



Figure 1 Wellington Advertiser April 1, 2016

Youth engagement - Showcase staff from the Rural Ontario Institute were in Harriston March 16, filming a video on a local youth theatre program organized by Megan Raftis (far left) as part of the institute's Youth Engagement Showcase.

## ROI showcase video filmed in Harriston

**HARRISTON** - A video filmed here on March 16 will form part of the Rural Ontario Institute's (ROI) Youth Engagement Showcase.

Local resident Megan Raftis was chosen as one of four finalists for the showcase from among of 44 nominations from across the province.

The finalists are being profiled through individual video documentaries filmed in their hometowns. These documentaries will highlight individual involvements and accomplishments as well as programs and organizations that are successfully engaging youth in their local communities.

Raftis was nominated for her role in organizing a theatre program for youth in her community.

"I think what really stood out about Megan's story is ... not only is she involved in a program in her community, but she's sort of fostering the engagement of the young minds of the future through this program," said Ryan Deska, ROI project lead for the showcase.

With the support of the Grey Wellington Theatre Guild, Raftis has staged live theatre productions involving as many as 23 actors aged six to 17 for the past six summers. For the most part, she has written the scripts herself in order to ensure the cast numbers can be tailored to include everyone interested.

Deska and camera operator Simon Brothers spent the entire day in Minto, filming youth rehearsing for a production at the Harriston Town Hall Theatre, as well as interviews with participants, parents, theatre guild members and municipal officials.

“What we’re looking to do through this project is profile these stories in a way that might inspire other people to get involved but also to demonstrate the value that comes through engaging youth people in our rural communities, because every community is facing challenges in terms of maintaining population and specifically their young population. So once we get them involved there’s a lot of value that they can bring to the community and there’s a lot of evidence that suggests if we can engage them at a young age they’re more likely to return after going away to university,” explained Deska.

“In some of these stories that are coming out we’re seeing models of engaging youth, like the summer youth theatre program, that could easily be replicated in other communities across the province and from our perspective that’s what’s really valuable. We’re seeing people that are doing innovative things that could be brought elsewhere.”

Blogs about the four finalists have already been posted on the ROI website (<http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca>) and the videos will also be posted on the site, as well as distributed through various social media channels, said Deska. Finalist will also have the opportunity to speak at conferences related to their activities, he added.

Deska stresses that although the showcase could only focus on four finalists, there are many youth with similar stories around the province.

“There’s so many youth doing amazing things out there and we obviously couldn’t profile all of them.”

*April 1, 2016*