National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS)

NYARS was established in 1985 as a cooperative funding arrangement between federal, state and territory governments to facilitate nationally based research into current social, political and economic factors affecting young people. NYARS operates under the auspices of the Education Council (formerly Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood).

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (ACYS)

ACYS is a not-for-profit national organisation funded by the Australian Government, Department of Education and Training. The Clearinghouse was established in 1983 at the Australian National University, and moved to its current home at the University of Tasmania in 1985.

ACYS supports researchers, practitioners, service providers and organisations, as well as Australian youth, by providing information services on current practices, research, policies and issues important to young people. The resources developed by ACYS inform policy and program development, and lead to improved practices in the support of young people across the country.

For more information about ACYS and its products and services please see the website: www.acys.info

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme and is intended to provide background research and other information as a basis for discussion. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments or the Education Council.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In many ways the mechanics of how to engage young people in regional, rural and remote areas are not so different from those used to engage young people in urban areas. In reviewing literature on the subject, the themes of involving young people in decision-making, the need for cooperative networks to support young people, and creating pathways from education through to employment are present throughout. And in some cases, the strategies to engage young people do not differ substantially from strategies to engage other age groups. Regardless of who needs to be engaged or re-engaged, the need for a supportive community environment with services responsive to local needs is highlighted again and again.

However, there are several key differences.

AUSTRALIA’S FUTURE RELIES HEAVILY ON RURAL ECONOMIES

According to Smart Company:

The rural sector and farm-dependent economy accounts for 12% of GDP, 14% of exports, 17% of employment, 60% of the land mass and between half and two-thirds of total water use. Mining accounts for 9% of GDP, 35% of exports and 2.2% of employment (Campbell 2012).

Having skilled future employees for these industries with local and cultural understanding requires planning for education and training pathways.
RURAL DIVERSITY MEANS THERE IS NO SINGLE APPROACH TO RURAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The majority of Australians live in the country’s few urban areas – capital and coastal cities – which leaves most of Australia classified as either inner-regional, outer-regional, remote or very remote. Given such a vast area, it is not surprising that there is a great deal of variation to the issues facing young people living in these areas, and that indicators that lump young people all into the category ‘rural youth’ cannot accurately portray their experiences.

CHANGING YOUTH POLICIES AFFECT RURAL YOUTH TO A GREATER EXTENT

At the time of this report’s release a number of policy and program areas are in their early stages of implementation or are experiencing change. Government programs, such as Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance and the Work for the Dole scheme, have new eligibility requirements or limitations to their support periods. And at the end of 2014, the Youth Connections program wound down, with responsibility for coordinating services to re-engage at-risk people with education and employment shifting back to the states and employment services.

Limited options for education and employment may make meeting the new eligibility requirements difficult for rural youth. Transition to employment is a significant issue for rural youth, with barriers that sometimes lead to disengagement. The Youth Connections program had been particularly effective in rural, remote and Indigenous communities.

RURAL YOUTH EXPERIENCE GREATER DISADVANTAGE

Educational attainment continues to lag in rural areas, with remote and Indigenous communities recording the lowest rates of school attendance and completion. While there have been increases in young people pursuing higher education across the country, students from rural areas continue to be underrepresented. Distance imposes greater cost to access services, employment and education, as lengthy travel or relocation is often required.

Disadvantage experienced by rural communities as a whole also has an impact on young people, as businesses, schools and services have limited resources and reduced capacity to respond to their needs.
WHY ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS IS IMPORTANT

There are a number of issues facing rural communities that relate to engaging young people.

OUTMIGRATION – ENCOURAGING RETURN
While there is some discussion about the degree to which youth outmigration affects rural communities, there are indications that communities would greatly benefit from strategies to maintain ties with the young people who have left. The determining factor for young people deciding to return is the contribution that they perceive they can make in their communities.

OVERCOMING DISADVANTAGE
Improving engagement with education improves educational outcomes. Education provides a smoother transition to employment and young people with higher education levels are able to contribute to a greater degree in their communities. Increase in health and wellbeing is also linked to engagement with community.

COMMUNITIES BENEFIT FROM INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE
Young people who stay in rural areas need to have ways of being involved in their communities. However, the extent to which they can contribute varies greatly. Young people can provide energised approaches to business development and entrepreneurial skills. Involvement of young people in local government ensures that local services meet the needs of the whole community and encourages young people to remain in the area.
HOW LOCAL COMMUNITIES CAN PUT ENGAGEMENT IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

In reviewing the materials on rural youth engagement, it became clear that the involvement of the wider community was the key factor to successful engagement practices. Not only does this involvement pool together limited resources, but it also creates networks that make the most of local knowledge and expertise. For that reason, this report looks at young people’s engagement in education, employment and their communities as a means for growing social capital and building collaborative impact networks.

The reasons young people become disengaged are complex and the factors involved are interrelated. Therefore, engagement efforts have to take into consideration all the systems, organisations and people that young people rely on. The following have been identified as contributing to effective engagement efforts:

IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Young people aren’t the sole stakeholders in their futures. Education and service providers, local business and government, and other individuals and organisations all contribute to the social capital of communities, and by extension the futures of rural youth.

IDENTIFY THE LOCAL CONDITIONS

This includes the levels and types of disadvantage experienced within the community, as well as the opportunities and strengths for building social capital. While a program or policy may be administered or managed outside the local community, successful delivery requires local insight.

“Young people aren’t the sole stakeholders in their futures. Education and service providers, local business and government, and other individuals and organisations all contribute to the social capital of communities...”
IDENTIFY THE NEEDS OF LOCAL YOUTH
Feedback from young people may reveal discrepancies between collected data and the reality of what they experience. Likewise, there may be differences between the views of young people and those delivering services and programs.

ORGANISE FOR ACTION
While collaborations between organisations are useful in addressing easily identifiable problems, addressing complex social issues often requires a more rigorous and structured approach. In this report, collective impact is presented as a means for improving youth engagement in rural communities.

INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE
Engagement efforts have been proven more effective when young people are directly involved in decision-making, planning and evaluation. Representation in local government and involvement in community networks ensures that services meet their needs. As noted in this report, adopting the concepts used in customer engagement may provide ideas for including young people.

IMPLEMENT CONSIDERED TIMEFRAMES AND PROGRESSIVE EVALUATION
Many program evaluations have pointed out that the impacts of programs or initiatives cannot be measured quickly. In particular, the effects of engagement efforts on success in education or employment cannot be measured until young people reach those milestones in their lives. Also at issue is the continued refinement of program and service delivery. Policies and local conditions can change quickly, and long-term initiatives need regular evaluation to accommodate these changes.
THIS REPORT

This report addresses the issue of youth engagement in rural areas in the following sections:

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

Sections 1 and 2 provide definitions of youth, remoteness and engagement as they relate to rural youth, as well as demographics and issues related to rural youth wellbeing, education, employment and other social indicators.

ISSUES FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

This section identifies the issues faced by key stakeholders, including:

- young people
- rural communities
- schools and education service providers
- businesses, employers and local economies
- policymakers and local government.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

This section provides examples of current research in the areas of:

- educational engagement
- pathways and transitions
- strategies to retain and attract
- understanding the local context.

Also included is a discussion of research practice and methodology in the area of rural youth engagement.
WHAT IS HAPPENING IN RURAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

This section provides examples of current practices in the areas of:

- community partnerships
- local government
- centrally managed, locally delivered services
- Indigenous youth engagement
- resource management
- connections with higher education
- volunteering and leadership
- youth-specific networks
- youth-driven engagement.

Discussions of consumer engagement, social capital and collective impact – concepts related to engagement practices – are included here.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEWS

This section gives examples of how the views of young people have been used in previous research, program development and evaluations.

DISCUSSION OF HOW TO ADDRESS RURAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

This section presents indications of how rural communities can plan, develop and deliver youth engagement strategies and programs. It draws on the information provided in research, practice and the views of young people to identify approaches that have worked and how these may be applied more broadly in other contexts.
CASE STUDIES

Three case studies of current rural youth programs or initiatives are included in the report. The case studies identify the approaches used to engage young people and involve them in their communities.

- Flinders Island Transition Program
- FReeZA program
- Desert Knowledge Australia

TOOLS

This section provides information for those planning, developing and delivering youth engagement programs and services. Links to the materials described in the report are provided.

LIMITATIONS

Youth engagement is a complex concept. As such, this report cannot address all the issues involved in engaging young people with the myriad of activities, systems and organisations they encounter. Engagement with education, employment and community were identified as the key issues facing rural youth. Other resources more adequately cover curriculum delivery, education policy and online learning, areas that have generated a great deal of discussion about their impact on rural youth engagement. This report looks at the community relationships needed to support education and employment engagement efforts.

Likewise, the specific issues related to Indigenous youth cannot be covered comprehensively in this report. There are important lessons to be found in research on Indigenous youth engagement, however. Innovative program delivery and community involvement methods tailored for Indigenous youth are at times more fully developed and evaluated than programs in other rural communities.

While it is recognised that technology has had a significant impact on the way young people interact with services and each other, the emphasis of this report is on the necessity of community involvement in supporting young people to be come engaged in education and employment. Equally, development and leadership programs, while touched on in the report, are not singled out in order to provide information on a wide-range of engagement strategies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACYS</td>
<td>Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARACY</td>
<td>Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARIA</td>
<td>Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAEPR</td>
<td>Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and linguistically diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Collection District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTI</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender and intersex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSAY</td>
<td>Longitudinal Studies of Australian Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATSEM</td>
<td>National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRHA</td>
<td>National Rural Health Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYARS</td>
<td>National Youth Affairs Research Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Statistical Local Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRYS</td>
<td>Victorian Rural Youth Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>YACVic</td>
<td>Youth Affairs Council of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>YCNN</td>
<td>Youth Connections National Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>YNOT</td>
<td>Youth Network of Tasmania</td>
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<tr>
<td>YSE index</td>
<td>Youth Social Exclusion index</td>
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A note about *Creating better educational and employment opportunities for rural young people*

In 2001, the report *Creating better educational and employment opportunities for rural young people* was prepared for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) and published by the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (Kenyon et al. 2001), and is viewed by many as the definitive research report on rural youth education and employment. It focused on the transition experiences of rural youth and the government and non-government programs that addressed their needs. Results from extensive interviews with young people around the country provided insights into the barriers and challenges they faced, as well as indications for where and how programs could better meet their needs. Promising practices and valuable lessons were found in the analysis of the various approaches of education, employment, transition and employment programs in rural areas.

Some of the report’s findings can be loosely grouped into ‘education’, ‘transition and employment’ and ‘community’.

**EDUCATION**

- The costs associated with education are a barrier. Providing education services within rural areas costs more, and there are significant costs associated with travel or moving to further education opportunities.
- There is a need for local providers of post-compulsory education and training.
- Indigenous youth often disengage from education because of the lack of culturally appropriate curriculums and the attitudes of their families and communities towards education.

**TRANSITION AND EMPLOYMENT**

- Training needs to relate to local context and current labour demands.
- There is a lack of diversity in employment options.
- There is a lack of career counselling that incorporates an understanding of rural conditions.
- Potential sources for employment are: tourism, conservation, self-employment and niche marketing.
COMMUNITY

- Programs addressing the needs of rural youth need to take into consideration local context and need to involve the community as a whole.
- Young people and community members stated that there were poor linkages between different sectors (education, employment, government, support services, etc.).
- Communities often have difficulty in knowing how to engage effectively with young people.
- Young people have very definite views. They would like:
  - to be more involved in their communities but feel that their input is often superficial or not used; and
  - to have local mentors and role models, and recognise that community attitudes have an impact on their own futures.

While the political and economic landscapes have shifted since the report was published 14 years ago, indications are that young people in rural Australia continue to face many of the same issues that were identified then.

So what has happened since then?

- More research has been conducted into rural youth engagement in education and employment.
- More evaluations of engagement programs have been conducted.
- More reports have been produced that record the experiences of rural youth, including examples of involving young people in decision-making.
- New tools have been made available to provide communities with information specific for their local areas.
- Promising approaches for community collaboration, that can help put good intentions into practice, have been implemented.
This section provides background information about young people in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Definitions of geographic remoteness and youth engagement are needed in order to inform policy development and program delivery. Demographic data provide a snapshot of rural youth and point to the issues that relate to their wellbeing and capacity to become engaged in education, employment and their communities.
DEFINITIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

The age bracket for young people has been defined by the youth sector in Australia as being between 12 and 25 years of age. However, in reviewing the issues faced by young people in rural Australia, there is some evidence to suggest that this definition may need to be broadened at both ends (Brader & McGinty 2005).

Surveys have found that young people in rural areas start thinking about their futures at a very early age, well before they turn 12. In particular, they begin to consider whether they will remain in their communities or move to pursue education and employment opportunities (Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) 2013).

In terms of education, the middle years, starting in Year 5 when students are 10 years old, have been found to be the period during which young people are at most risk of becoming disengaged from school and learning (Walsh & Black 2009). Limited availability of resources in rural schools means that young students are at even more risk of disengagement.

At the other end of the age spectrum, transition to independence in rural areas is generally attained later in life than in other areas. Many professional organisations for young people in agriculture, such as Future Farmers Network, provide services and support for those up to the age of 35.

The wide range of ages encompassed by the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ presents a number of challenges. Efforts to engage, retain and attract young people in rural areas need to tailor efforts to a broader range of ages than in urban areas.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH

The terms used to refer to Indigenous Australians in literature on youth engagement vary, including the terms Aborigine, Aboriginal people, Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders, and native Australian. As well, some materials employ the terms remote or very remote to describe Indigenous communities. This report will use the terms Indigenous youth, Indigenous young people and Indigenous communities. Where quoted, the original terms used in the materials will be used.
REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE

The terms to describe areas of Australia outside capital cities have changed over time, as has the use of those terms by government agencies, service organisations and researchers. This report will use the term rural to describe all areas that fall outside city areas and their surrounding suburbs.

Remoteness classification schemes were created to provide a picture of disadvantage related to service accessibility, and thereby inform decisions regarding funding, and service development and delivery. Remoteness is seen as a contributing factor in social and economic disadvantage, in that there are inherently fewer services in sparsely populated areas and distance excludes many from accessing services in more populated areas.

The idea that living in rural areas necessarily involves disadvantage plays a significant role in the approach to youth and community engagement. The starting point for many programs is to overcome problems associated with the disadvantage caused by distance. However, reviews of remoteness classification schemes have cautioned that distance from services is not the sole determining factor in disadvantage.

DEFINING REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE

The terms metropolitan, regional and remote are used by most classification schemes to describe changes in population density or the distance to services. The term rural is used by some classification schemes, but is not included in the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) classification, the classification scheme most frequently used. In the interest of simplicity, this report will refer to all non-urban areas as rural, unless there is a need to differentiate between the different area classifications.

Metropolitan areas include most capital cities and their surrounding suburbs, except for Hobart and Darwin. Other large, heavily populated areas such as the Gold Coast are also classified as metropolitan.

Regional areas are those outside metropolitan areas; there is a distinction between inner regional and outer regional.

Inner regional areas are those with higher population densities, such as those outside of non-capital cities – for example Newcastle and Townsville – and the areas around capital cities. Hobart, while a capital city, is classified as being a regional area.
**Outer regional** areas have a lower population density and lie beyond inner regional areas. Darwin is classified as outer regional, along with a significant proportion of the Queensland coast.

**Remote** areas are those that are further out again from more densely populated areas. Isolated pockets, such as Alice Springs and Broome, are classified as remote areas although they have some of the same centralised services as larger, more populated areas.

The bulk of inland Australia is classified as **very remote** as the population is widely dispersed.

Frequently the terms **remote** or **very remote** are used to describe Indigenous communities.

Other organisations, such as Regional Development Australia (2015 [http://www.rda.gov.au/](http://www.rda.gov.au/)), have divided the country into 55 regions representing areas to coordinate economic development activity within state boundaries. These are not based on changes in population, but on shared economic development goals, such as agriculture and resource industries. Large metropolitan areas, such as Sydney and Melbourne, are divided to provide localised representation.

**TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT**

**Urban**
This will refer to capital cities and other metropolitan areas, including major cities and towns such as Newcastle and the Gold Coast.

**Regional**
This will refer to those areas that lie just outside urban areas, or to the population centres located within remote areas, such as Alice Springs or Katherine.

**Rural**
This will refer to all areas outside regional areas, but with access to services locally. As noted, however, the term rural will be used to describe all non-urban areas more generally in this report.

**Remote**
This will refer to sparsely populated areas that are a significant distance from population centres.
MEASURING REMOTENESS

There are several agreed standards for measuring and referring to remoteness. The classification scheme used by most government, research and service organisations is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). It is important to note other standards and methods are used to determine remoteness by different funding and service delivery programs.

ACCESSIBILITY/REMOTENESS INDEX OF AUSTRALIA (ARIA)

The ARIA was developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) in conjunction with the Australian Department of Health and Ageing in 1997–98 to provide ‘an unambiguously geographical approach to defining remoteness’ (Australian Population & Migration Research Centre 2015).

ARIA measures the road distance to government, commercial and social service centres. Service centres are deemed to be located in significantly populated areas, including capital cities and major regional centres:

ARIA calculates remoteness as accessibility to some 20 service centres based on road distances. Remoteness values for 11,340 populated localities are derived from the road distance to service centres in 4 (now 5) categories (a weighting factor is applied for islands) (Department of Health and Aged Care (Australian Government) 2001, p.3).

In this way, ARIA allows for nuanced descriptions of regional, rural and remote areas. Earlier classification schemes had been based on the larger ‘blocks’ of Statistical Local Areas (SLAs), which refer to population density, rather than distance to or availability of services.

