

ANNUAL REPORT 2016



MACARTHUR
Legal Centre

Supporting our community

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Macarthur Legal Centre Supporting Our Community

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Macarthur Legal Centre (MLC) is part of a network of community legal centres that provides free legal advice, referrals and assistance to people living in the Macarthur region of NSW.

We currently auspice the South West Sydney Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (SWSTAAS), the Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (MWDVCAS), as well as a Children's Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS) and an

Aboriginal Legal Access Program (ALAP).

We are grateful to our state and federal funding bodies, as well as the solicitors, students and community members who freely give their time and expertise to assist us in our work.

We also acknowledge the Dharawal People, as the traditional owners of the land we work on, and pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Robert Pelletier
Chief Executive Officer

Chair Person's Report

Julie Deane

We are committed to providing quality services, with a person-centred approach.



I would like to thank the many organisations across the community that support the work we do, by partnering with us to enhance outcomes for individuals and community groups. This support is highly appreciated.

This Annual Report highlights the fantastic outcomes achieved over the past year. The examples of our work showcased in this report demonstrate how Macarthur Legal Centre (MLC) practices its commitment to providing quality services with a person-centred approach; as well as community support and engagement. MLC provides essential services to those in our community requiring support associated with legal, domestic violence and tenancy issues. We are proud to be an integral part of the diverse fabric of the communities in which we operate.

Our Legal, Domestic Violence and Tenancy teams work together to ensure our clients receive holistic and seamless support. Although all teams carry heavy and demanding workloads, our targets against funding agreements continue to be met or exceeded. Statistics, however, are not the only indicator of success.

Feedback from our client surveys indicate an extremely high satisfaction and appreciation for the work we do. Please take time to read the case studies in this report as they highlight outcomes from a client perspective - their stories truly reflect what community legal centres are all about.

In addition to the extensive work carried out by the legal team, a continuing area of work that MLC is very pleased to offer is the extension of legal access through the provision of outreach services across the regions in which we operate, including Wingecarribee. Our outreaches are also held at services such as Tharawal Aboriginal Health Service and Tharawal Land Council, which increases access to legal services for Aboriginal community members.

The Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (MWDVCAS) goes from strength to strength. This service not only provides direct assistance and support to women experiencing domestic violence, but also works tirelessly to raise community awareness of the prevalence of domestic violence and address systemic issues which impact on access to timely supports.

The South West Sydney Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (SWSTAAS) had great successes this year, resulting in many people being able to maintain their tenancy. Whilst SWSTAAS advocates at an individual level, systemic advocacy is also an important component of the work we do. This work has seen the team invited to provide constructive feedback to Government on policy directions.

This great work can only be achieved by implementation of quality leadership and a high level of dedication and professionalism from all staff. We were pleased to appoint Robert Pelletier into a more permanent position of Executive Officer, which also prompted a review of the role

and change of title (to reflect an emphasis on leadership, rather than directorship). Robert's focus on identifying and building on the strengths of senior staff has contributed immensely to the overall performance of Macarthur Legal Centre. On behalf of the Board I would also like to acknowledge and thank Robert and his senior team of Christina Pirina (Principal Solicitor), Tanya Whitehouse (Coordinator MWDVCAS), Vala Ola'aiga (Coordinator SWSTAAS) and Carina Southern (Financial Administrator) for all their valuable hard work.

I would also like to thank the many organisations across the community that support the work we do, by partnering with us to enhance outcomes for individuals and community groups. This support is highly appreciated.

This year we were fortunate to welcome two new board members – Peta Andersson and Sana Al-Ahmar – who collectively bring extensive knowledge and years of experience in community organisation management. I would also like to acknowledge and thank continuing board members Adam Quinn (Treasurer), Alison Croall (Vice-President) and Nevine Youssef for their dedication and support to myself and Macarthur Legal Centre. Attention to effective governance and financial sustainability has never been more important, as we meet the complexities of sector reforms and resource constraints. I am confident that the MLC Board has the right mix of knowledge and expertise to meet the many challenges presented by operating as an NGO. I am honoured to work with such committed and knowledgeable

people who uphold the values of MLC across the areas of social justice and law access.

During the year ahead MLC will continue to maintain its quality service provision. MLC will also look for new ways to build on the work we do so that we can address the many complex issues and legal needs experienced by those in the community most affected by disadvantage.

Julie Deane
Chair of the Board, MLC

Walking Through Molasses

Working in the not for profit sector is inspiring. My colleagues have a passion for social justice; they are flexible and apparently able to improvise solutions from nothing. Government agencies, weighed down by protocol and politics, struggle to achieve these qualities. Private enterprise, with its eye glued to the bottom line, also struggles in the social justice space.

A passion for social justice is part of the DNA of Macarthur Legal Centre and the many other not for profit organisations that partner with us to support the disadvantaged of Macarthur and South West Sydney.

Is it any wonder that Governments across Australia increasingly rely on NFPs to do the heavy lifting of supporting the social fabric of our community by providing and managing the social safety net?

But for all the feel-good side of working in the not for profit sector, it often feels like walking through molasses. We do fabulous work with the most disadvantaged people in the community and yet Governments – State and Federal – seem firmly resolved not to fund our work properly. We have been on one year funding agreements for the last two years. How are we supposed to plan? What do we say to our landlord when our lease expires? 'Please sir, I want some more?'

We pay our staff wages that are way below what they are worth. As a community we rely on the crazy generosity of the people who staff centres such as ours throughout the country. Many of them have more than one job, because they need the income to keep body and soul together in an expensive town like Sydney.

We know that they will go the extra mile because, it is part of who they are. They do it because they can do no other. So, why not pay them properly?

We are not given the resources we need to do the work because of a baffling short sightedness by those who hold the purse strings. They focus on this year's budget bottom line and ignore the downstream cost to society of ignoring need and social dysfunction. There are no line items for human suffering and dysfunction and, anyway, the downstream costs will be paid for by another Government so, why worry?

We worry because of the fundamental premise that is shared by all who work at Macarthur Legal Centre - whether as a volunteer committee member, employee or volunteer. We share a belief in the dignity of each and every human person who comes through our door, picks up a phone to call us or uses social media to seek our help. We believe in the rights of all in the Macarthur/South West Sydney community to access justice.

Our clients typically present with a host of problems. Overwhelmingly, they are financially disadvantaged. Many struggle with English. Some do not have a roof over their head at night (or not a secure one at least). Their intimate relationships may be dissolving into a nightmare of violence and confusion. Frequently, they have mental health issues. Often, they are at their wits' end because they do not have the language or the understanding to articulate their problems.

It requires very skilled people to work with our clients. I am not one of those very skilled people. My job is to support those very wonderful people and to make sure they have the resources and the clear

strategic direction to do what they do best.

