

WALK A MILE IN HER SHOES EVENT

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.27 pm]: This morning I had a motion on the notice paper and because of the way business this morning went I did not have time to move it. I would like to read it into the record now speak to it just briefly. My motion was that this house recognises the efforts of the men who participated in the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event on Sunday, 17 May 2015, in support of the campaign to stop violence against women. I doubt there would have been any dissent from that motion had I been able to move it. I notice that Hon Helen Morton is nodding her head in agreement with that.

I want to raise this today for a couple of particular reasons. One is that, of course, members will remember that on the morning of Sunday, 17 May, last Sunday, there was, to put it mildly, extremely inclement weather. I am very, very proud of my friends, comrades and colleagues who got up early in the morning at Trinity College at 7.00 am to take part in the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event. Unfortunately, Hon Stephen Dawson is out of the house on parliamentary business, but he was one of the members —

Hon Helen Morton: Did he have to wear heels too?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes; I will come to exactly what he wore.

Hon Sue Ellery: He wore wedges with socks!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, he wore wedges because, of course, on this side of the house we are extremely conscious about occupational health and safety and we felt that he was probably marginally safer in wedges rather than stilettos. Hon Stephen Dawson flew the flag for the members on this side of the house. There were several other Labor members of Parliament including, of course, the Leader of the Opposition, Mark McGowan. I am very, very proud of my parliamentary colleagues in this place.

Hon Helen Morton: Did he wear heels too?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will come to the actual footwear in a minute, Hon Helen Morton.

Also our comrades in the labour movement have been very active supporters of Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, right from the beginning of the event in Western Australia. I particularly mention the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union; the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; the Maritime Union of Australia; and the Electrical Trades Union. I well remember White Ribbon Day at the end of last year, when we heard one of the most moving accounts I have ever heard about an awakening of consciousness of this issue, from an ETU organiser who talked about his experiences doing some work at the local refuge, and then realising that somebody he knew was being helped by the refuge. I am very proud of my friends and comrades in the labour movement for the effort they put into this.

For those who do not know about the way this event works, it is a fun event. It is not often that we can raise a smile about domestic violence, but it is a fun event because it gives the opportunity to literally walk a mile in the shoes of women. The idea is that first they walk the walk and then they talk to talk. There is an old saying that we cannot really understand another person's experience until we have walked a mile in their shoes, so this is a way of raising community awareness and the consciousness of individual men about the need to talk about domestic violence in order to stop it happening.

Honourable members may have noticed that I never, ever, wear high-heel shoes, because I discovered when I was about 13 years old that they are simply excruciating to wear. That, of course, is the point of Walk a Mile in Her Shoes: participants experience something really excruciating, and domestic violence, and all forms of sexualised violence against women, are indeed that. For that reason, I come to Hon Helen Morton's point about what these guys actually wore. I noticed, browsing through the Facebook pages, that a few of them thought that brightly coloured thongs or a pair of extremely fluffy yellow duck slippers qualified, and I think the Leader of the Opposition actually wore rainbow sneakers. However, getting up off the ground is to really experience the pain and the agony and, as I say, the point of this is to make the link between a truly excruciating experience and the terrible experience of domestic violence.

The rationale behind putting on an event that elicits a great deal of good humour and fun for everybody involved is that, when sexualised violence against women is hidden, it is immune to cure. It is like a disease that we can begin curing only once we have diagnosed it and brought it out in the open. One of the things that keeps it hidden is the body of myths surrounding domestic violence. The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services has a very helpful page on its website about these myths and misunderstandings. The myths include, "I would know if my friend or family member was hurting someone." The fact is that domestic and family violence is often hidden, as people who are experiencing it do not want to talk about it. This is the other side of the coin about it being hidden. It is not just that people's awareness has to be raised—we have to learn to

ask the right questions of our friends and family and people we encounter in our workplaces—it is also that people who have experienced sexualised violence often do not want to talk about it; they want to forget about it and walk away from it. It is a particular challenge to help people have those conversations on both sides of the experience.

Another myth is that drugs and alcohol often cause violence. The fact is that drug and alcohol use does not cause domestic and family violence. It may well contribute to it, but it is not in itself a cause. However, of course, it is a fact that most men who use violence while under the influence are also violent when not affected by drugs and alcohol. Making that simplistic link can sometimes be very misleading in trying to assess a situation.

The third myth is that only Aboriginal women or people from disadvantaged backgrounds experience domestic violence. The fact is, of course, that it is all through our community. That is why we cannot use things such as drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, poverty or any of those other social indicators to make that direct correlation.

Another very destructive myth is that children who do not directly witness violence are not affected. We have plenty of evidence now in the public realm that that is indeed not the case, and that children and young people who live with violence witness it, hear it and know about it. Being around violence can be just as damaging for children and young people as is experiencing it directly.

The final myth is that it is easy for women to leave. Of course, we all know that that is not true. Many women who experience domestic and family violence are in fear of their lives and the lives of their children, and that is why it is so important that governments continue to put real resources into providing safe places for women and children to go when they start addressing the issues of family violence in their lives.

The other thing that will help to shine a spotlight into these very dark corners of our community is a simple statement of the facts. In 2014 in Australia, 84 women were murdered in incidents of sexualised violence, and so far in 2015, 38 women have died. In Australia—these are some statistics that I found—one woman is admitted to hospital every three hours because of gender violence.

I will start with the event last year. In 2014, just over \$18 000 was raised. The event last Sunday, given that the weather was exceptionally bad, has so far raised more than \$27 000. Every cent of that money will go directly towards programs that help the victims of family and domestic violence.

I want to finish by saying that I have one of the most attractive T-shirts that I have ever seen in my life. It is black with pink writing. On the front it states “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes”. On the back it states “Remember Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, only backwards and wearing high heels”. As my good comrade Joe McDonald said when he sold me this T-shirt, “Here is a T-shirt that will cost you only \$50; it’s worth at least \$10, but your \$50 will go directly towards helping the victims of family and domestic violence.”

House adjourned at 5.37 pm
