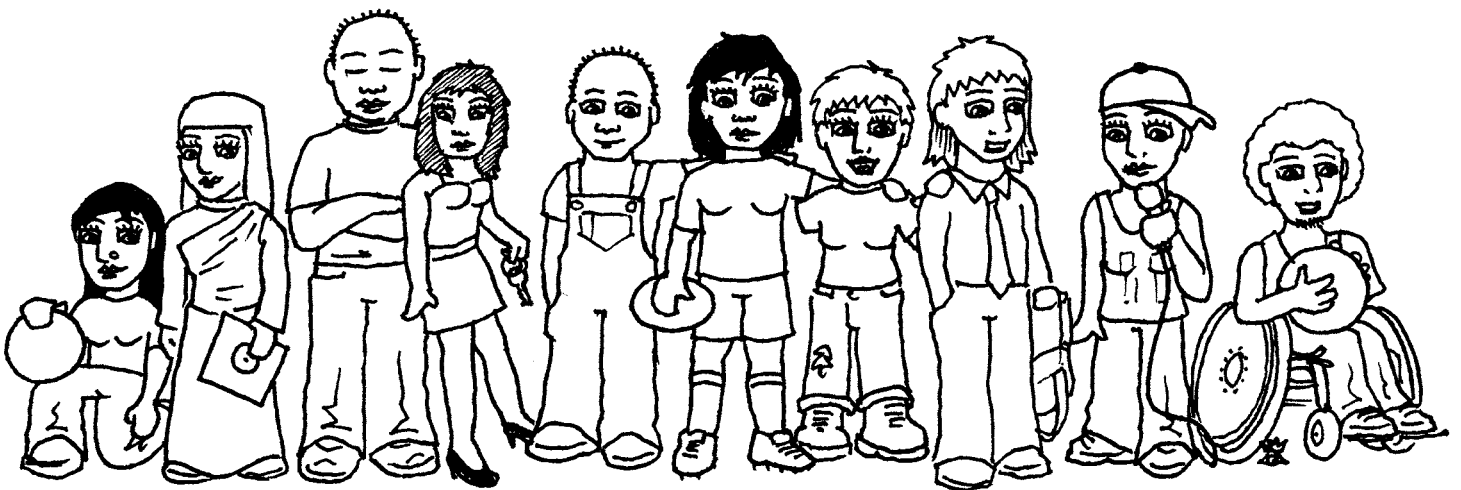


# Opening the doors

*A 'Do It Yourself' Access and Equity manual  
for working with young people*



*Produced by YAPA and the Access Project Reference Group  
for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy*

## **Opening the Doors**

This is one chapter of **Opening the Doors**. The other chapters are:

- What is Access and Equity?
- What does the law require me to do about Access & Equity?
- What does my funding body require me to do about Access & Equity?
- Young people with a disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender young people
- Early school leavers
- Rural and geographically isolated young people
- Young women
- Young parents
- Refugee and migrant young people
- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people involved with the juvenile justice system

**Opening the Doors** is only available online. You can:

- browse the publication in a series of web pages
- download individual chapters as PDF files
- download the whole publication as a PDF (large file: 2.4 MB – broadband recommended).

**[www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors](http://www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors)**

**Enquiries:** [info@yapa.org.au](mailto:info@yapa.org.au) (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323

**Produced** by YAPA & the Nepean Access Project Reference Group for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy.

**Drawings:** Colin Stokes.

**Design:** Breakout Design & Print [www.breakout.net.au](http://www.breakout.net.au) 02 9660 9111

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**Disclaimer:** This manual is a general guide for NSW services designed specifically for the Nepean Region (Blue Mountains Penrith & Hawkesbury). The producers of the manual took reasonable care to ensure that all information was correct as of 2005. However government regulations, laws and standards are complex and do change over time. This document is not intended as legal advice. You should seek clarification on legal matters through other publications and authorities.

# How to use the checklists

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**We have developed some checklists to get you thinking about how your service is performing on access and equity issues.**

It is best if you can work through these activities with your management committee or staff team, but you can also do these activities by yourself.