Macarthur Legal Centre's managers are very skilled people. I want to pay tribute to Christina, our Principal Solicitor, Tanya, the Coordinator of Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and Vala, Cowordinator of South West Sydney Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service. They set the tone of professionalism, integrity and commitment that permeates the Centre.

Tanya, of course, had a grand year. Her 20 years plus working with victims of domestic and family violence and, more recently, as the Chair of WDV CAS NSW Inc, was recognised by award of the 2015 Law & Justice Foundation Justice Medal and a Ministerial Citation by the New South Wales Government.

Special thanks to Carina. Every fortnight she is everyone's best friend when she does the pays! She has transformed our finances, making them transparent and managing to squeeze every cent out of every dollar we receive. She has transformed our Centre financially.

My thanks to every member of our staff. You do magnificent work. Sometimes, you make an amazing difference in the lives of our clients. Sometimes, the improvement is more subtle. Sometimes, we are not able to help at all. That can be the hardest thing for a worker to do – to acknowledge that our best may not be good enough. I stand in awe of the work our staff does and the difference each one of them makes.

Executive Officer's Report Robert Pelletier



Our Volunteers Unsung Heroes

Our volunteers enable us to extend the scope of our work. First I want to thank our Board members and especially, Julie Deane, our Chair. The Board members support those who work at the Centre with oversight and strategic direction. We are fortunate to have Members representing a mix of skills and services. Their passion for the Macarthur community is what initially attracted me to Macarthur Legal Centre.

We have volunteer lawyers and students who give up their time to work for us. Their generosity often extends over years of unsung service to the community. We are always proud when one of our students goes on to be admitted as a solicitor or go to the Bar. It is an honour to have been part of their growth as professionals.



Louis Bahn Vale and Thanks

I would like to pay tribute to one of our longstanding volunteers, Louis Bahn. Louis passed away in September 2016. Louis worked with us as a student volunteer from early 2011 until he completed his law studies at the University of New South Wales in late 2015. Louis was one of those generous students who make a regular commitment to the Centre over a long period. Our clients benefited, our Centre benefited and, we hope, Louis benefited. Vale and thank you, Louis.



MLC Online Community Engagement

Our new website went live in October 2015. We are very grateful to Paul Munro and the team at Forge Collective who helped us put together this website. Christina, our Principal Solicitor, managed the process through to completion and we now have an excellent shopfront on the net. We actively engage with social media to connect with the community we serve. The Legal and Tenancy teams maintain separate Facebook pages to promote their respective services and events, respond to inquiries and share interesting content.

30%

The Federal Government has planned a 30% cut to CLC funding in July 2017

We still don't know how the cuts will impact us. How are we supposed to plan? What do we say to our landlord when our lease expires? We pay our staff way below what we know they are worth. As a community we rely on the crazy generosity of the people who staff centres such as ours throughout the country.

Community Engagement

We are part of the community we serve

We connect with the community in a variety of ways - publications, outreach, community education, partnerships and training...



The Debtors' Guide

We signed a contract with the Law & Justice Foundation in October 2015 to write the new edition of the Debtors' Guide. This exciting project is under Christina's supervision. We prepared the last edition of the Guide. We are working with the State Library to make this accessible online when it is completed.

Working Closely with Other CLCs and Services

We work closely with other CLCs that serve our region. We work with South West Sydney, Illawarra and Shoalcoast Community Legal Centres, our immediate CLC neighbours. We regularly attend meetings of CLC NSW, our peak body in New South Wales – learning about the challenges faced by others and how they overcome them is always uplifting.

Campbelltown Library

We have developed a close partnership with Campbelltown Library. We run Community Legal Education seminars at the Library throughout the year. This has been an excellent relationship and we hope to develop a more targeted program with the Library next year, based on this year's patronage and interest.

New Technology

We completed the acquisition of new photocopiers with excellent scanning capacity. Eventually, we propose to store our files, current and archived, in the Cloud.

Our IT system now uses Office 365 software packages that give us access to the latest versions of Microsoft's Office software. We continue to renew the Centre's workstations. We should complete this renewal in FY2017.

The next phase in the IT/Communications strategy is to renew our system and take advantage of the savings that are available on VOIP systems. That will have to wait for FY2017 as well.



Health Justice Partnerships

Sometimes the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. When legal and health services work closely together on achieving the best for those who come into contact with health services, we achieve something that is greater than the two services could do in isolation. Macarthur Legal Centre has developed a very successful partnership with Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation and we are in the process of building one with Campbelltown Hospital.

Every fortnight, we attend the Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation's Medical Centre to provide an outreach that is always well patronized. Alison Croall, the Chair of the Corporation and a member of our Board, has worked closely with us to develop this relationship.

In November 2015, we met with Alison Derrett, the General Manager of Campbelltown Hospital. Our solicitors are regularly called up to the Hospital for urgent wills and other documents that need drafting. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a closer working relationship so that we can:

- Get to know and be known by the social work staff and other relevant members of the Hospital staff – hopefully, that will facilitate the making of referrals to the legal team across a range of areas including early intervention in DV matters, wills, appointment of guardians and attorneys, family law and the other areas of our practice.
- Have facilities available to us at the Hospital to prepare documents easily and quickly.
- Provide legal training to Hospital staff in relevant areas of the law.

Alison and her team at the Hospital have been great supporters of this project.

Since then, we have been working with the Hospital very carefully to set up a health justice partnership that is well designed and sustainable.

Working with university students

Training the next generation of law students has been part of the work of CLCs since their very early days. We ran a clinic for 40 students of Western Sydney University this year. The feedback from the students was fantastic. The Centre provided them with training that was concrete and opened their eyes to the extent of need in our community.

We also provided Australian Catholic University with a clinic on Probono work in early 2016. Several staff, led by Christina, provided the students with an insight into aspects of the legal system that are not part of the normal law school curricula.

Funding

Although I grumble regularly about the lack of adequate funding, I do need to express thanks to the New South Wales and Federal Governments for the funding we do receive. We could not exist without that financial assistance.

Thanks to Bronwyn McCutcheon and Michelle Jones at Legal Aid NSW for their continued support of our work. We received \$95,000 in additional funds in this financial year to support our outreaches and the work of our ALAP worker.

We also received an increase in funding for our MWDVCAS. This has enabled us to increase the hours of our staff to meet the significant extra demand on our services.

We also received confirmation from the NSW Department of Fair Trading that our TAAS funding has been extended for another three years. Many thanks to the Department for that vote of confidence in Vala and the team.

Health & Justice

Training Law Students

Funding Issues



Robert Pelletier
Executive Office, MLC

Staffing

Many long serving members of our staff moved on, including: Megan Hughes, Sunayna Baig, Rita Houbert, and Anthony Watt-Bright. Melisa Coveney, a member of our Tenancy team, was admitted to practice as a solicitor, and replaced Sunayna in the Legal team.

