

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by LANI HOUSTON 2004 Churchill Fellow

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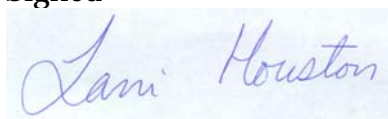
Project: Investigating the retention and attraction of youth in rural communities

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Signed



Lani Houston

Dated

24th November 2005

Contents / Index

Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Program from 12 July – 18 September 2005	5
Main Body	7
Youth Entrepreneurship	10
Engaging youth in the community & leadership development.	15
Government Programs	19
Conclusions	22
Recommendations	23
Bibliography	24

Introduction

The Churchill Fellowship allowed me to visit Canada, the United States, Mexico and Ireland over a period of 8 weeks to explore and learn what strategies that other countries have employed to combat the global issue of youth out migration. There were many wonderful learning experiences and this report is only a snap shot of what information I gathered from this wonderful opportunity.

My keen involvement with young people started as a secondary high school teacher and the enthusiasm for connecting with young people has flowed through my work experiences and into my current position as Manager for Hay Tourism & Development Inc. (a community & economic development organisation for the Hay Shire in NSW). Hay is my home town and I am one of those young people that has returned, so I have had my own personal experiences to draw upon when researching and exploring this subject. Hay is a small rural community looking to engage its young people and provide opportunities so youth are able to return.

Knowing the complex nature of this issue, I was hoping to gain a resource of strategies that could be adapted to suit the Australian environment. The base for all the strategies I viewed was 'valuing and acknowledging youth as assets in the community'.

Preparing for the fellowship and the journey itself connected me with a number of amazing people each with unique experiences and ideas in relation to this extremely important issue.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the wonderful experience that this fellowship has provided me. I would also like to thank those that assisted me in my preparation in applying for the Churchill Fellowship:-

My referees Peta Beelen, Kim Biggs and Mick Beckwith
Jim Cavaye (Cavaye Community Development)
Jeanie Hall (2003 Churchill Fellow) & Linda Duffy (2003 Churchill Fellow)
Hay Tourism & Development Inc. Management Committee
Peter Kenyon (Bank of IDEAS)
Jody Kretzmann (ABCD Institute)
Barbara Oates (Community Foundation of Canada)

There were many people who assisted me on my journey and unfortunately there is not enough room to list them all but I do thank you. I would particularly like to thank the following people for their extra time and support:-

Tara Stang, The Muttart foundation
Bliss Browne, Imagine Chicago
Robert Francis and the wonderful team at RYASAP
Arlington Bourne & Pearl Gabel, Intel Computer Clubhouse
Kim Whalen, Gwendolyn Hughes, Valerie Bellavance and the whole team at the Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF), especially for the use of their office as a base.
Isabelle Parrod, Place aux Jeunes
Raymond Gallant & Paulianne Howe, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
Caroline Breakey, Youth Action Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

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Project: “Investigating the opportunities to retain and attract youth in regional communities”.

The migration of youth from rural communities is an issue for many Australian communities and many rural communities world wide. The long term future of many communities is dependent on young people either staying or coming back to small rural communities.

The focus for rural communities should be in developing and building on strategies to bring young people back to rural communities.

After the Churchill trip I believe the critical factors are:

- Creating employment or an entrepreneurial culture where businesses can be generated.
- Creating a connection with young people and the community – ‘sense of place or belonging’.
- Ensuring youth feel valued and that they have the opportunity to assist in the decision making processes about issues that affect their lives in their community
- Flexible and creative training opportunities in institutions such as TAFE & schools

Some suggested strategies to implement in Australia include:-

- Youth Entrepreneurship Courses – engaging young people during school and post secondary forms of education.
- Engaging youth actively in community & economic development activities.
- Internships & University projects connecting youth to business/community development.
- Bringing youth back and keeping a link with those that have moved away for study or work through websites, newsletter and weekend visits. Promoting business & employment opportunities and community activities.

By employing the above strategies you also provide opportunities and engage youth that stay within your community. At the core of all the organizations and people that I visited regardless of the strategies they employed was the recognition of the real value that young people can add to the community. There was also a deep appreciation and understanding for youth and youth issues. Many of the youth organizations had young people employed so they were actively supporting a youth culture. ‘Walking the talk’ so to speak.