## **Steps**

1. Read through each checklist and answer yes or no to each question
2. You now have some guidelines for what you are doing well (your yes responses) and some goals for how you can improve (your no responses)
3. Prioritise each of your no responses
4. Choose 3 – 5 goals to work on in the next month and write a plan of how and when you will achieve them. You may want to include your plans in your work plan or strategic plan.
5. Once you have achieved one of your goals you can record your action as a new achievement and choose another goal from the remaining items on your list.
6. Keep other people, including your management committee, informed of your progress and share good ideas and examples with your colleagues and your youth network.

# WORKING WITH ... RURAL AND GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED YOUNG PEOPLE



## DEFINITION

This section looks at the needs of young people living in rural and geographically isolated areas.

Rural areas can be characterised by:

- low population density
- small total population
- predominantly agricultural or primary industry functions
- non-built-up areas are predominant compared to built-up areas
- being geographically isolated from essential services such as schools, shops, health and community services<sup>9</sup>

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The Nepean area has a mix of metropolitan and geographically isolated areas.

Nepean localities which can be considered rural and geographically isolated are:

Suburb	Total population
<b>Blue Mountains</b>	
Bell, Mt Irvine, Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson	213
Megalong Valley	113
Mt Victoria	1048
<b>Hawkesbury</b>	
Berambing	117
Bilpin	677
Cattai	717
Colo Heights	410
Colo Valley	593
Comleroy	625
East Kurrajong	918
Lower Portland	377
Maraylya	670
Mulgrave	238
Oakville	1545
Sackville	410
St Albans	302
Scheyille	319
Tennyson	617
Webbs Creek	184
<b>Penrith</b>	
Agnes Banks	572



Berkshire Park	1788
Castlereagh	819
Llandilo	918
Londonderry	3488
Luddenham	1160
Mt Vernon (incl Kemps Creek)	1573
Mulgoa	1604
Orchard Hills	1739
Wallacia	1044

Based on 2001 ABS statistics

## TERMINOLOGY

This section refers to young people who live in rural and geographically isolated areas.

The Commonwealth Government has developed a method of classifying rural areas known as the “ARIA - Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia”. However there is still much debate about the index and many other definitions of “rural” exist. The ARIA Index measures remoteness based on the road distance from any point to the nearest service centre and does not consider road conditions, travel time or the broader issue of accessibility.<sup>13</sup>

Other words that are commonly used to describe rural areas include *regional, remote, country, bush* and *geographically isolated*.

## OVERVIEW OF THE NEEDS AND ISSUES

There are many advantages to life in a rural area. These advantages may include a close-knit community, a slower and less stressed pace of life, more opportunity for family time, a feeling of increased safety, access to open spaces and nature, cheaper rent and property prices.

Around 70% of young people in rural areas

say they are pleased or mostly satisfied with their quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

Rural young people face many of the same issues as other young people. They also face a number of additional challenges.

## Transport

Rural areas face a considerable lack of public transport. Transport that is available is often extremely limited in terms of routes travelled, running times, availability, affordability and accessibility.

In many areas the only public bus may be the local school bus which runs on weekdays and only twice a day. Nearby towns may have an adequate bus system but not outreach to rural areas. Rail services are often non-existent. Community transport buses (a government funded transport scheme for the frail aged and people with disabilities) generally do not provide transport for young people.

When public transport is available, concession fares for young people can be limited. Young people employed under junior rates of pay, trainees and apprentices, and young job seekers not receiving the maximum rate of the Youth Allowance are not eligible for any concession fare on private buses.<sup>21</sup>

Rural areas are therefore very car-oriented with most essential services located some distance away. There is a higher level of multiple car ownership in rural families than their city counterparts.

Young people who do not have a licence and access to a car are heavily reliant on someone else, such as friends or family, for transport.<sup>16, 18</sup>

Alternative transport options are few and far between. The distances required to travel are often too great for walking or cycling, and taxis



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are often not readily available, or extremely expensive when they are.

