

## CAN visits Congress to speak out on health needs of ex-cult members

Members of the Cult Awareness Network joined with hundreds of other individuals from dozens of public interest groups on May 19 to participate in National Mental Health Constituency Day.

David J. Bardin, CAN's Washington, D.C. counsel, Cynthia Kissel, CAN's executive director, members of CAN's Washington, D.C. affiliate, including Ann Lindgren, Jon Ruth and Rudy Arkin, and CAN member Dr. Edward Lattick, participated on behalf of CAN in the activities sponsored by the Mental Health Liaison Group, of which CAN is a member.

The CAN delegation attended a White House briefing by senior officials on the status of health reform legislation. The proposed Health Security Act and its mental illness and substance abuse provisions were discussed by mental health advocate Tipper Gore and other administrative staff.

The delegation then visited members

of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and their staffs to urge them to become aware of the needs of former cult members in finalizing their respective positions of the proposed health care plan that Congress will consider later this year.

CAN's concerns on this topic

embrace medical and mental health needs of all ex-members of destructive cults.

• When they leave, former cult members are liable to have medical and severe mental health conditions. Any new insurance may exclude such conditions as "pre-existing."

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*Ann Lindgren, former CAN president, with Senator Mark Hatfield, R-Oregon (left) and Senator Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, sponsors of a health research funding proposal.*

### **Send a mailgram to Washington!**

**June 1 - June 30**

Let Congress know about the health care needs of former cult members.

Send a mailgram to your Congressman just by calling Western Union

**1-800-372-2626 Ask for hotline 9515**

Simply give your zip code and the operator will know your Congressman.

A prepared message will be charged to your phone bill for only \$6.00.

Tell Congress that any health care plan must help ex-cult members. Your mailgram of support is a powerful and compelling tool.

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## CAN visits Congress

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- Their cult group may have denied them or discouraged them from getting proper health care. They almost certainly leave with no insurance coverage.

- They may be impoverished and have children to support. They may be alienated from their families and have no support from family or friends close by.

- Confusion about what happened to them in the cult group may interfere with their seeking proper health assistance for a long time, exacerbating untreated health problems.

- Ex-cult members are prone to move

often, and change jobs as they recover from the distress and confusion that typically exists after leaving a destructive cult. They often have to enter the work force at the entry level where employers may provide no health insurance. Health insurers are liable to rate them as part of a high-risk, high-cost performance group.

Health care reform that effectively addresses the needs of these former members should be comprehensive, without restrictions for "pre-existing" conditions, and with flexible and trans-

ferable benefits. Mental health benefits should be on a par with medical benefits, with no arbitrary limits. Any funding for mental health research should include provisions for research on recovery from disorders and distress affecting those leaving destructive cults.

To effectively highlight the health care needs of ex-cult members, CAN is sponsoring a mailgram campaign to Congress in June. See details in announcement on page one. ❖



Dr. Edward Louick (right) with Bill Cahir, aide to Congressman Harris Wofford, D-Pennsylvania.



David Bardin, Esq. (left) with Mike Faenza, CEO of the National Mental Health Association (center) and Al Guida, Vice President of the National Mental Health Association, discussing National Mental Health Constituency Day.

## Australia officials settle

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tices involving children as well as poor schooling, isolation and other harsh treatment to which they supposedly are subjected. Much of the information was gleaned from the Family's own pamphlets and from former members.

Spokesmen for the Family say the settlement shows that despite the White Book, the department lacked evidence to make its case. They also say the Family may sue the department and would also consider calling for a public inquiry into the department's conduct in the case. Spokesmen for the department have declined to comment.

The department's decision to reach a settlement reportedly came after Aus-

tralia's minister for Community Services, Michael John, overruled Dr. John Paterson, the department secretary. Paterson favored pursuing the case. In a press statement, John said: "The department's objective of ensuring the children were not subject to extreme social isolation and inappropriate child rearing practices has been achieved by the terms of the settlement."

The Family was founded as the Children of God more than 20 years ago by David "Moses" Berg. The Family has followers in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe. During the 1970s and 1980s the group gained notoriety for using sex as a method of recruiting or

gaining support for the organization. Many past church pamphlets also include sexually suggestive materials, including discussions of adults having sex with children and children having sex with other children.

(From "Children of God may sue" and "Spotlight is now on the department" by Alex Messina, *The Age*, April 23, 1994; "Secret Cabinet deal killed Family case," by Alex Messina, *The Age*, April 30, 1994, p. 3; "Still in the dark over the 'Family' raids" by Chris Goddard, *The Age*, May 6, 1994, p. 15; and CAN research.) ❖