

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Attorney-General
Minister for Resources



Monday, 8 February 2021

NEW COURT DOG “KIKI” TO SUPPORT CHILDREN GIVING EVIDENCE

A program that provides vulnerable witnesses giving evidence in court extra support by having a four-legged friend by their side is being expanded by the Andrews Labor Government.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes today welcomed Kiki as the newest member of the Court Dog Program – a project delivered by the Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) and the Child Witness Service in the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The two-year-old black Labrador will join her Labrador partner, Suzie-Lucy, who was the first dog in Australia to be allowed on the witness stand as an individual gave evidence.

Due to overwhelming demand, Kiki has joined the program, and will be based at the Child Witness Service to support children and young people under 18 who are required to give evidence in court.

Since the Court Dog Program commenced in May 2017, the dogs have supported almost 300 witnesses across 250 cases – nearly half of which have been children.

Provided by Assistance Dogs Australia, the pair are trained to accompany a witness and will lie quietly next to their feet.

Kiki and Suzie-Lucy are able to perform a range of tricks, such as playing tenpin bowling with the witness and turning the pages in a book, to help provide calming support and reduce the likelihood of further traumatisation.

Victoria is currently the only state running a full-time program with an accredited dog working in both remote witness rooms and on the witness stand in courtrooms.

Both Kiki and Suzie-Lucy finished their advanced training at the Southern Queensland Correctional Centre, as part of the Pups in Prisons program. The wellbeing and rehabilitation program allows prisoners to train and care for dogs in partnership with Assistance Dogs Australia.

Quote attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

“The Court Dog Program is a wonderful initiative that helps make the court system more sensitive to the trauma many victims and witnesses have suffered.”

“Kiki’s calming influence will be welcomed in more court hearings across the state – providing emotional support to help minimise the particular distress and anxiety child witnesses can feel.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Victim Support Natalie Hutchins

“The Court Dog program has already provided support to hundreds of child witnesses and their families. Kiki is a fantastic addition to the Child Witness Service program and will ensure even more people have access to this important service.”

Quote attributable to Abbey Hogan, Solicitor for Public Prosecutions, Office of Public Prosecutions

“The Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions is proud to have started this remarkable program, which has proven so beneficial in helping ease the stress of witnesses giving evidence in the courtroom.”

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