NSW TRUSTEE AND GUARDIAN – THEN AND NOW

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In July 2009 the former Public Trustee of NSW and the Office of the Protective Commissioner and Public Guardian merged to form the NSW Trustee and Guardian. In 2010 an article appeared in the Journal outlining the background to the merger and the strategic direction of the new organisation.

Four years after the merger NSWTG expanded its presence in NSW by opening two new offices at Bathurst and Wagga Wagga. The full range of services is available at 11 offices with a further three planned to come on line in the next 12 months.

In any merger there is a great deal of 'behind the scenes' activity and some of the work in relation to technology continues. However our primary goals are to increase the uptake of pre-planning mechanisms: Wills, Power of Attorneys, Enduring Guardianship and Advance Health Care directives, and to provide best practice support to people under a financial management order, private or direct.

Just under 6000 adults over the age of 60 currently have a financial management order in place in NSW. With an ageing population that figure is set to increase dramatically unless people plan while they are still capable.

We are in an era of change and opportunity within NSW Trustee & Guardian. By 2050 the number of people aged 65 and over in New South Wales will have more than doubled, and the majority will live in the Sydney metropolitan area. This presents a challenge for our organisation and the wider NSW community and the importance of planning ahead for the future is now more important than ever.

In July 2012, the Minister for Ageing, Andrew Constance launched the NSW Ageing Strategy. This is a whole of Government approach to help seniors live healthy, active and socially connected lives.

NSW Trustee & Guardian is at the forefront of this initiative, an active participant with other Government Departments, community organisations and the public and private sectors to ensure seniors and those in their forties and fifties are well equipped for their future years.

A highlight of the NSW Government's Ageing Strategy is a commitment to increasing the number of people who have valid planning ahead documents and this is where NSWTG will play a key role. Working with the Office for Ageing, we have developed a public education campaign for the community on the importance of planning instruments, and a component of this will be the 'Get it in Black and White' social marketing campaign.

Already, our staff are involved in community education activities through annual programmes of events aligned with NSW Seniors Week, Law Week and other 'make your will' initiatives. NSW Seniors Week is a time when we can focus media attention on the issue of elder abuse, particularly financial abuse. We aim to educate the public to be aware of the indicators of abuse and how to put strategies in place as a preventive measure.

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A new telephone helpline was recently established as part of the NSW Ageing Strategy to help older people, frontline service providers, families and carers to tackle the disturbing problem of elder abuse. In the five months it has been operating it has received over 350 calls.

NSWTG has been a member of the Planning for Later Life Forum (PLLF) since its inception and the CEO has been the Chair for the past 3 years. PLLF is a peak consultation mechanism amongst NSW Government agencies, the non-government sector and community organisations on policies and strategies related to ageing, with a particular focus on planning ahead documents. One of the first initiatives of the revised PLLF was the establishment of the Planning Ahead Tools website (www.planningaheadtools.com.au). Since its inception the website usage has steadily increased, however, we are anticipating much greater visitation to the site following the launch of the 'Get it in Black and White' public awareness campaign.

Whether as Power of Attorney or Court or Tribunal Appointed Manager, NSWTG has a responsibility to place our clients and their needs at the centre of decision-making. As we move into the next five years we are refining a tool that will guide not only our staff but Private Managers and appointed attorneys under an Enduring Power of Attorney through the often complex and conflicted world of managing another person's finances in a sensitive and accountable way.