

INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM**SUBMISSION FROM LIFELINE CANBERRA INC.****Introduction**

Lifeline Canberra is a not-for-profit community service which provides services to the ACT and South Eastern NSW. The core service provided is a 24 hour telephone counselling service provided to the community by trained volunteers. Additionally, Lifeline Canberra provides an emergency accommodation referral service, youth outreach programs, gambling and financial counselling and suicide prevention programs. The organisation raises around 50% of its operational costs through various fundraising events.

Lifeline Canberra is a recent recipient of a Regional Partnerships grant. The grant totalling \$678,040.00 (GST exclusive) was approved and announced in October 2006 and we have received the first instalment of the grant in the past month. The grant is to assist Lifeline Canberra with the costs of constructing a Book Sorting and Storage Facility for our major fund raising event the Lifeline Canberra Bookfair which occurs bi-annually in Canberra.

The purpose of this submission is to offer reflections to the inquiry on the Lifeline Canberra experience of obtaining and utilizing the Regional Partnerships grant.

The application process

In late 2005, Lifeline Canberra became aware that it may be possible to access Regional Partnerships funding to assist with the construction of a Book Sorting and Storage Facility. The organisation recognised the need for a purpose built facility and had committed consolidated revenue to the project. However, without assistance, achieving the goal would have been impossible.

The application process was commenced and the first draft of the application was written. At this point, we engaged with the Capital Region Area Consultative Committee staff. Over the first 6 months of 2006 we worked with CR-ACC staff to prepare the application. This process was very painstaking and at times frustrating. However, once complete and submitted, we were not asked to provide any further information or to clarify any part of our application by DoTARS staff assessing the application. Consequently, the application suffered no setbacks and was approved in as short a time as possible within the process (i.e. 12 weeks). Lifeline Canberra believes the smooth progress of the application owes much to the work and commitment of CR-ACC staff to ensuring the application was as comprehensive as possible and that it reflected the stringent requirements of Regional Partnerships funding.

The contract process

The grant was announced at a function at Parliament House in October 2006 and received significant media coverage. Unfortunately, the contract negotiation and preparation did not progress as smoothly as the application process.

Lifeline Canberra understood and accepted that the grant and therefore the contract process was dependent on Lifeline Canberra receiving final approval and title to a community block of land from the ACT government. This meant the contract negotiation process was delayed by c3 months.

However, it was another 10 months before the contract for the grant was signed. In particular, there were delays of many months while DoTARS legal department negotiated a Deed of Priority with our bank. We have yet to receive a copy of this document from DoTARS. It was 13 months between the announcement of the success of our application and the signing of the contract.

In this interim time, the cost of construction of the Book Sorting and Storage Facility had blown out from \$1.56 million to \$2.2 million putting the project once again out of Lifeline Canberra's financial reach. This blow out of costs required a complete re-design of the building and required Lifeline Canberra to resubmit for planning approvals etc. The final cost of the re-designed and simplified Book Sorting and Storage Facility is now \$1.65 million.

A further implication of the delay was that all previous expenditure on design and pre-construction costs was wasted. Lifeline Canberra has lost almost \$200,000.00 in design and re-design work necessitated because of the delays caused by DoTARS and particularly the legal department. These final additional costs that have to be borne by Lifeline Canberra amount to \$350,000. Lifeline Canberra sought some support to meet these costs from the Regional Partnership grant scheme as the increase in costs could be directly sourced to delays by the DoTARS legal department in negotiating and processing the contract. This request was denied.

Lifeline Canberra has been dealing with the Sydney Southern NSW Regional Partnerships Office and has found the staff of this office to be helpful and proactive despite the delays from other sections of the Department. We have recently received the first instalment of the grant and hope to complete the construction of the BSSF by the end of this year.

Conclusion

Despite the frustration, anxiety and cost overruns caused by the delays, Lifeline Canberra acknowledges that the Book Sorting and Storage Facility would not be possible without the contribution from Regional Partnerships. As a not-for-profit community service, it is only through schemes like Regional Partnerships grants that we can hope to provide the facilities and environment required by best practice and compliance. The recruitment and retention of our volunteers and the continued growth of our fund raising capacity depend on the facilities we can provide.

