

Rural Aging in Kilkivan

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO AGING OPTIONS IN KILKIVAN

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1.0 Introduction

Research has identified that population aging is more significant in rural areas within Australia (Hancock, Winterton, Wilding and Blackberry, 2019). Rural communities encounter issues related to limited access to transport, infrastructure, fewer social and health services, and challenges in retaining health care professionals (Hancock et al. 2019). As a result of these challenges within rural locations, residents must often move away to aged care facilities away from family, friends and community, or residents must rely substantially on family and local community members for care arrangements and transportation to health care professionals. Physically moving residents away from the environment, they are familiar with in this manner is often detrimental to their mental health as aging in place can promote positive wellbeing (Winterton and Warburton, 2012). However, relying on the support of family and friends can often be a burden on those undertaking the caring (Skinner and Winterton, 2018).

Given this complexity facing rural communities there is a need to investigate the ongoing care arrangements in rural communities and identify potential viable models for long term care within the community wherever possible. Research highlights the need to investigate the challenge of rural aging in the words of the residents themselves (Hancock et al. 2019).

Kilkivan is a town situated near Gympie in Queensland. It is classified as a rural community. Kilkivan has a population of approximately 713 residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016) of which 24.2% of the town's residents are aged over 65 years old (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Despite this, Kilkivan has limited services available for aging within the town. This limitation extends to both residents aging in place within their own homes supported by high levels of care, or within a residential care situation. Neither of these full-service options are available. The services that are available are external providers such as Blue Care who make home visits based on pre-arranged funded care models, limited by the constraints of funding including travel time for carers. The nearest hospital is 54 kilometres away with no public transport link. There is no permanent doctor or allied health care workers within the town.

2.0 Research Overview

To investigate the impact of the aging options available to residents, a qualitative study was undertaken with a sample of residents in December 2020. In-depth interviews were undertaken with 47 residents from Kilkivan and surrounding towns. These interviews were conducted by two independent researchers from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane over four days. The research reported was granted ethics approval by the QUT Human Ethics Committee (QUT approval number: 2000001086) in line with standard ethical guidelines and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian Government, 2007).

3.0 Method and Research Questions

Forty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted from a sample of residents from Kilkivan and surrounding areas. These interviews lasted on average of 40 minutes. There were two parts to the questions.

3.1 Part A:

Participants were asked the following questions:

- What does Kilkivan and the area means to you?
- How dependent do you feel on Kilkivan for your wellbeing?
- If you moved from Kilkivan what would that do to you? What would you lose?
- What would make the biggest positive difference to your daily life at the moment?

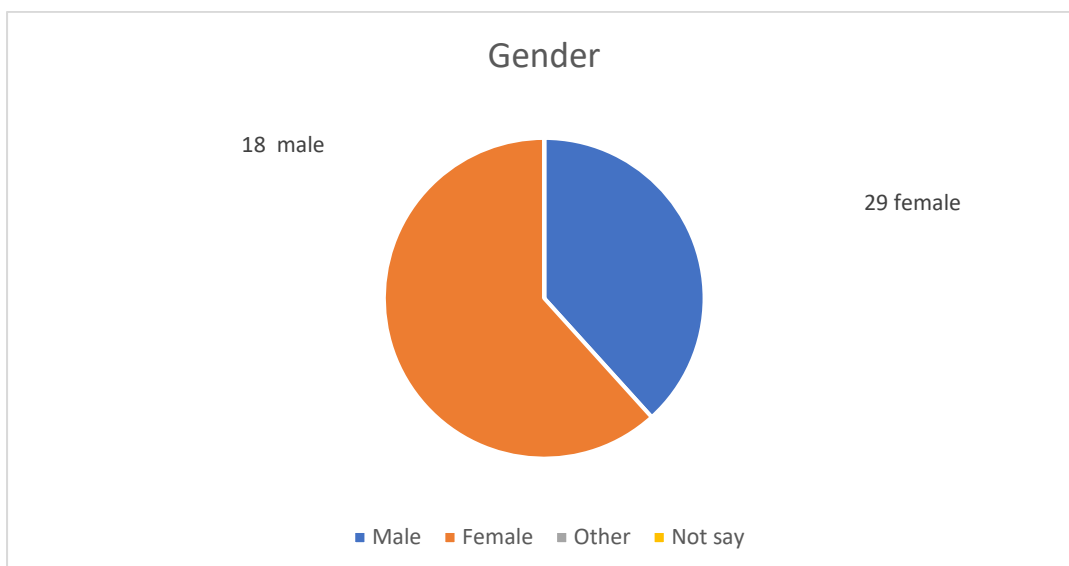
3.2 Part B:

