



Remote workers in Central Otago

February 2020

CONTENTS

1. ABOUT CENTRAL OTAGO REMOTE WORKERS	5
2. TYPE OF WORK	8
3. INCOME	11
4. WHERE REMOTE WORKERS WORK.....	13
5. SATISFACTION	14
6. BARRIERS	16
7. STAYING CONNECTED	17
8. REMOTE WORKER PROFILES.....	18
8a. NATASHA SINCLAIR	18
8b. YUEN LYE YEAP	18
8c. SANDRA TANNER	20
8d. HILARY LENNOX.....	21
8e. SHANNON THOMSON	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the results of a survey of 'remote workers'; residents who live in the Central Otago District but who earn some or all of their income outside the area.

A remote worker is someone who works outside a traditional office, often from home or a co-working or public space, connecting to customers or a work team via technology and travel.

The purpose of this piece of work was to find out more about remote workers in Central Otago. In particular, why they choose to work remotely, the industry they work in, their level of satisfaction, connectedness to the community, related opportunities and their interest to grow what they do.

The information will provide Council with a better understanding of remote workers and the opportunities to support this growing community.

The research for this report was conducted prior to covid-19.

The popularity of remote work is likely to increase as a result of Covid-19 due to employees and employers having had a forced trial of it over levels 3 and 4. Economic uncertainty also means firms are more likely to engage staff on contracts rather than permanent employment which often comes with more flexibility on where the work is performed.

In addition to this is the opportunity for Central Otago to attract remote workers out of the cities, and to residents returning to New Zealand, who have the ability to work remotely and who may be looking for the kind of lifestyle Central Otago has to offer.

Forty remote workers responded to an online survey and five respondents participated in face to face interviews gain a greater level of understanding of the reasons behind their answers to the survey.

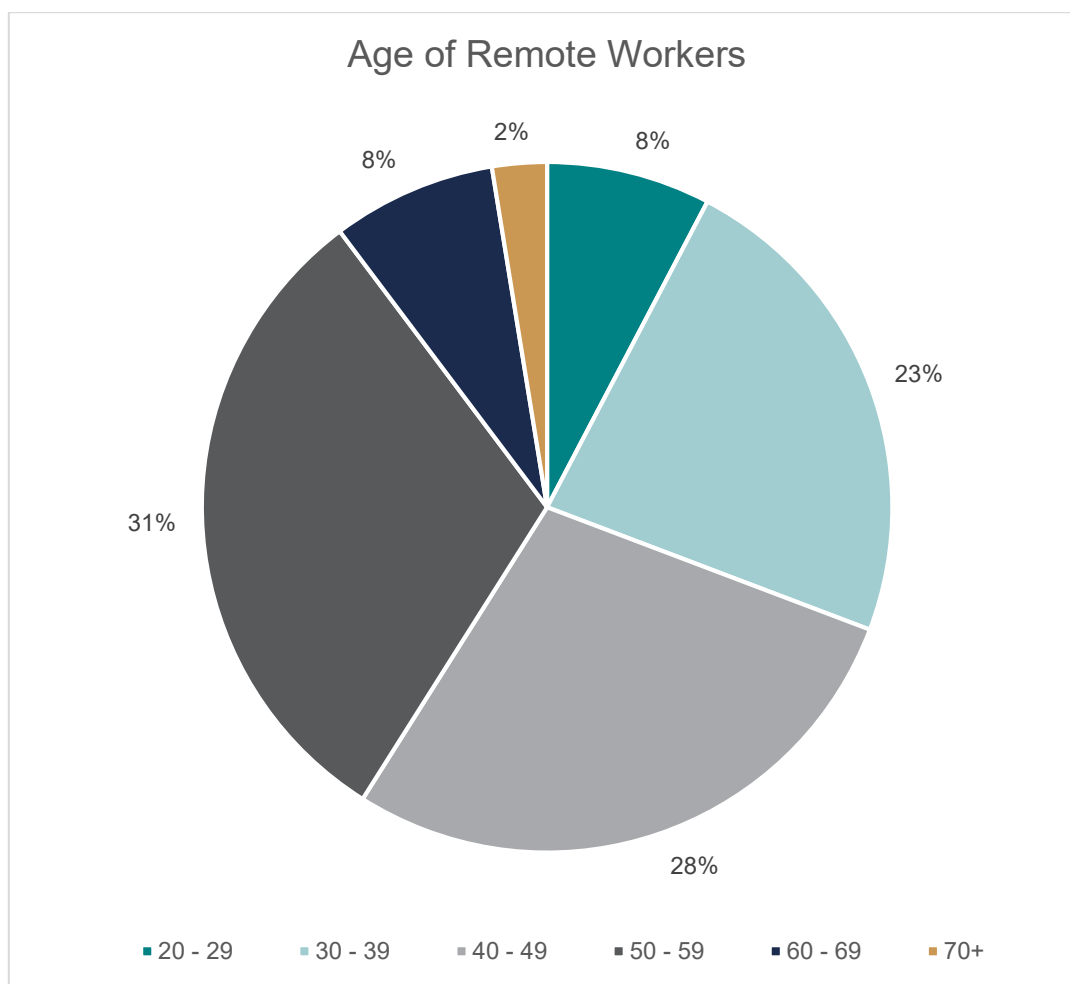
Some of the key findings of this sample of 40 include:

- More females than males working remotely in Central Otago (69% vs 31%).
- Most are mid-career, in the prime of their earning years, who have chosen to base themselves either in or close to the larger two towns (Alexandra and Cromwell) in the district.
- The vast majority work from home (78%). Some use an office space and only a few use public spaces such as a library or café.
- The majority of remote workers are self-employed directors, business owners or consultants, working in knowledge intensive industries, many of whom have been working remotely for up to 10 years.
- The majority earn above the mean income for Central Otago (\$52,000pa) with 62% of respondents earning \$61,000pa or more.
- Remote workers in Central Otago earn the majority of their income in New Zealand, outside of the Central Otago district. Only a small portion earn any income overseas.
- On average respondents to the survey spend approximately 65% of their work time in Central Otago.
- Reasons respondents choose to work remotely include; lifestyle (67%), flexibility (58%), family (42%) and availability of work (36%).
- Remote workers are happy with their situation. Selected an average of 4.2 out of 5 on a scale of how satisfied they are being a remote worker.

- Things that would help increase remote worker's satisfaction involve connectedness with the community (over half indicating that they would be interested in being part of voluntary projects) and having opportunities to meet others in similar industries.
- The main two barriers preventing remote workers from expanding locally include the ability to generate adequate income locally (42%) and proximity to customers (38%).
- Internet connectivity was a common theme identified in the interviews, both as an enabler of business and as an area where Council could advocate for improvements.

