What Makes a Strong Rural Community?

Katherine Gillespie

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme 2016

Executive Summary

The aim of this research was to explore ways to strengthen rural communities in New Zealand. The research focuses on the three small rural communities of Kimbolton, Apiti and Rangiwahia, all located in the northern Manawatu.

Six households were chosen from each community and invited to participate in the project. The participants were given a survey and interviewed in their homes. The survey questions covered the following things: participants' understanding of a sense of community, rural change, community facilities and social groups, community involvement, understanding of community governance, and access to technology.

Alongside the interviews, a literature review has been done. This explores the importance of community, the concept of social capital and examines research done into communities facing change in relation to a changing rural environment.

In interviewing the participants, it was evident that community meant more than a physical or geographical location or connection. Everyone involved in the interviews talked about relationships and connections, and supporting community members, i.e. social capital.

Participants were asked to score their own community on a scale from 0 = no sense of community, to 5 = strong sense of community. The scores ranged from 1-4, with the majority sitting around 3. The desire for a strong sense of community was expressed and participants were keen to discuss what could be done to improve this.

It was evident in discussions on community governance, that all communities needed to have a more visible community vision and strategic direction. The foundation for this has been provided by work done on community planning with the Manawatu District Council. The drive now needs to come from within each community.

Participants were asked about rural change over the last ten years, and its effect on individuals and on the community. Relative newcomers to the communities talked about recent changes, while well-established members went back over 40 years to discuss the effects of dramatic change.

The importance of good infrastructure was evident. Good roads, access to fast, affordable internet and reliable cell phone coverage were all deemed essential to the communities' wellbeing and development. For example, the recent sealing of a country road has made travel easier for residents and has also opened the area for tourist exploration.

All participants were heavily dependent on technology for social interaction, information and research, i.e. Google, business interactions and the ability to access technology for use on farms etc. Several participants talked about access to fast internet being vital in promoting the area to both a domestic and international audience. Several participants felt limited by expensive, and still unreliable, internet in the area.

Cell phone coverage remains a problem in places, particularly out on farms. Safety and ability to communicate for business needs were listed as high concerns.

The smallest community, Rangiwahia, appeared to have the highest social capital and community engagement. This is perhaps because counter-urbanisation is minimal and the community is still predominantly made up of farming families. There are very few lifestyle blocks and minimal urban influence. However, this is a community that is forward thinking, action based, and innovative with a high level of social capital.

The communities with the least cohesion had many transient farm staff and several people looking for very affordable housing and an alternative lifestyle.

The challenge here lies with successfully integrating non-rural community members into a traditional farming community. It is evident that larger communities face perhaps the most complex challenge with diverse individual and community needs.

The conclusion drawn from the research and literature review is that building strong social capital is necessary for a strong sense of community and sense of belonging.

This report concludes with four broad recommendations for actions that can be taken to support and strengthen New Zealand's rural communities.

These are:

1. Create Conscious Community - build social capital

2. Build Quality Leadership - support, train and encourage

3. Encourage Collaboration - with other local communities

4. Community Development - social, economic and environmental

The challenge to our modern day rural communities is to embrace change and to continue to evolve. This is required to meet the needs of the 21st Century rural community. For this to be possible, communities need strong leadership, an inclusive and engaged community and the ability to think outside the box.

Foreword

There are several personal factors that have led me to want to study the strong rural community.

My husband and I, along with our three children, have lived in our current rural community for ten years. Even within this time we have witnessed a slow deterioration in community spirit. An area that used to be known for its vibrant community and local spirit, now struggles for people to engage and connect in the community.

I see that our community has great potential, firstly to connect, secondly to meet the needs of our community members and thirdly to offer support to our wider community, to our rural industry and beyond.

I have embarked on a quest to discover ways to strengthen my local community. Through this, I am hopeful that in identifying key factors of community strength, my research will be applicable across all rural communities in New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

Author contact information

Katherine Gillespie
Phone: 027 296 5917
Email: lh.kjgill@farmside.co.nz

Table of Contents

1.0   Introduction

Historically New Zealand has been built on strong rural communities, and country living has occurred around a well-founded community hub. Over the last 50 years, countless changes have seen dramatic depopulation of rural areas, a decrease in services provided, and a marked change in the makeup of people in our rural communities.

Rural communities of the past were synonymous with farming communities. The social networks worked to support farming families and events were often calendared around the farming lifestyle.

The challenges of the modern rural community are vastly different from the communities of old. While the challenges are different, the needs remain the same. This being to provide strong networks between community groups and support for all community members, local businesses and industry.

The aim of this project is to look at what makes a strong rural community. In the fast-changing world that we live in, I believe there is a need for rural communities to be continually evolving. This is vital if we want our communities to endure into the future and meet the needs of our modern day rural areas.

For our communities to do this, it is first necessary to understand the historical context, to acknowledge the changes that have occurred and then to identify what is necessary for communities moving forward. Doing this allows us to embrace what has shaped our community, to celebrate our rural history and to plan for the future of rural New Zealand.

The information gathered in this study is qualitative, and the number of community members interviewed was not extensive enough to incorporate statistical analysis of the data. The study was done in one small geographical area and was limited to three local communities. The nature of qualitative research has allowed the author insight into a small window of rural New Zealand and to make recommendations based on this.

2.0　Methodology

Data used in this study were gathered from in-depth interviews with individuals and families from three local communities in the Northern Manawatu. The communities were chosen due to their close proximity, their similar historical settings, and their ability to provide examples of communities with different character.

Interview questions were formulated carefully to gain a good understanding of the perceived strength of each community. Participants were asked what "a sense of community" meant to them and were then asked to score their local area's sense of community.

Questions relating to changes witnessed over the years were important to gain insight into what the community used to look like. They also showed participant's perceptions of what the changes have meant for them individually and as a community. Participants' knowledge of local governance and their perception of its effectiveness were also obtained.

Participants' community involvement (both formal and informal) was explored and then used to determine their level of community involvement.

The survey questions covered knowledge of community groups, and access to technology such as internet and cell phone access.

Lastly, participants were asked what they thought could be done to increase community wellness.

Survey questions are listed in Appendix 2.

Initially three families in each community were selected and then, as further connections were made, additional participants were approached. Of all the people approached, only one family declined the invitation to be involved.

Consideration was given to the selection of individuals and families to ensure that the people involved could reflect the range of the community and give different insight and perspective on their community. A total of eighteen households were interviewed, with six households from each community.

The survey participants were all given a letter introducing the project and an explanation of why it was being carried out. They were informed that their responses would be anonymous and that they would not be identifiable in the final report. This was considered essential due to the nature of the small communities studied.

The letter of introduction is found in Appendix 1.

Survey participants were emailed an 11 question survey and asked to consider the questions prior to the interview. Interviews were held around the kitchen table over a cup of tea, allowing a semi-structured informal interview. Interviews ranged in time from 45

minutes to 2½ hours, this varied due to a number of factors.   Valuable information, not necessarily pertaining to the survey questions was gathered in this setting.

When analysing the information gained, the method of thematic analysis was applied. The information was then collated and analysed for recurring themes and trends. This qualitative analytic method is recognised as a structured way of looking for themes in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006 & 2013).

