Kym Williams :

Cultural safety for Aboriginal people is about providing a safe space where people can feel socially, emotionally, and physically connected to a space. Often it's spiritual connection to the environment that you're in.

Kym Williams :

Historically, we haven't had a good relationship with the justice system and we tend to avoid those places at all costs.

Kym Williams :

One of the challenges at VCAT that we have is about making sure that when our mob come to VCAT, that they have a positive experience.

Wendy Harris :

VCAT is a tribunal where people can come and have their civil dispute heard by an independent person, known as a member. That might relate to a rental tenancy matter, it could also relate to people who've got an issue around their goods and services. Another common reason people come to VCAT is for an administration or guardianship order to look after the affairs of a person who's no longer able to make those decisions for themselves.

Tracey Winmar:

We've got a Koori support team at VCAT, and we help applicants that come in with their paperwork. We can help them either via the phone, email, or if they come into the office.

Kym Williams :

We can help you also through your application process. We're unable to provide legal advice, but we can certainly help you walk through the VCAT journey. We can help book hearing rooms.

Tracey Winmar:

In the Koori hearing rooms we've got art work on the walls, we've got the flag, we've got the possum skin cloaks, we've got the table in the room with the Koori artwork on there. We're just trying to make it a more inviting space for Aboriginal people to come in.

Kym Williams :

If you're unable to attend your hearing in person, we can work together to provide alternatives either by doing phone hearings or video links. At least you get the opportunity to still attend your hearing, and you get to have a say.

Wendy Harris :

In the case of a family's violence matter, we also have safe rooms so that people can attend by video conference and actually participate in the hearing, but in a safe space. VCAT career support officers can also refer people onto other services that can assist people to feel more supported with better advice so that they're as comfortable as can be when they come into a VCAT hearing. So for example, referrals onto community legal services, like VALS, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victoria Legal Aid, and also referrals where there's a family violence aspect to the person's circumstances at that point in time.

Wendy Harris :

Our career support officers at VCAT are also available to attend a hearing with you. They can't speak for you; they're not an advocate, but they can be present in the hearing.

Kym Williams :

It's really important to me because of the history that our people have with the justice system, and because of that they haven't come to VCAT, they haven't come and told their stories. So by me being there, it shows that I can help support these people through these places and help them change their mindset about what it is to come to VCAT.

Narrator:

To speak to a friendly Koori support officer contact the Koori helpline today.