TQB Youth & Family Attraction and Retention Strategy

PART ONE: Studies Related to our Question:

How to Attract and Retain Youth and Young Families in our Community?

This summary offers an exploration of some of the main ideas presented in current discussion papers related to our initiative, and may help us understand the key issues that we will be considering. It may also be helpful for us to learn what similar communities have undertaken and how they have framed their process. While the outcomes and strategies vary widely according to the unique needs of other communities sampled, the steps taken and the resulting procedures may be of value.

PART 1: PERSPECTIVES offers some ideas about youth and young family attraction drawn from research from Canadian Government, Ontario, Illinois, New Zealand, and Wisconsin.

(See in next document: PART 2: OTHER BC COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE: This offers us a picture of how two B.C. towns similar to Qualicum Beach in size, location and demographics – Sechelt and Sidney – have approached the challenges related to an aging population.)

Rural Youth: Stayers, Leavers and Return Migrants
Stats Canada:

Note: This article sheds light on the question of whether youth population is sustained by retaining youth in their home communities or from in-migration of youth from other areas.

“Of all individuals who move out of their rural community, at most 25% return to this community ten years later. The implication of this result is clear: one cannot count on return migration as a means of preserving the population size of a given cohort. Rather, rural areas must rely on inflows from other (urban) areas to achieve this goal. Some rural communities achieve this; that is, they register positive net in-migration of persons aged 25-29 or older, even though they incur a net loss of younger people.”

“Individuals who move out of rural areas generally experience higher earnings growth than their counterparts who stay. However, it remains an open question in which direction the causality works: is the higher earnings growth the result of the migration process itself or does it reflect the possibility that people with higher earnings growth potential are more likely to become movers?”

Ontario – a Magnet for Newcomers
http://www.reddi.gov.on.ca/cirroimmigration.htm#changingdemographics

Neil’s Note: Ontario is focused on how to strengthen communities’ capacity for in-migration of what they term “newcomers” – either persons new to Canada or simply new to the community. The excerpt below reminds us of the negative outcomes of a pattern that unless reversed can spawn a downward spiral in small communites. The Ontario government also offers a toolkit from which we may want to select some methods that will be useful in our initiative.

One quote of interest: “The human capital in a community is the collective wealth of experience of all people in the community. As people retire, they take more human capital out of the workforce than they originally brought in.

Demographic trends reveal that many small communities in Ontario are experiencing population decline due to low replacement levels, aging populations and out-migration of youth. Some are already experiencing slower growth.

This holds several implications for small communities:
- decreased labour pool
- decreased local demand for goods and services
- decreased tax base
- increased centralization or consolidation of core services (e.g. schools and hospitals)

Unless communities take action, a negative spiral can begin. As fewer amenities are available, the community becomes less attractive to working age adults and young families. This results in a smaller labour pool, which makes the community less attractive to employers. With fewer employers, the community becomes less attractive for new residents, and the spiral continues. Ultimately, this negative spiral has the potential to undermine the sustainability of the community.

Note: The piece below can be quite relevant to our regional/provincial interests if we simply change the name “Toronto” to “Vancouver” ...

Opportunities and challenges for rural communities

The majority of newcomers arriving settle in Toronto. As Canada's largest city, Toronto is often the 'gateway' city for newcomers to Ontario. Of all the people that came to Ontario from 2001-2006, 67% settled in the Greater Toronto Area.

But not all newcomers become long-term, permanent residents of their city of arrival.

The preference to settle in large urban centres like Toronto can be the result of an immigrant's negative perception about small cities and rural areas. For many newcomers, in their home countries, the terms "small city" or "rural" carries negative connotations such as fewer job opportunities, fewer services, fewer amenities and greater social isolation. For Ontario communities, being aware of this and finding ways to
address these concerns is a part of the process of attracting more skilled, talented newcomers to your community.

Many people choose to live in rural communities because they are smaller centres and possess attributes and assets that are appealing for high quality of life.

