Insight Tool: Young People in Rural Communities

Informing partners and mentors on how they can help young people, struggling within rural areas

Introduction

Empowering Enterprise is a unique project for 18 to 24 year olds in Devon who face the biggest barriers to getting into work, education or training. Empowering Enterprise will work with over 600 of the most socially-excluded young people in Devon to equip them with skills for life and work giving them the confidence to find a path to a brighter future.

Led by Petroc, a Further Education College in Devon, Empowering Enterprise is delivered by a partnership of organisations with a wide range of expertise and experience in working with young people across the South West.

See www.empoweringentreprise.org.uk for more details.

The map shows the approximate location of current Empowering Enterprise participants. Most are grouped around Exeter, Torbay, Plymouth, Barnstaple and Bideford. Less than 10% live in rural areas.

We believe rural living can add challenges around issues such as: Access to services and opportunities; Aspirations; Mental health; Dependency on family members.

We wanted to inform partners and mentors on how they could work smarter to reach rural areas and help young people who need it. This document is the result of interviews with 13 young people, and dozens of informal conversations with other young people, parents, youth workers, school and college staff, employers, recruiters and others. Conversation transcripts are available as appendices via http://www.empoweringentreprise.org.uk/.

Conversations took place in the 'representative' areas. These were, the rural market towns of Holsworthy (pop. 2,600) and Chulmleigh (pop. 1,000); and the village of Ashwater (pop. 650).

This document seeks to share insight into experiences common for young people, but has not been designed to be an objective 'findings report'. This document is intended to be useful for stimulating conversation within and between organisations. To aid thinking and planning, practical resource links and prompts relevant to common barriers are provided.

This document also contains 5 'Pen Personas' created from interviews which took place, these personas try to create relatable characters useful for stimulating conversation and planning – but by definition they are generalisations and there is overlap across them - no individual is so easy to fit into boxes!

Contents

Health and Emotions

Boredom and isolation are common and strong feelings. This can be especially felt at periods when family are at work. Therefore, college or work environments serve as important places for socialising. Although the situation is changing (anecdotally drugs are becoming more prevalent), drugs are mostly not present in school/college age young people in rural areas, but increase steeply in usage around town from around 19-20 years old.

"Living here can feel bored and isolated. Nothing to do but going for a walk with the dogs or stay home. It's hard just staying happy."

Despite the boredom the peaceful environment is appreciated and cities are thought of as daunting.

"I like being able to clear my head in the woods or sit on a gate for 20 minutes. – in a town how would I do this? How would I just be alone?"

Moving away - and knowing people who have

The idea of moving to a city, without existing networks or purpose (job/education), is for many a daunting (and unaffordable) idea.

A compulsory final 2 years of education beyond 16 means young people get to see that there is a bigger world and can look beyond their hometown, towards Barnstaple or Exeter. Another, smaller, group start looking out of the county. Those who do leave the county tend not to come back for many years.

"People that have left for school and gone to uni they have to move away which is a good thing. It opens them up and they are able to move away again after uni as they are used to city life."

It is common by the early 20's for people who have not left their hometown to know others who have left—either to travel, work or study—and this awareness of, and desire for, a wider world often starts to grow in their early 20's. However, most people have already made significant life choices (e.g. college; qualifications) by then.

Aspirations and Employment

There are 50+ colleges/academies offering Post-16 education and training in Devon — but many young people view provision to be concentrated at large regional institutions like Barnstaple and Tiverton Petroc, Exeter College, City College Plymouth, South Devon College, Bicton College and the Duchy College in Cornwall. Most people have already made significant life choices (e.g. college; qualifications) by 16/18 years old. These are often based on the limited variety of role models and surroundings of rural locations.

Even in medium sized towns, there is a lack of opportunities of all kinds whether that is career-driven or '1st step/entry level' jobs. This is especially the case for office based or retail sector roles. People know they must travel. Apprenticeships are especially challenging due to the prohibitively high cost of travel. There is often a strong informal economy such as a summer-hand on farms or mowing lawns — but these can be monopolised by younger teenagers. In workplaces people need to be reliable and communicate any problems clearly. Any negative experiences can be carried over between employers in the same area.

"I'm from nearer Okehampton and the pubs are closing, the travel agent, the bank are closing. My 18 year old god daughter is a bright girl, works hard, trained to be a air hostess but can't get work – gets a few hours a week in the co-op but almost not worth it for the cost of petrol."

Transport

For public transport the cost and lack of service/frequency are significant factors for all areas of life. For an example see page 10.
For accessing education and services, early morning and late afternoon buses mean that even if only one class/appointment a whole day is needed. This limits other opportunities like part-time work or helping on family farms. The same 'whole-day-out' situation applies for any service, like the doctors, and even mundane tasks like fixing a broken phone.

