Exploring Strategies for Rural Youth Retention: A Case Study of the Town of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario

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Abstract

Exploring Strategies for Rural Youth Retention: A Case Study of the Town of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario

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Rural communities face a decline of young population. Many strategies related to rural youth retention have been developed to deal with the issue of youth out-migration. This research aims to explore rural youth retention strategies through a case study of the Town of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario. First, the research builds on the existing literature by identifying factors that cause youth migration and strategies that are being used to retain and attract young people to rural areas. Second, six interviews in Goderich and Huron County were conducted. The results indicate that youth retention strategies in the county/ town were mainly focused on four themes: education and training, career opportunities, youth engagement, and local community development. Finally, the research concludes with five recommendations to strengthen youth retention approaches in the Town of Goderich and Huron County.

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1 Introduction

Over a number of years, rural areas have experienced a major problem of out-migration, primarily among young people. Urbanization drives young people to migrate to larger cities for higher education, better life and more opportunities. This trend of urbanization leads to the depopulation of the rural areas in Canada. Between 1851 and 2011, rural population in Canada has dropped from 90% to 18.9% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Moreover, the number of seniors in rural area has increased between 1996 and 2012 (Rural Ontario Institute, 2013). As a result, the demographics in rural Canada are shifting with an increased proportion of aging population and a decrease of younger generation population.

To deal with this rural demographic change and to retain and/or attract youth to rural communities, a number of strategies have been developed. These strategies include programs or projects to provide employment, education, and training opportunities. However, these strategies have had only partial success as the proportion of rural youth continues to decline.

This research will identify what strategies are being used for youth retention through a case study in the Town of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario. Both Goderich and Huron County have been experiencing a decline of young population for several years. The county/ town have acknowledged the youth out-migration issue. Many interest groups have worked on this issue and many programs have been developed for young people. The research will use Huron County to get a deeper understanding of

strategies for youth retention and to identify successful strategies for addressing youth out-migration. This research will also provide recommendations to drive the development of future policies and/or programs to deal with youth out-migration. The outcomes of this research will contribute to the future development of Goderich/ Huron County.

1.1 Problem Statement

Many rural youth migrate out of rural communities for more opportunities in metropolitan areas, and this phenomenon contributes to an overall population decline and concentration of aged population in many rural areas. This research identifies the factors that influence youth migration decisions and current strategies that are being used to retain rural youth through a case study of Goderich, Huron County, Ontario.

1.2 Goals and Objectives

The goal of this research is to identify the reasons why rural areas are losing youth, and to identify strategies intended to help retain them. The objectives of this research are to provide:

1. An assessment of literature on youth retention in rural communities;
2. A description and an analysis of policies that assist rural communities to attract and retain youth in the Town of Goderich, Huron County.
3. Recommendations for youth retention by assessing the evidence obtained from both the literature and the case study.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Youth out-migration from rural areas has been a common issue, which is evident in the literatures for over 50 years from all over the world. This situation had been reported in many countries, including Scotland (Lima& Wright, 2009; Jamieson & Groves, 2008), United States (Ishitani, 2011), Australia (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Argent &Walmsley, 2007), and Canada (Avis, 2013; Malatest & Associates, 2002). This section explores three areas related to the issue of youth out-migration and youth retention strategies. The first section introduces the rural demographic change as a result of youth out-migration from a global perspective, and from a Canadian perspective observed from the viewpoint of Huron County. The second section provides a review of proposed factors that contribute to the out-migration of rural young people. The last section identifies the strategies and programs available to attract and retain young people to settle in rural communities.

2.2 Rural Demographic Change

In the past century, rural demographics have experienced a huge shift (Bilsborrow, 2002; Johnson, 2006). Although in some rural communities, "rural turnaround", a phenomenon of increasing population has been observed, but overall, a large number of rural areas are still losing people (Johnson, 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, the percentage of people living in rural areas is expected to continue to decline. Based on the UN Population Division database, the proportion of the rural world population has decreased from 66.4% to 53% between 1960 and 2000, and it is estimated that this percentage would continue to drop to 39.7% by 2030 (Bilsborrow, 2002, p.70). Among

this migration stream, rural young people is the highest migration group (Johnson, 2006). The young generation tends to go to metropolitan areas or urban cities for education, employment and social opportunities (e.g., in Australia (Davies, 2008)). In the past, rural youth would return to their communities to work on family farms or other careers, and enjoy the country lifestyles (Davies, 2008). However, the rate of youth out-migration from rural areas has grown in the past several years and it continues to increase (Gibson& Argent, 2008). Also, people at their older ages tend to migrate to the rural areas (e.g., in America (Johnson, 2006)). As a result, rural areas are not only experiencing the decline of population, but also an aging population.

Similar rural demographic shift has also been observed in Canada. In 1851, almost 90% of Canadians lived in rural areas, but over the past 160 years, the proportion of people living in rural area has declined dramatically to 19% in 2011 (Statistic Canada, 2012a). In Ontario, 91.21% of the population lives in urban areas, whereas only 8.79% in rural areas in 2011 (Moazzami, 2014). Youth out-migration is one factor leading to this population decline. According to Malatest & Associates (2002), more than 55% of rural youth were willing to move to the urban areas; compared to former rural youth who are currently living in the urban areas, only 37% had indicated that they would return to their rural communities. It is also reported that most of the young people under 25 years old consider rural communities as "*lacking in employment, education and social opportunities*", which shows that young people have a negative impression on rural life (Malatest and Associates, 2002). As a result, rural areas are losing their younger

generation and its population is older than urban areas in Canada (Dandy & Bollman, 2008).

Huron County has also lost population in the past several years. Among non-metro census divisions in Ontario, Huron County had the largest negative net migration between 2011 and 2012 (Rural Ontario Institute, 2014a). To be more specific, the County lost 306 people aged 18 to 24 and 328 people aged 25 to 44 between 2011 and 2012 (Rural Ontario Institute, 2014b, 2014c). Therefore, in Huron County, how to deal with population decline, especially the young generation, has become a serious issue.

2.3 Rural Youth Out-Migration Factors

2.3.1 Overview

This section focuses on factors associated with youth migration out of rural areas. Currently, there is no standard definition of youth and youth have been defined in many different ways (United Way of Calvary and Area, 2010). Both Redden (2005) and Malatest & Associates (2002) describes youth as a person between 15 and 29 years old as youth or "young adult". Therefore for the purposes of this research, the age range of youth is defined as in between 15 and 29.

Many factors have been proposed to contribute to youth out-migration. According to Gibson& Argent (2008), young people's pictures of their future and their lives are diverse and full of ambitions. They would like to try different experiences and leave their home community. This section will focus on five major factors to youth out-migration found in the literature: post-secondary education, employment, social life and recreation opportunities, attachment to the community, and family impact.

2.3.2 Post-Secondary Education

Attending post-secondary education is one of the most common reasons for youth to leave their home community (Crockett Shanahan & Jackson-Newsom, 2000; Redden, 2005; Gibson & Argent, 2008; Wylie, 2008; Avis, 2013). Many rural youth staying in their home communities are facing the challenges of limited educational and training opportunities (Looker & Naylor, 2009). In a large telephone survey of rural youth (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p.9), only 19% of the youth reported that they considered their community as capable of providing them an opportunity to pursue post-secondary education within the rural area. Since post-secondary education is considered a necessary step for many youth (HRSDC, 1998), young people living in rural areas would have to leave their hometown to attending higher educations (Shucksmith, 2004). On the other hand, for the youth who wish to stay in rural areas, occupational adjustment and educational sacrifice has to be made in order to stay in rural areas (McLaughlin, 2010). In addition, rural youth who move to urban centers are expected to be the more promising ones, in terms of achieving greater levels of education or skills, among their rural friends (Garasky, 2002). In other words, many rural young people consider their lives in rural communities as a failure related to education and employment (Looker and Naylor, 2009), so that they leave to seek success in cities.

Rural youth leaving for higher education to improve themselves is not a bad thing. It is a temporary move for those people who are leaving for education reasons instead of leaving rural areas in both physical and mental ways (Haartsen & Thissen, 2013). Furthermore, losing the youth should not be considered a loss in rural areas, as

the youth that have left are the "potential returnees" that the community needs to follow-up to attract them back (Gibson & Argent, 2008, p.136).

