

# INQUIRY INTO RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES

Submission by the Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning & Employment Network  
(CCLLEN) April 2006.

The CCLLEN covers the Victorian rural townships of Echuca, Kyabram, Rochester,  
Rushworth and Cohuna.

CCLLEN summary statement: Increased tertiary education opportunities, improved  
transport and accommodation facilities and enhanced community activities and initiatives  
to fully engage and value young people in the community will encourage young people to  
remain in their local community or to return to it.

## Terms of Reference:

### 1. Identifying and examining the factors that influence young people in deciding to remain in or leave the rural communities in which they reside.

The CCLLEN has identified three major areas of concern for young people when making  
the decision to stay or leave the local area. These three factors play a vital part in the  
decision making process for young people and their families.

- **Lack of tertiary education opportunities** – The only university in the CCLLEN  
area is Victoria University in Echuca which will be closing at the end of 2006.  
Students wishing to attend university must consider moving away from their  
home and family. Centres like Shepparton and Bendigo are relatively  
geographically close, however, transport timetables do not support education  
schedules and accommodation for most is unaffordable and unattractive. Students  
wishing to remain at home yet who wish to study at university are faced with  
enormous decisions about travelling daily or weekly between home and Bendigo  
or Shepparton or living in those cities.  
The range of TAFE courses is often limited because of the lack of numbers. For  
example, Echuca students have to travel to Deniliquin (NSW) in order to  
undertake an engineering course. There appears to be a need for better  
cooperation between the States to deliver popular courses.  
The limitations in university and TAFE offerings generally translates to a limited  
range of career opportunities for those young people choosing to remain in their  
home town and adds to the impetus of moving semi-permanently to a big city.
- **Limited range of career opportunities** – the size of local townships generally  
determines the number and range of employment opportunities available for  
young people. Young people who want to remain in their local town face the  
dilemma of selecting a career or job based on what is available. For example in  
Echuca there are four main industries – Agriculture/Forest/Fishing, Food

Manufacture, Retail, and Health & Community Services with the Tourism Industry also very significant. While many places are available within these industries, they are not necessarily the most attractive opportunities for students seeking careers in alternative areas. In the much smaller communities of Cohuna and Rushworth for example, the choices are significantly fewer.

- **Transport and accommodation** are also important factors to be considered by young people making the transition from high school to further study or employment. Bus services are generally limited to school travel and no other affordable form of transport is available within the towns and between towns. Taxi travel is economically unviable for the majority of young people and their families. Permanent, safe, affordable and accessible transport is needed particularly between towns. For example, young people living in Tongala who wish to work in Echuca are often thwarted by the tyranny of distance, even though the distance is approximately 20 kilometres! Young people have to organise lifts with family or friends and this is untenable as a long term arrangement or until the young person obtains a driver's licence and a vehicle. For young people to access tertiary education within a commutable range, serious consideration needs to be given to our public transport system, often the service is accessible but a lack of coordinated timetabling makes it all too difficult. An example of these comments is, there is no service available for young people to be able to be at Latrobe or BRIT by 9.00am, with times differing each day of the week.
- If the young person decides to move to another town there is also the issue of finding appropriate accommodation. There is an undersupply of safe, affordable places for young people to stay when they have to move away from home in order to work or study. For many young people the only option is to move away from their rural home to a big city so as to find meaningful employment or engage in tertiary education and at the same time enjoy comparatively affordable accommodation. While the CCLLEN acknowledges relocation to a city such as Melbourne can be a positive educational and life experience for many young people from rural Victoria, the option of remaining at home or close to home to study and settle should be available for those not ready or prepared for such a journey or for those who wish to remain in rural Victoria to build their future.

## **2. Identifying and examining the 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**

- Research tells us the Y-Generation is one which seeks connectedness with its community and places significant value in a balanced lifestyle. If a community exhibits tangible support, respect and caring for its young people then young people will be more inclined to return to that community in order to bring their skills and talents back to the area and to raise their own family within it. It is vital

therefore for communities to harness the concept of the 'village raising the child' and for local business and industries to take part in the education of young people and truly value their contribution and life-force through organisations such as LLENs, local service clubs (e.g. Rotary, Lions, Apex) and specific programs such as VET in schools and No Dole (Beacon Foundation). Forming groups for young people, run by young people, such as young professionals is also important. Through such groups young people have a voice and can have direct involvement in their community. Rural areas appreciate government funding for FReeZA events and it is activities like these which enrich the lives of young people. Having young people run Youth Councils is also a positive way to enable young people to be directly involved in decision making for their peers and their community. Rural communities must find ways to create positive memories and moments in the lives of young people and their families in order to leave a lasting impression which in turn may help to attract those young people back to their home town. The community must truly value the contribution young people make and can make in the future.

- Young people will only return if suitable business, employment and lifestyle opportunities exist for them or if they have the wherewithal and support to create those things for themselves and in turn provide opportunities for other young people. Communities have an opportunity to diversify by encouraging such growth.

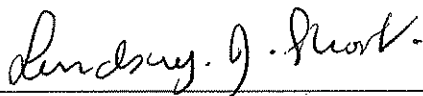
### **3. Developing strategies and recommendations on steps that might be taken to increase the number of young people who decide to remain in or return to rural towns and communities.**

- increase the number of tertiary education opportunities (more local university campuses, more TAFE courses at local campuses)
- encourage better cooperation between the States in offering popular courses
- provide more funding for local business and industry to help them attract more young people (better incentives to take on apprentices, trainees, cadets)
- continue funding for LLENs and other existing government initiatives
- continue funding FReeZA events
- improve infrastructure for transport (for example, regular and affordable bus travel within and between towns)
- launch a full enquiry into current public transport and that which is required to give young people access to tertiary education in nearby cities
- build more affordable and safe accommodation for young people (for example community hostels providing a family environment run by the local community)
- support community initiatives which enhance the experiences of young people (e.g. engaging young people in industry education, creating positive career and lifestyle experiences), making the community a vibrant and attractive place to live
- learn to communicate effectively with the Y-Generation (and future generations) researching what motivates them and how to incorporate these findings into community building.

Contributions to this submission by:

Lindsay Short, Executive Officer, Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning & Employment Network.  
Caryn Plant, Trainer, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Echuca Campus, Member of CCLLEN Board.  
Valerie McGrath, Executive Officer, Echuca Moama Beacon Foundation (A Beacon No Dole Project),  
Member of CCLLEN Board.

SIGNED:



---

Lindsay Short  
Executive Officer  
Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning & Employment Network

26.4.2006

---

Date