



## The FIVE project—addressing the stigma of mental health through community arts engagement

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### Mental health: a wicked problem

Western Australia's suicide rate stands at one person per day and has consistently been higher than the national average since 2006.<sup>1</sup> This figure sits alongside a raft of other indicators that mental health is a pressing health problem for the State and for the nation.<sup>2</sup> Amongst other groups, people living in rural and remote regions are especially at risk as a result of geographical and social isolation.

In WA, fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) and residential mining communities have unique needs, particularly in the areas of mental health, social connectivity and wellbeing. These extend to the partners and families of FIFO and residential workers.

The role of stigma in ongoing incidence of poor mental health is now well noted in the literature and makes addressing mental health a particular challenge.<sup>3</sup> The FIVE project has focused directly on this particular 'wicked problem'<sup>4</sup>, which we see as a complex mix of issues that includes:

- the insular and isolated nature of many of WA regional communities
- loss of the social fabric that historically bound and supported our regional communities
- a workforce that may be disconnected from home and community through FIFO practices servicing many extremely remote work sites across the State
- complexity of how the WA and global resources sector now fills a governance, health, social welfare, planning and philanthropic role across much of WA
- Australia's disconnection from the value that our resources workforce provides us with and the issues that they face
- the difficulties in supporting cultural development and cultural change in remote WA communities
- difficulties in building sustained social and cultural participation by this workforce, which reinforce social isolation and disconnection
- the intractable problem of stigma around mental health
- increase in the levels of suicide in WA and the global increase in mental health issues.

The result of these features has been high levels of social isolation faced by many working in the resources sector, and various social and mental health impacts faced by our mining workforce, their families and partners.

Over the past two years, community arts and cultural development organisation DADAA – in collaboration with Rio Tinto, local governments, and local arts and health organisations – has implemented FIVE, a multi-faceted arts initiative designed to address the challenge of stigma associated with mental health in regional WA.

In undertaking FIVE, we acknowledge the support of the WA Mental Health Commission, Australia Council for the Arts and local governments from Derby to Esperance. Collectively we have started a conversation about mental health and wellbeing and actively come together to explore a uniquely regional Western Australian take on wellbeing, resilience and the strengthening of community.

FIVE supports the State Government's Mental Health Strategy, *Mental Health 2020: Making it personal and everybody's business*, which maps critical reforms required to deliver mental health support and services. Importantly, the strategy outlines the WA Government's move away from a

clinical definition of mental health towards a social model, which aims for connection between people and community, as well as active management of one's own mental health. The strategy is aimed at responding to current needs across WA, including how the State's workforces and towns are changing.

### Creativity in a whole-of-community approach

Over the past two years, the FIVE project (see [www.five.org.au](http://www.five.org.au)) has engaged more than 7,000 people in exploring local responses to mental health, wellbeing, regional identity and the unique impacts of FIFO and residential mining phenomena. FIVE took 18 months to conceive and design but like all community arts processes, the reality has been organic and reliant on many tangibles.

The project's core goal is the use of artistic and cultural interventions to break down stigma around mental health. Based on a community arts and cultural development (CACD) framework, the project also draws from health promotion, prevention and recovery models. A range of defined objectives for participants and stakeholders aimed to push the deep potential of the project to have broad impact across communities:

#### For participants

- To reduce social isolation.
- To increase interpersonal dialogue around issues related to mental health.
- To increase awareness of poor mental health causes, manifestations and solutions.
- To strengthen a sense of identity through self-expression and self-advocacy.

#### For DADAA as an organisation

- To engage participants in a way that enables complex issues around mental health to be addressed, discussed and expressed.
- To facilitate the creation of an artistic or cultural product that can be shared with broader audiences – one developed for and by communities.
- To build skills in CACD at the local level: with local artists, community development workers, Rio Tinto personnel and government partners.
- To share experiences and findings with the arts and health sector and broader community.

#### For communities

- To experience an enhanced sense of cohesiveness and wellbeing.
- To gain increased awareness around issues and resources in mental health.
- To gain enhanced skills and understanding of the role of CACD in improving health.
- To build community pride and facilitate community storytelling and celebration.

FIVE engaged professional artists – Craig Walsh, Hiromi Tango, Alex Mickle, Nicole Mickle, Trevor Flynn, Sonal Kantaria and other artists working through local partnerships – and aimed to produce a collective narrative, predominantly through sculpture and film, that would engage participants in conversations around notions of caring, belonging and connecting to community. Artists were selected based both on their capacity as professional artists and on their skill as community artists, with this being a key factor in ensuring that FIVE followed core principles of participatory arts engagement.

