

# THE MOBILE WORKERS GUIDE



## FLY-IN/FLY-OUT & ROTATIONAL SHIFT WORK IN MINING

**YUKON EXPERIENCES**

Gertrude Saxinger

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The Mobile Workers Guide. Fly-in/Fly-out and Rotational Shift Work in Mining. Yukon Experiences.

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Mobile Workers Guide – Fly-in/Fly-out and Rotational Shift Work in Mining*. **This guide is designed for people who work in the extractive industry (and their families) and who fly or drive as long-distance commuters to a mining camp.** These forms of labour mobility are called FIFO (Fly-in/Fly-out) or DIDO (Drive-in/Drive-out). Some workers come from nearby communities while others have to fly for many hours to get to work. The Guide contains useful information also for companies and communities affected by FIFO/DIDO.

**Spending ‘half of one’s life’ in camp and going back and forth from home means having to deal with a very specific life-style.** Life in camp is very different from life at home, where family and friends are around. The mining sector goes through boom and bust cycles, which strongly affect the stability of jobs. *The Mobile Workers Guide* describes ways to develop skills to get through these ups and downs. It contains many useful tips for people who want to pursue a long-term professional career in this industry.

**If you are just about to start FIFO or DIDO — or thinking about it — you will find many details on the specifics of this lifestyle in *The Mobile Workers Guide*.**

Workers from a huge variety of professions related to the extractive industry and their

family members talk about their experiences and provide their advice on how to successfully live a mobile life in mining. They talk about the benefits of this kind of work and also raise awareness of problems that may come along the way — be it in the workplace, in the family or as a woman in mining.

**The guide also includes the experiences of First Nation employees who live in towns close-by and in the traditional territories where mining takes place.** Many First Nation people feel a strong attachment to their land. Besides wage work, they also hunt, fish and gather as part of their cultural way of life. Therefore, this guide also addresses how working in a mine and ‘living off the land’ can be successfully combined.

The numerous interviews we have gathered allowed us, the authors, to gain deep insights into the mobile life in the mining sector and what mining means to local communities, their socio-economic development and employment in the region.

*The Mobile Workers Guide* was developed between 2014 and 2017 by the team of the research project “LACE — Labour Mobility and Community Participation in Mining — Case Studies in the Yukon”. Throughout those years we collaborated with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and the Village of Mayo. Furthermore



we have visited various mine sites and different communities in the Yukon Territory where mining or exploration takes place.

### Thanks.

Big thanks go to all the interview partners who took part in this study. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the members of the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun (FN NND), to Chief and Council, the Elders and to the FN NND Heritage Department in Mayo for teaching us about their life, their culture and what mining means to the region as well as for their great support for this project. We would like to thank the numerous people from Mayo who contributed to this project. We also thank the Council of the Village of Mayo for hosting us and their support.

Throughout the years we also visited Keno City, Dawson City, Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, Whitehorse and many other places in the Yukon in order to collect a wide variety of perspectives. Many thanks to all the wonderful people we talked to in these places, the friends we made and the interview partners and mine employees who contributed to this project.

**In a sense, *The Mobile Workers Guide* is written “by you and for you” — it would not have been possible without all the shared stories and experiences.**

Furthermore, we thank the numerous experts from organizations and institutions related to the mining sector, and scientists who shared their knowledge, time and expertise. We visited mining sites, talked to over a hundred people<sup>1</sup> in interviews and had innumerable informal talks in order to learn about the way of life in a mining region. Without all these people *The Mobile Workers Guide* would not exist.

We would like to thank our funding institutions (mentioned in the beginning of this booklet), the companies who cooperated, and everyone else who facilitated or helped in any way.

A special thanks goes to Joella Hogan, Heritage Manager at FN NND as well as to Valoree Walker, research coordinator for ReSDA at the Yukon College, for being so incredibly helpful all along the way. We are grateful to the following people who commented on this guide and helped with their expertise or personal experience to improve it: Bobbie-Lee Melancon, Liz Blair, Beverly Genier, Jessica Dutton, Tara Cater, Andrew Harwood, Robert Seminiuk and, Justin Fromme.

*Gertrude Saxinger and Susanna Gartler*

*Whitehorse, 2017*

<sup>1</sup> All names are changed for confidentiality reasons.

*I look at it as an adventure. You know, the mining site is an adventure on its own and if you are open minded, you like these new things. Have the willingness, just be open and try to learn as much as you can. I see lots of folks out here who have broadened their mind and horizon by working in mining.*

**- ANDREW**

*I always aimed at higher paying jobs. These are mostly men's jobs. But I went for it! I like doing what I do. Today things have changed a lot and women do men's jobs too.*

**- MELINDA**

*You know its hard work and it's going to be long days. As a boss, I tell my crew members to keep an open mind and say more yes than no to new things.*

**- CHRIS**

*Have fun and enjoy your life and money! If you don't enjoy that kind of work, just don't do it at all. But, yeah, go for it, for sure I recommend that. There are so many good times, but also a lot of hard times. Life is going to be different.*

**- IAN**

*The circumstances will change a lot as soon as you have a child, but that might go well, as it did in my case. If you realise that it doesn't fit to your life circumstances, do not hesitate to quit. But take your time for this decision. Usually, you can transfer your skills to other sectors like trades, since people in mining are very handy people.*

**- JAMES**

*A fly-in fly-out lifestyle doesn't have to be for the whole of your life. I have done it on and off for years. Depends on the job. You take jobs, which suit you at the time, your finances, your kid's ages and your own needs.*

**- ANDREW**



# JOINING A MOBILE LIFESTYLE IN MINING

“Do it! Just try it!” says James, a wastewater manager. Melinda, a welder, joins in with her memories: “I had not the slightest clue, before I started working in a mine on what it means to be away for a couple of weeks from home, and what it means to be confined to a remote camp site.”

Melinda and James have both become gradually more successful in managing private life and their mobile jobs in the mines. **It helps talking to people who have already been working for a while in that business.** They know more about the loneliness that might sometimes occur, but also the friendships that occur within the crew, or how it feels not having a beer after work, sleeping in a small bed or sharing the bathroom. For James and Melinda it was also a new experience to keep up the relationship with their loved ones via Skype.

Ronnie, a heavy equipment operator, kind of knew already what he is getting into. His cousin and a neighbour are mobile miners, driving in and out to the camp right now. At another time they were flying in and out to other provinces for rotational shift work. Ronnie and his wife made a joint decision about working in the mining industry — weighing the pros and cons carefully. Then, they “just tried it”.

Ronnie said, “You never know of course what comes up and if it works out well for all of us — for my wife, my kids, for me. Nobody is the same. It might work for my neighbour but it must not necessarily work for me. My wife knew that she will be a kind of a single mother while I am on shift for two or three weeks and she was ready to try this out.”

For single people, as we were told in the many talks with workers, FIFO is easier because they had no obligations to a partner or kids. It is a worthwhile opportunity to earn money in different parts of the country and also worldwide. But there is no one-fits-all recipe to make a mobile life work for you. **The only way to know if being a mobile worker in the mining industry works for you is to experience it firsthand.** For some workers it can become a passion as well as a driver for career development and achieving aims in life.

Many folks use the opportunity of earning decent money to create the financial basis for planning a family in the future. FIFO is also convenient since you have extended leisure periods without any job obligations between shifts.

