

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Attorney-General
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BETTER COURT OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL FAMILIES IN SHEPPARTON

The cultural identity and needs of Aboriginal children and families involved in the child protection system will be placed at the centre of court proceedings with support from the Andrews Labor Government.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes joined President of the Children's Court Judge Jack Vandersteen to launch the Marram-Ngala Ganbu Koori Family Hearing Day at the Shepparton Children's Court today.

Marram-Ngala Ganbu means "we are one" in Woiwurrung language – reflecting the goal of the program to encourage Aboriginal children's cultural connections to their family and community.

The program was established in 2016 at the Children's Court in Broadmeadows to enable Aboriginal children, parents and others to participate in child protection proceedings in a respectful way – empowering them to participate meaningfully in court processes and supporting families to stay together.

The program has supported more than 470 Aboriginal families since it began. Its expansion to Shepparton means that even more families will have access to more effective and culturally appropriate responses and outcomes.

Prioritising Aboriginal-centred, therapeutic justice, Marram-Ngala Ganbu promotes Aboriginal self-determination by adapting courtroom setup and communication styles to make court a more welcoming and culturally safe place.

Families are empowered to actively participate in decision-making and discuss their matter directly with the Magistrate – all parties have a seat around the bar table to create an environment where children and families feel more comfortable and less intimidated by the court process.

Extended family are also welcomed to attend hearings, promoting an inclusive environment. Aboriginal staff support families to navigate the court process and provide information and referrals to relevant services.

The Broadmeadows program has proven successful with the dedicated support of Magistrates and Aboriginal staff, meaning families are more likely to attend Marram-Ngala Ganbu hearings and follow court orders.

This has meant more Aboriginal families staying together and being reunited, and more Aboriginal children being placed in kinship care when out-of-home care is required – ensuring vital cultural connections are maintained.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"This program provides an inclusive and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal families, helping children feel more comfortable during what can be a scary process."

"We've seen great success so far in keeping families together and preserving cultural and community connections – that's why we're expanding the program to support even more Aboriginal children."