

ONTARIO RURAL YOUTH DIALOGUE

Involving

Senior Members of 4-H Clubs in Ontario

Prepared for

Rural Secretariat – Ontario Region
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

April 2004

Forward

At the request of the Rural Secretariat – Ontario Region the Ontario Rural Youth Dialogue was planned to engage youth from rural regions across Ontario in a facilitated discussion of the opportunities and the challenges that face rural youth in rural communities respecting community and economic development.

The Ontario Rural Youth Dialogue is part of larger Rural Dialogue across Canada – an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and citizens from rural, remote and northern regions. This Rural Dialogue, initiated in 1998, helps the Government of Canada to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and northern citizens with an opportunity to influence government policies, programs and services that affect them. Input received from Rural Dialogue participants will help provide direction to future actions taken by Government of Canada in at least three of eleven priority areas already identified including:

- To provide more targeted opportunities, programs and services for rural youth, including Aboriginal youth;
- To strengthen rural community capacity building, leadership and skills development; and
- To create opportunities for rural communities to maintain and develop infrastructure for community development.

Introduction

A two-part facilitated discussion session took place with eighty (80) 4-H participants during the March 2004 Provincial 4-H Leadership Camp held near Huntsville, Ontario. Participants attending Provincial 4-H Leadership Camp were divided in to two groups and then engaged in a workshop discussion providing feedback and input on a series of questions put forward respecting opportunities, challenges and barriers to participation in community and economic development activities in rural communities across the province. The discussion proved to be wide ranging in nature as participants actively participated in the discussion.

Participants were senior members of the 4-H program in Ontario, between the ages of 15 to 21. All participants had applied for and been accepted to attend the week-long residential leadership program offered by 4-H Ontario. The Ontario Rural Youth Dialogue workshop session was held on the second last day of the program – March 16, 2004. A list of participants attending the program is attached as Appendix I. Participant addresses have been removed as part of 4-H Ontario's policy respecting sharing of members' personal information.

The objectives of the Ontario Rural Youth Dialogue were as follows:

- To continue to dialogue with youth from communities across rural Ontario;
- To identify key leadership, social and economic assets offered by rural youth in Ontario;
- To further define barriers and challenges preventing rural communities from benefiting from these assets; and
- To identify solutions and initiatives suited and designed to integrate youth in to rural community development.

Part One

A presentation was given by the facilitator on how youth can be involved in rural community development. This presentation entitled '*Changing the Paradigms about How we Involve Young People in Community Building*' served to set the context for rural youth involvement and dialogue and was based upon a presentation developed by Dr. Peter Kenyon, Director Bank of I.D.E.A.S (Initiatives for the Development of Enterprising Action and Strategies) in Australia.

Essentially this part of the workshop provided an opportunity for participants to hear and see what might currently be thought of as 'the norm' for dealing with and responding to youth. At the same time 'out of the box' thinking was also explored using some current examples of youth involvement and activities. This part of the session provided an opportunity for the group to react ahead of the facilitated part of the workshop program.

Part Two

Following the presentation participants were engaged in a two-way dialogue and discussion in response to a series of questions posed to them within three (3) theme areas:

- What are the assets and skills that youth can invest in rural communities?
- What are the barriers and challenges for communities wishing to use these assets?
- What are solutions and initiatives that could promote the integration of youth in to rural community development?

The group specifically considered the following questions:

What are the assets (social, cultural, economic development) and skills that youth can invest in rural communities?

What are the most important assets necessary to enhance the quality of life in rural Ontario?

What are barriers (social, cultural, economic) and challenges for communities wishing to use these assets?

What are the governance structures or decision-making barriers that prevent effective youth participation in rural community development?

What can communities, organizations and governments do to welcome, empower and actively engage youth in rural Ontario? (i.e. What are the solutions?)

What will be the results if communities, organizations and governments actively engage youth across rural Ontario?

What follows are the points and ideas raised and discussed through the above noted questions:

What are the assets (social, cultural, economic development) and skills that youth can invest in rural communities?

<p>Rural Youth are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role models for others • hard working and willing to learn • constantly learning • responsible (i.e. chores, animals, school, volunteering, etc) • smart • dedicated • risk takers/ not afraid to try/ move forward/ take a stand • active and energetic • committed • able to prioritize • exposed to many opportunities and experiences • mature • looked up to by others • sensitive about the environment • 'people persons' • team players • sociable • knowledgeable, quick to learn and adapt to change • able to use new and emerging technology • already volunteering • seeking respect of others • open and trusting • 	<p>Rural Youth have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high values and positive morals • compassion and respect for others (including elders) • positive work ethic • common sense • transferable skills which can be used when leading other groups • have a 'hands on' attitude • many opportunities for involvement in leadership development programs like 4-H and Junior Farmers • meeting and time management skills to offer the community • enthusiasm • the knowledge to do many things • excitement • spunk • new ideas and perspectives • varied work experiences that can benefit the community 	<p>Rural Youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stick up for themselves and stick together • already help out in the community and are community-minded • know the value of hard work • know how to work hard • may not be as allergic to things as others are • present themselves well within the community • promote themselves to 'city folk' through opportunities like 4-H and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. • care about what they do • look after their environment • take pride in team and individual accomplishments
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When asked to reflect on the list generated to determine what were the most important assets necessary to enhance the quality of life in rural Ontario, participants responded with:

