

CHAPTER 9

A phone called PAF: CAMP counselling in the 1970s

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The 1970s were a watershed in the homosexual history of Australia. It was the decade when gay and lesbian people found and used their political voice; a decade of collective ‘coming out’ in public life that enabled myriad private comings-out. Activists banded together to challenge negative perceptions of homosexuality in Australian society through media campaigns and submissions to government inquiries. Law reform agitation resulted in the decriminalisation of homosexuality in two jurisdictions before the decade was out, and laid the groundwork for most other states to follow in the 1980s. There was the emergence and proliferation of gay publications, venues and organisations that made homosexual people visible and coherent as a community. The decade opened with the formation of the first openly homosexual political organisation CAMP (the Campaign Against Moral Persecution) and Dennis Altman’s landmark treatise on homosexual oppression and liberation.² It ended with the defiant and consequential events of the first and second Mardi Gras demonstrations.

The activists of the 1970s recognised that the task at hand was not only to change the way the world thought about homosexuality. It was also to change the way homosexual people thought about themselves. This chapter explores the collapse during the 1970s of consensus within

1 This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

2 Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Liberation and Oppression* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971).

the New South Wales branch of CAMP about the complementarity of these twin objectives, and a perception of opposition that developed around which to prioritise. In the mid to late 1970s, a deep faultline developed between CAMP NSW's 'welfare wing', made up largely of those involved in its telephone counselling operation, established in 1973, and its political actions group. A so-called 'bloodless coup' in 1978 left the welfare faction in charge.³ In the new decade, Australia's first openly gay political organisation dispensed with its old name, the famous acronym with its playful yet militant edge. Instead of a Campaign Against Moral Persecution, the organisation was now to be known as the Gays Counselling Service.⁴

This volume documents the challenge the social movements of the 1970s presented to the long-established divide between public and private affairs in Australian life, and the new insight that emerged where the two spheres overlapped: 'the personal is political'. Equipped as we are today with this powerful inheritance, it is easy to recognise the political significance (as well as the pragmatic function) of social services established as adjuncts to emancipatory movements. It is clear that women's refuges and rape crisis centres, for example, were both produced by and productive of a feminist political consciousness in the period. Similarly, in the crucible of the gay and lesbian activist movement, the personal and the political were uniquely fused. This is not surprising, given the intimate matters of sexuality and kinship arrangements at the heart of the struggle. What is perhaps surprising to learn is the extent to which the personal and the political were prised apart in this early period. From the perspective of the present, however, it is possible to see that this fragmentation was ultimately productive, and contributed substantially to the movement's progress during the 1970s.

3 Bob Hay, 'CAMP Is Changing', piece drafted for publication in the *Sydney Star*, n.d., c. 1980, box 13, folder 79, 3, Gays Counselling Service of New South Wales records, 1970–1985, MLMSS 5836, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

4 The organisation is variously referred to as the 'Gays Counselling Service' and the 'Gay Counselling Service'. An explanation for this inconsistency is offered by Phone-A-Friend (PAF) counsellor Peter Trebilco: 'We were told by Telecom that we weren't allowed to be called the Gay Counselling Service but we could use the word "gays". And so we changed from Camp NSW to the Gays Counselling Service—because we were by that stage only providing telephone counselling services'. Peter Trebilco interviewed by John Witte (Pride History Group), Glebe NSW, 1 February 2010; audio and logs accessed at Pride History Group, Glebe NSW.

An archive of friends and factions

Most of the records of CAMP NSW are held in a collection comprising 19 boxes at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, labelled ‘Gays Counselling Service of New South Wales records, 1970–1985’. The contents list includes many references to the ‘Phone-A-Friend’ (PAF) telephone counselling service, including ‘logs of calls’ and ‘correspondence with counsellors’.⁵ As part of my doctoral research, I acquired permission to access the restricted collection.⁶ My project, ‘The Family as Closet: Gay Married Men in Sydney 1970–2000’, emerges from my own family experience: my late father came out at the age of 60 after 30 years of marriage and many secret relationships with men.⁷ In the logs of calls and correspondence, I hoped to find stories about men like my father, and perhaps even their wives. And there were a few. There were also statistical breakdowns of calls, one of which suggested that 28 per cent of male callers between 1973 and 1978 were either married or had been married.⁸ Another breakdown identified that in 1973, of the callers identifying as heterosexual (which were a small minority of 10 per cent), more than 60 per cent were female.⁹ Might some of these women have been calling about homosexually active husbands?¹⁰

The disappointment was that the ‘logs of calls’, though eloquent in their own way, were very slight, with often just a single word for a description, for example, ‘lonely’, ‘suicide’, ‘info’, ‘silent’.¹¹ Much more detailed were the contents of the correspondence with Phone-A-Friend’s parent

5 Contents list for Gays Counselling Service of New South Wales records, 1970–1985, box 10, folder 63, MLMSS 5836, State Library of NSW, Sydney, online catalogue, accessed 2 November 2017, archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110546966.

