
Informing Aspirations in Rural Regions Project

EVALUATION REPORT



A partnership between the University of Tasmania,
the University of Wollongong, and the University of Adelaide.

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August 2016

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Introduction

Rural people face additional barriers in accessing higher education including financial barriers associated with moving or travelling long distances, or being a confident independent learner able to study successfully at a distance from campus. Families without any experience of higher education are prevalent in rural regions. Participation by rural people, particularly from remote areas, has remained persistently low despite previous HEPPP funding to universities.

Outreach programs for people who live at a distance from university campuses can be expensive to deliver compared to outreach programs for urban residents. On-campus experiences incur transport and accommodation costs. The dispersed nature of rural settlement in Australia makes it more logistically difficult and costly to provide face to face activities that inform aspiration for higher education in people's home locations. There is very limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of online interventions in raising aspirations or participation among rural residents.

The Informing Aspirations in Rural Regions project was a partnership between the Universities of Tasmania, Wollongong, and Adelaide. It was conducted over 17 months from March 2015 to August 2016. The aims of the project were:

1. To identify the features informing aspiration outreach programs that are cost efficient and effective in informing aspirations and increasing access and participation for people living in rural regions in three cohorts: school children aged 7-14; senior high school students in years 9-12; and adults outside the school system
2. To modify, trial and evaluate between three-six programs which include the features of cost efficient and effective informing aspiration programs, and modify the identified features from (1) in light of the trials.
3. To produce a resource of features of rural outreach informing aspiration programs that are cost efficient and effective in increasing access and participation for people living in rural regions that includes vignettes and links to websites of programs with various features from the checklist. This could be an enhancement to DEMO¹ for rural contexts. Or a completely new checklist resulting from this project. The checklist and accompanying resources will summarise evidence on which future policy development can be based, and provide suggestions for improvement in current practice.

The main theme of the project was around 'rurality' and designing effective outreach programs to assist people living in rural areas to access and participate in higher education. This evaluation report reports on the program intervention phase of the Informing Aspirations in Rural Regions project. Three initiative projects each targeted a different age group.

¹ Gale, T., Sellar, S., Parker, S., Hattam, R., Comber, B., Tranter, D. and Bills, D. *Interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students*, National Centre Student Equity in Higher Education, Underdale, S. Aust. 2010.

Project Approach

To assess and evaluate the likely success of outreach activities the project used the Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO), developed by Gale and Sellars et al (2010) for use with a low SES school cohort, was amended for use with a more general rural cohort. This Matrix was used both as a tool to assist in design of individual university outreach projects and as an evaluation tool.

The project took the approach of gathering information regarding rural outreach which had been described in the literature and evaluations of the outreach programs delivered by each partner university, and analysing this information. Each partner university then either modified an existing program or developed a new program to reflect good practice revealed by the review of the literature and analysis of partner university outreach programs. The programs were then trialled with rural cohorts (Figure 1).

