

RURAL ISOLATION
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Tena Kouto, Tena Kouto, Tenakouto Katoa.

Rural Isolation for those on the prosperity side who own property, vehicles, and other assets are not so greatly affected as those who are experiencing poverty.

Grocery costs over the past 12 months have gone up from \$100.00 per week to \$140.00 per week for the same items.

Frequently people move to the country areas from the larger town because they can't afford the rents in the larger towns. What they don't take into account is that a reliable car is necessary as there is little or no public transport.

Increasing petrol costs make any travel prohibitive, and therefore the isolation increases. We currently pay 180.9cents a litre in Thames. 4c more than the rest of the country.

Access to services is limited. Most children in the country go to school on the school bus. If Mum has to assist Dad in the shed, the children often have to get themselves off to school at 7 or 7.30am, so if they miss the bus, they don't go to school. In many cases there is no extended family around for support.

- Meet Mum no 1 who has a 3week old baby in a front pack, a toddler in the back pack and an almost 4 year old at her feet as she goes to the shed to help milk twice a day. Her husband is struggling to work his way into owning his own herd and eventually his own farm. He needs her help. They are so tired in the evenings that they do not have much social life or many friends. Life for them is hard, with no let up over the summer.
- The farmer on the other hand takes a well earned summer holiday to his beach house with his boat. Petrol price increases don't really affect him so much because he can write it off against his business. He does have a choice of fairly new vehicles that he can use.
- Larger families who are farm workers often keep their children home from school to care for the younger children. - About 50% of the adults attending our agency on a regular basis cannot read or write. I find this difficult to understand in a prosperous country like NZ. Being illiterate reduces job opportunities significantly. It reduces any quality of life.
- Meet Jenny- a Mother of 3 preschoolers in her early 30's who has developed MS. Her husband who was a farm worker began drinking heavily when she was diagnosed with MS in an effort to cope with his emotions. His farm work and their accommodation was terminated. Her health was variable. He gets violent when he is drunk. They thought that moving to nearby town would solve their problems.

In the newly rented house, Jenny's health deteriorated. Her husband couldn't get work. His drinking accelerated. He trashed the new house. She was too weak to attend preschool activities, and was too embarrassed to admit she needed help.

Finally they parted, leaving her to return to her aging parents with three young children who had seen their father out of control, and their Mother too tired and weak to care for them. WHERE WILL THESE CHILDREN END UP?

Rural Isolation can hide an enormous amount of violence, heartache, low self image and need. The poverty cycle is real for these people as they try to live each day with inadequate funds and other resources to enhance their lives.

People who have been unemployed long term struggle to find work because they have no employment history. We have a young man working for us at present who was unemployed for 8 years. I helped him write a CV a few weeks ago, and here are some of his responses to my questions:

What did you learn while working for Work Plus?

I learned how to mow lawns
Lawnmower Maintenance
How to work with other people
To help each other
I enjoy working
Time Management
It's important to do the job well
When people pay for the job to be done, they expect it to be done well
Sometimes I don't like being told I am wrong
My fitness levels have improved since working.

What do you hope for?

I hope I don't have to be a couch potato again
I hope to get another job – I prefer outside work
I hope to get a job that will keep me fit
To have meaning in my life.
For an income

What will you need?

A CV References Education (I can't read)
Employment history A good attitude Be polite and agreeable to the customer. Be able to work well with other people. To work for a fair boss.

How would you describe yourself to a new boss?

I am honest, Hardworking and kind.

Life in the country can be wonderful or difficult according to the level of income and the state of health. A lot of violence which goes on behind closed doors can be hidden more easily in the country.