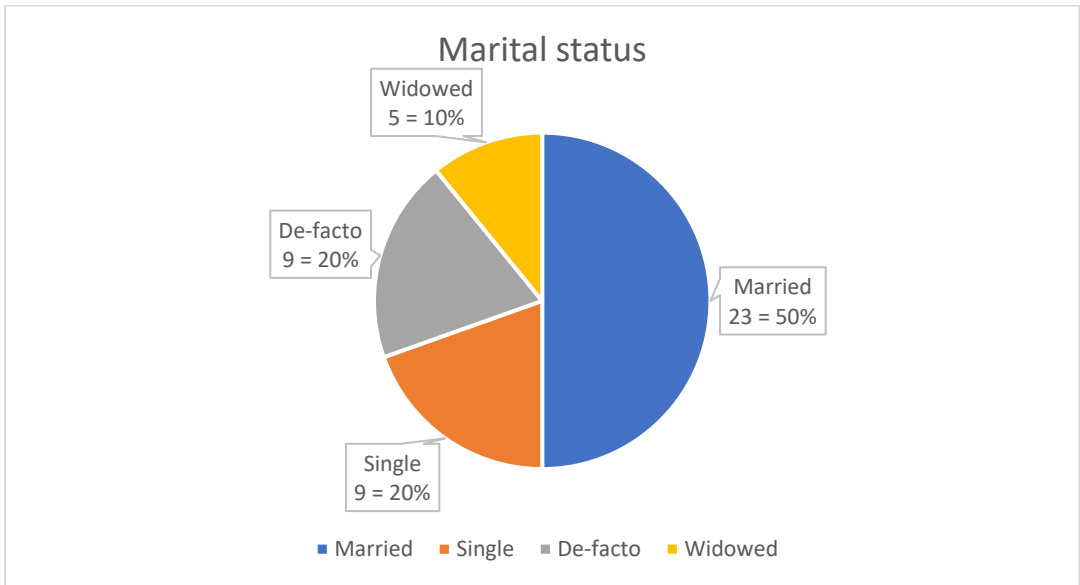
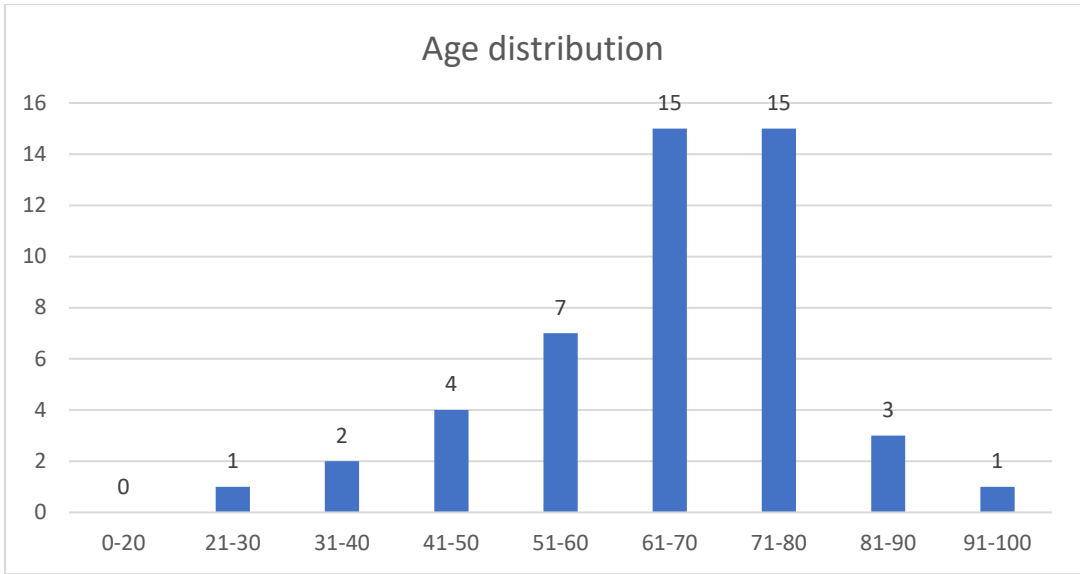
Participants were also asked, if the time came that you needed to move from your house to a more supported dwelling in the area, would you consider moving to either a group house or a rental unit in Kilkivan in preference to moving away from the local area. Participants were given Yes, No, Maybe options as answers and then asked why this is their response.