### Art, mining and working life

*Mental Health 2020* notes WA's FIFO workers as a population with specific needs. It recognises that long shifts and separation from family and friends, often for weeks at a time, impact not only on

workers but also on families who are left without one parent on a regular basis. Both workers and their spouses are considered at risk of developing mental health problems.

Deeply embedded in the resources sector of WA, FIVE has been actively operating from St George's Terrace in Perth's CBD to the sheds of the remote Pilbara town of Paraburdoo. In addition to its whole-of-community remit, it created specific opportunities for WA's regional workforce and their families to participate.

As source communities for Rio Tinto's Pilbara operations, three of our five communities – Busselton, Geraldton, Derby – saw large number of employees and their families become involved in FIVE's whole-of-community projects. In Busselton, for example, we targeted FIFO wives (and their families) through an ephemeral arts project over nine days in the Ludlow Forest on the Leschenault Peninsula.

The strategy to engage WA's mining workforce and their families involved local reference groups consisting of representatives from DADAA, Rio Tinto management, Rio Tinto health and safety division, Rio Tinto communities' division, Rio Tinto's mining operations, local governments, local services, communities and the project's research team. This rich representation ensured high levels of cross-sector engagement throughout each project.

A key aspect of the success of FIVE was the extent to which it became embedded in Rio Tinto, such that we could use an active arts project to address stigma amongst mine workers and in mining culture. Senior leaders from Rio Tinto operations were also actively involved. This increased dialogue and contributed to widespread employee engagement and business endorsement.

FIVE was rolled out at a similar time to the Peer Support Program at Rio Tinto, with feedback from the company's health and safety division indicating that this timing helped to raise awareness around other mental health support services available to employees.

Rio Tinto's peer support program is part of the company's mental wellbeing strategy and execution plan, which includes raising awareness, education and training, enabling healthy lifestyles, facilitating connectivity between employees and their families, equipping leaders to identify early warning signs in employees, providing around-the-clock support services for employees and their families, and engaging in partnerships around mental health.

In 2013, Rio Tinto became the first resources company to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mental Health Commission. This outlines their intent to work on collaborative projects that improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities of interest.

From the perspective of the resources sector, FIVE has involved hundreds of Rio Tinto employees across the company. That has been its real strength – mobilising frank, human conversation around mental health, and giving permission and support to talk about the human impact of mining and the unique operating environment of iron ore in our big State.

In many ways for us in Western Australia, FIVE was incredibly timely. We needed a mechanism to give an artistic voice to the thousands of resource sector workers and resource communities that support Australia's economy. We wanted to acknowledge their culture, find out what they thought, felt and through FIVE stimulate their participation in our culture.

### **The case of Paraburdoo: pushing the boundaries of CACD**

Following place-based practice, DADAA works in communities and with communities. This means that consultation processes are long and thorough, and logistics can be challenging. It also means that as an organisation, we need to adapt to different settings and contexts.

As part of the FIVE project, for the first time, DADAA moved to work directly inside the resources sector of WA. The organisation took head-on the challenge of working in mining communities – characterised as being geographically remote, social isolated, emotionally and mentally tough working conditions. As a residential mining town, Paraburdoo had the deepest and longest engagement, and we share findings from this project later in the paper.

Artist Alex Mickle was charged with the process of turning miners into artists, to create a space where residential and FIFO workers could come together in the remote town of Paraburdoo to engage in dialogue around difficult issues in the process of building a sculpture. He involved more than 450 employees and community members in using the technique of 'blast forming' to create unique steel plates that would become part of a permanent sculpture in the desert. Once forms had been created, the sculpture was built and finished at the Paraburdoo Men's Shed.

Overlapping with the sculpture project, digital artist Craig Walsh completed a four-week residency during which he captured 26 digital portraits that responded to the question of what it means to 'belong' in Paraburdoo. Candid responses about the challenges of mining life, the meaning of family and friends, community, loneliness and disconnection were woven together. The collective narrative – BELONGING Paraburdoo<sup>5</sup> – was screened at a community celebration in mid-2014.

To date, FIVE has been the first community-based project of its kind in WA with strong mining industry links. It is the first time Rio Tinto has had an artist work on-site, as well as in the community, to test mining processes and create participatory artwork. It is also the first time in Australia that the technique of blast forming has been used to create a public artwork of this magnitude.

