

## Child Sexual Offence Evidence Pilot Program – Information for families

### What is the Child Sexual Offence Evidence Pilot?

The Child Sexual Offence Evidence Pilot has been developed to assist child victims (the child) and prosecution witnesses through the trial process in prescribed sexual offence matters. The NSW Government is committed to the implementation of this reform, with the aim of reducing traumatisation and lengthy court processes for the child and prosecution witnesses.

The pilot includes the introduction of Children's Champions (Witness Intermediaries) and an expansion of pre-recorded evidence.

The pilot commenced on 31 March 2016 in two locations – Newcastle District Court and Sydney District Court (Downing Centre).

### Who can be involved in the pilot?

The pilot is targeted towards the child and prosecution witnesses of sexual offences. A Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary) will be available to assist in facilitating communication between the child and prosecution witness and the court for children under the age of 16 years and for those aged 16-17 with communication difficulties.

### What is pre-recording of evidence?

Part of the pilot is an expansion of the use of pre-recording of evidence. Previously, only the evidence-in-chief (the initial interview conducted by the police within the Joint Investigation Response Team – JIRT) was allowed to be pre-recorded and the child and prosecution witness were then required to attend court to provide further evidence (the cross-examination). Legislation now allows for the cross-examination and any re-examination to be pre-recorded as well.

### What is the role of the Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary)?

The Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary) is an accredited professional who will assess the child's and prosecution witness' communication needs and will inform police and the court on the best ways to communicate with the child giving evidence.

They are not a support person. The Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary) will be independent and impartial participants in the process.

### How will this assist the child witness?

The court process can be extremely lengthy, highly stressful and traumatic for children and vulnerable young persons who are victims and/or prosecution witnesses in sexual offence proceedings. It is anticipated that the expansion of pre-recorded evidence and the function of Children's Champions (Witness Intermediaries) will reduce the stress and trauma experienced by children and vulnerable young persons and contribute to a possible reduction in the duration of proceedings.

## **How will parents/guardians/carers be involved?**

Parents, guardians and carers will be notified of the opportunity to involve a Witness Intermediary during the police interviewing stage if it is assessed that the child or prosecution witness may have some communication difficulties.

If a parent/guardian/carer is aware that the child or prosecution witness may have communication difficulties, it is important to notify the police handling the matter at the earliest possible opportunity.

## **Can I speak to the Witness Intermediary about the court proceedings?**

No. The Witness Intermediary is an impartial and independent person who is only appointed to assist the child with communication.

Any information relating to the investigation, evidence or court proceedings should be directed to the police and/or prosecutor appointed to the case.

## **Who do I contact for more information?**

For further information relating to the Child Sexual Offence Evidence Pilot please contact Victims Services, NSW Department of Justice:

**Phone** 02 8688 2540

**Email** [srt@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:srt@justice.nsw.gov.au)

**Address** Locked Bag 5118, PARRAMATTA NSW 2124.

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