



# MEDIA RELEASE

Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC  
Attorney General  
Minister for Industrial Relations

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## NOWRA ELDERS TO HELP ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AT RISK

Nowra Aboriginal Elders are being trained to take part in a new court process that helps to decide the future of Aboriginal children at risk of abuse or neglect, NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos announced today.

“Care Circles are primarily about the welfare and safety of Aboriginal children, as well as ensuring they don’t experience another form of abuse – loss of cultural identity,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

Member for Kiama, Matt Brown, said Nowra Children’s Court has held five Care Circles so far in a trial of the program with encouraging results.

“The idea is that Aboriginal children are not taken away from their community or kinship system but raised in their culture,” Mr Brown said.

The Care Circle model for Indigenous communities is a joint initiative between the Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG) and Community Services.

Minister for Community Services Linda Burney said that a Care Circle can only be ordered by a Children’s Court magistrate.

“It is convened to formulate a care plan for an Aboriginal child who has been removed from their family,” Ms Burney said.

“The Care Circle provides advice to the Children’s Court magistrate on matters such as where the child should live, contact with family and support services for the child and family.”

Members of a Care Circle include the child’s parents and their lawyers, the child’s lawyer (usually from Legal Aid NSW), a representative from Community Services, the Magistrate, three Aboriginal community representatives and any other party to the matter.

In a similar fashion to Circle Sentencing for Aboriginal offenders, the members sit in a circle to discuss the case. The first meeting is held to work out the care plan including appropriate placement options and support services. The participants then meet six weeks later to evaluate the plan and provide final feedback. The magistrate then makes orders for the care of the child.

Elders from the community are screened by Community Services and DJAG for working with children and do not have a history with the people involved in the case.

The trial of the program in Nowra began in December and an evaluation of its progress will begin next month.

The training day for Elders is being held on Friday, 23 October from 10am to 3pm at the Interchange Building, 37 Holloway Road, Nowra. Aboriginal Elders interested in participating in Care Circles should contact Gail Wallace at Nowra Courthouse on (02) 4421 2277.