Program from 12 July – 18 September 2005

Churchill Program	Canada	Contact	Organisation
12-Jul	Sydney-Vancouver		
12-Jul	Vancouver, Canada	Barbara Oates	Community Foundations of Canada
13-Jul	Vancouver, Canada	Mark Gifford	Vancouver Foundation
14-Jul	Vancouver, Canada	Amrik Randhawa	Surrey Foundation
15-Jul	Calgary, Canada	Laurie Page	Board of Arrow & Slovan Lakes Community Services
18-Jul	Calgary, Canada	Tara Stang	The Muttart Foundation
21-Jul	Chicago, IL USA	Jody Kretzmann	ABCD Institute
		Sarah Dobrowolski	ABCD Institute
		Bliss Browne	Imagine Chicago
25-Jul	Chicago, IL USA	Raul Botello	Albany Park Neighborhood Council
		Melissa Spatz	Women's & Girls Leadership Project
		Mariame Kaba	Steans Family Foundation / Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team
26-Jan	Chicago, IL USA	Jennifer Tani	Chinese Mutual Aid Association
		Alex Poeter	Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
27-Jul	Cancun, Mexico		
28-Jul	Merida, Mexico	Irene Cavich Chavez	Universidad Autonoma de Yucatan
		Myriam Mejia	Universidad de Mayab
30 Jul - 9 Aug - Cuba on holiday			
7-Jul	Cancun, Mexico	Gaetano Prontera	Inter Action Team
10-Aug 10-Aug	Durham, NC USA	Anna Koltchagova	NC REAL Enterprises- RREM Course
		Eleanor Herndon	NC REAL -Buildings Entrepreneurial Skills Workshop Modules outline
11-Aug	Durham ,NC USA	Dean Kanipe	Rapid Response Entrepreneurship Modules Workshop
12-Aug	Durham ,NC USA	Jeff Stern	Laboratories for Learning
		Rachel Tompkins	Rural School & Community Trust
		Doris Williams	
16-Aug	Durham, NC USA	Shirley Robinson	NC Rural Center
18-Aug	Bridgeport, CT USA	Robert Francis	RYASAP-Catalyst for Communtiy Change

		Jan Laster	RYASAP- Prevention Partnership
		Paige M Nelson	RYASAP-Youth Development
		Abby Anderson	CT Juvenile Justice Alliance
		Ted Littlejohn	FSW-Youth Business Center
22-Aug	New York, USA	Stephen Lehtonen	Youth Venture
		Paula	City Lights Youth Theatre
23-Aug	New York, USA	Laura Cole	National Foundation for teaching Entrepreneurship
		Victor Salama	National Foundation for teaching Entrepreneurship
		Kathleen Recigna	Youth Life Skills Cornell Cooperative
		Carmen Castro	Grace House Youth Ministry Centre
		Arlington Bourne	Frederick Douglas Childrens Centre
		Pearl Gabel	Intel Computer Clubhouse
24-Aug	Toronto, Canada	Mahsa Taheri	Canadian Youth Business Foundation
25-Aug	Toronto, Canada	Kim Whalen	Canadian Youth Business Foundation
		Laura Austen	Video Artist and Jockey
		Len Fragomeni	Toronto Institute of Bartending
26-Aug	Toronto, Canada	Kim Whalen	Miziwebiik Aboriginal College Course
		Gwendolyn Hughes	Canadian Youth Business Foundation
29-Aug	Toronto, Canada	Kenn Ross	Miziwebiik Aboriginal College
		David Vince	Two Rivers Community Development Centre
		Deanna Dunham	Pallas Communications
1-Sep	Ottawa, Canada	Medin Admasu	Community Foundations of Ottawa
2-Sep	Montreal, Canada	Iris Unger	Youth Employment Services
		Anja Vroomen	Youth Employment Services
		Valerie Bellavance	Canadian Youth Business Foundation
		Isabelle Parrod	Place aux Jeunes
6-Sep	Fredericton NB, Canada	Paulianne Howe	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
		Richard Leblanc	Enterprise Network
		Jeanetta Hill	ACOA- SEED Project
		Heather Chase	EN Labour Force Development
		Robert Bowles	Southwest Valley Development
7-Sep	Fredericton NB, Canada	Sue Rickard	Neighborhood Alliance of North York
8-Sep	Dublin, Ireland	Ashling Nicantsiphigh	Enterprise Ireland
13-Sep	Galway, Ireland	Raymond Fogarty	Junior Achievement Ireland
15-Sep	Belfast, Northern Ireland	Caroline Breakey	Youth Action Northern Ireland

Main Body

Youth in the context of this project, included those aged between 16-30yrs of age. Research and personal observation had shown that the following were certainly factors in the retention or attraction of youth in rural communities in Australia.

- Employment opportunities
- The provision of training/post secondary education.
- Leadership skills
- Engaging youth in the community
- Youth feel valued & have a connection with their community – ‘sense of place’
- A proactive & vibrant community
- There are activities for young people to do.

The countries and organisations that I visited reaffirmed that there were similar factors world wide, causing the retention or attraction of young people. The solutions or methods of addressing the problem varied. The critical factor was that youth needed to be valued within their community and the community needed to be galvanised into doing something about the problem. It is interesting to hear some people’s perception of youth and how the youth of today are different. The quote below shows how perhaps young people haven’t really changed just as people get older their perceptions change.

‘Our youth of today now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect for older people. Children now days are tyrants, they no longer rise when elders enter the room, they contradict their parents, they chatter before company, gobble their food and tyrannise their teachers. They have execrable manners, flout authority, have no respect for their elders. What kind of awful creatures will they be when they grow up.’
Socrates (500BC)

