Riverside and Rangesview: Urban to Rural Migration in Two Areas of Western Australia's Great Southern Region

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Abstract

Incomers can be seen as a source of vital social capital for small rural communities struggling to maintain and grow their population. It is of concern therefore that incomers settle well. This study investigates locals and inmigrators in two areas of the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. Eighty five respondents reported on why they lived in a rural area, the positive factors related to a rural lifestyle and the difficulties they had encountered. They described their efforts to overcome these problems and their level of support for newcomers to their area. Their level of life satisfaction by self-ratings on a Likert scale and by supplying a descriptor word at the end of the survey. Results suggest that the majority of participants enjoyed their rural lifestyle and their problems could be overcome with some input from appropriate authorities.

While there is a recognised trend in out-migration from rural communities, there is also an emerging trend to in-migrate. The phenomenon raises questions relating to numbers of incomers, why they come and how well they settle. This research explores these issues by examining two rural areas in the Lower Great Southern of Western Australia. Eighty five people, of whom almost 70% had migrated, completed printed surveys asking whether they had recently moved to the area and why, what they liked and disliked about living in a rural area, and what they were doing to overcome any problems. They reported on the support they offered anyone newer to the area than themselves and rated their level of satisfaction with their lives. Information was also sought from local government in the target areas as to the type of support offered to newcomers. This research seeks to inform on factors that create benign or hostile environments for people in-migrating to rural areas. The implications for retaining population within the Lower Great Southern are considered.

Australians have a tradition of being a highly mobile population, moving often but usually within the same general area (Hugo, 2001; Salt, 2004). A typical outward movement is the exodus, particularly of young people, from inland rural areas to the coast (Cocklin & Alston, 2003) but not all in-migration takes people inland. Among the trends in internal population shift over recent years is the phenomenon known as *seachange,* a pattern of migration from metropolitan areas in Australia that has proved to be largely limited to coastal areas and the high-amenity hinterlands of major cities (Burnley & Murphy, 2004). For some migrants the change includes *downshifting* or opting for a simpler lifestyle, and again preference is shown for attractive coastal and hinterland regions (Breakspear & Hamilton, 2004). There is, however, evidence of a reverse movement, a cascade of people flowing to areas directly inland of the coast (Champion, 1998). Salt (2004) has coined the word *treechange* to reflect the movement to inland rural areas, while Hugo and Bell (1998) refer to the *forced relocation* of those too poor to buy into coastal areas. These patterns can be seen in the areas selected for study.

High residential mobility in Australia appears related to stages of the life cycle, e.g. young people shift often until they settle into a relationship; the middle-aged move for work-related reasons and the elderly may shift when they move into retirement (Hassan, Zang & McDonnell-Baum, 1996).

However residential mobility is also influenced by a number of other factors. The preferred coastal regions are becoming crowded and expensive and this forces less wealthy people to look at other areas (Hugo & Bell, 1998). The Great Southern has seasonal workers such as fruit pickers, and it has professional people transferring for promotional reasons i.e. employees of local government, health, law enforcement, agriculture, education or finance (The Great Southern Report, 1999; Ruben, 1995).

Some incomers are people whose partner lives in a rural area. Others are returning to their area of origin, others may be shifting closer to family members who migrated ahead of them. A proportion will be retirees or those seeking an alternative lifestyle whee they feel they can live according to their religious or ecological preferences (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998; Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Breakspear & Hamilton, 2004: Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Hamilton & Mail, 2003). This survey asked participants whether they had moved to their rural area and why.

Newcomers to rural areas are an important resource for increasing social capital but rural areas have been steadily depleted of population over the years and the incomers are less than the outflow (Cocklin & Alston, 2003; Cocklin & Dibden, 2005); Kenyon & Black, 2001). Small rural Shires lack resources to provide amenities that will attract incomers or meet the demands in the short term should their population increase.

Settling in a small country town makes newcomers intensely aware of *community*, a term applying both to the people and to the ethos (Ife, 2002). Obst & White (2004: 692) refer to the need for membership, influence, integration and needs fulfilment that comprise the feeling of being accepted as a community member. Good relationships lead people to report a more favourable quality of life and there are health benefits related to supportive social networks (Argyle & Henderson, 1982; Kawachi, Kennedy & Glass, 1999; Taillefer, Dupuis, Roberge, & Le May, 2003 for a review). To fulfil the need to belong requires a reciprocal process between rural community and incomer. Some groups are highly inclusive, drawing newcomers into their circle; others may be exclusive and leave newcomers feeling isolated (Alston, 2005: Brodsky & Marx, 2001). While it appears more difficult for ethnic minorities, women and the elderly to be included, almost anyone who acts without due care for local sensibilities may find themselves socially excluded (Dempsey, 1990; 1992; Stehlik, 2001).

