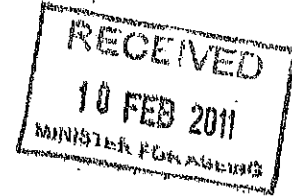




Geoff LYONS



① MC - MS (LN)
MB - MB MP-substantive
Mental H.



10 February 2011

The Hon Mark Butler MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing
Suite Mg 48
Ministerial Wing
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Butler

I thank you for your response to my letter dated 4th November 2010 regarding concerns raised by one of my constituents about the suggested closure of the Launceston Lifeline telephone room in February 2011.

Following your response to my initial enquiries, my constituent has further concerns and is seeking further explanation about matters surrounding the Launceston closure.

I have enclosed a copy of the letter, which you will find self-explanatory.

Can you please provide further clarification on this matter. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Lyons MHR
MEMBER FOR BASS

Our Ref: ce

M11002738. 11/3

Minister for Mental Health and Ageing	10 FEB 2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Reply by <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minister <input type="checkbox"/> Chief of Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Adviser	<input type="checkbox"/> Action <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Response <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call <input type="checkbox"/> Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Urgent by <input type="checkbox"/> Refer to
		<input type="checkbox"/> Department <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Constituent <input type="checkbox"/> Background <input type="checkbox"/> Information <input type="checkbox"/> Required <input type="checkbox"/> Comments	

RECEIVED

31 JAN 2011



Mr Geoff Lyons MHA
100 St John Street
Launceston TAS 7250

Dear Mr. Lyons

RE: The closure of the Lifeline centre at Launceston.

I thank you for, and refer you to, your letter dated 10 January 2011.

Because you did not respond to my letter near September 2010, and do this within a reasonable time, then subsequent events have overtaken any easy and possible resolution of the matter raised.

The closure of Launceston operation of Lifeline it seems is an irreversible and a dead issue now.

The information provided to your office by national Lifeline (and /or NW Lifeline) is inaccurate and misleading. It also deserves comment because of its omissions. I shall offer to you some examples:-

(1) The population base of Devonport is just 25,000 people and I believe NW Lifeline has struggled, off and on, to support **one** Lifeline telephone operating at Devonport.

It is evident as there has been an abnormal number of training programs (re for recruitment) needed at Devonport to keep the effort going in that town (when compared with the amount of training its offered at the Burnie & Launceston centres).

However, I am advised NW Lifeline (with its head office at Devonport) now has reached the final stages of implementing **four** Lifeline telephones at the Devonport office!

I believe they live in "dreamland" to think it is sustainable and reasonable for Launceston volunteers to drive (3 hours) to Devonport on a regular basis and then do a 4-5 hour shift there on the phones.

(2) Until just recently the Devonport centre of NW Lifeline faced / or was threatened with closure, and their recent actions (on paper) are an effort to avert its immediate closure.

(4) Herein I refer to Lifeline's assertion "... *These shifts are currently not attracting Launceston based telephone counsellors ...*". Please note, the said overnight shift issue/ problem that has been referred is **exactly the same** at Devonport!

It is clear NW Lifeline (wrongly) wants you to infer Devonport has had a much better record and is a leader in this regard of overnight shifts. This is plainly wrong.

(5) The CEO and /or the Board chairman of NW Lifeline **have not held a number** of meetings with Launceston volunteer telephone counsellors. Rather, there has been just one meeting (late Nov. 2010) and it was to inform volunteers of the decision to close the Launceston centre in 2011.

Lifeline has not informed you their Launceston closure decision is directly related to them not having to continue on with the **excessively high lease** that they got themselves into at Mowbray!!

I was not informed by the CEO/ Board chair that I would "benefit" from the improvement model.

(6) The national Lifeline "improvement model" (which I may add is basically an experiment) is about lifting the number of phones from one (1) to two (2) telephones at any given centre in Australia.

However, it is clear NW Lifeline's response to this is to increase the possible phones in use at the Devonport centre from **one** telephone to **four** telephones !!

It seems to me, **two** phones at Devonport and **two** phones at Launceston is more equitable and reasonable. The population base for volunteers at Launceston is larger than the entire NW Coast.

(7) A big problem the Launceston operation constantly has faced is that it is not at all represented on the NW Lifeline Board. All Board members are from the NW Coast. Therefore if/ when there is a crisis, the Coastal Board members make decisions that are ill-informed (or otherwise not as informed as they could have been) because they don't have full knowledge of the Launceston environs.

Notwithstanding that "informal" comment (say, about improvements) from Launceston volunteers does not systematically get fed to the Coastal Board members to assist with their decisions.

(8) It is my understanding the *Certificate IV Course* offered by Lifeline for its volunteer training is something recognised by Mainland universities (e.g. say, with social work degrees). Nevertheless, my suggestion that this ought to be something sincerely developed at Launceston (and with our Uni social work dep't) was met with a negative and dismissive attitude by one Board member.

But a reader of the NW Lifeline Annual Reports would note and learn everything is "hunky dorey", and the closure of the Launceston operation is something that could not be foreseen. I encourage you to share this letter with the Head Office of Lifeline because I believe the lack of transparency of decision making and accountability at NW Lifeline needs some urgent attention.

At a national level, I believe the government ought to discretely have a mind to monitor the role out of the referred "improvement model" (because of the massive funds the government provides to the Lifeline service). The bottom line is this, many small towns will (over time) lose a Lifeline centre. It is because of Lifelines new policy of having 2 and 3 telephones at all centres, else they face closure

Is it in the **national interest** to deny to a regional area (say, Darling Downs) an opportunity of volunteering to help the national Lifeline effort simply because its resources won't extend to man two telephones? Is it in the national interest to allow Lifeline to expand its telephone counsellors in metropolitan areas, and do so at the expense of smaller communities in regional areas?

Yours sincerely,

Peter Jacobson

