

Gay youth suicide on agenda

A Brisbane doctor pledges to raise serious social issues concerning Australia's marginalised groups, including gay youth and transgender people at this weekend's historic 2020 Summit.

by HARLEY DENNETT

A doctor invited to Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit has claimed new social inclusion programs

are needed to defeat the stigma of homosexuality because marginalised youth are being led to unsafe sex, drug overdoses and suicide.

Dr Wendell Rosevear will raise ideas to build esteem and arrest suicide rates in a number of marginalised populations including, gay youth, HIV positive and transgender people, drug users, rape victims and perpetrators.

Invited to the "Building communities, supporting families and social inclusion" forum, Rosevear wants more youth programs to raise awareness of gay and STI issues, sex offender programs, giving rape victims a choice of seeking mediated resolution instead of a trial, and legalising all drugs – which he admits will be controversial.

"Our society runs on a hierarchical ladder that says rich is better than poor, straight is better than gay," he said.

"My whole premise is flip that ladder on its side and say I'm valuable, you're valuable, and with that it's about fostering respect for choice and difference and individuality.

"There's a change of government now that wants to be more inclusive of gay and lesbian people. The previous government didn't really proactively value gay and lesbian people, certainly from a suicide prevention point of view," he said.

"If we're serious about suicide prevention, we need to not hold on to homophobic attitudes that don't value people of all sexualities, and don't hold onto

denial or pressure people to conform."

Failure to defeat the stigma of homosexuality will lead to more unsafe sex and drug overdoses, Rosevear claimed.

"We can say use condoms, but if people don't value themselves they know the information but they don't use it," he said.

Rosevear's work has involved establishing the Gay and Lesbian Health Centre in Brisbane, speaking about suicide prevention, running a gay and lesbian alcohol and drug support group, as well as a group for men affected by rape and sexual assault.

He has been awarded an Order of Australia medal, the Brisbane Australia Day Citizen of the Year award, and an AMA recognition for individual

contribution to the medical contribution.

"I want to translate that into some practical measures, not just nice words," he said.

"I believe in the legalisation of all drugs, so people can experiment and learn, not experiment and die from overdoses of unknown [substances], so we can destigmatise drug use and help people feel valuable not guilty and shameful and hide what they're doing and not talk about doing it with mum and dad. I'm promoting honesty and acceptance and the value of life.

"When you value people and give them choices they start to own their own life rather than spending their life showing the authorities 'you can't change me'. It's people who don't feel valuable

who love rebellion. They'll say 'I'll use drugs to feel a hero'. People who don't feel valuable love to put others down, they love to win, go beyond the reach of the authorities or the caring person in their life."

Rosevear said it was also time to remind people that there is no cure for HIV.

"There's almost a sense of complacency or invisibility, almost a collective denial response to the HIV epidemic," he said.

"I think that denial exhibits itself in the rising rates of syphilis in Australia that I see. That's a forewarning that HIV will rise if we have the same denial approach if we don't keep up the approach."

Sydney Star Observer, www.ssonet.com.au

Registry debate hits press

by CATHY ANDERSON

As gay rights groups celebrated the passing of Victoria's Relationships Bill through the state's Legislative Council last week, the Bill has sparked sensationalist headlines in regional Victorian press.

The *Warrambool Standard* ran a front page story with the heading: 'No-Gay Zone' and stated the Bill passed without the support of any of the region's MPs. Liberal and National voters were granted a conscience vote on the issue.

According to the article, Member for Western Victoria Region David Koch said in parliament: "I am not a supporter of same-sex couples forming a sexual relationship ... (It) is unfortunately the work of minority groups that are continually prepared to tear at the edges of our society."

But, in an article in regional paper *The Wimmera Mail-Times*, Lower House member for Lowan, Hugh Delahunty who also voted against the bill, said he was disappointed the paper had insinuated western Victoria was a 'no-gay zone'.

"There are a lot of gays in our community, who work within our community and I don't have a problem with that," he said.

"We didn't say we were against gays."

