

## 41/99 Anglican Counselling Centre

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

### Introduction

1. In 1998 the Standing Committee appointed a committee of enquiry to survey and enquire into the operations of the Anglican Counselling Centre (the "Centre") and, in particular, to consider and report on -

- (a) the number of persons employed in counselling;
- (b) the nature of their experience and qualifications;
- (c) what regulations/guidelines are in place and how they are monitored;
- (d) what insurance arrangements exist and what is the history of claims; and
- (e) the range and nature of the counselling practices and techniques used by the Centre.

2. In March 1999 the committee of enquiry reported to the Standing Committee making several recommendations, including 4 recommendations seeking to achieve the following -

*Having the Centre major on General Counselling.* In this context, General Counselling is counselling which focusses on assisting people to deal more effectively with issues and difficulties arising during the normal course of relationships and personal development.

*Requiring that counsellors of the Centre who engage in Clinical Counselling have professional registration or membership as psychologists, social workers or equivalent.* In this context, Clinical Counselling is counselling which is more specialised than General Counselling and is a more specific activity undertaken with clients who are experiencing more serious and/or persistent difficulties.

*Requiring that the Centre not practise Specialised Psychotherapy but emphasise other methods of counselling.* In this context, Specialised Psychotherapy is therapy which deals with longstanding behavioural and emotional difficulties and seeks to bring about change in psychological or personality functioning.

*Requiring that the Centre not be involved in cases involving "recovered" (or "enhanced") "memories" of abuse.* In this context, cases involving "recovered memories" are cases where a person apparently remembers abuse experienced as children, having previously no conscious memory of the abuse. Cases

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involving “enhanced memory” are cases where a person appears to recover additional forgotten details of childhood abuse, where the fact of abuse has always been consciously remembered.

3. In June 1999 the Council of the Centre provided a written report to the Standing Committee in which it particularly objected to the 4 recommendations referred to in paragraph 2 above. Subsequently, after considering the reports before it, the Standing Committee generally adopted the recommendations of the committee of enquiry. The resolutions adopting the 4 recommendations referred to in paragraph 2 above became known as the “disputed resolutions”.

4. The Standing Committee reported to the Synod in 1999 about the reasons why the committee of enquiry made the 4 recommendations referred to in paragraph 2 above. The report is published on pages 432 to 438 of the 2000 Yearbook and appears on the Diocesan home page at [www.sydney.anglican.asn.au/synod/synod99/counsellingrep.htm](http://www.sydney.anglican.asn.au/synod/synod99/counsellingrep.htm).

5. Subsequently, at the initiative of the Archbishop, the Standing Committee appointed a committee (Bishop Peter Watson, Mr Rodney Dredge and Mr Richard Lambert) to negotiate with Anglicare about the most effective means of implementing the resolutions passed by the Standing Committee by investigating possible full integration of the Centre with Anglicare.

### **Resolution 41/99**

6. In response to the Standing Committee’s report, the Synod resolved as follows (resolution 41/99) -

“Synod -

- (a) values the extensive good work of the Anglican Counselling Centre (“ACC”) since its inception;
- (b) commends the Archbishop’s initiative in exploring important aspects of an Anglicare absorption of the ACC;
- (c) also commends the Standing Committee’s ongoing process of consultation with the ACC;
- (d) notes the ACC’s deep concerns over the ramifications of Standing Committee’s resolutions about the ACC; and
- (e) notes the reported view of the committee of enquiry that these concerns are not necessarily justified;
- (f) requests the Standing Committee to reconsider thoroughly the 4 disputed

- resolutions in the light of these concerns; and
- (g) requests that the Council of the ACC then reconsider thoroughly their response to the revised resolutions of the Standing Committee.”.

7. Paragraph (f) of resolution 41/99 requested that the Standing Committee reconsider thoroughly the 4 disputed resolutions in light of concerns over their ramifications.

#### **Reconsideration of the disputed resolutions**

8. In December 1999, the Standing Committee agreed to reconsider the 4 disputed resolutions at a special meeting to be held on a date to be determined by the Archbishop. At the Standing Committee’s request, a small group of interested persons prepared a paper (the “first paper”) setting out the arguments why the disputed resolutions should be rescinded. A second paper was prepared by another small group which responded to the first paper from the viewpoint of supporting the disputed resolutions.

9. The special meeting was held on 27 March 2000 and the papers referred to in paragraph 8 above were circulated to members some 2 weeks before the meeting.

10. The reconsideration of the disputed resolutions took place in the context of considering the following motion -

“Standing Committee resolves not to rescind the 4 disputed resolutions.”

11. To enable the issues to be properly aired and debated, a special procedure was adopted -

- (a) The mover of the motion was permitted to speak for up to 30 minutes.
- (b) A person opposing the motion was permitted to speak for up to 30 minutes.
- (c) A time for questions followed.
- (d) Debate followed.
- (e) The principal speaker opposing the motion had a 5 minute reply.
- (f) The mover of the motion had a 5 minute reply.
- (g) Voting on the motion then took place.

12. In brief, the following were the arguments as to why the 4 disputed resolutions should be rescinded (note that no distinction is made between fact and opinion).

#### *The process*

- (a) The committee of enquiry was not well constituted since it did not contain any member from counselling

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agencies who knew about actual agency practice.

- (b) The committee of enquiry did not adequately inform itself about the Centre's practices. In particular, the surveys of the Centre's staff were inappropriate.