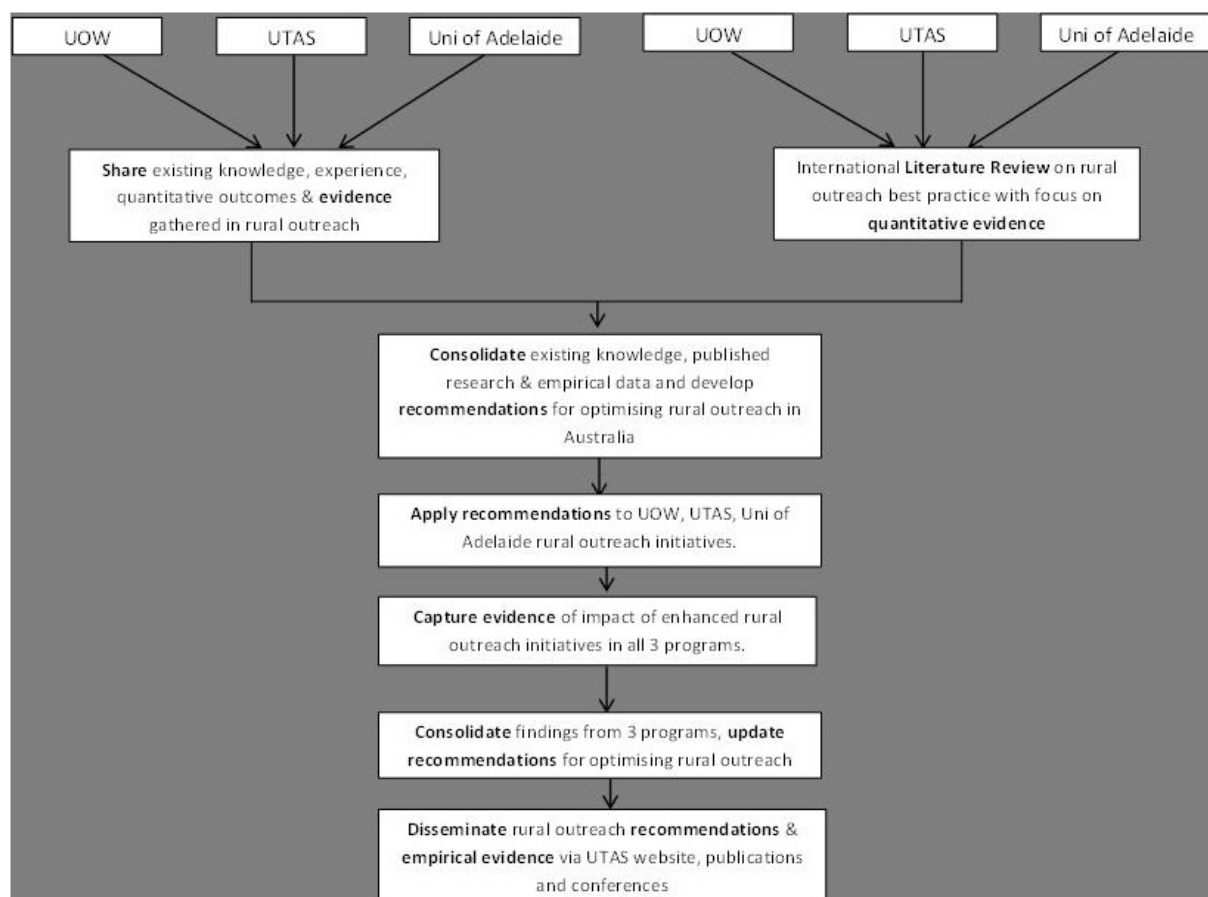


Figure 1: The research design

The literature review of university outreach into rural areas also provided information about participation in higher education by people from rural areas. A list of ‘barriers’ faced by people in rural areas in accessing and participating in higher education was developed, and is described in this project as Factors of Rurality. The literature review also identified a

number of activities and programs that could effectively tackle some of the Factors or Rurality which are described as the Aspects of Good Rural Practice.

Each university partner undertook an initiative targeting a different age cohort (Table 1). The initiatives are described in detail below.

Table 1: Projects for each partner university and target age groups

UNIVERSITY	PROJECT TITLE	TARGET AGE GROUP
University of Adelaide	Children's University	Primary school children
University of Wollongong	RuralIn2Uni	Students in Year 11 and 12
University of Tasmania	Warm Connections	Adults outside the school system

Following the project trials an evaluation of activities was undertaken using a combination of pre- and post- activity surveys, interviews with key stakeholders, and reflection journals (details below).

The Initiatives

The University of Adelaide

The University of Adelaide's catchment area includes the rural north of South Australia which has a dispersed settlement pattern with many small towns of populations less than 3000 people.

This initiative modified Children's University Australia activities to be accessible to rural students. The Children's University targets 7 to 14 year olds and aims to foster lifelong learning and introduce children to university (www.childrensuniversity.com.au). Existing Children's University Australia activities rely on access to validated 'learning destinations' such as museums, zoos, university children's science outreach and sports and arts associations, which are limited in rural South Australia.

The initiative included establishing webcams at the Adelaide zoo (<https://www.zoossa.com.au/zoo-learning/students/childrens-university/>) and developing associated downloadable scientific observation sheets so children could observe and record the activities of animals. Other Children's University Australia activities were modified so they could operate in small rural towns instead of urban Adelaide learning destinations, for example running science events at local schools instead of the children coming to the university campus.

