



ANNUAL REPORT 2014



MACARTHUR
Legal Centre

Supporting our community



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This year we provided legal ‘information’ to 4722 people who contacted our centre and our solicitors conducted 1877 legal advice sessions. 35% (657) of these advices were ‘face-to-face’ and the remainder were via telephone. Our solicitors also provided ongoing casework and assistance to about 400 clients, in a wide variety of legal areas.

WELCOME

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 also 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 Service and an Aboriginal Legal Assistance Program. We are committed to supporting our community and offering holistic service delivery to all our clients.

We are grateful to the lawyers, students and members of the community who freely give their time and expertise to assist us in our work.

We would like to acknowledge the Dharawal people as traditional owners of the land that we work on and pay our respects to their elders, past and present.

01/

CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY REPORT 2014

75.79% extremely likely to return to MLC if they need assistance in the future	46.55% said we were Extremely helpful with their particular legal issue/s
78.57% said they were treated very well by legal and non-legal staff	51.67% would prefer to receive face-to-face advice
62.5% said they completely understood the legal information/advice provided by MLC	51.79% said they were able to find a lawyer very quickly
75.44% of clients found it easy to make make an appointment via Telephone	

What They Say

“

It was nice that the legal staff checked up on the client after the matter was finalised.”

“

Very understanding and spoke in an approachable way.”

“

Both non-legal and legal staff were very polite, friendly, informative and helpful.”

Summary of Findings

Results from our annual client satisfaction survey indicate that clients were, generally, satisfied with the access and effectiveness of the service offered by Macarthur Legal Centre (MLC). The majority of clients found that the opening hours of the centre were convenient; felt they were treated well by both legal and non- legal staff and that they completely understood the legal information provided to them.



02/ CHAIRPERSON REPORT 2013 – 2014

It is my pleasure to present the 2013 – 2014 Annual Report for Macarthur Legal Centre.

My reflections on the past year have focussed on positive change and improvement to the organisation. The past year has brought a number of challenges that are now leading to the implementation of strategies to ensure Macarthur Legal Centre continues to provide quality services to people living in the Macarthur and South West Sydney Regions.

Macarthur Legal Centre values all members of staff and their input. In response to a number of concerns raised by staff during 2013, a Dispute Resolutions Service was contracted to undertake a review of our human resource systems and general operations. The review focussed on staff satisfaction, areas of concern and ideas for improvement. The resulting report highlighted areas of required improvement including human resource management functions, upgrade of processes associated with the identification and addressing bullying and harassment, increased staff safety and security, upgrade of information technology and layout of office areas. Actions are now underway to address the recommendations in the report. I would like to thank staff past and present for their honest and valued participation in this timely review.

I look forward to ongoing feedback as we progress towards implementing the required actions towards improvement across all areas.

Macarthur Legal Centre has a highly respected profile across the community which has resulted in continued strong referrals and usage of our services. Our achievements are highlighted within the Centre Director's and individual service reports. I would like to extend congratulations and thank you to all centre staff for their support of myself and the Board, particularly during a year that has been at times difficult.

The NSW Government reforms of domestic violence services brought a level of anxiety and change for Macarthur Legal Centre. Whilst the NSW Government decided to discontinue the Domestic and Family Violence Intervention Service funding, Macarthur Legal Centre was fortunate in retaining the Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service in an expanded capacity. This service has gone from strength to strength under the knowledgeable guidance of Tanya Whithouse.

We were pleased to welcome Christina Pirina back to Macarthur Legal Centre as the new Principal Solicitor. Christina has reviewed the Legal Practice operations and initiated changes to improve overall operation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Stephen Karanfilovski for his support of Macarthur Legal Centre by taking on the role of Acting Principal Solicitor. Stephen's dedication and commitment was deeply appreciated.

The South West Sydney Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service, under the continued strong leadership from Vala Olaaiga, has introduced new initiatives to improve effectiveness, service access and raised awareness of tenancy issues, particularly during time of increasing housing stress and associated tenancy issues. Macarthur Legal Centre successfully retained its auspice of this service after undergoing an open tender process. Thank you and congratulations to all the team.

A highlight during the year was gaining accreditation under the National Accreditation Scheme for provision of Community Legal Services. Reaching this certification is testament to the hard work of both the Board and Staff. The audit process to reach certification also highlighted areas for improvement, including governance. The Board is in the process of reviewing policies and procedures and aims to have these completed by early 2015. The Board is committed to a continuous improvement approach and believe this will strengthen our operations and ensure ongoing quality.

