

Rural Living : Children speak out

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In reviewing the literature on children living in rural cities or towns there has been to my knowledge nothing written on how children perceive their living environment. This paper attempts in a small way to present some of the positive aspects that children recognise in living in such an environment. However, to ensure some balance to the paper these children are also asked to present the positive aspects of living in a capital city with which they are familiar. The children are then asked where in the world they would like to live if they were given a free choice.

The Study

The study looks at ten to twelve year old children (approximately eighty children) in Years 5 to 7 at St. Teresa's, a small Catholic school based in Whyalla, a city of just under 27,000 people. St. Teresa's is a systemic school (ie funded by the Catholic Education system) with a cross-section of families, although the majority are 'middle class' families. The questions asked of the students are:-

1. What do you like about living in a city like Whyalla? List 3 aspects that you like.
2. If you were asked to move to Adelaide what would you like about living there? List 3 aspects that you would like.
3. If you were given a choice of anywhere in the world, where would you like to live and why?

The questionnaire was given to the students to complete by themselves whilst they were in class.

The Results

When the children considered what they like about Whyalla the major point to emerge is that their friendships are here. Many of these children also highlight how it is easy to see

their friends because of the short distance from their homes.

Interestingly, the children also feel that people of all ages in Whyalla are friendly. This helps them feel safe in the Whyalla community and surprisingly this is commented upon by almost 25% of the children.

Many children indicate that they enjoy Whyalla's environment as it is easy to travel from place to place, the weather is pleasant and the city itself is the 'right size'. Sporting and entertainment facilities are good and again easily accessible. The relative quietness and less busy nature of the community is also commented upon by 20% of the group.

Other aspects seen as significant are the education available, relatives living in the community, friendly neighbours and the Whyalla Show.

In considering what they like about Adelaide there is an overwhelming response that they appreciate the range of shops in Adelaide as well as the entertainment and sporting facilities. Another popular response is the greater range of fast food outlets (Macdonalds and Hungry Jacks!) as compared to Whyalla.

Several children comment upon the 'greenness' of Adelaide as compared to the dryness of the Whyalla environment. Other aspects mentioned are better television, better houses, the range of educational opportunities, relatives living in Adelaide and the pleasant beaches in Adelaide.

When given a choice to live anywhere in the world, over 60% of the children indicate that at this time they want to live in Whyalla. The major reason is because their family and friends are here as well as believing that the city is not too big and is safer than many other places in the world. Adelaide is viewed as the next best place to live (20%) largely due to the range of shops as well as several children

having family there. Other places mentioned include Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, California, Washington, on a farm, New Zealand, Canada, New York and Queensland. New York is mentioned because of its "cheap shoes" and Washington is mentioned because of the desire to work in the Pentagon!

What do the Results Mean?

Although a sample such as the above has many biases it does highlight some pertinent points. These are:

1. The importance of family and friends on the choice of where these children wish to live.
2. The friendliness of people has a bearing on where children may wish to live. Many children see the people in Whyalla as friendly and feel safe in this environment.
3. The appreciation several children have of not being caught up in the 'rat race' and the slower pace of a small rural city as compared to the larger metropolitan cities.
4. The perception of the larger cities as having the shopping, entertainment and sporting facilities as well as a greater range of fast food outlets. These responses are most likely influenced by the nature of activities undertaken by families when they visit the larger cities such as Adelaide.

Hence, in conclusion, what can be said is that whether children live in the country or city, factors such as family, friends, attitudes of people towards them have a major influence on their satisfaction with this living environment. The children in this sample are very positive about living in a small rural city like Whyalla. They do not see themselves as disadvantaged as compared to children of a similar age living in a larger metropolitan city such as Adelaide. ♦

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