

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP

Attorney-General

Minister for Racing



Wednesday, 13 September, 2017

CHILD WITNESS SERVICE MARKS A DECADE OF HELPING KIDS

Victoria's Child Witness Service today marked a decade of providing support to young people who have been victims of or witnesses to violent crimes.

More than 6,000 children, families and caregivers have received support from the Service since it was founded in 2007 under the then Labor Government in response to a Victorian Law Reform Commission report on sexual offences.

The Commission's report found that children and people living with a disability were vulnerable to being re-traumatised through the criminal justice process. The Child Witness Service was subsequently created to help prepare children for the role of being a witness and to make them feel safe to participate.

Staff help to facilitate communication between children, police, the court and their legal team at all points of the criminal justice process. They are available to witnesses under the age of 18 appearing in criminal proceedings that involve violent crime.

About 80 per cent of these cases involve a sexual offence, with 70 per cent listed in the County Court, 21 per cent in the Magistrates' Court and nine per cent in the Children's Court.

Each year, staff manage 500 new referrals and deal with more than 1,000 open cases. The youngest witness to receive support from the Service was only three years old.

Approximately 60 per cent of child witnesses give evidence from remote witness rooms that were purpose-built in the court precinct.

The Andrews Labor Government is proud to support the vital work being done by the Child Witness Service and has recently provided \$860,000 in the *Victorian Budget 2017/18*.

The Labor Government is also delivering \$2.6 million over two years to establish a separate intermediaries scheme to help young and vulnerable victims to give evidence to police and in court.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Martin Pakula

"Going to court can be an intimidating experience for victims, witnesses and their families. It can be even more daunting for young children and people with disability."

"Over the past decade, the Child Witness Service has provided vital support to children and people with disabilities."

"I commend the dedicated staff for the work they have done, and continue to do, in minimising trauma for children in the criminal justice system."