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Jess Davis, 22, was raised in the Riverina and studied in Wagga Wagga. She has worked for the National Australia Bank (NAB) in Albury, Shepparton, Tasmania and is now in Cohuna working as an agribusiness analyst. Jess has been actively involved in organising B 'n' S (bachelor and spinster) balls and ute shows as focal points for young people to meet.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

One of the best things about living in the country is the fresh air, the rural and local community spirit where you can walk down the street and people say hello and the ability to easily network and contact groups of all ages and interests to cooperate in community projects and activities.

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

A major misconception that annoys me is that there isn't a range of social activities for rural youth, in comparison to metro youth. I have been in Cohuna for 7 months and have been involved in tennis, the local show group and am now playing and umpiring for the local netball club. I also attend balls and parties most weekends in the region.

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

There needs to be more support from government through funding towards education, sporting infrastructure and social centres/facilities so rural youth don't feel so far behind their metropolitan counterparts.

What do you do for fun?

I enjoy listening to music (country is my favourite), going to live concerts and musical productions and socialising with friends. I also enjoy attending races and going to the occasional B 'n' S ball. On an agricultural side I have developed an enthusiasm for showing, judging and breeding sheep. I prefer merinos, especially to judge, but I happily work with any breed.

What is your most prized possession?

My most prized possession would be my RM Williams boots. I wear them at least 5 days a week and they have been on many adventures with me (if only they could talk!). My other prized possession would be my car 'Charlie' – it gets me from A to B safely and has travelled thousands of kilometres for my social life.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

'Never judge a book by its cover' or, jokingly at shows, I have been told many times 'never trust a man in a black hat'.

What would you like to have achieved by the age of 30?

It's my ambition to work in, and eventually manage, an agribusiness in a rural area. I hope to be an agribusiness manager, probably with NAB, within 10 years.

Along the way I want to share my knowledge and experiences with other rural youth to help keep rural communities alive and encourage young people to stay in country areas.

I also hope to be an active, positive and worthwhile member of the community I live in by volunteering and supporting local groups and initiatives.



Erin Beard, from Elsmore, is in Year 7. She plays sport at every opportunity, loves music, the colour turquoise and the Sydney Roosters.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

You have a lot more freedom and space and it is nowhere as 'boxed in' or hectic like the city. There is lots of fresh air and trees and you also feel safe.

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

That city kids will succeed or go further than country kids because they have more opportunity or better access to facilities. I believe that anyone can succeed and make their dreams a reality by believing in themselves, working hard, staying true and never giving up.

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

The government could create better plane and train systems to make it easier and cheaper

to get to the city. Now it is much too expensive and hard to work around times etc. to go away for sport, to the doctor, theatre or show or even an NRL game.

What do you do for fun?

I play a lot of sport both at school and after school. I don't know what I'd do without my sport. It keeps me happy and healthy. I also occupy myself by listening to music, reading and after school activities including music and drama lessons. My brother and I also like to spend time at the river having stick boat races and seeing who can skim a rock the furthest. We also have great family times together watching movies, playing cricket in the backyard and swimming in the pool.

What is your most prized possession?

A baby doll called Betty which I have had since my first birthday. She has pen lines all over her face and her clothes are all faded because I used to take her everywhere. That's why she is so special to me now. We have been through everything together, even into the operating theatre when I had my tonsils out at 4 years old. I would hate to lose her.

Best advice?

'The greatest glory doesn't consist in never falling, but in rising every time you do fall'.

What would you like to have achieved by the age of 30?

I would like to have finished uni, travelled around the world, working at a job I love (which at the moment is a sports physiotherapist), living in my dream house and started a family.



Anna Unger, 21, is in her final year of a Bachelor of Pharmacy (Hons) at Charles Sturt University in Orange. Her parents own an organic and biodynamic property at Peak Hill.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

The friendly people who include you in their social circles. In our small rural community ... this can be achieved through church groups, sporting clubs, arts and craft groups, the local Show Society and health organisations. News travels very fast in small communities and this can be very helpful in times of need or in celebrating successes. Open spaces, healthy living and lower stress levels are also major benefits of living in the country. Growing up on an organic farm has given me a wonderful insight into being resourceful and self-sufficient ... I have learnt to be resilient from an early age, coping with the death of pets ... and understanding the harshness of life courtesy of the prolonged droughts that we so often experience. Yet rural people seem to be eternal optimists, looking at the bright side and always bouncing back.

Love life, live rural.

– Anna Unger

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

That there is a lack of culture, fewer educational opportunities and no activities to participate in. In my experience you need to be active in accessing these experiences ... With the advance of modern technology such as the internet and video-conferencing, I was able to complete Year 12 at the local central school and achieved a UAI which qualified me to be accepted to study pharmacy.