4.0 Results of the demographic and background questions

4.1 Demographic Profiles:

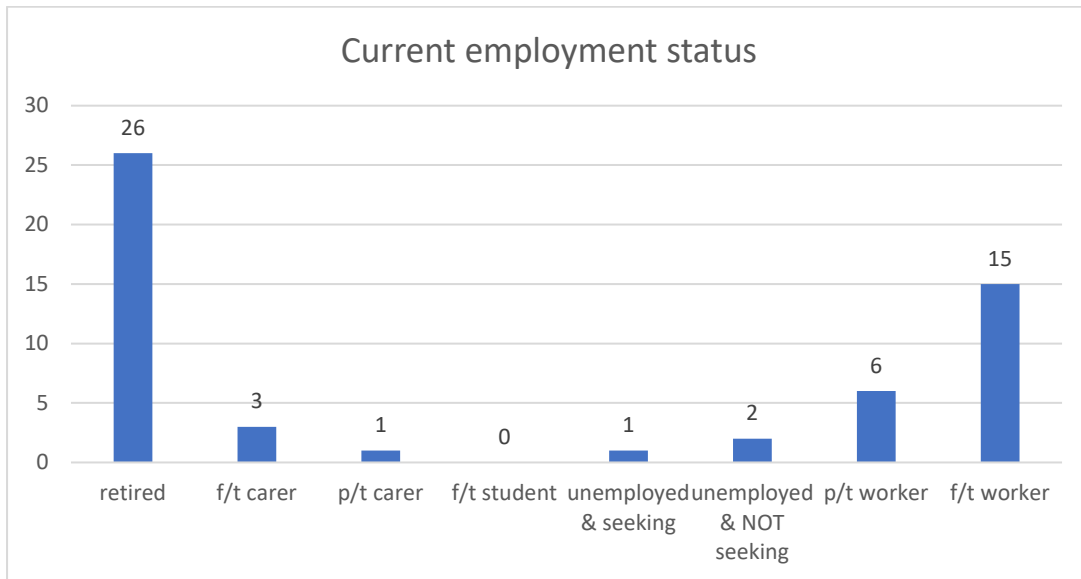
There were 18 males who participated in the study and 29 females. The average age of these was 65 years old and 50% of them were married.





