

## Speaking Out Briefing No. 3

### Children and Young People's Access to Services in Rural Areas

**Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across Government. The project will develop closer links between Government departments and the voluntary and community sector in delivering cross departmental plans such as *Every Child Matters* and the direct implementation of initiatives which affect children and young people.**

**The project aims to support children, young people and family voluntary and community organisations to better understanding the aims and impact on their users of a wider range of government policies and provide routes to influence them. We are funded by the Office of the Third Sector part of the Cabinet Office.**

#### Who are these briefings for?

This series of briefings intends to provide members of both NCVYS and NCVCCO and other interested parties with background and analysis on specific policy items affecting the sector.

#### Other activities

In addition to these briefings we will be developing work streams around the policy themes which will include:

- web forums;
- seminars and events;
- establishing communities of interest amongst members and other organisations on specific policy themes linking them into email groups and bringing them together for small round table meetings with policy makers;
- making representations to Government; and
- linking with wider campaigns NCVYS & NCVCCO may be developing.



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# 1. Background

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have made transport and housing priorities in their plans for the regeneration of rural communities.

Issues leading to rural social exclusion include access to services, homelessness, and a difficulties accessing affordable transport, a lack of which can have negative impacts on further education and employment prospects.

The traditional image of life in the countryside, often presented as a bucolic idyll, hides the fact that for many children and young people the difficulties in accessing transport services has a significant impact on their ability to take advantage of opportunities available for their urban peers. Transport in some remote areas is limited to the car - the number of rural parishes without any bus service having increased from 14% to 22% throughout most of the 1990's (Cabinet Office PIU 1999). By 1997 almost 20% of villages and towns with up to 2,000 inhabitants had bus services classed as 'below subsistence' level and, according to the Countryside Agency three-quarters of parishes have no daily bus service at all. Young people can be especially affected by the dependence on others for transport – often they cannot attend after school activities because they have to catch the last bus home, or cannot associate with friends outside of school because of the distances involved.

The issue is significant for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) because a considerable number of children and young people live in rural areas: up to 30% of England's rural population are under age 25, with 2.9 million children and young people under the age of 18. A further 1.1 million under 18 year olds live in 'inaccessible', or 'deep-rural' areas where transport for both them and their parents can pose a particular problem.<sup>1</sup>

Lack of transport impact on both young people's and their parents' employment prospects. In rural areas classed as 'remote' 11% of children live in workless households (the equivalent figure for 'accessible' rural areas is eight%). According to the International Organisation of Labour (ILO) 60,000 18-24 year-olds in rural districts are unemployed, a rate three times that for

<sup>1</sup> *Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making on The Environment, Sustainable Development, and The Countryside: A Review of Evidence*. Dr Nicola Madge and Natasha Willmott, National Children's Bureau (2004). According to a study by the Rural Evidence Research Centre in 2004 the figure is 29 per cent. A 2000 study carried out by the New Policy Institute arrived at a 20 per cent figure.

older workers.<sup>2</sup> Transport is an issue that the Government has recognised as central to increasing the chances for rural households and children and young people, both in their development and during transition to adulthood and entry into the workforce. Transport planning guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)<sup>3</sup> in 2001 recognises the place of the car in rural areas as often the only means for transport, but notes:

**‘A key planning objective is to ensure that jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services are accessible by public transport, walking, and cycling. This is important for all, but especially for those who do not have regular use of a car, and to promote social inclusion ... local authorities should give particular emphasis to accessibility in identifying the preferred areas and sites where such land uses should be located, to ensure they will offer realistic, safe and easy access by a range of transport modes, and not exclusively by car’.**

(PPG13: Transport, para 19, ODPM, 2001)

Transport is not a panacea to all rural social issues, and even where households do have wage earners average household incomes can be lower for rural families than urban equivalents. Currently 28% of children in remote rural districts, and 19% in accessible rural districts, live in low income households. Compared to the 31% of children in urban areas in low income households child poverty in remote rural areas exists at similar levels to that in urban areas.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Legal Context

Whilst the majority of working arrangements needed to improve outcomes for children and young people living in rural areas do not require primary legislation, there is a range of statute law that imposes duties on local authorities to develop joint planning and integrated working arrangements.

In the context of children’s services, **The Children Act 2004** created a number of duties relating to local authority’s work with children and young people. The Act included a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to promote cooperation between agencies and other appropriate bodies (such as voluntary and community organisations) in order to improve children’s wellbeing; a duty on key partners to take part in the cooperation arrangements; and a requirement for a single Children and Young People’s Plan to be drawn up by each local authority a requirement on local authorities to appoint a director of children’s services and designate a lead member.

