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Rural Youth Study, Phase II

**Rural Youth Migration:
exploring the reality behind the myths**

A RURAL YOUTH DISCUSSION PAPER

CANADIAN RURAL PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH

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Prepared by:

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd

Prepared for:

The Canadian Rural Partnership, Government of Canada
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
Canada Economic Development – Quebec Regions
Western Economic Diversification Canada
Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario
Human Resources Development Canada
Policy Research Secretariat
Statistics Canada

April 2002



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Gouvernement du Canada

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PREFACE

The opinions presented in the Rural Youth Discussion Paper have been developed from the research by the Consultant, and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Canadian Rural Partnership or those of the member agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rural Youth Discussion Paper was envisioned by the members of the Rural Youth Steering Committee.

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- ◆ Western Economic Diversification Canada
- ◆ FedNor
- ◆ Canada Economic Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

...the *Discussion Paper* reflects the views and opinions of a diverse group of stakeholders.

Many of the strategic options represent a new way of co-ordinating and delivering rural youth programs and services.

During the past several years, numerous studies have been completed of rural youth mobility patterns to address the need for, and importance of, programs and services that promote youth living in rural Canada. Included among these studies is *Rural Youth: Stayers, Leavers, and Return Migrants* – designed to provide direction for the delivery of federal programs and services.

Recognizing that possible “youth migration” strategies could be carried through a range of government programs and services, the Canadian Rural Partnership set out to develop community strategies to attract and/or retain youth in rural communities. Neither exclusively a federal nor a provincial responsibility, this discussion paper is viewed as an instrument to provide a common direction for all organizations engaged in the delivery of programs and services. Irrespective of whether or not the organizations are associated with federal, provincial or non-profit organizations, this discussion paper is intended as a “blueprint” for the future design, delivery and coordination of youth programs and services for young adults throughout Canada.

The research suggests that there is a definite need for a rural youth strategy, as labour market data indicated that rural youth have been migrating in relatively large numbers to urban centres. This *Discussion Paper* offers directions for enhancing opportunities for youth to more actively participate in Canada’s rural economic growth and diversification.

The results of the research suggest that out-migration from rural areas will likely continue, if not accelerate, in the near future. Among rural youth surveyed, more than one-half (55%) indicate that they intend to move to an urban centre. In contrast, among former rural youth currently residing in an urban centre, only one-third (37%) noted that they plan to return to a rural community.

Rural youth had a range of views regarding their community. While most youth were of the opinion that rural communities afforded a safe environment and a good place to raise a family, these same communities were perceived as lacking in employment, education and social opportunities – areas which are

of prime importance to youth, particularly to those who are less than 25 years of age.

In general, rural youth hold fairly negative perceptions of their community relative to major urban centres. In many instances, rural living is equated with little or limited economic or social standing, and limited opportunities. In contrast, despite some concerns about personal safety, rural youth equate financial success, educational opportunity and high social status with urban living.

This document reflects the input of thousands of current and former rural youth, community leaders and government officials from all regions across Canada. Participants represented a range of youth age groups (15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years) engaged in various activities (students, employed, unemployed, other) in rural communities. Irrespective of their current status, almost all youth were unanimous in their opinion that there was a need for a "Rural Youth Strategy".

The possible strategic options identified in this document represent a range of opinions and proposals from diverse stakeholders. Not all strategic options reflect a consensus among youth or community leaders - the strategic options do, however, represent an alternative to current practices regarding the provision of current programs and services available to rural Canadian youth.

Five key areas are examined in the *Rural Youth Discussion Paper*:

- ◆ Who are Rural Youth?
- ◆ Youth Perceptions of Rural Living
- ◆ Future Plans of Rural Youth
- ◆ Community Views on Rural Youth Issues
- ◆ Strategies for Retaining/Attracting Youth to Rural Communities

In addressing these issues, the *Discussion Paper* also includes numerous strategic options or "action items." While responsibility for some action items has been explicitly addressed, it remains incumbent upon some organizations and agencies to implement those strategic options for which they are responsible.

More detailed information regarding this study is available in the Technical Report, and the Case Study and Focus Group Reports.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Discussion Paper* reflects the desire to strengthen the attractiveness of rural living for Canadian youth aged 15 to 29 years.

The research provides insight into the reasons for youth out-migration as well as an insight into possible strategies that could help reverse the migration process.

In recognition of the need to develop a comprehensive and co-ordinated strategy to enhance the opportunity for youth in rural Canada, the Canadian Rural Partnership – consisting of representatives from various federal departments – commissioned this study to identify key challenges facing rural youth, as well as to identify a framework that would attract and retain youth in rural Canada.

To this end, the Canadian Rural Partnership contracted with R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. to facilitate and co-ordinate the development of a *Rural Youth Discussion Paper*. The mandate of this research was as follows:

- ◆ to consult with current and former rural youth to identify youth perceptions of both rural and urban lifestyles, opportunities and challenges;
- ◆ to identify the key motivators that influenced rural youth's decision to leave and/or the key factors that might encourage former rural youth to return to smaller communities;
- ◆ to develop strategic options that would contribute to more rural youth remaining in their communities, and also influence youth to move to rural/remote communities; and,
- ◆ to provide possible options to governments, communities and other organizations to better support youth in rural communities across Canada.

The Research Process

Development of the discussion paper and strategic options was based on an extensive consultation process. The various activities completed in developing this framework included:

- ◆ a review of past studies, migration patterns and research completed on rural youth migration;

The *Discussion Paper* was developed on the basis of extensive consultation with rural youth and community leaders.

- ◆ a telephone survey of current and former rural youth from all regions of Canada;
- ◆ a scan of current rural youth retention strategies in rural regions across Canada and throughout the world;
- ◆ consultation with community leaders in selected rural communities;
- ◆ focus groups with youth and community leaders; and,
- ◆ roundtable discussions of possible strategic options with former rural youth and community leaders.

More than 2,100 individuals provided input into the development of this *Discussion Paper*.

This document represents the input and synthesis of a considerable volume of information gained from interviews, surveys, focus groups and roundtable discussions. More detailed information is available in the Technical Report and the Focus Group and Case Study Reports. The Consultant would like to thank the more than 2,100 individuals across Canada who participated in this research process.

BACKGROUND

Rural communities in Canada face considerable challenges in retaining and attracting youth aged 15 to 29 years.

Past research conducted by Statistics Canada identified that many communities in Canada face sizable losses as a result of the net outflow of youth aged 15 to 29 years. While youth migration is not a phenomenon unique to rural communities, rural communities experience much lower rates of return migration than do urban centres. For example, it is estimated that at most, only 1 in 4 rural youth who leave their community will return to the same community within 10 years. The survey of former rural youth confirmed this trend with 37% of former rural youth currently residing in an urban centre indicating that they planned to move back to a rural community.

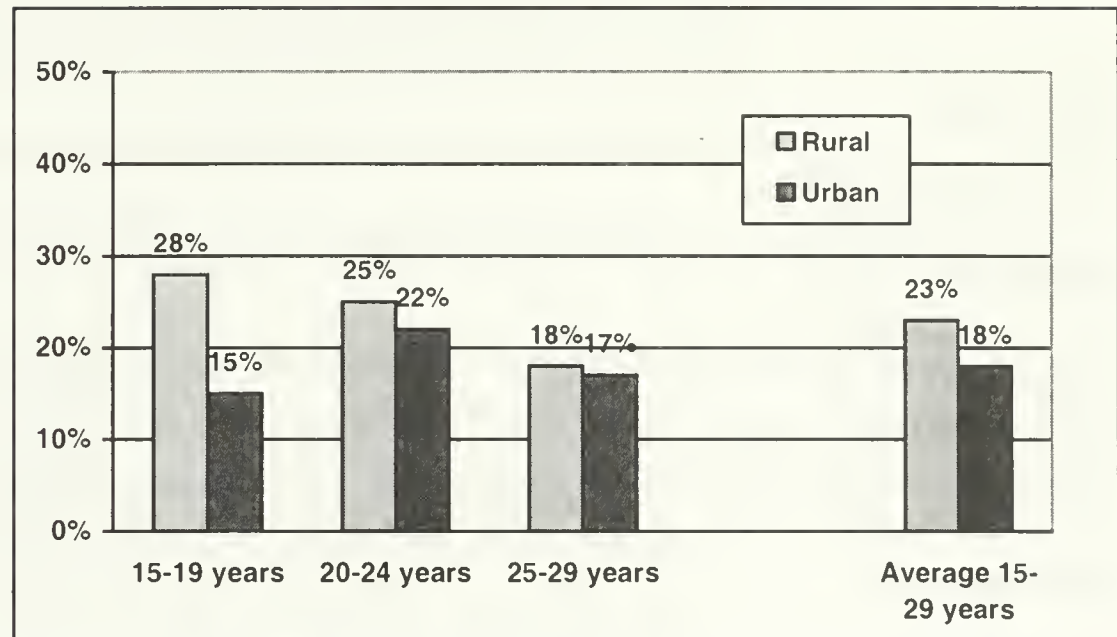
Youth losses in rural Canada have averaged between 12% and 16% for the 15 to 19 year age group for the period from 1986 to 1996.

Overall, there has been a considerable decline in youth populations in rural areas of Canada. For example, it is estimated that rural areas experienced a net loss of between 12% and 16% of 15 to 19 year-olds during the 1986-91 and 1991-96 periods (data not shown). In some provinces, including Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, rural youth losses among this age cohort ranged from 21% to 25%.

As highlighted in Chart 1, gross migration outflows among rural youth were higher than among urban youth for all age groups during the period from 1991-96.

