



NSW DEPARTMENT OF  
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

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Now in their fourth year, the annual awards aim to celebrate excellence in farming and environmental management, and increase recognition of farming diversity and sustainability.

The annual awards are coordinated by NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW Farmers' Association, and are supported by Rural Press and the Royal Agricultural Society. ■

### About the Awards

The NSW Farmer of the Year and NSW Young Farmer of the Year Awards are designed to recognise excellence in farming within NSW and have a particular focus on acknowledging farmers who combine sustainable environment practices with profitable production.

The NSW Farmer of the Year Award is open to farmers in NSW. The Young Farmer of the Year Award is open to farmers in NSW aged between 16 and 35 years.

Winners receive a financial bursary to further develop and improve their farming enterprise, with the Farmer of the Year receiving \$10,000 and the Young Farmer of the Year receiving \$5,000.

**For more information contact Trudy Glasgow, on Ph: 02 8289 3928 or go to: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au)**

# Update from the Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health

The Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health (CRRMH) aims to improve the mental health of rural and remote communities through academic leadership, collaboration and achievements in research, education, service development and information services.

Established in 2001, the CRRMH is a major partnership between the University of Newcastle, the Mental Health & Drug & Alcohol Office of NSW Health, and the Greater Western Area Health Service.

CRRMH has made substantial contributions to the achievement of state-wide policy goals in rural mental health through its research, education and service development initiatives, and has been particularly involved in learning about the needs of people living in rural and remote NSW in order to ensure the right levels of mental health care and support are available.

A recent example of this is CRRMH's role in coordinating

a state-wide Drought Mental Health Assistance Package (DMHAP) to provide support for drought affected communities. Announced by the NSW Premier in October last year and funded by NSW Health, the package is designed to reduce stigmas around mental health, improve pathways to care and build mental health capacity in rural communities affected by drought.

The experience and learning developed from the DMHAP will assist and advise the Centre's Farm-Link project, which commenced in July 2007. The Farm-Link project is funded by the National Suicide Prevention Strategy and aims to increase the support for farmers, workers and their families in rural and remote NSW by improving their connections with mental health service providers.

A study to gain better understanding of how rural community life affects the wellbeing of people is being led by the CRRMH. The Australian Rural Mental Health Study (ARMHS) is a unique study of rural households in NSW,

funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council. The study will survey over 3000 households across rural and remote NSW. At this stage, the target population has been recruited for the three Local Government Areas of Parkes, Forbes and Weddin.

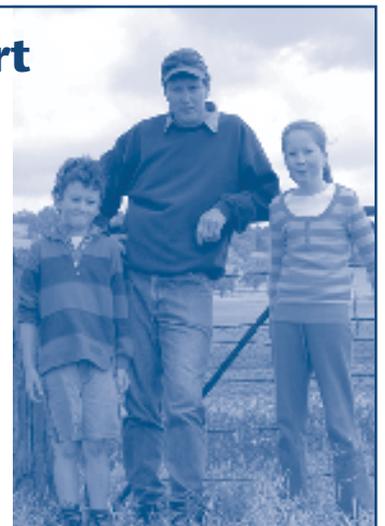
The ARMHS team is currently recruiting participants in Dubbo, Broken Hill, Cobar, the Far West, Balranald, Lismore and Orange.

Thirty-five students working in emergency departments, mental health and hospital security across the NSW Area Health Services have successfully completed the Mental Health Emergency Care Learning & Development Course. This 20 week course is a collaboration between the CRRMH and NSW Health. It is designed to provide staff working in rural areas with adequate information to develop skills relating to mental health emergency care. ■

*For more information about these or other programs being undertaken by the CRRMH, Ph: 02 6360 7828 or go to: [www.crrmh.com.au](http://www.crrmh.com.au)*

## Rural Mental Health Support Line: 1800 201 123

Many people in rural communities are facing pressures they find difficult to cope with and need to speak to someone about their problems. If you would like to talk to someone yourself, or if you are worried about a family member or friend, call the Rural Support Line. Even if you don't need the number now, write it in your phone book and keep it handy for future use. The Rural Support Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can provide on the spot help in an immediate crisis or help with referral to local specialist services.



*Resilience is the ability to manage and learn from difficulties and to bounce back after adversity. Resilient people have personal strengths, skills and abilities which help to buffer them against stress. Resilience skills can be learned from a young age, and are important keys to positive mental health.*

*The following information is taken from the South Australian Child & Youth Health website: [www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com) It includes ideas and tips to help young people build up their resilience so they can cope with life's hurdles.*

## WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

In some video games you have to get your character through all sorts of obstacles to the next level, and then do the same sort of things again! On the way you can 'power up' by hitting or jumping on something and that gives you the strength to keep going.

Well, life is a bit like that. You go through life trying to 'get to the next level', there are all sorts of obstacles to stop you and times when you can 'power up' to help you keep going.

Coping with everything, keeping on going, and collecting something to help you is what resilience is all about.