3.0 Community Background

For this study, I have chosen to look at three local communities to gain insight into a small window of rural New Zealand. Located in the northern Manawatu lie Rangiwahia, Apiti and Kimbolton.
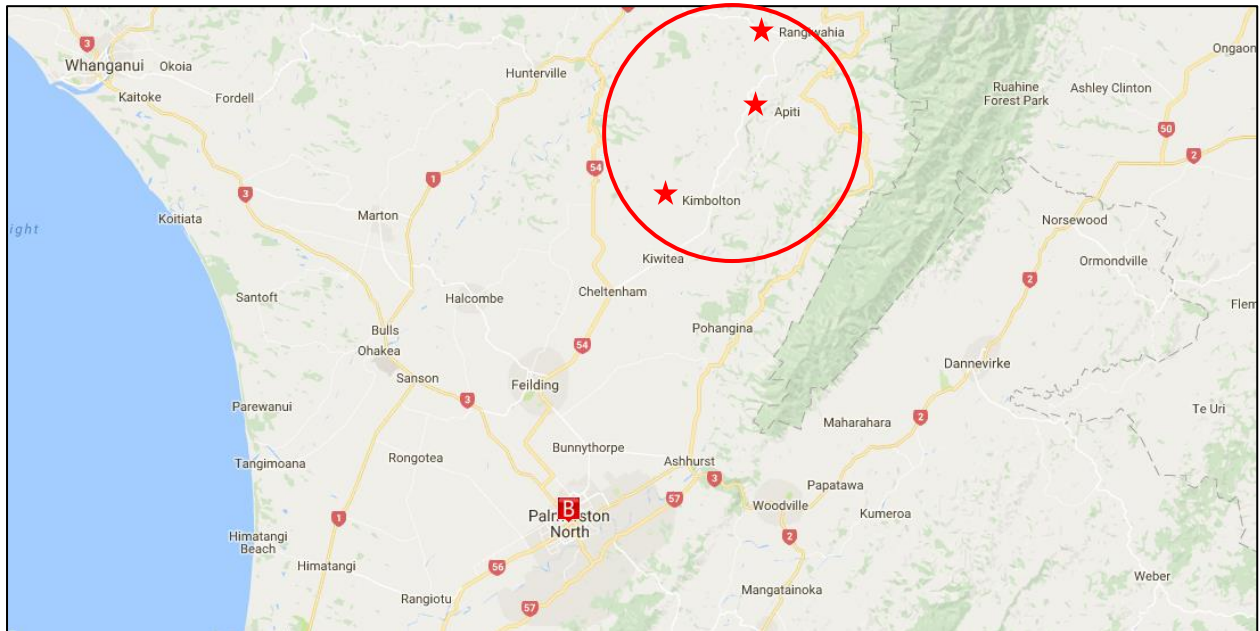
Google Maps (2016)
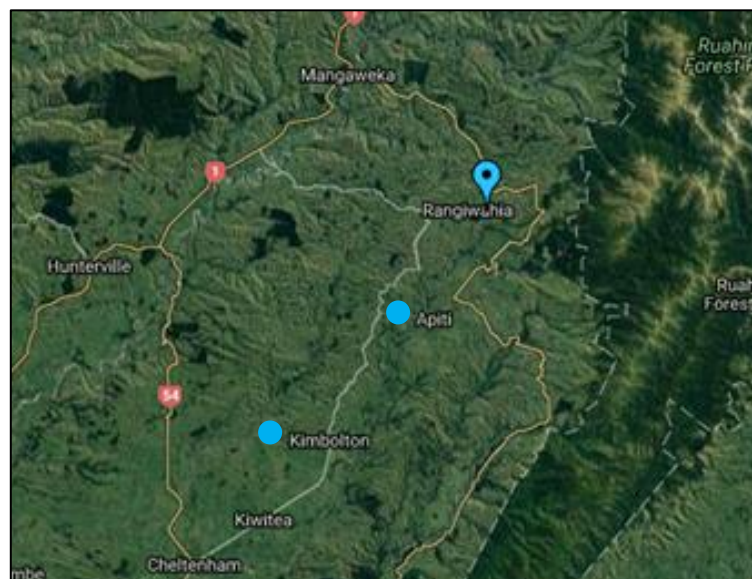
Google Maps (2016)

Due to its isolation and poor accessibility, the northern Manawatu was settled relatively late in New Zealand history. The area was challenging for the first settlers and its stories bring images of isolation, harsh geographical and physical conditions, and of the strong pioneer spirit essential to survival.

Special settlements took place under the Land Act of 1877. "This enabled the Governor to "set apart out of any rural lands such blocks of land as he shall think fit, and declare them open for special settlement". The provisions for special settlements also allowed for deferred payment of up to 90% of the purchase price, and a further Crown Grant conditional on the land being subject to "permanent improvement" (i.e. a certain amount of bush had to be cleared over a certain period of time)" (Lusk, 1988).

The purpose of the new Land Act 1877 was to open up the country to settlement, with the goal of putting the small people on the land. This provided an exciting opportunity not available for the settlers in their country of origin. The land was subdivided into 100 or 200 acre blocks and the blocks were allotted by ballot (Lusk, 1988).

Rangiwahia means "piercing the sky", "cloud piercer" or "opening in the heavens". Its name came about because the site was a natural clearing of approximately 100 acres in amongst the tall trees of the virgin bush. The settlement of the Rangiwahia area began in 1885 (Rangiwahia Community Plan, 2015).

Apiti is a Maori word meaning the narrows, or the gorges. This is a fitting description of where Apiti sits, located between two river gullies and high hills. The first European settlers arrived in Apiti during July 1886. Access to the area was difficult with the first bridge across the Oroua River not built until 1896 (Apiti Community Plan, 2014).

Kimbolton was settled at the same time as the more remote areas of Rangiwahia and Apiti. Access to the Kimbolton area was significantly easier and, as it was the closest settlement to Feilding, soon Kimbolton soon became the largest township (Kimbolton Community Plan, 2013).

Over the years, the settlements all rapidly became bustling townships, supporting the needs of their farming communities. Each area hosted a healthy township of hotels, boarding houses, taverns, dairy factories, creamery, maternity homes, schools, blacksmiths, and other support businesses, post offices and numerous churches.

Like all new settlements, communities were reliant on helping one another to work the land to its best potential. Community networks and community strength were essential for supporting the early settlers.

In 1906 the Wanganui Chronicle is quoted as reporting "Rangiwahia is one of the rapidly growing inland towns of the West Coast" (Rangiwahia Community Plan, 2015). This was indicative of the general growth in the Kiwitea County.

The townships boomed in their early days, however as early as 1916 evidence can be seen of a slowing of trade. In 1916 in Kimbolton the manager of the bank reports that "Local trade in this district has gone back, due to the introduction of the motor car, the farmers making Fridays, sale day in Feilding their market day" (Lusk, 1988).

Two years later he reported that "business is not likely to improve owing to aggregation (of land) and our adjacency to, and convenience in reaching Feilding, which is the market of this district" (Lusk, 1988).

The main source of income over the years has been dairy and sheep farming, forestry and some cropping, e.g. potatoes. Diversification occurred in the late 20th Century which saw the introduction of deer and, more recently, hospitality and tourism to the area.

Over the last 50 years the three communities have seen much change and the dramatically decreased population reflects this. These changes have included amalgamation of farms, conversion from sheep and beef to dairy, centralisation of rural service and urbanisation.

Kimbolton remains the largest village and contains a memorial hall, heritage library building, café, preschool, school, a bowling green, native bush reserve, rugby grounds, tavern, domain and rhododendron gardens and nurseries. Kimbolton is only 20 minutes' drive from Feilding. This makes it attractive for residents to commute to Feilding. It is also attractive as

a retirement area. The school roll sits at around 80 students and plays an important role in the area. The primary production remains farming and cropping along with a large plant nursery, public gardens and other small businesses that help service the area, e.g. garage, café, pub, artists, upholsterer, etc.

Apiti remains predominantly a farming community, although the last 10 years has seen an increase in people looking for affordable housing and an alternative lifestyle. Apiti contains a memorial hall, heritage library, museum, school, native bush reserve, tavern and domain. The school roll sits between 22-30 students and remains a valuable part of the community.

Rangiwahia has perhaps seen the biggest change, with little left of the bustling township. The focus now is on the community hall, church and native bush reserves. The community saw the closure of its school in 2014. However, the community spirit has remained strong and this is particularly evident in this area.

Local residents of the northern Manawatu remain fiercely proud of the district's history, and its heritage is cherished. The desire for strong community is evident.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Literature Review

To help understand the concept of a strong rural community, this literature review will look at the concepts of "community", "sense of community" and "social capital". It will also review literature found discussing change in our rural setting and the implications for rural society.

What is community?

The Oxford Living Dictionary has a total of five sub definitions of "community". For the purpose of this report, the following two are particularly helpful, these will be used to provide the framework definition of community.

1. A particular area or place considered together with its inhabitants. For example, 'a rural community'.

2. The people of a district or country considered collectively, especially in the context of shared social values and responsibilities; society (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2016).

"Community is built on common beliefs, values, concerns and interests" (Debertin, 1997). Sometimes, as with a purely geographical community, members are less likely to have many of these in common but are joined in community by the area they live in.