The gradual (and in some cases, marked) decline of youth populations in rural areas presents considerable challenges to Canadian rural communities. In addition to the short-term impact associated with reduced consumer spending, declining youth populations in rural Canada also negatively affects the supply of entry-level workers and the long-term health and vitality of rural communities.

Chart 1
Migration Outflows by Age*
1991 – 1996
Rural and Urban Youth



Source: Rural Youth: *Stayers, Leavers and Return Migrants*. Statistics Canada, 2000.

* Age at the beginning of the five-year period.

The objective of the research was to identify perceptions of rural living, define “motivators” associated with out-migration, and devise strategies that could enhance attractiveness of rural communities to Canadian youth.

While previous research has provided information about current migration trends, it was clear that additional work was required to provide insight into the following:

- ◆ What perceptions are held by rural youth regarding rural and urban communities?
- ◆ What are the key factors associated with rural youth’s decisions to move?
- ◆ What actions or programs could be implemented to enhance the attractiveness of rural communities to youth aged 15 to 29 years?

Answering these questions required the adoption of a comprehensive and broad-based research approach.

KEY FINDINGS – AN OVERVIEW

The *Discussion Paper* was developed on the basis of extensive consultation with youth, community leaders, government agencies and other private and public sector organizations.

The *Rural Youth Discussion Paper* was not developed in isolation: the key issues detailed in the *Discussion Paper* are based on a synthesis of a considerable volume of information, including:

- ◆ a review of previous research, studies and policies;
- ◆ an extensive telephone survey of 1,945 current and former rural youth;
- ◆ in-person, telephone and group interviews with more than 70 individuals associated with rural youth programs and services;
- ◆ focus groups in all regions across Canada with community leaders from rural areas, and current (youth currently living in rural communities) and former (youth who migrated to larger urban centres) rural youth; and,
- ◆ roundtable discussions of strategic options with former rural youth and community leaders.

A full listing of the youth sites visited and community consultation activities is contained in ***Appendix A***.

Development of the *Discussion Paper* proceeded in three stages as follows:

1. The identification of youth perceptions (positive and negative) of rural communities.
2. The assessment of the elements, factors or conditions that would be required to either retain existing youth or encourage rural youth who had left to return to their community.
3. The identification of the activities, strategies or policies that could be implemented by government agencies, the private sector or other organizations to support the economic and social conditions conducive to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities.

The developed *Discussion Paper* incorporates five key elements:

- ◆ Who are Rural Youth?
- ◆ Youth Perceptions of Rural Living
- ◆ Future Plans of Rural Youth
- ◆ Community Views on Rural Youth Issues
- ◆ Strategies for Retaining/Attracting Youth to Rural Communities

A discussion of these key issues and accompanying Strategic options form the body of the *Rural Youth Discussion Paper*. It should be noted that the order in which the issues are presented is not meant to reflect their relative priority.

SECTION 1: WHO ARE RURAL YOUTH?

For the purposes of this study, rural youth were defined as: "youth between 15 and 29 years of age who are living or have lived in a Canadian rural or small town community that has a population of less than 10,000 people."

Rural youth included "leavers", "stayers", "in-migrants" and "returners".

Clearly, the broad definition of rural youth resulted in a considerable variation in youth surveyed. For example, of the 1,945 youth who participated in the telephone survey, 416 (21% of the sample) were rural youth "leavers" who had left their rural community and now resided in a larger centre. The survey also included a significant proportion of "stayers" (n=1,243; 64% of the sample) – those youth who had always resided in a rural community, as well as "in-migrants" (n=115; 6% of the sample) – youth who moved from an urban community to their current rural community, and "returners" (n=171; 9% of the sample) – rural youth who had moved to an urban centre and since returned to a rural community.

There were considerable differences in the current status of rural youth depending on their age.

Given the considerable age range, it was not surprising that the current status of youth varied by age group. As highlighted in Table 1, the current activity of rural youth varied on the basis of the age of the youth. While most youth who were less than 20 years of age were attending school, only a low proportion (11%) of youth aged 25 to 29 years were attending school on a full-time or part-time basis.

Table 1
Characteristics of Current/Former Rural Youth by Age Group

Characteristic/Age	15-19 yrs	20-24 yrs	25-29 yrs	Average
Sample Size	854	584	507	1,945
Employed	13%	49%	69%	38%
Attending school	40%	17%	5%	24%
Employed and attending school	44%	19%	7%	27%
Not working/other	3%	15%	19%	11%

There were differences in the current activities of youth on the basis of age.

Youth in Western and Atlantic Canada tended to be more isolated than youth in Ontario and Quebec. Youth in Atlantic Canada and Quebec generally had lower incomes than those in Western Canada and Ontario.

Of the rural youth surveyed, approximately equal numbers were surveyed from the four regions of Canada. A minimum of 440 completions were obtained for each region in Canada (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Western Canada). It is interesting to note (data not shown) that among rural youth surveyed (excluding leavers), a much lower proportion of youth in Western (34%) or Atlantic Canada (54%) noted that they were in close proximity to a major centre than did youth residing in Ontario (61%) or Quebec (74%). As highlighted in Table 2, there were considerable differences in the educational attainment of rural youth across Canada.

Table 2
Characteristics of Youth Residing in Rural Communities by Region
(Youth aged 20 to 29 years)

Characteristic/Region	West	Ontario	Quebec	Atlantic	Average
Sample Size	268	266	271	265	1,070
Less than high school	12%	4%	10%	8%	9%
High school graduate	33%	22%	16%	26%	24%
Some PSE/trade cert.	43%	52%	40%	46%	45%
University degree	12%	22%	24%	18%	19%
Distance to major centre ¹					
< 1 hour	33%	40%	39%	39%	38%
1 to 3 hours	45%	20%	11%	28%	26%
More than 3 hours ²	8%	3%	2%	8%	5%
Income Level					
< \$20,000	48%	48%	65%	60%	55%
≥ \$35,000	23%	25%	11%	11%	18%

¹ major centre is an urban community with a population of 10,000 or more

¹ excludes leavers (rural youth currently residing in an urban centre)

² includes other (e.g., can only reach a major centre by boat or plane)

SECTION 2: YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL LIVING

"I would prefer to raise my kids in a small town, but if it would involve a really long commute every day, it wouldn't work. The job I want to do is only available in a really big city."

Western Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

"This place may not have everything a large city has, but it's clean and people are friendly."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

"Where you live depends on the stage of life you're at. In your 20's, you want the city; in your 30's with small kids, the country starts looking really good because of the safe environment and the support."

Atlantic Canada Community Leader Focus Group Participant

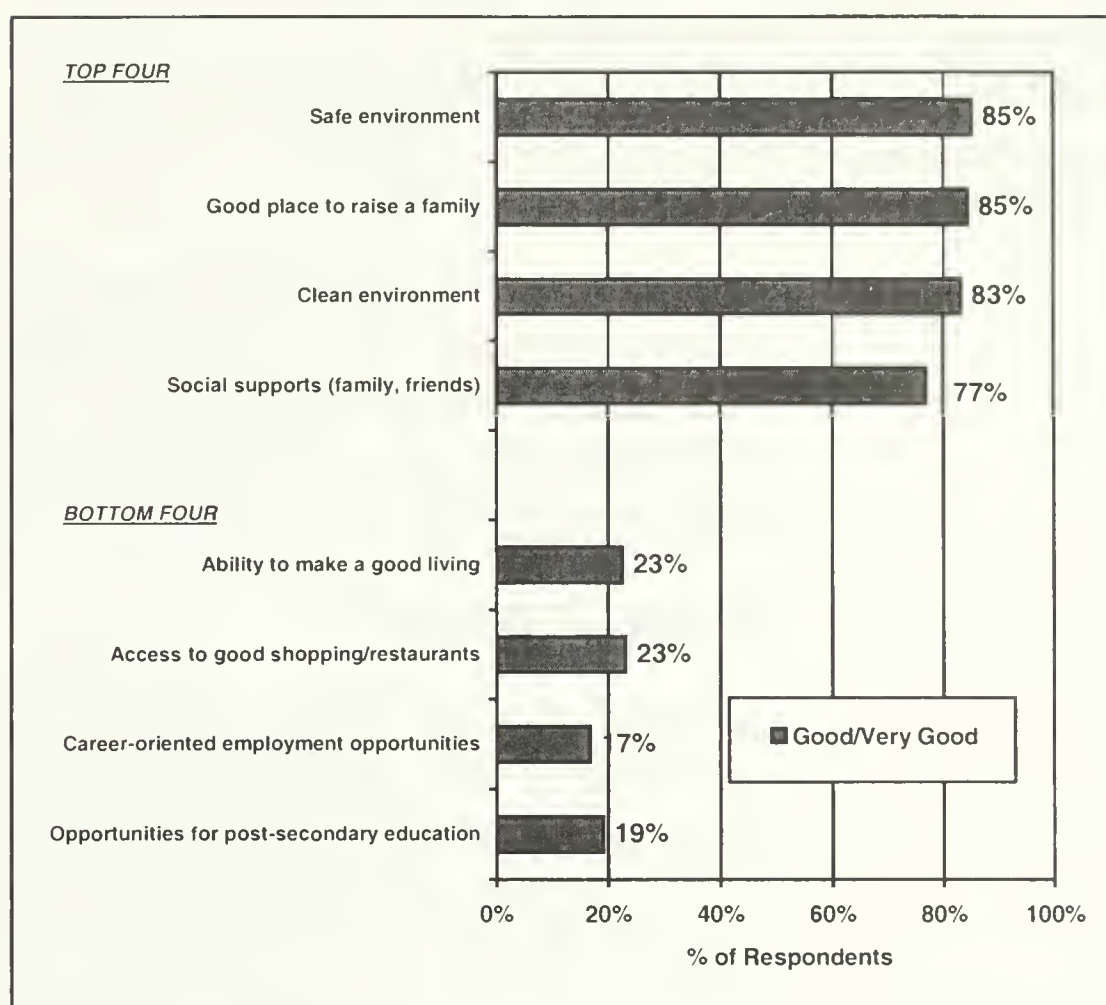
A key element of the *Discussion Paper* was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions rural youth had of their local rural community, a larger centre located nearby and a major Canadian city such as Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. Analysis of these perceptions provides an important insight as to what rural youth consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of their local community.