2.3.3 Employment

Jobs in rural areas tend to offer limited career development, and this may drive youth away to pursue more exciting employment opportunities in metropolitan areas. Davies (2008) noted that, in the Wheatbelt Region of Western Australia, the youth tend to have negative attitudes on employment opportunities in rural areas with 40% of the respondents thinking people working in the region are manual labours; while others believed it is difficult to find full-time jobs and these jobs are limited for their career development (Davies, 2008, p.167). Similarly, Dupuy Mayer & Morissette (2000) reported that "*One reason which is often cited to explain why young individuals leave rural areas is the fact that labour market conditions are less favorable in rural areas than in urban areas*" (p.4). As a result, the jobs in rural areas are low paid and low-skilled, and have less development potential for youth (Jentsch, 2006).

Although rural young people tend to be less affected by unemployment compared with their urban counterparts, as it is not a big problem for them to get jobs in rural areas; limited job choices impacts their decision of staying in rural areas (Jentsch, 2006). Although an increased amount of young people migrate out for higher education and professional skills, most of them are not with qualifying skills that are needed in rural areas, such as manufacturing firms (Hoyos & Greens, 2011). It has been a dilemma that young people thought they could not find the jobs they want and employers could not find employees they need. It is difficult for those who have higher education to get

appropriate jobs because employment opportunities are considerably skill-specific (Mills & Hazarika, 2001; Hoyos & Green, 2011). Redden (2005) agreed with this opinion in his research in the Municipality of Trent Hills, Ontario, that metropolitan areas offer more exciting and high paying jobs.

2.3.4 Social Life and Recreational Opportunities

Besides education and employment aspects, seeking qualify of life, may also contribute to young people migrating to metropolitan areas (Glendinning, Nuttall, Hendry, Kloep & Wood, 2003). As Corbett (2006, p. 294) noted, rural communities are often deemed as *"...as failures, as throwbacks, as primitives, as uncultured, as economically unproductive*", and isolated and boring (Glendinning et al, 2003). Rural youth who favor different and exciting lifestyle are more likely to migrate. Argent and Walmsley described this behavior as the "bright lights syndrome", which refers to the attractions to young people who want a change from their dull rural living (2007, p.142). Take young women for example, leaving rural areas means they would have more opportunities to choose their lifestyles, which their mothers and grandmothers might not have experienced (Glendinning et al, 2003). Redden (2005) found in his research that youth have extreme negative attitudes in social environment in Trent Hills, a rural area in Ontario. Social entertainment and recreational opportunities in cities attract youth to leave.

Malatest & Associates also found that many youth, aged 15 to 29, had reported that they had limited social and recreational opportunities in their home communities. They stated that social and cultural infrastructures within the community are mostly

available to young children or older adults. It is noted by respondents that "*some of the facilities that would appeal to teenagers (e.g., skateboarding park, roller rink, other) had generated counter-petitions from the community*" (Malaetst & Associates, 2002: p. 42). An interesting finding by Malatest & Associates (2002) was that youth often attributed petty crime in their home community to "*lack of social opportunities*" or "*nothing to do on Saturday nights*" (2002, p.11). This demonstrated that, from youth's perspective, the lack of recreational and social activities is a huge deficiency in rural communities. Malatest & Associates' research came to a conclusion that having limited social infrastructures was one of the problems of rural living for youth. Overall, it is a choice for youth to make between staying and leaving, choosing a traditional lifestyle, or a more modern one (Crockett et al, 2000).

2.3.5 Attachment to Community

Other literatures noted that the level of attachment to one's local community also influences migration (Jones & Jamieson, 1997; Jamieson, 2000; Stockdale, 2002; Eacott & Sonn, 2006). Attachment, defined by Chawla (cited in Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p.201), refers to "*simple affection for a place that is associated with family love and security*". Young people may still have some degree of attachment to their home communities, even after they leave for cities (Redden, 2005). Jamieson (2000) reported, based on the research in rural Scotland, half of the respondents (at age 20) had left their home towns, most of them showed their feelings of attachment to the communities with their childhood memories and their attitudes towards their home towns were more positive than those who stayed. Further, those who have the desires to return are

associated with the attachment to their community (Jamieson, 2000). Avis (2013) noted, from his study in Huron County, Ontario, those who returned and worked in their communities after their post-secondary educations, are now making contribution and giving back to the community through, for example, volunteering. They feel they are part of the communities.

Other studies also identified the difficulties that youth face in rural communities. Eacott and Sonn (2006) did their research on youth in rural Australia. They found that youth considered the lack of anonymity and privacy as problems within rural communities because of the small resident population. Paradoxically, many youth also held positive attitudes on knowing each other and having a familiarity with their home community (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Avis, 2013). Eacott and Sonn (2006) concluded that everyone knows everyone is "something that is both loved and hated about small towns" (p.203). Thus individuals who thought their community is a positive place to live and enjoyed the rural idyll because it is "*safe, comforting, peaceful and a great place to work and raises a family*", they are less likely to leave (Redden, 2005, p. 26).

Does people's attachment to their community have individual variation? Does this affect them in making decisions to leave or stay? An interesting finding by Elder (1996) was that girls showed greater willingness to live near their families than boys because they are more family-centered than boys. Further, people who are actively engaged in their communities show higher levels of attachment to their communities and they are more inclined to favor staying than those who are not involved so much

(Elder, 1996). Jones and Jamieson (1997) also claimed that children from outside may feel less attachment to a community because they were treated as outsiders, they may want to leave quicker than those from local families who find it hard to leave, even to pursue their career development. Moreover, young people's perceptions of their rural life vary based on their experiences and can affect their decisions in migrating or not. For instance, youth may leave their community because they resent their home town for failing to achieve their goals and decreasing their attachments to the communities (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p.201). Further, Stockdale (2002) claimed that individuals who attend higher education outside their home may weaken their attachment to their home regions, and they tend to work in the national employment market. For those who have strong family ties, they may be encouraged to stay at one point, while they may be pulled for outmigration the later due to a relationship change with family or friends (Stockdale, 2002). Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood et al. (2000) concluded that the personal experience of young people may contradict with the rural idyll and may cause youth to feel a sense of detachment, boredom, and isolation in their local communities.

Further studies have also examined that the attachment to one's community cannot guarantee that youth choose to stay in their local communities. Elder (1996) reported in rural Midwest of America, the attachment to the community became less important to youth between the eighth and eleventh grades. Instead, the lack of job opportunities in the area weakened youth' willingness to live in their community. For those who have left, many of them showed their desire to return to their rural lives, but the lack of opportunities in the rural community made them feel their futures were tied

to urban areas (Crockett et al, 2000). Redden (2005) concluded from his study that, because the youths' levels of attachment to their home communities may vary, it is difficult to predict whether they will migrate or stay. His research noted that many youth who have left deem Trend Hills, Ontario as "home", but they still choose to leave because they may value more on other things (Redden, 2005). As stated by Lumb, "*migration is not a phenomenon which will disappear when economic prosperity or demographic balance is achieved*" (cited in Stockdale, 2002, p. 47), it is a complicated issue and the factors affect youth's decision to migrate are also complex (Argent & Walmsley, 2007).

2.3.6 Personal and Family Reasons

Garasky (2002) identified from his research that non-economic, household and community factors have a significant influence on the migration decisions. Personal characteristics and parental household are fundamental in affecting youth's migration decision-making processes (Garasky, 2002; Kirstein & Bandranaike, 2004; Avis, 2013). Avis (2013) noted, from his study in Huron County, Ontario, most participants, including both migrants and returnees, considered family as a factor when they made their decisions. However, not all parents act actively in encouraging their kids to stay. Kirstein and Bandranaike (2004) argued, from their research on youth between 15 and 24 in Richmond Shire, Australia, youth made decisions to leave because their parents encouraged them to do so. In this case, those parents encouraged their kids to attend boarding school and to leave after graduation because their perceptions of rural life's

lack of education and employment opportunities, and because they wanted their children to have more choices (Kirstein & Bandranaike, 2004).

It is argued that parents' resources can influence youth's choices of leaving (Avery, Goldscheider & Speare, 1992; Ermisch & Salvo, 1997; Garasky, 2002). Youth with higher income parents are more likely to leave than those parents with lower income (Ermisch & Di Salvo 1997). Similarly, those with greater parental resources are more likely to move even further (Garasky 2002). Also, youth coming from middle-class families "take migration for granted" because they hold the opinion that they are meant to be the persons with good jobs (Jamieson, 2000, p.207). Avery et al. (1992) concluded this phenomenon as that "*parental resources appear to serve as a subsidy for young adults' establishment of separate quarters*" (p. 386). Additionally, people whose parents have university educations tend to be more likely to leave for post-secondary educations (Looker & Naylor, 2009).