What is sense of community?

This term was first used by psychologist Seymour B. Sarason in 1974. From his research Sarason concluded, "sense of community is everywhere, and lack of sense of community contributes to human misery" (Fremlin, 2016). Research at the time was exploring the idea of linked benefits to members, such as increased physical and psychological health. Since then, further research has been done to explore and develop this theme (Pinker, 2014), (Putnam, 2000), (Wiseman, 2008).

The following definition is widely used. "Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan, 1976).

Why is community important?

The need for relationships and connection is real and has been with us since the beginning of human existence. Humans are social creatures and inherently we strive to live in community.

Current research confirms that our individual health and wellbeing is intricately tied to the health of our communities and our interactions with others.

When talking about her book "The Village Effect", Canadian Clinical psychologist Susan Pinker states that "We are intensely social creatures," "We've evolved to live in groups. Surveys of what drives human satisfaction are pretty consistent: we're happiest when we feel we belong …. Social contact and the drive to belong is a powerful physiological appetite, like hunger." (www.vancouversun.com, 2014)

Pinker also talks about how life expectancy changes according to human contact, "If you're surrounded by a tightly connected circle of friends who regularly gather to eat and share gossip," Pinker writes, "you'll not only have fun but you're also likely to live an average of 15 years longer than a loner" (Pinker, 2014).

Research indicates that "varied, in-person social contact is a more powerful predictor of health, happiness, learning, and longevity than anything else within our control — better than exercise, better than quitting smoking or drinking, better than breathing clean air" (Pinker, 2014).

Brene Brown is a well-known and respected research professor at the University of Houston. "Connection is why we're here. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. This is what it's all about. It doesn't matter whether you talk to people who work in social justice, mental health and abuse and neglect, what we know is that connection, the ability to feel connected, is neurobiological, that is how we're wired—it's why we're here" (Brown, 2010).

Numerous studies have shown that as our social connectedness or sense of community diminishes so does our individual wellbeing (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

The importance of community in the rural setting is amplified due to the complications of living remotely and its resulting isolation (Sampson et al, 2007).

Social Capital

What is social capital and why is it important?

The main theme of social capital is that community networks have value. Expanding on this, many definitions refer to the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, for the benefit of all involved.

"Social capital refers to the collective value of all "social networks" (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ("norms of reciprocity")" (Putnam, 2000).

How does social capital work?

The term "social capital" captures a picture of a social network with a wide variety of specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital works to increase community strength by improving a number of factors. It creates value for the people who are connected and for the community where the connections occur (Putnam, 2000).

"In both rural and urban communities, social capital refers to the institutions and mechanisms whereby residents relate to and interact with each other to solve problems for the common good" (Debertin, 1997).

There's much debate over the various forms that social capital takes. Putnam categorises the links into three groups:

1. Bonds: Links to people based on a sense of common identity ("people like us") such as family, close friends and people who share our culture or ethnicity.

2. Bridges: Links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity, for example to distant friends, colleagues and associates.

3. Linkages: Links to people or groups further up or lower down the social ladder.

For a truly strong community to exist it is necessary to have varied and multiple interactions utilising each of the three links (Putnam, 2000).

There appears to be no consensus on how to measure social capital in terms of scientific research (Claridge, 2004). However, for the purpose of this report, the following will be used as an indication of high social capital.

● People spend more time in community organisations
● There are more volunteers
● People are more likely to be engaged in community
● People spend more time socialising with family, friends and neighbours
● Individual and community needs are being met

In a study done for The Young Foundation (UK), report authors concluded that there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that neighbourliness helps to build positive social capital and contributes to the improved wellbeing of communities, families and individuals (Hothi, Bacon, Brophy & Mulgan, 2011).

New Zealand's Mental Health Foundation is interested in the relationship between social capital and its potential to support flourishing communities and to improve positive mental health (www.mentalhealth.org.nz, 2016). In a report for the Foundation, the New Zealand Families Commission is quoted as saying "the more social capital that exists in a community, the greater the capacity of that community to build further stocks of social capital for the wellbeing of the collective." The commission references work done by Goodrich & Sampson, 2008 (Bradley, 2012).

On the other hand, it is evident that the symptoms of a community with low social capital include a depressed community spirit, apathy, hopelessness and a sense of being powerless to change things.

In the age of online connection and social media, it is argued that today's rural community has the advantage being part of much larger and diverse online communities. While online social media has its benefits, a controversial conclusion made by Susan Pinker is that technology alone is not enough to grow social capital. In today's social media culture, she

says that the connections are not strong enough to affect human wellbeing. We need face to face relationships and a wide range of connections to maintain wellness (Pinker, 2014).

It is recognised internationally that social capital has decreased due to changes in urban and rural society. There is less community, in general, happening internationally.

"Modern community lacks social cohesion and strength because social capital built in the past is no longer being constructed" (Putnam, 2000).

However, Richard Reeves suggests that community has not disappeared but has changed in its appearance. "Putnam overlooks construction sites of new social capital, including informal friendship networks as well as virtual communities created and maintained in cyberspace. The biggest hole in his analysis is the role played by work in the creation and maintenance of community" (Reeves, 2001).

Rural change in New Zealand and its effects on rural community

The study of rural change and its effects has been undertaken by numerous authors.

Reports on rural change discuss many factors that have affected New Zealand's rural communities.

Factors include: declining farm incomes, increasing farm debt, farm sales, conversion from sheep and beef to dairy, primary sector unemployment, farm amalgamation, change from family-owned farms to larger corporate farms, demographic changes, centralisation of rural services to the regions, urbanisation and counter-urbanisation. These have all contributed to the depopulation of our rural communities, resulting in decreased social capital, increased isolation, and the decline of rural wellbeing (Sampson et al, 2007) (Mackay et al., 2009) (Smith, 2010).

"Changes in the economic base (in farming and other businesses) which have increased time pressures and reduced people's availability for voluntary and community work and social activity, together with demographic changes (particularly the hollowing out of 20-34 year olds in rural communities) create new challenges for maintaining the service infrastructure and social networking" (Pomeroy, 2011).

It is of interest that older papers report patterns and issues that continue to be a problem for rural communities today. Of note is the 2011 report "Rural Community Resilience and Climate Change", by Ann Pomeroy. This paper references and quotes papers from the early to late 1990s addressing the effects of change in the rural community. Many of these are still issues that communities struggle to successfully tackle today.

"With many rural communities losing people (particularly the out-migration of young adults), and the change in work patterns, fewer people were (and are) available to run community services. Fewer leaders and people with the skills to manage and administer community organisations make it difficult to get new projects started. When enthusiastic newcomers started projects, then left, long-term community members were faced with completing them.

Many rural volunteers consequently suffered overload and burnout. This was compounded by people feeling pressured to keep services operating locally so that the same people ended up on the different committees (Liepins 1998, Taylor et al 1998)" (Pomeroy, 2011). "Farming is harder, more people are working off farm and more intensive farming is necessary to make a living. Taylor et al also found that dairying brought a mobile population: "the great majority of newcomers had been in the area less than ten years" (Taylor et al 1998). Most of the local dairy farm women had been on their current property only four years and some had shifted four times in the previous ten-year period. This gave little time for them to contribute locally and few had close social ties. Taylor et al commented that dairy farming families tended to socialise with other dairy farming families as their work patterns were similar. While dairying had brought 12 new families into the area "they do not always have the time, or feel welcome to take part in community activities" (Taylor et al 1998)" (Pomeroy, 2011).

As the rural population has decreased there is a greater need for collaboration to occur between community members that have little but geographical location to bind them together. This requires considerable leadership awareness and skill.

"As the size of the community becomes smaller, there is less likelihood that social capital will be built around networks of people with similar educational levels, income and housing, and a greater likelihood that people of widely varying education, income and employment skills will meet and interact in social networks. If the rural community is small enough, it is possible that nearly the entire community will function as a single social capital network. This one feature makes rural communities inherently different from urban settings and if the rural community is small enough, people of all income levels and housing values will likely be living in close proximity" (Debertin, 1997).

Overall it is agreed that the huge changes seen by rural New Zealand over the last 50 plus years have significantly impacted rural communities. Rural communities need to continue to evolve and find a new norm, one that will allow them to meet the needs of a diverse range of community individuals.