The project had essentially two components, investigating methods of:-

- Retaining youth
- Attracting youth

Some youth in regional communities do decide to stay in their own community. For some it may be a choice as they wish to be close to family, for others it may be due to circumstances such as no financial backing or family support to move. For these young people the issue is providing training and employment within their community. Often in situations like this the youth may have finished school at an earlier age so they need additional training to build their skills and often confidence. The self esteem for some of these youth may also be low and they may not feel connected with the community so the issue is also connecting these youth with the community, making them feel valued. Interestingly some research done by Youth Action Northern Ireland on youth in the rural areas of Northern Ireland reveals a similar situation occurring there. ‘Many of the activities of rural communities tend to be centred around either children (for example, playgroups and summer schemes) or old people (eg bingo and old folks dances). For young people, it appears, in the majority of cases, that there is “nothing to get involved in”. Apart from a perceived lack of activities and structures that might enable young people to contribute to their community, there are also other barriers that prevent young people from becoming involved. In many rural communities age bestows legitimacy, expertise and identifies a

person as having something to contribute. Young people identify various barriers preventing their participation and, therefore, their potential contribution’:

“It’s hard to contribute sometimes. Adults don’t give the space to talk. We don’t get the chance” (Laura, aged 17).¹

The nature of youth and young people is that they like to explore and take adventures so many youth will venture to other towns, cities, states or overseas. This may be for training, University, employment or simply a journey of discovery. The movement of young people away from a community is inevitable although some communities still say ‘we need to stop our young people from leaving’. The desire to gain further knowledge and explore new territories should be encouraged in our youth, if that is their goal.

The challenge however is attracting these young people back to a rural community. It doesn’t necessarily have to be the same rural community either. Being close to family for many young people can be an advantage but for some it can have negative implications or memories. In my opinion as long as young people are returning to rural communities with a new range of skills and experiences it will be beneficial for all rural communities.

The idea of focusing more on bringing young people back to their community was supported in all the countries I visited. Experience gained by the Canadian organisation Place aux Jeune du Quebec (PAJQ) supports this type of thinking as well and they capture the rationale well:

*‘The exaggerated use of the term exodus (which denotes a sudden, massive and irreversible departure) can seem limiting and even paralysing for the communities affected, and prevents community leaders from realizing that migration is an inherent part of the passage to adulthood for close to half of all young people, and that departure does not necessarily imply a complete rejection of their home region. In this sense, rural communities should perhaps focus less on how to keep young people from leaving and work harder at finding ways to maintain links with them, with a view to their subsequent return, and at attracting young people who are originally from urban areas and other regions’.*²

The idea of promoting the opportunities in rural communities to urban youth and youth from other regions is certainly a positive and proactive approach to the issue.

During the preparation and research for the trip I chose the following strategies to explore further:-

- Youth Entrepreneurship
- Engaging youth in the community so they feel a valuable part of the community
- Leadership skills
- Government programs

Youth Entrepreneurship – The theory behind developing a youth entrepreneurship culture is that young people can start their own business as a means of creating employment. This also has the double advantage for a rural community as the young

¹ ‘A sense of belonging-Young people in rural areas of Northern Ireland speak about their needs, hopes and aspirations’. Youth Action Northern Ireland.

² Place aux jeunes: A solution to the rural exodus

person may also be providing a service that is not available in the community. As attracting skilled labour is an issue for some rural communities.

Engaging youth in the community & leadership – If youth feel valued and connected with the community, they are much more likely to stay or return. If youth have the confidence and skills they will be more likely to become active leaders in their community.

Government Programs- investigate what government programmes have been developed to assist the retention or attraction of youth in rural communities and how they were implemented.

A number of these strategies overlap and provide benefits in a combination of ways.

Youth Entrepreneurship

The culture surrounding youth entrepreneurship in the USA, Canada and Ireland I found was much stronger than in Australia. The idea that young people could start their own business as a means for employment is quite a common thought in these countries and there are many programs to encourage entrepreneurial thinking and experiential learning in this area.

In Australia I believe the word entrepreneur is often more associated with large business tycoons, not necessarily the everyday person having the capacity to become an 'entrepreneur'. I was also introduced to a new term 'intrepreneur', "you are entrepreneurial about yourself, your interactions as a person, thinking outside the box. You may not own a business, but are employed, still taking risks, being independent, own your own house, property, passionate and motivated" as stated by Laura Cole, National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Some people may argue that "entrepreneurship is an innate quality that cannot be learned or taught". There are many organisations that I visited overseas that would strongly challenge this theory and I agree. The skills learned through an entrepreneurial course build confidence and provide people with tools and opportunities that they may never have realised on their own. I think all people should have the opportunity and believe in the hope that they can be entrepreneurs. For some that may only be in regard to their own life but that in itself will add value to our rural communities.

Strategies for teaching Entrepreneurship.

The following organisations I visited to learn more about teaching entrepreneurship:-

National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, New York USA

The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is a non profit organisation whose mission is to 'teach entrepreneurship education to low-income young people, ages 11 through 18, so they can become economically productive members of society by improving their academic, business, technology, and life skills'.³

The program stemmed from a drop out prevention program where students were not connected to the community and the education system was not relevant to these youth. The program was experiential and started by talking about subjects that the youth new about, such as money or more particularly the lack of money. Conversation started around the issue of money and this was the motivation. Then students spoke about what their interests were eg hair braiding, sport etc. This process built the students self esteem, self awareness and gave them life skills. Then financial elements were introduced with regard to business and how you could make a living/business out of your interests. Youth were then able to take control or ownership of their lives. Many of their parents were not owners so this broke these young people out of the dependent circle and enabled them to take risks.

