



## Main Street/Small Towns Program

### Young – success story

#### Challenges and opportunities

Young is a major centre for sheep, cattle, pig, poultry and fruit production. Its diverse economy also includes horticulture, mining, light manufacturing, tourism, retail, service industries and health services. Young enjoys reliable rainfall, fertile soils and a Mediterranean-style climate.

More than 55,000 people in neighbouring local government areas live within 90 minutes' drive from Young's retail centre. Efficient road transport links provide ready access to potential markets in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra/Queanbeyan. Local businesses benefit from excellent power, energy and telecommunications networks and a reliable water supply.

Nevertheless, by the mid 1990s Young was experiencing tough economic times and community pride and unity suffered as a result. Unemployment was high and the population was declining, with many young people leaving town. The closure of Young's leading department store was a major blow to the local economy and community morale. A few local activists were committed to working towards change, but the community was dominated by a sense of apathy.

#### A program for change

At a public meeting in April 1995, the Lambing Flat Inc (LFI) Executive Committee was formed 'to enhance Young's image and quality of life for residents through the improvement of the town's appearance, services and facilities, and to create community pride and unity'.

In 1997 LFI applied for a grant through the Main Street/Small Towns Program to fund the appointment of a part-time community coordinator. Funding was granted for three years, Young Shire Council matched the funding and a coordinator was engaged. Since 2000 the Council has funded the position independently, and the position is now that of Economic Development Officer (EDO).

#### Goals

With the help of the coordinator/EDO, the LFI defined its key goals as:

- encouraging young people to stay in Young and contribute productively to the local economy and community
- revitalising the Young business community and attracting new businesses
- creating a more pleasant environment for local residents and businesses, and promoting community pride
- attracting more visitors and tourists to Young.

#### Projects

A Youth Forum was formed to facilitate and support the ideas, activities and involvement of Young's youth. Its initiatives included:

- establishing a permanent under-18s disco, a movie theatre and a skate ramp
- encouraging Young Shire Council to employ a Youth Worker focused on creating access to work experience, helping youth at risk and formulating and implementing youth activities.

The Young Marketing Group was formed to encourage people from all business sectors to join together to promote and develop business enterprises in Young. Its initiatives have included:

- market research into Young's business profile and potential
- a Business Retention and Expansion survey conducted in 2001
- annual regional marketing campaigns since 2002 to promote the excellence of Young's retail centre
- since 2003, annual business revitalisation workshops and seminars.

Initiatives for revitalising and beautifying key areas in Young have included:

- the sensitive restoration of historically significant buildings
- freshening up the CBD's shopfronts and building facades.

Tourist operators and providers in Young have worked to:

- identify and address local shortfalls in tourist facilities
- promote Young's attractions locally, regionally and statewide
- organise special tourist events.

## **How the Main Street/Small Towns Program has helped**

By enabling the initial appointment of a coordinator dedicated to supporting the community in achieving its goals, the Main Street/Small Towns Program has served as a crucial catalyst for change in Young. Additional funding received by the Council through the Program has helped support business surveys and business workshops.

The Young Youth Council, which evolved from the Youth Forum and is now part of Young Shire Council, is deeply involved in the community and is connected with key groups in the Shire. Local young people are now gaining jobs and further training, and enjoy a variety of youth-oriented recreational facilities and events.

Local morale has lifted, the local business community is vibrant and local business is thriving and expanding. New business people report that they were attracted by the vitality of the town's main street. Commercial developments include mining, steel fabrication, civil engineering, hydroelectric power and food processing. Young's new viticulture industry is already valued at \$19 million.

After agriculture, Young's largest industries are now:

- construction – with a series of major community projects, record levels of residential sub-divisions and \$31.4 million worth of new development applications in 2003/2004
- retail – with people from as far afield as Lithgow and Cobar commenting that their perceptions of Young have changed. Several major retail chains have now opened in Young
- property and business services.

The population of Young is now growing, and residents enjoy improved quality of life. More than 250 new jobs were created in Young between October 2002 and June 2004. A new hospital and a new cinema/cultural centre were opened in 2004, and construction began on a new sports stadium.



Major tourist events held in Young during 1997–2000, including the annual Cherry Festival and the Young Home and Leisure Trade Fair, raised \$28 million and contributed more than \$20 million to retail turnover. In 2003/2004 Young attracted at least 120,000 visitors.

## **What we're doing now**

For the third year in a row, a major regional marketing campaign is spreading the word on Young's strengths via regional television and radio.

Local business people will be offered workshops aimed at motivating and training them in optimising the efficiency of their businesses, to help them expand, grow and create further job opportunities.

## **Contacts**

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**Community name:** Young Shire

**Area:** Young local government area; 2693 km<sup>2</sup>

**Location:** 3.5 hours by road from Sydney and 55 kms inland from the major Sydney–Melbourne corridor

**Region:** South East

**Population:** 12,000

**Main industries:** Agriculture, construction, retail, property and business services