

CONVERSION THERAPY IN AUSTRALIA

The state of the nation

A report by

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for

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International



'I have been through conversion therapy including help from pastors, counsellors and Christian acquaintances, I have been at this attempt to change for 14 years. I am currently in a relationship with a woman who I love, but down deep I am in a lot of pain, I wish I was dead, no joke. Conversion therapy and ex-gay ministries have almost destroyed me, my family thinks I am now cured, but it is crap. I am 48, I have struggled since about 11, my girlfriend is getting ready to break up with me, when she does, I am going to leave and disappear into thin air for good.'

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The peak body for religious counsellors and therapists, the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia (CCAA) finally made a decision about gay conversion therapy. You wouldn't have heard anything about it though as instead of declaring the important shift in position from the rooftops, it quietly slipped under the radar when the revised code of ethics was uploaded on to their website. A couple of years ago in fact.

This might explain why the Australian Christian Lobby's (ACL) leader at the time, Lyle Shelton told BuzzFeed's Lane Saintry last year that anyone seeking help or parents with gay or trans kids should have the option to send them to gay conversion therapy.

'I think anyone who wants to seek help for any issue they might be facing in their life should be free to do that,' Shelton told [Buzzfeed](#)¹ last September.

'Should people be forced to go to conversion therapy? - No, absolutely not. Now, children — they are under the care and responsibility of their parents, so I think if someone's a minor, it is up to their parents. And I think parental rights should be respected.'

More recently there was a [move](#)² by some members of the Victorian Liberal Party to legally protect practitioners who wanted to help people 'change' their sexual orientation. Although quickly condemned by a number of members of the Liberal Party, the acting Prime Minister, Michael McCormack said he had '[no view](#)'³ on conversion therapy and the Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, consider it to just be a matter of differing opinions and '[free speech](#)'⁴.

Obviously the politicians and Shelton were not only unaware of the new CCAA position but also of the young people who'd [taken their lives](#)⁵ when forced into religious therapy by ill-informed parents, as well as the many harmful long-lasting outcomes others have experienced.

Had any parent, or adult for that matter, engaged a Christian counsellor to change orientation from gay to straight, as suggested, then they would have been breaking the CCAA code of ethics.

¹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/lanesaintry/lyle-shelton-gay-conversion-therapy>

² <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/gay-conversion-off-liberal-agenda-after-party-president-pulls-pin-20180416-p4z9ug.html>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/19/michael-mccormack-says-he-has-no-view-on-gay-conversion-therapy>

⁴ <http://junkee.com/greg-hunt-conversion-therapy/154885>

⁵ <http://time.com/3655718/leelah-alcorn-suicide-transgender-therapy/>

When the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) in the UK changed its position on conversion therapy in 2014 it was done with great fanfare, including a [media](#)⁶ release and a [position statement](#)⁷. No one was left in any doubt. Not so the CCAA. Why the secrecy?

To understand the importance of their change of policy, but also the reasons why many in CCAA avoid public discussions of the topic, it's helpful to know more about the tortured history of gay conversion therapy in Australia. This report takes us through the foundations of the 'ex-gay' message; how it came to be promoted by religious groups; how the movement failed excruciatingly; how ex-gay ministries have either closed down, rebranded or gone underground while ethical counsellors have stopped promoting 'gay conversion'; and how understanding how all this influences our next steps.

Don't get confused

But first – a word on the key terms. We frequently hear these days about 'gay conversion therapy' or just 'conversion therapy'. These are fairly recently created terms which unfortunately are getting a broader reference. An article in the [Washington Post](#)⁸ the other day is a good example. The journalist opens up the article with these sentences: *'The matter before the House of Delegates [Maryland] on Wednesday was a bill that would ban licensed health professionals from practicing **gay-conversion therapy** on minors. That pseudoscientific "gay cure" attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity through techniques that have included **electric shocks and induced vomiting**. It operates on the thoroughly discredited premise that homosexuality is a sickness or moral failure, and it has been condemned by major medical and mental health associations.'* (emphasis mine). There is no recent record of anyone being treated with **electric shocks and induced vomiting** in Maryland let alone minors. This misuse of terminology clouds and confuses the issue of banning the prevalent forms of 'therapy' and often plays into the hands of the opponents of legislation.

Yes, there was a time, 1950s and 1960s, when mental health professionals believed homosexuals could become heterosexual (converted). Their approach was psychiatric treatment, months or years of psychoanalysis and medical interventions as mentioned in the Washington Post article above. Medical interventions included barbaric practices like lobotomies, electric shock treatment and chemical castration. In some developing countries these forms of 'treatment' still [exists](#)⁹. Torture, starvation, beatings, forced rape, along with outdated methods of medical aversion therapy also exist in these countries as extreme and rare incidences of what has now become known as gay conversion therapy (GCT) or just

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/13/christian-therapists-stop-conversion-therapy-turn-gay-patients-straight>

⁷ https://www.acc-uk.org/public/docs/ACCBoard/ACC_statement_to_its_members_January_2014.pdf

⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-bisexual-state-delegate-wants-to-ban-conversion-therapy-on-minors-her-state-senator-father-disagrees/2018/04/06/f4e14b46-38f7-11e8-9c0a-85d477d9a226_story.html

⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-3098146/Exposed-Delhi-doctors-claim-cure-homosexuality-hormone-therapy-seizure-inducing-drugs-electric-shocks.html>

‘conversion therapy’ ([more about that here](#)¹⁰). From the 1950s till only recently these ‘treatments’ were never called ‘conversion therapy’.

However, religious gay conversion therapy (RGCT) is the most widespread and prevalent form of conversion therapy today, and the one that currently gets the most media coverage. A good example is the recent in-depth probe by *The Age* journalist, Farrah Tomazin, that appeared in all the major [publications](#)¹¹ across Australia. The vast majority of my report will be highlighting this form of gay conversion therapy within Christian contexts, religious gay conversion therapy or RGCT. Previously, in Christian evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic (EPC) circles this phenomenon would have been known as ‘ex-gay’ or ‘reparative therapy’ or ‘assisting someone to overcome their “unwanted” same-sex-attraction’. So, to be clear exactly what I’m referring to, I’m going to use the term RGCT for religious gay conversion therapy but when speaking more broadly and not limited to religious contexts, I will use the term GCT.

It should also be noted that within the religious contexts mentioned above, using the word ‘therapy’ is also misleading. What is given in the majority of cases is not therapy as we think a qualified mental health professional would provide, but a pastor or church leader giving spiritual advice, prayer or spiritual ‘counselling’ based on their study of the Bible, Christian literature and personal experience.

It’s important to focus on RGCT because RGCT is the challenge we face in the western world, and it is being imported through evangelism to other parts of the globe like [Africa](#)¹², [Asia and the Pacific](#)¹³ as some examples, where it is as damaging and harmful as here.

RGCT is based on an ideology that preaches firstly, that being gay, lesbian or transgender is unnatural, dysfunctional and against divine order; and secondly, that through faith in God, prayer and persistence these ‘disorders’ can be changed. Even though there is a growing acceptance of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people within liberal and progressive denominations, the EPC streams of Christianity have remained resistant. RGCT as practiced today can take many forms from formal programs, support groups, counselling, online programs, through to prayer and exorcisms.

For me it’s personal

My understanding of RGCT runs deep as I have been intimately involved, on both sides, much of my life.

My journey with GCT goes back to 1968. Leading up to the start of this journey, I’d come to the realisation I was a ‘sexual pervert’ and ‘deviate’ a few years earlier. How did I know? The

¹⁰ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2017/10/what-is-gay-conversion-therapy/>

¹¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/i-am-profoundly-unsettled-inside-the-hidden-world-of-gay-conversion-therapy-20180227-p4z1xn.html>

¹² <http://www.abbi.org.au/2010/06/oooooooooopswe-meant-you-to-cure-them-no/>

¹³ <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/religion/2014/04/19/australias-anti-gay-churches-shift-focus-asia-pacific/1397829600>

thoughts and experiences I was having: boys are not supposed to have about/with boys. My school dictionary told me *'Homosexuality (noun) - attraction between individuals of the same sex; sexual perversion resulting from this attraction'*. I was seeing a psychiatrist in my final year at high school after being increasingly confused and upset about my sexuality and this leading to depression. Thoughts of ending my life remained for days which eventually drove me to a suicide attempt. The psychiatrist I was sent to didn't feel that my homosexuality had yet become entrenched; he possibly thought I was one of the [15% some believed had hope of change¹⁴](#) and that there was a good possibility of me living a 'normal' life. *Thank God we've nipped that in the bud*, I thought. As he never saw me again after those sessions, like many mental health professionals of the time, he probably assumed I'd been another successful client, who married and had children. Some of that was true.

'As a "born again", "bible believing" Christian at that time, I thought that the acceptance or rejection of my homosexuality had eternal consequences. I felt cursed. I don't know how many times I screamed at God "IT'S NOT FAIR!!!"

My journey with RGCT began soon after that when I turned to God in the hope that He could do what the psychiatrist and my will power had failed to do: rid me entirely of homosexuality. In 1972, after three years as a 'born again' Christian, then discovering the charismatic movement and being 'baptised in the Holy Spirit' and having more 'exorcisms' than one would admit to, I put myself into a [residential Christian rehabilitation¹⁵](#) centre which specialised in healing from homosexuality, among other things. It was an experience of shaming, isolation, and practicing an exaggerated masculinity – but I wanted to believe it would work.

