



Hon Greg Smith SC MP

Attorney General
Minister for Justice

MEDIA RELEASE

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CIRCLE SENTENCING CELEBRATES 10TH BIRTHDAY

The NSW Attorney General, Greg Smith SC, today paid tribute to the Aboriginal Elders involved in Circle Sentencing as the pioneers of the ground-breaking program celebrated its 10th anniversary.

“The Aboriginal Elders who have volunteered their time to Circle Sentencing have helped hundreds of offenders address the causes of their behaviour and get their lives back on track,” Mr Smith said.

A ceremony was held today in Nowra – the birthplace of Circle Sentencing – to recognise the contributions of Elders involved in the program, with Chief Magistrate Graeme Henson attending.

“The Elders have shown how Aboriginal communities can work with the justice system on common goals of reducing re-offending and helping victims of crime in their recovery,” Mr Smith said.

Almost 800 Circle Sentence sittings have been held for adult Aboriginal offenders since the program began in 2002. The alternative sentencing process, which is conducted in a community setting, enables Elders and victims of crime to speak directly to the offender about the impact of their behaviour.

“Offenders often find Circle Sentencing more confronting than a conventional court because there is nowhere to hide and they must face up to the consequences of their actions,” said Nowra Circle Sentencing project officer Gail Wallace.

“The Circle tailors a sentence to the offender that not only fits the crime but will also help them to address issues such as anger management and drug and alcohol dependency.”

The Member for South Coast, Shelley Hancock, said the program had become an important feature of the justice system.

“Circle Sentencing started in Nowra and a measure of its success is that it is now operating across NSW,” Ms Hancock said.

“There’s no doubt Circle Sentencing is changing people’s lives for the better, with many participants now earning an honest living and reconnecting with their families.”

Mr Smith praised the Elders involved in Circle Sentencing for their long-term commitment to helping offenders.

“The Elders don’t forget about offenders when the Circle Sentence finishes – they monitor their progress in the community and provide invaluable support and advice,” Mr Smith said.

Mr Smith also acknowledged the contributions of other participants in Circle Sentencing, including magistrates, police prosecutors and project officers. The program operates at 11 locations; Armidale, Brewarrina, Blacktown, Bourke, Dubbo, Kempsey, Lismore, Moree, Mount Druitt, Nowra and Walgett.