*I've worked in three different industries at least. I've been through the logging industry, the oil sands industry and now I am in the mining industry and they all have their ups and downs. Try to find a job that you can do throughout each industry. So I went into water and wastewater and now I can switch between companies a lot easier and I can work in town too.*

**- BRAD**

*My mom was really big on schooling and she always said to me you may get married but you should be able to look after yourself, you know. So you should have a proper education being able to support yourself. That way, if you ever get in a bad situation or say your husband gets hurt, you can become the breadwinner.*

**- JAQUELINE**

*When you are off work in mining try to get another trade to support yourself. Take equipment operating courses, machinery, welding, electrician, carpenter courses, stuff like that.*

**- KEN**

*I think about going back to school for a trade or something, yeah. Just to have something, because I'm thirty now, I'm thinking to myself I'm good in mathematics. So I am sure I can succeed when I get back to school.*

**- JESSICA**



*It gives you so much strength to learn new skills. I was so proud of myself holding the certificate in my hand.*

**- HENRY**

# TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Melinda, the welder, puts money aside for her son`s education: “I told him, number one is to take a trade and after that do whatever interests you. If you have a trade you will always be able to put food on the table. I`ve never really been without a job. If you want a job, there is one out there.” In the Yukon, just like in other places with a strong mining industry, there are colleges and training institutions for jobs in this sector. Moreover, most of the trades can be applied to other industries as well.

**A mix of trades, training and ongoing education is key to a long-term, successful career.** As Jason, who is currently a millwright, puts it: “If you only know one thing or if you are only at an entry level or in a ‘shovel job’ you are not in a good position. Especially if a mine operation closes down, it is harder to find something new. I`ve done lots of things in my life and it helps to develop your personality too — you know who you are. It makes you proud if you`ve got lots of different skills. That way you`ve got lots of different things to offer.”

Henry, who is working as a technician in a mill, dropped out of school in the village he is from. When he got older, he went back to complete his degree and started taking mine training courses. Henry said, “When you`re young you sometimes don`t think ahead. I really recommend for people to stay in school.

Otherwise, later on you must get used to learning again. When I was older I started to like learning and got a variety of tickets and certificates.”

**One feature of the mining industry is that people have the opportunity to complete on-the-job training and gain experience directly at the mine site.** In the mining industry, one can work up the career ladder: from a basic job to becoming a foreman or being in the management. Therefore, you learn a lot of different skills, which are also applicable to other sectors.

Miranda, who is currently working as a First Aid responder, has experience cooking for large workforces and has received training as a safety manager. She can jump from one job to the next, according to the needs of the small mining company she is currently working for.

In the mining sector, there is little job security due to changing market conditions and unpredictable commodity prices. **Being flexible in your profession and pursuing educational training can help ensure a long-term career in the dynamic mining sector.**

*I knew that I liked mining and I heard that my First Nation has scholarships for training. Me and my buddy went out to Newfoundland for a two month course.*

**- JASON**

*We need water samplers here in the community, going out with the folks from the company. There are lots of opportunities to work for the First Nation government related to mining.*

**- NATHALIE**

*We are operating on First Nation land, so they need to benefit job-wise. We have agreements with the communities to hire and facilitate training, mentoring, career advancement and so on.*

**- CONNIE**

*We did an open house in the community and it was great to see our workers talking to the younger folks in the community about their job, how they got into that and so on. They just shared the information.*

**- TANYA**

*All jobs are posted in the community, be it a superintendent position or anything else. I am the community liaison person for the company and can help and inform. Sometimes we have positions not filled for months. We really need the local people to get trained and employed.*

**- TARA**



# TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS FOR FIRST NATIONS EMPLOYEES

‘Impact Benefit Agreements’ or ‘Comprehensive Benefit Agreements’ between First Nation governments and mining companies set the framework for preference for local hires. This is particularly important for the younger generation. Another important element in such agreements are training initiatives for middle-aged members of the community and young adults. **In the Yukon, the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining (CNIM) and the Yukon Mine Training Association (YMTA) provide training for a variety of jobs in the mining sector.** This training is similar to activities in other provinces and territories.

Training courses can range from basic skills like literacy for those who dropped out of school, to financial management or alcohol and drug counselling. Training for trades like mechanics, drilling, machine operators, truck drivers as well as tickets in Health & Safety or First Aid are provided in such institutions. The training courses are varied and include short-term vocational upgrade as well as longer certificate courses. CNIM and the local Yukon College community campuses also run mobile training units for a variety of trades that come right to the smaller communities for a couple of weeks at a time.

The Yukon College in Whitehorse offers diplomas such as business administration and

other relevant programs, which are important for those wanting to gain employment in the mining industry in management roles.

A vocational trainer explains, “it is necessary, that people get trained before a mining boom comes back. When it is there, you maybe cannot catch up so quickly. Therefore, it is important to do the courses in the various trades during bust times — in order to be ready for work when mining comes back again.”

**More and more young women are getting trained in what were formerly male dominated professions. In addition, more young First Nation people are working towards university degrees throughout Canada.** This training is important, because First Nation employees are still often employed in lower skilled jobs and entry level positions. Companies benefit from local employment — hiring locals is cheaper than to fly-in/fly-out a professional from elsewhere.

**Today most companies have ‘community liaison’ officers. These are people who inform locals about new positions in the mine. They know very well what qualifications are needed for each position and can help you write up a resume.** They can tell you where and how to get trained for these jobs. In the Yukon, the local self-governing First Nations can subsidize the

training of their members. Sometimes these initiatives are co-funded by companies.

There are also jobs in the First Nation governments related to mining, such as environmental monitoring or land-use experts. Tanya, the Human Resources manager of a mid-sized company explains, “We come to the communities on whose land we operate and inform them about what the plans for the mine are and what jobs are available. We also did an ‘open house’ event and invited members of the community to the mining site.” **Finding out what type of jobs are available and what qualifications are needed is key to employment.**

Very often people only look for the jobs like driller, core sampler, cook or cleaning personnel and others are often not known to people. Tanya argues, “We have a huge variety of jobs and if you go on the Internet and check job announcements you will see that there are highly attractive positions where you can learn new skills and trades.”

According to Tanya, not all of the information necessary for successful local employment comes from the internet or company initiatives.

**It is important to have role models in the community who are successful, who can talk about their jobs and inform younger people about what mining can offer.** Tanya says, “These folks can be multipliers. Also, we need local people in all positions. Therefore it is good for us if there is a wide variety of people trained in different professions and trades in the communities.”

We, as authors of this guide, think that information about jobs and the characteristics of rotational shift-work in mining should also be made available to youth also in local schools and other places.





photo: archbold.com



*I think that the couple needs to have a strong grounding in their relationship before it can work out. So having common goals and interests is probably what is going to be what stabilizes the relationship. I think of the man leaving for camp, knowing that his wife has everything under control and that they are aiming for the same things with regards to their kids or with regards to the home or the vehicle, you know.*

**- PHIL**

*It takes strong people on both ends. It takes a strong person to leave the family and go away to work in a camp and leave everybody at home. And it takes a strong person to be at home and take care of the family while the spouse is away. I can see a lot of cases where it works very well out there. You know, and for other people it's very tough.*

**- KEVIN**

*If you trust each other, then, mining is good for families. If you have a toxic relationship, then good luck.*

**- JEREMY**

*We have in the camp a couple that comes out here together. She came here first, and then her husband, a mechanic, started working here too. It seems to work quite well for them.*

**- TERRY**

*I definitely don't see me doing this forever. I mean I do see there's a possibility of returning to it after a certain period. Maybe. I don't think I could be doing this while my children are small. I mean I want to be there when they grow up. Later on maybe I'll come back again to FIFO.*

**- SANDRO**

*You just have to set your mind to work, that's all. If you don't and go out drinking and all that, you probably would lose your family or your wife. I used to work away from home a lot of times and I just ended up missing my wife, so then I appreciated her even more.*

**- HENRY**



# FAMILY LIFE

There are a variety of challenges when balancing family life with being away from home for two or more weeks during a work rotation. Couples might be more vulnerable to break ups and quarrels. Other families manage these “on and off” conditions very well.

Since mining is male dominated, it is usually the father who is absent from home, but there are also many examples of commuting mothers. **The time off between shifts can be well used as quality time with your kids and spouse.** For many families this lifestyle becomes a routine that they manage well.

