

**Scotland's Rural College**

## **Children and young people and rural poverty and social exclusion**

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**Children's  
Neighbourhoods  
Scotland**

**Children and young people  
and rural poverty and social  
exclusion:  
A review of evidence  
November 2020**

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## Key Findings

1. Rural poverty accounts for 16% of all poverty in Scotland. Rural poverty is often less visible than in urban areas and harder to measure.
2. Children and young people are vulnerable to the risk of poverty in rural areas because their needs tend to be invisible behind the 'rural idyll'.
3. There is a lack of research that focuses exclusively on child poverty in rural areas in Scotland, but it is agreed that tackling generic rural challenges will help.
4. A key issue is that it costs 10% to 30% more for families with children to live in rural Scotland than in an urban area.
5. A lack of access to affordable, high quality and flexible childcare can be a driver of child poverty in rural areas.
6. Rural lone parents are particularly affected by greater distances to employment and childcare providers, more expensive travel costs and limited access to social housing.
7. Educational attainment in rural areas can be affected by higher per capita costs of education provision and local availability of specialist academic or vocational courses.
8. Patterns of inequality affect rural youth transitions, with those who cannot leave the local labour market generally reliant on low-qualified, low-paid, part-time/seasonal jobs.
9. Personal networks can be pivotal for securing employment and accessing other forms of support in rural areas.
10. There is often a lack of availability of social housing and/or affordable, single-person dwellings in rural areas, which can affect young people's housing options.
11. Sub-standard and expensive public and private transport infrastructure is a key factor that can exclude rural young people from the education system/labour market.
12. Social isolation of young people in rural areas is largely due to a lack of venues to meet and socialise in and/or organised activities to take part in.
13. Although rural children and young people are less likely to experience adverse childhood experiences than their urban counterparts, there are concerns about increasing levels of alcohol and drug use.
14. Many specialist health/support services are distant from rural communities, creating social inequalities for those who do not have access to their own private transport.
15. Although living in a rural area can instil a sense of identity and pride in children and young people, families on low incomes can be stigmatised within 'idyllic' rural settings.
16. Inter-generational tensions in rural communities can lead to feelings of powerlessness among young people.
17. Policymakers, practitioners and academics need to be more aware of the needs of young people in rural areas. Co-ordinating support initiatives and providing a single point of contact is particularly important.
18. A conceptual framework at the end of this report signposts individual, community and external factors that can affect outcomes experienced by rural children and young people.

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## 1 Introduction

The experiences of children and young people (CYP) in rural households received considerable academic attention in the early 2000s when rural young people were studied in detail by scholars across the UK and Europe (Shucksmith *et al.*, 2000; Dax and Machold, 2003; Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2004b; Shucksmith, 2004). Overwhelmingly, this work found that the needs of the UK's rural young people are often 'invisible' within geographies which are viewed by society at large as 'idyllic', 'natural' and 'peaceful' rural settings. It was also concerning at the time that most policies targeted at young people across Europe did not acknowledge that young people in rural areas encounter quite distinct problems.

More recent academic work in the UK continues to note specific poverty challenges and social inequalities faced by CYP in rural areas, with some challenges exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, particularly in terms of transport, digital connectivity and the opportunities to secure a livelihood locally (Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019). However, there is a lack of research that focuses exclusively on child poverty in rural areas, although it is generally acknowledged that tackling many of the generic rural challenges are important for addressing the issue (McKendrick, McHardy and Kelly, 2018). For example, it continues to be the case that it costs 10% to 30% more for families with children to live in rural Scotland than in an urban area (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2018).

It has been estimated that rural<sup>1</sup> poverty accounts for 16% of all poverty in Scotland, affecting approximately 160,000 people (McKendrick, McHardy and Kelly, 2018). Although many more people live in poverty in urban Scotland, the 'rurality' of poverty presents unique challenges that are not necessarily experienced by urban households. For example, rural households face additional overall living costs when compared with their urban counterparts. Transport makes up the most significant part of these additional costs, followed by domestic fuel bills, food, household goods and social participation (Smith, Davis and Hirsch, 2010). Despite this knowledge, national poverty policies still tend not to recognise fully the extent and specific characteristics of rural poverty, or how to address it (McKendrick, McHardy and Kelly, 2018; Atterton *et al.*, 2020), although there has been a growing policy emphasis on improving opportunities for young people who choose to remain in rural Scotland (Atterton and Brodie, 2014).

The Scottish Government has set out ambitious targets for tackling child poverty. Under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the country's first Child Poverty Delivery Plan<sup>2</sup> makes a clear commitment to eradicate child poverty in Scotland. It is encouraging that the Delivery Plan notes several factors that add a 'rural dimension' to poverty and social exclusion that may not be experienced by urban households. The costs of living, greater distance to services, the structure of rural employment and a lack of local childcare are mentioned as specific examples. The Plan also

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<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Scotland's land mass is defined as 'rural' (98%), yet rural areas are inhabited by only 17% of the population See [Rural Scotland: key facts 2018](#) (Scottish Government) for an overview of population and other indicators.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2018): [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022](#).

notes the ongoing investment in the Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS) programme, which is working to improve outcomes for CYP in both urban and rural communities.

The purpose of this review is to inform the ongoing, place-based work of CNS in rural settings and wider policy developments within Scottish education. The review explores the following question:

*How are poverty and social exclusion experienced by children and young people in rural areas?*

The methodology and scope of the review are explained in Appendix A and definitions of some key terms are provided in Box 1. The remainder of the report analyses and synthesises the findings of previous research in four sections, relating to:

- *characterising* poverty and social exclusion as experienced by rural CYP;
- the distinct *challenges* of growing up in a rural setting;
- *health and wellbeing* of rural CYP; and
- the factors that affect the *agency* of rural CYP.

The review concludes with a conceptual framework for improving outcomes for CYP in rural Scotland.

*Box 1: Definitions of terms used in the review*

**Poverty**

Usually refers to an individual’s income or financial situation, often related to low wages, casualisation of the workforce or unemployment. In Europe, people are regarded as relatively poor if their household income is less than 60% of the national median household income.

**Deprivation/disadvantage**

Multi-dimensional terms that are linked to sophisticated indicators of multiple deprivation.<sup>3</sup> Relates to access to resources/opportunities, including income/employment. Also includes living standards and an area’s resources, such as: access to services, transport, appropriate housing, shops, libraries, leisure facilities, etc. Disadvantage relates to the ability of an individual to participate fully in society.

**Social exclusion**

Refers to power relations and processes of change. Looks beyond the labour market to consider other processes that affect the allocation of resources and how people integrate into society (e.g. housing, community, friends and family, agency, capacity).

Adapted from: Atterton *et al.* (2020)

<sup>3</sup> Including the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) and the [English indices of deprivation](#).

## 2 Characterising rural poverty among children and young people

This section characterises contemporary understandings of rural poverty as experienced by children and young people. As suggested in the introduction, rural poverty is not invisible in Scottish policy. It is now recognised that rural poverty and disadvantage need to be measured and represented differently and there is an argument for developing indicators of deprivation to be tailored to rural specificities (Skerratt and Woolvin, 2014). However, broader issues such as employment and housing tend to be tackled in national strategies/frameworks without necessarily referring extensively to the rural context and the distinct problems that CYP in rural areas face. It remains important that policies targeted at young people do not neglect the extent to which personal experiences are shaped by place-based factors, spatial processes and gender roles (Dax and Machold, 2003).

People living in poverty in rural places in the UK do not necessarily describe where they live as 'problem places', which tends to contrast with the norm in deprived urban areas (McKendrick, McHardy and Kelly, 2018). Poverty continues to be seen generally as an urban phenomenon, and as noted above although many more people live in poverty in urban areas, it is increasingly clear that poverty is an important issue in rural settings.

Across the UK, it remains difficult to measure rural poverty accurately. Place-based measures of poverty such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) are generally accepted to underestimate the extent of rural disadvantage, being better suited to measuring the 'pockets of deprivation' characteristic of urban poverty (Scottish Affairs Committee, 2008; Atterton *et al.*, 2020). Low income is not a 'failsafe' indicator of poverty in rural areas because basic living costs can vary considerably, exacerbating urban and rural income disparities (a point which has been recognised across Europe) (Copus, 2014).