To gain a better appreciation of rural youth's assessment of their rural community, several questions were included in both the telephone surveys and focus groups to elicit opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of their community.

As highlighted in Chart 2, a large majority of current and former rural youth contacted for the telephone survey identified a safe environment (cited by 85% of rural youth), a good place to raise a family (85%) and clean environment (83%) as positive attributes of their rural community. In contrast, a much lower proportion of rural youth thought that their rural community afforded an opportunity to make a good living (cited by only 23%) or to pursue post-secondary education (19%).

Analysis of the focus group results provided additional insights into the relative strengths and weaknesses of rural communities, medium-sized cities and large cities as viewed by rural youth. As part of the focus group exercise, participants were asked to describe each of the three different sized communities in terms of a Simpsons' cartoon character. For example, residents of Wakaw were asked to choose a Simpsons' character that represented Wakaw, another character to represent Saskatoon and another to represent Vancouver. The findings suggest that youth have very different perceptions of rural and urban living.

Chart 2
Perceptions of Respondent's Rural Community:
Four Top and Bottom Issues



Their Rural Community

In general, many youth equated their community with Homer or Bart. The rationale for selection of such characters follows:

"...this place is like Homer, he doesn't do much, and has no interest in improving himself..."

*Quebec Rural Youth
Focus Group Participant*

Homer

- ◆ lack of initiative; slack-jawed yokel
- ◆ knows little of the outside world
- ◆ cultural "dryness" (knows little beyond the television, minimal interest in arts, etc.)
- ◆ focus is on current issues/problems – has limited long-term perspective

"...Bart: naughty, loud-mouthed and smart-alecky."

*Northwest Territories
Rural Youth Focus Group
Participant*

Bart

- ◆ involved in petty crimes/truancy
- ◆ a smart-aleck
- ◆ little concern about education or career
- ◆ "misdirected energies"

It is interesting to note that many youth identify petty crime as a problem in their community – often, this was attributed to "lack of social opportunities" or "nothing to do on a Saturday night". While these youth believe their community is safe, it is not necessarily crime-free.

Mid-Sized Urban Centre

In general, rural youth do not always have a positive image of their nearest urban or regional centre. Often, youth view these centres as a social opportunity, not as a cultural or educational centre. These cities are often viewed as a place to go for a party (e.g., for drinking), or the weekend, or for shopping. The cities are also seen as something that is bigger than their own town, but not overwhelmingly so.

"...picture the town as Moe's: lots of bars and little arts & culture."

*Ontario Rural Youth
Focus Group Participant*

Moe

- ◆ operating a bar, drinking establishments
- ◆ pursuit of profit
- ◆ the bar as a social centre

Marge

"She's half city, half small town; she's reassuring."

*Quebec Rural Youth
Focus Group Participant*

- ◆ comfortable
- ◆ mid-size, not too overwhelming
- ◆ provides some opportunities

Large Urban Centre (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver)

Most youth felt that large cities had both positive and negative

characteristics. For example, selection of Lisa was often associated with the desire and/or ability to pursue academic/career goals, an opportunity to be better than one's parents, and an appreciation of the arts. Rural youth also associated big cities with the character of Mr. Burns (greed, cold and uncaring, control over all elements but also powerful and wealthy).

"...she's a little more sophisticated and seems to be ready to explore the world..."

*Ontario Rural Youth
Focus Group Participant*

Lisa

- ♦ ambitious, energetic, intelligent
- ♦ opportunities to improve
- ♦ appreciation of the arts, very cultured and talented

"Rich and powerful, many people depend on him. He is the economic heart of the area."

*Quebec Rural Youth
Focus Group Participant*

Mr. Burns

- ♦ greed and selfishness
- ♦ control over society
- ♦ power and wealth
- ♦ not caring about other people

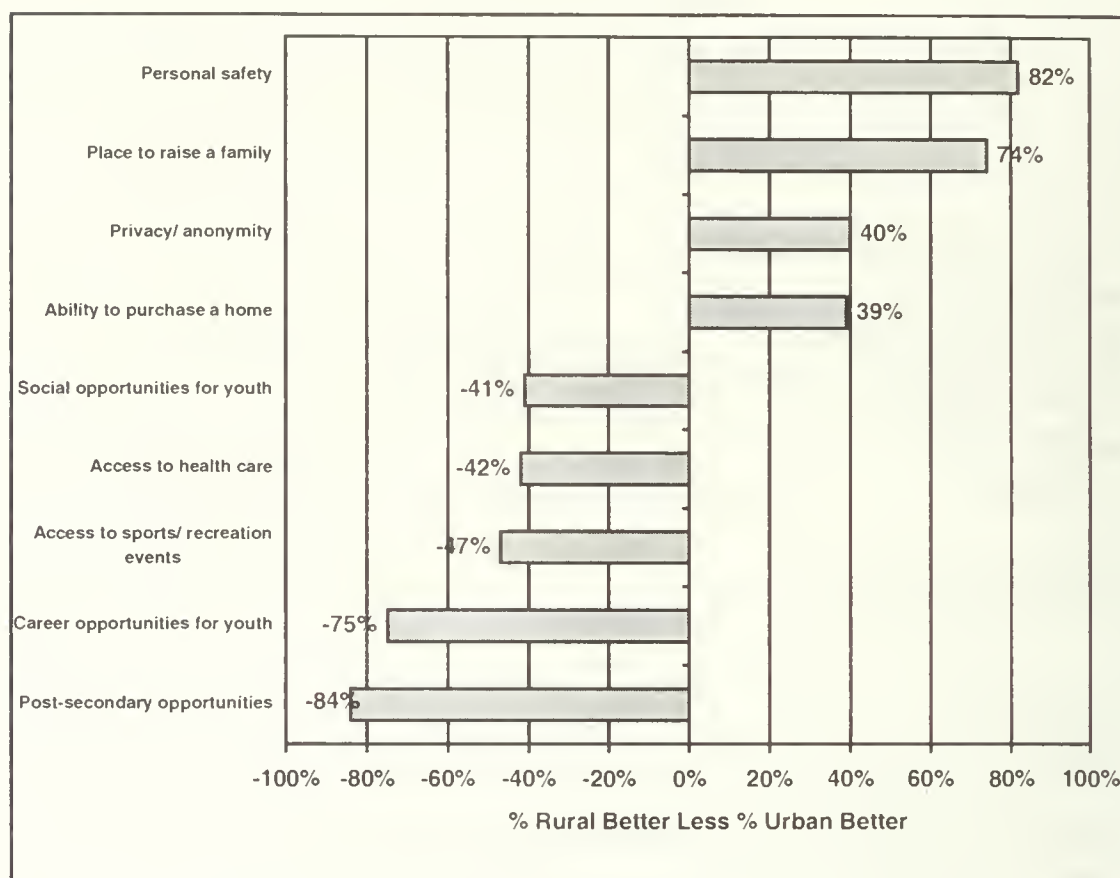
"...if you want to make something of yourself...you have to leave this community..."

*Western Canada Rural
Youth Focus Group
Participant*

These perceptions of youth offer an important insight into the relative attractiveness of rural communities. While rural communities were seen as straightforward and basic, they were also viewed as somewhat stifling and boring. Many youth felt that to succeed, it would be necessary to move to a larger centre. Major centres of Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal were viewed as more attractive than closer, regional centres.

In addition to the focus group research, information gleaned from the telephone survey of current and former rural youth underscores the considerable differences in the relative attractiveness of rural and urban communities. As highlighted in Chart 3, while rural communities were perceived as providing for better personal safety and a better place to raise a family, rural youth strongly felt that urban communities provided considerably more post-secondary education opportunities, career opportunities and better access to sports/recreation events.

Chart 3
Youth Assessment of Rural Communities Relative to Urban Communities by Net Percentage: % Citing Rural Better Less % Citing Urban Better



Youth Perceptions of Rural Living: Summary

"...this is a great place to raise a family...except most of us are not thinking about raising a family right now...we want to get an education and start our careers..."

Western Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

Highlighted below are the key observations regarding rural youth perceptions of rural communities.

- ◆ By and large, rural youth feel that while rural communities have several attractive elements (e.g., low crime, affordable housing, good place to raise a family), these "attractive elements" are not necessarily important elements for youth – especially those individuals less than 25 years old. In this context, rural communities are good places to return to, but offer only limited opportunities for youth who are looking forward to a post-secondary education or a career.
- ◆ While many rural youth noted that they would like to return to a rural community sometime in the future, most indicated that small towns lacked employment opportunities, especially those relevant to the post-secondary education they hoped to complete.

"The safety is so easy to get wrapped up in. It's okay for a while, but eventually you've got to see the other things out there ... there's more jive in the city"

***Atlantic Canada Youth
Focus Group Participant***

- ◆ Rural youth do not generally have any trepidation about moving to a large city. While large urban centres were viewed as being less safe, many youth equated relocation to a larger centre as a sign of success. Large centres tend to have both practical elements (i.e., post-secondary education, career opportunities) and social elements (i.e., prestige, having done something with one's life) that are attractive to youth.