The achievements of the past year would not have been possible without the wonderful work and support provided by Robert Pelletier, our Centre Director since November 2013. Robert has been instrumental in driving change across all areas of operation and has been an extremely positive influence at Macarthur Legal Centre. The Board thanks Robert for his hard work and support of staff and Board. I would also like to thank Vala for Acting in the Centre Director role during October/ November 2013.

The Board has also seen changes. Suzanne Hayden and David Barr resigned from the Board in early 2014. Their contribution to Macarthur Legal Centre was highly valued. We have been extremely fortunate in recently welcoming Alison Croall to our Board.

Alison brings a depth of knowledge and experience as a proactive member of the community and Director of other Boards across the community services sector. We look forward to Alison's ongoing membership, support and valued contribution to Macarthur Legal Centre.

A highlight during the year was gaining accreditation under the National Accreditation Scheme for provision of Community Legal Services. Reaching this certification is testament to the hard work of both the Board and Staff.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members during 2013 - 2014, Nevine Youssef, Adam Quinn and Cheryl McBride for their support, time and guidance during the past year.

I am excited by the future direction of Macarthur Legal Centre and my continued involvement.

Julie Deane

**Chairperson
Macarthur Legal Centre Board**

03/

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

26 November 2014

Since 1987 Macarthur Legal Centre has been supporting the community of the Macarthur region of New South Wales. It has been a great pleasure to be associated with this work as Acting Director since November 2013 and as Director since May 2014.

When I came to the Centre, Vala Olaaiga was holding the fort as Acting Director as well as coordinating our tenancy team. Vala has had a fantastic year – securing ongoing funding for the work of our tenancy team, the famous five AKA South West Sydney Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service, as well as managing the Centre through some challenging times.

We recruited a new Principal Solicitor, Christina Pirina, in March 2014. I wish to pay tribute to the excellent work done by our former Principal Solicitor, Prue Gregory and our Acting Principal Solicitor, Stephen Karanfilovski.

Christina has built on their excellent work to grow the skills and capacity of our legal team. Christina has brought first-class legal and management skills together with a commitment to social justice to the Centre. She is a natural fit as Principal Solicitor.

Tanya Whitehouse is the coordinator of Macarthur Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service. Tanya and her team just keep going from strength to strength. Not content with leading her stellar team, Tanya has been the Chairperson of WDVCAS NSW Inc and has just been reappointed in that position for another year.

Community Legal Centres face great challenges. The demand for our services is growing while Government funding is shrinking. The Macarthur region covers more than 3,000 square kilometers. It includes South West Sydney and extends into the semi-rural but rapidly urbanizing areas of Camden and Wollondilly. Our population is more than 250,000 and is growing rapidly. It is linguistically diverse – more than 18% speak a language other than English in their homes.

We are on the lands of the Tharawal nation. In fact, our region has one of the highest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations per head of population in New South Wales.

The diversity and size of our region means that we have to be innovative in how we service it. We increasingly use social media to enable us to cover this diverse region. We conduct outreaches in many locations outside of Campbelltown – our solicitors and caseworkers go where the need is most urgent.

My task has been to enable us to do more with less. We have been working on our policies and procedures, designing and implementing a new IT plan for the Centre and developing our teamwork. We have increased our work capacity through the use of volunteers. We are grateful to the lawyers, students and members of our community who freely give of their time and expertise to assist us in our work.

Our goal is to provide holistic services to our client. We do not see our clients as problems to be diagnosed, fixed and sent on their way. We value them, walk with them and empower them to make choices that will enable them to lead more satisfying lives.

Thanks to all the members of the Centre's staff. Each of them is an inspiration to me. They make a profound difference in the lives of so many people. Fortunately, they have a wonderful sense of humour to go with their commitment to the work of the Centre.

I wish to express my thanks to Julie Deane, the Chair of our Board, for her unstinting support of the Centre and of me. Every member of the Board gives of their time on a voluntary basis. On behalf of the Centre and of all of our clients, I wish to thank them.