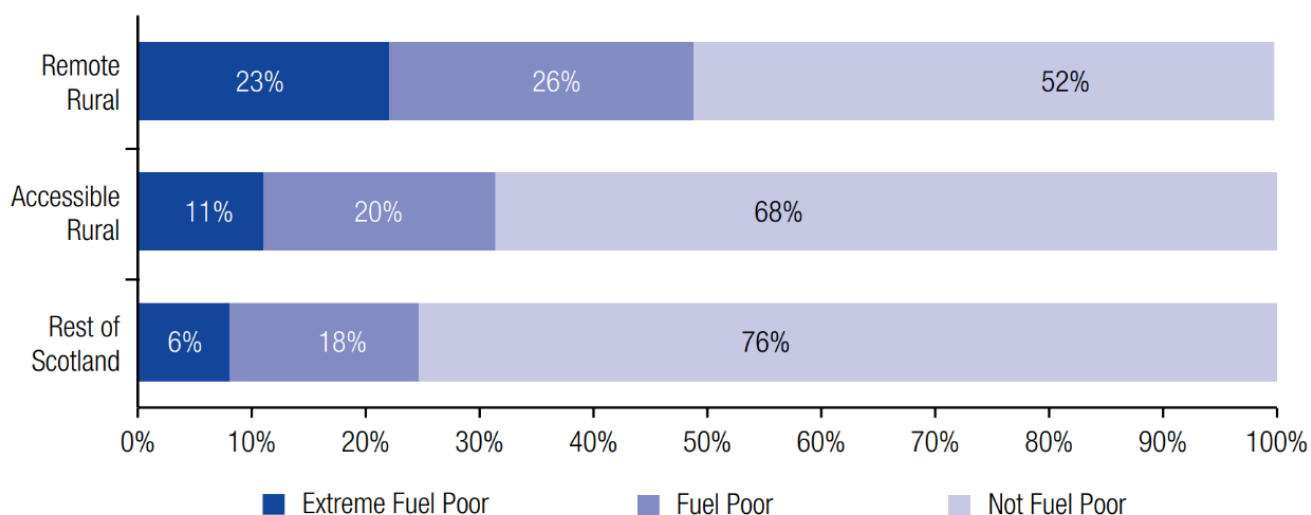
These higher living costs affect the extent to which benefits payments support an acceptable standard of living. For example, families claiming basic out-of-work benefits in rural areas have been found to fall about 50% short of the minimum income standard (Smith, Davis and Hirsch, 2010). In addition, the levels of take-up of social security benefits tend to be lower in rural areas, which also affects the assessment of place-based measures (Williams and Doyle, 2016). It has been suggested that there is lower uptake of benefits by eligible young people in rural areas, perhaps as a result of engaging in seasonal employment, which makes the claims process more complicated, and/or preferring to rely on lower incomes and family support (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Turbett, 2019).

In the late-1990s and early 2000s, as a result of New Labour policy, there was a decline in child poverty in rural England, falling from 26% to 22% (after housing costs) in the highly rural districts and from 25% to 20% in less rural districts (Vera-Toscano, Shucksmith and Brown, 2020). However, the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures have unevenly affected families across the UK, constraining their capacity to support young people (Shucksmith, 2018). Today, child poverty rates in Scotland are overall no different in rural than in urban areas (Satsangi and Wilson,



2020). While persistent poverty<sup>4</sup> is lower in rural Scotland than in the rest of the country, fuel poverty and in-work poverty rates are higher (Satsangi and Wilson, 2020). Figure 1 provides an overview of fuel poverty by geographic area in Scotland, highlighting the issue in remote rural areas.

Figure 1: Fuel poverty by geographic area (2016)



Source: Rural Scotland Key Facts (2018)

Children and young people are widely identified as a vulnerable group when considering the risk of poverty and/or disadvantage in rural areas (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; European Commission, 2008; Reid Howie Associates, 2011; Woolvin, 2015). In Scotland, there are differences in the proportions of young people in rural areas, depending on accessibility to urban centres. While there is generally a high proportion of people aged 0-26 in accessible rural<sup>5</sup> areas, many remote rural areas in the Highlands, the west coast and in the south of Scotland have much lower proportions (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). Across the EU, demographics are a key factor in the economic growth of an area and the outward migration of young people from rural areas has become a key concern (Augère-Granier, 2017).

Having three or more children is thought to be one of the many factors associated with a household being in poverty in both rural and urban settings (Satsangi and Wilson, 2020). Children living in single-parent families or those who are 'looked after' are even more at risk (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; McHardy, 2012; Woolvin, 2015). Across Europe, the incidence of single-parent families is generally lower in rural areas than in urban areas (European Commission, 2008), although this has not been the case in some parts of the UK, where rates of lone parenthood have risen slightly faster in the past than the national average (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). In Scotland, lone parents have been found to face specific rural barriers such as greater distances to employment/childcare providers, limited access to social housing and more expensive transport

<sup>4</sup> Those in poverty in the current year and at least two of the previous three years.

<sup>5</sup> See the [Urban Rural Classification 2016](#) (Scottish Government), which defines urban and rural areas based on population and accessibility.

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costs, all of which limit household budgets more than would be the case in two-parent families (EKOS Ltd, 2009). However, employment rates for lone parents between 2001 and 2011 were generally higher in rural areas than urban centres (Taulbut *et al.*, 2016).

### 3 Growing up rural: what are the challenges?

There is a large body of literature that discusses the factors that can lead to rural poverty in the UK, Europe and the USA<sup>6</sup>. Box 2 provides an overview of rural poverty drivers in Scotland. UK/European research has also focussed specifically on how poverty and social exclusion affect rural CYP. There has also been extensive work on poverty and social exclusion among CYP in the USA and Australia, albeit within different historical and political contexts.

Specific issues affecting CYP in rural areas across Europe are in many ways similar to those in urban areas, including access to education and training, employment, housing, welfare, and access to facilities only open to adults (Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2004a; Shucksmith, 2004). Rural young people also appear to share the usual mainstream aspirations as their urban counterparts (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000).

#### *Box 2: Key dimensions of rural poverty in Scotland*

- Low family incomes due to the nature of the labour market (seasonal, short-term employment).
- In-work poverty being more prevalent among the population experiencing poverty.
- Weak research and innovation capacity and a lack of university presence in some areas.
- Higher levels of fuel poverty due to old housing stock, reliance on more expensive forms of domestic fuel and lower household incomes.
- Higher costs associated with accessing services, which can in the most extreme cases mean that services and employment are difficult to access.
- Significantly higher costs of living meaning that disposable incomes in rural areas do not easily cover costs.
- Vulnerability to rising fuel costs, given the essential nature of car ownership in more remote rural areas.
- Challenges in accessing specialist services, placing the most vulnerable at particular disadvantage.
- Lack of affordable housing meaning the after-housing costs measures are particularly important to understand rural poverty.
- Relatively poorer access to support services, compared to urban areas.
- National poverty strategies not being sufficiently sensitised to 'the rural'.

Source: McKendrick, McHardy and Kelly (2018)

However, CYP in rural areas experience challenges related to access to transport, careers advice, leisure, specialist support services, and heightened visibility within their communities, all of which may be less common concerns for young people in urban areas (Shucksmith, 2004, 2016; McSorley, 2008; EKOS Ltd, 2009; Bailey, Bramley and Gannon, 2016; Youth Service Research, 2019). These issues can be coupled with a lack of awareness amongst CYP of the services available to them, with those most excluded finding it particularly difficult to access support (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). Several of these challenges are considered in more detail below.

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<sup>6</sup> See Atterton *et al.* (2020) for a review of research on poverty and financial hardship in rural Britain, Augère-Granier (2017) for a review of rural poverty in the European Union, and Weber *et al.* (2005) for the USA.

### 3.1 *Childcare and education*

It is well-documented that a lack of access to affordable, high quality and flexible childcare in rural areas can be a driver of child poverty and a major barrier to exiting poverty (Reid Howie Associates, 2011; Scott, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Without access to the support provided to families by high quality childcare, parental employment options are limited and children do not have access to safe and developmentally appropriate places (Sipple, McCabe and Casto, 2020).

Although access to rural childcare has improved in Scotland, particularly through recent increases to funded childcare provision<sup>7</sup> and innovative arrangements at new local authority centres (Copus *et al.*, 2001; McSorley, 2008), there may still be local capacity issues. For example, the capacity of childcare services in rural Scotland and rural Wales (and also in the most deprived SIMD areas) have been found to be lower than in urban areas, due to limited provision by other services such as crèches, holiday play schemes, children and family centres and out-of-school care (Williams and Doyle, 2016; NHS Scotland, 2018). These shortcomings can affect how well-prepared children are for school: in the north east and rural areas of the west of England, for example, the development of under-fives has been a particular concern (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2015). The impacts of a lack of suitable childcare in rural areas have also been highlighted in international research (see Box 3).

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.mygov.scot/childcare-costs-help/funded-early-learning-and-childcare/>

*Box 3: International insights – impacts of reduced childcare capacity in rural areas*

Poverty among school students in several rural school districts in the USA has been linked to the capacity of communities to provide formal childcare opportunities for infants and toddlers from birth to three years. Children whose families experience poverty during the first two years of their life have been found to be much more likely to have lower cognitive, language and social skills by the age of three, although these gaps can stabilise during the pre-school period, if the child engages with education provision.