It has also been found that having siblings who migrate can influence one's migration decision. The larger number of siblings living away from the parental home may increase the possibility for youth to leave (Garasky, 2002). However, Redden (2005) disagreed with this opinion through his finding in Trent Hills, Ontario. He noted that most young migrants indicated that they made their own decisions instead of being affected by their sibling/ siblings' migrations (Redden, 2005).

Researchers have also found there are personal reasons that influence youth's migration decisions. If young adults moved to a rural area, their significant others would

live in the rural area (Looker & Naylor, 2009). As well, if one moves to a city, the significant others would also move with him/her. Avis (2013) also agreed that significant others play a role in affecting one's decision-making process.

2.4 Rural Youth Retention and Attraction Strategies

2.4.1 Overview

There are many initiatives established to help rural community retain and attract youth. Strategies included programs, policies, toolkits and services provided by different government and agencies. Three major approaches are job creation strategies and programs, education and training programs, and youth involvement in the community (e.g. Youth Council).

2.4.2 Job Creation Strategies and Programs

As discussed earlier, a number of youth leave their home communities because of lack of favourable job opportunities in rural areas. Many young people express that they would like to return to their home community if there is a job available (Malatest & Associates, 2002). As Fairfied (as cited in Redden, 2005) stated "*If we have no jobs for people who are leaving for better jobs… … it is a problem we have got to address, both as an economic development and social issue*" (p. 31). Therefore, it is necessary to take employment into consideration for retaining and attracting youth to return in rural communities.

A number of government programs have been established to help a rural community create jobs. In 1998, Ontario government has launched a $35-million and four-year Rural Youth Job Strategy Program, which created jobs in rural Ontario and

helped youth to get a good job near their home (Government Canada, 2015). It was predicted that more than 17,300 employment opportunities for rural youth would be created (Government Canada, 2015). Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy also invested $195 million into the Youth Employment Fund in 2013 to help young people find work (MTCU, 2015a). Recently, it has reached its two-year target, and the program has helped employers across Ontario by offering 26,582 four-to-six-month jobs and training placements to youth (MTCU, 2015a). Nancy Schaefer, president of Youth Employment Services (YES), stated that *"when our young people suffer from a lack of opportunities, they experience frustration and a loss of hope for the future. As the President of YES, I congratulate the provincial government for their leadership in creating and providing financial support for the Youth Employment Fund. Thousands of youth across the province are now in jobs thanks to this program. When youth work, communities work"* (MTCU, 2015b).

Additionally, for over a decade, the Ontario Government has provided the Rural Summer Jobs Service (RSJS) to employers in rural Ontario to create summer jobs for rural students (between ages 15 and 30) each year (OMAFRA, 2015a). Employers receive a $2-per-hour reimbursement on salary paid to rural students during the summer time. The RSJS helped over 1,500 employers create more than 4,600 summer jobs for rural students in 2014 (OMAFRA, 2015a, website). The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Jeff Leal, once stated, *"The Rural Summer Jobs Service program creates important employment opportunities for students and contributes to economic*

development in rural Ontario. The program gives young people necessary skills and experience that will help build the province's highly skilled workforce" (MTCU, 2015c).

The Ontario Government invested over $176 million in 528 Rural Economic Development Program (RED) projects since 2003, which created over 36,000 jobs in rural Ontario (OMAFRA, 2015b, website). Several projects under the RED program provide internship opportunities for local youth (OMAFRA, 2006; OMAFRA, 2009). Besides, launched in 2006, the Youth Entrepreneurship Partnerships Initiative helps youth in Ontario develop important entrepreneurial skills, and three rural Ontario groups received funding for projects (OMAFRA, 2007).

2.4.3 Education and Training Programs

Similar to other Western countries, Canada has been in a transition "*from primary, labour-intensive industries to high-skilled, idea-driven industries*", which means knowledge and professional-skills are essential for employees (Carr, 2011, p. 5). Thus, higher education and skill training are also required to meet the need within Canadian society. Further, "*education, skills development and technical training are central to agricultural and rural employment*" (Hartl, 2009, p. 2). However, rural communities face a lack of higher education opportunities. As a result, many rural youth have to migrate to cities to attend colleges or universities. Therefore, it is important to offer greater access to education and training opportunities for rural youth to retain them in the community (Alston 2004).

To deal with limited education and training opportunities in rural areas, a number of initiatives have been developed to retain young population. The Ontario

Government is aiming to ensure students in rural Ontario have the same opportunities for getting access to excellent education as their urban counterparts (OMRA, 2014). For example, Ontario Government has invested 20 million to set up a distance education network for Northern Ontario in 1986, and provided funding annually, namely Contact North/ Contact Nord (Paul, 2012). Contact North/Contact Nord provided 112 online learning centers to small, rural and remote communities in Ontario (Contact North/Contact Nord, 2015, website). Students could study online courses offered by many Ontario's colleges, universities, and skills and training providers (Contact North/Contact Nord, 2015). Further, in order to provide more opportunities to rural students, the Ontario Government invested about $1.2 million in 2007-08 to support distance education and training network in Southern Ontario, with the help of Contact North/ Contact Nord (MTCU, 2007).

Additionally, many of Ontario's publicly assisted colleges are located in northern, rural and small communities (OMRA, 2014). These colleges offer more opportunities for rural students to study within or near their home community. Moreover, they also play important roles in regional economic development, employment and innovation (OMRA, 2014). Another example is that the Ontario Government announced a Reaching Higher Plan in 2005, which provided funding to Ontario's post-secondary educational institutions and training programs to better serve a larger number of students in Ontario (Colleges Ontario, n.d.). Through the Plan, $20 million was provided for northern and rural colleges by 2006-07 to increase students' access to high-quality programs within their communities (OMAFRA, 2007).

In terms of the agricultural sector, many young farmers expressed their concerns about the challenges they face to work in agriculture (Miller, 2010). The Federal Government has its share of training opportunities for young farmers. The Canadian Young Farmers' Forum (CYFF), which was established in 1997, provided education, leadership training and capacity building for young and beginning farmers to run successful agriculture business (CYFF, 2012). CYFF provided funding to 11 provincial organizations annually and supports their provincial projects (CYFF, 2012). In Ontario, a non-for-profit organization, FarmStart provides Start-up Farms to young farmers, including business planning support, technical training and mentorship (FarmStart, 2015).

Besides agricultural training, promoting careers in health services to rural youth to fill the physician shortage problem is essential in rural communities (Durey et al, 2001; TORC, 2008; Jutzi, 2009). Studies have shown that rural students who attend medical schools are more likely to choose rural practice and family practice than their urban peers (Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, 2004). It is necessary to provide training opportunities for those who are interested in rural health services (TORC, 2008). In other words, rural communities have the responsibility to grow their own health care providers to meet the local needs. The Healthkick program was founded in 2005 in Huron County, Ontario, with the goal to address the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural communities (HealthKick, 2009). Healthkick provided training opportunities and work experience to rural youth in healthcare. Carol Mitchell, the MPP for Huron-Bruce, praised this project by saying that *"This project will provide opportunities for young*

people to attain skills and access to higher education in the health care field. It will also help ensure that Huron and the surrounding communities have access to high quality health care closer to home" (OMAFRA, 2008).

2.4.3 Youth Involvement in the Community

A large number of youth expressed that they did not feel they were engaged in their communities (Malatest & Associates, 2002). Many young people would like to fully participate in their communities and have their voice to be heard (Jentsch, 2006; Ommani, 2011). Moreover, those who participate actively in their communities before leaving would enhance their community attachment and they would more likely have a preference to return to their home community (Malatest & Associates, 2002). On the other hand, youth often have a great impact on social development and community change (Jentsch, 2006), and they could provide *"the energy, the ideas, and the skills to build future opportunities in rural communities"* (Alberta Government, 2005). Thus, it is important for rural communities focusing on engaging youth before they leave instead of retaining and attracting them (Malatest & Associates, 2002).

