Hello and welcome to the first edition of the Sidney Myer Chair Newsletter. I hope you find it informative and useful. We would really like to hear what you think of the newsletter, so please contact us on 8201 7529 or email marja.vanbreda@flinders.edu.au with a brief message.

In 2009, as part of the Sidney Myer Fund and Myer Foundation Commemorative Grants Program, and after a competitive selection process, Flinders University was awarded $1 million over 5 years to establish the Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities. Flinders University also contributes substantial funding towards the work of the Chair. As the Vice Chancellor said when acknowledging the Sidney Myer grant, “...the university-philanthropy partnership is an ideal model for the establishment of a program to address inequalities in educational opportunities for rural and remotely located young Australians”.

The Chair has a mandate to develop new directions in rural research, teaching, community engagement and policy development. It is located in the School of Education.

Each element of the Chair’s mandate is framed by its vision statement: vibrant productive rural communities are integral to the long-term sustainability of Australia.

Last year I was invited to deliver the 2009 Elford lecture. It is held annually to honour the distinguished contributions the late Dr Ken Elford made during his academic career. I called my lecture Moving out of the Rain-Shadow: Rural Australia and Australia’s Future.

In the lecture I posed a question: given the growing pressures being placed on our country and our planet, how can we as a nation prepare and engage optimistically with and about the future?

There are two critically important and closely related answers to the question seen through the lens of rural communities and rural education.

Firstly, people who live and work in rural and remote Australia must have access to high quality, relevant and affordable education, training and care at all ages and stages of life.

Secondly, it is essential that people who live and work in urban contexts and provide policy advice to governments, and design and manage a myriad of programs intended to benefit country people and communities, deeply understand rural.

The vision of the Chair, the questions I asked in the Elford lecture and the answers I gave, play a fundamental role in shaping the research, teaching, community engagement and policy advocacy work of the Chair.

Research Projects in Brief

Extended Rural Professional Placement
A semester length extended rural practicum for 12 final year teaching students will commence at the start of 2011. See article on page 3.

Implementing the National Curriculum
This is a major education priority for the Australian government that has significant implications for rural and remote students, for their parents, teachers and leaders. More than 200 schools in rural and remote Australia and schools of distance education were invited to respond to a range of questions. Over 18% responded and analysis of results has commenced.

Mapping Rural Education and Communities
Mapping the ‘state of thinking/state of play’ of rural people/communities regarding a range of education and related matters commenced at the Karoonda Farm Fair. Five other Country Shows in Burra, Kadina, Kimba, Loxton and Naracoorte will also be data collection sites. See Upcoming Events.

National Mapping of Education Leaders in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia
A comprehensive national database about rural

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Community Conversations in Karoonda

The Chair held its first Community Conversations evening at the District Council of Karoonda and East Murray on Wednesday 16th June. The event was held at the Karoonda and East Murray District Council Chambers and attended by members of the Council, the community and school leaders. The aim of this and subsequent events is to inform interested rural community members about the Mapping Rural Education and Communities’ survey findings, to have a conversation about these results and to begin to build relationships for potential future work.

The evening’s program commenced with an introduction of the work of the Chair, after which the survey results were presented. A number of topics were raised that included commonly held concerns about rural education and the loss of young people to the city. The economy’s fluctuations continue to weigh heavily on rural community life, and there is a need to think about innovative ways which assist communities to remain strong and viable. Rural people know that their community values individual merit and that skills are recognised and transferable - not something easily found in the city.

It was an enjoyable evening with some lively conversation. The Chair would like to thank the Council for its hospitality, the rooms it provided and all who participated. We look forward to meeting up again.

Marja van Breda

In the News

Don’t Forget Country

Prof John Halsey

VIBRANT, productive rural communities are absolutely essential to Australia’s future. Little wonder, then, that rural leaders are frustrated about what is stifling the development of their communities (The Advertiser, 5/7/10). The message is not getting through to policymakers. Rural areas and communities are where most of our food is grown, energy and minerals are sourced and water is collected and managed. Added to these is the critical challenge of maintaining pristine natural environments.

Australia’s population growth - the big country option of 35 million or something less - will continue to put pressure on the basics for maintaining a reasonable standard of living: food, water, energy, space and clean air. As well, the world’s estimated population growth of an extra 3 billion by 2050 emphasises how important it is for rural and regional development and sustainability to be a top national priority. The availability of basic infrastructure and human services, which in urban areas can usually be taken for granted, are often in decline or absent in country towns and communities. Education is a typical case in point. From research conducted at a rural show this year, 97 per cent (366/374) of people surveyed ranked access to a local school as their most important concern. Other questions about education and rural communities also scored very high in importance. Our research, and that of others, shows that in debates and discussions about the future of rural and regional communities, listening to the “locals” is crucial for them and for those at the centre of policymaking. Why? Because sustainability is a rural and an urban issue.