SECTION 3: FUTURE PLANS OF RURAL YOUTH

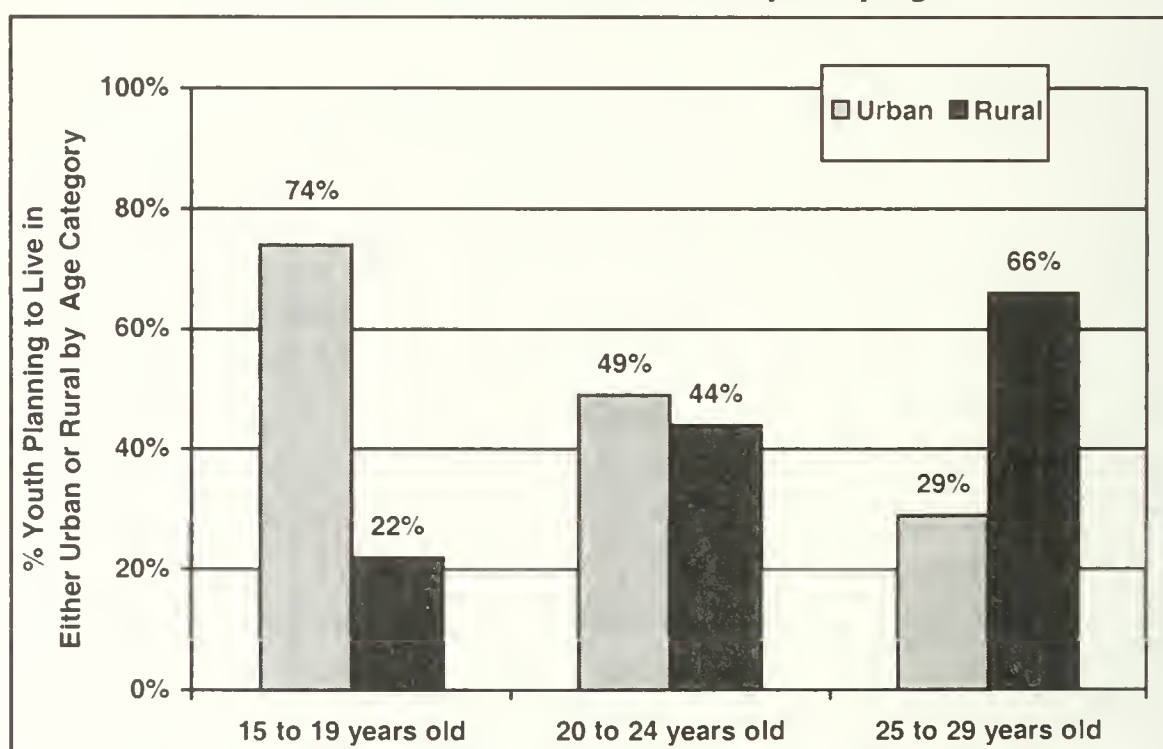
"I'm going to go to university in a large city and I think I might stay in the city. I like to meet new people and I just like doing new things. There are more options in the city for jobs that are careers."

Western Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

As indicated by Statistics Canada, over the past ten years youth populations have declined in rural communities, and this trend is expected to continue. However, it is important to gauge the extent of future rural out-migration by examining the expectations of rural youth.

More than one-half of all the youth who completed the telephone survey stated that they intend to live in an urban community in the future. However, Chart 4 indicates that youth mobility plans appear to be age-dependent, as significantly more youth aged 15-19 years plan to reside in an urban centre than do those in other age categories (20 to 24 years or 25 to 29 years old).

Chart 4
Future Plans of Rural Youth Surveyed by Age



Note: n=854 for 15-19 years old; n=584 for 20-24 years old; n=507 for 25-29 years old
Totals will not add to 100% due to "don't know" responses.

Focus group research further supports these findings, as more than one-half of the youth in each group indicated that they intend to relocate to an urban centre in the future. Again, this was particularly prevalent among the 15 to 19 year olds. Many

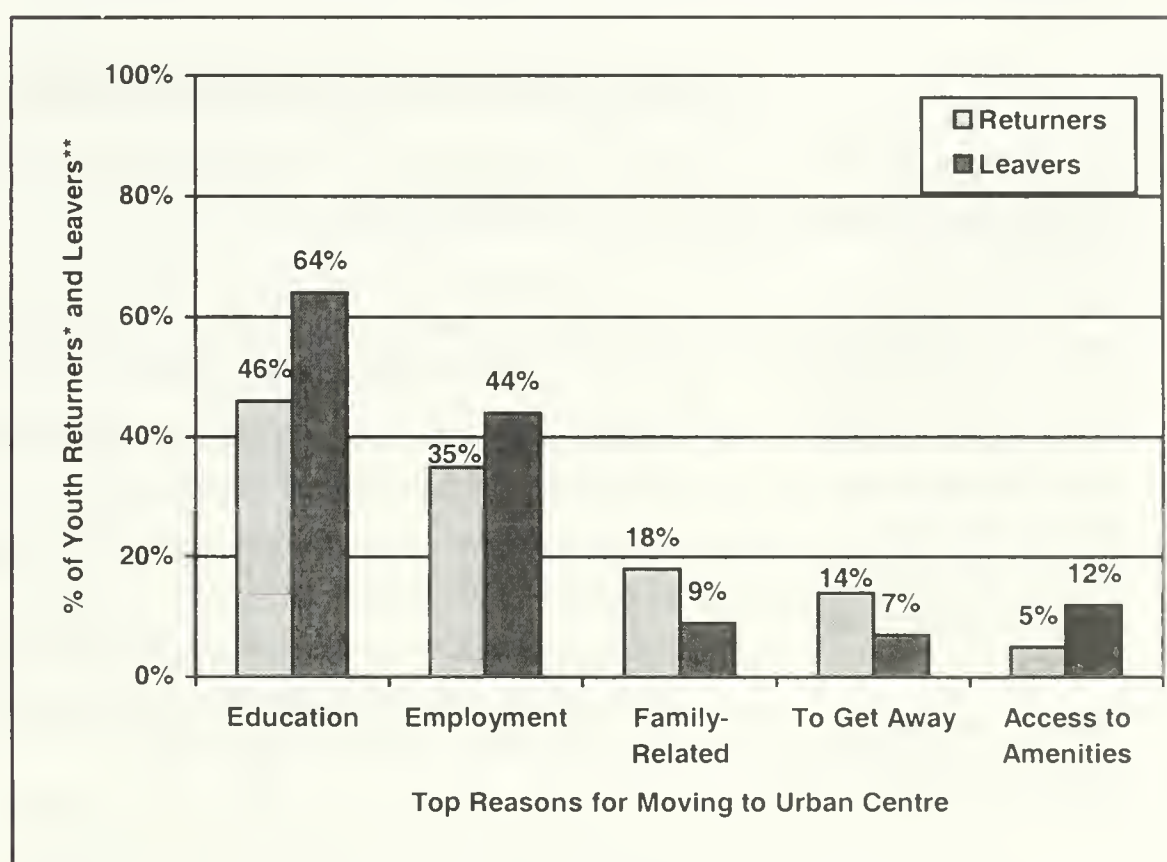
"Many young people do not have any roots when they're 15 to 19 years old. If they move to the city and like it, or if they meet someone in the city, then they suddenly have roots in the city and you'll never get them back."

*Atlantic Canada
Community Leader Focus
Group Participant*

youth would like to return to their rural communities but it is dependent on whether they can get suitable employment.

To develop strategies that attract and keep youth in rural communities, reasons youth move to urban centres must be closely examined. According to survey results, rural youth who currently live (leavers) or have lived in urban communities (returners) relocated to large centres to pursue post-secondary education, find employment, or accompany family. For some, the move is intended to be temporary, while others plan to remain in an urban environment.

Chart 5
Reasons for Moving to Urban Centres Cited by Rural Youth



Note: Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to multiple response.

*Returners are youth who lived in a rural community, moved to an urban centre and then returned to a rural community.

**Leavers are youth who have migrated to an urban centre where they currently reside.

"My husband has a job here, so we are not planning to move. Sure there would be more opportunities for my kids in the city, but I have concerns about safety and finding trustworthy child care in the city and that far outweighs the good things that are there."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

Equally important as the reasons for moving away from rural areas are the reasons that youth are attracted to rural communities. A large number of youth move to rural communities because their families move to the area or because they want to be closer to family who reside in the community. Employment also draws youth to rural areas, while other youth move to enjoy a better lifestyle and/or to escape the pressures of urban life.

A youth's decision either to remain in or leave a rural community can be influenced by parents, friends, peers, teachers and siblings.

Future Plans of Rural Youth: Summary

"The attitude of peers and parents is one of the reasons youth leave. When they hear things like 'this place sucks' and 'there's nothing for you here,' of course they're going to leave."

Western Canada Community Leader Focus Group Participant

The following provides an overview of the intent of youth and the influences on those plans.

- ◆ A large number of rural youth, particularly those aged 15 to 19, are planning to live in urban centres.
- ◆ Youth move to urban centres to obtain post-secondary education and to find employment.
- ◆ Youth move to rural communities for family-related reasons and for employment.
- ◆ Parents, friends, teachers and relatives are the individuals who most often influence youth in their decision to remain in, or relocate from, their communities.

SECTION 4: COMMUNITY VIEWS ON RURAL YOUTH ISSUES

"Older folks really don't care about youth. As long as we don't disturb them, all they want is to maintain things the way they are."

Quebec Community Leader Focus Group Participant

Of the six case study sites visited, only two had strategies in place for retaining or attracting youth.