Yet research by Cummins et al (2005) reveals a particularly high level of wellbeing among people who live in rural communities of a moderate size with a selection of amenities. Participant input as to how well they had settled into their community was gauged by asking participants to report on the positive and negative factors related to living in a rural area and the strategies they had devised to overcome their difficulties.

The Great Southern has shown the typical exodus of agricultural workers and young people and a lesser flow of people moving into the region for a combination of employment and lifestyle reasons. Research has shown that once people settle in the Great Southern any further move generally remains within the region. The reasons for this have not been fully explored but the Great Southern has a higher than average rate of people moving in for family reasons. The Great Southern Report, (1999:9) found that 25% of its sample said *family/marriage was their single main reason for moving.* This was found *to be more than double the results in some of the northern regions*).

About the area

Riverside is located within twenty kilometres of a major port; an area where white karri and feathery peppermint trees fringe the river. Rapidly being divided into farmlets, rich earth supports the orchards and vegetables and pastures of those who live there. Many of the homes appear architect-designed, unique or at least highly original. The area is priced to match its attractiveness. Few residents were home when I called so that I was forced to leave surveys in letterboxes and hope for the best. *It's so expensive we're all forced to work to pay our mortgages,* explained one resident, *I'm only home because my child is ill* (2).

By far the largest proportion of the sample (29) had moved to Riverside from an urban area. Eight had moved from another rural area and the remainder were locals. They could be described as well settled, with 26 of the 44 Riverfolk having lived in their area for longer than five years. Twenty one Riverfolk had relatives living in the area, leaving 23 with no relatives living close by. Generally, they had support at home with only seven Riverfolk living alone. The remainder ranged from couples and families to extended family and shared accommodation. The value people place on pets as company can be seen by eight people who included them as surrogate family members.

Rangesview has a different type of beauty. This is an area of jarrah and red gum growing from a yellowy soil that varies from sand to good loam. Twenty kilometres from the nearest town it slopes away to a panoramic view of a great plain bordered with ranges. Rangesview hamlet was subdivided many years ago and lay dormant; now it has been discovered and the original hamlet has been extended in all directions with special rural blocks (farmlets).

There is no river and the saline groundwater surfaces in poorly managed lowlying areas. Housing designs range from original and innovative to neat transportable-style farmhouses. Rangesview also lacks underground water. Town lots are connected to mains water but the surrounding farmlets are dependent on tanks. In this burgeoning area water is a big issue. Newcomers discover by trial and error the amount their family uses, and how to be careful with it. Trucking it in is expensive ($160 a load).

Rangesview is growing partly because land is cheap. The two Shires that oversee Rangesview cope with the influx by means of a five year plan and a slow but steady input of utilities to town lots. At this point in time, the owners of surrounding farmlets must cope on their own. In comparison, the Shire that manages Riverside coped with increased demands by altering

its rating policy. Many *special rural* blocks are now rated *residential*, presenting the locals with a sizeable and highly unpopular rate increase. Like Riverside, only two respondents lived alone and pets figured among the householders.

Printed surveys with a reply paid envelope were distributed door to door throughout two areas based on the hamlets of Riverside and Rangesview. Eighty five surveys were returned. Forty four surveys were completed by women and 41 by men with only one low score on life satisfaction self-rating and no significant differences between genders.

About the sample

Only two of the total 85 participants were younger than 30 years of age, and only 12 were in their thirties, figures that may relate to the known exodus of young people from rural areas (ABS 2004, 2001). Rangesview showed a steady increase in numbers with increasing age up to 70 years, while Riverside showed a peak in the 40-60 age groups. There were no significant age-related differences in their life satisfaction self-rating. The age groups reveal the reason why only 25 families lived with children; the majority of participants being older adults whose children would be leading independent lives. Respondents were overwhelmingly Australian and the eight who had migrated to Australia had mostly adopted Australian nationality.