In many cases the spouse being off shift devotes this time to the family — as Jason, a mobile worker describes, “You know, when I am at home, I can take out the kids and relieve the burden from my wife’s shoulders. I love to cook for them. My wife also works during the week, so I can help her with running the house.” Jason’s approach is often described by mobile workers as “making oneself valuable for the family.”

Jessica, a spouse of a miner, states, “We celebrate the time together when he is here, like cooking his favourite meal or hanging out at the camp-fire together and maybe invite friends.” She adds, “We also go out for a nice dinner just him and me and value our time together or travel somewhere.”

A big downside is the fact that one cannot be at home for important family events such as birthdays or Christmas, the kid’s hockey game, graduation and other special events — or in emergency situations such as if a family member gets sick. **It is important to be mentally and emotionally prepared for missing important events.** In severe cases, however, companies allow for special leaves, such as when there are substantial health issues or a death in the family.

**Not seeing their parents for a prolonged time is especially hard for kids. But on the upside, they can spend more time with the mobile parent while she or he is at home and off from any other duties.** Some take the kids out on a holiday, to the circus, to fish camp or on a hunt. Grown up kids cherish these memories from their childhood, while at the same time they remember longing for the parent who is not there.

Jason explains, “Being seriously engaged with your spouse and kids is really important during your time off. If you are not careful, the years pass by and you have not seen your kids growing up.” Many workers raise the issue of feeling guilty about not being at home, but also highlight that it is important to cope emotionally — like to remember that the whole family is benefitting from this job.

**Staying connected during the mobile work rotation is essential. Fighting over the phone or getting too involved in your spouses' style of parenting can be a source of conflict.** Corey, a social worker states, "I have a couple of clients who come to me with troubles in the family. Most of them are young parents and not very far along yet in their relationship. So they do not have too much experience together."

It is a gradual process to figure out how you manage your private life in the best way as a rotational shift worker. As you get older and more experienced it becomes a routine. Usually the mobile life works out well for older couples and families.

**It is important to seek information and counselling when troubles occur. If you are making the decision to go away for a mining job, make sure to consult with your partner and children.** Also, think about how you will deal with the hardships of being away from each other for a prolonged period of time and how you will manage the increased income.





*It is really a special day when he gets home. He is so tired. I try to make the kids not jumping on him all the time, but they are so happy to have him back. He needs time, for me this is ok.*

**- ALICIA**

*I start my re-establishment of a normal life prior to leaving the job site. I try and relax to get the adrenaline out of my system. I slow down my thoughts and even meditate on the trip home.*

**- ANDREW**

*Sometimes I feel like a stranger when I get home. They have their routines, their life and I am like a visitor. This happens sometimes.*

**- BARRY**

*I have to keep calm when I return home, as my family are doing their normal stuff, and there I am, wanting to catch up on lost time away.*

**- FREDERICK**

*I get a bit restless and stressed out when it comes to leaving again. There are a lot of things to be organised, packing your bag, and then saying good-bye. I am not a good 'good-bye-person'.*

**- JEROME**

*When he leaves I always pray that he comes home again safely — that he does not drive too fast to work, that nothing happens at work — I know that it is dangerous out there. Especially underground. But then I let it go.*

**- JENNY**

*Sometimes, I am a bit worried when travelling, especially when the roads are slippery in winter and when flying on these small planes, you know.*

**- CONRAD**



# TRANSITION FROM HOME TO WORK AND BACK

A key period in rotational shift-work or FIFO life is that of coming home and leaving home again — as well as the actual journey.

Flying-in/flying-out and driving-in/driving out involves using a variety of means of transport; be it their own car, company busses, helicopters or airplanes. Travelling is part of the work in all seasons and, therefore, also under bad weather conditions what can lead to stress. When you are on the road with your own car, make sure you do not immediately travel right after a 12-hour work day. Get a good sleep the night before in order to be safe on the road.

**The journey can help to calm down your mind: leave the private things behind in your mind and concentrate on your next shift, or, leave behind work related stress before you come home.**

The days before the shift ends you might start to feel that the days get longer and the longing for the loved ones or friends back home grows.

The expectations of a perfect time off-shift grow as well. For many, the first days of coming home means sleeping and relaxing, being by themselves and getting relief from the structured industrial environment of the mine site.

Others enjoy a lot of social interaction with their friends and family back home when they

come off shift before they relax and 'zone out' for some time. For others, it's a time to go on holidays to the beach or travel abroad.

**Sometimes this transition period may also lead to frictions with the expectations of the partner, spouse or kids. All are just looking forward to a perfect time.**

At home the one who returns engages in different family routines. Sometimes this is tricky when, for example, different styles of parenting conflict. John, a geologist, expands: "When I come home, I feel a little bit guilty that I was away. So I usually bring little presents for the kids. I know I spoil them and of course I am less strict than my wife has to be while she is responsible for the majority of the time."

**Departure is another important period. The last days off from work are usually filled with preparing the luggage.** Workers must bring their own toiletries, prescription drugs, reading books and computer.

People are saying good bye to friends with a couple of beers or a dinner with the spouse. Saying good-bye can be an opportunity to connect. Jenny, wife of an underground miner, says, "You know I always stick a little love-note in his suitcase so that he finds it later on when he is already in the camp. That way he thinks of me while he is away."

*Sometimes when there is a big decision you need to catch up of course, but I try to focus on my work when I'm out here.*

**- BARRY**

*I am connected on Facebook and can follow the things going on in town, but at the same time I am happy not to know too much and not knowing what I am missing out on a Saturday night. It makes being in camp easier, you know.*

**- JERRY**

*I must leave all behind. Like we are buying a condo now and my girlfriend has to figure out everything by herself. We can catch up on the internet, I submit my documents and stuff this way. This works out. If I think that she has to do this all by herself, it's a big burden!*

**- DAVID**



photo: Gertrude Saxinger

*In earlier times it was much more difficult to stay connected. I remember not having internet and the phone-lines were just too weak. Today, I can catch up with home almost always when I want.*

**- BORIS**

*Really, really important: stay connected. Keep the communication lines open is number one. But stay focused at work. Don't think too much about home. I mean before you make that decision to go into mobile shift work, if it is something new for a relationship, really try to get as much information as you can.*

**- BRENDA**

# STAYING IN TOUCH

FIFO families are also 'Skype-families'. **The internet and mobile phone connections in larger camps make it easy and cheap to stay in touch.** In smaller exploration camps satellite phones are available; but, usually used only in emergencies or for business calls. This makes private calls expensive.

When the Internet breaks down or is running slow, it interrupts life at the camp. Connecting to the world outside is essential for most of the employees and disruptions to Internet service can create tensions.

Staying in touch is crucial for upholding relationships with friends and family back home and important for a fulfilling social life.

Just a short call to one's partner and kids keeps the relationship stable and makes sure that spouses know what is going on in each other's lives.

Ben, a mechanic, explains that it is important not to fight over the phone, "it will leave both partners feeling miserable."

Regular communication from the mine site to the home helps family members stay connected and allows workers to keep track of what is going on at home. On the one hand, when there are major household decisions to be made, such as buying a car or doing major

repairs, it makes sense to communicate a lot. Or even if it is an event like a baseball game where you can cheer with the kids.

On the other hand, solving troubles at home over the phone might be less feasible and one has to get used to the fact that he or she cannot be involved in all the everyday business at home.

Barry explains, "I do not call home every day. I do not want to get too much involved in the little things that occur at home. The time in the camp is when I concentrate on my job and on earning money. I have a 12-hours shift and I am so tired afterwards that I do not want to deal with things back home I cannot change anyway."

Also for single workers it is essential to connect with friends back home and to keep up social bonds.