VARIATIONS OF ARIA

ARIA+ and ARIA++

Since its initial release, ARIA has been enhanced to incorporate additional characteristics that are now available in the products ARIA+ and ARIA++. Changes include more detailed levels of remoteness and reclassification of Tasmania to take into account its separation from the mainland. ARIA+ is the remoteness classification standard used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) framework (APMRC 2015).
SARIA/SARIA+
SARIA is a state-based version of ARIA that classifies remoteness within state and territory borders.

Other subgroups
Several subgroups address specific medical needs and provide indications of distance to related services. These include GPARIA (general practitioners), PhARIA (pharmacies), Cardiac ARIA (cardiovascular services).

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF ARIA/SARIA

Larger population centres have more services
Reviews of ARIA/SARIA point out that some capital cities and major population centres do not have the same services available. An example is that some medical facilities are not available in Darwin or Hobart (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2013; Queensland Government 2013).

Distance is the primary factor in disadvantage
ARIA does not take into account the socioeconomic make-up of populated centres, therefore the ability to provide access to services is assumed. There are other issues that affect or override the problems caused by remoteness, such as income, health, language and other social factors (Zhao & Guthridge 2008). See the section on SEIFA below.

State and territory borders
SARIA does not take into consideration the proximity of services across state and territory borders. For example, Tweed Heads, NSW, is closer to major centres in Queensland, yet would be deemed to be more ‘remote’ as it is a greater distance from the NSW capital, Sydney (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2013).

OTHER MEASUREMENTS

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)
Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas is a classification system developed by the ABS that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage using a range of factors, including distance.

Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA)
The RRMA was developed in 1994 for the Department of Primary Industries and Energy and is currently under review by the Commonwealth Department of Health. The RRMA bases remoteness on Statistical Local Areas (SLAs), which can vary in size and composition. The RRMA categorises non-urban areas as either rural or remote, and does not use the term regional (AIHW 2014).
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) classifications
The ASGS is the framework used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and incorporates data managed by the ABS and data managed by other organisations. The framework allows users of ABS data to view statistics using different area classifications, such as the ARIA remoteness index, ABS Statistical Areas (SAs), postcodes, suburbs, electoral divisions, and Local Government Areas (LGAs) (ABS 2015d).

Graphical Location Classification
The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Graphical Location Classification is based on the ARIA classification, but reduces the number of classifications to:

- Metropolitan – mainland state capital cities and major urban districts;
- Provincial – provincial cities and other non-remote provincial areas; and
- Remote – remote and very remote areas.

(Jones 2004, p.2)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
Funding formulas
As the Report on the development of a state based accessibility/remoteness index for the Commonwealth Grants Commission states, ‘[t]he purpose of the index was to assist the development of funding formulas for the distribution of Goods and Service Tax (GST) revenues, healthcare, and other grants to the States and territories’ (National Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) 2006). It is therefore essential that local governments and communities be aware of their remoteness classification when planning and applying for funding.

Both ARIA and RRMA have been used to determine funding allocations. However, neither takes into account other demographic information such as Indigenous population, socioeconomic or environmental factors. ‘All three geographic classifications (RRMA, ARIA, ASGC) are most valid when used to aggregate data over large geographic areas, but may be misleading when used for smaller areas. At the local level, they should be used very carefully indeed’ (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004, p.21).

Disadvantage and distance
In terms of youth engagement, the emphasis on distance as the primary driver in rural disadvantage is important to note: ‘Remoteness has largely come to be identified with lack of accessibility to services’ (Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care 2001, p.4).
Despite recognising that disadvantage is a complex issue with interrelated factors, efforts to address youth engagement and disengagement have largely been in response to solving the problem of distance, sometimes at the expense of addressing other factors.

**Government and commercial services**
Analysis of the nature of services found in rural and remote areas found that the availability of government services was related to population size, but that the same did not necessarily hold true for commercial services. Retail and industrial services could be found throughout these areas (Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care 2001). This has implications for the delivery of government services such as education and health, but also points to the availability of community resources that can be potentially very useful in establishing networks and building social capital. Different communities offer a different range of services.

**Sample sizes**
An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report on health indicators for remote communities cautioned that in some cases communities were too small or its members too mobile to be able to provide statistically robust data. The report stated: ‘... to deliver appropriate services in individual communities and to evaluate the impact on Closing the Gap targets, it is necessary to improve the coverage, quality and timeliness of data collected at the local level’ (AIHW 2014, p.45).

“... efforts to address youth engagement and disengagement have largely been in response to solving the problem of distance, sometimes at the expense of addressing other factors.”
ENGAGEMENT

Engagement has been recognised as an important factor in youth development and is vital to young people’s successful transition to adulthood (Armstrong & Manion 2014). Feeling valued and connected to community, family and friends helps young people experience a good quality of life, which encourages positive outcomes in education, employment and wellbeing (Burns et al. 2008).

The subject of youth engagement is often approached from the point of view of disengagement: as a problem that needs fixing. This can mask the complexity of engagement by focusing efforts on a single symptom of disengagement, rather than looking at the possible range of contributing factors. As the characteristics of rural areas differ from one community to the next, disengagement is difficult to address with a single policy (Brader & McGinty 2005).

In much of the literature on youth engagement, the emphasis has been on measuring activity as evidence of effective engagement, and usually with respect to the activities in which young people are obliged to participate, such as education, training or employment.

Youth engagement has particular attributes (see next page) that are helpful to keep in mind not only when planning engagement initiatives but also in establishing how the effectiveness of initiatives will be measured or reported. The attribute of local relevance is of particular importance to engaging rural youth.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Identifying the extent to which young people may or may not be engaged in an activity is useful when planning efforts to re-engage the disengaged or build up community capacity. Burns et al. (2008) developed a youth engagement spectrum with clear indicators of involvement:

- disengaged
- engaged with risk
- under-engaged
- engaged
- highly engaged
- over-engaged.

Please see the Tools section for greater detail.
A review of literature on effective youth engagement, which often draws on the views of young people, (Armstrong & Manion 2014; Lindeman et al. 2014; Brader and McGinty 2005) has identified youth engagement as having these major attributes:

**Meaning**: an activity that challenges young people, and in which success is achievable and is important.

**Variety**: the range of activities that young people are engaged in.

**Intensity**: the frequency or extent to which young people participate in activities. This may be how often they attend school or it may refer to the nature of the roles they undertake that may have different levels of involvement and responsibility.

**Stability**: the mutual trust and respect that a young person has developed with an individual, organisation or institution.

**Local relevance**: while young people can engage globally online, engagement in their communities relies on activities that involve those around them and take into account cultural and regional characteristics.

Together, these attributes describe the characteristics that youth engagement efforts should encompass. Youth engagement is more than just turning up, it is more than being involved in a single activity, it is ongoing and develops over the young person’s transition into adulthood, with different levels of engagement in different activities.
LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

The level of involvement of young people describes to what extent young people have control over their input into an activity. This spectrum was developed for Connecting young people in local communities – A guide for the development of a local government youth charter (Nabben 2004a):

- youth-led
- partnership involvement
- influential involvement
- passive involvement
- adult-led initiatives.

Please see the Tools section for greater detail.

AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT

Discussion of youth engagement often centres around the type of activities in which young people are involved. In terms of government policy, engagement is focused on education, training or employment.

Many indicators of rural youth engagement measure these areas:

- community or civic participation
- educational attainment and participation
- employment
- social/sport/entertainment
- housing
- physical and mental health services used by young people
- socioeconomic background.

However, this report will look specifically at how young people in rural areas are engaged in their communities, education and employment as these are most directly involved in the success of young people’s overall development. In particular, it will look at the importance of community engagement as an essential component of youth engagement.
OTHER TERMS

Compounding the difficulties of defining engagement is the tendency to use concepts associated with youth engagement interchangeably. Ways of measuring engagement, inclusion/exclusion, disadvantage and wellbeing are addressed in the Tools section.

PARTICIPATION

Participation relates to when and/or how often a young person is involved in an activity. It does not describe the experience of being involved or even the reason for involvement in the activity. Simply turning up to an event doesn’t mean that the young person is engaged. Participation is both an outcome of effective engagement, and a means of developing and improving ways to engage young people (Burns et al. 2008).

Participation is used in preference to the term engagement when referring to young people being involved in government, civic, or decision-making activities. Young voters are participants in democracy. Involvement in local government youth advisory groups is often termed youth participation. This view can reinforce the perception that engagement is often a formality or a means of ‘ticking a box’, rather than an opportunity to involve young people in meaningful ways (Nabben 2007).

Participation is also viewed as simply ‘being there’, as a part of a community. Nabben suggests that by living ‘in place’, young people are automatically participating through their use of shops and services, and attendance at school or work. This view does not hold true for online communities, as having an internet connection does not mean that young people are participating to the same degree.

AT-RISK AND DISADVANTAGE

Young people are deemed to be at-risk of disengagement if they are not in education or employment. The risks associated with disengagement from these systems are increased likelihood of drug abuse, crime, mental health problems and homelessness. These risks are increased further if young people are disengaged socially and do not have contact with other systems and supports, such as community, family, friends and support services (Brader & McGinty 2005).
In terms of the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous youth, Allard & Sanderson (2003, p.45) state:

Those whose cultural, economic, community, social and symbolic forms of knowledge remain outside the mainstream, that is those whose knowledge is not ‘carried’ in/through formal curriculum are frequently positioned as subordinate and understood to be ‘disadvantaged’. But it is the practice/experience of being positioned outside the dominant structures (an exercise of power) that creates the disadvantage – not the alternative forms of cultural, economic, social and symbolic knowledge themselves.

Disengaged youth more broadly have similar experiences of the systems they come in contact with.

**NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)**

The term NEET originated in the UK in the late 1990s to describe young people in their late teens who had ‘fallen through the cracks’ and could not be classified as participating in education, employment or training. The term is used occasionally in Australia, and is more widely being used in relation to young people over 18 years of age (Maguire 2014).

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

Social exclusion has been defined as ‘the lack of access to, or denial of, a range of citizen rights, such as adequate health care or educational success, and also a lack of societal integration, through limited power, or the ability to participate in political decision-making’ (Shortall 2008, p.451). As identified earlier, distance from essential services places those in rural communities at a disadvantage. Difficulty in getting to services or activities is a form of social exclusion.
This section presents the current demographic data, measurements and indicators on rural youth and their communities.
REMOTENESS AND DISADVANTAGE

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) notes that ‘[o]nly 2.7% of Australians live in remote or very remote areas but 13.7% of these are in disadvantaged Census Collection Districts (CDs) compared with 5.1% of people in major cities’ (ABS 2006, p11). The distribution of people living in disadvantaged CDs is not equal across all states and territories. Over 15% of people in the Northern Territory live in disadvantaged CDs. At the other end of the scale, less than 1% of people in the Australian Capital Territory are in disadvantaged CDs (ABS 2015d).

OUTMIGRATION: RATES OF RELOCATION

Research on rural youth frequently cites outmigration as a significant issue facing rural communities, and certainly ABS Census statistics record a dip in the number of young people living in rural areas (ABS 2015d). Outmigration is often referred to as a ‘youth exodus’ or ‘brain drain’, and has major implications for how the issue of youth engagement is perceived and where engagement efforts are targeted.

Outmigration is by no means a recent phenomenon, with media reports going back more than 70 years raising the issue of young people leaving rural areas. There have also been wide fluctuations in youth outmigration. ABS Census data showing that in the last half of the twentieth century ‘net inflows of young people [to capital cities] fluctuat[ed] from 49,800 in 1976, to a low of 25,100 in 1986, and up to a high of 82,500 in 2001’ (ABS 2003). Outmigration starts in the 15–19-year-old cohort and increases in the 20–24- and 25–29-year-old cohorts. Australian Census data shows that people in their early 30s move or return to rural communities, frequently with young families (ABS 2015d).

However, a comparison of census data from 1973 and 2013 (see Figure 1) shows that each state and territory capital city, with the exceptions of Brisbane and Canberra, has attracted an increased proportion of the population.

A national study found that rates of outmigration varied considerably across the country. Data demonstrated that young people moved in greater numbers from the driest, most remote areas, as well as those where agriculture was the predominant industry (Argent & Walmsley 2008).

Of interest, however, is a study of youth migration in two inland rural areas that found a significantly high number of young people moved to other areas within their regions (Argent & Walmsley 2008). This indicates that young people are willing to stay within rural areas when there are opportunities for work or study. This is also reflected in data
from the Youth Research Centre’s *Life Patterns* study, which found that approximately 20% of rural youth who participated in the study made the decision to stay within their local area (Wyn & Cuervo 2011).

**FIGURE 1: GROWTH OF CAPITAL CITIES**  
*Greater capital city share of state or territory population 1973 & 2013*  
*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics*

**SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHICS AND CURRENT MEASUREMENTS**

**GENDER IN OUTMIGRATION**

In the main, a greater proportion of young women leave rural areas than men. As young women are more likely to complete secondary education and go on to further study, they are more likely to move in order to pursue educational opportunities (Australian Council for Educational Research 2002). Young men who move are more likely to do so because of employment. Some young women move to escape the male-dominated social environment, where there are few activities that are inclusive of or specifically for young women (Argent & Walsmsley 2008).
INCREASES IN MIGRANT AND REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN REGIONAL AND RURAL AREAS

Hugo et al. (2013b, p.1) note that ‘for the first time since World War II there was a faster increase in the overseas-born living outside the capital cities than within them’. Referring to ABS Census data, Hugo et al. (2013b) note that the number of overseas-born persons living in regional Australia increased by 30% from 2006 to 2011. In the 15–24 age group, there was a loss of 106,835 Australian-born young people from non-metropolitan areas, but a net gain of 28,994 overseas-born young people.

The majority of migrants have settled in inner regional areas, but a significant proportion has moved to outer regional and even remote areas. Surprisingly, even the very remote areas of Australia experienced a 9.2% increase in migrant population. Nearly a quarter of non-metropolitan local government associations recorded a decrease in Australian-born population along with an increase in overseas-born population. The shifts in migrant population have not been uniform across the country, with areas reliant on mining experiencing the bulk of the growth.

ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT

A recent report on the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions found ‘the percentage of 15–24-year-olds fully engaged in education, training or employment has remained steady since 2002’ (Dandolo Partners 2014, p7). While these rates have not changed, young people in rural and remote areas still participate at a much lower level than their counterparts in major cities.

A recent review of education and employment statistics for regional Australia cautioned that low education attainment and unemployment were key areas of concern, particularly as the demand for low-skilled work continues to decline (Regional Australia Institute 2014).
ATTAINMENT AND ATTENDANCE LEVELS

A report using ABS Census data shows that there has been a steady increase in education participation in Australia from 1996 to 2006 (ABS 2008).

FIGURE 2: PEOPLE AGED 25–64 WITH A NON-SCHOOL QUALIFICATION BY REMOTENESS AREA

However, Year 12 attainment rates ranged greatly in different regions within Australia (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 3: PEOPLE WHO HAD COMPLETED YEAR 12, 2006
SOURCE: ABS

Attendance levels continue to be a significant issue in remote and very remote areas, particularly for those aged 15–19 (see Figures 3 & 4).
The link between education and wellbeing is well established. In *A snapshot of poverty in rural and regional Australia*, the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA 2013) use a range of education indicators as a means for comparing the wellbeing of rural youth across different regions of the country (see Figure 6).
FIGURE 6: EDUCATION INDICATORS FOR RURAL AUSTRALIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: NRHA 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major cities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children developmentally vulnerable, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaver participation in higher education, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time participation of 16-year-olds in secondary school education, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in vocational education and training, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outer regional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children developmentally vulnerable, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaver participation in higher education, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time participation of 16-year-olds in secondary school education, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in vocational education and training, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remote</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children developmentally vulnerable, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaver participation in higher education, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time participation of 16-year-olds in secondary school education, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in vocational education and training, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very remote</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children developmentally vulnerable, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaver participation in higher education, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time participation of 16-year-olds in secondary school education, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in vocational education and training, 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

According to National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data on Australian VET statistics from 2013, the percentages of young people from non-urban areas and Indigenous youth from all areas participating in VET courses have fallen from 2012 to 2013:

FIGURE 7: CHANGE IN PARTICIPATION IN VET COURSES FROM 2012 TO 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Students and Courses: Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics, NCVER 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very remote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Indigenous youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidence from the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, 2008) shows that people living in rural and remote areas are significantly under-represented in higher education:

**FIGURE 8: DEGREE OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage of the total in higher education</th>
<th>Percentage of total population</th>
<th>Participation ratio (where equitable representation =1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural/regional</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of young Australians living in rural areas is estimated to be around 32%, but they represent only about 19% of the tertiary student population (NRHA 2010).

**EMPLOYMENT**

Youth engagement in employment has become a significant concern as rates of unemployment grow across the country, with rural and remote areas most often hardest hit. The majority of SLAs recording the highest youth unemployment rates recorded are located in remote areas (ABS 2011a).

Analysis of data from the University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre’s *Life Patterns* study found that employment for young people in rural areas is mostly in retail, hospitality and administrative sectors (Wyn & Cuervo 2011). Of particular concern is the casualisation of work, which, while widely experienced, has seen opportunities in rural areas diminish considerably. Likewise, the shift away from blue-collar industries to service industries means that many new enterprises are unlikely to be located in rural areas (Squires 2003).

