and primary or secondary, then older dependants up to 25 years of age; the town of residence - Dalwallinu or Kalannie; and whether the person is a 457 primary (457) or secondary (457D) visa holder

Among the new residents, countries of origin are; Africa, Australia, Britain, Burma, China, Finland, India, Ireland, Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. They have come here for employment reasons or to join family members. Consultation with businesses shows that by the end of 2013, the number of 457 visa holders being employed within the Shire has peaked.

Many recent arrivals are the dependants of the originally recorded new residents.

To cater for the increased student numbers, at the start of the 2014 school year Dalwallinu District High School (DDHS) recruited 5 new teachers from within Western Australia. More students also allowed Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) to once again be offered at DDHS.

- There are education and employment, at least part time, opportunities for partners. All of the teenage 2013 school leavers are employed and several are doing further study, online from Dalwallinu.
- The unemployment rate in the Shire of Dalwallinu is less than 1%.

Student numbers

Dalwallinu District High School

2010 - 156

2011 - 136

2012 - 134

2013 - 137

2014 - 157

Kalannie Primary School

2011 - 42

2012 - 46

2013 - 51

2014 - 45

Unfortunately for the School a 457 family with 4 children was transferred to Queensland to work at the end of 2013.

Buntine Primary School

2011 - 16

2012 - 12

2013 - 12

2014 - 10

Community Liaison and Support Officer

In September 2012 a part time Community Liaison and Support Officer was appointed. The role of this newly created position is to liaise with the whole community and support all, but especially new, residents to ensure the strong community continues as the population grows.

The first strategy for the Community Liaison and Support Officer, who was coincidentally the English teacher and a previous resident of Dalwallinu, was to renew or establish relationships with businesses, the schools, the community and new arrivals. The establishment of relationships meant that areas of need could be identified and addressed. Procedures often caused problems for new arrivals. For example, the Community Liaison and Support Officer accompanied many parents to the school to enrol newly arrived children because of the unfamiliarity of that procedure. Being known through the English classes gave new residents confidence to approach the Community Liaison and Support Officer when they needed help. Help was given in applying for a job, getting Working with Children and Police clearances, accommodation, driver's licences, banking and many of those 'little things' that are necessary for everyday life.

Community Involvement

Members of the community had already recognised the need to welcome new people to the Shire. One of the first actions of the Community Liaison and Support Officer was to call a Community Focus Group meeting. This was to ascertain the community expectations of the position and to explain the role. It was clarified that the Community Liaison and Support Officer is the conduit of information and a resource to assist with the successful integration of new residents into the community.

The outcome of the meeting was to highlight the opportunities in a small town and that one duty of the Community Liaison and Support Officer is to network and match skills and talents with opportunities. Many groups need volunteers but new residents need to feel secure before they put themselves forward.

A regular event is 'A Get Together' BBQ.

This event sees a good mix of new and existing residents, key stakeholders, councillors and supporters from the District attend. As an event it continues to grow, not only in attendance by Community members value adding.



Conclusion

In April 2013 the Shire of Dalwallinu was awarded the Implementing Multiculturalism Locally Award at Government House in Perth. The award was presented to the Shire President Cr Robert Nixon by the Citizenship and Multicultural Interests Minister, Hon. Dr Mike Nahan MLA.

Since commencement of the Regional Repopulation Plan, linked to a strong Economic Development Strategy, the population has increased by over 100 new residents. For these efforts the Shire of Dalwallinu has been described as 'the best Shire in the Wheatbelt to have engaged and formed strong ties with its culturally and linguistically diverse community'.

Western Councillor Issue 65 April / May 2013

The Shire of Dalwallinu continues to invest in this project with staff time, expertise and financially. The Shire now finances two staff members to work part time on the project. The full time Economic Development and Marketing Officer has allotted hours and a Community Liaison and Support Officer is employed 24 hours per week.

Support is offered in many ways, with information about business, education, finding accommodation, local government regulations and more. New residents also come from overseas and some need assistance in understanding the customs and cultures of Australia and regional areas – and in comprehending West Australian English. Many of the new residents in the Shire of Dalwallinu currently on 457 visas will soon be eligible to apply for permanent residency. Many have expressed a wish to become permanent residents. This would be the most positive outcome for the Shire.

With an increase in population, the Shire becomes a more attractive place to live. The school has more teachers which means more options. Sporting teams are rejuvenated and there are more volunteers available. The vibrant towns attract even more residents.

