

## Land Use and Rural Policy Research Programme

# Social Inclusion in Rural Areas: Innovative Projects for Young People

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The study was carried following the publication of the 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Scotland' and 'Services in Rural Scotland' by Scottish Executive. These reports raised a number of issues relating to social exclusion and young people in rural communities, and this study was carried out as a preliminary review of rural youth projects. Specifically the study sought to gather information on innovative community and policy responses to problems faced by young people living in rural areas.

## Main Findings

- The study suggests that successful youth projects are often the result of young people themselves being involved in all stages of the project. Respondents reported that where young people were involved, the focus of the project remained relevant to youth concerns. Prioritising consultation with youth and direct involvement of young people in project decision-making also strengthened projects.
- The research suggested that a project action plan proved invaluable to youth project development. Action plans enabled youth groups to communicate their objectives to the wider community and in some cases engendered community support for their work. A sustainability plan also provided a useful tool when applying for short term and long term funding.
- The research showed that the distances volunteers have to travel to support youth work in rural areas limited the time individuals could commit to supporting projects. However, volunteers were more likely to be recruited to projects, and remain involved, if they were assured that they would not have excessive responsibilities or time demands placed on them.
- Projects where a management group or committee was able to provide accountability to the funding body, young participant's parents or guardians, and to the local community, appeared to enjoy a greater degree of working confidence because of a perception of risk-minimisation.
- Youth projects in rural areas have specific funding needs to ensure that projects are accessible to all young people living in the locality – for example a need for subsidised transport.

## Background

Together with older people and low income households, young people are consistently affected by rural social exclusion.

Young people in rural areas have the advantage of growing up in a close knit community, but in teenage years some young people desire to be able to act anonymously and become alienated from older members of the community. Despite a desire on the part of some for independence, tensions can arise due to simple issues such as young people being reliant on parents to drive them to activities. In addition young people in households without access to a car and funds for petrol may be excluded from social activity and sports that most urban young people take for granted.

The need for action to reduce social exclusion in rural areas and to empower young people was identified in Scottish Executive reports: *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Scotland* and *Services in Rural Scotland*, and this research was undertaken in order to gather information on innovative community and policy responses to problems faced by young people living in rural areas.

## Methods

The study reviewed recent work carried out by the Arkleton Centre for Rural Development Research, Scottish Executive Social Justice Taskforce, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Scottish National Rural Partnership (SNRP), and the Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group, resulting in a preliminary review of services provided for young people in rural areas. An internet search was also conducted, followed by study visits and the development of case studies to illustrate innovative practice and ideas in Scotland, Canada and Nordic countries. The case studies selected for inclusion in the report were categorised under three main headings: health; employment and education; and recreation, social and community involvement, and are identified below:

### Health case study projects:

- Sharing Strengths (Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada)
- Mainland South Teen Health Centre (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada)

### Employment and Education case study projects:

- Cowie Compass (satellite programme of Stirling Council)
- Svartlå (village in northern Sweden)
- Centre For Entrepreneurship Education Development (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada)

### Recreation, Social, and Community Involvement case study projects:

- Heartwood (Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, Canada)
- Hodge Rock Youth Centre (Hodgeville, Saskatchewan, Canada)
- Log-In Internet Café (Barrhead, Renfrew, Scotland)

Key themes addressed in the case studies were: Resources, Sustainability, Participation and Service Delivery.

## Main Findings

This study suggested that youth projects with a focus on social inclusion were more likely to succeed where they addressed the following issues:

## Resources and Funding

In rural locations obtaining a secure source of funding is vital to the success of any community programme. Youth projects reviewed were more likely to succeed if the following key issues had been considered:

- Award granting bodies have limited resources have to account for their expenditure. Successful projects were able to justify their financial investment: innovative projects had to convince funders that their projects did not present funders with any extra risks.
- Projects that obtain longer term funding were able to plan to work around financial constraints and employ permanent staff, which improved the quality of the projects.

- Projects in rural areas had to flag up to funders that rural communities without financial resources, physical facilities or trained professionals would require a greater initial investment and incur additional maintenance costs to address the needs of young people.
- Rural youth projects had to work creatively around time-limited grants, and the need to apply for future funding, while attempting to run ongoing programmes.

## Sustainability

Successful projects had both short term action plans and longer term sustainability plans. In some cases sustainability plans enabled the youth projects to promote themselves a positive development to the local community.

Sustainable long running projects also could demonstrate the delivery of longer-term benefits to their local communities - for example, community leadership networks. The benefits of ongoing community consultation were also identified as a key to success, and an advisory or management group who were prepared to be accountable for the project inspired local confidence.

## Service Delivery and Potential Barriers to Social Inclusion

The study showed that rural youth projects were more likely to succeed if the following potential barriers were considered:

- Accessing remote services was an issue in all areas. Some examples of providing in situ services in mobile units suggested that there may be benefits in taking the service out to the rural area, rather than transporting young people in to urban centres.

- Respondents in this study emphasised the importance of developing trust between young people and those attempting to provide a service. Projects have to allow time for trust and rapport to be established, particularly services dealing with sensitive issues.

- In situations where a youth project was attempting to address the needs of special needs young people, respondents suggested that consideration had to be given to whether the local community had the skills base or confidence to support such projects. Creativity and innovation is required when such challenges face rural service providers.

## Participation, Service Delivery and Evaluation

Respondents to this study reported that carefully planned projects with continuous evaluation have a higher chance of success than those who do not build in detailed planning or evaluation.

Respondents suggested that rural youth projects are more likely to succeed if the following key findings are considered:

- The project has to be focused on an issue that rural young people themselves have identified as important. Resources can be wasted if young people are not involved in the design, construction and operation of a programme.
- Health and safety and employment regulations should be considered in advance of a project being established – remote rural communities may not be able to meet the necessary standards, and a project could then fold.
- An internal evaluation system will demonstrate the value and achievements of any project. However, evaluation systems need to be designed to focus on project achievements rather than numbers of young people involved due to the smaller numbers of young people in rural communities.

## Implications

This study reviewed a number of innovative rural youth projects and concluded that there would be merit in undertaking more research on rural youth projects. It is suggested that a broader review would increase the amount of good practice available to rural communities who might wish to set up rural youth projects.

## About this Study

This study was carried out by Emily Bain, during her British Council Scottish Networks International programme placement with Scottish Executive Central Research Unit Rural Branch between October 2001 and April 2002.

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