We welcomed Samantha Alexander as our Aboriginal Legal Access Program worker. We have built an increasingly strong relationship with the Aboriginal population of Macarthur and Sam has been able to enrich and develop that relationship.

We also welcomed Laura Sutton as our Children’s Court Advocacy Scheme worker. Laura is now a regular at Campbelltown Children’s Court, at local schools and a variety of services that provide youth services.

The Future

I look to the future with optimism. For all the threats to our funding, Macarthur Legal Centre continues to look to new ways to engage with our community and to meet unmet legal need. We have developed an outreach in the Southern Highlands, in Bowral, and hope to develop a presence in Goulburn, funds permitting, in the second half of FY2017.

We will support our fantastic, committed, intelligent managers and staff.

We will continue to build close relationships with other community services.

Our job is to do what we can with what we have. That is what we have done for 29 years. Next year, is the thirtieth year of our foundation in 1987 by Simon Rice and others in a council owned property in Broughton Street. We have much to celebrate and to look forward to.

‘I look forward to the future. For all the threats to our funding, Macarthur Legal Centre continues to look for new ways to engage with the community and to meet unmet legal need’.





Principal Solicitor's Report Christina Pirina

MLC is part of a network of community legal centres, funded by state and federal governments and the NSW Public Purpose Fund, to provide free legal advice, referrals and assistance to residents of the Macarthur region of NSW.

We also deliver community legal education, to increase awareness of legal issues, and use our coalface experience to help inform positive legal and policy reforms.

Our Mission
Our key mission is to ensure that professional legal services are accessible to all members of our community, regardless of social or economic background. We see our clients as individuals and we constantly strive to deliver our services in innovative, collaborative and holistic ways. We provide free legal information, advice and referrals to all residents and service providers in our region, and targeted casework assistance for disadvantaged clients.

Our Services
This year we provided 'information' and referrals to 2807 people who contacted our centre and our solicitors conducted a further 1443 legal advice sessions. 39% (568) of these were 'face-to-face' and the remainder were via telephone. Our solicitors opened 549 new cases during the year, as well as providing ongoing casework assistance to 416 long-term, and return clients.

Our Clients
Our casework services are targeted at vulnerable and disadvantaged clients. 14% of our legal casework clients reported having a disability; 29% were from CALD backgrounds; 16% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and 71% of our casework clients were women.

Outreaches
We believe legal services should be accessible to all members of our community. Our solicitors offer advice at 13 outreach clinics across the Macarthur region. These services run either monthly, fortnightly or weekly, and are constantly adjusted to ensure we are effectively targeting areas of unmet legal need in the community. We currently partner with the following services, to provide free legal advice, referral and information services: Tallowood Community Centre (Ambarvale); Break the Cycle (Macquarie Fields); Benevolent Society (Campbelltown); Burnside (Campbelltown); Wollondilly Community Links (Tahmoor); Claymore Neighbourhood Centre (Claymore); Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation (Airds); Youth Off the Streets (Macquarie Fields); Camden Community Connections (Narellan); AB Central (Airds); Wingecarribee Family Support (Bowral); Tharawal Land Council (Couridjah) and the Family Relationship Centre (Campbelltown). This year, 15% of our advice activities were conducted at outreach clinics.

Our Main Areas of Practice

Matter Type	ADVICE	CASEWORK
Family law and related	57%	52%
Elder law	11%	22%
Victims Support	5%	8%
Credit and debt	6%	5%
Employment	5%	2%
Motor vehicle & traffic	4%	2%
Consumer complaints	3%	1%
Neighbourhood disputes	2%	1%
Civil Misc.	7%	7%

We believe it's important to be a part of the community we service

What sets CLCs apart from other legal service providers is that we are not only committed to delivering professional legal services, to the most disadvantaged members of our community, but we are also devoted to cultivating healthier, happier communities. Our service delivery is directly informed by the community we serve and support. Our solicitors and other staff participate in a range of community engagement activities - including attending community events, interagencies, local committees, visiting local schools, aged care facilities and other community centres to ensure people are aware of our services and to help us identify and redress unmet legal need.

Community Engagement, Partnerships and Collaborative Practice

We believe in delivering holistic, client-focused services. We partner with internal and external service providers to ensure our clients achieve the best outcomes possible.

FRC Partnership

We currently partner with the Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) at Macarthur Square, Fairfield and Bankstown to provide advice, referrals and assistance/representation to clients accessing FRC services. Generally, South West Sydney Legal Centre will provide similar advice to the other party in each matter. This model, whereby both parties are represented by solicitors from community legal centres, is aimed at redressing power imbalances and resolving entrenched conflicts. The legally-assisted model helps clients achieve parenting arrangements that are safe and in the best interests of their children, thereby (hopefully) avoiding the need for court action.

This year our solicitors participated in 50 mediations and about 10% of our clients were directly referred from the FRCs. We work with all centres to develop and implement best-practice models.

Care Partner Program

This year MLC continued to deliver specialised care and protection services, two days per week, as part of the Care Partner program supported by Legal Aid NSW. Our Care Partner solicitor, Robyn Roelandts, has provided advice to over 50 clients, including parents, grandparents and carers. Clients in this group were predominantly single women (92%), with 50% being Aboriginal and all on low incomes (i.e. less than \$30,000 pa). 20% of clients self-reported having a disability and 6% were from the CALD community. Casework included early intervention advice and advocacy for parents (to help prevent removal); assistance with negotiation of parental responsibility contracts; representation in Children's Court proceedings; and assistance with contact and restoration matters (where children were already in the care of the Minister). In addition, Robyn has been networking widely to help improve outcomes for children and families.

Community Education

We conducted 56 community legal education workshops during the year. These were delivered to a wide range of community groups in the Macarthur region, with audiences ranging from children and young people, to school principals and senior's groups.

The topics we covered ranged from bullying, healthy relationships, domestic violence, family law, child support, elder law issues, employment, discrimination, mental health and carers issues, to credit and debt. We also started our 'Let's Talk Legal' seminar series, in collaboration with Campbelltown Library, which is delivering targeted, plain language legal education talks to community members at local libraries.

Case Study

Our Clients are at the centre of all we do, and sometimes we can help make almost intolerable situations a little bit better...

We recently helped an elderly man, married for 60 years, and devoted to his wife but distraught by the change in her because of advanced dementia. He was covered in scars and recent wounds as his formerly loving wife, transformed by her condition, frequently attacked him with knives and anything she could use as a weapon.

To ensure their mutual safety he admitted her to several nursing homes - all of which contacted him within hours of admission, telling him to come back and get her as she was causing chaos (destroying equipment and assaulting residents and staff alike).

We advised and assisted him with an application to the Guardianship Division of the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT), for special orders to assist him. NCAT considered the facts and issued a guardianship order legally enabling our client to authorise sedation in any nursing home, so that his wife could live safely within a facility. These orders were quite extreme, and rarely made, but were clearly necessary.

