



Policy Position Paper: Children and Young People

ACRE's rural vision

Our vision is that rural communities will increasingly take a leading role in ensuring the social, environmental and economic well-being of all their residents. They will do this in a way that provides for the present generation and also plans for future needs and future challenges. RCAN members will be there to stimulate their thinking, support their work and help turn their aspirations into a reality.

ACRE's vision for children and young people in rural areas

ACRE believes that children and young people should have the opportunity to equitable access to both age specific and wider services in ways that meets their own needs and those of their families and carers.

For many children and young people, the 'rural idyll' of living in the countryside is far from the reality where there are no cinemas, clubs, or other facilities their urban counterparts take for granted. This isolation from services is often exacerbated by few transport options and hidden poverty. Rural communities are anxious to hold onto their younger residents, who will determine the future character of their villages. If they drift away the population is in danger of becoming unbalanced and communities unsustainable.

Unless children and young people live in or near a large market town they (and by extension their carers), will need to travel many miles to obtain the services they need. This applies both to services directly for children and young people such as youth clubs and education, and to generic services like leisure, shops, healthcare and affordable housing. This problem of access can undermine community sustainability because young people are forced to move away from their communities, often never returning.

A powerful and perhaps unappreciated example of the problem is the challenges faced by further education students, for whom reaching their local college often involves travelling great distances especially to reach specialist courses. Many students refuse to undertake these long and often complex journeys on a daily basis and instead restrict themselves to a limited choice of locally available courses.

Children and young people should have the opportunity to access age specific and general services in ways that meets both their and their families or carers needs. We recognise that the level of services provision must be based upon the size of a settlement to ensure that the services are sustainable. As such, the Rural Community Action Network undertakes activity that supports sustainable rural communities including initiatives developed by the community itself. Using a planned approach, RCAN supports objectives that help develop an appropriate range of accessible services and facilities and the advancement of affordable transport solutions that enable children, young people and families to access services to help meet their needs and aspirations.

Issue: Access to services for children

The lack of facilities for children and young people is often a problem for those groups and the wider community. Service withdrawal and limited transport means that community members experience problems obtaining services aimed directly at them.

Solution: Accessible services for children and young people

The Rural Community Action Network works with communities to develop services aimed at children and young people. In Featherstone, the Community Council of Staffordshire supported the community to develop a popular new summer activity programme for younger children. Volunteer effort has led to new village activities and a youth service which will provide local unemployed adults with work.

Norfolk Rural Community Council's Big Book of Games project is a series of durable 'larger than life Play Books' at ten community green spaces across south Norfolk. The aim is to bring youngsters together in Norfolk's more isolated areas through stimulating local play with reminiscence of traditional games being shared by older generations. The scheme will recruit ten volunteer play rangers and aims to reduce fear of bullying and social exclusion.

Following reports of anti-social behaviour in a village, Community Council of Staffordshire established a youth forum to seek solutions to address the problem of the lack of a meeting space. The community set up its own youth club which is now centrally funded. This initiative stimulated further activity for young people including the restoration of an unused pond for community fishing and environmental projects.

Rural Action Yorkshire has supported the development of Shakers, a meeting place for young people in Askern near Doncaster. It is a one-stop-shop with a café and meeting rooms, offers counselling services and leisure activities. Young people are actively involved in developing the service and contribute to management plans. Its value to the community has encouraged volunteering locally drawing adults into engagement with young people and strengthening the community.

Issue: Young people's access to college and work

For the majority of young people starting work or reaching their local college or work place requires travelling significant distances from locations ill served by public transport. Transport costs especially for private vehicles are prohibitive, especially when insurance costs are added.

Solution: innovative methods of access that meet the needs of young people

Wheels to Work schemes provide affordable transport (often mopeds) to enable young people to travel to work, college or training. It has been estimated that nationally schemes save the country more than £19 million of taxpayers' money per year.

There are over 50 Wheels to Work schemes across England many of which are run by RCAN members. Schemes like Shropshire Wheels 2 Work delivered by the Community Council of Shropshire, SCooTS (The Community Development Agency for Hertfordshire) and Wiltshire Wheels to Work (Community First Wiltshire) provide bespoke transport solutions. In addition to enabling work or college access they support the strategic and operational objectives of partners such as JobcentrePlus, colleges of higher education and local employers.

As a matter of course schemes also provide safety training for participants, are instrumental in trialling new innovative transport ideas such as electric mopeds, battery-power-assisted bicycles

and enable young disabled people access to work through provision of specialist driving tuition. Wiltshire Wheels to Work also has a link with local community based saving schemes (Credit Unions) which enables beneficiaries to purchase their own means of transport after returning their Wheels to Work moped.