University of Wollongong

The University of Wollongong on the south coast of New South Wales has a catchment that includes a mountainous region with poor road access to its coastal campuses.

This initiative modified an existing university preparation program for senior secondary school students to run it in two rural high schools. The objective of the 'RuralIn2Uni' Preparation Program was to increase the academic capacity of rural students and build their aspirations towards higher education. The city face-to-face campus based program was modified to be offered on the University's local rural campus, and to include some online modules with resource support from rural town libraries.

Current university students from similar rural backgrounds to the rural school students shared their experiences of managing finances, travel, and accommodation. They acted as academic mentors as the school students worked through the online modules. The students were also provided with face-to-face workshops delivered in their school and nearest university campus, where students were placed into small groups and had the opportunity to focus on subject content. In addition, online study and university familiarisation skills modules were compulsory for students to complete.

University of Tasmania

The University of Tasmania initiative was a new program that targeted adults in rural areas throughout the state. Tasmania has the most dispersed population of all the Australian states and territories with many small towns with populations less than 3000.

The initiative, entitled Warm Connections, was designed to embed a university presence in eight rural communities through a partnership with existing Education Department-run LINC (Library and Information Network Centre) (<https://www.linc.tas.gov.au/>), and Neighbourhood Houses (<http://nht.org.au/>). Neighbourhood Houses are locally run and operated organisations that bring together people in a community to respond to issues that are important to them, and most offer adult learning programs.

The goal of the initiative was to make the University a visible and active part of the life of the community by establishing a 'Warm Connection' between people in the local community and education providers. Elements of the initiative included:

- Permanent displays of University and TAFE course information, including banners, merchandise and other materials.
- Electronic displays using a large digital screen within the organisation including personal stories of local people who have studied at university, general UTAS information, and images of 'Life On Campus'.
- Training for local staff in a specifically designed training module called 'Learning First Aid' to equip local staff to hold conversations about learning options with local people.
- Attendance at local shows and events, including education open days to provide information about learning options.
- Establishment of a 'warm connection' between staff at partner organisations and university recruitment and marketing units.

Project Evaluation

The mixed method design included a thematic review of academic and practitioner literature, and development and trial of three rural outreach program initiative, described above, which were evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods. Twenty-two surveys of participants were collected using Survey Monkey. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 participants, 6 school staff, and 3 outreach program deliverers. Reflection journals were kept by three project staff members. Consistent with a qualitative approach, interview transcripts and reflection journals were coded thematically² with the assistance of NVivo qualitative analysis software. A thematic framework was developed from the literature and this deductive approach was supplemented by themes generated from the data, consistent with an inductive analytic approach³. Data were coded by two coders with checks for inter coder reliability. Themes were then combined into a smaller number of overarching categories that provided a framework for representing the major findings.

Evaluation highlights from each initiative project

University of Wollongong Rural In2Uni University Preparation Program

Project outcome highlights

- Positive feedback from all schools and participants.
- 87% from research group completed In2Uni program.
- 100% of completing students received an admission offer to University or Education Pathway Place.
- 100% of students who completed the program enrolled in tertiary education in 2016 and remain enrolled as at July 2016.

Factors in program success and other learnings

- The promise of an early admission interview was the key reason students enrolled in the program with UOW.
- Whilst students indicated they were interested in subject specific tuition upon commencement, this element of the program was seen as less important by mentors and participants by the end of the program.
- The positive relationships developed with uni mentors and staff was the key distinctive outcome of the program.
- The students and their parents felt free to share their questions and concerns, big and small, about applying to and attending university, and have continued to contact the regional campus staff to ask for advice following the completion of the program.
- The school holiday mock exam and advice session by HSC markers was voluntary but very well attended and received.
- Students and the schools valued the co-enrolment process, receiving a university student card and library and resource access.

² Creswell, J., 2014. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, 4th ed. Sage Publications, Los Angeles.

³ Ryan, G.W., Bernard, H.R., 2000. Data management and analysis methods, in: Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research, 2nd ed. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 769-802.