Early education and childcare remain scarce or inaccessible in some rural communities, creating 'childcare deserts'. This has a negative impact on parents' ability to enter the workforce, and knock-on effects include children in rural communities beginning kindergarten with less advanced reading and maths skills than those children from small urban and suburban communities.

In many communities, there is a reliance on the private sector to provide childcare and those communities with greater financial demand/wealthier populations are more likely to experience market demand, regardless of any government subsidies.

Childcare provision can also be affected by public provision of pre-kindergarten care (from age four). Although there is evidence that this public provision is improving children's academic skills, about half of rural children may not have access to it. Also, if children leave private childcare to attend a free programme in rural areas, this may lead to lost revenue and potential closure of a childcare business caring for younger children. In rural communities, where the loss of enrolment of only one or two children could affect a provider's ability to be financially viable, tailored and place-based subsidies/support may be required.

In rural areas of the US, children who do not take part in early learning opportunities are less likely to have high literacy scores at school, even when poverty-related variables, the home environment, and the quality of instruction are considered. These findings emphasise the need to ensure that pre-school learning opportunities are available to rural children. This is particularly pertinent when there is less willingness than in urban areas to make use of childcare subsidies and other welfare benefits.



Sources: Davis, Grobe and Weber (2010); Henning-Smith and Kozhimannil (2016); Burchinal *et al.* (2018); Vernon-Feagans *et al.* (2019); Sipple, McCabe and Casto (2020); Iruka *et al.* (2020)

Early literacy skills are important determinants of children's success at school (Vernon-Feagans *et al.*, 2019). Poorly educated and poorly qualified young people have been found to be particularly exposed to exclusion and marginalisation in rural Britain (Pluskota-Lewandowska, 2010), with disparities in educational attainment a key concern. There is consensus that access to education is more limited in rural areas across Europe than in cities (Augère-Granier, 2017) and that higher per capita costs of education provision in rural areas can be an important limiting factor (Copus *et al.*, 2001; Shucksmith, Shucksmith and Watt, 2006).

Despite this negative narrative about attainment in rural schools, other studies have shown a high degree of satisfaction with the Scottish education system in rural areas (Educational Institute of Scotland, 2002; Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2002). It is also clear that family engagement with schools

in rural settings is very important to address challenges related to children's academic and social outcomes (see Box 4). Nevertheless, several sources note that educational experiences influence the types of employment that rural young people seek, as well as whether they opt to work in the national or local labour market, and how they feel about their community and rural life (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000; Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002; Green, 2007). Concerns have been raised in some communities that there is a lack of vocational courses and that educational provision is not demand-led (Green, 2007).

*Box 4: The importance of connections between families and rural schools*



Research from the UK, Europe and further afield notes the need for more research about family engagement in rural settings and how good relationships between rural families and schools can have positive outcomes for rural youth, despite community poverty.

In rural areas in the US, for example, the distance between home and school, the prevalence of low-wage and non-standard jobs, high teacher turnover and/or a lack of very experienced

teachers can contribute to low levels of engagement between families and schools.

However, rural schools have been found to have more intergenerational connections than urban schools (for example, parents and teachers who grew up together), as well as community cohesion outside of the school that allows teachers and families to interact informally. One example in Norway noted the way in which a rural school imports and transfers knowledge across the community, reproducing local community cultures.

In the event of threatened school closures, these inter-generational connections, cultural links and extended school activities that involve local communities have been found to be particularly important when contesting state-led changes to rural school provision.

Sources: Irvin *et al.* (2011); Iruka *et al.* (2020); Villa and Knutas (2020)

As children grow up, the argument has been made that young people need a flexible system that fits around their changing needs, rather than expecting rural young people to follow a standard, linear transition into employment (Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2002). This may help to avoid the situation documented in other European countries, where the national educational system can be a source of demotivation for young people in rural areas. In Portugal, for example, it has been found that 'young people in rural areas often have to face up to the harsh realities of life at a very early stage, at which point some begin to downwardly revise their initial dreams and ambitions' (Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002, p.129).

In general, rural young people in Scotland often have to leave their home/community to attend higher education, not having the option to stay with their parents while studying due to the long commute required (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000; Skerratt and Woolvin, 2014). Online, distance learning provision for both further education and higher education has increased in recent years, via institutions like the University of the Highlands and Islands and Scotland's Rural College which

have facilities across rural Scotland. However, transport and the physical location of colleges/universities remains an important aspect in the mobility decisions of rural-residing students across the UK, particularly if a private car is required to travel to classes (Lucas *et al.*, 2019). The difficulties related to accessing further and higher education may also contribute to the higher rate of school leavers going into work following secondary school in remote rural areas (36%) than in accessible rural areas (31%) and the rest of Scotland (27%).<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2 Routes to the labour market

Research carried out in Scotland in the 1990s found that the lack of employment choice was perceived to be the most serious problem facing young people in rural communities (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998). The paucity of well-paid, full-time opportunities remains an issue today across rural Britain (McKee, Hoolachan and Moore, 2017) and Europe, with young people particularly hard hit by unemployment across the region in recent years<sup>9</sup> (Augère-Granier, 2017).

An analysis of British Household Panel Survey data<sup>10</sup> found that, across Britain, rural youth are paid less than their urban counterparts (Culliney, 2014b). Described as a 'double disadvantage', this lower pay is coupled with higher rural living costs, including the high cost of using public transport to travel to employment (or running a private car if one is available). It is also interesting to note that urban 'low-pay durations' tend to be somewhat shorter on average, with a higher probability of movement to a better-paid job in urban rather than rural areas (Phimister, Theodossiou and Upward, 2006). Across Europe, long-term unemployment rates also tend to be higher in rural than urban areas (Augère-Granier, 2017).

A key finding from research on European rural areas in the past couple of decades has been that rural young people tend to enter one of two distinct labour markets as they transition into adulthood. The first, the national labour market, is perceived as 'well-paid, distant and offering career opportunities', while the second, the local labour market, is generally characterised as 'poorly paid, insecure and offering fewer prospects' (Shucksmith, 2004, 2016, p.46). The routes to these labour markets reflect how patterns of inequality may structure rural youth transitions (Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019), with those who cannot leave the local labour market generally becoming reliant on low-qualified, low-paid, insecure and often part-time/seasonal jobs with limited opportunities for progression (Jones, 2001; Scottish Government, 2010; Atterton and Brodie, 2014). However, for some young people who are raised in rural areas and who are focused on pursuing a rural career, a 'restriction' to rural locations does not necessarily equate to stunted aspirations – it can show a 'conscious decision to continue a lifestyle to which they have grown accustomed' (Culliney, 2014a, p.54). Similarly, some groups of young people, particularly young women who have not attended higher education, do not see their social inclusion as reliant solely/primarily on their position in the labour market (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000). For these young women, motherhood and the construction of family may be seen as more important (and

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<sup>8</sup> See [Rural Scotland Key Facts](#) (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Along with women, unskilled workers and older people.

<sup>10</sup> This study looked at BHPS data from 2007/8.

carrying a higher social status) than low-skilled and low-paid employment in the local labour market.

It is important to note here that a key characteristic of the rural labour market is that personal networks are often pivotal for securing employment: a lack of the 'right' personal contacts can be a problem for job seekers (Culliney, 2014a). This is pertinent because around half the available jobs tend to be with small businesses (Culliney, 2014a), which may rely informally on their personal and professional networks to hire new staff, rather than advertising jobs publicly. The opportunities for young people to increase/upgrade their skills is also generally thought to be more difficult in rural areas (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). There are a range of EU and national level employment-related policies that have been designed for young people but, in the past, these have tended to neglect the rural dimension (Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002). The small size of rural businesses, as well as transport limitations, can also present a barrier to releasing young people to attend college or training (Atterton and Brodie, 2014).

The assumption that 'to get on in life, you need to leave' (Shucksmith, Chapman and Clark, 1994; Jamieson and Groves, 2008), perhaps reflects stereotypes that leaving a rural area is evidence of ambition, while staying is due to a lack of ambition or arrested development (Atterton and Brodie, 2014).<sup>11</sup> Those 'left behind' being described as 'no-hopers' (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000) and typically associated with lower income families with lower educational levels reinforces a lack of attachment to the area or sense of pride/belonging. However, research on the same topic in the US has found that it is can be the highest-achieving rural students who are among those with the greatest community attachment, and that student perceptions of local economic conditions are influential on the decision to leave or stay (Petrin, Schafft and Meece, 2014).

In the UK, higher rates of out-migration tend to occur amongst young women in many remote rural areas, with this often attributed to the constraints of living in a close-knit and controlling community, as will be discussed in Section 5.1 (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). Additionally, some families may put pressure on young people not to leave their home town, deliberately limiting the opportunities available to them as they grow up (Culliney, 2014a). These issues raise difficult questions about the extent to which training and further education opportunities should be adapted to local labour market needs to encourage young people to stay (Shucksmith, 2004).

