



COLLINSVILLE CONNECT

25 YEARS OF CONNECTION

SPECIAL 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION · PREPARED FOR THE AGM · SEPTEMBER 2026 · COLLINSVILLE, QUEENSLAND

From a Federal Grant to a Quarter-Century of Community

HOW A SMALL MINING TOWN BUILT SOMETHING THAT OUTLASTED EVERY OTHER PROJECT LIKE IT IN THE COUNTRY

In 1998 and 1999, Collinsville lost its two underground mines, and with them, a large share of the town's jobs. Out of that hardship came an unlikely idea: a local community worker, Serina Duhring, found a Federal Government grant, Networking the Nation, and a handful of locals decided to bring the internet age to a town the rest of the world had mostly driven past.

Twenty-five years later, Collinsville Connect Telecentre is still standing, and remarkably, it is the only Telecentre left operating anywhere in Australia from that entire original national programme. Every other town's version of this project has closed. Ours has not just survived, it has grown into a genuine local institution: a training ground, a heritage archive, a crisis-response service, and, for a great many young Collinsville locals, a first job.

Along the way, this small-town project has been recognised well beyond Collinsville. A case study on the Telecentre was one of the most discussed papers at an international conference in 2002, and was referenced directly in a UK professor's keynote address. The Telecentre has hosted state-wide industry conferences, secured Queensland Government funding through Blueprint for the Bush, and been visited by Federal Members of Parliament, twice, twenty years apart.

This year, the Telecentre marks 25 years. This summary is a taste of that story; the full record, richer and longer, sits behind it for anyone who wants the whole picture.

"It's been an amazing 20 years and for me it's been an absolute privilege."

— Sue Clark, Co-ordinator since 2001, at the 20th Anniversary AGM

25 YEARS IN NUMBERS

25

years of continuous operation

128,402

recorded visits, 2001–2025

\$3.29M+

raised and reinvested in Collinsville

\$190,000

raised in 90 days for the Pit Pony Experience

3

local history books published

130+

staff, trainees and volunteers

1 of 1

the only Telecentre left from the original programme

2,415

students trained in classroom courses since 2001

A Quarter Century, Era by Era

Five distinct chapters, each with its own character, together telling one continuous story of a small community deciding, again and again, to back its own Telecentre.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, ONE STEP AT A TIME

● **2001–2005** FOUNDING & ESTABLISHMENT

Founded after two mine closures cost the town its livelihoods, funded by a federal grant

Opened 20 October 2001, ribbon cut by the Mayor (Mike Bruncker), Federal MP (Kirsten Livermore) among the guests

Case study recognised at an international conference; referenced in a UK keynote

Named the most-used Telecentre in Queensland by year two

● **2006–2010** CONSOLIDATION & GROWTH

Confirmed as the only Telecentre left from the entire original national programme

Turnover passes \$1 million; a second permanent staff role created

Local council partnership renewed after amalgamation into the new region

A Federal MP (Kirsten Livermore) returns years later, this time to use the office herself

● **2011–2015** A DECADE ON

10th Anniversary AGM held on the exact date of the original 2001 opening

Digital heritage archive passes 8,000 community-donated images

The Pit Pony Experience, dreamed up over a cuppa, raises \$190,000 in 90 days

This grassroots idea grew so big it became its own incorporated body

● **2016–2020** NEW LEADERSHIP

Helps 24+ residents recover after Cyclone Debbie

Founding President Charlie Hobson passes away after 16 years of service

Total visits pass 100,000; a 100-years-of-mining history book published

Keeps its doors open right through the COVID-19 pandemic

● **2021–2026** A QUARTER CENTURY

20th Anniversary AGM reveals the Pit Pony campaign's full \$190,000 result

A third local history book completes a proud published set

A new 3D-printing service launches. Separately, a generous community donor gives \$55,000 across two gifts

A former work-experience student becomes Co-ordinator/Manager, 14 years on

The People Behind the Story

A great many people have given time, skill and years to this Telecentre. These are a few whose threads run the longest.

Charlie Hobson (in memoriam). Founding Chairperson and President from the very first meeting in 2001 until his passing in 2017, sixteen years of leadership.

Sue Clark. The Telecentre's first and longest-serving Co-ordinator, in the role since August 2001, twenty-five years and counting.

David Nebauer & Denise Hall. Both on the founding committee from the first meeting in March 2001; David has been President since 2018, Denise has been Treasurer, without a single gap, since 2004.

Marissa Kearney. Joined the committee at its second meeting in 2001 and is still an active member twenty-five years later.

Jenn Honnery. A trainee back in 2003, now the Telecentre's web designer and one of Sue's most trusted advisors, more than two decades on.

Jeannie Poole. A true Collinsville local historian whose knowledge has shaped the Telecentre's entire digital heritage archive and its published history books.

Jamaine Miller. Walked in as a work-experience student in 2012. Today, he is Co-ordinator/Manager alongside Sue.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The Telecentre's very first client was a woman in her eighties who rode in on a motorised bike and asked to be shown how "these things" worked. Within weeks she was emailing her grandchildren in England and China.
- The Pit Pony Experience, which went on to raise \$190,000, began life over a cup of tea one ordinary weekend.
- Two families, the Hobsons and the Honnerys, have each had a parent, and later their own children or nieces, come through the Telecentre's doors as staff or trainees, a generation apart.
- A UK professor referenced Collinsville Connect's own case study in a keynote speech at an international conference, a small mining town's project studied on the other side of the world.

"What we do at the Telecentre can't be measured by the bank balance, only by the thanks and satisfaction it brings to the people who use it."

— Collinsville Connect Telecentre committee, in its own words

WITH THANKS, ACROSS 25 YEARS

A genuinely rare thing for a town this size: support from every level of government, and from industry, right through a quarter century.

GOVERNMENT

Networking the Nation (Federal)
Blueprint for the Bush (Queensland)
Whitsunday Regional Council
Bowen Shire Council

INDUSTRY

Thiess
Glencore
Ark Energy
CFMEU

COMMUNITY

Collinsville Community Association
Lions Club of Collinsville
Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE
And 130+ staff, trainees & volunteers

THIS IS YOUR STORY TOO

The full 25-Year Historical Record, with every name, date and figure behind this summary, is available from the committee.

If someone in your family has ever walked through our doors, they're part of this story. Please share this with them.