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

Ensuring a range of services are made available in local communities. This would provide a greater selection of job opportunities and encourage youth to remain in their home towns. Organised functions targeted at youth, such as sporting competitions and social balls, allow networking to occur. Youth networks such as PCYC and the ASC Youth group encourage young people to network and become involved in activities they are interested in. Local councils should encourage youth representation on their councils so they can listen to the concerns and needs of youth in their communities, actively encouraging initiatives that would make life better for rural youth.

What is your most prized possession?

My Nan's pearl brooch. She passed away five years ago so I keep it close as it reminds me of her. She was such a positive role model, engaging in many volunteer organisations in our local community and was always offering praise

to people for their efforts. She was always proud of me and her other twelve grandchildren, never missing our special milestones in life. I wore Nan's brooch on my sashes during the entire 2008 Land Sydney Royal Showgirl experience.

What would you like to have achieved by the age of 30?

I would like to be at least a junior partner in a community pharmacy business. I aim to further my pharmacy qualifications to improve health outcomes in rural areas. I would also like to own a small block of land and have started a family. I will strive to be successful in whatever I do and maintain a healthy lifestyle by consuming mainly organic foods and staying involved in team sports. I hope to be involved in voluntary organisations to benefit the rural community in which I live and contribute my skills and knowledge to help these organisations achieve positive outcomes for their members.



Michael Newman, from the Wiradjuri tribe, turns 21 this year. He lives in Orange and is an Aboriginal caseworker with the Department of Community Services.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

You pretty much know everyone, saying 'g'day' in

the street is a normal everyday happening. Even if you don't actually know the person, you always get a reply. It's a good feeling. Social networks come in handy in this town, especially when it comes to finding a job.

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

That we all live on farms, we're only agriculturally motivated and own utes. Another common misconception is we don't have any modern technology out in rural areas.

Keep it country.

– Michael Newman

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

Legal adults (18+) usually go to the local pubs etc. It's the younger age group that don't have a lot of options available to them, so I think that needs to be addressed – maybe some under-age night clubs and places where they can loiter without getting in trouble or being harassed [or] perhaps pool halls etc. Ideally it would be a massive centre covering all bases, but with limited resources that's hard to make reality. Plus maybe a man-built beach, now that would be awesome!

What do you do for fun?

I play a lot of sport and love to go to the pub with my mates. We usually make our own fun – table tennis comps, parties, movies, having a jam with the guitar – a pretty normal 20 year old I guess.

What is your most prized possession?

I don't know if it counts as a possession, but my mates are the most valuable thing in my life.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?
'Keep your eyes on the prize'.

What would you like to have achieved by the age of 30?

I would like to think I'd have a loving family, healthy body and mind, stable income, car, a nice home to rest my weary body after traveling around in my younger years ... making a positive name for myself in my chosen career and hopefully initiated some positive change in my community.



Meg Hill is a Year 12 boarder at a Sydney school. Her family moved from Sydney to a small acreage near Mudgee when she was in Year 7. Meg has three older brothers.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

The wide skies that will never ever look the same the next second, day and night. I never believed in shooting stars. I thought it was just used in Hollywood for dramatic effect until I saw five in one night when I slept under the stars at a party with 30 of my friends in Year 9. In the city, buildings, pollution and the night lights obstruct the blues, greys, whites and stars. The fog in the city makes most of us sick to look at and to breathe in. 'Why live there?' I ask. But that's not fair; it was not until I moved from the city to the country that I noticed the difference.

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

If you move to the country you don't want to be part of civilisation anymore and want to escape the 'real' world. I think that's a joke. I believe it's more because people want a different reality. We still have phones and internet and TV. Especially in this day and age, no one in Australia gets left behind – fashion and movies maybe, but sometimes that can't be helped.

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

Make boarding schools fees cheaper! Boarding school has been the best thing that has ever happened to me and I have appreciated my whole time here, for I know how hard my parents have worked to keep me here. However the opportunity to go is always limited by financial components. I know it's impossible to make the fees cheaper because we use more facilities ... but that's just what I believe will make better life for rural youths – to experience a different social, academic and personal education.

**Shooting stars
Dirty cars
No traffic jams
Just baby lambs.**

– Meg Hill

What do you do for fun?

For fun, in winter, I pull my mattress out of my bed, lie it on my lounge room floor in front of our fire on a rainy day (not that there have been too many in the recent years) and have movie marathons with my family, only getting

up when the stomach or bathroom is calling. It's such a comfort to relax and not have to worry about anything.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

From my mother – 'Meg, If in doubt ... don't!' She was mainly referring to marriage [when I have to answer a proposal] however I relate this to my entire life. I believe greatly in gut instinct. It is everyone's sixth sense ... it will tell you anything and everything!



Alice McKenzie is in Year 10 and lives at Wiseman's Ferry.

