

## Rural and Regional Services Development Committee – Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities

KANDO - Kinglake Action Network & Development Organisation  
(KANDO) Inc. Submission  
12 April 2006

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### Kinglake Ranges Overview

The Kinglake Ranges (inclusive of the communities of Toolangi, Castella, Glenburn, Kinglake, Middle Kinglake, Pheasant Creek, Kinglake West and Flowerdale) covers an area of approximately **1900** sqkm and is at its nearest point less than 50 km from the Melbourne CBD (less than one hours drive). A significant proportion of our population (estimated at > 6,000 people and growing) commute to the suburbs or city daily to work or to undertake post primary education (our youth attend over 20 different secondary schools).

Historically, the community has been significantly disadvantaged, with Kinglake recording the highest unemployment and youth suicide rates in the state in the early 1990's. Isolation and inadequate or non-existent public transport has always compounded our disadvantage. Drug and alcohol abuse, domestic / family violence and mental health issues have all been matters of concern particularly given the absolute absence of health and welfare services to the area. In recent years the area has seen a large growth in the number of young families.

Our fragmented youth population makes it almost impossible to sustain junior sporting teams, despite well over 500 high school aged young people living in the wider region. Tracking young people's transition to training, employment or further study is extremely difficult with many falling through the gaps. Local employment opportunities continue to be extremely limited. The dispersal of community members has a detrimental impact on community connectedness and social cohesion.

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This has been an outcome of soaring suburban real estate prices and a willingness on the part of local government to allow the subdivision of some of the best agricultural land in Victoria. One of our primary schools has tripled its enrolments over the past 6 years and the number of children under 5 has doubled in the last 3 years.

## Current and Projected Population of Young People in the Murrindindi Shire by Locality 2001 – 2021

### Murrindindi Shire - Population of Young People 2001 - 2021

Locality	2001		2006		2011		2016		2021	
	number	% age group	number	% age group	number	% age group	number	% age group	number	% age group
Alexandra Region	729	33.5	586	29.5	552	28.5	520	27.8	477	27.4
Kinglake/Flowerdale Region	765	35.2	842	42.4	856	44.1	838	44.7	799	45.8
Marysville/Buxton Region	375	17.3	229	11.5	220	11.3	215	11.5	199	11.4
Yea Region	304	14.0	329	16.6	312	16.1	300	16.0	268	15.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,173</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,986</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,940</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,873</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,743</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Localities within the Shire with the highest numbers of young people are Alexandra and Kinglake. According to the forecasting, the town of Kinglake will see the largest increase in population of young people.

***Above information & table on page 2 taken from-***

### **Murrindindi Shire Council**

### **Youth Strategy and Youth Charter**

Project Plan and Budget

March 2006

### **Project Partnerships**

Community Development, Planning and Research

Christine Nunn - Director

Julie Rawson - Associate

### 3.

Kinglake has for a long time been truly an Interface or fringe community. Portions of our community have been variously on the extreme outer edge (frontier) of the following local government authorities (prior and post 1994):

- Shire of Eltham
- Shire of Healesville
- Shire of Whittlesea
- Shire of Yea
- Shire of Broadford
- Shire of Nillumbik
- Shire of Yarra Ranges
- City of Whittlesea
- Shire of Mitchell
- Shire of Murrindindi

We have lived on the edge of the above municipalities, and we have also been dissected and fragmented by local and state government boundaries that often intersected at critical points such as town centres or along major arterial roads. Many state government authorities have also had borders that split in two natural local communities. This has more often than not resulted in Kinglake Ranges communities being consigned to the *'too hard basket'* or described to be *'in an invidious position'* in terms of integrated local area planning, resource development, service provision and community strengthening.

We find ourselves in the invidious position of being a city-facing suburban interface community supported by a rural-oriented local government based more than 90 kms to the north in **Alexandra**, on a route very few Kinglake Ranges residents would traverse during any given year.

**Kinglake Ranges recent historical data (from the 1990's and 2000's) includes:**

- Highest youth unemployment rate in the state
- Highest youth suicide rate in the state
- Highest family violence reporting in the state - 2005

This data, some horrific incidents (murders and suicides) and the acknowledged particular vulnerability of Kinglake youth (by youth focussed agencies such as Berry Street\*) were the basis for employing a specialist youth community development worker.