The programs and products created by NFTE have expanded over the years and now their programs are implemented in a number of countries such as El Salvadore, China, India and New Zealand. The base theme of all their products is to emphasise the connection between learning, the real world and the importance of being financially independent.

³ www.nfte.com

NFTE have a text book 'How to start & operate a Small Business: A Guide for the Young Entrepreneur that is a flexible 80-160 hour one or two semester high school course in entrepreneurship and basic business principles. The text is flexible so the course can be broken up into segments from basic to advanced.⁴ There is also a Teachers Edition which includes comprehensive teaching and assessment suggestions. The modules correlate with NFTE's online learning program, BizTech.⁵

NFTE believe that by students learning how to start and run their own business they will make better employees. So even if students do not actually start their own business they will still become financially independent and achieve personal satisfaction.

Junior Achievement Ireland: developing young enterprise

The aim of Junior Achievement (JA) Ireland is to 'inspire and motivate young people to realise their potential by valuing education, developing self worth and understanding the role of business in the community'. Junior Achievement was established nearly 100 years ago in the USA. There are 114 countries around the world with their own JA operation. JA Ireland started in 1995-1996 school year. ⁶

Junior Achievement essentially provides high quality enterprise programmes for young people aged 5-18 years. Business volunteers are provided by leading Irish companies to teach enterprise or entrepreneurial skills in schools. The business volunteers and teacher are invited to a half day training seminar before they commence the program. This gives the business volunteer and teacher a chance to meet to discuss the class and some tips on classroom management and teaching techniques. During the training both teacher and business volunteer are made familiar with the modules of the programme. Some businesses utilise this as a form of professional development for their staff. Often it is younger staff members that participate as the business volunteers. These businesses also sponsor the program financially and schools select which program they would like to participate in. The program provides students with a clear connection between class room studies and the workplace and provides valuable relationships with businesses that they may be able to work with in the future.

The program is essentially aimed at disadvantaged schools in the city but they do promote the program in rural areas. In rural areas it is a little more difficult to find the businesses with the finances and resources to support the program.

North Carolina REAL Enterprises, USA

North Carolina REAL⁷ Enterprises is a not-for-profit organization that works in partnership with schools, community colleges and community organizations to foster entrepreneurial knowledge and skills and small business development. NC REAL places

⁴ 'How to Start & Operate a Small Business: A guide for the Young Entrepreneur'.
10th Edition by Steve Mariotti with Tony Towle

⁵ <http://biztech.nfte.com>

⁶ www.juniorachievement.ie

⁷ Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning

special emphasis on working with low wealth, minority and rural communities. The REAL program is offered to youth and adults through a Community College (similar to what would be a TAFE in Australia) as a curriculum course or as a continuing education course through a Small Business Centre network. This would be similar to a Business Enterprise Centre in Australia.

The theory behind the learning and teaching for REAL was to provide students with the opportunity to actually experience the entrepreneurial process, not just study it abstractly. REAL understand the experiential learning cycle to be a 4-part process Experience, Reflection, Expansion and Application. All REAL curricula are designed to provide direction and materials which⁸:-

- 1) Teach sound business principles and practices
- 2) Support experiential learning
- 3) Reflect the needs and nature of the community in which they are offered

During my visit to North Carolina I participated in the REAL Entrepreneurship: Rapid Response Entrepreneurship Module course. This course gave an overview of a set of modules developed to support the REAL Entrepreneur Course. The Rapid Response modules suited people who were perhaps already in business and only needed assistance with specific topics eg marketing. The Rapid Response modules enables institutions a more flexible delivery of the course to students. It was found in many rural communities that people would not enroll in any full time courses. The distance was too far to travel on a regular basis or they couldn't afford the time. ⁹

Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF)

Founded in 1996 CYBF was created to address underemployment and unemployment concerns amongst the youth in Canada. CYBF is modelled after the Prince's Trust program in the UK and is an accredited member of Youth Business International. There is an Australian organisation ENYA-Enterprise Network for Young Australians working with CYBF.¹⁰

The Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF) is a vibrant energetic organisation that oozes the youth impulse. Many of the staff are young (late twenties and thirties) and well connected with young people. The Canadian Youth Business Foundation is a national organisation that 'empowers aspiring young Canadian entrepreneurs, age 18-34, to start up their own business'. ¹¹ This organisation is slightly different with regard to previous organisations I have discussed in regard to Entrepreneurship teaching strategies. CYBF has 3 core services: start-up financing, mentoring & learning resources. CYBF delivers its services across Canada by partnering with volunteer community organisations. CYBF uses these community organisations to promote their programs and identify young people with a business proposal. So in this case young people usually have a business idea in mind. To

⁸ REAL Enterprise: Rapid Response Entrepreneurship Modules

⁹ In the state of North Carolina it was a state goal to try and ensure that no-one was more than an 1 hours travel from a community education facility ie TAFE. The reasoning was that all people should have the opportunity to access an educational institutional centre to ensure ongoing learning. This has almost been achieved, there are many community education centres. I thought that was a great state initiative.