6 The Gays Counselling Service later became the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service, which now operates the QLife phone and web hotline under the auspices the LGBTIQ youth organisation Twenty10. The Executive Director of Twenty10 authorised my access to the records, providing that the names and identities of clients remain confidential.

7 I borrow the term ‘gay married men’ from the Australian organisation established in the 1980s in NSW and Victoria to support heterosexually partnered men exploring homosexual inclinations—the Gay and Married Men’s Association.

8 ‘Phone-A-Friend Statistics to 1976’, box 13, folder 82, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

9 Brian Woodward and John Kennedy, ‘Our Vital Statistics’, *CAMP Ink* 4, nos 3/4 (April 1975), 17.

10 Also of value to my doctoral research were folders relating to CAMP NSW’s ‘married gays’ group and clippings of articles about the ‘the married homosexual’. These illuminate understandings of the phenomenon of the heterosexually partnered, homosexually active man before the advent of HIV/AIDS transformed that discussion.

11 Log of calls to Phone-A-Friend, no date, box 10, folder 63, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

organisation, CAMP NSW, and with subscribers to its magazine *CAMP Ink*. As I quickly discovered, the Gays Counselling Service was the later name of CAMP NSW, so this collection comprised the records of the venerable gay political organisation itself, and all of its projects, which included the counselling service. This explained why there was so much correspondence relating to CAMP and *CAMP Ink* in the boxes.¹² It was in these letters that I found detailed stories of individuals' circumstances. Even after the phone line was established, many lonely and distressed people made initial contact by letter.

It is clear from looking at the records that CAMP in the early years became a clearing house for all kinds of correspondence and requests for information and advice. This stands to reason, since CAMP was the first and for a long time the only visible gay organisation in the whole country. Nevertheless, I was struck by the sheer volume of correspondence received from individuals struggling with their own personal difficulties relating to sexual orientation, and by the consistent warmth and generosity of each individually crafted reply. For example, in 1974, one of the hundreds of letters CAMP NSW received came from interstate. 'I've obtained your address from that terrific women's magazine *Cleo*', the correspondent wrote:

It has taken me some time to get around to writing to you. However I feel I must be honest with myself and admit that I would dearly like to have a close lesbian friend. I'm ... married, with a 12 mths old little boy.¹³

She said her husband's work would be bringing the family to Sydney for some weeks the following month. The letter finished, 'Could you please advise me what I should do now'. The secretary of CAMP NSW, Mike Clohesy responded:

It was beaut to receive your letter on Friday: I'm glad you got around to writing.

I'm afraid neither I nor anyone else can 'advise me what I should do now'. That's up to you, hard as that may sound. All I can say is that there are many women around who are or have been in

¹² Correspondence is held in various folders within GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW, e.g. 'Correspondence regarding membership CAMP Ink subs', box 5, folder 33; '1973 correspondence', box 7, folder 38; '1974 general correspondence', box 8, folder 39; 'Counselling correspondence local and overseas 1977-1980', box 13, folder 80; 'Correspondence with members', box 13, folder 81.

¹³ Letter to CAMP NSW, 14 August 1974, box 8, folder 39, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

a similar situation to yours. The solutions to the situations are many and varied. I think perhaps the best thing for you to do would be, when you get to Sydney, to come along to our clubrooms and coffee shop at 33a Glebe Point Road ... Wednesday night is particularly devoted to women. I think you will meet some beautiful people and have a good chance for a talk over things ...

Please don't hesitate to get in touch at any time if you think we could be of further help.

Love and peace.¹⁴

Triangulating these primary sources with the historiography of Australian gay and lesbian activism in the 1970s, it emerges that the question of whether CAMP NSW had anything of value to offer women was already vexed by the time of this exchange.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in the correspondence CAMP received from the time of its inception, from women as well as from men, the 'welfare' need amongst homosexuals was apparent. This clear need was the principal catalyst for Phone-A-Friend.

Judging from the collection, there were a couple of other galvanising factors. The first was the fact that one of the CAMP NSW organisers, Chris Stahl, had been involved in setting up a similar service in Sweden called Jourhavande Vän ('Friend On Duty').¹⁶ The other was a letter published in the *Australian* newspaper in February 1973 from the secretary of the Humanist Society, commenting on the inadequacy of the Lifeline telephone counselling service.¹⁷ She objected to the claims by Lifeline's founder, the Methodist minister Alan Walker, that 'only Christians are capable of helping people in need' and that therefore 'only Christians are allowed to work in Lifeline'. She wanted to know where that left callers who had 'no spiritual affinity' with Christianity:

14 Mike Clohesy letter, 19 August 1974, box 8, folder 39, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

15 Denise Thompson, *Flaws in the Social Fabric: Homosexuals and Society in Sydney* (North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 2–3, 55–61; Sue Wills, 'Inside the CWA—The Other One', *Journal of Australian Lesbian Feminist Studies*, no. 4 (June 1994): 6–22; Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 75–80, 91–100.

