



Amy 'Dolly' Everett.

PHILANTHROPY

# Speak even if your voice shakes

WHEN A NORTHERN TERRITORY GIRL TOOK HER OWN LIFE, HER DEVASTATED FAMILY SET UP DOLLY'S DREAM. WE SPEAK WITH LESLEY PODESTA, CEO OF THE ALANNAH & MADELINE FOUNDATION, WHICH IS PARTNERING WITH DOLLY'S DREAM TO CHANGE BULLYING.

WORDS BY: KATRINA HOLDEN

In January 2018 Northern Territory schoolgirl Amy Everett, whose nickname was Dolly, tragically took her life after being the victim of bullying and cyberbullying. She was just 14 years old. In her childhood Dolly had been the face of Australian hat and clothing company Akubra in their ad campaigns. Her story, as well as the strength of her grieving parents Tick and Kate Everett, struck a chord and resonated around the nation — particularly in regional Australia, when the raw reality sunk in that this could happen to any of our children.

"The Everetts made a decision that they wanted to form Dolly's Dream in her memory," says Lesley Podesta, CEO of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, who is proudly bringing Dolly's Dream to life along with Tick and Kate, and an advisory board.

Before entering into the partnership there was much discussion with the Everett family. "They wanted to have Dolly's Dream established through us because we have a really similar view about some of the causes of bullying and

the things that need to be done to address it," explains Lesley. The Everetts were also inspired by Walter Mikac, who founded the Alannah & Madeline Foundation in honour of his two daughters, who along with his wife were killed in Tasmania's Port Arthur massacre in 1996, aged just six and three. "They saw that the Foundation has been going strong for 21 years and it's had such a big impact on children," says Lesley.

Dolly's Dream aims to raise awareness in communities among children and parents about the seriousness of bullying, and that it can have devastating consequences.

"Dolly's Dream wants to work to prevent and address bullying issues, to support victims of bullying and, most importantly, create positive change in our schools and communities so that there is no tolerance for bullying behaviours. One of the critical messages from Dolly's Dream is that they want to act as a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves by creating really positive change," says Lesley.

A number of companies throughout regional Australia,

including Akubra, have extended their support to Dolly's Dream in a number of ways.

"We've been working with clubs, people, organisations undertaking fundraising activities — and the wonderful Dolly's Dream Pins of Hope by Akubra are part of the fundraising. But we've also seen shirts, hats, raffles, auctions and more. We've had children making lemonade, we've had debutante balls and rodeos, we've had camp drafting events. People around Australia have really come together to say 'we want to do something, and this story has really touched us,'" says Lesley.

According to the Foundation, the problem of online and face-to-face bullying is greater than most people imagine. Recent data following a study conducted with Price Waterhouse Coopers about the cost of bullying in Australian schools revealed that approximately one in four students is bullied face-to-face and one in seven is bullied online; and approximately 900,000 children experience bullying in Australia each year.

"A lot of people talk about online bullying and the epidemic of it and there are terrible examples, but for most children it's still more likely that they will be bullied face-to-face in their school or in their community," says Lesley.

A particular stress for people living in regional Australia is that many children attend boarding school, as Dolly did, and those parents don't get to see their children daily.

"Of all of the things we've learned as a result of Dolly's Dream, the issue of supporting parents and getting parents the right advice is absolutely critical," says Lesley.

Equally parents need to model respectful behaviour and provide emotional support.

"Keeping communication open with your child is so important: being able to talk to them and making sure that you're not judgemental, and teaching them to value respect and kindness. There are strong pathways to be able to take down information on the internet in Australia using the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, for example. Step into your child's world. We need children to feel that bullying is not something that is their responsibility to solve. The responsibility is with their parents and their school — the child is living with the pain but it's not their job to fix it as well," says Lesley.

Parents are advised to talk to their kids before their teens.

"We have to be talking about this from the beginning, not shielding them from the consequences of their actions, however hard that might seem at the time. From when they are very young children, help them understand that mean words have consequences, and mean actions of isolating other children and not including them. Think about the impact on not just your children but other children, and practice that kindness and inclusion really early on," advises Lesley. **AN**



Alligator Creek Pony Club hosted a 'Do it for Dolly' open sporting day.

PHOTO: KATRINA ALEXANDER-SMITH

## POSSIBLE SIGNS OF BULLYING

Children often find it hard to report a problem with bullying, so it's important to know the potential signs if your child might be experiencing bullying:

Speak to your child's school first, as most schools have strong bullying processes. Further help if needed can be sought from the resources below:

- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in eating habits
- More frequent tears, anger and mood swings
- Frequently saying they are sick and not wanting to go to school
- Starting to bully or be mean to siblings
- Constantly saying they've lost their money
- Unexplained bruises or cuts
- Alannah & Madeline Foundation [amf.org.au](http://amf.org.au)
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner [esafety.gov.au](http://esafety.gov.au)
- National Centre Against Bullying [ncab.org.au](http://ncab.org.au)
- ReachOut Australia [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)

To connect with Dolly's Dream, contact the Alannah & Madeline Foundation (ABN 96 514 115 810).

- Ph: 03 9697 0666
- [amf.org.au](http://amf.org.au)
- [fundraise@dollysdream.org.au](mailto:fundraise@dollysdream.org.au)
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