It's difficult to find the words to describe my level of desperation at this stage. You've got to understand, this was no longer an issue just about family and societal acceptance. It was an issue of whether I'd spend eternity in hell with the devil or in heaven with Jesus and all my Christian friends. As a 'born again', 'bible believing' Christian at that time, the acceptance or rejection of my homosexuality had eternal consequences. I felt cursed. I don't know how many times I screamed at God 'IT'S NOT FAIR!!!'

Two years after leaving the program I found a lovely Christian young woman in a country church who became my wife. I thought I'd found my miracle. For nearly twenty years I lived as an 'ex-gay', married, with children and became a high-profile preacher; preaching in Australia megachurches. Was I intentionally deceiving everyone? Actually, the person I was deceiving the most was myself. Denial, justification and mental gymnastics are the [survival tools¹⁶](#) of 'ex-gays'. To let any of those defence mechanisms slip means our entire false reality will come crashing down with devastating results for us and all those around us. I thought one day sex might bring me undone, but it was love actually. It did fall apart. 'Fall apart' is too soft. My world [imploded/explored¹⁷](#), the pieces never to be put back together again. Let me tell you about some of the immediate and long-term impacts of a RGCT experience.

¹⁴ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/230228883>

¹⁵ <http://alifeofunlearning.com/extracts/#tab-ba5ba41dc9698194a56>

¹⁶ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/11/ex-gay-contradictions-denial-and-menta/>

¹⁷ <http://alifeofunlearning.com/extracts/#tab-2330ae6f93ff29bf32a>

The ex-ex-gay closet

For many 'ex-gays', like myself, coming out is not like it is for others. Pride? What's that? Our coming out is clouded. Very clouded. It's a reluctant acceptance. We feel shame, a sense of failure, and often a subconscious belief that we'll go to hell now we've 'given in' to our homosexuality as we'd often been told. We're damaged goods. It's not a healthy place to be mentally; just like believing you're possessed by homosexual demons isn't.

We usually hide our past and it's not a conversation we have with members of our new LGBTI tribe. They already believe we were fools to swallow that religious stuff so why embarrass ourselves further by telling our stories of pain and struggle to strangers in a bar? We wonder, can we trust our new-found friends with our secrets? We've moved from one closet into another: closets of shame, fear and secrets.

'From my experience, working with RGCT survivors since 2000, there's a 5-15 year period where we are in our "ex-gay" closet.'

It would be difficult for us to talk about our past anyway. Many of us have PTSD issues and not all of us even aware of it. The trauma lies locked in a dungeon we don't want opened, fearing the pain, grief and anger might destroy us.

From my experience working with RGCT survivors since 2000, there's a 5-15 year period where we are in our 'ex-gay' closet. Well, that's if self-destructive behaviours haven't ravaged our lives, or that our crippled emotional state meant we couldn't connect with meaningful long-term safe relationships. And anyway, we've had it drilled into us for years that the 'gay lifestyle' means drugs, sex (lots of sex), unsustainable relationships and loneliness, and so the negative conditioning we've had all those years continues to impact us like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If at this point you are thinking as a RGCT therapy survivor, this is not me, then you want to thank God. From my experience you are the exception not the rule.

Coming out of the second closet

My coming out of the second closet happened around 1999, about seven years after the first. How that came about is another [story](#)¹⁸, suffice to say I found personal resolution, which led to an overwhelming sense of freedom and peace. The contrast was astounding. I finally understood what this liberating coming out experience was I'd often heard others speak of.

But where would I find others like me? I'd never met an ex-gay survivor; the term hadn't been coined. In fact, I'd never met another gay person from an EPC background for that matter. Then I discovered the internet. The late 90s and early 2000s ex-ex-gays were networking, connecting, sharing and beginning to find a voice in online forums. Unknowingly, Exodus, the umbrella organisation for several hundred ex-

¹⁸ [Anthony Venn-Brown, A Life of Unlearning - a preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith. 2016](#)

gay/reparative/conversion therapy organisations globally, had created the very thing that would destroy it.

I created an 'exex-gay' [yahoo group](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Exex-gay/info)¹⁹ which grew to over 400. Gay rights groups like the [Human Rights Campaign](https://www.hrc.org/)²⁰ began to give attention to the RGCT movement as it was being used politically against LGBTI equality. A few websites and blogs began appearing, counteracting the 'now I'm straight' testimonials that had been promoted by Exodus groups for over two decades.

I learnt a lot during those years managing the yahoo group, but more than anything else it ignited a passion to do more than support survivors. Something had to be done to get to the root of the problem.

An audacious goal

Being acutely aware of the damage RGCT organisations caused and seeing myself more as an educator than a megaphone carrying, street marching, loud activist, I initiated a strategy to see what I could do in order to see the existing over thirty RGCT Australian ministries close. A goal without a strategy is only a hope or dream.

The [strategy](#)²¹ was:

1. Tell my story. [A Life of Unlearning](#)²² became an Australian bestseller in 2004 and is now in its 3rd edition. It was the first gay conversion Australian story which is probably why I've had thousands of emails from readers saying, 'your story is my story'.
2. Create awareness about the philosophy, practices and dangers of RGCT.
3. Encourage former ex-gays to tell their story. Here is a small [sample](#)²³ of some of those.
4. Encourage former ex-gay leaders to tell their stories and apologise. That was challenging work, firstly tracking them down, developing trust and finally encouraging them to say publicly they were wrong. It would take Alan Chambers from Exodus another six years to get to that place. Here are [eight apologies](#)²⁴ from former Australian and New Zealand RGCT leaders.
5. Encourage gay and mainstream media attention. This was another challenge, as initially many thought the story irrelevant or unbelievable. I believe the first RGCT survivor story that appeared in the mainstream press was in [July 2008](#)²⁵. Since then there have been many more.

¹⁹ <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Exex-gay/info>

²⁰ <https://www.hrc.org/>

²¹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2010/07/end-conversion-therapy-2/>

²² [Anthony Venn-Brown, A Life of Unlearning - a preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith. 2016](#)

²³ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/05/testimonials-you-wont-read-on-ex-gay/>

²⁴ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2007/08/australia-conversion-therapy-leaders/>

²⁵ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2008/07/straightened-out-sun-herald-130708/>

6. Provide information and write articles that closeted people in churches can access on the [internet](#)²⁶.
7. Encourage [research](#)²⁷. People could criticise my perceptions and findings by saying it was all anecdotal. I knew we needed data. In 2007 I knew of at least 10 individuals who were either doing their Honours or PhDs in the area of faith and sexuality; a couple focusing specifically on the 'ex-gay' experience and others including it.

Was the strategy working?

Ron Brookman, Director of Living Waters Australia (LWA), the largest and longest running Australian RGCT organisation, but now defunct, wrote in his 2010 newsletter *'There has been a real shift in society lately. We have detected this through responses to Living Waters offerings, **we cancelled a conference recently because only a handful registered.** This year we have **fewer Living Waters groups and fewer people in those groups.** Our leadership training week at Collaroy appears to be **hugely undersubscribed.**'* (Emphasis mine).

Four years later they [closed their doors](#)²⁸. HALLELUJAH!

Haydn Sennitt who took over Australia's second largest RGCT organisation, Liberty Christian Ministries (LCM) made a great fanfare in 2011 when he commented about how he was going to organise new groups and set up new programs. In his [2012 report](#)²⁹ he was admitting he couldn't get the numbers. *'Liberty would sincerely like to run a support group for those with unwanted same-sex attractions, **however numbers thus far have never been sufficient to have them.**'* The report went on to say: *'**This year I met with approximately 10 individuals to discuss overcoming same-sex attraction. On the whole, those that have stayed the course and have got to the end of their time with me have seen a lot of good fruit coming out of it. However, in general, the meetings have been quite sporadic with most being inconsistent in coming to meetings and demonstrating a double-mindedness that has kept them from making real progress.**'* (Emphasis mine)

Sennitt was gone by July the next year.

Mid 2012 I was pleased to announce that [two thirds of the RGCT organisations](#)³⁰ in Australia had either disappeared or closed down. I knew it wasn't all my doing. Changes in society, the growth of the gay Christian movement and affirming churches also had an impact. Seeing RGCT organisations close their doors would only be phase one in the process, there was much more work to do yet!

Getting to the root of the problem

²⁶ <http://www.abbi.org.au/conversion-therapy/>

²⁷ <http://www.abbi.org.au/research/>

²⁸ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2014/03/living-waters-australia/>

²⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130512173045/http://www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/how-liberty-has-progressed-in-2012/>

³⁰ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/07/ex-gay-ministry/>

As I pointed out in my 2010 [article](#)³¹ and earlier in 2009, at an [ex-gay survivor conference](#)³² in the United States, we needed to focus on the real problem. At that time this was not a popular message. People were out for ex-gay blood.

