



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

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YOUTH SUICIDE; YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.10 p.m.): Suicide has been a major and concerning topic for many years now. Why do people commit suicide? How can we prevent people from committing suicide? Those are very often asked questions, but they are very difficult to answer.

There are many schemes in place to attempt to prevent people from taking their own lives. Many forums have been held over many years, and many people have been made available for consultation. I believe that these people are very genuine in their attempts at prevention. Suggestions, particularly on youth suicide prevention strategies, are many. But I do wonder sometimes what levels they reach. I am told that 90% of suicides can be prevented if, at the crucial time, the person needing help talks to someone.

Our young people, particularly in Queensland, are at crisis level. Self-harm and suicide has become alarming, and the statistics for suicide among young men are soaring. Statistics show that suicide is the No. 1 cause of death of young men under 30 years of age—more than motor vehicle accidents. This is a very alarming figure. There has been an upward trend in the rate of suicide among young people from 15 to 24 years of age. Statistics show that, in 1964, the figure was 6% per 100,000, rising to above 18% in the 1990s. I am talking about 18,000 suicides—a threefold increase. That is very frightening stuff! The statistics also show that for each teen suicide, there are some 50 teen suicide attempts. This situation has to be turned around.

There are many known causes and reasons for those suicides and attempted suicides, these being mainly health, financial strains, stress, personal hardships and many others. If the symptoms or warnings can be detected early, many may be prevented. That is why I believe that the program I am talking about tonight, the Yellow Ribbon Program, will be another avenue in preventing suicide. I believe that this is a marvellous concept. It originated in the United States of America following the suicide of a 17 year old youth named Mike Emme in September 1994.

The Yellow Ribbon Program involves a business-size card which can be distributed to youth—and in many cases now older persons—to be passed on to a friend or family member or any person they trust when they are at a time of crisis or need to talk to someone. The problem seems to be that these young people get to the stage at which they should be talking to someone, but they dwell on their own personal thoughts and do not want to talk to anybody. The receiver of the card should then stay with the person seeking help and attempt to contact someone in a professional area to assist.

The Yellow Ribbon Program cards are to be distributed free to schools, clinics, hospitals, churches, doctors and any community facility that will distribute them. This can all be done at a local level. Since I have mentioned this program in the electorate of Charters Towers, the Lions Club of Clermont and the Rotary Club of Charters Towers have offered to have the cards printed for those towns. The cards are now in use in 33 countries across the globe. Lifeline has offered its 1800 number as a 24-hour contact, and the Kids Helpline, and I sincerely thank it for that.

I think it is well worth reading out what the card says. The front of the card reads—

"This ribbon is a life line. It carries the message that there are those who care and will help. If you are in need and don't know how to ask for help, take this card to a friend, counsellor, clergy, parent or friend and say I need to use my yellow ribbon."

The back of the card reads—

"This card is a cry for help. Take this seriously. Stay with the person. You are their life line. They may not be able to tell you clearly their needs if they are in severe emotional pain or distress. Get them to: or call someone who can help if you cannot."

Of course, there is a contact number on the bottom, which would be that of Lifeline or some other organisation. Let us remember this little proverb: it takes a community to help raise a child; it also takes a community to save a child.

If anybody wants any further information on this worthy cause, I have a lot more information in my office. Also, Naomi Wilson, the previous Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care in the Borbidge Government, has started a chapter in Cairns, and she believes it is working very well. She would be quite happy to visit anybody's electorate or any centres that do want to start this program to speak further to them about it.

This program is another way—and perhaps an easier way—to somehow prevent the continuous rise in suicide attempts among both young and older people.