This vital, popular and effective service was terminated by the new Council after local government amalgamations. No Council or agency services or programs specifically for young people have since been offered to young people in the Kinglake Ranges area.

## Current Situation & Trends

Recent demographic reviews and action research undertaken by Middle Kinglake Primary School students confirmed that Kinglake Ranges has overwhelmingly the highest proportion of young people in Murrindindi Shire. Obtaining accurate data is difficult and near impossible; available data is often skewed and/or outdated and often based on a Southern / Eastern Murrindindi geographical split.

Estimates suggest there are at least 500 high school aged young people and that some of these young people travel 'off the mountain' as far as 100km each way, each day to at least 20 different Secondary Colleges, fragmenting further an already vulnerable and socially isolated population.

The inability to adequately track and support Kinglake Ranges young people (they are marginal or peripheral at every high school they attend) means many early school leavers often drop out without sufficient support from their school or their community. It would be reasonable to assume that few if any of the principals of the 20 or more secondary schools that Kinglake Ranges students attend would have ever visited Kinglake to engage parents and the wider community. It is unlikely that they know much about Kinglake Ranges education and employment transition pathway options.

The absence of a **local post-primary education** option probably does more to fragment social networks, decrease options to develop a positive place-based local identity and exacerbate the vulnerability of our young people than any other single factor.

Once young people progress relations with new peers off the mountain (whether to the north, east, south or west) and experience the higher quality of amenity on offer at other more integrated town centres, there is very little chance of them developing a strong affinity with their locality - *'Kinglake really sux big time'* is a far too common response.

The absence of industry development support, economic development planning assistance and enterprise facilitation has meant that young people see only extremely limited employment opportunities in the Kinglake Ranges.

The CRLLEN (Central Ranges Local Learning & Employment Network) reports that the southern communities of Murrindindi have gone backwards on most significant economic development indicators over the past 15 years in direct contrast to the consistent economic growth trends experienced at state and national levels.

Transition programs are non-existent and post-primary education options are extremely limited with the under-funded and under-resourced local neighbourhood houses being the only real providers of any vocational training and career advice.

## 5.

Kinglake Ranges has some of the most inadequate sporting infrastructure in the state with every sport facing serious limitations because of poor infrastructure & access by public transport. Although the quality of the facilities impacts on membership and participation rates, Kinglake junior teams continue to perform well at regional and statewide levels. The determination of young people to transcend circumstances together with the dedication of sports coaches have been significant factors in sporting successes. Keeping young athletes with potential 'on the mountain' is a serious challenge, with talented youth regularly choosing to travel to better resourced clubs.

In a similar vein, there are no Arts and Cultural Development programs or facilities to support creative Kinglake Ranges young people. Recent volunteer-led, community initiatives such as *Mountain Jammin'* and *Mountain Idol* have unearthed enormous musical and performance based potential. Resourcing those passionate about supporting the development of this potential is a major challenge.

A recent initiative by members of our community concerned about the prospects of our young people has been the development of a Kinglake Ranges Learning Communities Framework focussed on the integrated developmental needs of our youth. The model based on the work of leading Canadian Learning Communities advocate, Dr. Ron Faris, has proven to be very popular among local community groups and has informed the development of a proposed partnership MOU between KANDO and RMIT University.

### **In conclusion**

There is no shortage of Kinglake Ranges young people capable of

- reflecting on and communicating their own experiences;
- researching and reporting on the experiences and opinions of their peers;
- nominating the assets of our region that would entice them home after studying, working or travelling elsewhere;
- developing comprehensive and cost-effective solutions to the problems as they see them; and
- advocating for a fairer go for Kinglake Ranges young people, particularly in arresting youth drift to urban and regional centres.

There is an *urgent* need for a local Youth Development Project Worker to be employed to enable a coordinated approach of youth services in the Kinglake Ranges; to institute and facilitate primary prevention programs and projects to assist with the current needs and challenges. Lack of transport and connecting tracks, isolation from peer groups, absence of meeting / gathering places, and the reliance on adults with cars are all contributing factors to a situation that mitigates against the building of social capital, community connectedness, incentives to remain 'in place' and establishing potential local apprenticeship, traineeship, education and employment opportunities for our young people.

**KANDO** President, Graeme Blakey