

2014

Tracing Onslow: a community in transition. edition 4, early 2014

Jess Allia
Edith Cowan University

Karma Barndon
Edith Cowan University

Ellie Blackmore
Edith Cowan University

Petrice Davidson
Edith Cowan University

Kayt Davies
Edith Cowan University, k.davies@ecu.edu.au

See next page for additional authors

Authors

Jess Allia, Karma Barndon, Ellie Blackmore, Petrice Davidson, Kayt Davies, Luke Pegrum, Tanya Phillip, and Katherine Powell

a community in transition

edition 4, early 2014

Tracking ON SLOW





HELPING YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT COURSE

THAT'S HOW UNIVERSITY
SHOULD BE

At ECU, we have experienced course advisers ready to help you choose the right course for you.

We're available to talk weekdays from 8.30am until 5pm. You can also check out our online Course Finder at chooseECU.com.au.

Simply select an area of interest and our Course Finder will give you a range of exciting options from which to choose.

Study areas include:

Biology & Environmental Sciences

Business

Communications & Arts

Computing & Security

Engineering & Technology

Exercise & Health Sciences

Law & Justice

Medical & Paramedical Sciences

Nursing & Midwifery

Psychology & Social Science

Teacher Education

WAAPA

APPLY NOW

chooseECU.com.au

Tel: 134 ECU (134 328)

E: futurestudy@ecu.edu.au

***** TEACHING QUALITY
***** GRADUATE SATISFACTION
The Good Universities Guide 2014



edition four

This edition marks two years since this project began and we started listening to and documenting what the people of Onslow have to say about the ways the Macedon and Wheatstone Gas Hub Projects are changing their town.

We come every six months to record the sentiments and write a first draft of the evolving history of the town, that we publish as a magazine in hardcopy and available online.

This project is supported by the Shire of Ashburton that funds our visits to Onslow, while respecting the independence of our journalism. We receive no funding from Chevron or BHP Billiton.

Despite our neutral position, we get little co-operation from Chevron which refuses to give us access to any Chevron staff or sites and went as far as blocking us from attending a CRG meeting held on February 12, 2014, at the Onslow Sports Club. In the words of community liaison officer Jeremy Coulson "You can't come in. It's for community members only. We ran it past our manager in Perth and he was not keen on you coming in."

We were told by community members after the meeting that several contentious issues were raised but they are clearly issues that Chevron would rather keep a lid on.

It's incidents like this that convince us that the task of telling the real story of Onslow is an important one and we are grateful to the many locals who take time to talk to us and tell us their stories and concerns.

If you would like digital copies of the magazine go to www.trackingonslow.net and for hardcopies visit the shire or contact me (my details are on the next page). We'd also love to hear from you, if you have a story to tell, or concerns you'd like to put on the record.

We look forward to seeing you when we're back in Onslow in July 2014.

Best regards,



The Feb 2014 Crew:
Tanya Phillips, Karma Barndon,
Luke Pegrum, Ellie Blackmore and Jess Allia.

Dr Kayt Davies
Edith Cowan University
Early 2014

Contents

The fishing village days are over	page 3
Feeling the heat	4
Touchy about turtles	5
Has Onslow missed the boat?	6
Hub of activity	9
Shire: Making the most of what they've got	10
Hospital on hold & the CRC lives	12
Hub updates	14
Defending Onslow	15
The accommodation squeeze	16
Water for the future	18
New kids on the Bindi Bindi block	22
Educating Onslow's teens	24
In your words	25
Onslow remembered	30
What's here for the kids?	33
What's new in town?	36

Editor

Dr Kayt Davies
Senior Lecturer in Journalism
Edith Cowan University

Journalism by

Karma Barndon, Jess Allia, Luke Pegrum,
Tanya Phillips, Ellie Blackmore
& Petrice Davidson

Photography by

Karma Barndon, Jess Allia, Luke Pegrum,
Tanya Phillips, Ellie Blackmore, Katherine Powell
& Kayt Davies

Proof reading by

Katherine Powell, Tanya Phillips, Karma Barndon,
Jess Allia & Ellie Blackmore

Graphic design by

Kayt Davies

With thanks to

Deb Wilkes
Executive Manager of Community Development
Shire of Ashburton



Photo by Ellie Blackmore

Got something to say ?

Contact the editor: Kayt Davies
Email: k.davies@ecu.edu.au
Post: ECU, 2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley, WA, 6050.

Cover: Kids on the memorial— Kendra Malleson, Brodie Kelly, Tiandra Parker, Erwin Parker and Kiara Parker. Others: Jim Reid, Dawn McAullay, George Wilson, Jill Vidal, Samantha Atkinson, Amber Montgomery and John Ashburton.

Disclaimer:

In creating this magazine we made every effort to ensure that the information published here was correct at the time of publishing. Interviews were conducted in Onslow in February 2014. Some information was gathered in subsequent phone interviews and through other research processes. We apologise for any omissions.

Printing funded by the
Shire of Ashburton
PO Box 567
Tom Price, WA, 6751.

Produced by Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley, WA, 6050.
CRICOS IPC 00279B



The Fishing village days are over

Onslow is remembered by many as a sleepy, fishing village. The locals grew up alongside a picturesque Beadon Bay that was often crowded with boats and trawlers that supported a number of commercial fishing businesses.

The Manifis family ran a company called Ashburton Fisheries in Onslow from the '50s right up until last year. Local resident Chilli spoke fondly of the days when he would head down to their fish factory on Beadon Bay Road with \$100 and receive a box of fresh squid tubes, succulent prawns and other wonderful fish in return.

Unfortunately, dredging activities took a percentage of the family's fishery away which had a follow-through affect on the prawn industry. A reduced fishery meant a reduced catch and therefore a reduced profit. It was this fact alone that forced the majority of commercial fishing business in town to close their doors. A fish truck that drove around the Pilbara region helped Ashburton Fisheries to stay afloat longer than most, as it provided a small amount of retail income.

Although the Manifis family still has one prawn trap in operation today, their business eventually shared the same fate as others in town and shut its doors in 2013. Their factory has now been converted into an office complex for Bechtel workers. President of the Onslow Chamber of Commerce, Geoff Herbert, noted "it's not easy making money from fish".

It seems like the town is a far cry from its once quaint description with the construction of the Macedon and Wheatstone gas hubs shifting the town into overdrive. This leaves locals debating whether Onslow will ever be the same again.

Vocal resident Flic Brennan said a lot of people in town seem to think things will go back to normal when Chevron packs up and leaves but she disagrees, "ah no. No, it won't!". Another local pointed out that commercial fishing can't return to Onslow unless the old jetty is replaced. >>



>>The original jetty was badly damaged by a cyclone in 1963 and the current one, located at Beadon Bay, is not practical for this activity as it stands.

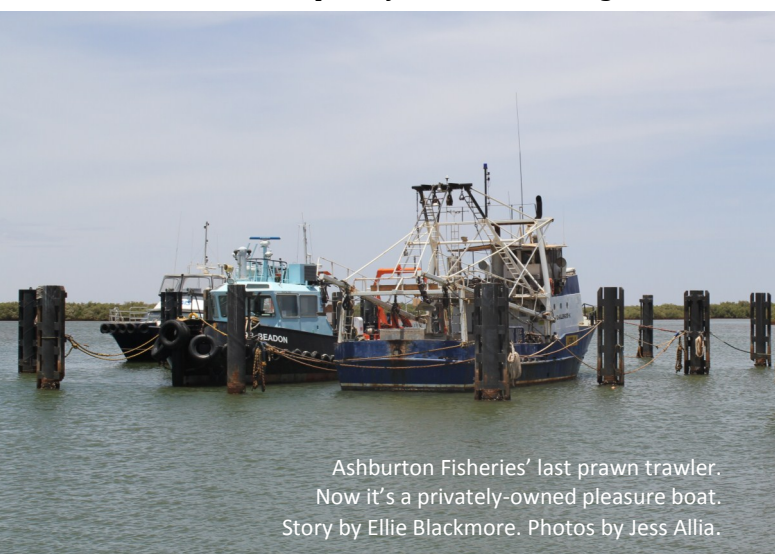
The Shire's Executive Manager Development and Regulatory Services, Brian Cameron, said: "Regardless of what happens with Chevron and us, the days of being a little fishing village are gone. Onslow's not going to look back."

Even though commercial fishing is no longer part of the economy in Onslow, recreational fishing remains a big draw card for locals and tourists.

It appears that the closure of commercial fishing has meant that there is an abundance of weird and wonderful fish in the sea for people to catch in their spare time. Geoff Herbert said that the fishing is awesome at the moment: "Last week we went off shore and had to stop fishing by 10am we'd caught that many."

A few companies in Onslow, including Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd, offer fishing charters to people in town. The company boasts that you will be able to fish a wide variety of species including Golden and Giant Trevally, Spanish Mackerel, Coral Trout, Red Emperor and Rankin Cod to name a few. Similar charters are available via the Eco Abrolhos Marine Services Company.

Although fishing has been reduced to a recreational activity, it is still recognised as being one of the highlights for those who live in and visit Onslow and hopefully this never changes.



Ashburton Fisheries' last prawn trawler. Now it's a privately-owned pleasure boat. Story by Ellie Blackmore. Photos by Jess Allia.

Feeling the HEAT

Onslow sweltered through a heatwave in January this year, and peak temperatures are not likely to get cooler any time soon.

Temperatures hit nearly 49°C on January 8 and 9, and Neil Bennett from the Bureau of Meteorology said the sweltering temperatures were unusual.

Asked about the cause, he said: "You can't nail any one event down to climate change, but you look at the frequency with which events start to occur and there's definitely a trend upwards for the number of maximum temperatures that are being broken."

According to the locals, Onslow is getting more humid. Gerard Carroll from the Post Office said: "We don't get the rain, but it rains all around us and maybe that's what's caused the humidity, and it's hard to deal with."

Marie-Pierre Dussault said she started noticing the rising humidity about five years ago.

