



Carsey: Parents Shape Coos Youth's "Stay Or Go?" Decisions

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June 30, 2009

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DURHAM, N.H. - When it comes to deciding whether to stay in New Hampshire's rural Coos County or leave for other opportunities, young people - even teenagers - are listening to their parents.

That's the major finding of a new brief from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire, the latest in its Tracking Changes in the North Country project. Surveying 78 percent of all seventh- and 11th-graders in public schools in Coos County, New Hampshire's northernmost and most rural county, researchers found that young peoples' future intentions to migrate from Coos in search of economic or educational opportunities or to remain in Coos to pursue a future close to home are closely aligned with the messages their parents deliver to them.

"We found that if parents encouraged their child or children to either stay in the area after high school graduation or to leave to plan their roots elsewhere, the child's own expectations were similar," says brief author Corinna Jenkins Tucker, a Carsey Institute faculty fellow and associate professor of family studies at UNH.

The brief notes that 53 percent of 11th-graders and 46 percent of seventh-graders responded that it was important to leave the area; and nearly half of each group (55 percent of 11th-graders; 48 percent of seventh-graders) said it was not important to live in the town they grew up in. Similarly, nearly half the 11th-graders and 45 percent of seventh-graders reported that they were not encouraged to consider staying in Coos by their parents. The researchers found the relationships between youths' perceptions of their parents messages about staying or leaving Coos were closely aligned to their own future residential plans.

The researchers also found differences between seventh- and 11th-graders, with the older students more likely to leave the area. "This may indicate that as they get closer to high school graduation, they are more acutely aware of the lack of opportunities if they stay, even if they might like to," says Tucker.

The brief informs efforts to stem the tide of out-migration, particularly among young people, in this area transformed by the loss of manufacturing jobs in the paper and pulp industry.

"Part of the challenge of keeping youth in Coos County is helping them *and* their parents see the value of living in the region. Our findings suggest that community programs aimed at

encouraging youth to stay in Coos County should target both young adolescents and their parents," says Tucker.

This brief, called "Stay or Leave Coos County? Parents' Messages Matter," draws on a 10-year panel study of students who began seventh and 11th grades in 2007 in Coos County. In future surveys, researchers plan to track the reality of these students' current plans to measure whether these expectations hold up and whether parental messages change.

The brief is available to download here:

<http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/NEIB14.pdf>. It was supported by the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation as well as the Carsey Institute endowment.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy and applied research on vulnerable families and on sustainable community development, giving policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, space-grant and community-engaged university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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