

In memory of our angel Isabelle

Author: By
MEGAN LEVY
Date: 27/01/2007
Words: 1067

Publication:
Illawarra Mercury
Section: News
Page: 6

A Mt Kembla family is demanding the introduction of stricter child seatbelt legislation after their daughter was killed in a car crash last year.

Noel and Danielle Broadhead said Isabelle's death could have been prevented if she was restrained in a five-point harness, rather than sitting in a booster seat with an adult belt.

Under existing laws, children older than 12 months can travel in a motor vehicle with only an adult seatbelt as a restraint.

That is despite extensive research showing that children under the age of four who graduate to a booster seat with an adult belt are substantially increasing their risk of serious injury.

Isabelle, 3, was sitting in a booster seat appropriate for her weight and was restrained with an adult seatbelt when the car she was a back seat passenger in crashed into a tree on April 13 last year.

The vehicle was travelling about 40km/h and swerved when a truck ventured onto the wrong side of Cordeaux Rd.

A post-mortem found Isabelle died of a blunt force trauma to her stomach caused by her seatbelt.

Her sister Madeline, who was seven at the time and sitting next to Isabelle in a booster seat, escaped uninjured.

Determined that Isabelle's death would not be in vain, the Broadheads have launched a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of booster seats for young children.

They have written to governments demanding legislation be tightened so that children must be secured by a five-point harness in a car until they are five years old, before graduating to a booster seat.

However, unlike in the United States, the Broadheads said there were no five-point harness seats - which have two shoulder straps, two hip straps and a crotch strap - for older children in Australia.

They are also calling for improvements to Cordeaux Rd. "Madeline got out (of the accident) because she was in an appropriate restraint," Mrs Broadhead said.

"I got out because I was in an appropriate restraint. Belle didn't get out, because she wasn't in an appropriate restraint. It's as simple as that."

She said there was no warning on booster seat packaging, or in the community in general, about the dangers associated with graduating young children to a booster seat.

That was despite a 2005 Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute report, which examined hundreds of children who presented at hospital emergency departments after car accidents.

That report recommended that "consideration be given to altering the current legislation so that children four years of age and under are required to use an appropriate child restraint rather than merely using an adult seatbelt".

The Broadhead family has written to NSW Transport Minister Eric Roozendaal, who told the Illawarra Mercury this week that he was concerned about seatbelt legislation for children.

He said NSW would seek the support of other jurisdictions to change the law nationally, so

that all children up to four were secured in appropriate restraints.

He did not specify whether an appropriate restraint was a five-point harness.

A spokesperson for Federal Transport Minister Mark Vaile said the matter had been referred to the National Transport Commission, which had employed a consultant to investigate the issue.

In the meantime, the Broadhead family will continue telling Belle's story. "It seems so senseless and so pointless, that she didn't die from a disease or anything like that. These are things that, had I have known, I could have prevented," Mrs Broadhead said.

"Now when I see people buying boosters, I feel like screaming at them 'Don't do it'. I want to tell people that it's as simple as putting them into a harness."

Memories

Danielle Broadhead's thoughts and memories on her daughter Isabelle, posted on a memorial website:

"Not only are we grieving the actual person, but we're also grieving what has happened and all the future events that should have been. It also feels as if this pain has no end. As I draw breath I suffer the loss and I miss Belle, as a person."

Memories of the accident:

"We began our descent and as always I travelled this tight winding section slowly. As we approached the last bend a truck appeared and it was travelling over the double lines, partly on our side of the road.

"I remember moving our people mover to the left to avoid colliding with him, I heard a crack and applied the brake just before we struck a tree head on."

"I remember looking back at them (Isabelle and Madeline), and they were both sitting up and upset, but neither was actually crying.

"I reached in to undo Belle, but something was wrong because Belle was leaning forward like she had gone to sleep. I undid her and had to grab her to stop her from falling.

"Belle only opened her eyes probably three times and each time it appeared that she wasn't looking at us, that she could hear us, but she couldn't see us. We talked to her a lot about going home to play her new computer game, and that she was going to be okay and that she would be fixed. We told her we loved her. I really thought they would fix her. I knew she was very sick but I didn't think we were watching her die. She was bleeding to death, only we couldn't see it.

"The ambulances finally arrived and they came to us. One officer knelt next to Belle and put his finger in her mouth, and ... then said 'scoop and run'.

"That was the last time I saw my baby alive.

"I replay this in my mind constantly. When I close my eyes at night I see the tree large and looming. I see it all replay as if I'm watching a horrible movie, but with no sound."

For more information about the Broadheads' campaign, see <http://isabelle-broadhead.memory-of.com> They have also posted a video on YouTube, which can be accessed from the above website.