



**\_Promoting the social inclusion of young families moving to non-metropolitan areas\_**

BY KAREN HEALY, MARGOT RAWSTHORNE, AMANDA DONNET,  
FIONA CANIGLIA, ANNE HAMPSHIRE AND ANNETTE MICHAUX

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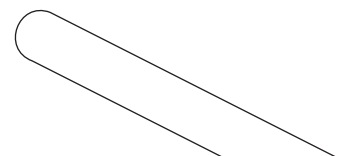
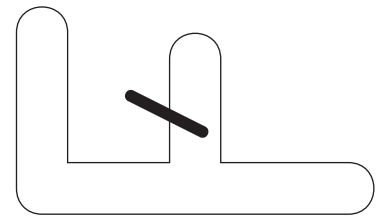
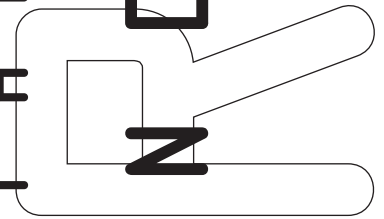
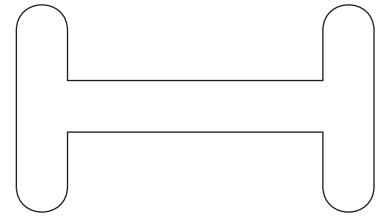
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### DISCLAIMER

This study was funded by a Linkage Grant LP0560740 from the Australian Research Council (ARC). Our research partners on the linkage grant are Queensland Treasury, The Benevolent Society, and Mission Australia. We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by these agencies.

The findings in this paper must not be interpreted as Queensland Government policy views or endorsements regarding methodology or results.

## GLOSSARY

**ABS** Australian Bureau of Statistics – a national statutory body responsible for collecting and analysing population data.

**AHURI** Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute – a national research body specialising in housing and urban research.

**LGA** Local Government Area – refers to the area for which a local government or Aboriginal council is responsible.

**MA** Mission Australia – a significant provider of community services in the areas of children and families, employment, homelessness and young people throughout Australia. Mission Australia also conducts policy and program research in a broad range of areas.

**OESR** Office for Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland Government – an agency within the Treasury department of Queensland Government which operates as the principal economic, demographic and social research agency for the Queensland Government.

**SD** Statistical Division – represents regions or geographic areas throughout Australia. They cover the whole of Australia and are the 'largest statistical building block' of States and Territories.

**SLA** Statistical Local Area – according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) "The SLA is a general purpose spatial unit. It is the base spatial unit used to collect and disseminate statistics other than those collected from the Population Censuses. In non-census years, the SLA is the smallest unit defined in the Australian Standard Geographical Classification. In census years, an SLA consists of one or more whole CDs [collection districts]."

**SEIFA** Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas – through SEIFA, the Australian Bureau of Statistics ranks regions to determine the relative level of social and economic well being (ABS, 2009). SEIFA is useful in analysing locations that should be prioritised for improved services.

**TBS** The Benevolent Society – a non-profit organisation established in Australia in 1813. It is a provider of human services in New South Wales and Queensland. Service delivery areas include support to families and children, older people, people living with a disability, carers and those experiencing mental health issues. The Benevolent Society also contributes to and generates social policy research as a basis for advocating improvements to benefit individuals and communities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2001 and 2006, significant population growth occurred along the eastern seaboard states of Australia. A substantial proportion of this growth occurred outside capital cities, particularly on the urban fringes of large cities, coastal areas and the areas around mining towns.

This study focuses on the movement of young families to non-metropolitan areas of Queensland and New South Wales, with the aim of building an understanding of the experiences and needs of these families. The research was conducted between 2006 and 2008, prior to the Global Financial Crisis. We recognise that the recent economic turmoil has affected all the communities we studied. One site of our study, Gladstone, has been greatly affected with employers in that area announcing the shedding of hundreds of jobs in 2009. While our findings point to underlying trends that are likely to remain in the context of current economic conditions, our report should be read as a snapshot in time.

The report includes an analysis of:

- population growth of young families within four diverse non-metropolitan communities;
- service providers' perceptions of the needs of young families who relocate, and
- the experiences of young families who have relocated to non-metropolitan areas.

On the basis of this analysis, practical policy responses are identified for government and non-government agencies. These responses look at reducing the factors that limit young families' choices about their location of residence and maximising the social inclusion of families who relocate to non-metropolitan communities.

The term "non-metropolitan" is used to refer to areas outside capital cities and major regional centres. This study includes urban fringe areas or peri-metropolitan areas, regional townships with populations under 200,000 people, and rural locations. The study was conducted in four communities in the following areas:

- Wyong Shire (Coastal regional – Central Coast, NSW)
- Camden (peri-metropolitan/urban fringe – South West Sydney, NSW)
- Oakey (inland rural town west of Brisbane, Queensland)
- Gladstone (Coastal regional – Queensland).

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used and a socio-demographic analysis of population growth in non-metropolitan areas of NSW and Queensland between the 2001 and 2006 censuses was undertaken. The study compares population growth trends with changing levels of disadvantage between the two most recent censuses within the four sites.

Field research was undertaken at each site. This involved in-depth interviews with 55 service providers across a range of service types and 43 parents of young families who had relocated in the last three years. Community forums involving social service agencies, community leaders and parents were also undertaken in each study location.

## FINDINGS

### Population growth and relative disadvantage

The study found that many coastal areas in Queensland experienced large growth between June 2001 and 2006, most significantly in coastal areas within commuting distance to Brisbane. In NSW, substantial population growth occurred in regions around Sydney. In both Queensland and NSW, many areas of high population growth were also becoming less disadvantaged. However, there was some evidence of displacement of disadvantage, as many inland regions near the coastal areas of high growth became areas of substantially greater disadvantage between 2001 and 2006.

In the Queensland study sites, marked population growth in Gladstone was associated with a significant decline in disadvantage in Gladstone and the nearby SLA of Callopie. However, more inland areas, such as the Banana Shire, experienced little population growth and remained highly disadvantaged as measured by the SEIFA index. Similarly, Oakey, the one inland rural site in the study, underwent limited population growth between the two censuses and remains a disadvantaged area within the region.

In the NSW study sites there was significant growth in the Gosford/ Wyong region with large population growth in the North East Wyong SLA. This growth was accompanied by a large decrease in relative disadvantage as measured by the SEIFA index. The Camden SLA is a relatively advantaged area and continued to experience strong population growth relative to other areas in the region.

Overall, the study found that population growth is strongest in advantaged areas and increased population was associated with increased relative advantage in three of the four study sites. Population growth was also found to be concentrated along the coastline.

Qualitative analysis of data from interviews with service providers and families revealed a number of reasons for relocation and a range of factors which promoted social inclusion or heightened the risk of social exclusion once families relocated.

### Reasons for relocation

The study found that families are relocating as a result of a combination of push factors and pull factors and, further, that the reasons families relocate appear to vary by location. Overall, relocation to the specific non-metropolitan area provided the majority of respondents with opportunities, such as improved housing and employment opportunities, or increased quality of life or lifestyle opportunities. Analysis showed that the importance of these factors varied across the study location.

- **Housing:** access to quality, affordable housing emerged as a major factor in the relocation of young families to communities in Camden, Gosford/Wyong and Oakey. In all three sites, some respondents identified that access to affordable housing for private purchase was a motivating factor for relocation. In addition, in Gosford/Wyong and Oakey improved access to private rental and public housing were also cited as factors in families' decisions to relocate.
- **Employment:** work opportunities emerged as a theme in the two Queensland sites, but not in the NSW sites, where a lack of local employment opportunities and the need to commute long distances to work, were identified as a stressor following relocation.
- **Lifestyle and safety:** in all locations, lifestyle issues, such as a more relaxed environment and perceptions of safety, factored in the decision to relocate. Whilst not a dominant factor in any community, this theme was mentioned in approximately a quarter of interviews across all areas. Respondents also reported that once a family had made a decision to relocate to a non-metropolitan area, they also took into account access to family and friends in deciding on their site of relocation.

### Contributors to social exclusion

Participants who had relocated were also asked to rate the extent to which they felt part of their new community. An assessment was made of factors which families and service providers felt contributed to families feeling socially excluded in their new community.

Six key themes emerged as contributors to social exclusion:

- dislocation from informal networks
- lack of local transport services
- commuting for work
- insularity
- mobility of the community
- inadequate service systems.

The relevance of these themes varied across the study sites, however three factors were common to all sites – dislocation from informal social networks; inadequate local transport systems; and inadequate service systems, referring in particular to limited access to health and community services and child care services.

Commuting for work was a significant issue in the two NSW study sites. The issue of perceived insularity of the community emerged as a theme in Oakey, which was the only inland rural community site in the study. Mobility, which referred to work-related mobility, was identified as factor contributing to social exclusion in Gladstone, where population growth was associated with work opportunities in the local mines.

### Promoting social inclusion

This study is concerned with promoting the social inclusion of young families who relocated to non-metropolitan areas. Social inclusion refers to maximising opportunities for young families to participate in their new communities at both a formal and informal level. At a formal level, social inclusion is facilitated by access to affordable and high quality health, educational and community services and having a say over the matters affecting their local community. At an informal level, social inclusion is facilitated through the development of local community networks that can assist people to "get by" in difficult times (Cattell, 2001).

In examining the factors that promoted social inclusion, three types of local activities contributed to the social integration of young families to the community.

- **Low-key outreach of neighbours and colleagues:** it appeared that young families who had at least one member in employment within the local area were more likely than those who were unemployed or not employed locally to experience this form of informal outreach.
- **Affordable recreational networks:** participation in social, cultural and sporting activities was seen as important in bringing new families into contact with established networks in the area. However, barriers to participation in these activities included, in some instances,

prohibitive costs and lack of time. Lack of time was a major issue for families where at least one member commuted long distances for work.

- **Proactive outreach by existing services:** in all four study sites, local health, education or community service institutions incorporated strategies for identifying and welcoming young families to the area. These strategies seemed especially important for engaging vulnerable young families.

#### **Practice, program and policy directions**

This report concludes that responses at the policy, program and practice levels must address both the 'push' factors that contribute to young families' decisions to relocate and the factors that contribute to increased vulnerability to social exclusion.

The study findings suggest that policy approaches should operate at three levels, these are:

- reducing the push factors leading young families to consider moving away from their original location of residence;
- improving planning, transport and service infrastructure within non-metropolitan communities;
- building community capacity to support and engage newly arrived young families.

Overall, access to quality health, education, child care and community services was a major concern in all study sites. The research highlighted the need for:

- additional multi-service hubs located in visible and high profile locations combined with a capacity for active and assertive outreach;
- holistic service provision approaches that are responsive to the diverse needs of young families relocating to non-metropolitan areas;
- adequate resources for community transport to enable more people to access services and adequate funding to services to effectively outreach to young families relocating to non-metropolitan areas;
- flexibility to provide mobile services where a team of professionals, particularly allied health and dentistry, visit particular locations where access is an issue, especially for low income families;
- flexible funding focused on assessing outcomes relevant to local communities;
- workforce strategies to attract and retain professionals in non-metropolitan areas.

Underlying these additional services should be the principles of:

- flexibility and innovation;
- assertive and active outreach;

- capacity to provide specialised services;
- capacity to achieve sustainability through the application of community capacity building strategies.

In summary, the report contends that government should reduce push factors by providing young families with every opportunity to remain in their location of choice, particularly where this location offers greater access to employment, transport and services. This will require policies and programs that ensure the availability of affordable, appropriate and accessible housing, particularly in the social and private rental sectors. For those families who do relocate to non-metropolitan areas, adequate employment and service provision are essential combined with targeted housing solutions to enable people to sustain a reasonable quality of life after the cost of housing. In seriously disadvantaged locations, a further policy priority needs to be the capacity for innovation and flexibility in service delivery to overcome severe barriers to access.

#### **Future directions**

The migration of young families to non-metropolitan communities is a well-established trend that is likely to continue. To a large extent this is a product of the perceived housing and lifestyle opportunities available in non-metropolitan communities. This research confirms that young families face a myriad of challenges as a result of relocation to these communities.

In the course of this study, a number of examples of flexible and active outreach by a range of local service organisations to promote the social inclusion of young families were observed. Of note was the extent to which these activities were something the organisations did of their own initiative, often unrecognised and unsupported by funding organisations. Currently, the social inclusion of young families in many non-metropolitan communities appears to be a matter of good luck rather than good planning. Yet, the phenomenon of non-metropolitan migration of young families is something government and service agencies should not continue to ignore as a major social concern, both for the sake of the current generations and the generations to follow. It is hoped this report will provide policy makers and practitioners with evidence for enhancing the social integration of young families who relocate to non-metropolitan areas.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Description of the research

Between 2001 and 2006, the population of Queensland and New South Wales (NSW) grew by more than 700,000 people. Remarkably, just over half this population growth occurred outside capital cities. Significant sites of population growth included the coastal communities within commuting distances to cities or regional centres and, in Queensland, the areas around the mining towns. Moreover, despite strong research interest in the non-metropolitan migration of older retirees, almost half of the population growth in non-metropolitan areas was amongst people under 50 years, with population growth amongst young families being especially strong on the coastline of these states. Attracted by a range of factors including actual or perceived opportunities for improved housing, employment, and lifestyle, these young families relocate hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres from established social networks.

This research aims to build an understanding of the experiences and needs of young families who migrate to non-metropolitan areas. The term “non-metropolitan” is used to refer to areas outside capital cities and major regional centres. This study includes urban fringe areas or peri-metropolitan areas, regional and rural locations (see also Murphy & Burnley, 1996, p. 242). This report includes a snapshot of population growth in non-metropolitan areas over the past decade, with a particular focus on growth amongst young families. The views of families and service providers in four non-metropolitan areas with regard to reasons for relocation, factors contributing to social exclusion and factors promoting social inclusion are then explored. The research was conducted between 2006 and 2008, prior to the Global Financial Crisis. We recognise that the recent economic turmoil has affected all the communities we studied. One site of our study, Gladstone, has been greatly affected with employers in that area announcing the shedding of hundreds of jobs in 2009. While our findings point to underlying trends that are likely to remain in the context of current economic conditions, our report should be read as a snapshot in time.

### 1.2 A rationale for action

There are many reasons why the growing population of young families in non-metropolitan areas needs attention, including evidence to suggest they may be at increased risk of social exclusion. On a per capita basis, many

non-metropolitan areas have lower levels of health and community services provision and fewer opportunities for permanent employment, particularly in high paying jobs, than metropolitan areas (see Meagher & Healy, 2005; Vinson, 2007). Increased commuting times experienced by some young families who relocate can also limit their capacity to participate in their adopted community. Young families who relocate to non-metropolitan areas may face increased vulnerability to locational disadvantage which Hayes *et al.* (2008) identify as one of the dimensions of social exclusion.

The moral imperatives for action centre on the fundamental tenets of social justice and the importance of society’s collective resources being equitably distributed to people outside of metropolitan areas. Successful regions and towns can play an important part in helping to manage the impacts of growth but only if adequate social and community infrastructure and service provision are available.

#### ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The *Families on the Fringe* research was funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant in partnership with the researchers at The University of Queensland, School of Social Work and Human Services (SWAHS) and The University of Sydney, Faculty of Education and Social Work, the Office of Economic and Statistical Research (OESR, The Queensland Government), The Benevolent Society (TBS) and Mission Australia (MA). The research was funded from 2005–2008. This research project was intended to enable the project partners to better understand, respond to, and advocate for, the needs of young families moving to non-metropolitan areas.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**The literature review focuses on the general experiences of people living in non-metropolitan areas, the historical reasons people have moved to these areas and the experiences of people once they do relocate.>**

Some examples of key policy initiatives that respond to the needs of families are also provided. The literature reveals that while people may relocate to non-metropolitan areas hoping for an improved quality of life, their vulnerability to social exclusion can actually increase.

### 2.1 Evidence that young families are relocating to non-metropolitan areas

Census data supports the notion that younger people are moving to non-metropolitan areas. Census 2001 suggests that 79% of the people who relocated to high growth coastal areas in the previous year were under the age of 50 (ABS, 2004). Of those relocating, about one third had come from a capital city and 42% from a large population centre (ABS, 2004). 78% of all residents had moved to a coastal area within the same state (ABS, 2004). Younger residents relocating to the coastal regions were most likely to have originated from large population centres (43%) (ABS, 2004). 25.2% of new residents were dependent children in high growth coastal areas (ABS, 2004).

ABS data analysed for this study demonstrated that in Queensland, for example, 58.7% of all population growth (or 462 000 people in absolute numbers) was to non-capital city areas in the period 2001-2006. The highest concentration of population growth occurred in coastal areas closest to the capital city with other regional growth also concentrated in coastal areas within commuting distances to work. In NSW 35.4% of the population growth (or 85, 900 people) was to areas outside of Sydney. Again this growth was concentrated in coastal areas and particularly in areas within commuting distances to employment .

### 2.2 Reasons why people relocate to non-metropolitan areas

Population growth amongst young families in non-metropolitan communities can be attributed to a

combination of push and pull factors. Push factors are the reasons people leave their current location and pull factors are the qualities that attract them to new places (Stimson & Minnery, 1997).

Differences in housing costs between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas has been found to be a major factor in people's decision to relocate to non-metropolitan areas (see Holmes *et al.*, 2002). It is significant that:

*...housing costs vary considerably by location. Median house prices or rents in metropolitan regions for example, exceeded those in non-metropolitan regions in the same states by as much as 20–80 per cent in 1996. (Yates, 2002, p. 7)*

Yates and Wood (2005, p. S82) establish a relationship between the "absence of a strong social rental sector" and lower income households relying on the private rental market for their housing needs. The problem is that in "many large urban areas, affordability problems are significant and reports of declines in the low-rent stock are widespread" (Yates & Wood, 2005, p. S82). This triggers "a concern that the increasing reliance on private provision of housing....will contribute to processes of social and spatial polarisation" (Yates & Wood, 2005, p. S82).

A major implication of decreasing housing affordability in metropolitan areas is that younger households are not able to afford home ownership. According to Yates (2007, p. 12), "The only existing affordable housing is likely to be located far from the centres of the growth engines of the economy."

Mission Australia quotes research from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) that indicates the mismatch between "where housing is affordable and jobs are located" (AHURI, 2005 in Mission Australia, 2006, p. 7). AHURI found the most prevalent reason welfare recipients moved away from non-metropolitan areas to metropolitan areas was employment, while the most common reason for moving from metropolitan areas to non-metropolitan areas was housing affordability (see Mission Australia, 2006, p.7).

### 2.3 Spatial disadvantage in Australia

In recent years, researchers have drawn attention to the links between social and spatial disadvantage. It is apparent that, on average, people living non-metropolitan areas, particularly rural areas, experience higher levels of disadvantage than those in urban areas (Vinson, 2007, pp. 66–85). According to Vinson (2007), social disadvantage in Australia is cumulative, temporal and spatial.

Vinson (2007, p. 6) applied a range of indicators closely associated with social disadvantage and grouped them as follows:

- social distress including low family income, rental stress and home purchase stress;
- health including disability, mental health and childhood injuries;
- community safety including confirmed child maltreatment;
- economic including unemployment and unskilled workers;
- education including early school leaving and incomplete education.

In essence because of the increasing polarisation of cities and regions along “socio-spatial lines” (Dodson *et al.*, 2004, p. vii), people living in non-metropolitan areas are more vulnerable to experiencing the dimensions of disadvantage outlined by Vinson. Furthermore, residents of non-metropolitan communities are less likely to have access to community and health services that might enable them to respond to some of the effects of disadvantage than residents of metropolitan areas (Meagher and Healy, 2005).

#### SPATIAL DISADVANTAGE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

This study seeks to understand the factors that contribute to social exclusion and inclusion. The term ‘social exclusion’ encompasses “not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life” (Green cited in Baum *et al.*, 1999, p. 4). While social disadvantage is relevant to this study, the concept of social exclusion penetrates further than disadvantage stemming from low-income. Social exclusion extends into dimensions of social life such as access to social services in education and health; lack of participation in community; and exclusion from resources and activities at an economic, political and cultural level (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2003, p. 7). For the purposes of this study, Saunders’ *et al.*, (2007, p. ix) summary of the three dimensions of social exclusion is helpful. These dimensions are described as follows:

- disengagement – lack of participation in social and community activities;

- service exclusion – lack of adequate access to key services when needed;
- economic exclusion – restricted access to economic resources and low economic capacity.

David Miliband, then Minister of Communities and Local Government in the UK (cited in Hayes, 2008, p. 8), also differentiates amongst types of social exclusion as follows:

- “wide exclusion refers to the large number of people being excluded on a single or small number of indicators;
- deep exclusion refers to being excluded on multiple or overlapping dimensions;
- concentrated exclusion refers to a geographic concentration of problems and to area exclusion.”

By including communities with a range of socio-economic profiles, from the comparatively disadvantaged (such as parts of Oakey) to the moderately advantaged (such as parts of Camden), this study seeks to understand how exclusion and inclusion of newly arrived families might function across differing socio-economic contexts.

The concept of social exclusion has been used by researchers to explore the social and individual impact of the geographical concentration of social and economic indicators of disadvantage. Daly (2006, p.11) contends that social exclusion occurs when:

*... people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle.*

The concept of social exclusion has been used to highlight the impact of a negative social and community environment on family and child well-being.

Recently, researchers have drawn attention to the links between spatial disadvantage and the social exclusion of young children. Harding *et al.* (2006, p. 2) observe:

*.. children living outside the capital cities face a much higher risk of social exclusion than those living within the capital cities, with some 14 per cent of all children living outside capital cities falling into the bottom child social exclusion decile compared with only 8 per cent of those inside capital cities.*

The negative effects of social exclusion include increased family stress and elevated risks of child abuse and neglect (Daly, 2006; Vinson, Baldry & Hargreaves, 1996), entrenched poverty and poor health outcomes (Wuff & Bell, 1997), and long term exclusion of children and young people from educational and employment opportunities (Travers, 2001).

## THE IMPACTS OF SPATIAL DISADVANTAGE

An important focus of this research is the role of local service systems in exacerbating vulnerability to social exclusion or in promoting inclusion. The literature provides insights on the impact of formal service structure and informal support on the likelihood of social exclusion.

It is well established that many urban fringe and regional communities lack adequate public transportation services (Dodson & Sipe, 2006). This contributes to vulnerability to social exclusion by limiting residents' access to employment and services compared to metropolitan residents (Dodson & Sipe, 2006). Dodson *et al.* (2004, p. vii) observe that:

*... transport systems play a role in mediating socio-spatial disadvantage through providing access to economic opportunities and social and community services" [and that] "location within the metropolitan urban structure...has become a key determinant of households' and individuals' access to employment and other opportunities.*

Furthermore, households on the urban fringe (or peri-metropolitan areas) are vulnerable to broader economic forces as, on average, they allocate a greater proportion of household income to servicing mortgages and covering commuting costs (Dodson & Sipe, p. 17).

In an exploration of carbon use among disadvantaged Victorian households, Unkles and Stanley (2008, p.2) found that in metropolitan Melbourne, the highest carbon use tends to be in the outer metropolitan areas:

*... the poor residents of LGAs with high carbon use... have a relatively low expenditure on public transport, but a correspondingly greater expenditure on private vehicles. It is also worth noting that within these areas there are fewer high order service centres such as hospitals, medical specialists, government offices and technical specialists, necessitating travel to obtain these services.*

Overall, Unkles and Stanley found that poor households in rural Victoria had much higher carbon use than in metropolitan Victoria (2008, p. 2):

*... one common feature of (poorer) LGAs is the absence of a major service centre and the limited availability of public transport.*

Hence, residents travel long distances by car to meet anything greater than the immediate local service needs (Unkles & Stanley 2008).

Among families who move to the fringes of major urban centres, there is increased likelihood of extensive commuting for work and educational purposes. Research points to the negative impact this has on quality of life for

individuals and communities. In their examination of the impact of commuting on households' capacity for family and community engagement, Flood and Barbato (2005, p. ix)<sup>1</sup> observed that:

*In high-commute communities there is less time for friends and neighbours, households are isolated and, depending on the time of day, the streets are either empty or roaring with traffic.*

In addition, to limited opportunities for community engagement, Flood and Barbato (2005) also found that 21 per cent of men "who work full time and have children under 15 spend more time travelling to and from work than they do with their children" (p. 29). Similar impacts were identified in relation to socialising with friends and relatives with "people who commute less... socialising more" (p. 30). Commuting times also impacted on participation in sport, hobbies or community organisations with people most active in these pursuits recording "significantly shorter commuting times" (p. 30).

Informal networks, or networks of family, kin and friends, can be stressed when young families relocate to non-metropolitan areas. In communities where public transport is lacking, the capacity of families to access service infrastructure can be limited. This is especially the case where families have one car and one parent uses this vehicle for work leaving the 'stay at home' parent without private vehicle access during the working week (see Daly, 2006, p. 28).

D'abbs' (1991) research on support networks found that adequate community and health service systems played an important role in reducing the potential for marginalisation of vulnerable families. In communities where service infrastructure is poor, families with high needs for services, such as families experiencing chronic illness or stress, are less likely to receive informal support than in circumstances where the service system is adequate. Given that many non-metropolitan communities have weaker service infrastructure than either cities of large metropolitan areas or large regional centres (Meagher and Healy, 2005), families with high service needs who relocate to non-metropolitan areas would appear to be at increased risk of social exclusion.

## CONCLUSION

This review has established that a substantial proportion of population growth in non-metropolitan communities has occurred amongst people under 50 years. The review also indicates that a variety of factors make relocation an attractive option for young families. Researchers have identified the lack of affordable housing as a major factor in families' decisions to leave metropolitan areas, particularly capital cities. However, as the socio-economic differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan

<sup>1</sup> This study analysed data from Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) which is conducted by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. The data analysed was from 2002 (Flood & Barbato, 2005, p. vii).

areas continue to grow, young families moving to non-metropolitan areas may find themselves at increased risk of social exclusion. While it is established that non-metropolitan areas are, on average, less advantaged than metropolitan areas, there has been little research on the extent to which population growth is affecting levels of advantage in non-metropolitan areas nor the experiences of young families or service providers in non-metropolitan areas. Our research will contribute to addressing these gaps in knowledge.

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### 3. METHODOLOGY\_

**The research took place in Queensland and New South Wales. A mixed method approach was used involving both quantitative analysis of data from the Australian Census of Population and Housing Data in 2001 and 2006 and qualitative analysis of interview data from four field sites.>**

The data included interview material with parents in families who had recently relocated to non-metropolitan areas and service providers in a range of health and human services fields who work with young families who have relocated.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'non-metropolitan' refers to areas beyond the boundaries of metropolitan cities. This study includes urban fringe areas or peri-metropolitan areas, regional, and rural locations (see also Murphy & Burnley, 1996, p. 242).

The four locations chosen for field research were:

- Gosford/Wyong, a regional location on the coast 90 kilometres north of Sydney, NSW
- Camden, a peri-metropolitan community 70 kilometres west of Sydney, NSW
- Oakey, an inland rural town 157 kilometres west of Brisbane and 29 kilometres west of Toowoomba, Queensland
- Gladstone, a regional location on the coast, 532 kilometres north of Brisbane and 107 kilometres south of Rockhampton, Queensland.

Sites were selected using a purposive sampling strategy<sup>2</sup> on the basis that:

- Substantial population growth had taken place;
- Diverse non-metropolitan locations were represented. The sites include both relatively economically disadvantaged and advantaged areas and also rural, regional and urban fringe communities. This variation was intended to enable the identification of possible differences in the motivations of families who have relocated and in their experiences of social inclusion and exclusion across those sites.

#### 3.1 Part 1: Socio-demographic analysis

A socio-demographic analysis was undertaken to:

- identify and analyse the rates of population growth within Queensland and NSW between the two census periods (2001–2006);
- analyse the relationship between areas of growth and change in relative levels of advantage and disadvantage between Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) between 2001 and 2006;
- identify how non-metropolitan areas with strong growth differ from surrounding areas.

National and state population growth was examined using the following ABS data:

- Regional Population Growth figures for 1996–2006 (ABS catalogue no. 3218.0)
- Estimated Resident Population data for 1996 at an SLA level for Queensland and NSW.

Annual population growth rates at an SLA level for Queensland and NSW were then averaged across two five year periods: 1996–2001 and 2001–2006.

SEIFA<sup>3</sup> data from 2001 and 2006 was analysed at an SLA level for Queensland and NSW. This data was used to assess any associations between areas of population growth and socio-economic disadvantage. The SEIFA disadvantage scores were converted to percentile ranks calculated at a state level to reveal the proportion of the state that is more disadvantaged than the SLA in question. The change in SEIFA percentile ranks<sup>4</sup> from 2001 to 2006 was calculated for each SLA in Queensland and NSW and areas with high levels of change in their SEIFA rank were identified. SEIFA rank changes were also compared to patterns of growth in order to assess what relationship, if any, exists between non-metropolitan areas of population growth and changing levels of disadvantage.

<sup>2</sup> Purposive sampling involves selecting study sites or participants based on a defined set of criteria.

<sup>3</sup> SEIFA analyses "the socio-economic wellbeing of Australian communities and (identifies) areas of advantage and disadvantage. ...SEIFA ... consists of four separate indexes that each concentrate on a different aspect of the social and economic conditions in an area." (ABS, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> A SEIFA percentile score of 25 would mean that 25 per cent of the state is more disadvantaged than that SLA. So, if in 2001, an SLA had a percentile rank of 20, and in 2006, it had a percentile rank of 40, this SLA had become less disadvantaged, as there is now a larger proportion of SLAs more disadvantaged than this SLA.

## 3.2 Part 2: Field research

### DESCRIPTION OF FIELD SITES

The following descriptions of the field sites are drawn from ABS data from the 2006 Census using the Basic Community Profile Series and Census Quickstats.

#### Location 1: Wyong Shire (Central Coast, NSW – coastal/regional)

The population grew from 284,581 people in 2001 to 297,956 in 2006 (ABS, 2007a<sup>5</sup>). 20.4% of the population is aged 14 years or less compared with 19.8% for Australia. In 2006, 18.6% of households were single parent households compared to 15.8% for Australia overall. For the whole area, unemployment was at 7.1% compared to 5.2% for Australia in 2006.

