

# The West Australian

## Belmont campaign steps up

VIVIENNE RYAN

Fashion designers and artists have banded together to support the campaign to protect the Belmont Small Business Centre.

The centre is at risk of closure following the loss of \$93,000 in State Government funding from July 1.

The Small Business Development Corporation says the services will be picked up by other centres, but Belmont's supporters claim it is irreplaceable, citing its expertise in textile, clothing and fashion.

"There is everything here (in the centre) I need to know and everything I don't know that I need to know," indigenous artist and designer Leanne Manado said.

Ms Manado launched her online art business last year through the Federal Government's New Enterprise Incentive Scheme and said she would have failed without the support of the Belmont centre and its chief executive, Carol Hanlon.

She has since set up two websites to sell her products. "You need to have someone show interest in you," Ms Manado said.

Designer Taku Mbudzi also developed her Ribbon of Africa label under the eyes of Ms Hanlon. She said the



Opportunities: Carol Hanlon, left, Leanne Manado and Taku Mbudzi at the Belmont Small Business Centre. Picture: Sharon Smith

support she received had given her the confidence to start her business, and other African women were looking to follow her lead.

Ms Hanlon said the Government was penalising a centre which was helping creative women from multicultural backgrounds who had traditionally slipped through the system.

"Nothing stacks up if you are talking about really helping small business," Ms Hanlon said. "This is something WA should celebrate.

"Everyone who walks through the doors receives help. I have busted my guts going up to regional and remote Aboriginal communities to help women and I have had to struggle for

15 years to keep the doors open.

"I can't understand (the funding cut). It just doesn't stack up."

Belmont hosted 329 workshops in the December quarter and says it created 41 full and part-time jobs.

The centre has helped more than 17,000 small businesses, most of them outside the Belmont area.