

Barbara Perry MP

Minister for Local Government
Minister for Juvenile Justice
Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)



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New service to support Aboriginal young offenders in Western Sydney

Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation has been selected to provide support services for the Bail Assistance Line a new after-hours phone line to assist police to help Aboriginal young people eligible for bail in Western Sydney receive adequate support in the community.

Minister for Juvenile Justice Barbara Perry also announced today that *CatholicCare* will provide similar services for the BAL in Sydney metropolitan area, and *Life Without Barriers* was selected for the BAL in Dubbo and Hunter regions.

The Bail Assistance Line operates as an after-hours phone service connecting NSW Police with Juvenile Justice staff who assist in finding a responsible person and services such as accommodation for young people who police decide are eligible for bail.

Other services to be provided by the community organisations may also include transport, education and training, drug and alcohol counselling, and other support programs.

"Before the Bail Assistance Line was introduced, a young person who was eligible for bail may have been held in custody because they did not have anywhere safe to live or because police were unable to locate a suitable person to attend the police station," Ms Perry said.

"Those who police determine are eligible for bail will be provided with practical assistance to meet the conditions set by police."

Glendra Stubbs, Chief Executive Officer, Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation, said: "We are very pleased that the NSW Government is providing us with funding to start a service that supports Aboriginal young people on police bail in Western Sydney - so that they can remain in the community while fulfilling their bail conditions.

"There will be many Aboriginal and non Aboriginal organisations that will be delighted that an Aboriginal service was successful.

"We will be providing an Aboriginal service run by Aboriginal people to the local Aboriginal community. This is true Aboriginal self determination and capability building of Aboriginal service which is what reconciliation is about."

Under the new Bail Assistance Line service:

- Police can contact Juvenile Justice (JJ) staff between the hours of 4pm and 3am; seven days a week;
- JJ staff can then assess the young person's circumstances, attempt to locate the young person's parent or guardian, arrange accommodation and/ or transport for the young person if required;
- JJ staff then contact the NGO to help facilitate bail conditions for the young person;
- The NGO may come and pick up the young person and take them to suitable accommodation if required to meet the conditions of bail set up by police.

John McKenzie, Chief Legal Officer, Aboriginal Legal Service, said, "We are very happy to support this initiative, which aims to divert Aboriginal young people away from spending time in custody. Our lawyers who work in the Childrens Court jurisdiction are often frustrated when they see an Aboriginal young person at Court who is in custody because suitable transport, accommodation and supervision options were not immediately available when they were arrested."

Ms Perry said the service will help reduce the numbers of young people who are eligible for bail but remain in custody simply due to their personal circumstances.

"I sincerely hope that this new service will also give these young people guidance and support with the aim of reducing their likelihood of offending in the future."

Ms Stubbs said: "Our 30 years' experience working with the Stolen Generations, we know that the effects of the history of forced separations cannot be seen in isolation: they continue to have far-reaching effects on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, frequently with inter-generational impacts. These impacts show up in many, many areas, including the continuing over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the juvenile justice system.

"In the Western Sydney and Blue Mountains areas where Link-Up is based, too many Aboriginal young people struggle with crime, homelessness, drug abuse, behavioural disorders and disengagement from training and education. Our work has brought us into frequent contact with these young people and with other services working with them, including educators, lawyers, police, youth workers, counsellors and health services.

"The Bail Assistance Line means that Aboriginal young people in Western Sydney will not have to spend their police bail period in detention simply because they have no permanent home address or because the responsible adult is temporarily absent or unavailable.

"We will support the new service by providing accommodation and support, as well as working with the young people on respecting themselves and others, understanding their responsibilities to themselves and others, re-integrating them into their families and communities, and choosing positive alternatives to offending behaviour."

* The Bail Assistance Line is a Keep Them Safe initiative, the NSW Government's five-year plan to fundamentally change the way children and families are supported and protected in NSW. For more information on Keep Them Safe, visit www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au

For interviews:

Aboriginal Legal Service: John McKenzie, Chief Legal Officer, (02)8303 6699;
john.mckenzie@alsnswact.org.au

*** For more information on the NGOs:**

- Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation: www.linkupnsw.org.au
- CatholicCare: www.centacare.org
- Life Without Barriers: www.lwb.org.au