"It has now become nearly the norm. I reckon the humidity has increased but the temperature has decreased," she said.

"It seems to have become more tropical, a bit more like you'd find in Broome and up that way."

Neil said the data indicated that the north of WA would experience a rise in maximum temperatures and an increase in wet season rainfall in the coming decades.

The latest data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows the changing climate means higher sea levels and more extreme weather events.

This doesn't mean Onslow will see more cyclones in total, though according to the IPCC the intensity of the most severe storms in northern WA may increase by 140% by 2070. Neil said: "There's likely to be an increase in the frequency of the higher end cyclones of category 3 or above."

Touchy about TURTLES

Mention turtles around town and the long-time locals will tell you it's a privilege to witness the nesting season. Every year between October and April, flatback turtles and green turtles nest on the beaches around Onslow.

To satisfy environmental requirements, Chevron regularly monitors turtle nesting activity to minimise Wheatstone's impact.

A spokesperson for Chevron Australia said preliminary data showed Ashburton Delta Beach had around 145-165 adult female turtles and Ashburton Island had 67-77 adult females.

Chevron also employs professional marine life spotters and trains some of its boat staff to recognise and report marine fauna activity. In addition there are strict rules limiting boat speed, lighting and distance from nesting areas.

But not everybody's convinced it's enough. Local character Chilli has a simple message to share: "Fuck with the turtles and I'll fuck with you."

Another local who is passionate about turtles is Flic Brennan, a resident of 21 years who runs a Facebook page called *Onslow Plume Muddy Waters*. She is critical of what she considers to be a lack of transparency from Chevron.

"Everyone accepts that in a three-year dredging program there are going to be animal deaths. But tell us," Flic said.

She said she had found around eight dead

turtles since last October and November, and though she couldn't confirm what had caused their deaths, she said they had likely been struck by boats or had died from ingesting plastic.

"There's a lot of plastic on that beach since those boats have been working out there, whether it's bits of buoys or fenders off the boat."

She said there had also been rumours going around that one of the dredgers had malfunctioned, killing turtles and stingrays.


Chevron Australia wouldn't comment specifically on the rumour but said: "The potential environmental impacts of the dredging program were closely considered as part of the environmental assessment process for the Wheatstone Project, which has resulted in stringent conditions."

Chevron will also run a turtle information session for the community on March 15 and 16, led by turtle and marine expert Dr David Waayers.

Flic hopes the program will help to educate people from the city and stop them touching turtles or letting their dogs onto nesting beaches.

"I want to try to get as many people interested as possible," she said.

"People who go to the beach regularly are passionate about our wildlife and don't want to see dead critters washing up on the beach as we have. We've never seen dead turtles washing up before this started, not even people who have been living here longer than I have."



Turtles off Long Island.
Photo by Andrew Slater 2014.
Climate and turtle stories
by Jess Allia.

Has Onslow missed the boat?

In 2012 the Shire of Ashburton published its vision for the expansion of Onslow, exclaiming that Onslow would become the “Star of the North”. But fast forward to today, construction of Chevron’s Wheatstone gas hub nears halfway and Macedon is done, yet the plans for Onslow’s reinvention remain just that, plans.

Goeff Herbert, the president of Onslow’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said the lack of progress on the Light Industrial Area (LIA) expansion had severely restricted the ability of local businesses to capitalise on the construction projects.

The Shire councillors recently voted to sell the entire industrial lot to a private developer, rather than develop it themselves or as part of a joint venture.

They said prohibitive costs and an overstretched works schedule meant privatising the development was the safest option, but Mr Herbert said this was a “terrible” decision. He said the shire should have developed the LIA themselves or as a joint venture because this decision to sell would just cause more delays.

“Private developers are put off by the risk, and the conditions being imposed on the sale. We would have preferred they just steam on and build it themselves, but I can understand why they don’t want to, given their financial losses over the aerodrome.”

Mr Herbert believes by the time the LIA gets off

the ground, the construction phase at Wheatstone will be complete and industrial land won’t be a priority.

“Without industrial land there is no expansion of business in Onslow.

“All that advantage we had is gone. The shire has missed the boat,” he added.

But the CEO of the Shire of Ashburton, Neil Hartley, has fervently defended his organisation’s handling of the development.

“Here is a local government, half the size of Victoria, addressing an economy that is building at 50% of the capacity of the Perth CBD, and doing it with a very basically resourced organisation.

“It is completely overwhelmed with these sorts of activities, so it addresses things in a prioritised way to the best of its resources,” said Mr Hartley.

He accepted the lack of key infrastructure and industrial space was strangling the local economy, but said to turn the plan into reality was a giant undertaking that would take time.

“I’m not sure it could be done any quicker or

“Without industrial land there is no expansion of business in Onslow. All that advantage that we had is gone.”

better, even with hindsight.

“It’s a huge issue building a town in a remote area, literally from scratch, when it is only one town competing with all the others in Western Australia,” said Mr Hartley.

For this reason, privatising the LIA development was the best option and Mr Hartley expected the sale to progress smoothly.

“The professional advice showed clear and strong demand. I’m hoping we can secure a deal within 12 months.”

But much of the key infrastructure required to support any new developments in Onslow falls under the umbrella of the State Government. Before the Shire of Ashburton can allow new developments to take place, solutions have to be found to Onslow’s overloaded power, water and waste treatment problems.

“We constantly raise the issue of those civil services being provided as promptly as possible, but other than that there is nothing we can do,” said Mr Hartley.

“We have to live within our state’s budgets and there will never be enough money to satisfy everybody.

“It’s a difficult, complex, costly issue to address and everybody is doing their best but it’s a very slow process,” he said.

“Slower than those who don’t have to invest the money would like.”

It’s this issue that has become a sore point in town. Mr Herbert said the strength of the OCCI showed the community was not happy with how things were being run.

“The chamber has around 50 members now, and we are one of the strongest chambers in the state, for a town of our size,” he said.

Support from the Department of Commerce and Industry has been forthcoming, with a recent round of business grants awarded to 14 local businesses as part of the State Government’s Industry Facilitation and Support Program, co-sponsored by Chevron, and partly funded by the Royalties for Regions program.

The OCCI has also built a close relationship with



Photo of Geoff Herbert by Jess Allia

Chevron, with negotiations underway for \$173,000 over two years in sponsorship to help establish a small business centre in town.

“Chevron definitely felt some of the community’s ill will, but I’m happy to say our relationship is getting stronger by the day,” said Mr Herbert.

Tim Dodds, general manager of Discovery Parks and an OCCI member, said solving Onslow’s infrastructure problems quickly was important to local business.

“Onslow needs these things fast tracked,” he stressed.

The Discovery Parks development has had to overcome major infrastructure shortcomings to get up and running. Mr Dodds said they were planning to build a private desalination plant to get around the water shortage.

Another local business owner, Laurie Bradley, said the rates for his lot in the existing light industrial area had doubled for the last three years. He expects rates to continue to rise until more land is released, but he isn’t holding >>

“They don’t want expansion of the town. They don’t want it to really grow. They want it to stay the way it was.”

>>his breath waiting for that to happen.

“Nothing gets done quickly around here,” said Mr Bradley, whose stuffed friend ‘Protest Pete’ has criticised the shire for years over an unresolved drainage issue on his lot.

“The shire knew this was coming, they could have got on top of all this back in 2004.”

But Neil Hartley maintains the shire has done its best with limited resources, and that while the current construction boom was placing immense pressure on the town, the shire was focusing on the long term.

“While there is an awful lot happening at the moment, it’s construction, which by its nature is short term.

“As long as the residential component progresses, this short term economic aberration will be a blip in history, and once we get into operation phase Onslow will become a normal

town, with a constant population,” he said.

Mr Herbert said this belief was holding the town back. He said councillors like Onslow representative Kerry White represented a section of the community who were against development.

“They don’t want expansion of the town. They don’t want it to really grow. They want it to stay the way it was.”

However Mr Hartley said both the Shire of Ashburton and its councillors understood the need for development.

“The council understands that Onslow is changing. They can’t force it to stay like it was.

“But the philosophy is still the same: There is a need to retain as much of the history, culture and feel of Onslow as is practical, but also accommodate the inevitable growth that is occurring. That can be achieved.”



HUB of activity

Story by Tanya Phillips

The Onslow Business Services Hub is due to open in early 2014. The hub is being run by the Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and according to president Geoff Herbert it aims to give businesses easy access to the West Pilbara Small Business Centre (SBC) and chartered accountants RSM Bird Cameron.

The hub at 453 Beadon Creek Road, is staffed by Demelza Franklin who is the Onslow SBC rep.

She said: "The centre provides businesses with planning, marketing support, training, government assistance, licencing and applications for grants."

Mr Herbert explained: "It's to support local business in the long term and to be a lot more sophisticated than we are now."

RSM Bird Cameron has been contracted by Chevron to work remotely with local businesses offering accounting advice and business planning, and are also likely to visit regularly.

One of the challenges facing many businesses in Onslow is that locals often opt to shop elsewhere to save a few dollars.

Ashley McAullay said: "All the salt workers go to Karratha, I go to Pannawonica, you save a lot of money. Everyone brings a lot of jerry cans back

'cause of the price of fuel."

Chris Wenzel from the supermarket explained the challenges "all boil down to overheads and that's accommodation, freight and electricity. Everyone has this perception that we're an IGA store but we're independent so we don't have the same buying power."

Chris said business is good but it has slowed a little over the past couple months. He said their prices have stayed the same since he started at the shop about a year ago, besides alcohol which went up state-wide in February.

"You won't get everyone buying here, some people tend to go to Karratha. We'll never be able to compete with Woolies or the big IGAs."

Chris currently employs 22-25 staff – a few locals and the rest are backpackers and grey nomads. "We can't compete with Wheatstone. And that's another cost because you're always training people because people are leaving."

Chris is positive about the Onslow Business Services Hub: "We might use it for its training facilities. It should be good for small businesses, if you are starting a new business it will be really good."