- Mock early admission interviews – 100% attendance at this session and highly valued by the students.
- Mentors reported that the following factors came up again and again in student interactions:
 - Need for essay writing support and exam and study techniques,
 - Positive reinforcement – “if I can do it so can you”,
 - Navigating the university application process – UAC offers, Early admission, 2nd round offers
 - Understanding the range of degrees, where to go for further information,
 - Navigating student accommodation applications,
 - How much will uni cost? How can I get financial support?

Key recommendations for rural Year 12 programs

- Involvement of former students from the same school who are currently attending university.
- Regular face to face contact during year 12.
- Tour or virtual tour of a university campus.
- Co-enrolment at the university – receipt of a student card and library/resource access,
- Link to a university entrance program.
- Opportunity for local pathways.
- Program more cost effective with ratio of 1 mentor to 6 students.
- Program development and training costs are one-off and program becomes more cost effective when repeated.
- Possibility of utilising volunteer mentors.
- Inclusion of a mock interview program.

University of Tasmania – Warm Connections

Project outcome highlights

- University presence established in eight rural Tasmanian communities through partnerships with LINC's, Neighbourhood Houses, and a local Council.
- Information displays include course information guides and brochures, university banners, and digital imagery displayed on television sets.
- ‘Learning First Aid’ training module developed and delivered to 40 staff from LINC's, Neighbourhood Houses and local government.
- Attendance at community events well received – agricultural shows and education open days.
- ‘Warm Connections’ established between the university and partner communities – direct communication between staff of community organisations and university recruitment and information units.

Factors in program success and other learnings

- ‘Life matters’- jobs, children, businesses, social and financial situation – all have an impact on ability of people to engage in university education. Acceptance and understanding of this enhances credibility and engagement.

- Aspiration to higher education is usually tempered by barriers which need to be overcome, often associated with the factors above. These barriers create a lower expectation that a university education is possible.
- Adults are not a homogenous group and come with a wide range of experiences of life, education and with different aspirations for the future.
- Staff in local community organisations such as libraries and Neighbourhood Houses are very engaged with their own communities and are very receptive to engaging formally with the university.
- Universities are not visible in many communities and this project has raised visibility.

Key Recommendations for rural outreach to adults

- Use existing infrastructure and networks where possible.
- Local people know local people – and are more comfortable dealing with them. Use local people as a valuable resource to engage with the local community.
- Effective outreach is a long-term process. Long-term engagement is the key in rural areas, rather than short-term, project driven initiative.
- Provide multiple sources of information and messaging – people will access it where and when it suits them, and often many times before making decisions.
- Many people are unsure of their ability to take on further education, especially if they have been out of the education system for a long time. Make use of university preparation programs and taster units to encourage people to ‘have a go’.
- One size doesn’t fit all – programs and activities should be tailored to suit individual communities and individual people where possible.
- Make the university visible in rural areas, so it becomes a part of the fabric of everyday life. Do this through partnerships with local organisations, and the use of logos, banners, advertising.
- Have a presence at local community events, such as agricultural shows. This can be done through local partner groups if a stand-alone university presence is not possible.
- The provision of accessible and up-to-date information is vitally important for people in rural areas. Do not rely completely on internet-based information like university websites as internet access can be a problem in rural areas, and people are not necessarily familiar with higher education terminology and processes.

University of Adelaide – Children’s University

Project outcome highlights

- Web cams installed in the Nocturnal House at Adelaide Zoo, together with downloadable scientific observation sheets so children can observe and record the activities of animals.
- Trial of Adelaide Zoo webcam activity at a primary school in rural South Australia. In the trial cohort, 78% of students learned something new, 100% of students have talked to their relatives/friends about Children’s University and 89% think that the program is fun.
- To date, hundreds of Children’s University students across three different states in Australia have logged in to the online Adelaide Zoo webcam activity.

- Program coordinators in rural schools reported that their Children’s University students were visiting Learning Destinations in Adelaide when they went to the city with their families because of participation in the program.
- Establishment of a Children’s University program in rural South Australia.

