

Fixing an ongoing miscommunication

People from the Gundillion area are fed up with having no reliable telephone service, neither mobile nor landline.

Mandy O'Brien got her email through eventually.

In December last year, through Christmas and into the middle of January, Gundillion did not have any landline service at all. There was a major outage at the exchange so no one up this way had service for about four weeks. We are unable to receive mobile service so the community was fairly upset with Telstra. I contacted Eden-Monaro MP Peter Hendy with my concerns and asked him if he would come to a meeting up here.

The meeting was very well attended with over 80 people turning up to voice their views. The depth of concern was evident with the continual stream of speakers covering issues including the lack of a dependable landline service, which is ever-aging and ill maintained, and the non-existent mobile phone coverage. This endangers peoples lives, jeopardises road and work safety and causes incessant business disruption with businesses losing work because of constant communication blackouts. It also creates havoc when accidents occur through not being able to contact emergency services.

Even though other parts of Australia see advances in technology, we are

technically going backwards. The meeting attendees spoke with sincerity and honesty with regard to their personal and business situations where the lack of a steadfast phone service had impacted on their lives.

We regard any form of phone communication a luxury in the Gundillion area.

Safety is our number one concern and Neville Marsden our local Ambulance Officer certainly highlighted and illustrated this through his experience with callouts into the Gundillion district.

Due to the unreliability of our landlines and no mobile phone coverage, some residents have purchased a personal EPIRB [Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon], so that if they have the misfortune of having an accident or are unwell, contact can be made with essential services so their lives aren't put at risk. These are extraordinary lengths to go to in this day and age.

As a result of this meeting a delegation has been formed to meet with the various stakeholders including politicians and providers which will begin the task of securing a mobile tower in our area and the sooner the better.

Chauntelle Hindmarsh adds:

I don't think most people would be aware of just how bad the landlines and exchange have become. From a personal point of view, our phone has no dial tone randomly throughout any given day and is worse in wet weather or will drop out during a call with no warning.

I am led to believe, from Telstra technicians, that it is bad here and other places because over the years, as properties have been divided up and new homes or hobby farmer sheds have needed phones, Telstra has split the old phone lines instead of laying new infrastructure. In our case I think there are eight dwellings using the one line over 20km from the exchange.

We've had satellite phones issued from Telstra for months at a time and over the years I have written letters to our Federal Members, a submission to the Regional Telecommunication Review in 2011 and also the Mobile Black Spot project — but mostly no one cares.

It is very frustrating to be in the situation where your child is injured at school and might need to be taken to the hospital and you can't be contacted because the phones are out; or your husband is losing work or can't make business calls because the phone has stopped working.

At Christmas the phones were out for a month, so there were no Christmas day phone calls from family and friends and no new years phone calls. Nor birthday calls which can be hard for people who are socially isolated because of distance, or are flooded in which happens on all of the roads up here a minimum of four or five times a year.

Over Christmas and into January there was the potential for chaos should there have been an emergency such as a bushfire. UHF radio was all we could have used.

Last year we had more than ten faults reported for our phone, each takes at least a fortnight to a month to be fixed. One day we are apparently going to get 90m of cable replaced where it was hit by lightning, but this was ordered by a technician several years ago.

At the moment it is easy to feel as though the area has gone backwards in the last ten or fifteen years with the essentials of roads and phones deteriorating. We need the active help of all levels of government to have in our region the services that most Australians take for granted.

I wrote a little poem called 'Wattle' when I was eight. Then there was one about monsters when I was twelve — my teachers and my parents loved it — and my friends enjoyed it. I love words, everyone who likes to write does I guess. I had encouragement and I liked putting words together.

I started writing many of the poems in the book 'My Uncles Cat' when I was eighteen. So I put a second introduction in the book because the other poems were written so much later. They were quite different work to that of a girl of nineteen — you get a progression, perhaps.

I started getting neck pain and back troubles at 13. I had flu-like symptoms as well where I'd be sick for a while, then back to school for a while, then sick again... But it was not serious enough that anybody took much notice. I bumped along like that until I was 15. I started getting sicker and I still went to school but I didn't do much else which was like an alarm bell ringing. I'd get home from school and flat-line.

I remember the onset of the horrible grey drag in the second half of year 10. The maths teacher kindly gave me revision notes for what we'd learned — it just wouldn't stay in me, it'd just float away and I couldn't get it back.

At the end of that year I slept right through the holidays and at the beginning of year 11 I thought, no, no, I can't. I rested for a year and hoped I'd get better but I didn't.

My first experience with a specialist was being told to go home and 'sleep it off'. He expected me to get better in 3 to 6 months. I didn't — but at that time I thought, as I did for ten years after, next year I might get better.

In those first five years I thought, well I can't go to uni now, but I might be able to when I'm 21; I never thought I'd still be sick after that. I'd read the literature, CFS could last for up to 5

What is a Poem?

A spoken song,
The voicing of wrong,
Done to one or to many,
A way to understand if there is any.

A story, a feeling,
With troubles dealing,
A description, an ideal,
All that it makes you feel.



Poetry and pain

Katishe Reynoldson lives with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and Fibromyalgia. She also writes poems.

years if you were unlucky. Well, it turns out that I'm very unlucky.

I've been tested for everything you can think of. In the general tests nothing showed up, not even arthritis which is sometimes related to fibromyalgia.

In my 20s the doctors diagnosed me with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome which is what you have when all other tests fail. That is, a 'syndrome' being a collection of symptoms.

I should have written a poem with a verse on each of the doctors, they were such a varied group. They're very human especially on the first visit.

I've found Doctors anything from remote to the point of disinterest, reassuringly brilliant, likeably hopeless, through to infuriating full of assumptions. The last, be they sloppy or arrogant, are the most dangerous to your happiness; they can scar their patients and impede their recovery. That said, the work doctors do is immensely difficult and I try to remember that — particularly when I'm paying the bills.

I've had years and years of doctors and quacks. Seventy percent of suffer-

ers get better within three years. I've been diagnosed to have Myalgic Encephalomyelitis or ME for short. It's symptoms overlap into Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

This year I've had Botox injections for the headaches and the spasms in my face muscles. It's helped quite a lot with the pains around my face.

When you're living with any chronic illness, the room starts out this big but because it's shrinking so gradually you think, I can live with this. To start with, I could still do things, hobbies like writing, then with the light sensitivity it became much harder. You try doing much with the curtains closed all day.

This year I found a couple of things I wanted to say so I started writing again. It's great how everyone likes a different poem. I like poems that have nothing flabby about them. That's why I love 'My Uncles Cat' because it's long but not flabby. I do like black jokes — that's why I write them.

Poetry is when the written word is like music. When you get it right it's like

MORE THAN EIGHTY PEOPLE GAVE UP THEIR MONDAY MORNING TO MEET WITH LOCAL MP PETER HENDY AND MAYOR PETE HARRISON AT GUNDILLION HALL.