'My belief is that ex-gay ministries are often not the cause but are more like the symptom of a much bigger problem. The real enemy is ignorance. That is, the ignorance that exists in Christian circles about sexual orientation. When the director of Exodus, Alan Chambers, claims that Exodus gets over 400,000 calls and emails annually from people saying they hate being homosexual, we have to ask the questions "Is Exodus the cause or only responding to something far deeper?". Did these peoples journey begin because of Exodus or is this just where these tortured people end up? Exodus offers hope for the "problem" in subtly disguised messages of "change". Ninety nine percent of these inquiries come from evangelicals and Pentecostals. We know the source of this self-loathing is based on an outdated view of homosexuality as pathology fuelled by a terrible ignorance of the historical and cultural contexts of scripture.' (full presentation on [YouTube](#)³³)

How Australian 'Ex-gays' fared in the media

'Some leaders jumped at the opportunity that I was providing for them. That is, to get their 'change is possible' message out to a wider mainstream audience. But it didn't end as they anticipated.'

One of the downsides of creating awareness about the dangers of RGCT was that journalists, in order to report objectively, would also have to present the other side of the story. Traditionally, in Australia, these ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy organisations didn't court the media and were relatively non-political; unlike their American cousins across the Pacific which had become pawns and fundraising hooks for the Religious Right. Even though the ex-gay ministries began in Australia in the mid-1980s there wasn't a mainstream article about the topic until 1990. The article appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald under the heading 'Guiding Light for Gays in Doubt'. The article speaks of Peter Lane, the elusive, but active, father of the ex-gay movement in Australia, [Sy Rogers](#)³⁴, and Exit Ministries, recently founded in the former Hillsong Church, Christian Life Centre, pastored by Brian Houston's father, Frank. Some ministry leaders jumped at the opportunity that I was providing for them. That is, to get their 'change is possible' message out to a wider mainstream audience. But it didn't end as they anticipated. I even gave the journalists the names and contact details of the 'opposition', confident that the survivor truth was more real and honest than the 'ex-gay' truth.

Moving into the Australian media landscape with a 'homosexuality is a sin' and 'you don't have to be gay' message in the late 2000s was challenging to say the least. Mental health professionals declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras had been going since 1978, and by 1984 homosexuality had been decriminalised in every state except Tasmania and Queensland. Australia had moved on.

³¹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2010/07/end-conversion-therapy-2/>

³² <http://www.abbi.org.au/2009/11/australias-ex-gay-world-clock-is/>

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-tYi1CWjiM>

³⁴ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2007/12/sy-rogers/>

What may have had some impact in the 1980s in a culturally conservative America was not doing the same in our increasingly secular or progressive Australian landscape. It was sad, pathetic, amusing, laughable, ridiculous. No one was buying it.

No matter how objective the journalists were, and how committed to presenting both sides of the story, ex-gay leaders always came out looking bad. They were particularly unconvincing explaining how they had turned from gay to straight, but occasionally had homosexual 'thoughts'.

There was only one documentary ever made about RGCT in Australia. It's called [The Cure](#)³⁵. In The Cure, Ron Brookman, LWA leader, towards the end tries to justify this 'thoughts' issue. He begins to describe how he recently noticed a young man's thighs. You can almost see him drift off at the moment as he describes the event. I asked the documentary makers about this. They said it was a very awkward moment in the interview as Brookman, while the camera rolled, went into some length about his moment with homosexual 'thoughts', which, of course, he rejected. Such an awkward moment that they felt rather uncomfortable....icky. Like when someone gives you way too much personal, unsolicited information. They couldn't use the entire conversation in the documentary as people would have thought they did it to just humiliate Ron and make their work appear biased. Even the small piece they did use always brings laughter from audiences, as the 'I'm ex-gay but I still have homosexual thoughts' message is amusing to say the least.

I had no problem believing what the documentary makers were telling me as several years earlier, when Brookman and I were being recorded together in a piece to be shown to students at the Assemblies of God Bible College, he mentioned more than once had he'd been [sexually aroused](#)³⁶ reading my autobiography. As I highlighted before denial, justification and mental gymnastics are the [survival tools](#)³⁷ of 'ex-gays'.

'locked in a complex matrix of personal issues, outdated understandings of sexuality, a fortified Christian culture and an unyielding belief system that is only ever questioned at the risk of losing one's faith all together.'

Some Australian journalists went [undercover](#)³⁸ for stories with different levels of [success](#)³⁹ but of course the ministries and participants came out looking unbelievable at best, charlatans at worst. Even though they may have appeared like charlatans to an uneducated public, those of us from the EPC world knew they were actually sincere and well-meaning people. Sincere and well-meaning, but locked in a complex matrix of personal issues, outdated understandings of sexuality, a fortified Christian culture and an unyielding belief system that is only ever questioned at the risk of losing one's faith all together.

³⁵ <http://thecuredocumentary.com.au/>

³⁶ https://youtu.be/EVc64qaX_w4

³⁷ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/11/ex-gay-contradictions-denial-and-menta/>

³⁸ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/straight-and-narrow-20090226-8j9y.html>

³⁹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2015/06/gay-conversion-camp/>

The most revealing and harmful articles about RGCT appeared simultaneously in the [Sydney Morning Herald](#)⁴⁰ and the [Melbourne Age](#)⁴¹, Easter 2012. Ron Brookman (LWA), Shirley Baskett (Renew Ministries and leader of Exodus Global Alliance Asia Pacific) and Haydn Sennitt (then leader of Liberty Christian Ministries) were all incensed their work had been painted in such a dark light. The ministries' newsletters told what they wouldn't say publicly. Well, I guess they could have said it publicly, but they would have been shouted down. Anti-gay people are always bemoaning the public opposition but allowing their statements to go without a response, would be like saying nothing about the ridiculous US gun laws when, once again, there is another horrendous High School massacre of innocent teens. It's insane.

Ron Brookman said in his newsletter response to the Easter article *'[Anthony Venn-Brown] the founder of Freedom2b, a same-sex affirming organization, repeated what he has said previously, that he will not rest until Living Waters (and like ministries) are closed down. Let us not feel threatened but take heart that we are seen to be a worthy contradiction! It is sad that while he claims to be a Christian, he wants to destroy a ministry that simply gives people who face ambivalence a chance to examine it and make choices in the grace of God. Does he want to destroy a ministry that enables Christians who face addictions, to overcome, or who are bombarded by temptations, to flee? Does he want to preclude Christians from embracing a wholeness to which they desire and aspire?'*

Clearly, they didn't like me. It is easy to see how they would [perceive that I was attacking them and their organisations personally](#)⁴² but as I'd said repeatedly 'The enemy is not individuals, churches, 'ex-gay' organisations or political parties; **the enemy is ignorance.** Change is created by focusing our energies on overcoming the latter instead of attacking the former.' Counteracting and deconstructing the myth has been a focus of mine for years.

In Brookman's statement, referring to me, he said that the Living Waters program was *'a ministry that enables Christians who face addictions, to overcome, or who are bombarded by temptations, to flee'* and that it enabled people to *'embrace a wholeness to which they desire and aspire'*. But Randy Thomas, the former Vice President of Exodus International had a different perspective. In his [apology to the LGBTI community](#)⁴³ Thomas stated that one of his greatest regrets was his promotion and participation in the Living Waters programs. *'I look back on my time as a Living Waters coordinator (eleven years ago) with the most remorse. Even though there is some good in this program, it often ripped open old wounds in the name of healing by attempting to manufacture an environment for the Lord to work in. I have to apologize for the times some people may have felt manipulated to bare their souls to a group full of strangers. I apologize for any pressure we, on the Living Waters team I led, might have placed on group participants as we tried to help them cultivate "authentic experiences."*

In his 2012 newsletter defence of LWA, Brookman stated. *'Sometime in the last 2 years a watershed in Australian society was passed. Homosexuality became normalized. Indeed, the majority of Australians do not oppose same-sex marriage. The above articles reflect the*

⁴⁰ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/healing-the-gay-worshipper-20120407-1wiav.html>

⁴¹ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/ministries-preying-on-gay-shame-20120407-1wif0.html>

⁴² <http://www.abbi.org.au/2014/06/conversion-therapy/>

⁴³ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2013/07/andy-thomas/>

state of the culture in which we live. Referring to our ministry as ‘an outfit’ and regarding as incredulous that some would still seek to change people’s sexuality, reflects an emerging dominant and demeaning view in our country. Short of a miracle from God, this will not change.’

In my view, I think it had happened way before that. But even with the writing on the wall, it was striking that there was little impact on their approach.

Speaking of watershed moments, the Easter article was also one for RCGT organisations’ willingness to enter the public domain and preach their increasingly irrelevant ‘change is possible’ message. It became too hot in the kitchen. *‘The three groups that Lograsso attended - and similar Melbourne groups EnCourage and Exodus Asia Pacific - all refused multiple requests for interviews, or to provide evidence or examples of their effectiveness’* The Age journalist [wrote](#)⁴⁴.