For young Indigenous people, the effects of unemployment are even more pronounced; the Indigenous youth unemployment rate is more than double the national youth unemployment rate (ABS 2011a). Despite some rural areas having experienced increases in employment opportunities, in particular those with healthy resources industries, unemployment rates for Indigenous youth in these areas still remain high (Fordham & Schwab 2012).
VOLUNTEERING AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

One indicator of community engagement is the rate of participation in volunteering activities. Volunteering was less common in major cities (34%), and considerably higher in inner regional (42%), and outer regional and remote areas (41%) (ABS 2011a). This presents opportunities for developing the social capital needed to build rural youth engagement strategies.

There is also the preconception that young people are not as involved in activities as older members of the community. However, ABS General Social Survey data from 2010 (ABS 2011a) show that involvement in social groups is high among those aged 18–24 (see Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS BY AGE**

SOURCE: ABS 2011A

![Graph showing active participation in groups by age](image-url)
Housing status

Housing and homelessness data specific to rural youth are difficult to obtain, in part because young people often report living with their families despite actually residing elsewhere for study or work. However, general housing statistics do provide insights into the issues faced by young people in rural and remote areas.

ABS Census 2006 data show that there is very little difference between household compositions in urban, regional, rural and remote areas (ABS 2015d). Across Australia, the percentage of people living in a one-family household is 79%, with 3% living in multi-family households (two or more families). However, in very remote areas 64% of people reported living in a one-family household and 18% in multi-family households (Baxter et al. 2011).

Statistics from a report on movement of rural youth to city areas using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) recorded the rates of home ownership of a cohort of young people from rural areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic groups</th>
<th>Stayers</th>
<th>Leavers</th>
<th>Returners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home owners in 2004</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-home owner</td>
<td>1167</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with parents</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not living with parents</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings demonstrate that home ownership among those who stayed in and those who returned to rural areas was much the same, but their counterparts who left for city areas and did not return had a lower proportion of home ownership (Hillman & Rothman 2007).
RURAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Young people in rural areas experience homelessness in different ways to their urban peers. They are less likely to be ‘on the streets’ and more likely to experience secondary homelessness (couch surfing at friends’ or relatives’ places, staying at refuges or temporary accommodation) or tertiary homelessness (insecure tenancy, including boarding houses or single-room accommodation) (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) 2006).

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

LSAY data show there are notable differences in relationship status between survey cohorts who choose to stay in, leave, and return to rural areas (Hillman & Rothman 2007).

FIGURE 11: RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTAL STATUS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STAY IN, LEAVE, AND RETURN TO RURAL AREAS, 2004
SOURCE: HILLMAN & ROTHMAN 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic groups</th>
<th>Stayers</th>
<th>Leavers</th>
<th>Returners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not parent</td>
<td>1232</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND DRUG CONSUMPTION

SMOKING
More rural young people smoke than their urban counterparts. Rates in outer regional and remote areas have not changed substantially between 2007 and 2010. The proportion of Aboriginal people who smoke has fallen substantially from a high of 51% in 2002, to 41% in 2013, although ABS health report statistics cited by NRHA show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 15 were still 2.6 times more likely to be regular smokers (NRHA 2014b).

While the number of young people who smoke has reduced, the number of cigarettes smoked per week increased during the period 2007–2010. The Australian National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA) has suggested focusing on young people, which may well have potential in rural and remote communities (NRHA 2014b).

ALCOHOL USE
The 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows that the proportion of those drinking at risky levels increases with increasing remoteness, and the AIHW has reported that among those living in rural areas, men and youths are particularly likely to drink at high-risk levels (NRHA 2014a).

FIGURE 12: PREVALENCE RATES OF RISKY ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION
SOURCE: NRHA 2014, USING AIHW DATA FROM 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of population who drink at risky levels</th>
<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner regional</th>
<th>Outer regional</th>
<th>Remote/Very remote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For lifetime harm</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For single occasion harm</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ILLEGAL DRUGS
While rates of illicit drug use vary only slightly between urban areas (15%) and rural areas (16–17%), studies have identified ‘distance and isolation, lack of public transport, lack of employment opportunities, uncertainty about the future and lack of leisure activities as contributing to illicit drug use in rural communities’ (NRHA 2012a). The type of drugs used varied widely in regional, rural and remote areas, with no overall trends noted (NRHA 2012a).
PREGNANCY RATES

Teenage birth rates are more than seven times higher in very remote areas (91.4 per 1,000 females aged 15–19) than in major cities (12.3 per 1,000 females aged 15–19). Teenage pregnancy rates increase with remoteness, from inner regional (21.7 per 1,000), across outer regional (29.6 per 1,000) and remote (47.6 per 1,000 females aged 15–19) (NRHA 2012b).

Remote Service Delivery SLAs have higher teenage fertility rates than the national average as a whole; most were also higher than the national Indigenous teenage fertility rate (AIHW 2014).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have a higher overall fertility rate and teenage fertility rate than non-Indigenous women. In 2008–2009 the Indigenous teenage fertility rate of 75 babies per 1,000 women aged 15–19, was almost five times the teenage fertility rate of all women (17 babies per 1,000 women aged 15–19) (AIHW 2014).
Fostering an environment that encourages youth engagement involves building relationships within rural communities. This section will identify the issues for key stakeholders involved in developing effective youth engagement efforts, including:

- young people
- rural communities
- schools and education service providers
- businesses, employers and local economies
- policymakers and local government.
YOUNG PEOPLE

Some of these issues apply to young people across Australia, not solely those in rural areas. However, distance and reduced access to services mean that they are often more difficult to address in rural areas.

DISTANCE AND ISOLATION

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The focus in much of the literature on rural youth is on the effect that distance has on the provision and choice of services. Many rural and regional centres have seen government and commercial services leave their communities. For young people, this means difficulty in accessing services such as Centrelink, employment and support services. These additional barriers can draw out the transition to independence (Regional Australia Institute 2014).

LIMITED CHOICES FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Another major issue, and one cited repeatedly in youth outmigration research, is the impact of limited choices in education and employment on the outlook and futures of young people in rural areas. Many young people reported that they were unable to pursue studies in fields that they were interested in, and that employment opportunities in those fields could not be found in their local areas (Victorian Rural Youth Services (VRYS) 2014; YNOT 2013).

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Reduced wellbeing among rural youth has been connected with a decrease in levels of satisfaction with their communities (Bourke & Geldens 2006). This is primarily due to a lack of social contact and activity, as well as exclusion from the community. Encouragement of some forms of social connections can have its challenges. Many young people report that ‘social interaction is so important for [those] who are socially isolated that it is preferable for them to experience alcohol-related harms than the harms related to isolation’ (National Rural Health Alliance 2014a).
DECIDING TO LEAVE

The decision for young people to leave their communities for study or work is not taken lightly (YNOT 2013). While there may be some who are lured by the ‘bright lights’ of capital cities, more often than not young people would prefer to stay in the same areas as their families. In fact, a survey of rural communities found that people would be willing to travel up to two hours for education or work (Regional Australia Institute 2014). The concern for young people is to be supported in making the decision that best meets their needs and their aspirations for their future (Gabriel 2000).

MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

Young people want to be involved in and contribute to their communities. Rural youth have grown up in an environment where participating in community activities and volunteering is the norm (ABS 2011a).

Young people have reported that a barrier to participation in community decision-making is the belief that their contributions would not be valued or used (Bryant 2003). This is despite the fact that their wellbeing greatly improves when they are more involved with their local governments and able to make decisions on issues that affect them (VRYS 2011). Programs that are inclusive and offer equal participation for all members are more likely to be successful, and are recognised by young people as being more worthwhile (Milstein & Cameron 1998).

WELLBEING

RISK FACTORS

As rural health indicators demonstrate, young people in rural areas have improved health and wellbeing outcomes when they are engaged in education, employment and their communities (AIHW 2014). Disengagement also increases other aspects of disadvantage, including the likelihood of juvenile justice issues, homelessness and economic hardship when transitioning to adulthood (Burns et al. 2008).

A more disturbing trend is the incidence of suicide among rural youth, particularly young men, who are 1.5–1.8 times more likely to attempt suicide than those in urban areas (National Rural Health Alliance 2010). The rates increase substantially for those in very remote areas, including Indigenous communities, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 15–24 years being over five times more likely to die because of intentional self-harm (National Children’s Commissioner (Australia) 2014).
HOLISTIC APPROACH
The interrelationship across the spectrum of rural youth activities points to the need for a holistic approach to service provision (Abello et al. 2014). This is especially important as disadvantage is experienced in different ways across the country. However, sharing information to improve services is often difficult in areas where there is the perception that everyone knows everyone’s business. Surveys of and interviews with rural youth show that they recognise the benefits of living in close-knit communities as well as the drawbacks, with one of the primary negatives being the lack of privacy.

Rural service providers recognise the importance of addressing the wellbeing of young people along with other issues associated with disengagement. Transition service providers in remote communities have stated they ‘felt that initiatives designed for young people in remote communities would only work if the basic health and welfare needs of young people are addressed first’ (Goodrick 2012, p.7).

RURAL COMMUNITIES

POPULATION CHANGES
Youth outmigration from rural communities is a perennial issue, and one that has been discussed in demographic research for well over 70 years (Argent & Walmsley 2008). While young people have traditionally left rural areas to pursue education and employment opportunities, recent studies have shown that more are choosing to move for lifestyle reasons to coastal areas (Hugo et al. 2013a; Argent & Walmsley 2008).

The views are not all negative, however. Australian and international studies have found that many communities believe the decision by young people to leave rural areas is a natural and expected part of development. In many cases, moving is seen as a rite of passage and an essential step towards independence (Hillman & Rothman 2007). Outmigration is sometimes seen as beneficial to the community as well as the young person, with residents recognising that when young people return – either after study or work – they will bring with them skills and experience that are necessary for developing sustainable futures in their communities.
RETAINING ‘TALENT’ VS SUPPORTING THOSE WHO STAY

Argent and Walmsley (2008) point out that research efforts into population migration have concentrated on the disadvantage that youth outmigration imposes on an ageing population, rather than the impacts of population changes on young people who remain or leave.

While many young people move to urban areas, a significant number of them move to other areas within the region (Argent & Walmsley 2008). This would suggest that many young people are willing to stay in rural areas, but may not be aware of the opportunities available in surrounding areas.

Potentially of more concern, however, is that limited resources may be channelled towards stemming a ‘brain drain’ at the expense of services and programs to re-engage a more disadvantaged cohort of young people.

ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO RETURN

Maintaining and strengthening ties with young people who leave is essential to ensuring that, when they consider returning, they are already connected to community networks (Hugo et al. 2013c). Many regional and rural communities have developed ‘Bring them back home’ policies to champion the positive aspects of living outside urban areas (Regional Australia Institute 2014; Hugo et al. 2013c).

A review of regional development in Queensland identified the need to present a complete package for young people (Cavaye n.d.). Employment is not the only consideration for young people when moving or returning to rural areas; housing, access to education and other services, entertainment and social activities, and networking opportunities were deemed to be equally important.

A survey of young people in rural communities conducted by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria found that young people often considered the contributions they might make if they returned to their communities after a period of study or work. The survey also found that young people with a history of volunteering were more likely to consider returning to rural areas (VRYS 2014).
IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

Rural communities feel the effects of change to a greater extent than urban areas. The ability to weather change depends largely on the investment that communities have made in their social capital. The transition of rural youth to adulthood relies on the involvement of all community members working efficiently and effectively to provide opportunities (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2005).

There are numerous studies into building social capital in rural areas. Rural communities face the challenge of having limited capacity to increase their social capital. With regard to youth engagement, connections with other rural communities, particularly regional centres, can help to fill skill and resource gaps by providing access to services, education and employment.

A study of youth migration in two rural regions found that the major population centres nearest to the rural regions played an important role in providing necessary services to 'broaden each region’s economic base', thereby providing more opportunities for young people in the surrounding areas (Argent & Walmsley 2008).

Regional universities also have a role to play in the economic success of rural communities. The research and work undertaken at universities are often important to the local area, providing benefits to not only local businesses and communities, but also to the universities themselves as they draw on the local community for case studies and research examples (devrieze 2006). A joint submission by regional universities to the Higher Education Base Funding Review noted that a university campus had broad benefits for the community in general, including higher rates of school attendance, increased healthy lifestyles, social inclusion, civic participation and volunteerism (Charles Sturt University 2009). The submission stated that while 75% of its students came from regional and rural areas, 88% of graduates in agriculture and environment studies found employment in regional and rural areas, demonstrating the capacity of regional universities to attract young people to these areas as well as providing skilled employees for local economies (Charles Sturt University 2009).

There are differing views on the subject, however. Hugo et al. (2013c) point to a Grattan Institute report that found that regional universities and job attraction schemes have done little to help slow-growing regions. The Grattan Institute report also stated that development of services should be based on equity or social grounds, not on the hopes that such investment will generate ongoing economic development.
DISTANCE AND DISADVANTAGE

While distance is one form of rural disadvantage, it can also compound other types of disadvantage. The differences in regional industries and community capacity mean that disadvantage is not experienced in the same way across all rural areas. ABS Census data for 2006 show that while less than 3% of Australians live in remote or very remote areas, these areas account for almost 14% of the disadvantaged population in Australia. As well, this disadvantage is concentrated in some areas, with over 15% of the population in the Northern Territory living in disadvantaged CDs and only 1% of the population in the ACT in disadvantaged CDs (ABS 2015d).

Recent media reports have highlighted that rural areas are the poorest in the country: ‘of the 20 poorest electorates in Australia, 18 are rural’ (Bush telegraph 2014). ABC Radio National’s Bush telegraph report goes on to state that income disparity is a significant issue in rural areas, with the pockets of wealth located in rural and remote areas in regions reliant on resource industries.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION SERVICE PROVIDERS

A lot is asked of rural schools, trainers, teachers and other service providers. They are valued in rural communities for the various roles they play in helping young people develop through teaching, providing opportunities and mentoring. Schools also form the heart of many rural communities, placing greater strains on school resources.

PROVIDING FLEXIBLE VARIETY AND ENABLING ACCESS

The delivery of education services at all levels in rural areas varies greatly across the country. Online or virtual learning environments can provide equitable access to courses not available locally. However, success in this form of learning still hinges on local support (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013). Access to higher education, particularly for remote Indigenous youth, is a challenge for many young people. Some regional centres may have several satellite campuses from various universities available to them, while others do not. The Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 supported investigating a ‘national regional’ university that would provide courses across remote areas. However, the review acknowledged that such a ‘university may not
be best positioned to serve the needs of every regional community’ (Bradley et al. 2008, p.113). VET courses may offer pathways to employment for young people in rural areas, however their studies can be curtailed when seeking local certification as local industry and businesses may not be available to provide training needed to obtain qualifications (Bryant 2003).

**TRANSITION SUPPORT**

In an LSAY study, young people in rural areas with a Year 12 certificate were more likely to be employed full-time, with employment rates over 4% higher (Ryan 2011). While it is clear that educational attainment helps young people gain employment, support in finding jobs is also critical.

The Evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transition report found that 69.5% of participants in the Youth Connections program were located in rural and regional areas (Dandolo Partners 2014). The program was geared towards providing pathway planning to those who were most disengaged or at risk of becoming disengaged from education and employment.

**SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS FOR LOW SES REMOTE STUDENTS AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

While socioeconomic status appears to have little impact on the success or failure of students at university, there are notable exceptions. Indigenous students and those from low-SES remote areas experience greater transition difficulties and have a much lower retention rate than those from other SES backgrounds or those from less remote areas (Centre for the Study of Higher Education 2008).

Rural education policy and research generally approach the subject by comparing urban ‘advantaged’ to rural ‘disadvantaged’. This results in the development of education policies that are not designed for the rural context. As well, generalised evaluation standards and processes reinforce the delivery of a curriculum that does not take the local community’s needs into account (Franklin 2010).
BUSINESSES, EMPLOYERS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

DEVELOPING AN ENVIRONMENT THAT ATTRACTS AND ENCOURAGES YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE

For rural businesses, the emphasis has been on attracting talented workers to fill skills gaps. A report prepared for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation found that there was an ‘almost total absence of young people participating in regional development’ (Bryant 2003, p.1). The report goes on to say that while it is important for local communities to provide social and recreational activities, it was imperative to involve young people in businesses and to do so while they are at school rather than wait until they complete their education.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Rural networks build social capital by sharing information and resources, and raising awareness of local needs and opportunities. However, effective networks should encompass more than just business organisations by cutting through the ‘silos of government, health care, education, not-for-profits, large and small businesses, and individuals including employees and youth’ (deVrieze 2006, p.1). deVrieze mirrors the network governance structures of collective impact by stating that major institutions are required to provide stability, providing backbone support (Hanleybrown et al. 2012).

PROVIDING TRAINING AND CREATING EMPLOYMENT

Many times young people in rural areas are unable to complete their studies to become qualified or certified in their chosen field, despite these skills being needed in their local areas. A survey of young people who left rural South Australia found that young people moved away at the point in their education and training when they needed to gain employment qualifications as there were no local employers able to provide hands-on work that would lead to certification (Bryant 2003).
The Evaluation of the National Partnerships Youth Attainment and Transitions report (Dandolo Partners 2014) emphasises the importance of business in providing transition opportunities:

Schools, the community and businesses need to work together in partnerships to create opportunities for successful transitions to meaningful employment. While the period of the National Partnership has seen an observable improvement in youth attainment and participation, the transition of young people from education and training into full-time employment remains problematic.

The state of the labour market is acknowledged as critical to transition outcomes, and flexible and responsive labour markets also have an important role (p.115).

And also:

As an example, businesses have a potentially significant role to play in providing work experience as well as job pathways to assist young people to make successful transitions from school to work. The international literature as well as recent Australian research shows that the opportunity to combine work and study, whether through apprenticeships, work placements, work experience or part-time jobs, is a significant predictor of successful school-to-work outcomes (Dandolo Partners 2014, pp.8-9).