A number of community leaders stated that youth leaving the rural communities was a positive event, perhaps inevitable but arguably necessary. Community leaders seemed to feel that rural youth need to leave their community to gain new experiences and broaden their horizons. If a youth wishes to pursue post-secondary education, then in most cases leaving the small town is the only way to accomplish that. Often, parents actively push their children "out of the nest," citing the lack of opportunities in the small town and its insular nature as reasons why youth should leave. Leaving in order to broaden horizons was, therefore, viewed positively by many community leaders.

"[Rural youth migration] is not an issue for our town."

Atlantic Canada Community Leader Focus Group Participant

Some community leaders felt that youth retention/attraction was not particularly important. In one case, the town's mayor stated that the challenge was not retaining youth but retaining seniors, and that the town's strategies for increasing the population have been focused on the latter age group. In still another town, the mayor was concerned about the infrastructure that would be necessary to support an increased number of youth. The town would have to consider the costs involved in "having more youth around" and to consider what that age group can give back to the community. In another town, one of the community leaders questioned the wisdom of even trying to maintain the small towns of Canada, as they require a great deal of expensive infrastructure (on a per capita basis).

"I'm not so sure I'm into getting more youth here...I'd want productive youth."

Western Canada Community Leader

While these views reflect the majority of the input from community leaders, some members of that group expressed concern that youth were leaving the community. Notwithstanding a view that youth must gain post-secondary education (and leave to achieve this), these leaders foresaw significant problems in the long-term if their community was unable to ensure the retention of some of the young adults not continuing on to post-secondary education or the repatriation of a portion of the graduates. They described the

"As long as you're 10 and under, you're cute and everybody loves you. From the time you're 10 until you're 20, nobody wants to see you. Younger youth are seen as trouble."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

"Even if I saw a youth stand up and say something [at a Council meeting], I couldn't take it seriously because society doesn't take youth seriously."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

vicious circle initiated by the loss of dynamic youngsters gone to pursue higher education, leaving the town with less energy which then drives more young people to leave and so on.

The concern about "what that age group can give back to the community" was also reflected in comments by some community leaders regarding the kind of youth they would want living in their towns. They wished to see more "good" youth; that is youth with an education, ambition, drive and a good work ethic. Related to such concerns is the perception that youth who return to small towns are those who could not make it in the big city. One community leader stated that the perception of "returning equaling failure" should be actively combated.

Consistent with the above is the perception youth have of being "disconnected" from the community – particularly if their community is characterized by a high proportion of seniors or older adults. A number of youth focus group participants stated that they were made to feel unwanted in their rural communities. They felt that they were viewed solely as potential troublemakers and were discriminated against by the older members of the community. In one community a skateboard park was built for youth but it was located so far out of town that it was difficult to access making them feel like the town wanted the young people as far away as possible. Other youth commented that any place that youth chose to hang out was immediately closed to them. Youth felt like they were often blamed for anything that went wrong in their towns. For example, petitions were made in opposition to their projects. In some cases, youth felt like the community wished to forget they existed.

This perception of being unwanted and unheard also surfaced in discussions of youth involvement in community decision-making. Even younger community leaders (those aged 20-29) felt that, at best, the community paid lip service to the views of youth. Youth are tolerated, but not taken seriously. Some youth, however, admitted that it was difficult to get youth to care enough to go to Council meetings and make a difference because, "it's easier to complain than to go and make an effort for change." Both

"We have an Internet café and a youth work co-op because young people got involved and pursued these projects."

***Quebec Rural Youth
Focus Group
Participant***

community leaders and youth themselves cited youth apathy as a serious barrier to increased youth involvement in the community. A number of community leaders felt that youth input had to be actively solicited and then fostered. Some, however, expressed concern about whether or not more youth involvement would change youth migration patterns, stating that the "good ones" are the ones who care about being involved and they are going to leave anyway.

Youth noted that it was important that initiatives to get youth involved in civic affairs should not be "token" efforts to appease local youth. Several youth indicated that youth involvement would increase if tangible changes resulted from youth suggestions or input. While many youth acknowledged that their communities had more urgent priorities (e.g., unemployment, potential loss of a major employer, health care issues, etc.), it was noted that implementation of youth-focused initiatives did not often require major expenditures or policy changes. Having the community express an interest in youth was seen as an important first step in developing "youth-friendly rural communities".

SECTION 5: STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING/ATTRACTING YOUTH TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

A key objective of this research project was to identify the possible strategies/initiatives that could be implemented to help communities retain and/or attract youth. In developing the list of possible strategies/initiatives, the research team utilized information from various sources, including:

- ◆ focus groups/interviews with rural youth, community leaders and other experts (government officials, business representatives, other);
- ◆ a major national telephone survey of current and former rural youth;
- ◆ a review of programs and initiatives undertaken in other jurisdictions; and,
- ◆ feedback from roundtable participants, community leaders and former rural youth.

Although numerous strategies were identified by youth and community leaders, the research team sought to identify those strategies that were commonly cited in most regions or among most youth groups. In general, the identified strategies can be grouped under the following headings:

- ◆ Enhancing Employment Opportunities
- ◆ Facilitating Access to Education and Training
- ◆ Civic Engagement
- ◆ Tax and Fiscal Policies
- ◆ Work Orientation/Rural “Exposure” Programs
- ◆ Recreation/Social Activities and Infrastructure

5.1 Enhancing Employment Opportunities

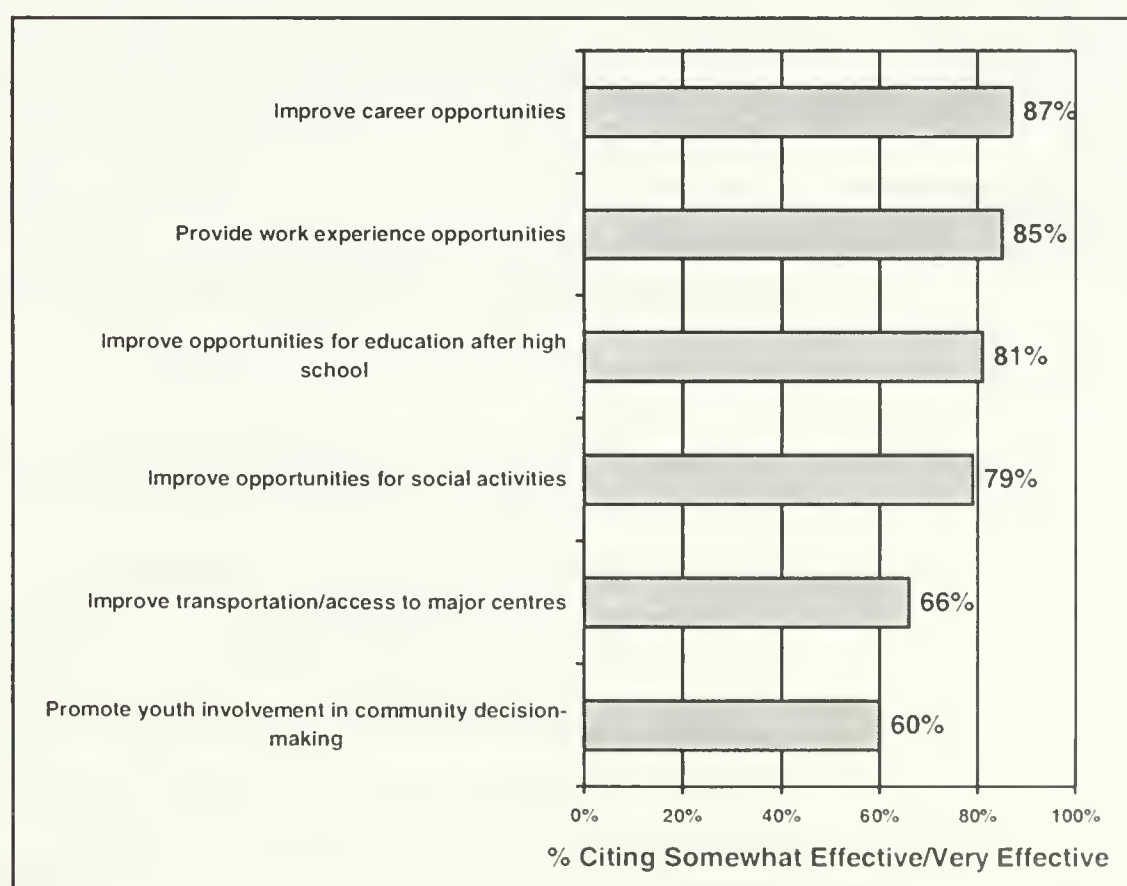
"You can get a job in this town, but you can't move up the ladder ... it's hard to get started on a career-oriented employment path here."

***Atlantic Canada
Community Leader Focus
Group Participant***

Considerable data indicate that rural youth have significantly fewer economic opportunities than do their urban counterparts. For example, just over 30% of workers aged 20 to 29 years were employed full-time in rural communities in 1996, as compared to the 50% average in urban areas. In addition to declining employment, those individuals who work in rural communities are less likely to be employed in professional or managerial occupations. For example, in 1996, whereas 30% of urban youth aged 15 to 29 years were employed in professional/managerial occupations, only 22% of rural youth were similarly employed.

Enhancing employment opportunities was identified as a key priority among rural youth contacted in the telephone survey. As highlighted in Chart 6, more than 85% of youth indicated that improving career opportunities (87%) or providing work experience opportunities (85%) would be either somewhat or very effective in terms of enhancing the attractiveness of rural living to young Canadians.

Chart 6
Effectiveness Ratings of Selected Initiatives to Enhance Rural Living to Young Canadians



"All city council is focussed on is the implementation of a new mill. But there is no plan B and plan A does not seem to go anywhere."