### 3.3 *Housing costs and access to housing*

Issues related to poor housing conditions or disrepair have been well-discussed in the Scottish rural poverty literature (Bailey, Bramley and Gannon, 2016). This is not to say that these challenges are unique to rural residents – in urban and rural areas across Europe the most influential difficult circumstances for those experiencing poverty are reported in their personal housing history (Meij, Haartsen and Meijering, 2020). Access to affordable housing is, however, a common problem that affects rural young people, particularly when the cost of housing restricts their ability to remain in the area and/or there is a lack of social housing and/or single person dwellings to enable them to

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<sup>11</sup> This reflects a dilemma for public policy: while promoting social inclusion can be an objective of rural development, the aim to retain young people in rural areas can conflict with the aim of youth work and education to increase opportunities for young people (Shucksmith, 2004).



move out of the family home (Shucksmith, Chapman and Clark, 1994; Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000; Cloke, Milbourne and Widdowfield, 2001; Green, 2007; Skerratt, 2018). Access to housing for young people as they transition to adulthood has also become a growing concern in the context of trying to reduce the out-migration of young people from rural areas (OPM, 2009). This is discussed more in Section 5.2.

Rural young people have been described as having an 'intensified' experience of housing, due to the strong links between rural housing, the labour market and educational opportunities, which bring knock-on effects: those not earning an adequate and consistent income are unable to live in rural housing that meets their needs (McKee, Hoolachan and Moore, 2017). Indeed, analysis of British Household Panel Survey data collected between 1999 and 2008 revealed that in-work poverty is significantly higher in rural Scotland than in non-rural areas when measured 'After Housing Costs' (AHC) (Satsangi and Wilson, 2020).

Young people in rural areas often rely on the private rented sector, which can include poor quality accommodation, located in isolated areas (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000), or they may resort to extended periods of residency in the parental home (McKee, Hoolachan and Moore, 2017). In a worst case scenario, limited rural housing options can lead to homelessness, particularly as there are very few 'emergency' housing options available for those who feel they can no longer live in the family home or who are forced to leave (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; McKee, Hoolachan and Moore, 2017; Curry *et al.*, 2020). Like rural poverty in general, youth homelessness tends to be more hidden in rural areas, with young people most likely to rely on friends to stay with or move away to urban areas to seek hostel accommodation (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006).

### 3.4 *Digital connectivity and transport*

In a recent survey of young people in rural areas of the UK, USA, Canada, Sweden and Australia, 94% of the respondents stated that digital connectivity is essential for their future in rural places, yet slow broadband speeds and poor mobile phone coverage 'deleteriously impact their lives' (Malcolm Watson Consulting, 2018). Similar work carried out in focus groups with young people in rural Northern Ireland noted how young people feel socially disadvantaged due to a lack of access to digital technology and/or slow internet connections (Youth Service Research, 2019). These issues can have practical implications for young rural dwellers, such as hindering potential routes to market for a new micro-business or affecting access to online learning/training.

Sub-standard and expensive public and private transport infrastructure has also been widely recognised as a key factor that can lead to the exclusion of rural young people from the education system and/or labour market (Educational Institute of Scotland, 2002; Atterton and Brodie, 2014; Powell, Keech and Reed, 2017; Lauby, 2019). In rural Wales, the lack of adequate public transport infrastructure and its high costs have been described as a key problem affecting the rights of CYP as outlined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (End Child Poverty Network Cymru, 2009).

The cost of transport can also impact on the social participation of CYP who cannot afford to attend activities/cultural events in places far from home (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2013). In

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households without access to a car or money for fuel, young people may be excluded from an activity that most urban young people might take for granted (McSorley, 2008). For example, research with organisations in Scotland who support rural people experiencing poverty found that even though activities are often low-cost (e.g. a sports class with a £2 fee), the additional cost of travel means that these sorts of activities can be considered 'luxuries' and not affordable for families on low incomes (EKOS Ltd, 2009). Young people without access to a bus service in the evenings have also described feelings of isolation as they are unable to visit friends or take part in activities (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000; Green, 2007), as well as disenchantment with their locality due to not being as well-connected to 'global' reference points as their urban peers (Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002).

## 4 Childhood health and wellbeing: rural dimensions

Research has been conducted in the UK and Europe on the differences in health and wellbeing outcomes of rural CYP, as compared to their urban counterparts. For example, attention has been given to whether there are rurality factors that affect mental health and wellbeing, sexual health, misuse of drugs/alcohol, the likelihood of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the risk of offending. There has also been a considerable amount of work that focuses on the challenges involved in providing specialist care and support services to rural residents.

### 4.1 Impacts of social isolation

Social isolation in rural communities has been raised as an issue of concern for people with mental health conditions, particularly because of the additional distance from services and help networks (Scottish Government, 2017; Turbett, 2019). In rural Ontario in Canada, for example, children living in rural areas with unsatisfactory public transport and higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage are more likely to have an 'unmet need' for mental health services than children in urban areas (Duncan *et al.*, 2020). Box 5 provides an example of an approach that has been taken in Canada to address this.

Social isolation is also a general issue for rural CYP, with documented reports of young people feeling lonely or isolated in rural settings, even if they do not associate this explicitly with poor mental health (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; Youth Service Research, 2019). Young carers are particularly vulnerable to social isolation, especially if they are caring for an adult who has a 'stigmatising' mental health problem or drug/alcohol misuse condition and they are very visible in the community (End Child Poverty Network Cymru, 2009; Hussain, Wark and Ryan, 2018). (In)visibility of CYP in rural communities and the impacts this can have on the wellbeing of CYP are discussed further in Section 5.1.

A lack of venues for young people to meet and socialise, or a limited selection of activities to take part in, are widely regarded as contributing factors to social isolation (Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002; Atterton and Brodie, 2014; Malcolm Watson Consulting, 2018).<sup>12</sup> A lack of facilities can also encourage young people to leave the area. For those living in households with low disposable income and without access to transport, the issue is more critical and although feelings of isolation are felt especially strongly by those living in remote rural areas, isolation can also be felt in small rural towns (Youth Service Research, 2019).

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<sup>12</sup> In the international survey conducted by Malcolm Wilson Consulting for the Rural Youth Project (2018), over 60% of respondents felt that they needed more access to activities to meet other young people in their areas.

*Box 5: International insights – youth-centred mental health support in rural New Brunswick, Canada*

Since 2015, New Brunswick in eastern Canada has made youth mental healthcare one of its four healthcare priorities. As a result, the focus has been on integrated service delivery, with links made between healthcare providers, a community-based mental health organisation and an established volunteer centre in the region.



Unlike in other mental healthcare programmes, such as in schools or hospitals, young people taking part in the 'ACCESS Open Minds' programme do not need a predefined mental health problem/diagnosis in order to take part.

There is a commitment to initial contact or crisis assessment with a clinician or youth worker within 72 hours of a young person seeking help. Considering the vastness of the region, this is challenging, with phone and online interactions also possible, although in a crisis there is a commitment from the clinician/youth worker to travel to the individual.

There is a collective regional effort, involving other youth-related programs and mental health sectors in social events, community kitchens or collective cooking classes, etc. to help with early identification of issues. There is also a shared commitment not to duplicate provision and/or compete with other services/programs, and those involved work closely with other community sectors to identify young people in need.

A key aspect has been that those young people who take part have a sense of ownership of the programme and can talk openly about their positive experiences. The development of a youth mentor scheme has also created opportunities for young people to have access to a 'family substitute', recognising that young people often don't want their family members involved in their healthcare, particularly in small communities where issues are very visible.

Source: Dubé *et al.* (2019)<sup>13</sup>

Youth services have declined across the UK in the past couple of decades – youth centres can provide safe and welcoming environments for CYP but providing these services regularly/at required times of the week can be challenging, particularly as they rely on volunteer support (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Youth Service Research, 2019). It has also been noted in Scotland that local community centres are sometimes unwilling to support evening events for young people, due to a high degree of intolerance towards young people socialising in the local neighbourhood (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2010). This has been described as associated with 'blurred boundaries' over what is perceived to be legitimate or criminal behaviour in rural areas (Atterton and Brodie, 2014, p.31). These types of tensions and how they link to feelings of powerlessness and disconnection are discussed more in Section 5.1.

<sup>13</sup> See [https://accessopenminds.ca/our\\_site/new-brunswick-nb/](https://accessopenminds.ca/our_site/new-brunswick-nb/)

#### 4.2 *Adverse experiences, crime and drugs/alcohol*

Parents generally consider rural areas of the UK a safer place for their children to grow up (Valentine, 1997), with rural living constructed as 'idyllic' in comparison to urban life (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013). When considering the potential for children to experience dangerous/harmful events in rural areas, some evidence exists. For example, a study of children born in Scotland in 2004/5 found that, at age 8, those living in urban areas were more likely to have experienced a higher number of ACEs than those in rural areas (3.4% in urban areas, compared with 1.3% in rural areas) (Marryat and Frank, 2019). In the rural southern US, rates of ACEs have also been found to be lower than in urban areas, although questions have been raised about whether there are fewer reports of maltreatment due to low levels of formal child welfare intervention in rural areas, rather than actual reduced risk (Smith and Pressley, 2019). Also in the US, it has been found that children living in rural areas are more likely to be exposed to the adverse experiences associated with parental divorce or separation, when compared with their urban counterparts (Crouch *et al.*, 2019).