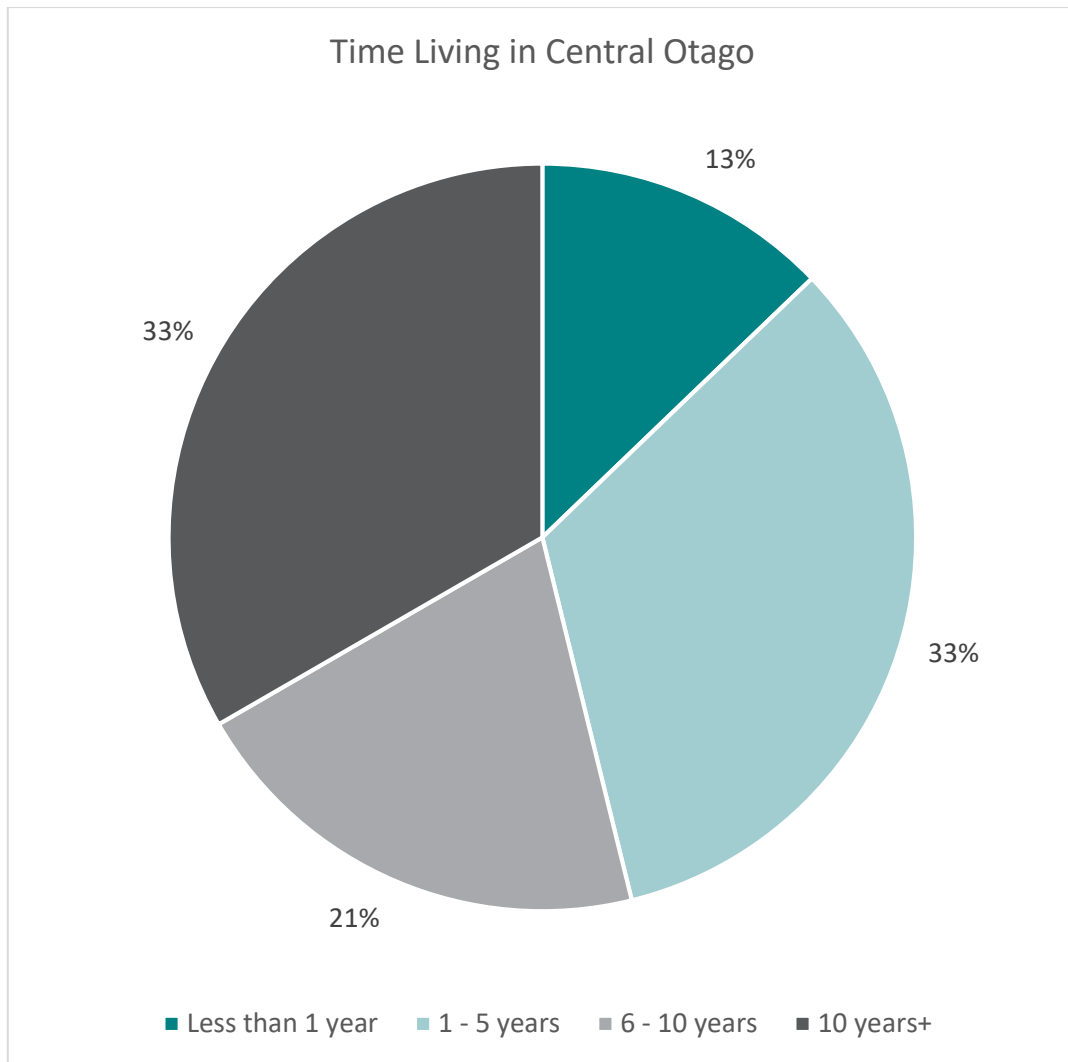
1. ABOUT CENTRAL OTAGO REMOTE WORKERS

To gain an insight into the types of individuals who choose to work remotely from Central Otago, respondents were asked a couple of questions about themselves including demographics where in the district they live and how long they have been living here.

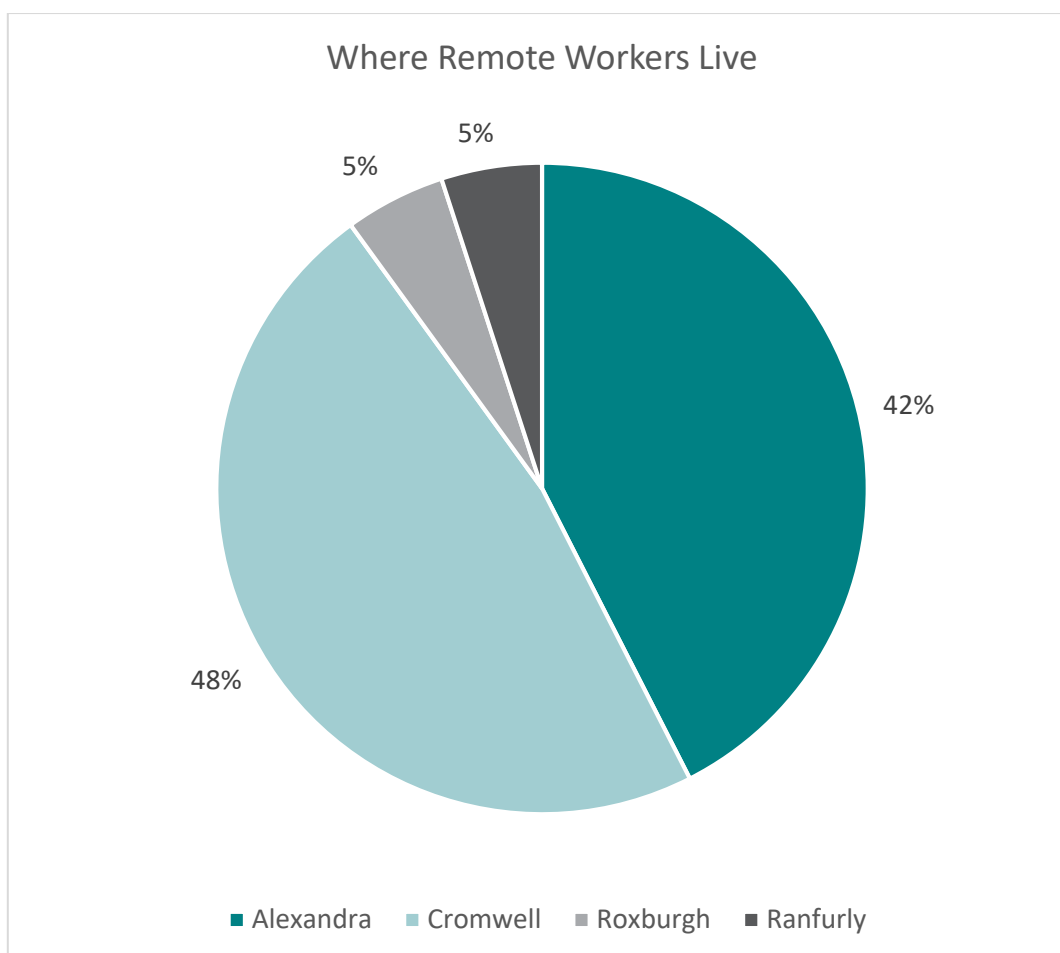


The majority of respondents were aged between 40 and 59 (59%), with 23% falling in the 30-39 age bracket.

Twice as many females responded to the survey as males (69% vs 31%).



There is a relatively even split between those who have lived in Central Otago for 1-5 years (33%), 6-10 years (21%) and 10+ years (33%). This suggests that it is not only those relatively new to the district who choose to work remotely but that people who have lived in Central for 10 years or more are also choosing to work remotely.



Respondents were asked which of the four largest towns in the district they live closest to. The majority of people live in or near to one of the largest two towns with a relatively even split between Alexandra (42%) and Cromwell (48%).