"If going shopping or something – you've got to plan it all out. Can't just go if you feel like it. Will only go if we know what we want."

For employment bus timetables mean that jobs with early starts, weekends or evening work (i.e. hospitality, retail, manufacturing, etc.) are not possible.

Very early morning starts (pre-7am) to catch buses require significant motivation and add an extra dimension to other barriers individuals are already facing (e.g. late night gaming addiction), impacting on reliability and motivation.

Learning to drive and operating a car become 'essential' for rural living but for most this requires significant financial support from family.

The role of youth clubs (and other venues)

Although relevant to an age range prior to EE's 18-24 it is important to discuss youth clubs as they have impacts on the fabric of an area for years beyond their use and people may have lasting positive connections with staff.

"It was buzzing. All age ranges, so many different types of people.
Amazing cross section of people. And that's why I know a lot of people now.
And that's why I didn't get any shit from the 'Greenhouse' people in town."

Youth clubs serve as a safe place for all sections of society to mix together. Including, those who have 'scattered' across the county post-16 to different colleges or training; or those with SEN who may not be involved in mainstream education.

This role of a youth club needs to be filled by other open meeting spaces in towns such as cafes.

Gaming and connectivity

Gaming is popular and common and although there is often an element of meeting new people, games usually revolve around familiar groups. Popular online computer games include 'Farming Simulator'.

"There are a lot of people you don't know also though. In a game squad there
might be 50/50 people you know and don't know.

Wouldn't add people I don't know. Having the people you know makes it feel fun
and safe. The people I know that I'm playing with – live about 30 mins away."

There is a feeling that gaming can become an especial problem if it impacts onto early morning starts with busses or if out-of-sync routines are causing a problem with family members at home.

"Find it fun. Get to meet new people.
If they are interested in the same games. Form groups.
Don't be racist, abusive, etc. or you're gone from the group."

Pen Personas

These personas try and create relatable characters, useful for planning

Name: Gavin/Vicky
Main Characteristic(s): Busy
Age: 21
Occupation: Farming contractor
Location: Several miles from nearest shops
Their needs/wants: Loyalty

Usually people from a farming background are happy in their work and staying in the area. They have strong intergenerational social ties through Young Farmers groups, local pubs and weekly market events. Young Farmers groups connect individuals locally and across the region in a range of activities – however, social parties may become less popular and 'looked down upon' by those in their twenties, as they can be seen as being for younger members. These groups can often have a heavy drinking, anti-drugs culture.

Family farms can struggle to support 3 generations on full salaries. However, informal and part-time work is nearly always available. Farmers are raised to be in work and not be fussy about choices, with this confidence in a future work trajectory, it is common to have not tried hard at school. Female farmers are more likely to have divergent careers e.g. temping work alongside helping on the farm.

Working on a family farm does not always carry the same obligations, e.g. punctuality, that comes with other employment. Families may 'get under each other's feet' living and working together.

"There is always something to do, I'm too busy to get bored"

Pen Persona - Sporty

Name: John/Lisa
Main Characteristic(s): Active
Age: 18
Occupation: Retail
Location: Village
Their needs/wants: Being Active; Socialising

Where other youth clubs and services may be lacking there is often a local football club or similar social group for activities like cycling, a football club, or similar. 'Sporty' young people can likely have access to multiple, local and regional, social networks through these sports clubs.

However, the costs associated with sports groups through membership fees or equipment can be prohibitive and local sports centres/gyms in to nearby towns do have evening classes but they are targeted at those aged 40+. Paired with the transport challenge, clubs are often not accessible by bus routes/ frequency and so dependency develops to be driven by family up to several times weekly.

A willingness to cycle from village to local towns can allow for greater freedom in socialising or work access.

"I have 2 mates in the village my age. Nice people but not sporty – they wouldn't go running.
One will join me for a cycle but he wouldn't go on main roads or in bad weather."

Pen Persona - Gamer/Musician

Name: Sam
Main Characteristic(s): Bored
Age: 22
Occupation: Retail
Location: Town or Village
Their needs/wants:
Activities, socialising and variation

These groups tend to have small but close social groups. Unengaged in 'country living' and not satisfied with town offerings. There are no venues that provide chances for socialising or even to feel comfortable; cafes feel too formal, surrounded by "silent old people".

This group may have increased aspirations, and an awareness of a bigger world may come earlier than for others, due to having travelled to cities for gigs, or having friends who have. This group is always looking for where 'its' happening because 'its' not happening where they are. However, travel to gigs/e-sports events in cities costs £100's and often rely on friends with cars.

Gaming addiction, playing into the early morning, is a common form of distress as it affects the rhythms necessary for individuals to, for example, live with their families, pursue work, catch early morning buses.

"We used to just get on the bus to Exeter to just 'bum about'. There is nothing to do here we'd bummed around here too much."