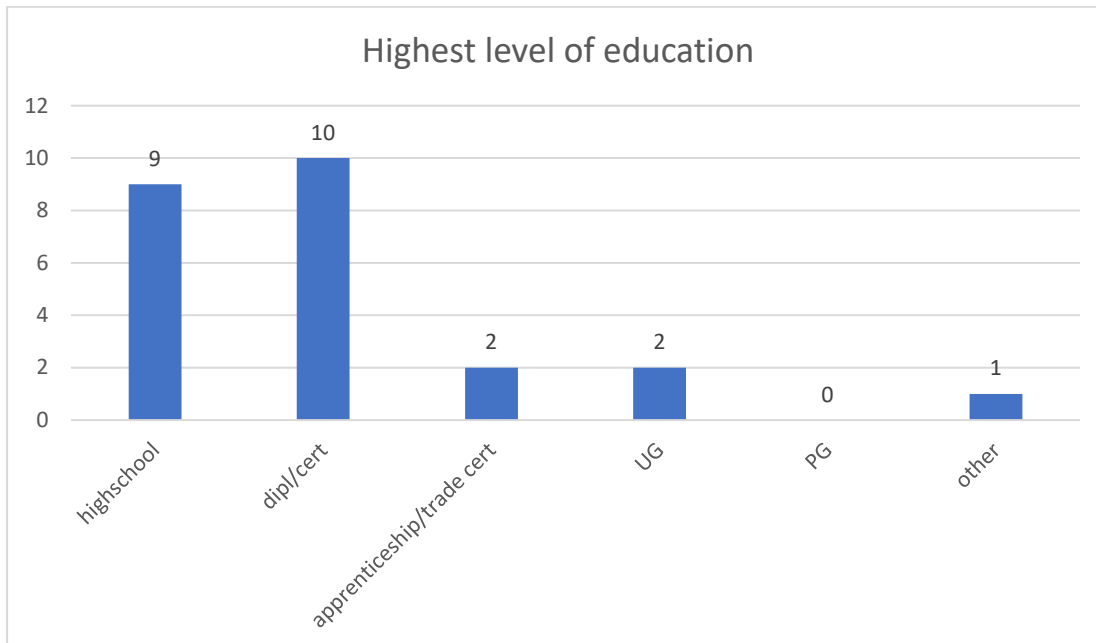
4.2 Employment:

The majority of the participants were retired (26 respondents), followed by full time workers (15 respondents).



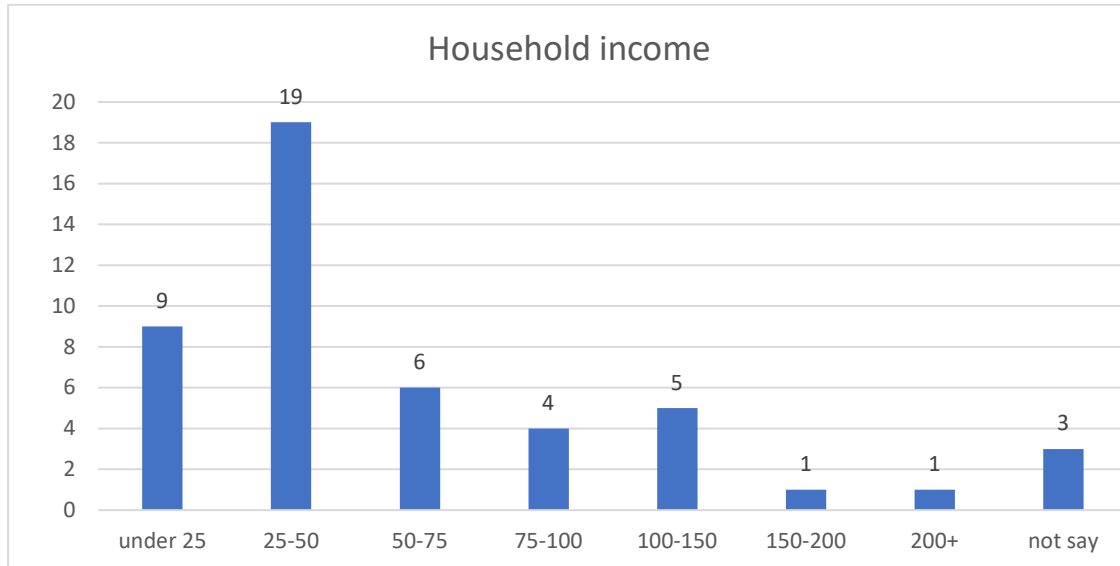
4.3 Education:

The most frequently reported levels of education were high school or a diploma/certificate. Although a number of participants did not complete this information.