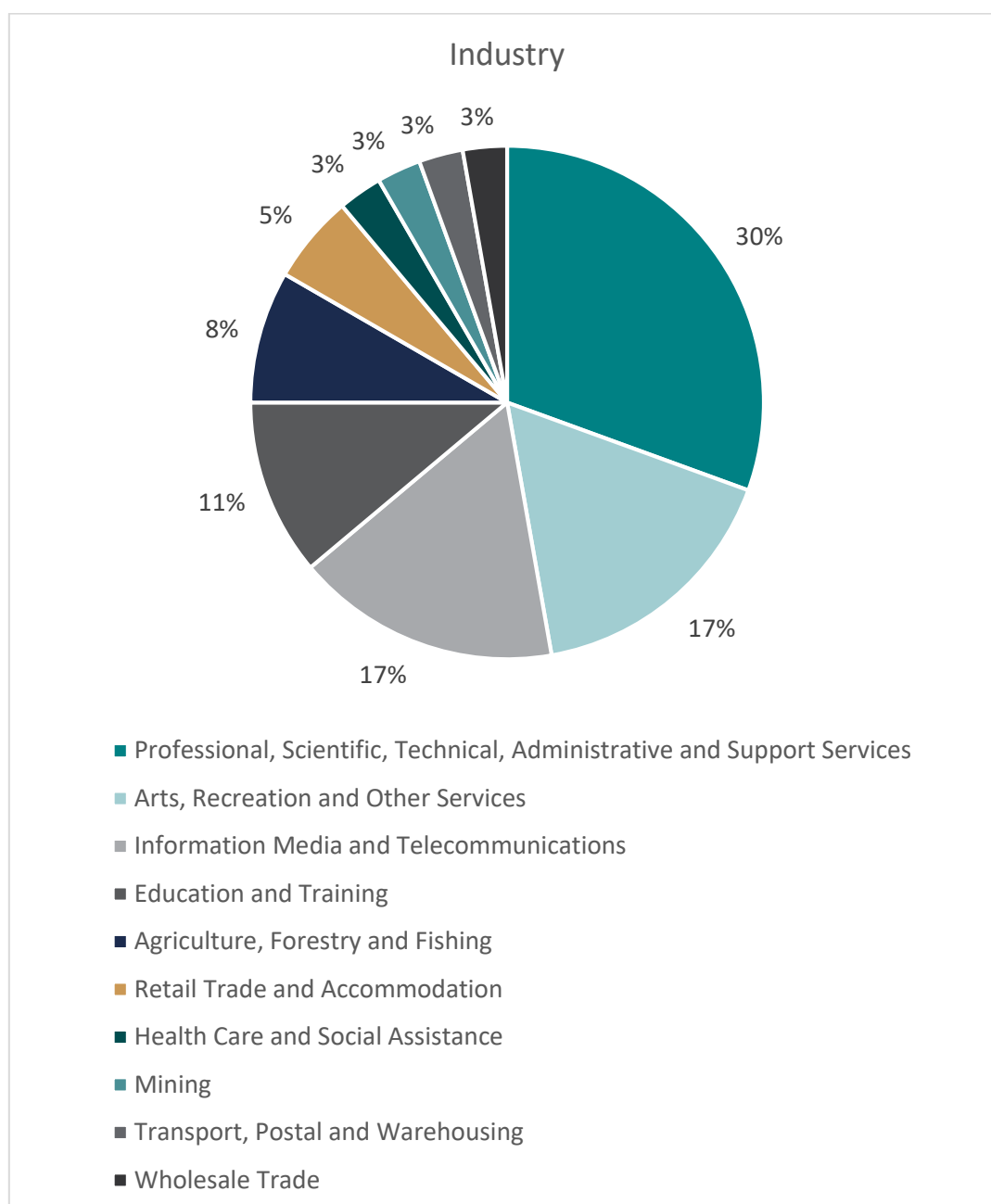
Respondents were also asked to provide their postcode so that, in our geographically wide-spread district, we could see more specifically where they base themselves. Remote workers are dispersed throughout the community with a little over half in Cromwell or Alexandra, and the rest in smaller communities or more rural areas of the district, for example Bannockburn, Poolburn-Ida Valley, Earnsclough.

Overall, this information suggests that remote workers in Central Otago are mid-established career people in their most productive earning years, who have chosen to base themselves either in or close to the larger two towns in the district.

2. TYPE OF WORK

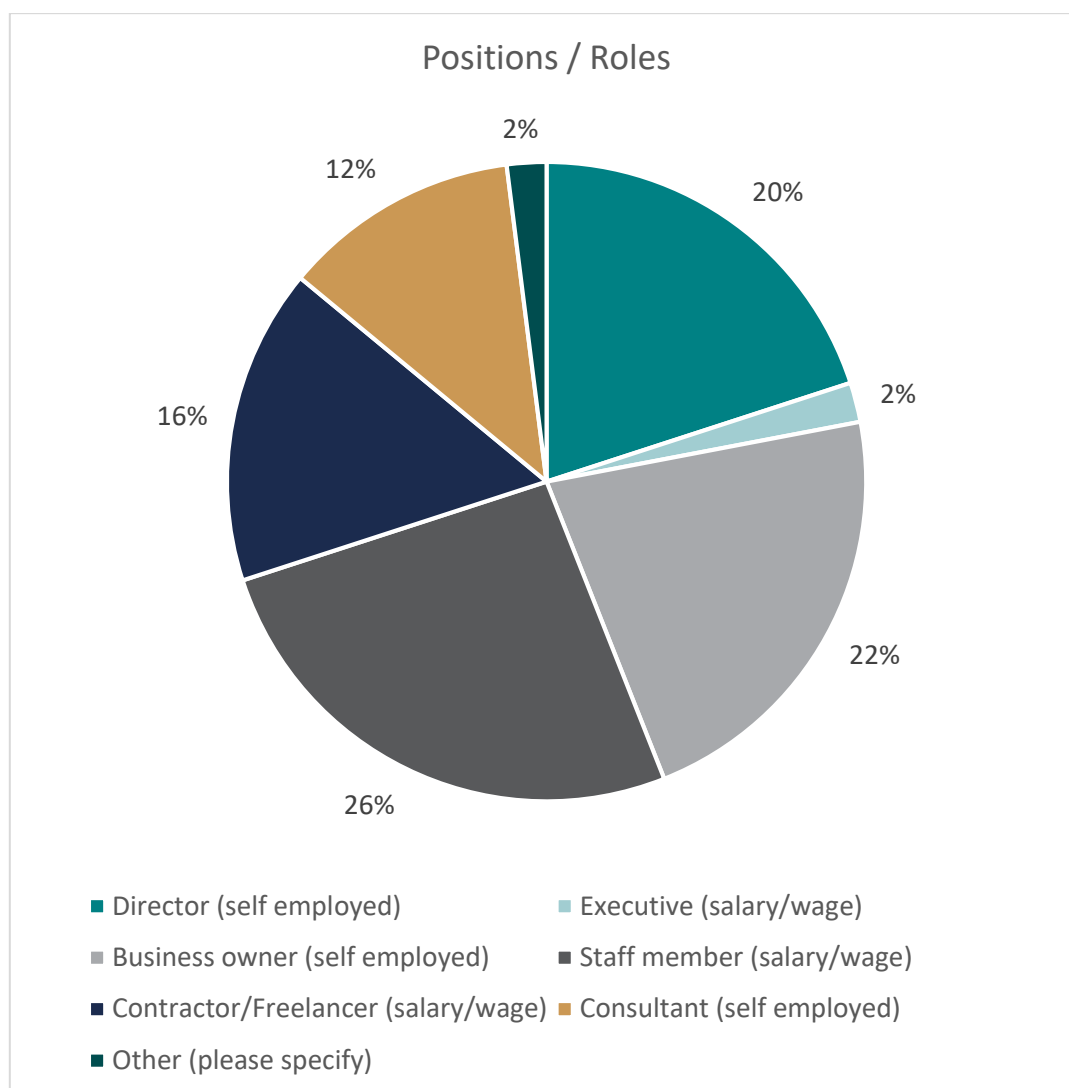
To gain insight into the type of work remote workers do in Central Otago, respondents were asked about the industry they work in, the role they have, how long they have worked remotely for and how many hours per week they work.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents work from home with 17% using an office space and only 6% using public spaces such as a library or café.