Young people may resort to risky practices in order to meet their transport needs, such as hitchhiking, riding bikes on major roads, drink driving, or carrying too many passengers in a car. <sup>14, 20, 22</sup>

Rural young people face a higher risk of motor vehicle accidents due to increased driving distances, and more dangerous driving conditions, such as lower grade roads. Country road accidents account for 60% of all motor vehicle accident deaths <sup>19</sup>

Recreational opportunities, particularly at night, can be extremely limited and parents may be unwilling to transport their children long distances. For example, a family living in a geographically isolated area in the Hawkesbury or Blue Mountains area may need to drive over one hour each way to access night time recreational opportunities in Penrith.

Young people who wish to access a service confidentially for issues such as sexual or mental health, face a great deal of difficulty because if they ask a friend or family member for a lift they may need to disclose where they are going and why.

Overall the lack of transport makes it very difficult for young people to access essential services and life opportunities.

### **Recreational opportunities**

There are a lack of safe, supervised, affordable and accessible recreational opportunities for young people in rural areas. <sup>14, 20, 22</sup>

Adults in rural communities usually have some options for night time recreational activities such as restaurants, the club, the pub or the

movies. These options are usually closed to young people because of age restrictions, lack of transport or lack of finances.

Sport plays a major role in many communities, in particular young men's sport is celebrated and plays a significant role in community life.<sup>8</sup> However the high cost of participating in structured sport, often amounting to several hundreds of dollars per year, means that young people on low incomes miss out.

Recreational facilities such as bike tracks, skate parks and basketball courts are often unavailable in small communities.

Rural young people frequently cite 'somewhere to go' and 'something to do' as a priority need in their lives. <sup>20</sup>

### **Surveillance and scrutiny**

Due to a lack of recreational opportunities and services, young people in rural areas face constant surveillance and scrutiny from other members in the community.

In a nationwide survey of over 1000 young people in rural towns, the majority of young people reported that they felt under constant surveillance by other people in the community. This perception of surveillance was significantly stronger for young women than young men. <sup>11</sup>

Young people frequently choose to 'hang out' with their friends in a town centre, main street or park where they are subjected to a large amount of scrutiny and reproach from other community members. Young people may then come into contact with police and be moved on, often to a more isolated and unsupervised area. <sup>11, 22</sup>

As a result rural young people often have a negative public image, are branded as a



problem, and face ongoing criticism in local media outlets.<sup>5, 22</sup>

### **Lack of confidentiality**

Lack of confidentiality is a major barrier for young people in small communities.

Young people are often concerned that they will be 'seen' and judged by others. This prevents many young people from accessing appropriate support and services, particularly from health, counselling and community services.<sup>5, 8, 22</sup>

In smaller communities it is highly likely that young people will be seen by people they know everywhere they go. It can be difficult to access a GP for example, because others will see them entering or leaving the premises, and they will probably know other people in the waiting room or the receptionist or administration staff. Accessing contraception can be just as difficult, as young people will also be seen by others they know in a chemist or in the local supermarket where many of their peers work. Young people can fear that their behaviour will be reported to their parents.<sup>5, 8, 11, 14, 22</sup>

In the nationwide study previously mentioned, half of the young women surveyed believed they could not see a doctor without everyone knowing.<sup>11</sup>

Young people often prefer to travel to a larger town to ensure confidentiality. Geographically isolated young people in the Hawkesbury or Blue Mountains area may travel to Penrith, Blacktown or the city to access services.

