

Step forward for Community justice

Echuca-Moama's First Nations Community is celebrating the long-awaited opening of the region's first Koori Court.

Koori Courts have been in operation around Victoria for many years, and the local Community worked hard over two decades to have the initiative brought to our region.

Among those striving to have the court established has been Local Justice Worker Colin Atkinson.

The proud Wollithiga man works for the Njernda Aboriginal Corporation and partnered with Court Services Victoria and the Koori Court to deliver the new service.

"The Koori Court will be a huge benefit to the Indigenous Community to help them through their justice matters and to move on to improving their lives," Mr Atkinson said.

An official opening ceremony was held recently, with Mr Atkinson leading a smoking ceremony.

His grandfather, Professor Uncle Henry Atkinson, a Wollithiga Elder from Echuca, conducted a Welcome to Country.

The Koori Court has been developed to reflect cultural issues and operate in a more informal way.

Participants sit around a table – called the bar table – with the magistrate, Elders and respected persons, a Koori court officer, the prosecutor, community correction officers, lawyers and family.

Koori owned and controlled agencies may also be in attendance to contribute to the conversation and offer support.

Everyone is encouraged to take part in a sentencing conversation by having a yarn and avoiding the use of legal jargon.

Aboriginal Elders or respected persons may give cultural advice to help the magistrate make a judgment that is culturally appropriate and helps reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Attached picture: Colin Atkinson conducts the smoking ceremony at the Echuca Koori Court opening (Courtesy Casey Atkinson from the Koori Court).