*Ontario Rural Youth
Focus Group
Participant*

Although youth identified the importance of employment-related initiatives, they were also cognizant of the challenges associated with generating employment opportunities in rural areas. For example, both survey and focus group participants identified four common employment "barriers" for rural youth, including:

- ◆ lack of career-oriented employment opportunities (few "interesting" jobs that paid well);
- ◆ limited ability to gain entry into well-paying permanent jobs (little turnover, seniority issues);
- ◆ inability of the community to attract large employers; and,
- ◆ difficulty in obtaining education, training or support (financial, other) for self-employment/entrepreneurial activities.

Lack of career-oriented employment opportunities

"I'd like to move back here or some place where I'll find a good job but I don't know where I'll find that."

*Western Canada Rural
Youth Focus Group
Participant*

Many rural youth noted that if they were successful in their post-secondary education programs, there would not be an opportunity for them to work in their chosen field in a rural community. Other youth noted that due to the limited number of employers, it was also difficult to gain entry into apprenticeship and/or technical areas. Some roundtable participants suggested that traditional approaches to rural employment were not always viable options in today's economy. For example, some forward-thinking grain farmers had become entrepreneurs by adding native fruit crops and jam manufacturing to their operation. However, participants recognized that it may be difficult for youth to attempt novel practices without support or guidance from successful business people.

Limited ability to gain entry into well-paying permanent jobs

Many of the rural communities visited were characterized as having one or two major employers. While it was acknowledged that such employers often offered interesting and well-paying positions, these positions were generally unavailable to youth due to the limited turnover and/or seniority requirements. Some community leaders attending the roundtable sessions suggested that it was not always possible for small rural business people to

"...this town offers lots of minimum wage jobs...but unless you like working at [fast food restaurant], you can't get a real job."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

provide employment or career opportunities to youth without temporary financial support. These businesses by their nature hire few employees and need to "put their best foot forward every day". Thus, these businesses may need to have financial support to hire and train young people, particularly in the first year or two of their employment.

Inability of the community to attract large employers

Several youth focus groups identified the need for the local community to become more proactive in terms of attracting new employers that could provide jobs to youth in the community.

Difficulty in obtaining education, training or other supports

Rural youth cited numerous "barriers" in terms of gaining the education and/or skills to participate in the local, regional or national economy, including:

- ◆ minimal or no post-secondary education institutions in the community;
- ◆ limited availability of adult education or upgrading courses offered in local schools;
- ◆ lack of high speed internet access that limits distance education opportunities in some centres; and,
- ◆ limited opportunity for apprenticeship or on-the-job training activities.

Roundtable participants noted that young rural women in particular had fewer employment opportunities than males in their rural communities, and consequently, most of them relocated to larger centres. In addition, community leaders felt that some of these women would have been good candidates for trades/technical training (e.g., in trades needed in the community) but these avenues were not suggested or promoted as options to young women.

Many youth also noted that while they were interested in entrepreneurship or self-employment, they did not have access to training, education or other youth entrepreneurship support programs in their community.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Enhancing Employment Opportunities

1-1 Have education and training institutions provide greater access to technical/trades training:

- ☐ Recognizing that only limited career opportunities are available to rural youth, it is important that education and training institutions provide sufficient opportunities for rural youth to acquire the skills that could be used in career employment in their local community.
- ☐ Promote technical/trades training to young rural women.

1-2 Have local employers provide youth employment/entry into career positions:

- ☐ Have employers establish some positions open only to youth (youth employment "set aside").
- ☐ Encourage employers to provide apprenticeship opportunities for rural youth.
- ☐ Provide government subsidies to local employers to encourage participation.
- ☐ Initiate a mentoring program between youth and successful business people in the community.

1-3 Have school districts/colleges/local economic development agencies build an awareness of self-employment as a career alternative:

- ☐ Encourage school districts/colleges/local economic development agencies to promote self-employment as a career alternative.
- ☐ Consider non-traditional approaches to employment that may involve sectoral revitalization, knowledge-based work, ecotourism, etc.
- ☐ Have rural communities develop youth entrepreneurship strategies.
- ☐ Have government agencies promote entrepreneurship training strategies that focus on rural youth.

1-4 Provide allowances or stipends to allow/support rural youth to attend training or networking sessions that they might otherwise be unable to attend.

1-5 Encourage employers to make available summer employment opportunities to help retain ties with the community among those youth who have left to pursue post-secondary education.

- ☐ Provide employers with wage subsidies for first-time youth employment in order to make the program viable.
-

5.2 Facilitating Access to Education and Training

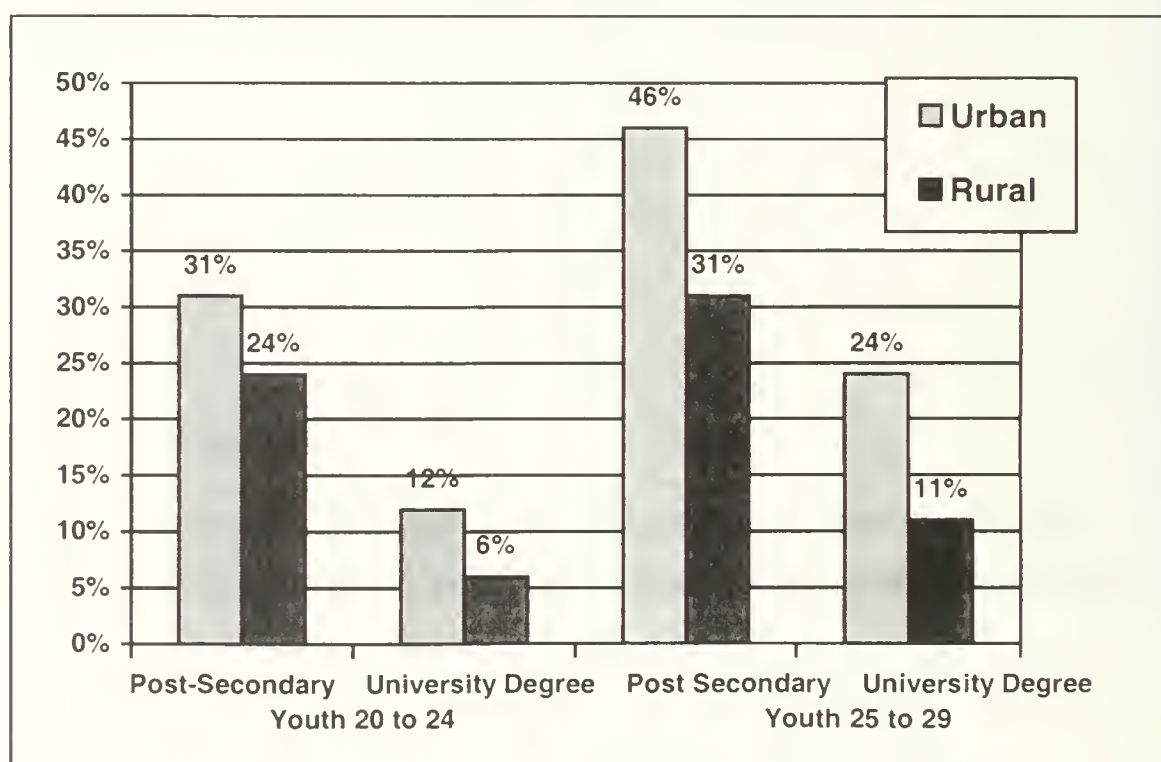
"It is way more expensive for rural youth to get a university education because they cannot live at home while they are going to school. The playing field has to be leveled."

***Western Canada
Community Leader***

Statistics on education levels in Canada show that rural youth are generally less educated than urban youth. Chart 7 highlights these differences. An examination of education levels in one of the case study sites, Wakaw, Saskatchewan, indicate that 41% of residents 25 years and older have less than a grade nine education compared with the provincial average of 15% and the national average of 14%.

Rural youth have considerably less access to post-secondary education and training programs than urban dwellers. Consequently, many youth leave rural communities to pursue education in larger centres. However, there are financial implications that can deter youth from pursuing post-secondary education. By migrating to urban centres, rural youth are unable to remain in the family home and, therefore, must incur additional expenses for food and accommodation. Additionally, there are social, cultural and psychological implications involved in moving from rural communities to urban centres.

Chart 7
Education Levels of Urban and Rural Residents of Canada



Source: Rural Youth: Stayers, Leavers and Return Migrants. Statistics Canada, 2000.

"I'd say we are being pushed away from our town. Because they closed the technical college, people have to go away for their education now."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

Both survey and focus group participants identified lack of post-secondary education and training as a major "barrier" to retaining rural youth. Although many youth may plan on moving back to their rural community after completing post-secondary education, job opportunities are limited, particularly professional and skilled positions. In addition, youth may develop new attachments to the urban centre where the educational institute is located.

Access to Education and Training

Most colleges, universities and technical institutes are located in urban centres. Although some offer distance education courses, not all courses and training opportunities are made available remotely nor are they always feasible. However, some roundtable participants felt that industry located in rural areas often had difficulty attracting skilled labour. Consequently, they felt that strategic alliances between community-based industry and educational institutions could be forged to bring needed training to the rural community.

For many distance education courses, students must have access to the Internet in order to participate.

Studying by correspondence is an option that requires diligence and self-motivation. Youth appreciate the classroom atmosphere, support of other students and the social milieu afforded by an on-campus educational experience. One roundtable participant noted that technology (e.g., videoconferencing) that would allow interaction between students and with teachers is not often utilized for distance education courses.

As noted in past research, (Bollman, Fuller and Ehrensaft, 1992) youth need to be directed to knowledge-based industries (e.g., e-commerce, Internet sales), and the production of goods and services attractive to urban dwellers (e.g., tourism, recreation, artisan goods) that are not traditionally rural industries. Entrepreneurial enterprises may be a viable option if youth were to receive support and encouragement (Nebraska Community Foundation, 2001).