The median individual income was \$407 per week compared to \$466 for Australia in 2006. Household income and family income per week was also lower than for Australia (\$856/\$1,027 and \$1,081/\$1,171). 42% of the population were couples with children (compared to 45.3% in Australia). 2.2% of the population is Indigenous compared to 2.3% for Australia.

The median rent for the area was \$200 per week compared to \$190 for Australia. The median monthly mortgage repayment was \$1,500 compared with \$1,300 nationally. A higher proportion of the population fully own their own home (36.5% compared with 32.6%) leaving 33.1% purchasing a home and 25.7% renting (compared with 27.2% for Australia).

#### Location 2: Camden<sup>6</sup> (south west Sydney, NSW – peri-metropolitan/ urban fringe)

Camden is a shire in south west Sydney, which encompasses both residential and rural locations. The Camden local government area (ABS, 2007b<sup>7</sup>) population grew from 43,779 to 49,645 between 2001 and 2006. 25.5% of the population is aged 14 years or less (compared with 19.8% for Australia). 64.4% of the population is employed full-time compared with 60.7% for Australia overall. Correspondingly, unemployment is lower for the region (3.9%) compared with Australia (5.2%).

Median weekly incomes for individuals, households and families are all higher than for Australia at \$566/\$466, \$1,353/\$1,027 and \$1,465/\$1,171 respectively. The proportion of households that are couples with children is significantly higher than for Australia at 56.6% compared with 43.3%. One parent families are a slightly lower proportion than for Australia (14% compared to 15.8%). 1.3% of the population is Indigenous compared to 2.3% for Australia overall.

The median rental costs are significantly higher than for Australia at \$250 per week compared to \$190. Similarly, the median housing loan repayment per month is \$1,800 compared to \$1,300 for Australia.

Only 24.9% of the population fully own their own home and correspondingly, 50.1% are purchasing a dwelling compared to 32.2% for Australia overall. Only 18.9% are renting compared to 27.2% for Australia.

#### Location 3: Oakey (west of Brisbane, Queensland – inland rural town)

Oakey is an inland rural town with a population of 3,657 (ABS, 2007c<sup>8</sup>) in the urban centre, increased from 3,460 in 2001. Oakey is located in the former shire of Jondaryan which has a wider population of 14,094 (ABS 2007c, ABS 2007d). Jondaryan Shire had a higher proportion of residents aged between 0–14 years (24.2%) compared to Australia (19.8%). Oakey reflects this trend with 23.8% of the population aged 0–14 years.

9.1% of people living in Oakey are Indigenous compared with 2.3% in wider Australia. The median weekly income for individuals in Oakey is \$388 compared with \$466 nationally. Median weekly household income and median weekly family income for Oakey are also lower than median incomes for Australia (\$797/\$1,027 and \$995/\$1,171 respectively). 64.6% of the labour force is employed full-time compared to 60.7% across Australia. The unemployment rate was measured as 6.6% in 2006 compared to 5.2% for Australia.

38.9% of families are couples with children which is lower than for Australia (45.3%). The area has a slightly higher proportion of families headed by one parent compared to Australia (19.9% compared to 15.8%).

The median weekly rent is \$150 compared to \$190 adding strength to the possibility that lower housing costs may attract some households to the area. Consistent with lower rental costs, the median housing loan monthly repayment is \$867 compared to \$1,300 for Australia overall. A slightly higher proportion of the population is renting (36.2%) compared to Australia (27.2%).

#### Location 4: Gladstone (Queensland – coastal town)

Gladstone is a coastal town in Queensland. The population grew from 38,812 in 2001 to 42,903 at last census (ABS, 2007f<sup>9</sup>). 24.4% of the total population was aged 14 years or less compared with 19.8% for Australia overall.

The median weekly income for families was higher than Australia overall at \$1,437 compared with \$1,171, which may reflect that 13.2% of employed people worked in metal resources industries compared to 0.2% for Australia overall. Similarly, the median weekly income for

<sup>5</sup> All subsequent statistics in this section are from this publication unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> This information is from 2006 Census QuickStats for the Camden Local Government Area.

<sup>7</sup> All subsequent information in this section is from this source unless otherwise stated.

<sup>8</sup> This information about Oakey is from 2006 Census Quickstats for Oakey Urban Centre unless otherwise stated.

<sup>9</sup> All subsequent information in this section is from this source unless otherwise stated.

individuals and households overall was higher than for Australia.

3.3% of the population was Indigenous compared to 2.3% for Australia. 49.7% of all families were couples with children and 13.5% of all families were headed by one parent equalling an absolute number of 1,553 (compared with 45.3% and 15.8% respectively for Australia).

A slightly lower proportion of the population fully own their own home compared with Australia (26% compared to 32.6%) reflecting that 38.7% were purchasing homes (compared to 32.2%) and 29.1% were renting (compared with 27.2%). The median weekly rent was \$180 compared with \$190 for Australia. The median housing loan monthly repayment was also slightly less than for Australia (\$1,226/\$1,300).

## COMPARISON OF KEY STATISTICS

**Table 1: Comparison across areas of key demographic features**

Demographic features	Wyong	Camden	Oakey	Gladstone	Australia
Percentage of population <14yrs %	20.4	25.5	24.2	24.4	19.8
Proportion of households with one parent and children %	18.6	14.0	19.9	13.5	15.8
Median income (families)	\$1,081	\$1,465	\$995	\$1,437	\$1,171
Unemployment %	7.1	3.9	6.6	5.0	5.2
Percentage of population who is Indigenous %	2.2	1.3	9.1	3.3	2.3
Percentage of population renting %	25.7	18.9	36.2	29.1	27.2

(adapted from ABS data cited above)

Table 1 demonstrates that in three of the four community sites the population of young people (under 14 years) was substantially greater than the Australian average. In two study sites there were substantially more single parent households than the Australian mean. The study sites varied according to economic advantage, with people in two study sites having higher average incomes than the Australian average and two having lower. One community site, the rural study site, has a substantially higher Indigenous population than the Australian average. There is significant variation in the level of households renting their home, with Camden demonstrating a low proportion of renters, compared to the Australian average,



and Oakey showing a substantially greater proportion of people renting.

### DATA COLLECTION COMPONENTS

The field research was undertaken in 2006 and 2007 and involved three data collection components:

- interviews with service providers;
- interviews with parents;
- community forums.

#### Interviews with service providers

The first component involved 55 interviews with service providers recruited using a purposive sampling method. The primary criterion in selecting service providers was service delivery provision in one of the following fields:

- education;
- health;
- community services;
- child care;
- government services (primarily local government).

Two local government and one state government policy maker involved in contracting for community services were also interviewed. In selecting service providers, senior practitioners were recruited wherever possible as they were able to offer insights from their practice experience and also from the position of oversight within their organisation.

**Table 2: Overview of service providers interviewed**

Location/ field of service delivery	Education	Health	Community Services	Child care	Other	Total
Camden	2	1	5	1	1	10
Gosford/Wyong	5	0	4	5	2	16
Oakey	4	3	5	2	1	15
Gladstone	3	4	5	2	0	14
Total	14	8	19	10	4	55

### Interviews with parents

Forty-three parents participated in a semi-structured interview of 60–90 minutes duration. Forty of the interviews involved female parents. Parents were recruited from specific SLAs across each of the field study regions.

Participants were recruited via a combination of snow-balling<sup>10</sup> and purposive sampling methods. The following criteria were used in selecting participants:

- Participants had moved to the area preferably within the last two years and no more than five years previously. Most participants' time in the area ranged from three months to four years, though only four of the 43 participants reported moving to the area more than four years previously;
- Participants were parents of children aged 0–8 years;
- Participants resided with their children.

Service providers across the key service systems listed in Table 2 assisted the researchers to recruit participants.

Table 3 shows the number of interviewees in each study site.

**Table 3: Parents interviewed at each site**

Site	Number of parents of parents interviewed
Toukley (Gosford/Wyong)	11
Currans Hill (Camden)	10
Oakey	12
Gladstone	10
Total	43

The interviews focused on exploring the perceptions of young families who had relocated about:

- their motivations and experiences of inclusion and exclusion;
- factors contributing to exclusion and the opportunity for inclusion;
- the impact of relocation trends on the local community;
- the level of integration into their new community;
- their intention to remain in their new community;
- their experience with service systems.

### Community forums

Community forums were held in each research site and were attended by:

- local and state government policy makers;
- managers in community services;
- local service providers;
- families who had relocated to the community within the last two years.

The forums presented the initial data analysis and gathered views about available key service systems.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data from all interviews and forums was transcribed and entered into NVIVO qualitative software. Interview data from service providers and parents was analysed separately and inductive analysis techniques were used to identify and code themes. Networks of themes were developed around key research interests, particularly with regard to motivations for relocation and experiences of social exclusion and social inclusion.

A casebook recorded demographic characteristics of all participants. Matrix searches were used to compare emergent themes by characteristics of respondents, such as location of residence or site of service delivery. This allowed us to contrast the prevalence of themes such as housing costs as a motivation for relocation across the four study sites.

<sup>10</sup> Snow-balling sampling methods refer to the practice of asking research participants to identify other potential participants for the study.

## 4. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

This section outlines and analyses the socio-demographic context of families relocating to non-metropolitan areas including:

- the location of major hubs of non-metropolitan population growth;
- some key characteristics of non-metropolitan growth areas;
- relative levels of advantage and disadvantage as indicated by the SEIFA index.

Overall, there is evidence of substantial population growth in non-metropolitan communities. Population growth is highest in areas on the coast and in areas close to employment. These areas are also relatively advantaged using the SEIFA index. Correspondingly, there is some evidence that disadvantaged households have been displaced to areas surrounding high growth communities.

### 4.1 Australia's population growth

Australia's estimated resident population (ERP) was 18.3 million people in 1996, 19.4 million in 2001 and 20.7 million in 2006. Growth rates between 1996 and 2006 are represented below:

**Table 4: Estimated resident population between 1996 and 2006**

	Annual growth over 5 years %	Total growth over 5 years %	Total growth
1999-2001	1.2	6.0	1.1 million
2001-2006	1.3	6.6	1.3 million

All states and territories experienced population growth between June 2001 and June 2006. The three most populous states recorded the largest population growth in the five-year period to June 2006 as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: States by growth in population**

State	5 years to 2001		5 years to 2006	
	Growth in population	Average annual growth %	Growth in population	Average annual growth %
QLD	290,300	1.7	462,000	2.4
VIC	244,600	1.1	323,000	1.3
NSW	370,000	1.2	242,000	0.7

The fastest population growth in the five years to June 2006 was in Queensland, with the population increasing by 2.4% per year on average. Western Australia also experienced fast growth, recording an average population increase of 1.6% per year over the five years to 2006.

In each state and territory, the regions with the most prominent growth during the five years to June 2006 continued to be outer suburbs, inner areas of capital cities and some regional centres, particularly along the coast.

Capital cities recorded the highest growth of all areas and in all states and territories except Queensland and South Australia in the five years to June 2006, although the growth rate in the balance of NSW almost equalled that of Sydney Statistical Division (the Greater Sydney Area).

The balance of Queensland (Queensland excluding Brisbane) had the largest growth outside any capital city, increasing by 271,300 people. Table 6 compares growth outside of capital cities for Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

**Table 6: Population growth outside of capital cities, June 2001 - June 2006**

State	Population growth
QLD	271,300
NSW	85,900
VIC	50,800

Generally, the most prominent growth outside capital city districts was recorded along the coast of Australia.

## 4.2 Queensland

### THE BROADER CONTEXT OF POPULATION GROWTH TRENDS

Many Queensland coastal Local Government Areas (LGAs) experienced large growth between June 2001 and 2006. The LGA of Gold Coast for example, experienced the second largest growth of all LGAs in Australia between June 1996 and June 2006, with an annual growth rate of 3.7% (second only to Brisbane). Other Queensland coastal LGAs to record large increases included Maroochy, Cairns and Caloundra.

In a number of fast growing areas, decreases in the level of disadvantage have been recorded. In the Caboolture Shire, for example, five out of eight Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) experienced a SEIFA percentile rank change greater than 10. Ipswich East grew 5.1% in the five years to 2006, with a decrease in the level of disadvantage recorded as a change in SEIFA percentile rank of 22.

While growth was strong in the coastal regions, the hinterland regions of the Sunshine Coast are also experiencing stronger growth than for 1996–2001. Nine of 16 SLAs in the Sunshine Coast region showed a SEIFA percentile increase (i.e. less disadvantaged) of over 10 percentiles. The biggest changes in levels of disadvantage were two of the areas of highest growth – Maroochy North and Caloundra South – which both experienced a change in SEIFA percentile rank of over 20. This trend has been similar in locations such as Gatton, Kilcoy and Laidley.

Other non-metropolitan areas of Queensland have also experienced growth in the five years to 2006. The two areas surrounding Bundaberg both experienced substantial growth in the five years to 2006. Burnett (S) – Part A<sup>11</sup> which consists of the coastal area east of Bundaberg (i.e. Bargara) grew at 3.8% per annum. Burnett (S) – Part B, which surrounds Bundaberg to the north, west and south, grew an average 2.3% per annum compared to growth in Bundaberg itself, which was 1.7%. Gladstone experienced growth of 2.9% and the coastal region south of Gladstone (Calliope Part A) experienced growth of 3.6%.

### THE STUDY AREAS

**Map 1 (Refer to page 23)** illustrates population growth rates and changes in the SEIFA index between the 2001 and 2006 censuses in Jondaryan (Part B), where Oakey is located and including surrounding SLAs.

**Table 7: Changes in population growth and SEIFA rank, Oakey and surrounds**

SLA	Average annual population growth %		SEIFA rank		Change in SEIFA rank
	5 years to 2001	5 years to 2006	2001	2006	
Cambooya – Part A	5.8	5.0	66	76	10
Crows Nest – Part A	4.5	7.3	88	94	6
Jondaryan – Part A	5.3	6.0	74	86	12
Jondaryan – Part B	0.5	0.3	20	27	7
Rosalie – Part A	3.3	3.3	45	60	15
Toowoomba – Central	-0.3	-0.2	31	29	-2
Toowoomba – North-East	0.1	0.1	82	70	-12
Toowoomba – North-West	-0.4	0.6	14	21	7
Toowoomba – South-East	3.1	3.7	76	70	-6
Toowoomba – West	0.6	0.9	21	24	3

The analysis demonstrates a low level of population growth in relatively disadvantaged areas within the region and high patterns of population growth in more advantaged ones. This was a consistent theme across all of the study areas. There was little population growth in Jondaryan Part B, where the township of Oakey is located, and it is relatively disadvantaged compared to many other areas in the region.

Between 2001 and 2006, there was very strong growth in Cambooya, Crows Nest and Jondaryan Part A, with much of the growth in the Toowoomba region concentrated in these SLAs. All of these areas have low levels of disadvantage as indicated by their SEIFA scores. Furthermore, the population growth in these areas was associated with a further decrease in the level of disadvantage in these areas. A similar large decrease in the level of disadvantage was seen in Rosalie, which also experienced relatively strong growth in this period. This pattern of strong growth and decreasing disadvantage

<sup>11</sup> The Burnett SLA is divided by the ABS into two parts for data collection purposes. These parts are titled: Burnett Part A and Burnett Part B.

in these regions is in sharp contrast to the weaker growth and much greater level of disadvantage in Jondaryan Part B, where Oakey is situated. In summary, Oakey did not record the level of population growth experienced by many of the surrounding regions and remains a highly disadvantaged area within the region.