4.2   Community Case Studies: Community Interview Findings

Snapshot of the Kimbolton Community

Kimbolton is a rural village and farming area. It has moderate urban influence (NZ Statistics, 2004). Kimbolton is bucking the national trend of decreasing populations in rural centres. It has recently seen an influx of new residents to the village. Because of its affordable housing and location, Kimbolton has attracted people who commute for work, it is also a quiet village for retirees and has an English country village feel to it. There is a new subdivision in progress and several new houses being built, there are very few houses for sale or to rent. The area is known for its stunning views, its rhododendrons and its community village feel.

The following sections contain information from the interviews and discussions with Kimbolton area residents. They highlight the responses of participants.

Sense of Community

"A feeling of belonging"
"An underlying sense of care between residents"
"General feeling of safety"
"Knowing your neighbours"
"Pride in appearance of the town"
"A willingness to pitch in"
"People looking out for neighbours"
"Utilising skills within district before going out of the district, e.g. for tradesmen"
"People who are looking out for others"
"We came because we liked the feel of the community"

Strength of community
Survey participants scored the sense of community in Kimbolton **3-4**.
(0 = no sense of community, 5 = strong sense of community)

The consensus was that Kimbolton was a large community, fragmented in many smaller groups and that there was room for improving the overall sense of community.

Rural Changes and Effects
This section highlights the rural changes in the Kimbolton area as discussed by the interview participants.

Police presence:
Kimbolton has recently had a police officer return to living in the area.
"Police presence is very important to have in Kimbolton, it keeps crime down, petty crime that can become bigger = local kids etc."
"Traffic has slowed down"
"Perception of safety and wellbeing has improved"

"It is nice to know the personal side of the police force, we are really lucky to have him living here"

An increase in new people in the community:
"New people have breathed fresh air into the community as they seem to be positive and upbeat people who have made a conscious choice to move to Kimbolton"
"Lots leave the village for work so are not involved in day to day activities"
"There is a greater turnover of families at school, parents are busy working either on farms or travelling to town to work and this affects fundraising support at school and parental involvement in school activities"
"Not all established residents welcome new people but I think this is getting better"

Loss of petrol bowsers from local garage:
"Inconvenience to locals and passing traffic"

Changes in availability of preschool care:
Preschool "Little Ark" is set up. *"Great start to school (well-adjusted kids) and wonderful opportunity for mums to make new friends especially for new families to the district."*
"Kids were with other local community children every day, this helped with starting school"
"Little Ark helped connect the families"

Closure of Little Ark Preschool after eight years, closure of Kimbolton Playcentre, along with the Plunket services now being based in Feilding.
"Travel for childcare, less convenient and kids are not getting as many days of education"
"Children no longer as socially connected to their community and other local children"
"There is nowhere for parents to meet other local families"
"Increased isolation felt by new parents and families new to the area"
"It has made it really difficult for some families to get their children to preschool"

Amalgamation of the local rugby club with town club:
"Less games played at Kimbolton, fewer social activity for locals"
"Farmers' social life used to be going out to the rugby at Kimbolton"
"The amalgamation of the club occurred because of a lack of young men in district, amalgamation of farms, or farms not being economic to keep sons at home. As well as dairy farming hours not being conducive to playing sports."
"Rugby used to bring the local area and surrounding area together, like church used to"

Local Governance - Kimbolton Community Committee
The northern Manawatu falls under the umbrella of the Manawatu District Council. As part of the Council's Community Development Plan, each area has a Community Committee.

 *Notes on the Manawatu District Council Community Committees Policy are available in Appendix 6.

The Kimbolton Community Committee is made up of a diverse group of community members and generally has 14+ people attending each meeting plus the Council Liaison Councillor.

The Committee is highly visible in the community and takes responsibility for organising social community events as well as providing strategic direction. It appears to have a high energy for social events and getting things done. It is evident that the Committee collaborates a little with other committees in the region.

Comments made about the committee included:
"*They do a good job, fun events for the community*"
"*Need a strong committee to be a squeaky wheel to the Manawatu District Council*"
"*We need someone to work and persist on keeping the community plan moving*"
"*They need more "people relationships" to interconnect social networks throughout the area.*"
"*The revamped Fowlers Reserve is a great space for the community*"

The Committee communication online is done through the school newsletter http://www.kimbolton.school.nz/newsletters, and the "We are Kimbolton" Facebook page. Committee minutes can be found at the Manawatu District Council website. http://www.mdc.govt.nz/Living_Leisure/Community_Committees/Kimbolton

The Committee is working to build Kimbolton's online presence and promote the area.

Internet and Cell Phone Coverage

Access to affordable internet has become widely available in the area.
Cell phone coverage has improved dramatically in the last five years with a new tower situated just outside the village. However, there remain areas on local farms with little to no reception.
"*We still don't get cell phone coverage all the way to town*"
"*Safety and general communication both need better reliability in the hard to reach places*"

Community members use the internet for social connection, business, advertising and researching.

Participants' ideas to increase community wellbeing.

- Monthly community dinners
- Encourage people to join Neighbourhood Support
- Increase communication to community
- Increase awareness of community needs
- More community events
- Something to interlink community groups and social groups
- Events that join our neighbouring communities

Snapshot of the Apiti Community

Apiti is a small rural community with a small central village. It has low urban influence (NZ Statistics 2004). The area still has a large farming influence with some multi-generation family farms in existence. Apiti has recently seen a portion of farms change hands, bringing new families into the area. Cheap rentals and affordable house prices in the area have attracted people looking for an alternative lifestyle. The village has seen two homes built and people choosing to move into the area for their retirement. There is a large range of socioeconomic layers within the community. A number of community members commute for work in Feilding and Palmerston North. The area is known as "The Gateway to the Ruahines" and has stunning scenery and multiple outdoor activities available.

The following sections contain information from the interviews and discussions with Apiti area residents. They highlight the responses of participants.

Sense of Community

"A sense of belonging, sense of family"
"Belonging somewhere and having a place"
"An enlarged family network"
"Friendship and being there for each other, community networks, support for community events"
"It is the people in the community that bring it together. People who are willing to be the drivers behind events, communication, building community"
"Having a list of phone numbers on the board and kids knowing they can call if they need"
"Genuine connection, relationship and care between people, centred around one or more commonalities such as geographic location or interest"
"Local people working together and helping each other "
"A gathering is stronger than each individual strength"

Strength of community

Survey participants scored the sense of community in Apiti **1-3**.
(0 = no sense of community, 5 = strong sense of community)

The consensus here was that things have been better and that there is something missing from community connections.

Rural Changes and Effect
This section highlights the rural changes in the Apiti area as discussed by the interview participants.

Amalgamation of farms:
"There used to be lots of farms on our road. We would get together for family potluck teas. I have seen six households disappear just on my road"
"Men use to stand at the boundary fence and roll a cigarette and catch up"

There is a need to go further now to meet social needs, *"less chance of bumping into people in the community"*

"There are less people around my age. I feel lonelier" - loss of friends and neighbours as farms have sold and been amalgamated.

Change in diversity of population: More people in the area are not farming.
"When my kids were at school, everyone was from a farm."
There are more *"transient people on dairy farms, they don't do anything for the community"*
"Apiti seems to attract different people"

Decline in community spirit: *"the community is fractured"*
"School families are unwilling to participate in community"
"Lack of awareness of needs"
"We don't have big community events anymore"
"There are a fair few people that are left out, and are practically invisible"
"It is more isolating, there is fracture between older generation and younger"
Here the older generation discussed that they feel the younger people don't want to know them.

Apiti Tavern: Introduction of drink driving campaigns in the 1980s changed the patronage of the tavern. *"People are more likely to drink at home, with or without friends"*.
Increased financial pressures mean that some cannot afford to eat out or drink at the tavern. These changes have made it financially difficult for pub owners. During the last 10 years the Apiti Tavern has seen multiple management and ownership changes and in the last five years has been closed intermittently for variable lengths of time. The stop-start nature of the tavern in recent years is seen as detrimental for the community.

When discussing the tavern's importance in the community, both extremes were heard. From *"The Apiti Tavern is a lifeline"* to *"We don't need a pub to keep us together"*. Most however agreed that when the Tavern is open there is a common meeting place for the community and that this is invaluable.