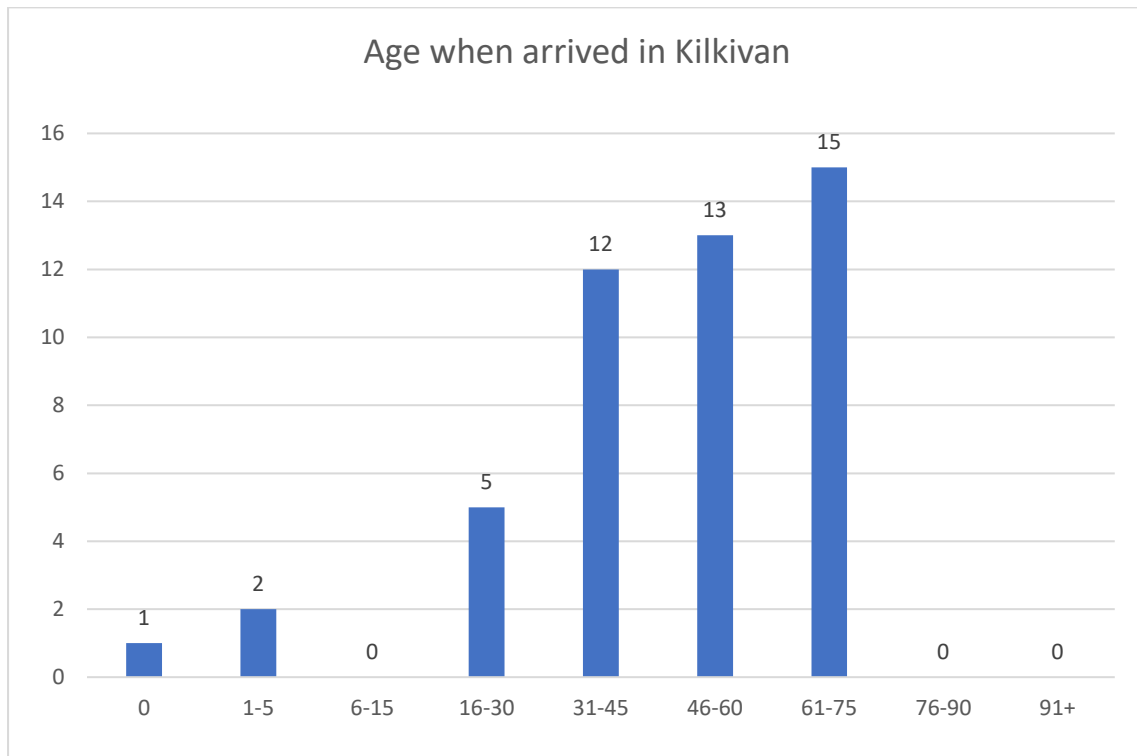
4.4 Household income:

19 of the participants had a household income of \$25-50 thousand a year followed by under \$25 thousand as the most frequently cited income levels.



