

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Socially Engaged Rural Youth

Associate Professor Natalie Bolzan and Dr Frances Gale from the Centre for Social Justice and Social Change have been investigating the improvement in social resilience of marginalised young rural people as a result of youth-initiated community-based programs. This research was funded by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and builds on work started in an Australian Research Council project.

'Social exclusion and isolation have consistently been linked with negative health and social outcomes and this is particularly evident in rural and remote communities', says Associate Professor Bolzan. 'The social resilience of young people can be affected by their involvement in their local community and by the availability of community support structures and facilities, but little research has been done on these specific issues. A recent project in Armidale NSW has helped a group of young, mainly indigenous men develop a highly successful dog training program and involve them in dog jumping competitions. The enthusiasm and high levels of participation have led to at least a threefold growth in the number of young people involved in dog-training skill development and, more recently, a welders training program. The community in turn has been highly supportive, with people in neighbouring towns now asking to be involved in these training programs. The development of social resilience will be examined as a result of this project.'

The current training program will be further developed along a number of pathways, to be determined by the young people themselves. This may be training through local schools or TAFE colleges, or with local farmers. The study will collect data and analyse it to identify components of the training program that contribute to social resilience and an increase in the involvement of young people and their community.



Increasing social participation and resilience through youth-initiated training programs has enormous benefits for the whole participating community, as well as the self-esteem of young people themselves. It helps to address rural youth social disconnection and isolation and makes for a more harmonious and engaged community for all of its members. A deeper understanding of social resilience will help to inform methods of increasing this quality in other communities.

Project Title: Young People and Social Engagement in Rural Communities
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Contact Details: n.bolzan@uws.edu.au
<http://www.uws.edu.au/sjsc>
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