The Tavern is seen as a place for informal connections.
"When the pub has been closed, people lose a place where they can talk about issues like porina, grass grub, the crap weather … where the men can just touch base and have a support network"
"Rub shoulders and share issues on farm"
"Invaluable for people to know that they are not the only one dealing with a problem"
"Helps keep things in perspective"

Community members also spoke of finding it difficult to meet new people without the regular community dinners hosted by the Tavern.

Community Groups and Community Involvement

- Strong Rural Volunteer Fire Brigade
- Apiti Tavern and Eatery
- Apiti Playcentre

- Apiti School - School BOT and fundraising committee
- Apiti Golf Club
- Apiti Community Committee
- Apiti RSA
- Apiti Show Committee
- Ladies Group
- Indoor Bowls
- Pool Club

All community members interviewed take part in community in an informal way. A minority stated that they were on committees and were involved in groups on a regular basis.

Local Governance - Apiti Community Committee
The northern Manawatu falls under the umbrella of the Manawatu District Council. As part of the Council's Community Development Plan each area has a Community Committee.

 *Notes on the Manawatu District Council Community Committees Policy are available in Appendix 6.

The Committee is very small and is run by a small group of long standing citizens. The number of people attending meetings is about 5-10, plus the council Liaison Councillor.

Community engagement is very low and the survey results indicated that community knowledge of the Committee is weak. Numerous people stated that they know that it exists but do not have a good understanding of its role.

" I have no idea what they do"
"Lack of connection with the community"
"Sense of fatigue and lack of interest/value in community committee"
"Lack decisive leadership"
"I went to the community planning meetings but what is being done now?"
"The community plan needs someone to drive it, is it responsibility of the community or the Council?"
Committee members feel that they are working alone with minimal engagement from the community and with little interest from people willing to step onto the committee.

"No-one wants to help"

There is a high degree of apathy in the community and it is not evident what has caused this to develop. There is no "succession plan" in place and there is little motivation for younger community members to participate in meetings.

Communication from the Committee is minimal. Meeting dates are listed in the "Community News" section of the school's online newsletter and the minutes can be found on the Manawatu District Council Website www.apitischoolnewsletter.blogspot.co.nz/p/community-notices
www.mdc.govt.nz/Living_Leisure/Community_Committees/Apiti

Internet and Cell Phone Coverage

Access to affordable internet is becoming more available in the area. There remain some houses with limited options and, because of cost, often these households go without. There is mutual feeling that it should be easy for the area to get great internet access but that the priority for this remains low. "The more difficult areas to get good internet access are often the areas that would benefit the most, through improved social connections".

All agree that fast, affordable internet is something that the community needs and several asked why the community does not collectively campaign for this.

Those that do have internet access use it for "everything".

Cell phone coverage has improved dramatically in the last five years with two new towers in place. However there remain areas with little to no reception. Usually the areas are where communication for safety is seen to be most important.

Participants' ideas to increase community wellbeing.

- Cohesion - something that links the smaller groups together
- Something that connects the young and old
- Casual informal get-togethers
- More frequent social gatherings
- Greater shared vision and sense of identity
- A community newspaper or newsletter independent of school
- Fuel and basic groceries
- A community van for transport to town
- Monthly health team visits to the area

Snapshot of the Rangiwahia Community

Rangiwahia is a small rural community with minimal urban influence (NZ Statistics, 2004). The region remains predominantly farming, with several fourth-generation farms in the area. There are few non-farming households and *"people who settle here have chosen to live a remote country lifestyle"*. A small percentage of the population commute for work, either within the Manawatu, e.g. Feilding, Palmerston North or travel north into the Rangitikei District. There is a strong sense of community, pride in the area's natural beauty and history, along with forward thinking and innovative community members.

The following sections contain information from the interviews and discussions with Rangiwahia area residents. They highlight the responses of participants.

Sense of Community

"Small communities are not stale stagnant ponds of nothingness"
"An awareness of others' needs, we know people on a personal level"
"Community means that we experience others' generosity and help"
"Heightened sense of awareness to other people's vulnerability in situations"
"Gratitude when people come to your aid"
"Networks are strong like a family"
"Joy of mixing with others"
"Knowing that you can ask for help but not needing to ask because it is already offered"
"Looking out for each other, people are not afraid to ask for help"
"Welcoming environment, with people of similar values and interests, a place where you can connect and where people care for each other."

Strength of community

Survey participants scored the sense of community in Rangiwahia **3-5**.
(0 = no sense of community, 5 = strong sense of community)

There was a consensus that the community had a moderate to strong sense of community and all stated that more that could be done to build on this.

One community member stated "*To have a strong community you need feisty women with a get it done attitude and four or five good men willing to step into roles of leadership*."
It would appear that the community of Rangiwahia has just that.

Rural Changes and their Effects
This section highlights the rural changes in the Rangiwahia area as discussed by the interview participants.

Amalgamation of farms and a change in the culture of farming:
"We just don't have as many neighbours/friends here anymore"

Changing culture of dairy farms from family-run farms to large corporate businesses with high staff turnover and immigrant workers. Perception is that the purpose of these farms is to make money and that staff are unwilling to be involved or contributing to community. *"There are only two big dairy farms but they have affected the area"*

Increased value in the land
"*Has made it more difficult to farm profitably and has made families have to work harder"*
"It is very difficult for new blood to buy into the area."
"Impossible for the kids to come home to the farm"
"More women are off farm to work and this changed the community in lots ways."

School Closure: The decision to close the school was influenced by Ministry of Education action, however it was a community decision. Roll numbers in 2013 meant the MoE allocated one teacher funding for 2014. Funding previously had been allocated for two teachers. (The school had approximately 25 children in the area but not all attended the local school.) Following this decision, numbers dropped rapidly with families opting to send children to other larger schools, either in the area or to boarding school. The decision to close was made when there was only one family left attending school.

This divided the community with many strong feelings on both sides. Impact from this division is still felt today but community members surveyed stated that this was becoming less evident. *"Some people stopped engaging in the community but this is improving".*

The school provided regular community events during the year as part of its calendar. These included a Christmas concert, Lamb and Calf Day, fundraisers etc. *"These were a good excuse for the community to get together"*

Members of the local community supported the school and numerous people had volunteered their time over the years, e.g. to teach Te Reo, cheese making, art, assisting with reading etc. This is missed by those who were involved.

Several people said that they miss the school newsletter and that they used to look forward to reading it. "*Because children now go to school outside of the area it is more difficult to keep track of their achievements at school and beyond*". "We have lost that family community feel".

The long-term consequences of losing the school are yet to be seen. Questions remain in terms of farmers employing staff and attracting staff with families and how the closure will affect future land sales. However, one thing that people are quick to point out is that *"losing our school has not meant the end of our community"*.

Community Groups and Community Involvement

- Strong rural volunteer fire brigade
- St Barnabas Church - services help once a month and annual Christmas Carol Service
- Friends of St Barnabas - active fundraising group
- Rangiwahia Playgroup

- Ruahine Rangiwahia Collie Club
- Rangiwahia Home and Garden Club
- Book Club
- Rangiwahia Community Committee
- Rangiwahia Educational Arts Centre REACT

Rangiwahia community has a strong online presence and actively communicates and promotes the area. http://www.irongates.co.nz/, http://rangiwahiacommunity.weebly.com/, Facebook; Friends of St Barnabas, Rangiwahia community pages, etc.

Most community members surveyed belong to numerous groups and all take an active part in the community.

Local Governance - Rangiwahia Community Committee
The northern Manawatu falls under the umbrella of the Manawatu District Council. As part of the Council's Community Development Plan each area has a Community Committee.

 *Notes on the Manawatu District Council Community Committees Policy are available in Appendix 6.

All the of survey participants stated that they are either on the Committee or that they attend the meetings. The Committee has a high level of community engagement with meetings attracting around 20 attendees. New members to the community are encouraged to participate and attend meetings.

The Committee organises social events, coordinates fundraising, implements infrastructure development, e.g. renovated public toilets, as well as providing some strategic direction for the community.

The community appears to have a high level of understanding of the role of the Committee.