As Farrah Tomazin revealed in her recent [piece](#)⁴⁵ when she tried to speak with the Pacific and Asia leader of Exodus Global Alliance and the rebranded Renew Ministries, Shirley Baskett, Baskett declined to be interviewed, saying, *‘We have a No Media policy.’*

Ultra conservative Tasmanian senator, Eric Abetz, believes homosexuality is a lifestyle choice and if people switch from being gay to being straight, we should admire them for their honesty and courage. In 2016, as the marriage equality debate was going through another of its heated phases, he [blamed the media](#)⁴⁶ for not celebrating or honouring people who ‘come out’, switching from being homosexual to heterosexual. This is the same man who told the media that legalising same sex marriage in Australia could lead people to marrying inanimate objects, like the Harbour Bridge. Yes, he said that and the media [reported](#)⁴⁷ it. That’s the way it goes for politicians and ex-gay leaders.

Not only were the ‘I’m now straight, but.....’ messages undermining the credibility of the ‘ex-gay’ leaders, there was a terrible lack of consistency in their messaging.

We do/we don’t/we do/we don’t/we do cure gays

One of the most confusing messages that has ever come out of the RGCT movement both here and overseas has been their concept of healing of homosexuality. It is not easy getting a straight answer about if they believe people turn from gay to straight or not. Some journalists, not understanding the nuances of EPC Christianity or know how to speak Christianese, will ask questions like ‘Do you practice conversion therapy?’ Of course, the answer is an emphatic NO! (they’ve read the [articles](#)⁴⁸). They don’t even use the term.

⁴⁴ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/ministries-preying-on-gay-shame-20120407-1wif0.html>

⁴⁵ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/i-am-profoundly-unsettled-inside-the-hidden-world-of-gay-conversion-therapy-20180227-p4z1xn.html>

⁴⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/media-bias-means-people-who-switch-from-homosexual-to-heterosexual-arent-celebrated-abetz-20161010-grylij.html>

⁴⁷ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/aliceworkman/bang-the-bridge>

⁴⁸ https://imfromdriftwood.com/mathew_shurka/

In Jill Starks' article [When Faith and Sexuality Collide](#), in The Age in 2013 following the suicide of Damien Christie, the double speak is blatantly clear. She wrote, *'In a separate interview, David Hardy said the claims against his wife [Carol Hardy] were "malicious lies" and that she had tried to help Damien. Asked if his wife had ever told people she counselled that she could cure them of their homosexuality, he said: "Wrong. Only if the person wants to be cured. They can be cured of anything. I'm not saying they can be cured completely but they can overcome it, like alcoholism."*' Within days the Mosaic Ministries website had disappeared.

As Tomazin reported in the Fairfax [article](#)⁴⁹ when she endeavoured to get answers from the newly appointed Liberty Christian Ministries leader [Jackson Stace](#)⁵⁰, it was pretty much a cut and paste statement:

'Liberty is not an ex-gay ministry,' says spokesman Jackson Stace in a statement. 'Liberty does not encourage Christians to change their sexual orientation - nor do we refer to people or counsellors who would. We primarily seek to support a sub-group of Christians that can feel under-supported in church life as they seek to live out their faith.'

And further about Shirley Baskett and Renew Ministries:

A similar message is conveyed at Renew Ministries, which operates in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. The group's website insists it does not 'force people to change' but, rather, aims to 'release people into sexual and relational wholeness' through 'repentance from sin'.

Jackson Stace, the new pastoral worker for LCM, might need a history lesson on the organisation he's now committed to. When he and others make statements like *'Liberty does not encourage Christians to change their sexual orientation'* they should always add 'now' or 'anymore' at the end. LCM was always a 'change is possible' ministry. Sydney Anglicans who have backed LCM are famously anti-gay as demonstrated again recently when they foolishly [donated](#)⁵¹ \$1mill of church money to the NO Campaign against marriage equality.

The original leader was Christopher Keane. He wrote two books. Actually, the first was a compilation of stories and articles from his time leading LCM. ['What some of you were'](#)⁵² (2001). The title, taken from infamous verse mistranslated in 1947 to use the word homosexual for the first time in an English translation, 1 Corinthians 6:9. Keane's title clearly implies you don't have to be gay. The second was [Choices – one person's journey out of homosexuality](#)⁵³ (2009). The message in both book titles is clear and Keane's description of the latter states *'My aim in writing this book is to tell the story of how I broke with a sexually active homosexual life, as well as the process of change.'*

⁴⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/i-am-profoundly-unsettled-inside-the-hidden-world-of-gay-conversion-therapy-20180227-p4z1xn.html>

⁵⁰ <http://www.liberty.sydney/about-us/about-libertys-pastoral-worker/>

⁵¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/oct/10/sydney-anglican-diocese-donates-1m-to-no-campaign-for-same-sex-marriage-vote>

⁵² <http://www.liberty.sydney/what-some-of-you-were-christopher-keane-ed/>

⁵³ <http://www.liberty.sydney/choices-one-persons-journey-out-of-homosexuality-christopher-keane/>

'As a young 20-year-old Christian, being told I could never be gay and a Christian, I embarked on a 10-year journey going to every ex-gay meeting I could, reading every book I could be my hands on, praying every day, having every 'anointed' minister pray over me, till finally, after ten years of torment, I accepted being gay, let go of the shame and came out proud. But I lost what could have been some of the best years of my life.'

The next LCM leader was [Simon Riches⁵⁴](#), another who had left the 'homosexual lifestyle' and was now married to a woman with two children. Simon said regularly that people may still have homosexual 'thoughts' and 'struggles' but they should never give up. *'Don't give up. Don't give up walking with Christ and don't give up on your journey of healing and wholeness.'*

Don't give up? How many years is that, Simon? It's not hard to find stories in the RGCT survivor world of men and women who spent 20, 30 or 40 years of their lives doing what Simon is encouraging, who lived with a false hope that finally left them destroyed as individuals. The devastation on the individual and those around them is often criminal.

One survivor told me, *'As a young 20 year old Christian, being told I could never be gay and a Christian, I embarked on a 10 year journey going to every ex-gay meeting I could, reading every book I could be my hands on, praying every day, having every 'anointed' minister pray over me, till finally, after a ten years of torment, I accepted being gay, let go of the shame and came out proud. But I lost what could have been some of the best years of my life.'* But at least this young man did survive; so many took their own lives in this struggle. Some people have a lot to answer for.

The next leader at LCM, Haydn Sennitt, went to great lengths to sanitise their site in 2012, after they were consistently criticised for preaching the 'God wants you to be straight' message. You'll see from this Wayback [snapshot⁵⁵](#) how the list of 'What Liberty Does Not Do' including **'we do not advocate sexual orientation change'** is essentially a reaction to the things LCM was criticised of through media articles and [appearances⁵⁶](#) etc..

What Sennitt put on the website was one thing, but behind the scenes he talked about what he really believed. The 'What We Don't Do' list on the LCM was a smokescreen to take the pressure off.

Sennitt declared in his lengthy [testimonial⁵⁷](#) *'No one is born gay. No one can be a gay Christian because God has made us for heterosexual sexual unity. Jesus, His Father, and the Holy Spirit can heal and change people and it's not just me. There's no excuse for failing to trust God because He does transform'*.

⁵⁴ https://sydneyanglicans.net/news/self_destructive_life_ends_in_light

⁵⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140107113518/http://www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/>

⁵⁶ <https://youtu.be/3Ke5vIKg8oc>

⁵⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20160615162504/http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/haydn-sennitt-p1631.php>

When Alan Chambers, the leader of Exodus International at the time, made the announcement at the 2012 conference that they no longer believed in reparative therapy, Sennitt was incensed, and wrote on the LWA [blog](#)⁵⁸:

'Within Exodus and its affiliates there are many people whom I have a close and incredibly cordial relationships, such as Shirley Baskett of Exodus Asia-Pacific. Not all, but many believe that change in sexual desire is possible and are living proof of it, as exceptional as that is; as such it is no secret that many regional and affiliated leaders are at odds with the new direction pioneered by Chambers and believe that it is not representative of their own position.'

[Allan Starr](#)⁵⁹, was the next pastoral worker at LCM, after Sennitt's resignation in 2013. Starr, a straight, non-ex-gay, began taking the organisation into a celibacy model, [no longer 'pray the gay away' but 'gay without the lay'](#)⁶⁰. He did believe however that in exceptional circumstances miracles happened. As he stated in a letter in [Eternity](#)⁶¹ magazine. *'Haydn has experienced remarkable change in his own life, which is a wonderful testimony to God's grace and power. However, we cannot prescribe the healing other people should experience. I know two people personally who have experienced miraculous healing...'* The miraculous healing that is so frequently presented is actually nothing more than what I've called ['situational heterosexuality'](#)⁶²; a level of functionality by a homosexual person within a heterosexual marriage. This is not a change in orientation however.

Sennitt attacked Starr and the organisation [publicly](#)⁶³.

'I am grieved that this great ministry that I once worked for has moved in this direction. It was never set up to be what it is acting like now, and it is letting down the people who are seeking its help. It grieves me to no end to see that it has come to this and that I am writing a post like this. It's even more lamentable to see that I have even been so horribly misconstrued by my successor; with all due respect to him, he has not had to personally wrestle with such issues; neither has he prior experience in such a ministry.'