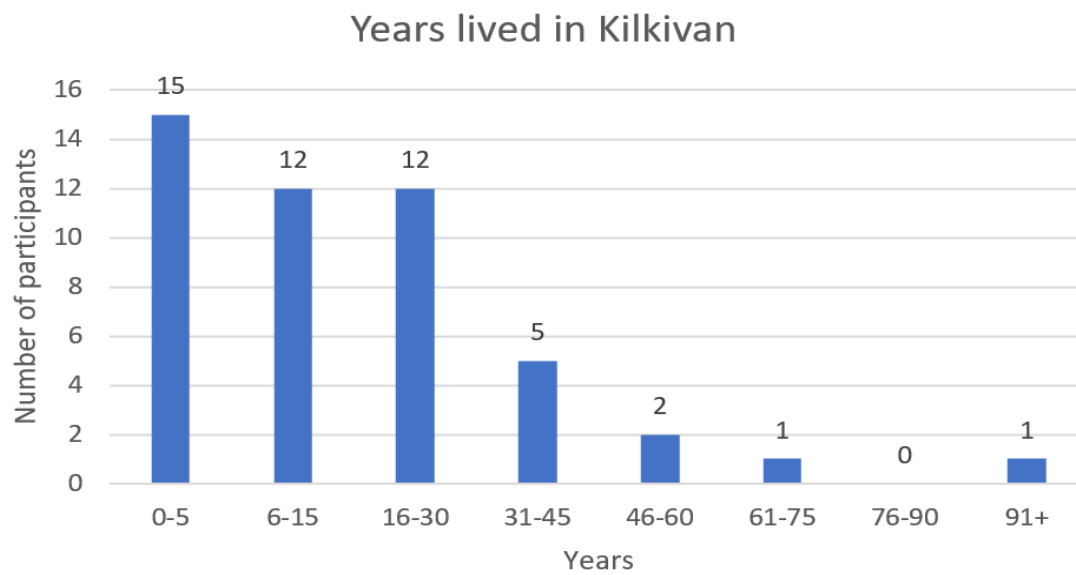
4.5 Age when arrived in Kilkivan:

Most of the participants had arrived in Kilkivan as adults with the highest frequency being those who arrived when they were aged between 61-75 years old, this was followed by those arriving between the ages of 46-60 years old.



4.6 Years lived in Kilkivan:

Fifteen of the participants had lived in Kilkivan for less than five years, with 12 living there between 6-15 years and another 12 participants having lived there for between 16-30 years.



5.0 Interview Results

5.1 Part A:

What does Kilkivan and the area mean to you?

There was an overwhelming feeling from the participants that Kilkivan was home. The participants identified the landscape and the people as contributing to this feeling of being home. This was evident for those participants who had lived in Kilkivan for most of their lives and also for those that were relatively new to the area.

"It's a place we want to be in. It's, at this stage of our lives, because we've moved around a lot, we found Kilkivan and I think this is the place where we've settled down and we're happy here, we've made friends. It's very dear to us, Kilkivan."

F, approximately 30 years in Kilkivan

"But certainly... Well, I suppose we're looking for that sense of community. Not a lot of people, small town, self-sufficient to a large degree if you can help it. And obviously locality is quite important, so that's sort of what it means to me, I think. That sense of community. It's the biggest part."

M, approximately a year in Kilkivan

"The area means everything, absolutely everything. Life, work, living. That's the area. It is an absolutely beautiful area because we are working here, we're living here. Most of us hate the big smoke, even the big smoke at Gympie, because the environment changes terribly from here to Gympie. Yeah, and so we have this peculiar thing that we call the bush, and it's just part of us. You feel part of this country, part of that land out there. Yeah."

M, approximately 22 years in Kilkivan

"I think it's just, it's in you. And sometimes it can be brought out through necessity, like city people that just want a tree change. Because they're burned out and they've been on holidays and traveled through some little country town and they think, "Oh this is beautiful, I want to come back here." And often that's the way it happens. And then they get into the swing of that little town's lifestyle and get to know more and more people. They rejuvenate themselves. I think the country just does something to you. Country living does something to you that you don't find in the cities."

F, approximately 14 years in Kilkivan

"I think just the friendliness and the acceptance and the interest"

F, approximately 20 years in Kilkivan

"I think it's the people that make it."

F, approximately 55 years in Kilkivan

"In part, it's the place where we live, but then it's the neighbours we have, and it's the people we know and care for in the town too".

F, approximately 6 years in Kilkivan

"I moved from the city, so it's home. And it's the best home I've had because of the land, and I've never actually been on the land, or done and grown vegetables or anything like that, or lived in a rural area. I absolutely love it. So I've found somewhere that I'll be able to retire in, for the first time in my life, and feel comfortable doing that."

F, less than a year in Kilkivan

"No, I just think it's the more laid back type of people that live around here. Just where they genuinely care for other people who are around them. And I don't know, they bother. I suppose that's a funny word to use, but they bother to get to know who people are and a little bit about them without going into their personal, deep and meaningful lives."