Country Shows Agricultural Society of SA

A presentation on the work of the Chair was made at the Country Shows Agricultural Society of South Australia’s Symposium on July 9 2010. This provided an important opportunity for Chair staff to meet officials and others of the Country Show Societies in South Australia. It was good to get together and to share in the discussions around the issue of succession planning as young people leave rural areas for education and employment. The Chair will be working with the Society to see whether there is a demand to hold workshops for young people and community members that focus on capacity building to strengthen and develop rural communities. For further information on the Society please visit their website: www.sacountryshows.com/

Marja van Breda
Extended Rural Professional Placement Program

It is widely recognised that a major issue for education in rural Australia is attracting and retaining teachers. How to solve this, or at least reduce it, has been a challenge for over a century in Australia. The Chair, in partnership with other staff in the School of Education, is introducing a new teaching placement option in 2011 as a contribution towards addressing the problem.

The Flinders Rural Medicine program based in Renmark and Mount Gambier is also supporting the extended rural teaching placement, and is keen for medical and health students to study and socialise with teaching students.

An important feature of the program is the time and opportunities students will have to become engaged with local communities and learn about them. Put another way, the extended rural placement is the opposite of the fly in/fly out or drive in/drive out model which does not promote a fully engaging experience of education in a rural setting.

From the start of next year a selected group of 10-12 final year teaching students will commence a two term professional placement in a rural school. The innovation will occur in the Riverland where a group of principals, led by Kent Spangenberg of Loxton High, have been working towards this for over two years. A school in the South East will also place a student.

Final selections and the matching of students to schools and communities will be done by a small panel, which includes principal and community representatives.

Research is a significant part of the program. There are five main areas of research being planned-participating final year students, supervising teachers, the schools, the community, and implications for teacher education. Work has commenced on designing the research.

Prof John Halsey

The Ins and Outs of Quantitative Research

What is Quantitative Research? Dr Aaron Drummond

The work of the Chair involves both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (descriptive) research. To familiarise you, the reader, with the quantitative side, I will be producing a range of short articles to give the foundations required to accurately read the data presented, as well as some examples of our quantitative research.

A lot of people seem to get confused or anxious about quantitative research. Most commonly people indicate they are not good at maths, or that the world is not about numbers. In actuality, all of us use quantitative data every day. How often do you find yourself thinking: What temperature will it be tomorrow? How many people agree with me? How long will it take to get to work?

Numbers are a natural way to think about the world. Indulge a simple example: Ask yourself how much a litre of milk costs. All of you had a response to this question, and probably a pretty accurate one. At an early age, people learn to predict numbers based upon previous data. You already know how much milk has cost, and are thereby predicting how much it will next time.

In March 2010, the Chair collected data on rural communities. While this will be elaborated on further in the next newsletter, some interesting facts emerged. Our 374 respondents were on average 45 years of age, while they had lived in the country for an average of 40 years. This means that many of our respondents had lived in the country for all of their lives – a rich source of rural experience indeed. In the next article we will elaborate on their views on rural education and communities.

Until next time,
Strength in numbers,
Dr. A.
Vision and Mission

- Vibrant, productive rural communities are integral to the long-term sustainability of Australia.

- It is critical that people who live and work in rural and remote Australia have access to high quality, relevant and affordable education, training and care at all ages and stages of life.

- It is essential that the people who live and work in urban contexts and provide policy advice to governments and others, and who design and manage a myriad of programs intended to benefit country people and communities, deeply understand rural.

We're on the web!
www.flinders.edu.au/education/rural

Upcoming Events

(Continued from page 1)
educational leaders and leadership will be developed and from this targeted research, policy development and advocacy work will occur. The database will enable the Chair to inform and advise related research occurring or planned across Flinders, in other universities in Australia and elsewhere, like the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Youth and Rural Australia
Research is being planned to gain further knowledge about reasons for the exodus of youth from rural areas and, very importantly, what might create a flow of youth from urban to rural communities.

Kadina Country Show
21st-22nd August 2010
The Sidney Myer Chair will have a stand at the Kadina Country Show to continue to collect data for its Mapping Rural Education and Communities research project.

The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA)
15th-17th September 2010
Sustaining the Rural Education Community: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning. Keynote presenters: Scott Goringe, Murrimatters Pty Ltd; Professor Matthew Tonts, School of Earth and Geographical Sciences; Professor John Halsey,

Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities.

Kimba Country Show
18th-19th September 2010

Loxton Country Show
3rd-4th October 2010

Burra Country Show
9th October 2010

Naracoorte Country Show
16th October 2010

Summit 2011 Rural Futures
Matter: A Sustainable Australia
This National Summit will be held at Flinders University, 21st to 23rd September 2011. Details will be available as soon as these come to hand.