Knowledge of Post-Secondary Education Options

One of the difficulties with pursuing post-secondary education in a rural community may be in the dissemination of knowledge about educational opportunities. Information about training opportunities and distance education may not be promoted in the community. For example, in one case study site, community leaders and parents of graduating teenagers were unaware that the local college offered courses that could be transferred to university credits. In other cases, roundtable participants noted that rural teachers and other people who have influence on youth in their community do not have skills in using the Internet or computers. Therefore, these “influencers” cannot provide youth with needed skills or support to use distance education options.

Another difficulty mentioned by roundtable participants was that not all distance education courses are accredited or recognized by educational institutes or employers. Consequently, some youth may have taken distance education courses that did not result in credit towards a degree or an improvement in their ability to find employment. Youth need access to knowledgeable people who can direct them to accredited courses.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Facilitating Access to Education and Training

2-1 Provide post-secondary education options to rural youth:

- ☐ Recognize that rural youth have limited access to post-secondary education opportunities; it is important that education and training institutions provide sufficient opportunities for rural youth to acquire the skills and education, particularly those that could be valuable to the local community.
- ☐ Encourage strategic alliances between community-based organizations/industry and educational institutions to offer programs that meet the needs of the community.
- ☐ Ensure distance education courses are accredited (i.e., recognized by post-secondary education institutions and employers).

2-2 Promote awareness of the importance of technology to local teachers and to “community influencers”:

- ☐ Ensure that high school teachers are proficient in computer and Internet technology in order to pass this expertise to students so that ultimately this knowledge can be used to promote distance education opportunities.

2-3 Make computers with high speed Internet available to rural youth enrolled in distance education:

- ☐ To facilitate enrolment in distance education courses, computers and high speed Internet connections should be made available.
- ☐ Provide subsidies or grants to purchase computer equipment and install high speed Internet for rural students who enroll in distance education courses.

2-4 Have school districts/colleges/local economic development agencies build an awareness of distance education options:

- ☐ Raise the awareness of post-secondary education and training opportunities available to rural youth.

2-5 Promote group enrollment in distance education courses to facilitate learning for rural youth:

- ☐ Encourage group enrollment in courses, as youth may benefit from having the support of other students and better appreciate the distance education experience.

- ☐ Offer facilities (e.g., in existing schools) for rural youth to meet for study and discussion.

2-6 Provide grants or interest-free loans to support rural youth in attending training sessions that teach skills needed in the rural community:

- ☐ Provide grants or interest-free loans to rural students who enroll in training that can be used in the local community after graduation.
-

5.3 Civic Engagement

"The people in our town should hold focus groups like this with youth so that when changes are made they are the kind of changes that will really benefit youth."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

"If we empowered youth (i.e., not just a token 'youth on the board') and really let them know that their input was felt to be valuable, then they would want to be involved."

Atlantic Canada Community Leader Focus Group Participant

The results of the focus groups and telephone survey suggest that a significant proportion of rural youth feel that they are not considered to be active participants in their community. In some instances, youth felt that they were a marginalized group within the community and had no influence or status in their community.

A number of focus group participants noted that rural communities should make a more concerted effort to encourage youth to be active participants in their town. Involvement in civic activities and local decision-making was identified as one way in which rural youth could help ensure that youth priorities were addressed in local decision-making.

Rural youth identified several activities that could contribute to greater civic engagement of youth, including:

- ◆ establishment of youth advisory committees;
- ◆ development of "youth issues" sections in local newspapers/publications;
- ◆ tasking of a councilor/position with responsibility for youth issues; and,
- ◆ establishment of youth priorities for local government.

Youth at the roundtable sessions stressed the importance of involving local youth in the development of any rural youth strategy beginning with the initial planning stage. This was essential if communities wanted to develop strategies that would be effective.

Participants from the roundtables also noted that it is not always feasible for small communities to provide all the opportunities needed to retain and attract youth. However, by working with neighbouring communities on developing youth action plans, each community can develop activities to enhance or compliment what is offered. Thus, opportunities for youth in the general area can be maximized.

Mentoring was mentioned repeatedly in the roundtable sessions as a method of maintaining attachments to rural youth. If community leaders can engage youth and mentor them, the ties that are established may draw youth back to their rural communities after they have completed post-secondary education or when they have a family that they want to raise in a small community.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Civic Engagement

3-1 Encourage local governments to adopt a pro-active approach to include rural youth in the decision-making process through several avenues.

- ☐ Organize a Youth Advisory Committee.
- ☐ Develop a Local Youth Action Plan.
- ☐ Identify a "Youth Representative" or "Youth Advocate".
- ☐ Charge a town councilor with a portfolio that encompasses the promotion of youth involvement in civic affairs.

3-2 Encourage rural communities to make greater efforts to publicize youth issues, activities and strategies.

- ☐ Publicize youth issues and activities in local papers to show that the community truly "values" their youth.
- ☐ Publicize youth accomplishments to exemplify the success that other rural youth may strive to achieve.

3-3 Encourage local governments to identify youth initiatives as a priority in community plans and strategies.

- ☐ Assign a "youth portfolio" to a town councilor.

3-4 Encourage local governments/communities to work together to develop strategies to engage rural youth.

- ☐ Promote youth opportunities/activities in surrounding communities (i.e., rural nodes) to enhance and compliment all communities involved.
-

5.4 Tax and Fiscal Policy

"There should be tax breaks for rural family planning."

*Atlantic Canada
Community Leader
Focus Group
Participant*

A number of youth focus group participants felt that if government(s) was serious about making rural living more attractive, then it was important for them to demonstrate this commitment through tax and fiscal policies.

Although focus group participants acknowledged that the cost of living in most (but not all) rural areas was less than that of larger urban centres, rural youth also felt that the earning potential of youth in smaller towns was lower than that of their urban counterparts.

In general, options for tax and fiscal policies focussed on the need to provide "advantages" to youth who decided to remain in a rural area and/or relocate to a rural area. Among the innovative suggestions provided by youth included initiatives relating to educational programs, housing and taxation.

Educational Programs

Rural youth felt that the federal government should explore reduced student loan payments for rural youth who returned to a rural community upon completion of their studies. This relief could take the form of reduced interest payments and/or a portion of the loan remission for each year that the youth resides in a rural community upon completion of studies.

"Communities that are having problems attracting people should be given more home-owner grants by the government."

*Western Canada
Community Leader*

Housing

Youth identified possible housing initiatives that could attract youth to rural communities. Among the initiatives cited were property tax rebates for rural youth, home ownership programs for rural home purchases and/or interest deductions for rural residents.

Tax/Fiscal Programs

"We are a long way from the next major centre and I think the government should bring back the Isolation Tax Credit."

***Western Canada
Community Leader***

Some youth noted that residents in certain parts of Canada received special tax allowances (e.g., Northern resident allowance). In addition, youth noted that some businesses could qualify for funding/tax relief based on the location of their establishment. Other youth felt that it would be important for governments to encourage the establishment of new businesses that hired a minimum proportion of youth in rural regions.

Although most youth participants acknowledged the perceptions of "special treatment" that could arise due to the establishment of rural-based programs, youth noted that rural areas often lacked the amenities of larger centres (post-secondary education centres, hospitals, government offices) and that such programs could help redress the perceived inequalities between rural and urban areas.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Tax and Fiscal Policies

- 4-1 Have provincial and federal governments review the opportunity to adjust student loan repayment requirements for youth who reside in rural areas upon completion of their studies.**
- ☐ Possible financing reductions or loan remission for each year post-secondary education completers reside in a rural community upon completion of their studies.
- 4-2 Encourage local governments to examine the feasibility of offering reduced property tax assessments for youth (first time home-buyers).**
- 4-3 Have all levels of government explore possible fiscal/tax strategies that would encourage industry to locate to rural areas and hire rural youth.**
- ☐ Business tax reductions.
 - ☐ "Rural operating allowances".
 - ☐ Income tax/EI premium relief for rural youth hires.
 - ☐ Consider specific quotas for rural regions in terms of employment/support programs.
-

5.5 Work Orientation/Rural “Exposure” Programs

Rural youth noted that it would be important for rural communities to undertake activities designed to increase the awareness of rural opportunities and the benefits of rural living. In essence, youth felt that given the often negative stereotyping of rural living, it would be necessary to provide urban/other youth with an opportunity to experience rural living first hand.

Rural youth cited several activities that could be completed to provide such opportunities, including:

- ◆ active recruitment of professionals/businesses to rural areas, especially for those businesses in which proximity to major markets was not important;
- ◆ establishment of rural “work experience” programs to encourage young professionals in health, education and other sectors to complete their practicums/residency/training in rural communities; and,
- ◆ ensuring that teachers and other community “influencers” are promoting the advantages of rural living not only to urban dwellers but also to local youth.

“...it would be good if local businesses would make an effort to use youth businesses – first contracts are important and hard to get...”

*Ontario Rural Youth
Focus Group
Participant*

Several youth also noted that local industries needed to become more aware of the services/employment that could be provided by youth and/or young entrepreneurs. Several individuals noted that rural businesses needed to try and build “partnerships” with local youth (young entrepreneurs/self-employed) to support youth business in their community. Cultivating such partnerships was seen as having several benefits:

- ◆ it would allow industry to better explain needs and opportunities;
- ◆ it would provide youth and youth businesses with potential markets; and,
- ◆ the partnerships could enhance opportunities for youth to market developed products/services once they had established their businesses.