**A certain balance should be achieved to stay in touch while not being too involved in business at home.**

*My first marriage did not work out. My wife felt lonely when I was not around. This has changed in my current relationship. We are happy. My new partner knew before what she was getting into. I explained to her what my job and the life in the camp is about. The second time it worked out well!*

**- MARIUS**

*I've seen so many 'Dear-John' calls and texts when girlfriends break up over the phone. This has tremendous effects. The guy gets nervous and stressed-out and it affects everybody in camp. This can create real troubles. It is also dangerous at work not to be concentrated. They should wait and talk with them face-to-face.*

**- BEVERLY**

*If you are having a lot of drama back home, your camp life is going to be really miserable. Trust me. You'll have more injuries because your mind is somewhere else. If your home is stable, it is much easier and safer. You like the job, you also like your family. Both go together.*

**- BRADY**

*Yeah, I think we are learning to let go of each other and give up that control while we don't see each other. It is hard for me sometimes. Also she has lots of responsibilities. Roles are interchangeable. At home she is in charge.*

**- DAVID**

*It is hard for me when he is away but I manage anyway. I do all the other things I like during that time, like volunteering, I do artwork, hanging out with my friends and so on. I am adjusting my schedule to his, so we can have more time together. It is important for me that he knows that. He shouldn't take me for granted when he's at home.*

**- JENNIFER**



# JEALOUSY, BREAK UPS AND PRIVATE RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are different for rotational shift-workers and their partners. The long-distance, limited communication opportunities and time being absent from everyday life at home can be challenging. The older people get, the more they get used to a 'mobile relationship' and fewer break-ups occur.

**It is really a matter of partners and families getting acquainted to the specific circumstances of the mobile lifestyle.**

When divorces and break-ups do occur, many times the shift work is not the real or sole reason why people split up. Many people actually enjoy the freedom and independence it gives both partners.

Sometimes jealousy is involved, either on part of the mobile partner, who does not trust the spouse back home, or the person at home thinking that he or she might fool around with someone in the camp. Of course these things can happen, but they are not the rule.

Freddie, an electrician, argues, "Having a trustful relationship and staying away from paranoia and jealousy is key for making a good FIFO relationship happen. Most of what drives you crazy is only in your head anyway. You cannot concentrate on your job and you end up in silly fights for nothing. I trust and love my wife and she does the same. You can never predict things, but we are both committed to our relationship."

He adds, "Sometimes it is just a myth that hook-ups happen on site in the camp. The company for sure does not like to see that because it just creates troubles. I think you should just work together and stay out of trouble, that's what I do. And I'm tired after a 12-hour shift anyway. So these things are rare."

Carrie, a stay-at-home mom, says, "It's actually excellent for us because we miss each other and when he gets home we value the time together like a honeymoon. Of course it is hard sometimes. But on the plus side we remain independent and loving each other at the same time."

We heard throughout our research that most break-ups occur amongst those who are not yet used to this mobile life-style, but other aspects come into play too. **Mistrust, violence or simply not caring about things going on at home as well as not being engaged in the relationship during off-shift can have a harmful impact.**

Finding a partner can be difficult for a mobile worker. Shania recounts, "It is hard because I am only at home for one week. How am I supposed to find someone in that limited time and build a trustful relationship?"

It seems that the most successful relationships are those with mutual trust, care and understanding — even during break-ups.

*Our role as HR and safety person is also to look out for substance abuse. We do this for personal safety and the safety of the crew, really. If we find marijuana or alcohol they are done. We immediately charter a plane and send them home. We have strict policies and a clear procedure for that.*

**- TANYA**

*You know, in Fort McMurray they bus you out from camp into town. There is a lot of partying and girls and things going on. You can easily blow up your money. Here in the Yukon like in other places, there are dry camps and you do not leave the camp most of the time. I think it is better.*

**- JASON**

*Sometimes I see these guys drunk and not knowing what to do with themselves in the community. It is great when I see the same people sober in camp, they are proud of what they can do and so strong!*

**- BRENDA**

*I was not sober for my next shift and it turned out to be a vicious circle. No job, no money and next thing you know you are selling your toys and sit on your mortgage.*

**- BENJAMIN**

*If they suspect something they can also do tests randomly. This is the companies' right, you signed that in the contract. They can check you anytime.*

**- BRADY**



# ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND OTHER TROUBLES

Many of the quarrels in the family occur when drinking and drugs come into play. Terry, a facility manager in a camp, explains, “I hang out with my buddies nearly the whole time while off shift and of course I get drunk. My wife hated that. I know it is silly, but I needed this relief.”

Terry is now divorced. His ex-wife, Connie, couldn't bear to have all the duties on her shoulder and care for 'another child.' She explains, “He was just not engaged in the family, he was drunk all the time, I was so sick of that. When he was drunk he was violent and angry not just with me but with the kids too and that is just not acceptable.” This example of Connie and Terry's relationship is an extreme example for a couple participating in mobile work, but it shows how problems with drugs and alcohol can lead to break-ups and divorce.

**There are many problems associated with substance abuse amongst mobile workers. Most companies have strict anti-alcohol and drug policies.** Urine tests — to identify marijuana and other drugs — must be submitted when being hired. In the event of a collision or any other accident there will be an immediate drug and alcohol screening of all parties involved.

Furthermore, not showing up at the pick-up point for getting on site may easily lead to

immediate lay-off, likewise when showing up hung-over or otherwise impaired at the start of a workday. **Not being able to work is one thing, but the most severe consequences are accidents: mine-sites are dangerous work places.** Workers that are under the influence of drugs or alcohol could potentially harm themselves or colleagues in their intoxicated state.

Coming out of camp brings relief from an often stressful work shift at the mine site. Some people have troubles spending their time and money wisely during off-shift. This happens to workers of all ages, to single people but also to those in relationships. Some people seek relief in gambling halls and pubs. This is not necessarily a problem when done responsibly.

**It becomes troublesome when addiction occurs, leading to loss of money, degradation of health or loss of your job.**

Especially if there is a decrease in mining in the region, it can be hard to find a job again if a worker has been penalized for their use and abuse of recreational drugs or alcohol.

The mining community is small and you can easily get a negative reputation. When a job opens up a lot of times HR managers will ask their trusted staff if they can recommend someone they know.

*Money goes by so quickly. Like right now, I don't even see it disappearing. I have too many bills to pay and too many toys.*

**- CONNIE**

*Jake, my son, just moved out and he was in the forces. Having money in the bank account makes it easier to visit him. We went to Montreal and to Edmonton to see him. It was no problem, like there was no financial stress. And it felt great being able to help him stand on his own two feet.*

**- TERESA**

*Savings? Yes. I've put lots of money into savings. I was actually saving up for a house but now could not really work this year because of the mining downturn, so I spent it all already. Yeah when I first started off in the mining industry I didn't care about money. I needed a truck? I went and bought a truck. I wasn't thinking ahead.*

**- BEN**

*My colleague who had bought a house with her boyfriend had to move back in with her parents' house because they couldn't pay the mortgage. They blew all their money instead of saving some for dry times. They ended up selling their truck, their skidoo and their quad just by being silly.*

**- SANDRA**

*We paid off a giant line of credit with my salary. Now, when I first come out of camp I love to walk into a bookstore and spend 300 dollars or go for a really fancy meal. You know, buy a 30 Dollar bottle of wine, instead of an 8 Dollar bottle. But that only lasts for a couple of days and then I start looking after my money again.*

**- SANDRA**

*I own my own business now on the side with my wife. I really enjoyed the money I made in mining and the freedom that it gave me for setting up our small company.*

**- BRAD**



# MAKING GOOD MONEY AND MANAGING IT RIGHT

There is no doubt that you can make a lot of money in any of the huge variety of professions on a mine site. The high wage associated with mining jobs is one of the main reasons people take up a life 'on the move'.

Brenda, who works as a cleaning person, states, "In camp you don't go out, you don't have to buy groceries and so I can put a few hundred dollars or sometimes a thousand every month into my savings account."

Underground miner John says that he has quickly paid back his first mortgage, bought a second house and can afford to pay back the student loan taken out for his daughter.

