

# A story about community: Tony and the student activists

## Tony's story

Residents of a small, semi-rural community were excited when a new walkway was built north of their village. High on an escarpment, the walkway offers magnificent sea views. It quickly drew in thousands of eager walkers from all around the region – far more people than anyone had anticipated. It soon became clear that the walkway was a mixed blessing. While locals enjoyed having its use and took some pride in sharing the beauty of their local landscape, they soon tired of poorly parked cars, requests for directions, and on occasion, a lack of toilets.

Tony was well aware of both the benefits and the unintended consequences of the walkway. A keen amateur historian who is head of the social sciences faculty at the nearby high school, he was looking forward to using the walkway to enable students to study the geological and human history of the area. As a resident, he was getting exasperated by its impact on his community. As class began one morning, he overheard some students talking about it:

*Angus: When we were at the skatepark, at least five different groups asked us how to get to the walkway!*

*Cameron: At least they took the train. I was late for soccer on Saturday – there was a car parked over our driveway!*

*Marian: My grandmother had a lady knock on the door, desperate for the loo. Nana let her in, but it was a bit scary for her – how can you tell if someone is safe?*

*Tony: Sorry to interrupt, but you guys seem pretty steamed up about this. I am, too. What do you think we should do?*

*Tala: Dad is on the Residents Association committee. He says they want to put signs up to show people the best route between the walkway and the station but there are at least three different possibilities and they're not sure which is best.*

The conversation continued, with other students joining in. Tony soon realised that he needed to set aside the day's lesson and focus on a problem that was very real – to both him and the students! By the end of the lesson, they had hatched a plan, but it needed to involve some other people.

The next day, everyone reported back – yes, the Residents Association would love the class to run a survey of the issues and the preferred route. And they'd love some help with signage and with lobbying the Council for more toilets! Yes, Marian's grandmother would be happy for the class to investigate setting up a drinks stall in front of her house on hot days. Yes, the economics teacher would help with setting up a business plan and the English teacher would help with the PR campaign. And yes, the technology and arts teachers would help them design and build their signs and the drinks cart. They were away!

## Connections to the emerging ideas about a system that learns

### National Curriculum

The notion of citizenship is at the core of our National Curriculum. While the concept of citizenship is of special relevance to the social sciences curriculum, citizenship needs to be grown across all learning areas and across all the worlds a young person inhabits. It's not just about preparing students for citizenship; it's about being citizens now!

### Responsive local Curriculum

Tony responds to student interest in an issue of real interest and concern to them and the wider community. The plan that he and the students have begun to co-construct includes a survey that will enable them to clarify the issues and what the solutions might be. Their plan integrates learning opportunities that stretch across the curriculum and reach out into the community. It incorporates genuine partnerships with other community members and the opportunity to learn about local government, as they take action to bring about positive change for their community. It is likely that the results of their efforts will be appreciated by both the community they live in and the visitors who use the walkway.