¹⁰ www.enya.org.au or Ph: 02 8765 4151

¹¹ www.cybf.ca

gain funding these young entrepreneurs need to have a complete and viable business plan, but CYBF have the resources to assist with the development of the plan or can refer youth to other appropriate organisations. Business loans can be provided up to \$15,000 and repayments can be over 3 or 5 years. An agreement of the loan is that the young person must work with a business mentor for the duration of the loan. CYBF matches qualified business mentors with the young entrepreneurs giving them practical hands on skills and knowledge. The experience of the Prince's Youth Business Trust in the UK is that mentors help young entrepreneurs succeed. 'Before a mentor program, the success rate for young entrepreneurs business supported by the organisation was only 40%. Three years after the mentor program the success rate of businesses climbed to 75%'.¹²

Naturally a barrier for many young people when looking to start up a business is capital and many do not have assets which they can borrow against with a bank. Funding options for youth business start-ups will be discussed in the Government programs section as well.



L to R : Katrina White (CYBF), Lani Houston and Gwendolyn Hughes (CYBF) in the CYBF Head Office in Toronto, Canada.

Youth Entrepreneurship Program (YEP Canada)

This was a government funded program for youth at risk. Youth had to apply for the program and they had to have a business idea. Approximately 100 young people applied. A further 45 were selected for an assessment process where students had 4 days of classes discussing starting a business, job search skills and life skills. From this group 15-20 were accepted. The program ran over 1 year, students were given an allowance of \$250 a week for the year. During this time they attended classes to learn how to write a business plan and they were also given a business mentor. The first 18 weeks were spent writing the business plan and then the remaining time was spent establishing their business and implementing their business plan. Essentially they were learning entrepreneurial skills.

A discussion with the teacher for this program revealed that not only did youth have to deal with the pressures of starting a business, but for many they had to overcome personal hardships and barriers. Self esteem and confidence was low so this had to be built. A

¹² www.cybf.com

number who started to progress really well with their business objectives would ‘self sabotage’ because they were not used to achieving success and this overwhelmed them.

Volunteers were often used from the community to assist with delivering certain components of the program.

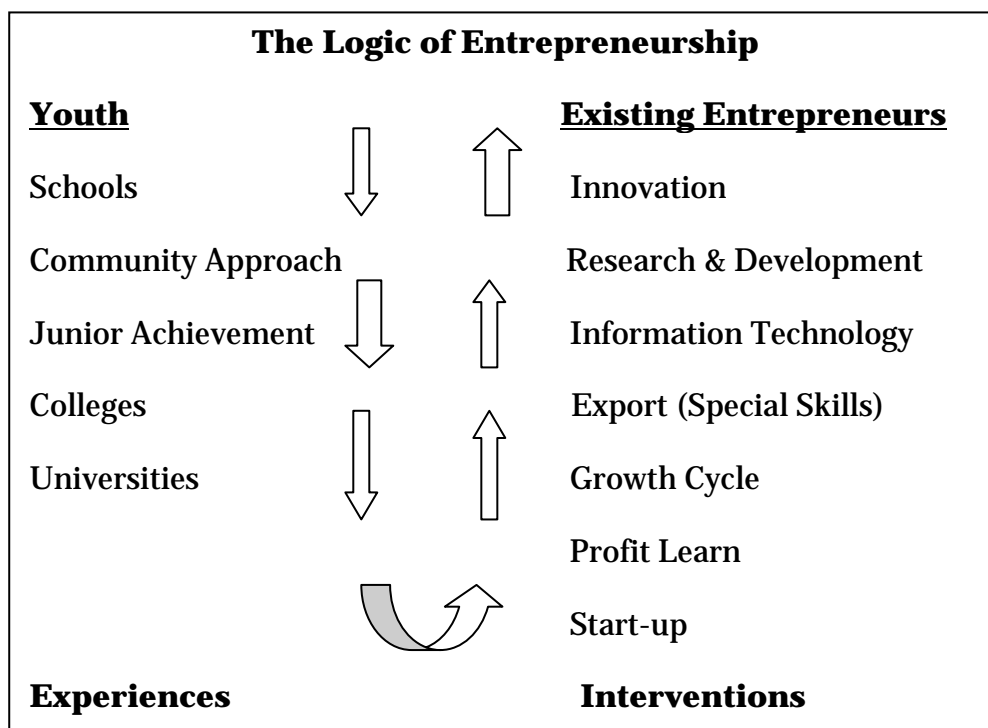
I was also very fortunate to have interviews with two young people who participated in a program similar to this, both now with successful businesses. Both had also received start up funding for their business through the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. When asked ‘what were the critical factors for success in the entrepreneurship program’, the following were mentioned:

- Learning how to write a business plan, this gave confidence that the business could work and gave a plan/steps for setting up the business.
- Important to have a supportive and understanding teacher. A person who can be ‘responsive to the class needs’.
- Flexibility & variety in the method of learning eg guest speakers/motivational speakers (business people who have been there), hand outs & interactive sessions.
- Supportive and appropriate mentor –match the student with a mentor in the area of their business that they were least confident or knowledgeable with. In some situations this had ongoing benefits for both mentors and the students business if the match was suitable.

Both also indicated that the start-up funding was also critical as neither had equity to obtain a loan from the bank. It gave them the head start, even though it was only a small amount of funds.