The Goods Shed Museum has been awarded a Chevron Spirit Grant of \$10,000 to digitally catalogue its collection which showcases aspects of life in Onslow over the past 100 years.

According to curator Sue Lennard, the collection covers the pastoral, fishing and pearling industries. WWII memorabilia, local flora and fauna, atomic testing and much of Old Onslow is also represented in the collection.

As Onslow has on average six cyclones per year, the purpose of this project is to protect and preserve the historical fabric and integrity of the town. The grant money will cover the costs of purchasing a laptop computer, digital camera, scanner, licences for *Mosaic* software, training and support.

The museum is seeking volunteers to help with writing the catalogue. Three days of training will be provided to one volunteer, and the work will take place over the winter months until it is complete. The grant will also cover the volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses.

Applications for Spirit Grants are open during April and September and must seek to enhance health, education, economic development, the sense of community, or the environment.

Story by Petrice Davidson



Shire: making the most of what they've got

After the turmoil of the last two years, many hoped 2014 would provide the Shire of Ashburton with a chance to get back to regular business. Alas, a spate of resignations over the Christmas period has left some big holes to fill.

The shire has had to say goodbye to its manager for strategic and economic development, Amanda O'Halloran, among several others.

But Shire of Ashburton CEO Neil Hartley said some of the positions had already been filled and the rest would be "as soon as possible". However, he said the process would not happen overnight.

"Staff turnover is common and ongoing and always creates challenges, but also opportunities," he said, adding that this was unfortunately just part of doing business in the Pilbara.

"The churn of turnovers across all of our towns is an ongoing issue to deal with. People come and go from these remote locations."

Despite the staff setbacks, the new CEO said he was happy with the way the shire was operating. He also said the councillors had taken stock of the issues uncovered by 2012's Probity Compliance Audit (PCA) and were moving forward. "They've taken on board the issues raised by the probity audit and my understanding is that the council meetings are running now much more smoothly."

Mr Hartley said he was working to ensure the same problems didn't happen again, but defended the council's integrity throughout the affair.

"The council were dealing with a whole range of issues which were very challenging and significant ones," he said.

Mr Hartley, who took up the role of CEO last year, said it was great being back in a small town environment but admitted he doesn't get the chance to spend as much time in Onslow as he'd like.

"It's more of a challenge up here, with the distance and the time it takes to get to Onslow.

"It's certainly a challenge and an inefficiency of Pilbara life."

While the tyranny of distance means he only expects to spend about four weeks a year in Onslow, he said the town was certainly not out of sight, out of mind.

Meanwhile, for local shire staff, the impact of the shire office fire is still being felt one year on.

Shire administration is now being done from three separate buildings. Staff are split between





Photo of Brian Cameron
by Karma Barndon

the MPC, temporary offices known as the Business house on Second Ave, and the Beach House on First Ave.

Plans to build a new office that will accommodate Onslow's needs into the future have begun but no dates have been set for completion.

The Shire's Executive Manager Development and Regulatory Services, Brian Cameron, said rebuilding the office was on a long list of projects underway, but money was the biggest hurdle.

It's no secret Onslow's population growth has put the town's infrastructure under huge strain.

The local tip filled up and so the shire had to truck rubbish to Tom Price as a short-term solution. The Shire's waste co-ordinator Margaret Rowe said a new landfill was at least five years away.

Mr Cameron said the Shire of Ashburton's rate base was not huge and addressing all the problems facing Onslow was financially challenging.

"We don't have bucket loads of money to build that stuff.

"Towns like Tom Price and Paraburdoo were built around mining projects and facilities like swimming pools were shared with the community. Onslow residents look at those towns and expect the same level of infrastructure, but because Chevron is based outside the town the financial pressure for constructing these things falls on the ratepayer and the Shire."

The fact Chevron has built two swimming pools at its Wheatstone camp, out of reach of locals, particularly frustrates Mr Cameron.

"We've got a lot of kids who would love that pool. We've got our aboriginal community who would love a swim. But we just don't have that money.

"We understand Chevron have a job to do, but we'd like it if they left some sort of legacy for the community."

"We understand Chevron have a job to do, but we'd like it if they left some sort of legacy for the community."

Hospital on HOLD



Onslow shouldn't hold its breath for Chevron and the State Government's mooted hospital upgrade, with no firm plans or an estimated start time in sight.

A spokesperson from Health Minister Kim Hames' office told *Tracking Onslow* that the plans were being readied but couldn't give an estimated year that building might start.

Ashburton Shire's Executive Manager of

Development and Regulatory Services Brian Cameron said the Shire hadn't yet received any plans for the new hospital.

President of the Onslow Chamber of Commerce Geoff Herbert reckons it would be hard to attract doctors to the new building even if it does go ahead.

"People haven't even started talking about (the hospital)," Geoff told *Tracking Onslow*. >>

While Onslow doesn't have a resident doctor, these medical services are available in town at certain times:

- A Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) funded GP flies in from Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha on Monday, Wednesday and Friday each week.
- A RFDS female doctor visits for 3 - 4 days every three months. An obstetrician and gynaecologist visit for one day every two months.
- A dentist visits once a month for three days.
- A community midwife visits for three days each month.
- Allied Health Services provides physio and health assistance for three days each month and occupational therapy, speech pathology and a social worker for one day per month.
- Community Health Nurse (Amanda Wealleans) lives in Onslow and provides child, school and public health services.
- Home aged community care services are available Monday to Fridays.
- A paediatrician visits for one day every two months.
- There are also Aboriginal health services, dieticians and a mental health nurse.
- Onslow has two ambulances and eight volunteer paramedics.
- Patients who need to go to Karratha and beyond can apply for financial help from the Patient Assistance Travel Service.

Source: WA Country Health Service, Community Health and Bruno DeLongis (St John Ambulance).



He said: "We were at one stage going to get a new building, but now it's just going to be an expansion on the existing building."

While the Department of State Development said it was finalising the scope and scale of the upgrades to Onslow's health services, when asked for details it added: "This is all we can say at the moment."

Though some of the town's locals are pessimistic that a new hospital upgrade is even going to happen, others are appreciative of the existing medical services.

Discovery Parks' food and safety officer Jill Vidal broke her ankle last year and had to be airlifted from Onslow to get surgery in Perth. She stayed in Onslow Hospital for a few days and said the nurses were professional and kept her comfortable while she waited to be moved.

She doesn't think there's much need for a surgeon in the town.

"The flying doctors are great, they can get you to a bigger hospital at any time," she said.

"What are you going to have a surgeon doing up here? Sitting on his bum most of the time."

But Jill said the hospital building does need an upgrade: "It needs a bit of money spent on it. You can see that it needs some paint."

Jill's boss at Discovery Parks, Julie Dodds, was concerned that Jill was deemed to be low on the priority list to be flown to another hospital despite needing surgery.

"Living remotely, it's very sad," she said of the limited services in Onslow.

Onslow doesn't have a resident doctor, but a doctor flies in from Karratha every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Patients giving birth or needing major surgery must travel to other hospitals, most often in Karratha or Perth.

St John Ambulance paramedic Bruno Delongis told *Tracking Onslow* that the town currently had eight volunteers and Geroge Wilson added that it could use more.

While Chevron and the State Government insist the hospital upgrade is coming, they provided no clue as to when building will take place or what services will be available.

Last time *Tracking Onslow* came to town, the Community Resources Centre had shut its doors and seemed unlikely to reopen, but that's about to change.

The CRC was thrown a lifeline when Karen Sloan came to Onslow three weeks ago and took over the job of coordinator.

Originally from the UK countryside, Karen spent four years in Perth before relocating to Onslow with her husband and their 8-year-old son. Outspoken and passionate, Karen is positive about the changes occurring in the town.

"I want to make the CRC the core of the community, with regular meetings, because you can't understand what the community wants unless you speak to them," she said.

"I think it doesn't matter how long somebody's been here, it's what they bring, their expertise and life experiences, and they can help to build the town into what it potentially can be," she said.

She is also looking at getting funding to start online training courses for stay-at-home mums and other interested community members, as well as homework sessions for kids after school.

The CRC is run by the community and Karen hopes it will be up and running again in a few weeks.

Some of its facilities include being an agency for Centrelink, internet access and photocopying.



Both stories & photo of Karen Sloan by Jess Allia

HUB UPDATES

macedon

What: Macedon is a joint venture domestic project to pipe gas from the Macedon field to an onshore plant that processes 200 terajoules of refined gas per day for the WA market. It generates 20% of the state's gas supply.

Where: The Macedon field is 100km off Onslow in the Exmouth sub-basin, and comprises of four sub-sea wells, the project also has an onshore gas treatment plant at Ashburton North near Onslow.

How Much: \$1.67 billion project

When: 1992 Macedon gas field discovered

2012 Construction began

2013 The project was completed and the gas plant started operating

How Many: Employment peaked to 600 workers during the construction phase and has dropped to under 20 now that the plant is fully operational.

Contribution: BHP committed \$5 million to the Multi-Purpose Centre and a decision is scheduled regarding the progress of the basketball stadium and skate park.



wheatstone

What: The project is in two parts. One consists of two liquid natural gas trains that will process 8.9 million tonnes per year combined for export. The second is a domestic gas plant that will process 200 terajoules of gas per day for the WA domestic market.

Where: Wheatstone is being built at Ashburton North, and in February 2014 there were 3500 workers living in the FIFO 'village' near the site.

How Much: \$29 billion project

When: 2004 Wheatstone gas field discovered

2011 Construction commences

2014 In February the hub was 27% complete.

2016 Start-up of the first train of LNG is expected. Project life is 40-50 years.

How Many: At present there are 3500 workers. This will increase to 6500 at the peak of construction, and drop down to 300 workers when the plant is in its operational phase.

Contribution: \$12 billion spent so far and \$250 million committed to community projects for Onslow including upgrades in power, water, health services and a pool, scheduled to start in 2014.