What are the best things about living in a rural area?

The driving hours you can rack up [for your driving licence]. One day, you can get an easy 45 minutes of driving experience. Not only that, there is plenty of space for you to practice before you unleash yourself on the unsuspecting public.

What is a common misconception about living in a rural area?

I think a lot of people think that we live further out than we do. Although 50 km away from civilisation sounds like a long way, there is no traffic and ... it may only take 30 minutes [to drive].

What could be done to make life better for rural youth?

Closer schools. Many kids who live across the Hawkesbury River have to get up an hour before I do because of transport and the lack of high schools in that area.

What is your most prized possession?

My iPod is the one thing that gets me to school every morning. Without music, I think I may just go crazy!

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

'You can't change your bad luck; only choose to make it good luck'. I think it is important for kids in rural areas to see the good side of rural life and hold onto that because it can be a trap living down here because of lack of transport and job opportunities.

What would you like to have achieved by the age of 30?

I'd like to have done something that will impact society for the better. I am particularly interested in Aboriginal communities and their culture.

Slogan to promote rural life

One of the main problems about living down here is that there is a huge gap between the rich weekenders and the people struggling on the dole living in leaking houses. Many people come down here looking for the country bumpkin life and when they can't find it, they leave without putting anything back into the community. The community needs more than a slogan to promote rural life, they need actions to keep the 'rich' here to improve the economic prosperity of this town.

Hearing – a resource for life

Dr Tony Lower, Project Coordinator, Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

North Coast beef producer Ken Vary is typical of many of his colleagues. Having worked the family farm all his life, he knows that he has damaged his hearing by driving tractors, shooting and using chainsaws and other farm equipment.

‘When I was younger I used to think I was pretty well bullet proof. Protecting my hearing didn’t even enter my thoughts. I just got on with the job and didn’t complain. Even if I had thought about hearing, I would not have known who to talk to about it.’

‘When I look back I realise that I was losing some of my hearing over 20–30 years ago’, said Ken. ‘Even when I was first married my wife always used to say I was as deaf as a post – but she put it down to selective hearing. In more recent times I have been told that one of the best indications of a hearing loss is when people close to you complain that you are deaf. Unfortunately it wasn’t until I was struggling with picking up conversation at social gatherings, that I finally bit the bullet and went to get a hearing test.’

A recent pilot program run by the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing aimed to address hearing issues for farming families.

Conducted in the North Coast, New England and Far-West regions, a number of different approaches have been used to promote the prevention of hearing loss and to assist those

with an existing loss. The lessons learned will help roll out hearing health programs in the rural sector across Australia.

Centre Director Dr Lyn Fragar indicates that this situation is very common with 60–70% of all farmers having a hearing loss from their occupation. ‘We also know that having a hearing loss can lead to individuals withdrawing from social situations because they simply can’t hear what is being said, leading to greater levels of social isolation. This can also have further negative impacts on mental health.’

Research conducted as part of the project has indicated the crucial roles that farm women and agricultural suppliers play in encouraging the use of protective equipment and in prompting individuals to have a hearing test.

Hearing tests are the first step in identifying if you have an issue and are quick, painless and available free of charge through Community Health Centres. Many private hearing services also offer hearing screening at no cost. Your GP is also a useful point of contact that can advise you on local services.

For younger farmers, prevention of hearing loss is very important. For farmers that already have impaired hearing, it is important to maintain what hearing they have left. In both cases, there are some simple steps that can be taken to minimise damaging noise exposure.

■ If possible, eliminate noise by using a different method.

■ When purchasing new equipment, select quiet equipment.

■ Engineer out the noise, for example, by making sure equipment is well serviced, rearranging the workshop and insulating the cabins of vehicles.

■ Change the way you work to limit the amount of noise; for example, limit the time exposed to a noise and reduce the volume of radios.

■ Use hearing protection at all times.

‘There are many things that can help farmers to maintain the hearing they have, like changing the workshop set-up so it reduces the echo when using equipment like compressors or angle grinders’, Dr Fragar stated.

‘It is also important to have a few sets of ear muffs in central locations like the tractor, header, ute and workshop. It’s a cheap investment to help maintain hearing. In the longer term when you replace equipment like tractors, you should always look for quieter options such as cabined tractors to reduce the noise you are exposed to.’

Since his hearing screening Ken says ‘The solutions they offered have helped me enormously. I no longer make embarrassing comments like I did when I used to miss parts of a conversation and try to say something. This certainly helps in social situations. I’ve also found I am a bit fresher and more awake as I don’t have to concentrate as hard on trying to listen to people



Hearing loss can lead to individuals withdrawing from social situations because they simply can’t hear what is being said, leading to greater levels of social isolation.

talk or when I am watching TV. So it’s made things a lot more relaxed at home as well.’

