

Programs to aid inmates in Victoria



VICTORIA will soon have new programs in jails aimed at strengthening Aboriginal prisoners' cultural and family connections, and reducing reoffending.

With an overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons, the programs are designed to rehabilitate Aboriginal inmates by focusing on cultural strengthening, family violence, healing, parenting and women's programs.

The new culturally focused programs will be run by Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service, Connecting Home Ltd, Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency and Relationships Australia Victoria.

Victorian Corrections Minister Gayle Tierney said the \$2.5 million Kaka Wangiy, Wangin-Mirrie Aboriginal cultural program grants would be funded until December 2019.

"Through culturally focused education and rehabilitation, our corrections system can help people turn their lives around, helping make Victoria a safer place," she said.

Ms Tierney also said a new Aboriginal health care pilot program would be rolled out over the next two years to ensure Aboriginal women and men leaving the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC), Dhurringile Prison and Fulham Correctional Centre are helped to access healthcare services.

The pilot will be controlled by Aboriginal-run organisations Ngwala Willumbong (at DPFC), Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative (Dhurringile) and Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative (Fulham).

Tenants focus

Of new project

By KEIRA JENKINS



ABORIGINAL Housing Victoria (AHV) has launched a new project, 'More than just a landlord', that focuses on the health and wellbeing of their tenants. The project includes the employment of a group of peer researchers who have just completed training so they can hold a household survey, which focuses on tenants' aspirations.

The project is run in partnership with Melbourne University's Indigenous Health Equity Unit and First 1000 Days Australia project, which focuses on the health of children from conception to age two.

One of the new peer researchers, Sharyn Lovett, said she has lived in Aboriginal Housing for a number of years.

"We'll be going around and collecting the information from the tenants in Aboriginal Housing," she told the *Koori Mail*.

"I'm actually interested in what the other tenants have to say because I can probably relate to them."

Ms Lovett said the training for her new role was also a great experience.

Keita Ahwang also completed the training to become a peer researcher, and she hopes the project will help give tenants a voice.

"I've been an Aboriginal Housing tenant for nine years, and I'm a single mum," she said.

"I've got three kids under five and I've always worked for my community. I think this project will help to empower tenants so they can speak up."

"It's all about bettering Aboriginal housing. The surveys don't identify tenants either. The



The peer researchers with Melbourne University and Aboriginal Housing Victoria staff, information that we're given doesn't name people."

Ms Ahwang said this role will mean a foot in the door back into the workforce for her after she had time off with her children.

"I think I'll be able to relate to the tenants," she said. "It's about having a voice. Sometimes you can feel like you're just a number."

"You apply for maintenance and things don't get fixed, and it's those things that I want to bring to the tenants so they can speak up about it."

"I think it'll also help me feel like I'm part of the community. It's an awesome feeling knowing I'm helping my community."

Ms Ahwang said there are two surveys – a general household survey, and a more

personal individual one – that tenants will be asked to complete.

"Anyone can fill out the individual survey as long as they're over 14," she said.

"It asks about what they want, so for example, maybe a 14-year-old boy fills it out and says he wants to play footy, but his mum can't afford it."

"We don't write names so there's no shame, but we have the number of the house. We might say there's a footy club or a SportsReady program he can do and it's all free."

"I know about that stuff. I'm a single mum and I've had to figure out how to get enough nappies to last the week and been connected with the Salvos who do vouchers and meals and things."