Factors in program success and other learnings

- There are limited opportunities for the establishment of Learning Destinations in rural settings. While having the opportunity to travel to Learning Destinations in metropolitan areas is a wonderful experience, students, due to tyranny of distance, find it difficult to maintain ongoing relationships with the people at those organisations.
- Teachers in rural areas often have multiple roles and find it a challenge to find the time during their work day to coordinate the program at their school.
- Parental involvement is critically important to facilitate student’s participation in the program. However, as parents need to be involved in the program their involvement has stimulated discussion about their children’s participation and about higher education in general.
- While coordinators report good engagement and participation with the program, they would like the links to higher education to be more explicit in certain activities.
- Due to the infancy of this program in rural areas of Australia, it is difficult to ascertain if students intend to move on to higher education in the future as a result of their participation, however, those involved have demonstrated a greater awareness and curiosity about their education options after school.

Key Recommendations for rural outreach to primary school students

- Further discussions about what other extra-curricular activities can be validated as part of the program should occur between universities and rural program coordinators.
- Institutions should allow sufficient time for engagement with schools and the education system. Establishment of outreach programs in rural schools may take longer than in metropolitan areas.
- To decrease the workload, a group of teachers working in collaboration should coordinate programs at rural schools. The Department of Education could be approached to allow teachers more hours to take on a leadership role to coordinate programs like Children’s University at their schools.
- Ideally, a university presence in regional areas would help engage students in higher education. Alternatively, funding to allow two school trips per year to a metropolitan university campus would allow rural students to have a campus experience, which has been previously identified as an important disruption component of higher education outreach.
- Further long-term funding is needed to continue the program and investigate the effectiveness of this program in increasing participation in higher education in rural areas.

Common initiative project themes

The following section describes the themes which emerged from the semi-structured interview evaluation data from the three project co-ordinators.

Aspiration to higher education

There were nuanced responses to the issue of aspiration towards higher education from people living in rural areas, reflecting to some extent the different target age groups of project cohorts. A consistent theme was that it was not aspiration itself that was an issue as much as the provision of the information and experiences about university life and study that informs that aspiration.

You can only aspire to what you know exists, so if you don't know about it, you can't make an informed choice. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

I think that with rural students, there's often a perception that they're not aspiring to university study, but we find in our area that that's not the case, that they are aspiring towards that study but they don't know how to get there, or how to overcome the barriers that are in their way. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

Provision of information about university, university life, and pathways to university were seen as crucial to informing aspiration and, more importantly, the expectation of pursuing higher education.

Certainly anecdotally, we hear that children being around university students, being on campus, being exposed to learning in its greatest form beyond the classroom, is something that does switch them on more to that journey and familiarisation. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

We also had a number of presentations from various university departments, and about scholarships, accommodation, entry, early admission, all of those sorts of familiarisation activities, and we also had a mock interview program. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

For adults living in rural areas, especially those who have been outside the education system for a number of years, the process of realising aspiration can be a lengthy one, as they juggle with a number of personal, social and economic factors.

It might take some people two or three or four years to have that full conversation, from the initial, what am I thinking about, right through to actually enrolling. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

Using existing networks and infrastructure/remote campuses/partnerships

The issue of being able to study locally was a key element of all three projects. The barrier of distance can be overcome through delivery of education services at a local level where possible, either through an official rural university campus or by using existing community infrastructure and resources.

The idea was to embed the university in a community by forming relationships with local and existing networks, things like LINC's, and Neighbourhood Houses and Councils. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

For some students the possibility of being able to study locally, without having to relocate to a city, was perhaps the crucial element in being able to realise their aspirations to university studies.

...a number of the students elected to study regionally, where they hadn't realised they had that opportunity before... (Project Co-ordinator 1)

But it made a huge difference to those students in actually being able to attend university at all, because they could see that the financial barrier for them to move away was just unsurmountable. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

The existence of local educational infrastructure and organisations can be a catalyst for engagement of more people from rural regions, in part due to their interest in helping students fulfil their potential. There is clear motivation for the local organisations to play this role.

I think sometimes, in rural and regional areas, the sense of community is much stronger, so I think it is essential to be able to tap into some of those things using some of these programs. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

The ultimate beneficiaries of all this is their own people, and obviously if you're working in a local library or a local Neighbourhood Centre, the community you're working with are your people. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

This element of partnership between the university and a local entity was common through the three projects, whether a partnership with a school, a community organisation or individuals.

