



**Children's Court
Victoria**

MEDIA RELEASE

A Family Drug Treatment Court, conducting child protection proceedings in the Children's Court of Victoria, has been launched today by Attorney-General, the Hon. Robert Clark MP in conjunction with Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP.

The Family Drug Treatment Court is the first of its kind in Australia and only the second outside the USA.

Parental substance abuse is a substantial problem in a high proportion of cases that come before Children's Courts in Australia and overseas. Many children are removed from their parents' care as a result of this substance abuse, often permanently. The goal of family reunification, which is widely recognised to be in the best interests of the child, is rarely achieved in these cases.

Family Drug Treatment Courts provide the best opportunity for parents to achieve rehabilitation and work towards successful family reunification. The court comprises a multi-disciplinary team, chaired by a judicial officer. It is a non-adversarial, 12 month intensive program. The team comprises drug and alcohol clinicians and a dedicated social worker. In addition, links have been established with agencies providing services for the participants in the program that include residential treatment, drug, alcohol and mental health counselling, parenting programs and housing programs. Professionals will work with children to assist with the journey to reunification.

The launch of the Family Drug Treatment Court in Victoria is the result of research conducted by Magistrate Gregory Levine. Mr Levine has been a Magistrate in Victoria for over 20 years including five years as head of the Children's Court. Mr Levine was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2011 to study the operation of these courts in the USA and UK.

The Family Drug Treatment Court has commenced as a three year pilot program funded by the Victorian Government. The court will sit at Melbourne and transfer to Broadmeadows in 2015 when a Children's Court currently under construction has been completed.

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