Despite all of the changes and the issues faced, the original concept – the primary settlement of humanitarian refugees – remains viable. Land is still earmarked in Buntine and could be accessed immediately. The community accepts that many different nationalities now live in this district, and that that is beneficial.

The Shire and the Committees are to be congratulated on the successes and the growth in the population. After all, this was the object of the project.

Could this be just the beginning?

Observations

The support from the Shire to my concept and the formation of the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee was astounding from the outset. It took a little while for the Shire to accommodate a new and innovative committee to deal with an issue that fell outside of normal Shire functions. The project was impeded by the lack of an Economic Development and Marketing Officer for a period of time to follow up actions from committee meetings. It wasn't until this position was replaced that the project gained momentum and reached potential again. Support from government in the formation of the Perth Working Group was outstanding. A quality group of people were always assembled for meetings, and there was a shared passion for the project's worth as a potential option for repatriation of humanitarian refugees.

One of the constraints to the project was the inability to fund and employ adequate human and financial resources in a reasonable time frame to capitalise on the momentum and innovation generated from the project committees. Unfortunately funding guidelines don't always allow for innovative ideas to be funded. Even though there was wide support from politicians and their agencies for the project's potential to engage humanitarian refugees, I see it as an indictment on the system that Government seems unable to reward progressive and innovative ideas on merit in a timely manner. While I recognise guidelines are very important to progress government policy and accountability, there is a need to be able to progress visionary projects with access to funding.

Without the appropriate resources and policy changes to progress the opportunity to resettle humanitarian refugees, the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee concentrated its resources on 457 visa employees. Although it was the local businesses that sought and employed these people, I believe that the programs and the support instigated by the Shire and Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee has encouraged many of these people to seek permanent residency within the Shire.

I still have a vision to create something special that will provide a model that could be adopted across regional Australia. I guess it saddens me a little that the project has not been able to address the lack of population in Buntine and the under utilisation of resources there. There are many towns like Buntine across Australia that face a similar situation. There is still land and resources at Buntine and there still remain opportunities through agricultural for regional food production to address some of the environmental, social and economical problems of farming today. The opportunity to utilise new Australians to be part of this plan will be integral to its success. Hopefully someone will help fund this part of the project. This is an opportunity for social change and a revitalisation of regional areas.

I am extremely proud to have worked with so many people that have ensured the successes that we have enjoyed so far and to know that the legacy will continue into the future.

Stuart McAlpine, former Chair Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement must be extended to the residents of Buntine and Wubin who originally created the concept for the Regional Repopulation Project. Recognition must also be given to the people who formed the Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee and the Perth Working Group and Hon John Castrilli who orchestrated the founding of the Perth Working Group.

The Regional Repopulation Advisory Committee consisted of:

Chair – Stuart McAlpine

Cr Robert Nixon – Shire President, Shire of Dalwallinu

Cr Ian Hyde – Councillor, Shire of Dalwallinu

Bill Dinnie – Councillor, Shire of Dalwallinu (retired Oct 2013)

Peter Crispin – Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Dalwallinu

Richard Milloy – Economic Development and Marketing Officer, Shire of Dalwallinu (Nov 2010 - 2011)

Tess Slot – Economic Development and Marketing Officer, Shire of Dalwallinu (April 2012 - current)

Merrie Carlshausen – Community volunteer and Project Officer

Max Hudson – Chair, Kalannie Sustainable Population Committee

Lois Best – Community Liaison and Support Officer, Shire of Dalwallinu (September 2012 – current)

The Perth Working Group consisted of:

Chair – Vanessa Harvey – Manager Policy and Strategy, Office of Multicultural Interests

Veronica Bannon – Manager Settlement, Department of Immigration & Citizenship

Paul Kyaw – Multicultural Services Centre, Burmese Community Representative

Kate Gatti – Area Director Population Health, Department of Health

Catherine Dunn – Manager Policy, Department of Training and Workforce Development

Camille Le Geios – Multicultural Officer, Department of Human Services

Chris Harrison – Team Leader, Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations

Other departments and organisations:

Department of Housing

Polytechnic West

Wheatbelt Development Commission

Department of Regional Development and Lands

Department of Agriculture and Food

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council

Information Sources:

A variety of information sources were used in the formation of the plan; these include, but were not limited to, information from:

Shire of Dalwallinu

Department of Immigration & Citizenship

Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre

State & Federal Government Ministers and departments

Reference documents can be found at

www.dalwallinu.wa.gov.au