### **Health**

Young people who want to access a GP may not realise that they are eligible for their own Medicare card from the age of 15. Young

people feel that they have to ask their parents to use the Medicare card and fear facing questions as to why they want to access a doctor. There are lower rates of bulk-billing services in rural areas so young people may be required to pay the full cost of accessing a GP upfront.<sup>2, 5</sup>

Specialists and hospital services are very limited in rural areas making it difficult for young people and their families to access appropriate health care.<sup>5</sup>

Many young people are reluctant to seek help for mental health issues. Young people may not want to admit that something is wrong, they may be fearful of the unknown, may not understand the nature of a mental illness or fear being labelled. These pressures mean that young people may not seek help as early as they should.<sup>12</sup>

Gay and lesbian young people often face negative attitudes and discrimination from the local community. This can make it very difficult to access support services such as counselling, support groups and sexual health services.<sup>5</sup>

### **Regional services**

State and Commonwealth governments fund many services on a regional basis and expect that these services will effectively outreach to smaller communities across the region.

In the Nepean area, regional services are frequently located in the Penrith local government area. It can be extremely difficult for young people in the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains area to access these services.

Some of these regional services provide a level of outreach to the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains areas. However the level of service is rarely equivalent to that provided



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in the Penrith area. Services can also be infrequent, making it difficult for young people to know when they can access the service.

Regional outreach is usually to the major towns in each council area and smaller and geographically isolated areas do not receive any service.

Some services, particularly educational and employment assistance programs, are funded to cover a large region, however they may only accept referrals from the local area. Rural communities that seek funding for additional services are told that their area is already covered by these regional services.

Regional services experience difficulty in providing a service to young people in outlying areas due to limited resources, limited staffing, and not enough time to cover the long distances they are expected to travel to reach outlying areas.

### **Lack of knowledge about services**

A major barrier for rural and regional young people is lack of information about available services.<sup>12</sup>

Rural areas are usually not targeted in information campaigns and rural young people may not access the places that display service information within the main township, such as shops, street outreach, neighbourhood centres, library etc.

### **Limited services**

In many rural and geographically isolated areas there are no youth services at all. Where such services exist they may only be funded for one or two days a week, making it difficult for young people to know when and where they can see the worker.

Youth services located in rural areas often face difficulty recruiting and retaining trained and professional staff. These staff frequently experience high workloads, a limited number of services to refer to, and a lack of opportunities to talk to other professionals about their experiences. Services, like the young people they work with, can face a high level of scrutiny and criticism from the general community.<sup>3</sup>

### **Education and employment opportunities**

The Year 12 retention rate is much lower in rural areas. Boys in rural areas have a retention rate of 54%, compared to 63% in capital cities. For girls the rate is 66%, compared to 74% for their city counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

Young people face a higher unemployment rate. For example, young people living in geographically isolated areas in the Blue Mountains face a higher unemployment rate than young people living in the lower Blue Mountains.<sup>3,5</sup>

Young people in rural areas are more likely to combine paid and unpaid work with their school education, with 66.5% of 12 to 16 year olds being engaged in work, compared to 50.4% in metropolitan Sydney. Large numbers of these young people are involved with farm work.<sup>7</sup>

Local educational opportunities may not be linked to local employment needs. For example, some rural towns which are tourist attractions have no opportunity to study hospitality or tourism.<sup>22</sup>

Career opportunities that do exist may be extremely limited and reinforce traditional gender roles.<sup>8,18</sup>

Frequently young people in smaller towns

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move to regional or city centres after high school in order to access further education and employment.<sup>3, 5</sup>

75-90% of young people intend to leave small towns.<sup>1</sup>

### **Sense of independence**

Rural families often have a strong sense of independence and self-sufficiency. In another nationwide survey of almost 1,800 young people, the desire for self-sufficiency was identified as the biggest barrier to seeking help. The survey identified that young people identified with an image of 'practical people who just get things done rather than talking about it.' Consequently rural young people may wait until a situation of crisis or desperation arises before seeking help.<sup>12</sup>

## **PRACTICAL TIPS**

### **Transport**

There are a number of strategies that your service can adopt to address transport barriers including:

- Organise your events and programs around public transport times.
- Hold your events close to the public transport that does exist.
- Negotiate with your local Community Transport Scheme to provide transport for young people, particularly in their 'off peaks' such as weekends, nights and special events.
- Develop joint programs with other local youth services that have a minibus service for young people.