Establishing a youth council is a way to engage youth in their communities. A Youth Council is "*a formal 'board' of young people that provides representation or a 'voice' for youth in the community*" (TORC, 2008, p.4). The Alberta Rural Youth Council (ARYC) gives youth an opportunity to represent to their peers and to participate in their communities (Government Canada, 2004). The goal of ARYC is to raise people's awareness of youth issue in their communities, to help youth gain respect from local communities and provincial organizations, to provide a forum for youth to express their

ideas and concerns, and to involve youth at decision-making process (Government Canada, 2004). ARYC enables communities to work "with" young people instead of working "for" them.

Another example from a local level municipality is Mayor's Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) in the Town of Pelham. MYAC is an 18-member council and it serves the young population in the Town of Pelham to inform Town Council on the important issues affecting youth, and to act as voting members in Town Committees (Town of Pelham, 2015). David Augustyn, the Mayor in Town of Pelham, expressed that with the involvement of youth, the council would make better decisions for the community and they could *"build a strong Pelham for the future"* together (Murrel, 2010).

Besides youth council, youth engagement actually involves multiple elements. The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship developed a Youth Engagement System to assist communities to improve youth participation (Dabson, Schroeder & Markley, 2010).

It is said that a community's future "*without young people is envisaged as a bleak one*" (Glendinning et al., 2003, p. 131). Although a youth-led approach, such as youth council, cannot guarantee that young people will stay in rural communities, it is acceptable that policy-making cannot successfully address all the factors that cause youth out-migration; young individuals often have the preference to return to attractive communities (Jentsch, 2006). Therefore engaging youth in community will not only address the issue of youth out-migration, but it will also attract youth to return to their home communities.

3 Case Study

3.1 Overview

This project conducted a case study investigation of youth retention and attraction strategies. The goal is to identify strategies that can be used to deal with the rural youth retention issue. The case study includes three parts: 1) a demographic analysis of Town of Goderich and Huron County; 2) Huron County Policy inventory related to youth retention; 3) key informant interview of youth retention strategies in both locations. Information generated from all three parts will be assessed against each other to propose recommendations for future actions.

3.2 Method and Analysis

The Town of Goderich and Huron County were chosen for their presence of youth out-migration and available strategies for youth retention and attraction. Demographic data were obtained from the 2011 Census of Population by Statistics Canada. Key policy documents were retrieved from Huron County official website (http://www.huroncounty.ca) prepared by the economic development department and planning and development department.

In person interviews were conducted with people working in the public service of both jurisdictions. Five questions were developed and asked during the interview. The questions were developed in consultation with the project advisor. Questions 1- 4 were the main focus to gather information for this research. Question 5 was the supplemental question and it will be included in the former 4 questions in the results, and it will not be analyzed separately in this study. The interview questions are listed below:

1. From your perspective, what are the issues related to youth retention in Huron County?

2. What strategies are being used in Huron County?

3. What strengths and opportunities do you think exist with current strategies being used in Huron County?

4. What challenges/ difficulties do you think exist with current strategies being used in Huron County?

5. What other suggestions or what else is required to retain and attract rural youth?

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Regional Context: Town of Goderich, Huron County

Huron County is located on the southeast shore of Lake Huron in southwest Ontario (see Figure 1). Huron County is accessible to major commercial routes in Ontario, such as Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, and London, as well as the United States (County of Huron, 2013a). Huron County is considered an agriculturally based community. Put it another way, it is one of the most agriculturally productive counties in Ontario (County of Huron, 2013b). Manufacturing, tourism, and creative industries, together with agriculture are the four important sectors of economy in Huron County (County of Huron, 2013a). Huron County is known by residents and visitors as "Ontario's West Coast".

Figure 1. Huron County Location Map (County of Huron, 2015)

There are nine municipalities in Huron County: Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh, North Huron, Morris-Turnberry, Howick, Goderich, Central Huron, Huron East, Bluewater and South Huron. The Town of Goderich is the county seat, located on the eastern shore of Lake Huron. Due to its natural beauty, historical attraction, cultural features, and physical location, the Town of Goderich is recognized as "Canada's prettiest town".

4.2 Demographic Distribution

4.2.1 Huron County

Based on the 2011 Census of Population, the County has a total population of 59,100 and covers about 3,400 square kilometres resulting in a population density of 17.4 persons per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 2012b). As shown in Figure 2., Huron County has a high proportion of middle-aged population (aged 45 to 64), which are baby boomers, and elder population (aged 65 and over). At the bottom side of the pyramid, the County also has a high proportion of teenager population (age 10 to 19). The middle of the pyramid represents youth population. Compared with the other age groups, there are fewer young people living in Huron County. In addition, between 2006 and 2011, the population grew 5.7 percent in Ontario; however, it declined 0.4 percent in Huron County (Statistics Canada, 2012b).

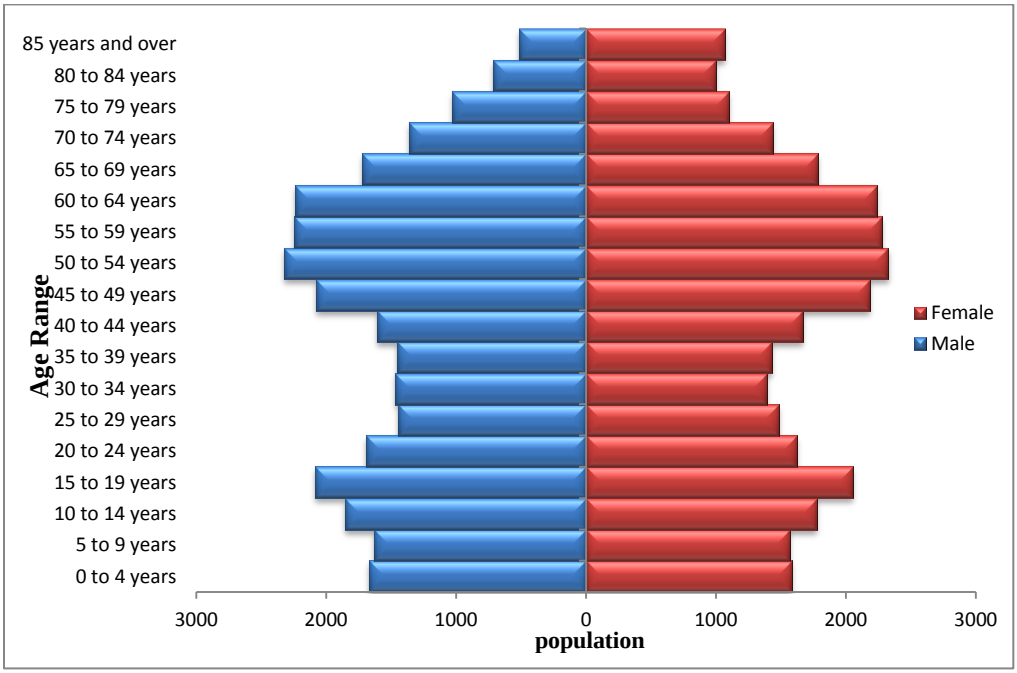

Figure 2. Huron County Population Pyramid (Statistics Canada, 2012b)

4.2.2 Town of Goderich

Goderich is the largest town and the regional urban center in Huron County. It

has a population of 7521 people (Statistics Canada, 2012b). Similar to Huron County, there are also fewer young people living in the Town of Goderich (See Figure 3). Goderich has a high proportion of middle-aged population (aged 50 to 64). The lowest proportions were observed with population aged 20-39.