There has been a growth in the use of alcohol and drugs by young people in rural areas across Britain (Meek, 2008), with much of the research about consumption levels linking the issue to the lack of leisure and recreation facilities in rural communities discussed above (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 2004; Shaw, Egan and Gillespie, 2007). The lack of activities for rural young people has also caused some young people to become involved in anti-social behaviour (Youth Service Research, 2019). In relation to alcohol consumption, a study of young people in rural Cumbria found that binge drinking of alcohol was often constructed as an urban problem, normalising the behaviour in rural settings, particularly when the local pub is seen as a safe place for socialising (Valentine *et al.*, 2008). However, other studies undertaken with young people in England, the USA and Australia have highlighted the relationship between young people's alcohol and drug consumption and social problems (Kraack and Kenway, 2002; Dunkley, 2004; Meek, 2008).

There is some consensus in the evidence that hard drugs are considered widely available in most rural communities in the UK, with the growth rate now higher than in urban areas in some places and rural drug users commonly introduced to drugs at a relatively young age (Forsyth and Barnard, 1999; Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Meek, 2008). However, the County Lines<sup>14</sup> phenomenon remains underdeveloped in Scotland as compared to in England, although there is evidence of some exploitative processes involving marginalised children and young people being used to transport and sell drugs to rural drug markets (Batchelor and Armstrong, 2019). Easy access to alcohol and drugs in rural areas has also been suggested to increase the likelihood of risky sexual behaviour and young parenthood (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Warner, 2018).

#### 4.3 *Other rural health outcomes*

A recent, country-wide and cross-sectional study of levels of physical activity among 10-11 year old children in Scotland revealed some interesting points about general health and wellbeing (McCrorie *et al.*, 2020). Over the course of one year, it was estimated that rural children accumulate approximately 79 hours (about three days) less sedentary time than urban children, replacing that

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<sup>14</sup> When illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across policy/local authority boundaries and usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced by gangs.

time with 'light intensity' activity. However, they engage in similar levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) as compared to their urban equivalents, which has more health benefits. These findings complement previous research which has found little evidence of rural childhood automatically equating to closer connections with nature and more MVPA. It is also important to note that this research found that rural children engage in significantly lower levels of activity in winter months, which may amplify the social isolation challenges outlined above at that time of the year.

A study of the nature and extent of food poverty also noted some urban/rural differences in terms of healthy eating habits in Scotland (Douglas *et al.*, 2015). Overall, more rural households were achieving the 'five-a-day'<sup>15</sup> target than urban households, and this trend was similar across all households, regardless of income level. However, the study also noted that those living in rural areas spend 10-20% more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas, which includes the cost of fruit and vegetables. In addition, the nature of rural employment (as described earlier in this report), combined with poor public transport connections, were found to be key causes for people in rural areas experiencing household food insecurity.

In rural areas of the US, several academic reviews have identified health risks associated with consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, with consumption found to be particularly high among rural adolescents (Yuhua *et al.*, 2019). The importance of rural parents' efforts to promote healthy eating at home, regardless of socio-economic challenges, has also been noted, with nutrition education and school lunch programmes also acting as key facilitators to healthy eating amongst rural young people (McDonald, Dawkins-Moultin and McWhinney, 2018).

#### 4.4 Access to specialist support/care

The centralisation of advice and support services (e.g. welfare advice, psychological services, social work, specialist school provision, provision to disabled children, support for children whose first language is not English, etc.) has had impacts on rural CYP experiencing poverty and disadvantage across rural Europe (Reid Howie Associates, 2011; Camarero and Oliva, 2019). For example, a survey carried out in rural Wales in 2009 found that there are no support services for vulnerable young people in 76% of rural communities and that there are additional challenges in accessing statutory services for children and families (End Child Poverty Network Cymru, 2009). Delivering specialist healthcare services in remote rural areas is a challenge experienced by healthcare providers in all of the countries included in this review, with the extent of the issue affected by the actual distances that patients and professionals are required to travel, access to public transport, and levels of socio-economic disadvantage (see Box 6).

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<sup>15</sup> [NHS guidance](#) on the recommended minimum daily intake of fruit and vegetables.

*Box 6: International insights – delivering specialist healthcare to rural residents*



Rural geography can have an influence on the extent to which healthcare professionals can support young people living in social and economic disadvantage. For example, young mothers and new mothers may find that rural living compounds the extent to which they are marginalised from the healthcare system.

In British Columbia in western Canada, interviews with public health nurses and staff delivering a 'Nurse-Family Partnership' programme, revealed several challenges for nurses delivering care to young mothers in rural areas. These included: long travel distances, poor weather, and nurses struggling to maintain connections with their supervisors due to remote working. However, these issues were often considered 'normal' for rural practice. Importantly, the research found that partnerships/healthcare provision that provide home visits is crucial for the wellbeing of rural clients, particularly those experiencing extreme financial and social disparity.

In Australia, access to healthcare in remote rural regions receives a lot of academic attention. It is understood that complex rural disadvantages can contribute to inequity of access to essential services to avoid poorer outcomes later in life (for example, in relation to speech and language therapy, oral healthcare and mental wellbeing). There is growing recognition in academic research that localised solutions are required in remote and rural contexts, particularly in a manner that enables 'civically engaged and sustained healthcare'. However, delivery remains a challenge and failing to engage communities in identifying childhood health issues presents an additional barrier.

Sources: Bristow *et al.* (2018); Jones, McAllister and Lyle (2018); Campbell *et al.* (2019); Jean, Kruger and Tennant (2020)

This creates distinct social inequalities and marginalisation of rural young people because 'many of the services that are most distant from the majority of rural communities – including hospitals, job centres and benefit offices – are those whose users are least likely to have access to their own private transport' (Woods, 2005, p.104). The centralisation of emergency healthcare services has led to an increase in travelling time for patients and this can place an extra burden on CYP from poorer households as they must travel further for specialised care. If a parent or close relative requires hospitalisation many miles from home, this can also have a significant effect on the wellbeing of CYP, particularly if they do not have access to transport to the hospital (End Child Poverty Network Cymru, 2009). Support from family members has been found to be particularly crucial for enabling rural residents requiring drug use support services to attend appointments (Shaw, Egan and Gillespie, 2007).

It is generally accepted that many aspects of social care are more problematic to deliver in rural settings with sparse populations, due to the high costs involved. Public spending cuts, particularly as a result of austerity, have made the lack of and limited provision of these services even more stark in rural places (Turbett, 2019). It is more time consuming for social workers to support children in rural areas, which means that rural children may not get the same level of monitoring as those in urban areas (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). There is also evidence that young

people who have been in care are at particular risk of disadvantage in rural areas, both while they are in care, and subsequently (Allen, 2003). This is generally because their care placements may be some distance from their home, which makes it hard to maintain contact with family and friends. It can also be difficult to enable young people to keep attending the same school and/or maintain contact with any social networks they have developed if a placement does not continue, again due to the longer distances involved (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006).

The heightened visibility of young people in rural areas creates added challenges when seeking confidential drug, alcohol and sexual health advice. This can be particularly difficult for individuals in remote rural areas where healthcare professionals are usually known personally by them and their families, which can act as a barrier to seeking support<sup>16</sup> (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). Research in a rural area in Washington State in the US found that individuals living more than ten miles from a screening site for sexually transmitted infections were much less likely to receive treatment or have an increased number of days between symptoms and treatment (Amiri *et al.*, 2020). These issues emphasise the need for healthcare providers to understand demographic and contextual characteristics that can impact on behaviours among rural young people in relation to seeking treatment and advice for health conditions.

In light of all the issues outlined above, the importance of co-ordinating initiatives that deliver different types of support via a single point of contact has been noted as 'doubly important' for rural communities, because accessibility is a challenge in this way (Scottish Affairs Committee, 2008). Similarly, there appears to be scope for more work to consider the role of technology in access, engagement and general navigation of the health care system by those in rural areas (Robards *et al.*, 2018).

## 5 Factors affecting rural children and young people's agency

Strengthening the agency<sup>17</sup> and voice of children and young people is a key objective of the Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland programme. This is particularly important in rural communities, which often have little overall political economy to advocate for change (Biddle and Mette, 2017). Increasing the agency of rural CYP has also been a central concern of research that recognises that children are both influenced by society and also exert influence over society (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013). In the UK, much work has centred on the position of CYP within the 'rural idyll', raising questions about the extent to which disadvantaged CYP can develop a strong sense of identity and belonging in a cultural context which may inadvertently exclude them socially.