There were no significant marital status-related differences in participants' life satisfaction self-rating and a preponderance of couples suggests that life in these farmlet-oriented areas works best for those with a partner.

There were no significant differences between type of employment and self-rating of life satisfaction for all groups with the exception of invalid pensioners and the unemployed who showed a greater range of scores. Figure One reveals that the majority of those professionally and agriculturally employed lived in Riverside while the majority of people working in service industries or retired lived in Rangesview. These patterns suggest that Riverfolk are seachangers and Rangefolk are treechangers but the latter may have settled inland because land was cheaper, which suggests forced relocation.

Figure One: Employment of Riverside & Rangesview Participants				
		Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Employment	Law/Education/Health/Finance	22	7	29
	Retired/Home Duties/Unemployed	6	18	24
	Agriculture/Craft/Contractor	10	2	12
	Service/General/Other	6	14	20
	Total	44	41	85

Responses on an item asking participants to categorize their income showed that two thirds of respondents earned less than $40 000 per annum but their life satisfaction scores were spread across the spectrum with 17 of the 34 lowest earners rating their current life satisfaction at 9 or 10 as did 6 of the 14 highest earners (most of whom lived in Riverside). The large number of participants earning below $40 000 is of concern because they are less able to afford high travel and living expenses and may depend more on local authorities for support.

Figure Two: Income of Riverside and Rangesview Participants

Income Group	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
$0-$20 000	14	21	35
$21 000-$40 000	7	7	14
$41 000 - $60 000	10	6	16
$61 000- $80 000	10	2	12
Over $80 000	2	0	2
Missing	1	5	6
Total	44	41	85

Level of education ranged from primary (two people), secondary school (24 Riverfolk and 27 Rangefolk), to tertiary for 19 Riverfolk and 12 Rangefolk again without any significant differences in their level of life satisfaction. Proximity to a major centre allows Riverfolk and even Rangesview to commute and explains the number of professional people in the sample. Australians identify strongly with the mythic Aussie battler, but it appears that holding a reasonably paid professional job may be useful or even necessary in attempting the rural idyll.

Figure Three:Highest level of education for Riverside and Rangesview Participants

Education level	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Primary	1	1	2
Secondary	24	27	51
Tertiary	19	12	31
Missing	0	1	1
Total	44	41	85

Forty respondents rated religion 0-2 and of low importance compared to 18 who rated it as 8-10 and highly important. Comparing importance of religion with ratings of life satisfaction showed low scorers on religion were just as likely to be happy with their lives as high scorers.

Leisure activities were numerous and many people named a range of interests that suggested a balanced lifestyle. Bearing in mind the fact that only 14 of the 85 respondents were under 30 years of age, it is understandable that team sports were specifically mentioned only by those who liked to *watch AFL football*. For 36 people actively indulged sports included *golf, swimming, horse-riding, bowls, walking, speedway*, and *rock climbing*. Many of the activities suggested a love of outdoors and were linked with *beach, travel, mountain-climbing* and *camping*. Activities such as *classic cars, motorcycles,* and *dancing* appeared to bridge a sport-cultural activities divide.

Participants named 21 highly varied cultural activities. Four people stated that their leisure interest was *community affairs*. This number is quite low and is important because rural communities draw heavily on the support of volunteers to provide services. Not only are the services under-manned, the shortage eventually leads to the willing suffering burnout.

Home featured for 42 and included 28 who loved gardening; 27 preferred an outdoor interest and 8 liked travel while five respondents had farm related interests. One person had *found a new hobby – doing nothing –* probably a wise choice in a busy life.
Respondents who had moved to the area were asked to rate on a ten point scale how satisfied they had been with their life prior to moving to Rangesview or Riverside. The first rating was

not applicable to anyone who was a lifetime resident and it was completed by 75 people. All 85 respondents were then asked to rate on a ten point scale how satisfied they were with their current life. Comparing the Riverside and Rangesview scores showed that life satisfaction has improved for almost all the participants

Why they came

Overall, 64% of the total sample had migrated from an urban area compared to 33% in an earlier study of the entire region (The Great Southern Report, 1999). Twelve had moved from another rural area, 13 were locals and 5 scores were missing. The increase in immigration may be due to the attractiveness of the climate and the scenery in Riverside and Rangesview compared to some of the drier areas of the Great Southern. However, inland Shires are advertising widely to attract incomers and it is likely that the next regional survey will show increased migration throughout the region's entire western half.

