

Quotes to support research release

Ian Roberts, first openly gay male athlete in Australia, and in Rugby League

I came out 25 years ago because I was tired of living a lie and like those who came before me, I hoped telling my story would make things better for others in the future.

I was also hopeful that the many sport leaders who congratulated me at the time were serious about protecting LGBT kids from discrimination. It has been a quarter century, I hate to think about that, but truly it has been a quarter century since I came out. It has also been nearly a half century since the first gay athlete came out, yet it seems nothing is changing.

I find it very hard to read stories of athletes who have come out recently, like Dan Palmer or Ryan O'Callaghan, the NFL player. When you compare their stories to my story, and others who came out before me, their experiences seem to be getting worse, not better.

I'm devastated to learn that gay kids who come out to their teammates are the most likely to be the target of homophobic abuse. This is exactly that opposite of what should be happening and what I expected. I thought if these kids came out that everyone around them would be on their best behaviour. I'm very proud of these kids for having the courage to come out at such a young age and very disappointed that the adults around them don't seem to have the courage to ensure these kids are safe.

I understand why guys still use homophobic slurs with their teammates thoughtlessly to get a laugh if they think all of their teammates are straight. We all like to have a laugh. But this language and this behaviour needs to stop. I've said this before, and I'll keep saying it, kids are literally killing themselves in the suburbs because they hear this language. It does not matter whether you think you are homophobic or not, you need to stop using words like fag and 'gay' to refer to anything that is weak. I've always suspected that hearing this language was harmful but now we have very solid evidence that kids who are exposed to this language are more likely to self-harm.

I'm getting very frustrated by the lack of action on this issue and all the empty promises. I can't tell you how many sport CEOs and board members have told me they think ending homophobia in sport is important and they want to help. In 2014, all the CEOs of Australia's major sports signed a formal commitment to eliminate homophobia. They received a lot of great media attention but they clearly have not followed-through on their commitments.

I'm not sure how to drive this issue forward. We need to find a way to get the guys who lead sport in Australia and around the world to care about this problem. Perhaps it would help if the government and major sponsors put pressure on the governing bodies and leagues. We can't keep ignoring this problem and hoping it will be fixed by time. It has been a quarter century since I came out and this problem isn't solving itself.

I'm really motivated to try to find some solutions. If there are others who feel the same way and have some good ideas of how we can move things forward, please reach out.