During the interview process, it appeared that communication from the Committee to the community was informal but effective. However, when an internet search was performed, the author found an entire weebly site dedicated to the Rangiwahia Community (www.rangiwahiacommunity.weebly.com), with a significant amount of information available for local community and the public.   Interestingly, not one of the survey participants mentioned this form of communication.

The following are some examples of the community's resilience and forward thinking:

- One family have pushed for the District Council to improve roading. This was done not only to improve conditions and accessibility for locals, but also with the idea of promoting tourism in the area. This has been achieved and now the area has its own "Manawatu Scenic Road" bringing visitors off State Highway 1 at Mangaweka with options to drive right through to Palmerston North or Feilding.

- The Rangiwahia Community Hall is one of the best in the region and the community take great pride in it. The Hall is well maintained and resourced and it is a real

community asset. Until recently, the Committee needed regular Council grants to pay for the basic running costs of the Hall. The Committee have upgraded the grounds of the Hall and domain to include a septic dumping station and power points for motor homes. By providing low-cost parking spots and facilities, the Hall is now financially self-reliant.

- Friends of St Barnabas: This group was formed when it appeared that the area would lose its last church as operation costs were not being met by the parish. *"We saw the value in keeping the church in the community."* This group has strong community support and annually fundraise to keep the church. A factor significant in the success of fundraising is the ability to draw people into the area for the events, i.e. money comes from outside of the community.

- The local Fire Brigade and Playcentre took over the organising of a community Christmas function.

- The Rangiwahia ANZAC Day Service has started since the school's closure. The committee responsible for organising this formed naturally when it was decided a service was needed. The service has been scheduled to fit between two local services so as not to detract for long standing local events.

Internet and cell phone coverage

Affordable internet has only recently come to the area. It is the author's understanding that the neighbouring community of Kawatau Valley were responsible for getting the company "Inspire" into the area and that Rangiwahia has benefited greatly from this.

Households still struggle if they do not have line of sight to a receiver and there remains frustration on the expense and lack of options available. Inspire provides free Wi-Fi to the community hall. Interview participants all agreed that superfast reliable internet is essential to building businesses and community.

Cell phone reception remains unreliable, Vodafone has no reception and Spark has variable service. The consensus is that the lack of cell phone coverage means the community is disadvantaged in numerous ways including safety and communication on farm, implications for businesses and increased social isolation.

Participants' ideas to increase community wellbeing:

- More local groups, e.g. walking or craft groups
- Incentives from Regional Council, e.g. currently costs to use the community hall are prohibitive to using the hall for small gatherings.
- More frequent social gatherings
- More quality community engagement, e.g. community newsletter, phone tree, support from wider community.

4.3 Discussion on Research Findings

When setting out to research "What makes a strong rural community?", I was expecting to find that infrastructure and resources rated highly in potential impact on a community's strength. I was hoping to be able to campaign for rural communities to receive more from the Government and therefore be aided to grow stronger.

Very early on in my research process I saw in my reading that without strong social capital, communities struggle (Putnam, 2000, Pinker, 2014, Pomeroy, 1998). I also gained a greater understanding of why I feel connection and community is so important.

Along with this, I realised that the development of rural communities needed to come from within the community, with strong leadership and a strong support team with an action focus and innovative thinking.

With this newly gained insight, it is perhaps not surprising that in my own research I found evidence that backs social capital and community ownership as having the greatest impact on strength.

I discovered that the smallest community with the least amount of infrastructure was identified as having the strongest sense of community. This has been counterintuitive to my initial thinking on the subject and has resulted in a fundamental mind shift for me.

Themes seen in the findings

Strength of "Sense of Community"

When questioned about the strength of their community, all participants talked in some form about whether the community could meet the needs of individuals. They talked about being part of something bigger than themselves and of belonging.

This is consistent with McMillan's definition for "sense of community", a sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan, 1976).

Those who scored their community poorly described unmet needs, loneliness, feeling invisible, uncared for. They also described a sense of division and lack of cohesion, along with a lack of leadership and direction.

Where the needs of individuals were met and the principle of caring for others was actioned, people felt that there was strong sense of community.

Members of the Rangiwahia community talked about the older members of the community often having people call in to check on them or help with gardening etc. They spoke of a general awareness of needs and of a community willing to act on this awareness.

Social capital

"In communities where social capital is accumulating, residents increasingly work with each other to identify problems, share ideas and identify solutions to problems which benefit the entire community" (Putnam, 2000).

This is evident in the Rangiwahia community where social capital was high prior to the closing of the school. Because of this, I believe that the area has treated this event as a sad moment in their history rather than letting it define the community and its future.

Following the closure of the school, other community groups identified the need to continue some of the events traditionally organised by the school. The Rangiwahia Playgroup and Fire Brigade picked up the end of year Christmas Party. A subgroup of the Rangiwahia Community Committee organised the area's first Anzac Day Service. The community has also been more proactive in organising social gatherings to maintain social connections.

It was also identified by community members that it may be more difficult for new people to feel part of their community. This can be a negative effect of high social capital.

Apiti appears to have suffered a significant drop in social capital. This is evident with the lack of community engagement in the community council as well as the struggle to get people on board different groups. Recently it was decided not to hold a Jubilee to celebrate Apiti School's 125 years. The decision was made due to only three people attending the second attempt to form a committee. I believe this is indicative of the lack of social capital and community cohesion.

Commitment to volunteering

One of the components of social capital is the active community volunteering (Putnam, 2000). Volunteering has been a big part of the rural of New Zealand in the past.

"Changes in the economic base (in farming and other businesses) which have increased time pressures and reduced people's availability for voluntary and community work and social activity, together with demographic changes (particularly the hollowing out of 20-34 year olds in rural communities) create new challenges for maintaining the service infrastructure and social networking" (Pomeroy, 1997).

From my research, it remains unclear of why some communities face this challenge successfully when others don't.

It was evident that those highly involved in their community had a greater sense of belonging. They also scored their area's "sense of community" more favourably than those with little or no community commitments.

There is a danger in smaller communities of burnout, the same people taking responsibility for everything. Community members spoke of a sense of fatigue in the Apiti community, it is possible that this comes from a sense of burden in those that "do it all".

Inclusion through bridging and linking

The communities with the least cohesion have a section of transient farm staff and several people looking for affordable housing and an alternative lifestyle. They also have a large number of non-farming families. The challenge here lies with successfully integrating non-rural community members into a traditional farming community.

The larger community of Kimbolton has numerous strong social and community groups. This works well to meet the needs of group members. In order for the entire community network to be strengthened it is necessary for bridging relationships to be put in place.

Well established residents in each community referred to the transient nature of dairy staff and rental house tenants. The overall impression was that there is a need for inclusion and acceptance for these people. Perhaps a mindset shift is required to look past social economic differences and values that don't align with what has been a traditional farming area. The area generally is slow to accept these differences.

"For the established community, the failure to integrate and draw on new people represents a missed opportunity for social renewal. Community development in its broader sense is needed to help new populations turn diversity into community vigour" (Pomeroy, 1997).

I believe that the sense of inclusion can be increased by more opportunity for different groups to interact, i.e. social capital bridging and linking. When groups of people with diverse views come together, there are greater opportunities for people to be aware of others' values and opinions. "The opportunity to understand where others are coming from can ease tensions and build stronger more resilient communities" (Pomeroy, 1997).

Strong Leadership and Vision

Having a vision for the future is a strength that appears to be essential for community strength.

It was evident that the Rangiwahia Community had a commitment to looking ahead and making things happen. They invite people into their area and proudly show off the natural beauty as well as talk with passion about their rich history. Their future focused thinking is evident in many situations, the following is just one example.

"To show Manawatu District Council why Main South Road should be tarsealed, Steve videoed the route from Mangaweka to Apiti. Then Mary put together a DVD. They presented the video to Council in May 2011 and it made a big impact. They listened, as they realised that tar sealing this eight kilometres of metal road would open up the northern Manawatu for visitors and tourists, allowing them to enjoy a scenic route, which would take them through to the Pohangina Valley and to Feilding via Kimbolton" http://www.irongates.co.nz/ (2016).

The word "Altruism" was used by a community member, when discussing the need for good leadership. Someone who is altruistic looks beyond their own needs to the greater good of the community. When community leaders are without ego and have the best for the community at heart there appears to be a strengthening of community.