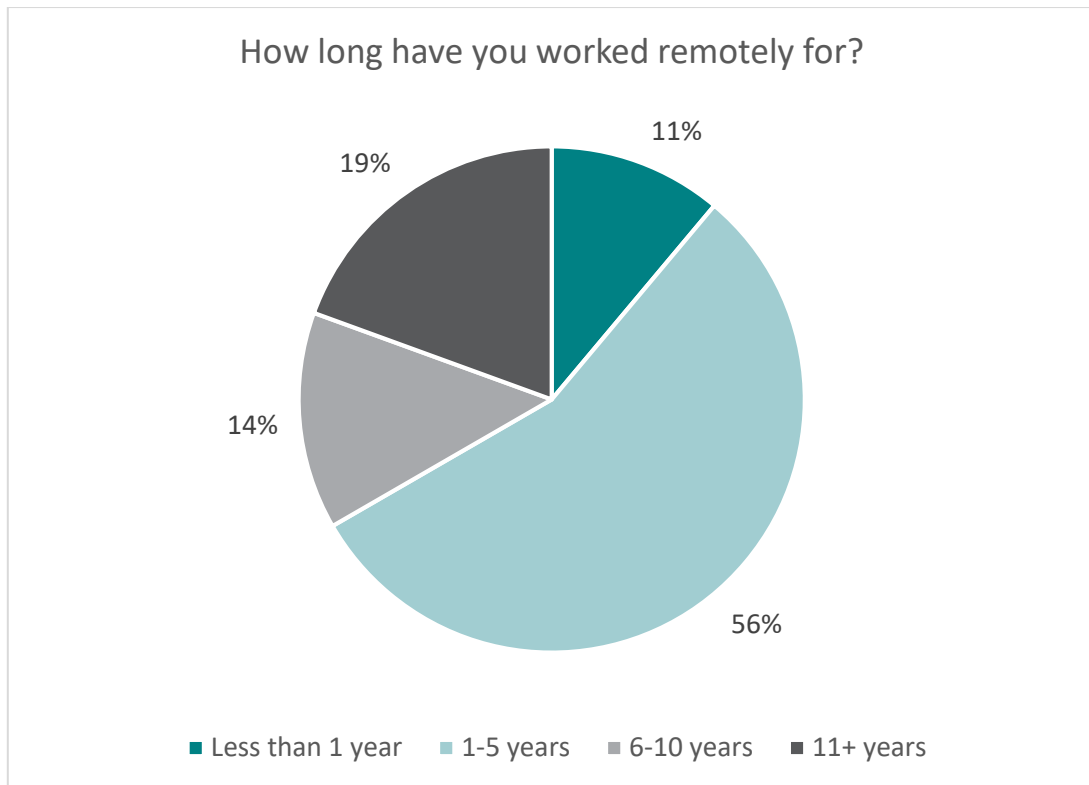


Remote workers in Central Otago work in a range of industries. The majority (64%) work in professional, scientific, technical, administrative and support services as well as information media and telecommunications, and arts and recreation. Through the interviews a number of remote workers were identified as “creatives” both in terms of their art and innovation focus

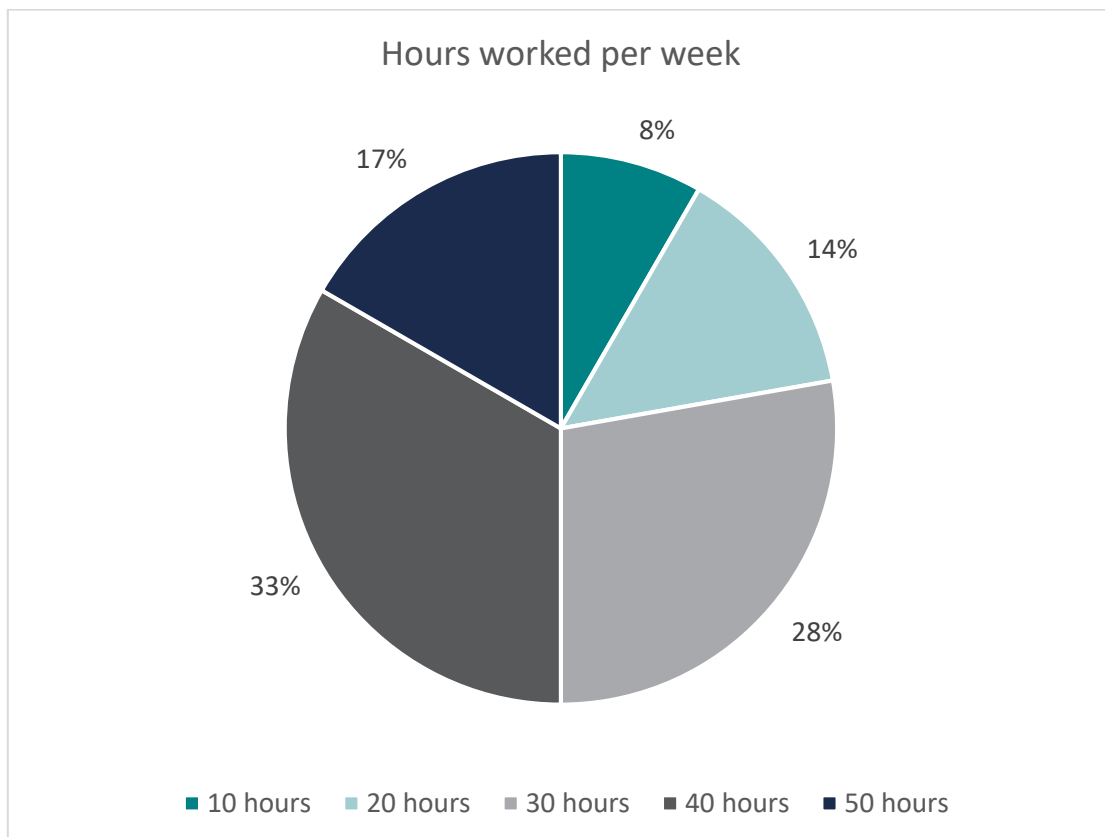
in the software industry. *Creative: A person with a never-ending, intense desire to produce based on originality of thought, expression, etc.*



There are a variety of positions held by people who work remotely in Central Otago. The majority are self-employed directors, business owners or consultants (54%). Forty-two percent are staff members or contractors earning a salary or wage working for a business located outside of the district.



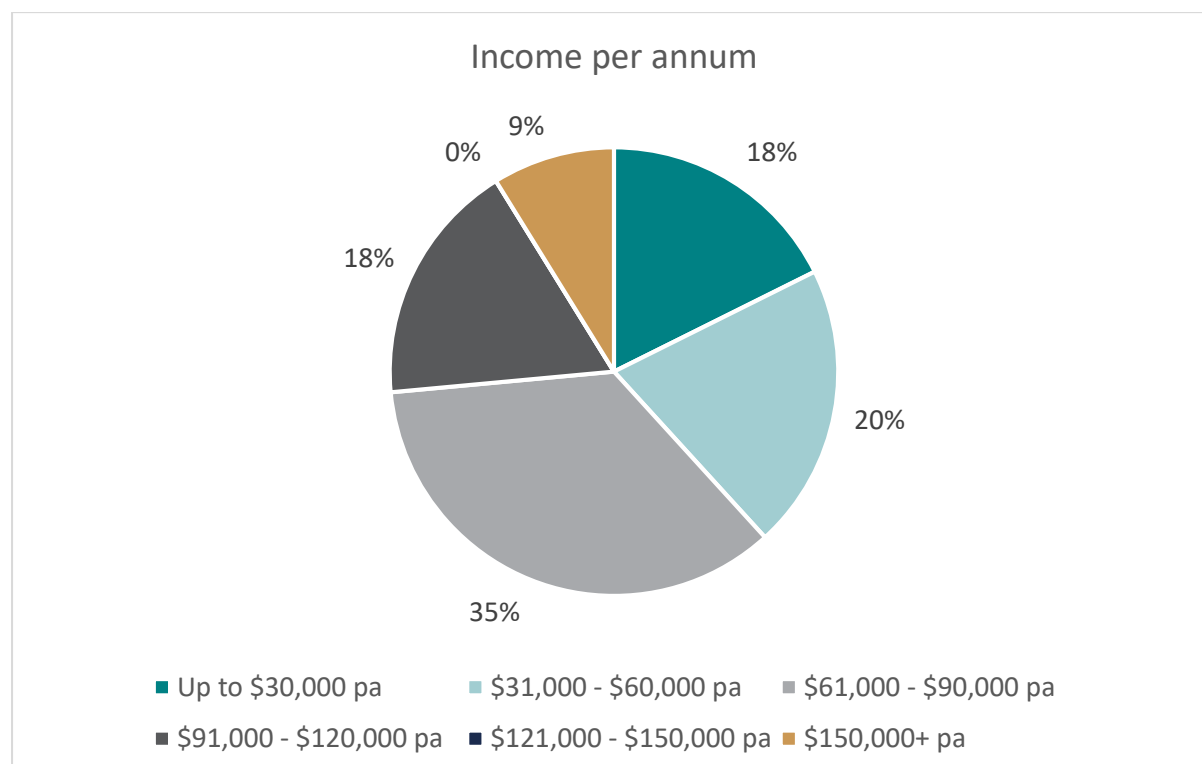
Two-thirds of people who took the survey have been working remotely for up to five years.



