AUGUST 2018

POSITION STATEMENT

LINKWEST ADVOCATES ON MULTIPLE FRONTS ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE NETWORK

While Linkwest continues to advocate against State Government funding cuts to the CRC network and encouraging more efficient delivery of WA Government services via CRCs, the peak body has gone federal, highlighting the role CRCs play in supporting regional Western Australians accessing Federal Government online services

Following a meeting with the Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development in May, Linkwest consulted with its members for guidance on how they would like their peak body to proceed in relation to the funding cut of 40% to the Community Resource Centre network. Most CRCs voted for Linkwest to continue to advocate against funding cuts to the network.

In a letter to Minister MacTiernan on 20th July Linkwest and its membership acknowledged the difficult financial position the WA government has inherited and therefore accepts that, in the short term, the Community Resource Centre (CRC) program will be subject to some funding cuts.

However, as the WA economy improves, Linkwest will advocate via pre-budget submissions, relevant research findings and through WACOSS to inform policy on CRC funding and services in the future.

The board and Linkwest membership will continue to actively advocate for the 23 CRCs that have been allocated Tier 2 funding of $50,000, with the objective to bring their funding up to $70,000, which will ensure that all CRCs are funded equally. Core funding of $50,000 for a service is not sustainable, particularly in light of increasing utility and wage costs. Linkwest believes that all the CRCs should be given an equal chance, and that the current criteria for the tiers does not reflect individual community demographics, availability of transport or level of need.

GST payments to WA have improved since May and the Shire of Denmark has returned $4 million in Royalties for Regions funding. In light of this, Linkwest is requesting that all CRCs be funded to the sum of $70,000 and that a minimum of $500,000 funding for regional traineeships and some funding for third party sector support be maintained. In the 2017/18 financial year, $1.8 million was budgeted for regional trainees under the CRC program. Therefore, $500,000 represents a very significant cut to this regional traineeship funding.

Conversations with Federal Government

Linkwest has begun conversations with the Federal Government with regards to funding for the network in recognition of the role they play in supporting regional Western Australians accessing Federal Government services such as MyGov, ATO, MyAgedCare or MyHealthRecords online.

To date, board members have met with the Hon Dan Tehan MP and Melissa Price MP. The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report Falling Through the Net – Digital Divide in WA plus the Anglicare Australia report Paying the Price of Welfare Reform highlight the need for Federal Government to provide alternative arrangements for those unable to access or engage with online government services.
All CRCs need to be funded adequately by Federal Government to provide this support in their communities. Currently, some are funded as a Centrelink agency or access point. This funding does not reflect the true cost to the CRC in staff time providing support – particularly for those funded only as an access point. The funding does not address support provided to access the ATO or other federal government services. In fact, ATO funding to some CRCs was stopped in June 2018. In addition, there are many CRCs that receive no federal government funding at all for the support they provide individuals in their communities to access Federal Government online services.

The Linkwest board has established a Federal Government Advocacy Subcommittee which includes Cate Rocchi (Linkwest Chairperson), James Jarvis (CEO Nintirri Centre, Chairperson of Pilbara for Purpose, Board member of Country Arts WA), Elizabeth White (Linkwest Board member) and Sandy Joffe (Centre Manager Broome Circle).

The Subcommittee has invited the State Government to work together in its federal advocacy, as Linkwest believes – since CRCs are supporting access to many key Federal services – it is fair the Federal Government adequately supports that service delivery.

Linkwest is currently working with three CRCs to provide a census on Federal Government Services provided over a 10-day period. This information will be available at the end of August and will supplement the Centrelink services review, and the information provided by a recent DPIRD survey which asked the CRCs to provide data on Federal Government Services.

**Encouraging Better Delivery of WA Government Services via CRCs**

At the request of the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development for advice on better delivery of Government services through CRCs, Linkwest has surveyed its members and is now working with several CRCs to collect data which will support the recommendations of the Service Priority Review of better delivery to regional WA.

On 19 July, Linkwest Vice-Chair, Lee Steel and CEO, Jane Chilcott met with the Attorney General and with his support will now be meeting with representatives from the Department of Justice to explore opportunities that will be mutually beneficial to the State Government and people living in regional WA.

Again, the BCEC report on the Digital Divide in WA recommends a whole of state digital strategy. The CRC network was set up to support the economic development of regional WA through the provision of access to technology and support to businesses and education. The network needs to be recognised as a vital part of the solution and the digital future of WA in any future strategy. CRCs could be further developed into modern digital hubs and the network expanded into new communities requiring this support.

In addition, through Linkwest’s brokerage in June, 19 CRCs were contracted to assist the Sustainable Health Review consultation. 16 of the CRCs provided a venue for interested community members to be part of the consultation via Video Conferencing. In June, Minister Tinley consulted with regional young people as part of the Youth Strategy again via Video Conference through four CRCs.

Not only did this give regional people a voice, but it demonstrated a very cost-efficient method of regional consultation. All CRCs taking part were paid a fee for the service. This is a model that can be used for regional consultations in many areas.
Linkwest believes that there are a number of actions that can be led by government, which would further support the better delivery of government services into the regions via CRCs:

- A requirement for all government departments to consider the use of the CRC either via VC or local room hire as a fee for service basis for visiting agency staff.
- Agencies are requested to explore whether a CRC can be subcontracted to deliver a service on the agency’s behalf particularly in supporting the recommendations of the sustainable health review.
- The CRC network is represented in the state-wide digital strategy consultation and recognised as a vital asset in the digital transformation of regional WA
- As recommended in the 2016 Curtin Report on the network, state government could create a working party of government advisors from several departments, DPIRD representatives and Linkwest to create a steering committee to explore the future of the network.

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