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Aboriginal people wanted to help boost child protection responses

Aboriginal people across Western Australia are being sought to join a new reference group that will advise the Department for Child Protection on how to tackle child abuse in Aboriginal communities and provide better care for Aboriginal children.

Department for Child Protection director general Terry Murphy said nominations were now open for the new Aboriginal Reference Group - a recommendation of the 2007 Ford Review into the former Department for Community Development.

“The review recommended that an Aboriginal-specific reference group be created to provide advice on how the Department can work more effectively with Aboriginal people and organisations,” Mr Murphy said.

“The new Department for Child Protection has undertaken to do this, and is encouraging Aboriginal people from across WA to become involved in this important group.

“With Aboriginal children and young people heavily over-represented in child protection services, the reference group will help ensure that the Department delivers support and services to the people who need it the most.”

Mr Murphy said about one third of the Department’s clients and 41 per cent of children in State care in 2006-07 were Aboriginal.

However, Aboriginal children made up less than six per cent of the State’s young people.

“The reference group will help the Department address the issues behind these disturbing figures,” Mr Murphy said.

“We want Aboriginal families and communities to have greater involvement in the way the Department supports Aboriginal people, and through the reference group we can achieve this.”

The group will comprise a chairperson and 14 community members from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions, Murchison/Gascoyne, Western Desert, Goldfields, Wheatbelt, Southwest, Great Southern and Perth.

Members of the group will be appointed by the Child Protection Minister for a two year term and will report to the Department for Child Protection’s director general.

The group will meet six times a year.

Applications for the reference group opened today (February 4) and close on Monday 18 February 2008. Successful applicants will be notified in March 2008 and the first meeting will be held shortly after.

More information and application forms are available at www.childprotection.wa.gov.au or by phoning Naomi Smith on 9222 2706 (not to be rung for media inquiries).

Media contact, telephone 9222 2810 or 0438 962 692.