The loss of entry-level positions for young people is a nationwide issue. However, as services withdraw from rural and remote areas, there are fewer opportunities for young people in these areas to get a start in a career. This is especially the case for public service positions, which had in the past been a valuable source of employment for school leavers (Alston & Kent 2009). Another issue is the casualisation of employment, limiting work to short-term, part-time or casual positions that offer few prospects for advancement or enhancing skills (Squires 2003). The AMP.NATSEM report, We can work it out (Tanton et al. 2014), stated that the majority of new positions were created in urban areas and that rural areas offered fewer opportunities for young people interested in pursuing careers in service or professional sectors.
YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

While the focus has been on entrepreneurship as a mechanism for creating economic sustainability in rural areas, entrepreneurial skills can be built into other areas such as social enterprises, local government and education (Cavaye n.d.). A US survey of young people in rural areas found that a significant number of high school students identified entrepreneurial activities that they could undertake in their own communities (Dabson et al. 2010). The survey also concluded that 45% of students would undertake entrepreneurial studies at school if they were linked with hands-on experience with local businesses.

POLICYMAKERS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

The same US survey on rural youth engagement found that 72% of young people had never been asked their views on how to improve their communities to make them more attractive to young people (Dabson et al. 2010). While there may be cultural differences in the way Australian local governments and communities engage with young people, ensuring that a broad, representative base is canvassed is essential to addressing the needs of rural youth populations.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In its Future directions statement, the Victorian Office for Youth identified the implementation of the local government youth charter as one of its priorities (Nabben 2007). However, as of 2011, the majority of rural local councils have yet to develop formal youth strategies, even though the majority had youth-specific programs (VRYS 2011). While this may not be the case across the country, it is an indication that local governments want to involve young people, but may not know how to do this formally or perceive the benefits in doing so.
Also at issue is the nature of the services that local governments believe they should provide. Many local governments help to foster social, business and civic networks within their communities. However, youth services tend to be viewed as living outside those spheres, as they fall predominantly into either a social services or recreation category (VRYS 2011). There are indications, however, that involvement of the whole community has an impact on addressing health and wellbeing issues among rural youth. Research conducted in the US found that programs addressing risk behaviours among rural youth were more successful when business leaders and schools worked with local government (Rishel et al. 2012).

**MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS**

Cavaye (n.d., p.35) points out that ‘evaluation and accountability for regional development outcomes are also largely inconsistent with sustainability’. This is often due to the short-term nature of reporting requirements and funding cycles. Youth engagement efforts involve myriad contributing factors and have long-term goals that cannot be measured easily or quickly.

Indicators used to measure change do not always reflect what is happening within a community. A review of the impact of policies affecting Māori communities noted that ‘evaluation tends to look at specific outcomes, rather than a holistic view of what’s going on’ (Moewaka Barnes 2013, p.159). The review goes on to state that relationships between government and Māori communities can be damaged by a reliance on outcomes rather than looking at what the community has actually experienced.

The evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions found that the complexity of factors that contribute to or hinder youth participation and attainment mean that data should not be used to determine causes, but should be used as means for identifying correlation and progress (Dandolo Partners 2014).
WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

This section looks at recent research on rural youth engagement issues. Key themes are identified, along with areas for potential future exploration. These include:

- The necessity of involving young people in developing, delivering and evaluating programs and services that meet their needs;
- The importance of community attitudes and involvement in rural youth engagement, particularly in building social capital;
- The complexity of youth engagement and the inter-relationship between contributing factors to disengagement; and
- The need for awareness of local socioeconomic and cultural environments in identifying solutions.
ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

While the focus of research into engagement in education has been to evaluate educational outcomes, there are also lessons to be learned on how to engage rural youth more broadly with the communities, institutions and systems they will encounter as they transition to adulthood. The examples here point to the importance of community attitudes and involvement in developing engagement strategies, whether in education or in other settings.

EXPECTATIONS AND MOTIVATION

Engagement in education often hinges on how families and communities value education, and in particular their expectations for participation and attainment. Communities that place a high importance on education have higher completion rates and young people are more motivated to pursue post-compulsory education.

Rural educators have identified that lower education expectations have a significant effect upon motivation while in school, manifesting as a ‘low horizon mindset’. However, studies of successful rural education engagement efforts have determined that this horizon can be ‘raised’ by incorporating students’ interests and providing achievable challenges. ‘A student’s motivation is dependent on their estimation of two key things: the goal’s values and the likelihood of success’ (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013, p.13).

Transition to post-compulsory education is more challenging for young people in rural and remote areas. Barriers to higher education include high costs associated with moving and living away from home, or the necessity to remain and work in family-run businesses. However, Drummond et al. (2011) found that another deterrent was the perception that university was not important to young people’s futures in rural areas. This study of university students and their communities found that in areas where there was easier access to university, education was valued more highly, and young people were more likely to go on to study either at university or undertake other forms of education and training. Lower expectations for tertiary education also have an effect on Year 12 completion rates as young people and their families see no benefit in continuing on to Years 11 and 12.
CHOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

A varied and challenging school curriculum can encourage participation and the retention of young people in rural areas. However, providing variety poses challenges for rural communities with limited resources. Fewer course choices, particularly in secondary school, can also limit the options available to young people who may want to go on to post-compulsory education.

A NSW review of rural education found career goal-setting and the choice of diverse subjects were highly motivating to young people in rural areas, and that a lack of specialist teachers and limited course selection were significant barriers to providing more variety in secondary school curriculums. The review found that, as a result, students in non-metropolitan areas were up to 61% less likely to choose extension or advanced courses. While online delivery of courses is possible, the review noted that this only succeeded when there was local support available to help guide students (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013).

Two longitudinal studies have shown that the paths available to rural youth are often limited to the subjects available to them. The University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre’s *Life Patterns* study found that participation in tertiary education has increased in Australia over the past two decades, except in rural areas; and those rural students who did go on to university studied a much narrower range of subjects, reflecting the limited choices available (Wyn & Cuervo 2011).

The Australian Government-funded *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)* provide ongoing research into the transition trends of young Australians. A review of LSAY data found that the pathways of rural youth might be limited due to fewer course choices in their school's curriculum and fewer specialised teachers available to teach certain subjects at a higher level (Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2002). Fewer young people in rural areas studied humanities/social sciences, business studies and languages, although a greater proportion of rural youth studied sciences and technology.

However, the perceptions of disadvantage, not the number or nature of programs, may also be a factor in decisions about careers and education. A survey of Year 11 students at a rural school in NSW found that the vocational education and training (VET) courses available had little impact on their decisions about whether to continue on to Year 12 or what they might pursue as future employment (Franklin 2010). Students felt that the disadvantage experienced in their community was a greater influence in their decisions about their futures.
PLACE-BASED LEARNING: RELATING EDUCATION TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Place-based education is defined as ‘hands-on learning opportunities that are rooted in local history, culture, art and environment’ (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013, p.15). The practice has been widely adopted in very remote Aboriginal communities, and is especially relevant to mobile communities that pass on local knowledge to successive generations.

Australian studies confirm that when implemented effectively, place-based learning provides better outcomes and is useful in engaging particular groups of young people, in particular Aboriginal youth (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013). A review of the Positive Pathways Program for Indigenous Youth found that learning opportunities placed within the community were more likely to engage or re-engage young people with education than those in a more traditional school-based setting (Goodrick 2012).

An evaluation of the US placed-based education initiative, School at the Center, found that in addition to improvements in the outcomes for students, the wider community benefited through enhanced understanding of the needs of young people, leading to greater participation of young people in community activities. The evaluation also found that up to 20% of the national curriculum could be contextualised to local communities (Searston 2003). The review noted that the success of the initiative was largely due to the voluntary effort of staff and community.

LINKING COMMUNITIES TO SCHOOLS

Related to place-based learning is the creation of community networks that include schools; schools can also form ‘hubs’ for youth engagement activities. Equally, however, schools can be ‘opened up’ through learning in community. This can be especially useful when supporting students whose interests and needs fall outside the classroom-delivered curriculum.

A NSW review of rural and remote education found that informal networks between schools and their communities, or between neighbouring schools, often delivered innovative solutions to resourcing. However, the review cautioned that these initiatives have not been evaluated and may be difficult to replicate elsewhere. In fact, anecdotal evidence shows that manufactured networks often did not provide desired outcomes (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013).

International trends in supporting young people disengaged from education suggest that flexible community networks are useful in supporting students and the schools
themselves (Brader & McGinty 2005). Many countries have restructured their education systems to allow young people to move in and out of education through employment-based or informal learning programs located within the wider community, thereby building employment pathways within their communities (Franklin 2010).

The ethos of opening up learning is captured in the term community as curriculum where school and community environments are one and the same, allowing students to learn about, and with, their communities. This approach has proven effective for re-engaging young people who have found learning in a traditional classroom setting difficult. A study of rural youth in NSW found that the provision of VET courses delivered within the community had a twofold effect: it provided local businesses with skilled employees, and it kept young people in the region (Franklin 2010).

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Efforts to ‘close the gap’ in Indigenous education have been thoroughly evaluated. This report cannot cover the issue comprehensively; however, there are exemplary lessons that can be taken away from current research and applied to rural and remote communities more broadly. Among the literature reviewed, two major themes were identified: the need for extensive, considered community consultation, and the importance of ongoing, progressive evaluation. By demonstrating trust and faith that programs will remain, service deliverers gain respect in local communities and avoid being labelled as ‘fly-in, fly-out’.

Indigenous communities have seen that an undesirable effect of education has been a loss of culture (Allard & Sanderson 2003). Having to make a judgment about which culture is more valuable results in resentment and further disengagement. Engaging Indigenous communities is the lynch pin in successful engagement of Indigenous youth, particularly when it comes to education. In-depth consultation with Aboriginal families in remote South Australia found it was more effective for communities to identify how and to what extent they should relate to schools for the benefit of young people, than for schools to set the agenda (Allard & Sanderson 2003).

A strategy to involve the community in youth engagement reform is Engoori, a staged approach for communities to work on and resolve issues together. It has been a successful platform for Indigenous communities to re-engage young people with education. Engoori recognises that all participants, including young people, have strengths and skills to offer, and that collectively any group of people are able to develop and implement ideas for addressing issues in their communities. Engoori also emphasises the importance of ongoing evaluation to refine engagement programs (Gorringe 2011). Please see the Tools section for more information.
PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS

Young people in rural areas face unique challenges when planning for their futures. They may see dead ends as a result of limited choices locally in education and employment. The result is that pathway planning – a time usually to consider future possibilities – may be a time of stress and disengagement. With the winding down of the Youth Connections program, which was delivered extensively throughout rural areas, local services are now responsible for determining to what extent they will provide youth-specific employment programs and training (Jobs Australia 2014).

WHAT AGE?

Transition planning most frequently takes place during the last two years of compulsory education, usually Years 9 and 10. Rural youth begin to think about their futures at an early age (Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) 2013). Walsh and Black (2009) put forward that young people are most vulnerable to disengagement during the middle years, when they are between nine and 14 years of age, well before transition planning takes place.

The transition period for rural youth is lengthening, with independence, completion of education and gaining full-time employment occurring much later in life (Brader & McGinty 2005; ABS 2008). Social exclusion has also been singled out as a factor in delayed transition (Abello et al. 2014). With this in mind, efforts to engage young people need to start earlier and last longer, with programs and services tailored appropriately to different stages of development.

EARN OR LEARN

The ‘earn or learn’ strategy is by no means solely Australian. Other countries have restructured education, welfare and employment systems as a response to meeting the needs of those young people who have become disengaged with education and employment (Brader & McGinty 2005).

With fewer options for education and employment in rural areas, this approach has been seen as prolonging disadvantage. Brader and McGinty point out that this approach conflicts with training and employment services that seek to tailor services to meet the specific needs of the young person. This tailored approach has been recognised as particularly effective in re-engaging those who have dropped out of the education and employment systems.
A review of the ‘earn or learn’ approach in several countries found that government policy viewed the ultimate and primary goal of transition programs as helping young people into stable employment. Whereas many service providers had more holistic goals in mind, such as addressing multiple concerns and the overall wellbeing of the young person through support with housing, health services and finances (Brader & McGinty 2005).

**TRANSITIONS FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH**

Pathways for Indigenous youth often stop and start, or take on different directions. These variances are not usually considered in reporting. The report *Positive pathways for young people in remote communities* provides evidence that programs and services need to keep realistic targets in mind (Goodrick 2012). While the ideal may be to have all students complete Year 12 and have a pathway plan in place, the reality is that in many communities young people attend school irregularly and may not even finish Year 10.

Pathway planning is typically a partnership between the young person and those with access and knowledge to information about how to achieve the goals and desires identified by the young person. The *Positive pathways* study noted that while the young Aboriginal people who were consulted ‘may be able to select some things they want to happen in their lives they cannot readily articulate the path to get there’ (Goodrick 2012, p.39). A program that is meant to meet the needs of all Australian youth may not, in their view, present opportunities for them to engage in decision-making about their futures.

Pathway planning for Indigenous youth in rural areas is more successful when it is aligned with the community’s values. Goodrick (2012) cautions that reporting on progress in Indigenous communities needs to take into account local, cultural differences, and results should not be looked at separately from the local context. The concept of ‘positive pathways’ was not familiar to many of the Indigenous communities that participated in the report’s survey, as it was not a traditional part of their community’s culture.

A report prepared for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) proposed that the field of resource management could offer career opportunities for young Indigenous people, as ‘many of the activities underpinning national resource management align with the custodial responsibilities for the environment held by Indigenous landowners and passed on to Indigenous young people’ (Fordham & Schwab 2012, p.7).
TRANSITION FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

A common theme in literature on the engagement or re-engagement of disadvantaged youth is the effectiveness of a personalised approach that develops robust relationships between young people and service providers, and the wider community (Goodrick 2012). The Youth Connections program had been successful at re-engaging disadvantaged rural youth, and in particular Indigenous youth, through a case management approach that could be adapted to rural locations and community needs (Youth Connections National Network n.d.).

The purpose of involving the community in transition programs is to demonstrate the value of training in a practical setting and to provide real pathways to employment. A study of rural youth in NSW found that both students and teachers believed that high school VET subjects tied to the community were valuable in engaging those at risk of disengagement (Franklin 2010).

STRATEGIES TO RETAIN AND ATTRACT

As mentioned earlier, how communities view young people who leave to study or work elsewhere can have a significant impact on the strategies adopted to address youth engagement. Leaving doesn’t mean that a young person has not been engaged in their community, nor does it mean that those who stay are engaged. Young people who have moved away from their rural homes have stated that opportunities to engage with their community are a prime consideration in their decision whether or not to return home (VRYS 2011).

RURAL YOUTH ‘EXODUS’

Movement of non-metropolitan youth towards the cities, 2007 was prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER 2007) and looks at the reasons why young people leave or stay in rural areas, as well as what they do in the years after compulsory education. The study followed the movements and activities of one LSAY cohort from 1997 to 2004 and found that there were no significant differences in life satisfaction, average weekly income or the hours worked between those who remained in rural areas and their urban counterparts. This points to the importance of young people being able to make the decision that best suits their personal development.
The study had these main findings:

- The majority of young people moved for study and, of those, most went to university rather than TAFE, apprenticeships/traineeships or similar.
- Young people who had full-time employment in their rural communities were less likely to leave.
- Young people who ended up studying full-time once they left were less likely to return.
- While the percentage of young people who returned to rural areas was at times statistically significant, between 8% and 22%, it did not compensate for the outmigration of young people to metropolitan areas.
- There were no differences in the average weekly income or the hours worked between those who stayed, returned or left rural areas.
- The decision to leave rural areas was developed over a period of time and took into consideration future career expectations and aspirations.
- The higher the ARIA score (more remote), the more likely the young person was to move to an urban area.

**RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS**

Efforts to stem the ‘brain drain’ or attract young people can sometimes miss the mark. Those who are disengaged and remain in rural communities will not have their needs met by initiatives to keep the best and brightest from leaving. Argent and Walmsley (2008) point out that research efforts into population migration have concentrated on the disadvantage that youth outmigration imposes on an ageing population, rather than the impacts population changes have on young people who remain.

Drummond et al. (2011) found that rural communities perceived that having a university campus nearby would help to retain young people in their region. However, a review of tertiary students found that the location of the university had less to do with their decision of where to go than the nature of the courses offered.

A review of regional development in Queensland identified youth entrepreneurship as a strategy to retain young people in rural areas (Cavaye n.d.). Opportunities for rural youth to participate in local economies are no longer dependent on the traditional agricultural or commercial industries, and advancement does not hinge on leaving rural areas in order to succeed. Research into rural youth entrepreneurship in the US has shown that while the development of networks between school and community must be well planned and thought out, not all interaction should be formal. Mentorships and informal traineeships with organisations or individuals who share the same interests are effective ways of nurturing young entrepreneurs (Dabson et al. 2010).
WHAT CAN ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE TO REGIONAL AND RURAL AREAS?

It is tempting to think that offering education and employment opportunities will be enough to keep young people in rural areas. However, surveys of young people who have left for, or who already live in, urban areas found that a whole ‘package’ is needed. Infrastructure, service availability, and social and civic activities were equally important (Hugo et al. 2013c). A survey of young Victorians who had moved from rural areas found that they were more likely to consider moving back if there were opportunities to contribute to their communities (VRYS 2014).

While civic contributions are important to rural youth, the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship in the US found that the number of high school students considering returning to their hometowns is greater when there is an established culture of entrepreneurship in their local communities (Dabson et al. 2010).