Robert Pelletier
Director

Colelli Photography 2014

04/

PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Our Centre

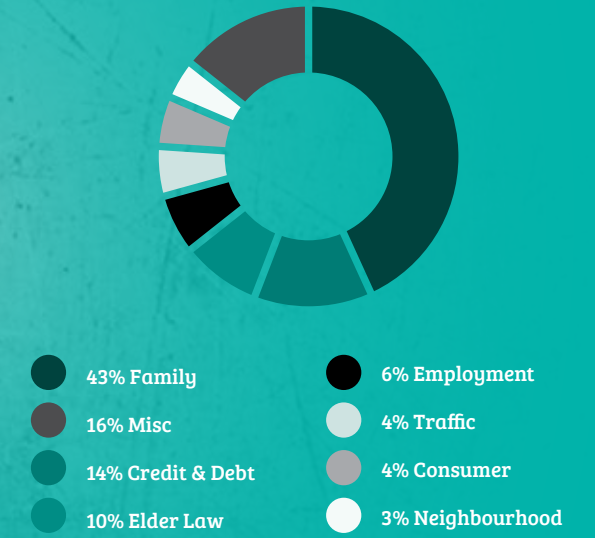
MLC is part of a network of community legal centres, funded by state and federal governments and the NSW Public Purpose Fund, to provide free legal advice, referrals and assistance to residents of the Macarthur region of New South Wales. Our solicitors deliver community legal education to community groups and service providers, with the aim to increasing awareness and preventing entrenched legal problems. We also use our casework experience to help identify systemic legal problems, and advocate for legal and policy changes to help the community.

Our Services

This year we provided ‘information’ to 4722 people who contacted our centre and our solicitors conducted 1877 legal advice sessions. 35% (657) of these advices were ‘face-to-face’ and the remainder were via telephone. Our solicitors also provided ongoing casework and assistance to about 400 clients, in a wide variety of legal areas.

Our Main Areas of Practice

Family law continues to be our main area of practice, followed by credit and debt, elder law, and employment issues. Our advice activities, by area of law, are outlined below:



Our Clients

Our solicitors provide services to a wide range of vulnerable client groups - 12% of our clients reported having a disability; 35% were from CALD backgrounds; and 4.2% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. 37% of the people we advised were men and 63% women. While we provide free advice to all members of the community, including individuals and service providers, our casework services are targeted at vulnerable and disadvantaged clients.

Outreach and Partnerships

We believe it’s important to be part of our community, and that legal services should be accessible to all members of our commuity. Our solicitors offer advice at 12 outreach clinics across the Macarthur region. These services run monthly, fortnightly or weekly, depending on community need. We currently partner with the following services, to provide free legal advice services: Talloood Community Centre (Ambarvale); Break the Cycle (Macquarie Fields); Benevolent Society (women only service, Campbelltown); Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative (Campbelltown); Wollondilly Community Links (Tahmoor); Claymore Neighbourhood Centre (Claymore); Minto Access Point (Minto); Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation (Airds); Traxside Youth Services (Campbelltown); Workventures (Airds); Youth Off the Streets (Macquarie Fields); Camden Community Connections (Narellan). This year, about 15% of our advice activities were conducted at outreach clinics.

We currently partner with the Macarthur Family Relationship Centre (FRC) to provide weekly onsite advice sessions, for clients experiencing separation. As part of our broader FRC service we also provide telephone advice, referrals and assistance to clients accessing the FRCs at Bankstown and Fairfield. We provide representation in ‘legally assisted mediations’, which run at each of the three centres. This model, whereby both parties are represented by solicitors from community legal centres, is aimed at redressing power imbalances and resolving entrenched conflicts. Our solicitors participated in 43 mediations this year and about 7% of our clients were directly referred from the FRCs.

Community Legal 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 seniors groups. The topics we covered ranged from bullying, healthy relationships, domestic violence, family law, child support, elder law issues, employment, to credit and debt. We have also developed a range of new presentations and information

brochures, covering our main areas of practice.

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 to a recent Commonwealth Senate Inquiry into out of home care, because of our concerns about indigenous children being removed from their families, by child protection workers and courts, without adequate consultation with wider indigenous family/kin networks. We also continue to participate in law reform activities conducted by the CLC sector more broadly, with our solicitors actively involved in a range of NSWCLC committees.

