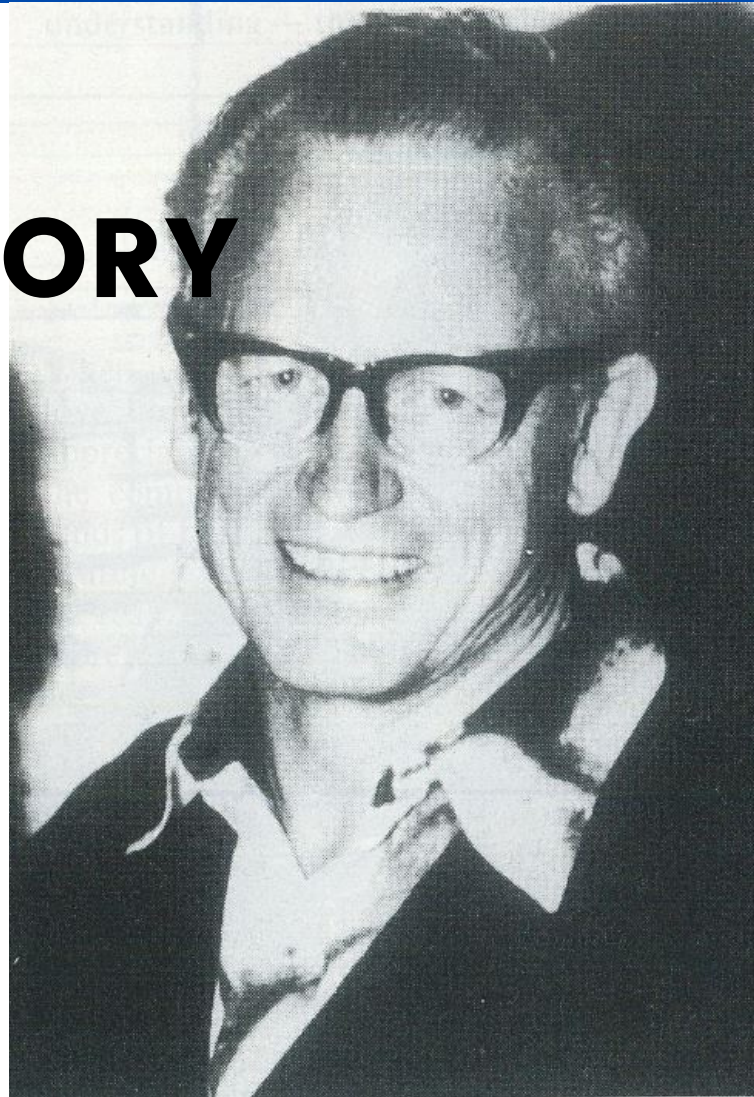


# A BRIEF HISTORY

Written by Dave McLoughlin

If the final principle in our Grow program is true, ie; "Each person's recovery aids the transformation of the world", then one could easily assume that this principle is personified by the life work of Con Keogh. In his modest humble way Con never saw himself as "The Founder of Grow" – he always saw himself as a co-founder – but I believe, like many others, if Con did not have his break-down it is entirely possible that we all would not be here today celebrating yet another birthday of our wonderful organization.



In 1954 Con was young very hard working priest in a Sydney parish, burning the candle at both ends and very much involved with the social issues of the time, Con was using a stimulant to keep himself awake so he could work late into the night and early hours but eventually this workload took a heavy toll on him and he began to decline into a terrible mental breakdown and was hospitalized. By all accounts his paranoia played against him as he fought against his treatment whilst being subjected in those days to what Con described as the "coercive treatment" ie; straight jackets, isolation, shock treatment and at times being wrestled to the ground by several attendants to be medicated.



He spent about 10 months in hospital and after discharge, whilst recovering, he describes being “mortally afraid and suffering from severe memory loss”. During this time after hospitalisation, a good friend invited him to an AA meeting. He responded well to the fellowship of the meetings and the AA program and during this time met others attending AA who were not necessarily alcoholics but attending the meetings to find help with serious mental health problems. Eventually this group of like-minded friends started to talk about forming a group of their own to meet the particular needs of recovering their mental health.

## THE FIRST MEETING

The 26th April 1957 was the first official gathering of this group of people at a church hall in Hurstville Sydney to begin helping and supporting each other back to good mental health. They called the group Recovery – to emphasise the goal that they aspired to – and they collectively worked on developing the solution to recovery rather than getting bogged down in the problem. They also decided very early on that they would use to the utmost their own personal resources to help themselves and one another. In time they committed to identifying, recording and passing on to one another the things they found successful in their recovery.

This first group meeting at Hurstville was chaired by Renee, a friend of Con's from AA, and six months later the group moved to Concord West. In May 1958, a second group was formed in Lithgow, about 150kms west of Sydney in the Blue Mountains.

By the end of 1960 there were seven groups in existence, three in the metropolitan Sydney and four groups in large country towns across NSW. Also, in 1960 was the first publication of the “amplifications” of the Twelve steps which were Program Commentary writings expanding the understanding and application of the 12 steps in our lives.