Simone, a cook and artist, loves to travel the world. She goes to the beach in Hawaii or even flies to Mexico or Europe during her time off. Sometimes she is unemployed and she asserts, "You need to save some money because mining has its regular downturns. You always need to be ready for booms but also for the busts."

## **Many of the mid-aged workers put money into the bank or into the pension fund.**

Rick, a diamond driller explains, "Some of the younger folks blow up their money and do not think ahead." When workers get older, they can get sore or may not be able to

work anymore due to injuries. **Some people work all their lives and have nothing left when they retire due to harmful spending behaviours during their career.**

Among the mobile workers we engaged with, there was huge difference in how people spend their money. For some, daycare in big cities back home may add up to a lot of money, others pay for expensive trips to Disneyland with their kids.

Some workers may buy a skidoo, a boat, rifles or other equipment for hunting and fishing. Some invest in real estate or support their adult children or their young families. Ian, a camp manager, says, "Food and bills come first, then the truck. Then maybe a second truck, and then the toys like four-wheelers and so on."

Young single men often care less about money. Ian explains, "I blew it up in bars with my buddies and fancy girls. I was not used to the huge pay-cheques, I just enjoyed my life and that was good. For a while anyway until I got into drugs and the money blew up even faster."

It is really important to put money aside or to invest it. **Many save their money also for further training or for times when there is no work around.**

*We started our own little library here and shared books. We had a shelf and everyone put the books on there. This was pretty fun, you know, we did something together.*

**- BRENDA**

*Sometimes people have a big ego in the beginning but once you start talking to them and get on their good side, they open right up. Then things work out just fine. There are definitely some grumpy people around, but once you get in touch, they are just like big teddy-bears.*

**- BRIDGET**

*You need to be open minded here, so many different folks from all walks of life. I tell myself: Keep my business to yourself and just be open to new people. I am a pretty easy person to get along with.*

**- GREG**

*The chef and kitchen staff play a vital role. Before the new management came here it was just convenience food, like pre-packaged food that was just warmed up. It was the number one reason for complaints and people were grumpy. Ever since we cook fresh foods and have a steak night now and then or a special pizza day people are looking forward to their meals and sit together in the canteen with a smile on their face.*

**- JOHN**

*You should bring an attitude like this is almost your second family. When someone comes back here, they welcome you back home in camp. So you know, it's a 50/50 time at camp and at home so it's almost your second home. The accommodations and the food are decent and good here. So, to me it's not so bad. I don't mind it at all.*

**- KEN**

# SOCIAL INTERACTION IN CAMP

James is a very open and friendly guy. He says “this helps a lot in making new friends and to quickly engage with the folks around. In camp you are forced to live together with people in a more or less confined space. So obviously it’s important that you get along.”

**Getting along with your co-workers is key for a healthy and respectful environment in camp.** Mining camps are different sizes, whether it be just a couple of people in exploration camps, a few hundred in larger mining sites or thousands of workers as is the case in the Alberta oil sands region.

The social amenities differ from camp to camp. In mid-sized mining camps there may be TV rooms, pool tables, badminton or a gym for working out and a library. In larger camps there can be a store that provides fundamentals or a café. **Leisure activities after long work days are essential to unwind and help you get a good sleep, ensuring you have the energy for the next day.** Usually people spend their time before and after work in the canteen or in the mentioned leisure facilities. Although mining camps are mostly dry camps, celebrations can occur from time to time.

Being close to your colleagues can lead to strong social bonds. Francis, an environmental technician, explains, “We are like a little family here. We need to be respectful to each other,

like if you were at home. Yelling is a no go. People who swear or yell a lot do not last long in the camp. The managers have to be careful about the way they talk too. Otherwise it might end up causing troubles among the crew.”

The last couple of days of a work shift can be extra stressful for mobile workers as they might be overloaded with work, exhausted, and wanting nothing else than to go home. During these times it is important to remain calm and civil with fellow workers.

It is important to mutually support each other, like listening to your fellow workers if they are having troubles. Some workers prefer not to engage in too much social activity. Instead they prefer to spend their time after work in their bedroom watching TV, chatting to family and friends, just reading or playing video games.

**It is necessary to balance the connection and close companionship with fellow workers alongside the need for recreation and alone time.** Alan, a safety manager, explains, “You must be careful not to get too involved in other people’s private lives and you don’t need to listen to everything people tell you. Sometimes it is better not to say what you think or voice your political opinions, it just makes the life out here easier.”

*It is good to have these routines sometimes, like getting up at the same time every day. I stick to some of these routines when I'm at home. It helps having a structure also when I am out of camp and have not much to do.*

**- CHARLES**

*Usually my days are spread out over 17 hours. I start about 4.30 in the morning and the day ends about 7.30 at night. Sometimes even later. So my days are long but given that I am the manager I have quite a bit of flexibility during the day too.*

**- HENRY**

*The younger people, let's say the twenty-five and thirty year old ones, have troubles to self-entertain. If you need to be active, go to the gym or for a walk. If you want quiet time read a book, watch TV or play a computer game. Just do your own thing. Entertaining yourself is absolutely good.*

**- JENNY**

*If people have troubles back home, it affects their work. You are thinking about home when really you should be concentrating on work. We try to socialise here amongst co-workers and that helps. This is part of the routine you need to get into.*

**- ROGER**



photo: Gertrude Saxinger



# CAMP ROUTINES

People often describe living in mining camps as monotonous. Christie, driving a hauler in a mine, expands on her daily routine while at work, “I get up at 4:40, get dressed and go to the mess for breakfast. Then I go to my safety and other meetings or meet my cross-shift, before I get on my hauler. I drive 12 hours a day up and down the same road. I’ll have a sandwich in between before I get back to camp at 6 o’clock. I have a shower, hop in my clean pants, go for dinner and watch TV for a bit or play cards until it’s bedtime. Sometimes I do some calls or the laundry. Every day is pretty much the same.”

**The camp remains quiet during the day, since fellow workers are sleeping when they get back from night shift.** Some workers say they go out for a walk in nature near the camp while it is still daylight or unwind in the gym after their working day ends. Some companies have cleared trails so their workers can take safe leisure-walks.

Veronica is a First Nation woman working as safety manager. She tells, “I sometimes pick berries or herbs for making traditional medicine. This connects me to the land while I am out here.”

Bonnie, a camp services worker, reports, “Especially young folks out here sometimes have a hard time to entertain themselves.” **It is really important that you can have a good time just being on your own. You can bring your own games, books, or whatever you like to camp.**

Some people also like being by themselves out at site without having family duties. The routines and the strict schedule of the industrial mine camps can also help workers to unwind from stress at home.

The time at work helps also for transitioning from any potential alcohol abuse during off-shift, as Veronica, the safety manager, explains, “People don’t drink here and they are in a sober environment. This makes them much happier; they are self-confident and have a smile on their face.”