The partnerships with the schools was really, really important. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

So I think that's the key to it, it's the partnerships.....developing those relationships and understandings with the people and the communities. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

Early and long-term engagement

Two messages that came clearly from the projects was the need for university engagement with people from rural areas to be early and sustained.

The sooner you get involved with students ... and I think, really, what it looks at is, the children need several touch points, that it's not a question of, you speak to children once and that's it, they're convinced to join the university. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

It's the being there permanently and long-term so that you're not there and gone again. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

For the adult cohort this is particularly important because the process of deciding to pursue higher education can often be lengthy, while a variety of barriers and life matters are sorted out.

People ordinarily expect lots of barriers and difficulties, and they usually work their way around those, but it doesn't happen immediately. They have to get other life things in order, and we had a lot of conversations where it was about when the kids are at the right stage, or when they can potentially go to a campus or can they do it online, or the business isn't quite in the right shape yet. But in two years' time, we should be ready to do this or that or the other. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

For this rural cohort an on-going university engagement is very important. This approach can also be very rewarding for the university too.

...so the university itself becomes part of the community, rather than this outside body that comes and goes... (Project Co-ordinator 3)

The importance of people - mentors/advisers/social networks

The involvement of people and social networks is a strong element in university engagement with the rural community. The three projects all reported effective use of a range of people in support roles and in the delivery of messages to a variety of rural cohorts.

The issue of limited social networks and availability of role models, people who had achieved through education, was noted.

So they definitely had sort of a narrow social network in terms of other people that they'd met who had jobs similar to what they might be aspiring towards (Project Co-ordinator 1)

The range of people involved and affected by the projects reflected the importance of involving people who are close to and part of the lives of students or potential students.

And that's a really great, feel-good, positive experience, and I think, from the point of view of influencing parents who may have had a negative educational experience, that's a really positive ... and I think, also, it's a great way for the community to get involved with that learning for students. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

It provides information locally, which is what people want. It provides it in a non-threatening way because it's being delivered by local people that know people already. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

In the case of school students, mentors were considered to be extremely effective, particularly ones who were of a similar age and with similar life experiences to the students.

...with the student mentors, having this weekly connection rather than just one off workshops or conversations over a telephone, or Skype, really encouraged a strong relationship and trust between those students and those mentors and that was really, really effective. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

I really would like to see rural students partnering with other rural students, with metro students, but also, because it's a global entity, to partner some of the students with UK schools, exchange of ideas, all of those sorts of things. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

Information and familiarisation with university processes and life

One of the biggest deficits faced by the rural community is a lack of information about universities and university life, and allied to this is an unfamiliarity with university life.

...one of the problems we've got, is that people still, even in places not that far away, feel the university is a mysterious scary place over there. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

Unlike in many urban locations, university is not often a part of the community, and is not a natural pathway to follow for people in rural areas. To many people in rural areas, university is simply not part of their daily life.

...if you go around the state, it's not often visible that the university exists in a lot of these small communities, because there's no visible evidence of it. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

This can lead to people in rural areas being unaware of even the most basic information about university study and the processes available to them to access higher education.

They just have no idea that you can make two UAC applications, one after another, and change your preferences. Or that you can apply for early admission, and first round, and second round, and what pathways there are, and how certificates can link into university degrees. That was just foreign knowledge to them. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

Provision of information and experiences to familiarise people with all aspects of university life is key to informing aspiration and providing improved access to people living in rural areas.

So I think the information provision can be a really powerful tool, in terms of making the university visible. The banners were really good there too. (Project Co-ordinator 3)

Overcoming ICT Issues

The use of information and communication technologies in the delivery of higher education services featured in all three projects and provided a glimpse into the future of higher education.

I think that's why a lot of the online stuff is really useful, the fact that with the online program, that the children can actually access something that ... they can't just walk down the street and go to the zoo, but if they can actually access that online ... and I think, with the way that tertiary education is going, that ultimately, that's the way the future generations are going to access their tertiary education. (Project Co-ordinator 2)

Issues were encountered with student access to technology which were reflective of experiences in many rural areas, where access to technology at home cannot be assumed.