Defending Onslow

If volunteers are the heart and soul of a community, a walk down to the FESA shed late on a Tuesday shows the spirit of Onslow is strong.

Long serving FESA volunteer George Wilson gave *Tracking Onslow* a tour of the local unit, and took us for a ride in the fire engine.

The local unit has around 20 volunteers, but George said numbers at the Tuesday night training sessions varied from week to week.

“Because Onslow is such an in-and-out town, sometimes we’ll get two people and the following week get 15.”

George has been a FESA volunteer for 10 years, while Maxine Moroney has contributed 9 years and Murray Reid, 15 years.

“There’s a couple of old hands,” he said.

But he added that the unit was stretched and getting enough members was a challenge: “It’s hard getting enough volunteers. Everyone in town — the ambos, water rescue — we’re all struggling.”

George said part of the problem was how hard people were working: “People finish a 12 hour shift and they’re shattered.”

Despite this, George said there were always people prepared to give up their time to help out.

“People want to do something for the community, and it is interesting, there are a lot of great skills involved.”

The local unit has two fire fighting vehicles at its disposal. The main truck is capable of fighting several types of fires and is equipped with the Jaws of Life in case of car crashes. But it is due for replacement and George is hopeful the Dept of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) will supply a new one before the year’s end.

The lack of water pressure in town presents a serious issue for the fire fighters.

“Basically there are too many people on the system,” said George.

New developments must have on-site water supplies to get around this problem.

George said Onslow’s recent spate of fires had kept them busy. They reached the supermarket fire early enough to stop any structural damage.

“It wasn’t really a big fire but it was a lot of heat. The air conditioners on the walls were melting.”

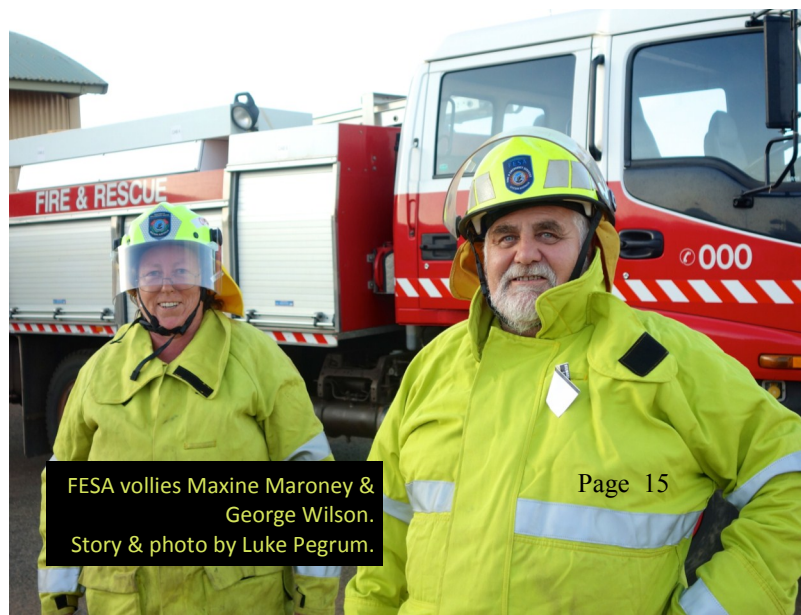
Unfortunately, the shire offices were already burning out of control when they arrived.

George said they were lucky nobody was hurt: “When we got there we heard a couple of bangs and didn’t think much of it. It wasn’t until later on we discovered there was a gun cabinet in there and that was the cartridges going off.”

DFES provides the unit with training, ranging from basic fire fighting skills, to advanced courses for more experienced volunteers.

“We try to get them down every couple of months to do the training,” George said.

“It’s really important that we get our new members up to speed with the basics.”



FESA vollies Maxine Maroney & George Wilson.
Story & photo by Luke Pegrum.

Onslow's accommodation squeeze

For the past couple of years the gas hub construction workers have occupied every spare bed in Onslow, driving the prices up and the locals out.

The average rent in Onslow has risen to \$2000 per week making it hard for locals and unskilled workers to find a job that can provide them with enough money to pay rent alone.

"I came here 12 years ago and rented a house for \$250 a week," said Chilli, a well-known local who now has to share a caravan with a friend after being evicted from his home when rent prices rose to an impossible \$1800 a week.

The same struggle transfers across to real estate sales in town.

Currently there are roughly 20 properties listed on the market for sale in Onslow with an average market price of \$1.5 million.

Onslow Project Sales and Marketing Manager, Ben Papalia, said that all markets ebb-and-flow with Onslow being no exception.

The first two weeks of February saw eight listings sold, yet there is speculation that the market may slow as the completion of a number of renovation and construction projects around town reduces the pressure for accommodation.

The Ashburton Resort Motel has been completed and has opened 86 brand new executive apartments, with a restaurant and function centre also in the works.



Discovery Parks is nearing completion of stage two of its \$100 million redevelopment.

They have finished building a number of deluxe double studio rooms, Single Men's Quarter (SMQ) units and temporary caravans to bring their accommodation capacity to more than 300 people.

On top of this they have completed their 350-seat dining room, commercial kitchen, bar and recreation room, gym, and laundry with more expansions planned for the coming year. Julie Dodds from Discovery Parks said that while the 'wet bar' was built and ready to use, they were still waiting for their liquor licence approval.

The new Onslow Oceanfront complex is also well underway with the Shire's Executive Manager Development and Regulatory Services Brian Cameron noting that its foundations and footings are in place and now only awaiting the arrival of the final pieces of its modular construction. The architect-designed apartments are said to be already 75 per cent sold with final completion expected around June/July.

Onslow Chamber of Commerce president Geoff Herbert said these changes mean that the town is finally on top of the accommodation problem and heading towards an excess. But with an additional 1500 Chevron workers expected to arrive by August, there may be another accommodation squeeze looming.



Floatels gone but not for long

Beadon Creek is now rid of the accommodation boats (floatels) — that some locals described as an eye sore — but not for long. Jay Cox, managing director of marine services company Eco Abrolhos, said he will be returning to Beadon Creek in March with one of his 35 meter catamarans.

With no work currently lined up, he's heading back to Onslow "on a wing and a prayer" that he will secure a new contract. He was forced to leave in December when his three-year contract with Bechtel was cut short.

The Shire's Executive Manager Development and Regulatory Services, Brian Cameron, said that people in town don't want to see the floatels back at Beadon Creek as they'd prefer accommodation to be built in town.

Mr Cox disagreed with this point, noting that his company spent \$1.8 million in Onslow last year on local businesses and contractors.

"We're very good to the town" he said.

Further speculation in Onslow as to whether sewage from the floatels was being dumped in the bay has caused a stir with some locals living at the Ocean View Caravan Park.

But Mr Cox assured us that the sewage is sucked up by tanks on shore and transported to Karratha. Any additional waste (paper, glass, etc) is sorted and transported to Perth.

"Nothing is left in Onslow" he said.

Cheap homes for hard workers

A \$4.8 million initiative funded by the State Government's Royalties for Regions program has seen the construction of 12, two-bedroom chalets at Discovery Parks.

The chalets will be rented to service workers in town who are struggling to cope with the rising cost of living.

Starting from \$450 a week, the modern chalets come semi-furnished with two queen-sized beds, two bathrooms and a fully equipped kitchen and dining room. So far, 11 of the 12 units have been filled and a waiting list is forming for when more accommodation becomes available.

The Department of Housing's General Manager of Commercial and Business Operations, Paul Whyte, said he understands the need for affordable housing in Onslow and is developing further proposals aimed at addressing the specific needs of service workers in town.

For more information on this opportunity head to:

http://www.dhw.wa.gov.au/investorsandpartners/swa/Onslow_SWH/Pages/default.aspx



Stories by Ellie Blackmore.
Floatel pic courtesy of Eco Abrolhos.
Photos of Discovery Parks Service Worker units (top) and Stage 2 units by Jess Allia
Page 17



WAT

for the

Onslow pastoralist and magnate Andrew Forrest is in the fray over water supply for the Minderoo property. It's a move that proposes a plan to provide drinking water to the town of Onslow from the desalination plant Chevron is commissioning on the coast. Forrest, through his new company H2Onslow, will provide groundwater supplies through a series of weirs and pumps that runs through his ancestral land, to supply the town of Onslow. H2Onslow's public water supply proposal is called the *Recharge Scheme* and it was presented to Chevron, the Water Corporation, in December 2013.

Under the State Development Agreement governing the multi-billion dollar project, a component of the Social Infrastructure Fund, Chevron is obliged to provide 100 million litres a day of water to Onslow. But despite promising to commence construction pending environmental approval, which has pushed the construction timeframe into 2015. A Chevron spokesperson said the company plans to submit an application for approval this month. "Approvals permitting, construction is expected to begin in early 2015, with completion in 2016," the spokesperson declared.

The Water Corporation too is confident the project will eventuate. North West Regional Manager Mr McAllister said the company is working with Chevron and the EPA to secure environmental approval for the desalination plant. "A submission is expected to be made to the EPA in February 2014," Mr McAllister said. Detailed design work will start once all approvals are in place.

Onslow's water currently comes from the Cane River Borefield, which the Water Corporation is upgrading. Mr McAllister said the upgrade of the water supply main and borefield collector main was complete, and they will be installing a new storage tank, pump station and associated pipework in Onslow will begin in April 2014, and all approvals for the project will be in place by then. While Mr McAllister believes the upgrades to the borefield will satisfy Onslow's water needs until the desalination plant is operational, H2Onslow's hydrogeologist Don Scott, from Pennington Scott Consulting, told *Tracking Onslow* he also has concerns about the impact of the project on Mud Creek, part of the Ashburton River Delta which sits on the Minderoo Pastoral Lease and flows onto the Onslow Sandstone aquifer.

ER

future

and mining
it has entered
for the town by
taking water from his
could trump the need for
mitted to build.

ow, wants to harness
s, from the Ashburton River as it
n with fresh water.