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agencies New Brunswick

The ACOA New Brunswick approach to ‘creating a more entrepreneurial culture’ is outlined in the diagram below¹³



¹³ ‘Creating a More Entrepreneurial Culture’- The ACOA New Brunswick Approach

This model also fosters the idea of partners. Schools working with colleges, universities, agencies, business and government.

Lessons learnt from the Youth Entrepreneurship programs:

The earlier entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills are taught the better. Creating an entrepreneurial culture can only be helpful as it builds young peoples confidence and life skills as well as connecting them with the business world. The integration of this type of program within schools from Infant/Primary and continuing through to secondary school is something that should be further developed in Australia.

Flexible modules and tools, teaching entrepreneurship are critical. There are many Entrepreneurship courses available it's important to adapt a model that is relevant for the Australian rural situation. Involving local businesses where possible is also important to add value to the course. Experiential learning is critical so students really have hands on experiences in implementing strategies.

The availability of start up funding for young people in business supported by a mentoring or entrepreneurship type program would also be very helpful especially in rural communities as distance and access to this type of resource is limited.

Engaging youth in the community & leadership development.

'Younger people need more opportunities to create and implement their own ways of increasing the community's options, viability and quality of life'.¹⁴

I interviewed a number of people who were involved with engaging youth from various levels in the community. Some were from foundations or organisations that funded youth projects, some were community members who were involved with local youth councils and some were individuals interested in helping youth.

A summary of the critical factors for engaging youth from my interviews are as follows:-

- Youth require adult support, but the adults must listen, provide guidance and support
- Activities must be fun & creative
- Arts & theatre are great mediums to engage youth
- Activities must have relevance and meaning for youth
- Youth Councils should have rotating board positions or perhaps buddy/mentor system with positions
- Increasing intergenerational communication is critical to engagement in the community.

¹⁴ Rural Women's Advisory Group (2001)
The Success Factors Managing Change in Regional & Rural Australia

The following are some of the organisations that I visited where youth were engaged and valued:-

The Muttart Foundation

The foundation has a 'Youth granting for Youth' program. This program involves a group of young people from 12-18 years of age who are given the challenge of granting funds to youth projects. The youth panel award up to \$5,000 per application. ¹⁵ This organisation is a wonderful demonstration of a funder that truly believes in youth, as they give youth the power to make decisions about issues that have meaning. Who better to determine what projects will be beneficial to youth in the community than young people!

Imagine Chicago

Imagine Chicago was a project that was developing a process for looking at the community, engaging youth and alleviating the intergenerational gap. Youth were asked to be involved and then youth selected and interviewed community representatives from all types of communities, business, government and agencies in Chicago. Youth developed questions around the topic of; "How do you see the future of Chicago?". ¹⁶

Bliss Browne the instigator of Imagine Chicago had some amazing theories about the methods of involving youth and also engaging a community.

"Keep terminology & thinking to basic principles" Bliss Browne, Imagine Chicago.

A critical factor in community development is not knowing all the answers but asking the right questions. The youth were asked to think about a real question, a question that you wished someone had asked you. The following questions were some of questions that were asked to the selected community, business and agency adults by young people:-

- What are the important aspects of civic pride?
- Describe a learning experience that had a long lasting affect on your life?
- Discuss or think of a situation where you learned something important from someone older or younger than yourself.
- What environment/place/institution has been where the most important learning has occurred for you?

My discussion with Bliss Browne and the Imagine Chicago project certainly opened my mind to new thinking and ways of creating connections between younger and older people. There was also some important learning for developing community spirit.

¹⁵ www.muttart.org

¹⁶ www.imaginechicago.org

Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Chicago USA

I was extremely fortunate to be able to sit in on a school holiday program coordinated by the Chinese Mutual Aid Association¹⁷. This school holiday program for students of 14 & 15yrs was sponsored by the city and the students were charged with the responsibility of assisting with a current community issue, gentrification. In Chicago there was a plan in place to relocate people currently in housing in the inner city and demolish the housing to build new condominiums. The new condominiums would be unfordable for these families and the only other option was to move to the outer city limits. Many of the students and their families were directly affected by this issue. Students were paid a minimal wage to assist the local Council/government with this community issue. Many of these young people were from low socio economic backgrounds and their parents were immigrants. The school program worked on self esteem, communication skills, media, journalism and looked at many issues that young people experience in an inner city environment eg drugs abuse, violence, racism, sexism etc. The students had been involved in the program for about six weeks and in the session I observed were extremely confident and articulate with expressing their thoughts and opinions. The teacher mentioned that in the beginning they were much less confident but over the period of the program they had really developed and gained confidence. A true testament to what can happen when youth are valued and supported.

Intel Computer Clubhouse, New York USA

This wonderful organisation was part of the Frederick Douglas Children's Centre which focused on children. The centre is open from Monday – Friday from 1pm-8pm and has a Youth Officer who coordinates the activities with the youth. The Clubhouse has a gym, outdoor recreation area (including basketball court), recording studio and computers with a range of programs and games. Various activities were taught such as photography, film making, IT and painting etc. ¹⁸ During my visit the youth were very excited about showing me a short video they had filmed and produced about 'life in the neighbourhood for a young person'. The youth were also the stars in the video as well. The quality and thought that had gone into the production was incredible. This was one of my most memorable moments with this group of young people.

