



# Youth Retention

KNOWLEDGE BRIEF



The outmigration of rural youth is a longstanding issue across Canada<sup>1</sup>. For regions like the Columbia Basin Boundary where there are aging demographics youth retention is increasingly important<sup>2</sup>. Outmigration in general acts as a destabilizing factor that can result in the loss of services and a shrinking local economy<sup>3</sup>.

Specific to youth, the so called rural 'brain drain' sees those with greater academic abilities as more apt to leave, something highlighted as a key issue with talented youth labelled as a rural export<sup>4-9</sup>. While rural youth retention is a recognized need, it is rarely clearly defined. For the purposes of this brief youth retention is defined as any initiative resulting in a stable youth population within the region. In this way youth retention is not limited to keeping existing youth, but includes repatriation and attraction.

There has been a large amount of research on what causes and influences rural youth to stay, go, and return. Decisions related to education, work, marriage, parenting, mobility, and so on are not made in isolation from each other<sup>10</sup>.

This highlights the importance of identifying what youth value in communities and working to translate these values into a where place youth wish to be<sup>11</sup>.

Relevant factors include:

- Lack of opportunities related to employment and education<sup>4,12-19</sup>

Quality of life factors such as:

- Limits to or lack of amenities and services<sup>3,4,6,7,9,12,19,20</sup>
- Community acceptance, attitudes toward youth, and youth engagement<sup>3,4,6,9,13,14,19</sup>
- Personal and socio-cultural factors like: relationships (e.g., friends, family), parental role models, financial ability, and gender<sup>3,4,6,7,9,15,16,21-23</sup>
- Perception of available opportunities<sup>8,9,16</sup>, of the choice to stay in rural areas<sup>6,8,15,22,24,25</sup>, and of the opportunities available elsewhere<sup>7,20</sup>

The literature reviewed suggest a variety of approaches to youth retention. Overall, youth retention strategies often focus on education, training, career opportunities, as well as youth engagement demonstrating that retention is a combination of efforts<sup>26</sup>.

In order to successfully retain youth you have to identify and pay attention to the influencing factors noted above. It is important to know your youth, to understand the relationships that youth have with their region and to educate decision makers about youth needs<sup>4</sup>. Education is a critical element of youth retention as rural school success is tied to economic viability and the sustainability of economic development<sup>9</sup>.

A strong, integrated education network, from daycare to post-secondary, is important<sup>4</sup>. There also needs to be a focus on enhancing youth employment opportunities through entry level or temporary positions, funding for training and networking, and other supports<sup>27,28</sup>.

Active engagement with youth also increases likelihood of them staying, including involving youth in strategy and decision making<sup>4,28</sup>. Changing perceptions is also a key factor, including working to promote strengths, raising awareness of opportunities, and eliminating negative perceptions<sup>4</sup>.

Youth retention is broad, relating to workforce development, community engagement, assets and amenities, social programming, and so on. In light of the discussion above two messages are important to highlight.

First, it is important to go beyond jobs. While jobs and education are critical, youth will only remain or return if a rural area is attractive<sup>27</sup>. Creating not only job opportunities, but an engaged community – a community that has engaged youth before they leave – is crucial. Areas with strong civic engagement, civic welfare, and social capital are shown to retain higher proportions of their populations<sup>29</sup>.





Second, leaving can be a good thing. Within the youth retention conversation it is important to consider that leaving can be good – so long as there is thought given to ensuring youth return<sup>30</sup>.

Youth retention strategies should be approached with the mindset that retention is not keeping youth locked in place. There are employment opportunities in rural areas that require skills and experience that youth may not be able to get at home, forcing them to leave. Examples from the literature note the importance of encouraging youth to explore, while inviting them to return and, more importantly, creating the conditions that allow them to do so<sup>3,21</sup>.

## REFERENCES

1. Dupuy, R., Mayer, F. & Morissette, R. Rural Youth: Stayers, Leavers and Return Migrants. (2000). at <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/000905/dq000905b-eng.htm>>
2. Ingenia Consulting. Regional skills training plan 2013-2020. (2013). at <[http://selkirk.ca/sites/default/files/About Us/KootenayRegionalSkillsTrainingPlan.pdf](http://selkirk.ca/sites/default/files/About%20Us/KootenayRegionalSkillsTrainingPlan.pdf)>
3. Hamm, Z. E. Enhancing Rural Community Sustainability through Intergenerational Dialogue. (University of Alberta, 2012).
4. Robichaud, A. Youth attraction & retention in Northeastern Ontario: A regional strategy. *Pap. Can. Econ. Dev.* 14, 6688 (2014).
5. Carr, P. & Kefalas, M. The Rural Brain Drain. *The Chronicle Review of Higher Education* (2009). at <<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Rural-Brain-Drain/48425/>>
6. Demi, M. A., McLaughlin, D. K. & Snyder, A. R. Rural Youth Residential Preferences: Understanding the Youth Development-Community Development Nexus. *Community Dev.* 40, 311–330 (2009).
7. McLaughlin, D. K., Shoff, C. M. & Demi, M. A. Influence of perceptions of current and future community on residential aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociol.* 79, 453–477 (2014).
8. Looker, E. D. & Naylor, T. D. 'At Risk' of Being Rural? The Experience of Rural Youth in a Risk Society. *J. Rural Community Dev.* 4, 39–64 (2009).
9. Looker, E. D. Policy Research Issues for Canadian Youth An Overview of Human Capital In Rural and Urban Areas. (2001).