16 Chris Stahl, 'Friend on duty', 7 November 1972, box 8, folder 39, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

17 Lifeline had been running since 1961.

We need counselors with warmth and human understanding to provide moral support in times of crisis ... At present, people whose behaviour Mr Walker considers deviant (such as homosexuals) are not dealt with satisfactorily.¹⁸

CAMP contributed to the discussion that ensued in the letters pages of the *Australian* that coincided with the lead-up to the launch of Phone-A-Friend, winning much-needed publicity and even a \$50 donation from a reader for its fledgling service.¹⁹

The internal newsletter circulated on 14 April 1973 described the launch of the service the day before:

PHONE-A-FRIEND STARTED Friday, 13th April 1973. Our first telephone Counsellor was Ron A. and the Supervisor was Peter B.B. Chris S., Allan H., Michael S., Peter B-B and Ron A. celebrated the opening with a bottle of Kaiser Stuhl Pink Champagne. The telephone was baptised in the name of Jesus Christ Super Star, and named PaF!²⁰

What becomes clear from the oral histories of PAF's founders, recorded recently as part of the Pride History Group's 100 Voices project, is that the duly baptised phone was actually located in the Balmain lounge room of CAMP founders Peter Bonsall-Boone and Peter de Waal. Co-founder Brian Woodward recalled in 2010:

We started it off in Peter's lounge room, and then it moved to Chris' bedroom in Beattie St [Rozelle] ... Chris and I were living next door to each other in Beattie St. And then it ... moved between the 2 houses ... we had a very long telephone cord ... the houses had a common courtyard at the back.

He also described the early philosophy of the service:

We didn't actually set it up as a counselling service. We really set it up as ... somewhere that people could ring and talk to other gay people ... there were say 10 or 12 of us who were ... reasonably comfortable with the way we are ... The word 'friend' was really the thing that we actually wanted it to be. We wanted people to feel like they could actually phone us as a friend ... it wasn't

18 Mrs W. G. Weeks, 'Lifeline', Letter to the Editor, *Australian*, 27 February 1973.

19 PAF newsletter, 25 March 1973, box 10, folder 63, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

20 PAF newsletter, 14 April 1973, box 10, folder 63, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

a problem line, it wasn't an advice line, it wasn't a pick up line, it was [for] whatever ... people might want to talk about ... We didn't have any formal training, or at least most of us didn't. We had, I guess, a listening ear and common sense.²¹

These records reveal the mix of improvisation, intuition, informality and empathy that animated the early spirit of Phone-A-Friend, and suggest an underlying principle of shared past experience as a basis for help and support.

Phone-A-Friend in context

As Graham Willett describes it, the 'first wave' of Australian gay and lesbian activism crested with the national celebration of Gay Pride Week in September 1973, then broke into a turbulent swirl for several years before the events of June 1978 revived solidarity.²² But even as the movement fragmented during the middle years of the 1970s, its progress was sustained. Willett argues that the secret to the movement's success during this period was the 'action group model' that saw the formation of 'scores, if not hundreds' of special interest groups, most of them loosely affiliated with the broader movement, many operating autonomously within larger organisations such as CAMP NSW or Melbourne Gay Liberation. A group might be oriented:

towards a particular occupation (such as gay teachers) or politics (such as lesbian feminists or socialist homosexuals); [it] might work on an ongoing task (such as the gay radio groups, counselling groups or law reform organisations) or a short campaign (such as running a candidate in an election).²³

In this way a thriving ecosystem took root, and many fronts were tackled. Of all the species of action group that sprang up during this period, the 'archetypal' one, says Willett, was the counselling group.²⁴

21 Brian Woodward, interviewed by John Witte (Pride History Group), NSW, 11 April 2010; audio and logs accessed at Pride History Group, Glebe NSW.

22 Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 110.

23 *Ibid.*, 114.

24 *Ibid.*, 118.

CAMP NSW's Phone-A-Friend was not the first. It was preceded by the Homosexual Guidance Service (HGS) established in April 1972 by Sue Wills, who had just joined CAMP NSW and would soon become its co-president, and CAMP founder John Ware. Wills and Ware, both psychology graduates, were focused on challenging psychiatric views on homosexuality, with the provision of counselling services to 'troubled homosexuals and their families' as an associated program. Unlike the PAF collective, the HGS group included several 'sympathetic straights' and people with qualifications in psychology and psychiatry.²⁵ Its traces are slight in the archives of its parent organisation by comparison with those of Phone-A-Friend, reflecting HGS's lower profile and shorter life.

During the early to mid-1970s, counselling services were established in most states, with local variations. At the first National Homosexual Conference in 1975, Jocelyn Clark, who had worked as a counsellor for the Melbourne Gay Liberation Front (GLF), outlined the philosophy of Gay Liberation counselling. She spoke of an attitude of 'libertarian anarchism', of 'the influence of the anti-psychiatry movement' and:

the very natural suspicion which homosexuals have of mental health professionals, because we have been the victims of psychosurgery, aversion therapy, hormone therapy and all sorts of other harassment and torture.

