

WEAR RED FOR RUBY DAY

Statement

HON COL HOLT (South West) [5.28 pm]: I want to rise briefly to alert the house of an event this Saturday, 24 September: Wear Red for Ruby Day. I am sure that, if members have been following discussions and questions in the house, they would realise it is about Ruby Nicholls-Diver. This is the second year it has been run. Last year was her eighteenth birthday. This year would have been her nineteenth birthday. As we know, Ruby lost her battle with mental illness in March this year and took her own life. The reason I have an interest in this day is that her dad, Geoff Diver, lived next door to me in Goomalling. We were raised together in the very early days. I remember quite clearly playing with Geoff on the day the Meckering earthquake struck. That probably gives away a little bit about our age. We have been friends for a long time.

When I read in the paper about what had happened to Geoff and his family and then heard him on the radio, I rang him to see how I could help him at that time. In discussions with him, we arranged for him to come and meet with the Minister for Mental Health, and I would like to thank her for granting Geoff the opportunity at very short notice to meet face to face so that he could give his own very personal account of what he had been going through. From talking to Geoff, I could see that obviously he was very traumatised about what had happened to his daughter and his family, but I always had the sense that he wanted to contribute to greater outcomes for people with mental illness, especially adolescents with mental illness, in Western Australia. I noticed that he now sits on the Mental Health Advisory Council, and I am sure he takes a lot of comfort from providing very proactive and direct input into policy. Again, I would like to thank the minister for providing him with that opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Saturday is really about raising awareness of mental illness, especially amongst adolescents, and about breaking down the stigma that mental illness still has in our community; I think it is still a real challenge for us to overcome that stigma. In a place such as this we are probably a bit more used to talking about policies that affect people such as that, but I really believe that mental illness is still a subject that is not talked about in our communities and still has a stigma attached to it. My own children are 21 and 18 years old, and I think about adolescent mental health amongst their peer group. I am sure that it is still a challenge for them to deal with mental illness amongst their peer group—how they support and manage it, and recognise and acknowledge that perhaps some of their friends suffer from mental illness. There is still a way to go, and days such as Red for Ruby day on Saturday can only help raise that awareness.

Interestingly, I was down at Albany last week at a football club presentation with Glenn Mitchell and Paul Hasleby, who are now working for One Life. Obviously, there was a bit of a presentation about what is happening in the footy world and Glenn talked a bit about cricket, but the real message they wanted to talk about was mental illness in our communities. I really thought it was pretty profound at one point; I am sure members have seen the presentation. There would have been about 50 or 60 people there, and Glenn Mitchell asked, “Who here suffers from asthma?” I guess maybe about 10 or 12 people put up their hands. He then asked, “Who suffers from mental illness?” One person put up his hand, and Glenn Mitchell immediately said, “Well, good on you, mate, for having the courage to actually acknowledge it.” We know that the statistics say that more than one person in five suffers from some sort of mental illness at any one time, but it is probably more like only one in 60 who acknowledges it. That says to me that we have a long way to go to overcome that stigma and recognise that it is an illness and that it is okay to say, “I’ve got a mental illness and I need help”. Again, Red for Ruby day is another proactive step towards raising that awareness.

In conclusion, I encourage all members to think about putting on a red shirt or red dress on Saturday and think about Ruby and her family. Let us continue the good work in speaking up about mental illness and mental health in our communities so that we take away some of that stigma and continue to erode it so that we can be a much healthier community, and a community that really wants to help those who suffer from those illnesses.