##### *The substantive issues*

- (c) The Centre's counsellors are well qualified and there is an extremely high standard of agency and in-service training. Psychiatrists and other medical practitioners regularly refer their clients to the Centre for counselling, including psychotherapy.
- (d) The Centre's counsellors use methods which are safe, are best practice and are used in similar agencies.
- (e) There is no evidence of substantial malpractice in the Centre's operation. There have been few complaints about the Centre's work.

##### *The consequences*

- (f) If the 4 disputed resolutions are implemented, a substantial number of counsellors will leave the Centre. Commonwealth funding will also be at risk. Low-cost expert counselling will no longer be available through a Diocesan counselling agency.

##### *Alternative Approach*

- (g) The Standing Committee's concerns can be addressed by a Code of Ethics and Practice which is binding on all counsellors and ensures counselling is only undertaken by those with appropriate training, experience and supervision.

13. In brief, the following responses were made to the arguments referred to in paragraph 12 (note that no distinction is made between fact and opinion).

##### *The process*

- (a) The members of the committee of enquiry were highly qualified and widely experienced from a range of relevant fields of expertise.
- (b) The committee's procedure was thorough and responsible. Conclusions drawn from surveys were broadly supported by other aspects of the enquiry.

##### *The substantive issues*

- (c) The committee of enquiry was accurately informed about the qualifications, experience and training of the Centre's counsellors. The committee reported

that some counsellors were unqualified *for the kind of counselling they have been practising*, not that they were underqualified as *counsellors*.

- (d) The disputed recommendations do not prohibit mainstream, tested and effective forms of therapy. But the dominant model at the Centre is controversial.
- (e) It is irresponsible to take the number of formal complaints by itself as a measure of the appropriateness of the Centre's practice.

*The consequences*

- (f) The implementation of the disputed recommendations would significantly change practices at the Centre. A willingness to approach these changes constructively and in good faith is the main factor influencing the way in which these changes affect the Centre's work.

*Alternative Approach*

- (g) The proposed Code of Ethics and Practice would not accomplish significant change in accordance with the intent of the 4 disputed resolutions.

14. After considering the arguments the Standing Committee resolved not to rescind the 4 disputed resolutions.

**Integration of the Anglican Counselling Centre with Anglicare**

15. In March 2000 the committee referred to in paragraph 5 reported that the integration of the Centre and Anglicare was feasible and would probably enhance the provision of counselling services in the Diocese. The Standing Committee subsequently agreed to the integration of the Centre and Anglicare. For this purpose, the Anglican Counselling Centre Constitution Ordinance 1963 Amendment Ordinance 2000 was passed to appoint an interim council for the Centre (the Archbishop, Canon (later Bishop) Robert Forsyth, Mr John Creelman, Dr Stephen Buckley, Mr Peter Gardiner and Mr Robert Stewart) to plan the integration and the implementation of the disputed resolutions.

16. In June 2000 the interim council promoted the Anglican Counselling Centre (Home Mission Society Integration) Ordinance 2000 which was passed and received the Archbishop's assent. With effect from 1 August 2000, this ordinance effects the integration of the Centre and Anglicare -

- (a) by providing that the members of the Council of Anglicare from time to time are to be the members of the Council of the Centre; and

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- (b) by varying the trusts of the Centre's property so that it is henceforth held for the purposes of Anglicare.

### **Counselling in the future**

17. Counselling services will continue to be provided in the Diocese in accordance with the following principles.

18. Marriage and relationship counselling will be integrated into the existing regional services structure within the Welfare Services Division.

19. Clinical counselling will only be undertaken by counsellors who have professional registration or membership as psychologists, social workers or equivalent, and requisite counselling experience.

20. No marriage and relationship counsellor will be involved in the practice of specialised psychotherapy techniques which involve "recovered" or "enhanced memories" of sexual abuse. Any cases which require complex psychotherapy intervention, will be assessed and accepted by appropriate specialist practitioners within Anglicare with the specific consent of the General Manager, Welfare Services. Otherwise appropriate referrals to external specialists will be made.

21. The family education and community education components of the Centre will transfer to the Diocesan Services Division of Anglicare and form the basis of a community education unit.

22. A personal counselling referral service will be established to meet the need for individual counselling services. Appropriate professional standards will be set for competence and experience and expressions of interest will be sought from suitably qualified practitioners willing to receive referrals. Negotiations will continue with the Association of Personal Counsellors Inc to encourage the participation of their members in the assessment and referral process.

23. Anglicare will arrange a formal review of the personal counselling referral service after 3 years of operation, by a body competent to undertake that work.

24. The Centre's training course will conclude at the end of October 2000 with certificates of completion to be issued in the name of the Centre to successful candidates. Anglicare does not intend to conduct a training course in personal counselling and negotiations are underway with alternative training providers to try to ensure that candidates who have partially completed the Centre's training course can obtain credit points for that work.

25. Anglicare will report to the Standing Committee in 5 years about the integration of the work of the Centre and, in particular, the matters referred to in paragraphs 19 and 20 above.

**Conclusion**

26. The process which has resulted in the integration of Anglicare and the Centre has taken much time and the Standing Committee is grateful for the work of the members of the committee of enquiry, the members of the Council, interim council and staff of the Centre, and the members of the Council and staff of Anglicare. It also appreciates that many Synod members, other members of the Church, professionals and members of the public generally have taken the time to write to express an opinion about the process and its outcome. In particular, the Standing Committee has attempted to be sensitive to the concerns which have been expressed but, unfortunately, not all will be pleased with the process and its outcome.

27. The Standing Committee considers that the outcome ensures the continuation of the good work commenced by the Centre, and ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to minimise the possibility of harm.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE  
*Diocesan Secretary*

1 August 2000