This earliest recording of the Recovery Program didn't commence until about 18 months after the first group started in 1957. The first program material written down was the 12 steps, initially they came up with 9 steps then these were discussed and added to until, over time, they had our original twelve steps of Recovery.

About 12 months later, the Recovery leaders produced an “Amplification of the 12 steps” which was used in the group meeting as what they called their Program Focus for the meeting and a source for reading and discussion within the group. Later that same year was the first attempt at organizing what we all recognize today as the Blue Book. Back then it was typed out on about twelve foolscap sheets of paper and “roneo'd” copies were handed around to all the Recoverer's.

## THE GROW PROGRAM

Accompanying each of the steps were what was called the "Declarations" which were an expanded explanation of each of the steps and these writings were also used as a focus of discussion during what was to eventually become the "Middle Routine" of our present day meetings;

Historically Step One for example was...

### 1. We admitted we were mentally sick.

The accompanying Declaration was; We admitted that our lives were in disorder, that we were mentally sick, and that we needed help.

### 2. We endeavoured to cooperate with help.

The accompanying declaration was; Daily affirmed our need and willingness to distrust our own judgement and feelings, and to carry out the advice of trustworthy helpers until we were well.

And so it continued for each step...I'll move on to step seven

### 7. We strengthened and mastered our bodies

The accompanying Declaration was; We adopted a regime of proper nourishment, exercise and rest. Undertook to temper each of our senses and to counteract their instinctive selfishness by the firm and willing acceptance of displeasure and discomforts when they came our way.

### 8. We learnt to think by reason rather than by feelings and imagination

The accompanying Declaration was; Ceased to express ideas which, on sound advice, we had come to regard as probably delusions or obsessions. Gave up the practice of emotionally analyzing mere sounds, syllables, words, names and phrases, combining them into pleasant or disturbing impressions, and reacting to these impressions as if they were real or without caring whether they were real or not.



GROW leaders at Training Weekend in Tasmania, 1978.

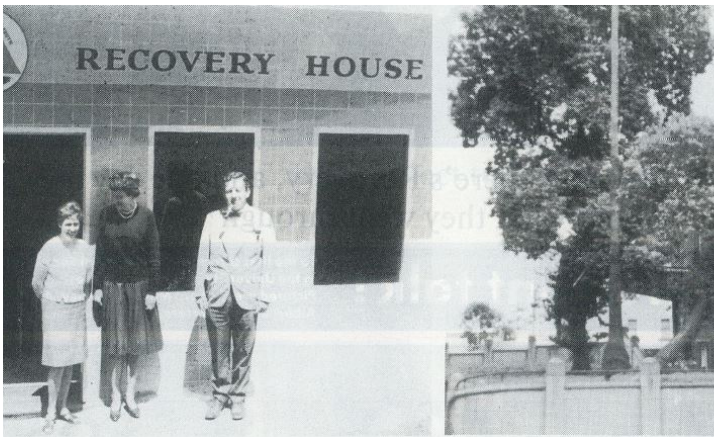
Senior Leaders of these early groups who were keen to contribute to the development the Recovery Program conducted additional meetings on a regular basis, not to discuss problems, but to reflect on their gains, what had proved successful, or at least helpful. It is one of the Grow's chief differences from other mutual help groups, right from the beginning there have been two types of meetings, the helping meeting and the meeting to assess, develop and preserve what was helping.

Together they worked out ways of getting themselves right again, to work out together how to beat their symptoms of mental ill health. At these "Leaders" meetings Con took copious notes and set himself the task of collating all the discussion material, condensing it and arranging it. In time there started to emerge several broad principles, and a suggested program which any Recoverer could apply to himself with the help of the group. Con would keep the group up to date with what was emerging. It would be discussed, added to or modified.



Members recorded their findings and debated the contents of prepared notes by Con who was the main scribe in those days. Today these get together are called Leadership meetings and the notes have developed into Leadership Papers, Grow literature, the Grow basic Program and our unique Group Method for conducting our meetings.

Through these leaders meetings the Program began to expand and develop with many of the basic early principles, still evident in the Program today for example; The Four Stabilising Questions, Personal value, First keys for understanding feelings, Basic Convictions and the Three Determinations to keep our wills set on the way of Growth.



March 1961 saw the formation of a central committee of group representatives. The meeting was held in Lithgow and they met on a three monthly cycle. The business of this meeting was to cover Recovery affairs that included; Recovery Literature, Finances, publicity and so on. One of the first things accomplished by this committee was to register the organization with the Chief Secretary's Department as a charity in the name of Recovery.



## FIRST HEADQUARTERS

In July 1962 Recovery rented it's first headquarters in a part of Sydney call the Rocks at the place known as Gallows Hill which was the site of the gallows for the first Convict Settlement which was in use through to 1841.

By the end of 1962 there were eight city metropolitan groups and ten country groups in rural New South Wales and the highlight for the fledgling Recovery movement that year was the first interstate groups with the first one starting in Brisbane, Queensland and then later in the year Camberwell in Victoria.