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<sup>16</sup> Although another review noted evidence that this does not always act as a disincentive for drug users to access services (Shaw, Egan and Gillespie, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> 'Agency' can describe the individual and collective power/capacity that people have to think for themselves and act in ways that positively shape their experiences and life trajectories. Childhood Studies theory recognises that children have agency and participate in the construction of their own childhood (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013).



### 5.1 Identity and belonging within the 'rural idyll'

Research from Childhood Studies and Children's Geographies suggests that cultural and social contexts have been found to shape understandings of rural living and childhood (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013). Living in a rural area can instil a sense of identity and pride, as well as resilience that enables young people to become competent and active members of society (Shucksmith, 2004; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009; Youth Service Research, 2019). Young people have been shown to be particularly active participants in the productivity of family farms (Riley, 2009), as well as creative in their leisure and recreational opportunities (Jones, 2007), with an appreciation of 'hard work and independence' as 'intrinsic to rurality itself' (Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019, p.273). Indeed, the recent international survey of rural young people found that 80% of young people live in rural areas because of their emotional and family ties, with 71% feeling optimistic about the future, despite the many challenges they described about living in a rural area, and only 26% planning to move to a town or city (Malcolm Watson Consulting, 2018). Overall, younger children tend to express more positive views of the rural lifestyle, with increasing dissatisfaction appearing as they become older (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013).

However, the dominant narratives in research about disadvantaged CYP in the UK concern the tendency to regard rural living as idyllic or problem-free (Commins, 2004) and the *difficulties* experienced by young people who find themselves 'visible' and 'stigmatised' within a rural community, or 'invisible' in terms of research, service delivery and policy (Watkins and Jacoby, 2007; Meek, 2008; Bailey, Bramley and Gannon, 2016). With perceptions of the rural 'idyll' also rendering 'poverty' and 'deprivation' 'culturally ineligible' in rural settings (Powell, Taylor and Smith, 2013, p.124, citing Cloke, 1994), it is easy for poverty to remain hidden and/or for families on a low income to become stigmatised as a result of their higher visibility in the community (McSorley, 2008). The latter may have long-term negative effects on all aspects of an individual's life, including access to employment and leisure opportunities (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). These issues are amplified for CYP from families on low incomes and/or those who have claimed welfare benefits or visited foodbanks (Shucksmith, 2004; Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019), particularly in places where moral imperatives may stigmatise access to these forms of support (Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019).

The impacts of social isolation discussed in Section 4.1 are precursors to feelings of powerlessness among rural CYP. For some young people, engendering a sense of belonging can be a daily struggle, due to the way that power relations take shape in rural settings. Research has noted that some rural residents feel intimidated by the presence/activities of young people which they feel represent a 'cultural threat' to the 'rural idyll' but are not criminal activities, such as congregating in open spaces (Yarwood and Gardner, 2000), although this is not necessarily an international issue (see Box 7).

*Box 7: International insights – youth belonging in rural areas*

The application of the rural idyll is seen as problematic in North American research. This is likely to be because poverty in rural North America is less hidden than in the UK, particularly in the rural south where post-industrial decline is common. In the US, communities are also often 'absent' from wilderness landscapes, national parks and places of 'natural beauty', as opposed to rural Scotland where communities exist within 'wild' landscapes, rather than on the fringes.



In rural Appalachia, young people are, like in the UK, commonly perceived as crucial for the future viability and vibrancy of communities. Many rural communities are in economic transition following the long-term decline of the coal industry. Work with a sample of college-educated young adults found that young people experience tensions when trying to reconcile identity, place and mobility. However, there is evidence to suggest that giving people the opportunity to 'make a difference' in rural communities – perhaps through organised programmes/scholarships – can strengthen place-based identities and community attachment.

Sources: Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2003); Terman (2020)

The lack of sanctioned social space for young people to meet within their own communities makes them highly visible when they congregate (and subject to adult scrutiny/disapproval) and this can lead to them being seen 'as a problem rather than as contributory members of their communities' (Davis and Ridge, 1997, p.3, cited in Shucksmith, 2004). Marginalisation of young people can be related to adult surveillance and relations between the generations, with the close-knit nature of communities described as being associated with 'claustrophobic and intrusive surveillance' by some young people (Pavis, Platt and Hubbard, 2000, p.33). As found in one survey of young people in a Somerset town, 77% of those surveyed agreed with the statement 'adults in my community see young people as a problem' (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006).

As a result, young people often employ 'mobile strategies' (Leyshon, 2011, p.304) to navigate these relations and feel more connected to the rural place (for example, through walking and developing a detailed knowledge of the local landscape). This also addresses the fact that, despite an abundance of open spaces, young people are very limited in where they can 'get away' from adults in public spaces. Work conducted by Meek (2008) in rural England found that community attitudes towards young residents were a significant theme when considering this lack of space and the resulting impacts of rural community dynamics on outcomes for young people. This work raised concerns that there were not enough community-wide initiatives to bring together older residents with young people, particularly those young people who are typically excluded from community events.

These challenges highlight the overwhelming theme of some young people feeling marginalised by the wider community and the need for research and policy to consider the interactions between

rural youth and adults, rather than focussing on young people as a 'group hermetically sealed from others' (Leyshon, 2011, p.305). Although the option to be recognised and known in a rural community can be a positive aspect of life (particularly in terms of accessing local networks), for those young people who rightly or wrongly develop a bad reputation or belong to groups that are a higher risk of exclusion<sup>18</sup>, this visibility can be a disadvantage. At the same time, in scenarios where young people are unable to interact with each other (perhaps due to a lack of their own space), social isolation and marginalisation are likely to be amplified because of tensions between young people and adults. Addressing these issues is likely to be important for strengthening young people's sense of belonging and identity within the rural idyll, particularly when belonging is 'a matter not only of individual choice but also of community acceptance' (Jones, 1999, p.19).

## 5.2 *Participation in formal and informal networks*

The outmigration of young people is a 'top five' issue across the rural areas of the UK (Skerratt, 2018). The loss of young people from rural areas is widely seen as inhibiting the social reproduction of a community, as well as damaging informal support networks and local economic opportunities (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; OPM, 2009). The difficulties associated with visibility and stigmatisation that were discussed above may also contribute to a young person's decision to leave their community, if they do not feel attachment to it (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). With outmigration generally linked by scholars and policy makers to the challenges of 'growing up rural' that were described in Section 3, it is widely accepted that the strength of social networks in rural communities plays a role in encouraging young people to remain in their local labour market, as is a strong sense of belonging.

Integrating young people into local networks is important for finding employment, as well as for constructing a basis for their wider participation in community matters (see Box 8). Taking the time to widen and deepen participation of young people in local networks may counter young people's dissatisfaction with rural society and their association of life in other places 'with more freedom from the constraints and barriers they face at home' (Dax, Machold and Gerry, 2002, p.176). However, studies of young people in rural Europe in the early 2000s found very little involvement of young people in decision-making. For example, young interviewees in research carried out in rural Austria highlighted a widespread wish to have a voice and participate in decision-making, but this was in contrast with a lack of available opportunities for youth involvement (Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2004a). A recent survey of rural young people from across the UK and other countries also found that only 13% of those who took part feel that they have a say in the future of their own communities (Malcolm Watson Consulting, 2018). However, a lack of awareness of how to become more engaged can present barriers. For example, the Scottish case study in Angus (in the same pan-European research described above) found that despite there being a dedicated 'youth forum' set up by the local authority, most interviewees were unaware of this and felt unmotivated to take part.

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<sup>18</sup> These groups include LGBT youth whose invisibility, combined with homophobia and a lack of support services in rural areas may 'act as push factors in encouraging migration or in leading to exclusion' (Atterton and Brodie, 2014, p.32). Roma people also live in rural regions, in segregated communities, and they are at high risk of poverty and social exclusion (Augère-Granier, 2017).

Although now nearly 20 years old, the following statement in the European Commission White Paper on youth still rings true when considering the importance of local networks and activities:

*'It is by taking part in the life of schools, neighbourhoods, local districts or associations that young people can acquire the experience and the confidence they need to go a step further, either now or later, in public life – including at the European level. It is by throwing themselves into social activities which are open to all, without any form of discrimination, that young people can make their contribution to a more solidarity-conscious society and live citizenship to the full'*

(European Commission, 2002, p.9).

*Box 8: International insights – how spatial context shapes social networks*

Research on rural poverty in north east Germany highlighted how, when compared to urban networks, rural networks tend to be smaller and include more family members and fewer supportive relationships.

When considering people's strategies for coping with poverty in rural areas, the extent to which local networks can provide much-needed

support is weakened by the selective out-migration of younger and better educated individuals, as well as the ageing and shrinking of the overall population. This highlights how those people experiencing poverty in rural areas who are not integrated into networks beyond their family and friends (or perceive themselves to be poorly connected) have less capacity to cope with their situation.