Of the 44 Riverfolk, 29 had moved there from an urban area and 8 from another rural area, the remainder being locals. In Rangesview 26 of the 41 Rangefolk had moved from an urban area and four from another rural area.

Figure Four: Length of Time Participants Resident in Riverside & Rangesview			
Length of time	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Lifetime	7	7	14
0-12 months	1	7	8
13 months – 5 years	11	14	25
61 months- 10 years	4	4	8
11-20 years	10	3	13
more than 20 years	5	1	6
missing	6	5	11
total	44	41	85

Riverside had more long term settlers with only 12 having moved there within the last five years. Rangesview had more newcomers than Riverside, seven having moved there in the last 12 months and 14 within the last five years. The remainder had lived there from 6 years to a lifetime. The lower number of longstanding residents in Rangesview may be an artefact of the sample but the area has increased in popularity over recent years.

The Great Southern Report (1999) found that although employment was the major reason given for migrating to the Great Southern when people were at liberty to give further reasons, lifestyle proved to be a major factor. This was borne out by the current study where incomer participants were free to write at length about their reasons for moving.

Results from the total sample of 85 showed that 28 people (33%) nominated environmental reasons for moving. Twenty people gave lifestyle reasons. Eleven people (eight from Rangesview) had moved in order to *reduce the stress* in their lives and eight (six from Rangesview) specifically mentioned wanting to feel *safer from crime*. Four people wanted to live in an area where they could *enjoy feeling part of a community*, and four people chose their area because it *had adequate facilities*. Environment and lifestyle were obviously huge drawcards, named by 54% of the sample and obviously of increasing importance since The Great Southern Report (1999) found 31% of its sample nominated lifestyle (including climate) as a major reason for moving to the Great Southern.

Seventeen people, of whom 14 were from Riverside, had moved to a rural area because of work-related reasons (20% compared to 38% in the Great Southern Report and possibly related to the age of the participants). Eight people had moved in order to start their own business or rural enterprise. Three people thought it might be cheaper to live in a rural area and five people from Rangesview said they chose the area because they could afford to buy there. Three people had chosen their area as a retirement move, nine had downshifted as a means of simplifying their lives, and eight wanted to grow their own food. Three people had become the partner of a local resident, five were returning to their area of origin or shifting to be near their children, and 12 people stated that they were local residents.

Figure Five: Riverside & Rangesview Participants' Reasons for moving to their rural area

Reason for moving	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Environment	17	11	28
Lifestyle	9	11	18
Employment	14	3	17
Local resident	5	7	12
Health	3	8	11
Downshift	4	5	9
Rural Enterprise	7	1	8
Alternative Lifestyle	5	3	8
Safety	2	6	8
Return to area of origin	1	4	5
Afford property	0	5	5
Community reasons	1	3	4
Facilities adequate	3	1	4
Retire	2	1	3
Partner is a local	2	1	3
Cheaper living	1	2	3
Other	2	3	5
Did not respond	1	0	1

N.B. Participants were able to give more than one reason for moving

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Settling in

In order to gauge how well they had settled, all participants were asked to describe the positive aspects of a rural lifestyle and were free to write as much as they wanted. It was interesting to note how few categories emerged.

Environment and lifestyle were important for 70 of the 85 participants. Fifty six people nominated or linked environment and lifestyle factors with statements such as g*reat place to bring up happy, healthy kids.* Other participants listed negatives related to crowding, noise and pollution that they were glad to be without – *away from the rat race.*

With a perceived need for creating a sense of community it was reassuring that 34 (40%) people liked *the friendliness of the local people* and/or found the *wonderful community spirit* in their area a major benefit of living there. A reciprocal reaching out was implicit in many of the statements; *there's a warmth and friendliness about the country people we love* .Community spirit was strongly linked to help in time of need; *close-knit community everyone helps those who need help.* Business also rated a mention from two respondents; *customer focused shop*.

Seventeen participants appreciated quieter roads and less crime. While some used generalisations i.e. *feel safe and secure* others were specific; *no dogs attacking our sheep; no one dumping rubbish in our bush; not having shitheads roaming the streets breaking into cars*.

Eight people found they were less stressed and were enjoying good health; five had found living in their area was cheaper, although growing your own food took *planning and suitable weather*. Four were pleased with the price of their property. Seven found the available facilities adequate. The positive aspects of living in a rural area were supported by the adjectives used by 70 participants whose final descriptor was rated as positive, and ranged from *good* (10) to *privileged; blessed.*

Problems associated with the move

An interesting change was revealed when participants then described the difficulties, problems or shortcomings they had experienced.