F, approximately 4 years in Kilkivan

How dependent do you feel on Kilkivan for your wellbeing?

There was general consensus from the participants about the importance of Kilkivan for wellbeing. The scenery, peacefulness and other physical environmental factors were mentioned as well as the friendliness of the community and the removal of stress and time pressures from life.

"It certainly contributes to my day-to-day wellbeing, but it doesn't contribute to my overall wellbeing. It will keep me healthy and well because I don't worry about a lot, and it's a peaceful place, as I've said before. And when you can feel that and you can relax properly, that's good for you."

M, approximately 8 years in Kilkivan

"Psychologically pretty good. Once again, not having that stress of Sydney living, traffic lights, driving. I can drive here to Gympie in less time than I can drive just three or four kilometers in Brisbane. No traffic lights. So that's definitely got to be stress related or not having the stress primarily."

M, approximately 13 years in Kilkivan

"Yes, yes, you do things when you can, that type of thing, you don't have to run to the clock all the time."

M, approximately 35 years in Kilkivan

"Oh, quite a lot. Yeah. Quite a bit. ... If it gets too much then we're, "Okay, let's go and see who's at the hotel, so we go down to the hotel, have a meal, have a chat and then go home."

F, approximately 20 years in Kilkivan

"We go to Widgee, we go to Kilkivan, there's a triangle there, and that is our life. That is our life and it's all wonderful because all those people are nearly all farmers, and we have so much in common. So we just all feel part of it. Yeah."

M, approximately 22 years in Kilkivan

If you moved from Kilkivan what would that do to you? What would you lose?

There was a strong sense of loss in the idea of moving away from Kilkivan. A focus was on the loss of friendships. But there was also a realisation that often moving away was required for health and aging reasons.

"They'd have to drag me out kicking and screaming. I don't know really. Other memories of that property. Probably memories of all the fun time well, the happy times I've had."

F, approximately 5 years in Kilkivan

"Wonderful friendships. A sense of belonging. Where you've planted your heart. Just the familiarity of, "This is my home." And I'm talking about the Kilkivan area. It would be awful to lose that. I'm saying, the way things are now, [husband's name] and I know that we'll have to leave Kilkivan because we don't have anyone. We don't have family to care for us if it comes to that. He's got bladder cancer and he's my carer because I lose my breath so easily. I'm regarded now as an invalid. Can't believe it, she who is always busy. It happens. Age is a horrible horrible. We joke about it but it's a mongrel. It's horrible

F, approximately 15 years in Kilkivan

"I don't want to leave, because where would I go? I don't want to leave. I don't want to not take anything. Where would I go from here that... It's funny, isn't it? Where would I go from here when I've been in the city and everywhere else and this is better, so why would I leave here to go back to somewhere that's not as good?"

F, approximately 2 years in Kilkivan

"I don't know really know. I've still good country values here. That would be missed. And knowing if you needed a hand, someone is there for you. But then again, that is part of the country as well... everyone's got your back. And everyone looks after you and keeps an eye on your place for you...I've had trouble with cattle or something getting out or fencing. I've been able to ring. People just come straight over. So it's that family feeling, I suppose."

F, approximately 30 years in Kilkivan

What would make the biggest positive difference to your daily life at the moment?

There was a lot of discussion around the requirements for health services and also for retirement living. There was concern that as people age, they would have to move away for increased care levels.

"The health services here. They're limited. Doctors, limited wound care. Elderly skin's so fragile. And there's probably a lot of people out here with wounds that should be dressed more frequently than they're getting dressed, or they're trying to do them at home. And then they're turning into ulcers because they're not getting tended to properly. Things like that."

F, approximately 7 years in Kilkivan

"They need an ambulance here, that would be handy. Probably an old people's home. Other than that, maybe a bigger mini supermarkets sort of thing would be handy too"

F, approximately 5 years in Kilkivan

"I think we need, ... to have a home where you can ... If you get crook, you can go to that home that is in the same environment that you're living in. You can stay there for a day, or a week, whatever, and be looked after and not charged by a wounded bull, and I think that's it. Run by, probably, volunteers, with one or two professionals, that want to look after people."