## WHAT HELPS YOU TO BECOME RESILIENT?

Where is it that you get your 'power'?

- A caring and supportive family
- Caring friends who you can trust
- Being encouraged to try
- Setting yourself realistic goals and reaching them
- Being confident in your own abilities
- Being able to communicate with others
- Successfully using your problem-solving skills
- Managing strong feelings like anger

## HOW TO BUILD UP YOUR OWN RESILIENCE

If you have all these 'power builders', that's great! But what if you don't? You can still build up your resilience and create the kind of caring support that everyone needs by:

■ **Get connected.** Make friends, get to know people, join in with teams, clubs and organisations. Talk to and help people and allow them to help you.

■ **Don't give up.** Everyone has to deal with a crisis from time to time. Just go into 'automatic mode' and work your way through it. Things will get better. It isn't easy, but you do get through eventually.

■ **Change is here to stay – accept it!** Of course, it's unsettling when you feel comfortable with something, then it all changes. Try to see change as a chance to alter the future, not the end of the world as you know it!

## Be good at making realistic goals.

- ➔ Make long-term goals, then work out the steps you have to take to achieve them.

- ➔ Set these steps as your short-term goals and work your way through all the ones that will get you where you want to be.
- ➔ Remember that being realistic doesn't mean accepting second best. As you reach each goal, you can aim higher.

■ **Face up to problems.** Think about how you can solve them instead of wishing that they would go away.

■ **Learn from the bad times.** Often people find that they have developed better skills, made new friends and got to know themselves better after they have gone through some crisis.

■ **Trust yourself.** Develop your skills [eg. communication, problem solving, conflict resolution] and instincts, and then develop confidence in your ability to use them.

■ **Don't turn every small set-back into a '10 act drama!'** Unless of course you're practising to be a stand-up comedian!

■ **Practise thinking positive thoughts.** Always be hopeful of your ability to get through, and that things will improve.

■ **Look after yourself.** Exercise and eat well for a healthy body, and learn to relax.

■ **Get to know yourself.** Some people do this by meditation or writing down their thoughts. It's helpful to know what your opinions are, and also to reflect on how you handle life, what works for you and what doesn't.

## LEARN, ADAPT & MOVE ON

We need resilience to cope with the challenges life throws at us. Looking at how you have managed and survived past events can help you become more resilient at managing future events.

Ask yourself:

- What were the bad times?
- How was I affected?
- Who helped me?
- Who did I help?
- Did I overcome obstacles and how did I do it?
- What did I learn that would help in future?
- What did I learn about myself?

Every time you face a crisis, deal with a disappointment, lose someone or something you love, you use your resilience to help you recover and move on with your life.

Josh says:

*'Being a resilient person means sometimes being active and sometimes being passive, knowing when to step forward and act, and knowing when to step back, relax and allow yourself and others to nurture your inner self.'*

*Having good relationships with adults and peers, knowing how to keep yourself safe, building stress-busters into your life and getting involved in good stuff makes your life meaningful. It also gives you the inner strength or resilience to cope with whatever life throws at you.'*

# The city-country divide

*There are many differences for people living in rural areas in contrast to city dwellers. One of the biggest challenges for rural people is isolation and the need for appropriate and affordable access to services and facilities. Quite often, the simple everyday tasks of taking a child to school, visiting the doctor or other health professionals, filling up the car with petrol, buying food and logging on to the world wide web can pose many challenges. People often have to travel hundreds of kilometres to access even basic services, or wait many months for specialist appointments.*

*The following information is taken from a report compiled by the Rural Women's Network (RWN) in 2007 in response to discussions with members of the RWN State Advisory Committee who highlighted a need for this type of information and statistical data to be available to highlight the many city-country divide issues. The full report and reference list is available on the RWN website under the resources section: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn)*

## Introduction

Bush Talks, a report produced by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), draws on consultations conducted across rural, regional and remote areas of Australia during 1998 and provides valuable insights into the city-country divide. HREOC (1999) noted that improved technology, distance, isolation, lower incomes, limited employment and the decreasing levels of government and private infrastructure and business in many rural, regional and remote areas has resulted in great change to communities who often feel they have a minority status compared to their city counterparts.

How do urban dwellers learn about life in rural Australia? Journalist and writer Asa Walquist (2003) suggests they have little knowledge and learn through film, books and the media and these images are often not truly reflective of life in the bush or issues facing rural communities.

*There is little evidence [in film, literature and the media] of the reality that one-third of farmers are women, most are computer literate, around 40% belong to Landcare, and thus are more active conservationists than many city people who like to think they are green, and that broadacre farmers made a very respectable annual productivity gain of 2.5% over the 20 years 1976-97 (Walquist, 2003 p.67).*

Social Demographer, Bernard Salt (2005) notes there is no longer a strong attachment to the bush. At the time of Federation, 52% of people lived in rural and regional areas.