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Aboriginal Legal Assistance Program (ALAP)

Our ALAP worker, Megan Hughes, continues to provide specialist services to indigenous members of our community. She runs a Facebook page to help us with the community, helps to break down barriers between ATSI people and service providers and provides specialist casework assistance to indigenous youth.

Children's Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS)

MLC also runs the Children’s Court Assistance Scheme, at Campbelltown Children’s Court. This year we provided assistance to 788 young people with matters listed before the Court – this included information, referrals, transport, and casework assistance. A special thanks to Kathy Milat, for her volunteer support on this project.

Case Study

MLC is committed to meeting unmet legal needs in our community. An area of significant need is the provision of legal advice/assistance in respect to division of small asset/liability pools post separation. We recently assisted a client who self-represented in the Federal Circuit Court, and was able to reach a just and equitable property settlement with her ex-partner. Maryann has this to say:

'I approached Macarthur Legal Centre about a superannuation split with my ex. There was literally weeks to go, as the 12 month deadline was almost up. I had previously had assistance from Legal Aid, but no longer qualified for assistance.

The end result was a successful settlement. I had so much help in going through the whole process.

To find myself in such a situation was somewhat of a shock after a long marriage. Melissa from the legal centre helped me through the whole process and although there was literally days to spare the paperwork was filed.

The end result was a successful settlement. I had so much help in going through the whole process. Sometimes we end up needing help and Melissa and the legal centre were wonderful. We never know when we may need assistance and I encourage my friends and associates to contribute to the Centre. Again, thank you.'

Our Volunteers

We are indebted to our student and solicitor volunteers, for their assistance during our weekly advice sessions. We have about 20 student volunteers who attend advice sessions on a monthly basis - to answer phones, take instructions and brief solicitors. Our volunteer solicitors provide legal advice and referrals. The generous support of our volunteers significantly increases our capacity to provide advice services. We also acknowledge the dedicated day-to-day assistance of our daytime volunteers and students participating in practical legal training placements

Acknowledgments

A big thanks to our staff solicitors - Barbara Simpson, Christopher Joyce, Stephan Karanfilovski, Melissa Jozwiak, Robyn Roelandts, Susan Su, Stanley Tao and Sunayna Baig. I'd also like to acknowledge the special efforts of our support team, including Phillipa Magro and Kathy Milat. A special thanks to Stephan Karanfilovski, who acted as principal solicitor during the year, and continues to provide leadership as a senior solicitor in the team.

Christina Pirina
Principal Solicitor



05/

MACARTHUR WOMEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT ADVOCACY SERVICE (MWDVCAS)

Overview:

MWDVCAS is part of a network of 28 community based Court Advocacy Services in NSW. Legal Aid fund all WDVCS'. MWDVCAS covers Campbelltown, Camden and Picton Court – workers attend on the AVO List Day and other days for hearings to support clients. MWDVCAS also give appropriate referrals and information relating to their Domestic and/or Family Violence matter, advocate for clients, network with the local community service providers on issues around Domestic and Family Violence, offer training to community workers and ensure women have access to appropriate support outside of the justice system.

MWDVCAS was very lucky to be given extra funding in January 2014 to enable the service to expand and employ case workers. MWDVCAS is now a large team of 8, including 4 case workers. Women and their children now have access to case workers that can effectively support them pre, at and post Court and remain connected with them to case manage their ongoing needs. MWDVCAS also have fortnightly meetings that were formally known as Case Tracking. These meetings enable MWDVCAS, Police, FACS and Correctives to meet and discuss matters that are high risk or risk with women and children.

Community and Interagency Support:

MWDVCAS works closely with a number of agencies and services in the Macarthur area. We acknowledge the support and collaborative working relationships with the following:

Macarthur Legal Centre, Narellan/Campbelltown and Macquarie Fields Police, Campbelltown/Camden and Picton Court staff, Nanette Reuben, Chamindri Veitch, Benevolent Society Centre for Women's Health, Staying Home Leaving Violence, WILMA Women's Health Centre, Community Links Wollondilly, Chisholm Program, Campbelltown Family and Youth Service, Tharawal Aboriginal Health Service, Housing NSW, Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative Inc., Brand New Day, BCS Lifecare, Jackie Burns, Major Cheryl Hall, Legal Aid Campbelltown Office, SWS Family Referral Service, Partners in Recovery and Brighter Futures.