**Map 2 (Refer to page 24)** illustrates population growth and changes in SEIFA in Gladstone and the surrounding regions.

**Table 8: Changes in population growth and SEIFA rank, Gladstone and surrounds**

SLA	Average annual population growth %		SEIFA rank		Change in SEIFA rank
	5 years to 2001	5 years to 2006	2001	2006	
Miriam Vale	2.4	3.8	8	19	11
Monto	-2.7	0.3	33	23	-10
Fitzroy – Part A	0.2	5.6	23	39	16
Livingstone – Part A	3.7	3.8	45	87	42
Rockhampton	-0.3	1.2	29	29	0
Calliope – Part A	2.6	3.6	46	65	19
Gladstone	0.2	2.9	26	49	23
Calliope – Part B	-0.1	0.7	13	27	14
Fitzroy – Part B	0.5	-1.4	41	44	3
Livingstone – Part B	2.5	2.9	45	44	-1
Mount Morgan	-0.1	1.5	2	8	6

The data in Table 8 shows that the Gladstone region experienced significant growth with a substantial decline in disadvantage as indicated by changes in the SEIFA ranking between 2001 and 2006. Gladstone itself experienced population growth and a decrease in the level of disadvantage. The SLA of Calliope shared in the

population growth and improved SEIFA rank, and overall has a lower level of disadvantage than Gladstone itself. A similar pattern can be seen around Rockhampton, with a less disadvantaged SLA adjacent to the city. This may be because those who are less disadvantaged are choosing to settle in the area immediately adjacent to the regional area or because those already residing there have experienced a decline in the level of disadvantage in the period 2001–2006. Notably Miriam Vale, which is on the coast and has experienced considerable population growth, remains a highly disadvantaged SLA although there has been a slight positive change in its SEIFA rank between 2001 and 2006.

### 4.3 New South Wales

#### THE BROADER CONTEXT OF POPULATION GROWTH TRENDS

Overall, growth is occurring around Sydney, with the highest growth tending to occur in areas with lower levels of disadvantage. In areas traditionally more disadvantaged, growth seems to be causing local dichotomies: where highly disadvantaged groups live alongside those who are relatively well-off. Similar trends are recorded on the outskirts of Sydney.

Coastal areas are becoming less disadvantaged, yet in areas near these growth regions, there is an overall increase in disadvantage. For example, on the mid-north coast of NSW, Byron and Bellingen both became much less disadvantaged, but the inland region behind them (Clarence Valley Balance) experienced a steep increase in the level of disadvantage, moving from the 38th percentile to the 8th percentile. This general pattern of decreasing disadvantage in growth areas combined with higher disadvantage in surrounding regions was broadly reflected across the state.

One explanation for this trend is that workers on lower incomes are trying to break into the property market or are searching for a lower cost of living. To do this, households are moving into traditionally lower cost areas, leading to reduced levels of disadvantage in that area and concentrated disadvantage in the surrounding areas. This possibility is further explored in our analysis of respondents' discussions of their reasons for relocating to specific non-metropolitan sites.

#### THE STUDY AREAS

Within the Gosford/Wyong region, the strongest growth was recorded in the most disadvantaged SLA in the region, Wyong North-East. This strong growth of 3.3% per annum in the period 1996–2001 and 2% per annum from 2001–2006 was associated with a steep drop in the level of disadvantage in the area.

The splitting of Gosford/Wyong has shown that the western region (60th percentile) is much more disadvantaged than the eastern region (83rd percentile). The eastern region may be seen as more desirable as it is a coastal area, closer to Sydney and on the transport corridor, whereas the western region is off the transport corridor and not coastal. Again, the extent to which the availability of transport was a factor in respondents' decisions about relocation is explored subsequently.

**Map 3: Gosford/Wyong (Refer to page 25)**

**Table 9: Changes in population growth and SEIFA rank, Gosford/Wyong**

SLA	Average annual population growth %		SEIFA rank		Change in SEIFA rank
	5 years to 2001	5 years to 2006	2001	2006	
Gosford – East	2.0	0.2	71	83	12
Gosford – West	0.9	0.1	71	60	-11
Wyong – North-East	3.3	2.0	25	34	9
Wyong – South and West	1.6	0.1	26	49	23

Growth in the Gosford/Wyong region between 2001 and 2006 was concentrated in north-east Wyong, which included the study area of Toukley. The north-east Wyong SLA is the most disadvantaged SLA in the region, but the large growth was accompanied by a large decrease in the level of disadvantage. The SEIFA changes in Gosford East and West are uninterpretable, as East and West Gosford were only split in 2006; data from 2001 viewed the area as a whole. Notably, the coastal portion of Gosford (Gosford East) has a concentration of low disadvantage, compared to the remainder of the region. We have highlighted Toukley on this map, because this was the area where we undertook the qualitative research discussed in the next chapter.

**Map 4 (Refer to page 26)** illustrates population growth and changes in SEIFA in the Camden area and the surrounding regions.

**Table 10: Changes in population growth and SEIFA rank, Camden and Currans Hill**

SLA	Average annual population growth %		SEIFA rank		Change in SEIFA rank
	5 years to 2001	5 years to 2006	2001	2006	
Sutherland Shire – West	0.9	-0.4	92	93	1
Bankstown – North-West	0.7	0.3	22	14	-8
Bankstown – South	0.6	0.1	22	71	49
Fairfield – East	-0.3	0	1	2	1
Fairfield – West	0.5	-0.7	2	26	24
Liverpool – East	1.6	0.3	16	16	0
Liverpool – West	12.5	3.1	17	72	55
Camden	6.6	2.3	83	87	4
Campbelltown – North	-0.2	-0.8	13	26	13
Campbelltown – South	0.7	0	13	37	24
Wollondilly	2.1	1.5	76	81	5
Holroyd	1.3	0.8	46	44	-2
Parramatta – South	0.3	0.6	62	4	-58
Penrith – East	0.1	-0.3	63	61	-2
Penrith – West	2.5	0.2	64	77	13

The fourth study site Camden is located within highly advantaged areas and relatively high growth areas. The population growth in this peri-metropolitan region is concentrated in Camden, Wollondilly and Liverpool West. These areas all have low levels of disadvantage. Of the areas with high growth, the largest SEIFA change was in Liverpool West, with a large decrease in the level of disadvantage. Large decreases in the level of disadvantage were also seen in the SLAs adjacent to the high growth SLAs, including Campbelltown South and Fairfield West. We have highlighted Currans Hill in this map because this was the area where we undertook field research for this region.

### **SUMMARY FINDINGS**

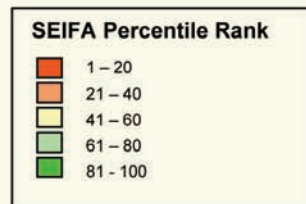
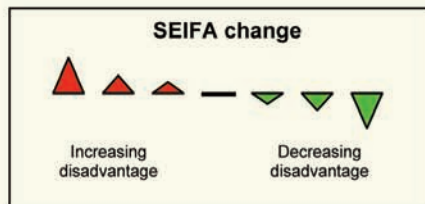
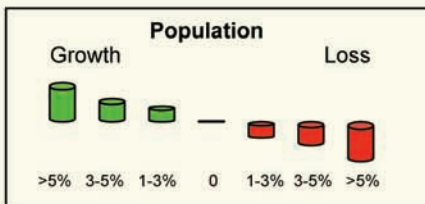
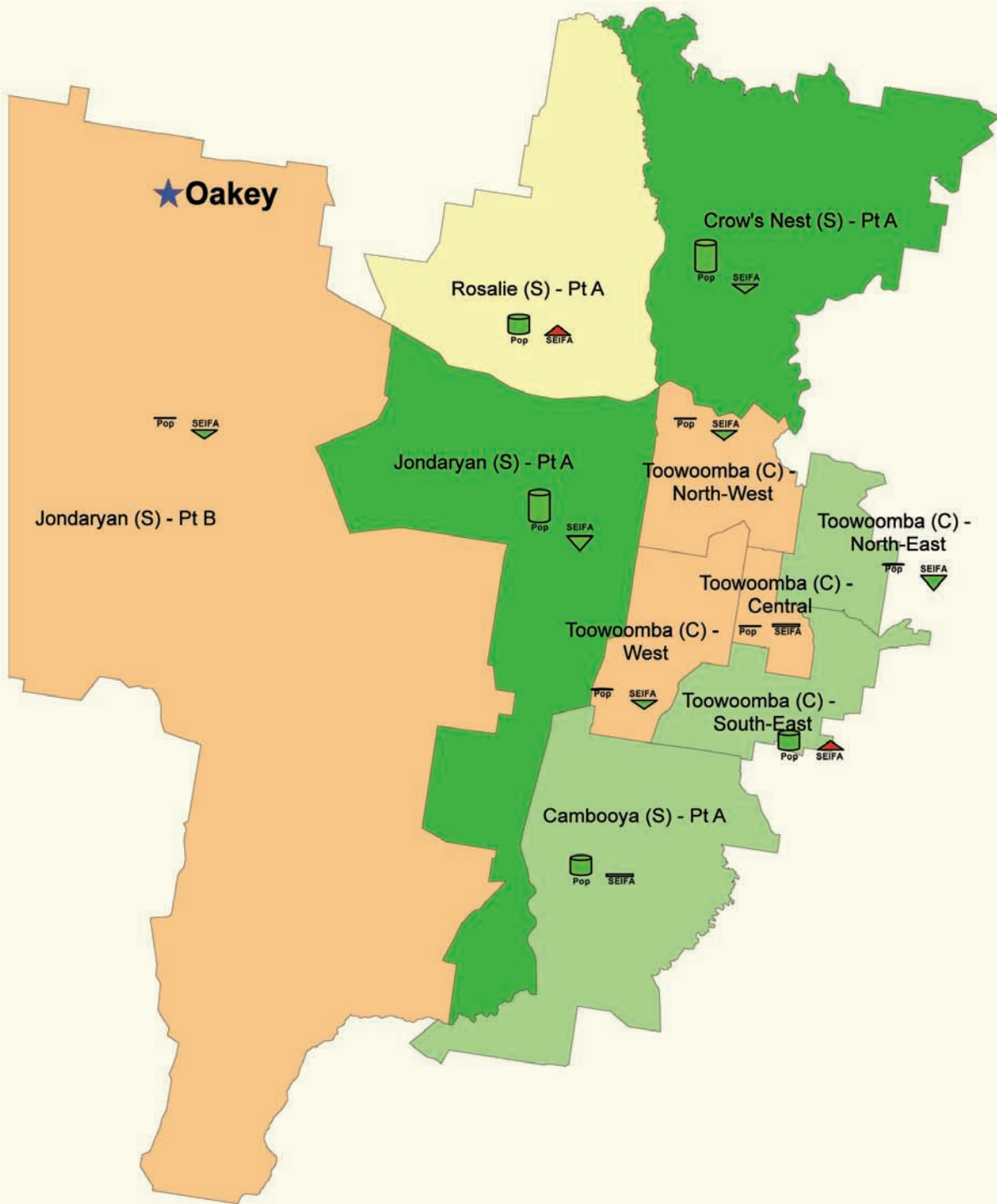
Findings on population growth and relative disadvantage suggest a number of features of population growth in non-metropolitan communities.

First, population growth is strongest in advantaged areas. Second, increased population is associated with increased relative advantage, with three of the four study areas demonstrating increased socio-economic advantage as indicated by positive changes in their position on the SEIFA index. Third, population growth is concentrated along the coastline.

The further away non-metropolitan areas are from regional centres and employment opportunities, the less likely it is that these areas will experience population growth. There is some evidence of displacement of disadvantage, as areas further inland from the coastal areas appear to be subject to limited population growth and little, if any, increase in their position on the SEIFA index. Some inland areas experienced a substantial decline in their position on this index.

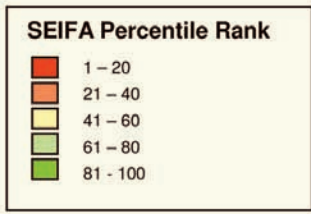
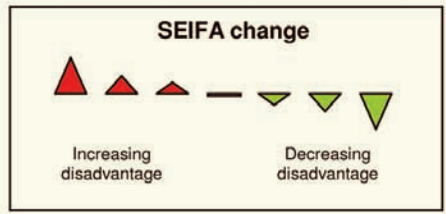
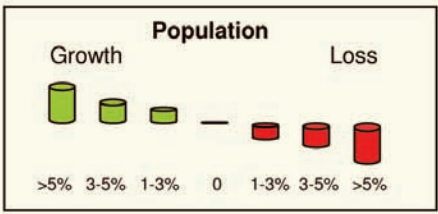
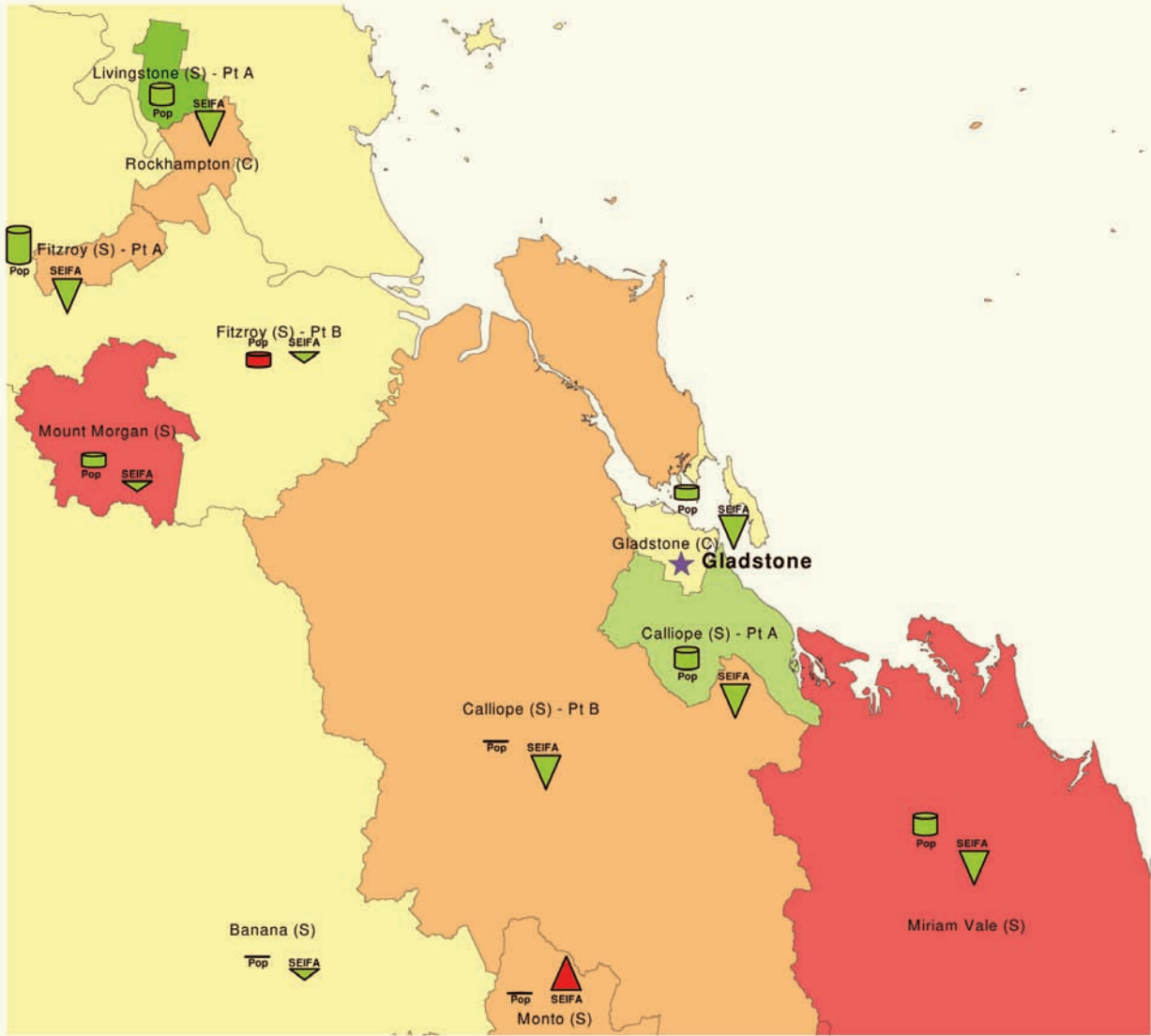
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MAP 1: OAKLEY AND SURROUNDS