Twenty six people nominated inadequate medical services or difficulty in accessing specialist medical services as a problem; *with advancing age only one [*problem] *getting to see a specialist - they pay you to go to Perth on a bus.* Rangefolk tended to feel the medical service was poor as they are reliant on a visiting doctor or a 100 km trip to the nearest city. The lack of medical specialists was cited by both hamlets and would be echoed by many people in the Great Southern, including those who live in the major port and in spite of the fact that some specialists travel to the south coast on a monthly basis. Lack of specialists appears general to rural medicine in Australia (Lopez-Abuin, Garcia-Criado & Chacon-Manzano 2005: 2) and is of particular concern to older people who fear being unable to drive and ill. The degree of concern suggests the need for a community bus or the provision of local health care centres (Worley & Worley, 2004) and increased support from Home & Community Care (H.A.C.C.).

Twenty three participants (27%) had a problem with the people in their locality usually related to local social structures (See also Dempsey, 1990) with locals and incomers each commenting negatively on the other group: *people who move here with no respect for farming; small-minded locals, not friendly.* This was a problem for 14 Rangefolk and 9 Riverfolk. And their comments contrasted strongly with the 34 people who commented warmly on the friendliness of local people. Their comments are of concern as factors that undermine community spirit. Without the provision by the Shires, perhaps as a joint effort, of a visiting Community Development Officer, lack of a mediator may see the community increasingly divided.

Fifteen participants complained of distance both in the sense of isolation and the need to travel. Riverfolk appeared to miss relatives and found this a bigger problem than Rangefolk perhaps because they are 100 kms further away from Perth.

Four participants complained of a lack of public transport. Twenty six had found living in the country was more expensive, the cost of fuel and of running a vehicle being the main difficulty. These are important considerations as older people are often on reduced incomes and also need public transport for ease of travel.

Figure Six: Difficulties, shortcomings and problems of living in a rural area for Riverside & Rangesview Participants

	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Lack of Medical facilities, doctors and/or specialists	10	16	26
Higher prices particularly for fuel	10	16	26
People problems	9	14	23
Lack of amenities both infrastructure & cultural amenities	13	9	22
Lack of choice in shops, banks and tradesmen	8	12	20
Distance including from friends and relatives	11	4	15
Lack of employment opportunities for adults and teenagers	6	5	11
Poor telephone and internet services	6	4	10
Lack of choice in schools, particularly secondary	5	2	7
Water problems	3	4	7
Unreliable electricity supply	3	3	6
Lack of further education	3	2	5
Pests – flies, locusts, snakes, foxes, insects	3	2	5
Lack of public transport, taxi service	2	2	4
Land values	3	0	3
Bushfire	2	0	2
Rural crime	1	0	1
Salinity	1	0	1
Inadequate radio and television service	0	1	1

The lack of choice as regards shopping, of tradespeople and of banks was cited by 20 people. If Rangesview continues to grow at its present rate it may possibly attract more business into the area which would then rely on the locals to support it rather than travel to larger centres. Riverside, however, is close to a city but not so close tradespeople would relish a home visit.

Amenities were criticised by 22 respondents and included rubbish collection, rough gravel roads (6), the lack of sporting and cultural facilities, water shortages (7) and a Riverside respondent concerned about the increasing salinity of the river.

Two people expressed their concern about bushfires and certainly the generally grassy roadsides and the houses surrounded by trees appeared terribly vulnerable. In both areas homes that had organised well [some of them standing in the fire-blackened aftermath of a major conflagration] stood out like beacons. Buildings and driveways were grass-free. No trees overhung their houses and their vegetable patch/orchard provided a further barrier. Some used an encircling driveway or a well-placed dam as buffers.

Five people listed pests as one of their problems. Flies, foxes, insects, and snakes all received a mention. Rural environment necessarily includes some negatives; human pests were much less noticeable, only one respondent mentioned rural crime.