‘In some ways I wish I could have my time over again, so I could protect my hearing better in the first place. Luckily for me, the local services have made things easier but I still need to make sure I protect the hearing that I have left as best as I can’, stated Ken.

‘Getting my hearing screened was a quick and easy first step in helping me to get a bit more out of my hearing. I’d encourage any of my farmer mates, regardless of their age, to do the same.’

More information

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under ‘For Farmers’

Farm Day 2008

Written from information provided by Deb Bain, 2007 RIRDC RWA winner

Farm Day was set up in 2006 to help foster a greater understanding of farming. On Farm Day a farm family hosts a city family for a day of hands-on experience of the day-to-day life on a farm.

The program is coordinated by Deb Bain, national winner of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's Rural Women's Award in 2007.

More than 300 city families across Australia experienced life on a farm as part of national Farm Day 2008, which is a jump of 50% from last year.

A survey released by Meat and Livestock Australia in May showed that nearly one third of Australia's city dwellers have never visited a working farm and only 22% of Australia's city residents have a relative or close friend who is a farmer.

'Because city people no longer have a country cousin, their children are not getting first-hand exposure to farming and in many cases have no idea where or how their food or fibre is produced', Deb said. 'Farm Day provides an opportunity for city families to get up close to the animals and learn how a modern farmer operates. There's a perception among city families who are not connected to family or friends on the land that farmers are old fashioned, environmentally unsound or cruel to animals'.

Farm Day aims to break down these misconceptions by giving city families a chance to witness how progressive farmers are. Farm Day is an opportunity to show city people how innovation in science, genetics and efficient, sustainable land management has helped the industry to produce more food without increasing livestock numbers.

Following last year's Farm Day, 86% of city participants said they would buy more Australian products and 89% said they gained an understanding of the role of farming in our daily lives.

'City families that have taken part in Farm Day have been amazed at how little they knew and how much they've learned. It's great fun and leaves a lasting impression', Deb said.

For more information or to participate

Ph: 1300 367 036

www.farmday.com.au



Farm Day 2008 participants enjoy their day out of the city

COLLARENEBRI VIA POKATAROO

For Judy

Nostalgia comes upon me when I think of days gone by
How in my youth a country life was what I sought to try
Romantic thoughts of life out west beyond my city scene
Of country trains to towns and farms in shades of dusty green

I never went to Colly on the train to Pokataroo
So I can't be sure the stories of that trip out there are true
But I know when I was thirteen and at school in sixty three
At end of term, travelling home by train sounded so much fun to me

Leaving schools in taxis, to Central Station kids would flock
Checking the departures board and waiting under the big clock
Struggling with suitcases and making sure that they had food
For the coming journey through the night, expectation was the mood

The sleeper train from Central, the North West Mail left about six
And the boarders from the Sydney schools got up to some tricks
It might have been a journey conductors rather'd not try
With a train full of school kids and excitement levels high

Playing cards through the night, match sticks for poker chips
In those seating compartments, how many kids would fit?
The luggage racks to climb up to, spread rugs and lie along
Telling tall tales in the dark and jokes and singing songs

Sharing food and grog and lollies as the cigarette smoke clears
The boys and girls together growing up through their school years
Not much sleep on that journey, noise and high jinks on the train
While it halted in the darkness, climb out the window if you're game!

To the station at Broadmeadow and through the Murrurundi Range
Leaving the Hunter Valley and out towards the plains
Arriving at Werris Creek sometime after midnight
Shunting carriages in the dark, along platforms bathed in light

It seemed to stop at every station so that progress was quite slow
Delivering mailbags and passengers, then the train would go
As it creaked and moaned and jolted from stopped, back up to speed
Roughly rocking, clickety-clack, monotonous indeed

Changing trains at Narrabri, before to Burren Junction
Breakfast with white tablecloths 'n' silver cutlery to function
The train might stop along the way so the driver could dig worms
And if the clover was too thick about the wheels refused to turn

Seventeen hours to Pokataroo, it pulled in there about one
Bringing sons and daughters from boarding school home for holiday fun
Parents drove from Collarenebri to meet the train at Pokataroo
Six rail services a week then, so it was the thing to do

A long, long ride to Pokataroo, the trip was not for the faint hearted
And no doubt by the end of it the nerves were frayed and smarted
'The end of the line' they called out but the locals showed some mirth
When the sergeant arriving on the train cried, 'it's the end of the bloody earth!'

Fond memories of yesteryear, school holidays begun
Parents, friends and home cooked meals; the train back yet to come
It lasted for a time then, perhaps those bragging tales were true
But there'll never be those kids again by rail to Pokataroo

It's coaches now for students travelling back in half the time
And instead of the refreshment rooms they call in for 'Mac time'
But if what matters is the journey, not simply the arrival
In hearts and minds train memories have had long term survival.