FIVE featured in local and national media but was picked up by a number of mental health and mining publications, including by the One Life suicide initiative, Mining Technology Australia<sup>6</sup> and *Australia PayDirt* magazine. All ran the art, mining and working life angle in their stories.

### Evaluating the social impacts of FIVE

An evaluation of FIVE was undertaken by Professor Peter Wright from Murdoch University as chief investigator and Natalie Georgeff from DADAA as co-investigator. Wright and Georgeff highlighted the challenge of evaluating the complexity of a project that merges arts and mental health and drew their methodology from the notion of FIVE as a 'complex adaptive system' (CAS). From the CAS perspective, mental health and wellbeing are seen as multidimensional, going beyond a simplistic notion of a biochemical imbalance in the brain to include physical, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, vocational and environmental elements.<sup>7</sup>

Drawing on work by Leicester and Sharpe who refer to this field as an 'ecosystem of cultural innovation'<sup>8</sup>, Wright and Georgeff note that "we can understand that there are many *interacting, interdependent, interrelated, and sometimes competing* systems that transect in dynamic ways where what happens in one impacts on others. In other words, what happens (cause and effect) is not linear, predictable, or one-directional" (p.4).<sup>9</sup>

The main framework used for evaluating FIVE the 'Five ways to Wellbeing' model.<sup>10</sup> Drawing from recent population health evidence, the model posits the following five actions in our daily lives as essential for wellbeing:

- *connect* with people around you
- *be active* by discovering physical activity you enjoy
- *take notice* of the world around you and what you are feeling
- *keep learning* as new things will make you more confident and be fun
- *give* to the wider community, which is rewarding and creates social connections.

Our researchers also used Animating Democracy's 'continuum of impact' in order to represent the complexity of outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

A pluralistic approach was employed for data collection with in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with people most involved in the project, and electronic surveys for Geraldton and Esperance and Paraburdoo. The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique was used for data collection and analysis for Busselton, with MSC-type questions used in data gathering in the other communities.

## Stories of change and key findings

The evaluation report's key finding was that the project was successful in building both the depth and breadth of social connections – what Wright and Georgeff call 'connected belonging' – as well as improving wellbeing through self-expression. Over the five communities, 87.5% ranked 'connecting' as the strongest way to wellbeing.

Two key outcomes are highlighted as being most significant and consistent across each site. They are: '*connecting in a creative space*' and '*wellbeing through self-expression*' and capture the mechanisms by which arts participation in a community setting can have a positive impact on mental health. We select three from the report for discussion below:

- *Connected belonging*: Through arts practice opportunities were provided to reshape participant's relationships to their community. This enabled many to move from a focus on the symptoms of their condition/s, to seeking to create meaning out of their experiences. This awareness raising did much to help participants understand and contextualise the social, political, environmental and cultural influences on their behaviour. It is this principle that highlights that *related-ness* is central to any effort to improve mental health and wellbeing.
- *Artists and makers*: When participants worked as artists and makers they were able to reclaim their personhood and identity, and subsequently reclaim his or her dignity. This reclamation occurred both through shared action learning (making), and reflective practice (viewing).
- *Making meaning*: The arts provided both the means and ends to gain more understanding about what was going on in participant's lives through the power of connection; this connection providing a richness of feeling that participant's described as 'missing' in their hearts referencing value and consequence.

To return to Paraburdoo specifically, the key theme that emerged from interviews was around 'connecting, collaborating and cooperating' (p.55).

When data from surveys was mapped against Animating Democracy's continuum of impact, the greatest difference that FIVE Paraburdoo made was in getting people talking more about mental health (64.3%). Similarly, for people involved in the large-scale sculpture project, the second highest ranked benefit is starting up a conversation about mental health and wellbeing (52.9%). These results are supported by interview themes about increased communication and discussions about mental health. It is this conversation, this capacity to talk about mental wellbeing that was the vital catalyst in breaking down stigma around mental health in FIVE communities.

More broadly, regarding the capacity of FIVE to address mental wellbeing in individual people involved, Wright and Georgeff note:

Key to understanding the successes of FIVE in its entirety is that health is a state of being, and then wellness is a process of 'connected belonging' not only to others, but also bringing into relationship one's social, creative and physical selves. Put simply, being *useful*, being *meaningful*, and feeling *hopeful*.

These outcomes can be understood through the way that arts practice brings together the participant's personal domain (their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes), the domain of arts practice (experimentation, inquiry and expression), the domain of consequences (the salient outcomes achieved), and the external domain (the resources of information, stimulus or support).