Seven people regretted a lack of choice in secondary schooling their children, the options being long bus trips or boarding school. Five were concerned about the lack of further education for themselves and their children. Lack of employment opportunities were a major concern for 11 participants. This is the issue that most concerns rural councils; how to develop industries that will attract (young) people to their area. Concentration of services in major towns and changes in dryland farming reduce job opportunities and increase the pace of urban drift (1). Riversiders are within commuting distance of a city and can fill the role of a dormitory suburb. For Rangesview, commuting to the city or even the nearest town involves travel costs and lack of public transport. Rangesview has one major industry and its future is problematical.

Utilities were not popular and included problems with telephone and internet services (10); power supply (6); and television and radio coverage. Some felt the Shire was slow to fix problems, and others that politicians were not interested in rural problems.

People also had personal problems often related to age. From the elderly came *fear of losing drivers licence; loneliness*; *pensioner's difficulty in affording travel.* From the young came *few people my age in the area;* and from the middle-aged *being treated as a free motel by friends.*

Fortunately, there were 11 people who had no problems or found the *difficulties compensated for by nicer lifestyle.* Even those whose final descriptor had been assessed as neutral (8) or negative (4) showed a variety of life-satisfaction ratings. Neutral scorer's self-ratings of life-satisfaction ranged from 4 (1 person) to 9 (four people). Negative scorers showed a lower range from two (1 person) through four (2 people) to seven.

The problems listed undermine people's contentment particularly with advancing age but suggest a few well-placed moves by appropriate authorities could restore confidence and allow residents to remain where they are happiest.

Overcoming the problems

Participants were asked to describe how they were working to overcome their difficulties. Sixteen people (Riverside 10, Rangesview 6) stated that they had no problems to overcome. For the rest the answers combined changing their attitudes and organising to work around their problems.

Figure Seven: Riverside & Rangesview Participants' Strategies for Overcoming problems related to living in a rural area

	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Modify lifestyle	10	15	25
Modify expectations	9	9	18
Community involvement	10	5	15
Travel to city/major centre	5	5	10
Encourage visitors	6	1	7
Visit others	4	2	6
Lobby politicians	1	4	5
Joined a sports club	3	2	5
Adopt self-sufficiency	3	1	4
No Problems	10	6	16
Problems not overcome	3	4	7
Intention of moving away	3	2	5
Did not respond	1	3	4

Respondents named anything from one to six strategies that they used.

Eighteen people said they had made an attitude adjustment that has helped them cope better; *get used to it; accept travel as a part of life; accept the positive aspects; if you can't change factors like distance prioritise what you can do and enjoy these.*

For 15 people community involvement was a means of agitating for improvement. Input on community issues is of importance in feeling one can make a contribution of value to the community.

Participants had found it essential to plan with trips to a major centre used for as many purposes as possible to cut down on costs. Time and expense was saved by transporting children to school and sport by car pool. Internet banking was used and one person had found it good economy to lease rather than buy a car.

Ten people scheduled regular city visits to family, friends, shows and medical appointments, their mode of travel including plane, bus and car, and most participants were supportive of local events. Seven participants said they encouraged visitors, and six made the effort to visit friends and relatives, being aware that it was *easy to get withdrawn and isolated.* They advised *be resourceful.*

Some responses were strictly hands-on practical – *saving for a rainwater tank; job hunting; baiting foxes; run chooks; use uht milk; cook and store extra meals in the freezer.* Others had listed items any newcomer needed; *a water container, gas lamp, hurricane lamp.* Others emphasized the importance of being handy; *on a small income you need to fix things yourself.* One person had organised so that overflow from their huge house tank was piped underground to a dam which doubled as a fire barrier to the house.

Five participants appeared to be wearing out; *no problems but looking after it all is getting too much.* It appeared that professional help might do much to ameliorate their situation.

Support offered to newcomers

The willingness to assist others is elemental to building strong communities (Rogers & Ryan, 2001). If residents appreciated a sense of community to what degree did this translate into support for people newer than themselves (particularly the 55 respondents who had moved to their rural area and had themselves experienced what it was like to settle in)? Ten people felt the question was not applicable because they were newly arrived and eight people did not respond to the item but the remainder described a multitude of ways to make people feel welcome. There were 41 who said they welcomed people and offered help and 29 who said they gave useful information *if they appear to need help.* Others took care to discover the new arrival's interests before offering information or advice.