Our client, though heart broken by the necessity, was extremely grateful to MLC as some semblance of normalcy had been re-established for him. He simply did not know where to turn, or what to do, before he approached our service. His wife is now safe in residential care and his two adult daughters also thanked us for our assistance to their parents in their time of need.

Law Reform

We continue to participate in law reform activities, which relate to systemic legal problems being experienced by people in our community. For example, we prepared submissions in response to the Federal Government Inquiry into Elder Abuse. We are actively participating in law reform activities in the Care and Protection field and, more broadly, our staff are actively involved in a range of committees working to redress systemic injustice across a range of legal areas.

ACU Pro Bono Clinic

In February 2016, we delivered a two-week (70 hour) pro bono clinic at the Australian Catholic University. During the workshop, students learned about community need and disadvantage, the legal assistance sector and the value of ongoing pro bono work. Students also helped us develop a range of novel legal resources for the centre (plain language legal resources, App ideas etc.).

We received great feedback from the students, and although the clinic was a success we won't be able to continue in the future, due to funding constraints. A special thanks to Melissa Jozwiak, Robert Pelletier and Tanya Whitehouse, for helping me facilitate the workshop.

WSU Student Placements

In the first half of 2016 we ran a clinical placement school for students of Western Sydney University - hosting groups of law students, in one week blocks. Students were given a range of experience at the centre - assisting with reception, admin and legal tasks - and obtained invaluable workplace and community experience.

As with the ACU clinic, we received great feedback from students and the university, but can't continue the project, due to lack of independent funding for the project.

Other Services and Partnerships

Our Children’s Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS) and our Aboriginal Legal Access Program (ALAP) help us engage with some of the most vulnerable members of our community

Children’s Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS)

MLC runs the Children’s Court Assistance Scheme, at Campbelltown Children’s Court. This year we helped 711 young people with matters listed before the Court – this included information, referrals, transport and casework assistance. 76% of the young people assisted were males, 24% female and at least 24% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We also assisted 420 parents/carers. Our new CCAS worker, Laura Sutton, also participated in a broad range of youth and community focused activities; interagencies and committees (Youth Off the Streets Advisory Committee, Youth Justice Coalition, Claymore Action Network etc.); a wide range of community events in Macquarie Fields and Claymore (Street BBQs in Macquarie Fields and Claymore community events); delivered the Break-A-Way Program to a group of Aboriginal girls at Eden College (legal and life skills program, funded by the Mercy Foundation); and also developed and delivered a range of legal education talks for school groups (discrimination, employment, cyber-bullying, healthy relationships etc.)

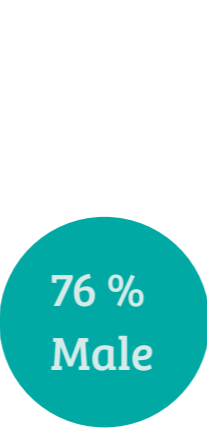
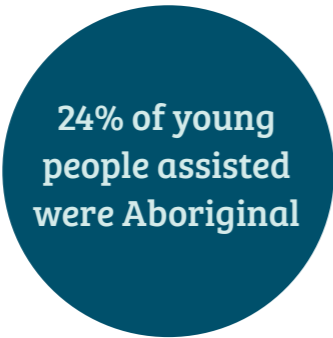


Aboriginal Legal Access Program (ALAP)

Our ALAP worker, Samantha Alexander, has been a welcome addition to the MLC legal team. This year Sam has attended a variety of Aboriginal Community interagencies and networking events; helped us organise and deliver NAIDOC week activities; delivered the Break-A-Way program with Laura at Eden College; and assisted with intake/casework at the Aboriginal Medical Corporation (Tharawal). Sam also promotes our services to Aboriginal clients, via our Facebook page.

Pro Bono Partnership

We continue our successful partnership with law firm, Seyfarth Shaw, whose solicitors provide telephone advice to MLC clients with employment law issues. When clients call MLC for advice our intake volunteers collect client information and instructions and the matters are referred to Seyfarth Shaw for telephone advice and some minor case assistance. This relationship greatly boosts our capacity to provide timely, professional advice to our clients, and we are thankful to all participating solicitors.



Children’s Court Assistance Scheme Statistics 2015-16

Client Satisfaction Survey

This year we conducted a client satisfaction survey, with 50 legal clients randomly selected to provide feedback, via telephone. Results indicated that most clients preferred face-to-face interviews, but were generally satisfied by telephone advice services. Most clients surveyed found the advice/casework provided by MLC to be useful. Most clients found it easy to make an appointment and reported that the service was very quick to respond to their needs. Overall, clients felt that they were treated well by staff, and most respondents said that they would refer the service to others. A special thanks to the volunteers who collected survey results and collated the report.

Our Volunteers

We are greatly indebted to our student and solicitor volunteers for their assistance during weekly advice sessions. We have about 16 student volunteers who attend advice sessions monthly - to answer phones, take instructions and brief solicitors. Our volunteer solicitors provide legal advice

during these sessions, alongside staff solicitors. The generous support of our volunteers significantly increases our capacity to provide advice services. As indicated in Robert’s report, we were saddened to hear of the death of former volunteer Louis Bahn. Louis was a dedicated volunteer, who served the Centre and the Macarthur community over several years. His loyal commitment will be remembered by all of us at MLC. We also acknowledge the enthusiastic assistance of our daytime volunteers, and students participating in practical legal training placements. A special commendation to solicitor, Melissa Jozwiak, for all her hard work on volunteer recruitment, induction, training and supervision.



Christina Pirina
Principal Solicitor
(Broken Hill Cross-Check)



Acknowledgements

A big thanks to our staff solicitors - Barbara Simpson, Stephen Karanfilovski, Melissa Jozwiak, Melisa Coveney and Robyn Roelandts for all their hard work this year. I’d also like to acknowledge the special efforts of our support team, including Phillipa Magro (paralegal), Danielle Archer (our office administrator) and Melanie Tisma (locum admin/paralegal assistant). A special thanks to Norman Laing, who helped as a locum solicitor for a few months, and brought a wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm and good cheer.

The Year Ahead

We have lots of great initiatives planned for the year ahead - including finalising the new edition of the Debtors’ Guide to the Local Courts of NSW; new outreaches and partnerships; new community legal education seminars; and practice-informed law reform projects.

Despite funding uncertainties, we will continue to strive to make access to professional legal services a reality for all members of our community – especially the most disadvantaged. We thank all those who have supported us this year and look forward to working with you all in the year ahead.