Similarly, rural jobseekers in Canada have been found to use informal networks to find employment. Having good connections in the local area is key, with those able to access local networks much more likely to find employment.



Source: Klärner and Knabe (2019); Matthews, Pendakur and Young (2009)

While it is well-known that social and family networks influence employment outcomes, it is less clear whether poorer people have weaker networks (HM Government, 2014). People in poverty in both urban and rural areas tend to report lower levels of social support: 'they feel less able to turn to family or friends for help with practical or personal problems' (Bailey, Bramley and Gannon, 2016, p.ii). In rural areas, the impact of poverty is likely to be more isolating due to the greater visibility of individuals and the rural notion of self-reliance, as well as the fact that often only a small minority are included in local networks (Culliney, 2014a). In the Netherlands, recent research found that growing up in isolated and excluded rural networks creates a sense of inferiority and stigma that can become deeply internalised (Meij, Haartsen and Meijering, 2020). For young people, this leads to an overwhelming reliance on family for support, which generates further inequalities for those in rural areas, particularly if their family is not well-connected within the community (Black, Scott

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and Shucksmith, 2019) or if young people do not come from a family with a positive local reputation (Culliney, 2014a).

It can be particularly challenging for young people with a history of violence, substance abuse and/or crime to connect into local networks, because they tend to be more visible in rural areas and may find themselves stigmatised. This can lead to them being excluded from the labour market, with associated negative impacts on their confidence and willingness to access other support available to them (Atterton and Brodie, 2014). A study of young offenders from rural areas in England found that many felt they were unable to return to their home communities after their release from prison as it would be 'impossible to shake off their reputation' (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006, p.223). While support from family may help to counter these challenges, perhaps through connections into local job markets or entry into higher education, in some cases family support may carry with it 'an expectation (implicit or explicit) of reciprocity, such as fulfilling a carer role' (Black, Scott and Shucksmith, 2019, p.272), which may have impacts on a young person's freedom of choice and/or transition into adulthood.

## 6 Positive outcomes for rural children and young people: a conceptual framework

This review has identified several important themes related to the experience of poverty and social exclusion by children and young people who live in rural areas. Although less prevalent than in urban areas, rural poverty manifests itself in nuanced ways, and requires tailored policy responses, particularly in relation to education, housing, employment and skills, healthcare and access to specialist support services.

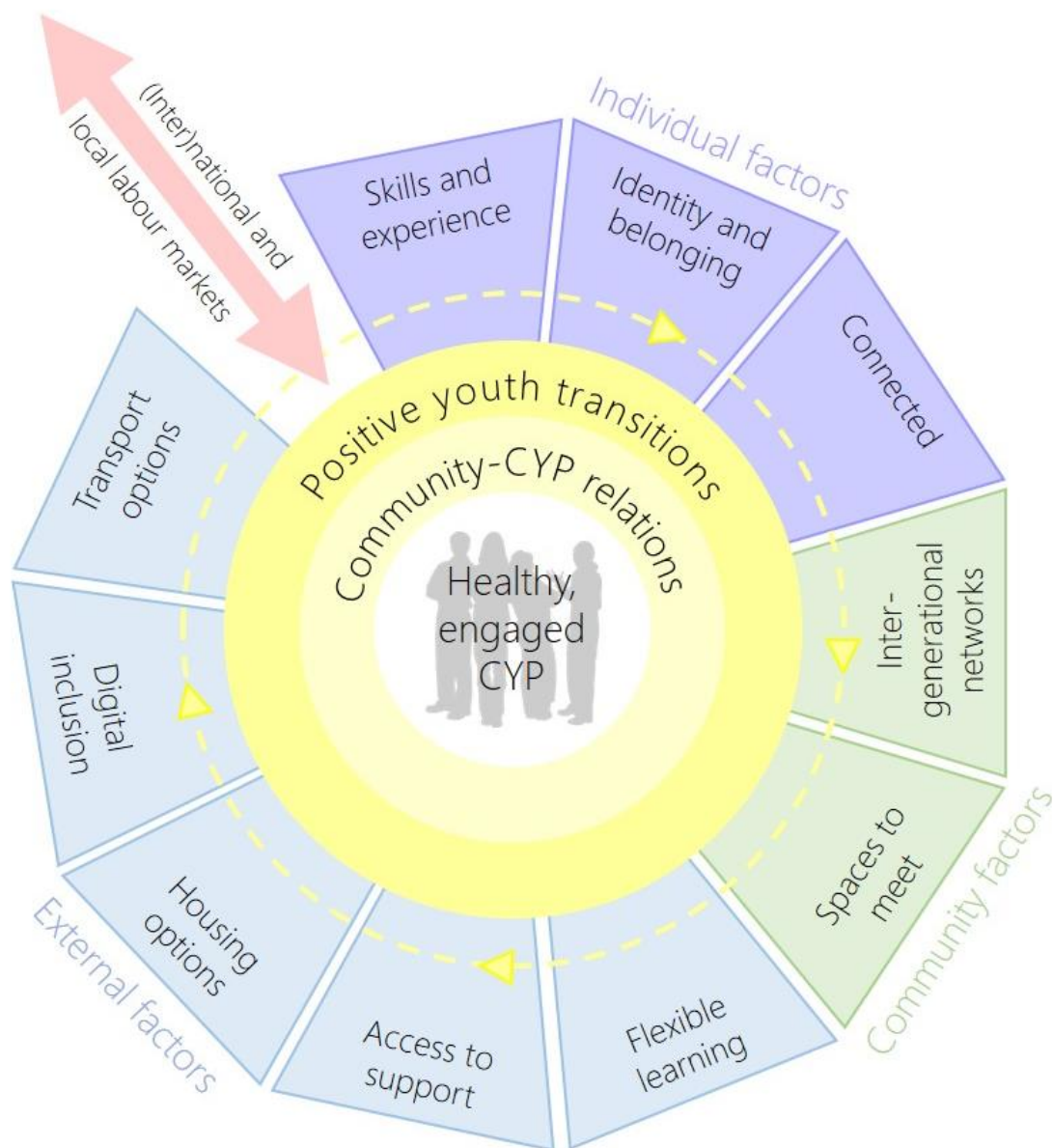
The narrative throughout the review has focussed predominantly on rural 'issues' associated with poverty and social exclusion. However, the outlook need not be framed solely as challenging/negative: the review has highlighted numerous aspects of rural childhood that are positive and/or that can be improved to create better outcomes for rural CYP.

It was anticipated at the start of this report that the findings of the review would provide a 'launch pad' for further conceptual development in the field, as well as a guiding structure for the continued work of Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland. To this end, the review has arguably identified ten important factors that can contribute to positive outcomes for disadvantaged rural children and young people. The factors encompass individual, community and external dimensions:

- **Individual factors:** skills and experience; identity and belonging; strong connections.
- **Community factors:** inter-generational networks; spaces to meet.
- **External factors:** flexible learning; access to support; housing options; digital inclusion; transport options.

These factors are presented in the following conceptual framework (see Figure 2) and explained in the text that follows. Crucially, the framework notes the potential for healthy, engaged CYP when they are situated/nested within strong inter-generational community networks, which support positive youth transitions (whether these lead to them remaining in the local labour market or moving away from the area as they grow up).

Figure 2: A conceptual framework for developing positive outcomes for rural CYP



Individual factors	Community factors	External factors
Skills and experience → Resilience to non-linear transitions Identity and belonging → Address marginalisation and visibility issues Connected → Strong personal network in the community	Inter-generational networks → Embedding young people in the idyll Spaces to meet → Opportunities to socialise and reduce isolation	Flexible learning → Increase opportunities Access to support → Health, employment Housing options → Accessibility/cost Digital inclusion → Infrastructure and devices Transport options → Public/private

## **Individual factors** – related to personal capacity and development

### *1. Skills and experience*

The review noted a range of challenges related to the transition from childhood to adulthood in rural areas. These include transitions from childcare/pre-school education into school, and from school into the workplace or further/higher education. Crucially, it was described how youth transitions in rural areas can often be 'non-linear' (e.g. involving unexpected events, being limited by lack of access to transport and/or being limited to the training/skills development available in the local area). Ensuring access to (and uptake of) high-quality childcare provision and pre-school education, as well as engagement in school activities (within and outside the curriculum) is important to ensure rural children and young people have the opportunity to engage in a range of learning experiences as they grow up.

### *2. Identity and belonging*

While there has been a tendency in research to present children and young people as 'static' actors within a rural community, improved understandings of how young people make their own identity and sense of belonging in rural areas emphasise the importance of accumulating experiences and complex social interactions in the place they are based. Strengthening place identity and local culture appear to be highly important to those negotiating the youth transitions described above. This requires issues related to marginalisation to be addressed, particularly in creating more positive relationships and equal power relations between young people and adults in rural places. There is also a role here for rural schools, by strengthening parental engagement and place-based identities rooted in local culture.

