

Telecentres — Royalties for Regions Funding — Adjournment Debate

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [10.36 pm]: I thank the honourable member; that was very entertaining. I have to confess that I was at the Esperance show on the weekend.

Hon Ken Travers: Did you catch the train there?

Hon MIA DAVIES: No; unfortunately, I did not; I flew down on Friday night and then had the pleasure of driving back to Perth for eight hours with Hon Wendy Duncan, stopping off at Hyden to look at Wave Rock. But if I had been at Burswood, I would have had one foot in both concerts because I am a tragic John Farnham and Black Eyed Peas fan. I know that Jimmy Barnes was playing at the Doodlakine on the weekend, so we were spoilt for choice over the weekend. However, that is not what I want to talk about.

I want to follow on from Hon Col Holt's comments last night and let members know how royalties for regions funds are being spent in regional Western Australia, particularly after the launch of the second round of the regional grants scheme in Bunbury yesterday. I would like to talk about telecentres, because earlier in the year Hon Brendon Grylls announced funding for telecentres, and I would like to let members know how important telecentres are to regional communities throughout Western Australia. Newer members of the house may not be aware that the telecentre network was a National Party initiative conceived and introduced by our then leader, Hon Hendy Cowan, in the early 1990s. We funded a number of telecentres; I think there were about 35 in the first instance. They were provided with about \$30 000 to kit out the centre and then \$20 000 was provided to pay for a coordinator.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I set up the first one.

Hon MIA DAVIES: Is that right? And they are still going. As time went on, the number of telecentres increased, and we are very proud of that. They became a hub of activity and are now firmly entrenched in the fabric of many communities. The number of telecentres slowly grew from the early 1990s, and I think in 2008 there were probably about a hundred, or maybe a few more. Unfortunately, they were still receiving only \$20 000 per annum to fund their coordinators. Under the Labor government it flatlined and many of them were worried that they would have to shut down, particularly the Kalannie telecentre. An article in June 2008 reported that it would have to close down. The article goes on to quote the lady president at the time and states —

“I couldn't imagine our town without a telecentre now. It's really like a drop-in centre for the community, tourism, it's just like the hub of our community and all these would have to go off to Perth if we didn't have these facilities,” she said.

When the Nationals came into government with our Liberal colleagues, we recognised the role that telecentres played and their importance in providing education and access to online services in regional Western Australia. In February 2009, Brendon Grylls announced that telecentres would receive \$5 million in that financial year as part of the first phase of royalties for regions funding, including an immediate boost of \$10 000 for each facility, so that telecentre coordinators would no longer have to struggle to fund activities to bring in an income and they could concentrate on providing much-needed services to their community.

I recently attended the 10-year birthday celebration of the Dowerin telecentre with the local member, the Minister for Regional Development. That is an illustration of just how important these services are in our towns, because not many government departments would be celebrating those 10 years. A lot of people from the local community attended. They had a cake and balloons and people made speeches. I was privileged to hear one of the previous coordinators speak at this celebration. I would like to read part of the speech, because Denise Sutherland's words are probably far more eloquent and heartfelt than I can convey in this house, and she demonstrates the real value of these telecentres. Do I need to do that formally?

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon MIA DAVIES: I thank Hon Ken Travers for his advice! Denise states —

It seems like only yesterday that the Dowerin Telecentre first opened its doors to the community in a little room inside the Newsagency.

Denise said that initially the telecentre co-located with home and community care, a dentist, the library and the Westpac Bank—the latter two of which the telecentre managed. Denise continues —

After a few years the Telecentre took on running the local people, HACC moved and we established the Visitors Centre.

Denise said that they had a number of coordinators over the first few years. Denise came to the telecentre around 2002 as the fourth coordinator, having been an assistant for nearly 18 months. Denise goes on to say —

... we prided ourselves in offering everything we possibly could in a professional manner. From offering community access to computers and internet through to Community Training via TAFE courses, First Clicks and non accredited Telecentre delivered courses, to things like makeup and cosmetics.

Their motto was “nothing is too hard. If it was missing in their town, they would deliver it. They focussed on all aspects of the community and provided services for everyone, from mothers with babies through to seniors. The telecentre, at one point, through the library, became involved with Better Beginnings offering information kits to every newborn baby in Dowerin, playgroup and child-friendly facilities offering kids’ holiday activities and youth activities such as trips to Adventure World and Binkley outdoor park, which I think must be in Perth somewhere.

Denise goes on to name the plethora of activities that they coordinate, and which for a long time have been provided on a minimal amount of money. Denise continues —

The rest of the community it supported in many ways whether it be delivering community Rest, Relax and De-stress days, to the many other community services. The most looked at being the local paper the Dowerin Despatch, printed weekly and assembled by a very dedicated team of local volunteers.

Most country members would know that most of our small wheatbelt towns, and probably a few up through the north west and mining and pastoral regions, have a little paper that we call snake gullies. People read them from cover to cover, and they include everything from the classifieds to the local primary school’s newsletter, notes for birthdays, thankyou’s to people who have been of help and thankyou’s to the doctor for looking after kids. They are just wonderful little papers, and they are usually put together by a dedicated group of volunteers—and most of the time they are located in these telecentres. They provide an absolutely wonderful service.

Denise finished her speech by referring to the current coordinator. She stated that Mel Couper did her traineeship with the telecentre. She said that the telecentre provided a wonderful opportunity for a young woman to stay in the community with skills that will see her have an outstanding future. These telecentres are providing employment and opportunities particularly for young women who, like me, have found there are limited opportunities in many of these smaller towns. These telecentres have played a vital role in giving people a future in their community without having to move away.

After I heard Denise give her speech I asked her whether I could refer to it in this house to let some of my colleagues know what an important service the telecentres provide. She duly gave me a copy of her speech and that is what I have been quoting from tonight.

I am very proud to say that under a Liberal-National government the Telecentre Network, which will be rebadged as a community resource centre, will thrive and grow. We will continue to support these centres and allow them to provide new and expanded services to the community.