Statistics:

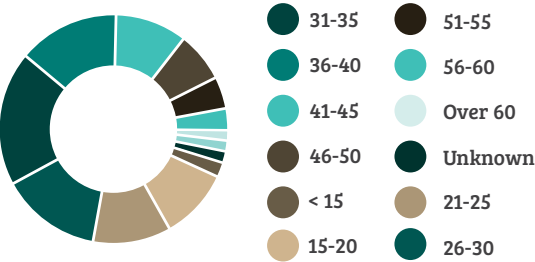
MWDVCAS have had some significant increases in the last 12 months – this has been primarily because of the additional funding and extra workers. MWDVCAS work very hard to support their clients and children and are proactive in all matters.

2013-2014: Service Events
(anything done with a client)

N/A	1247	
Camden	2373	
Campbelltown	8840	
Picton	519	
Total	12979	

N/A has increased by 14.6% from the previous financial year (this is matters not at Court). Camden has decreased by 1.5%. Campbelltown has increased by 99%. Picton has increased 21.5%. Overall has increased by 55%.

2013 – 2014: Age Group Of Clients



2013-2014 Overall Statistic Reflections:

- ➡ New Clients: 2236. **An increase of 79%.**
- ➡ Referrals given to Women: 21,639. **An increase of 36.7%.**
- ➡ CALD Women assisted: 236. **An increase of 12.9%.**
- ➡ Aboriginal or TSI Women assisted: 116. **An increase of 27%.**
- ➡ Women with a Disability assisted: 137. **An increase of 18%.**

MWDVCAS have done a few projects in the last 12 months. We were successful in gaining funding for an AVO Translation Project – this involves translating the AVO conditions into 39 languages. We also launched the A&TSI Strong Black Women & Pacific Islander Domestic Violence calendars. We also attended CALD Pamper Days. We also commenced a DVD training project funded by FACS that is going to be a resource for non-Indigenous workers to gain skills in working better with the A&TSI community.

MWDVCAS have been involved in several community

projects too, including co-facilitating the DV Forum for the Macarthur area – done with Housing NSW and other service providers; attended a consultation with the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and Their Children; presented training to Housing NSW on D&FV; attended a lunch with the Attorney General to advocate for the non-closure of Camden Local Court and had a stall at the Women's Law Expo.



Tanya Whitehouse

Case Study

MWDVCAS had a Mum with 3 children as a client. She had DV issues with her current partner.

She had also had issues with tenancy and finding a new rental property. She was referred to Tenancy Advice and was informed of her rights with her tenancy issue, which she dealt with and then was able to find another property to rent. The client had an incident at her home with her (then) partner. She communicated with a FACS worker and Police became involved. The client made a statement and the defendant was charged with an offence and an AVO was applied for. The client had engaged with a support service for herself and her children and was very proactive in going through the court process. She attended Picton Local Court for her AVO and related charge matter and gave evidence. The defendant was convicted and a Final AVO was made. The client had successfully gained employment interstate and was in the process of moving. The client was referred to DV NILS for a loan to assist with the removalist truck and was successful in that application. She is now able to confidently move interstate to a new job, new house and bright future.

The client was extremely grateful for the ongoing support and advocacy that she received with MWDVCAS and has stated that she would not have gone through the process without that support. We wish the client the best of luck in her future.

06/

SOUTH WEST SYDNEY TENANTS ADVICE & ADVOCACY SERVICE

Annual Report 2014

As we reflect on 2014, the first word that comes to mind is Change. A lot of internal and external changes have forced us as a service to prioritise our focus according to identified need(s) in our catchment area and available reources. Our focus changed a couple of times throughout the year however, we have re-focused after considered efforts to adapt as and when necessary.

The 1st December 2014 will mark one year since the current tenure of funding for all TAASes including South West Sydey TAAS ('SWSyd TAAS' hereafter) started. We have trialled a few variations in service delivery based on the new service delivery model of Fair Trading. We have also undergone a full working calendar year since the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal ('NCAT' hereafter).

One of the more exciting changes that have occurred this year is that we have proudly and successfully undergone a change process to bring a new look to our service logo.

Through the uncertainties that accompany any process of change, we have had doubts, challenges and successes through our own approach. We have also identified areas in which we need to progressively change in order to improve our service delivery.