**Satisfaction with food in the canteen is essential for good mood in the crew, which, in turn, increases the satisfaction with FIFO in general.**

Coping with routines and boredom at the mine camp is different from person to person. **Ultimately, a strong mind is necessary to make the best of the mobile work lifestyle and routines in the camp.**

*I did my certificates and I am as qualified as any other man. I can maintain heavy machinery without any problem. Times have changed, thank god.*

**- MELINDA**

*I like that there are more and more women joining us. I also find this masculine stuff often annoying. Men work hard and play hard. Women have a more balanced attitude and this makes the whole atmosphere better.*

**- JAMES**

*No doubt, we need to prove every day that we can do our job. This is double standard and discrimination too. Women, therefore, are often even better than male colleagues. It will take some time, I hope not a full generation, until women are accepted in the same way as men.*

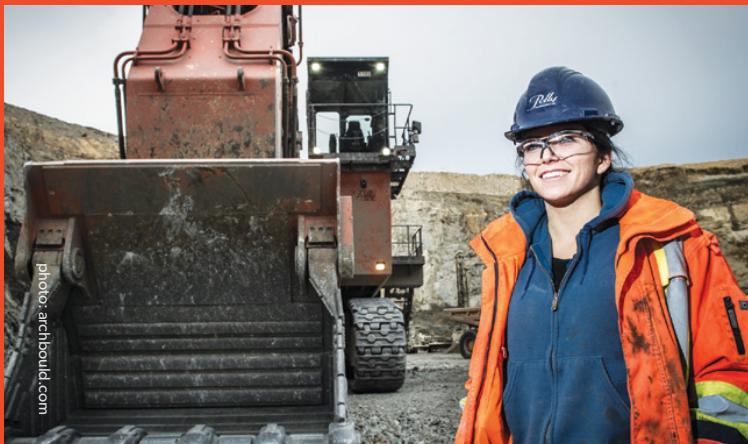
**- TIFFANY**

*I had a few incidences of sexual harassment myself, but I tend to be outspoken and not very shy. So I dealt with them pretty well. I told those people straight to their face that their behaviour is not appropriate and if I wanted to I could get them kicked out of here.*

**- VERONICA**

*There needs to be more advertisement and information for women in mining. The young girls should learn also in school about the cool opportunities you have in this field!*

**- TAMARA**



*I tended to keep away from those things. You know people knew that I wasn't the girl for just a night — if that is what you are looking for. So yeah, it was good.*

**- MARILYN**

# WOMEN IN MINING

The mining sector is still dominated by men. Increasingly, there are more women working in mining camps. However, as Andrew, a camp manager, puts it, “The camp and the work places have still a strong ‘testosterone culture’, which is not appealing to all people. Some men even find it annoying too.” A certain male way of talking can make the situation for women uncomfortable. But most male workers are not only comfortable with more females in the camp on a personal level, they also feel that the overall atmosphere in the crew is better, as yelling and coarse language is reduced when there are more women employed.

**Women are increasingly hired in a variety of professions. This results from increased training and education in the mining field.** Today women work as geologists, environmental engineers, heavy vehicle operators, hauler drivers, mechanics, welders, electricians, first aid responders, safety managers and environmental engineers. They are administrators, cooks, cleaning personnel and service managers for camps. In short, all professions are open to females today. **However, there is still a disproportionate number of women who are employed in entry-level, low paying jobs such as site maintenance and kitchen staff.**

In addition to the availability of jobs for women, other sorts of discrimination can still

occur. There is certainly some improvement in comparison to the previous generation, but some women report that they have to show much more ambition than their male co-workers and have to prove their qualification in front of the male peers. Sydel, an electrician, explains that “especially in the beginning it was really annoying that the males talked behind my back, and asserting that ‘this is not a job for a woman’. They considered me as less qualified, although I had all my tickets and was even better qualified than many of my male colleagues. It is important not to get stressed out about other people’s opinions. It is your job — be confident that you do it well.”

When it comes to cases of sexual harassment, some women are not sure how to deal with it. However, such situations are not the rule, as Francis, a truck driver, asserts, “Being a woman in a male peer group is not a big deal. We are treated respectfully and sexual harassment is really the exception. Well, it depends on the size of the camp and the general atmosphere.”

**It is important to know that one is protected by the laws and rules of the company. Sexual, racial and other discrimination at the workplace is against human rights.**

Camp managers and company representatives clearly state that in case of sexual and other — like racial — harassment the perpetrator is fired immediately. For instance, if you face

such a problem in your company you can file a complaint, for example, at the Yukon Human Right Commission.

Moreover, supervisors are there to help. Jessica, a young geologist says, "You have the power to speak up. Go tell your supervisor or the human resources people if you are not feeling comfortable with someone's behaviour."

**Often unpleasant situations are not upfront harassment. Discrimination is sometimes much subtler.** It is not always easy to judge certain behaviour; there is a fine line, it might be just comradery. So how to deal with such situations? Marilyn, a cleaning person puts it like this, "Be upfront. Talk to the guy who is behaving in a weird way. Often there are only a few weird guys who do not know how to behave. The others will support you. Just be upfront. Sometimes it turns out the person wasn't trying to harass you. Do not hesitate, do not be ashamed. Remember: nobody has the right to put you in an unpleasant situation."

Francis, who has been working in mines for a long time, asserts, "It is a tricky situation. On the one hand you should be yourself and on the other hand you have to adapt to a certain extent to the male environment. They are simply the majority." However, this is no reason at all to accept unpleasant situations, should they occur.

**When it comes to a career in mining, there are women's organizations like Yukon Women in Mining that can help and provide information on how to get into the sector.**

They promote awareness of the opportunities for rewarding careers for women in the mining industry. They develop initiatives that foster personal and professional development, through awareness, education and networking opportunities. Friends or relatives who are working in a mine are also good sources of information about your options.





photo: Eric Hoogstraten



*There is always work here. If you want to work, there is work. Sometimes it's really good, and sometimes you got to get your hands dirty but there is always something to do.*

**- FREDDY**

*The only advice I can give to everyone coming into this industry is to be trained in safety. Safety comes first. The industry has changed a lot over the years. A lot for the better, but I think they could build in more safety aspects into the training courses. I think the safety aspects still could be improved.*

**- WILLY**

*I started out as a labourer. I didn't like it, when I was young, that it was so slow to advance. Now that I am 47 I know that it is the proper way to bring people up slowly. Today they do it much faster in mining and this is not good for safety. Young people really need to learn step by step.*

**- FRANCIS**

*My grandfather always told me: you go to work, you finish the job you started. And I have always been that way. Just do your job and you will be fine. Do not sit there and dilly dally all day.*

**- NORA**



Photo: Gertude Sakinger

# WORK ATTITUDE AND SAFETY

Working in mines and in exploration can be challenging — due to physically demanding work, long hours, huge workloads in a short time span, etc. A strong work ethic and a positive work attitude are generally required.

Workers need to be proactive when it comes to work attitude. Conrad, a foreman, puts it this way, “You need a strong mental condition. You need to know what you are working for. We need independent and self-encouraged workers. It is not possible to explain and supervise every step. People must know their job and be ‘self-starters’. They need to be able to self-motivate.”

This becomes difficult when it comes to problems such as addictions. **People need to make it on time to be picked up for the next shift. Not showing up can result in a lay-off.** In times of a downturn in the industry, it can then be hard to find another job.

Conrad continues, “It is a small world here in mining. You can easily ruin your reputation when sleeping-in regularly or not getting on the airplane and so on. You also might be registered when you are caught in a drug test and will not be hired again.”

**Work in the mining sector, regardless of the specific field you are working in, can be**

**dangerous, so health and safety regulations are essential.** Working in these circumstances requires a strong commitment to safety.

Jobs in the mining sector can be monotonous and repetitive. This can lead to dangerous situations when people are not alert at all times. **Fatigue and stress may lead to psychological problems such as depression. See a doctor if symptoms occur.**

Supervisors must take care that their workers wear personal protective equipment, including safety gear tailored to their position. Workers must also be responsible for their own personal safety and ensure they do not behave in a careless manner while on duty.

**A healthy work attitude — on part of the workers as well as the bosses and supervisors — is key to avoiding dangerous situations and accidents.** And for everyone this means that you must have patience for your own sake and everybody else’s safety.

If your employer is not careful in terms of obeying safety regulations get in touch with your labour union. You can also contact, in the case of the Yukon, the Yukon Worker’s Compensation Health and Safety Board.