Ashburton River Managed Aquifer
ater Corp and the State Government in

ion dollar Wheatstone liquefied natural gas plant, as
construct a desalination plant capable of supplying two
ce construction in 2014, Chevron is yet to be granted
2015.

approval from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) later
with the plant scheduled to be handed to the Water Corporation in

anager Peter McAllister told *Tracking Onslow* that at present, they are
e. "Consultation on environmental aspects of the proposal is underway and the
gn work on the plant and pipeline into town will continue and construction can

The borefield supplies about 820kl per day.

were now working on mechanical and electrical upgrades to the borefields. "Work to build
r this work have been received."

plant is completed, H2Onslow claims the Cane River Borefield is unsustainable in the long term.

out the Chevron Desalination plant as the current proposal involves flushing the brine down Quick

lt lease. He said: "We've been in negotiations with the state and Chevron to provide an alternative >>

solution to the current desalination project. We're here with ecologists and environmental consultants because we're concerned the current desalination project's disposal of brine is not good for this environment. We think it will cause damage. It's clear it's the cheapest solution."

Mr Scott said Chevron's proposed desalination process isn't new technology, but taking water from the Birdrong Sandstone core 400m below the surface and pumping the residual brine into the river is new.

"Our early investigations and presentations with Water Corp and Chevron have suggested there are heavy metals in there, so we'd like to ensure any disposal of the brine is managed correctly and the environment is protected. Right now we suggest the project is not environmentally responsible," Mr Scott said.

Chevron's proposal to tap the ancient groundwater in the Birdrong Sandstone from the 400m deep BHP Macedon bore in the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area involves forcing the groundwater, which has salinity around 12000mg/L, under high pressure through membrane filters, in a process called reverse osmosis.

Around 60% of the raw water stream would filter through the membrane to be used as demineralised drinking water, while the remaining 40% would form brine for disposal.

Disposal of the brine into the marine environment is problematic because the raw groundwater has a temperature of 46.5 degrees Celsius, is highly acidic with a pH of 4, and contains high levels of heavy metals, including radionuclides and hydrocarbons like methane

and radon gases.

The high pressures used also require power, so Chevron would have to complement the desalination plant with a 9MW gas fired power station, to feed the plants energy needs.

According to Mr Scott, the desalination project has significant disadvantages, including a timing delay of three years while the power plant is completed, high technical risks and maintenance costs, and an extremely high operating cost per kilolitre.

H2Oslow's alternative proposal is based on a Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) system, which involves building a series of weirs on the Ashburton River to recharge the adjacent Ashburton Alluvial Aquifer with low salinity river water during annual river flows.

The water is then filtered naturally through the alluvial sediments.

A test project was completed several years ago, which successfully produced 3000kL per day of potable water that was used for irrigation.

Mr Scott explained that Minderoo's existing weir is 3m up the face of the river, so that when the river flows it holds the water at 3m and that water recharges into the aquifer, refilling the groundwater mound that is 2.5km across. If the annual influx of water was not caught in this way it would run down into the ocean.

"We don't want Chevron's brine to flush down into the Ashburton River and accumulate in the food chain," Mr Scott said.

"The desalination plant should not go ahead at the expense of the environment; the brine needs to be treated properly. Minderoo is not a dumping ground."

"The desalination plant should not go ahead at the expense of the environment; the brine needs to be treated properly. Minderoo is not a dumping ground."

H2OOnslow has said it could implement the scheme in two stages to expedite delivery.

Stage 1 involves constructing all infrastructures apart from the weirs, and using the existing bores to supply the town, while Stage 2 would provide a permanent solution with construction of five weirs within 18 months.

The benefits include potential to speed up progress of proposed land releases that are being held back by the lack of water, a renewable water supply for the town, and the early delivery of a public swimming pool.

Mr Scott said H2OOnslow can build its project for the same cost as Chevron's desalination plant, with operating costs at a third of Chevron's.

"A desalination plant in a cyclone area with heavy metals present is not ideal, but its uncertain right now whether our proposal will be successful."

He explained there were delays with Chevron's desalination project because of the technical challenges involved in making it work.

Apparently, if the EPA says no to Chevron, then Chevron will consider H2OOnslow's plan.

The door has been left open, but the ball is now in the court of Chevron and the state government.

Mr Scott said, ironically, that while the town was struggling with water, Minderoo was using that same volume (2million litres per day) for crop irrigation.



If the project gets the nod, he said: "We will turn that off and use our bores, and redirect that volume into town. We have the infrastructure and we can deliver in nine months."

H2OOnslow's plan has the community talking. Discovery Parks manager Tim Dodds is watching what happens and going ahead with building a small desalination plant on their own site to meet the park's water needs.

He speculated that by the time the Chevron plant is built, the town might not have any need for it, as the 'boom' would have run its course.

Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Geoff Herbert has his fingers crossed the Water Corporation takes up Mr Forrest's "good project".

The Chamber was also told that the Water Corporation has also quietly expressed preference for H2OOnslow's project, as long as it meets its requirements.

Big decisions on the issue are pending but it seems that Forrest's ambitious plan to usurp Chevron, is slowly gaining momentum.



Story by Karma Barndon.
Ashburton River photo by Jess Allia.
Minderoo irrigation photos courtesy of Minderoo.

New kids



on the Bindi Bindi block

The remote jobs scheme launched by Labor last year has left significant holes in the Onslow community.

The Federal Government's Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) was rolled out in July 2013, replacing the controversial Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), with the expressed aim of integrating a number of programs and services into one agency.

Three other programs that delivered employment services to remote regions – Job Services Australia, Disability Employment Services, and the Indigenous Employment scheme – were also merged into the RJCP.

Under the new system, a single provider works within the region with individuals, communities and employers to help both indigenous and non-indigenous people enter the workforce.

But Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion

is not a fan of the new program, declaring it “a complete disaster”.

According to the minister, the provision in the new community development fund of \$237.5 million over five years would not adequately cover appropriate levels of support to program providers.

The previous CDEP provider, Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation (AAC), lost its tender bid for a job services contract despite its strong local presence and business links. The tender was instead awarded to a joint venture between the company Real Employment For Aboriginal People (REFAP) and the My Pathway Group.

CEO of AAC Janet Brown said unfortunately they had to close the doors of the Bindi Bindi office and leave town.

“We are sad to be losing Onslow,” she said.

But regardless of the federal misgivings, Ms

Brown believes the community is still in good hands. “REFAP will do a good job,” she added.

REFAP founder and CEO Triscilla Holborow established the Karratha-based female-owned and operated small Aboriginal business in 2010.

She told *Tracking Onslow* the new RJCP is running well, despite only recently reopening the office



The recently closed and re-opened Bindi Bindi office

at the Bindi Bindi community.

“Teams are starting to grow, activities have started and people are turning up,” Ms Holborow proudly explained.

“It’s a big change in the management process, and, like anything, there’s teething problems, but at least we are engaging the community. The other positive is that we are representing all people from all language groups, and non-aboriginal people too, because in our community engagement we have to look after everyone.

“We’ll be talking to the Thalanyji group too, to see how we can directly work with them.”

Down at Bindi Bindi, manager Bernadette Shepherd said she felt positive about the plans they had for Onslow.

“We opened the doors here at Bindi two weeks ago, and while it’s a bit slow going, it’s going well.”

Ms Shepherd said it took a while to secure the lease of the office building, and it still needed a significant clean.

She said they’ll soon establish work crews to clean the office, and clean up the community grounds.

“The idea, if there are no jobs here, is to run some cooking classes for the women.”

Originally from Wyndham, Ms Shepherd has worked at REFAP for six months.

She and another employee travel from Karratha each week to staff the Onslow office, as the company is yet to employ a local woman to assume a supervisor’s role.

Men’s group supervisor John Ashburton said the building of more houses in the community would potentially provide much needed jobs to community members.

He said the Gumala Corporation was planning to construct a number of houses for Gumala association members, and build another access road into the community, to provide better access for emergency vehicles. He told *Tracking Onslow* the Bindi Bindi community was established to house the many tribes forced off their country by the encroaching spread of pastoralism.



REFAP Men’s Group manager John Ashburton.
Story & photos by Karma Barndon.

“So many tribes ended up here,” he said softly, adding:

“They were removed from their lands as many different tribes, and forced to become one.”

Mr Ashburton’s mother is from Queensland, where he was born and raised, and his father from country around Tom Price, where he moved to 18 years ago.

Back in the ’60s his father worked on Minderoo Station, and Mr Ashburton’s brothers were playmates of a young Andrew Forrest.

“That Andrew Forrest, my brothers used to bash him up,” he said with a grin.

“He’d walk around in his fancy clothes, and my brothers in their chequered shirts with cuffed sleeves and gings in their pockets would hide in the bushes and gung him when he went past.”

Summarily, despite the slow pace of progress, REFAP is here for the long haul, or at least for the five year tenure of their contract.

While working hard on filling the hole in the Indigenous employment sector left by AAC, Ms Holborow is optimistic about Onslow jobseekers’ future.

“We’re working together to do what we do best, and that is getting people jobs and training.”

Educating Onslow

Who teaches the teens?

High school in remote locations like Onslow is unlike the city experience. With the new school year just getting underway, high school teacher James Trimble is getting to know his 24 students who are in years 8-12.

The school currently has 142 enrolled students in seven classes, many of which are split years. The school's numbers have been quite consistent over the past five years and the demographic is split quite evenly between indigenous and non-indigenous students these days, now that more families are moving to town for the employment opportunities.

All high school students are in one class which blends traditionally taught lessons with the online Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) program.

Principal Jackie Barry said: "It's challenging for the classroom teacher, they have to be quite clever with their teaching skills."

The high school program is skewed towards the Vocational Education and Training program which this year is now offering two electives; a sport and recreation certificate and a media production analysis certificate. The students will get a Certificate I in Year 10 and a Certificate II in Year 11.

Mr Trimble is looking forward to the year ahead. "It's very early days but we're really excited, we ordered GoPros (cameras) and we're looking at integrating the media class with the Coral Bay camp and the swimming with sharks excursion."