Changes, Challenges and our Approach

Change in Management
We have had an Acting-Director in Robert Pelletier for the better part of this year. We always look forward to opportunities to better the service for our clients and the tenants of South West Sydney. We have enjoyed working with Mr. Pelletier to continuously improve our service.

We have also welcomed the decision of the Macarthur Legal Centre (MLC) Board to employ an internal accounts officer to assist with smooth facilitation of the accounts and smooth out the process of consultation with the MLC management team.

Changes in Service Delivery Model
Firstly, Fair Trading implemented a varied service delivery model, which meant we were not given specific targets, or tied to specific advice hours.

As a service, we were to focus more on the advocacy aspect of our work and reach more of the vulnerable clientele in our catchment area.

Secondly, the change in the service delivery model also included the implementation of the Specialist Complaints Tenancy ('SCT' hereafter). This unit is separate to its existing Call Centre, which also takes calls and gives advice on private tenancies and residential parks matters. Social Housing disputes remain the concern of TAASes.

The aim of the SCT unit is to settle disputes between tenants and landlords and/or real estate agents through a mediation process with Fair Trading SCT staff acting as mediators.

The main areas of tenancy that SCT unit would accept a query in include, repairs and maintenance, non-urgent health and safety issues, alterations to premises, access to premises or inspections, non-compliance with tenancy agreement, water saving devices and smoke alarms, provision of correct notices, ending a tenancy or breaking a lease, condition reports and rental bonds.

Our Challenges

As a service, we were looking at potentially undoing all the practices and routine we have had for the better part of 10 years in this service.

Initially, we thought that this meant that all disputes which fall under the parameters that Fair Trading have indicated will be referred to the Call centre and SCT. Other TAASes around NSW took steps to ensure that enquiries from tenants, which fall within the parameters of Fair Trading, were referred to Fair Trading.

Our Approach

One year on, the initial theory of change and our experience have been very different.

We are firm in the knowledge that the Fair Trading call centre is as it was previously.

We also understand that SCT is another resolution option for tenants who are privately renting with a query in the parameters indicated by Fair Trading as opposed to referring all of those queries to SCT.

Our approach to the change in service delivery model was to:

- implement minimal change in the beginning,
- trial change,
- observe variations and how the changes pan out,
- make variations to adapt,

- continuous process of observe and adapt as appropriate.

We will continue following this approach and make changes as appropriate. Hence, in the course of the year, through our continuous improvement approach, we have changed our service delivery model to the following:

Mode of Delivery	Current Service Delivery Model	Previous Service Delivery Model
Phone/Advice line	16hours (per week)	22hours (per week)
Set face-to-face* in office	2.5hours drop-in session (per week)	3hours drop-in session (per week)
Outreach	5hours (2nd and 4th week per month)	Ad hoc
Duty Advocacy at the Tribunal	7hours per week	7hours per week

Staff can make their own face-to-face appointments to see clients in the office. These are separate and not counted in drop-in face-to-face hours.

Fair Trading has also been reviewing its own processes and service delivery model. As of the 17th November 2014, Fair Trading has modified its own service delivery model as follows:

- Fair Trading Centres are to handle all complaints involving private Landlords (no real estate agent involved);
- Fair Trading Centres are to handle all Residential Park complaints and enquiries, including park closures;
- Fair Trading Centres are to action all Tenancy enquiries;
- Specialist Complaints Tenancy (SCT) is to handle all complaints involving a Real Estate Agent, regardless of who lodges the complaint ie. Landlord, Tenant, real estate agent, TAAS.

We will approach these confirmations with the same attitude we have adopted this year to reflect on our practice. We will consider this when we have our Service Planning Day in the beginning of 2015.

NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) becomes official in January 2014.

The second biggest external change influence was the beginning of NCAT in January 2014. It is a much bigger Tribunal than the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal that previously heard tenancy disputes. As with anything new, we had concerns initially with the transition between the two Tribunals.

Our Challenges

We were concerned about the transitioning of the old matters under the CTTT to NCAT.

We were concerned for the lack of administrative support and/or standard form required for the different levels of appeal in NCAT.

Getting used to the new Tribunal was always going to have its challenges because of new processes, forms, dealing with a different government department and new costs for applications and exceptions to exceptions.

Our Approach

Our experience has been to take each challenge as it presents itself.

For example, there was no standard form for a set-aside application when the Tribunal first started in January. No one in the TAAP network had submitted a set- aside application yet in the early stages.