But Clark noted that this philosophy hadn't served them ideally at all times:

Such has been Gay Liberation's attitude to professional 'help' that when, in the early days of Melbourne GLF, a member who was completing a social work degree offered his services as a social worker to the centre, the idea was completely rejected because of its overtones of professional authority. Later we were faced with the sad possibility that this rejection had contributed to the man's suicide.²⁶

When a Gay Counselling Service was established in Adelaide in 1976, a very different approach was taken. One of its founders, Peter Migalka, described the service in a 1977 letter that is held in the CAMP NSW collection. Its volunteer staff were described as 'fully qualified professionals with a range of experience in psychotherapy, counselling, clinical psychology,

25 Sue Wills, 'The Politics of Sexual Liberation' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1982), 85.

26 Jocelyn Clark, 'On Counselling or Personal Problems: Mine and Other Peoples', *Papers and Proceedings of the First National Homosexual Conference, Melbourne 16-17 August 1975* (Melbourne, Vic.: Homosexual Conference Collective, 1975), 67.

group work' who were themselves serviced by 'medical practitioners, psychiatrists, and social workers'. They trained collaboratively to develop special expertise in 'the delicate and sensitive area of sexuality, particularly the field of homosexuality and sexual (dis)-orientation'. Migalka added:

Personally I feel somewhat critical of gay phonedines which purport to offer counselling by unsuitable or untrained personnel. It is poor criteria because one is gay or a professional counsellor, or both, to validate assisting people who are homosexual or unsure of their own sexual proclivity. We have witnessed appalling and disastrous attempts of gays and professionals creating even more serious situations by their 'help'.²⁷

At least one disastrous situation is documented in the NSW collection—a statement by a PAF staffer in 1980 details a complaint made by an 18-year-old client regarding a counsellor who allegedly exerted 'emotional pressure on him by threatening disclosure of personal information entrusted to him to the clients' parents in return for his company at his (the counsellor's) home'.²⁸

There are references in the oral histories too, to a nickname PAF acquired in the early days: Phone-A-Fuck, because of the not-unheard-of phenomenon of sexual encounters developing between counsellors and callers.²⁹

In Western Australia, the counselling service was led by clinical psychologist Vivienne Cass, who later went on to author an influential theory of homosexual identity formation.³⁰ With CAMP WA president Brian Lindberg in August 1975, Cass gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Human Relationships. Their testimony shows that the WA service ran along professional lines and entailed both telephone and face-to-face counselling.³¹

27 Peter Migalka, letter to Bob Hay, 25 January 1977, box 9, folder 49, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

28 Report to CAMP secretary from PAF administrative coordinator, 7 July 1980, box 13, folder 82, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

29 For example, John Greenway interviewed by John Witte (Pride History Group), Wentworth Falls NSW, 31 March 2008; Peter Trebilco interviewed by John Witte (Pride History Group), Glebe NSW, 1 February 2010; audio and logs accessed at Pride History Group, Glebe NSW.

30 Vivienne Cass, 'Homosexuality Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model', *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 3 (1979): 219–35, doi.org/10.1300/J082v04n03_01.

31 Vivienne Cass and Brian Lindberg, testimony, 21 August 1975, *Royal Commission on Human Relationships: Official Transcript of Proceedings* (Sydney: Commonwealth Reporting Service, 1974–1976), vol. 6, 2112–123A.

At CAMP Queensland, counselling was handled by the Befriending Group, with a phoneline established in November 1974.³² Statistics enabling a comparison of the volume of calls received by CAMP NSW's Phone-A-Friend and CAMP Queensland's telephone service were published in two consecutive editions of *CAMP Ink* in 1975.³³ Even though the population of Queensland was less than half that of New South Wales in this period, the Queensland service received a far higher volume of calls: an average of 110 per week, compared with PAF's weekly average of 37 calls. The writer attributed this to advertising. Whereas PAF in Sydney was apparently not permitted to advertise in the newspaper, the *Courier Mail* put up no objection, so the Queensland service advertised daily. Another difference (for which no theory was offered) was that only 7 per cent of callers to the Queensland service were female, whereas the NSW figure was 18.5 per cent. Among the records of CAMP NSW is a later handwritten tally titled 'Phone-A-Friend statistics to 1976' that shows the percentage of female callers to be just 13.4 per cent of total calls examined.³⁴ More interesting to consider than the difference between Queensland and NSW, in this regard, is the extreme gender disparity these statistics suggest in the take-up of such services.