Client Satisfaction Survey Results 2015-16



MWDVCAS Report Tanya Whitehouse



Tanya Whitehouse
MWDVCAS Coordinator



MWDVCAS is part of a network of 28 community based Court Advocacy Services in NSW. Legal Aid NSW fund all WDVCS'

Overview
MWDVCAS covers Campbelltown, Camden and Picton Court – workers attend on the ADVO List Day and other days for hearings to support clients. MWDVCAS also gives appropriate referrals and information relating to a client's Domestic and/or Family Violence matter, advocates for clients, networks with the local community service providers on issues around Domestic and Family Violence, offers training to community workers and ensures women

have access to appropriate support outside of the justice system. There are 9 staff employed with MWDVCAS, including Coordinator – Tanya Whitehouse; Assistant Coordinator/ Multicultural Specialist Worker – Sesilia Large; Aboriginal Specialist Worker – Brenda Coan; Intake Worker – Kelly Standaloft; Youth Focused Caseworker – Amanda Weigand; Generalist Caseworker – Lisa Stark; Generalist Caseworker – Joanne Walker; Office Manager – Rebecca

Whitehouse and part-time Intake Worker – Shaylyn Schumacher.

Community and Interagency Support

MWDVCAS works closely with several agencies and services in the Macarthur area. We acknowledge the support and collaborative working relationships with the following organisations and individuals:

Macarthur Legal Centre, Narellan/ Campbelltown and Macquarie Fields Police, Campbelltown/Camden and Picton Court staff, Nanette Reuben, Veronica Love, Nazira Sowaid, Benevolent Society Centre for Women's Health, Staying Home Leaving Violence, WILMA Women's Health Centre, Community Links Wollondilly, Chisholm Program, Macarthur Family and Youth Service, Tharawal Aboriginal Health Service, Housing NSW, Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative Inc., Macarthur Disability Services, Brand New Day,

BaptistCare, Jackie Burns, Uniting, Major Cheryl Hall, Legal Aid Campbelltown Office, SWS Family Referral Service, Vinchez Refuge and Brighter Futures.

Staff at MWDVCAS regularly attend local Domestic Violence Committees; relevant community interagency meetings; represent at several Reference Groups, and our Aboriginal Specialist Worker also facilitates the Sista Girl Yarnz Group each week of school terms.

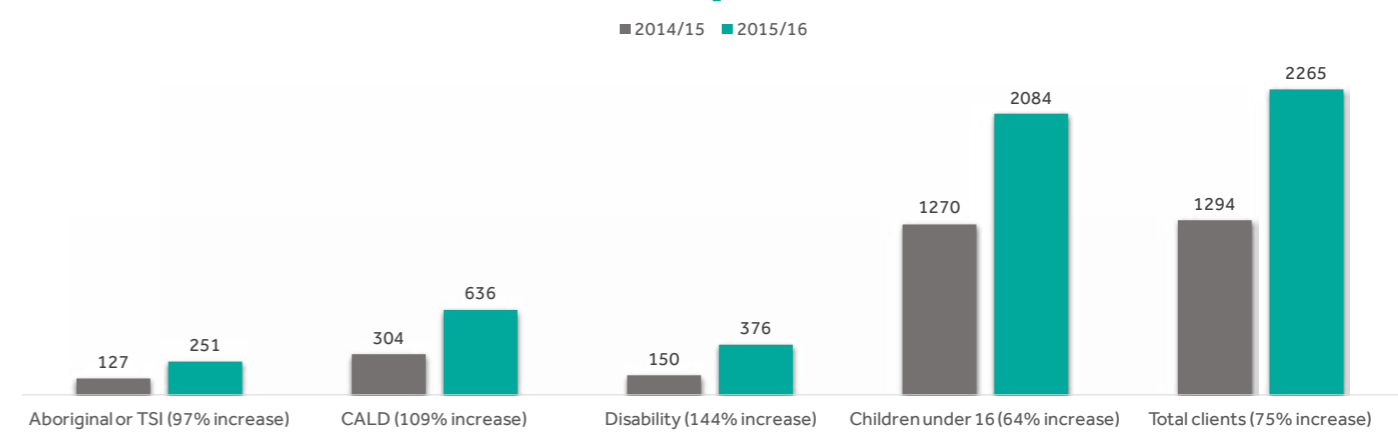
Statistics

Statistics indicate a substantial increase in the use of our services over the last year. This is clearly linked to the rollout of the Central Referral Point (CRP) – where all DV incidents, from the 3 Police LACs we service, are directly referred to MWDVCAS.

This system ensures that all women who experience a DV incident, which is reported to police, will be contacted by this service – regardless of whether they go to court or not. MWDVCAS also acknowledges the increase in funding, by 20%, that has allowed extra hours for staff and the addition of a part-time Intake Worker to assist with the overwhelming increase in demand. Our data for the 2015-16 period also indicate that women are engaging under the CRP referral system, and accessing support they would not otherwise have obtained.

It is interesting to note that we now contact 39.35% of women before their court date, and 14.53% are contacted on their first court date. This indicates that many women are now being contacted prior to their actual court date, which is ideal, and ensures women are aware of supports available to them at court.

Client Group Numbers



Offender is ex-partner

45%

Offender is current partner

26%

Offender is adult child

8%

Increase in referrals

There were 38,190 referrals made in 2015-16, an average of 734 per week

55%

Increase in clients

MWDVCAS assisted 2265 clients in 2015-16, this is an increase from 1294

75%

Increase in service events

20893 events in 2015-16, including: referral, court support, calls, letters etc.

10%



MWDVCAS Team

Case Study One Domestic Violence using IT and social media

We received a referral for a client in early 2015 for an ADVO application. Client had been married for five years, with two children, and had been separated for just over 12 months. This was the second ADVO application by Police, in relation to the former partner. A Final ADVO was granted after a Breach ADVO charge. The Perpetrator continued to interfere with the client through the internet (he worked in IT). Client’s phone, internet and email were hacked. Inappropriate messages were sent to her friends through emails and social media under the guise of it being our client. He was also sending messages back to her own personal email to make it look like she was sending herself threatening and abusive material. The perpetrator also changed her phone and utility providers, locking her out of her own accounts.

Our client ceased having any internet service on her phone, or in her home, for fear of him accessing them – leaving her very isolated. The caseworker engaged with the client and established some safety plans to keep her safe when at work and in the community. Court support was provided to the client on all court dates. The perpetrator represented himself, leaving our client feeling very anxious, vulnerable and open to inappropriate questioning. The caseworker sought opportunities for our client to meet with the Officer in Charge (who was very supportive) and to meet with the Police Prosecutor to allow her the space to be heard, prior to her court date. These meetings ensured that the client felt secure when at court. In total our client had one ADVO matter; two Breach ADVO matters and two Variation of ADVO matters. She attended two hearings.