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONTEXT

IDENTIFYING WHERE EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE

One of the challenges for rural government, community and business is determining priority areas in a climate of limited funds and capacity. Evidence of the extent of disadvantage experienced locally or the potential for development helps communities to make those decisions. Two indexes provide valuable data at a local level on indicators that can help in planning and evaluation of youth engagement efforts.

The Youth Social Exclusion (YSE) index was developed by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) and compiles data across a number of wellbeing, family, education and employment domains and indicators, thereby presenting a more holistic view of disadvantage at local levels (Abello et al. 2014). As Figure 13 shows, the vast proportion of rural Australia is in the ‘most disadvantaged’ category. Details at a local level are available and provide data on the specific areas of disadvantage.
[In]Sight – Australia’s Regional Competitive Index was developed by the Regional Australia Institute and tracks data across a range of indicators, including human capital, institutions and labour markets (Regional Australia Institute 2014). It also provides an indication of the diversity of local economies. Initial findings from the index show that some local economies are more diverse than previously thought. The index provides diversity indicators for LGAs across Australia. Figure 14 below displays the aggregated results for different remoteness categories.
The temptation is to look for a common solution to addressing the issues affecting young people and their communities in rural Australia. However, there are substantial differences in the composition of rural communities, even though the measurements of disadvantage and indicators of wellbeing may present a picture of likeness across the country. Reinforcing these generalisations, studies often compare the experiences and outcomes of rural youth to their counterparts in urban areas.

Evidence of diversity can be found in the views of young people who have participated in surveys about their experiences of living in rural areas (see Section 6 of this report, Young people’s views). Further evidence of an empirical nature is available through the NATSEM Australian Youth Social Exclusion index, which provides information on key areas associated with engagement, such as participation, and education and health status. The index shows that while some geographic generalisations about social exclusion can be made, there are differences at local levels (Abello et al. 2014). Acknowledgement of this diversity helps to inform local delivery of national and state policies and programs.

Programs that foster inclusiveness of young people from different economic and cultural backgrounds, sexual preference and identity are more successful and lead to the wider community benefiting. Collaborative work allows people from different cultures to gain an understanding of strengths and skills, as well as an appreciation of cultural differences that is likely to diffuse conflict (Hoffman et al. 2010).
RESEARCH ISSUES

Often research into engagement programs provides limited insight into the effectiveness of long-term engagement. Evaluation primarily takes the form of surveys or feedback from participants and service deliverers, and relates to short-term project outcomes rather than the ongoing or lasting effects of the programs. This is most likely due to constraints imposed on research parameters or to the timeframes of reporting requirements. Many reports recommend that continuing and ongoing monitoring and evaluation is necessary to establish what the impact of efforts has been.

Another issue is that research tends to look at a single issue in isolation, such as education engagement, and report solely on its particular indicators. As there are a wide range of factors that contribute to a young person’s wellbeing, the interaction of those factors needs to be taken into consideration. Longitudinal studies are able to record measurements of attainment and participation rates, but are generally unable to provide causal links to some complex issues of rural youth engagement, where there are many stakeholders and a variety of local contexts to consider.

Frequently, evaluations focus on how rural disadvantaged youth compare with urban advantaged youth, shifting the focus away from addressing a local issue. While there are standards and benchmarks that apply to all young people, in some cases reporting does not reflect the true nature of what is happening. As an example, in a nationwide study of young people’s participation in physical activity, data gathered through a common survey pointed to rural youth as being less physically active. However, when discussions were held with young people locally, it was discovered that they were much more active in other ways that were not covered by the survey which was primarily concerned with school-based and organised activities (Lee 2003).

Evidence of success, failure and effectiveness is also necessary in the information that is shared between government and service delivery organisations. In a review of efforts to engage Indigenous youth in resource management, limited program evaluation meant that while insights into how programs could be implemented elsewhere were provided, there was no clear indication of the effectiveness of programs (Fordham & Schwab 2012).
AREAS TO CONSIDER

There are a number of areas where further study may provide additional valuable information:

EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS IN RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE

While outmigration of young people is frequently cited as a significant issue facing rural communities, there has been little study into the effects that engagement strategies have on retaining young people. As most young people leave rural areas to pursue education or employment opportunities, it would seem that they have already been successfully engaged in their communities.

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Study into social capital mainly looks at how the ‘health’ of a community’s social capital affects the opportunities available to young people. There are few examples of how young people’s involvement has been directly attributed to building or improving social capital in their communities.

COMPARING EXPERIENCES OF SIMILAR RURAL AREAS

Research has been conducted that compares the engagement programs of remote Indigenous communities. However, most studies tend to look at the effects of a particular program in one or two communities or schools. Indications about the transportability of programs would be beneficial to those attempting to avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’.
Successful efforts to engage or re-engage rural youth rely on collaboration between community organisations, such as schools, businesses and local government. Many programs have integrated the concepts of building social capital, consumer engagement, and developing collective impact networks. This is in part because rural communities have recognised that they must work collaboratively in order to achieve success. A discussion of these three concepts is included at the end of this section.

This section looks at current efforts in rural youth engagement, including the response of local government to changes in the community. Examples of approaches, programs and initiatives are included for the following areas:

- Community partnerships
- Policy development in local government
- Centrally managed, locally delivered
- Indigenous youth engagement
- Resource management
- Connections with higher education facilities
- Volunteering and leadership
- Youth-specific networks
- Youth-driven engagement.
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The impact of community support on youth engagement cannot be underestimated. A survey of rural students in South Australia found that the range of activities and the extent to which young people would readily engage in them was dependent on how much the community valued those activities (Bryant 2003).

DEVELOPING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The focus of many rural community partnerships has been to encourage participation in education, with the school becoming the hub or heart of the community. However, rural schools with the poorest education outcomes are often located in economically depressed areas, making it difficult to create community partnerships (Walsh & Black 2009). This puts greater responsibility onto schools by making them responsible for coordinating engagement programs with the community.

An effective program that has been adopted by over 1,500 schools across Australia, many of which are in regional, rural and remote areas, is the civic education program, RuMAD? (Are You Making A Difference?). Initially developed and supported by the Education Foundation (a former division of the Foundation for Young Australians, now defunct), the program is now delivered independently by schools and other organisations. The aim of the program is to put young people, primarily those in middle years, in charge of making social change in their schools and communities. Students select and research an issue important to them, plan ways of ‘making a difference’, and then execute projects to address the issue. The program is tailored to the students’ needs and the capacity of the community to contribute.

Reviews of the program note that its success is largely due to the degree of hands-on control that young people have. This is achieved through active citizenship that moves outside the classroom and into the community. RuMAD? has been successful at engaging students who are most at risk of disengagement by providing them with opportunities to plan, develop and implement projects in their communities. The program develops skills in entrepreneurship, leadership and community participation. It has had the effect of not only developing the skills of young people, but also of increasing social capital by establishing collaborative networks within the community where there may not have been opportunities to do so in the past.
POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government is the level of government most directly involved with community activity. Local governments can formalise their goals for youth engagement through the development of strategies, frameworks and charters. Local governments are important for helping communities manage change, whether this is due to outmigration, changes in demographics, or economic growth or decline.

While there is no national report on rural local governments and youth engagement, there is extensive information available on engagement efforts that have happened in rural Victoria over the past ten years. In 2004, Victoria launched the guide *Connecting young people in local communities* to help local governments develop youth charters. The guide was developed by the Municipal Association of Victoria in collaboration with RMIT University. In 2011, Victorian Rural Youth Services (VRYS), an initiative of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), surveyed the youth engagement activities of Victorian councils. And more recently in 2013, VRYS prepared a discussion paper on engaging young people in regional centres. The VRYS report of 2011 found that despite the availability of the guide, only ‘46% of rural LGAs have produced and or/worked towards developing a youth strategy’ (VRYS 2011, p.3) and only half of those had current youth strategies that were in use (VRYS 2011). It should be noted, however, that 65% of rural LGAs had at least one youth group or body attached to the council.

Involving young people in rural local government can encourage community sustainability, retention and build social capital. The Victorian report, *Engaging with young people: Local Government in action*, provides comprehensive detail on how young people can be engaged in local government activities. Nabben’s analysis (2004b) of effective youth engagement programs found that the involvement of the wider community is a common and essential ingredient. The report goes on to note that local governments can provide opportunities in other ways that are particularly relevant to engaging rural youth by:

- Providing traineeships and graduate recruitment opportunities;
- Encouraging participation of under-represented groups, including multicultural, LGBTI youth; and
- Managing change in growing regional areas by including the views of young people in discussions about community development.
Managing change is a recurring theme in literature on local government and youth engagement. Some rural areas have experienced rapid growth, including growing youth populations, while others are shrinking, which often coincides with a higher percentage of young people leaving the area. In response, the roles and functions of local government have evolved, although there is some debate about just what those are.

In a report presented to the 2nd Future of Australia’s Country Towns Conference in 2005, the author states that the role of local government has changed ‘its focus from “hard” infrastructure provision to a greater relative importance on spending on social services such as health, welfare, safety, and community amenities’ (Butler 2005, p.4).

However, the VRYS report, Engaging young people in regional centres, notes that ‘a number of regional local governments have signalled that they see their councils’ role in the youth sector predominantly in terms of coordination and capacity building, not direct service provision’ (VRYS 2013, p.29). The report provides examples of how several growing regional areas have worked to share information between service agencies, augment public transportation, and increase youth health services in response to growing and changing needs.

While these views differ, they both recognise the need for local governments to work in partnership with their communities. Butler (2005, p.4) states, ‘the more local governments engage with communities, the more obvious it becomes that communities themselves are an extremely valuable resource generally overlooked, or at least underestimated by local government. The capacity of communities to work collaboratively to meet identified community needs is greatly influenced by the levels of social capital within communities’.

**CENTRALLY MANAGED, LOCALLY DELIVERED**

Successful programs aimed at engaging or re-engaging young people in geographically dispersed areas are developed, managed and funded centrally, but delivered locally. They rely on communities to tailor programs to suit the needs of young people, and take into consideration the capabilities and resources available locally.

A number of these programs have focused on engaging young people through creative projects that encourage entrepreneurial skills: FReeZA and Human’s Shockwave and Creative Tracks. The FReeZA program is highlighted as a case study (see p.110).
**Shockwave and Creative Tracks**

Human started as Human Ventures in 1995 and operates throughout Queensland and identifies itself as a ‘creative and cultural social enterprise’. Its programs are designed to build social capacity in disadvantaged areas by encouraging sustainable creative industries to develop. The *Shockwave* program in Central West Queensland provides workshops for young people to plan, design and execute creative projects that include videography, dance, photography and music, with the end result being a collaborative Shockwave Festival. Support is provided through a centrally managed design hub. The program is currently in a transition phase where management will be handed over to a locally-based regional body.

The *Creative Tracks* program is a partnership between Human and Aboriginal organisations such as councils, youth support agencies, community members and Elders. Like the *Shockwave* program, the aim is to develop skills through creative activities. Local festivals and community events showcase the results. The creative endeavours are tied closely to local Indigenous culture and help young people engage with education, develop leadership skills and discover career pathways.


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**INDIGENOUS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

Programs to engage Indigenous youth are frequently ahead of the curve. Many take into account the complexity of the factors leading to disengagement, the local context, and the role of community in addressing, planning and delivering programs. A model that exemplifies this approach is *Engoori* (Gorringe 2011). (See also Section 5, *What does the research say?* and the *Tools* section for greater detail.)

Gorringe notes that successful engagement efforts in Indigenous communities build on the strengths of all participants, including young people, Elders and the wider community. Gorringe suggests that *Engoori* starts from the belief that any group of people hold the knowledge required to address a problem satisfactorily. This mirrors many of the fundamental steps involved in building social capital and collective impact, in that the cycle of developing skills, putting plans into practice and evaluating progress leads to adaptable, flexible engagement efforts.

Gorringe provides an outline of *Engoori* from Mithaka country in southwest Queensland (see Figure 15). The model builds social capital by drawing together the knowledge and skills of community members to inform each other, through a cycle of continuous evaluation and improvement.
Reviews of successful Indigenous youth engagement programs echo the call for Indigenous communities to be the drivers, not solely partners, in program development and delivery. A review of youth programs in remote Central Australia found that ‘cultural relevance’ was the determining factor in a program’s effectiveness (Lindeman et al. 2013).

In addition to program development, whole of community engagement is needed in delivering and evaluating programs, training a workforce, developing policy frameworks, and fostering networks between community and government agencies (Lindeman et al. 2013; Phillips-Brown et al. 2013).
The *Engoori* model describes a cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation. Ongoing evaluation has been identified as critical to the success of Māori youth engagement programs in New Zealand. Moewaka Barnes (2013) outlines these factors as essential to the evaluation process:

- It is controlled and owned by Māori.
- It is conducted for the benefit of Māori (although it may benefit others).
- It is carried out within a Māori world view, which is likely to question the dominant culture and norms.
- It aims to make a positive difference for Māori.

A key theme in Indigenous youth engagement efforts is the recognition that it takes time to develop engagement approaches that work and to develop the cultural knowledge required by service providers who are not part of the community. Unfortunately, program constraints currently often demand that impact can be demonstrated on a much shorter timescale.

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Resource management is an area that holds promise for providing local employment and training opportunities for young people. There are added benefits for the wider community, too. Young Carbon Farmers, an initiative of Future Farmers Network, introduces innovation and promising practices in land and resource management to rural communities by educating the next generation of farmers. The Young Carbon Farmers website community provides updates on what is happening across the country, allows information and resource sharing, and support for young farmers on how to implement changes locally.


Resource management programs have the potential to provide pathways for Indigenous youth through young rangers programs, cadetships and internships. Two programs, in particular, engage Indigenous youth with education and training that focus on ‘learning through country’: Junior ranger programs in the Northern Territory and the Australian Government *Indigenous Ranger Cadetship Program*. Despite the resource boom providing employment in many remote areas of the country, the opportunities for Indigenous youth have in the main been short-term positions and have not provided sustainable employment (Fordham & Schwab 2012).

CONNECTIONS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION FACILITIES

The presence and involvement of higher education institutions (universities and TAFEs) in rural communities has been shown to have a significant impact on engagement in education, school retention and future aspirations. The connections can be physical, such as a satellite campus nearby, or in community partnerships with local schools, businesses and training facilities. The connections can also be on a more personal level.

Research conducted by Flinders University evaluated the effectiveness of a peer-mentoring program in influencing aspirations for higher education (university or TAFE) among young people in rural areas. The program had a strong foundation in developing personal, ongoing relationships between the mentor and mentee. Results demonstrated that as the program progressed, young people who had previously not thought of continuing their education did change their views, with many stating that they would not have otherwise done so without the mentoring program (Curtis 2012).

VOLUNTEERING AND LEADERSHIP

Rural areas are renowned for having a vibrant and ongoing culture of volunteering. In some cases, however, young people can dismiss or overlook volunteering as a means of becoming engaged in education, employment and community, despite the fact that they can see the benefits for their own skills development and the good of their communities.

Volunteering efforts have grown to encompass other, more personally challenging activities, including leadership development, and social and commercial entrepreneurship.

Programs offered through the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) are built around the fundamental idea that young people are capable of making an impact locally or globally on issues that are important to them. A number of its initiatives are established to support rural youth – and in particular Indigenous youth – develop skills to become leaders within their communities. The FYA-run IMPACT is a three-year Indigenous leadership and development program in the Northern Territory that supports students during school and the transition to work. The focus is on providing positive role models within schools and community.

Agfest is an annual agricultural show organised by the Rural Youth Organisation of Tasmania and is recognised as one of the top three field days in the country. Beginning in 1983, the event has grown to a three-day event that hosts hundreds of exhibitors and caters for thousands of visitors. It is organised and run by young volunteers from agricultural and rural communities. Planning is a year-long process and involves learning skills and collaborating with community, state and national organisations.


Entrepreneurship, and in particular social entrepreneurship, is now considered an important skill to be included in school curriculums. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in their report, *Shooting for the moon: Good practices in local youth entrepreneurship support*, has identified three main good practice criteria:

- Opportunity creation – making it easier for young people to put forward ideas.
- Entrepreneurship education – generating motivation and creating entrepreneurial mindsets.
- Start-up support – providing the network connections necessary to support them.

(Hofner & Delaney 2010, p.8)

The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (US) has identified four themes that should be considered when developing a youth entrepreneurship program in rural areas:

- Quality entrepreneurship curriculum
- Supportive community environment
- Peer networking
- Pathways from education to opportunity.

(Dabson et al. 2010)

A report on social entrepreneurship and partnerships in rural Queensland schools outlines the approach of two social entrepreneurship enterprises programs. Partnerships were developed with the communities, but also with a local university (Walker-Gibbs 2004). The study found that entrepreneurship fits well with current education strategies and teaching methods, and the partnerships formed were mutually beneficial. By partnering with a local university, the program was able to provide education and future employment pathways.
YOUTH-SPECIFIC NETWORKS

Networks provide the means for sharing information, developing skills, and representing the ideas and concerns unique to rural youth. Several regional and rural organisations have groups or networks specifically for their young members. While their primary concern is to support their young membership, some networks now see the value of young people helping to manage change in their local communities and provide leadership.

*Desert Knowledge Australia* connects people and organisations that are working to improve the social, economy and wellbeing of people living in desert Australia. Its programs are featured in a case study (see p.113).

National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy (NIYLA) is an initiative supported by the FYA. NIYLA brings together Indigenous young people to develop networks and gain skills to initiate social action initiatives in their local communities. By providing a national platform for Indigenous issues, young people represent not only themselves but the concerns of their communities.


