

Mr Terry Sullivan
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Monday 11th April 2009

Senator Moore
 Chair
 Senate Community Affairs Committee
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Moore,

Firstly, I thank you and your fellow Senators for providing the opportunity for the Forde Foundation to attend the public hearing of your Committee to expand on the submission which we made to your Committee late last year. Board Members appreciate your leadership in this significant and challenging area of community need.

As outlined in the letter dated 22 April 2009 from your Committee Secretary, Elton Humphrey, I am taking up your offer to respond to comments made by others in their evidence or submissions to your Committee.

In particular, I make reference to the submission and oral evidence of Mr Michael Collins, a Former Resident and a former Board Member of the Forde Foundation Board of Advice.

In the table below, I have responded to a number of comments made by Mr Collins during his oral evidence. My main purpose in providing this response is twofold: firstly to provide supporting information for a range of people about whom Mr Collins made derogatory remarks (Karyn Walsh; two Board Members; the FF Executive Officer and HAN volunteers); and secondly, to respond to comments made by Mr Collins about me.

#	Mr Michael Collins' Comments	Response from Mr Terry Sullivan
1	Criticism of Ms Karyn Walsh from the Esther Centre and Micah Projects. <i>.... policies and tactics used by people who are in positions of power and who act in an abusive self-seeking manner. I consider two of these three people I have just mentioned—Mr Terry Sullivan and Ms Karyn Walsh—as morally and ethically corrupt.</i>	Karyn Walsh has done, and continues to do, great work with some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I admire her determination, her persistence and her commitment to her work. As with all organisations, there are clients at Lotus Place who disagree with some decisions that Karyn has made or the directions she took the organisations. Healthy, productive discussion has occurred on a number of issues. However, it is grossly unfair and unjust for Mr Collins to make his derogatory and untrue statements about Karyn at the hearing. Unfortunately for Mr Collins, he has the propensity to readily fall out with people (including fellow Former Residents like Alan Allaway), and he is all too ready to criticize anyone who does not agree with him.

		In contrast to the broad network of Former Residents established by service providers at Lotus Place, Mr Collins indicated that the new network of Former Residents which he established involves just 10-15 people. He does not speak as the representative of the Former Resident community in any manner.
2	Mr Collins made reference to a current Board Member when he said: <i>“It says on the website that Emmaline Harris represents former residents of institutions. Emmaline has never been in an institution.”</i>	This statement makes no sense because Mr Collins has ‘fused’ two Board Members – Ms Emmalene Travers and Ms Donna Harris – to create a non-existent ‘Emmaline Harris’. Both Donna and Em have significant experience with Former Residents and with the needs of those placed in care. Em, who has served on the FF BOA since 2002, has given long and dedicated service to Former Residents. It is unfair, inappropriate and cowardly for Mr Collins to criticize these two women who have made considerable contributions to the FF BOA and to the wellbeing of Former Residents.
3	Mr Collins made statements regarding the FF Trust Fund investments. He raised the matter of the decline of income from the Trust Fund. He claimed I was not interested in this matter and that I refused to call a meeting.	The FF BOA has never had responsibility for the investment decisions of the FF Trust Fund - the Public Trustee holds that responsibility. The Public Trustee invested funds through the QIC which has always provided a return on investment well above market average. When Mr Collins called for a special meeting of the BOA during the Christmas / New Year period, I immediately emailed all Board Members detailing Mr Collins’ request. All other Board Members voted against holding a special Board meeting to discuss Mr Collins’ proposal; hence no extraordinary Board meeting was called.
4	Mr Collins’ comments about the Historical Abuse Network (HAN) being “.. female dominated ...”	This comment says more about Mr Collins than it does about the people who volunteer with HAN. His words reflect the approach he seems to take with a number of women who hold positions of leadership and responsibility. This comment may help explain his actions with respect to FF Executive Officer.
5	After receiving a response to his question about the political affiliation of the Senate Committee members, Mr Collins’ response was: <i>“That makes me a bit suss.”</i>	Even though Mr Collins could see that there were two men and two women on the Committee, and was informed that there were two Liberal-National Senators and two Labor Senators, his response <i>“That makes me a bit suss.”</i> indicated that he saw something dubious or circumspect about the make-up of the Senate Committee. This is another example of Mr Collins’ mindset of mistrust that flavors his view of other people who are doing their best to help others.
6	Criticism of myself, as Chair of the FF BOA.	Senators might find it helpful to know something of the background to the difficulty that arose between Mr Collins and myself, as Chair. During his short period as a member of the FF BOA, Mr Collins conducted himself in a manner which required me to speak to Mr Collins in respect of his interaction with our Executive Officer. Mr Collins sent inappropriate emails to our EO, including one late-night email which, by Mr Collins’ own admission, was written under the influence of alcohol.

		In addition, Mr Collins made critical comments of a personal nature which caused distress, hurt and anxiety to our EO. As a result, I directed Mr Collins not to have one-to-one contact with our EO in the semi-isolated upstairs office at Lotus Place. Mr Collins reacted negatively to this direction, and his criticisms of the EO and me increased in intensity following my intervention.
7	In responding to a Senator's question about his short time on the BOA and his resignation from the Board, Mr Collins detailed the five reasons which he presented to the BOA on his resignation.	<p>I have no problem with Mr Collins criticizing me on any matter related to my work as Chair of the FF BOA. And if he chose to interpret my actions as: "<i>Terry Sullivan basically forced me out</i>", then he and I can agree to disagree.</p> <p>But Mr Collins' comments about the FF Executive Officer are totally out of place. The Forde EO always acted in a professional manner, with the best interests of Former Residents in mind. She carried out her work as directed by the Board and/or by the Chair.</p> <p>Mr Collins' attack on our EO yet another example of his inability to deal with females in a reasonable and respectful manner.</p> <p>I wish to place on the record the whole-hearted support of all other Board Members for our Executive Officer who has always demonstrated a caring, realistic and generous attitude to Former Residents with whom she has worked.</p>

Senators, there are many challenges facing Governments and NGOs who work with those citizens who, as children, were placed in care.

It is unfortunate that we have had to spend time addressing the inaccurate, untrue and intemperate comments from Mr Collins. But, as his comments were placed on the public record, some formal response is warranted.

I would be happy to provide any further information to your Committee, or to speak with you or your staff about any aspect of the written and oral submissions which the Forde Foundation made.

Again I thank you for your commitment to this difficult but important area of social need.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Sullivan
Former Chair
Forde Foundation Board Of Advice