Gender dynamics

We saw that CAMP NSW secretary Mike Clohesy's advice to the female correspondent cited earlier was to visit the CAMP coffee shop on a Wednesday night, which is 'particularly devoted to women'. He added 'If you're a little hesitant... give a call to our telephone listening service, Phone-A-Friend'. The following month the same correspondent wrote again, this time from Sydney:

[W]e have only a couple of friends in Sydney and I find it impossible for me to visit the club and coffee shop on Wednesday nights as you had suggested. In other words I've no excuse for going out at night by myself.

32 Willett, *Living Out Loud*, 119; Roger Sawkins, 'The Brisbane Telephone Service', *CAMP Ink* 4, no. 4/5 (no date, c.1975), 22.

33 Woodward and Kennedy, 'Our Vital Statistics'; Sawkins, 'The Brisbane Telephone Service', 22.

34 'Phone-A-Friend Statistics to 1976'.

She said she had since learned that CAMP had branches in other cities too, including her own, and that she would follow up there.³⁵ Whether she availed herself of PAF as Clohesy suggested is not apparent. But this exchange of correspondence usefully introduces to the discussion the fact that men and women in 1970s Australia faced different challenges as they worked through questions to do with sexual orientation. In this case, the difference was to do with the gendered distribution of access to privacy and autonomy outside the domestic sphere.

Other gender-based differences existed too, for example, the experience and consequences of ‘coming out’. Writing about North America, Canadian sociologist Roy Cain has traced the shift in normative views of disclosure of homosexuality from the 1950s to the 1980s. He shows how ‘coming out’ came to be viewed as desirable in this period by mental health professionals, gay political activists and sociologists alike, and emerged as the ‘central political act’ of gays in the collective sense.³⁶ This ideology was certainly borne out in the language of CAMP activists in the early to mid-1970s, as Robert Reynolds has summarised.³⁷ Consistent with this discourse, what PAF offered was often referred to in-house as ‘coming out counselling’.³⁸ But as Rebecca Jennings discovered in oral history interviews with lesbians of the period, there was real ambivalence about the idea of openness as a form of liberation. She writes that for many women, ‘the influence of feminist ideas and activism in opening up new opportunities and freedoms was often more significant in reshaping their experience than the ideology of “coming out”’.³⁹

For this reason, and for the political critique of patriarchy offered by the feminist movement, many lesbians were attracted to women’s liberation groups, where several lesbian groupings emerged as a result, and where ‘consciousness-raising’ rather than ‘coming out counselling’ was the preferred modality.

35 Letter to CAMP NSW, 27 September 1974, box 8, folder 39, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

36 Roy Cain, ‘Disclosure and Secrecy Among Gay Men in the United States and Canada: A Shift in Views’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 1 (July 1991): 25–45.

37 Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 55.

38 Hay, ‘CAMP Is Changing’, 1.

39 Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 96.

The tensions within CAMP NSW about the place of women have been described vividly by Sue Wills who was co-president from 1972 to 1974. They emerged within months of the organisation's founding. A women's group was established in June 1971 and soon began meeting away from CAMP's premises because they 'had come to feel so unwelcome'. At a meeting in 1972, 15 to 20 women voiced their criticisms of the organisation, which included:

that CAMP really wasn't concerned about lesbianism; that the men expected the women to clean up after them and little else besides; and that a lot of men did not really want women there at all. In short, their complaint was that the organisation was sexist. More particularly, that there was a group of male members who disliked women intensely.⁴⁰

Around this time, a new constitution was drawn up requiring the election of two co-presidents: one male and one female. Nevertheless the tensions continued. Jennings sums it up: 'Although individual women continued to work within CAMP throughout the 1970s, the group's appeal to women declined and its female membership was extremely small.'⁴¹

We saw earlier that only men were present at the baptism of PAF. But in the early PAF newsletters written (by the Swedish-born Chris Stahl 'in a new language, Swenglish') in the lead-up to the launch of the service, there is evidence of a push to achieve equal gender representation. For example, in the newsletter dated 8 March 1973:

Male-Female situation. At present moment we are 11 male and 7 females. This means that we need 3 girls more to be able to start rostering a male and a female on the same shifts. I hope that the girls will be arranging for this for us, in their own interests.⁴²

The 'girls' seem to have heard the call because in the next newsletter it is reported: 'We have today in our group 14 males and 13 females'.⁴³ But parity does not appear to have been sustained. For example, in a typed list of PAF members in 1977, of 15 names, only two are those of women.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, a somewhat unsympathetic 'us and them' attitude

40 Wills, 'Inside the CWA', 8–9.

41 Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 79–80.

42 PAF newsletter, 8 March 1973, box 10, folder 63, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

43 PAF newsletter, 25 March 1973, box 10, folder 63, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

44 'Phone-A-Friend Telephone Numbers', 10 September 1976, box 13, folder 82, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

around gender can be detected in the following excerpt from an oral history interview with long-term CAMP activist and PAF counsellor Peter Trebilco:

Interviewer: It would have been a bit strange with women ringing in and men answering the phone and vice versa, did you have any problems in those early days?