Half of all respondents (50%) are 'full-time' working 40-50 hours per week. Forty-two percent work 20-30 hours per week.

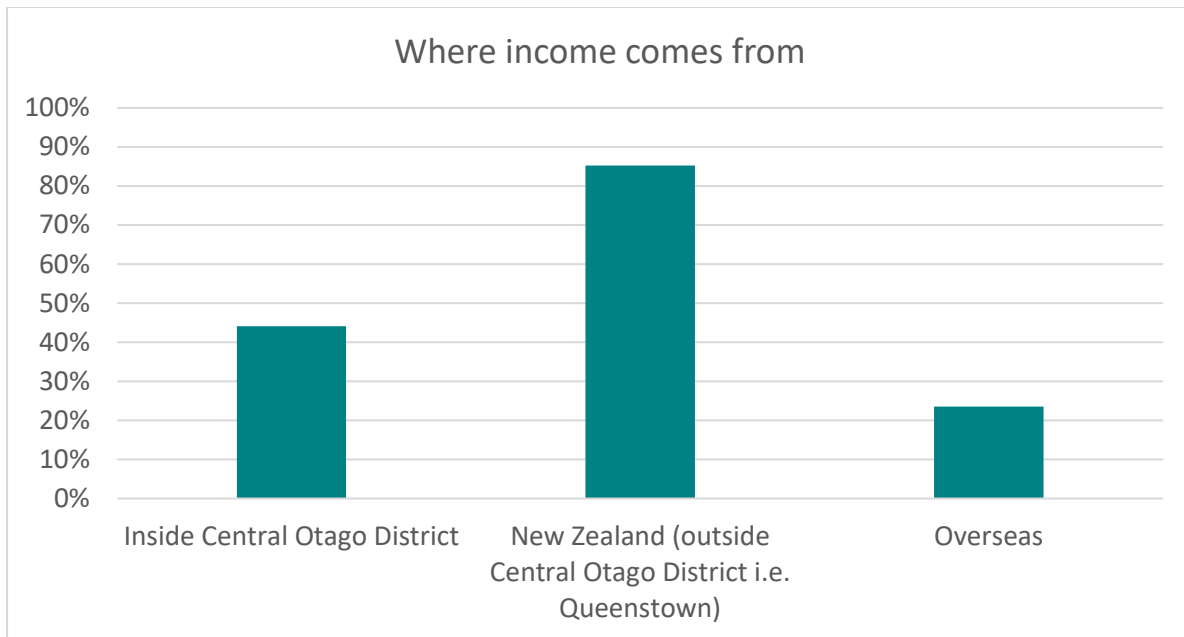
Overall the majority of remote workers are self-employed directors, business owners or consultants, working in knowledge intensive industries, many of whom have been working remotely for up to 10 years.

3. INCOME



The majority of remote workers in our district earn above the mean income for Central Otago (\$52,000pa) with sixty-two per cent of respondents earning \$61,000pa or more. This corresponds to the number of remote workers holding knowledge intensive roles where the salary is typically higher. It is also worth noting that the incomes recorded are not based on equivalent full time roles with only half of respondents working 40-50hours per week and 42% of respondents working 20-30 hours per week.

Respondents were asked where their income comes from; inside Central Otago district, from elsewhere in New Zealand (i.e. Queenstown) or from overseas.



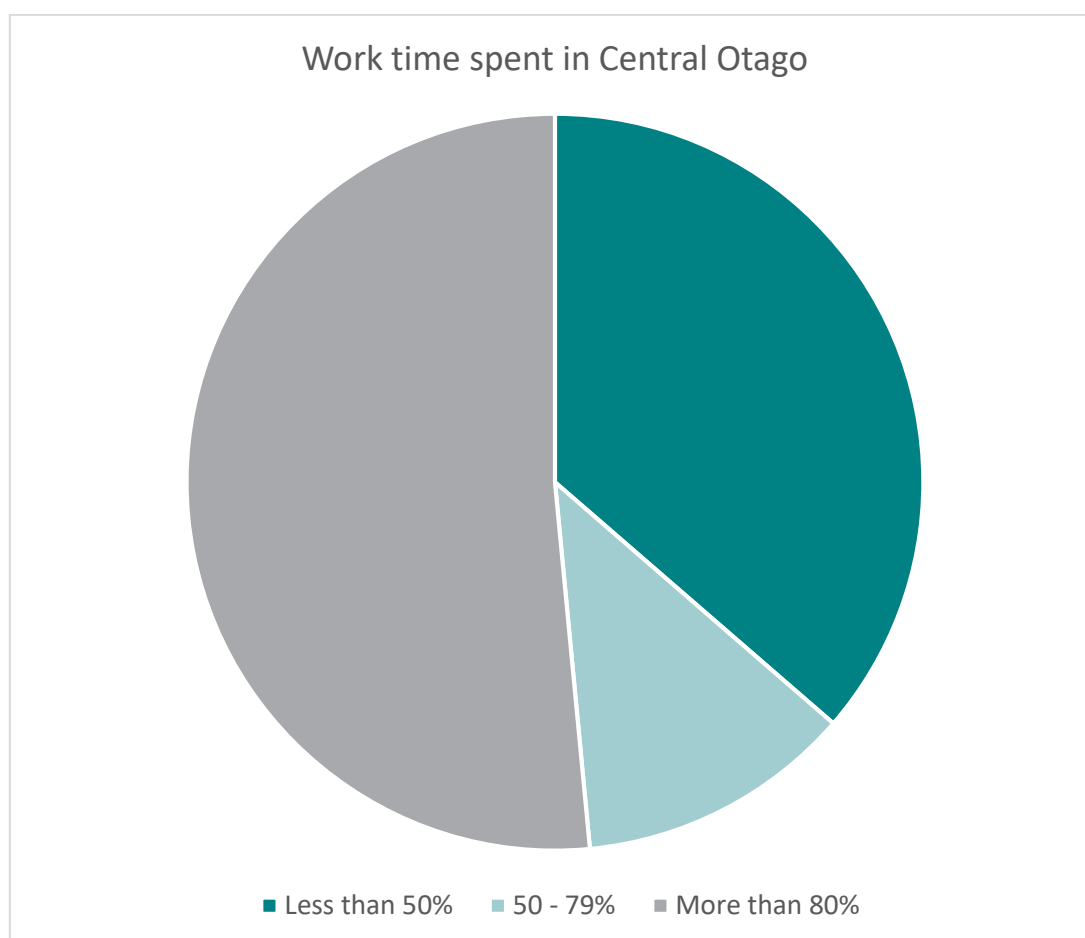
Eighty-five per cent earn a portion of their income in New Zealand outside of Central Otago and nearly half of respondents earn some of their income in the Central Otago district. Only 24% earn any income overseas.