The caseworker referred our client to Victims Services for counselling and a Recognition Payment; two referrals were made to Macarthur Family & Youth Services and a referral to Staying Home Leaving Violence. Due to our assistance, the client received counselling (and has since had those hours extended); was awarded a \$1500 Recognition Payment; received \$480 compensation by the Local Court for damage to personal documents; has a Family Worker working with her family; and had her home assessed by way of safety audit whereby necessary safety precautions were put in place. This matter was complex in that the perpetrator was using the internet and social media to continue to harass, control and intimidate our client. These types of matters are difficult to prosecute and very difficult for clients to deal with. Our client now feels a lot more secure, and has faith in the system should she need to report any future issues.

Case Study Two Value of Aboriginal specialist workers

Our client was a young Aboriginal woman, who we first assisted in 2013. At that time she had two small children, and disclosed a history of controlling and aggressive behaviour. She obtained a final ADVO and the perpetrator received a section 9 bond, relating to DV charges. The perpetrator continued to harass her, regarding the children, and earlier in the year we helped her to find new accommodation, at an address unknown to the perpetrator.

In March 2016, another referral was received for our client. The Perpetrator had found out where she lived and had attended the address. A verbal argument occurred and threats were made in front of his children including that he would “kick her in the head”. He then slapped her across the face, pushed her onto the lounge and slapped her to the side of the head. The children were distressed and our client ran to a neighbour’s house for

assistance. Police arrived and the perpetrator was arrested. He was charged with Resist Arrest, Assault Police, Stalk/Intimidate, AOABH and a new ADVO was applied for. A Final ADVO was made for two years and a warrant was issued for the arrest of the perpetrator, as he did not appear at court. This warrant is still outstanding and the perpetrator has not yet been arrested.

FACS became involved and our client was referred to the Child and Family Team at the Benevolent Society. Our client became hypervigilant and worried about this involvement. She requested an Aboriginal Worker and was told one was not available. Our caseworker advocated with FACS for better information to be provided to Aboriginal women and the importance of having access to Aboriginal workers. Our client booked herself into the Aboriginal Living Beyond Abuse program with BaptistCare and

found some great support during this time. She has also re engaged with the Sista Girl Yarnz Group and is seeing a counsellor there.

Our caseworker provided wide-ranging assistance to the client: referral to MLC for family law advice; information provided in relation to the Aboriginal Living Beyond Abuse program; advocacy with Housing NSW to relocate the client; supply of a mobile phone through Westnet Safe Connections; help with applications to Victim’s Services for counselling and a Recognition Payment; referral to DV NILS for a loan for new furniture; advocacy/liaison with FACS and the Benevolent Society; and inclusion of the client to the iSAM agenda for feedback and information from Police around the outstanding warrant.

SWSTAAS Report Vala Ola'aiga



Vala Ola'aiga
SWSTAAS Coordinator

2015-16 has brought us many challenges, some greater than others, but challenging all the same. Through it all the team worked hard.

We achieved consistent and outstanding results for the tenants we supported through the year, and those we will continue to support. Typical of challenging times we have endured struggles, but the strong cooperation and team spirit has seen the Service through the year, relatively well.

We had our funding contract with Fair Trading renewed for the provision of advice and advocacy services to the tenants of South West Sydney. The new period is for another three years (July

2016 until June 2019). This is exciting news not only for the community, but also for the team. We look forward to continued growth, and supporting the community through our work.

Advice and Advocacy

From 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, we provided 1310 advices to tenants over the phone, via electronic mail and face-to-face and we also provided representation in conciliations and formal hearings at NCAT. The various modes of

providing advice are very much in keeping with technology - allowing clients greater access to justice in ways that fit with their busy lives.

We have been working very hard for the community. Out of the 1310 advice and advocacy matters, we achieved 18,016 outcomes for the clients. This is a significant achievement for the team and client group. Consistent with previous years, we continue to support tenants going through the termination process, involuntary or otherwise. Preventing

people from being made homeless, or helping them navigate the legal process, remained our main area of work (33.2% of matters).

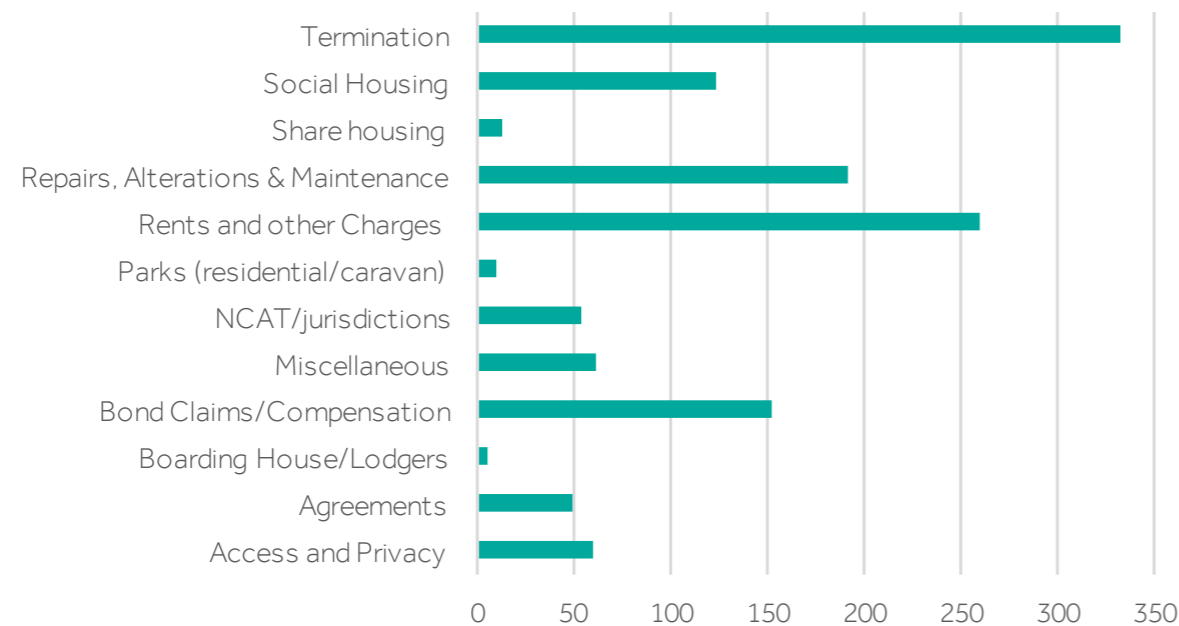
Appeal Matters

This year we took ten appeal matters to the NCAT Appeal Panel - with mixed results, including: two losses (albeit one was an 'in principle' win, and was referred for judicial review with the tenant still housed in her home); two settlements,

three wins; one withdrawal and two pending matters.

The Appeals Portfolio is a new and useful area of advocacy within the service. We recognise its many challenges but also believe it is a very worthwhile aspect of our work, because we can help individual clients and hopefully set precedents, further improving tenancy law.

