Friday, 26 February, 2016

ADVANCING ABORIGINAL DECISION-MAKING TO IMPROVE CHILDREN’S LIVES

The first regional pilot of a program that empowers Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to make culturally appropriate decisions about the care of local Aboriginal children is starting in Bendigo.

Minister for Families and Children Jenny Mikakos said the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative will assume greater responsibility for a number of local Aboriginal children living in out-of-home care.

The Andrews Labor Government will invest $240,000 in the Bendigo pilot to enable the Co-Operative to employ three dedicated workers who will manage the cases of local Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

Last year the Labor Government passed new laws that allow the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified powers and functions usually undertaken by the Secretary – such as the care of children.

The changes are an important step towards self-determination for Aboriginal communities and will help address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

A similar pilot conducted in metropolitan Melbourne through the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency concluded at the end of June last year.

The results of these two pilots will inform how the Labor Government will work with Aboriginal organisations to deliver the best care for Aboriginal children.

As part of the Government’s work to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children Ms Mikakos has established a quarterly Aboriginal Children’s Forum, bringing together community leaders and experts.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Families and Children Jenny Mikakos

“This program will help tell us how these new changes will work in practice and ensure we equip Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations with the tools they need to improve the lives of Aboriginal children.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Natalie Hutchins

“This investment reflects our commitment to self-determination by putting the Aboriginal families and communities at the centre of the decision making process, as they know what is culturally safe for their own people.”

Attributable to Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People Andrew Jackomos

“The work of the Aboriginal Children’s Forum is establishing solid foundations for the self-determination of the Aboriginal child and family sector by working to bring all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care under the authority, care and case management of an Aboriginal organisation.”