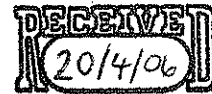


Your Ref:

Our Ref: 21/15/04
Infra Ref: 60838
Contact: Anne McLennan



13th April 2006.

Lilian Topic,
Executive Officer,
Rural and Regional Services and
Development Committee,
Level 8, 35 Spring Street,
MELBOURNE VIC 3000.

129 Mollison Street,
Kyneton, Vic. 3444

Dear Ms Topic,

Re: PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES.

PO Box 151,
Kyneton, Vic. 3444

I refer to the above inquiry and make the following comments on behalf of the Macedon Ranges Shire Council.

Factors that influence young people in deciding to remain in or leave the rural communities.

Telephone
(03) 5422 0333

On Census night 2001, there were 6,040 young people aged 12-24 years living in the Macedon Ranges Shire. Of this youth population less than 40% was made up of young people aged 18-24 years.

Rates
(03) 5422 0322

The Shire experiences a sharp post secondary school drop. With Shire young people aged 15-24 only making up 13% of the labour market young people are moving into metropolitan areas to pursue further education or employment opportunities.

Local Laws
(03) 5429 9670

The main areas of employment in the Shire for young people are manufacturing and retail. Whilst the retail sector has demonstrated slight growth, the manufacturing sector has experienced a decline in employment since 1996 with the effects of major industry closures in Kyneton in 2004 (Frews Abattoir and Kyneton Mineral Springs) yet to be documented. It is, however known both these companies were significant employers of young people.

Planning
(03) 5422 0377

Building
(03) 5422 0399

Youth jobs that have not disappeared have been casualised or made temporary or part time. The growth even in these positions has mostly been in bigger population centres, and young people have followed.

Facsimile
(03) 5422 3623

ABN
42 686 389 537

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Email: mrs@macedon-ranges.vic.gov.au
Internet: <http://www.macedon-ranges.vic.gov.au>

Young people's involvement in small business has declined, with a more complex business environment and higher start-up costs in many lines of work.

Unlike most rural shires the Macedon Ranges has no population hub or regional centre. Its nine towns are separated by distance, geography and history, while public transport beyond the radial paths to Melbourne is basically not available. So for many young people the social aspect of the city, plethora of recreational activities and better transport and social infrastructure on offer is also an important determinant in youth leaving the Shire.

Despite its relatively large population and size it has no regional or sub regional services and access to career information and transition-to-work programs that are available to other young Victorians, including job search support cannot be accessed. Training programs like apprenticeships and traineeships are difficult to get and access to TAFE programs is limited.

Other factors which influence young people in deciding to leave the Shire include;

- Temporary and permanent homelessness
- Inadequate supported accommodation services (including crisis, long and short term supported housing)
- Lack of availability, and discrimination in access to, safe, affordable and secure housing.
- Inadequate provision of affordable, reliable and safe public transport.
- Reduced access to, and lack of, adequate and relevant, education, training and work experience opportunities.
- Lack of meaningful work opportunities
- Heightened discrimination on the grounds of sexuality and sexual identity.

For those young people choosing to stay in the Shire the compounding factors as reported by young people include;

- A commitment to family
- A commitment to a family business such as is seen in traditional farming communities.
- Permanent employment.
- The 'lifestyle' a rural town can provide.

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Strategies and recommendations for increasing the number of young people who remain or return to rural towns and communities.

Significant resources are required to extend employment and educational opportunities for young people in rural communities.

The current trend of young people having to leave rural areas to find employment and education opportunities can be detrimental to the community and the young people. Young people need to have the option to remain in their communities to study and work if they so choose. Flexible models of education delivery such as online learning and video conferencing from regional areas should be funded. Support for cultural, technological and service industries and small business in rural areas will help to increase the employment options for young people.

The level of youth specific service provision should be increased in rural areas. In many rural communities crisis services for young people are non-existent, inadequate or generalist. Project models and services need to be created in consultation with local rural young people and service providers, to ensure projects are designed to meet the needs of rural young people and remain grounded in addressing practically the rural experience.

Young people in rural areas need to be able to meet and socialise in safe and supportive environments. They require appropriate recreational activities to be provided at times when they wish to access them such as in the evenings and weekends. There needs to be an equal distribution of resources so that the recreational and social needs of both boys and girls are met in rural communities.

Early intervention with children at risk in the 12-14 year old age group should be made possible through relevant and adequate education, training and work experience opportunities.

The provision of an adequate, safe, reliable and affordable public transport system is essential. Lack of transport compounds the isolation experienced by rural young people. Community transport schemes are ideal ways to provide appropriate and affordable transport options for rural young people; they can also link more isolated areas to existing public transport services such as the train.

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Based on broad ranging community consultation, including significant input from young people, Council has raised numerous priorities regarding transport need in the shire with the Department of Infrastructure.

Communities and Government have to work hard to address important contributing factors like transport, employment, education and training, accommodation and cultural opportunities.

Significant support is also required to assist Councils and business associations with the retention of local business, to foster the local economy, and to develop local strategies to include young people in these processes.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further, I can be contacted on 5427 8224

Yours sincerely



Anne McLennan
Director Community Wellbeing
Macedon Ranges Shire Council