- Sociability (ability to be a social part of the community)
- Being and having access to community role models
- Having a willingness to learn and work hard (positive work ethic)
- Gaining and maintaining respect amongst peers, elders and communities
- Being open-minded
- Having energy and enthusiasm for your community
- Having a knowledge and understanding of new and emerging technology

What are barriers (social, cultural, economic) and challenges for communities wishing to use these assets?

Transportation issues

- Getting to jobs, volunteering for activities, participation in leadership and personal development opportunities, getting from one part of the county to another

Current responsibilities

- Household chores, after school/ weekend jobs, everyone seems to be busy!

Access to education, capital and resources

- In order to provide opportunities for youth involvement funds may be required
- Lack of educational opportunities in rural areas (smaller schools and fewer resources)
- Cost of education, now and in to the future
- Lack of resources available for use by communities wishing to involve youth

Lack of opportunities to get involved

- “There just aren’t opportunities to get involved in my community.” (direct quote)

Too many opportunities for involvement

- a variety of opportunities exist so it is hard to decide what to get involved in

Leadership Issues

- some communities have leaders who recognize youth input and participation while some communities just have ‘no leaders’.

Youth Involvement Issues

- It’s not ‘cool’ to volunteer/ get involved/ give back to my community
- “I’m too busy with other things.” (direct quote)
- Perceived time commitment necessary
- It is hard to get something accomplished without adult back up and support
- Lack of willing participants
- Boredom
- Future job despair/ lack of available jobs
- Career and futures planning vs. having fun now – it is a tough struggle!
- Age issues
- “Adults just hold us back. They don’t want us to grow up!” (direct quote)

Stereotyping

- “I always have to explain myself and my actions”. (direct quote)
- Elders don’t respect youth opinions
- Adults always put us down
- ‘They’ never take the time to ask us what we think!

- 'They' don't think we're capable of anything
- Adults never listen to us

Rural / Urban 'Divide'/ The new rural landscape

- new population not volunteering in communities like before
- small towns growing too quickly. Municipal government has to deal with too many other things.

Youth involvement is NOT appreciated!

Media can sometimes be a barrier

The group agreed that:

- it is possible to climb over barriers that are put in their way and accomplish anything they set their minds to.
- having adults on side is important
- group work is better than individual work
- it is important to be prepared
- it all comes back to gaining respect within the community
- dreams are hard to develop to reality

What are the governance structures or decision-making barriers that prevent effective youth participation in rural community development?

- Decision makers may not or do not care about the youth perspective.
- Youth thoughts and ideas are difficult to put in to action and get through the processes in place within communities.
- Broken promises and political egos (photo opportunities vs. results/ kissing babies vs. reality)
- It is difficult to get youth input and consensus
- Lack of knowledgeable and understanding political players
- Intergenerational gap
- 'Rural' discrimination
- Voting age should be lowered. We pay taxes but we can't vote!

What can communities, organizations and governments do to welcome, empower and actively engage youth in rural Ontario? (i.e. What are the solutions?)

- Be willing to open up, ask and then listen to us
- Use our suggestions!
- Provide resources – media training, continued leadership and personal development opportunities at the local level. Help us to get our voice out there and heard in the community.
- Support us and work with us
- Appoint us to community committees. Make us feel important! (i.e. Mayor's Youth Advisory Council/ Community Youth Advisory Council/ Junior Community Councils)
- Work with local organizations and the school community to develop youth activities days
- Really realize, appreciate and understand that youth are the future
- Do not look down on us (i.e. don't give us dirty looks)
- Give us a chance!

- “Don’t ignore us – is it our world too!” (direct quote)
- Respect and appreciate the youth experience available

What will be the results if communities, organizations and governments actively engage youth across rural Ontario?

- You will see results. There is no doubt!
- There will be more of a youth perspective within the community.
- Youth will have a better understanding of and interest in the community’s (and their own) future
- There will be less out-migration.
- There will be less ‘street youth’.
- If the community gives to youth then youth will be more willing to give back to the community.
- There will be more community volunteerism
- Youth will be less likely to be stereotyped as ‘bad, lazy, etc’.
- More vibrant communities will develop and grow, as will the economy.