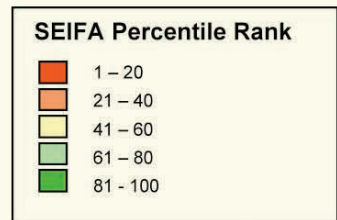
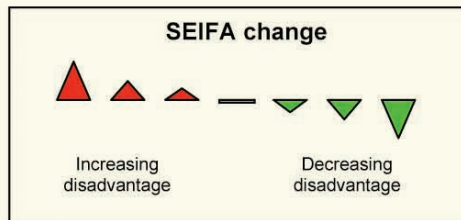
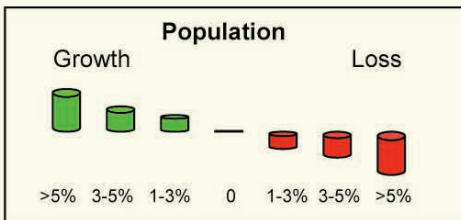




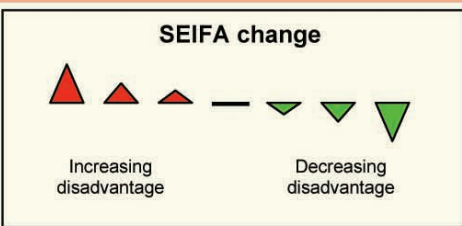
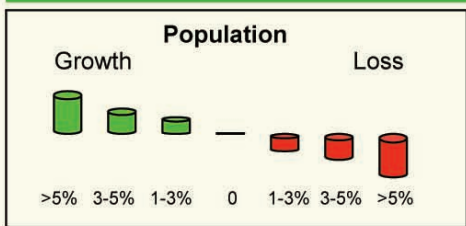
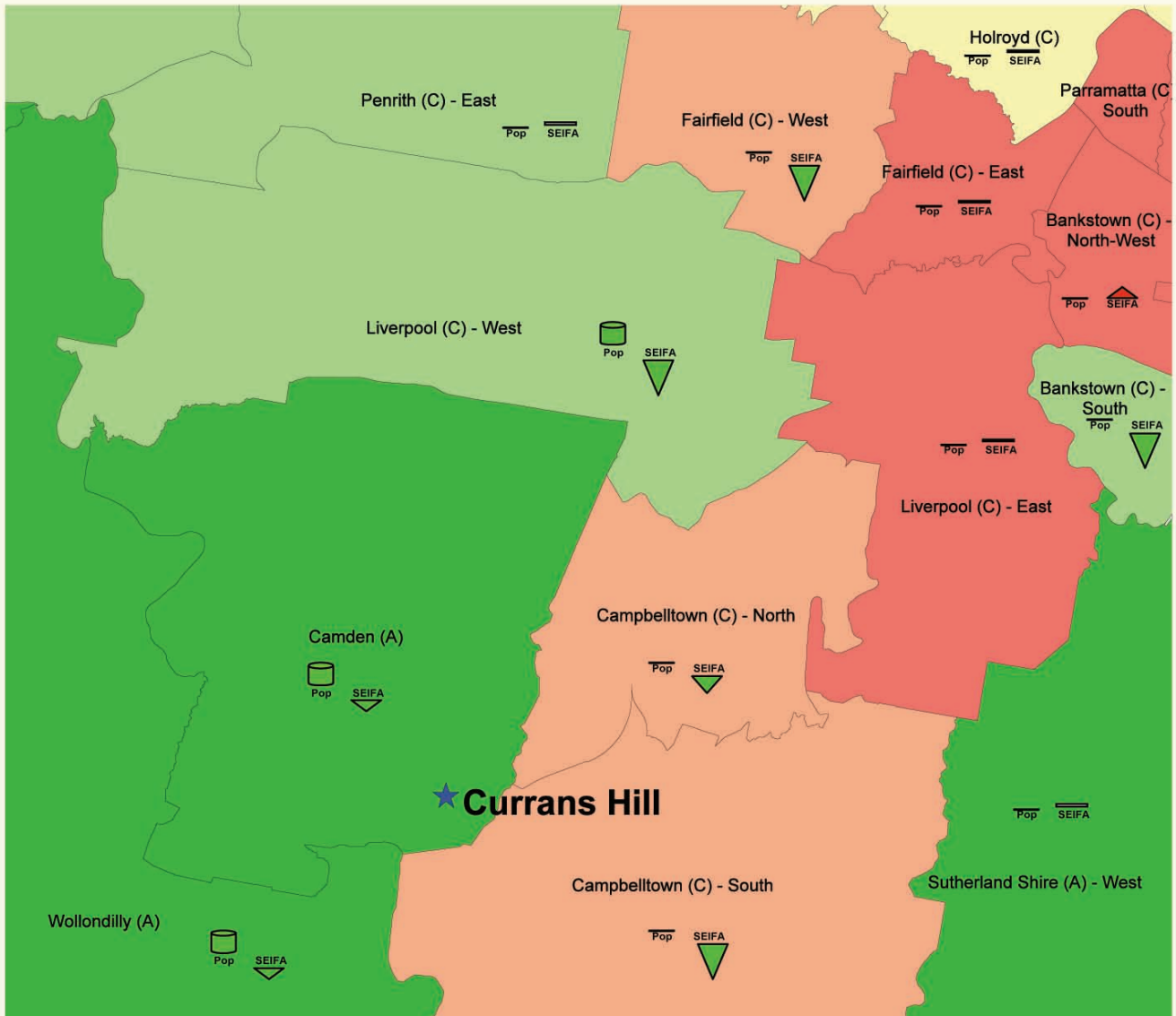
MAP 2: GLADSTONE AND SURROUNDS



MAP 3: GOSFORD/WYONG



MAP 4: CAMDEN AND CURRANS HILL



## 5. THE VIEWS OF FAMILIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents a qualitative analysis of service providers' and parents' views about non-metropolitan relocation across the four locations. >

This analysis focuses on:

- the motivations underpinning young families' decisions to relocate;
- factors contributing to perceptions of social exclusion, including perceptions of adequacy of the service system in each site;
- practices that contributed to social inclusion.

### 5.1 Motivations to relocate

The following themes regarding reasons for relocation emerged in most but not all study sites:

- housing;
- employment;
- lifestyle and safety issues.

Pre-existing social connections also emerged as a theme, but did not appear to be as significant in young families' decision-making about relocation.

Furthermore, the meaning of each theme varied considerably by site. For example, while housing was a key theme as a motivator for relocation in three sites, participants differed around whether they sought public or private housing and about housing accessibility, affordability and quality.

Table 11 provides an overview of the key themes contributing to the decision to relocate by location.

**Table 11: Motivation for relocation by field research site**

Location	Housing	Employment	Lifestyle & safety
Gosford/Wyong (NSW)	✓	X	✓
Camden (NSW)	✓	X	✓
Oakey (QLD)	✓	✓	✓
Gladstone (QLD)	X	✓	✓

#### Theme 1: Housing

Access to quality, affordable housing emerged as a major factor in the relocation of young families to non-metropolitan communities in Camden, Gosford/Wyong and Oakey. In all three sites, some respondents identified that access to affordable housing for private purchase was a motivating factor for relocation. Even so, there were differences within each area about the type of housing families were seeking.

In both Camden and Gosford/Wyong, respondents indicated that affordability and quality of housing was a key motivator for relocation. For example, a newly arrived resident of Currans Hill in the Camden area observed:

*We were looking for a bigger house. We'd had one child already, and we were looking something bigger – we knew there was more [children] to come... We were looking for somewhere where we could afford, and a big house and all of that. (Camden, parent participant)*

A family support worker made a similar observation in her discussion of the factors motivating families to relocate to Camden:

*The very first thing that's going to draw someone out here is the lower cost of housing, as opposed to the high cost of housing as you get closer to Sydney... It's cheaper to buy a house out here. Number one, the dream is owning a house, as of all of society – if it's going to be a reality, then they have to move where they can pay for it, where they can afford it.* (Family Support Worker, Camden)

Similarly, a resident in the Toukley area of the Gosford/Wyong area commented:

*We couldn't afford down in Sydney with what we've got up here, we live on the water up here. We would never afford going to Sydney in the water there.* (Parent participant, Gosford/Wyong)

In this excerpt we see that the resident is able to live in a property that more closely approximates her ideal (to 'live on the water') than would be possible in Sydney. In the Gosford/Wyong shire, a respondent who worked in the local government observed that many young families who relocated to the shire were motivated by

*Housing affordability, as far as about the cost of house – but it's probably about being able to buy a home with a backyard rather than a unit or a semi, or something like that.* (Government respondent, Gosford/Wyong)

Data from Camden and Gosford/Wyong suggested that for those interviewed, access to affordable and quality housing were the major factors in decision-making.

By contrast, respondents from Oakey indicated a preference to reside in a rural community with the lower cost of housing being an additional attraction. For example, one Oakey resident described the following motivations for relocation:

*...cheaper living, cheaper blocks of land, just the country lifestyle really. I'm just not into the hustle and bustle.* (Oakey, parent participant)

Similarly, a respondent from the local council observed:

*I think primarily, the people that are moving into Jondaryan Shire are doing so because the land prices are a bit cheaper, compared to Toowoomba.* (Government respondent, Oakey)

Many respondents who had relocated to Gosford and Oakey resided in rental properties. Differences were evident between the two sites. Those who had relocated to Gosford/Wyong mentioned the quality of rental housing and its proximity to desirable locations, such as beaches, as a factor in their decision to relocate:

*Where I was living before in Western Sydney, I was paying \$180 per week in a unit and it was horrible. So I thought, why not pay rent at the same price and actually be able to move to the beach?* (Gosford/Wyong, parent participant)

By contrast, four of the 11 resident respondents in Oakey identified greater and more immediate access to rental properties as a factor in their decision to relocate. For example, in discussing access to private rental housing one respondent stated:

*It's a lot easier than in Brisbane... I applied for housing and found out two hours later after applying [that I had the house].* (Oakey, parent participant)

*We were just lucky that we went through private [real estate], and we got the house accepted straight away. Cause they were looking for long term people that work and have got children. Yeah, we got it pretty well straight away. And very lucky for a first time, you know. 'Cause I came from Department of Housing. I had that for seven years. And then coming out of Department of Housing and trying to move into a house, it was really hard.* (Oakey, parent participant)

Ready access to public housing in Oakey was also a factor mentioned by respondents both in interviews and also at the public forum. For example, one respondent stated:

*[my partner] was already on the priority wait list for housing, and so he took me to Fortitude Valley [metropolitan Brisbane] office one day. ...And three weeks after going for that interview we were housed [in Oakey].* (Oakey, parent participant)

Overall, for the majority of families, housing was a factor in their decision to relocate. However, housing choices were often accompanied by a range of factors such as employment, proximity to family and perceived suitability of the area as a medium to long term site of residence. The following case study illustrates this mix of factors.

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#### CASE STUDY ONE: MOVING TO OAKEY

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The young family in this case study comprised a married couple with three children under 7 years who had relocated to Oakey from Toowoomba, the nearby regional centre. The family identified that their decision to buy a house led to their decision to move to Oakey. While the family had employment in Oakey, they had initially considered buying a home in Toowoomba in part because they have family networks there. However, they found that housing costs in Oakey were considerably lower and they also saved time and money due to reduced travel time to work. The family said that prior to residing in Toowoomba,

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they had lived in a large coastal town and would still prefer to live near the beach. Their long term plan is to relocate to a coastal area. For now, however, Oakey provides them with the advantages of affordable housing, proximity to work and to family. The family considers themselves part of the Oakey community and attributes their inclusion to involvement in networks associated with their work, the oldest child's involvement in sporting activity and the welcome they have experienced in the community. As one respondent from this family stated: "When we moved to Oakey, the whole neighbourhood came and said "G'day". When my child was born, everyone came around and brought presents."

### Theme 2: Employment

A second theme in the decision to relocate was employment. This theme was evident in the two Queensland sites, but not in NSW. In the NSW sites, a lack of local employment opportunities and the need to commute long distances to work were identified as stressors following relocation.

Employment opportunities were identified by the majority of respondents in the Gladstone study area as a major factor contributing to the decision to relocate to that area. In particular, access to well paid employment opportunities in the mining industry was frequently identified as providing significant incentives for relocation, as the following case study illustrates.

### CASE STUDY TWO: MOVING TO GLADSTONE

The young family in this case study had moved from overseas to Gladstone during the previous year. They had previously lived in mining towns and moved to Gladstone because of employment opportunities. They have two children under five years and found that they fitted well into the Gladstone community. Like many of the families interviewed in this study, their intention was to remain in the area for a set period of time. Their plan was to reside in Gladstone for three to five years. Initially the husband's employer had provided support with accommodation and the family had recently purchased a house. They have no family ties in the area and the husband's work involved regular periods of absence from the home – for two days at a time. The family described this work pattern as acceptable but "difficult for the kids." The mother felt somewhat isolated when she moved to the area and was disappointed at the lack of government or employer sponsored support services for new families. In her previous country of residence, she identified that there were government sponsored groups that "introduce new mums that come into the area and organise groups within the area and that's to meet other mums, I find that they

didn't have anything like that here." This parent also expressed concern about the lack of affordable child care services, stating that: "I think the cost of kindy, the fees are so shocking, I've never known anything like this. Getting your child into a kindy, my son had to wait and he only just got in this term and yeah, so really bad. Child care services, private child care services, are really hard to get into and astronomically expensive."

Similarly in Oakey, respondents identified local employment opportunities as motivation for some young families to move to the area. In reflecting on the reasons young families relocate to the area, one respondent stated:

*....would be work-related. A lot of people that I'm in contact with move here for work, whether it be the army base – that's a big thing for young families to move to this area. The meatworks is another one, so – mainly work-related, or family ties – because this is a community where families are generational. They're very large families, and they've been here for generations. (Oakey, community services sector)*

By contrast, respondents in Camden and Gosford/Wyong identified that there were limited local employment opportunities except in the building industries, seasonal work in the tourism industry on the Central Coast, or casual low paid work in service industries. As a consequence, many families spent considerable time commuting to Sydney for work. As is discussed later in this report, this has been found to contribute to difficulties in achieving social integration (see Flood & Barbato, 2005).

