



# Hon Greg Smith SC MP

Attorney General  
Minister for Justice

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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**8 December 2011**

### **CARE CIRCLES TO KEEP LISMORE ABORIGINAL CHILDREN SAFE**

The NSW Government is expanding a program that gives Aboriginal people greater input into decisions about the care of children at risk.

The NSW Attorney General, Greg Smith SC, will today join the President of the Children's Court, Judge Mark Marien SC, and Community Services Chief Executive, Anne Campbell, to launch the Care Circle program in Lismore.

"Conducted in an informal setting outside of court, Care Circles enable Aboriginal families and community leaders to meet with all parties involved in a case to develop a plan for the safety and wellbeing of the child," Mr Smith said.

"This may include discussions about placement options, contact arrangements and the support services that should be made available to families," he said.

Judge Marien said Care Circles provide a unique and important opportunity for considerations of Aboriginal culture and identity to be taken into account.

"Facilitated by a specialist Children's Court magistrate, Care Circles encourage frank and open discussions and allow for increased participation in decision-making about Aboriginal children by Aboriginal families and communities," Judge Marien said.

"Decisions made about the future of Aboriginal children in the setting of a Care Circle are therefore more likely to result in better outcomes for those children," he said.

Ms Campbell said conventional care proceedings conducted in court can be intimidating, overwhelming and stressful for participants.

"Aboriginal families can sometimes feel vulnerable and alienated by court processes. Many families still live with the legacy of the Stolen Generations which can lead to fear and mistrust of government," Ms Campbell said.

Ms Campbell said Care Circles were an important initiative for Aboriginal families in care matters.

"We want to empower Aboriginal families and communities by reducing the barriers that prevent Aboriginal people participating in care proceedings," Ms Campbell said.

The Care Circles program began in Nowra in 2008 and is being expanded to Lismore following a positive independent evaluation.

“The Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia found higher levels of satisfaction and acceptance of decisions relating to the care of Aboriginal children,” Mr Smith said.

“Many Aboriginal families felt Care Circles provided opportunities for involvement in decision making that were not available in conventional court proceedings,” he said.

All plans developed in a Care Circle must be put before a magistrate for approval.