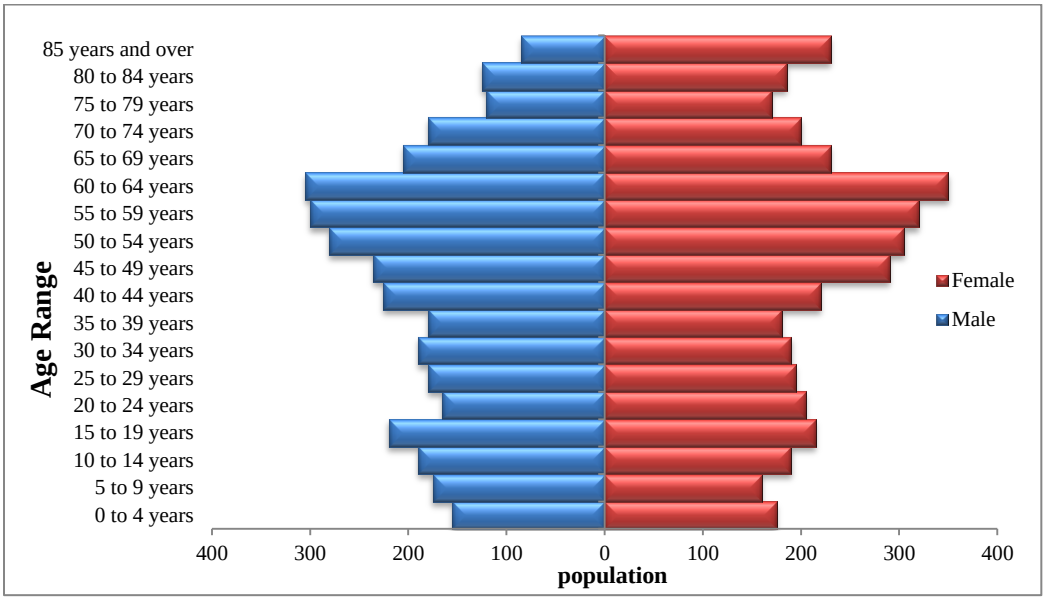

Figure 3. Town of Goderich Population Pyramid (Statistics Canada, 2012b)

4.2.3 Demographic Comparison

As shown in Figure 4, the Town of Goderich and the County of Huron had a higher percentage of elderly people (age 65 and over) than the province. As of 2011, individuals over 65 years represented 22.92% of population in Goderich, compared with 19.84% throughout the county and 14.62% in the province as a whole. Among the population aged between 45 to 64 years, the Town of Goderich had the highest percentage being 31.71%, followed by Huron County at 30.28%, and lastly Province of Ontario at 28.73%. On the contrary, young population in Goderich and Huron occupied a smaller proportion than the province being 25.58%, 25.81%, and 32.97% respectively. Last for the age group under 20 years of age, Goderich had the lowest percentage

population at 19.79%, whereas the Province of Ontario and Huron County, both with comparable percentage population of 23.69% and 24.06% respectively.

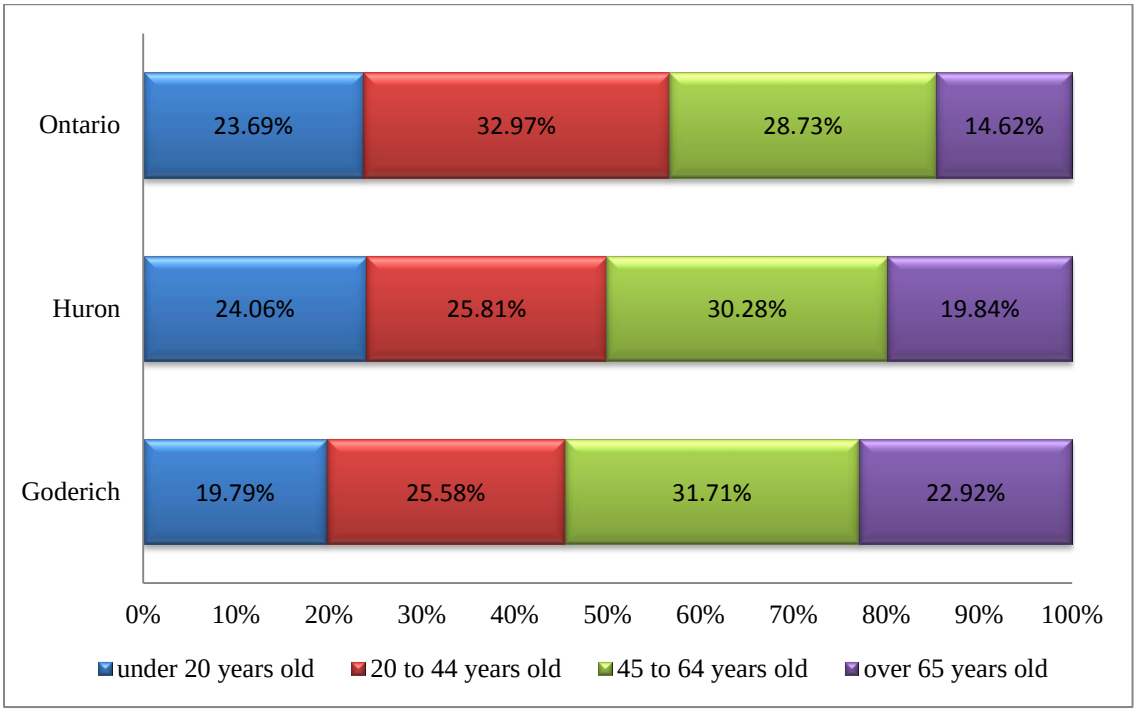

Figure 4. Population by Age in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012b)

4.2.4 Discussion of Demographic Analysis

As demonstrated in the demographic analysis, both Huron County and the Town of Goderich are experiencing the highest population proportion being in the age group of 55 and over. Normally, people of this age group are about to leave the labour force, compared to younger age groups of 20 and over, normally who begin to enter the labour force. It can be learned that Huron County is experiencing not only a youth out-migration, but also a shortage of labour.

As mentioned earlier, there has been a decline in population between 2006 and 2011 in Huron County (Statistics Canada, 2012b). Although it is a small population decline, 225 people, the county has actually experienced a decline of population over

past census periods. And it will continue losing population. According to the Ministry of Finance (2014, p. 40), the population of Huron County is projected to decrease to 54,700 people in 2041. Additionally, during the 2006 and 2011 period, 1,202 youth (aged 18 -24 years of age) migrated in Huron County, however, the County lost 2,219 young people, resulting in a net-migration rate of -1017 people (Knafelc, 2012). Further, this situation will become worse. The number of youth (aged 15-29 years of age) is projected to decline from 10377 in 2013 to 8365 in 2041 (Ministry of Finance, 2014). One reason to explain this demographic change is because of the failure to retain youth in rural areas. And it is a serious problem that needs to be solved.

This trend observed in the comparison analysis showed that the Town of Goderich is a place to attract retirees and early retirees instead of youth to the community. It suggests that the phenomenon of having fewer young people and higher percentage of older residents existed both in the Town of Goderich and Huron County.

4.3 Key Documents in Huron County

4.3.1 Key Documents Analysis

Huron County has already taken the youth out-migration issue into consideration. Youth retention strategies have been highlighted in several policies and planning documents in the County. Three key documents were reviewed in detail for their proposed approaches to address the issue of youth retention in Huron County (Table 1). Four major approaches were identified after reviewing the key documents: 1) Education; 2) Employment; 3) Youth Engagement; 4) Community Development. Huron County Official Plan 2013 focused on education and employment changes. Both Take Action for

Sustainable Huron 2010 and 2011 address possible actions for all four approaches.

Table 1. Approach of Youth Retention Proposed in the Key Documents

	Education	Employment	Youth Engagement	Community Development
Huron County Official Plan 2013	*	*		
Take Action for Sustainable Huron 2010	*	*	*	*
Take Action for Sustainable Huron 2011	*	*	*	*

* indicates respective strategies were available in the key documents.

1) Education initiatives have been proposed by all three key documents.

"Education and training programs will be supported for the purpose of workforce development and job creation, including programs designed to encourage retention of youth" (County of Huron, 2013c, p.17, section 4.3.5).

"Network with universities to establish student co-op and internship placements within the County" (County of Huron, 2010, p.11).

2) Employment initiatives have also been proposed by all three key documents.

"Planning and delivery of economic development programs and services will be developed and reviewed with the goals of: … diversifying the economy; retaining youth; fostering job creation; and conforming to the policies of this plan" (County of Huron, 2013c, p.18, section 4.3.9).

"Enhance opportunities for employers to hire youth and post

secondary students for career-related summer jobs, co-op placements, internships, apprenticeship and mentoring programs" (County of Huron, 2010, p.11).

"Demonstrate to youth the opportunities that exist in Huron (agriculture, manufacturing, and cultural industries)" (County of Huron, 2010, p.11).

"Promote rural and small town lifestyle and employment opportunities to seasonal residents and visitors – entice people to move here" (County of Huron, 2010, p.11).

3) Youth Engagement initiatives have also been proposed by Take Action for Sustainable Huron 2010 and 2011

"-2009 Career Symposium

-Lake Huron Watershed Youth Summit

-Youth Council

-Technology Skills Camp and Medquest

-HealthKick's Rural Healthcare Work Placement Program

-Engaging Huron's Youth in Arts & Culture Program

-Summer Company Program

-CED Youth Internship Program" (County of Huron, 2011, p. 37).