"I try to meet up with people - but there's no venues or anything. You can only go to the pub so many times"

Pen Persona – SEN and Ill health

Name: Paul/Lucy
Main Characteristic(s): Anxious
Age: 23
Occupation: Volunteer
Location: Town or Village.
Living with family or supported accommodation.
Their needs/wants: Self-care; safety; a supportive, familiar environment

Depending on level of needs, they may be cared for by dedicated specialist services, but most likely rely upon family members. Travel to and from services, appointments and work/study can take a great toll and cause of anxiety and exhaustion.

Illness or SEN will likely have had a disruptive influence on qualifications, aspirations and confidence. Young people and parents in this study felt their schools' staff were not trained well enough to recognize and support those with SEN needs. Diagnoses were often too late - after the potential for achieving qualifications has passed – leaving years of struggle to find a suitable path.

There is a general need for 'entry level' jobs or volunteering within a supportive, understanding team.

"There are help groups in Exeter but it's a BIG deal to go. It's not just the whole days travel but it tires me out for days afterwards – it becomes a week. There's loads of times I didn't go to the doctors in Exeter."

"I can drive a tractor, and have, but with my Asperger's I don't like high pressure situations e.g. during sillaging time they drive a tractor for 20 hours a day powered on energy drinks and sleep in the tractor."

Pen Persona – 'Off the rails'

Name: Cameron
Main Characteristic(s): Intense
Age: 24
Occupation: Military; Construction
Location: Town or Village
Their needs/wants: Status; Respect

Whether still engaged in damaging patterns of behaviour, or on a better path, this group tends to be well known in their local town and community due to consistent presence (e.g. in local pubs or 'on street corners'). This familiarity with a bad crowd heavily impacts life choices, and a prevailing negative reputation can become a significant barrier.

Likely saw school as a 'waste of time' and had a lack in variety of role models and social networks to open eyes to the wider possibilities beyond their town. There is work around but generally if interested in doing further training (e.g. forklift driver; construction; security), the courses which allow for work are at least an hour away.

"There are deep, deep routed histories. And if I go back I'll end up in the same circles. Everyone knows you and will still be judging you from years before "

"Everyone knows everyone's business! Even if I try to keep my head down I still get dragged in (to the drinking and cocaine and fighting). Even though I don't go looking for it, I just can't avoid it."

Practicalities

Transport

When talking about journey planning think of all transport options:

Public: Information on bus routes can be found using this interactive map: www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/community-transport
Alternatively, you can get a personalised travel plan created and emailed over. This can be a good tool to use with a participant. Free taster tickets can also be booked:
www.traveldevon.info/bus/tickets/bus-taster-tickets

Community: Community bus and car schemes require booking in advance. Information on local schemes can be found here:
• www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/community-transport/ring-and-ride
• www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/community-transport/community-car-schemes

Car shares: Are run by members of the public who take regular journeys (i.e. commute), they can be formally named on sites like Car Share Devon – which has easy registration and a searchable map. Other lists can be found in local areas – for example recruitment agencies sometimes maintain a list.

Devon Wheels 2 Work: A not-for-profit company providing 6 month minimum lease loans of scooters at £40 per week (inc. 250miles fuel), first payment is £210. Under-25 year olds require a financial guarantor.
It is stressed that there may be flexibility and a phone conversation is the best place to start. More information can be found here:
www.devonwheels2work.co.uk

Family and friends: Don't underestimate existing 'friends of friends' and networks. They are often there, and just need to be reached out to.

General Advice and Useful Organisations

Map the Area: When working in a new rural area it is essential to map it. Get to know the existing transport, services, support networks, work opportunities. It can help everyone to do this in collaboration with participants, ask them to do a 'scavenger hunt'? Find activities that interest them? Pinpoint also has a good map feature to search for services: www.pinpointdevon.co.uk

General Organisations: Farming Community Network provides support for mental health and family issues; National Young Farmers Network provides resources and training.

Education and Employment

Farm Work: Labourers, farm hands and similar are commonly needed in rural areas and can be found with online platforms. Platforms include: www.4xtra-hands.com or via local/regional Facebook groups such as 'Farmers Free Ads Job Shop' or 'Farmers Free Ads South West'.

Gig Economy: The gig economy refers to employment contracts which pay for each 'gig' completed. Gigs are one off pieces of work and usually limited to a certain, short-term, time period. This can include jobs brokered by organisations like Deliveroo or be more bespoke. The gig economy allows for remote working on a wide range of areas from logo design, to coding, to research, to transcription or data input, to games testing. A potentially crowded and difficult field to enter but valuable to explore with a participant. Useful websites include Fiverr or Upwork:

• www.fiverr.com/categories/business?source=category_tree
• www.upwork.com

Project Practicality Prompts

Paperwork: "What paperwork's in your meeting pack?" Can you plan ahead to complete several forms allowing future meetings to take place on Skype or similar.