And when Allan Starr resigned, Sennitt became a little nastier:

'On the bright side, I have heard that today is (officially) the last working day of my successor at Liberty Christian Ministries. No one has done more to dismantle all my hard work at that organisation and promoted the satanic lie that people are born gay, must remain in same-sex attraction, and that God cannot heal and deliver people from it than this individual. My enemies always did that, but never did I ever expect my successor to do so and he has been a traitor to the cause of those seeking blessing and healing for same-sex attracted people. His stance and that of his puppet masters has been a position very much against the spirit of Liberty and the reason for which it began in the first place.'

⁵⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130410184459/http://www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/exodus-changing/>

⁵⁹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2013/12/liberty-christian-ministries-3/>

⁶⁰ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2015/03/is-celibacy-the-new-ex-gay/>

⁶¹ https://issuu.com/biblesocietyau/docs/eternity_60_all_low_res_final

⁶² <http://www.abbi.org.au/2010/04/situational-heterosexuality/>

⁶³ https://issuu.com/biblesocietyau/docs/e59_web_version/22

'They may have been there for weddings and births, but we were there for the break-ups, divorces and funerals.'

Ron Brookman had no problem stating his position on the possibility of change from gay to straight in his newsletter response to the Easter [Sydney Morning Herald](#)⁶⁴ and [The Age](#)⁶⁵ articles or before a [Senate Same-Sex Marriage Inquiry](#)⁶⁶ in 2012 when he told the committee ['For over 30 years I was homosexual' and that he had experienced a 'transformation of my sexuality to heterosexuality'](#)⁶⁷.

In the Living Waters April 2012 newsletter Brookman said:

'We have seen many men who experienced deepset homosexuality gradually be freed to experience heterosexual desire, and in turn, marry, and father children! There is a great sense of joy and gratitude to God when the Living Waters family attends weddings, whether of those who have overcome same sex attraction, or hetero lusts and compulsions that would have precluded marriage. More joy occurs when we celebrate the birth of children into whole-enough families, which could not have existed without the program!'

They may have been there for weddings and births, but we were there for the break-ups, divorces and funerals.

A wife of a 'former homosexual' wrote after learning what Brookman had said before the Marriage Equality Senate Inquiry: *My story... I am straight and I was married to a closeted gay Christian man. This is a scenario that occurs over and over again in the Christian world. The gay man or woman has heard all their lives from the pulpit that they are an "abomination". Mostly there is never even a distinction made between same-sex attraction/orientation and same-sex behaviour. So gay Christians learn to hide, to never be authentic, to never reveal their struggles. They marry a person of the opposite sex because that's what is expected. This is a marriage doomed to failure. The unsuspecting straight partner knows something is wrong but can't work out what. The gay partner eventually finds every excuse in the book to avoid intimacy and most often also becomes emotionally distant and detached, depressed and anxious. The straight partner has lost not only an intimate partner but also a friend and companion, and their self-esteem is quite often shattered in this facade of a marriage.*

I'm sad for Ron Brookman's wife, and for the wives (and children if these marriages don't make it) of the other men he talks about in this interview. I'm sad for everyone who will believe what he says. I'm sad for myself... separated, now divorced from my Christian, closeted, gay-in-denial ex-husband (also in ministry). I'm sad for my ex-husband's first wife and children. I'm sad that he quite possibly will do this again to a 3rd woman because of fear and shame, and because of messages like this one from Ron Brookman that say that it's

⁶⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/healing-the-gay-worshipper-20120407-1wiav.html>

⁶⁵ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/ministries-preying-on-gay-shame-20120407-1wif0.html>

⁶⁶ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/05/ron-brookman-marriage-equality/>

⁶⁷ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2010-13/marriageequality2012/hearings/040512

possible to be a “former homosexual”. I support honesty, authenticity, and integrity. And... I’m very very sad for my ex-husband, and for all the unnecessary anxiety, depression, fear and shame that keeps him in the closet.’

In [Mamamia](#)⁶⁸ last year, a writer and researcher, told her story of what it was like in an EPC church and of her former husband who came out after eleven years in a heterosexual relationship: *“Attending the second wedding of a friend, I was seated near my former church youth minister. I hadn’t seen him for over ten years. He was drunk. I asked if he knew that my husband had come out. ‘Oh yes’, he told me, enthused. ‘We knew that he was gay all along. We just hoped that you could straighten him out.’ When the leadership endorsed our relationship with the intention that somehow, my heterosexuality could ‘straighten out’ my gay husband, I was seventeen years old.*

*Our church had programs in place for gay people, believing they were made and not born (for gay men, this was the result of an over-bearing mother, so this particular prejudice had the benefit of killing two despised groups with one stone). **There was a program called ‘Exodus’, which claimed to cure gay people who entered the church.** What it did, in actuality, was accentuate shame and require gay people to either commit to lifelong celibacy or a heterosexual marriage, without regard for the impact of this on any of the families involved, or their children. **Men would attest they had been cured of their homosexuality, and were now living in heterosexual marriages and having children.***

*.....both my sister and I were told God had made his will known to the leadership, and **both of us, inexperienced in relationships, unknowingly married gay men.** My husband was in the church, hoping the shame he felt about his sexuality, coming from a conservative farming family of many generations, could be relieved by a miraculous encounter with God.*

The day I found out my husband was gay, we had attended a wedding. I had been aware, listening to the familiar vows, that my heart still held these promises for our relationship: in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, until death us do part. But I sensed my husband had withdrawn from our relationship. When I found a letter he had written to a gay lover, which detailed the torment of his dilemma in being married to me, I knew right away that our marriage was over, but I was utterly grief-stricken.

*The expectation in our church was that I would be disgusted by the revelation of my husband’s gay identity, that I would spurn him and erase any happiness or joy we had found together from my history. I was treated like an outcast for failing to have this attitude. **I attended a support group for other wives whose husbands had come out, only to find it was overwhelmingly attended by Christians, at a ratio of about 10:2.** The level of revulsion as the women talked about their former partners – often also the fathers of their children – was intense.*

***A matter of weeks after my husband came out, my sister’s husband did the same.** Conscious of his elderly parents who had raised all their children in the church, he additionally had to deal with being a father to two small children, my niece and nephew. **Deeply struggling with unsolvable dilemmas, he tried conversion therapy.** (emphasis mine).*

⁶⁸ <https://www.mamamia.com.au/women-who-married-gay-men/>

And the funerals? We will never be able to actually count the cost of [lives lost](#)⁶⁹ because of sexual orientation/faith conflict and the collateral damage from RGCT; it has been a silent, unacknowledged genocide.

The personal torment Damien Christie experienced had been [told](#)⁷⁰ in The Age, in 2012 and a year later dedicated an [article](#)⁷¹ to his subsequent suicide.

A RGCT therapy survivor Andrew, told me about three young men (aged 18, 23 and 26) who suicided in the space of two years in a prominent Assemblies of God church he used to attend in Melbourne.

Steve from Brisbane told me: *'In short, I was trapped for 10 years in the Pentecostal church and three times was subjected to reparative therapy through Ex-gay programs run by Exodus (Peter Lane). The experience was devastating and I am lucky to be alive today....sadly several of my gay friends took their own lives.'*

When survivor Matt contacted me through Facebook, after reading my autobiography, he wrote in a PM: *'I just wanted you to know that you are an inspiration to me. Reading A Life of Unlearning assisted my mental health and acceptance for myself in a tangible way. I used to be on six antipsychotic drugs and now I'm only on one mild antidepressant. Thank you. It truly did help. I've always been taught that God hates me. **I made a lot of friends in conversion therapy. Out of forty, only six are still alive (one died naturally, the rest suicide.)** Your book gave me hope and let me see a truer Christ.'* (emphasis mine).

Back to the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia

In the 2012 Christmas newsletter of Liberty Inc., Brisbane (not to be confused with LCM, Sydney), leader and counsellor, [Paul Wegner](#)⁷² told his readers:

'Recently, we had the wind knocked out of our sails when CCAA strongly requested Liberty Inc immediately take down our website as they believe the wording on our website may offend some people who may perceive the comments to be judgemental and harmful. CCAA does not support "judgemental" advertising. The offending words that needed to be changed were "recovering from", and "sexual brokenness" and "same-sex attraction". As you will notice, we have complied with their request. You'll notice our new slogan "to foster the freedom of relational and sexual wholeness ...".'

Reading the newsletter in 2012 I wondered what had prompted the CCAA to take this action. There were many sites that used wording like Liberty Inc's and much worse. Maybe it was that Paul Wegner was registered with the CCAA whereas others were independent, unqualified RGCT ministries and someone took exception with the tone of the Liberty Inc.

⁶⁹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2015/09/lgbt-religious-suicide/>

⁷⁰ <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/ministries-preying-on-gay-shame-20120407-1wif0.html>

⁷¹ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/when-faith-and-sexuality-collide-20130413-2hskc.html>

⁷² <https://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/restoring-a-marriage-pauls-story-p1885.php>

website. Wegner, a confessing, married, ex-gay believes in change to heterosexuality, although he [has made it clear](#)⁷³ on numerous occasions that he only works with people who have 'unwanted' same sex attraction. According to the new CCAA guidelines however, he can't work with people who, because of religious culture and pressures, want to 'become' heterosexual.