**It is your right to have a safe and healthy work place.**

*Sometimes I take a leave for important things like for funerals or headstone potlatches of an Elder in the community. I want to be there if this person was close and it is also show of respect towards our Elders.*

**- MIKE**

*You know mining has drastic effects on hunting, fishing and the environment. We still struggle with the waste and pollution from old mining sites. There was not sufficient environmental protection in those days. We have to be aware when mining comes in, that this is our land, that this is the most important thing that we have.*

**- SAM**

*What I really disliked in the other mine is that I never got off when it was hunting time. You would see the moose walking right by the camp in the season but I could not take a leave. This is the reason why I quit.*

**- RONNIE**

*When I am out for trapping, which takes some time, often weeks, I ask my boss for a leave. This is fine for him if I ask quite in advance. As long as you tell them early enough so that they can bring someone else in to do your work it is fine. It has always worked out at this mine.*

**- GREGORY**

*In our negotiations with the companies we make sure that they value our traditions and culture. We are part of the land and part of the water. And we are stewards of our land. Our people cannot work in a mine that harms the environment; the company must understand our values.*

**- KEN**

*We still need the land for our basic necessities. This is the moose, this is the fish and much more, like our water. And it is not only for food. Our Elders say, "if you feel bad, go out on the land, take the boat and a little pack-sack and go." It is true you really feel better. This is our tradition.*

**- CLOE**

# DOING SHIFT WORK AND LIVING OFF THE LAND

‘Living off the land’, which means being connected to nature, is essential for First Nations people, including those in the Yukon and other Aboriginal people on this planet. Hunting, fishing, trapping, and picking berries or medicinal plants has been part of First Nation cultures since time immemorial. **Cultural identities and survival for First Nation peoples is based on sharing the food harvested from the bush and the rivers with their friends and relatives.**

This is important for fostering and maintaining social bonds and mutual help within community groups. It is also essential for the families of harvesters to fill the freezer and store dry-fish and dry moose or caribou meat for the winter.

Jessica, the wife of a miner, asserts, “I cannot live without my moose meat. I grew up with this taste. Imagine how much money I can save from my family budget when I don’t have to buy beef or pork. I don’t even like that taste as much as I like wild foods.” She continues, “He should bring home at least one moose in the season. One more the better, because we can then share, like with Elders who cannot go hunting anymore.”

Jessica’s husband, Mike, works a shift roster of two weeks on, two weeks off. Mike explains, “For me, working in the mine is good. You know, the hunting gear, the fuel, the vehicles

and the boat are expensive. A lot has changed compared to the old days. It is hard for others who don’t have well-paying jobs to afford to go out on the land.”

**A critical point is having time for traditional activities in the season when animals are around or fish are going up the river. Some companies acknowledge these cultural needs for First Nation peoples.**

Agreements between the mining companies and First Nation groups are called ‘Impact Benefit Agreements’ or ‘Comprehensive Benefit Agreements’. First Nation workers are sometimes entitled to take longer leaves during the hunting season in order to harvest for their families and communities during peak animal migration. Tanya, a HR person at a mid-sized mine, explains, “Today companies want to employ locals. Therefore, we have to adjust to the local cultural needs of our workers. If they give us a note in advance, we can manage to find a cross-shift and they can take longer leaves than two weeks.”

Shania says, “Two weeks is usually enough to get moose or sheep or to go to fish camp. Sometimes you get a moose in a day or two. Sometimes it takes longer.”

Unfortunately it does not always work out like that. Some mining companies are not sensitive



towards the cultural needs of their employees. Since it is such an important part of Aboriginal cultural identities and livelihoods to harvest subsistence foods, sometimes local workers report that — when the company is not sensitive to these specifics — they feel forced to quit their job during hunting season. This, in turn, leads to unemployment and other potential troubles.

**In general, Mike enjoys his two weeks off. He can take his rifle and stay out on the land for a couple of days to hunt and cut firewood. He also takes his kids out to the fish camp or on a hunting trip.** He tells, “I prefer that to a nine-to-five job. I am much more flexible. The moose do not come around only on weekends. You need time, a lot of time in the bush.”

**Some mining operations, especially exploration camps, may shut down during winter. This is the time when the trapping season starts. For local workers participating in trapping, shift work can be convenient during the off seasons in the mining sector.** Trapping allows some local workers to continue participating in traditional activities while making an income to support themselves and their families.

Evon says, “Sometimes I wish I could spend more time out on the land. When my father was sick it really helped me to stay grounded.

But the mine job is good because I can afford equipment.”

Tanya, the HR person addresses specific experiences with First Nation employees saying, “We have great people from the community here. They are an important part of our multicultural environment. **We must consider that First Nation people have a very specific culture and attachment to the land. By recognizing certain cultural needs we try to strengthen the commitment to the mining company.** For instance we plan to regularly celebrate not only Canada Day but also the Annual Aboriginal Day.”

**This acknowledgement of Aboriginal events is important to make First Nation employees feel welcome in an industrial mining environment that is rarely, but still sometimes, described as racist and prejudiced.**

For First Nation communities and native employees it is crucial that mining is done in a manner that does not harm the environment and does not jeopardize subsistence or traditional ways of life. Our First Nation interview partners stress that mining should not be done only for short-term revenues. Instead, the goal is to preserve some of the wealth in the ground for future generations to profit.



photo: Liz Blair



*You know, sometimes I go for a hunt when I stay here in the village during my off-shift. Sometimes I do that. I work with the folks from the First Nation here and we are friends. So they take me on a hunt from time to time. It's a lot of fun.*

**- ROBERT**

*You know, the local people want the camp to be outside of the village, because of social issues with the incoming workers. I mean they think there will be troubles, but we, the workers, are not as bad as they probably think.*

**- JEREMY**

*In the last years there were lots of drillers and other skilled work-force. They came in for a dinner from time to time. Back in the days it was not so highly regulated. Now they often cannot go out of camp at night and they do not have their own vehicle up here. Economically for me it would be a good thing if I had more customers.*

**- MARCUS**

*There was a big international company here and the folks were told not to go into town and party and bother any girls. They would get fired right away. I think this was a deal with the community, it was part of the contract.*

**- JESSICA**

*You know I liked to hang out with the miners, I was young and it was fun. The village is so boring anyways. It was great, I had a good time.*

**- KATELYN**

# FLY-IN/FLY-OUT AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Company towns located near the mining site, such as Elsa and Faro in the Yukon, are now just a site of old abandoned buildings or have continued to exist with a much smaller population after finding new ways to operate. This is generally the case worldwide as companies move away from building mining towns.

This is due to the fact that it is expensive for a company to run a full-fledged town, including the technical, social and cultural infrastructure needed to attract families. And the government is no longer willing to let companies build such towns since changing technologies mean shorter lifespans of the mining projects.

**Today, FIFO and mobile shift work operations are the norm for the mining industry, bringing mobile workers from all over Canada and elsewhere to work at remote mining sites.** Mobile mine workers are, therefore, more flexible when it comes to a downturn in mining. They can more easily find a job in another place when the mine is (often suddenly) shut down.

The question remains, for nearby local communities, whether they can benefit from incoming mobile mine workers and FIFO camps. We heard from our interview partners that nearby communities want to avoid social

problems that might come along with an influx of FIFO workers. While many of the local communities would welcome whole families to stay for a longer period, they are hesitant about an influx of single (young) men flying frequently into town, yet keeping their home residence in another province.

Henry from a small town asserts, “Actually, I don’t want my daughters to hang out with the miners, for example in front of the liquor store and so on. You never know. My girls are still young and have no experience with that kind of stuff.”

A local business person on the other hand said she would welcome having more of the FIFO people in her restaurant. She explains, “The local businesses could benefit a lot from the spin-off from mining and maybe we could have a hotel, a bunkhouse or a bar in town. This would also benefit the community.”

**These examples reflect the pros and cons of FIFO work practices, which must be carefully balanced by local decision-makers and governments when a new operation comes to the region.** John, a local politician stresses, “We agreed with the company that they build their camp outside of town and that it is a dry camp, so that the folks are not attracted to come in to town and drink. Regardless of the potential economic benefits

this is better for the social wellbeing in the community. It would be different if we were a larger place. We would have more facilities where the workers could spend their time off.”

John continues, “Since they operate on our land, we get compensation for what we lose economically if they were in town. For example, companies co-fund youth camps, sports facilities or cultural activities, have stipends for training and education for our youth and so on.”