4. WHERE REMOTE WORKERS WORK

Remote workers in Central Otago travel regularly with 89% of respondents saying they travel outside of Central Otago for work.

Respondents were also asked to provide an approximate percentage of time that they spend working in Central Otago. On average respondents to the survey spend 65% of their time working in Central Otago.

The graph below shows that just over half of respondents spend more than 80% of their work time in Central Otago. This suggests that though people working remotely in Central Otago travel regularly for work they do spend the majority of their working time in Central.

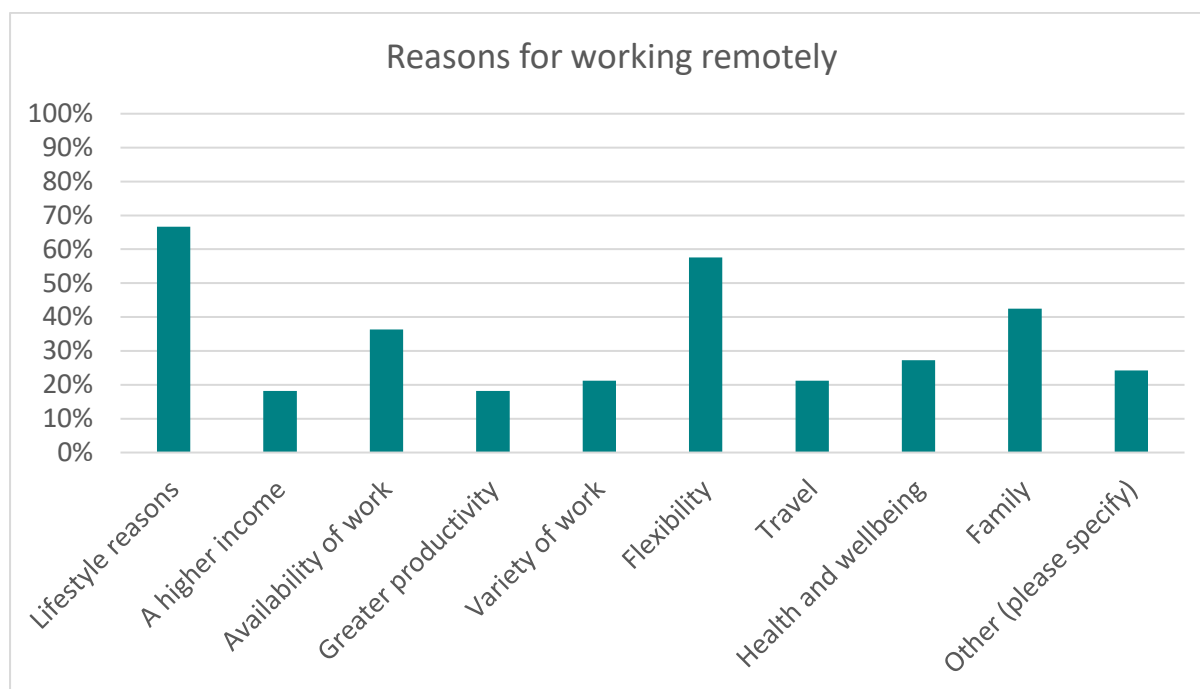


5. SATISFACTION

Respondents were asked why they choose to work remotely. They were asked to select as many reasons from the list that applied to them.

Lifestyle reasons (67%) was the most commonly selected; followed by flexibility (58%), family (42%) and availability of work (36%).

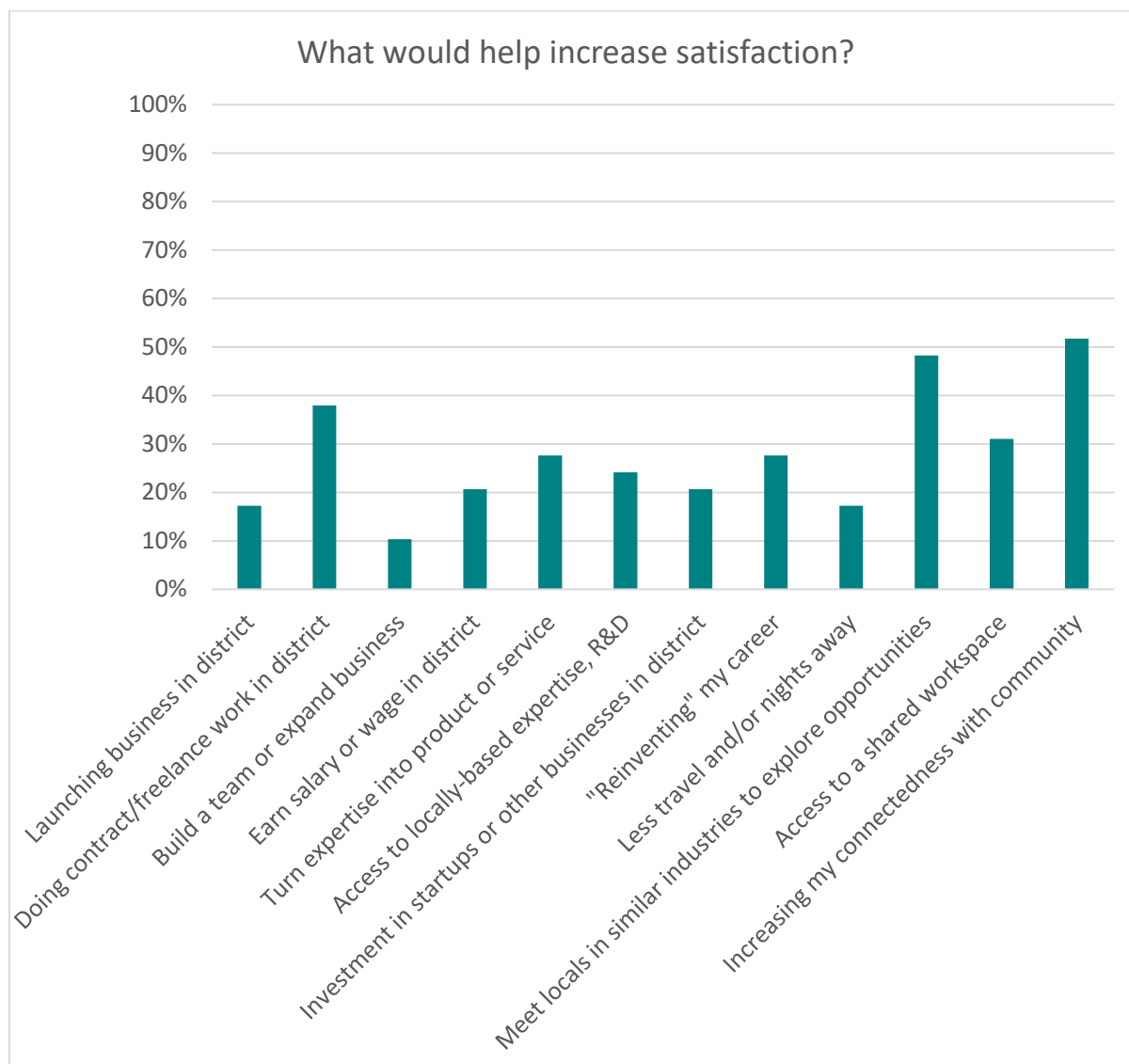
'Other' reasons included; cheaper housing, partner or family based in Central Otago, minimising fuel consumption, transfer from another centre and a lack of job opportunities in Central Otago.