— Jacqui Warnock, Narrabri

A letter to Tim

Dawn Druitt Hollins, Cobargo

Dear Tim,

I loved you before I met you. I used to look at your photograph and wonder about the serious five year old in Korean costume, so far away, and about to join our family as the sixth and last child. When you metamorphosed into a real boy in the Seoul office of the adoption agency we laughed together when you pointed at my nose, clearly astonished! Our homecoming, on Anzac Day 1985, was amazing. We expected problems but found none. You seemed to fit in as though you had always been the adored youngest. You endeared yourself to the family and everyone you met with your amenable cheerfulness, but your Dad and I were concerned that you were unable to express negative emotions and didn't like to be hugged. Four years later you were still our bright and beautiful boy and we were still dealing with a record-breaking attempt at the longest honeymoon period ever!

You were nine when your defences started to come down, first at school and then in homeschool. Your rebellion escalated. Avoidance of work, manipulation, lying and stealing were commonplace. After we moved to a rural residential area and you returned to school you made friends with the troublemakers. I didn't know then that you were using marijuana and alcohol. The early teenage years were the beginning of the long dark period when you slipped further and further away from us. The bonding we felt certain of was declared to be a sham. Professionals were consulted. Schools were changed. You cared about skateboarding, and nothing else. I was the focus for your rage at the monumental losses in your life, and I lived every day in fear of your threats and retribution as you set about to destroy me and our relationship. Years later I was able to thank you for being a catalyst for change in the family, but at the time it was unbelievably sad and painful. I lost the love of my husband as well as that of my son.

The dark period in your life became a black hole as you descended into drug-enhanced psychosis. You hurt yourself and those who loved you as you moved from one institution to another. Do you remember when you were in hospital and I offered to massage your back? At last you were able to accept my touch. I always carried oil in my purse after that, and our emotional scars started to heal.

In May 2000 your father and I met at your bedside and were told that your heart was so enlarged from drug use that you were not expected to survive the night. The doctors revised their verdict the next morning when you sat up and ate breakfast! Medication was prescribed which could prolong your life for a few months or years at the most.

I am so grateful, Tim, that not only did you exceed medical expectations, you exceeded mine. We became close again as the years went by. It was wonderful to see the thoughtful, loving and generous boy return; sadly too late. You took complete responsibility for your bad decisions and their consequences. I was awed by the courageous way you faced the inevitable failure of your body. Your main concern was for your family. And there were now so many of us who would mourn you.

Your life ended on 23 December 2007 and once again you acted as a powerful catalyst within the family; this time for togetherness. We began the process of designing a unique and meaningful ceremony to celebrate your life, warts and all. What a blessing it was to have a civil celebrant in our ranks. We felt that we could create a memorable occasion without handing all the responsibility over to professionals; and knew that you'd be pleased by that. We worked on our grief in practical and loving ways. I sewed a gold-coloured robe for you to wear on your final journey. I wish you could have seen the superb casket that your eldest brother made and the PowerPoint presentation

your eldest sister created, and heard the music your brother-in-law played and the stories we told.

The ceremony was held under the big tree in the back yard. It was simple and emotional and, despite your request, we did cry. You would have loved the next bit though. Your father and step-father had decorated our large trailer and you rode on this behind the shiny red vintage tractor to the front yard where we planted a tree in your memory. A crowd of us walked behind you to the cemetery where your casket was lowered into the grave and the earth shovelled in by hand.

It is such a privilege to have you close to me, and one day both your parents and their partners will rest near you in this magical place encircled by hills. Now I know the truth of the poet Philip Larkin's words, 'What will survive of us is love'.

Peace and love Tim. You taught me so much.

Mum



Dawn with Tim on his 26th birthday in 2006

Working her out

Written from information provided by Abi Spehr, 2007 RIRDC Rural Women's Award South Australian winner and national runner-up

As a wife and daughter-in-law in a fourth generation farming family Abi vividly recalls her arrival on the farm sixteen years ago. Since then she has learned a lot about farming, rural communities and family farm dynamics.

Abi believes that the role of rural women in the farm business can greatly affect its success or failure. She has a particular interest in the relationships between mothers and daughters-in-law (DILs) in family farm businesses so when she received the 2007 SA RIRDC Rural Women's Award she used the bursary to conduct some research.

Information was collected in case studies, interviews, workshops, diaries and by email from 50 participants. The study highlighted the extent to which farm women attempted to cooperate for the sake of the family farm business. There was general agreement that harmonious relationships between mothers and DILs were desirable but not always achieved.

Many incoming DILs reported they were keen to be accepted by their mothers-in-law (MILs) and willing to concede to the demands of the extended family for the sake of their relationship with their husbands. They felt they were expected to forsake their own values and adopt the customs and values of their new family and many DILs felt their efforts to gain acceptance were one-sided.

