

## **MEDIA RELEASE – WHEN CUPID’S ARROW GOES ASTRAY!**

The most popular day for romantics is fast approaching...Valentine’s Day.

Whilst Valentine’s Day is traditionally a time for love, it is also an unfortunate reality that the course of true love doesn’t always run smooth. In the first bloom of love, some questions that can quite often be overshadowed are what if it doesn’t last? What if there is no happily ever after? But to consider such things at this special time of year would be unromantic wouldn’t it?

According to Ms Clarissa Rayward, Director of Brisbane Family Law Centre, more couples are starting to ask such questions and consider the ‘unthinkable’ by entering into pre-nuptial agreements, particularly if they are bringing significant assets into the relationship or wish to financially secure their children’s future.

As Ms Rayward reports, “With the divorce rates so high, we are finding that people are becoming more savvy and realistic when it comes to relationships. We are seeing clients who are wanting to eliminate uncertainties should their relationship not last ‘forever’ by putting arrangements in place that deal with the distribution of property in the event their relationship breaks down.”

“Along with the legal certainty that couples gain from having their financial affairs in order should their relationship break down, they also achieve the peace of mind knowing that they are potentially avoiding significant legal costs in the future if they are involved in the Family Court process.”

Should however the relationship end, the staff at BFLC favour a “collaborative” approach where both parties and their solicitors engage in negotiation with a view to resolution, avoiding the Courts in the process and saving all parties as much stress as possible. The concept is nothing new, having been actively used in America for around 20 years.



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**a SPECIALIST FAMILY LAW FIRM focusing on collaborative law, mediation and out of Court dispute resolution**

This method enables couples to successfully resolve their divorce through a collaborative process, benefitting themselves, their children and their family as a whole. Further, both parties and their collaborative divorce lawyers agree that, should the negotiations not work out and the couple decide to litigate, the lawyers must resign from the case. This motivates everybody to work out a settlement that satisfies all parties. The method also encourages the use of other neutral professionals, such as a financial advisors and/or counsellors, (both available on-site at BFLC) to offer their expertise.

“The hope is to keep everyone communicating”, points out Ms Rayward, “which is the best outcome for all, especially when children are involved”.

As the Court system becomes more and more congested this innovative and more financially viable option is going to become more and more popular”, Ms Rayward said. “As collaborative law becomes more common and widely recognised I am positive that couples who are faced with the breakdown of their marriage will find it the more appealing option and maybe their first required point of call”.

A recent client of BFLC who chose this method to successfully resolve a complex property settlement involving many businesses and investments had only good things to say about collaborative law.

“By using the collaborative law approach for my settlement with my ex-wife it enabled all of us, as a team to work through the settlement with relative ease in knowing that both my ex-wife and I were working towards a common goal of reaching an amicable settlement. Brisbane Family Law Centre acted not only as my legal team but offered quality advice and real world solutions to what could have been a costly and lengthy divorce if a more traditional settlement approach had been decided upon.”

Collaborative law is an option available for everyone. Even the stars are getting in on the act, with references to the process in the recent movie “Juno”. Celebrities such as Robin Williams and Uma Thurman have also embraced the concept – quite a turnaround for Williams who once referred to divorce as deriving from the Latin word meaning to rip out a man's genitals through his wallet!

The process has been described as a kinder, gentler way to divorce and uses a “round table” concept so that everyone is seen as equal. It can be seen as an investment in the family's future – saving them time, money and emotional impact and it is hoped that collaborative law will be embraced by the wider community as the best option in family law.

BFLC has in fact noted an increase in the number of clients seeking to handle their family law matters through the collaborative method. As a result, BFLC has found it necessary to increase the number of solicitors practising at the firm.

When the Centre opened its doors in May last year, a financial planner was available on site to assist clients with the financial elements of separation and relationship breakdowns. Sonya Treble has been assisting BFLC clients in this area and is soon to join the firm in the capacity of consultant solicitor.

Sonya lived and studied in Switzerland and London prior to completing both her Honours Degree in Psychology and her Bachelor of Laws Degree at the University of Sydney. After being admitted to the Supreme Court of NSW in 1985, she worked as a Judges Associate in the District Court NSW prior to practising as a Solicitor for the Director of Public Prosecutions. She practised in the Advocacy Unit and appeared in all jurisdictions of the NSW Court, including the Court of Appeal, Court of Criminal Appeal, and the High Court of Australia. After concluding a period working in a commercially based firm in Sydney she moved to the Snowy Mountains and established her own general legal practice, S.P.Treble Solicitors which covered most areas of law. In 1995 she opened another legal practice in Coffs Harbour and lectured at Southern Cross University in law, tourism and business management. She headed up the Family Law and Estates division of a medium sized multidisciplinary legal firm in Coffs Harbour and regularly wrote articles for the press as well as conducting legal educational talk back radio programs.

Sonya was introduced to the world of financial planning at this time and commenced studying financial planning, participating in interviews, as well as continuing to practise law. On moving to Brisbane in 1996 she continued studying and working in financial planning on a full time basis and became a Certified Financial Planner. She worked in a major bank in both the Private and Business banking sectors, and became an Associate Director and Senior Manager of a National Accountancy and Business Advisory firm managing the Queensland sector of the Wealth Management team. During this time she was also a Director on the Board of Trustees of a Public Offer Superannuation Fund. Sonya has appeared on TV regularly, presented at numerous events and provided editorials and articles for magazines and newspapers.

Sonya was admitted to the Queensland Supreme Court in 2002 and established her own Financial Planning business in 2006 which has now grown into Legal & Financial Advisory Services. She specialises in assisting those experiencing separation and divorce in law and financial planning as well as assisting people from all walks of life with strategies for comprehensive wealth management, including superannuation advice. Her breadth of knowledge spanning the two professions provides a unique combination of expertise which she brings to her clients.

Obviously the aim is for the least financial and emotional strain to be placed on divorcing couples and Brisbane Family Law Centre firmly believes that the collaborative method is the best way to achieve this outcome and is certainly the way of the future in family law. A free information evening on the benefits of collaborative law is planned for 15 March 2011.

For further information on collaborative law and details on the free information evenings, please contact Brisbane Family Law Centre on 3862 1955 or visit our website [www.brisbanefamilylawcentre.com.au](http://www.brisbanefamilylawcentre.com.au).

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