The first set-aside application that was submitted to NCAT came from SWSyd TAAS in the form of submissions modelled on our previous application for a rehearing in the previous Tribunal framework and the relevant sections of the NCAT legislation. The way NCAT handled this set-aside application set the tone for the following months until it created its form.

These submissions were shared around the TAAP Network until NCAT created the standard form for a set-aside.

We continue to use this original template of submissions as an attachment to the set-aside application form.

In general, we have learnt to deal with the changes of NCAT from our experience and practice. We have also learned a great deal from the duty advocacy at the Tribunal.

We will continue to review our approach and make changes and appropriate.

Our Year That Was ...In Numbers (Mostly)

Below is a summary of some of our statistics from the beginning of June 2013 to the end of June 2014.

Our total Client Contact for this time period is 1383.

Client Profile percentages

ATSI Client Profile	
Aboriginal Clients	2.10%
Torres Strait Islander	0.29%
Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Profile	
Australia	54%
CALD	25%
Not Specified	21%

NB: the non-specified 21% could be representative of people who either did not want to be identified as CALD or that the information was not recorded accurately at time of intake.

Top Five Enquiry Fields (Number of)

General Rights & Responsibility	597
Termination	539
Repairs	256
Non-Payment of rent	223
NCAT	179

Our biggest focus area is in our continued assistance and advocacy to prevent terminations, as much as practicable, and helping tenants defend being terminated out of their residential tenancy agreements and subsequently becoming evicted out of their homes.

The sixth most enquired area is in rental bonds and the recovery of rental bonds. This reflects a shift in practice focus that we have implemented recently. Previously, we have not been able to focus on this area due to its ability to drain resources. However, we have revisited and reviewed our position given the practice of landlords and agents, that we know occurs, to take advantage of most tenants, especially vulnerable tenants, and claim bond moneys.

Case Study

A reflection on positive collaborations

Sandra and her son Sam, who was her carer, previously lived in a Housing NSW premises in Liverpool for 27 years. An unfortunate incident occurred which saw Sandra and her son Sam becoming guests of her majesty in the early months of 2014.

While incarcerated, Sandra enlisted the help of a family member to help her clean out the property and return the keys to Housing NSW.

Eventually, when Sandra was released from gaol, one of the conditions of her release was that she was to stay with her parents in Lismore. Sam had a longer jail term than Sandra.

Sandra contacted our service because while she was incarcerated, Housing NSW sent her a bill to the tune of \$10,000. Sandra only contacted us in October, through the Welfare Officer, when the matter was due to be heard in NCAT.

The first action was to get an Authority to Act form signed. This was difficult to obtain because messages had to be passed on via the Welfare Officer. When the Authority was received, a request for an adjournment was sent to the Tribunal so more paperwork can be obtained in order for us to advice Sandra.

An adjournment was granted.charges. Evidence was still submitted in accordance with due process. Sandra had severe PTSD from having witnessed her other son being horrifically murdered, as well as other mental health issues. The psychologist’s report was submitted as part of Sandra’s evidence.

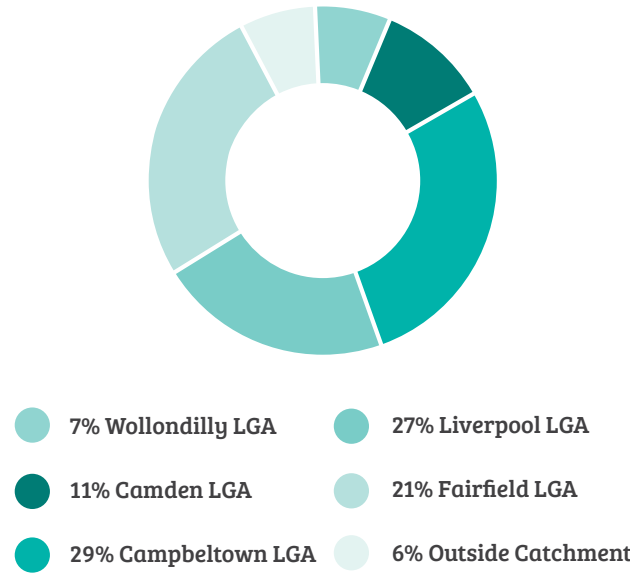
As well as submitting evidence on Sandra’s behalf, a request for a telephone appearance was requested.