"Establish and support a Huron Youth Council to discuss and address youth issues" (County of Huron, 2010, p. 11)

4) Community Development initiatives have also been proposed by Take Action

for Sustainable Huron 2010 and 2011

> *"Ensure that a variety of housing options exist, including affordable housing options suitable for youth, young families, and singles"* (County of Huron, 2011, p.14)

> *"Provide safe places in each community for youth to 'hang-out'"* (County of Huron, 2010, p. 13)

4.3.2 Discussion of Policy Analysis

It is said that "*the youth today are the adults of our future*" (Croteau, 2008). Huron County has already taken youth out-migration issue into consideration. The County emphasizes increasing employment opportunities as a means to retain youth to the community. Moreover, Huron County values the importance of youth engagement in the community. The County has established Huron County Youth Council in 2008/2009, which gave youth a voice on the County Council in terms of youth issues within the community (County of Huron, 2011). Further, the County also kept communicating with youth in the area through a Youth Engagement Coordinator to try to create a community that meets youth needs. It is reported that 2,438 youth attended the Huron Business Development Corporation-supported youth skills initiatives in 2009.

The County continues to consider youth involvement to deal with youth issues as a long-term community development action. Examples include developing industries according to youth interest in order to help retain youth (County of Huron, 2011).

Since agriculture is the primary industry in Huron County, the County focuses on engaging youth into the agricultural sector (see examples in County of Huron, 2010;

2011; Cummings, Murray, and McIntyre et. al, 2014). Another major strategy to retain youth is developing youth's entrepreneurial spirit and the County provides training and funding for those who are willing to start their own business (HSBEC, 2012; County of Huron, 2011).

4.4 Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews were identified using a "snowball technique". It began with contacting three local politicians and asking them for help to locate three additional people whose work related to youth retention issues until the information was gathered. Six key informant interviews were completed. Each interview took about 30 minutes to one hour. The purpose of conducting key informant interviews is to get insight of the youth migration issue and the strategies that are being used to deal with youth retention in the Town of Goderich and Huron County.

4.4.1 Parties Interviewed

Kevin Morrison, Town of Goderich, Mayor

Dwayne Evans, Town of Goderich, Clerk/Planning Coordinator

James Cox, Town of Goderich, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

Paul Nichol, County of Huron, Economic Development Manager

Rebecca Rathwell, County of Huron, Project Manager

Anonymous, County of Huron

Kevin Morrison and Dwayne Evans were joining the same interview together. The other four interviews were conducted separately. And one interviewee, who would like to be kept confidential, will not be named in this research.

4.4.2 Summary of Interview Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews were summarized in four tables, each highlighted key information collected for each question. The results of the first question were classified into three sections: 1) reasons that contribute to youth leaving; 2) consequences of youth out-migration; and 3) reasons that encourage youth to return (see Table 2). The strategies being used were classified under four main sections: 1) education and training; 2) career opportunities; 3) youth engagement; and 4) local community development (see Table 3). The strengths and opportunities, as well as the challenges and difficulties were also broken down into the same four sections as the strategies described above (see Table 4 & Table 5).

4.4.2.1 Youth Retention Issue in Town of Goderich and Huron County

Youth out-migration was recognized as an issue by the six individuals interviewed in both Huron County and the Town of Goderich. Rural youth tend to migrate to metropolitan areas to pursue higher education, to find jobs, and to experience different lives (Crockett et al, 2000; Glendinning et al, 2003; Argent & Walmsley, 2005; Redden, 2005; Gibson & Argent, 2008; Wylie, 2008; Avis, 2013). Similar to what has been reported by the previous literature, the interviewees in this study also identify limited higher education options and job opportunities, as well as seeking exciting experience as key factors leading to youth out-migration.

Table 2. Youth Retention Issues in the Town of Goderich and Huron County

	Reasons that cause youth to leave	Consequences of youth out-migration	Reasons that encourage youth to return
Kevin Morrison	-further education -employment opportunities	-aging population -lack of skill labour	-employment -lifestyle in town -sense of community -friendly community
Dwayne Evans	-further education -limited employment opportunities -further experience -career advancement	-reduced skills in workforce -declining population -school closures -older demographics	-small town lifestyle -family ties -familiarity
James Cox	-post-secondary education -jobs -seeking experience	-skill-shortage -aging population -detrimental to local economy	-quality of life -employment
Paul Nichol	-further education -employment -limited opportunities to explore local job market	-aging population -negative impact on local economy (i.e. jeopardize future entrepreneurs, jeopardize workforce)	-employment
Rebecca Rathwell	-education -employment opportunities - exciting social life in cities	-	-families and friends -employment
Anonymous	-education -employment -life experience	-	-employment -sense of community -families and friends

Confirming previous literature, education and employment play a major role in youth's decision to leave, stay or return to rural area. As one of the interviewees pointed out, it is actually not a bad thing for youth to go for post-secondary education and to experience the diversity in cities because all these are good for youth development. However it would become a problem if young graduates cannot find jobs in the area that fit their education after they return to the community (Looker & Naylor 2009). Therefore lack of suitable employment opportunity may not only play a major role in driving youth away from rural, but also prohibiting them from returning to their home community.

Youth out-migration has serious consequence to the rural communities including lack of labour force and increasing proportion of aged population. Similar to previous literature (Hoyos & Greens, 2011), interviewees mentioned that youth out-migration resulted in skill-shortage in Goderich/ Huron County (Table 2). Employers could not find people to fill in the job vacancies sometime. Moreover, confirming 2011 Census Population data, interviewees also acknowledged that they have a high proportion of older population in the county. One interviewee postulated that a third of people in the workforce are going to retire in the next five years. In addition to the local aging population, Mayor Morrison stated that many people chose to come to the county/ town to retire. Together these factors contributed to an increase of aging population and a lack of younger labour force in Huron County.

Employment opportunities, lifestyle and sense of community are potential ways to attract youth to rural communities. Since lack of favourable employment opportunities are major contributors to youth out-migration, it is not surprising that the majority of the interviewees identified job creation as a way to attract youth to return. As mentioned in the previous literature, youth tend to find rural lifestyle as less exciting and therefore leave their hometown to seek new experiences in urban cities (Glendinning et al, 2003). In this study, interviewees also mentioned that creating a friendly community and emphasizing the nature aspect of rural life might have the potential to appeal to the younger generation. However further research is needed to confirm this hypothesis. Research findings regarding the impact of creating attachment to the community on youth retention have been mixed. Some research did found that

attachment to the community is not really attractive to youth (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Matthews et al, 2000), while others reported that a sense of community plays a role (Jamieson, 2000; Avis, 2013). In this study, the interviewees considered sense of community as an important factor to draw people back.

4.4.2.2 Strategies are being used to Retain and Attract Youth

The strategies that are being used in the county/ town were divided into four sections: 1) education and training; 2) career opportunities; 3) youth engagement; and 4) local community development (Table 3). Table 4 and Table 5 show the results of strengths/ opportunities, and challenges/difficulties related to these four main sectors accordingly. The analysis of these strategies will be presented after the results.

Table 3. Strategies that are being used in Goderich and Huron County

	Education and training	Career opportunities	Youth engagement	Local community development
Kevin Morrison	-working to offer post-secondary education	-	-launch Youth Caucus	-develop recreational facilities
Dwayne Evans	-	-	-Launch Youth Caucus	-lifestyle in town
James Cox	-attract post-secondary education institutions to Town -have training programs in the county	-communicate employment information with youth	-establish Youth Caucus -Engage HurON	-improve recreational opportunities -marketing characteristics in town (i.e. lifestyle)
Paul Nichol	-have programs provide training and co-op opportunities (i.e. Bridges to Agriculture, HealthKick, art and culture program, Ag ambitions) -social enterprise	-internship -coop -programs provide funding and training to youth who want to start their own business (i.e. Starter company, Summer company) -communicate with youth about career	-youth organization (youth council) -survey high-school students every five years to get to know youth thinking -Engage HurON	-

		opportunities		
Rebecca Rathwell	-different programs provide skill training	-	-	- the Skills Gap in county to know labour market information in the county
Anonymous	-	-	-	-