Liberty Inc. may have changed some wording on their site to comply but the [books](#)⁷⁴, DVD's and [articles](#)⁷⁵ tell a different story. The promoted DVD '[Such were some of you](#)⁷⁶' says the people in the documentary '*....had found such a measure of healing from the brokenness and strongholds associated with what we now call homosexuality that they no longer considered themselves homosexual, nor did they act in that way. Such Were Some of You features interviews with a cloud of present-day witnesses who testify to the same life-transforming power of Jesus Christ. They describe the development of their same-sex attractions, what the gay lifestyle was like, what their conversion process was like, and the various ways that Jesus has brought healing to their broken places. Such Were Some of You lays out the facts about healing homosexual confusion and rejoices in the reality that Jesus Christ can heal anyone from anything while providing grace for the journey.*' The documentary is produced by Pure Passion Media, which would now be the largest clearing house for 'I once was gay' testimonials. Their YouTube [playlists](#)⁷⁷ are extensive.

Anyone from the Exodus International decades (1976-2013) will recognise authors listed on the Liberty Inc site such as Joe Dallas and Alan Medinger as standard recommendations for same sex attracted Christians desperately looking for change. Shirley Baskett's latest offering 'C-Change' is promoted. *C-Change is 16 stories of people who have left homosexuality behind or who have had families impacted by someone who is same-sex attracted.*'

None of the above complies with the new CCAA code of ethics. Even though Wegner is [no longer](#)⁷⁸ involved in the day to day running of the organisation his '*heart is still to journey with people and to share the change they have experienced in their lives.*' ...and '*Paul will still be available for professional counselling*'.

Liberty Inc is quick to [tell](#)⁷⁹ everyone that they will only recommend counsellors who are:

- Professionally trained and qualified or undergoing a qualification from an accredited training institution.
- Members of an appropriate accredited Australian Professional or Counselling Association.

⁷³ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2013/02/unwanted-same-sex-attraction/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.libertyinc.org.au/resources/books/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.libertyinc.org.au/resources/articles/>

⁷⁶ <https://youtu.be/J2K0FIKspnA?t=6m15s>

⁷⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/user/DavidKyleFoster/playlists>

⁷⁸ <http://www.libertyinc.org.au/2016/12/passing-on-the-baton/>

⁷⁹ <http://www.libertyinc.org.au/counselling/>

But of course, no member of any accredited Professional or Counselling Association would be involved in reorientation therapy, would they? Wouldn't it be incongruous with their values and code of ethics?

Previously in the [CCAA 2012 code of ethics](#)⁸⁰ there was no mention of ex-gay, reparative or conversion therapy. Was sexual orientation change conducted amongst members of CCAA? Most certainly. We have no way of knowing how prevalent it was and neither do they. It wasn't being monitored. As far as I'm aware the CCAA was very much like most EPC pastors and church leaders. As the topic of homosexuality is controversial, divisive and volatile the preferred response is to bury their heads in the sand and avoid getting involved, even in a dialogue. Around 2013, I knew RGCT was being discussed in the CCAA and offered to dialogue.....the offer wasn't accepted.

Not all CCAA counsellors believe in RGCT. A number have attended our seminars '[Walking Between Worlds - working with LGBTI people from faith backgrounds](#)'⁸¹. If there is one common theme that comes through their feedback forms after the seminar, it is that they are horrified at the extent of harm experienced by LGBTI people from Christian friends, family and church leaders. Like many Christian counsellors they don't usually see clients who have left the church. The seminar is a real eye-opener for them. Confronting even.

The CCAA is a member of the Psychotherapy and Counsellors Association of Australia (PACFA). PACFA is the national peak umbrella organisation uniting about three dozen counselling associations in professional standards, accountability and self-regulation.

In 2013 PACFA were working on a draft proposal re ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapies.

It read: That counsellors and psychotherapists firstly recognise therapeutic interventions that aim to reduce or eliminate same sex attraction or non-conforming gender identities or expressions are harmful to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and secondly do not use such therapeutic interventions;

PACFA challenges the validity, efficacy and ethics of any clinical attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation such as 'reparative therapy' or 'conversion therapy' and any approach to therapy that pathologises homosexuality or discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation. PACFA thereby stands with other professional associations who oppose reparative therapies, such as the [APS](#)⁸² (2000).

Then in 2014 the draft became ratified, with amendments.

That counsellors and psychotherapists recognise there is contention regarding the harmful effects of therapeutic interventions, such as conversion and reparative therapies, that aim to reduce or eliminate same-sex attraction or non-conforming gender identities or expressions;

⁸⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20121029053855/http://www.ccaa.net.au:80/CCAACodeofEthics.php>

⁸¹ <http://www.abbi.org.au/services/service-provider-workshop/>

⁸² <https://www.psychiatry.org/file%20library/about-apa/organization-documents-policies/policies/position-2000-therapies-change-sexual-orientation.pdf>

PACFA does not condone or support therapeutic interventions, such as conversion and reparative therapies that proactively aim to change a person's sexual or gender identity. Careful attention should be paid to avoid subtle influence, manipulation or coercion in this regard.

You may notice the differences between the draft and the [final document](#)⁸³. It's watered down isn't it? Why? Were Christian counsellors upset their worldview and practice comes into conflict with the organisation that accredits and regulates them?

The new [code of ethics](#)⁸⁴ quietly uploaded on the CCAA site in March 2017 is pretty clear though. Under the heading of Ethical Conduct it reads:

8.8 Counsellors shall not do therapeutic interventions aimed at modifying or changing the sexual orientation of clients, as distinct from treating recognised sexual disorders.

So, if even the governing body of Christian therapists says their '*Counsellors shall not do therapeutic interventions aimed at modifying or changing the sexual orientation of clients*' shouldn't that be the end of the story?

To ban or not to ban?

When one considers that:

- a) Over four decades ago it was acknowledged homosexuality is not an illness that needs to be cured;
- b) [No scientific evidence](#)⁸⁵ has ever been produced that demonstrates that GCT can change an individual's sexual orientation;
- c) Scientific evidence has demonstrated that attempts to change one's sexual orientation can be [harmful](#)⁸⁶ to an individual's mental health including suicide ideation along with evidence it has contributed to some actually taking their lives;
- d) All credible [mental health organisations](#)⁸⁷ oppose it, with many writing position papers against it;

The questions might be asked '*Why do we still need to ban GCT?*' and '*Why hasn't it been done already?*'.

In the US they are seeing increasing success with this. Since 2012, at the time of writing, [ten states](#)⁸⁸, one territory and 34 counties, municipalities or communities have banned conversion therapy for minors. Currently California is ramping up their previous legislation

⁸³ <http://www.pacfa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/PACFA-Position-Statement-on-therapeutic-support-for-LGBTI-individuals-and-their-families-OCT-2014.pdf>

⁸⁴ http://www.ccaa.net.au/images/documents/Ethics/CODE_OF_ETHICS_March_2017.pdf

⁸⁵ <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2009/08/therapeutic.aspx>

⁸⁶ <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a8fa/f008ed1c74f105da2ddaf5d20172033e2d4a.pdf>

⁸⁷ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2012/05/ex-gay-reparative-conversion-therapy/>

⁸⁸ <http://www.newsweek.com/washington-state-bans-gay-conversion-therapy-minors-829741>

banning it for minors to now include adults. Banning it for all is being attempted through [consumer fraud legislation](#)⁸⁹.

In a surprising move the Church of England in the UK, called on the government to ban conversion therapy after [Jayne Ozanne](#)⁹⁰ proposed the motion at the 2017 Synod. *‘Ozanne quoted an online survey she recently conducted in the LGBTI community, in which just under 40% of her 553 respondents said they had undergone some form of conversion therapy. More than two-thirds said they had chosen to do so because they believed their sexual orientation to be “sinful”. Just under three-quarters were under the age of 20 when they began conversion therapy.’* the Guardian [reported](#)⁹¹.

Banning GCT may have stalled though in the [UK](#)⁹² however.

In 2013, New South Wales independent, Alex Greenwich was the first in Australia to attempt a formal ban through his [speech](#)⁹³ in parliament. The [Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission](#)⁹⁴ conducted an inquiry into [The Promotion of False or Misleading Health-Related Information or Practices](#)⁹⁵. This was about any misleading health practice, but counselling to change one’s sexual orientation was only a small component of the committee’s inquiry. The committee received 72 submissions, and five of those were about conversion therapy, with four against and one pro. Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI) lodged a substantial 28 page [submission](#)⁹⁶. The final outcome was that the Minister for Health at the time, Jillian Skinner, and the [committee](#)⁹⁷, felt there were already checks in place for complaints to be made should qualified/licenced/accredited individuals in the health profession be acting fraudulently.

