

## EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Wednesday 1 November 2006

**The Hon. A.L. EVANS:** I would like to speak about the Eating Disorders Association of South Australia. Mr Acting President, I would like to make you aware of an organisation that silently helps many every day: the Eating Disorders Association of South Australia. The illness that the organisation deals with is one of secrecy and shame, so few people admit to their suffering. Most people with eating disorders go to great lengths to hide the distress they are going through. Eating disorders touch not only the person suffering from the illness but also the family unit as a whole. EDAsa estimates that 2 per cent to 3 per cent of adolescent and adult females suffers from anorexia and bulimia. The figures are rising. Some 2 300 young people experiencing body image issues and eating disorders contacted the group for help in 2005-06; this is up from 18 000 in 2004-05.

While statistics like this are helpful in understanding the magnitude of the problem, they may only be the tip of the iceberg. Many sufferers go unidentified and unnoticed. Therefore, eating disorders are not given the attention and resources needed to adequately decrease their incidence. With this in mind, EDAsa is doing all it can with the resources it is given to raise awareness in the community, as well as improving prevention, increasing early intervention and promoting recovery and rehabilitation from eating disorders.

EDAsa was founded by a group of concerned parents in 1983 who identified a gap in services and an inability to obtain accurate information about eating disorders and treatment options. Since then, it has grown and developed into the association it is today, with one full-time worker, one part-time information support worker, and a support group facilitator (15 hours per fortnight) to oversee the Persons with an Eating Disorder Support Group. Currently, there is also a support group specifically for family and loved ones of individuals experiencing an eating disorder. This is facilitated by volunteers. The organisation currently has more than 20 active volunteers assisting with a

variety of projects, activities, general office duties, answering phone calls, and providing support and advice for clients, and it has a network of over 200 active members.

EDAsa has been and is currently facilitating trials of various projects aimed at identifying the causes of eating disorders and successful methods of treatment. Because eating disorders are both physically and psychologically debilitating, it is difficult to address the isolation, secrecy and overwhelming uncertainty about how to overcome this illness. This means that the projects being trialled are instrumental in providing awareness and relief for anyone experiencing an eating disorder. EDAsa is well aware of the difficulties and subsequent needs faced by health professionals in identifying and managing eating disorders.

General practitioners are often the first port of call. This can present GPs with a variety of issues, including how to best approach the problem, the requirement for an adequate assessment, making a diagnosis and knowing when and where to refer the person or family for further help.

EDAsa includes in its mission statement that it is dedicated to educating the community and providing a variety of resources for both lay people and professionals alike. It would like to work more extensively with GPs and health professionals to offer resources addressing early detection assessment, management and appropriate referral of people with eating disorders. EDAsa has recently been active within the school community, educating students, staff and families on the nature, risks, prevention, treatment options of body image and eating disorders, through initial presentation. It also offers ongoing support and follow-up.

EDAsa is a not-for-profit community organisation and currently receives funding from the Mental Health Unit, a division of the South Australian Department of Health. However, donations from the community, special grants, bequests and charitable trust grants help the organisation to expand its projects and programs in the community.