New charter to address safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children

Victoria has led the way on improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people by becoming the first state in Australia to introduce a charter of safety and wellbeing. Launched on December 10 by Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development Maxine Morand, and Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Committee Chair Jill Gallagher, Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People is a joint government and Aboriginal community initiative that aims to improve the safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people, while identifying areas in which Victoria needs to improve. The charter also recognises that culture is central to building resilience and improving outcomes.

Ms Morand said the charter provides a philosophical framework for government and community to ensure Aboriginal children and young people are given every opportunity to thrive.

“It will ensure that government and communities will work together: social and economic hurdles which contribute to the disadvantage many Aboriginal children live with will be addressed,” Ms Morand said.

She said the charter follows extensive community consultation and reinforces work already being undertaken by the government to tackle Aboriginal disadvantage, including the $30.6 million Wannik strategy for Koorie students and fee subsidy for all Aboriginal children aged three and four to attend kindergarten.

Flag for every school

The familiar colours of the Aboriginal flag will soon be flying high over Victorian playgrounds, when every government school receives their own Aboriginal flag this year.

Designed by Luritja elder Harold Thomas in 1971, the flag is divided horizontally into equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom), with a yellow circle in the centre. The black symbolises Aboriginal people and the yellow represents the sun, while the red depicts the earth and ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.

First flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines’ Day in 1971, the flag has been adopted by all Aboriginal groups and is flown or displayed permanently at Aboriginal centres throughout Australia.
“Many Aboriginal children and young people continue to experience significantly worse outcomes in life than non-Aboriginal children,” Ms Morand said. “We are determined to work with Aboriginal communities to change this situation.”

Ms Gallagher signed the charter on behalf of Aboriginal Victorians. “I believe that if the government and the community work together on monitoring and implementing the charter we can not go wrong,” she said. “If we can achieve 60 per cent of this charter then I believe it will have a big impact on strengthening Aboriginal youth.”

_Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People_ has been developed in recognition of the impact of past child removal policies, particularly the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – who were forcibly removed from their families and communities by states and territories.

The charter also includes resources that are central to the theme for the anniversary of the National Apology on February 13 this year (see story page 37).

Copies of _Dardee Boorai_ have been sent to all schools and early childhood services, and wall planners and posters will be sent soon. ■

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