Respondents on the whole are satisfied working remotely. When asked to rate on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being extremely unsatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied) how satisfied they are with being a remote worker, 87% selected 4 or 5. Only four respondents selected neutral or unsatisfied. Overall respondents selected an average of 4.2 out of 5.

Respondents were asked what would increase their level of satisfaction as a remote worker.

Fifty-two per cent of respondents selected 'Increasing my connectedness with the community through local groups', 48% selected 'Meet locals in similar industries or occupations to explore opportunities' and 38% selected 'Engaging in contract or freelance work in the district'.

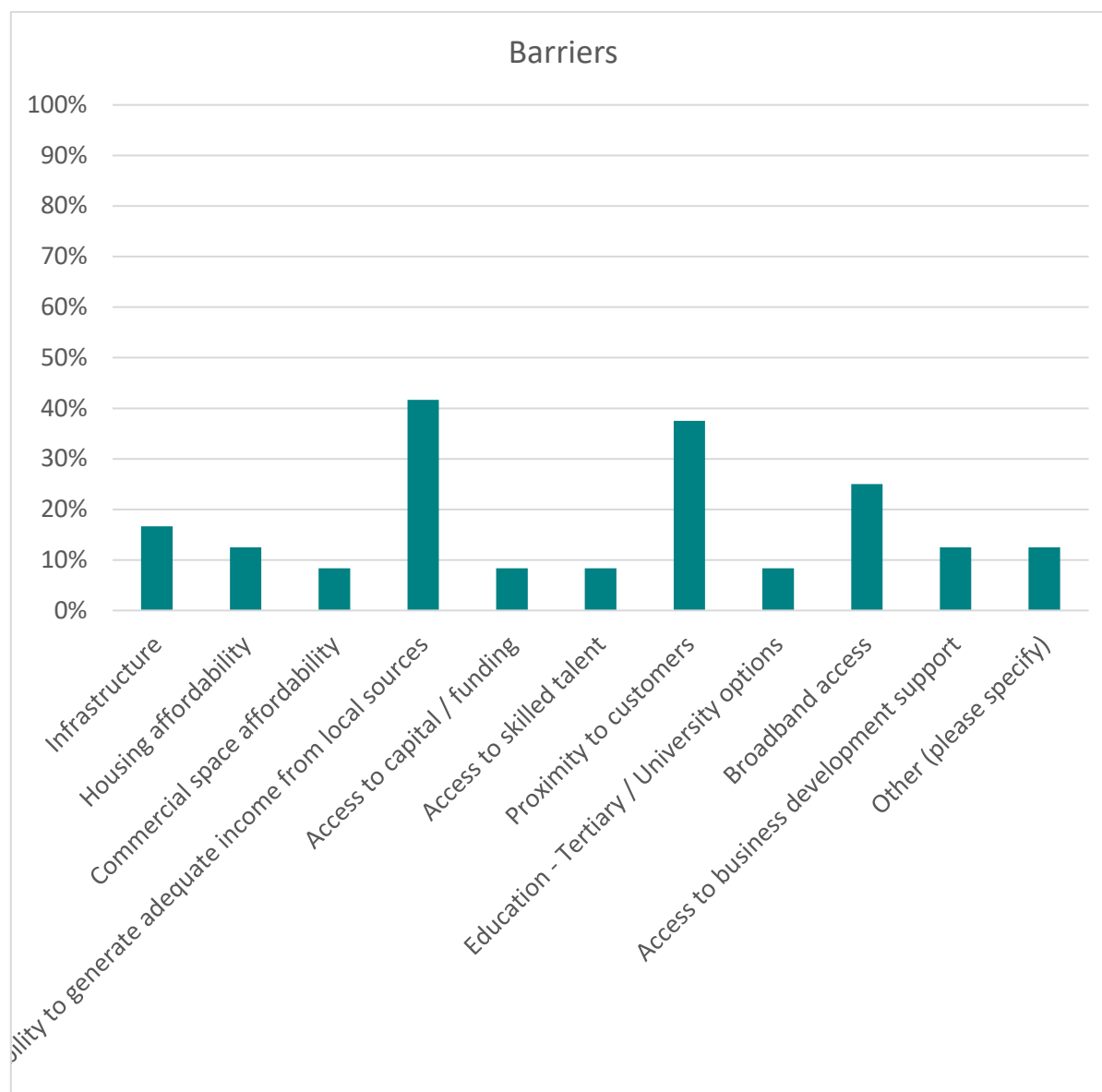


This shows that the things that would help increase remote worker's satisfaction involve connectedness with the community and having opportunities to meet others in similar industries.

6. BARRIERS

Respondents were asked what barriers are preventing them or their business expanding locally. The most commonly selected barrier was the ability to generate adequate income locally (42%) and proximity to customers (38%). Broadband access (25%) and infrastructure (17%) were also considered barriers by respondents.

Other barriers mentioned include; motivation and not wanting to expand too much to keep the business manageable without needing to hire staff.



7. STAYING CONNECTED

Voluntary projects

Survey respondents were asked if they would be interested in connecting to community through voluntary projects. There was a positive response to this with 23 people saying they would be interested, though for most it would depend on the type of project.

Connecting with other remote workers

Respondents were also asked if they would like to be connected with other remote workers in Central Otago. Seventeen respondents said that they would like to be connected. Council will arrange an event for survey participants to get together.

8. REMOTE WORKER PROFILES

Interviews

As part of finding out more about remote workers in Central Otago district and examining the detail behind the responses received, respondents were asked if they would be willing to talk with our team about the ideas they raised in the survey. Five people have met with Council staff and the results of the discussions are below.

Natasha Sinclair



Natasha Sinclair made the switch to remote work because of the flexibility it offered her when her second child was born. She has been working remotely for the last six years. Natasha runs Indafrica Travel, a specialist travel wholesaler with a focus on tours to Africa and India. She does this from her base in Cromwell where she is also the New Zealand representative for two safari companies.

“Working remotely gives me the ability to scale and grow the business how I want to. To me it’s not necessarily about being the biggest business, particularly when what you are delivering in terms of income may be just fine to support your family.”

Natasha has been living in Central Otago for 15 years, first working for the company that was the precursor to Bike It Now!. She left the business prior to the birth of her daughter and was reassessing her future options when she was approached by a safari company she previously worked with to look after their business in New Zealand. This provided the starting point for Indafrica. She reflects on how Cromwell has changed during her time there into a place which is much more diverse and open minded. But for her, it’s the lifestyle and schooling opportunities which keep her and her family in the area.

“Living here my children are able to have the same freedoms that I had growing up”
Passionate about her work, Natasha gets over to Africa every 12-18 months and to India at least once a year. She explains that these are places that she has always been interested in so it was only natural that her business should focus on these two destinations. Because of

this, motivation doesn't come as a challenge the trips she offers are a once in a lifetime experience that needs to be special.

Natasha considers one of the key challenges of remote work is the social isolation that comes with working alone. It can be difficult without having others there to recognise when you are becoming stuck in your ways and step back to reassess and review your systems. A further challenge of her work is that the income is seasonal and reflects changing travel patterns.

One of the ways that Central Otago could be a better place for remote workers is through better internet. She noted that better internet would improve the attraction to remote working in Central Otago. For people living in areas without fibre, doing their job can be a real challenge. Natasha recalls that Cromwell getting fibre was a game changer for her business. There is also the scope for there to be a wider range of business focused events and at different times of the day, recognising that fewer people are working a traditional 9am-5pm day.

“Don't be scared of starting small. I started out with one contract with one safari company.”

Natasha would recommend that those considering remote work carefully look at whether it will work in your chosen industry. Once you get started, there's plenty of free Apps you can use to help with things like administration and accounting before you progress onto paid platforms. She also thinks that if you have a young family, one of you need a steady income given the ebbs and flows of cashflow that comes with being a remote worker.