M, approximately 22 years in Kilkivan

"So as a community, supporting a community, we don't have the people, the time, the space for that. So for me, there needs to be active, paid services in town to be able to support that. I don't think we need the full healthcare services, 24 hours a day, everything else, but we need to have the community paid aspect of being able to get these people to one from whenever they need."

F, approximately 4 years in Kilkivan

"I was thinking if there was a bus service, only two days a week or something like that, for people that require that type of thing to go into Gympie in the morning, do their little shopping and then come home in the afternoon. That type of thing. Because some of the things you need you can't get here. So they've got to get out of town to get them."

M, approximately 18 years in Kilkivan

5.2 Part B:

In response to the question, if the time came that you needed to move from your house to a more supported dwelling in the area, would you consider moving to either a group house or a rental unit in Kilkivan in preference to moving away from the local area. Participants were given Yes, No, Maybe options as answers and then asked why this is their response. Forty-two of the forty-seven participants responded to this with 76% agreeing that they would like to consider moving into a group house or rental unit in Kilkivan in preference to moving away.

- Thirty participants responded that they would like to consider moving into a group house or rental unit in Kilkivan.
- Six participants said they would not like to do this option.
- Six participants said they may consider this option.

Comments given in support for moving into a group house or rental unit included:

“To stay in familiar surroundings and maintain friendships. To be closer to family. To maintain the same or similar course in my life with minimal changes or adjustments.”

F, approximately 65 years in Kilkivan

“Moving away would mean loss of friends. The tyranny of distance urban environment totally foreign to me. Love being in the bush - love animals - cattle, dogs, horses”

M, approximately 90 years in Kilkivan

“I would move to a group house to stay as a local resident, because of the laid-back nature to the town”

M, approximately 13 years in Kilkivan

“Just to stay closer to people and things that I am familiar with, so that mentally it isn't as difficult to adjust to different circumstances.”

F, approximately 30 years in Kilkivan

“Emotional wellbeing, familiarity of the area and locals. Love of country life”

F, approximately 14 years in Kilkivan

“If possible, you can still be able to be involved in the community and maintain a lifestyle that is as similar & familiar as possible.”

M, approximately 1 year in Kilkivan

"Know many locals, enjoy company of others of a similar age, intimate knowledge of the area".

M, approximately 40 years in Kilkivan

"Because I would want to be around friends and a familiar area. Close to what I have known and accomplished:

F, approximately 7 years in Kilkivan

Comments given in support for NOT moving into a group house or rental unit included:

"Will travel to be closer to family and friends"

F, approximately 18 years in Kilkivan

"I want to die on my own property not in a home/hospital/unit"

M, approximately 30 years in Kilkivan

"I would struggle to stay near my property but not be on it".

F, approximately 4 years in Kilkivan

Comments supporting MAYBE responses include:

"Depends if health reasons would mean having to move closer to family in Brisbane"

F, approximately 1 year in Kilkivan

"Hoping to stay in our home and residence until the day dot..."

F, approximately 2 years in Kilkivan

"If other options such as being with family were not available then I would be happy to stay in Kilkivan"

F, approximately 6 years in Kilkivan

"I would like to end my day in Kilkivan"

M, approximately 2 years in Kilkivan

6.0 Conclusion

There was obvious support for the community within and around Kilkivan, and connections between wellbeing and the location. Participants indicated strong attachment to the area and a desire to continue to live in the area. Similar issues emerged such as those identified in other research projects related to rural aging across Australia (Hancock et al. 2017), including lack of health care, transportation, and other infrastructure such as ambulances. This highlights the need for further investigation into access to healthcare and other requirements for residents to stay around Kilkivan as they age including residential care. 76% of the participants indicated a great deal of support for the option of a group home or rental unit which would allow them to stay in Kilkivan as they age.

7.0 References

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