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<sup>2</sup> Figures from ILO sourced from New Policy Institute website: <http://www.npi.org.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup> Planning and Policy Guidance 13: Transport, ODPM, 2001.

[http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/138PlanningPolicyGuidance13Transport\\_id1507138.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/138PlanningPolicyGuidance13Transport_id1507138.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> New Policy Institute

### 3. Policy Context

Since 1997 the Government has been exploring ways to increase service accessibility in rural and remote areas as part of a more general attempt to renew communities and the engagement of individuals living within them:

*Our Countryside: Our Future* (Defra, 2000) introduced proposals to strengthen rural communities by 'rural-proofing' policies affecting them, and ensure that they become viable centres for families living in them to access key services, such as health, transport and education. The proposals developed a common government theme that social exclusion can be countered by delivering services where they are needed, and that opportunities should exist for local people to remain in their communities despite pressures on local housing stock. Initiatives introduced in *Our Countryside* included mobile service units to deliver health and other services in remote areas and the development of Rural Transport Partnerships to enable services users to reach an extended range of services in local hubs. Proposals to meet rural housing needs included partnerships with rural housing corporations to develop affordable housing.

Integrated planning to deliver access to services, housing and transport needs were further developed in *Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003) through the introduction of 'accessibility planning' as a framework to develop services within a rural area around a combination of transport to access services at local services centres, a cluster of villages where integrated transport could be planned to give better access for groups dependent on public transport. The development of an accessibility planning framework was supported by a duty on local authorities to carry out an accessibility audit of services in their area and an action plan to meet the needs identified in the audit. *Making the Connections* also builds on the strategic role local authorities can have directing service provision through Local Strategic Partnerships, and ensures that rural communities are brought within the scope of the 2006 white paper *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* (SEU, 2001) and the role coordinating service deliverers and communities to address social problems in their area through joint planning.

The quality of decision making about rural services has been the subject of two papers since 2004. The first, the *Rural Strategy* (Defra, 2004) furthered the concept of rural-proofing policies with a rural application by transferring to Regional Development Agencies responsibility for regional decision making on rural development and sustainability issues (against Defra's sustainable development and access to services PSA targets one and four) and granting oversight for this to government regional offices. In November 2006 performance reward elements of existing Local Public Service Agreements between local authorities and government regional offices were incorporated into Local Area Agreements (LAAs) so that rural interests are reflected in the

development of LAAs. To monitor rural outcomes an Annual Rural Services Review was proposed together with the establishment of a The Commission for Rural Communities in October 2006, a new countryside agency with an advocacy and monitoring function. The second paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006) aims to devolve to communities a greater role in determining solutions to the problems that affect them. One key proposal is the extension of sub-council level tiers of governance through the parish council system.

As a group, children and young people are particularly prone to marginalisation. This is the result of bad housing decisions and lack of access to transport and to services. In 2001 the Government made clear that:

**‘Special care should be taken to include children and young people not traditionally involved, for example... those living in rural areas’.**<sup>5</sup>

*Learning to Listen* (the then Department for Education and Skills, 2001) imposes on all departments a responsibility for producing an action plan to show how children and young people can be included in their policy making process.

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<sup>5</sup> *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (DfES, 2001) p16

## 4. Findings from Research/Pactice

Lack of adequate transport and housing have a significant affect on the experiences of children and young people living in rural areas, creating a unique set of challenges for VCS organisations working with them. Difficulties in accessing public transport networks can lead to children and young people missing out on leisure and other opportunities. A Joseph Rowntree report in 2000 recorded some of the experiences of young people denied adequate transport:

**‘We’ve only got one car; [mother] is having to take my dad into work everyday and then come back and then take herself off to work and then she has to go and get him in the evening... I suffer from that because she says, “I’m not taking you anywhere”.’<sup>6</sup>**

Often, children remain isolated until they are themselves able to drive:

**‘Until you get to 17 and you can get a car and a decent paid job, you can’t get anywhere and you can’t see your mates.’<sup>7</sup>**

The lack of transport options leaves children and young people cut off, which can lead to feelings of isolation, and ultimately increasing levels of anti-social behaviour and drug misuse within their communities. In 2004 a Defra commissioned research project listened to children and young people living in rural areas on the range of leisure options:

**‘I just go down the park, and then somebody gets bored and sets something on fire, lights a big fire, then the police come.’<sup>8</sup>**

**‘You just haven’t got anything else to do...There is trouble with drugs as well, definitely, because of boredom.’<sup>9</sup>**

Children and young people have differing experiences of rural housing, older young people often experiencing worries about leaving home and the ability to remain within their communities.