There were many difficulties with this case due to the distance between our office and Lismore. Sometimes, Sandra couldn’t be found on her available contact number. Often letters had to be sent to Lismore to obtain instructions and relay advice.

Negotiations with the relevant Housing NSW office were carried out alongside the Tribunal processes. This method proved to be very successful.

At end, the claim of \$10,000 for repair costs beyond wear and tear was considerably reduced to \$3500. Sandra was happy with this offer. The full amount was to be paid by agreed instalment of \$20 a fortnight. The agreement was negotiated, agreed and settled before the hearing date in early November; which is about a month from the time Sandra first contacted us.

NB: All names have been changed to protect the innocent!



Our Gratitude

We acknowledge the people of Tharawal nation on whose lands we work. We pay respect to their elders past and present.

We acknowledge NSW Fair Trading for granting South West Sydney TAAS the funding in its current form, which has allowed us to do the work we do.

We acknowledge and thank our partnerships in the wider community including CatholicCare Liverpool and Fairfield. We also thank BITAS, SWRTA, Residents Groups in Claymore, Airds/Bradbury and Minto, Anglicare, Lifeline, Financial Counsellors in various services, Housing NSW offices in Macquarie Fields, Airds, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Miller and Liverpool, Newleaf and all the various Interagencies that we have worked with and involved in this year. Our work is never done alone. We wouldn't achieve what we achieve daily for our clients without your support and willingness on your parts to work together.

We thank Tenants Union NSW management and all staff for their unwavering belief in the TAAP network and for the continuous support to our service throughout this year. We thank the TAAP network "the brains trust" for the fantastic group that you are! We have had yet another challenging year but we power on in the way only the TAAP Network knows how.

We congratulate the staff, management team and the Board of Macarthur Legal Centre for the courage in the face of challenging times in 2014. We thank you for your support of our work that has tremendous positive impact on the lives of many tenants in our community. We appreciate all of you and the very powerful work you each do in your respective roles in the Centre and in the community.

Finally, after what has been a year of many changes, a special thank you and commendation is due to Douglas Lee, Melisa Coveney, Ben Connor, Anthony Watt- Bright and Livia Lu of the SWSyd TAAS team. Thank you for all your hard work, support and your eccentricities. Congratulations also to Susan Su of the Bonnyrigg

Independent Tenants Advice Service for your dedication to the BITAS clientele.

Let's do it all again in 2015!

Vala Olaaiga,
Co-ordinator of SWSyd TAAS



06/ FINANCIAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2014

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	Note	2013 \$	2014 \$
Revenue	2	2,116,912	2,220,481
Depreciation Expense	3	(25,136)	(27,506)
Employee Benefits Expense	3	(1,741,602)	(1,525,159)
Other Expenses From Ordinary Activities	3	(561,292)	(426,567)
Surplus/(Deficit) before income tax		(211,118)	241,249
Income Tax Expense			
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year		(211,118)	241,249
Other comprehensive income after income tax		-	-
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year net of tax		-	-
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year		(211,118)	241,249
Total comprehensive income/(loss) attributable to members of the entity		(211,118)	241,249

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	Note	2013 \$	2014 \$
Total Current Assets		1,430,076	1,734,690
Non-Current Assets		37,971	65,516
Total Assets		1,468,047	1,800,206
Total Current Liabilities		674,643	814,065
Total Non-Current Liabilities		54,431	36,050
Total Liabilities		729,074	850,115
Total Equity		738,973	738,973

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	Retained Surplus \$	Total Equity \$
Balance as at 1 July 2012	708,842	708,842
Surplus attributable to members	241,249	241,249
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Balance as at 30 June 2013	950,091	950,091
Surplus/(Deficit) attributable to members	(211,118)	(211,118)
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Balance as at 30 June 2014	738,973	738,973

Financial Report available at your request

Our Goal

“

Our goal is to provide holistic services to our client. We do not see our clients as problems to be diagnosed, fixed and sent on their way. We value them, walk with them and empower them to make choices that will enable them to lead more satisfying lives.”

Robert Pelletier

Director





MACARTHUR
Legal Centre

Supporting our community

(02) 4628 2042

E: macarthur_administrator@clc.net.au

W: www.macarthurlegal.org.au

Address

317 Queen Street

PO Box 798

Campbelltown NSW 2560