Conclusion

Participants certainly seemed to enjoy the opportunity to dialogue in a relaxed learning environment amongst friends who had similar perspectives and interests and who were located across rural Ontario. Discussion did not diminish throughout the entire workshop session. While an overall evaluation of this specific facilitated discussion did not take place, participants did indicate an interest in the outcomes of the dialogue when combined with others happening across the country and any future actions springing from these dialogues. They further requested that they be provided with a copy of the *Ontario Rural Youth Dialogue* final report. 4-H Ontario, the host organization, will ensure that each participant is provided with a copy of this report in a follow up mailing to all Provincial 4-H Leadership Camp participants.

Appendix I

Participant Profile

Total Number of Participants: 80
Target Group: Senior 4-H members in Ontario
Overall Age Range: 15 to 21 years of age
 15 – 19 years of age: 78
 20 – 25 years of age: 2
Male Participants: 23
Female Participants: 57

Participants and Distribution

Initials	M/F	County	Postal Code
JA	male	Bruce	N0G 1S0
KB	female	Huron	N0G 1G0
AB	male	Middlesex	N0L 1A0
CB	female	Haldimand	N0A 1K0
KB	female	Hastings	K0K 3E0
MB	male	Bruce	N2Z 2X5
LB	female	Bruce	N0G 1V0
BC	female	Wellington	N0B 2K0
EC	female	Bruce	N0H 2N0
EC	female	Temiskaming	P0J 1H0
JS	female	Grey	N0H 2N0
JS	female	Peel	L0N 1K0
MC	female	Peel	L0N 1K0
KD	female	Hastings	K0K 2C0
YD	female	Huron	N0G 1T0
Md	female	South Simcoe	L0G 1L0
AD	female	Dufferin	L9W2Y9
JE	male	Elgin	N0L 2E0
NF	female	Grenville	K0G 1G0
TF	female	Bruce	N0G 2S0
JF	female	Waterloo	N0B 1E0
DG	male	Oxford	N0J 1B0
AG	female	Bruce	N0G 2B0
TG	female	Bruce	N0G 2B0
AG	female	Oxford	N0J 1J0
JH	female	Bruce	N0H 1L0
SH	female	Oxford	N4X 1C7

BH	male	Wellington	N0G 2L0
JH	female	Middlesex	N0L 1V0
SH	male	Waterloo	N0B 1E0
KH	female	Rainy River	P0W 1C0
KI	female	Temiskaming	P0J 1H0
GJ	male	York	L0E 1R0
JJ	female	Huron	N0G 1G0
CJ	female	Peel	L6T 3Y7
MK	male	South Simcoe	L3Z 2A4
CK	female	Prince Edward	K0K 2T0
SK	female	Bruce	N0G 2J0
SK	female	Bruce	N0G 2J0
ZL	female	Bruce	N0G 2J0
SL	male	Durham East	L0B 1B0
JL	female	Peel	L6V 1A1
JL	female	Halton	L0N 1G0
L	female	Bruce	N0G 2N0
CM	female	Middlesex	N0L 1A0
BM	male	Bruce	N0G 1L0
KM	female	Durham West	L0C 1H0
LM	female	Niagara	L0R 2A0
DM	male	Hamilton-Wentworth	L0R 2B0
RM	male	Haldimand	N0A 1L0
CM	female	Haldimand	N0A 1E0
BO	male	Durham West	L1H 7K4
AO	female	Waterloo	N2L 3G1
JO	female	Essex	N9G 2S5
AO	male	Grey	N0H 1P0
CO	female	Middlesex	N0M 1V0
HP	female	Dufferin	L0N 1S7
JR	male	Wellington	N0G 2L0
AR	male	Bruce	N0G 1L0
JS	male	Grey	N0H 1R0

AS	female	Bruce	N0G 2S0
JS	female	Grey	N0C 1H0
AS	female	Wellington	N0B 1J0
CS	female	Elgin	N0L 1P0
SS	male	Elgin	N0L 2P0
RS	female	Oxford	N0J 1J0
WS	male	Haldimand	N3W 1P7
KS	female	Waterloo	N0B 1M0
BS	female	Wellington	N0B 1Z0
LT	female	Grey	N4K 5N5
ST	female	Halton	L7G 4S4
KT	female	Wellington	N0B 2K0
TT	female	Middlesex	N0L 1M0
AT	male	Haldimand	N0A 1C0
JV	female	Dufferin	L9W 2Z3
MV	female	Dufferin	L9W 2Z3
CW	male	Oxford	N4S 7W2
SW	female	Durham West	L1H 8L7
LW	female	Prince Edward	K0K 2T0
DZ	male	Middlesex	N0L 1M0