For many women, marrying into a family farming business meant moving to a new area, leaving their own family and friends and entering a new and unfamiliar family situation. The experiences of the participants ranged from positive to strongly negative and some reported their relationship with their MIL changed over time.

A woman who enjoyed a good relationship with her MIL said:

Week by week my mother-in-law and I consult, debate, compromise and shuffle kids, cars, sport, work, farm and life to cover all bases ... I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Women who experienced a bad relationship with their MIL reported feeling a deep sense of isolation and vulnerability. Many of these women attributed it to 'controlling' behaviour that was sanctioned by the father and in some instances the son (their husbands). Controlling behaviour manifested itself in different ways.

■ **Emotional.** Many DILs reported that their education, experience and skills were invalidated by their MIL and some were openly criticised.

■ **Financial.** The farm business decided how much money the DIL could access. In some cases where the DIL worked off-farm, her income was expected to go directly into the farm business, taking away her financial independence.

■ **Decision making.** Often the DIL felt excluded from decision making. In some cases the DIL had some kind of formal training but was prevented from using her skills because it was perceived as a threat to the family farm business. Many women experienced resistance to change, i.e. 'it's not the way we do things'. Further, important events like weddings were arranged around farm activities.

*Did you feel worthless, and inadequate, scared you'd have a 'blue',
Did you want to be accepted, to be valued just as you?
Did you feel frustrated, and moulded, awkward and all alone
As you tried so hard to find your place inside their family home?*

*I don't believe she meant to judge you, because she knew the score.
Years ago, she'd been a son's new wife, and a daughter-in-law,
Please don't look back with regret, you can respect her point of view,
But while you meld into her family, make sure you're true to you.*

– Participant

In all cases, the women reported that the interests of the farm business were put first. As a rule the father directed the operation of the farm, the majority of mothers assumed a traditional gender role and the DIL was expected to conform to the family's norms.

Farm succession was a key issue in the mother–DIL relationship. Often it was reported that DILs were initially treated with suspicion however the arrival of grandchildren had a direct bearing on their acceptance by the MIL. Children were perceived by the MIL as a sign of stability and future farm succession.

The study identified the following important factors for positive and sustainable family farm relationships:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Mutual respect | ■ Trust |
| ■ Appreciation and recognition | ■ Communication |
| ■ Inclusive planning | ■ Effective conflict resolution |

The workshops Abi conducted were well received. An exciting outcome is that many of the participants offered to mentor another pair from their group to enable them to share ideas and experiences.

There is a level of commitment required to continually make the relationships work effectively. For us, it has taken a lot of awareness, talking, listening, understanding and forgiveness. It will require just as much, if not more, into the future, however we have decided the 'pay-off' is too valuable to not be committed. – Participant

A paper, written with assistance from social scientist Karen Cosgrove, will be presented at the Monash University Social Science conference in Italy in July. *Working her out*, a book that contains findings from the research as well as Abi's own experience, is almost complete. The book aims to help farm families to discuss difficult issues such as succession planning.

More information

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www.workingherout.com.au

Other resource

The In-Laws: A six part ABC Radio series that provides useful insights and strategies for resolving challenges faced by many farming families, www.abc.net.au/rural/telegraph/inlaws Available for loan from RWN.

It is not just students who can find the Higher School Certificate a very stressful time.

Year 12 is frequently the year during which students may:

- lose interest in school
- have no plans for after the HSC
- start an intense relationship
- gain a driver's licence
- experiment with drugs
- have a part-time job
- be part of a sporting team
- develop an eating disorder
- suffer from depression.

All these are complications which can cause parents and caregivers additional concern. It is important to be aware that you are not alone.

The following advice from Richard Cracknell, Counsellor and District Guidance Officer, is designed for parents and caregivers who want to provide help and support without interfering.

HELPING STUDENTS THROUGH THE HSC

The most obvious forms of support parents can offer are practical, physical things.

- Provide a good place to study. Ideally it should be quiet, a comfortable temperature, with good ventilation, good lighting, adequate desk or table space and free from distractions.
- Provide good, balanced meals.
- Encourage sensible levels of sleep and regular exercise.
- Encourage moderation in late night parties and alcohol consumption.

Less obvious, but of equal or perhaps greater importance, are the things you can do to provide a positive and understanding emotional environment.

- Be supportive.
- Highlight strengths and successes. Encourage your child not to dwell on failures. Reframe failures as 'mistakes' and encourage them to see mistakes as something we can learn from.
- Appreciate that most students will be experiencing quite a high level of stress, frequently without any obvious indicators. Many fear that they might let their family down or that they will not be able to match the performance of siblings or relatives. There are also many other pressures. Some students experience a sense of impending departure: leaving home, leaving lifelong friends, the prospect of having to live in an alien city environment.
- Appreciate that it is normal for people under pressure to become supersensitive and explosive from time to time. Family members are usually the first targets. Try not to overreact to such outbursts.
- Avoid confrontations, especially over minor matters.
- Don't panic when they announce on the evening before the examination that they know nothing. Reassure them, even if you think they could be right. 'Just do the best you can' is a good response.
- Avoid nagging. That doesn't mean you can't give a nudge or gentle reminders.

