



Brad Hazzard MP

Attorney General Minister for Justice

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW YOUTH KOORI COURT – COMBATS CYCLE OF CRIME

NSW Attorney General Brad Hazzard yesterday announced the Parramatta Children's Court is trialling a dedicated court for young Aboriginal offenders to combat the cycle of crime and help turn young lives around.

Mr Hazzard said the Youth Koori Court will provide greater Aboriginal involvement in the court process ensuring it's culturally relevant, addresses reoffending behaviour and reduces the number of young people being sentenced to a period of detention.

"It's a sad fact that Aboriginal people are over represented in the criminal justice system which is why the Baird Liberal & Nationals Government intend to put even more energy into measures to try to break the cycle of crime," Mr Hazzard said.

"It's frustrating and concerning that by the age of 23, more than three quarters of the NSW Aboriginal population has had a run in with the justice system – they may have been cautioned by police, referred to a Youth Justice Conference or convicted of an offence.

"For some years we have had Circle Sentencing for adults. Now it's time to see what we can do to turnaround criminal behaviour in young people as early as possible – before it becomes a destructive way of life."

In Victoria, the Children's Koori Court has been operating since 2005 and has helped hundreds of Aboriginal youth get their lives back on track.

Mr Hazzard said the Koori Court model also takes the victim into account.

"Elders will play an important role in getting young offenders to see their actions through their victim's eyes," he said.

"The Children's Court has found many victims are keen for a young offender to be rehabilitated – hopefully the same will be seen in this dedicated Youth Koori Court."

"By the time the case comes to sentence, it is hoped the young person will demonstrate to both the court and the victim genuine remorse and prove they are taking steps to change their lives."

Member for Parramatta Geoff Lee said "I am pleased that Parramatta has been chosen as the first location to trial the Koori Youth Court and look forward to seeing the outcomes."

The twelve month trial will start in January 2015. If successful the Koori Youth Court could be introduced at other locations around the state.

HOW IT WORKS:

Young Aboriginal offenders under 19 who have been found guilty of committing a criminal offence at the Parramatta Children's Court will be eligible for the program.

Unlike a mainstream court, the Koori Court is more informal with everyone sitting around a table talking 'plain' English rather than using technical legal jargon.

An Elder will sit with the judicial officer to provide cultural advice about the Aboriginal offender including their circumstances and why they are in court.

Before being sentenced by the magistrate or judge, an informal conference will be facilitated by a Children's Registrar with input from the young person, their family, Elders and staff from both government and non-government agencies.

A plan will be developed at this meeting to help reduce the likelihood of reoffending including strategies to improve cultural connections, encourage the offender to stay at school or get work, secure stable accommodation and address any health, drug or alcohol issues.

If the magistrate or judge approves the plan, the Aboriginal youth will have six months to comply with the program and achieve their goals before being sentenced. At the end of this period, the judicial officer will make a judgment after considering the work that has been undertaken by the youth to address their anti-social behaviour.

Victims will have an opportunity to prepare a victim's impact statement as part of the court process and can be present at sentencing to hear from those involved in the case.

If the young person breaches the program the matter can be referred back to the Children's Court for normal sentencing.