



Wyndham Telecentre

Supporting a diverse range of services in a remote Kimberley community

The Wyndham Telecentre serves a small community in the remote Kimberley region. It is one of several telecentres in the Western Australian Telecentre Network that have developed a broader role in serving rural and remote communities.

Broadening the role of a telecentre

Wyndham is a community faced with the challenges of a declining population and employment opportunities and the consequent loss of services. It is seeking to establish a new economic base to sustain the community in a difficult period of transition and adjustment. The telecentre is seen as a key element in this transition.

The Western Australia Telecentre Network, with a support unit in Perth, was developed in the 1990s to provide a technology hub for a wide range of government and community services and programs in the state's regions (Short 2001, p.18).

Each telecentre is community owned, incorporated and managed. Funding is provided jointly by the state's Department of Local Government and Regional Development to support the coordinator's salary, with further income from a variety of sources including the state's Lottery Commission. Local communities are required to provide accommodation and meet other costs. This builds an entrepreneurial

incentive into telecentre activities to generate local revenue in serving their communities.

The Wyndham Telecentre was developed from initiatives taken by the local school and later the local campus of TAFE. It was established in its current form in 1997 and shares accommodation with the Business Enterprise Centre in the local port area.

At present, the telecentre has five desktop computers, two laptops and a copy printer, and has recently acquired video conferencing equipment

Like those elsewhere, the Wyndham Telecentre has broadened its role from an access function to serving its community in a variety of ways. As the Wyndham population has declined over the past two decades and lost local services, the telecentre has taken on a broader role as a community focal point.

This is most evident in its production of the local community newspaper *The Bastion Bulletin*, for which the telecentre seeks community contributions to maintain a sense of identity in a period of difficult change. These provide a broad overview of local activity and perspectives.



There is every reason to believe that this pattern of development will continue in telecentres. The ongoing march of technology will continue to impact on their work and there is likely to be a greater role for them in government services, more fee-for-service activities to maintain financial viability and perhaps a greater role in open and distance education opportunities for lifelong learning in remote communities to develop.

Benefits

Wyndham is a community with a significant Indigenous population so the social impact of the telecentre is influenced by the patterns

of race relations in the community. There are indications, however, that the community role of the telecentre (including production of a local newspaper) is valued by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. From this perspective, it is a force for building social capital that bridges community divisions.

As the telecentre has evolved to take on additional community information services, its influence on building formal and informal social networks has increased. An example is its new role as an agent of the Employment Directions Network, which provides free personalised career information and assistance for clients developing career plans.

The Network enables access to tools for exploring career options, assists with résumé writing, enables users to access training services and liaises with a range of community organisations including Indigenous corporations and TAFE. In this way the telecentre has an ongoing role in building

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community networks and the trust that underpins social capital.

The Telecentre Support Branch has a key function in this process. It is the hub that links all telecentres for interaction and dialogue and promotes regional co-operation between telecentres. When issues arise, it is usual for the coordinators of telecentres to seek advice through the network, to draw on accumulating and shared knowledge and expertise.

While it is not surprising that the Wyndham Telecentre's strongest relationship is with its neighbour at Kununurra, the potential exists for the Kimberley telecentre network to exercise significant influence in policies and strategies for regional social and economic development.

Barriers

The Wyndham Telecentre operates on a tight budget but its longer-term sustainability is inevitably linked to the town's future. Wyndham currently faces the difficulties of shifts in its economic base and the requirement for new skills to support potential growth industries such as tourism.

There are also limited post-school education resources, with a small TAFE campus the main resource. Whether the telecentre can take on a larger education role in the provision of open and distance learning through technology is a question for the future. However, the work of the telecentre is valued by the community and it is likely that its role in the delivery of government services will increase.

Until now, the low level of ICT and Internet skills in the community has been a major barrier to the telecentre's community role. This is now being addressed with a larger number of



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computers available to support training in basic skills. With the growth in the number of telecentres in the Kimberley and the role of the Wyndham Telecentre becoming more visible through the services it provides, increased demand for computer and Internet skills is growing and will further strengthen the telecentre's community role.



Key lessons

- Telecentres can take on a broader community role by incorporating a variety of strategies. The production of the community newspaper enables the community to build a sense of ownership and serve as a catalyst for community building.
- There is increased benefit in linking telecentres in a state-wide network that combines support services with the attributes of a shared learning and knowledge generation system.
- The evolving role of telecentres has particular importance in the context of sustaining small rural communities, supporting the delivery of government services in such communities and strengthening arrangements for adult learning throughout life in rural and remote communities.

References:

Short, G. (2001) *The Western Australia Telecentre Network*, in Latchen C & Waller D (ed), *Telecentres: Case Studies and Key Issues*, Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver.

WA Telecentre Network www.telecentres.wa.gov.au

COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

More information

In these case studies, communities, nonprofit organisations and groups share their experiences and lessons they have learnt using ICT: enhancing capability and service delivery; supporting and building communities, networks and connections; and overcoming barriers and challenges.

Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004–2006 emphasises the need to ensure that all Australians can participate in the benefits of the information economy.

Key strategies in 2004–06 will be to strengthen collaboration and capabilities in nonprofit organisations, facilitate the creative use of ICT for building stronger communities and social cohesion, and develop networks, capabilities and tools to enable participation by people who are facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

For more information visit the DCITA website www.dcita.gov.au or email community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au.

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