What this means was that mental health competence was built through (i) self-exploration, the asset rather than a deficit approach, which built (ii) strengths and confidence, which strengthened (iii) creativity and innovation, and facilitated (iv) emotional wellbeing through sharing and expressing difficult emotions and relationships. (p.77)

## Reframing CACD, rethinking policy

The convergence of art and mining is relatively rare, even more so in the CACD sector. Yet FIVE – in particular in Paraburdoo – has shown that these two fields have much to offer each other at a deep, human level. Through FIVE's CACD process, the project bridged two different ways of working: on the one hand, a mining company with concerns around risk mitigation, structured processes and material outcomes; on the other, community arts practice – inherently risk taking, fluid in process with experiential and aesthetic outcomes.

In Paraburdoo, the scale and ambition of the large-scale sculpture project and the commitment from Rio Tinto from all levels of its business meant that FIVE took CACD practice to a new level. It was able to engage community in such a way that a remote and dusty Pilbara town could contribute to the national conversation on public art. Their permanent 4.2 metre-high sculpture used artistic techniques novel in Australia and adds an important contribution to the nation's collection of public artworks.

In terms of changing workplace culture, CACD sat comfortably alongside more traditionally corporate-style initiatives and, at this point in time, there appears to be no other art-in-working-life project of this scale or character in Australia.

FIVE, to date, has demonstrated that CACD can be used to address 'wicked problem' such as mental health and suicide, but that this is best designed as part of a committed and layered partnership model that aims for collective action to make it work in complex and untraditional settings.

As we look to planning FIVE 2 – and beyond – we think that, based on our research findings, it is not overly ambitious to consider the project as having a significantly stronger platform around advocacy for the interconnection between the arts and wellbeing both in practice and in policy. More specifically – and with implications for policy change – we would advocate that many of the impacts on mental health seen in the FIVE project are best achieved in a specifically community arts space. It is not just the artistic or creative process, but the uniquely engaging setting, processes and products of the **community** arts that have the potential to bring about the crucial changes in our 'interactions, interdependencies and interrelatedness' that affect our wellbeing, and that we discuss in the preceding pages of this paper.

Key to the impact of a project such as FIVE is its ability to engage people directly in taking control of their own lives. In a mental health context, this is a powerful approach. CACD projects across Australia are demonstrating similar kinds of outcomes.

Many government arts funding bodies do have 'wellbeing' provisions in their funding policies, and this is to be applauded. However, the arts and health sector still needs a robust mechanism at the federal government level for drawing together the different strands of CACD so as to ensure that the national CACD sector is better recognised for what it achieves, and funded accordingly.

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## Presenters

**David Doyle** is Executive Director of Perth-based DADAA, a leading arts organisation at the forefront of the Arts and Health movement over the past 16 years. David has worked across Australia, Hong Kong, Kenya and Ireland to extend cultural participation for people with disability and mental illness. David holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts (ANU), Graduate Diploma of Education (ECU) and is an accredited Partnership Broker through PBAS UK. David is Editor of *Proving the Practice: Evidencing the effects of community arts on mental health*. In addition, he has written widely on Arts and Health practice in Australia, has been an advocate for arts and health for more than two decades, and is active in policy discussions at the state and federal levels. He is regularly invited to speak at conferences and symposia, both in Australia and internationally. David was awarded the National Arts and Health Leadership Award in 2009 for his work in the Australian Arts and Health sectors and the Western Australian State Arts Business Leadership Award for his work in sustainable partnerships, between communities, the business and Arts sectors. He is currently a Board Member of Creating Australia, an Australia Council for the Arts initiative that provides support and leadership to the CACD sector.

**Andrea Lewis** is Head of Communications at DADAA in Western Australia and one of the Coordinators of the FIVE project. In this role, she is part of the team that developed the FIVE project and subsequently managed various media, communications and partnership elements of the project. Andrea is Editor of *Proving the Practice: Evidencing the effects of community arts on mental health* and of *Bridging the Gap: The Story of a Community Arts initiative in the City of Bunbury*. She also helps to coordinate DADAA's research, evaluation and publishing activities. From 2001 to 2006, Andrea worked in marketing and public relations at Curtin University, managing the publications office, and from 2006 until 2007, she was Marketing Manager for the Western Australian Community Foundation. She has also worked as a freelance writer in the health sector. Andrea received a PhD from Pennsylvania State University in 1995, and subsequently taught English literature and critical thinking at the University of Colorado at Boulder.