

MEDIA RELEASE

Page 1 of 2

SAVE BELMONT SMALL BUSINESS CENTRE!

In the current trying economic times the Belmont Small Business Centre (SBC) has continued to support businesses by providing mentoring, business skills workshops and has delivered a raft of information and programs to business owners across the metro and throughout Western Australia.

However much to the surprise of the centre, it was advised yesterday (29th of April 2009) that the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) has withdrawn agreed funding for the one year remaining in their 3 year contract. With little more than 60 days notice, the SBDC Board has made a decision to severely negatively impact the service delivery and viability of one of the most successful and award winning business support centres in WA.

Mr Steve Moir, Managing Director of SBDC, informed Belmont BEC - Small Business Centre (SBC) stakeholders that the funds would instead be directed to 19 regional Business Centre's, even though he admitted that 12 of those centres will likely struggle for financial survival anyway. Given that the Belmont BEC - Small Business Centre has efficiently managed to service clients across the state, even though only funded for its geographical area, this decision seems ludicrous.

Following the lengthy review of the BEC/SBC program in 2004, the Belmont centre was able to continue because it was agreed that it would deliver services to clients in both the Belmont area and specifically those from the textile, clothing and footwear industry (TCF). This specific focus has successfully supported clients from metro and regional Western Australia including remote areas.

The withdrawal of the state funding support will now place federal funding support of the Belmont BEC in jeopardy according to the federal contract terms and conditions, and the centre could be forced to cut services or be in jeopardy of possible close.

This particularly threatens delivery of business support services to women as 80% of the Belmont SBC's clients are women, with 35% of these aged under 35. It also will have a negative impact on women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and also indigenous clients. The centre also works closely with the wool and leather industries and offers specific programs to business owners in the racing industry because of its Belmont location.

Ms Carol Hanlon, Manager of the Belmont BEC – Small Business Centre said, "I have managed this centre for the past 15 years, and the BEC – SBC team have assisted so many small business owners to grow their businesses as a result of programs we have implemented. I am shocked by the sudden decision made by SBDC to cease our funding, especially when we are trying to stimulate our economy."

In recognition of her work in the non-profit sector, Ms Hanlon has been a nominee in the WA Citizen of the Year Award, Industry & Commerce category, has twice been awarded the National Business Enterprise Centre Manager of the Year and has been recognised by the City

of Perth as one of '100 Champions of WA' for her work within in the textile and fashion industry sector in WA.

“The withdrawal of \$93,000 in funding will leave thousands of small business clients locally and nationally with limited or no access to similar services. Given our results and our recognition by others, I cannot understand the decision made by the SBDC and we are seeking public support”, Ms Hanlon said.

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About Belmont BEC:

Since its inception, the Belmont BEC has established an extensive range of community projects and programs. These include the Textile Clothing Footwear Resource Centre Inc. (TCFWA), Belmont Small Business Awards, WA Racing Industry Development Project, Designedge Innovation Festival, Multicultural Business Support Services, Designedge Fashion Incubator, Belmont Clothes Library, and Business Workshops for Youth. Other centre activities include the establishment of a range of specialist business workshops, many with a focus on creative industry business development programs with indigenous and culturally diverse groups.