Table 4. Strength and Opportunities of Strategies in Goderich and Huron County

	Education and training (programs)	**Career opportunities**	**Youth engagement**	**Local community development**
Kevin Morrison	-do have post-secondary education institutions interested in offering programs in town	-summer jobs available	-	-friendly and united community -good health care services -convenient technology (i.e. high speed internet) -open to change (i.e. open to fresh and new ideas) -recreational facilities (i.e. ice rinks)
Dwayne Evans	-	-	-	-
James Cox	-some colleges interested in post-secondary education in town	-	-Engage HurON (i.e. positive engagement with youth, provide potential opportunities information)	-success in marketing quality of life -numbers of interest groups and volunteers
Paul Nichol	-success in providing skill training opportunities (programs related to agriculture, manufacture, art and culture etc.) -more opportunities in agriculture -raise funding through social enterprise	-help youth find jobs through coop work term, internship, summer job, summer camp -give youth opportunity to explore health care career occupation	-Acknowledge youth career intentions	-
Rebecca Rathwell	-have provincial funding available for some programs	-	-	-many interest groups in this issue

Anonymous	-	-summer job -co-op opportunities -internship	-	-many interest groups

Table 5. Challenges and Difficulties of Strategies in Goderich and Huron County

	Education and training (programs)	**Career opportunities**	**Youth engagement**	**Local community development**
Kevin Morrison	-	-lose some larger companies -lack of promotion the opportunities in town	-	-working in silos - need to get people to work together
Dwayne Evans	-	-	-	-
James Cox	-lack of funding to run programs	-lack of communication between employers and youth	-	-no formal Huron County Youth Retention Strategy -working in silos (need coordinative approach between individual initiatives)
Paul Nichol	-lack of sustained funding -County does not run the programs	-different view point of education and career with school board -targeting people of Starter company programs are leaving -have difficulty in making connection with youth after the program	-funding issue	-
Rebecca Rathwell	-	-lack of resources (Funding, time, people) to actively invite people	-	-many discussions related to youth retention, nothing really happens
Anonymous	-	-bigger companies left the county -job creation (how to provide jobs to	-lack of connection to youth (youth network)	-lack of collaborative unified approach (i.e. individual groups work in silos)

	young people) -lack of active invitation	-many groups acknowledged youth retention issue, but there are no real strategies

1. Education and Training

As described in the literature review section, there are many education and training programs being developed for rural youth retention. Similarly, Huron County also has many training program available for youth retention (Table 2). The programs offer skill-training, co-op terms, or internships enhance youth working skills and help youth to think about their future career interests. Paul Nichol told a successful story about the training program:

> *"…we ran a program for three years called Bridges to Agriculture. We worked with our local school board at a time…kids signed up and they took the in-class component, where things related to agriculture …and then they can do two co-op work terms…so they've spent grades 11, 12, 13 focused on this co-op program. During that time, we had 138 young people take part, and if I recall right, over 100 of them then decided to choose career path as agriculture. And after that, about 90 of them ended up returning to Huron County or going directly into taking over their parents' farm. We found that was really quite successful…"* (2015).

Post-secondary education is important for rural communities to retain youth. It is reported that there are colleges located in rural areas in Northern Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, 2014). There is, however, a lack of literature showing that municipalities in Southern Ontario really focus on establishing post-secondary

institutions in town (save for a few authors). Huron County not only has training programs, but also tries to offer post-secondary education locally. There are colleges and universities interested in providing post-secondary education in town (Table 3). It is an opportunity for Goderich to expand education field locally, to retain youth, and to contribute to local economy. As Mayor Morrison (2015) stated:

> *"…we can offer college programs here, so that our youth can stay in the community as for their education. And a lot of programs will be offered as well, [which] will be relevant to what we need here, in the county."*

Huron County has experienced many successful education programs to attract youth to rural areas. However sustainable funding limited the long-term implementation of these programs. Ontario is very supportive of training programs in terms of providing funding and resources (OMAFRA, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2015b) and interviewees have acknowledged that there is government funding available for some programs (Table 3). However, a lack of sustained funding is a challenge to the county. A number of successful training programs in the county, which won a couple of awards, ran out of money after several years. These programs are not part of the county (Table 3). They are run by different organizations and when they do not fit county's policies, they will not get support anymore (Nichol, 2015).

2 Career Opportunities

There are many job creation programs and strategies across rural areas to help youth get employed, such as providing funding, encouraging employers to hire students. Huron County applies similar strategies and programs by providing funding for youth who would like to start their own business. Further, these programs work with local

business companies to provide internship, co-op opportunities for students (Table 2). And many students do find jobs after internship, co-op, or summer jobs in the county (Table 3). Additionally, some students established their own business through Summer Company program (Nichol, 2015). However, the Starter Company program, which is for those who want to run permanent business, does not run as well as Summer Company program. Nichol (2015) explained:

> *"…the demographic, that we are targeting… [is] 18-30 years old. They are just not here. They've already left. The other part is the job market is so strong that the ones that are here are quite happy because they are working. They are not necessarily thinking about running their own business at this stage."*

It is interesting to see that the job market in Huron County is considered very strong. But in Avis' (2013) study, some respondents felt the career opportunities in the county are limited. In fact, it is a common perception of youth that rural areas lack employment opportunities (Looker and Naylor, 2009; Davies, 2008). Part of the reason is due to the lack of communication between adults and youth. Some migrated young people express that they are willing to come back but no one told them of the opportunities in their home town (Omaha World Herald, 2014). It is mentioned that rural communities are encouraged to connect local employment opportunities with youth (Shamab, 2011). And it is recognized by all interviewees that the county does not do a good job on promoting job availability to youth and actively inviting migrated youth

to come back (Table 4). One strategy in the County is Engage HurON, which has a main focus in building connections and networks with young individuals, and building connection and capacity between employers and young people. Although Engage HurON gains some success on making connections, it mainly focuses on the people who have already come back or intended to return at least (Cox, 2015). It is more like retention instead of attraction. And some interest groups tried to communicate the career opportunities with high school students (Table 2, Table 4). Cox (2015) further explained none of these groups has the ability to really retain youth on their own, so it needs collaborative approach to work on youth retention issue. From the County's perspective, Rebecca Rathwell mentioned that it depends on resources to actively invite youth to return, "*it would have to be a specific program to make that happen*" (2015).

Another challenge mentioned by two interviewees is that some larger companies, such as Volvo Manufacturing Plant, have moved to other areas which decreases employment in Huron County (Table 4). The importance of retaining business and companies in rural communities is recognized by local municipalities. Back to 1997, a business retention and expansion (BR+E) program has been developed by the Rural Programs Branch of OMAFRA, and numerous rural communities participated in this program, including Huron County (County of Huron, 2014). One goal of BR+E project is promoting job growth in the county (County of Huron, 2014). In this research, only one out of six interviewees emphasized that it is needed to consider how to create jobs in the county (Table 4). The other five interviewees identified promoting available employment opportunities in the County as a priority.

3 Youth Engagement

Increasing youth engagement may have the potential to enhance rural youth sense of involvement and community thereby increasing their likelihood to stay in rural areas. Research has found that most youth indicated that "*no adult had ever asked their views on how to make their community a more attractive place for young people*" (Dabson, Schroeder & Markley, 2010, p. 2). A number of articles demonstrated the importance of youth engagement and the benefit of establishing a youth council in local communities to deal with youth retention (Malatest and Associated, 2002; Glendinning et al, 2003; Jentsch, 2006; Ommani, 2011). Interviewees recognized the needs to involve youth to deal with youth issues. There is a survey conducted for high school students every five years to get to know these youth (Table 2). Also, 10 years ago, there was a youth council in Huron County. Paul Nichol (2015) stated:

> *"We actually launched one about 10 years ago, and then ran out of money. It's a perfect example, where the County Council should've seen the value of having a youth council to provide input on youth issues. And they just didn't think it was important at that time. I'd like to see that notion revive though…"*

Although there is not an established youth council currently, this strategy is valued by both the county and the town (Table 2). And the Town of Goderich is going to launch one. Mayor Morrison is interested in building a "youth caucus":

> *"I want a committee of young people that are there to advise what they would like in the community…for [young people] to be aware that we are listening to them, and that's important. What they come up with, we*

need to follow through on. [Youth] are huge part of our community…" (2015).

4 Local Community Development

Lastly but not least, the literature also mentioned that recreational facilities should be provided to young people, such as social activities, after-school programs, and parks (Malatest and Associates, 2002; Perry, Saelens and Thompson, 2011, Christie and Lauzon, 2014). Two out of six interviewees stated that the town is working hard on improving recreational opportunities and it also helps enhance the characteristics in town (Table 2).

