

CORRECTED VERSION

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities

Donald — 17 May, 2006

Members

Mr B. P. Hardman

Mr R. G. Mitchell

Mr C. Ingram

Mr P. L. Walsh

Mr J. M. McQuilten

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman

Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic

Research Officer: Dr P. Chen and Ms C. Tischler

Witness

Ms C. A. Solly, youth worker, Yarriambiack Youth Services (affirmed).

The CHAIR — Welcome, Christine. Could you give your full name and address, the name of the organisation you are representing today and your position within that organisation.

Ms SOLLY — My full name is Christine Anne Solly and my address is [ADDRESS REMOVED] Pimpinio. I am the youth worker with the Yarriambiack shire.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Christine. If you could give us your evidence for about 10 minutes or so, then we will have some time to ask questions after that. Thank you.

Ms SOLLY — Is it okay if I just do, like, just dot-points?

The CHAIR — Thank you; that would be wonderful.

Ms SOLLY — I am a farmer's daughter. Our farm is on the edge of Lake Albacutya, just north of Rainbow. I grew up in a rural community, I moved to the city and I have come back to live in a rural location. As a young person I grew up knowing that I had to leave my home town to get work, and that is a very common thing. It is still very common that young people grow up knowing that they need to leave to get a further education or to get work. There are very few that remain in their home towns because they can get work. Some of the reasons why young people remain are connections to their family and to their community. Also a lot of people remain for sport, and a lot of people who go away actually come back on weekends to play sport. People leave to gain employment.

People may stay because they like the rural lifestyle and they feel safe and connected because they know everyone and everyone knows them. Also a positive family reputation in the community can influence a young person's options and choices and make it easier for them to stay. Some young people stay because they fear change and they fear leaving their family and their community environment. A lot of young people leave because they grow up knowing that they have to leave to get education and employment. Quite often when they stay they know and they fear that their social structure will diminish when their peers actually leave for education and employment. Also they have more options of gaining more skills in employment.

There is very little industry in the country, so again they need to leave for job opportunities. Some people feel that they will not amount to anything unless they leave and have a wider experience. Young people's negative family reputations in the community can limit their options and choices. Limited transport impacts on being able to travel for work, entertainment and recreation, especially when young people do not have a drivers licence. I have known lots of young people who have missed out on apprenticeships or farm jobs because they have not got a licence to travel. Also, a lot of parents and teachers encourage young people to leave.

Some of the reasons that people take into consideration in whether to remain or leave are the availability of skilled jobs; opportunities for career advancement; availability of social infrastructure; differences in income from city and country; cost of living; access, variety and cost of consumables and goods; access to recreation and entertainment; access to a variety of sports; access to services; lifestyle choices; connections to family and community; and ability to penetrate conservative communities and older generations to make constructive changes.

Some of the things that may assist in retaining young people in the country are combining all education facilities in small rural towns to be one education centre for all age groups; instigating more creative ways to deliver post-secondary education so young people would not have to leave to further their education or to update their skills; developing more industry in rural areas and localise government services; training and supporting youth in starting and running their own small businesses; education and support for young entrepreneurs; supply of recreational water; the development and promotion of tourism industry for all country Victoria — and I am really keen on an open range zoo; business and/or industry supplying scholarships for young people to complete their tertiary education — and in return they will come back and work for that business or industry for an agreed period of time; development of more on-the-job, train-as-you-go opportunities such as apprenticeships; extension of traineeships to equal university qualifications; and creation of more opportunity for young people to take on more important roles in local communities.

The CHAIR — Again, thank you very much, Christine, for going to that effort. Do you have any ideas for training and supporting youth in starting to run their own small businesses and education support for young entrepreneurs? I am interested in how you think we could go about doing that.

Ms SOLLY — I am aware that the education department has had limited ways of doing that. I am aware that there was a position that was based in Geelong, and that person was responsible for coming out to schools all the way up to this area, over a short period of time, and running an entrepreneurial-type course with the students. The students had to come up with an idea of something to market and then sell it. I think that could be expanded on a lot. I know a lot of people who have very low educational levels who are really very successful businessmen. A lot of them have been illiterate and that type of thing, but they have been successful because they have taken the risks and built on their businesses. Probably a lot of the non-academic students may have ideas of being entrepreneurs. I think that could be explored a lot more.

Mr WALSH — In providing the education facilities to one education centre, are you talking about the likes of Warracknabeal there or the smaller towns?

Ms SOLLY — For small towns, including Warracknabeal, I could see that that would be very feasible, and I think you would end up with better facilities. Someone was mentioning before about neighbourhood houses; they have computer banks; the secondary school has a computer bank; I daresay primary schools have computer banks. If there was just one huge computer bank, I think it would be much better. Again that would create an opportunity for another position in the town where you could have a computer service person looking after all those computers.

Mr McQUILTEN — If you look at the Maryborough Education Centre, that is one model that you could be looking at. It is now being built; it is all the schools at Maryborough on one site.

Mr INGRAM — Christine, we have had it described that one of the things that keeps young people connected with their communities is the level of culture or the diversity of experiences and entertainment that is necessary for young people. I know that is very difficult for the smaller communities to provide. What do you think the level of those types of activities is like across your area?

Ms SOLLY — If young people are into sport, they are very well catered for. If they are not into sport, then there is a huge gap. In Warracknabeal in particular the gap is very noticeable. In our smaller communities a lot of the low-income earners have moved into the areas for cheaper housing, and those people are not welcomed or accepted into the communities, so they are on an outer edge. Their children, or any newcomers who have young people coming into the community, are looked down upon as soon as they arrive — without people actually knowing who or what they are. The gap I think is getting wider.

Mr INGRAM — To put it another way, most rural communities value and reward and acknowledge sporting achievement, particularly in young people. They place sporting achievement on a pedestal. Do you think across the area that you cover that similar rewards are put on artistic or other achievements or even the academic type of results?

Ms SOLLY — Yes, there is certainly a gap there. Young people are recognised in sport, but not so much for other things, for other achievements. The opportunities are not there either. We have a couple of young people who are into singing and it is very difficult for them to get tuition. They would need to go to Horsham which is 1½ hours from their home.

Mr INGRAM — How are young people and their leadership qualities embraced by council and youth services? What is the main purpose of your role? Is it to support those young people who have problems, or is it really developing leadership skills and getting them to connect with the council and other organisations?

Ms SOLLY — My role is multifunctional; I do everything. We run a Friday night program in different townships within the shire where young people can come along and participate, whether they watch videos, play music, play games or do some art and craft-type activities. They might have a barbecue, or they might have a bonfire or something like that. Each community operates differently and there are different successes and different failures in each community as well.

Mr INGRAM — Is funding for those types of programs through local government?

Ms SOLLY — Yes.

Mr INGRAM — Is it ongoing, or is it piecemeal? Is it very patchy?

Ms SOLLY — We ran that program for about four years during the school term. We started off just running during the winter months. We did not want to compete with the swimming pools being open. We decided not to run that program this year; we want to try to do holiday programs instead. It was not well attended in some of the smaller communities; figures would go up and down. You are always re-creating when you work with kids, always changing what you are doing to keep the interest levels going.

The CHAIR — Christine, thank you very much for giving us your time today, as well as your suggestions. You will receive a copy of the transcript in about two week and you may correct any errors but not matters of substance. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.