YOUTH-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT

The messages that young people in rural areas provide during consultation, research or other engagement activities are sometimes not used to best advantage. There are, however, examples of the voices of rural youth being more than another form of feedback on a single issue; they are being used to inform others on how to engage young people more effectively.

Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) is an initiative supported by the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT). TYF convenes several times a year and gathers young people from across the state to discuss a current issue in depth. While one of the objectives of the event is an exchange of ideas, the results of the day’s proceedings produce two reports: one for young people on what their thoughts were and what decisions were made, and the other is a communiqué for government and the wider Tasmanian community. The communiqué is an important document that informs policy direction and provides advice on how young people would like to see things happen in their state.

Heywire, launched by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1998, provides a forum for rural youth to put forward their views on issues important to them. Thousands of stories have been shared over the years, with the winners of an annual competition attending a national summit to develop leadership skills, meet politicians and further develop their ideas in teams. These are presented at Parliament House to a panel of influential Australians and experts.

Heywire website: http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/

WHAT HASN’T WORKED

Evidence of programs that have not worked can be difficult to find. A review of youth engagement initiatives in rural South Australia found some forms of engagement were not successful. Among them were youth round tables, youth councils and other consultation methods (Bryant 2003). Young people identified the chief reasons for failure were:

- Lack of purpose
- Uncertainty about participants’ role
- No encouragement from the wider community to participate
- Accommodating too great an age range
- Lack of promotion of activities or results.

Often, whether a program succeeds or fails comes down to timing. The report on the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transition pointed out that early intervention and rapid responses were effective in stemming disengagement from education (Dandolo Partners 2014).
CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

The term *consumer engagement* is also referred to as *client engagement* or *consumer and community engagement* and most commonly used in the healthcare sector, but is also used more generally in the social services sector to describe how service providers interact with the people they are serving. The goal of engaging consumers is to provide better and more efficient service.

There are many models for consumer engagement, but in general the approach is designed to place the emphasis on the experiences of the consumer when planning and delivering services. Service consumers are engaged in a number of ways, from gaining feedback through surveys and interviews, through to representation on panels and committees. (See the *Tools* section on *Levels of engagement* for more information.)

Consumer engagement strategies outline the relationship between consumers and providers, helping to ensure that everyone is aware of rights and responsibilities, procedures and the boundaries of the services provided. Most consumer strategies emphasise that consumer engagement is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach and relies on broad consultation and involvement with the community, taking care to be as inclusive as possible.

Some local governments and community organisations have detailed youth strategies that define how young people will be involved. However, much of the engagement is limited to youth-only forums, such as youth councils, boards or other advisory bodies, and for youth-specific issues such as public space, entertainment and sporting activities. Young people are involved in many other aspects of community life. Young people feel more engaged when they are involved in areas that make a genuine contribution to their communities. Involving young people in broader consumer engagement activities can ensure that services are suited to all community members.
Social capital generally refers to the relationship between organisations, networks, systems, policies and norms that allow people to get things done. These can be formal relationships, such as local government regulations, or informal relationships, such as knowing who can provide answers to questions locally, or understanding that ‘this is the way we do things here’.

As has been pointed out in much of the literature on youth engagement in rural areas, the success or failure of efforts depends on developing social capital. Young people, like all community members, come into contact with multiple systems and organisations. The distinction, however, is to what extent young people are viewed as a part of a community’s social capital.

Those developing programs and delivering services solicit the input of young people and may involve them in planning processes, but young people are not generally viewed as an equal ‘resource’ in communities. Effective youth engagement programs have demonstrated that they are successful in part because young people are invested in the community’s social capital. The community gains an appreciation for what they can contribute and then relies on them for that contribution.
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Effective rural youth engagement strategies cited in this report point to a few key ideas:

- Engagement efforts that target one specific area are less likely to be successful than those that take a holistic approach.
- The holistic approach requires the involvement of the whole community, and given the isolation of rural communities, engagement efforts need to make the most of what is available locally.
- However, it may become apparent that skills and expertise is needed that isn’t available locally, and may require partnerships with other communities, or organisations and institutions not located locally.
- The effectiveness of engagement cannot be determined quickly; evaluation over longer periods of time is required.
- Ongoing evaluation fine-tunes engagement efforts and can accommodate change.

These ideas are incorporated in the concept of collective impact. Whether intentionally or not, many evaluations have identified the components or ideals of collective impact as an approach to developing effective engagement programs.

Collective impact is defined as ‘the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a complex social problem’ and ‘is more rigorous and specific than collaboration among organizations’.

The five conditions of collective impact success that provide a framework for community collaboration are:

- **Common agenda**: All participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.
- **Shared measurement**: All participating organisations agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities**: A diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- **Continuous communication**: All players engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- **Backbone support**: An independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilising resources.

It may seem obvious to involve young people in developing programs to meet their needs, particularly when they have been designed to increase engagement or encourage re-engagement. However, this has not always been the case. Youth development programs have often approached the subject of solving a problem by doing things ‘to’ young people, rather than ‘with’ them. The messages that young people want to be listened to and to have their views taken seriously were repeated in the material reviewed for this report. Young people have also stated that, in many cases, the mechanisms for being heard – such as local councils or youth leadership initiatives – were confusing or not effective in putting their ideas into action.

While this section cannot present the voices of all rural youth across all engagement issues, it includes examples of how young people have provided input into some of the resources referenced in this report. Key messages are presented along with an analysis of how views were gathered and used.
Young people's opinions and experiences may be captured directly through surveys and focus groups, or indirectly through consultations with those who work with young people. Data collected can be either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative data includes measurements of preferences, activity or performance, which can be useful for determining any changes in program effectiveness. Quantitative data may also include demographic data, which is useful when identifying the characteristics of youth cohorts. Qualitative data is often more difficult to summarise, as it includes opinions, suggestions and personal experiences. However, qualitative data is essential, as it captures information that attempts to answer ‘why’ or ‘how’ some things work or don’t work.
**VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SELECTED REPORTS**

*Preventing youth disengagement and promoting engagement*  
(Burns et al. 2008)

**Organisation:** Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

The report includes a literature review, case study examples and results from consultations with young people.

**Reasons for gathering the views of young people:** The report authors stated that young people’s views are not traditionally thought of as ‘lived experiences’ in research, program and policy development. The inclusion of young people’s thoughts seeks to address this gap in disengagement research.

**Methods used:** Face-to-face interviews were coordinated with several youth service organisations.

**Key messages:**

- Young people made the association between advantage/disadvantage and engagement/disengagement.
- Being a part of a community makes young people feel valued.
- Opportunities for engaging young people should be inclusive and acknowledge diversity in terms of cultural and socioeconomic background, as well as capabilities.
- Young people value being able to make their own choices.

**How findings were used or could be used:** The consultations with young people helped to support the suggested engagement approaches and strategies.

**Insights:** The report states that young people’s views are not taken into consideration in research and program development. Our review of research for this report shows that this remains the case at this time. More than two-thirds of the research reports incorporated the results from consultations, surveys, and interviews with young people. What is clear, however, is that young people are primarily consulted at the beginning of engagement efforts, and less so at other stages of program development, implementation or evaluation.
Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)

**Organisation:** National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

The LSAY program tracks young people across Australia as they transition from compulsory education to further education, training or employment. The program began in 1995 and collects information on cohorts from different years in order to track changes in the experiences of young people over time. Data is collected across issues relating to educational achievement, future aspirations, as well as social and work issues. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) manages the program and produces reports regularly. Data is also made available for other researchers to use.

**Reasons for gathering the views of young people:** As information is collected over a period of time, trends, generational changes and geographical differences can be ascertained more easily due to the larger sample sizes and lengthier periods of the study. Quantitative data provides benchmarks and indicators for measuring the effects of policies and programs.
The extent and nature of young people's participation in decision making in local government in rural and regional Victoria: A discussion paper by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (VRYS 2011)

Organisation: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Victorian Rural Youth Services

This report reviews the youth engagement policies, strategies and activities of local government associations in Victoria. Along with this review, youth development officers and young people participating in local government programs were surveyed.

Reason for gathering young people’s views: The effectiveness of youth participation in local government is not well understood. In rural areas, youth engagement is not always considered at local government level. Understanding their views will lead to more effective strategies and programs.

Methods used:
- Direct: Quantitative survey
- Indirect: References to results from consultations with young people conducted by local governments.

Key messages:
- Most consultation revolves around youth issues, while some addresses broader, community-wide issues.
- Consultations were used to develop youth strategies, but young people may not have been involved beyond that.
- Assumptions should not be made that a local council already knows the issues that are important to young people. Young people feel that their views are not taken into consideration, even after consultation.
- Young people who have participated in youth councils acknowledge that the experience has provided them with skills and social opportunities. They believe that youth councils are a good way of recognising the contributions of young people in their communities.
- Young people believe that more culturally diverse youth councils should be encouraged. They also believe youth council should be youth-run, inclusive and fun.
- Youth councils need to have a clear purpose that young people can relate to and a goal they can commit to.

How findings were used or could be used: While the results were not extensive, they do provide insights and anecdotal evidence on the involvement of young people in rural local governments.

Insights: There is the opportunity to involve young people in all community consultation. Follow through on consultation is imperative in order to build trust and worthwhile relationships between young people and local governments.
Staying in touch: Young people maintaining relationships with rural and regional communities (VRYS 2014)

Organisation: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Victorian Rural Youth Services

In addition to a literature review and a policy overview, the report provides statistical and demographic data collected from 83 young people who have at one time lived in and moved away from rural areas in Victoria.

Reason for gathering young people’s views: In response to a government inquiry into retaining young people in rural areas, initiatives have sought to address some of the issues faced by rural youth, including improvements to infrastructure, access to services and engagement strategies. This information looks at whether the areas targeted by government align with the issues that are important to young people who have made the decision to leave their communities.

Method used: Quantitative online survey of 83 young people, including open comments.

Key messages:

› Connection to family and friends is the best thing about living in a rural community.
› Young people valued the physical environment of rural communities, such as the green spaces, farms, beaches, etc.
› Most young people would like to live in a rural community one day.
› After leaving, no one had ever encouraged them to return to their communities.
› While employment and education opportunities were a major concern, and were often the reasons for leaving, other attributes such as volunteering and community activities were valued more highly.
› The higher costs associated with living in rural communities were a major consideration, particularly housing costs.

How findings were used or could be used: The report was developed by the Victorian youth peak body (YACVic) to inform its membership, as well as government and service providers, about the direction of current policies and programs to retain young people in rural areas. The data collected identifies and prioritises retention issues for future investigation, and helps in the development of youth engagement efforts by local government, community and regional development organisations. Quantitative data provides profiles of ‘typical’ young people who have chosen to leave rural communities. Quotes from young people also provide anecdotal evidence to back up recommendations and provide personal insights into general statements about young people in rural areas.

Insights: It is interesting to note that none of the respondents to the survey had been encouraged to return to their rural communities. This points to the need to make a greater effort to nurture contact with those who have left rural communities and to keep them informed of future opportunities in these communities.
**Tasmanian Youth Forum: ‘Should I stay or should I go?’**
(YNOT 2013)

**Organisation:** Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)

The Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) is the peak organisation for consulting with young Tasmanians, and holds regular forums attended by young people from across the state.

**Reasons for gathering the views of young people:** To find out why young people may be considering leaving the state and what reasons they may have for staying.

**Methods used:**
- The ‘Should I stay or should I go?’ forum was held in October 2013 with over 150 participants.
- An additional online survey received 292 responses.

**Key messages:**
- Most young people said they think they may leave the state, but would also like to return.
- The state’s environment and community are the most valued aspects of living in Tasmania, and most young people were proud to be Tasmanian.
- The lack of jobs is a significant factor in deciding whether to leave.
- Young people felt there were fewer options for study at university or TAFE in Tasmania versus the mainland.
- There are few youth-specific opportunities, events and activities in the state.
- Young people started thinking about leaving the state when quite young; however, they do not make the final decision lightly and consider many options before developing their plans.

**How findings were used or could be used:** The findings from the forum and online survey were analysed and a communiqué prepared for government. Reports were also available to services organisations, schools and other stakeholders. A report on the forum and its findings was prepared specifically for young people, which detailed what was going to be done with the information participants provided.

**Insights:** Young people are aware of the limited opportunities available to them at an early age. It would appear that if there were more youth-focused activities, many might reconsider moving.
**Staying at home: Integrating rural youth in rural communities**

(Bryant 2003)

**Organisation:** Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

This report looks at the outcomes of a South Australian study into young people’s involvement in recreational, civic and business activities. It was intended to be a pilot study to develop mechanisms for comparing data from rural communities across Australia, and for developing strategies to incorporate the diverse views and needs of young people in engagement efforts. A range of data were collected, including quantitative and qualitative data from both young people and community stakeholders.

**Reason for gathering young people’s views:** The surveys were conducted to identify how involved young people were in their communities and the relationship between this involvement and their desire to stay or leave their communities.

**Method used:** This review involved several methods of collecting young people’s views, including personal interviews, quantitative telephone surveys and a focus group. It is interesting to note that the survey was extended to the age of 30, as it was felt that this was the age when young men and women begin to become involved in farming and other rural activities in their own right.

**Key messages:**
- The main reason young people left was to pursue educational opportunities.
- Sports and sporting events – in particular football – were seen as the main recreational pursuit for rural youth.
- Some non-sporting organisations, such as volunteer organisations, Scouts, and Country Fire Service were recognised as providing valuable opportunities, but were deemed to be ‘uncool’.
- Transportation was the main barrier to participation in recreational activities.
- Young people wanted a place to ‘hang out’ that was not necessarily a youth drop-in centre.
- Student representative councillors did not have much influence in local councils.
- Young people reported not knowing what local councils did, and those who did know were not confident in interacting with the council or approaching them with suggestions.
- Young people needed to know that their suggestions and input were valued.

**How findings were used or could be used:** The findings back up recommendations for further research, national policies and strategies, and local programs for engaging young people in rural areas.

**Insights:** Quantitative data provides a way of measuring and recording the effects of programs and policies. As well, this data can help to identify relationships between issues, for example the lack of knowledge about the role of local councils and the perception of the effectiveness of local councils. Qualitative data provides an understanding of why some engagement efforts have not worked: for example; the lack of appeal of some organisations despite their recognised value to the community.
‘The space in-between’: Future policy directions for youth at risk (Youth Connections National Network n.d.)

**Organisation:** Youth Connections National Network (YCNN)

This report was prepared by YCNN prior to the defunding of the *Youth Connections* program. It includes evidence from services on achieving outcomes as well as a review of program implementation.

**Reasons for gathering the views of young people:** As young people are the ultimate beneficiaries of the program, recording their experiences as customers was seen as important in identifying what worked to engage them in education, training or employment.

**Methods used:** Young people were interviewed at Shout Out Summits, which were held in every state and territory between July and October 2012.

**Key messages:**
- Because of the effectiveness of the program, the majority of participants said they would recommend the program to friends or others they felt would benefit.
- The program was identified as the primary reason for re-engaging with education.
- Across the country, similar barriers to education were identified, including struggles with peer and teacher relationships, difficulty adjusting to the school environment, feelings of not being able to keep up or fit in, and not feeling that what they were doing was useful.
- The majority of young people had plans to get a job or an apprenticeship; a much lower percentage believed they would participate in further education.

**How findings were used or could be used:** The views of young people substantiated the need for a specialist transition program for at-risk young people, and provided experiential evidence of why the program was successful.

**Insights:** Because the needs of at-risk young people are so specific to their own individual experiences, it is often difficult to gather the evidence of why and how something does or doesn’t work. The Shout Out Summits were established just for *Youth Connections* participants, and as such, young people felt comfortable and confident to contribute their views.
**Section 6: Young People's Views**

*Choices and chances in programs and plans for the gaining of credentials: Perspectives from a small rural high school*  
(Franklin 2010)

*Journal article by Janice Franklin, Charles Sturt University*

This article challenges whether discussions about rural education should be conducted from the traditional standpoint of rural disadvantage. The views of young people participating in VET programs are contrasted with the views of educators and service providers.

**Reason for gathering young people’s views:** Young people from a small rural high school were interviewed in order to understand whether the objectives of the school’s transition program were matched to young people’s understanding of and expectations for their futures.

**Methods used:** One rural school was reviewed.
- Qualitative data: focus groups with students; interviews with staff.
- Quantitative data: survey of students, review of school documents and programs.

**Key messages:**
- Young people are aware of the economic and social changes occurring in their local communities that affect their own futures.
- Young people and educators both agree that VET courses help to engage those who are at risk of disengagement.
- Young people did not necessarily leave because of what is lacking in their communities, but because of what other communities and areas might offer.
- Young people felt that their school was unable to provide the support or subject choice that would allow them to pursue the areas in which they were interested.
- Young people believed that they were responsible for making choices about their futures and in seeking help when needed.
- The range of VET choices offered by the school did not have a significant influence on young people’s decisions about their futures.

**How findings were used or could be used:** While the findings pertain to a single school, other rural schools may face similar issues when delivering state or national programs to a local audience.

**Insights:** Young people and educators had different views on what they believed influenced the decisions of young people.
The place and meaning of physical activity, physical education, and physical culture in the lives of young people living in rural Queensland (Lee 2003)

Journal article by Jessica Lee, University of Queensland

This article forms part of a national project into young people's engagement with physical activity and physical culture.

Reason for gathering young people's views: Data from quantitative research has shown that young people in rural areas participate in physical activities to a lesser degree than their urban counterparts. Qualitative research can provide clues to why this may or may not be the case.