If there is a child who's more academically minded, the school can offer a tertiary entrance program through SIDE. But with low numbers

enrolled, the trend continues of kids moving away to larger high schools with more options.

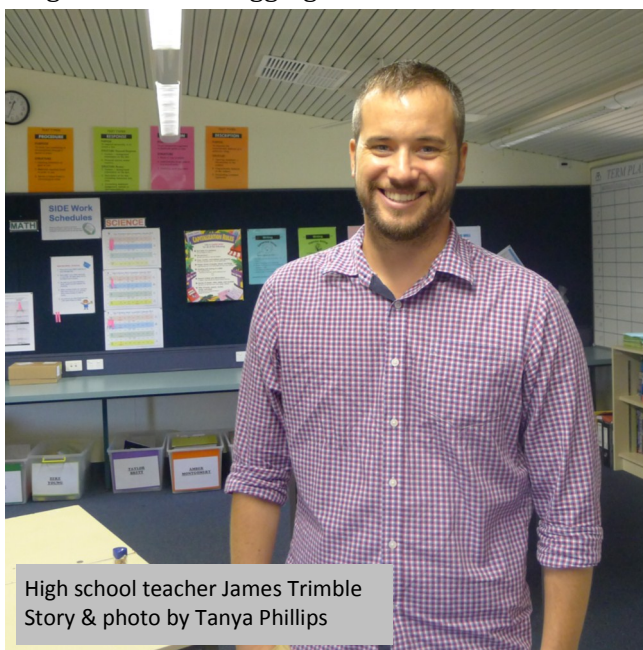
Ms Barry said: "It's a bit chicken and the egg; we can't get the high school without numbers and we can't keep the kids without the high school."

Attendance levels ebb and flow so the school implements incentives like school balls which kids can only attend if they have been in class enough.

Parent Julie Dodds said Mr Trimble is inspirational and tries to get the kids involved. "But the trouble is the kids aren't sticklers, they just don't stay in the classroom. They might come but then they might go home."

The school helps organise work experience opportunities for Year 10 to 12 students in a range of positions, often on the gas hubs.

Ms Barry said: "I'd like to continue to build on partnerships to have more learning experiences and careers days and show the kids there's more to gas hubs than digging holes."



In your words

Dexter Stone and Sterling Barrington have been looking for a new business venture ever since arriving in Perth from New Zealand three years ago. They saw an investment in Onslow's Nikki's Restaurant as the perfect opportunity and they recently moved to Onslow to get it up and running again. The two have enjoyed high end careers in the hospitality industry and have come to Onslow to let loose a little bit and have some fun building a new business. "We still have high standards but we can enjoy it," said Dexter.

Although the idea of moving to a tiny town was daunting at first, they're loving the lifestyle so far. "Last Monday we went out fishing all day and caught these huge fish," said Sterling. "It's normal for the locals to do stuff like that but for us it's just amazing."

They say it's all coming together nicely so far in Onslow and they're planning on being in town for the long run.



Cheerful 21-year-old Amanda Ouwerkerh has recently moved to Onslow. She is earning a bit of money working behind the bar at the Beadon Bay Pub to fund her ambition to travel overseas.

She's worked as a barmaid for about three years now and originally hails from Darwin, having also spent some time in Exmouth.

She's grateful of how welcoming the town has been to her and is loving the lifestyle so far with the only down side being the beach: "I love the beach, so it's a shame I can't swim much here." She's put off by the "disgusting" colour of the water.

Her boyfriend works on the oil rigs in Timor and, although it's a struggle living away from him, she's looking forward to his visit in March, when they plan to visit the Mackerel Islands.

Amanda hopes to stay in town for at least six months before heading to Exmouth where she loves the snorkelling and plans to stay for two or three years.

In your words

Originally from Cairns, Jill Vidal came to Onslow in August last year and works as a food and safety officer at Discovery Park.

Asked why she came to Onslow of all places, she was frank: "I'm here to work and to save money, to get myself together financially for when I retire," she said.

Just 17 days after Jill arrived in Onslow, she had an accident, but she still came back after returning home for three months.

"I packed up my whole life over in Cairns, came over here and just loved it, and then 17 days later I fell down a drain and broke my ankle," she said.

Jill doesn't have much to say on the development in Onslow or even the town itself, but she reckons she's lucky to have the job she has.

"I really like it here, but it can be a bit like Ground Hog Day, the same thing over and over again.

"I'll be coming back, but instead of doing six month stints, I'm probably going to see if I can do four-month stints and two weeks off every four months because I've got grandchildren and I want to be a part of their life, not to be so isolated from them."



Jim Reid and his wife started travelling around Western Australia in 2008 before finding themselves in Old Onslow two years ago. They camped down by Scotty's Wall for seven weeks and "fell in love with the place" so when it came time to head back to work they had a look for opportunities in town first.

Unfortunately they only managed six weeks at the General Store before being chased out of town by a cyclone. Plans to return shortly after never eventuated as other job opportunities saw him and his wife remain closer to their previous home in Shark Bay. But when work ran out again, Jim found himself looking to Onslow and moved back to town earlier this year.

He loves the coastal, old-town feel of the place and notes that "even with the influx of mining, you can see the benefits it's bringing". Another draw card for him has been the fishing: "Mud crabbing is my biggest attraction up here, you don't get that in Shark Bay". Now working as the maintenance manager at the Ashburton Resort Motel, he describes his lifestyle as "pretty kick-back and peaceful" and he doesn't plan on leaving anytime soon.

Sergeant Drew Taylor moved to Onslow three months ago and took over the police station.

"It was a perfect opportunity. The first thing my wife and I noticed was how friendly everyone was," Drew said.

He's a country boy at heart: "I moved from Perth to the bush when I was 22 and I never went back to the city."

He is mostly positive about the changes occurring in Onslow.

"If things do expand in the town, we might have better infrastructure and with more people coming to town there might be more sporting events for people to get involved in.

"However, the cost of housing and rent is going to go through the roof and sometimes you pay something like \$2.13 a litre for fuel."

Drew is enjoying his job, though it presents some challenges, such as dealing with alcohol-fuelled crime, domestic violence and young offenders. "There's a lack of parental support and responsibility," he said.

A keen fisherman, he told *Tracking Onslow* he couldn't tell us about the prime fishing spots around town.

"The community would have me hung," he joked.



Last time *Tracking Onslow* spoke to Flic Brennan, she was planning to move out of town, and her mind hasn't changed.

"The town's gotten worse. If I could leave tomorrow, I would," she said. "I've been here 21 years but it's not a community anymore, it's a mining town, and it will never revert back to the sleepy little town it was."

Though she's leaving, Flic is still passionate about Onslow and wishes more people in the community would come together to fight for issues they cared about. "There needs to be more community involvement from the people that care, but I don't think there's too many of those."

She's still vocal about the negative impacts of Chevron on the town, but she said the school's turtle education program was a positive and she welcomed the community turtle program planned for March 2014.

"They should have run the program back in January when the turtles were laying eggs, but at least they're doing it."

Asked about Chevron and the State Government's promised Onslow Hospital upgrade, she said it desperately needed to go ahead and kept being pushed back. She said: "I just want a decent hospital. We need more facilities and a full-time doctor."

In your words

“**Y**ou must be the funny guy behind the counter my husband told me about,” laughs another satisfied customer at the Onslow Pharmacy.

She’s referring to the town’s charismatic pharmacist, Eddie Tan.

Originally from Malaysia, the 28-year-old moved to Onslow from Fremantle five months ago.

“It’s not the most happening place,” he said of Onslow. “But I like this job, it’s interesting.”

Eddie said it’s the first time he’s lived outside a city and he was enjoying the chance to get to know his customers.

“When you work at the pharmacy, you get to know everyone in town.”

Eddie describes himself as “humorous” and obviously thinks laughter is the best medicine.

He said what Onslow could really use was a good Chinese restaurant and oriental grocer.



Teacher Tanya Fildes moved to Onslow on Australia Day with her husband and six-month-old baby girl Selina. They moved to Onslow from Nullagine (towards Newman) which had under 300 residents, so to them, Onslow is big!

Tanya said the lure of living on the coast enticed them and so they applied to move and got lucky, and their life was trucked 815km to Onslow, home gym and all.

“We’re looking forward to going to the museum, going back to Old Onslow, doing all the touristy things. I love the history, there’s a lot here, it’s the best part.

“We live right on the coast, so it’s great, we can just go to the beach. We got really lucky with our house.”

For now, her hubby looks after bub but he’s looking for work in the resources industry as an earth mover. Tanya said the family is looking forward to settling in and making the most of the facilities.

“I heard the teachers are thinking of forming a bowls team, that’d be great. We’re looking forward to having a restaurant, we never had that before!”



Mel Seymour came to Onslow two years ago to start up his electrical business, Dice Solutions. “A friend of mine had some property up here, and we heard about Wheatstone and all that so we got a contract with the shire,” he said.

While it took time to take off, the business is beginning to thrive and he has work with Chevron, Wheatstone, Discovery Park and other parts of town.

“We’re not just here to work on Wheatstone, we try to do as much as we can for the community. I’m on the sports club and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry committee and I also volunteer as a firefighter.”

His favourite thing about Onslow is the small, friendly community. He said he also appreciated the help he had received from the Chamber: “It’s helped us heaps with its contacts and information and the ability for us to network.”

Mel’s biggest criticism of way Onslow is growing is the pace of progress: “They should have built infrastructure four years ago, which delays everything else and pushes rent up. It’s going to be put in place, but when?”

Gerard Carroll runs the post office and has been in town for 15 years, but like many locals he’s had enough and is trying to sell his business and leave.

“I’ve been here too long and it’s time to move on. We put the business on the market in April but so far we’ve had no luck,” he said.

Unlike a lot of locals, Gerard isn’t moving out because of the impact of the resources industry. He plans to move to East Victoria and retire after working seven days a week for 15 years: “I’ve got a lot of golf and fishing to catch up on.”

