

**FELLOWSHIP HOUSE, ALBANY**

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**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West)** [9.45 pm]: Last Tuesday, 23 May, it was my honour and pleasure to attend the opening by the Deputy Premier of the new Fellowship House in Albany, which supports sufferers of schizophrenia. This was a very special occasion. It clearly demonstrated the value of hard work and commitment that is so often found in regional and rural communities. In mentioning schizophrenia, it is significant to note that approximately one in five people will at some time in their lives suffer a particular type of mental illness. That is something that society is often reluctant to talk about. There is a growing awareness, however, that mental health issues must be brought into the public domain. Extra funding must be provided, which is something that this government has embraced since the financial year 2001-02, to the tune of a 46 per cent increase in funding. However, funding alone, especially in rural and regional areas, is not the complete answer.

The proper care for those affected by mental illness calls for a particular partnership at the local level, which involves families and community networks. People must be closely connected to each other, but it will always be imperative that individuals be prepared to fight for and stand alongside those who suffer from a mental illness. I refer to individuals such as Albany's Hope Sharp, who has been involved in schizophrenia support for some 25 years. Hope Sharp founded the Schizophrenia Fellowship in 1981. She often experienced at first-hand the devastating impact of mental illness in her own family. Hope Sharp and her late husband, Ted, understood the need to develop better support services and to promote a greater community understanding of mental illness.

Hope Sharp had a vision of a place in which people could connect with others in need in a safe and caring environment in which sufferers could be supported, and self-esteem and confidence could be built up as the sufferers were helped to get their lives back on track. The first schizophrenia fellowship meetings in Albany were held in private houses. In October 1993, dedicated premises were opened, and Fellowship House was born. It was a great boon to all concerned and was a vital resource to support families and carers. I am reliably informed that it was open 24 hours a day.

The facility soon needed improvement, as demand began to outstrip supply. In 2003 the fellowship, largely with the drive of people such as Hope Sharp, applied for a Lotterywest grant to extend and renovate the premises. Lotterywest's response was to encourage the fellowship to think bigger and to consider whether it was time to develop a new centre. The rest is history. Lotterywest supported the project to the tune of \$500 000-plus, and helped to deliver a new state-of-the-art Fellowship House for schizophrenia sufferers. All involved should be proud of their endeavours. It is certainly a first-class facility. I offer my congratulations to the dedicated team of staff, volunteers and supporters of the new Fellowship House. I particularly note and place on record the energy and vision of the fellowship founder, Mrs Hope Sharp. Schizophrenia sufferers in Albany and their families are greatly indebted to her.