Advice by Matter Type



65%

Advice by Telephone

19%

Face-to-Face Advice

11%

Representation

5%

Email or Other

Modes of Assistance

Case Study Broken Bob

Bob was in a serious car accident in January 2016 - suffering a broken neck and severe head trauma. Legal Aid NSW assisted him with a Personal Injury Claim and his rental arrears matter (being a by-product of the accident). Ruthlessly, his Landlord then applied for termination under s 87 (breach of agreement, due to failure to pay rent) and s 89(5) (where a tenant frequently failed to pay rent, they can be terminated, regardless of whether they'd entered repayment plans or had actually paid). The tenant was only one day out from an order for eviction and Legal Aid NSW successfully had the order set aside.

Legal Aid NSW then contacted SWSTAAS, to request ongoing advocacy for the tenant at NCAT (the substantive matter had been delayed, but relisted). Our service provided advocacy and advice to the tenant at NCAT and settlement was negotiated as follows.

Our Work

On 3 July 2016, the landlord's new real estate agent contacted our service looking to reach a settlement before the next hearing. Our service successfully reached an agreement, where the agent agreed to drop the s 89(5) part of the Notice of Termination. We drafted up a general s87 Termination and suspended the order for possession until 1 December 2016. Both parties signed the orders.

The tenant was ordered to pay the arrears of \$420 and a daily occupation fee of \$60, until 1 December 2016. The tenant had informed the agent that they wanted to put \$5000 into the rental account as a sort of security guarantee for the landlord. Bob also had a son who had just entered the final year of high school studies. Fewer disruptions, by relocating to a new house, would help his son be stable for Year 12. Given that the Tribunal would not have jurisdiction to make an order for this security, our advocate added this guarantee as a notation (i.e. when the insurance pay-out arrived the tenant would put the money into the rental account as security). Bob's tenancy was thereby secured, for a timeframe that worked for him and his family.

Community Engagement Partnerships, Community Education, Information Sessions and Training

Casework and Support

The matters we adopt for ongoing casework continue to be complex and multifaceted. There are often several issues at play in any single case. In addition, there are many factors affecting housing law in South West Sydney.

Firstly, the cost of living is extraordinary. This, coupled with other factors, including: lack of affordable housing; ever changing government policies affecting tenants in social housing; and several other socio-economic factors which impact on housing stress and the community generally. This is reflected in the complexities we see at the coalface. We have seen more of:

- People with mental health issues;
- Victims of domestic & family violence
- Family/relationship breakdown;
- Private renters being taken advantage of by ruthless landlords and/or their agents;
- Boarding house residents dealing with breakdown in relationships and imbalances in power that are often magnified when things go wrong; and
- Public housing tenants navigating the many different policies that affect them.

Outreaches

We continue our partnership with CatholicCare in Liverpool and Fairfield. This remains a viable way for the service to reach clients in both locations. We are grateful for the generosity of the two services for making room for us to see clients at their offices at no cost.

We have also started an outreach with the Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service in the safe room on ADVO Tuesdays. It has been an effective service provision, with other agencies present to provide information and answer questions for women affected by domestic and/or family violence (and their families) while attending court for their ADVO matters. We look forward to making this more viable and effective in the next 12 months.

Training Police

A very important development/achievement in community legal education has been training police at the Campbelltown Local Area Command. Housing issues sometimes collide with the work of NSW Police and we were involved in delivering training to Police about NSW Housing law and how it might affect their work. We ran five sessions in the series. In total, we trained 55 duty officers, and feedback indicated that the training was well received.

Community Education

Another way we supported our community was by providing information and/or



Thank you to the Campbelltown Local Area Command, especially the Commanding Officer, for this opportunity. We'd also like to thank the training officer, who helped make this happen.

We will endeavor to reach out to the other Local Area Commands, in the future, to continue to support our community via education.



training to frontline workers and organisations in our area. One of the exciting and challenging aspects of this work is the broad geographical area we service. One way of reaching out is by creating pathways of support, back-up advice and feedback to the community via other frontline community organisations in the area.

We provided a total of 15 (outside the police training series) tenancy information/education sessions to local organisations, including: Macarthur Family & Youth Services; Mission Australia in Cabramatta and various English classes for adults at learning centres in Fairfield.

Specialist Homelessness Services Training

We also secured a small sum from Homelessness NSW to conduct training to Specialist Homelessness Services in our general area. 16 workers from different services attended. They walked away

with basic knowledge on housing law and how they can deal with small matters they come across in their work. They also received a small training manual from the day. Most importantly they gave feedback about the positive network they have added to their contacts list from coming along to the training. The main benefit of this training was the establishment of referral pathways to SWSTAAS, for complex tenancy matters.

Thank you to all the community/not-for-profit organisations which have helped us throughout the year. You have all impacted our work. If our services are yet to meet, we hope to change that in the coming year.

Thank you to the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Network or the "brains trust" for always having our back. It's been another big year but we all made it through. Thank you to the Tenants Union NSW for the ongoing support.

Thank You

Thank you to Macarthur Legal Centre Inc., the Board members (old, current and new), the management team, the administration team, the Legal Team including ALAP and CCAS workers, the Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and the volunteers of the Centre. You have all impacted on the work of SWSTAAS and we look forward to being stronger together in supporting Macarthur, and all of South West Sydney.

The Tenancy Team is currently made up of Douglas Lee, Nicole Kennedy, Ben Connor, Naomi Hare and James Keech.

We also cannot forget the services of Anthony Watt-Bright and Livia Lu who have both moved on to other adventures. We wish them well.

Congratulations and thank you to the Tenancy Team for all your dedication to our clients and never giving up on each other. The case study above is only a small example of a whole year's worth of incredible work. May you always impart strength, and deal in hope, so that our clients see through the winters of the next 12 months. Anyone would be proud to work with such strong and tenacious team.