PT: The men didn't. In fact the male counsellors always felt a little put down when a woman said 'No, I want to talk to a woman.' But we would always say 'That's fine, but if you'd like to talk to me my name is Peter, I am a gay man.' 'No I'd prefer to talk to a woman.' 'That's fine, Monday night' ... no I think lesbian night was Friday night ... Goodness, endless bloody problems [staffing] that. Because they want to be seen to be doing something rather more than listening to other women bitching, as one of them said to me.⁴⁵

Jocelyn Clark cited misogyny as a key reason for her decision to stop working on the phones at Melbourne Gay Liberation. 'It is not very pleasant for a woman to be cossetting a man with a problem, and suddenly realize that the problem is that he hates women.'⁴⁶

Welfare versus politics

In the mid to late '70s, people with professional experience in community health and welfare entered the ranks of PAF. Terry Goulden and Bob Hay were part of this new cohort. With mental health and psychology backgrounds, they came to hold key positions at PAF. Their perspective is clearly articulated in the CAMP NSW collection in the form of a conference paper, which they delivered at the First International Gay/Lesbian Health Conference in New York in 1984. In this paper, they looked back on the evolution of PAF, and acknowledged the challenge this new emphasis on professional standards represented to the anti-professional, anti-establishment orientation of the PAF collective. Yet according to Goulden and Hay, the influence of professional people and a synthesis of their experience helped lay down many of the fundamental principles on

45 Trebilco interviewed by Witte (PHG), timecode 84:03.

46 Clark, 'On Counselling', 67.

which the service could grow from ‘a small, face-to-face group of friends aiming to befriend fellow gays “coming out”... to a service organisation which is funded by government and the gay community’.⁴⁷

A clear picture emerges in the organisation’s papers, that this evolution of PAF was accompanied by the emergence of bitter divisions within CAMP NSW in the mid to late 1970s. Two opposing factions developed, with those primarily interested in welfare service provision on the one hand, and those who understood PAF’s and CAMP’s most important function as being political action on the other. According to accounts in the collection written by Bob Hay, the political faction was taking the organisation into militant territory:

They publicly aligned us with the alternative movement of the day, affiliating CAMP NSW with many non-gay organisations ... Those of us concerned primarily with counselling and welfare issues, saw party political alignment and the militant use of gay and feminist symbols as driving away the very people we wished to serve.⁴⁸

In May 1978, CAMP NSW split along this faultline. Within the organisation, this watershed was apparently later referred to as the ‘Palace Revolution’. The entire executive resigned and the vacuum was filled by the numerically stronger PAF personnel.⁴⁹

Denise Thompson records that tension along these lines had emerged as early as 1974. In March of that year, Lex Watson and Sue Wills resigned as co-presidents, as did Gaby Antolovich as editor of *CAMP Ink*. In their letters of resignation, each criticised PAF as a depoliticising influence within the organisation. Sue Wills, for example:

objected to the provision of ‘help’ and ‘communion’ for homosexuals being seen as the dominant function of CAMP, at the expense of the activities designed to remove the oppression which makes this ‘help’ and ‘communion’ necessary.

47 Terry Goulden and Bob Hay, ‘The Changing Identity of a Gay Counselling Service: Paper Prepared for the 1st International Gay/Lesbian Health Conference, New York 16–19 June 1984’, box 16, item 3, 3, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

48 Hay, ‘CAMP Is Changing’, 2.

49 *Ibid.*, 3.

Thompson notes ‘the prophetic aspects of [this] criticism’ in 1974, but acknowledges it took some years to be borne out. In the meantime, ‘CAMP’s political activities not only continued undiminished, but actually increased in scope and intensity’.⁵⁰

Peter de Waal, one of CAMP and PAF’s original founders, had led many of CAMP NSW’s political actions in the 1970s. In July 1978 he drafted ‘A contribution to the political debate at CAMP NSW’ for circulation in the CAMP newsletter. According to de Waal, the split within the organisation ‘reflected the current trend towards a right-wing, conservative backlash in the community at large’. He lamented the splintering not of CAMP’s energies, but of what he saw as the guiding philosophy that had previously integrated its welfare, social and political activities. He saw this particularly in the operations of the phone counselling service:

PAF in the past was an instrument by which homosexuals were radicalised and encouraged to make a break with what society thinks is good for the homosexual. Now, referrals to steam baths and bars are on the top of the list. This of course means that homosexuals who go to these places financially support their own oppression.⁵¹

Disdain for saunas and bars and other profit-oriented operations catering to gay clientele was an attitude established in the early days of gay liberation. From the start, the premises of CAMP had included a coffee shop, run as an adjunct to the counselling program. The aim was to provide an alternative to gay bars and bathhouses, seen by early CAMP activists as commercially exploitative. But maintaining this position took some resolve as the commercial gay scene exploded in Sydney through the 1970s and became the site of a vibrant new gay male subculture. After the split, the new executive decided that the hostility that had grown up between the movement and the emerging gay male subculture had to be routed. In an article for the gay newspaper the *Sydney Star* in 1980, Bob Hay, who was then president, laid down CAMP NSW’s guns on this issue. He wrote:

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Flaws in the Social Fabric*, 18–19.

