

Transitioning from high school to post-secondary and the working world in a rural community

What you need to know:

Young adults living in rural communities can face unique social and economic challenges when moving from high school to post-secondary and the working world. However, community and family encouragement and positive and hopeful outlooks and attitudes can support young peoples' pathways. Goal planning and career development resources can support the transition.

What is this research about?

For young adults, the move from high school to university or college and the working world is influenced by cultural and economic factors, making this a complex social process. Existing research focuses on what this process looks like for young people in urban settings, however, there has not been much research attention on school to work transitions in small and rural communities.

Previous research shows that physical isolation, low-income, and rural place identity, which involves the attachment to a community's land, nature, and local relationships, can impact young adults' goals and pathways from school to work. Coasts Under Stress, a five-year research project that ended in 2006, looked at how environmental,

social and economic changes have impacted rural communities, and results showed that young people in these coastal communities recognized the negative impacts of these changes but were hopeful for the future. The current study follows up, returning to a coastal-community to see how young people's plans and goals turned out after high school, and to explore their work-life transitions.

What did the researchers do?

Breanna Lawrence and Anne Marshall met with young adults between the ages of 21-25 who live in a small coastal town in North Vancouver Island. Three women and six males participated in the study. Three original Coasts Under Stress participants were interviewed and they helped the researchers find and include six other individuals who attended the same high school as them.



The researchers met with young adults between the ages of 21-25 who live in a small coastal town in North Vancouver Island (Photo credit: E. Anne Marshall, with permission).



What did the researchers find?

The researchers found seven themes across the participants' stories:

- **High school plans and goals:** Many of the participants had broad and general goals in high school, and did not have clear-cut plans for life after high school.
- **Work and education after high school:** Several participants were not doing what they had thought they would do after high school. Money concerns and the unstable job market in their small town influenced their education and employment decisions.
- **Moving away:** Moving away to explore options in new and bigger cities was common among the participants. Some planned to return; others were not sure they could find work "at home".
- **Rural living:** Appreciation and connection to their small town was mutual even though changes in the community meant less employment possibilities.
- **Relationships:** Participants could depend on family members and other adults in their rural community for encouragement and to discuss future plans.
- **Personal qualities:** Characteristics like work ethic, work experience, problem solving, and self motivation helped the young adults in their work-life transitions.
- **Insight and hindsight:** While the young adults were hopeful and positive about their futures and were focused on happiness and personal fulfillment, some reflected on things they might have done differently in regard to education and careers.

How can you use this research?

This research is relevant to parents, career educators, and counsellors to help students create steps for small and large goals for transition planning. The findings highlight the importance of considering context, such as desires to return to rural communities when planning young people's work-life transitions.

Future research could look into the experiences of work-life barriers, investigate the impact and connection between emotional/mental health events, such as depression or grief, and young adults' career development, and compare the differences between urban and rural peoples' work-life pathways over time.

About the researchers

Anne Marshall is a Professor in the Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies department in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria.

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Keywords

Young adults; rural community; life transitions; work-life; career

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