The stronger communities also had a large proportion of community members engaged in the Committee meetings. It is important for all community members to feel they have a voice. By engaging on this level there is room for individuals to feel they have been part of decision making for their community.

Both the Rangiwahia and Kimbolton Committees take leadership in organising community events, and it is evident that these are beneficial for maintaining connectedness and community strength.

Grief and Loss

For those community members who have seen the changes over the last 40 years, there was an overwhelming sense of sadness. This related to what has been lost from the community over this time. A sadness that the next generation are not coming home to the family farm, a sadness of loss of community and friendships over the years.

The impression of sadness was evident in all three communities studied and I feel that it is important to acknowledge this. There is a need for established residents to feel that their grief is recognised and shared. I believe that this may enable communities to move forward more freely.

Final Thoughts

"Symptoms of a depressed or disadvantaged rural community include apathy and a sense of helplessness, why bother?" "Many people have low self-esteem and any suggestion of effecting change is greeted with any number of reasons as to why it won't work" (Matthews, 2001). The statements above have helped me look at struggling communities in a new light. Perhaps it is not because of these attitudes that a community lacks cohesion but that these attitudes come because of weakness in a community.

I continue to be puzzled by the concept that "a community can be thought of as the womb in which social capital grows. Without communities, there would be no social capital (but without social capital community disintegrates?)" (Debertin, 1997). My question is which comes first, and how do you build them?

How is it that some rural communities succeed in building and maintaining strong social capital while others struggle? Is a loss of social capital related purely to changes in rural society or does something happen in the community that precipitates such a loss and the ensuing battle to regain it?

When looking forward, I feel that a big question remains in my mind … "How do we kick start the building of social capital, is it enough to raise community awareness and one by one start making a difference?" Time will tell, as I put this to the test in my local community.

5.0 Recommendations

The importance of community strength for the wellbeing of rural living has been highlighted in this report. I believe that it is vital to be actively developing our communities and consciously building social capital and community.

It is essential to have an understanding and an appreciation of where our communities have come from and just how much they have changed. This helps highlight what the changes have meant for the appearance and needs of our communities today.

From here we can use this knowledge to build strong rural communities and create a strong vision moving into the future.

My recommendations are as follows:

1. Create Conscious Community

- Strive to cultivate community that is open minded, inclusive, engaged, and forward thinking. Encourage awareness of community needs and flexibility in thinking when addressing these needs.

2. Build Quality Leadership

- Build local leadership skills and recognise importance of leaders with a future focus and skills in governance and strategic planning. Ensure that community leadership and vision is visible and accessible to all.

3. Encourage Collaboration

- Empower communities to engage and collaborate with other local communities. Share knowledge, ideas, problem solving, community event planning; draw on others knowledge and expertise.

4. Community Development

- Endeavour to become a community actively involved in improving its own social, economic and environmental situation. Engage with local government to ensure that community development is resourced and sustainable.

6.0 Conclusion

Rural New Zealand has seen much change in the last 50 years. Transition has occurred from predominately farming communities to neighbourhoods diverse in their people and businesses. Urbanisation and rural depopulation have influenced our rural areas greatly.

These changes are well researched and it is not difficult to find information on this. What is more difficult to find is research and evidence of how we can strengthen our rural communities of today.

My research is a step in this direction. I have investigated what it is that makes a rural community strong. In doing so I have identified factors that are vital for strength, and have highlighted factors that are important for moving forward.

It is apparent through my literature review and community research that the importance of social capital cannot be ignored. I see potential for strengthening our local communities through raising the awareness of the value of community relationships and networks.

Research shows that when a community is able to meet the needs of individual members, the sense of community is strong. To be able to do this it is crucial that social awareness present and social connectedness is well networked. I believe that these are areas that can be grown in all communities.

A healthy strong community has passionate leadership and a strong support team - where team members volunteer, collaborate, network and assist one another. The strong community has access to resources, is innovative and forward thinking.

The potential for strong rural communities is there. The community of today does indeed look different from the community of the past. However, the diversity and differences should be seen as assets as much as challenges. The inclusion of people, with different attitudes, values, and skill sets can be a building block for the foundation of the new look rural community.

7.0   Suggestions for Further Research

Due to constraints in time and resources, this research has been confined to three rural communities in a small geographical area. The researcher was limited to interviewing a small number of community members. The result of this being that the information may not be indicative of a typical New Zealand rural community.

For this research to be truly representative of rural New Zealand, it would be necessary to interview community members from a much broader cross section of rural New Zealand.

Participants from each community were chosen to achieve a broad community perspective. However, they were also chosen for their community awareness and their ability to articulate their thoughts clearly. This resulted in very successful interviews with maximum information imparted to the interviewer.

To give a clearer picture of how the majority see their community, it would be necessary to interview a greater percentage of each community. This would allow the data to be statistically analysed and would give a clearer indication of the strength of each community.

Further questions suggested by survey participants:

- What are the hindrances of a strong of community?
- How can local/regional council help support and develop local community?
- How could big business groups like dairy companies, meat processors etc help? What role do they play?
- What are the benefits to a family living in a rural community?
- How do we get more community engagement from a wider cross section of the community?

Further questions suggested by the author:

- What have other communities done to increase community strength?
- What have other communities done to bring business into their area, e.g. events, shops, tourism and hospitality, health retreats?
- How can communities integrate "non-farming" community members into what has typically been a tight-knit farming community?
- Look further at community governance with particular interest in communication between the local governance group and their community.
- What measures could be used to measure the quantity and quality of social capital in a rural community?
- Specifically, how do these vary across communities large and small?
- Are measures of social capital also measures of the sustainability of rural communities?

8.0 References

Bradley, A, (2012) **Neighbourliness: the relevance of local connections to mental wellbeing and positive mental health summarised.** Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

Blundell, S. (2015) **Village People** NZ Listener August 22, 2015

Cavaye, J, (2000) **Understanding Community Development** Cavaye Community Development

Claridge, T. 2004, '**Social Capital and Natural Resource Management**', Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) **Using thematic analysis in psychology**. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3, 77-101.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013) **Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners.** London: Sage

Debertin DL., (1997) **A Comparison of Social Capital in Rural and Urban Settings.** University of Kentucky

George, I, (1987) **"Apiti! Where's That?"** Centennial Edition, Self-Published

Helliwell, J F., Putnam, R D. (2004) **The social context of well-being.** *Philosophical transactions-royal society of London series B biological sciences*:

Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) **Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review.** PLoS Med 7(7): e1000316. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

Howard, Q, (2015) **Back to the future 2015, the death and life of small New Zealand Towns** NZ Transport Agency

Lusk, S, (1988) Up **the Kimbolton Road- The Story of a New Zealand Small Farm Settlement.** The Dunmore Press

Matthews, L. (2001) **Reviving Rural Communities-One small community's first steps to a better future**. Kellogg Rural Leadership Report; Lincoln University

Mackay, M., Perkins, H.C., Espiner, S,. (2009) **The Study of Rural Change from a Social Scientific Perspective** Lincoln University

McMillan, K, Weyers, J, (2013) **How to improve your critical thinking and reflective skills** Pearson Education Limited

Mulet-Marquis S, Fairweather J R, (2008) **Farm Labour Change**. Aeru research report No.300

Pinker, S, (2014) The **Village Effect: How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and** Smarter Atlantic Books

Pomeroy, A (1998) **Social Capital and Policy Development** (Review), *Public Sector,* 22(1):27-8.

Putnam RD (2000) **Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community**. New York, NY, US: Simon & Schuster.

Reeves, R, (2001) **We bowl alone, but work together** *New Statesman.* (Apr. 2, 2001)

Reim, M, (2013) **Rebuilding Social Capital Through Community Institutions** Center for Policy Innovation Discussion Paper #15 on Economic Mobility December 6, 2013

Robertson, F (1999) **Social work in rural communities** Kellogg rural leadership Report, Lincoln University

Robertson, N, Perkins, H. C. and Taylor, N. (2008), **Multiple Job Holding: Interpreting Economic, Labour Market and Social Change in Rural Communities**. Sociologia Ruralis, 48: 331–350.

