

'INQUIRY INTO RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES' March 2006.

Response From: Hepburn Shire Council Youth Services

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Directed to: Ben Hardiman MP (Chairman)
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Level 8, 35 Spring St
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Purpose: To report to Parliament on strategies to encourage and support young people to remain in or return to their rural towns and communities

1. Factors that influence young people in deciding to remain in or leave the rural communities in which they reside

Remain

- **Community connectedness:** young people feeling connected to their local community and having a sense of positive social obligation to be involved in community life (i.e. volunteering with the CFA, committees, community festivals and events including FReeZA). Young people enjoying the tight knit small town environment – everyone knows who they are and who they are related to (if they are considered a 'local'). Young people who are cherished, actively included and valued by their local community.
- **Social opportunity:** young people who are able to maintain a happy social life, have affordable and fun things to do, a variety of groups to become a part of (i.e. youth activity groups, organised group outings, sporting, creative arts, musical or special interest such as computer gaming clubs) and a variety places to meet and gather.
- **Personal development:** young people who are able to become involved as civic leaders, play an active role in positive community change and develop their skills in the various non-tokenistic aspects of town life (local government and Youth Councils, event management including FReeZA, leadership opportunities with youth groups, Victoria Police youth and community safety projects including the Bluelight program). Young people who feel supported through difficult times ('surrogate family' links in the community, community mentors, access to services such as generalist youth counseling or Centrelink in a timely manner).

- **Family and friends:** young people who are happy living near family and around friends that have known them 'all their lives'. This also includes young people who are also parents of young children and enjoy the support they have from local extended family (i.e. baby sitting, parenting advice and help) in addition to wanting their children to grow up in a 'safe' geographic/social environment.
- **Jobs:** young people who enjoy working in family owned business such as farms (crops, dairy, cattle, wool) or family enterprise (self sufficient housing/ecotourism, laborers, IT). Young people who are starting their working life and enjoy the support of their community (retail including supermarkets, hospitality, manual labour on farms). Young people who are involved in traineeships, apprenticeships or cadetships in their 'dream career'. Young people establishing their own business under the NEIS scheme.
- **Education:** young people who are happy in their school environment (including within shire school at Daylesford Secondary College and schools outside of Hepburn Shire such as Ballarat or Maryborough schools). Young people who are able to access their desired course (at TAFE or Uni) or flexible learning opportunities (including VCAL, VET, distance education/home schooling, tailored secondary school programs and special funded programs such as Community Development subjects and Lighthouse School developments).
- **Housing:** young people who are happy living at home with low living costs and the support of parents. Young people who have been fortunate enough to have been able to establish a youth share-house (very rare) within their local community (this is becoming increasingly difficult as property prices rise and are purchased as weekender/tourist accommodation and due to the perceived negative stereotypes of young people as tenants). Young people who have independent living arrangements on their family's property (i.e. granny flat, caravan or annex).
- **Transport:** young people who are able to afford to own and maintain a car. Young people without a car that have parents or older friends willing to drive them places. Youth people who have access to public transport such as busses, trains and taxis (currently difficult for young people to access/utilise and under resourced in our region). Youth people who travel under 60kms each way between home, place of study or employment.
- **Recreational opportunities:** young people who can participate in recreational activities due to inclusive community infrastructure (skate parks & BMX facilities, safe playgrounds for young children, walking/fitness tracks including accessibility paths throughout the town (suitable for prams), sporting clubs with adequate facilities (football, soccer, cricket, netball, basketball, tennis).
- **Entertainment:** young people who enjoy the culture of their community including community events and festivals (music, food, well being), exciting events and visiting attractions within a reasonable driving distance or within their local community (tours, comedians, famous bands).
- **Too young to leave:** young people who are too young to leave home/become independent but long for social and recreational opportunities such as youth groups and youth events or 'something to do apart from walk up and down the main street'. Young people who spend significant amounts of their free time outside of the shire participating in youth activities and events because their community is lacking in youth recreational opportunities/resources. Young people who are geographically isolated from townships and live in remote or farm areas and long for contact with other young people.

