

CHILDHOOD CANCER

Statement

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral) [5.53 pm]: I rise briefly to echo the words of Hon Matthew Swinbourn. Firstly, it is an honour to be here with Matthew because he speaks very honestly. He and his family always stand so proudly in support of raising awareness of children with cancer. I have a lot of respect for him, his wife, Glenda, and Harrison and Mitchell. He puts up a fight, puts on a brave face and constantly keeps going, and I think that is very commendable. It is amazing how much I have learnt about how full on childhood cancer is just from listening to his speeches this month and in the last two years.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn has taken me along to Kai's Big GOLD Ball two years in a row. Kara and Richard put on an absolutely amazing event, which is designed to raise as much funds as it can to take up the fight for childhood cancer. This year, I thought that the first one was pretty full on and tugged at the heartstrings, but this year was at another level altogether. Parents who have lost children stood and gave speeches and there were videos across all the screens about people's lives that had been affected by childhood cancer. I am pretty sure you could not find a dry eye in the room after about an hour and a half. Then they pull out all the auctions and everything else and the wallets start being opened. It works quite well. I think I was one who was bidding too much. It was great. The kids were there as well and had done up some action figures for the tables, which were then sold. A lot of money was raised and a lot of conversations were had about childhood cancer, which I think is the point of that ball.

My family has been touched by childhood cancer as well. My youngest sister, Millie, had stage 4 Hodgkin's lymphoma when she was 16, which was a huge shock. She had dealt with it for two years building up to the diagnosis, with us not knowing what was going on. It affects the whole family dynamic. You do not understand. You feel lost. I will never be able to explain that moment when we were finally told what it was. It was unbelievable. I want to raise awareness of the organisations that assist families through that process, and one of them is Ronald McDonald House. We see it everywhere. We see the collection boxes at McDonald's and we put in a dollar here and there. That organisation was an absolute lifeline for my family and for my sister.

We lived in Darwin at the time and Darwin's medical services probably are not up to the world standard like Melbourne, so we were rushed down to Melbourne. We did not have a house or anything down there, but we were able to stay at the Ronald McDonald House directly across the road from the hospital. I think I lived in that house with my sister for three months. Given the number of times that we rushed her across to emergency in the middle of the night during the chemotherapy and radiation treatment, having the house so close to the hospital was such a relief. It took a lot of weight off our shoulders. It also put us in a situation with other families who were going through it. Day to day we were sharing stories with other families. Millie formed friendships with kids on the ward who were living in the house as well and there was a camaraderie; we felt that everyone was going through it together, rather than on our own. I think a hugely important thing for childhood cancer is that people do not feel alone.

A lot of organisations, not-for-profit groups and sporting clubs get involved with the Ronald McDonald House and rock up and put on food nights, movie nights and game nights. It is amazing how much that affects people going through something such as this. Something like that can be such a fantastic night. My sister definitely appreciated the Ronald McDonald House throughout her time fighting Hodgkin's lymphoma. I have a positive story. She has been in remission now since she got rid of it when she was 16. She is now 24 and she is supposed to be giving birth to her first child this week, but apparently she is waiting a bit longer because the baby will not come out. She has really powered on since then, and she constantly remembers the people who helped her.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn touched on research. It was amazing to see the doctors were talking to doctors on the other side of the world about my sister. Every morning they were having debriefs and going through things, and coming back to the family and telling us what was going on. They do an amazing job. The nurses, all the staff, are amazing. When my sister was constantly getting treatment, the nurses had ways of being able to understand it. It is a big recognition to those nurses, and a few of them were at Kai's Big GOLD Ball. Again, I thank Hon Matthew Swinbourn for bringing this very important discussion to this chamber once again. I know that the honourable member will keep up the fight and I believe everyone in here should take it up as well.