The challenge for community economic developers in smaller centres is often how to get the human capital needed to maintain the standard of living without losing the small town feel.

This requires a very different approach than the one taken by larger centres. A much greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing a vision of what the community wants to become and defining the resources it needs to get there.

Many smaller centres also lack the resources to attract new residents directly from other parts of the world. It is often much more efficient to target new arrivals from a gateway city. Opportunities exist to create partnerships with organizations in gateway cities to promote smaller centres and communities.

Attracting and Retaining Young People as an Economic Development Strategy
- Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs 2009

Neil’s Note: This article offers a valuable exploration of the key factors that influence decisions of the 20-30’s generation about where to live.

Although it is grounded in the American perspective, it is most probably globally relevant, as the authors contend that the criteria that once drove youth decisions about where to live have changed from the material/practical to more aesthetic dimensions. These are a couple of excerpts:

In The Rise of the Creative Class, Richard Florida (2002) argues that members of the creative class “insist they need to live in places that offer stimulating, creative environments. Many will not even consider taking jobs in certain cities or regions—a stark contrast to the organizational age, when people moved to chase jobs” (95).

The important message of this report is that rural communities need to refocus their attention on addressing what makes their small towns and rural settings a destination sought after by those individuals relocating in American society. Understanding the location preferences of today’s young people will help these communities create the kinds of places that will attract these “people on the move.”

Much attention has been focused on the movement of people to the “stimulating and creative environments” found in larger, urban centers, where creative people are drawn to the arts, culture, night life, and to other creative people. Because of this attention, community development practitioners in small towns and rural areas may be inclined to build their community development efforts by offering these urban style amenities such as pedestrian malls and a thriving night life.

This approach may work in those small towns and rural areas with especially unique assets such as lakefronts and mountains, or those located in a larger metropolitan area, but a much different approach may be more productive in most small towns and rural areas.
Rural Youth Study: Federal Government
Rural Youth Migration - exploring the reality behind the myths
- A rural youth discussion paper prepared by: R.A Malatest and Associates


Note: This study sheds light on a Canadian and global trend that finds youth moving to larger urban centres for a variety of interesting reasons.

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

Key Ideas from this study

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”.

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**Chart 5**

Reasons for Moving to Urban Centres Cited by Rural Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Reasons for Moving to Urban Centre</th>
<th>Returners</th>
<th>Leavers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Related</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Get Away</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Amenities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
Youth Perceptions of Rural Living: Summary

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.

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%).
SUMMARY

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 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.
Making Rangitikei Home / New Zealand  
- Ideas that Rural Councils can use to Strengthen and Grow Their Communities

www.rangitikei.govt.nz/index.php/.../1197-making-rangitikei-home

Neil’s Note:  This New Zealand experience begins with a concise executive summary of the research drawn from global sources. Again, it emphasizes the identification and celebration of strengths, made known through effective website information and “personal touch”.

Summary: The factors encouraging people who are economically active to move into rural areas are the availability of high quality jobs compatible with their experience and/or qualifications; an appreciation of the local environment and ease of access to it; the availability of low cost housing; social and/or family connections; and the perceived strength and safety of some rural communities. The factors encouraging them to return to rural areas are social ties; family obligations; high quality employment opportunities (including opportunities to work remotely); and the desire for a lifestyle change.

For older people, the factors encouraging older people to move into rural areas are: an appreciation of the local environment; ease of access to it; the availability of appropriate, affordable housing; and the perceived strong sense of community available in some rural areas.

Factors Influencing Migration Decisions into Rural Towns

The quality of life in rural areas is an important consideration in the decision to migrate to or remain in such areas with a desire to improve one’s wellbeing. This is highlighted in overseas publications but also applies in New Zealand.

Important criteria include:

- Employment opportunities  
- Affordable housing  
- Higher education availability  
- Lifestyle, family and social ties  
- The personal touch - A sense of belonging in the community.