¹⁷ www.chinesemutualaid.org

¹⁸ www.village.computerclubhouse.org



Hanging out with young people at the Intel Computer Club House

The Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development in Canada researched and identified 5 elements that need to be in place for youth to participate fully in community development¹⁹:-

- Meaningful contribution (taking action to meet a genuine need)
- Peer team support (creating an atmosphere fostering a strong team)
- Youth/Adult partnerships (gaining inspiration, support and guidance through a relationship of mutual caring and respect)
- Adventurous learning (engaging individuals through life experiences, encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone) and
- Empowering culture (providing opportunities to initiate, commit, plan and choose paths to work together with peers and the community as active citizens)

‘Youth who are involved in their communities will feel better respected and develop stronger ties within the community, making it more likely that they will stay as adults’.²⁰

Youth Action Northern Ireland

This organisation funded through the European Union and the Department of Education had many programs and levels that it assists youth within Northern Ireland. They also have a major focus on assisting youth in rural communities. Two courses that I was particularly interested in were the ‘Principles and Practice of work with rural young people’ training program. This course is designed to ‘build the capacity of those committed to working with rural young people in order to develop and support work in local communities’²¹. The course using theoretical and practical training sessions covers Rural Development and Youth Service Policy, Community development theory and practice and gives practical resources & materials for working with rural young people.

The other program is the Community Leadership Programme for Young People aged 18-25. This program was a competency based training package so in addition to being an employment qualification in its own right, the program award is recognised by a number of Universities as an entrance qualification into Community Youth Work or Social Work.²²

¹⁹ www.heartwood.ns.ca

²⁰ Canadian Rural Partnership- ‘Our Communities Our Success’ Spring 2005 Newsletter

²¹ www.youthaction.org

²² YouthAction Northern Ireland – Leadership in Action an evaluation by Rodney Green

University of Yucatan, Mexico

This University had an amazing program that involved students across a wide curriculum base including Psychology, Education, Architecture, Accountancy, Business Administration, Economics etc. Students spent 6 months in a rural community working with the community to determine their needs and then implementing strategies to overcome these. Activities started with basic infrastructure such as schools, clean water supplies to assisting with micro businesses associated with local products.

Lessons learnt from engaging youth in the community & leadership development.

Visiting the various organisations on my journey reinforced the importance of engaging youth within the community, especially in the decision making process. This is particularly important for those in community and economic development roles in rural communities. There are often organisations that support youth with regard to organising entertainment and activities for youth to do (which is important), but often youth input is neglected in more 'solid core' activities. Youth should be viewed as valuable assets that can contribute ideas, thoughts and solutions to many issues that affect the community and their own lives.

Certainly when engaging youth activities have to be fun but also have meaning. In this engagement process it is important to create and build youth and adult relationships.

The other great lesson is that in dealing with issues such as drug abuse, violence, crime, poverty and school drop outs a proactive collaborative approach is required involving community, agencies, state and federal departments. This is a real lesson for Australia where state and federal departments still appear to work in isolation, rather than perhaps looking at the desired outcome and working together to develop strategies.

Government Programs

Whilst on my fellowship I was able to explore a number of government funded programs. I was particularly impressed with the finances and resources committed to supporting youth in both Canada and Northern Ireland. I'm sure there are government programs in the other countries but I had chosen Canada & Ireland to explore this area. This was mainly due to the timing of my Churchill. Many countries in the Northern hemisphere take their summer holidays in July/August so many people particularly in government offices were out of the office.

The Canadian culture and the issues with regard to distance and its rural base I found very similar to Australia. There are many strategies that could be easily adapted for Australia.

RYASAP (Regional Youth/Adult Substance Abuse Project)- C.T. USA

RYASAP is a youth and community development organisation based in Bridgeport, Connecticut USA. The organisation's mission "is to build healthier and safer communities free of harm caused by substance abuse, and related crime and violence." The organisation uses an asset-based community development (Asset Based Community Development

Institute at North Western University) approach developed by Jody Kretzman and John McKnight.²³

The organisation bases its programs on research. RYASAP survey youth every 3 years. During this process they measure young people's risky behaviours such as substance abuse, crime, depression, & truancy but they also survey youth's developmental assets such as family connection, connection to school, family boundaries, motivation to succeed, values, civic participation, connection to community and how the community is utilising young people as resources. The outcomes from this research are then the basis for a program or community strategy using the assets approach. The RYASAP program receives some government funding, foundation and private funds for the delivery of programs. Robert Francis Executive Director for RYASAP and his fantastic team deliver a range of programs. One of these is the **Safe Neighborhoods AmeriCorps Partnership**. Young people become involved in projects that assist the community. For example safety for older people living alone, so providing security. Placing locks on doors, fixing windows etc. Young people are taught the appropriate skills to enable them to assist with the required tasks.