*When the first of the 'baby boomers' were born, 32% of the population lived in the bush. Whilst many of them headed for the city for careers, they remained country boys and girls for many years and headed 'home' for Christmas and Easter. Now about 14% of Australia's population lives in rural areas (Walquist, 2003).*



**EDUCATION:** Children in remote areas are often home-schooled by their parents via school of the air with support from NSW distance education units.

Pictured above is Will and AJ Murray in their school room (as featured in *Living Out Back*). Photo by Ella Dreyfus 2002.

Many of the assets taken for granted by city dwellers are absent or provided in quite different ways in rural, regional and remote communities.

*An increase in prices, due to drought shortages, hardly affects most city dwellers, with food and fibre a comparatively small part of the average budget. It is only when water restrictions kick in, as they did in Sydney in 1995, and again in 2002-03, that city people begin to take cognisance of long dry periods. Most city people have little understanding of modern agricultural production or of the Australian climate and the significant role that El Niño plays... radio and television weather presenters largely define good weather as the absence of rain (Walquist, 2003 p.67).*

## Defining 'non-urban' areas

What do the terms regional, rural and remote really mean? The Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) has a system of identifying and classifying urban and rural areas. Hugo (2000) states a need for an additional classification of accessibility/remoteness allowing areas outside of the major cities to be classified according to their degree of accessibility to services. This classification is known as ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia). We have broken the classification down one step further to provide a more useful distinction between regional centres, rural towns and rural villages as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categories are very broad with 'other urban' encompassing populations of 1000-99 999. The table following (see next page) can be used as a reference for this revised 'remoteness index'.

Remoteness area	Description
<p><b>Capital cities and major urban areas</b> 40 000+ pop.</p> <p>(ABS term: 'major urban' = 100 000+ population eg. Central Coast, Maitland, Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong)</p>	<p>Geographic distance imposes <b>minimal restriction</b> on accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.</p>
<p><b>Regional centres</b> 20 000 – 39 999 pop.</p> <p>(ABS term: 'other urban' = 1000 – 99 999 population is inadequate eg. Armidale, Bathurst, Broken Hill, Goulburn, Orange, Wagga Wagga)</p>	<p>Geographic distance imposes <b>some restriction</b> on accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.</p>
<p><b>Rural towns</b> 2000 – 19 999 pop.</p> <p>(eg. Bourke, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Grafton, Gunnedah, Hay, Kempsey, Narrabri, Taree, Temora, Wellington)</p>	<p>Geographic distance imposes a <b>moderate restriction</b> on accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.</p>
<p><b>Rural villages</b> less than 2000 pop.</p> <p>(ABS term: 'bounded locality' = 200 – 999 population is inadequate eg. Balranald, Boorowa, Canowindra, Grenfell, Millthorpe, Lake Cargelligo)</p>	<p>Geographic distance imposes a <b>high restriction</b> on accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.</p>
<p><b>Very remote</b></p> <p>The ABS term <i>rural balance</i> encompasses the remainder of state. This does not truly reflect remote areas as the term includes those living on small rural allotments within commuting distance of major urban centres as well as farms and other property throughout Australia.</p>	<p>Geographic distance imposes the <b>highest restriction</b> on accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.</p>

For a list of the main centres in each category, see the full report on the RWN website: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn)

*There is ample evidence to suggest both that the position of non-metropolitan Australia is worsening relative to metropolitan Australia, and that the position of smaller towns is worsening in relation to larger regional centres (Collits, 2000).*

Overall, much of the research confirms that rural communities have been in decline for some time, which has created an increased pressure on communities and governments to respond.

*People living in declining towns risk losing their savings, livelihood and support systems as they confront the break-up of their community, loss of jobs, deteriorating infrastructure and declining property values. In addition, declining towns often lose services through the closure of schools, hospitals, retail establishments and banks. Such closures have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of remaining residents, but they can also have psychological impact, with many seeing the closure of central services as signalling the 'death of a town' (ABS 1998: 10).*

Researchers have identified several trends, evident since the 1970s, which have played a key role in contributing to the changes in rural, regional and remote areas. Some of these points are outlined below.



**HEALTH:** Poor dental health seriously impacts on overall health through conditions such as cardiovascular illness, coronary heart disease and heart attack, as well as through the adverse effects of poor nutrition. In rural areas, people often have to wait many months to receive public dental treatment or they have to travel long distances to access appropriate dental services.

#### OUT-MIGRATION

The escalating 'out-migration' from many small towns (especially of young people) is often associated with the withdrawal of services due to government and industry downsizing (eg. banks and government offices). NSW has always been demographically and economically dominated by Sydney. This has been reinforced by transport routes and migrant population growth, which are all geared to the 'metropolis'.

*New immigrants to Australia predominantly settle in capital cities. People from non-English speaking backgrounds in rural Australia typically form very small communities. The lack of interpreters was the major issue they raised with Bush Talks. For example, people are asked to sign consent forms even though they do not understand them (HEROC, 1999 p.27).*