

Centre committed to social justice

Macarthur Legal Centre (MLC) is a hive of activity - whether it is a mother with a toddler looking for a way out of a domestic violence situation or a Centrelink issue to a people seeking financial counselling - the Campbelltown based not-for-profit organisation helps members of the community who can't help themselves. "We are about offering free access to legal services," Robert Pelletier, the centre's acting director, said.

Generally the MLC is the first stop to fast, professional and accessible advice and in many cases a resolution is found.

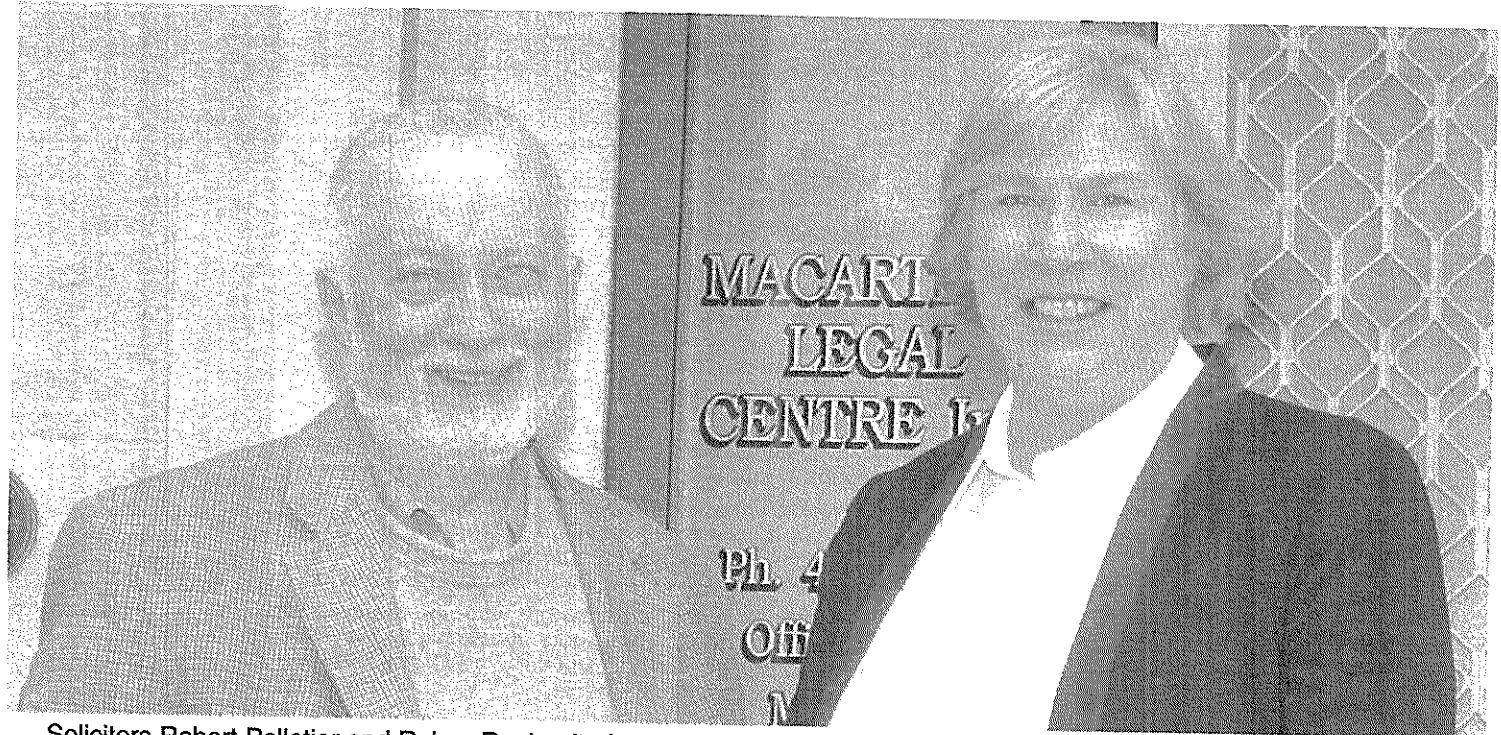
Solicitor Robyn Roelandts said services are wide and varied and with all of the Macarthur region as well as Wollondilly to cover, the lawyers and aids have their work cut out for them - they cover 3000 square kilometres and have 13 outreach centres across the region. "If we can help we will; if not people will be referred to other services," Ms Roelandts said.

One of the main features of the centre is the telephone advice line which is available twice a week. "Most of the public can call in and we can deal with anything from family disputes to sexual assault.

"If people find themselves in a situation and they don't know what to do such as domestic violence and they want to leave with their children, we can help; we have family lawyers to give them information ...they then can make an informed decision."

Mr Pelletier, who has been heading the centre for about a year, said it is reliant on funding and donations to keep their work going. But, there are also community minded legal practitioners who give their time freely. "We have seven lawyers/solicitors who are from private practise who give up their time.

"We also get a lot of students who are practising. We are providing access to so many people."



Solicitors Robert Pelletier and Robyn Roelandts from Macarthur Legal Centre, a not-for-profit organisation helping people access legal advice - there's an outreach service in Wollondilly.

The service consists of face to face or telephone advice. "We have an outreach service in Wollondilly as well as a phone advice line every third Wednesday between 10am-12noon," Ms Roelandts said.

Other services available include: Financial counselling; Disputes with neighbours; Dogs barking; Aboriginal services; Children's issues; Criminal matters, and; Tenancy advocacy. "We also get a lot of consumer disputes and rental issues.

"We also do legal education, by going out to schools and talking to different groups.

"We work closely with other services and are here to support the community. For many people we are the last stop."

For both Mr Pelletier and Ms Roelandts being involved in Macarthur Legal Centre, which was established in 1987, is about providing social justice. It's a third career venture for Ms Roelandts, who joined the legal centre three years ago. "When you get a very good outcome, you feel good."

Mr Pelletier practised law for 20 years, before becoming an academic - he has taken some time off from teaching to be part of the centre. "I feel very privileged to work with

these people who are supporting the community and who are doing something very tangible."

The Wollondilly outreach service is available at Wollondilly Youth Services 6 Harper Close, Tahmoor 4683 2776, the telephone help line is available the third Wednesday of the month 4683 2776 between 10am-12noon.

The general advice line 4628 2042 is open Tuesday 6pm-8pm and Thursday 2pm-5pm weekly. To find out more about Macarthur Legal Service call 4628 2042 or visit www.macarthurlegal.org.au.