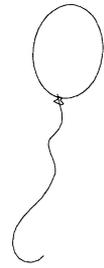


Cridlands cuts the cake



Staff at Cridlands had cause for a double celebration. The firm recently marked the tenth anniversary of its merger with Poveys and its fortieth year of operation in the Northern Territory.



From left: Alan Lindsay, George Roussos, Richard Giles (cutting the cake), David Farquhar and Danny Masters.



A selection of Cridlands staff who have completed more than 10 years service. From left, Gaby Vita, Lorraine Colliver, Ron Pearse, Deb Whitaker and Donna Makin.

Family mediation in the Northern Territory

Family mediation is becoming a popular choice for separating and divorcing couples who wish to develop constructive solutions to disagreements arising after relationship breakdown without going to court.

Resolve Family Mediation NT offers a Territory-wide service. The full time coordinator and senior mediator is NT lawyer Tony Fitzgerald who says that referrals to Resolve come regularly from the Family Court, various community organisations, private lawyers and legal aid.

"More and more lawyers," said Fitzgerald, "now recommend that clients mediate family law disputes, rather than slug it out through the legal system. Basically mediation reduces conflict by opening up channels of communication between separating couples. This enables them to focus after separation on their futures - and their aspirations for the future of their children."

Mediation uses trained neutral mediators to assist couples to systematically analyse

issues in dispute and reach an amicable agreement that meets their needs. If the parties choose, they may also arrange for their children to see a separate mediator. Issues of concern to the children which may have been overlooked by the parents can then be conveyed, with the children's permission, to the parents by the separate mediator.

During mediation the parties themselves decide the content of the discussion. That is, those who know most about the issues in dispute control the agenda, giving them a significant advantage over couples who engage in traditional court-based dispute resolution controlled by judges and lawyers (who know considerably less about the dispute). In other words, **the people involved**, not their lawyers, take responsibility for the resolution of disputes.

However family mediation complements - not replaces - legal advice to separating/divorcing couples. In fact family mediators emphasise the importance of seeking legal advice before and during mediation.

Legal advice provides a comparison between what has been achieved through mediation and what lawyers say is attainable through litigation - enabling couples to be fully informed before finalising the terms of their mediated agreement.

The Family Law Act provides that family mediators must possess a degree or equivalent in law or social science in addition to recognised mediation training.

Resolve has a panel of 14 mediators who are employed on a sessional basis (all have full time jobs in real life). Resolve is not a marriage counselling service - it is available for couples whose relationship cannot be reconciled and who seek solutions to problems arising after separation.

Those interested in family mediation or joining the panel should contact Resolve on the following numbers:

- Darwin 8985 0040
- Katherine 8972 1571
- Alice 8952 2833
- 1800 898 500 (NT Freecall)