Issue: Rural children being unable to take part in after school activities

Lack of suitable, affordable transport in rural areas restricts young people's opportunities to meet their friends, take part in leisure, training and employment opportunities.

Solution: Timely transport solutions

The Twilight Buses Scheme developed by Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council, provides transport from market town secondary schools to surrounding villages, making it possible for rural students to take part in extended schools' activities. The RCAN member's transport experience made maximum use of existing rural bus routes, persuading schools to schedule activity programmes to fit with these. The scheme has many advantages, for instance, rural pupils have the choice to remain after school for activity programmes and there has been increased uptake of revision classes contributing towards improved grades. Just by adding a few extra passengers to the rural bus routes has helped to keep them viable for the whole community. Ofsted has also commented favourably on the Twilight Buses during their school inspections.

Issue: Children and young people's participation in decisions that affect them

Amongst the numerous barriers that young people in rural areas face, it is also the case that many lack the opportunity to express their views and to take part in matters that affect them in their communities.

Solution: Innovative participation and involvement methods

Setting up innovative methods of engaging with young people, listening to their views and taking action to implement them can benefit the whole community. RCAN members have developed a number of original solutions to ensure young peoples participation. For example, in Shropshire Pod voting technology has been used to involve young people in putting forward views about where they live. It involves using a "Who wants to be a Millionaire" style system where questions relevant to each community are put into a PowerPoint presentation and linked to a set of handheld pods. Children vote on each question and the results appear on the screen instantly. Pod voting is extending to all ages and is an excellent way of involving all residents when carrying out a Community Led Plan (see www.communityledplanning.com)

In other areas RCAN members have been involved in consulting young people and involving them in identifying problems and developing creative solutions to the issues they face. Community Lincs has been commissioned by West Lindsey District Council to work with young people in the village of Scotter where they had a problem of large numbers of young people congregating on the streets. Work has been carried out with the young people and from this projects and solutions are being planned, including a meeting place for new activities.

In 2008 Action in Rural Sussex launched the Sussex EDGE Learner Forum. The members of the forum work together to develop projects to promote practical and vocational learning and different pathways to success for other young people, employers, teachers and parents. It gives the young people a voice about education, an important part of their lives in which they did not have much of a say.

About ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. We aim to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector that is well connected to policy and decision-makers who play a part in delivering this aim. ACRE is nationally recognised for its expertise in ensuring rural community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.

ACRE is a member of:

- Homes & Communities Agency Rural Housing Advisory Group
- Age UK Rural Advisory Group
- Ministerial Task Force on climate change, the environment and sustainable development
- The new national rural coalition, under the chairmanship of Matthew Taylor MP, which aims to take forward his 2008 proposals to government on a Living, Working, Countryside.

RCAN Rural Community Action Network

The Rural Community Action Network comprises 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) at local level, RCC regional groupings and their national arm in ACRE, providing coverage of all rural areas throughout England. RCCs are county-based, independent, local development agencies that, for decades, have been delivering support on the ground to enable rural communities to improve quality of life for all. They act as a strategic voice for rural communities, allowing grassroots issues to be championed and solutions worked out in partnership between statutory, voluntary and private sector providers. Their strength lies in their ability to work within communities in an inclusive and holistic way, helping local people to develop local solutions and identify unmet needs through a unique approach to community-led planning. Alongside this, RCCs provide a trusted local support network for rural community groups, including dedicated expertise in arenas such as transport, housing, the management of community-owned facilities, social enterprise and rural services.

RCAN National coverage, local reach

Members of the Rural Community Action Network have a long history of supporting communities to find solutions to their needs. We do this by supporting all sections of the community to plan for the future and by developing relevant services that meet the needs of all generations. We do this with a passion for social inclusion, and high standards throughout the network.

Network members

- Provide genuine reach into rural communities across England, linking national, regional and local policy with community action at the grassroots
- Promote and develop local solutions that benefit the social, environmental and economic well-being of communities
- Act as a focal point for partners across statutory, private and voluntary sectors, working together to benefit rural communities
- Tackle disadvantage by ensuring their work within rural communities reaches out to marginalised groups and encourages the development of local services for those least able to travel

ACRE details

**Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Somford Court
Somford Road
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1TW
(tel) +44 (0)1285 653477
email acre@acre.org.uk**

**Company Limited by Guarantee 3336101
Registered Charity No. 1061568**

This document is one of a series covering the following topics, Rural Challenges, Community Led Planning, Climate Change, Rural Community Buildings, Housing, Rural Services, Transport, Sustainable Communities, Social Inclusion, Older People, Children & Young People, Healthcare and Digital Inclusion.

Published on 22th September 2009