Though he won’t miss the workload, he said he had made some good friends over the years, but many had already moved on. “It’s not a place that people retire in because it’s too expensive and too hot.”

When Gerard last spoke to *Tracking Onslow* in July 2012, he was positive about change and said the growing population would benefit his business, but now he is feeling disillusioned.

“When Chevron first came to town, they gave us a lot of lip service and made promises that they haven’t kept. They don’t buy anything local and all we get is a headache with a heap of mail.



Onslow remembered



It may be the pindan or the hearty community spirit but something about Onslow gets into the blood of folks who have lived here and stays with them long after they leave. It also prompts the 'old-timers' to get together once a year to reminisce about their Onslow days.

Tracking Onslow's Petrice Davidson and photographer Kat Powell went to the 2014 reunion and heard some of their stories.

Bill McAullay, 56, loved his job mustering cattle for the Forrest family on their Minderoo station back in the 1950s. It was essential that he bonded with the other stockmen, and learned important bush skills in order to survive the harsh terrain of the 600,000 acre property. They would stop at the designated watering points and refill their eskies from the river.

"We used to stop at the claypan, a big open flat of dirt, and the boys on the ground would hand us our tucker." He enjoyed the camaraderie with the men and the freedom of the open bush. The 3000 head of cattle would be found in different areas, and needed to be teased out, even if it meant parting with their water supply. Bill left as soon as the first two-storey building was erected, because he felt the town had lost its uniqueness, and he's disgruntled that mustering is now done with helicopters.

Skippy Flink was born in England and moved to Onslow in 1976. She proudly recalls becoming involved in the local drama group at the shire hall, after a coach came up from the city to get things rolling, and she began performing in comedy-dramas and having fun making costumes. Although she can no longer afford to stay in Onslow due to the high cost of living, she fondly remembers the old jetty, which was her favourite spot, and the peace. "The mining has taken away the quiet style of the town."

Skippy loved Onslow so much she took beautiful scenic photographs and made a subsistence living by selling them as postcards to holidaymakers. Her first official job was washing and ironing, working for Western Geophysical, who took seismic surveys of the town and tested for natural gas. She misses everything about the town, especially the friendly people, but she likes the new boardwalk that links Sunset Beach to the town-strip.





Norma Williams, 71, grew up in Onslow and remembers the old days when there were no fridges to preserve food and the roads were closed off during flood season in many areas, making the area quite isolated.

All of the local supplies came to the town by way of the state ship called *The Koolinda*, which came from Perth to Onslow twice a week to unload staples such as rice and cereal.

There was also no electricity in town and the small timber home Norma lived in with her sister was raised off the ground to make it cyclone-proof. The two girls remember their father nailing wooden boards onto the flimsy tin roof in preparation for the approaching storm season.

What she misses most are the two-day race meetings all of the community participated in and enjoyed, held where the salt mines are now.

“There was lots of freedom growing up there. You could ride your bike from one end of town to the other without having to worry about a thing.”

She became an assistant in the Shire of Ashburton office and was responsible for collecting money for rates, licensing of vehicles and other duties and expenses.

Although she has only been back to visit her friends a couple of times in the last 10 years, she has noticed the improvement in the roads that the mining companies have been responsible for.

Terry Baker, 66, migrated to the town in 1965 and worked out at Peedamulla Station on the outskirts of town where he built a wool press for the shearing shed. This wool press is now on show in the Onslow Goods Shed Museum.

He was president of the local council from 1985 to 1990 until he moved away for a couple of years and upon returning resumed his position, reigning from 1992 to 1995.

During this time, he and his son, Ward, helped to promote Aboriginal artwork and culture and formed friendships with Indigenous people.

He also recalls the controversial arrival of ‘the salt people’, when Onslow Salt was established, creating 85 new jobs. Terry was involved as a conservationist preserving the environment.

“I didn’t support the mining because I knew it would change the town, but we needed the employment.”

He recalled the salt flares on Thevenard Island that were created by the burning off of excess gas, which interfered with the mating patterns of the turtles, resulting in them not being able to lay their eggs. Terry helped to successfully ban this practice.

Shirley Maudsley (Mousher), 65, was born and bred in Onslow. Her father and mother ran the Beadon pub and the general store that were both owned by her grandfather.

There were only about 300 people living in the town in the 1950s, and the pub was the centre of the social network. Families would get together for a counter lunch on the weekends.

In those days there was a cottage next to the hotel for the bar-staff. The bar was close to the beach and welcomed locals and holiday makers alike. She remembers fondly the townsfolk: the postmaster, mines-men and the two local police families. She laughs at how her father used kerosene fridges to keep the beer cold.

“Everyone knew everyone in those days, but now a lot has changed in the town, and there are many strangers.”

Shirley took over Norma Williams’ old job at the shire and recalls going with her childhood friends to Direction Island for a picnic aboard a small boat called *The Lighter*. In 1963 the old jetty was damaged by a cyclone that drenched the town and destroyed the weather instrument, but Onslow is a sturdy town used to rebuilding.

Her last visit was over five years ago. The biggest changes she noticed were more houses and infrastructure fuelled by the mining companies that have changed the landscape.

Onslow remembered

Craig Butcher, 56, remembers the town before the mining companies came and changed the landscape. Today he's the managing director of his own company, called High Risk Training, which contracts to BHP for services such as rigging, crane and forklift operation.

He relishes the simple lifestyle he had as a kid, when his family moved there in 1956 and there were only a few hundred people: "We were never bored because we played in the sand dunes after school and went to the pictures at the primary school, every Saturday night."

Although he's earning good money, he said there is the sense that Onslow has become too commercialised and the trust and friendliness has gone.

"It's different now, there are lots of fly-in, fly-out workers and the town has lost its laid back feel."

Another negative he mentioned is the price of housing which has blown out of proportion, making Onslow feel like just another mining town affected by the Western Australian boom.

But Craig will never forget his teenage adventures on Direction Island, where he would catch trophy fish and spend the weekends with his mates.

Laura Shannon, 86, was born in Perth and grew up in Onslow. She vividly recalls the war years, when the town was bombed by the Japanese in 1943.

A full-scale evacuation was launched, and townsfolk were relocated to nearby cattle stations, such as Minderoo. Fortunately, the bombs missed their target – the aerodrome where 44 gallon fuel drums were stored – and there were no casualties.

Perhaps this is why she is protective of the town and interested in its history and conservation, restoring burial records and erecting plaques on bush graves.

"The water table has had to be diverted because of the effects of the mining," she said.

Laura and her husband ran the post office in 1991, which they later sold to Marie-Pierre Dussault. Living there they became weather reporters, conducting observations every three hours, seven days a week, for the Bureau of Meteorology.

These colourful life experiences have led to her authoring several books, notably *Ashburton Alleluia*, which is an inventory of the heritage of Ashburton shire that documents all of the old buildings and their locations. Laura no longer lives in Onslow but she attends the Onslow Reunion in Perth every year to pay tribute.

1958 photos of Onslow pages 30 and 32,
courtesy of Jeremy Coulson

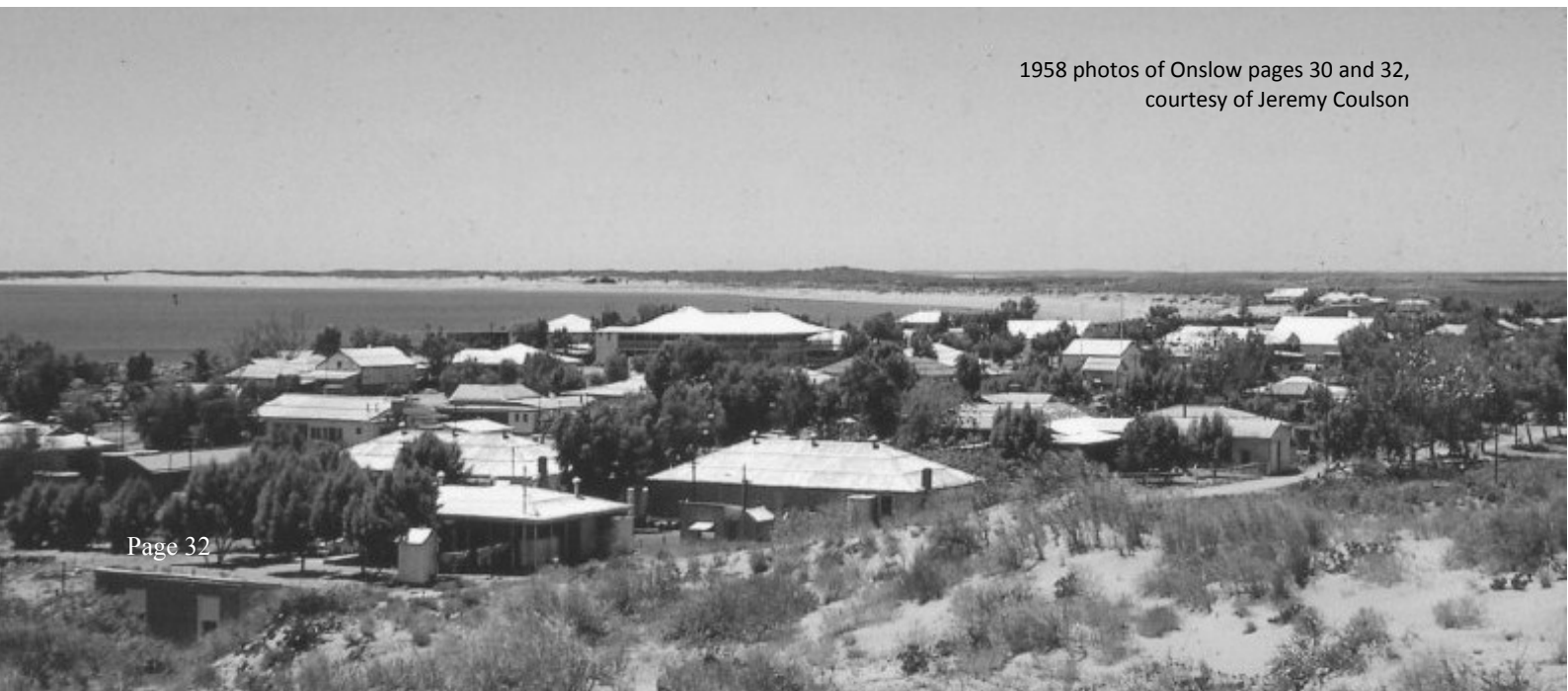




Photo by Kayt Davies

What's here for the kids ?

