



Department of the Attorney General
Department of Corrective Services

Geraldton Family and Domestic Violence Project

A Reducing Aboriginal Imprisonment Strategy

Background

The Geraldton Family and Domestic Violence Project was launched in December 2005 as one of the State Government's eight strategies to reduce Aboriginal imprisonment in Western Australia.

The focus of the Geraldton project has been to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison and the high number of people imprisoned as the result of family and domestic violence related offences.

The State Government has sought to address these issues by engaging with the local Aboriginal community, to work with them to decide what interventions would work best in Geraldton. The departments of the Attorney General and Corrective Services and other government agencies have worked with an Aboriginal Reference Group to ensure community input and feedback has been considered in decision-making by the project's working group and steering committee.

The development phase of the project aimed to:

- develop a culturally-appropriate court-based model that meets the needs of the Geraldton Aboriginal community in reducing family and domestic violence.
- work with the Geraldton Aboriginal community to explore offender case management and through-care approaches for:
 - appropriate prison diversion strategies
 - delivery of suitable and effective programs that are culturally sound, such as domestic violence offender programs, counselling and drug and alcohol programs.
 - the management of perpetrators through community-based initiatives
 - the provision of victim and family support
 - the prevention of family and domestic violence
- develop a model to inform future planning and development of subsequent regionally-focussed family violence projects.

The outcome

The project has developed a new approach to addressing family and domestic violence in Geraldton, with a range of interventions and community programs included in a model for change. The model was completed in August 2006.

Implementation of the model as a pilot project in Geraldton began in October 2006. This model may be used in the future as a starting point for the development of other regionally-based models.

Project management

The implementation phase of the project is being managed by a structure that includes:

- Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) – community members, who present the views and experiences of the local Aboriginal community to the working party.
- working party – comprises the local Magistrate, court manager, community and juvenile justice manager and ARG members.
- working party advisory group, to provide expert advice to the working party.
- steering committee – the project's decision-maker, comprising senior DotAG and Department of Corrective Services officers – assesses working party advice.

Implementation

The model has been implemented since October 2006 and aims to create:

- **Alternative court processes** based on the establishment of a Family Violence Court. This includes:
 - a round table court
 - Aboriginal court advisors and justices of the peace
 - participation by the accused, victims and families
 - support from a case management team, to include a case manager, ARG representatives, Police prosecutor and Officer in Charge of domestic violence, victim support services and legal aid
 - review of court and non-court supervised breach processes.
- **Programs and services.** These will include:
 - adaptation of the Northern Territory Prison-referred and Community-based Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program
 - continuous review of programs available in Geraldton to identify any gaps in services, assessment of programs used in other locations for use in Geraldton, and development of new programs to meet the needs of the Geraldton Aboriginal community
 - evaluation of existing programs as a means of continuous improvement.
- **Public education** about family and domestic violence victim and perpetrator services and programs, and court processes, to be coordinated by the ARG and working party.
- **Community-based support** for victims of family violence and management of offenders and potential offenders. These may include:
 - mens group for peer support
 - Aboriginal mens time out centre
 - womens group
 - safe house for women and children
 - family counselling and care
 - youth support.

Resources

The implementation of the project relies on the introduction of a range of resources recommended by the model.

Geraldton Magistrate Steve Sharratt is developing the family violence court, with a part-time magistrate appointed to complete his usual court duties.

A judicial support officer is being employed to work at the court and a project coordinator/case manager and a programs officer is being employed to work at Community Justice Services.

An Aboriginal Reference Group will continue to work with the project to ensure ongoing community input.

February 2007