Natasha sees an opportunity to grow her business through expanding the guided tours side of the company. She sees an opening to possibly bring on other remote workers in the district to grow what she does. Finally she considers there a need to help people get a better idea of what remote workers and businesses are operating in Central Otago in order to

Yuen Lye Yeap



Having lived for just one year in Central Otago, Lye reflects on the move and considers it a success. Originally from the metropolis of Kuala Lumpur, Lye enjoys the more laid back way of life Central Otago provides. He and his wife made the move to Central after she secured a job at the Central Otago District Council.

Lye works as a freelance software developer based in Alexandra. He has worked remotely for the past 18 months the first six months in Kuala Lumpur and the later in the district. This job sees him pick up contracts to assist companies with their projects. He is currently working on food delivery App for the Wisconsin based start-up ChopEats as well designing a mobile App for a Dunedin based company.

Lye made the switch to remote work because of the flexibility and ease of scheduling it offers:

“I prefer to work at my own pace and not be caught in the 9-5 cycle. It’s better for my working style and allows me to accommodate clients in different time zones.”

The ability to choose his own working environment and be selective with the projects he gets involved in are two of the main benefits that Lye sees in remote work, particularly in working as a freelancer.

“Central could be a better place for remote workers if there were more opportunities for remote workers to meet and network.”

Lye would enjoy the opportunity to meet people working remotely in Central Otago to build connections. He also thinks more choices to entice young people to the district would be beneficial.

“It’s difficult to find opportunities to do what I do for and with people in Central Otago.”

Lye believes that it is useful when you are beginning your career to spend some time in an office and build the skills and experience necessary to go into remote working. He reflects that having those existing connections from his previous roles gave him a head start when he moved out of the office.

“The opportunities for remote workers in Central are relatively untapped but as an industry, it is becoming more accepted as views on what constitutes a business evolves.”

Lye is considering growing the work he does and possibly starting his own business after his current contracts are complete. There is a real opportunity to assist workers like Lye through facilitating remote workers to build their own communities. He sees the idea of an innovation hub as a good thing which if done right, could bring great benefit to Central Otago. An opportunity exists to help more people start out as a remote worker as knowing where to start can often be a big hurdle.

Sandra Tanner



On the hunt for cheap land to park up the campervan, Sandra found her own slice of paradise when a friend suggested she check out Central Otago. Sandra is a web designer and internet entrepreneur based in Millers Flat. Her work involves buying rundown, underperforming websites and renovating them into efficient, high-quality sites.

“I’ve been working remotely on and off for the past 10 years and the switch was really facilitated by the being able to run a business online. The choices I make now are ones which don’t tie me down to any one place and allow me the freedom to work on my own terms.”

Now 3 years in Sandra and her partner Garry are now well established in the Millers Flat community and loves the lifestyle working remotely in Central Otago affords.

“The best thing about being a remote worker is being able to play tennis at 10am on a Friday in Millers Flat.”

Sandra’s focus on redeveloping travel websites and sees a lot of opportunities to grow the work she does. She would be open to partnering with other people to expand the business as well as designing a system to teach other people to do the work she does. One thing she finds hard is finding other people who have done similar work to learn from.

“A lot of people don’t even think about looking down that avenue, but the industry is quite big. Most people don’t know where to begin.”

Sandra admits that motivation can be challenging at times, particularly without the structure provided by a conventional workplace. It requires self-discipline and a clear idea of the direction you want your business or work to go.

She considers that Central Otago could be a better place for remote workers if it had better internet, particularly in the smaller towns. There is also an opportunity to support workers like Sandra through better networking and mentoring opportunities.

Sandra embraces the freedom and flexibility offered by remote work. The lifestyle of being a remote worker provides opportunities that are simply not open to people working a 9am-5pm job. Her advice to anyone who has an opportunity to make the switch to remote work: *“Just go for it.”*

Hilary Lennox



When reflecting on her shift to remote work, Hilary says that remote working chose her and it provided the opportunity to get involved in more diverse work. Hilary works as an environmental consultant for Dunedin based Ahika Consulting Ltd. Working from her home in Cromwell, her job sees her working on projects across the lower South Island.

Hilary moved to Central Otago 4 years ago to take up a position with Landpro and has been working remotely for the past 18 months. Hilary was self-employed for a time but realised that she enjoyed having a team around her and found a job working for a business that was happy to accommodate her working from home.

“When you are working in an office, the routine can be quite constraining, and you are sometimes at work when you are not in the headspace to be productive. With remote work, you can operate on your own terms, do something else when you hit the wall and not be watching the clock until 5pm.”

The flexibility remote work allows Hilary to work with several local non-profit groups such as Wastebusters Ltd and Sustainable Queenstown Charitable Trust. She enjoys not having to commute to Queenstown for work and is acutely aware of the important role sustainability plays in her work so appreciates not having to use a car every day.

Hilary sees a use for an innovation hub and thinks sharing of ideas and collaboration in a co-working space would be beneficial. This space could be particularly helpful for workers whose businesses are not based in the district. Better internet and opportunities for exposure would also be helpful to remote workers in Central Otago.

“If you had an area where there were lots of little offices and everyone had a space with their name on the window, you could create a mini high street within an area. It would do wonders for exposure.”

For many remote workers there is not enough work for them to justify leasing an office, so they end up working from their house. Hilary notes that one of the main challenges of working remotely is being organised and accountable. It can be difficult to get help with the things you don't know as you don't have the same support systems in place which you would have if you were working in office.

Hilary's advice to anyone considering remote work is to consider how you can keep an element of socialisation in your work. It is important not to isolate yourself by staying locked up at home all day because there is definite value in networking and exchanging ideas with likeminded people.

Hilary sees her current work as an avenue to grow the work of her team in the district by attracting business and building connections. There are not a lot of people doing the work she does in Central Otago and she sees a real opportunity to expand the business and take on more projects in the district.

Shannon Thomson



Shannon Thomson works as a freelance creative based in Cromwell. With a diverse skillset incorporating things like web design, photography, social media and journalism, her job sees her get involved in a broad range of projects such as the Alexandra Blossom Festival and WoolOn. She and her husband both also work as pastors in their Cromwell based church and volunteer for Red Frogs – Central Otago and Queenstown Lakes.

She made the move to Central Otago from Invercargill with her young family 5 years ago to set about establishing a Cromwell base for their church. The move also made sense at the time because she has family living in Central. Shannon has worked remotely for the past 18 months, previously working as a journalist for the Central App.

“Because my husband and I work as pastors and with Red Frogs, I can't really hold down a conventional job between November and January. Remote work allows me the flexibility to both volunteer and make an income.”

Shannon says that the variability of income from her line of work can be challenging at times, but the opportunity to work with non-profit groups provides rewarding experiences. Social isolation and motivating oneself can be difficult, particularly in the absence of the structure and collegial support provided in conventional employment.

She sees opportunities to grow the work she does and would like to grow it so she can support her family more. Shannon sees the potential to work smarter not harder, as the work she does needs to fit around her family, church and volunteering commitments. She enjoys being able to choose the projects she gets involved with and sees a chance to work with more local events.

'I think remote workers are a unique bunch who can't be put into one box. Our needs are not the same. The needs of someone doing IT work for a business will not be the same as someone being a freelance designer.'

Her advice for anyone starting out in remote work is to be disciplined and organised in what you do. It's helpful to have a dedicated space to do your work to put you in the right mindset. Remote work can be lonelier than you think so it is important to take the time to meet up with likeminded people.

Shannon thinks that better internet would make remote working easier and more attractive in Central Otago. She considers the idea of an innovation hub is a good one, but the space would need to have atmosphere to work. It would need to be more than a traditional office environment to entice people to use it. Shannon explains that she enjoys working in cafés because of their fun and vibrancy, and because she does not enjoy working in silence, the café environment is more productive for how she works.