### Theme 3: Lifestyle and safety issues

In all locations, respondents reported that an improved quality of life was a factor in the decision to relocate. Whilst not a dominant factor in any community, this theme was identified in approximately one quarter of interviews across all areas.

In Camden and Oakey, a country lifestyle was identified by service providers and residents as a significant attractor to the area. As one resident in Oakey stated:

*I mean I've sort of lived in cities all my life, and do prefer the country. (Oakey, parent participant)*

In the coastal areas of Gosford/Wyong and Gladstone, respondents cited access to beaches and waterside living as attracting young families to the area. For example, one respondent in the Gosford/Wyong area commented that despite the significant commuting times, the Central Coast offered considerable advantages for young families on low to middle incomes:

*People were travelling all the way back to their homes in outer western Sydney, on a Friday afternoon, with*

*still not as much to do. Whereas in summer here we've got the beach. And for a proportion of them [families moving here] – the beach is a very big attractor.*  
(Service provider, education sector)

Respondents at the Gladstone field research site also observed that access to the beaches was considered a factor in why young families chose to relocate to that particular area rather than an inland mining community.

In both Gosford/Wyong and Camden, respondents reported that the areas offered the 'best of both worlds' in that families could enjoy a non-metropolitan lifestyle whilst maintaining access to the employment opportunities offered in the cities. As a service provider stated:

*I think they move here mainly to get that more rural feel, but still be very close to their urban needs... it's very much the focus is – 'Well Camden's country – but hey, I need to be close to work, train, all of that sort of stuff.*  
(Education service provider, Camden)

Another lifestyle factor that appeared especially important amongst those in Camden was access to quality educational services, which was mentioned by three of the parents interviewed.

Perceptions that the non-metropolitan environments offered a safer place to live than metropolitan areas was also a lifestyle factor for some respondents across all areas. For example, one respondent resident in Oakey stated:

*Well it's a lot safer here than what it is in the city. And you don't have to worry about needles and stuff like in the city. And hooligans, and drugs and stuff like that. Here, you get them every now and again, but not as much.* (Parent participant, Oakey)

The popular view of regional and rural areas as places that are more relaxed and less affected by crime, was also represented in the lived experiences of some of the participants to this study and added to their attraction to non-metropolitan areas.

#### **Theme 4: Social connections**

A final theme in the decision to relocate was pre-existing social connections within the specific area. Social networks appeared as a secondary factor in decisions about where relocate, rather than part of the initial decision to relocate to a non-metropolitan area. In some instances, these social networks were distant acquaintances, and in other instances, relocation provided the opportunity to be closer to family members, though, this did not necessarily mean that extended family members were resident in the local community.

Typically, respondents mentioned familiarity with the area because an extended family member, acquaintances or friends had relocated there. For example, for one respondent who relocated to Camden, having family moving to the area was a factor in decision making:

*I have a brother that lives in Narellanvale, my Mum that's lived in Camden for quite a few years, and my dad moved to the area probably about 10 years ago as well.*  
(Camden, parent participant)

For this respondent, the relocation to the non-metropolitan area had followed relocation to the area by other family members. For some respondents, relocation was linked to opportunities for greater proximity to family or friends, even though considerable distances remained in accessing these networks. For example, in discussing her family's decision to relocate to Gladstone, one respondent stated:

*We had lived in Mount Isa and found that really quite remote and... decided to come here... because of work and because our family sort of live close like in [name of a place], close to Brisbane.* (Gladstone parent participant)

In this example, Gladstone was still more than 400 kilometres from family networks compared to nearly 2,000 kilometres from Mt Isa. So, while relocation led to greater proximity to her family, the distances to family support networks remained substantial.

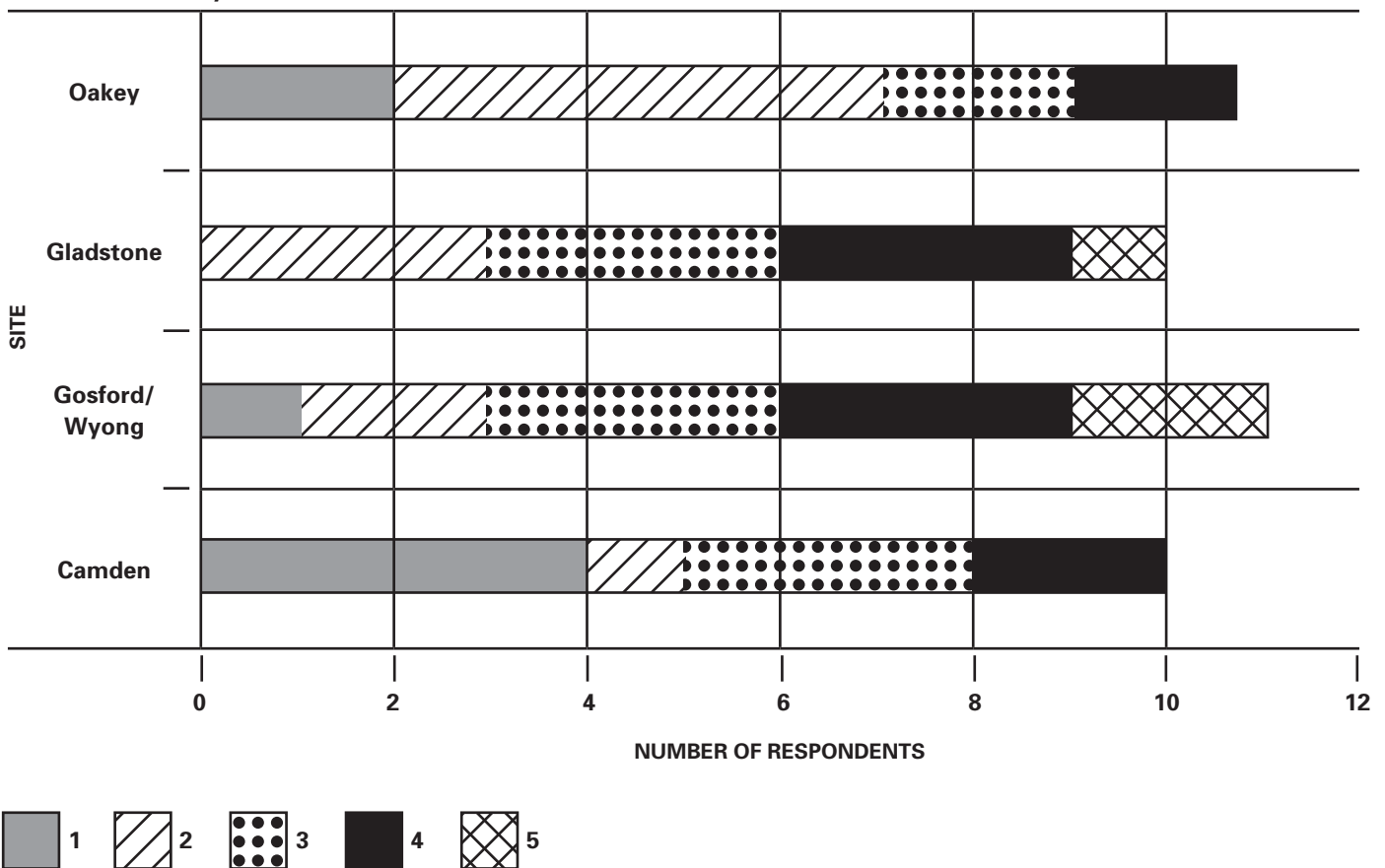
### 5.2 Participation in the local community

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they feel part of the local community in the non-metropolitan area where they currently reside. Participants were asked to rate their perception on a scale of one to five, with one referring to not feeling part of the community at all and five referring to feeling completely included. Participants could also select 'not applicable'. 'Not applicable' was used by one participant who had moved to the Gladstone area in the three months prior to the interview and who commented that it was "too soon" for her to comment about the extent that she felt included.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents provided a score of three or less, indicating a limited sense of inclusion in their local communities. Even so, there was considerable variation amongst respondents' views. Residents from Camden, an urban fringe community, reported the lowest ratings, with almost half the respondents recording that they did not feel at all part of the local community (rating one). Participants in this area frequently reported that work commitments for themselves and others, including the time spent commuting, was a barrier to local participation. Almost half the respondents in Camden also reported not knowing anyone in the area prior to moving, which was a barrier to participation in local community activities.

#### RESPONSES TO QUESTION "To what extent do you feel part of the local community?"

Figure 1: Respondents' self rating of sense of belonging in local community



1= Not feeling part of the community at all.  
 5= Feeling completely included.



More than half of the respondents in Oakey recorded scores of one or two, indicating low levels of feeling part of the local community. In contrast to respondents in Camden, some respondents in Oakey identified that the high level of cohesiveness within existing social networks contributed to difficulties in breaking into those networks.

The greatest diversity of responses was found amongst participants in Gosford/Wyong. Those who felt included cited community support services and cultural and support groups as facilitating their involvement. Responses amongst Gladstone respondents were clustered around the middle rankings, indicating that respondents felt neither extremely excluded or included from local networks. Respondents linked employment, particularly within the mining industry, or other services within the town as a key pathway for local participation.

### 5.3 Factors associated with social exclusion

Six themes emerged as contributors to social exclusion in most, but not all, sites:

- dislocation from informal networks;
- lack of local transport services;
- commuting for work;
- insularity;
- mobility of the community;
- inadequate service systems.

Table 12 summarises which themes were reported by families in each location.

**Table 12: Contributors to social exclusion**

Location	Dislocation from informal networks	Inadequate local transport system	Commuting for work	Insularity	Mobility	Inadequate service systems
Gosford/Wyong (NSW)	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓
Camden (NSW)	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓
Oakey (QLD)	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓
Gladstone (QLD)	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓

### Theme 1: Dislocation from informal networks

Being newly arrived in a community was identified by families as contributing to social exclusion in each of the field sites. In particular, it was identified by both service providers and parents that many migrating families were isolated from established family and friendship networks as a result of their relocation.

The absence of these networks was a barrier to meeting new people. This isolation was exacerbated when those who relocated remained close enough to their previous community to maintain primary links with that community but where the distances were enough that building new networks in that community was difficult.

While isolation as a result of relocation was evident at all study sites, families who relocated to the urban fringe of Sydney and also the Central Coast of NSW, appeared more likely to maintain primary networks in Sydney, as the following excerpt illustrates:

*A lot of families live up here without any family support around them, without any friends, and end up being quite isolated – and often go back to Sydney for their social connections... They go back to Sydney to visit family and things.* (Community service provider, Gosford/Wyong)

In Gladstone where employment opportunities were a powerful motivator for relocation, it appeared that parents not in paid employment (usually mothers of young children) experienced particular vulnerability to social isolation as a result of relocation. As one health service provider in Gladstone observed:

*The thing that we sort of see as well I suppose is the social isolation for women here. Often they don't have any family support, and then combined with probably husbands or partners working shift work – working with the industries can be a trying time for many women.*  
(Health services provider, Gladstone)

In Gladstone, parents' vulnerability to isolation was exacerbated by the fact that many of these young families had relocated hundreds of kilometres from established networks. By contrast, in the other study sites, the vulnerability of a parent not in paid employment was often associated with their partner commuting to work, the absence of access to a vehicle to access local community engagement activities and the under-development of local networks as a result.

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### CASE STUDY THREE: MOVING TO CAMDEN

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One of the participants in the study had moved to Camden after having previously resided in inner Sydney. She and her husband had a four month old child and had moved to the area less than two years previously. The quality and affordability of housing was identified by this respondent as the major reason for their decision to locate to the Camden area. She described the area as a nice area and a nice neighbourhood. Her husband also had family ties in the region though not in Camden. This respondent stated that while she liked the location "I personally would have much preferred to go to Wollongong or places closer the beach", however, her husband's work was within commuting distance from Camden. The majority of families interviewed for this study had at least one member who commuted to other areas for work. This respondent stated a desire to relocate within the next few years preferably to a location nearer to a beach. The respondent described feeling isolated when she first relocated and identified the importance of playgroups in enabling her to become part of the community, as she stated: "I mean, when I moved here I didn't know anyone. I didn't know any services, anything around... And since we had a baby, and you sort of start to go and choose the parenting groups and get to know other people – I feel much more comfortable now."

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#### Theme 2: Lack of local transport services

Participants in all four study sites expressed concern about the inadequacy of local public transportation systems. A common issue raised was that public transport services, primarily bus services, were:

- infrequent, particularly during the middle of the day, evenings and on the weekends;
- costly;

- difficult to access for families with more than one child.

In Camden and Gladstone, respondents reported that most young families had two cars because public transport was inadequate. By contrast, respondents in Oakey and Gosford reported that many families were unable to afford a second car. The lack of frequent and affordable public transport contributed to the vulnerability of young families in non-metropolitan areas. As a service provider respondent observed:

*If they've got a commuting partner who takes the car – they can only afford one car, and if you've got a Mum or Dad with say, two or three or more kids, and one's in a pram and you've got to depend on the bus.* (Community services provider, Gosford/Wyong)

Similarly, a parent residing in Camden observed:

*I can't use public transport, where I go. There's no public transport there anyway. Not unless you went all the way into the city and all the way back out again... there used to be a railway line out here, and it's all gone now.*  
(Parent participant, Camden)

In the absence of an effective local public transport system, families' capacity to access services and opportunities for community engagement were limited.

#### Theme 3: Commuting for work

The majority of families interviewed for this study had at least one family member who commuted substantial distances for work. Amongst the families we interviewed in both Camden and Gosford/Wyong, at least one and sometimes two parents commuted significant distances to work primarily because of inadequate local employment opportunities. Commuting disrupts the capacity of young families to participate in their new community for a number of reasons.

The first reason was that time spent commuting left little time for engaging with the new community. With commuting times of between two and four hours per day, individuals often left their homes early in the morning and arrived home late at night. As a respondent from the Gosford/Wyong area reported:

*So we've got a whole range of issues for kids – if both parents work in Sydney, in terms of long hours in child care. Or kids – older kids that probably aren't really old enough – being left at home. Coming home from school and not having anyone home... Or you've just got one parent, or both parents going to Sydney – as being a long time away from their families every day. So when they get home at night, you know – they're tired, they don't have much ability to participate in their communities. And think that prevents you from building a community of social networks.* (Local government officer, Gosford/Wyong)

Similarly a parent in Camden stated:

*Well it's pretty hard. Because of where I'm travelling, to Parramatta, it can take up to an hour and a half each day to travel one way, and then another hour and a half back. So then there's the need for the kids to be by themselves, because we can't really find child care.*  
(Parent participant, Camden)

Long commutes contributed to exhaustion and limited the capacity of families to engage in child-related social activities, which may provide pathways to community involvement.