■ Encourage confidence by reassuring them. If you have doubts, keep them to yourself.

■ Be realistic in your expectations as to where the HSC leads.

■ Encourage your child to seek help from teachers or the school counsellor if he or she is having any difficulty with subjects, study organisation, stress or anxiety.

■ Make reasonable concessions, such as release from some household chores as study programs become more demanding.

■ Encourage a reasonable balance between work and leisure. Planned leisure periods are an essential component of a good study program. An occasional total escape for a few days may be helpful for a student who is feeling unmotivated or excessively stressed.

■ Take an interest in what your child is doing, if he or she will allow you to.

■ Remember the occasional hug and 'I love you' do not go astray, even when they are 18 years old.

■ Encourage and allow your child to be as independent as you can possibly stand. This will help prepare him or her for success at a tertiary level or in the workforce.

Having said all this, parents of Year 12 students shouldn't feel too badly when they forget not to nag, when they get picky and complain bitterly that their child has the time to attend the eighteenth birthday party of every Year 12 student but doesn't have time to help with the washing up.

Parents are only human and can feel the pressure of Year 12 from time to time.

Year 12 students should try to understand that when their parents behave in a less than supportive and encouraging way, the chances are that it stems from the fact that they simply care too much.

SOME RATIONALISATIONS

Finally, it is inevitable that some students or parents will be disappointed when the HSC results finally arrive. Should this happen in your family some of the following rationalisations may be of help:

■ Tertiary education is not the only path to a successful and fulfilling life.

■ Look at how much growing up you've managed to do over the last two years. You are much better prepared to leave home and go out into the world now than you were two years ago. It certainly hasn't been a waste of time.

■ If you really want to go on to tertiary education later there are many other pathways. Interestingly, the success rate of mature age students is much higher than for those who go straight from school.

■ Once you've got yourself settled into a job or a training course somewhere you'll probably never look at your HSC again; it'll probably just sit in the bottom drawer and gather dust.

More information

hsc.csu.edu.au/for_parents
(available in many languages)

Coonamble ★ 2008 Women's Gathering

Program & Registration

Please note that this program is subject to change.
The latest program will be available at the event and
on the website www.coonamble.org/wg

FRIDAY 17 OCTOBER

Note: All activities will be held at the Multi-purpose Centre (MPC), Coonamble High School, Maule Street, Coonamble, unless otherwise stated.

- 3.30 pm – 6.30 pm **Registration and pampering sessions**
7.00 pm – 9.00 pm **'Welcome to Coonamble' cocktail function** (Commercial Hotel)
7.30 pm **Welcome from Coonamble and the Rural Women's Network**
Buses to Gathering Village and motels from 8.00pm

SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER

- From 7.00 am **Breakfast for the Gathering Village** (Coonamble Golf Club)
8.00 am **Registration opens**
Relaxation activities
9.00 am – 4.00 pm **Trade exhibitions**
9.00 am **Welcome to country**
Official opening: The Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, NSW Minister for Primary Industries
9.30 am **Keynote address:** Dr Carol Liston, historian
9.50 am **Connecting Rural women:** Westpac
10.05 am – 10.30 am **Morning tea** (Main Canteen)
10.30 am – 12.30 pm **MORNING WORKSHOPS** (Various venues)
12.00 pm – 1.30 pm **Lunch** (Anglican Church Hall)
1.30 pm – 2.00 pm **Keynote address:** Gwen Troutman-Weir, Aboriginal cultural advocate
2.00 pm – 4.00 pm **AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS** (Various venues)
4.00 pm – 4.30 pm **Afternoon tea** (Main Canteen)
4.30 pm – 5.00pm **Presentation by guest speaker:** Kerry Cue, comedienne and author
5.00 pm **Wrap up session and housekeeping**
5.30 pm **Plant a tree to offset your carbon footprint** (TBA)
7.00 pm **Pre-dinner drinks** (Coonamble Racecourse Marquee)
7.30 pm – late **Gala dinner, parade and entertainment** Special guest: Kerry Cue
Theme: Weddings past and present. Dress: Semi-formal

SUNDAY 19 OCTOBER

- 8.00 am **Relaxation activities** (Coonamble Golf Club)
8.30 am **Ecumenical service** (Coonamble Racecourse)
9.00 am **Gathering breakfast** (Coonamble Golf Club)
Registration / Information desk opens
9.00 am – 4.00 pm **Trade exhibitions**
9.30 am – 11.30 am **MORNING WORKSHOPS** (Various venues)
11.30 am – 12.00 pm **Morning tea** (Main Canteen)
12.00 pm – 12.30 pm **Closing speakers**
12.30 pm – 1.00 pm **Official handover ceremony**
1.00 pm **Lunch**
2.00 pm **Plant a tree to offset your carbon footprint** (TBA)

OPTIONAL TOURS

Tours will run before the
program starts each morning
and on Sunday afternoon.

