

# Media Release

**The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP**

Minister for Crime Prevention

Minister for Corrections

Minister for Youth Justice

Minister for Victim Support



Thursday, 8 July 2021

## **BUILDING BETTER FAMILY CONNECTIONS FOR FEMALE PRISONERS**

Women in prison will receive increased support to maintain and strengthen family ties – helping to reduce reoffending and help keep women out of prison when they return to the community.

Minister for Corrections Natalie Hutchins today announced the \$700,000 investment by the Andrews Labor Government to deliver the three-year Family Visits Program across the women's corrections system.

The Family Visits Program supplements existing personal visits and targets women who are seeking family reunification or strengthened family ties.

Following a successful pilot, the Family Visits Program will be in place at Tarrengower Prison and the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre – providing additional structured support for meaningful visits with family and children, by trained and dedicated Family Visits Workers.

Strong family bonds are one of the key factors in reducing a person's risk of reoffending after release from prison. The program connects female prisoners with their families via fortnightly or weekly visits.

Supporting women and participating families to positively engage with each other can improve children's happiness and wellbeing, increase women's confidence in their parenting abilities, and improve reintegration outcomes for women leaving prison.

Participants of the program, both the women in prison and their family members in the community, will receive intensive support from the Family Visits Workers, building their capacity for positive communication and making family decisions as women prepare to transition back to their families.

The Family Visits Program is part of a wider \$5.8 million initiative that also includes family engagement workers and a family therapy service.

The Family Visits Program will be delivered by the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) – one of Australia's oldest independent community organisations that provides support for people in contact with the criminal justice systems.

### **Quotes attributable to Minister for Corrections Natalie Hutchins**

*"Maintaining meaningful relationships with children and families is one of the major factors in helping women reintegrate back into the community after they leave prison."*

*"The team at VACRO provide the resources and tools to help women stay connected. Expanding the Family Visits Program will help reduce the risk that a woman will reoffend – and help keep her out of prison."*

### **Quotes attributable to VACRO CEO Marius Smith**

*"We know video visits make children feel more comfortable and relaxed, and mums get the chance to also actively parent."*

*"There's no doubt the program can have a positive effect on mental health. It strengthens the bonds between a mum and her kids and increases the chances that the family will thrive post-prison."*