

SPEECH GIVEN BY DEAN DYER, PRESIDENT THE MEN'S ADVISORY NETWORK (MAN) INC MEN IN BLACK BALL

A FUND RAISER FOR MAN, MEN AND HEALTH

ON SATURDAY 18th JUNE 2011 AT THE HYATT HOTEL, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Hello everybody and welcome along to this wonderful event.

I would like to acknowledge and give a heartfelt thanks to some key people who have made this event happen - Barbara McNaught, Sara and the team at Momentum Events, all the dedicated volunteers and staff at the Men's Advisory Network, the Honourable Helen Morton MLC, Minister for Mental Health and Disability services, David Boromeo, state manager for Bendigo Bank, Rick Collingwood and, especially Heath Black for his efforts to be here tonight, good on you Heath.

What are we here for tonight? Men and their mental health right.

I'm sure a lot of you know this, but here's a snapshot. 48% of men have a mental health issue, most men do not take their health and wellbeing seriously, 17% of men in Australia do not ever use their Medicare card.

I reckon a lot of us blokes think we are immortal, 'it won't happen to me'. I think Steve Biddulph sums it up pretty well in his latest book called 'The New Manhood' which came out late 2010. "Men, on average, live for 5 years less than women do. They also have higher death rates in every age category. Out of the top seven causes of death in Australia, Men excel in the numbers sometimes by as much as two or three times the number of women who die of the same cause. Men routinely fail at close relationships, 50% of marriages break down and divorces are initiated by the woman in four out five cases. Over 90% of acts of violence are carried out by men, and 70% of the victims are men. In schools, approximately 90% of children with behaviour problems are boys, and 85% of children with learning difficulties are also boys. Young men aged from 15-25 have 3 times the death rate of young women, and these deaths are all from preventable causes – motor vehicles and road trauma being the greatest cause. Men make up 80% of the homeless on our streets. Men make up over 90% of the gaol population. The leading cause of death among men aged 15 – 44 is self-inflicted death. Mental health, physical health and mortality – men dominate every category, just being male is the biggest risk factor of all".

If all those men and boys were able to speak up, it would be a cry of anguish!

It seems to me the old ANZAC, bronzed Aussie digger values of sacrifice and endurance have outstayed their usefulness and welcome, when it costs so much in men's lives, and ripples out into women's and children's lives as well.

I know I have sacrificed my health and wellbeing on the altar of 'achievement'. There is a deep chasm between men and health services; it is not going to be filled with another billion dollar building, with multi-million dollar equipment and staff.

What is up with Aussie 'masculinity'? Men are taught to grow up a certain way in our culture, 'man up', 'stand strong', 'suppress emotion', 'beware of other men' and for God's sake whatever you do, 'do not bloody well cry'.

Isolation, competition and homophobia are crippling us men. Ridiculing and shaming young boys into becoming 'man machines' and work robots, it's the opposite of what we want men to be like if we want them to be mentally healthy and well.

Yes, we are training boys to turn into men who suffer and die early deaths. Now, there is some good stuff happening in recent times to indicate that some of us are getting the message; WA Mental Health Commission, WA suicide prevention strategy, WA Injury Control Council etc. But we need more, a lot more.

I represent M.A.N., which is a bunch of mostly volunteers doing what we can to improve the health and wellbeing of boys and men in this state. We exist to straddle the enormous gap between those statistics I mentioned, and the too few services, groups, assistance and resources available to really help men and boys.

I know many 'grassroots', community based, groups of men who are making a stand for the benefit of all men.

We are developing a culture of men who can help themselves and help other men and boys to grow and be well. Doing it locally and within their families.

If we help our boys to grow into healthy balanced, connected and caring men, helping them to become more aware of these issues and pitfalls, help them to be less stressed, seeking solace in alcohol, drugs or killing themselves!

Help older men to realise their wisdom and eldership, the capacity they have to bless and honour a younger man, indeed many younger men.

Then, our relationships, our families, our workplaces and our communities, will begin to flourish in new and amazing ways. The benefits will ripple out for all to notice, especially the women and children who really deserve to have the best of their men, don't you agree?

I hope to meet you and talk about ways we can work together on this soon.

Thanks so much for your willingness and generosity, I hope you enjoy your night.

Thank you.