Some students didn't have technology at home, so we ended up having to take with us some devices to our different sessions. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

Additional issues occurred with the Education Department IT policies which, while not restricted specifically to rural areas, are a large issue when alternatives are not so readily available, as they might be in urban areas.

There's all sorts of requirements within the department about what websites you can go into, and different things you can download, and we found that an issue.
(Project Co-ordinator 1)

However, the benefit of a rural university campus with good IT infrastructure may provide some solutions to this issue.

...we also provided the schools that were nearby the opportunity for the students to come into our campus and use our Internet facilities. (Project Co-ordinator 1)

Good practice for cost effective rural outreach programs

The project has identified a number of overarching themes regarding good practice for cost effective outreach programs in rural and regional areas. These are discussed below and will be further developed in academic papers to be published in the coming months.

Factors of Rurality and Aspects of Good Rural Practice

People living in rural and regional areas face a number of issues, barriers or challenges not faced by people in more urban locations. Some of these may be considered 'barriers', while others may simply be things to take into consideration when making decisions about pursuing higher education. Factors of rurality are issues, barriers and particular strengths of rural communities, gleaned from literature and the experience of the project participants. They are related to geography and isolation, the nature of rural labour markets, the small size of many rural communities, the physical and social infrastructure that are generally present. Factors of rurality and include other cultural factors such as community social capital. Aspects of good practice in rural outreach are ways of responding to these factors. Examples from the Results section above include drawing on existing networks and infrastructure, and partnering with local people and organisations in outreach programs. We suggest that the DEMO model could be enhanced to take account of factors of rurality and related aspects of good practice.

Mapping infrastructure that supports learning

Many rural and regional communities have existing facilities and infrastructure that could support higher education study. They include physical and cultural infrastructure. The Maps Project pilot plotted educational and other infrastructure such as libraries and online access centres, which are part of a community's capacity to support people undertaking studies in their own community in some of the study communities, see <http://www.utas.edu.au/rural-aspirations-project>.

Aspiration and expectation

We observed that some rural people have limited access to others who have experienced higher education, and may not be aware of the jobs that open up for higher education graduates. For these people, the first step is to become aware that higher education is a possibility for themselves, or their children; that is to inform their aspiration. . Imagining different future possibilities is a key aspect of the rural outreach initiatives. People who are

aware of the possibility of higher education and aspire to higher education need to understand practical financial, support and other access issue solutions, and more importantly they need to feel comfortable that they will be able to 'fit in' to the unknown higher education environment, and that they can succeed at higher education. This will move people from aspiration to expectation of participation.

Conclusion

The Informing Aspirations in Rural Regions Project considered factors particular to rural areas that impact on aspiration toward, and participation in, higher education, termed factors of rurality. A different age cohort was targeted by each of the three participating universities, and three quite different projects were designed or modified to address the factors of rurality identified, and then trialled.

Broadly the project has highlighted the issues faced by people from rural areas who may aspire to participate in higher education, and suggested ways of addressing these issues. Four key themes have emerged from the project evaluation which can inform university rural outreach programs.

Firstly, people in rural areas do have aspirations towards higher education but their expectations of achieving such aspirations are diminished in the face of barriers, challenges and cultural factors associated with rurality.

Secondly, a number of factors of rurality are associated with a lack of information about, and experience of higher education. This can be addressed with effective outreach programs and the increasing availability of the internet. Making use of existing local infrastructure, networks and organisations to deliver information and support to students and potential students is an effective approach.

A third theme is interventions should begin early and continue over the long-term. Evidence of successful lives being shaped through higher education is more readily available in urban centres than in rural ones, so providing alternatives to established family and community views is a key element that should start early – ideally in the primary school years – and continue into adult life.

Finally, each project reflected the important role people play in informing the aspirations and expectations of others. In some cases it is a friendly face at the local library, for others a mentor who has been along the same journey and can provide useful tips, advice and support. Electronic and internet-based information has a significant role to play, but effective university outreach will inevitably involve many people. To quote Gale and his colleagues, it will be ‘people rich’⁴.

⁴ Gale, T., Sellar, S., Parker, S., Hattam, R., Comber, B., Tranter, D. and Bills, D. *Interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students*, National Centre Student Equity in Higher Education, Underdale, S. Aust. 2010.