One person had produced a document describing the area and what was available. Fourteen people were prepared to show newcomers around or to socialise. Nine said they always ensured newcomers were invited to join local organisations and functions. Others made themselves available to *look out for their kids,* or their *property* and several had home grown produce to share. Those who enjoyed seclusion said they smiled and waved but were happy to be available if needed. One person had an interest in working for the good of refugees. Several commented on the rapidity and thoroughness, with which assistance arrived following the bushfires, stating that it had *set a benchmark for future assistance to others*.

Figure Eight: Support offered to newcomers to the area by Riverside & Rangesview Participants			
	Riverside	Rangesview	Total
Welcome them & offer help	21	20	41
Give useful information	16	13	29
Show them scenic places	1	0	1
Introduce them to local people, socialise	4	0	4
Invite them to clubs, associations & events	5	4	9
Lobby government on refugees behalf	1	0	1
Not applicable because I'm a newcomer	4	6	11
Did not respond	5	3	8
Participants named from one to four strategies they used to welcome newcomers.			

One principle of a sustainable community (Rogers & Ryan, 2001) is that it *ensures the well-being of its members; offering and encouraging tolerance, creativity, participation and safety*. These Shires already have an incomer population which is basically happy and suggests the Shires publish their plans more widely and demonstrate the gradual process by which they will supply needed infrastructure. Supply of further infrastructure may encourage further in-migration which will foster business enterprise and the employment of younger residents. This would allay the fears of older residents concerned about distant services and the continuing need to drive.

Community relies on networks, reciprocity, trust, and social agency (Gray, Dunn, Kelly & Williams, 1991: Onyx & Bullen, 2000). If small rural areas are to maintain and enlarge their populations they have a vested interest in making newcomers welcome but it takes more than individual effort to do this. I contacted local authorities to find out whether they set a lead in welcoming newcomers. Riverside and Rangesview encompass three localities and Riverside and Rangesview are both growing although the Rangesview population is considered less stable.

To some extent the two larger Shires felt that with people flowing in they did not need to do much to encourage them but they do supply newcomers with elegant folders of useful information. On Australia Day they welcome all newcomers as well as holding naturalisation ceremonies for migrants. The third Shire is much smaller and has a decreasing population so it adds a welcoming morning tea party. Members of service clubs and local sporting organisations make a point of calling at the house and inviting newcomers to attend a meeting. Feedback suggests that newcomers appreciate these gestures.

Conclusion

The majority of participants from Riverside had moved there and while they might once have been making a seachange many are now so well-settled they are probably best called *lifestylers*. Riverside participants included professional and service people wanting to maintain a rural lifestyle while living within commuting distance of work, the self-employed, and retirees. For these people Riverside acts as a dormitory area for a nearby city.

Rangesview also produced participants who had migrated to the area, many of them recently. The inflow suggests a cascade effect outwards from the city (Champion, 1998), a pattern also labelled *treechange* by Salt, (2004). However, there is a likelihood that many participants bought into Rangesview because land was cheap and this is reminiscent of Hugo & Bell's (1998) forced relocators.

Riverside and Rangesview reveal characteristics that seem to me typical of people in general and country people in particular. Among themselves there are small rubs and disagreements but when there are times of need they pull together. Even the newcomers who felt they were having problems fitting in still identified strongly with their community. Asked to complete their survey with a word that described their life 70 out of 85 participants used a positive descriptor. These people will remain if necessary infrastructure can be provided.

Riverfolk's difficulties relate to increasing age and to rising costs (rates, mortgages), an issue when income for half the group is below \$40 000. While they have the advantage of knowing that their properties are highly marketable the majority want to remain in Riverside but will need outside support to maintain their lifestyle.

Rangesview contains a larger number of people who are retired, disabled, occupied with home duties or unemployed. Rangefolk are generally happy with their lifestyle, but only eight participants have an income above $40 000 and they are obliged to supply many of their own facilities. This suggests a gradual descent into poverty compounded with advancing age and the distance from town. To prevent continual turnover of blocks, Rangefolk need government support and increased infrastructure. The advantage to the Shires of increased settlement would be the new businesses that could be supported.

This research supports the concern held by local government relating to trends in migration within the Lower Great Southern Region of Western Australia. The out-goers appear to be young people and the incomers in this sample were older people. The majority of the sample had settled well, and their concerns related to issues readily remedied over time. The current situation suggests that, until new industries can be established, future employment will be related to service industries for older people who wish to stay in their homes.

5407 words of text

1. Written communication dated August 2002.
    2.   I also asked locals to distribute surveys for me and many kindly did so.

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