

Tuesday, 15 August, 2009

FORMER STATE WARDS BETTER SUPPORTED

Victorians who grew up in institutional care during the last century will have access to new vital support services thanks to \$7.1 million Brumby Labor Government funding boost.

Community Services Minister Lisa Neville today announced a new, dedicated, stand alone service for former state wards and a new Victorian Care Leaver Memorial would be constructed at Southbank.

“The Brumby Labor Government is taking action to help former abused or neglected children in care and ensure unacceptable past practices never happen again,” Ms Neville.

“For many former wards, growing up in institutional care has had a long-term effect on their lives.

“Many have lost contact with their parents and siblings, suffer from low self-esteem and depression and can have poor marital relationships and few parenting skills.

“The development of this new service is the latest in the efforts of the Brumby Labor Government to support former state wards, acknowledge the trauma and hurt suffered and go some way towards rectifying the wrongs of the past.”

Vital services to be provided through the new service for Forgotten Australians include:

- Professional counselling for care leavers and their families;
- Assistance to access community services including health, housing, education and employment services;
- Search services to help former wards find their records and family members;
- Legal information and support to assist care leavers to make legal compensation claims and general support in during the claims process;
- Financial assistances;
- Community Education to promote services, and build community awareness;
- A peer leader education program to care leavers skills in involvement in advocacy, build community awareness and decision making activities; and
- Meals program to assist in life skills development and social interaction.

Ms Neville said Berry Street and Relationships Australia, Victoria, would provide the new specialised services, bringing professional expertise and experience.

Ms Neville said the new service would be developed involving former state wards and their families to ensure it addresses their real needs.

“The new service will be up and running in November this year in a centrally accessible metropolitan Melbourne location near public transport and with disability access,” Ms Neville said.

“Additional support services will also be developed in Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo to assist care leavers in regional and rural areas.”

In addition Ms Neville announced the Brumby Labor Government would construct a new memorial at Southbank to provide a lasting commemoration acknowledging the hurt and trauma suffered by state wards.

“The memorial will provide a lasting recognition of the experience of care leavers and provide the opportunity for the wider community to reflect on the experiences of Victorians who grew up in institutional care,” Ms Neville said.

Extensive work involving former wards of the state, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Department of Human Services and Melbourne City Council has led to the development of the memorials design.

To be created by Helen Bodycomb the sculpture features constellation mosaic of wattle blossoms inlaid into black granite.

The establishment of specialist support services and memorial grew from the Commonwealth Governments *Forgotten Australian's Report*.

Ms Neville said the new service, the 2006 Government apology and acknowledgement of the pain and hurt experienced by children in care were key elements of the Brumby Labor Government's response to the report also released today.

“The *Forgotten Australians* report has led to a greater understanding of the trauma and ongoing difficulties faced by people who experienced institutionalised care as children,” Ms Neville said.

“We have taken action to implement many of the recommendations of the report and are committed to further supporting people who have experienced institutional out of home care as children to improve their health and wellbeing.

“I commend the Commonwealth on the announcement of its intention of an apology for the trauma and hurt suffered by children living in institutionalised care during the last century.

“The Brumby Labor Government made an official apology on behalf of the State in 2006, and look forward to assisting in the development of an appropriate and meaningful national apology for people affected by past practices of care.”

The development of these new services will enhance supports already being offered by the Department of Human Services, an interim service is located at the Centre at Level 5, 50 Market Street Melbourne, phone 9614 1577.

To see the Victorian Government's response to the *Forgotten Australians Report* visit www.cyf.vic.gov.au/placement-support/care-leavers-forgotten-australians