

SNAP UNRAVELS

At the end of 2011, a Missouri judge ordered David Clohessy, the president of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), to be deposed regarding his role in cases of priestly sexual abuse. Clohessy fought the order vigorously, but lost. On January 2, 2012, he was deposed; the deposition [it is available on our website] was made public only recently. [NOTE: all pages cited are taken from the deposition.]

Clohessy proved to be uncooperative, refusing to comply with a request for internal documents; he only released a small portion of them. On the stand, he was similarly recalcitrant, refusing to answer many questions. He took refuge in a Missouri law which protects the confidentiality of rape crisis centers. But there are serious reasons to doubt whether SNAP meets the test of a rape crisis center.

Clohessy was asked point blank, "Did you identify yourself as a rape crisis center?" His reply, "I don't know." [p. 87.] At another point, he admitted, "I don't know under the Missouri statutes exactly what constitutes a rape crisis center." [p. 112.] The lawyers for an accused priest were not impressed. From their questions, and from subsequent statements they've made, it is clear that they do not believe that SNAP qualifies as a rape crisis center. They have plenty of reasons for reaching this conclusion.

When asked what training he has as a rape crisis counselor, Clohessy said, "You know, I've done—I've provided support to victims of sexual assault for 20—roughly 23 or 24 years. I do not have a—no." He was then asked, "Do you have any formal education or training with regard to rape crisis counseling?" He answered, "I do not." [p. 19.]

Clohessy has a bachelor's degree in philosophy and political

science. He is not a licensed counselor, yet counseling alleged victims of sexual abuse is what he does for a living. When asked, "Did you have any classes at all in counseling sexual abuse victims?" He answered, "Any formal classes?" The attorney affirmed his question, answering, "Yes." To which Clohessy replied, "No, sir." [p. 191.]

The defense attorneys wanted to know if anyone at SNAP is licensed to counsel abuse victims. Clohessy was asked, "Does SNAP have any licensed counselors in the State of Missouri?" He said, "We are a—as I said at the beginning, we're a self-help group. We are not—we don't hold ourselves out to be formal licensed counselors." [pp. 19-20.]

Clohessy then maintained that SNAP has support groups that "meet on a regular basis and offer support and comfort and consolation and guidance" to alleged victims. The lawyers picked up on this by asking, "Are there any licensed social workers or counselors on the staff at any of those meetings in the state of Missouri?" Clohessy was able to mention the founder of SNAP, Barbara Blaine, who is "a licensed—as I said, she has a Master's degree in social work." The attorneys were curious. "Is Barbara Blaine licensed as a counselor or social worker in the State of Missouri or the State of Illinois?" Clohessy answered, "I don't know." [p. 20.]

(There is a difference between someone who holds a Master's in Social Work and someone with a Master's in Counseling. It is expected that if someone wants to practice independently, he obtains licensure. Typically, this means at least two years of clinical work in a supervised setting. *No one at SNAP is a licensed counselor.*)

The attorneys for the defense sought to find out where the counseling takes place. Clohessy said, "We meet people wherever they want to meet, in Starbucks, at, you know—wherever people feel comfortable, that's where we meet." [p. 22.] When they meet at Starbucks for their "counseling"

sessions, they mostly just talk. “You know, the overwhelming bulk of our work is talking to, listening to, supporting sex abuse victims,” he admitted. [p. 23.]

Of interest to the defense attorneys was the amount of money SNAP spends on “counseling.” “How much annually does SNAP spend for individuals in individual therapy sessions?” Clohessy offered a straight-forward answer: “I have no idea.” [p. 26.] He then dug himself in deeper. He was asked how much money has been paid “to an individual counselor for an individual victim.” Explicitly, “out of that \$3 million that’s in the tax return,” how much was spent on individual counselors? Clohessy confessed, “Don’t know.” [p. 30.] Regarding the \$3 million in SNAP’s bank account, he was asked, “Where is that money kept?” He wasn’t sure. “I’m assuming it’s in Chicago.” [p. 29.]

Clohessy explained what he does for a living. He says SNAP has a business address in Chicago, but that he doesn’t know the zip code. Having no office—he works out of his home in the St. Louis area—he fields phone calls. [p. 9.] “Individuals call me and they share their pain with me.” So what does he do about it? “I console them and I may be on the phone with them for an hour.” He said he doesn’t charge them a fee for his consolation over the phone. [p. 26].

Declaring one’s home to be a place of business raises legal questions. Clohessy was asked whether “at your house do you have an occupational license or a business license to do business out of your house.” He simply said, “No.” [p. 98.]

Clohessy refused to disclose his source of funding. When asked, “You won’t tell us the sources of your funding; isn’t that correct?”, he said, “That’s correct.” [p. 85.] Now it is well known that Church-suing lawyers have generously given to SNAP over the years [see my 2011 report, [SNAP EXPOSED: Unmasking the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests](#); it is available on our website].

When asked specifically about monies SNAP receives from lawyers, once again Clohessy refused to answer. What really set him off was the question, "Does SNAP have any agreements with attorneys regarding referral of victims to those attorneys?" Clohessy snapped, "Can I say I'm offended at the question?" [p. 32.]

Given the type of work SNAP does, it is mandated by law to give a portion of its funds to charity. "As a director of SNAP," Clohessy was asked, "do you understand that SNAP is required by federal law to contribute so much of their assets every year for charitable purposes." His reply, "I'm not aware of that." [p. 82.]

So what does SNAP do with its money? In 2007, it spent a total of \$593 for "survivor support." [pp. 102-03.] The following year it spent \$92,000 on travel. [p. 107.]

SNAP says it pursues priests who are "credibly accused." It may interest bishops and priests what Clohessy means by this. "How would you define the word 'credibly accused?'" (This is important because many accused priests have been railroaded by those who have made false claims.) Clohessy replied, "You know, there's all kinds of criteria." All kinds of criteria? He continued by saying sometimes there are multiple accusers, but at no time did he say what the criteria were. [p. 110.]

Anyone who has followed SNAP is aware how often it holds a press conference condemning a diocese *before a lawsuit is filed*. By working with its attorneys, and some reporters, SNAP is able to get on the evening news making the diocese look bad (lawyers for the diocese are usually the last ones to receive the lawsuits). So it was not surprising that the defense lawyers would ask Clohessy about this tactic.

For example, in one case, where a lawsuit had a file stamp of October 20, 2011, the time was recorded as 2:44 p.m. When asked how SNAP could have had this information before it was

filed in court, Clohessy refused to answer. [pp. 52-53.] In another case, a lawsuit had a file stamp of November 8, 2011 at 1:28 p.m., yet Clohessy was able to post information about this before it was filed with the court. When asked to explain himself, he refused. [pp. 62-63.]

Apparently, Clohessy knows next to nothing about his staff. When asked about his staff, he mentioned the founder, Barbara Blaine. He also said, "We have an administrative person who is new," but he could only remember the person's first name. He admitted that they also had a fundraising person but "I apologize, I don't know the spelling of her last name." [pp. 13-14.] Later, he was asked, "Who is in charge of SNAP's website? Is there a specific company or is it done in-house?" Clohessy was blunt: "I don't know." [pp.165-66.]

Finally, Clohessy admitted that he has lied about some of his statements to the press. "Has SNAP to your knowledge ever issued a press release that contained false information?" He didn't blink: "Sure." [p. 39.] Did he lie about priests he knew to be innocent, or at least thought may have been innocent? We don't know.

So is David Clohessy a sincere man driven by the pursuit of justice? Or is he a con artist driven by revenge? It may very well be that the former description aptly explains how he started, while the latter describes what he has become.