Leave

- **Study:** young people who have obtained a place at a metropolitan TAFE or University and need to relocate to enable them to attend their chosen course. Young people who are unable to afford a car and due to lack of public transport need to relocate closer to their regional TAFE or University. Young people who are disconnected from school and are establishing themselves as a young independent adult. Young people who have completed school and are 'taking a break' prior to returning from study whilst establishing themselves as a young independent adult.
- **Work:** young people who are unable to find full time work in their local community and need to relocate to a metropolitan or regional city to find or keep a job. Young people who cannot afford a car and do not have public transport from their place of residence/home town. Young people already employed who are seeking further career advancement and experiences (greater variety).
- **Travel:** young people who want to 'go and see what life' is like beyond their community, either in metropolitan areas or overseas, without any set travel timelines.
- **Rite of passage/becoming independent:** young people who are seeking different challenges in life and are drawn by the variety and excitement of living in a bigger community. Young people who are seeking a new start from negative community perceptions (either due to an actual incident or negative family reputation within the community).
- **Housing:** young people who were unable to obtain a rental lease on a property in their home community (either due to rising property prices and properties purchased as weekender/tourist accommodation or due to the perceived negative stereotypes of young people as tenants).
- **Pursue relationships:** young people who are in a relationship and are keen to establish themselves as a couple (also difficult to obtain rental properties in their local community).
- **Social opportunity:** young people who are seeking choices in available entertainment and things to do (such as cinemas, live music, sporting, fitness, cultural, special interest groups, night life, availability and 'open hours' of shops, clubs, pubs, restaurants). Young people who are part of social groups/subcultures outside of their community and want to live near friends and be able to meet and gather.
- **Anonymity:** young people who feel monitored and watched by their community. Young people who are seeking personal space and privacy from the small town close knit atmosphere ('where everyone knows everything about you all the time').

2. **Factors that influence young people in deciding whether or not to return to the rural communities in which they have previously resided following the completion of study, travel or other fixed or short term activities in other places**

Return

- **Community connectedness:** young people who miss relatives, friends and the friendly inclusive atmosphere of their home town. Young people who already felt strongly connected to their community prior to their travel and have a strong sense of place and belonging in their local community.

- **Vibrant community:** young people who favourably compare their home town to their travel/other locations and still believe that their home town has all the elements that they desire in a community (such as culture, comfortable lifestyle, places to meet and gather, community events, people within their age range and friends).
- **Availability of housing:** young people who are able to obtain a rental property or affordable mortgage within their home town area. Young people who are able to join established youth share houses.
- **Job opportunities:** young people who are able to gain meaningful employment (either within their desired field as an apprentice, trainee, cadet, fully qualified personnel or with an adequate salary/full time work).
- **Exchange program ended:** young people who are too young to become independent and have returned home after school based overseas exchange programs.
- **Broke after traveling:** young people who have traveled and worked overseas or within other areas of Australia and have returned home to get on their feet again (financially) or get ready for their next adventure or life stage (including transition to work, study, family life etc).

Not return

- **Feel established:** young people who left their rural community for regional city or metropolitan life and have established themselves either professionally (obtained full time work in their chosen career) or personally (have financial commitments including setting up a home either as a rental or mortgage, relationships, becoming parents and have established new peer groups).
- **Have outgrown their community:** young people who feel as though they enjoy the faster pace of regional city or metropolitan life and the vibrancy of entertainment, culture, anonymity and acceptance of difference.
- **Not many other young people in town:** young people who feel isolated and as though they are 'the only young person in town'.
- **Access to services and infrastructure:** young people who are parents and want to live near hospitals, schools, recreation facilities such as pools and playgrounds.

3. Strategies and recommendations on steps that might be taken to increase the number of young people who decide to remain in or return to rural towns and communities

- **Social opportunity:** increase available resources and funding for youth activity programs (including Bluelight Program/Victoria Police, after school youth groups and school holiday type programs). Continue funding for youth music events (FReeZA program/Dept for Victorian Communities).
- **Transport:** availability of community busses (12 seater) for youth group activities and outings. Public transport run on a timetable that enables young people to travel for work and post-school study. Public transport that enables young people to get home from social events in evenings.
- **Affordable housing:** availability of low budget local rental accommodation for older youth (as distinct from emergency youth housing service provision). Transition mentoring for young people who are ready to leave home (workshops on how to find a rental or boarding opportunity, renting, setting up a home, conflict resolution etc).

- **Jobs:** continue traineeship and apprenticeship schemes and NEIS program. Provide industry mentoring for young people establishing their own businesses (including non-NEIS business ventures). Continue the funding of Local Learning & Employment Networks through the Victorian Learning & Employment Skills Commission. Continued funding of accessible specialist youth employment services to be delivered to rural and isolated young people within their community.
- **Flexible and accessible education opportunities:** funding to enable Neighbourhood Houses and Secondary Colleges to offer flexible and responsive education opportunities for young people according to youth interest and community synergies/partnerships (including but not limited to VCAL and VET).
- **Community connectedness:** funding to enable adult community volunteers to be trained as youth mentors and youth program volunteers. Continued focus on apprenticing young people into leadership roles within the community (civic leadership and social leadership). Continued support from Govt to enable community strengthening projects to be funded and operate (including but not limited to Community Capacity Building Initiatives and Community Building Projects/Department for Victorian Communities)
- **Service provision:** funding to enable the development and availability of childcare facilities. Funding to enable ongoing generalist youth counseling and support.
- **Community resources:** continued support of the development of youth friendly public space and venues (including sporting, educational facilities, public internet and social spaces).
- **Advocacy:** continue Regional Youth Affairs Networks as a mechanism for advocacy, communication and regional youth issue development. Continue School Focus Youth Services and Primary Care Partnerships as a mechanism for coordinating services, brokerage funding, advocacy and professional support (including service development).