⁵¹ Peter de Waal, ‘A contribution to the political debate at CAMP NSW’, 31 July 1978, box 13, folder 81, GCSNSW records, MLMSS 5836, SLNSW.

Perhaps we all need to realise that we no longer stand alone. Those of us who came to the gay eighties through the militant seventies often cannot really recognise the spirit of community even when it stares us in the face. At CAMP NSW we stand corrected and are prepared to join in that community as fully as we can.⁵²

At the end of 1978, the membership voted in support of the new welfare-oriented executive. ‘Since that time,’ reported Hay in the *Sydney Star* piece in 1980:

CAMP NSW has been identified by its members as a non-party political, non-religious, non-aligned kind of organisation concerned with gay welfare, community education and related issues.⁵³

By the late 1970s, decriminalisation of male homosexual activity had been achieved in both South Australia and the ACT. An interesting question to consider in relation to the ‘Palace Revolution’ at CAMP NSW in 1978 is whether its outcome reflected a waning sense of political urgency as homosexual law reform in Australia got underway. There is little to suggest in the records of CAMP NSW that this rationale was consciously in play at the time of the split. One place where the broader trajectory of legal and political progress might have been referenced, had it been perceived as relevant by players at the time, was in the presentation by Bob Hay and Terry Goulden at the conference in New York. To this international audience, they made no reference to the political context in Australia, even though the conference took place just weeks after the passage of decriminalisation legislation in NSW. The political context that *does* seem to have been relevant to the tensions within CAMP was the conservative backlash in the post-Whitlam era against some of the broader left-wing causes that the ‘political heavies’ in CAMP NSW had aligned themselves with—for example, ‘militant feminism’, socialism and the anti-uranium movement.⁵⁴ The welfare faction saw an association with these movements as a deterrent to many people who would otherwise want to make contact with a gay organisation in the late 1970s.⁵⁵

52 Hay, ‘CAMP Is Changing’, 4.

53 Ibid., 3.

54 Peter de Waal in ‘A contribution to the political debate at CAMP NSW’ noted that anti-uranium stickers and posters had been removed from the CAMP NSW coffee shop, ‘apparently because political activity should not be seen to take place there’.

55 Bob Hay, ‘CAMP Is Changing’, 2.

Arriving in ‘the gay eighties’

Australian gay and lesbian activism of the 1970s was riven with fascinating splits. Historians have devoted particular attention to the rift between the so-called ‘reformers’ who continued to align themselves with CAMP and the ‘revolutionaries’ who broke away to articulate a more radical agenda by way of a new group called Gay Liberation.⁵⁶ So too have historians charted feminist dissent within Australian gay activism and the emergence of a distinct lesbian politics during this period.⁵⁷ The contest explored in this chapter between the ‘welfare’ and ‘political’ factions of Australia’s oldest and earliest gay political organisation is less well documented in the historiography. One notable exception is Denise Thompson who accorded the contest, and its outcome, a prominent place in her pioneering but not impartial history of ‘homosexuals and society in Sydney’ published in 1985. According to Thompson, CAMP NSW since the ‘enforced withdrawal of the “political heavies”’ at the end of 1978 had become ‘just one more state-approved institution’. It had ‘[given] up any attempt to bring about social change’; its role had ‘become that of looking after the welfare of the (male) gay community, while leaving “straight society” to its own devices’. In her reckoning, in a liberationist sense, CAMP NSW had failed.⁵⁸

But an episode from the very end of the 1970s reminds us that the provision of sympathetic counselling, and support for people negotiating homosexual lives in a heteropatriarchal society, was itself a political challenge to the values of mainstream Australia at that time. Late in 1979, preparations were afoot for the 1980 Festival of Sydney and its Grand Parade through the city. In applying to enter a float, CAMP NSW enclosed a sample of leaflets for distribution that included pamphlets advertising its telephone counselling service. The application was refused. Festival director Stephen Hall explained in his letter that:

The parade is largely a family affair watched by tens of thousands of young children; in our view it would be inappropriate to permit any group to use what we hope will be a happy, spectacular ending to the festival for the purposes of propaganda.

56 Willett, *Living Out Loud*, 60–62; Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, 69–75.

57 Thompson, *Flaws in the Social Fabric*, 55–61; Wills, ‘Inside the CWA’, 6–22; Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 75–100.