From there in 1963 a group was sponsored by Bill Salter, the Medical Superintendent of Hillcrest Hospital in Adelaide, South Australia. In New South Wales another mental health professional, Neville Yeomans sponsored a group at North Ryde Hospital. The value of Recovery groups became obvious to some in the mental health professions of the day when they saw that Recovery offered something very positive for people to attend once they left hospital, rather than merely returning to the same environment from which they had come before their breakdown. Groups were also started for patients in a Sydney hospital moving towards rehabilitation, prior to the point of discharge.

1963 was an especially significant year for a couple of other reasons as well Recovery gained it's first and back in the day much loved promoter and co builder of the Grow movement, Dr Albert Lacey. Albert was a noted criminologist and Lawyer. Together with Con, they launched the first group for criminal offenders in Long Bay Jail in Sydney. That group was also the first "special" group – closed to general membership. The group was called the "Rehabilitees" group for the rehabilitation of offenders and was in time followed by a closed group in the city for ex-offenders. Con and Albert were affectionately dubbed "honorary ex-crimis" because they regularly attended the Rehabilitees groups.

Interestingly this extension of Recovery's work into prison throughout Australia necessitated a change in the 1st Step of Personal Growth. Up until that time the First step read ; We admitted we were mentally sick. The prisoners urged Recovery to change the step because from there stated point of view they regarded it as a convenient copout for some, to be able to hide from their wrongs under the guise of mental illness. Consequently, the step was changed to "We admitted we were maladjusted. This change was considered to cover one being mentally sick or in the wrong.

Secondly, in 1963 Recovery also acquired it's first benefactor, Mr Reuben F Scarf, a prominent Sydney Businessman. Reuben was chiefly responsible for financing and remodeling of Recovery House which was in a terrible state at time of acquisition, into what is described as "something of beauty and quite useful".



**OUR FIRST BENEFACTOR**  
Reuben F. Scarf with Kit and Con

By the end of 1963 there were now 24 groups throughout the country and by October 1964 there were 31 groups. During 1964 Con and Albert had a series of meetings with a man who was to become Recovery's first international Patron, Mr W Clement Stone, an American business man. These meetings resulted in the sponsoring of a trip to America so that Con and Albert could go on study tour in the US to learn more about the self-help movement in America.

## GROW GOES GLOBAL

In 1965 Recovery spread to New Zealand which resulted in a dozen groups being started initially by Sponsors. Con and Joannie traveled the North Island of New Zealand by push bike promoting Recovery and helping Sponsors start Recovery groups.

By 1967 there were 120 groups in Australia.

In 1969 Shaun O'Hanlan, who had been a missionary in New Guinea suffered a breakdown and while recuperating in Victoria, Australia, attended Recovery and returned to Ireland "well armed with Recovery Literature" and he started the first groups in the Republic of Ireland. That same year the first youth groups were started in Sydney.

During the next several years...

- 1970 the total number of groups in Australia was 180.
- 1971 Recovery receives it's first government funding from the New South Wales Government Centre for Mental Health and Recovery spreads to Hawaii under the name of GROW.
- 1975 Recovery in Australia officially changes it's name to GROW.
- 1976 The first residential program was started in Cairns in Northern Qld.
- 1978 The first mainland Groups in USA
- 1979 Grow's residential drug rehabilitation program starts in NSW.

From here on Grow continued developing and expanding across Australia with Branches being established and funded by State Health departments across the country. These State health departments could appreciate the value of Grow in supporting community mental health especially now the need was even greater due to State Health departments deinstitutionalising the mental health system, shutting down the larger psychiatric facilities and moving to a community care model. During this time Grow National was established at Enmore in Sydney and for many years nurtured, developed and trained Grow leaders and employees from around the country and from overseas.



We were however struck quite a blow in the early 2000's when the Federal Government brought in a policy to defund Federal Secretariats of Non Government organisations. This along with the declining health of Con and his subsequent necessary need to be less involved saw a stalling of our growth and perpetuated a period of decline from which we are only recently turning the corner.

Over the past several years we have reestablished a National direction, strategy and support for leaders and Branches that has steadied the ship so to speak whilst at the same time challenging us to think and act differently about how we can contribute to the needs of the wider community.

We are working out new ways to be accessible to those in the community most in need of our help through developing new Programs such as; the Get Growing Program in our schools, eGrow for our isolated country folk disadvantaged by the tyranny of distance and in more recent times adapting our Program and Group meetings to an online environment in response to the international pandemic we are still experiencing.

All in all we have come a long way over the past 65 years and there is no reason why we can't continue to develop, grow and contribute to the mental health of the whole community well into the future.

**“The Best in Life and Love and Happiness is ahead of us”**

Dave Mc



#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

GROW wishes to acknowledge Dave Mc for his extra-ordinary service to GROW over a 30 year association, both as a Grower and significant contributor to the development of GROW in Australia and indeed across the globe.