- Provide mobile versions of your services to rural and geographically isolated communities. For example many organisations are now purchasing buses or box trailers that they can convert into mobile centres.
- Have a clear policy about whether your service can transport (car or minibus) individual young people where appropriate. Ensure that parents and young people are aware of the policy.
- Consider whether your service is able to cover the costs of public transport. For example a bus pass or taxi vouchers for larger groups of young people. Include these arrangements in your transport policy.
- Seek funding to hire minibuses for special events and school holiday activities.
- Talk to the transport or road safety officer at your local council about other initiatives you may be able to develop.
- Work with your local youth network or community safety committee to lobby for improvement and expansion of public transport services.

### **Confidentiality**

Develop a clear confidentiality policy that states when you may need to disclose personal information (eg. if the young person or someone else may be in immediate serious danger). YAPA has a model privacy policy that you can adapt at [www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies](http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies). Advertise your confidentiality policy in your promotional material and at your service. When young people first contact your service take the time to explain your policy.



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If you have more than one staff member, avoid a situation where a worker providing intensive support personally knows the young person, their friends or their family. If this is not possible, raise the issue immediately with the young person, assuring them that whatever they say will be kept private and confidential as outlined in your confidentiality policy.

Consider the location of your service or program: Is it in a busy street where everyone can see who goes in and out? Or is it in a location where it is not immediately obvious who is accessing the service, or what the service is? Sometimes several programs and services operate out of the one building. Not only does this have the advantage of cost saving, but it is also less obvious to the general public what service a person entering the building is accessing.

Consider the way in which you advertise the service. Sometimes discretion can make the young person feel safer in accessing the service.

In some situations, and if your organisational policy allows, you can offer to meet a young person at a neutral location off site. Ask the young person to suggest a location where they will feel safe and private.

Communicate with the broader community about the importance of confidentiality and how this assists young people to get the help they need.

When considering how to create a feeling of privacy in your organisation, think about what would have worked for you when you were a teenager.

### **Knowledge about services**

Be creative in the ways you let young people know about your service. Consider the way

most young people in the community find out information. Is it through the local newspaper, the school newsletter, email, the shopping centre bulletin board, postcards on the local skateboard shop counter, or by word of mouth? Many young people don't read newspapers. Many young people in rural areas can't pop down to the local shopping centre to read a bulletin board.

Useful places to promote your service include:

- local radio outlets
- pamphlets received through the mail
- rural newspapers such as The Land
- the internet
- services which already successfully outreach to rural communities
- shops in rural communities.

Develop a communication strategy. Determine who it is you wish to target and the best way of communicating with them. If you are unsure (or even if you are sure!) ask the young people themselves. They will soon let you know where they get their information from. Ask them how they get information without the rest of their community knowing they have done so. Once you have determined your strategy, and its budget (if any), begin a multi-pronged strategy.

Network with people who work in areas that young people frequent, such as the local fast food outlet. In one part of the Nepean, a service station has become the 'hot spot' for young people late at night. The attendant has requested pamphlets and information to pass onto the young people as the need arises. Collaboration between community services and businesses can be a very powerful way of increasing information sharing.



**Other tips**

Check the demography of the areas you wish to target. Some isolated areas in the Nepean have very few young people. Ensure that you are not doing the hard sell to young people who don't exist! Be strategic with your outreach.

Service models that have been developed for metropolitan areas should not be directly transferred to a rural or regional setting. Get local communities involved in the planning and management of services to ensure an appropriate fit.

Develop partnerships with many different services, eg. schools, school counsellors, local area health services, police, Department of Education home school liaison officers, youth workers, sporting groups etc. By working together duplications and gaps can be identified.

If there are a number of part time workers employed in a location, explore the option of joining together to fund a fulltime multi-skilled outreach worker. The worker may then be able to deal with a large variety of issues, making them and their services more accessible for young people.

Ensure that your service is open the hours that are advertised. Young people are not likely to travel a long way if they are unsure that the service will be open when they arrive.