In 2014, [Inside Ex-gay](#)⁹⁸ was founded in Victoria and began implementing similar strategies to those mentioned previously. The state of Victoria has also gone down the track of attempting to ban all forms of GCT through the work of Human Rights Law Centre director Anna Brown and a yet to be published research report the state government commissioned in 2016. As [reported](#)⁹⁹ in the Star Observer last year: *VICTORIA has a new complaints watchdog that will be able to investigate and ban anyone trying to practice ‘gay conversion therapy’ in the state. Lawyer Karen Cusack has been announced as the state’s first Health Complaints Commissioner, a role that will see her launch investigations and ban unregistered practitioners from treating patients if her office believes it poses a danger to the public.*

⁸⁹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/california-lawmakers-consider-bill-that-treats-conversion-therapy-like-consumer-fraud_us_5ad9ed84e4b029ebe0237ff2

⁹⁰ <https://jayneozanne.com/2017/09/12/condemning-conversion-therapy/>

⁹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/08/church-of-england-demands-ban-on-conversion-therapy>

⁹² <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/21/uk-government-claims-ban-on-gay-cure-therapy-could-have-unintended-consequences/>

⁹³ http://www.alexgreenwich.com/reparative_therapy

⁹⁴ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=173>

⁹⁵ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=1954>

⁹⁶ <http://www.abbi.org.au/about/submissions/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/5470/Final%20Report%20-%20The%20Promotion%20of%20False%20and%20Mislead.pdf>

⁹⁸ <https://insideexgay.org/>

⁹⁹ <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/victoria-news/watchdog-ban-conversion-therapy/155356>

The new Health Complaints Commissioner, has powers to investigate and ban unregistered health practitioners, gay conversion therapists being just one area. Those who ignore the commissioner's ban can be given a prison term. A couple of excellent things about the changes in Victoria are that this covers everyone, not just minors, and also the complaint can be made by a third party and not the individual themselves. You'll see why that is important below. Retrospective claims will not be assessed though.

Currently it is rumoured that Tasmania, the ACT and also Western Australia are looking at their options to see the practice wiped out.

How prevalent is RGCT?

RGCT, in its many numerous forms, is happening more than most realise. The recent Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law [report¹⁰⁰](#) figures were alarming to say the least.

The Williams Institute estimated that:

- 698,000 LGBT adults (ages 18-59) in the U.S. have received conversion therapy, including about 350 000 LGBT adults who received treatment as adolescents.
- 20,000 LGBT youth (ages 13-17) will receive conversion therapy from a licensed health care professional before they reach the age of 18 in the 41 states that currently do not ban the practice.
- 6 000 LGBT youth (ages 13-17) who live in states that ban conversion therapy would have received such therapy from a licensed health care professional before age 18 if their state had not banned the practice.
- 57,000 youth (ages 13-17) across all states will receive conversion therapy from religious or spiritual advisors before they reach the age of 18.

It would be naïve to think that individuals are not getting some form of GCT from some health care professionals as well here in Australia. We must remember that just because the American Psychiatric Association (APA) took homosexuality off its list of mental disorders in 1973 it didn't magically mean every single psychiatrist had shifted. How could they? They had been seeing mentally ill gay men and lesbians seeking healing as clients for years.

'What you have in a homosexual adult is a person whose heterosexual function is crippled like the legs of a polio victim. What are we going to call this? Are you going to say that this is normal? That person who has legs that have been actually paralyzed by polio is a normal person even though the polio is no longer active?'

As an example that the work was far from done, the weekend after the APA decision, Irving Bieber, M.D., clinical professor of psychiatry at the New York Medical College and chairman of the research committee on male homosexuality, told the [New York Times¹⁰¹](#): *'What you have in a homosexual adult is a person whose heterosexual function is crippled like the legs*

¹⁰⁰ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Conversion-Therapy-LGBT-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/12/23/archives/the-issue-is-subtle-the-debate-still-on-the-apa-ruling-on.html>

of a polio victim. What are we going to call this? Are you going to say that this is normal? That person who has legs that have been actually paralyzed by polio is a normal person even though the polio is no longer active?’ Bieber died in 1991, at the age of 80, with no record of him ever changing his position on homosexuality.

In a 1978, Time magazine article titled ‘Sick Again’ a survey done the previous year, four years after the APA change, was quoted. *‘For many psychiatrists, that poll has hardly disposed of the issue—as a new survey by Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality shows. The journal sent questionnaires to 10,000 members of the A.P.A., and compiled the first 2,500 responses. Of those answering, 69% said they believed "homosexuality is usually a pathological adaptation, as opposed to a normal variation," 18% disagreed and 13% were uncertain. Similarly, sizable majorities said that homosexuals are generally less happy than heterosexuals’* the article stated. The survey also claimed 60% thought homosexual male relationships were less mature and loving than heterosexual relationships, and 70% percent thought that the psychiatric problems experienced by homosexuals were due more to conflicts within the individual rather than societal stigma. Obviously, a change in official policy doesn’t automatically mean a change in understanding or perception.

Even in 2009 the UK Guardian [reported](#)¹⁰² that: *‘A survey of more than 1,300 therapists, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists throughout the country found more than 200 practitioners had attempted to change at least one patient’s sexual orientation, while 55 said they were still offering the therapy.’*

Only recently, a friend, who is a librarian, told me that a lady had inquired if she could borrow some books on homosexuality. In an obviously upset state she told my friend that her son had come out as gay. Not knowing anything she went to her family doctor to get more information. The elderly doctor told her that it was her fault that her child had turned out gay. Thankfully my friend was able to reassure her this was a completely outdated belief, suggest she change doctors, give her some up to date books and the details of [PFLAG](#)¹⁰³.

In the work we do at [Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International](#)¹⁰⁴ an understanding of the [Diffusion of Innovation Theory](#)¹⁰⁵ has been most helpful. Thank God for the early adopters. Within certain Christian circles however, understanding LGBTI people, relationships, sexual orientation and gender identity, the late majority and laggards are prominent.

Last year I got a text from an unknown number saying, *‘Hi Ron, a counsellor I went to see gave me your number and said I could talk with you about my same sex attractions.’* Immediately thinking that possibly he’d been given Ron Brookman as a referral but somehow ended up with my number, I engaged in conversation for a while, let him know that it was actually Anthony Venn-Brown (from the other side) he was talking to and said I’d be willing to meet him for coffee and a chat. Apparently when he’d accepted that he was

¹⁰² <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2009/mar/26/homosexuality-gay-cure-treatment-orientation>

¹⁰³ <https://www.pflag.org/>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.abbi.org.au/services/>

¹⁰⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations#Adopter_categories

gay and come out to his Christian Asian parents, they were not happy about this and arranged for him to talk to a therapist who could 'fix' him. I still have no idea how it ended up contacting me, let's just say a 'miracle'. Over the next few weeks I was able to provide information for him and particularly for his Christian parents. He had come to a place of acceptance before he told his parents but through these recent events and family pressure he'd become unsettled. Last time we spoke he was doing fine. His folks are going to take a little longer. Who knows, they may live with misplaced shame and estranged from their son for the rest of their lives, their #1 son.....gay.....where did they go wrong..... not something they'd share amongst their friends at church. I shudder to think what may have happened if this young Asian man had not been given my telephone number by 'mistake'.

Tackling an outdated religious ideology

So yes.....GCT is going on in secular settings, in the CCAA even with their new code of ethics, but far more prevalent of course is what is happening in your local EPC church. How many of those churches are gay [affirming](#)¹⁰⁶? 'Rare as hen's teeth' my mother used to say.

Most of the RGCT formal ministries are now closed down or moved on to a celibacy model. The celibacy model is, 'yes you can be a Christian with same sex attractions, but you are never to act on that'. Of course, this means you can never have a relationship, get married to someone of the same gender (even though it's legal) and never fall in love. Sounds like your same sex attraction is a curse doesn't it? Yep.... but try not to feel ashamed of that. '*In our church we love and accept everyone*' are hollow words when you are constantly reminded you are and never will be like everyone else. You were not a part of 'God's plan'.... they are. According to the celibacy model, Genesis makes it abundantly clear. Gays and trans are the unfortunate mutants from 'the fall'.

Here is the most common scenario that will take place for any young person in an EPC church.

Picture this: I'm a young teen just beginning to be aware that I'm not like the others in my school or youth group; I'm attracted to the same gender. This troubles me as I've never heard anything positive about being homosexual or the LGBTI community. In fact, during the recent postal survey I'd heard regularly that they are all political subversives, who hate God, the church, want to convert people and eventually destroy society by destroying gender norms. And that's just before lunch.

After a great deal of secret internal torment, I finally pluck up the courage to talk to my pastor or youth leader and tell them 'I think I might be gay'. When I tell them, I will get one of several responses.

- a) You're just confused. You're too young to know.
- b) We are all heterosexual deep down inside.
- c) You know this is not God's best for you.
- d) You must have been molested.... tell me about that.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2017/03/welcoming-accepting-affirming/>

- e) God's power can deliver you from every sin.

This will be followed by:

- a) We'll pray for you and help you overcome this.
- b) We can cast the spirit of homosexuality out of you.
- c) The reason you're turning out this way is some brokenness in your past that needs to be healed.
- d) Mr and Mrs XXXXX in the church have an inner healing ministry. God can heal your brokenness. I'm going to get them to pray for you.
- e) Lots of people have overcome homosexuality, look at Sy Rogers. Look on YouTube for all the testimonies.
- f) You are not allowed to do anything in the church till you've dealt with this.

As has happened to an immeasurable number within EPC churches for years and demonstrated clearly in the personal story from the Mamamia article above, a God ordained, heterosexual marriage will be the final fix that will put everyone's mind at rest.

And so, it goes on. This is RGCT of sorts but not the formal programs or organisations we've known in the past. It's not 'therapy' as such, it's biblical/spiritual counselling within a church context that doesn't require any recognised mental health qualification. But it's always been there and will be for some time. How do you ban a religious belief system? Who takes responsibility for the abuse and harm?