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#### CASE STUDY FOUR: MOVING TO GOSFORD/WYONG

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The young family in this case study had relocated from Sydney to the Gosford/Wyong area 18 months prior to their interview for this study. The couple had two children under six years. The opportunity to purchase a quality home near the beach had been the major motivator to relocate to the area. They plan to stay in the area for the long term. A key goal is to pay off their home within five years. Both parents are in paid employment, with the husband doing night shifts in Sydney. This appeared to limit their time together, as the husband stated: "I get to see my wife for about two minutes every day". However, the family had found the time costs of commuting also interfered with their family life and so had opted for the current arrangement. As the husband explained: "I was doing day shifts but I was getting up at two o'clock in the morning to go again to work and not getting home until five, six o'clock at night, sometimes because of the traffic coming home so either way you are to get the traffic... It [working night shift] does work better because we actually get more done. I can help clean the house through the day so it was not so much of a trouble for her [my wife] at night because really my wife looks after 30 kids through the day and she comes home and looks after two kids straightaway, she doesn't really get a break until seven thirty when the kids go to bed."

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#### Theme 4: Insularity

The theme of insularity was raised by service providers and families in Oakey as a factor contributing to social exclusion. The strength of social networks within this inland rural community was very positively viewed by some participants who felt very much a part of their new community. However, a substantial proportion of families interviewed identified that the insularity of the town was a factor limiting their inclusion in social networks:

*It's too much of a 'cliquey' town. If you haven't been here for a certain amount of time, then they're sort of*

*very cliquey – they're too cliquey. It's hard to describe. Yeah. It's hard to make friends here.*  
(Parent participant, Oakey)

For this respondent, the strength of social networks in the town was experienced as a barrier to integration into her new community.

#### Theme 5: Work-related mobility

In one study site, population mobility was identified as a factor in social exclusion. Most of those who identified a high level of inclusion in the town were involved in mining or in a service industry that brought them into contact with others. The nature of mining however, with short-term contracts and high incomes, appears to contribute to population mobility which some respondents identified as a barrier to community participation.

*And a lot of people who are coming here are those who are itinerant workers, who work from construction sites – in the old days it used to be construction site to construction site. Now it appears to be people who are looking for work, maybe not construction but in the big Rio Tinto, the aluminium refinery and whatever.*  
(Community services provider, Gladstone)

For families whose motivation for relocation was employment, particularly short term employment, there may be little incentive for them to build relationships in the community. For example, one respondent from Gladstone stated:

*I know I am not committed and I am not staying... I can't say I am a big fan of Gladstone.* (Parent participant, Gladstone)

A common theme amongst the families and service users interviewed was that relocation to Gladstone was temporary and this limited their willingness to engage in the community.

#### Theme 6: Inadequate service systems

In all sites, medical, allied health, dental and community support services were reported to be inadequate to meet growing demand and this had a significant impact for newly arrived families. In at least one site, Gosford/Wyong, it was reported that new families' capacity to access basic medical services was limited because many general practitioners in their areas were not accepting new patients. The absence of adequate specialist services, such as obstetrics and allied health services, such as speech therapy, was noted in all four study sites. It was reported that families faced long waiting lists to see specialists, if they were available at all in their community, or had to travel to other areas to access them. For example, families in Gladstone had to travel to Rockhampton (more than 100 kilometres each way) to access some key specialist services, such as obstetrics and paediatrics.

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One respondent from Gladstone, who was a community service provider, had conducted a survey on residents' service needs and reported the following:

*The biggest thing that came out [of the community survey] that we cannot address ourselves in the local community, is things like specialist services like paediatricians, occupational therapists, speech therapists, those types of things. The families here then have to travel to Rockhampton in order to gain those services. Some of the things that have come out, that they were happy with, with the Gladstone community, was the fact that it was coastal but it was also fairly regional and that they could be rural as well.*  
(Community service provider, Gladstone)

The lack of services also impacts on the capacity of young families to participate in their local community. For example, the lack of access to allied health services, such as speech therapy, was identified as having significant implications for the participation of young children with speech issues in their schools and communities.

A major contributor to service infrastructure problems was identified as the lack of health and community service professionals residing in non-metropolitan locations. This perception is supported by prior research in the health and community sector pointing to the greater concentration of professionals residing in metropolitan areas (Meagher & Healy, 2005).

Respondents also suggested that a lack of forward planning by government agencies and private developers also contributed to deficits in service infrastructure. For example, the perceived shortage of obstetric services in Gladstone is notable given the proactive attempts by government and private companies to attract young workers to the area. Amongst respondents there was a perception that planning based on established needs leads to considerable gaps in service provision in areas of high population growth. As one respondent from the Camden study site observed:

*The last thing to go up is the necessary services... being hospitals, being medical care, being therapeutic services, being government and non-government agencies... So what happens is that they'll do an assessment on the needs of families before they put the services in, and it's always, you know – it's a band aid approach to the community services. And then all of a sudden, people start scratching their heads and saying, 'Oh my goodness, we don't have any services.' So of course families are – first off, moving out here without services, meaning they have to travel... there are a lot of under resourced and overworked workers out this way, that are trying to cover the gaps.* (Family support worker, Camden)

The absence of appropriate infrastructure puts pressure on existing services which limits access both for new and established families in the area, as one respondent asserted:

*There's been a significant impact on the social human services sector, in that with the huge population influxes that Gladstone and Calliope region are experiencing they're having several thousand people entering the community in such a short space of time. This is impacting on things like housing, healthcare facilities as well as community services such as counselling services.* (Community services worker, Gladstone)

The limited capacity of community services to meet increased demand as a result of population growth was raised by participants in all study sites. It was an especially strong theme amongst parents at the Oakey study site, many of whom identified that mental health issues were a factor in their housing issues and thus in their decision to relocate to a non-metropolitan area.

The absence of dental services was a major issue in each of the study sites. Notably, many of the residents we interviewed stated that their access to dental services was limited in large part by the prohibitive cost. However, in non-metropolitan communities, respondents also faced the further challenges of limited numbers of dentists available to provide services and the absence of a local public dental service. Many respondents discussed foregoing dental services for themselves and, in some cases for their children, because of significant problems in accessibility.

In all study sites, respondents raised concerns about the adequacy of child care services. Respondents perceived that there were insufficient child care spaces in the context of high population growth. The pressure on existing services meant families had limited child care options, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

*More young families are looking for kindergarten or child care placements. Because we were a smaller town to have that big influx, it really has pushed things to the limit. Some people have not been able to get in where they want. I wouldn't say it's that they can't get in, I'd say more it's that they mightn't be able to get into their choice of centre or things like that.* (Education service provider, Gladstone).

In at least two of the study sites, Gladstone and Gosford/Wyong, respondents raised concerns about lack of child care for parents involved with shift-work, such work being very common in mining towns and tourist areas like those included in this study.

*Lots of our families work shift work. So there's no support for any families that may have two parents working night shift... One of our families both work in hospitality and their shifts vary, so it's quite difficult for*

*them to get child care when they need it. So I don't know a lot of support that's happening.* (Gosford/Wyong education service provider)

Concerns about lack of affordable child care were raised by respondents across all study sites. These concerns were most consistently discussed in Oakey where respondents identified that inability to pay was a significant barrier to accessing child care services in that community.

#### 5.4 Promoting social inclusion

Social inclusion refers to maximising opportunities for young families to participate in their new communities at both a formal and informal level. At a formal level, social inclusion is facilitated by access to affordable and high quality health, educational and community services and having a say over the matters affecting their local community. At an informal level, social inclusion is facilitated through the development of local community networks that can assist people to "get by" in difficult times (Cattell, 2001). Despite the challenges of relocating to a new community, many respondents in each study site also commented that some young families experienced inclusion in their new community. A range of factors appeared to enhance the chances of inclusion, such as: the personal attributes of the families (particularly being outgoing); being employed and access to networks through employment; the availability of child-related or leisure activities. As one parent who had relocated to the rural community site, Oakey, observed:

*Pretty much I feel that the people here in Oakey are very friendly. It might be just the situation we're in with twins, and a gasbagging husband (both laugh). Plus also, where he works is a very big place so you can get to know a lot of people. A lot of people come and go, so he gets to know a lot of people. But yet again in a country town, you go to a lot of barbeques, friendly sort of places.* (Parent participant, Oakey)

Similarly, a respondent in the regional coastal study site of Gosford/Wyong, commented on her experience:

*Both my neighbours when I first moved in here, they both come popping their head out of the fence saying hi, how are you and introducing themselves, yeah I got along well with one neighbour but you can't have two good neighbours (laughs)... I wouldn't move back to Sydney, put it that way.* (Parent participant, Gosford/Wyong area)

For this participant, as for a small number of participants in each community, entry to the community was facilitated through the low-key outreach of existing community members. Some respondents in the coastal communities of Gladstone and Gosford/Wyong observed that high rates

of relocation of young families to the area meant that the communities were more open and welcoming to newcomers. The importance of the community members, themselves, taking responsibility for welcoming newcomers was emphasised by a small proportion of respondents, as the following comment from a community service worker suggests:

*I think from a community perspective it lies really more in the community's hands, to extend that welcome and say like, 'Come round for a barbie' you know? Not everything's solved by funding and social services.* (Community service worker, Gladstone)

Although most respondents were supportive of attempts by formal institutions, such as schools and health services, to welcome newcomers to the area, it was also the case that many newcomers reported becoming involved in their communities through low-key informal means. The most common ways of developing community networks appeared to be through participation in social, cultural and sporting activities. When asked about the avenues for families who were newly arrived in the area to integrate into those areas, many respondents, across all areas, emphasised the importance of sporting and cultural venues and service clubs as the following comments indicate:

*I mentioned all the football teams, the soccer teams, the netball teams, the dancing, surf clubs – most of them are fairly open to new people coming in. So I think that's good.* (Community service provider, Gosford/Wyong)

*I think 'cause we're a pretty close knit community, there's a lot of sports and volunteer type of organisations that you can get into. And often if you're in one then you know people that are in others and you may get involved with that. Also lots of different sporting types of things. Like I'm in a couple of different sports.* (Child care provider, Gladstone)

*There's a fair bit here. There's basketball, there is the skate parks – there's a lot of infrastructure in that sort of terms.* (Oakey, Community service provider, Oakey)

*People belong to Lions Club and Rotary, and the local soccer and rugby clubs – all of that. So there's definitely a culture of community here, which I think is a real plus... that can have its negative sides as well, but on the positive, it means that people really care about this place.* (Education service provider, Camden)

While it is apparent that many service provider respondents perceived recreational and sporting activities as key venues for inclusion, we found the parents themselves were more mixed in their involvement with these associations and clubs. Undoubtedly some did find local groups, particularly sporting groups, to be a welcoming environment, however barriers existed for some.

These barriers included the financial cost of involvement, lack of interest in the specific activities being undertaken and the fact that some activities were not suitable for young children.

Churches were also identified by a small number of participants as playing an important role in family support in regional communities. It emerged that Churches and religious institutions in regional and rural areas were predominantly from a variety of Christian denominations and as such, their capacity to engage non-Christian families is likely to be limited.

Despite the important role existing community informal networks played in welcoming new families to the communities, formal services also were also identified as having a key role, particularly in relation to enabling vulnerable young families to participate in the community. In each of the study sites, local government or local community services played an important role in facilitating opportunities for community engagement and these were identified as opportunities for new community members to meet more established members. For example, a teacher in Gosford/Wyong identified that:

*The community runs a number of events here that are aimed at getting community involved together. They have a GOATTS festival – which is ‘Go Out and Talk To Someone’. And there is a youth driven art exhibition and that. So they do that. They have picnics in the parks and things like that, where the youth and the local services are all involved. And that gets people to know each other and network together. So it’s building up more since I’ve been here. I’ve been here – this is my fourth year here, so it’s starting to build up more.* (Education provider, Gosford/Wyong)

Facilitated community groups were also identified as sites for newly arrived people to participate in the community. The presence of paid workers means that workers can provide stability to community networks in the context of considerable population movement and ensure that opportunities for parents to meet are facilitated. One worker talked about initiating a welcoming campaign to the community (which was a community with a high influx of new people primarily seeking work in the mines):

*And just to give you an idea of that, like 29 people yesterday were sitting in a room and they were all women except for [one participant and Community Advisory Multicultural Officer]. And they were from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the reason that they were there was to try and connect with other women with young families – because their husbands were professionals or working in construction, and doing expertise jobs, professional jobs – and they were trying to find human contact and somebody that they can talk to within the community.* (Community services worker, Gladstone)

In all study sites, child care and parenting support groups were identified by workers as important sites for forming connections between young families new to the community and for providing information about the community. The following comment from a health service provider illustrates the multiple benefits of child-centred activities:

*And certainly what we do in our work here at the Child and Family Team, is provide new Mums’ groups and toddler groups where Mums can get together. And like, it is structured – so they get some information on various topics, but they also make some good networks and friendships out of that.* (Health service provider, Camden)

In all of the community sites, there was evidence of community, health or education services engaging in proactive outreach to new families to the area. By proactive, we refer to active attempts by formal agencies to meet families in their own contexts rather than waiting for families to find their services. While proactive outreach was evident in all locations, it was a particularly strong theme amongst service providers in the rural location as the following excerpt, from a teacher at the rural study site, suggests:

*We have barbeques to welcome them [new families] to the area. We have part of our curriculum that talks about mobility. And then there’s extension activities provided at lunch times to help them make friends, and so forth. We have Indigenous teacher aids who do the same sort of thing with our Indigenous children who come to the area as well... And a lot of home visits and links in that way. With any other new families, we also have two or three Mums who actually are a bit of a welcoming committee, so – for families who don’t fall in to either of those categories that I’ve just mentioned, there are other families who will touch base and welcome them.* (Education service provider, Oakey)

Here we see that the school, like many other services within the rural study site, was attuned to the presence of new families in the area and make proactive attempts to engage the families. In many instances, these attempts involved going outside the usual expectations of service providers through initiating welcoming committees to facilitate young families’ engagement with their new community.

## SUMMARY

Overall, respondents reported that young families’ decision to relocate to the specific non-metropolitan site was motivated by a mix of factors. For the majority of respondents, relocation provided opportunities such as improved housing, employment or lifestyle opportunities. Even so, most respondents pointed to significant barriers within non-metropolitan communities that impacted on

their capacity to participate in their new community. Many of the barriers to local community participation relate to lack of resources, such as inadequate transport, service and employment infrastructure. These are barriers local communities cannot solve alone and will need the combined effort of all three sectors (government, non-profits and business) to address. Furthermore, respondents indicated that under-resourced non-metropolitan community members' capacity to meet the needs of newly arrived families was weakened by the pressures facing these communities as a result of population growth. Three levels of social outreach appeared to be important for promoting social inclusion: informal outreach within the community; availability and affordability of recreational groups; and proactive outreach of service institutions in health, education and community services. It was apparent that many service providers went beyond the usual requirements of their role to ensure that young families were welcomed into the community.

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## 6. PRACTICE, PROGRAM AND POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION\_

**This study suggests particular challenges for practitioners and policy makers in promoting the social inclusion of young families moving to non-metropolitan areas. >**

This research supports policies, programs and services aimed at reducing the push factors experienced by young families, most notably housing costs. However, for those who do relocate, better delivery of services and infrastructure is needed. Some non-metropolitan communities have limited resources to manage an influx of young families to the area, putting pressure both on established residents and newcomers.

This section links Australian and international experiences of facilitating social inclusion to the experiences of young families moving to non-metropolitan areas and service providers. Drawing on the experiences of young families and service providers in the four study sites, this section identifies a range of strategies to facilitate social inclusion. It highlights the importance of flexible, locally responsive policies and programs as well as the need for a comprehensive approach.