Partnership: Send a quick email and check in with Petroc to see if there are other participants in/near an area, and who is their mentor. Can you reach out for collaboration? Does the mentor have valuable knowledge of local hubs?

Referrals: Where did the referral come from? Can you potentially follow up and find more people in the area?

Transport - Some examples

Bus routes shape the geography of the area and whether attending college, work or youth centres are feasible. It is important to note there is often a need for a significant walk at either end of a bus route. Weekend routes are significantly reduced. Five days bus fare is approximately £20-£30 per week.

Holsworthy to Barnstable (28 miles)

Car: Approx. 45 minutes
Bus: Minimum. 1 hour
Leaving 4 times at 07.23, 09.40, 12.10, 15.10

12:10 PM (Friday) - 1:11 PM
(1 h 1 min)

🚌 85

12:10 PM from Library (Stop A)
🚶 1 min

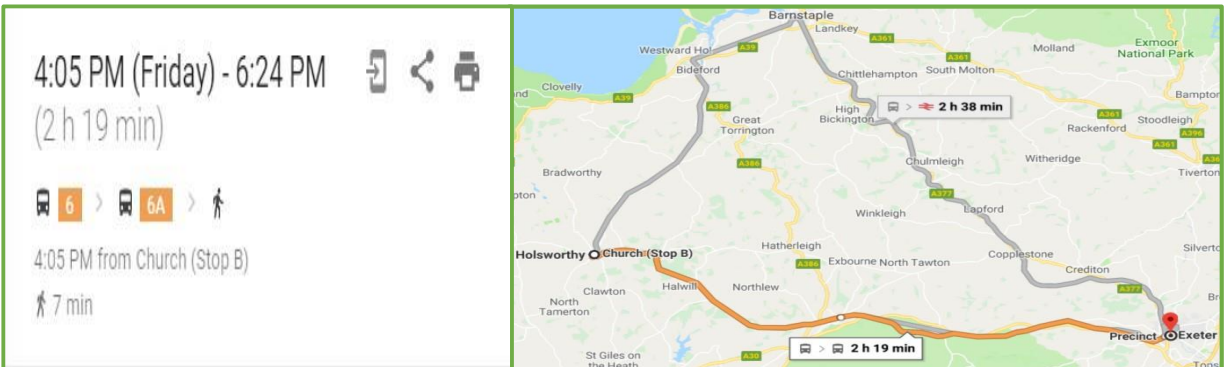### Holsworthy to Exeter (48 miles)

Car: Approx. 1 hour
Bus: Minimum. 1 hour
Leaving 8 times at 06.00, 06.45, 07.10, 09.17, 11.27, 14.00, 16.05, 18.27

4:05 PM (Friday) - 6:24 PM
(2 h 19 min)

🚌 6 > 🚌 6A > 🚶

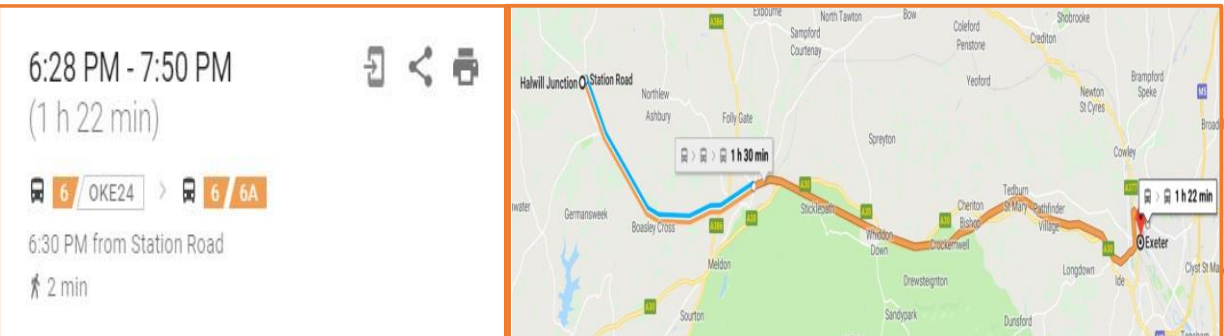4:05 PM from Church (Stop B)
🚶 7 min

Ashwater to Exeter (43 miles) (from 5 miles away at Halwill Junction)

Car: Approx. 50 minutes
Bus: Minimum. 1 hour 25 minutes
Leaves Halwill Junction 8 times at 06.18, 07.05, 07.28, 09.35, 11.45, 14.10, 16.23, 18.30

6:28 PM - 7:50 PM
(1 h 22 min)

🚌 6 / OKE24 > 🚌 6 / 6A

6:30 PM from Station Road
🚶 2 min

For more information, please visit: www.empoweringenterprise.org.uk