Mr Delahunty said he voted against the Bill because he believes marriage is between a



Couples are encouraged to have a public ceremony when registering their relationship.

man and a woman.

However, only nine Upper House members opposed the Bill. Stephen Jones, Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby co-convenor, said it was an historic day for gay and lesbian Victorians.

"The Victorian government has removed the burden currently on same-sex couples of repeatedly proving the existence of their relationship," he said.

Couples will be able to register their relationship with the Victorian registry of Births, Deaths & Marriage when it comes into effect either on or before December 1 this year.

But the Lobby expressed its disappointment that the Government did not support the proposed amendments by the Greens to include ceremonies.

"Celebration is a central

part of recognising a loving and committed relationship and we encourage couples to hold a ceremony or party to celebrate their special day," said Jones.

It is believed the government will review the Bill later in the year to potentially recognise relationships registered in other states.

Tasmanian activist Rodney Croome called upon the Federal Government to act on this issue.

"In the wake of Victoria's adoption of a registry, we strongly encourage other state governments to also allow same-sex and other couples to formalise their unions," he said.

"We also call on the Federal Government to give full and equal spousal entitlements to couples in state-recognised relationships."

HEADLINES



Love fundraiser

Love Machine nightclub has raised \$2000 for the Victorian AIDS Council from its recent Red Masquerade Ball. The money will be used to provide additional training to food service volunteers at the VAC's Positive Living Centre. The Centre provides two-course meals twice a week as well as brunch every day for people living with HIV/AIDS. On a busy night up to 70 people are served meals, mostly by volunteers. The money was handed to the VAC's Carolyn Warren by Love Machine co-manager Warwick Joseph (both pictured above).

No world bid for Outgames

Organisers of Melbourne's inaugural Asia Pacific Outgames this week decided against bidding for the 2013 World Outgames due to tight timelines. A steering committee of Melbourne Outgames Incorporated (MOI) said the May 16 deadline was too soon to secure government support and create a financial feasibility study, especially considering

the Melbourne event's finance report has not yet been finalised. However, organisers are confident of a financial surplus.

Thai blood donation

The Red Cross of Thailand announced last week that gay Thai men will now be able to donate blood. Gay rights activists had complained about the screening process, which barred gay men from donating blood, solely because of their sexual orientation. In 2007, it was found 500 Thai blood donors had HIV and that about half of those donors were gay or bisexual men.

Maccas goes gay

Fast food chain McDonald's has become a corporate partner of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC). McDonald's USA vice president of communications, Richard Ellis joined the NGLCC's board of directors in March. The NGLCC lobbies members of Congress on issues such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, hate crimes laws and equality for same-sex couples, according to its website.

Gay graveyard

A special graveyard has been opened for Danish homosexuals in Copenhagen where the organisation Rainbow has reserved 36 places for funeral urns. Ivan Larsen said he and his partner, Ove Carlsen,

wanted to be close after death, and co-founded Rainbow 12 months ago. A funeral urn site costs 2,500 Danish kroner (\$A567.69).

Gay stoush in Tassie

Tasmanian gay activists have rejected claims homophobia is rife in the Apple Isle. Coming Out Proud program co-ordinator, Julian Punch claims that openly-gay developer Stephen Roche left the sea-side town of Penguin because of "an old, dominant homophobic culture" in rural and regional Tasmania. Peter Power, spokesperson for same-sex partner lobby group, InDeed, refuted the claims. "Every community has some prejudiced people, but at the same time things aren't nearly as bad as Julian Punch has made out, and credit should be given to small-town Tasmania for changing as much as it has," he said.

Gay royal scandal

Queen Elizabeth's nephew, Viscount Linley, will not appear in court in London during the case of the alleged £50,000 (\$A106,000) gay sex blackmail plot. Two men, Ian Strachan, 30, and Sean McQuigan, 40, are accused of trying to demand the money Viscount Linley by threatening to release a mobile phone video of an assistant taking cocaine and boasting of engaging in a homosexual sex act with him. [A]