Financial Report

For the year ended 30 June 2016



Statement of Comprehensive Income

Expense	2016 (\$)	2015 (\$)
Revenue	2,091,764	2,086,539
Depreciation Expense	(23,773)	(30,647)
Employee Benefits Expense	(1,668,034)	(1,661,497)
Other Expenses from Ordinary Activities	(353,861)	(479,650)
Surplus/(Deficit) Before Income Tax	46,096	(85,255)
Income Tax Expense	—	—
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	46,096	(85,255)
Other Comprehensive Income After Income Tax	—	—
Total Other Comprehensive Income for the Year (Net of Tax)	—	—
Total Comprehensive Income/(Loss) for the Year	46,096	(85,255)
Total Comprehensive Income/(Loss) Attributable to Members of the Entity	46,096	(85,255)

Statement of Changes in Equity

Expense	Retained Surplus (\$)	Total Equity (\$)
Balance as at 1 July 2014	738,973	738,973
Surplus Attributable to Members	(85,255)	(85,255)
Other Comprehensive Income	—	—
Balance as at 30 June 2015	653,718	653,718
Surplus/(Deficit) Attributable to Members	46,096	46,096
Other Comprehensive Income	—	—
Balance as at 30 June 2016	699,814	699,814

Statement of Financial Position

Expense	2016 (\$)	2015 (\$)
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,373,641	1,046,916
Trade and Other Receivables	14,325	26,957
Other Current Assets	15,185	12,323
Total Current Assets	1,403,151	1,086,196
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, Plant and Equipment	63,813	49,600
Total Non-Current Assets	63,813	49,600
TOTAL ASSETS	1,466,964	1,135,796
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and Other Payables	526,071	279,128
Provisions	197,593	154,285
Total Current Liabilities	723,664	433,413
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Provisions	43,486	48,665
Total Non-Current Liabilities	43,486	48,665
TOTAL LIABILITIES	767,150	482,078
Net Assets	699,814	653,718
Represented by		
EQUITY (Retained Surplus)	699,814	653,718
Total Equity	699,814	653,718

Statement of Cash Flows

Expense	2016 (\$)	2015 (\$)
CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Receipts of Grants	2,542,130	1,992,936
Payments to Suppliers and Employees	(2,206,325)	(2,327,008)
Interest Received	27,345	27,659
Net Cash Provided by/(used in) Operating Activities	363,150	306,413
CASH FLOW FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES		
Payment for Property, Plant and Equipment	(37,986)	(42,276)
Net Cash Provided by/(used in) Investing Activities	(37,986)	(42,276)
Net Increase/(decrease) in Cash Held	325,164	(348,689)
Cash at Beginning of the Year	1,046,916	1,396,605
Cash at the End of the Year	1,372,080	1,046,916

MLC would like to offer a special THANK YOU to all our volunteers and supporters...

Student Advice Volunteers

Aishwarya Chand
Ashleigh Best
Aydin Genc
Emily Lucas
Jeevan Saggi
Livia Lu
Theofania Anagnostakis
Tiarnne Brown
Wilson Huang
Zia Khan

Volunteer Solicitors

Ali Mokhtar
Andrew Hack
Brittany Short
Greg McCauley
Joanna Knight
Patrick Duffy
Ravi Prasad
Renee Dibley
Steven Cosgrove

Primary Funding Bodies

Legal Aid NSW
Cth Attorney General's Department
Fair Trading NSW

Pro Bono Partners

Seyfarth Shaw

Student Day/PLT Volunteers

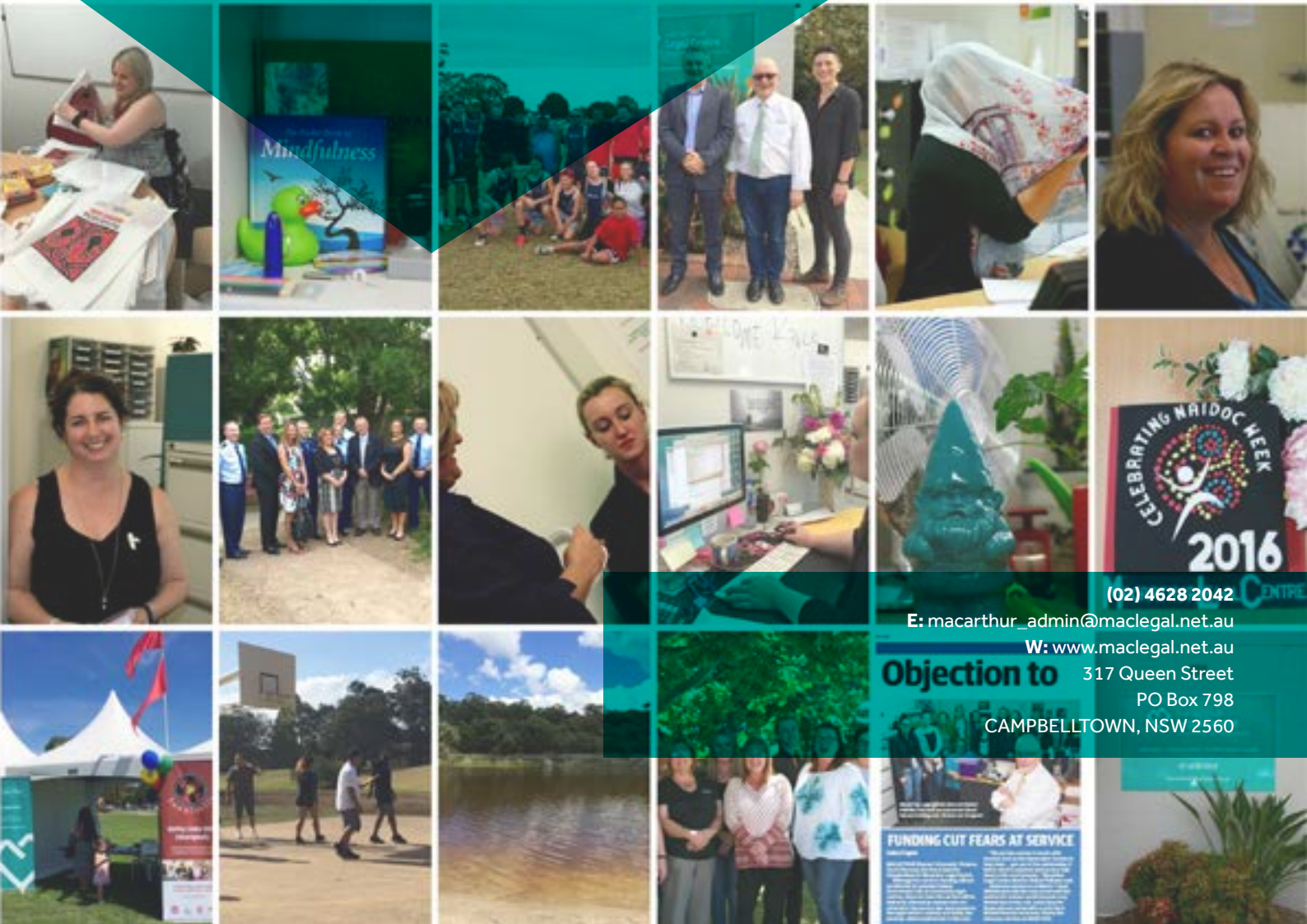
Andrei Stepanov
James Suptut
Melanie Tisma
Rebecca Crofts
Roland Blackstone
Tamara Woods

CCAS Volunteers

Tanya Nazari
Matthew Ross
Eve Alam

Private Supporters

West Leagues Club Leumeah



(02) 4628 2042

E: macarthur_admin@maclegal.net.au

W: www.maclegal.net.au

Objection to 317 Queen Street
PO Box 798
CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW 2560