A Scottish article records that factors encouraging young people to stay in rural areas include the availability of higher education and employment opportunities; social/family pressure to stay; and a lack of resources to move. A sense of attachment to the local area and whether they feel included or valued by the local community is also important in the decision making process.

Factors encouraging families to move into rural areas or return to them are the desire for a lifestyle change; local family connections; and the perception that rural areas provide a good environment for bringing up children. Factors encouraging families to stay in rural areas are parents’ desire to safeguard their children’s education; and a general unwillingness to uproot family life.

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Multiple methods and personal contacts make a difference in recruitment and retention success with the personal touch being highly motivating.

According to a University of Nebraska study, 70 percent of newcomers to the pan-handle region used the internet to learn about their community. A community website showcasing the area was important, but caution was expressed to market assets accurately. Better educated, more highly skilled individuals considered the Internet a very important recruitment tool. However, the second best tool was active recruitment by the community – that personal touch, with nearly 60 percent indicating this was important.

Housing and job opportunities were also reported to be essential recruitment elements. In terms of retention, a feeling of belonging to the community and acceptance was rated as the number one reason people remained in their community, followed...
closely by an open-minded attitude toward new residents and ideas, a clear positive community vision, individual job and career enhancement, and opportunities both for leadership development and participation in the community.

A further study on immigration trends in Western Australia, regarding population in regional and remote areas also reported that people may relocate for practical reasons such as employment, housing, lifestyle, variety, divorce, and financial problems. The life-course factors affecting motivation to move include career, education, income, and family, as in professionals who accept a country transfer for promotional purposes. Cultural factors reported include assets, employment, social networks, culture, ethnicity, and class. People prefer to move where they expect to feel comfortable among the locals, but also to places where they can afford to relocate. Spatial factors affecting choice of location consist of climate, population density, cultural, and recreational opportunities.

Gogebic Range Next Generation Initiative

*Will Andresen / University of Wisconsin / Community Resource Development Educator*

[http://www.uwex.edu/academic-affairs/andresen.html](http://www.uwex.edu/academic-affairs/andresen.html)

Note: Learning from this research, we may want to focus on a TQB inquiry based on four questions:

1) What is TQB’s niche – the stuff that can make it stand out in eyes of youth and young families?
2) What are the general strengths of the community that make it distinct?
3) How can students’ connection to the community be strengthened?
4) How can young workers be retained?

The question I derive from this study is: – *If the people of the community are the key to communicate the assets, how do we engage them fully so that they become the ambassadors?*

“Many of today's young people are looking for more than just a job. They want to live in a place that also matches their lifestyle. This is a major change that local government and economic development officials should understand so that the community can attract and retain young people to sustain its population and economy.”

“A thorough review of the related literature supported this idea, but I realized that local research was required to build community credibility. I surveyed 668 local young people, presented the survey results to an audience of more than 60 local leaders and community members, and divided participants into four groups to develop strategies to retain and attract young people by better connecting them to the community, developing our niche, promoting our strengths and creating social capital.”

After analyzing the results, I identified four opportunities to attract and retain young people on the Gogebic Range, leading to the creation of four community-based work groups:

1. Attract young workers by strengthening our niche.
2. Attract young workers by promoting our strengths.
3. Retain students by better connecting them to the community.
4. Retain young workers by building social capital.

After 15 months, the evaluation of the Next Generation Initiative's (NGI) short-term outcomes has been largely positive. According to the March 2010 Zoomerang survey:

97% believed the NGI had a positive impact on the community, and those opinions were shared equally among natives, boomerangs and transplants to the community.
88% had a better understanding of how to create a community more attractive to young people. A clear majority stated that they (and the community) had a better understanding of the community’s assets and the importance of promoting these assets.
79% of all respondents – and 88% of natives – had a more positive perception of the community. All six work group leaders indicated they learned new valuable skills.
87% of participants in the Go-In Forward Next Generation Group (formed to retain young workers by building social capital) said they would be more likely to stay in the community as the result of the group’s social and networking opportunities.