<sup>6</sup> *Young people and transport in rural areas*, Pamela Storey and Julia Brannen, JRF/National Youth Agency, 2000

<sup>7</sup> *Young people and transport in rural areas*, Pamela Storey and Julia Brannen, JRF/National Youth Agency, 2000

<sup>8</sup> *Challenging the rural idyll*. Mullins, A., McCluskey, J. and Taylor-Browne, J. (2000), in *Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making on The Environment, Sustainable Development*, Dr Nicola Madge and Natasha Willmott National Children’s Bureau (2004).

<sup>9</sup> *Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making on The Environment, Sustainable Development, and The Countryside: A Review of Evidence*. Dr Nicola Madge and Natasha Willmott, National Children’s Bureau (2004).

Research into the issue of rural housing needs carried out by the Centre for Housing Study at the University of York discovered that almost two thirds of young people in the study expected to leave their because of availability of affordable housing, the need to look for suitable work elsewhere, and greater social opportunities.<sup>10</sup> A finding from this report is that many of the 83 VCS organisations working in the rural housing field are unable to address the long term needs of young people in rural areas, focusing instead on emergency or temporary accommodation needs for short periods of time.<sup>11</sup>

## 5. Issues for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Children and Youth Organisations

Defra do not have any policy streams that address rural issues from an exclusively child and young person-centred viewpoint. Despite this, and despite the failure of Defra to include the Learning to Listen principles into their work, a number of opportunities do currently exist for children and young people's organisations to engage with the department's current work, including the issues of lack of access to rural public transport; access to public services and leisure facilities; and the growth in the number of young families from migrant backgrounds.

The structure of the rural workforce has changed drastically since 2003 and the accession of eastern European states into the European Union. Rural areas in the UK have seen an influx of seasonal migrant workers with implications for the rural education, health and social services system. Recent immigration trends mean that areas such as East Anglia are experiencing the arrival of migrant workers in large numbers for the first time, placing considerable strain on exiting services. Many of these migrants are young people, 43% aged between 18 and 24 years, who live on-site and not able to easily access local services.<sup>12</sup> The traditional role of the voluntary sector in harnessing the skills and time of motivated individuals opens up opportunities in assisting these seasonal communities in ensuring that they are not left isolated whilst working in the UK.

<sup>10</sup> Young People and Housing, Janet Ford, Deborah Quilgars and Roger Burrows with Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Studies, University of York. <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/ruralneed.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Young People and Housing, Janet Ford, Deborah Quilgars and Roger Burrows with Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Studies, University of York. <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/ruralneed.htm>  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5384516.stm>

Many seasonal workers, for instance, are highly educated with a strong grasp of English, making them ideal to bridge the gap between local services and migrant communities. Rural children and young people face the same range of problems that their urban peers do and the same risks of social exclusion. Solutions to issues such as rural homelessness, advice and information, and training need to be adapted to a rural context, whilst issues like access to transport present a uniquely rural challenge. The Rural Development Commission describes a range of practice responses to rural homelessness, including Foyer projects, combining temporary hostel accommodation and training opportunities, and transport solutions to allow young people a base from which they can develop life and work skills.

Rural communities are often close-knit and young people especially often lack someone impartial to gain advice from and raise confidential issues. Youth support schemes and one-to-one counselling are two models through which young people have someone to speak to about issues affecting them.

Rural based VCS organisations face the challenge of entering communities with well established identities and a strong sense of independence. Research, carried out on the initial stages of the Sure Start programme by The Countryside Agency in December 2003, suggests that VCS organisations entering rural communities need to spend a considerable amount of time overcoming a distrust of outsiders, and a reluctance to admit that young people face problems. Often as a result of a wave of short lived initiatives, rural communities can be reluctant to rely on VCS groups, meaning that more successful initiatives are those that invest in the process of engaging with the community and working with local people.

## 6. Resources

In addition to the documents and Government papers used in this briefing the following web-based resources are useful guides for those wishing to know more about the challenges of working in rural areas:

1. The Commission for Rural Communities offers a range of research and news items relating to the development and sustainability of rural communities. Information can be accessed via the Commissions website:  
<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/>.
2. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA) carries a range of resources aimed at improving local council performance in rural areas:  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=300427>
3. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has a useful site dedicated to the development of a rural evidence base:  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/research/default.htm> together with a comprehensive set of rural affairs resources: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/default.htm>.