### *3. Connected*

The review has noted the importance of enabling rural children and young people to interact more with others in order to strengthen their personal support and opportunity network, as well as ensure their voice is heard in broader decision-making processes. Creating more opportunities for children and young people to engage in local activities, sports, clubs, etc. will help to broaden their networks. Equally important is that children and young people are well-connected to communities beyond their own, via face to face networking opportunities, as well as good digital infrastructure and access to electronic devices.

## **Community factors** – related to place-based, bottom-up initiatives and relations

### *4. Inter-generational networks*

A pressing issue highlighted in the literature is that disadvantaged young people can feel very 'visible' and 'stigmatised' in rural communities. This can lead to long-term, negative emotional impacts on young people, particularly if they feel there is nowhere for them to socialise and/or engage in organised activities. Unsupportive relationships with adults in the community may also hinder the development of young people's personal networks within the community and limit the potential for them to seek opportunities further afield. Creating community-wide initiatives to



bring together older residents with young people, particularly those young people who are typically excluded from community events, may help to address these issues. There is also an opportunity for owners/managers of rural businesses to include local young people in their business models, broadening young people's horizons and providing training in key skills.

### *5. Spaces to meet*

Recognising that social isolation presents a real challenge for rural children and young people, the review highlighted the importance of community venues/spaces for young people to socialise in a manner that is seen as 'legitimate' by the wider community. This is particularly important for reducing the likelihood of mental health issues related to social isolation among young people. Having 'safe spaces' to socialise is likely to have additional benefits in the winter months when rural children and young people may have fewer opportunities to socialise/exercise indoors than their urban counterparts.

## **External factors** – related to public policy interventions and/or local initiatives

### *6. Flexible learning*

Linked to the individual factor related to skills and experience in the framework, it is important to recognise that rural children and young people have a wide range of expectations and realities, which may not map easily onto the standard educational system and which may change over time. Understanding young people's aspirations in more detail, as well as the pressures that might lead them to leave their local community, may help education and other support providers to develop bespoke educational and training opportunities for rural children and young people. Public policy that supports the development of intellectual capacities, and therefore the 'intellectual mobility'<sup>19</sup> of rural youth through education and training, is also likely to yield positive results.

### *7. Access to support*

Delivering specialist healthcare services and other forms of youth support has been found to be challenging in research conducted in many of the countries considered in this review. The key concern is that this creates social inequalities and marginalises rural young people because so many of the services that they need are distant from their homes. A strong message from the literature reviewed in the report is that co-ordinating initiatives that deliver different types of support is likely to yield positive results. Having a single point of contact for issues that rural children and young people experience may lead to more co-ordinated and timely responses.

### *8. Housing options*

Issues related to housing provision and access to housing in rural areas are well-documented. A key point noted in the review is that access to affordable/suitable housing is a challenge particularly for young people, who may be forced to leave the area or remain in unsuitable accommodation as a result. Others may have to stay in the family home for extended periods. There is a need for

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<sup>19</sup> See Auclair and Vanoni (2004).

place-based solutions to local housing supply issues, with all relevant stakeholders involved in addressing the issue.

### *9. Digital inclusion*

It was noted above that children and young people need to be well-connected within and beyond their communities. This is important not only for their learning and personal development but also to interact with their local and wider peers. For those who may wish to stay in the local labour market, good digital connectivity can be crucial for many small business start-ups. Creating local workspaces/hubs within communities may also help.

### *10. Transport options*

Rural young people without access to a private vehicle can be very constrained in relation to their participation in education, the labour market and social activities. Young people from households on low incomes are less likely than their urban counterparts to be able to travel long distances to take part in clubs, activities or social events. There is scope to consider place-based solutions to expand/subsidise transport options for young people so that they can take part in activities that urban children might take for granted.

### **Commentary**

While a range of policy priorities have been identified, those included in this section are underpinned by the notion that 'actions to tackle child poverty are likely to be more effective where local differences are recognised' (NHS Scotland, 2018, p.6). This review highlights the potential to develop place-based solutions to address the impacts of poverty and social exclusion on children and young people in rural areas. Taken together, the ten factors outlined in the conceptual framework are strongly linked to the well-documented need in the academic literature to support rural youth transitions. This support can come both from within the community (e.g. via inter-generational networks and local institutions) and from outside the community (e.g. via public policies and support mechanisms that are tailored to meet the needs of disadvantaged rural children and young people). Put simply, the evidence reviewed in this report highlights a challenging and complex set of intersecting issues that on the one hand can mask the impact of rural poverty for CYP and on the other hand can either exacerbate or mitigate the impact of poverty and social exclusion on children and young people.

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## 8 Appendix A: Methodology and scope

This work employed a critical review methodology, designed to take stock of previous research and provide a 'launch pad' for further conceptual development in the field (Grant and Booth, 2009; Wilson *et al.*, 2009). A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed literature was conducted using the Scopus<sup>20</sup> database and the following keywords:

- ('child\*' AND 'poverty' AND 'rural')
- ('social exclusion' OR 'disadvantage' AND 'child\*' AND 'rural')
- ('social exclusion' OR 'disadvantage' OR 'poverty' AND 'youth' AND 'rural')
- ('social exclusion' OR 'disadvantage' OR 'poverty' AND 'young people' AND 'rural')

The search results were limited to those published in the UK, Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In total, 1,394 references were identified and screened manually to check the location and topic relevance of each individual source, as well as to remove any duplications. The screening process yielded 216 relevant sources for further scrutiny.

Additional searches for relevant literature relating to Scotland were conducted using Google with the following keywords:

- 'child poverty' AND 'rural' AND 'Scotland'
- 'youth' AND 'poverty' AND 'rural' AND 'Scotland'
- 'young people' AND 'poverty' AND 'rural' AND 'Scotland'

These searches yielded an additional 43 reports, working papers, policy briefs and media articles, two scientific journal articles and one book.

Other materials and reports passed on via professional contacts and/or collected prior to the formal search process were also included (13 additional sources). In total, 272 sources were taken forwards into the review process. The sources spanned several disciplines, including: health, education, psychology, youth studies, rural geography, childhood studies, children's geographies, medicine, etc. Table 1 shows the geographical locations of the research reported in the sources.<sup>21</sup>

*Table 1: Location of the research reported in the sources*

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of sources</i>
Scotland	56
Rest of UK	32
Rest of Europe	31
USA/Canada	110
Australia/New Zealand	32

<sup>20</sup> The Scopus database includes scientific journals, books and conference proceedings.

<sup>21</sup> The total number of sources does not equal 272 as some sources included findings relevant to more than one location or were not reporting empirical findings from a location (e.g. review papers). Note that the Google search focussed only on Scottish sources, which has increased the Scottish total in comparison to the others.

The volume of results relevant to the USA/Canada in Table 1 reflects the large amount of work that has been done on this topic in the USA. Rural dwellers in the USA experience greater distances of remoteness as compared to the UK, as well as much more widespread deprivation, which is opposite to the situation in the UK (McCrorie *et al.*, 2020). The field is also quite well-developed in Australia for similar reasons, particularly the challenges of delivering healthcare to very remote (and indigenous) communities.

When working through the sources (starting with those relevant to Scotland then moving out to the UK, Europe and further afield), the conceptual contribution of each work was noted and a thematic analysis conducted on the empirical findings of the studies (see Table 2 for a summary of the emergent themes). International insights relevant to each theme are included in numbered Boxes throughout the report.

*Table 2: Summary of the themes and sub-themes commonly occurring in the reviewed sources*

Theme	Sub-themes
Extent of poverty affecting CYP in rural areas	Definitions; causes; poverty rates; welfare take-up; demographic factors; family types (e.g. lone parents/number of children).
Rural factors that create distinct experiences	Cost of living; access to (support) services; housing costs; access to housing; digital connectivity; transport; rural education and youth transitions; rural labour markets (including employability and skills); outmigration.
Health and wellbeing characteristics of rural CYP as compared to urban	Mental health; sexual health; adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); drugs/alcohol; risk of offending; access to specialist support.
Visibility/invisibility of CYP in rural areas	Disadvantage hidden within the rural idyll; identity and belonging; socialising and isolation; gendered aspects of CYP experiences; experiences of minorities in rural areas; marginalisation of CYP; role of formal/informal networks; inter-generational tensions.
Lessons from policy and other interventions	Community empowerment/assets; interventions to increase agency of CYP; role of schools and other local institutions/organisations; employment/training support; improving access to support.

The themes listed in Table 2 are unpacked in the following sections, and key issues that require further research are signposted.



# Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

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## About us

A children's neighbourhood is an initiative that brings together people, resources and organisations in a neighbourhood area, so that all of those things can work together towards better lives for the children living there.

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland is a collaborative centre, developed by Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Policy Scotland and Robert Owen Centre at the University of Glasgow.



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