Methods used:
- Longitudinal survey over 28 months, including interviews and diaries to record activity.
- Face-to-face and phone interviews.

Key messages:
- Some young people may not see that they are actually involved in physical activity, thinking of it as 'work' or 'chores'.
- The requirements for participating in group physical education activities are at odds with those who are home schooled in remote areas and unable to find suitable equivalents.
- Many physical activities and sports are perceived as 'male only', such as football, cricket and community activities such as State Emergency Service (SES) and army training.
- While rural youth are involved in physical activities to a greater degree than the quantitative data would suggest, there are still fewer options available to them than those in urban areas.
- Transportation is cited as the key barrier to participation.

How findings were used or could be used: Results point to the need for changes in school curriculums, and the need for more inclusive activities.

Insights: The qualitative data dispels some of the assumptions made by the quantitative data, namely that young people in rural areas are not as active as those in urban areas.
Deferring a university offer in regional Victoria
(Freeman, Klatt & Polesel 2014)

Organisation: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

This report is a synthesis of findings from several past reports on deferring university enrolment. The report also includes results from a questionnaire provided to a current group of young people who had chosen to defer their enrolment.

Reasons for gathering the views of young people: As several other studies had looked into the reasons for deferring university enrolment in the five years prior to this report, more current views of young people were sought to validate the report’s analysis.

Methods used: Detailed questionnaire completed by 27 young people.

Key messages:

- Young people in regional Victoria require more support in course and career guidance, as well as financial and social support, in order to avoid students withdrawing or deferring.
- Information and guidance is needed when students are in secondary school to prepare them for life at university.
- Advice and support is needed to first-year students when relocating.
- The limited availability of affordable accommodation is a barrier to students who need to relocate to study.

How findings were used or could be used: The respondents confirmed the findings of previous reports, making for stronger recommendations. The information is intended for politicians and higher education providers.

Insights: The questionnaire is very detailed and covers a wide range of issues. The results from the survey actually have the potential to produce a greater range of recommendations.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUDING THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The views of rural youth have primarily been used as a means of prioritising what areas to work in and, to a much lesser degree, to provide input into program development or gauge effectiveness of engagement efforts during evaluation. More often than not, the effectiveness or success of a program is measured through results or outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy scores or participation levels. While those measures are necessary, they do not capture the experiences of young people required to make further improvements or refine service delivery. The feedback of young people can even contradict some outcome measures. Program evaluations tend to seek the views of those delivering programs, who may or may not represent the views of young people.

While many of the reports from research projects included findings from consultations with young people, there were instances where their views were not included. Most noticeably, reports covering service delivery or program evaluation concentrated on capturing the views of service delivery staff and community members, and neglected to canvass the views of those receiving the services. Research and program reviews into Indigenous youth engagement also neglected to incorporate the views of young people. Of the research conducted in remote and very remote communities, the views of community leaders and service delivery staff are recorded, but those of young people are frequently missing.
Young people need to be engaged in their communities in order to get the most from education and employment opportunities. It is also important that young people are valued for the contributions they make in the decisions that affect them. Why and how young people become disengaged are complex issues, usually involving a number of factors that can be difficult to address individually. For this reason, efforts to engage or re-engage young people often require coordination between community members and organisations.

Just how rural communities approach working together is the key to addressing youth engagement effectively. Three key concepts have been identified and discussed in the materials in this report:

- The issues facing rural youth must be correctly identified.
- Engagement efforts should be organised for action.
- There are effective approaches to engaging young people.
IDENTIFYING THE ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

IS THE ISSUE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE OR THE COMMUNITY?
Community involvement in the engagement of young people in education and employment is critical. However, engagement may focus on what is being done to or for young people, and not what needs to be done within the community.

Discussions about young people in rural communities usually point to outmigration as an indication that a community is in ‘crisis’, rather than looking at what communities can do to help young people develop and grow (Gabriel 2000).

Allen et al. (2014) point out the benefits of reframing discussions to focus on the young person:

Many of them are ‘connected’—to friends, neighborhoods, churches, families, and local community-based organizations. But the institutions, organizations, and public systems that could help them achieve higher levels of education, training, and jobs are themselves disconnected from one another. Recognizing this reality, many advocates have abandoned the term ‘disconnected youth.’ Instead, we favor ‘opportunity youth,’ a phrase that calls attention to the opportunities these young people seek and that should be opened up for them.

While both the rural community and its young people may benefit from engagement efforts, how the issue is approached has implications for the way initiatives are planned and delivered, as well as for how young people themselves view the efforts of the community. A survey of students in a VET program at a rural NSW school found that they believed the disadvantage experienced in their community had a greater impact on their plans for the future than the courses offered through their school (Franklin 2010). Young people recognise that strengthening the community will provide them with brighter futures.

WHAT INFLUENCES YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?
Community attitudes
The importance that rural communities and families place on education and employment has a huge impact on the motivation of young people. Community support is one of the main positive attributes that young people value about living in rural areas.
Holistic approach
Many issues associated with disengagement cannot be looked at in isolation, and each community has its own particular issues it faces. Programs in Central Australia that attempted to address volatile substance abuse in Indigenous communities were unsuccessful if they did not take into consideration general wellbeing issues, as well as engagement in education and employment, and a myriad of other factors (Lindeman et al. 2013).

Clear, supportive pathways
Transition is a period when young people are particularly vulnerable to disengagement. This period is lengthening for all young people, but more so for those in rural areas. Support is needed for much longer and to a greater degree for young people in rural areas.

Without the ability to see education and career pathways and the support needed to plan their futures, many young people drop out of school early. Young people in rural areas have reported that they begin thinking about their futures at an early age, with the middle years being a time when they are particularly vulnerable to disengagement (YNOT 2013; Walsh & Black 2009). However, transition planning does not usually start until later on during their school careers.

Disengagement can also occur when young people cannot see opportunities for pursuing their interests. Restrictions in choice and availability can have an impact on future pathways, particularly if hands-on training is needed for qualification or certification.

The Flinders Island Transition Program demonstrates that preparation for transition needs to start early and be supportive at all stages in order to develop students’ confidence in their abilities (see p.107).

WHO IS INVOLVED IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUES?
The themes of cooperation, collaboration and partnership are repeated throughout the literature on rural youth engagement. Primarily, these relationships are articulated in terms of providing or extending education and training opportunities within local communities by developing ties between schools and community. However, given the need for a more holistic approach to addressing complex issues, other stakeholders may need to be involved, including those providing social support services and local governments. This points to the need to build the social capital of local communities.

Local government
There is no national understanding of how local governments should involve young people or respond to their needs. The reviews in Victoria (Nabben 2004a; VRYS 2011) may provide insights that are indicative of what is happening around the country. Some rural local governments see their role as directly providing services for young people,
while others see their role as supporting networks and organisations to meet the needs of young people. The fact that the VRYS review found the majority of regional and rural local governments in Victoria did not have current youth strategies in place, despite an initiative to facilitate adoption of youth charters in 2004, may suggest that there is a role for local governments to help organise efforts to address youth engagement.

**Local knowledge and developing social capital**

The fundamental concept of *Engoori* is that communities have the capacity to address their issues and meet the needs of its members (Gorringe 2011). Place-based learning has been demonstrated to engage and re-engage young people effectively with education, and relies on the school's connections with local business and cultural organisations and individuals.

A review of Indigenous youth engagement efforts in resource management found that while there were employment opportunities made available to local Indigenous youth, these were primarily casual positions with few prospects for career development (Fordham & Schwab 2012). The review pointed out that there were many benefits for business and the rural communities to tap into local knowledge and land management practices.

**Relationships with other communities and regional centres**

At times, knowledge, skills, resources and services need to be brought in from outside the community, or shared between communities. Connections with other rural towns or regional centres provide a greater range of opportunities for young people. Regional universities have also contributed to the social capital of rural communities and have had an impact on engagement with education in their local areas.

*Desert Knowledge Australia* has created several networks that target specific issues or needs within desert communities. Support for the networks is provided centrally but relies on its members to build up a pool of knowledge that can be shared (see p.113).

**WHAT ARE THE LOCAL CONDITIONS?**

Franklin (2010) states that rural *advantage* needs to be understood in order to understand how to address rural *disadvantage*. Knowing what opportunities, resources and capabilities are available is just as important as knowing the particular barriers and challenges a community experiences. Two indexes are available to help communities understand their local situation and to provide benchmarks for measuring the effects of programs and services:

- The *InSight Regional Competitiveness Index* measures a range of economic indicators and shows the diversity of local economies. This can help communities
identify opportunities for development that can help in planning education and employment programs for young people (Regional Australia Institute 2014).

- The Youth Social Exclusion (YSE) index compiles data across a number of socio-economic indicators that affect young people to present a holistic view of disadvantage at local levels (Abello et al. 2014).

Changes in national, state and territory policies can also have an effect on local services and engagement activities. Uncertainty or discontinuation of funding and support may mean that communities will have to find ways to provide the same services with fewer resources or compensate for the loss of others.

Much of the literature on engaging Indigenous youth points to a lack of cultural awareness as a key factor in program failure, either by not taking into account community values or through ‘fly in and fly out’ service delivery that did not establish a sufficiently meaningful relationship within the community.

**WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE?**

Consumer engagement models may provide guidance for how to involve young people in planning and delivering services. As has been shown in some of the literature on youth engagement, the views of young people can sometimes differ from the data collected or the views of service providers. Understanding issues from the point of view of young people is critical to targeting engagement efforts. This is often the case with programs in very remote or Indigenous communities, where the views of young people were frequently not sought during program development and evaluation, instead relying on the views of service delivery organisations to identify the issues involved.

Communities also have to keep in mind that there are different engagement requirements for those who are thinking about leaving their communities, those who leave and those who stay. Young people who have left to pursue education or employment opportunities elsewhere have reported that they valued the relationships and contributions they could make to their rural communities, but that they were rarely contacted or involved after leaving (VRYS 2014). Communities seeking to encourage young people to move or return to rural areas may need to develop specific engagement strategies to keep young people involved in their communities.

For those young people who stay in rural communities, the opportunities to be involved in local activities may be limited. As mentioned, there is no information available nationally on how local governments involve young people in decision-making or service delivery. However, in Victoria, the majority of rural local governments do not have a youth strategy in place (VRYS 2011).
ORGANISING FOR ACTION

While community partnerships and networks are advocated in engagement research and program evaluation, there is not an agreed approach on the best method for creating these. A NSW review of rural education found that informal networks were effective at addressing specific issues, and cautioned that they may be difficult to apply in other settings (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013).

Much of the literature points to schools as community hubs. School hubs may be suitable for addressing engagement in education, but may not be useful in addressing engagement in other areas. Examples of effective engagement efforts outside education and training provide little indication of how networks are created or what their governance structures might be like. This poses challenges for communities looking for guidance on how to establish networks, partnerships and other cooperative relationships.

The case studies provided in this report all have different approaches to the collaborative relationships to implement youth engagement programs. The Flinders Island Transition Program strengthened and grew relationships with its partners through the use of a partnership broker who could provide the expertise in governance and role development. In the FReeZA program, a state government agency provides support and funding, but allows a great degree of freedom in decision-making at the local level. Additional support is also provided through a specialised consultant service that is an expert in the area of music event management and production. And Desert Knowledge Australia supports a number of different forms of collaboration, including networks, collective impact arrangements and facilitation between government and local communities.

What is clear from these examples is the importance of appropriate organisation, development of social capital and ongoing evaluation in their success.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collective impact is an approach that holds promise for addressing the complex issues faced by rural communities. As it is not tied to any single issue or facet of engagement or disadvantage, the model is adaptable and scalable. It is able to incorporate existing programs or initiatives, so that communities don’t have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ or disregard the programs that are already working. As the model relies heavily on communication and agreed action between its members, social capital is enriched and strengthened.
Most importantly, however, this model is ideally suited for the holistic approach that is needed to address youth engagement issues. By not focusing on fixing one problem in isolation, collective impact initiatives draw in stakeholders from areas that may not have worked collaboratively in the past.

**Backbones and hubs**

As mentioned, much of the literature on education engagement advocates the formation of community ‘hubs’, usually with the school as the hub. This may place additional burdens on schools that already need to stretch resources further, or on staff who already volunteer to a great extent outside the classroom.

The collective impact model recognises that there needs to be a backbone organisation responsible for keeping the group organised and on task. It may be that the local school undertakes this role where it makes most sense. However, other community members or organisations may also be suitable. Many local governments view their role as facilitators of local networks and can fulfill the role of backbone.

**Funding**

Without a doubt, one of the major issues facing rural communities is the lack of funding to support engagement efforts. Many engagement programs have short-term funding arrangements, either through government or grants from business and philanthropic organisations. One of the ways that this can be addressed is through collaborative impact initiatives. Constituent members may not know of funding opportunities outside their own spheres of influence. As well, cooperative arrangements with sound governance structures are more likely to be taken seriously by outside funders.

**Cultural awareness**

Collective impact initiatives, like the *Engoori* model of community collaboration, rely on local knowledge and expertise in planning, developing and delivering engagement programs. This means that what is delivered will be aware of the local context and take into consideration the cultural, economic and social conditions of the community. Youth engagement efforts that relate to the young person’s world or their cultural heritage are effective at engaging or re-engaging those who have dropped out of education and employment systems.

**Timeframes and progressive evaluation**

Both collective impact and *Engoori* models stress adopting realistic timeframes and ongoing communication and evaluation. They rely on a cycle of evaluation, discussion and readjustment. This allows for fine-tuning and the ability to be responsive to external and internal changes.
EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

Programs and services where rural youth are more directly involved in making decisions about their futures are far more successful than those that do not involve youth directly. However, just how to go about doing this poses challenges for communities that have never adopted this approach before. The literature reviewed on youth engagement provides information on what good engagement looks like, types of engagement, and ways in which young people can be involved. It may also be worthwhile to look at models for consumer engagement as a way of involving young people to co-develop services and programs in their communities.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

To recap, the attributes of effective engagement are:

- meaning
- variety
- intensity
- stability
- local relevance.

In considering successful programs, including those from the case studies, it is clear that community collaboration is needed to meet these criteria. Very few individual organisations or systems are able to deliver programs that include all these attributes.

WHEN TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE

In Section 6 of this report, Young people’s views, it was apparent that young people were not always involved to the extent that they would like, for instance in decision-making, or at times when they should have been, such as in program evaluation. Consumer engagement models may provide guidance for those planning, developing and delivering programs for young people.

Young people have views about what keeps them engaged and influences their participation. These views can contradict collected data or program evaluations prepared from the point of view of service delivery. As young people are the ultimate beneficiaries of engagement efforts, their views should be part of ongoing, progressive evaluation.
Young people are citizens of their communities and should be able to make contributions in all areas. For local governments and other organisations, a youth strategy should not be limited to youth-only issues or services. The Flinders Island Council is a partner in the Flinders Island Transition Program. Through this program, students have become more involved in all areas of community activity with the council, not just those areas that relate to youth concerns. Young people recognise that their local government is the forum for making decisions about their communities, but often feel that they are unable to contribute or have their views taken seriously.

**TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT**

There are different forms and mechanisms of engagement. Young people, like all people, contribute to varying degrees or in different ways. The way young people are involved also depends on their age.

**Participation spectrum**

The participation spectrum provided in the Tools section of this document has five levels:

- inform
- consult
- involve
- collaborate
- empower.

Programs have different reasons for engaging young people, and accordingly the degree to which young people participate or contribute will vary depending on the circumstances. Health education programs, for instance, are about raising awareness and as such the emphasis will be on engaging young people in order to inform them. Transition programs seek to build resilience and help young people gain independence; therefore the emphasis will be on empowering young people.

The FReeZA program allows for individual committee members to contribute at varying levels, depending on their skills and self-confidence. The program is able to provide appropriate roles for those who want to participate.

**Age-specific engagement**

Young people in rural areas are taking longer to achieve independence than previous generations, often not until they are in their thirties. And at the other end of the age spectrum, rural youth are thinking about their futures at an earlier age, frequently while they are still in primary school. As such, engagement initiatives may need to be tailored to suit the very different requirements of young people of different ages.
This report has demonstrated the complexity of youth engagement in rural areas by discussing the increased disadvantage that young people in rural, and particularly in remote areas, face. The issues associated with disadvantage are complex and inter-related, requiring a coordinated approach by their communities in addressing engagement and disengagement.

In order for these issues to be addressed, it is necessary that communities have an understanding of the challenges and the opportunities in their local areas. New tools are available to help communities identify the specific areas of disadvantage, and to later measure the effectiveness of their efforts. Likewise, there are tools available that can provide communities with insights into where future development may be possible that might retain or attract young people to their areas.

Rural communities are renowned for being inclusive, nurturing and supportive environments for young people. They have a culture of volunteering and civic participation that demonstrates the capacity to address the economic, environmental and policy challenges they will face. Young people are able and willing to be involved, make decisions and contribute to the social capital of their communities.

There are a number of collaboration models that communities can adopt depending on the issues to be addressed and the extent to which they are able to draw on community involvement. Consumer engagement can develop a greater understanding between young people and those in rural communities working with and supporting them. Engoori, a model used by the Mithaka country in southwest Queensland, recognises local expertise in making continual improvements within a community. Most promising is collective impact. Collective impact is a structured model that makes the most of local resources, knowledge and skills in a way that clearly identifies roles and processes that can be applied to complex social issues.