1. Walking tours of the historic main street
2. Bird watching tours of the upside down river
3. Tour of Coonamble feedlot
4. Macquarie marshes adventure
5. Gaze at Gulargambone (community run post office, petrol station and tourism project)
6. Warrumbungle National Park and Siding Spring observatory

OFFICIAL PROGRAM

★ Looking back... moving forw@rd ★

Coonamble ★ 2008 Women's Gathering

The hard working Coonamble Women's Gathering committee is very proud to present the 16th Women's Gathering.

We know you will find something to interest, amuse and stimulate you and your friends.

We invite you to catch up with old friends, meet new ones and forget about life for at least a weekend.

See you in October!

Amanda Colwell, Chair, Organising committee

Gatherings are a great annual opportunity for women from across the state to build support networks, learn skills, celebrate achievements and showcase the host region.

— Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald

Workshops

Workshops with additional costs are indicated. The costs are approximate. Payment is required at the Registration Desk Friday night/Saturday morning.

GROUP A

1. Cooking for a crowd – trade secrets from a professional
2. Eat, think, move to a healthier lifestyle – taste of Weight Watchers
3. Ouch! Beauty treatments you can do for yourself at home
4. Caring for carers – information, education and support
5. Have your way with your bank manager – learn what your bank needs to make loan decisions
6. New tricks with your new phone – Telstra shows how to achieve the most with your phone
7. The art of small motor maintenance – DIY to save time, trouble and money
8. Shake your booty – belly dancing for laughs

9. Back-to-school – the joys of mature age study
10. Emu egg carving – learn a traditional Aboriginal craft (\$20)
11. We dare you to sing! – with inspirational choir leader Michelle Leonard
12. Sweet baby sleep – massage for mums, nannas and bubs
13. A bit of bling – make a four strand pearl and quartz necklace (\$35)
14. Making finance easier – Westpac
15. No comment – when do I really need a solicitor? Information on wills, points of law and more
16. As good as a bought one – barista skills and other café goodies
17. *The Gammon Wagin* – a light skinned Murri woman's perspective of growing up black with Gwen Troutman
18. Rosie's story – building a successful home business

19. Crafty crochet accessories – hands-on for the latest red hot trends in accessories (\$8)
20. What is 'carbon farming' and what does it have to do with me?
21. Point and shoot – learn about all those buttons on your digital camera
22. Travel the world online – how to create and use a 'blog' to find new friends all over the world
23. Covered or naked: The science of climate change – where is agriculture?
24. Gentle exercises – water aerobics without getting wet. Exercises for all ages and abilities
25. Spice up your life – cooking authentic Indian curries (\$5)

GROUP B

26. Baz Luhrmann look out – make more professional home videos
27. Rediscover a flair for that chair – restoration and upholstery
28. Covered or naked: Agriculture's approach to emissions trading and the cost of offsets
29. Covered or naked: Environmental perceptions – fact or fiction?
30. Smash hits – mosaics workshop. Take home a completed 30 cm square tile (\$20)
31. Nurturing yourself naturally – beauty and healthcare products from your garden. Make several products to take home (\$30)
32. Does my bum look big in this? Exercises for your bum, bones and brain from a nurse and physio.
33. Happy scrappy – paper, cardstock and embellishments. Bring five photos to work with (\$15)

34. Women's Gathering design – by designer Anni Downs for hand or machine applique, embroidery or needle punch (\$TBC)
35. Looking after the past – preserving records and archives with Dr Carol Liston
36. The colour of water – watercolour card painting (\$12)
37. Shaping Our Futures Together (SOFT) – building self esteem, goal setting and networking
38. Aerobics for your art – drawing and painting exercises to help those creative ideas start to flow
39. A postcard from home – creative correspondence. Make a mixed media creation (\$18)
40. Understanding your moody teenager – strengthening your family's communication
41. Put on a happy face! Creative face painting
42. Something's gotta change! How to make changes in your life or career
43. West women weaving – cultivating plant material, weaving and care of the land
44. Yarn up girls – a group of women tell their unique uplifting stories in a moderated session
45. Tin town tour – local guide around the site of Coonamble's Aboriginal mission town
46. Stories behind the headstones – guided tour of Coonamble's cemetery that delves into local families and their stories



★ Looking back... moving forw@rd ★