Rural youth also felt that rural employers should adopt a more proactive approach in terms of demonstrating to youth the types of jobs available in rural areas. Many focus group participants indicated that employers should be more active in terms of participating in work experience or career exploration programs to ensure that rural youth were more aware of career opportunities available in their rural community. Several focus group participants noted that they were unaware of the full range of occupations available in their community.

Roundtable participants noted that often work experience programs had negative connotations. Teachers were seen as not “buying-in” to these programs. Students who took work experience programs were seen as “losers” who could not succeed at post-secondary education options. In addition, not enough effort was put into ensuring that students were streamed into work experience options that reflected their interests. Available work experience often involved jobs requiring minimal training and most importantly, did not reflect career goals of the students.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Work Orientation/Rural “Exposure” Programs

5-1 Encourage employers in rural communities to establish “work experience” programs to encourage job seekers to acquire work experience/familiarization in rural communities. This activity could also be partially funded through local community economic development offices and/or other agencies.

- ☐ Gain the support of high school teachers for the work experience programs to help eliminate the stigma associated with these programs (e.g., that only students with poor grades enroll in work experience programs).
- ☐ Tailor work experience to the career goals of youth.

5-2 Encourage local businesses to recognize the importance of youth business and establish minimum targets for youth business contracts (e.g., 5% of contracts to go to youth-run businesses).

5-3 Have the school districts and local employers work closely together to provide work experience opportunities for youth in local industry.

5-4 Promote the advantages of rural living.

- ☐ Industry in rural areas need to promote the advantages of a rural lifestyle to attract young employees.
 - ☐ Rural teachers need to promote the benefits of rural living to their students to help combat the negative stereotyping of rural communities.
 - ☐ Media portrayal of rural life is negative; the advantages of rural living need to be publicized.
-

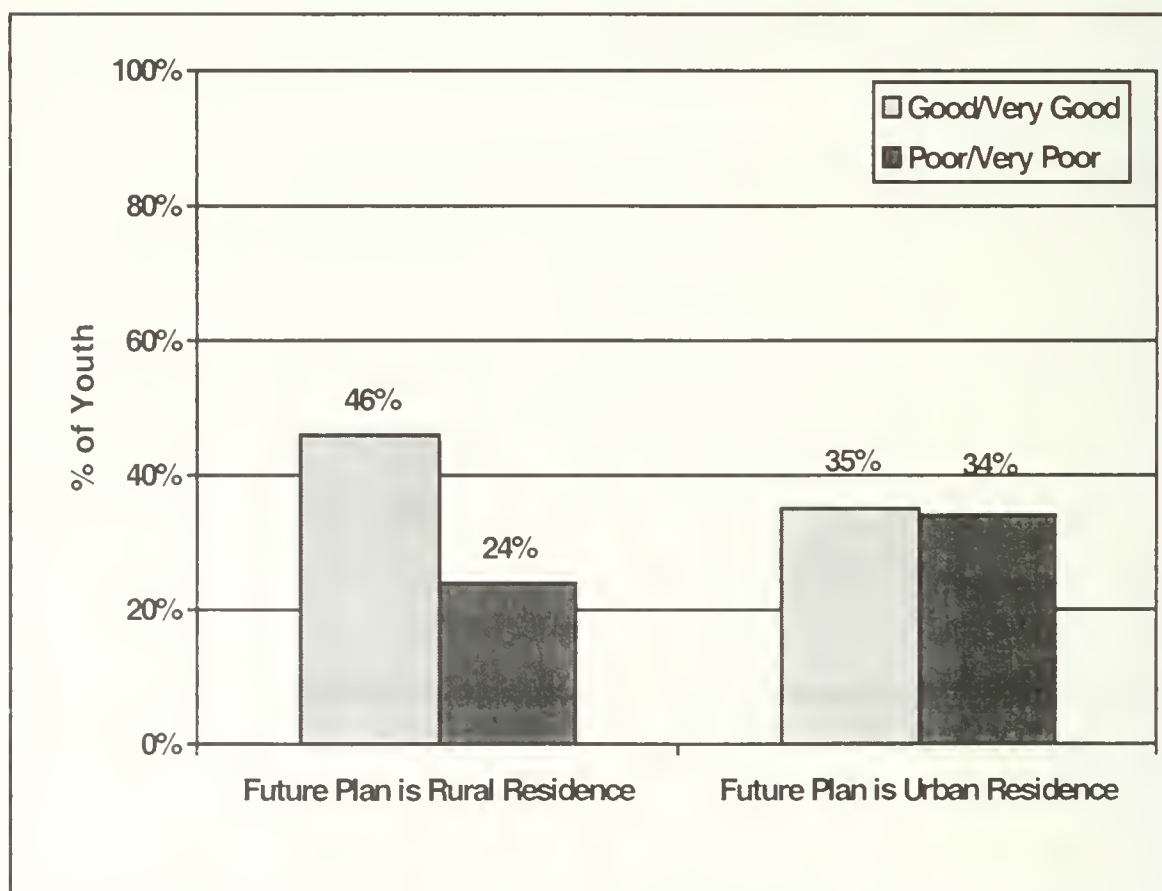
5.6 Recreation/Social Activities and Infrastructure

"Our community has some sports, but it really lacks any form of arts or culture."

Western Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

Although access to recreation and social activities was not identified as a major deficiency to most rural youth, the lack of "social infrastructure" was cited as one of the problems of rural living – especially among those individuals who are planning to leave their rural community. As highlighted in Chart 8, whereas approximately 46% of youth who planned a rural residence indicated that their access to cultural and social activities was good or very good, a lower proportion of youth who planned for an urban residence (35%) felt that access to social/cultural opportunities in their rural community was good or very good.

Chart 8
Rural Youth Perception of Access to Social/Cultural Activities in Rural Communities by Future Residence Plan



n=1,266 for Future Plan is Rural Residence and n=573 for Future Plan is Urban Residence

"Our festivals are a way for the town to set itself apart from the other towns..."

Atlantic Canada Rural Youth Focus Group Participant

Many rural youth noted that it was important to develop the arts/cultural infrastructure to help identify the community among all other rural communities. The presence of unique festivals and activities was thought to positively contribute to the sense of "community identity".

It should be noted that many youth felt that their community's social/cultural infrastructure was often geared to young children or older adults. In particular, many youth felt that there were limited social/recreational opportunities available for youth aged 15 to 19 years and single young adults aged 20 to 29 years. Focus group participants noted that some of the facilities that would appeal to teenagers (e.g., skateboarding park, roller rink, other) had generated counter-petitions from the community. When such facilities were made available they were often located a considerable distance from the town centre. Youth at the roundtables stressed the importance of having youth involved in planning facilities and events in order to ensure that facilities and activities would meet local needs.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS: Recreation/Social Activities and Infrastructure

- 6-1** Ensure that Community Recreation Plans explicitly address the needs of local youth groups including the 15 to 19 year age group and single young adults aged 20 to 29 years.
- 6-2** Encourage rural communities to explore the availability of government funding (e.g., Canadian Heritage, other) to support cultural/social infrastructure or events in their local community.
- ☐ Ensure youth input in the planning stages of cultural/social events and/or infrastructure changes.
 - ☐ Encourage cultural exchanges in rural areas.
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SUMMARY

The *Discussion Paper* contains more than 20 strategic options that could be implemented by communities, employers and other agencies.

The results of this research suggest that rural communities across Canada will continue to face a net loss of youth to larger urban centres. The research also confirmed that while much of this outflow could be attributed to employment, educational and social factors, there are a number of activities or actions that could be implemented to help redress the factors that contribute to rural youth migration.

The research confirms that for many rural youth, the relocation to a larger urban centre is both an economic and social priority. However, many of these same youth would return to a rural or small town community if such communities could be made more attractive to youth.

This *Discussion Paper* presented in this document includes more than 20 strategic options designed to enhance the attractiveness of rural communities to Canadian youth. It should be noted that the suggested strategic options encompass a range of activities. While some of the strategic options could be easily implemented, others (e.g., tax incentives) would require considerable dialogue and analysis by the various levels of government.

The *Discussion Paper* represents a starting point to enhance youth opportunities in rural communities.

The development of *the Rural Youth Discussion Paper*, based on the contributions and input of thousands of individuals, should be viewed as the starting point for discussions on changing rural communities to help them become "youth friendly". As a starting point, it is expected that many of the suggested options and strategies will require further consideration and debate. While it is unlikely that all strategic options can be implemented in the short-term, the *Discussion Paper* is intended to provide some direction with respect to longer-term goals and objectives. While the *Discussion Paper* has identified numerous changes that could be implemented to enhance local opportunities for rural youth, it is critical that the *Discussion Paper* not be seen as a panacea for reversing rural youth outflows. In fact, it is expected that this *Discussion Paper* will be subject to change and modification as new and different issues arise with respect to Canadian rural youth.

... it is expected that this *Discussion Paper* will change as new and different rural youth issues are identified ...

Appendix A: Youth Sites Visited, Community Consultation Activities and Roundtable Discussions

APPENDIX A

Youth Focus Group Sites Visited, Community Consultation Activities and Roundtable Discussions

Province	Community	Youth Focus Groups	Community Leader Focus Groups or Interviews / Case Studies	Roundtable Discussions
Newfoundland	Clareville	✓	✓	
PEI	Kensington	✓		
Nova Scotia	Windsor Halifax	✓	✓	✓
New Brunswick	Caraquet	✓		
Quebec	Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Conseil	✓	✓	
	Maniwaki	✓		
Ontario	Goderich	✓		
	Blind River	✓	✓	
Manitoba	Morden	✓		
Saskatchewan	Wakaw	✓	✓	
Alberta	Hanna	✓		
	Edmonton			✓
British Columbia	Port Hardy	✓	✓	
Northwest Territories	Rae-Edzo	✓		
	Total	13	6	

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