### 6.1 Australian and international experiences

Recently, the Australian Government has outlined a comprehensive policy framework for achieving social inclusion which recognises the importance of the following factors in achieving social inclusion:

- employment;
- accessing services;
- connecting with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- dealing with personal crises such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job;
- being heard.

(Julia Gillard, 2008, in Hayes *et al.*, 2008, p. 9)

This highlights the multi-levelled and inter-related factors that can either facilitate or act as a barrier to social inclusion. A recent review of social inclusion strategies highlighted the importance of improving educational access, formal family support services, and access to

affordable quality housing (Hayes *et al.*, 2008, p.14). A review of Australian and international experiences suggests social inclusion is facilitated by policies and programs:

- that are **holistic** in focus and designed to **work intensively on a number of dimensions in combination**. A holistic approach will address the push factors that compel young families to relocate to non-metropolitan communities whilst also improving the opportunities for social inclusion of young families once they relocate. Young families relocating to non-metropolitan communities require access to a range of services such as education, child care, community services and health services.
- that are **seamless** based on a **one-stop entry point**. An integrated approach to service development and provision means these services are more likely to be effective in responding to the needs of new and established families. The complex and siloed service system create real barriers to newly arrived families who, in some circumstances, found it difficult to negotiate.
- focused on concepts of **'family' and 'community'** as support structures and as organising principles in designing policies responsive to children. **Place-based** implementation offers greater flexibility and responsiveness to families so that policies organised at a macro level according to target groups (e.g. children) are delivered using communities/ places/ local networks as the organising principle. Government and non-government services are essential to the success of place-based programs and activities. This is relevant both in terms of plans for large scale residential development programs in metropolitan areas of Sydney and Brisbane and also for key non-metropolitan areas where young families currently reside or are attracted to.
- supported by a more developed and formal **relationship between national and regional/local government** regarding service and program delivery. International experience highlights the role of regional and local authorities as **effective local facilitators and providers**



of a wide range of services and programs for families and children. In non-metropolitan areas, an enhanced role for local authorities may assist in delivering targeted, responsive and area-based approaches to services for families. An enhanced role for local authorities in regional development may also strengthen economic opportunities for a range of households.

- that arise from a combination of **large scale policy directions** focused on whole of government service design and **very localised and flexible community grants** programs. Flexibility in funding arrangements enables targeted, specific, responsive and innovative approaches to local service delivery achieving outcomes such as mobile teams of professionals with the capacity for assertive outreach to vulnerable families.

## 6.2 Promoting social inclusion: study findings

Responses for promoting social inclusion must be locally relevant and cognisant of the specific motivations, needs and interests of migrating families. This research shows that young families' motivations and intentions with regard to non-metropolitan migration are varied, as are their experiences of social exclusion and social inclusion. Effective strategies for promoting the social inclusion of young families who migrate must begin from an understanding of this diversity. Place-based strategies with in-built flexibility for responding creatively to local area needs are essential.

This study suggests that policy approaches for promoting the social inclusion of young families who are considering relocation, or have relocated, to non-metropolitan areas should operate at three levels:

1. Reducing the push factors leading young families to consider moving away from their original location of residence. Participants in this study identified the lack of access to affordable, quality housing as a major motivator in the decision of young families to relocate in three of the four study sites.
2. Improving planning, transport and service infrastructure. The stress on young families in non-metropolitan locations is exacerbated by the lack of transport and service systems supporting participation in work and community life. The health and well-being of parents are compromised by inadequate services and infrastructure in areas of high need.
3. Building community capacity to support and engage newly arrived young families. The demographic data suggests that in-migration of young families has a positive impact on the socioeconomic circumstances of communities. Engaging young families in their

new communities is likely to contribute to long-term sustainability of non-metropolitan areas.

### 6.2.1 Reducing the push factors

Of primary importance are policies that aim to reduce the "push factors" causing some young families to relocate. Current efforts by the Commonwealth Government to address the housing affordability crisis in Australia are an essential policy cornerstone. Specific housing products and initiatives need to be geared in part towards responding to the particular needs of young families facing displacement from locations of relative advantage.

Both the Housing Affordability Fund and National Rental Affordability Scheme present opportunities for housing solutions focused on the needs of families. Similarly, the Sydney Metro Strategy focused on brownfield redevelopment and Queensland's Urban Land Development Authority will also be important in delivering better housing outcomes in key locations. Again, specific targets and strategies will be needed to ensure that a proportion of the resulting housing products actually meet the needs of young families.

Specific policies and programs are also needed to protect young families from the potentially negative yet unintended consequences of the increased first home owners grant, which may result in housing purchases or construction in areas where the risk of low or even negative capital gains are higher.

Overall, the new suite of Commonwealth Government housing initiatives has built-in capacity for flexibility and innovation. In particular, the housing needs of young families in key metropolitan areas should be considered to achieve sufficient housing opportunities (social, private rental and home ownership) to meet those needs.

Governments at all levels must ensure that private housing developments include adequate housing mix so that middle and low income families have access to the private housing market in all forms of tenure. This requires strengthened planning provisions as well as targets for housing supply that meet demand. Planning provisions also need to strive for leading practice in relation to family friendly residential developments where proximity to open space, community/health services and transport networks are prescribed. Where families relocate, a more comprehensive approach to affordable housing is needed that addresses not only high need but low and middle need/income families.

## 6.2.2 Improving planning, transport and service infrastructure

Parents and service providers in the four study sites highlighted the inadequate state of existing planning, transport and service infrastructure.

### TRANSPORT AND EMPLOYMENT PLANNING

In all four sites there was strong frustration about poor planning and infrastructure development to support population growth. The lack of local employment opportunities coupled with forced commuting was placing strain on young families, increasing their vulnerability to social exclusion.

In addition to service access, infrastructure, particularly the creation of local employment opportunities and public transport, can promote social inclusion through enabling residents to work and live in the same location and avoid the considerable social, environmental, and financial costs of commuting.

This research suggests there is a need for governments to support local economic development opportunities resulting in medium, high income and permanent employment. This can include relocating major government units to non-metropolitan areas (examples: Workcover NSW relocated to Gosford, and the NSW Department of Local Government relocated to Nowra).

Publicly provided transport, to and from work and within the community for those left without private transport at home, was identified as a key factor assisting young families moving to non-metropolitan areas. This research highlighted the need for flexible, local/regional transport models that facilitated easy movement around the region as well as catering to the needs of young families in design and cost. Given the shortage of key services (such as specialist health services) in many non-metropolitan areas, effective public transportation systems are essential to ensuring that young families have the capacity to travel to access those services. Nationally, and internationally, there are examples of effective responses to the challenge of adequate public transport provision. In regional South Australia, for instance, Integrated Transport Plans have been used to overcome gaps in transport availability for more remote areas. An integrated approach might involve stand alone services, feeder services, ad hoc services for particular target groups aimed at reducing social exclusion and services focused on service organisations such as schools and hospitals (Webster *et al.*, nd). In Victoria, the Transport Connections Program “aims to improve access and mobility for people in remote, rural, and regional areas” (RACV, 2006, p. 4). There have been nine funded programs in various locations of Victoria with a focus on optimal use of existing resources facilitated, in part, through the role of a local transport co-ordinator.

### ACCESS TO FORMAL SERVICES

Service access was a major concern for families living in non-metropolitan areas. In all areas, access to services – particularly basic medical and dental services – was limited, especially for low income families. Two major contributors to this appear to be lack of adequate service planning and also questions about the feasibility and viability of specialist services in non-metropolitan areas.

Residents and service providers identified a range of initiatives to improve access to formal services. The research supports the need for area-based initiatives with the resources and flexibility to deliver generalist medical, dental and community services. In particular the research highlighted the need for:

- Additional multi-service hubs that provide a visible and high profile location with diverse services combined with the capacity for active and assertive outreach;
- Greater integration or holistic service provision. Initiatives such as the Commonwealth Government’s “Communities for Children” initiative, aimed at delivering place-based early intervention in 45 disadvantaged communities across Australia, are important and need to be expanded.
- Adequate resources for community transport solutions enabling more people to access existing services and adequate funding for services to effectively outreach;
- The flexibility to provide mobile services where a team of professionals (particularly allied health and dentistry) visits particular locations where access is an issue, especially for low income families;
- Flexible funding focused on assessing outcomes relevant to the local communities;
- Workforce strategies to attract and retain professionals in non-metropolitan areas.

The delivery of appropriate and accessible formal support services requires particular staff resources and skills. Effective direct practice with young families moving to non-metropolitan areas was based on:

- Flexibility and innovation, and the capacity for workers to apply diverse methods and skills across the spectrum of counselling, group work and community practice.
- Active/assertive outreach to newly arrived families, with adequate resource levels, in order to overcome barriers to access.
- A capacity to facilitate and broker specialised services when needed. For example, while it may be unviable to establish some specialist services, such as psychological trauma services in non-metropolitan areas, funds could be directed to enable service users to cover travel and accommodation costs and fees in order to access specialist mental health services in metropolitan locations.

- A capacity to achieve sustainability through the application of community capacity building strategies. We refer here to building the capacity of the local community to promote the social participation of young families relocating to non-metropolitan areas.

In all four study sites attracting and retaining suitably qualified health and human services staff was difficult. Addressing the skills shortage in non-metropolitan areas requires a nationally coordinated approach to workforce planning issues. In particular, incentives and resource allocations are needed for some communities to attract appropriately skilled professionals. In addition, a flexible and proactive approach should be recognised and supported by educators and employers. This can be achieved by a number of strategies which build the capacities of direct service workers, in health, education, child care and community services, to promote the social inclusion of young families. These strategies include:

- **Enhancing educational preparation of health, education and community service providers for practice in non-metropolitan areas.** This can be achieved by ensuring that service providers are encouraged and supported to gain experience in rural practice in the course of their education. Student scholarships covering the entire placement period in non-metropolitan areas as well as bonded scholarships resulting in a guaranteed period of post-graduate service in non-metropolitan areas could assist in encouraging students to develop knowledge and skills in this domain of practice. At a post-graduate level, universities and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector providers could also develop education and training programs for building capacity in professional practice in non-metropolitan areas. Employer support is needed to cover the costs of additional education and training undertaken by service providers.
- **Professional development of practitioners in non-metropolitan areas.** Professional support and development structures are needed to recognise and respond to the unique challenges of practice in non-metropolitan environments. Opportunities for workers to upgrade qualifications are essential. Formal support, training and education accessible to service providers without qualifications are also essential.
- **Recognising and supporting locally appropriate work practices.** In the course of this research it became apparent that service providers were often working outside of existing role descriptions both in terms of the spread of working hours and services provided. Specific roles and functions, as well as flexible working arrangements, should be incorporated into role descriptions. In addition to recognising the existing situation, this would also be a basis for attracting and recruiting staff with the range of capabilities required.

### 6.2.3 Building community capacity

The dislocation of informal support systems was one of the key issues identified by young families relocating to non-metropolitan areas. Informal support systems enable young families to 'get by' and deal with personal crises when they arise. For young families moving to non-metropolitan areas, connections with others through friends, work, personal interests and local community build a sense of belonging and social inclusion. The availability of family and social supports for parents have been identified as a 'protective factor' against poor individual and societal outcomes such as increased social isolation and parental mental health problems (Stanley 2007 p. 45). In the broadest sense, social supports mean the 'tangible and psychological resources available to individuals through their relationships' (Bornstein *et al.*, 2006 p. 877).

For young families relocating to non-metropolitan areas, the disruption of supportive social networks can have serious consequences for individual and family well-being. The resilience of young families can be promoted through an active civil society in the established community. In some areas, a sense of belonging was built for newly arrived young families through welcome packs and neighbourhood or community barbeques. The erosion of informal support systems through geographic mobility, work patterns and changes to family structures (Homel, 2006, p. 13–14) has been particularly marked for the participants in this study. This research supports Homel's call for the creation of 'formal support systems that support and generate informal support systems, that in turn reduce the need for formal support systems' (2006 p. 13–14).

Parents and service providers identified a range of informal support strategies that help to achieve social inclusion, including:

- The availability of low-key, non-stigmatising community based activities such as playgroups. These activities are based on a common positive focus on children and are not necessarily 'problem' focused. Child-focused activities often succeed in engaging families new to an area or community.
- The availability of sporting activities which enable young families to participate in group-based sporting activities and clubs.
- The use of naturally occurring contacts with new families to provide information, such as through real estate agents or the local newspaper.

Many non-metropolitan communities are characterised by an ageing population and the out-migration of young people. The arrival of young families into these communities may reverse this demographic decline.

This research suggests the need to build the capacity of established communities to welcome and include new families.

### 6.3 Future directions

This research suggests an integrated and multi-pronged response to support young families who are vulnerable to social exclusion. Of primary importance are policies that aim to reduce the “push factors” that cause some young families to relocate. Current efforts by the Commonwealth Government to address the housing affordability crisis in Australia are an essential policy cornerstone. Specific housing products and initiatives need to be geared, in part, towards responding to the particular needs of young families facing displacement from locations of relative advantage.

Improved planning, transport and service infrastructure for those who do relocate also plays a key role in facilitating the social inclusion of young families. The delivery of health, education and community services in non-metropolitan communities differs in key ways from service delivery in metropolitan areas. This research highlights the importance of both service and direct practice flexibility and innovation; proactive and assertive outreach; and sustainability.

Firstly, flexibility and innovation are required in response to the reduced range of services available in non-metropolitan areas. For example, community service workers require broad knowledge and diverse skills such as supportive counselling, group work and community practice. At the same time, service providers must be aware of the limits of their capacities to provide specialist services and to focus instead on facilitating access to those services. It may also be the case that a community health nurse or social service worker may require substantial training and support to provide specialist services, such as trauma counselling for example.

Second, a proactive approach is required to maximise the social inclusion of newly arrived families. This means that the service provider takes active steps to ensure that newcomers are aware of, and able to access, services. The capacity for assertive outreach to families will be needed in some circumstances to overcome systemic barriers to access, at least initially.

Third, a sustainable approach is required. Sustainability can be achieved by minimising dependence on individual workers or service infrastructure. Community capacity building strategies that engage the community in actively including newcomers are relevant.

This framework will improve access to a universal level of support and services, so that families are in the best position to participate in a range of social and recreational opportunities. Furthermore, the established community will be better resourced to welcome and include new families because existing infrastructure has been strengthened to respond to population growth amongst young families (d’Abbs, 1991).

### CONCLUSION

In recent years, many young families have relocated to non-metropolitan Australia. The growth has been strongest in coastal areas but there is also movement of young families to inland rural towns. The factors motivating young families to move are complex, though, it is clear that, for many, housing affordability is an important motivator. This report presents findings from an analysis of population data and from interviews with service providers and families residing in non-metropolitan communities. The report outlines a framework for promoting the social inclusion of young families who have relocated to non-metropolitan areas. The report aims to enable policy makers and service providers to develop thoughtful and participatory responses to the challenge of promoting the social inclusion of families relocating to non-metropolitan areas, whether these families are relocating to areas just beyond the fringes of our capital cities, the growing coastal communities of Australia or inland towns. Promoting the social inclusion of these young families will benefit our society now and also for generations to come.

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