10. Looker, E. D. & Dwyer, P. Education and Negotiated Reality: Complexities Facing Rural Youth in the 1990s. *J. Youth Stud.* 1, 5–22 (1998).
11. BC Rural Network. The Rural Youth Diversity Project. (2013). at <<http://www.bcruralnetwork.ca/the-rural-youth-diversity-project/>>
12. Wylie, J. Knowledge Synthesis - Rural Youth Retention: Creating Community Connections. (2008). at <[https://smith.queensu.ca/centres/monieson/knowledge\\_articles/RetainingRuralYouth - Knowledge Synthesis Rev 1.pdf](https://smith.queensu.ca/centres/monieson/knowledge_articles/RetainingRuralYouth-KnowledgeSynthesisRev1.pdf)>
13. The Ontario Rural Council. Rural Youth: Leading Today, Tomorrow and Beyond. (2007). at <<http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=bf17140fce38-4360-9722-b37a2290acad>>
14. Theodori, A. E. & Theodori, G. L. The influences of community attachment, sense of community, and educational aspirations upon the migration intentions of rural youth in Texas. *Community Dev.* 46, 380–391 (2015).
15. Donaldson, G. Do you need to leave home to grow up? The rural adolescent's dilemma. *Res. Rural Educ.* 3, 121–125 (1986).
16. Canning, A., Power, N. & Norman, T. Rural Youth and Quality of Work. (2010). at <[http://www.curra.ca/documents/Research\\_Report-Rural\\_Youth\\_and\\_Quality\\_of\\_Work\\_\(final\)\\_revised.pdf](http://www.curra.ca/documents/Research_Report-Rural_Youth_and_Quality_of_Work_(final)_revised.pdf)>
17. Bollman, R. D. FCM Rural FactSheet #7 Youth retention. (2014). at <<http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/rural-and-northern/rural-report-fact-sheets/youth-retention-in-non-metro-areas.htm>>
18. Bollman, R. D. FCM Rural FactSheet #6 Youth out-migration. (2014). at <<http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/rural-and-northern/rural-report-fact-sheets/youth-outmigration.htm>>
19. Irshad, H. Attracting and Retaining People to Rural Alberta: List of Resources and Literature Review. (2013). at <[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi14329/\\$FILE/Attracting-and-Retaining-people.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi14329/$FILE/Attracting-and-Retaining-people.pdf)>
20. Siegel, D. The young are the restless: The problem of attracting and retaining young people. *Can. J. Urban Res.* 17, 105–124 (2008).
21. Avis, M. Exploring the Issue of Young Adult Migration and Retention in Rural Communities: explanations from the class of 2008 from St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School, Huron County, Ontario. (University of Guelph, 2013). at <<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=psc-papers>>
22. Government of Canada, Government of British Columbia, Fraser Basin Council & BC Rural Network. Project Comeback: creating vibrant rural communities by retaining and attracting a young adult population. (2015). at <<http://www.bcruralnetwork.ca/resources/project-comeback-final-report/>>
23. Byun, S. Y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J. & Hutchins, B. C. The Role of Social Capital in Educational Aspirations of Rural Youth\*. *Rural Sociol.* 77, 355–379 (2012).
24. Davies, A. Declining youth in-migration in rural Western Australia: The role of perceptions of rural employment and lifestyle opportunities. *Geogr. Res.* 46, 162–171 (2008).
25. Rye, J. F. Rural youths' images of the rural. *J. Rural Stud.* 22, 409–421 (2006).
26. Liu, Y. Exploring Strategies for Rural Youth Retention: A Case Study of the Town of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario. (University of Guelph, 2015).
27. R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Rural Youth Study, Phase II Rural Youth Migration: exploring the reality behind the myths. A rural youth discussion paper. (2002). at <<http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/A22-272-2002E.pdf>>
28. MacMichael, M. Research Summary Report: exploring the motivations, experiences, and contributions of young people moving into rural Nova Scotia. (2015). at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.850849>>
29. Irwin, M., Tolbert, C. & Lyson, T. There's no place like home: nonmigration and civic engagement. *Environ. Plan. A* 31, 2223–2238 (1999).
30. Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development. Putting Teens at the Top of Rural Communities' Agendas. (2013). at <<http://heartwood.ns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/PuttingTeensAtTheTop.pdf>>