Other research conducted in the U.S. showed that the primary reasons for most returning people were because of family and life style (von Reichert, Cromartie & Arthun 2011). Respondents of that research also expressed that they have sacrificed a lot to return to the rural communities for family and life style (von Reichert, Cromartie & Arthun 2011). Similar to the literature's finding, these are the reasons for more than half of the interviewees in this study who have returned to Huron County. Dwayne Evans (2015) told his own story:

"I was born and raised in Huron County. I attended post-secondary school in Kitchener and London and when I finished I returned to the area for an employment opportunity. After working a few years and early in my career I obtained employment in the London area to further my experience, further my education and advance my career. My wife and I were both

raised on farms and after the birth of our daughter we started looking at the environment for our family. We saw kids playing road hockey on our street and kids hanging out at malls. We decided this was not the environment we wanted for our family and starting seeking employment opportunities in [Huron County]…"

The life style in the county/ town is very important. Mayor Morrison gave another example:

"*We own a restaurant here in town and we have a girl that left us two years ago to go to school. She returns home now, but she can't find a job in her field - of that expertise. So now she's working with us again…the reason people do come back, even though they can't find work in their field is because they love the area… People would sacrifice the higher income they've been educated for, [to move to Goderich] for the life style…"* (2015)

It is observed that marketing rural lifestyle is a strategy to attract youth. It is evident that a number of them do return to Town of Goderich and Huron County to enjoy the quality of life (Table 1).

Many local politicians, interest groups and organizations are interested in youth retention in the county/ town (Table 3); however, they are working in silos (Table 4). Literature suggests that many different groups need to come out from silos and the collaborative approach is very important (Smith, 2012). It is noted by interviewees that communication or collaboration is needed to bring people to work together in the

county (Table 4). From a broader viewpoint, Mayor Morrison also indicated that it would be beneficial for the whole of Huron County to have collaboration among all municipalities:

> *"…By bringing people together, so much more can be done. What affects a small town like Seaforth or Clinton in Huron County, can also affect negatively or positively what happens in Goderich. We don't have large parcels of industrial land here in Goderich. But if a huge manufacturer would want to come to the area, why can't we have a neighbouring municipality look at a parcel of land they potentially have. Because where are people going to live? Where are they going to shop? [What they do will help the local economy.] So what's good for others is good for Goderich, is good for the whole county…"* (2015).

It has been a challenge in the past, but the County and Town is moving forward by having all of council working together (Morrison, 2015). Further, Mayor Morrison also discussed that people have to be open to change and open to fresh new ideas for trying to rebuild the whole community (2015). It is not a whole community if young people are not there. It is an ongoing issue to better retain and attract youth.

5 Recommendations

Based on the literature review and interviews of local practitioners and politicians in the Town of Goderich and Huron County, lessons have been identified in terms of the strategies to retain and attract rural youth.

5.1 Establishing youth council

It is recommended that a youth council be established by the county/town. Since young people know themselves well and since sometimes a generation gap does exist between youth and adult, a youth council can play an important role. Many young people themselves have a passion for community building and they know what their peers want in the community. Moreover, many youth are very creative and could contribute a lot to municipal government (County or Town).

Basically, there are 10 steps to recommend creating a youth council: identify "Champions", recruit participants, determine the "why", establish roles and responsibilities, set goals, outline activities, secure funding, ensure sustainability, have fun, and evaluate progress (see details in TORC, 2008).

This approach could make youth feel they are part of the community and it will enhance their attachment to the community. A youth council is also good for youth development. Youth could benefit from the process in terms of their leadership skills, team work, critical thinking, and enlarge their social network.

5.2 Encouraging collaboration

A rural youth retention strategic plan is necessary for youth retention and it has

to be a county level approach. Huron County has a number of plans and documents related to this issue and many interest groups are working on this topic. There has to be a county level program or an organization to integrate the plans, the initiatives and the youth studies which have been already done in the county to formalize a strategy. By doing this, it is better to have all different groups of people, including county councilors, local school boards, program representatives, and interest groups, to sit together to have an open discussion. Also it would be beneficial to include a youth council in the discussion process. If a youth council has not been established, youth representatives are equally important as well. Although it is recommended that this be a county level strategy, it should not be top-down planning. Since collaboration is very important for implementing the plan, people should work together to make it happen. The program or the organization could act as a role to bring people together to share information and learn from each other. Without collaboration, different groups may be doing the same thing which will result in a waste of resources and less effectiveness.

5.3 Connecting with youth

It is really important to communicate with youth who are in school and leave for post-secondary education. Youth should be encouraged to pursue further education because not only the county needs skilled professionals, but also it is good for youth personal development. Goderich has made a big step here by working with post-secondary institution to try to provide further education locally. However, many rural communities do not have the capacity to offer post-secondary education to young people. Further, youth may still leave their community even if there is education

available but may not meet their needs. Therefore, it is understandable that youth leave for education, but the county need to follow-up with them to try to attract them back. Since many young people held a negative attitude on local employment opportunities and many local employers mentioned that they are unable to find employees, communication and information sharing would be important at this point.

It should be a two-step communication. First, communicating with high-school students who are still in the community. The purpose of this is to try to understand the youth career intention and inform them of job opportunities in the county. The county should work with the public and separate school boards to provide information. For example, there has to be some group or someone, such as an economic development manager, who visits every graduating class in the county. The second step is keeping in touch with youth after they graduate. For example, social media can also be a means to get in touch with those graduates. Many classes and schools have their own group Facebook page, including their classmates. The county could also create one to actively invite students to join in and get all county students together with the county's information and extend the invitation for them to return. Another example would be for the county to provide graduates with personal email address. The information, such as employment opportunities and the news in the county could be sent out to those graduates. At the end of the each email, it is important to mention the invitation, such as "Huron County is always your home" or "You are always welcome home" or "We are waiting for you to come back" etc. This may let youth feel they are still part of the community even though they are not there.

5.4 Creating Short-term Job Opportunities

Employment needs within the county/ town are an important reason to retain and attract youth. Many young people get employed in their local communities after having an internship, summer job, and co-op work terms. If the county/ town has internship, co-op or summer job opportunities for youth this can help them to gain skill-training and working experience that will help them find work in similar fields and they would be more likely to return.

The county/town should also encourage local employers to provide internships, co-op or summer job opportunities and enhance their awareness of the benefits of hiring post-secondary students. Benefits for these employers include potential funding that can help to help pay students' salary, and that students who have already gained training and experience in the business, may stay after graduates. Communication is needed to keep in touch with these young people.

5.5 Promoting County Culture

It is an important advantage that Huron County is a beautiful, friendly, affordable and quiet small community. There are many young people who yearn for a life style like this. The life style in Huron County is very attractive. From a long-term perspective, Huron County has already done a good job on health care services. It could also enhance the quality of life by enhancing transportation and telecommunication infrastructure and services. All of this can help to enhance the unique life style of the county.

In the meanwhile, it is helpful to promote the characteristics of life style in Huron County. Many youth within or outside the county may not know there is great life style

in Huron County unless they see the information or they are told about it. The *Make Huron Home* website is a means to promote the county. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, etc., is a good way to promote. Huron Small Business Enterprise Centre has a Facebook page currently, but the county does not. It is important to recognize that youth have different interests and needs. From this perspective it is helpful to target youth, promote the unique lifestyle and amenities within the county and deliver a targeted message to this age group.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research shows that both Goderich and Huron County realized youth out-migration is a problem within the county. Local politicians in the county/ town acknowledged the factors that influence youth's decision to migrate, which is similar to the literature reviewed. The research also examines the strategies that are being used to retain and attract young people. The youth out-migration phenomenon in each rural community has its own context, the strategies to deal with that are also specific to the region.

Overall, there is not a significant difference between the finding in the Town of Goderich and Huron County and the literature. In this study, limited higher education options and limited job opportunities, combined with a desire to seek new and exciting experiences elsewhere were identified as key factors leading to youth out-migration. The issue of youth out-migration has led to a shortage of skilled labour and has increased the proportion of aged population. However there are many programs available at Huron County to address this issue. These programs tend to target education, job creation, youth involvement and community development. Many lessons can be learnt from the success and failure of these programs. The success of these programs demonstrated the importance of these areas to youth retention. On the other hand, lack of sustained funding and lack of effective communication were major limitation to the implementation of these programs. Recommendations have been proposed to further maximize current strengths and address limitations, thereby

creating more effective strategies to attract youth to stay and/or return to their home community.

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