The challenges banning RGCT

Some people have approached me for my expertise in this area when they wanted to see GCT banned. Others, not fully understanding the landscape and implications, have gone ahead wasting time, energy and money going down dead ends. When people seek advice, below are the challenges I tell them we face and that they need to be aware of. Particularly getting people to tell their stories before a parliamentary tribunal or committee. It appears that without current prevalence and extensive practice, legislators are not interested.

1. ***It is rare to find anyone these days who would say 'Yes, this therapy can turn you from gay to straight.'*** In the past, in Australia, it would be hard to find anyone who made the claim. Fred Nile, Margaret Court and Peter Stokes of the defunct Salt Shakers would always say they know people who were once homosexual but are now straight but that is quite different to promising, '*I can turn you from gay to straight*'. In the US people were sued because it was proven they'd made those claims. The famous 2014 [case¹⁰⁷](#) against Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality (JONAH) was quite exceptional. Most former ex-gay leaders were careful not to promise change. Living Waters and Liberty Christian Ministries leaders in Sydney would say things like '*you will always walk with a limp*' (poor choice of words I know) when young men came for help. If it was stated one on one privately, it would be hard to get that through a court of law. It is your word against theirs.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.newsweek.com/life-and-death-jewish-exgay-therapy-organization-406898>

2. ***The fear and secrecy of practitioners.*** Their perceived poor treatment in the media has made RGCT practitioners ‘gun shy’ and they have taken a lower profile. Attempts by journalists and opponents to go undercover have made them additionally cautious of ‘inquirers’. Even the wording on their sites has changed so they are not as easy to pick up anymore. Probably this is a blessing although many are flying under the radar. Shirley Baskett’s site [Renew Ministries](http://www.renewministries.com.au/)¹⁰⁸ is a good example. It would be hard to pick up it’s an ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy ministry till you got to the resources page. Maybe this is why a same sex attracted man from Australia sought help from the US ministry [Hope for Wholeness](http://www.hopeforwholeness.org/)¹⁰⁹ and has flown to their conference [twice](#)¹¹⁰. He was desperate for change. So desperate in fact that in 2016, whilst unemployed, he sold his car to fly to the US, president [McKrae Game](https://www.facebook.com/HopeForWholeness/)¹¹¹, told all his followers on [Facebook](#)¹¹².

3. ***The mental and emotional capacity of RGCT survivors to tell their stories.*** Most of the people who have been through this experience have been traumatized even if they are not totally conscious of it. Many of us are aware of our PTSD issues that continue to play out in our lives. This is why every time the media has contacted me wanting to use someone in a story I have had to go through a lengthy process with the gay conversion therapy survivor. Firstly, I have to ensure the journalist is going to handle the story appropriately and not do a ‘beat up’. I check on the survivor’s current mental state and if they feel ready to tell their story. I discuss with them what boundaries they’d feel comfortable to work within, e.g., share their real name, a photo, name names, etc.. Introduce them to the journalist going over what the boundaries are and agreed to. Check in on the person after the interview for a debrief and to make sure they are ok. Finally, when the story comes out, check in with them again as this can be another crisis time for the ex-gay survivor who suddenly feels very vulnerable now their story is out in the public domain. When people felt this process was too restrictive and ignored it, it had devastating results. Not everyone wants to tell their story, particularly in public spaces when their experience may be challenged.

4. ***Many of the stories of RGCT are dated.*** I’ve previously mentioned the ex-gay closet. For most ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy survivors in Australia we are talking about experiences 10-20 years ago. It could take years, even decades to heal and get to a place where people are comfortable to tell their stories. By the time you’ve got to a place of resolution and peace the last thing you usually want to do is dig it all up again and go through the drama of attempting to sue for damages. You just want to move on in your life. I have to chuckle when a journalist asks me ‘*can you put me in touch with someone who is going through conversion therapy now for our story?*’ If they are going through RGCT they are not going to have anything to do

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.renewministries.com.au/>

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.hopeforwholeness.org/>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/HopeForWholeness/photos/a.318105034898565.69316.134296229946114/1612857485423307/?type=3&theater>

¹¹¹ <http://www.hopeforwholeness.org/mckrae-game/>

¹¹² <https://www.facebook.com/HopeForWholeness/posts/1136255589750168>

with me; I'm the enemy. I'm the person who could stand between them and their dream of being 'normal'. But such is the lack of understanding of some people about how this religious culture works.

5. **Migration and multi-culturalism.** Australia has become one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world. This of course has its challenges. When people come from other countries they bring cultural practices with them. There are numerous ethnic churches that have sprung up in Australia. Some of them have very large congregations. I'm talking about Christians from Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Eastern Europe and South America. Their version of Christianity is usually extremely conservative. They often have a strong mixture of culture and religion which have now become inseparable: the Pacific and Africa are the most prominent examples. Being able to reach LGBTI youth in these contexts and educate leaders is a huge challenge, one I've experienced [personally](#)¹¹³.
6. **Transgender focus.** For those of who've worked in this space for many years, one thing that has been interesting to observe is how many of the remaining reorientation organisations have shifted focus. A combination of the failure of ex-gay ministries and the increased visibility of trans people in our western world means that the RGCT groups have begun to target transgender teens and adults more [stridently](#)¹¹⁴. It has become an increasing [theme](#)¹¹⁵ of the ACL. The ex-gay groups who have remained are having an increased attendance at their events, not of trans people, but of parents troubled about their trans children. It's as if they believe that this new 'rainbow political agenda' as Lyle Shelton likes to call it, has somehow got a hold of these poor kids and brainwashed them into believing they have been born in the wrong body. These groups are now targeting vulnerable parents whose kids are thinking and talking about transitioning.

Liberty Inc provides services like this. As one attendee [observed](#)¹¹⁶ *'Their young adult children had come out as gay, bi, or trans. Some were going through gender transition. One is a drag queen. I listened to their grief and pain and saw all their tears. It was hard to hear. Vulnerable and raw, mums told the exact words that hurt worst of all, and dads told where they were when they heard. The process of their kids 'coming out' was full of shame, deceit, fear and a sense of betrayal in both parents and the young people involved.'* It's pretty obvious to me who needs the help here.....and it ain't the kids.

7. **It's a belief system we are fighting not an organisation.** Within the professional networks GCT still exists, and it is up to these organisations that are either self or government regulated to ensure that members are abiding by their existing guidelines and code of ethics and that LGBTI people are not harmed by ignorant, ill-informed and prejudiced practitioners. RGCT is a whole different matter. We are

¹¹³ <http://www.abbi.org.au/2017/04/ymca-international-lgbt-affirming/>

¹¹⁴ <https://youtu.be/BCKdF3WCB2s>

¹¹⁵ http://www.acl.org.au/you_won_t_believe_the_latest_consequence_of_same_sex_marriage_in_canada?recruiter_id=3606

¹¹⁶ <http://www.libertyinc.org.au/2017/01/reflections-on-a-support-group/>

currently facing the controversy of religious freedoms in Australia after marriage equality passed. This is the arena we will find ourselves fighting in.

These are just some of the challenges so I'm sure you see this is no simple task of 'let's just ban GCT'. GCT should be banned here – as it has been elsewhere around the world, because it kills people by promoting a toxic message of illness and a false narrative of cures. Yet that will only be the beginning, because most GCT is now conducted outside professional counsellors' practices, in religious congregations, groups, and organisations. As I stated in a 2015 [ABC interview¹¹⁷](#) on the topic, *'[Legislative change] would send a very clear message to young people and also, another thing is that it would be a message to the churches of how far behind they are in their understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity. That message that will come from that, from having that legislation in place will definitely have a very, very positive impact. Any pastor or youth leader, who was saying to some young gay men, "Look, we can pray to you", if this legislation is in place, they will definitely be thinking twice about that.'*

To change RCGT, it's going to take more than new laws though. It's going to take hard work, collaboration, education, graciousness, dialogue and something the LGBTI community seems to excel in..... a dogged determination to not quit till the job is finished.

After all it has always been about more than equality. We've been fighting for our very survival and especially that of the next generation. We don't want even one person to spend one day in the unnecessary internal torment that so many of us lived in for decades. And we don't want any more dead.

¹¹⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-27/harmful-gay-conversion-therapy-should-be-banned-rights-group/6651078>



About the author

Anthony Venn-Brown is one of Australia's foremost commentators on faith and sexuality. His best-selling autobiography '[A Life of Unlearning – a preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith](#)', details his journey from being one of the first in the world to experience religious gay conversion therapy, becoming a married, high profile preacher in Australia's growing mega-churches, such as Hillsong, to living as an openly gay man. Anthony was the co-founder and former leader of Freedom2b. He is an [educator and consultant](#) on LGBT/faith issues and leader in [deconstructing the ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy myth](#). Anthony is the founder and CEO of [Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International](#). Anthony has been recognised on a number of occasions for his contribution and impact including being twice voted one of 'The 25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians'.

Parts of this report are from the upcoming book '[THE QUEST TO CURE QUEERS - Exodus to Nowhere](#)'. To be one of the first to be notified of the publication please subscribe [HERE](#).

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