**The companies usually have strict rules when it comes to troubles caused by workers in the nearby community. If workers cause issues they risk losing their jobs.** In some situations, FIFO camps are located at a far distance from communities and the FIFO work force is bussed to and from the next airport. In these situations, there is usually very little interaction between FIFO workers and nearby communities.





photo: Gertrude Saxinger



*Toronto is a major hub for people flying in and out. I am a big fan of city life. It is busy, I can go downtown, there is life and I have access to anything and everything, you know, entertainment and a lot of travel options.*

**- DAVID**

*If my wife finds a job too, we could move up here. It is a lovely place and I like the nature. You can even have your own house! Now we just have a condo.*

**- BRADY**

*I know a lot of miners, they are used to FIFO — that is their lifestyle. They do not want to move up here, they prefer travelling.*

**- JESSICA**

*They did a survey a couple of years ago, asking if you are interested in moving to the Yukon. Unfortunately, they did this in the winter with minus 40°C outside. Of course, I checked the No. But I know it is a beautiful country up here. But Nevada is pretty different!*

**- SARAH**

*Some companies pay relocation costs or you get housing subsidies. This would definitely be a bonus for moving here.*

**- JOHN**

*There is nearly no unemployment here in the Yukon. You can always find something in the various sectors. So, where can the workers come from? Of course there is FIFO, because there are just not enough locals to cover all the positions. If the work force is not available here, then it has to come from outside. This is the way it is done in the Yukon.*

**- FREDDY**

# (RE)LOCATION OF FLY-IN/ FLY-OUT WORKERS INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Decision-makers in sparsely populated places such as the Yukon Territory would like to see more people and families permanently move to the communities, rather than participating in FIFO work practices and keeping their main residence elsewhere.

**In many remote mining regions the governments try to attract the FIFO workers to settle permanently — sometimes with housing subsidies or other benefits.** For companies, it is less costly to hire locally than to fly a massive number of people from all over the country in and out of camp. Therefore, there is a trend towards attracting trained people to the nearby towns. However, this is difficult for a number of reasons: not everyone likes remote places, small villages and mid-sized towns. Larger cities offer more diversity in terms of cultural and social activities.

**But even more importantly for many is that cities offer a better economic structure. This allows the spouse to choose a more attractive job and there are more education options for children.**

For some, it is hard to leave friends and relatives behind and to build a new social network elsewhere.

Nevertheless, others are attracted by life in smaller communities and the opportunity to be in the ‘bush’, leading an outdoorsy lifestyle, like it is possible in remote communities. However, housing shortages can be a significant issue, as Sam, an engineer, explains, “I tried to find a house here but it was really hard. In this town they have a housing shortage and therefore, the price was just too high. You never know when you might lose your job in the mine, since this business is so dynamic. You might end up sitting on your mortgage while the price for your house is down.”

Jennifer puts it this way: “I am afraid of the boom and bust cycles. I’d rather fly in and out since I do not want to bring my husband with me. He would have to find a job here first. If he doesn’t and I lose my job in the mine we’re screwed. I think about the downturn in mining right now. It is not secure enough for us to relocate.”

These concerns might change over time, as the mining sector prospers again and a new boom comes back. Under such conditions it is a bit more likely that families are willing to relocate to remote regions.

*I am definitely prepared for the next down-turn. You know, I can show up tomorrow morning and get a lay-off notice. This is how it is today, this is the nature of the industry.*

**- JASON**

*You need an exit strategy, maybe I will be going to BC, Ontario, Fort McMurray or even Alaska. I hope there will be jobs these days.*

**- FRANCIS**

*Get into another trade to support yourself, do training courses, longer ones or day-courses. Just diversify your skills. There are plenty of opportunities out there.*

**- RONNIE**

*My other job was perfect, it was 23 days in and 19 out. And a decent salary, so it was great. I flew to Cuba, or wherever with last minute deals, right? But it's so slow these last two years. In my camp of 250 people, they just laid everybody off.*

**- MICHELLE**

*Some companies pay relocation costs or you get housing subsidies. Nowadays you have to be adaptable, you have to do something no matter what. Those lifelong mines that went 25, 30 years, they are no longer around.*

**- CHRIS**

*That downturn leaves a bunch of people going from pay-check to pay-check. Just struggling with their income. I think when we focus purely on mining then we end up with a kind of economy which is not diversified and this is tough for people.*

**- CARRY**

# BOOM AND BUST

“Over the decades we have faced the boom and the bust periods in the industry. I find it really interesting how people get caught by surprise each time a boom or a bust occurs. It has always been the same, it is inherent to this industry on which we so much depend on,” argues a senior government official in the Yukon.

**Local governments, as well as the mining workforce benefiting from the boom period, should be better prepared for bust times.**

These preparations should include attempts to diversify economic practices.

Jerry, a diamond driller who also works in carpentry, explains how this could happen on the individual scale, “I try to diversify my skills as much as possible. In carpentry, I am my own boss. I can stop anytime when I get a decent job in a mine somewhere. And if they lay me off, I go back to my own business.”

There are high turnover rates in current mining economies. Mobile workers go from one mine to the next with the hope of finding a more secure position.

Apart from mines, the government is usually a big employer in locations like the Yukon or other remote regions. Service and entertainment sectors, like tourism, may offer jobs. This is often the case in larger towns, but

in smaller villages the economy is not very diversified. Therefore, people may leave the region to find jobs in another locale.

We heard during our research that this was the case after the Keno Hill mine in Elsa and the mine in Faro, both in the Yukon, shut down in the late 1980s and in the 1990s, respectively. Lisa, who comes from a mining family and lives in Mayo, mused, “We lost a whole town, not many families from Elsa moved down to the village of Mayo. Many of them just left the territory. There were no jobs for them anymore and it was impossible to say when such a high demand of mine workers will occur again.”

**Being dependant on the mining industry creates vulnerable economic conditions for communities.** It means that workers are dependent on company politics or price developments on the global mineral market. First Nations people living in mining-dependent communities face the difficult choice of moving away from family and their culture, or remaining in an economically vulnerable situation.

A First Nation representative explains, “We aim for diversification of our livelihoods and economy. Agriculture, including greenhouse activities, are essential for our food security in the future and can give jobs to our people. Tourism is not very labour intensive around



here, there are few restaurants and hotels, but the tourists come with their own trailer and their own food. Some changes in this sector need to occur to make tourism more profitable on a local scale.”

**A continuous career until retirement is not very prevalent in the contemporary mining sector. But qualified people can use their skills in mines elsewhere in the country or abroad.**

This option, however, requires FIFO livelihoods with longer travel time and different (potentially longer) rosters. Jess, a geologist, explains, “I just cannot sit at home and wait for the boom. I go to other places, the travel might be a bit longer, but I can use my skills everywhere.” She continues, “Sitting on \$300,000 mortgage can be a real problem when you are not flexible and skilled only for working in mining.”

**Learning how to deal with an unstable salary and uncertainties about the length of your job contract is key to coping with today’s conditions in the mining industry. It is of paramount importance to be flexible in terms of skills, further your training and be prepared to be mobile in times of busts.**

For some people it is not desirable to migrate in order to get a job elsewhere. Therefore, not only local economic diversification is necessary for communities, but responsible planning is needed by mining companies – who should avoid the abrupt shut-downs of mining operations that have occurred so often in the past.











This *Mobile Workers Guide – Fly-in/Fly-out and Rotational Shift Work in Mining. Yukon Experiences* presents a wide range of insights into a work life that is characterised by mobility, living in camps and being on scheduled times away from home. In it, experienced workers — men and women alike — from a variety of professions in the exploration and mining sector provide insight for those who are new to this industry. They share stories, experiences, strategies for coping with potential difficulties and tips for how to benefit from this traveling lifestyle. The sections of the guide introduce the readers to topics, such as, coping with boom and bust cycles, specifics of mining communities, First Nation employment, women in mining, family life and private relationships, income management and career development.