Ensure that your service is open at times that are suitable to young people, ie. some time outside of school and work hours. Young people in rural and regional areas may need extra time to get to the service after school. Talk to the young people about what hours work best for them, and negotiate this with your management and funding body.

Ensure that young people have a voice in the project or service. This makes the service

relevant, and provides an opportunity for young people to determine how the service can best assist them.

Speak with other services that successfully outreach to rural communities about the strategies and communication methods they use. Adopt some of these best practice strategies or work in partnership to deliver or promote programs.

**COMMON MYTHS**

**Myth 1: Young people in rural areas don't need support because rural life is great**

Young people in rural areas face many of the same issues that other young people face, as well as a number of additional challenges outlined earlier in this section.

Young people in rural areas also face a higher risk of:

- poorer health, particularly injury and suicide
- smoking, drinking at hazardous levels and using illicit drugs
- leaving school early
- possible unemployment
- being involved in motor vehicle accidents.  
2, 19

In addition, young people in rural areas don't have access to the same recreational and support services that are available to young people in other areas.



## **Myth 2: Rural communities are homogenous in their views**

People who live in rural areas have a wide variety of ages, backgrounds, beliefs, political views, aspirations and needs, just like other communities.

It is important to consult with a wide range of young people in the local community to identify the range of needs that exist, and to ensure that your service is responsive to these needs.

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# Rural and geographically isolated young people

## How accessible is your service?

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**Use this checklist to identify how you can improve your service for rural and geographically isolated young people**

### Needs analysis and planning

Your service knows about the demographics in the area that you are funded to cover . . . . .  Yes  No

You collect statistics from young people who use your service about their geographic area . . . . .  Yes  No

Your service compares the demographics of your local area with your client statistics to identify groups of young people who do not use your service . . . . .  Yes  No

You consult rural young people, including those who do not use your service . . . . .  Yes  No

### Promotion

Your service is promoted in ways that reach rural young people . . . . .  Yes  No

### Partnerships

Your service works in partnership with organisations that successfully outreach to rural young people . . . . .  Yes  No

### Transport

Your service provides outreach to the communities you are funded to cover . . . . .  Yes  No

Your service considers public transport timetables or provides transport for programs . . . . .  Yes  No

### Confidentiality

Your service has a confidentiality policy which is used by staff and volunteers . . . . .  Yes  No

Young people know about your confidentiality policy and its limits . . . . .  Yes  No

The broader community knows about the importance of maintaining confidentiality for services . . . . .  Yes  No

### Service delivery

Your service is open at consistent times and young people know when and how to access your service. . . . .  Yes  No

Your service is open during the times when young people need support . .  Yes  No

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# Contact Services

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## **Forgotten Valley Mobile Resource Unit**

**Phone:** (02) 4566 4328

**Address:** Lot 6, Singleton Rd,  
Wisemans Ferry

**Email:** [fvmru@pacific.net.au](mailto:fvmru@pacific.net.au)

**Description:** Provides a range of activities for young people as identified by them. Identifies needs in the local community and works in partnership with services, government agencies, community groups and residents on community development activities and projects to address those needs. Services provided include information and referral, support and resources for new services setting up in the area.

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## **Colo Wilderness Mobile Resource Unit**

**Phone:** (02) 4573 1166

**Address:** 1033 Grose Vale Road,  
Kurrajong

**Email:** [cwmrs@summit.net.au](mailto:cwmrs@summit.net.au)

**Description:** Youth information & referral.  
Holiday programs and youth groups

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## **Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Australian Youth Facts and Stats**

**Web:** [www.youthfacts.com.au](http://www.youthfacts.com.au)

**Description:** Statistics about Australian young people, including rural young people

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## **Young Australian Rural Network**

**Web:** [www.yarn.gov.au](http://www.yarn.gov.au)

**Description:** An interactive website designed for young people in rural industries.

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## **Heywire**

**Web:** [www.abc.gov.au/heywire](http://www.abc.gov.au/heywire)

**Description:** An ABC Radio program to showcase personal stories from a regional perspective.

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