58 Thompson, *Flaws in the Social Fabric*, 11, 31–35.

Even when CAMP NSW suggested they drop the plan to distribute information, Hall confirmed the refusal. He wrote, 'there are certain aspects of life which parents of young children may not wish to be brought to the notice of their children'.⁵⁹

It is possible that in 1979 Hall, himself a gay man, was under pressure from his patrons to keep the gays out of the parade.⁶⁰ The memories would then have been fresh, after all, of the violence and arrests into which that other Sydney street festival, the first Mardi Gras, had descended the previous year. But there is no suggestion of sympathy for CAMP's larger cause in Hall's letters of refusal. And if the views expressed in the letters were not his own, might he not have delegated the communications with CAMP to a festival colleague? This is the difficulty that gay and lesbian activists of the 1970s had been up against constantly. So real and entrenched was the marginalisation and stigma of homosexuality in Australian society, that many gay people were not prepared to disclose their homosexuality and join or even support the cause.

CAMP secretary Terry Goulden took up the argument with the festival:

We wish to inform you that we do not accept your discriminatory exclusion of our entry from the 1980 Festival Parade ... We are seriously angered with your imputation that being homosexual is something to be kept hidden and furtive. We are even more angered by the impact that this exclusion can have on the self-image of the many gay children who will be watching the parade and the effect on the many gay parents and their children.⁶¹

Despite an appeal to the Premier, Neville Wran, the Ombudsman and the Anti-Discrimination Board, they did not win entry into the parade in the 1980 festival.

59 Stephen Hall letters, quoted in Bob Hay, 'The Gay Walk, "Scaring the Kiddies"', last updated 16 February 1999, accessed 21 January 2019, pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-wb/19990228130000/http://www.ozemail.com.au/~vombatus/festive.html.

60 When Stephen Hall died in late 2014, various obituaries recorded that he was survived by his partner of 45 years, Vincent Dalgarno, e.g. Matthew Westwood, "'Festival" Stephen Hall was Sydney's master of ceremonies', *Australian*, 2 January 2015, 12.

61 Terry Goulden letter, quoted in Hay, 'Scaring the Kiddies'.

It was a different story the following year, however. The application was accepted and, along with the NSW Council of Gay Groups, CAMP NSW, now called the Gay Counselling Service, took part in the 1981 festival parade. Participant John Greenaway reflected afterwards on the experience in the CAMP NSW newsletter:

After [a] rainy morning we were surprised that so many people were watching—an estimated 50,000 thronged the route. The reaction from the crowd was very interesting—bursts of applause, cheers, waving occurred all along the way. Some of course from gay people which we happily acknowledged, but a surprising amount from what looked like straight couples or groups. One elderly lady almost jumping up and down, clapping and cheering, called out: ‘Good on you. Good for you’ ... the biggest benefit was to stand up proudly in front of 50,000 people and say ‘we’re here, we’re proud of this great city.’⁶²

At the dawn of the new decade, gay and lesbian people were taking their place in mainstream society and enjoying a profound shift in public attitudes. In this transformation, it is not possible to dismiss the contribution of any part of the activist work of the preceding decade: not the outward-facing work of the political activists whose concerns were systemic, nor the pastoral care of those whose orientation was individual welfare. Even though it had not felt like it to many activists at the time, the two agendas complemented one another very effectively. As Peter de Waal reflected in 2009:

After the confrontation within CAMP about the PAF issue ... that split became quite permanent. There [were those of us] who kept on working away on doing the submissions, the public appearances and all that and Phone-A-Friend went its separate way and there was a long period where we had very little to do with [that group] ... We didn’t fit in with what they were trying to do and vice versa. But ... it didn’t stop us from going ahead and doing lots of other things. So perhaps it was a good thing in some ways that there were two organisations formed.⁶³

62 John Greenaway, quoted in Hay, ‘Scaring the Kiddies’.

63 De Waal interviewed by Witte (PHG), timecode 119:10.

Impervious to the tensions within CAMP NSW and in the movement more broadly, the phone called PAF continued to ring. The steady stream of calls from individuals in states of crisis and uncertainty gave CAMP NSW and other activist organisations operating counselling services around the country a clear *raison d'être* during years when morale was fragile. Melbourne Gay Liberation Front was on the point of disbanding when at a meeting in early 1975 they decided to maintain the counselling service, prompting Jocelyn Clark to observe in 1975 that 'the counselling group is about the only part of GLF left'.⁶⁴ Even Denise Thompson acknowledged PAF's success in this regard:

In comparison with the rest of CAMP's activities, PAF was more continuous, much in demand, and the first introduction for many people to the 'gay community.' It was obviously achieving something, and generated a sense of purpose among those who worked in it.⁶⁵

By 1980, CAMP NSW had adopted a deliberate strategy to prioritise Phone-A-Friend as a community service and, in rebranding itself, to establish a break with the political past. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that during the 1970s, the personal gazumped the political inside what had been Australia's first homosexual activist organisation. The very existence of a gay counselling service was politically productive. Nurturing the welfare and self-acceptance of individual homosexual people was an inherently political act. It represented a serious challenge to straight society, and an important point of entry for callers into a community of queers whose ranks and collective power were steadily increasing.

64 Willett, *Living Out Loud*, 119; Clark, 'On Counselling', 67.

65 Thompson, *Flaws in the Social Fabric*, 18.

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