Onslow teens are just like any other teens in Australia — they just want to hang with their friends. The basketball courts are the current hotspot but they're as addicted to Snapchat right now as much as any city kid.

Year 10 student Amber Montgomery is one of the few who has lived in Onslow since she was born. She said: "I use the Multi-Purpose Centre sometimes when there's fun activities like sport events, discos and movie nights."

School principal Jackie Barry said she's in talks with the local police to put on more Blue Light Discos following the success of last year's.

Amber added that the heat affects her options. "At this time of year there's nothing much you want to do because it's so hot you just want to stay inside. I do swim at the beach but I don't go in too far because there's sharks and they come in really close."

Twenty-six-year-old Ashley McAullay grew up in Onslow and wishes he could still fish anywhere, like he used to: "Before when I was a young fella

I'd go fishing, but the fishing isn't good anymore 'cause of Chevron. They stuff up our land. Now everything's gone. You have to go way out to sea and I'm not a boatie person."

Amber said: "I fish sometimes but there's nothing much to catch anymore unless you're fishing at night for sharks."

She has visited Karratha and Perth a lot but still loves Onslow. "It's small so it's easy to get around and you know everyone. And my family are just a five minute walk away – both my nans and my aunty and uncle."

With the waves of people coming in, the thought of maybe one day having traffic lights sounds ghastly to Amber. "It's just getting bigger and bigger, with all the apartments. I've just never known Onslow like that, it's just a small quiet town and I'd rather it stay like that. But it is good to have more people around — to meet new people and make more friends."

Samantha Atkinson, Amber's step-sister, moved to Onslow from the northern suburbs >>



>> of Perth six months ago with her dad, a town mechanic. Sam has adjusted well to living in a much smaller town but thinks she will move back to the city in a few years and go to university. She enjoys the freedom of feeling safe walking around town and that everything she needs is within a few short streets. Being used to shopping centres and tall buildings, she's happy for the town to grow.

Both girls think an indoor swimming pool would be the best addition to the town. Amber said: "It's better than going to the beach and it'd be fun, somewhere to hang out with your friends. And in the summer it's too hot to go to the beach,

so if there was a pool, you could go there," said Amber.

There is a glimmer of hope for this prevalent wish as Chevron has said it plans to build a pool next to the Multi-Purpose Centre in 2016-17.

However, Brian Cameron, the Shire's Executive Manager Development and Regulatory Services, said: "No plans have been drafted yet, and no approvals made, so nothing is carved in stone".

On the other hand, if Andrew Forrest's alternative to Chevron's desalination plant is approved it includes a promise of free water for a town pool for five years.

The good people at the Multi-Purpose Centre and V-Swans Active provide after-school, weekend and school holiday sessions to provide the town youngsters with fun and engaging activities. For many kids this means they have a safe and fun environment to go to after school.

The V-Swans is a Chevron-funded youth initiative set up by the Swan Districts Football Club in 2010. Regional Manager Daniel Munday runs sports activities after school on Monday to Thursday at the Multi-Purpose Centre. Parents are encouraged to come down, and many of the younger kids' parents already do.

"We hope that our presence here can help the community become sustainable. With the town growing we will hopefully help continue to bring activities and sport to the kids," Daniel said.

Lingering plans to build a youth drop-in centre at the old power station site are waiting on one more signature. Complications with land ownership has held up the process but the V-Swans hope the facility will be open by semester two this year. Daniel said: "In the interim we'll have some community meetings with key stakeholders in town for final assessments and to award contracts, and as well

*"I do swim at the beach
but I don't go in too far because there's sharks
and they come in really close."*



Left: Samantha Atkinson & Amber Montgomery
Above: Ashley McAullay. Right: the fitness group
Stories and photos by Tanya Phillips

“speak to the kids so they can tell us what they want included at the facility. The more they let us know the better.”

The Lotterywest grant-funded facility will provide mostly indoor activities so kids can keep out of the heat, featuring a selection of technology including educational apps for maths and literacy. There will be arts and crafts, a kitchen, table tennis, video games and a mini library.

Daniel explained: “It’s going to be, at its core, a hangout spot for the kids, especially the teens. There’s not a lot for them in Onslow, so this is a place where they can have a home base.

“We want it to also be a point of access for health services and other providers in town so kids can get info they need in an environment where they feel comfortable.”

Amber and Samantha said they will use the facility when it opens.

Boarding school parent Julie Dodds thinks the centre will make a difference to how the youth interact with each other. “It’s a big problem when the kids go away to school, when they come back they don’t have anything to do, so a drop-in centre would be great because it would get those kids involved with the locals. It would be lovely.”

The V-Swans will be looking for part time staff, preferably from Onslow, who can be role models and who are also familiar with the kids.

“It’s excellent, it’s the best thing Onslow could ask for!” said Onslow Salt worker Kim Eaton after her second session.

Friends Melissa Ayres, Tala McBreen and Kate Wilkinson are showing true community spirit and have started running free group fitness sessions twice a week.

“It’s just been us here training together and then we thought ‘well, we’re doing it, I wonder if anyone else wants to?’,” said Kate.

“Tala’s done boot camps and boxing, Mel’s done a lot of different stuff, and my background is in triathlons, plus my parents are personal trainers, so I guess we’ve got a bit of knowledge between all of us.”

The ladies are not formally qualified, the sessions are just a casual community initiative.

The first session was held on February 10 and attracted 10 punters and the second session grew to 11. Kim enthused: “I just want to get fitter and my goal is to run to 4Mile and back.”

The sweaty and energising session starts with a boot camp circuit called *Run the Cards* which uses a deck of cards to randomly select strengthening on-the-spot exercises.

It’s a no-pressure atmosphere and alternative options are given for different fitness levels and ability.

The free sessions are at the Onslow oval 6-7pm, Mon & Thurs for 16 years and above. Keep up to date at the *Onslow Ladies Group Fitness Facebook page.*



What's new? in town

Fine dining has returned to Onslow with the reopening of well-loved local restaurant Nikki's. New venue manager Dexter Stone and Head chef Sterling Barrington are aiming to bring a community feel to the new Nikki's.

"Creating something special for the locals is so important to us," they said.

Dexter said that the design and decor of the new Nikki's was inspired by the restaurant's natural surroundings and this

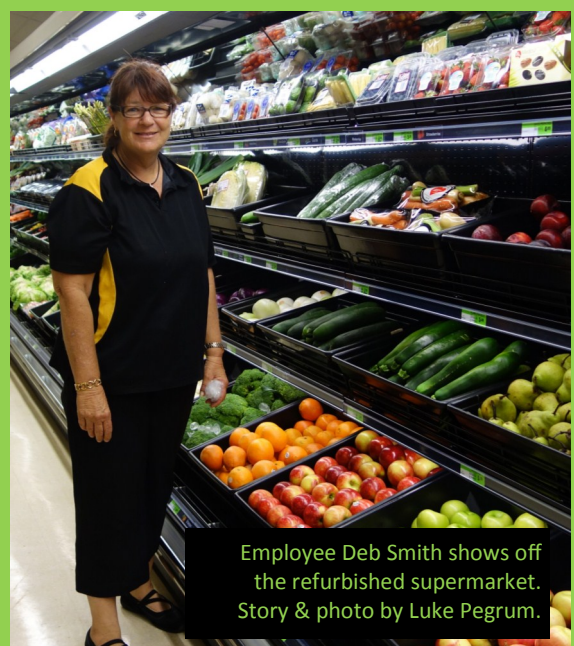
goes for the menu as well. He believes that the food is all about letting the natural ingredients speak for themselves without putting too many pretentious frills on things.

The menu includes a number of gourmet mains ranging from \$27-\$43 as well as a selection of delicious starters, sides, desserts and cheeses. The restaurant is open for dinner Tuesday-Saturday 6pm till late and serves lunch Friday-Sunday.



Nikki's story & pic by Ellie Blackmore. 4 Mile by Jess Allia

The revamp of the 4 Mile fishing spot is complete, including a fancy bush loo with wheelchair access on top of the hill, a shady wooden deck, two gas BBQs and a baffling maze of carpark posts that some of the locals have a laugh about. What hasn't changed is that there's still some impressive and tasty fish to be caught there.



Employee Deb Smith shows off the refurbished supermarket. Story & photo by Luke Pegrum.

After four months of renovation and repairs the Onslow Supermarket on Second Avenue re-opened on October 28, 2013.

In edition 3 of *Tracking Onslow* we covered the supermarket fire and the difficulties faced by its owners. The building, damaged by a fire caused by an electrical fault, has now been entirely refitted with a new roof, larger more efficient fridges and a modern checkout. Manager Chris Wenzel said he was glad to have the new facilities available after spending four months running the supermarket from its temporary home at the MPC.

Chris moved to Onslow with his family in March last year and despite an eventful 12 months said he was enjoying his role in town.

A photograph of a residential street at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and purple. Silhouettes of trees, utility poles, and a street lamp are visible against the bright sky. The street is dark and leads into the distance.

And yes, there's more.

**To watch the video interviews,
to find this and our other magazines online,
and to see more of your changing town visit
www.trackingonslow.net**

We'll be back in July 2014

to continue telling the story of Onslow.

If you'd like your story to be part of our next edition

email the editor at k.davies@ecu.edu.au



This media project is a collaboration
between Edith Cowan University
and the Shire of Ashburton
ECU CRICOS IPC 00279B

