



# Diocesan e-News

## RURAL YOUTH AMBASSADOR

*The Rural Youth Ambassador (RYA) program was established in 2011, aiming to provide country students a formal voice on issues affecting their education. Focused on Year 11 pupils, RYA is a joint venture between the Country Education Partnership (CEP) and the Rural Inspire initiative. Ella Gleeson is a young person from Cobden and attends Mercy Regional College, Camperdown currently studying Year 11 and has recently written about her involvement with the program this year.*

Being a Rural Youth Ambassador (RYA) in 2018 has been nothing short of amazing. The teachers at my school had considered students from Year 11 and as a result I was nominated by my school to become a Rural Youth Ambassador for 2018. After looking at brochures and reading about the program, I thought it would be a group of country kids putting their ideas on a piece of paper and that's where they would stay. I was completely wrong.



Getting on the train at 6:45am to go to Melbourne for the first state-wide forum in April, I was completely nervous, just knowing to go to café in the train station to meet a man called Phil and a lady called Rose (whoever they were).

A group of young people from all corners of the state, formed a group around a small table outside the café and from that day onwards we never looked back.

The Country Education Partnership runs the Rural Youth Ambassador program. It runs yearly and gathers Year 11 students from all around the state to discuss issues surrounding rural and remote education. The 2018 Rural Youth Ambassador group was the biggest with twenty students from Kaniva in the east to Tallangatta in the west, Murrayville in the north and Foster in the south. The Rural Youth Ambassadors represent 50,000 students in rural schools across the state.

Over the course of 2018 we have met four times in person and countless amounts of times online via Facebook messenger and group video chat platforms such as iSee (a virtual school platform) – all focused on discussing how we think education within our communities could be improved.

We have been involved in a huge number of discussions and workshops that have included:

- Meeting at Latrobe University to talk about rural young people and their lower uptake of university programs;
- Meeting with the Minister for Education to talk to him about rural education;
- Meeting with the Opposition spokesperson on Education;
- Meeting with people from the State Library to look at the study resources they have for rural kids – wow, what a great place;
- Meeting with the Secretary of Education within Victoria to explore key rural education issues;
- Participation within a leadership program with Steven Munby from the UK;

- Meeting with the Country Education Partnership Committee;
- Involvement in a workshop with Heywire people;
- A visit to the ABC headquarters;
- Attendance at the Rural Education Conference;
- Meeting with the critical friend to the Minister of Education in relation to the Victorian Education State approach;
- Meeting with the Regional Directors of Education within Victoria;
- Presenting an idea that we had developed to leaders within the Education Department, to support the establishment of a Virtual School to encourage rural schools to work together and provide a broader education for young people.

As part of the discussions we decided to focus on four key areas:

- Subject availability and choice for rural students;
- Attracting and retaining quality teachers in rural schools;
- The lower levels of aspirations amongst rural young people; and
- Mental health of rural youth.



We put a number of great ideas together, which we have presented throughout the year to many people and we are sharing our thinking in a forum as part of our last discussion in early December.

One of the creative ideas that we have developed has been the establishment of a virtual school platform to be used by rural schools as a key way to share their curriculum and learning, so that young people within these communities can be provided with a greater range of subjects. We were asked to put a proposal to the Education Department and they are currently considering whether funding can be found to support this exciting idea.

We have since presented these issues and our suggestions for solutions to:

- Minister for Education, James Merlino;
- Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education and Training - Gill Callister and Katy Hare;
- Regional Directors for Education in Victoria; and
- Opposition spokesman Mr Tim Smith.

Our suggestions have contributed to many areas now being discussed by politicians and education personnel, some including:

- The Coalition promising to allocate a significant amount of money to support young people transitioning from school to further education;
- Allocation of money from the Labor Party to provide an incentive for rural and remote schools to work together through the use of communication technology; and
- The development of a new approach to career education and support.



Making a difference in rural and remote education has been a real honour - but the friendships made through the Rural Youth Ambassadors, the stories shared and the bonds forged throughout this year, have been ones that will always be with me.

Being involved within the Rural Youth Ambassadors has been an awesome experience for me personally, by being provided with a range of experiences and involvements that I would not normally get within my local community. I have gained a great deal of self confidence and ability to share my thoughts confidently with a range of people. I have established a wide range of networks and friendships that are much wider than my local networks, have developed my problem solving skills and improved my critical thinking, which will be a real asset for me in my future life and career choices.

Due to the Rural Youth Ambassadors program pushing me to try something new, put my ideas out there and encouraged to take on experiences outside my comfort zone, I have come out of it a better person. I wouldn't change it for the world!