Sampson, K, Goodrich, C, McManus, K,(2011) **Rural families, industry change and social capital:some considerations for policy** School of Social and Political Sciences

Scheffert, D,. Horntvedt, J,. Chazdon, S,. (2008) **Social Capital and Our Community** University of Minnesota

Smith, P., (2010) **Whatever happened to Tuatapere? A study on a small rural community** Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work issue 22(3)

Wiseman, J, Brasher, K, **Community Well Being in an Unwell World: Trends, Challenges, and Possibilities** Journal of Public Health Policy; 2008; 29, 3;

Websites

https://apitischoolnewsletter.blogspot.co.nz/
http://www.irongates.co.nz/
http://www.mdc.govt.nz/
http://neighboursday.org.nz/
http://rangiwahiacommunity.weebly.com/
http://www.senseofcommunityresearch.org/
http://www.stats.govt.nz/
http://youngfoundation.org/

Appendices

Appendix 1: Cover Letter

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme Research Project

Katherine Gillespie
Contact: **06 328 4747**
              027 296 5917
              lh.kjgill@farmside.co.nz

Dear Community Survey Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project.

My aim in this project is to identify commonalities within strong rural communities that contribute to a strong sense of community and community wellbeing. By doing this I hope to show how best we can support and strengthen rural New Zealand well into the future.

I am surveying a number of community members from our three local communities Rangiwahia, Apiti and Kimbolton and will analyse survey participants' responses to look for themes, features, characteristics, services and community infrastructure held in common.

All survey responses will be confidential and I will ensure that community members are not able to be identified in my final report.

Ideally, I would like to discuss the survey with you in person and will be in touch to make a time to do this. Alternatively, if this is not possible we can arrange a telephone conversation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely

Katherine Gillespie

Appendix 2: Survey Questions

<u>What Makes a Strong Rural Community</u>?

Rural Case Study Interview Questions

Age-20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71+
Male/Female
Length of time living in the community?

1. What does a sense of community mean to you?

2. 0 = no sense of community and 5 = strong sense of community
    0-5 On this scale how do you feel about the sense of community in your area?

3. (a) What are the main changes you have seen in your community over the last 5-10 years?
    (b) How have they affected you?
    (c) How have they affected your community?

4.   What local community groups exist in your community, e.g. volunteer fire service, community committees, community "service/event" groups, e.g. Apiti Show Committee, school, playcentre/playgroup, church?

5.   What community involvement do you have?

6.   What local governance is in place in your community?

     How effective do you see these groups being in supporting your community?

7.   Internet:
    (a)   Do you have access to the internet? Dial up, broadband, wireless, satellite.
    (b)   What do you use it for?
    (c)   In your opinion is your community's internet reliable, affordable and accessible?

8.   Cell phone reception:
    (a)   Do you have access to this in your home/farm/ work/community?
    (b)   How does this affect you/ your business/ the community?

9.   What do you think could be done to improve community wellbeing in your area?

10. What services would you like to see available in your area?

11. Are there any questions not asked in this survey that you think are important?

Appendix 3: Table of Survey Participants

The table below provides an overview of the families taking part in the study.

Table 1: Household Types Included in This Study

Family type	Total family members in household	Length of time in community	Employment	Community Involvement	Rating for strength of community
New to township	5	<3years	Entrepreneurs	Moderate	3
Older farming	5	>40years	Farming	Moderate	3
Younger farming	2	<2years	Farming	Low	2
Farm employees	4	<3years	Skilled labour	Low	3
Township empty nesters	2	>10years	Retired	Moderate	3
Lifestyle block	2	<3years	Outside employment	Moderate	2
Township empty nesters	2	10 years	Retired	High	3
Older farming	2	>40 years	Farming	High	3
Younger farming	2	5 years	Farming	Moderate	4
New farming	2	3 years	Farming	Moderate	4
Rural renting	2	3 years	Outside employment	Moderate	1-2
Township family	5	<5 years	Outside employment	Low	3
Farm employees	3	<1	Skilled labour	Low	2
Older farming	2	>40	Farming	High	3
Younger farming	4	>20	Farming	High	5
New farming	4	<5 years	Farming	Moderate	3

Appendix 4: Specific recommendations for Northern Manawatu communities studied

Recommendations from the research are as follows:

- Embrace our area heritage and acknowledge the history that has influenced the area and the community.

- Develop a greater shared vision and sense of identity. This can be done by communication from the Community Committees to the wider community.

- Initiate another community meeting regarding the Community Plan.

- Cultivate community through well planned activities and events. Facilitate regular opportunities to come together.

- Community Connector - Development of a community connection strategy for introducing and including new people to the area.

- Community Care Team - a network of people that are willing to be the confidential link to support when things are tough, e.g. new baby or illness, bereavement, loneliness, stress, depression etc.

- Support local businesses!

- Continue to push for fast and <u>affordable</u> internet and more reliable cell phone coverage. Is there something that the communities could do collectively to gain better services?

- Continue with regional tourism agencies to promote the area and develop new attractions

- Community Committee suggestions:

  - Invite people personally to attend the Community Committee meetings. With increased attendance, obviously, there will be a greater awareness of the role of the Committee, as well as potentially more people willing to be on the Committee. We can no longer assume that people will just come to things like this, invite them!
  - Create or maintain a culture in which a diversity of opinion and perspective is welcome.
  - Combined meetings for the three community committees. Find out what is happening in other communities. Share ideas and solutions to problems.
  - Instigate regular community events.
  - Communicate, communicate, communicate with the wider community.
  - Allow for a two-way flow of communication, e.g. a community-wide survey, community discussions etc.
  - Expect and ask for community help; the Committee should not be the only ones "doing".

- Keep driving the Community Plans with support from the Manawatu District Council.
- Brainstorm for new ideas and welcome young people to the Committee meetings.

● Community website – to allow easy communication to people interested in the area, new to the area, as well as current members of the community.

Sections to include:

- History of the community
- Area calendar
- List of local business in the wider community
- Volunteer opportunities e.g. rural fire service, working bees, helping at school
- Education – school and playcentre information and contacts
- Social and interest groups
- List of service providers that come to the area
- Communication from Community Committee
- Local areas of interest e.g. gardens, walks, horse trekking, cycling, native bush reserves
- Accommodation and hospitality
- Area Civil Defence Plan
- Support agencies e.g. Manawatu Rural Support Trust, Feilding Health Care
- Community Plan

● Regional Governance Support

- Manawatu District Council to continue to support the Community Committees.
- Potential to facilitate an annual combined meeting of the three committees.
- Community plans these have been initiated well. The community goal needs to now be to keep focused and action based. Support from the Council is crucial to achieve this.
- There is opportunity to grow community leaders in their roles by providing training and support.
- Incentives for local businesses.

Appendix 5: Community Governance

The three communities fall under the umbrella of Manawatu District Council. As part of the council Community Development Plan, each area has a Community Committee.

Information on this page comes from the Manawatu District Council http://www.mdc.govt.nz/Living_Leisure/Community_Committees and is taken from "The MDC Community Committee Policy".

"Community development is a means for Council to partner with community groups and not for profit organisations to encourage these groups to strengthen the interests and values of our district's residents by encouraging active citizenship in identifying the issues they want to deal with and to generate local solutions that will deliver economic, social, ecological and cultural wellbeing of our District."

"Each Community Committees is supported by a Liaison councillor appointed by the Council. The role of the Liaison councillor is to assist the Committee and advice on Council processes and to communicate updates on matters of interest at a local, regional and national level. Liaison Councillors are there to listen to the community's concerns and to clarify the process of engagement with Council and to give guidance to where the Committee can seek help on specific issues. They are not the Community's spokesperson."

Community Committees Policy

Over the last three years the Council has worked with each community to develop individual Community Plans.

The Community Planning Programme supports communities to develop a shared vision for their village. It provides a mechanism for collaboration between communities, Council and other agencies to implement improvements.

The programme's objectives are:

- To set clear strategic direction for villages, reflecting each community's unique characteristics.
- To provide a pathway for village community's vision and priorities to be reflected in Council's and other agencies strategies and work plans.
- To grow village community spirit, attract and retain residents.
- To enable village residents to create the communities they want.
- To further develop constructive working relationships between councillors, village residents, businesses and council staff.