Another program is the **Public Allies Connecticut** program where youth aged 18-30 yrs are placed with a Senior level staff person (\$30,000 per person) for a 10 month period similar to an apprentice program. The program is a partnership of corporate, government & agency funding.²⁴

Place aux Jeunes (PAJ)

Place aux Jeunes (PAJ), Quebec was created 15 years ago to 'counter the exodus of Quebec youth by facilitating their return and their occupational and social reintegration in their home regions'. Essentially bringing youth back and keeping a link with those that have moved away for study or work. The program initially targeted the 18-35 age group and now also targets teenagers 14 to 17 years of age to make the population in general aware of migration from and the potential of the regions. Firstly the organisation creates a local committee & mobilizes local people & youth in the community. The organisation hosts a website with up to date information on the regions, jobs etc. and this can be utilised by the community. Youth that have gone away to University/College are encouraged to become members and they are emailed a newsletter with information about what is happening in the region and their community. Students are also invited back for a weekend to meet with business and see what's available in the community. In some situations student placements are negotiated with Universities and colleges.²⁵

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)

ACOA is a government organisation that assists Atlantic Canadians (Eastern Canada) acquire skills to prosper and they have a substantial range of funding programs. The main focus is to ensure entrepreneurs throughout Atlantic Canada have equal access to information and capital they need to make business succeed.²⁶

²³ www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd

²⁴ www.puublicallies.org/connecticut

²⁵ www.placeauxjeunes.qc.ca

²⁶ www.acoa.ca

ACOA have a 'Seed Capital program' that provides loans of up to \$20,000 for small business. This is usually administered through local non profit community organisations in the various provinces.²⁷ Applicants must be 18 or older. Applicants under 35 may invest the loan in the start-up, expansion or modernization of a business whereas applicants over 35 can only use the loan to start up a business. Applicants must provide a business plan and present to a Committee. The Committee comprises of people within business with a sound business record.

²⁷ I met with Robert Bowles from the Southwest Valley Development who administers this program for ACOA in New Brunswick Canada

Conclusions

In conclusion there are two strategies that are consistently pursued with regard to encouraging youth to return to rural communities. The first is that you must provide employment opportunities. Many communities do have employment opportunities so it's important to stay connected with youth that move away and inform them of the job opportunities available in their own or other rural communities. For example through a website or newsletter. Employment can also be achieved by building the skills of young people so they can start their own business, that is encouraging an entrepreneurial culture. The culture of entrepreneurial thinking should be nurtured in children from an early age. The learning must be in an experiential way and have relevance to the young people. Start-up funding is also important for young people as they rarely have assets that they can borrow against through normal lending mechanisms. A start-up fund or loan combined with entrepreneurial training would be extremely beneficial. Support through funding programs that are administered in partnership with community organisations appears to be the most successful method for business success and youth engagement. The commitment needs to be for a substantial period of time, at least 3 years so the program or activity has enough time to achieve the desired results.

The other strategy is based on engaging youth actively in the community so they feel connected and return if they do choose to move away for study. Communities also need to create an environment that is youth friendly and they must be committed to supporting youth. Similarly government support at all levels is critical as well. The depth of support offered for youth in Canada and Ireland is amazing. Through their actions with research and the funding of programs you feel that youth in rural communities really are a priority. There is a real and substantial commitment to young people in rural areas from government departments, especially in Canada.

The information I have gathered will be disseminated through the following mediums:

Presentation of a paper at the Department of State & Regional Development, Community & Economic Development Conference in Thredbo 16-18 October 2005.
Guest speaker at the 'Women About Hay' meeting 19th October 2005
Riverina Economic Development Officers Network Meeting
Presentation to the Hay Shire Council and Community Drug Action Team
Presentations with State & Federal Government departments such as Department of State & Regional Development, Department of Education & Training
Presentation with the Riverina Area Consultative Committee and Riverina Regional Development Board.

Recommendations

There are a number of strategies and improvements that could be implemented in Australia.

The labour shortage experienced in rural Australia is well documented and if youth were encouraged to return to rural communities this would assist greatly with this problem. A collaborative approach is required from government. There needs to be more communication between education and business government departments to ensure the gap for students from school to work is decreased.

Recommendations on a local level –

- Educate your community to consider youth as assets. Actively involve youth in community and economic development activities.
- Foster a greater link between the school and business community.
- Liaise with TAFE and the school to investigate offering an entrepreneurial course in Hay.
- Liaise with the local high school and create a database of youth that have moved away in the last 5-10 years. Communicate with some of these young people and discuss the concept of a newsletter that informs them of job opportunities in their own community.
- Liaise with a local University to determine if they have students who may be involved in formed with employment opportunities in Hay.
- Encourage intergenerational activities within the community
- Work with local government to ensure youth participation in activities that are going to affect young people.

Recommendations on a regional level-

- Work with economic development officers within the region to develop a website that could be utilised for young people that lived in the region and promote opportunities for employment and business development.

Recommendations on a state level-

- Liaise with departments such as the Department of State & Regional Development and Department of Education & Training to investigate Entrepreneurial training and perhaps funding.
- Encourage the state government to investigate providing funding or start up loans for young people looking to start a business.

Recommendations on a federal level –

- Review existing funding and programs aimed at rural communities with regard to education, business development and employment at a state & federal level.
- Investigate fledging projects such as CREATE – Creating Rural Entrepreneurial Attitudes Through Education (BANK of IDEAS)²⁸ and gather representatives from various departments, agencies, communities and youth to discuss programs similar to this.
- Investigate the logistics for setting up a program such as Junior Achievement in Australia.

²⁸ www.bankofideas.com.au

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