

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Community Services
The Hon. Linda Burney MP



Thursday, 3 September 2009

REFORMS ON TRACK TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE

The NSW Government is on track to deliver its sweeping changes to the State's child protection system and has attained significant milestones in the implementation of its major reforms, Minister for Community Services Linda Burney today announced.

"Child protection is a shared responsibility which must begin with parents, families and communities. This must be backed, however, by a better and more developed service system in which Government and the non-government sector work together," Ms Burney said.

"The launch in March this year of the Government's *Keep Them Safe* action plan to reform the child protection system marked the beginning of a new era of collaboration and partnership between Government, community organisations and individuals.

"*Keep them Safe* is drastically changing the way family and community services will be delivered so that children, young people and their families receive the right services, at the right time, before problems escalate.

"I am proud to report that since the Premier and I announced the reforms, the vast majority of actions in *Keep Them Safe* are well underway and major milestones have already been reached."

Ms Burney reported that achievements to date include:

- The Government's commitment of \$750 million over five years to reform the child protection system, about 40 percent of which will go to non-government organisations
- The passage of special legislation in the NSW Parliament in April to support the reforms
- The appointment of His Honour Mark Marien SC as the first President of the Children's Court
- Extensive collaboration with the sector to create a definition for the new threshold for reporting children to Community Services. This new threshold will allow Community Services to concentrate on children at risk of significant harm
- The first staff appointments to Child Wellbeing Units in Government agencies. These units offer an alternative, voluntary pathway into relevant support services for troubled families who fall outside the new threshold
- Case management of over 500 children in foster care transferred from the Government to non-government organisations
- The launch tomorrow of a new website www.KeepThemSafe.nsw.gov.au to keep the public informed of changes to the child protection system
- The commencement of 11 regional engagement forums across NSW to inform almost 1000 key people in the sector about the progress of the reforms
- The forums will be followed by wider training for around 200,000 mandatory reporters starting in mid-October 2009.

“The NSW Government, in partnership with the sector’s peak body the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA), will be holding special forums across the state for one thousand professionals in the community services sector,” Ms Burney said.

“These forums are about informing the people who work with children, including nurses, teachers, childcare workers and police officers about how *Keep Them Safe* will affect them.

“Tomorrow’s forum in Sydney – the first of the 11 to be held across NSW – has attracted over 300 participants.”

Ms Burney said other components of *Keep Them Safe* underway include the development of family case management for families with complex problems who frequently come into contact with a range of Government departments and non-government agencies.

“To help these families break the cycle of disadvantage and dysfunction, they will be supported by a team of workers from all the relevant agencies. These teams will deliver tailored services to individual families,” she said.

“Stage One of this project will involve up to 90 families from Western and South Eastern NSW and South West Sydney.”

Ms Burney said the Government has also started to implement *Keep Them Safe* measures that address the over-representation of Aboriginal children, young people and families in the child protection system.

“The Aboriginal people of this country have faced severe disadvantage and experienced suffering, discrimination and dispossession. The risks associated with poverty, poor housing and substance misuse need to be addressed because they have had devastating consequences for children, too many of whom have been reported to be at risk of harm.

“We are committed to developing and applying an Aboriginal Impact Statement to every component of *Keep Them Safe*. This is about ensuring the needs of Aboriginal children and families remain a priority in everything we do,” she said.

“I’m pleased to say this proposal has received the endorsement of key Aboriginal stakeholders.”

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