This report has provided examples of how communities and young people have worked together to develop new programs, or tailored centrally managed programs to suit local conditions. The views of young people have been featured to demonstrate that their involvement in their communities is essential, not only for addressing their own needs, but also in making valuable contributions to their communities.
CASE STUDIES
CASE STUDY 1

FLINDERS ISLAND TRANSITION PROGRAM

In 2013 Holly Barnewall became a national finalist for Young Australian of the Year representing Tasmania, in part because of her teaching career achievements, but primarily because of her work developing a program to help young people who were much like her. Holly grew up on Flinders Island – a remote island off the northeast corner of Tasmania – where, when students finish Year 10, they must make the decision whether to move to Launceston to continue their education or remain on the island and work.

Students who moved to Launceston often found this transition difficult and, as a consequence, many dropped out. Leaving the island was the biggest barrier to their futures, as they felt isolated and unsupported while away from their families. In addition, many found it difficult to take on the responsibilities of living away from home as well as studying. The Flinders Island Transition Program began in 2009 and has helped provide smoother transitions to further education and employment for 41 students so far.
PROGRAM DETAILS

Program governance: Partnership between Flinders Island District High School, Flinders Island Council, Newstead College in Launceston, and partnership brokers, Tasmanian Life Long Learning (TL3).

Participants: 41, 18 currently in the program; 40% female and 60% male (reflective of the gender mix of the Flinders Island District High School).

Results: 100% of students who have participated in the Flinders Island Transition Program are still engaged in education or full-time employment.

Students begin the transition program in Year 7 and are involved in all aspects of planning and organising their activities, including school choices, extra-curricular and holiday activities, sports and volunteering.

The program has five stages:

1. A basic life skills class is incorporated into the Flinders Island District High School’s curriculum.
2. A work experience exchange program with students from Newstead College in Launceston.
3. Orientation trip to Launceston.
4. Youth camps for students and other organised activities designed to increase students’ independence, confidence and awareness, and allow them to feel supported and able to succeed.
5. Mentoring of Flinders Island students by Newstead College students in their first term of Year 11 at the college.

VALUABLE INSIGHTS

Partnership agreements

The program grew from an initial transition trip organised by the Flinders Island Council Youth Officer (now the Community Development Officer). As the Flinders Island District High School became involved in the planning process the program developed to incorporate school activities that prepared students for transition to Year 11. As a partnership broker, TL3 recognised an opportunity to further strengthen networks and relationships between Flinders Island and Launceston, and contacted the program to offer their services to work closely with contacts in Newstead College on their behalf. TL3 has since lost its funding; however, the well-established roles and responsibilities it established have prepared Flinders Island District High School, Flinders Island Council and Newstead College to continue delivering the program.
Youth development

An unexpected benefit from participating in the transition program for some students is that they have been asked to be involved in other council areas. In Holly’s words:

I think young people in rural communities need to feel valued and important before any program will work. They also need to be enticed to engage and participate by providing opportunities that they feel are fun and/or important. The most important thing, I feel, is that meaningful relationships are forged between the providers and the young people, and these relationships need to be maintained even after the young person has graduated from the program (pers. comm. 2014).

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge the program faces is securing financial support. A NAB Schools First award provided initial support. However, this funding is limited and the program will need to find other ways of securing funds to continue. While the partnership has applied for grants they have not been able to secure all the funding they will need. The partnership continues to investigate sponsorship and other funding opportunities.

For more information about the Flinders Island Transition Program, go to: http://www.flinders.tas.gov.au/transition-program
CASE STUDY 2

FReeZA

First established in 1997 after a successful pilot, the FReeZA program provides young people with practical opportunities to participate in the planning, development and delivery of music and cultural events for youth in their local communities. Across Victoria, over 140,000 young people attend FReeZA events each year – this equates to 2.38 million young people attending FReeZA events over the 17 years the program has been running.

Young people participate through local FReeZA committees where they plan events for their local communities. The FReeZA program covers 47 out of 48 regional and rural local government areas (LGAs). In addition, 29 out of 31 metropolitan LGAs are covered with further programs supporting specific cohorts of young people (LGBTI, CALD, Recently Arrived Refugees and Indigenous young people).

PROGRAM DETAILS

Program governance: The FReeZA program is coordinated and funded by the Community and Economic Participation Branch in the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS). The 80 FReeZA committees across the state are responsible for planning, budgeting and producing events. Groups often seek financial or in-kind support from their communities.
Participants: There are approximately 1,200 young people involved in FReeZA committees across Victoria.

Results: The FReeZA program successfully meets the state’s youth engagement policy objectives of ‘Engage, Involve Create’. In 2007, DHS conducted an extensive program review by collecting feedback from organisations running FReeZA programs. The review gauged the participation and community benefits, and evaluated the effectiveness of FReeZA Support Services. The review found that young people who had taken part in FReeZA activities were more connected with their communities and peers, developed skills in planning and organising events, and became more self-confident. FReeZA programs are well supported by local communities who often contribute financial or in-kind support that equates to two or three times the amount of centrally provided funding.

Program administration: FReeZA funds are allocated through a competitive grant process every three years, with funds dispersed yearly. Regional and rural groups receive an extra $1,500 in funding to cover the costs associated with distance. Successful grant recipients are offered support through FReeZA Support Services, which is delivered by The Push, an independent statewide youth music and event management organisation. Support includes annual training events, developing resources, general advice for young artists, and mentoring programs. FReeZA Support Services developed an outcomes framework to track performance milestones across youth development and volunteering, training, mentoring, advice and support, and reporting and evaluation. The framework ensures that all FReeZA committees are supported and connected at all times.

Young people’s involvement: As committee members, young people are involved in all aspects of planning and producing entertainment events, from performance to stage management and promotion. Each FReeZA committee works in a way that suits their group. Young people decide how often to meet, who is responsible for what, and how to work with the community. Some rural committees have worked collaboratively to share information and skills.

A four-stage program builds confidence and increases young people’s skills over time. The stages are:

- Practical event management training and introduction to the music industry through local FReeZA providers.
- Intermediate training and career exploration through FReeZA Support Services.
- Advanced practical training, mentoring and career development through FReeZA Support Services.
- Career consolidation through referrals and networks established in the music industry.
VALUABLE INSIGHTS

Providing support centrally ensures a measure of consistency in program outcomes, while local organisation means that young people are more likely to be engaged and see the benefits of their involvement.

Thorough and regular evaluation verifies whether the program meets its objectives, and provides the necessary feedback to make improvements to the program model and to cater for the particular needs of specific cohorts, including regional and rural youth.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Staging events in rural areas incurs greater costs than staging them in urban areas; these costs are associated with such things as hiring buses to transport young people from outlying townships, high costs for security and first aid. Travel is also an expensive undertaking for FReeZA committee members who attend planning meetings, and professional development and other training activities.

After the program review in 2007, it was recommended that regional FReeZA program providers establish a network to mitigate some of these challenges by providing additional support and networking opportunities.

For more information about FReeZA programs, go to: http://www.freeza.vic.gov.au
Remote Australia holds great potential in its culturally diverse communities and in the economic benefits derived from its resources. Remote areas are also some of the most disadvantaged, and face complex challenges for which there are no quick fixes. For the young people in these regions, it is vital that communities are supported in a way that builds capacity to ensure sustainable futures are available for young people.

DKA is a statutory corporation of the Northern Territory Government, with a national mandate to contribute to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future for desert Australia. It delivers several programs to create networks and provide leadership and training. The organisation also supports other groups in the region by facilitating collective impact processes to address local complex challenges, and by providing access to infrastructure and shared resources through its knowledge centres. DKA also helps government to connect more effectively with remote communities to improve service delivery. In 2013–14, a strategic review of DKA was conducted and found that the organisation had delivered a rate of return of $19.90 for every $1 of operational funding invested by the NT Government.

While DKA is concerned with all aspects of desert life, there is a strong youth focus to much of its work. Youth-specific programs include youth leadership and networking opportunities, and the concerns of youth are reflected in many of its initiatives. DKA has identified the need for establishing intercultural relationships between communities, governments, business and other organisations.
Youth Desert Leadership
This program is a cooperative arrangement between colleges and the Alice Springs community to engage young people in the wider Central Australia region. Young people from Indigenous and Australian backgrounds work together on community projects and are supported by community and national leaders. The program complements leadership programs in each of the schools involved.

Desert Leadership Alumni
In addition to the Youth Desert Leadership program, DKA offer a number of development programs for Indigenous and desert communities. Past participants of these programs can continue their involvement through the Desert Leadership Alumni program, that seeks to strengthen network connections and put leadership skills into action.

Indigenous Education and Employment Taskforce (IEET)
The taskforce is a group of local Alice Springs stakeholders, facilitated by DKA, to improve education and employment outcomes for Indigenous people in Alice Springs. Initiatives of the group have focused on developing the links between school, community and business, and include:

- the Alice Springs Partnerships for Success and Girls at the Centre programs in Central Australian high schools
- the ‘What’s Your Dream?’ aspirational media campaign
- Alice Career Connections, a website aimed at building links between school students and employers.

remoteFOCUS
The need to strengthen the relationship between government and local communities is a recurring theme reflected in research into youth and community engagement. Researchers and program evaluators often cite the lack of cultural understanding and trust as contributing factors in the failure of some programs and initiatives.

remoteFOCUS is an initiative that seeks to change the way governments govern, administer and engage with remote Australia. remoteFOCUS provides an information sharing network for local communities, industry and government.

The foundation of the program is an initial report entitled Fixing the hole in Australia’s heartland: How government needs to work in remote Australia (Walker et al. 2012). The report identifies key areas for improvement in government interaction with local communities and notes the proposed solutions and opportunities that have been identified through various consultation mechanisms. Meeting the needs of young people is viewed as critical to the sustainability of many remote areas. Areas of
particular concern are: how young people are involved with their local communities through government initiatives; how local industries can provide career pathways and the role that government can play; and how communities can be better prepared to work with government to provide opportunities for young people.

The remoteFOCUS report listed the following as the main concerns expressed by communities on their relationships with government and external organisations:

- a say in planning, budgeting and decision-making
- equitable and sustainable funding arrangements
- improved services that can respond locally
- local control and accountability
- recognition of concerns at a national level.

DKA facilitates cooperation between and within remote communities using a number of different collaboration and development models. All of its programs stress the need for long-term plans, ongoing evaluation and sustainable development. This is particularly critical for youth development and transitions, where the completion of a program can leave young people at risk of becoming disengaged.
This section provides further information about some of the resources referred to in this report, including definitions, sources for data, and collaboration models. Links to organisations, programs and online resources are also provided.
## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

The youth engagement spectrum from *Preventing youth disengagement and promoting engagement* (Burns et al. 2008, pp.13-14), describes levels of engagement, and contributing factors to disengagement. The spectrum does not describe levels of participation, but rather helps organisations identify behaviours that may be indicators of disengagement or over-engagement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Engaged with risk</th>
<th>Under-engaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Highly engaged</th>
<th>Over-engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Disengaged** – young people feel alienated or disconnected, unvalued or unable to contribute in a meaningful way. They may lack knowledge and skills or face structural barriers that limit their engagement, such as prejudice or limited resources and opportunities. Young people are also excluded from particular processes because they are considered to be deficient in skills or knowledge.

**Engaged with risk** – young people feel connected and valued but their relationships or the activities they engage in put them at risk, i.e. gang violence, drug and alcohol use. Because of this kind of engagement, they may be excluded from other ‘more appropriate’ or socially sanctioned forms of engagement.

**Under-engaged** – young people are concerned about issues and want to be engaged in a range of settings but face barriers to participation (political, socio-economic, cultural etc.). They lack access to resources and opportunities.

**Engaged** – young people are aware of issues, want to make a difference and are positively connected to institutions that support their engagement. They are moved to act in formal and/or informal contexts. They have access to resources and are motivated to engage with others.

**Highly engaged** – young people have a heightened understanding and involvement in issues of concern, and a strong desire and capacity to participate in conventional ways and institutions. These young people have significant experience and skills, are often turned to for advice and are seen as experts in youth experience. These young people are typically structurally privileged (through access to economic, educational and cultural resources).

**Over-engaged** – young people undertake a high level of commitment and address focused issues of concern. Organisations often rely on these young people for their expertise and ability to ‘represent’ youth. Organisational expectations place these young people at risk of burn out or emotional stress.
## Participation Spectrum

Participation spectrums help to identify suitable ways of engaging and involving young people in activities and decision-making processes. The spectrum below was developed by the International Association for Public Participation, and is used frequently in community and consumer engagement strategies.

### Increasing level of public impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Participation goal</th>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that the public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Promise to the public

- We will keep you informed.
- We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
- We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
- We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.
- We will implement what you decide.

### Example tools

- Fact sheets
- Websites
- Open houses
- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings
- Workshops
- Deliberate polling
- Citizen advisory committees
- Consensus building
- Participatory decision-making
- Citizen juries
- Ballots
- Delegated decisions

*Source: International Association for Public Participation [www.iap2.org]*
LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Levels of youth engagement are related to the participation spectrum but reflect the specific ways that young people interact with organisations, systems and each other. From Engaging with young people: Local government in action (Nabben 2004b, p.8):

**Youth-led** – where young people have the direction and ownership of the resources, implementation and decision-making process.

**Partnership involvement** – where young people have a direct and controlled role in the implementation and decision-making process of the project in conjunction with the help and support from adult leaders.

**Influential involvement** – where a considerable amount of consultation and shared control occurs across the project.

**Passive involvement** – where there is a limited amount of involvement and participation of young people.

**Adult-led initiatives** – projects designed and implemented by adults but directed at young people.

DATA SOURCES

The information used in this report relied on the following sources for data:

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Australian Bureau of Statistics:

InSight: Australia’s regional competitive index  
Regional Australia Institute:  

Youth social exclusion in Australian communities: A new index  
National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra:  

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REMOTELESS CLASSIFICATION  

Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)  
Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, University of Adelaide:  

Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS)  
Australian Bureau of Statistics:  

Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA)  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW):  

State Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (SARIA+)  
National Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA), University of Adelaide:  

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ENGAGEMENT MODELS  

So much of effective rural youth engagement relies on the coordinated efforts of community organisations and individuals. The following models were described in this report as being potentially useful to communities when organising, planning and implementing engagement activities.
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collective impact in action: Guide to evaluating collective impact, FSG:

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

A framework for active partnership with consumers and the community
South Australia Health:

Consumer and community engagement framework, 2012
Queensland Government:

Continuum of intervention for health and wellbeing
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria:

ENGOORI

Engoori is a model used by the Mithaka country in southwest Queensland to develop community understanding about an issue. It recognises local expertise in making continual improvements. The model was put forward in ‘Honouring our strengths – moving forward’, Education in Rural Australia, v.21, n.1, pp.21-37, as an effective way for Indigenous communities to develop youth engagement initiatives, and as a way for external organisations to value local knowledge when working within remote communities. The three steps in the cycle, depicted right, emphasise the adaptive nature and flexibility of this approach. As new insights are incorporated into existing traditions, problems with clashing cultural expectations and viewpoints are less likely to occur.

SOURCE: GORRINGE 2011, P.29
RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Local government youth charter
Department of Human Services, Victoria:

Codes of ethics for working with young people:

Australian Capital Territory
Youth Coalition of the ACT:
http://www.youthcoalition.net/documents/sector%20development/Code%20of%20Ethics/Youth%20Work%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20ACT.pdf

New South Wales
Youth Action:

Tasmania
Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT):

Victoria
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YAC Vic):

Western Australia
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA):

National
National Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC):
LINKS TO ORGANISATIONS, PROGRAMS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

Agfest:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS):

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (ACYs):
http://www.acys.info

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER):
http://www.acer.edu.au/

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS):

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW):

Australian Local Government Association:
http://alga.asn.au/

Australian Population and Migration Research Centre:
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/apmrc/

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY):
http://www.aracy.org.au

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition:
http://www.ayac.org.au

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR):
http://caepr.anu.edu.au/

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation:

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (US):
http://www.energisingentrepreneurs.org/

Centre for the Study of Higher Education:
http://www.cmshe.unimelb.edu.au/

Collective Impact Forum:
http://collectiveimpactforum.org/

Department of Education and Training:

Desert Knowledge Australia:
http://www.desertknowledge.com.au

Flinders Island Transition Program:

FreeZA Program:
http://www.freeza.vic.gov.au

FSG – Social impact consultants
http://www.fsg.org/

Foundation for Young Australians:
http://www.fya.org.au/

Future Farmers Network:

Heywire:
http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/

Human:

Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY):
http://www.lsay.edu.au/

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV):
http://www.mav.asn.au

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER):
http://www.ncver.edu.au

National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy (NIYLA):

National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA):
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/apmrc/gisca/

National Rural Health Alliance, Inc.:

National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM):
http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):
http://www.oecd.org/

Regional Australia Institute:
http://www.oecd.org/

RuMAD? (Are You Making a Difference?):
http://www.assistantworld.org/website/?page_id=38

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation:

Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF):

Victorian Rural Youth Services (VYRS):

Youth Action (NSW):
http://youthaction.org.au/

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA):

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACvic):

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA):

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ):

Young Carbon Farmers:

Youth Coalition of the ACT:
https://www.youthcoalition.net/

Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT):
http://www.ynot.org.au

Youth Research Centre (YRC),
University of Melbourne:
http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/yrc/
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Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne 2008, Participation and equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people, Universities Australia.

Charles Sturt University 2009, Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities: Submission by Charles Sturt University, Charles Sturt University.


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National Rural Health Alliance Inc. (NRHA) 2010, ‘Further education and health’, NRHA Fact Sheet, n.6, October.


——2013, A snapshot of poverty in rural and regional Australia, NRHA and Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), Deakin West, ACT.

——2014b, ‘Smoking and rural health’, NRHA Fact Sheet, March.
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