

CREATING upstanding citizens

Courage to Care NSW recently marked 20 years of educating schoolchildren and others about the importance of “being an upstander”. **Gareth Narunsky** looks at how the program has evolved over time.

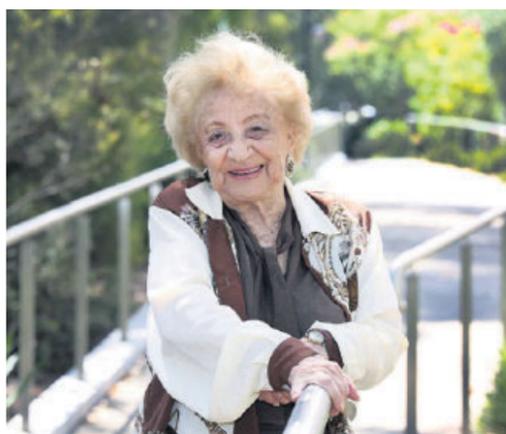
HOLOCAUST survivor Lena Goldstein recalls being hesitant when she was given an opportunity to flee the Warsaw Ghetto and go into hiding.

“I had a chance to leave, these Polish people were offering us a hiding place,” she said.

“I told my brother that I don’t want to go and leave him and he said, ‘You have to go. Somebody has to tell the world what’s going on here, otherwise nobody is going to believe it.’”

The caretaker who hid Lena, at considerable risk to his own family, most certainly saved her life.

“Those that survived without [going to the] camps like me, they owe their lives to people that risked their lives and their families’ lives to save a person they never knew,” she said.



Lena Goldstein

Photo: Noel Kessel

It is this heroism that inspires the core message behind Courage to Care, which uses the stories of Holocaust survivors and the Righteous Among the Nations to encourage people to be “upstanders” rather than bystanders when they see discrimination, prejudice or bullying take place.

“I consider it not work, but I consider it as a duty,” Goldstein said of her association with Courage to Care.

“It is an organisation worth working for.”

In just 20 years, Courage to Care NSW has had an impressive impact, holding 49 exhibitions all over NSW and Queensland and along the way educating 215,639 people, 85,001 of whom were school students.

“We basically started in November 1998 and it was an idea and not much more,” founding chairman Andrew Havas said.

“It was already being run in Melbourne and I saw a major opportunity. Pauline Hanson was going around ... for the first three, four years we actually attempted to follow wherever she had been to neutralise her path in the country towns.”

Havas’ motto is, “People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.”

And so he set about making the idea into a reality, gaining the support of then Powerhouse Museum director Kevin Fewster, conferring with the NSW Department of



Armidale High School students at the first exhibition in 1999.

Education and engaging the help of educator Ruth Wilson.

Being very involved in B’nai B’rith at the time, Havas brought the fledgling program in under its umbrella. He consulted with the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, who have for many years successfully sent speakers to regional NSW, and with the Sydney Jewish Museum.

A committee was formed, short and medium-term project plans were drawn up and the first successful exhibition came to fruition in Armidale on February 22, 1999.

“We had over 5000 people [attend],” Havas said.

Over the five weeks, 95 volunteers, which included 22 Holocaust survivors, travelled to Armidale at different

times to work on the program.

“They became oral historians, giving explanations and sharing their whole range of different experiences,” he said.

The program went to another level in 2001 when Courage to Care successfully negotiated a partnership with the Powerhouse Museum, which had announced an Anne Frank exhibition.

The opening of the two exhibitions attracted a crowd of 500 people, a message from then United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan and an address from chief justice Jim Spigelman. Over 39,000 people would visit the exhibition over the six weeks.

“Being in such a professional and



Founding Chairman Andrew Havas.



Students at the Powerhouse Museum exhibition in 2001.



The new exhibition launched in 2012.

high-profile location meant that we really had to lift the game to best practice," Havas said.

"So I believe that Courage to Care really came of age in May 2001."

In 2004 Courage to Care introduced its "Local Hero" project, whereby one person is honoured in each town to which it travels.

The program has continued to grow and evolve, with a brand new modern exhibition launched in 2012.

"One of the things I'm very proud of is we tried a whole lot of things. If it worked, fantastic. If it didn't, it was lessons learned," Havas said, adding, "There's no way in the world you could do this without a fantastic team of people."

In terms of the program's tangible effects, he tells a story of being on a plane from Sydney to Melbourne.

"A young person with an army hat was sitting next to me. I said to him, 'Are you in the army?' and he said, 'Yes, what do you do?' And I said I am the chairman of Courage to Care.

"I thought that he was going to jump and give me a kiss. This is what he said: 'My friends are either dead, in jail or drug addicts. When the little old lady came to Liverpool Boys' High School in year 10, I decided to turn my whole life completely around.

"He became the school captain in year 12. He joined the army because he knew he needed discipline. I keep in contact with him, he is now an electrical engineer and is just absolutely amazing.

"And if we did that to one person, the whole program is worthwhile."

That is just one example.

"I cannot tell you the number of times that I have personally witnessed a whole entire class apologise to a student for many years of bullying, of racial taunts, just because they were different," Havas said.

"So we've been incredibly effective."

But the program is making a difference beyond the schoolyard. Queensland Police use the program for its recruits and presented Courage to Care with an Award of Excellence in 2017.

"We've been able to morph. Initially it wasn't really about bullying, it was more about racism," he said.

"And now, we're looking at school programs and we're looking at other workplace initiatives because of our success."

Current chairperson Juliet Seifert said Courage to Care is "tremendously important" in 2019.

"What we're seeing worldwide is a terrible resurgence of all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism," she said.

"We really have to, particularly with youngsters, make them aware not just that discrimination is wrong, but of the potential dangers that can come of it if it's allowed to escalate because no one responds."

She continued, "There are debates in Australia around immigration, around refugees, around all forms of racism ... it just makes us realise how important it is to add

this into school curricula, and also to try and talk to corporate Australia about what we know is going on in the workplace.

"We know that there's harassment, there's bullying and we need to address that by showing that sort of behaviour is unacceptable, but also encouraging people to stand up and speak out."

The workplace program is particularly important, she said. Last month, it was introduced into an aged care facility in Wellington in Western NSW.

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Andrew Havas

"It was extremely well received to the point where the CEO remarked that she will recommend the program not just to other aged care facilities, but will build it into the submission that she is doing for the current inquiry into aged care," Seifert said.

"So she clearly saw the relevance."

Seifert has big plans for the future of Courage to Care.

"We've got to build our force of volunteers, we've got to go through a renewal

process of bringing a new and younger cohort in, training them to deliver the program and using professional educators as well if we can build up our finances and afford to do that," she said.

"I'd also like to look at the possibility of getting our program accredited so that teachers have the benefit of doing the program as part of continuing education.

"There is a lot that can be done, but we really need to now extend both our human resources and our financial resources so that we can increase the reach of the organisation and increase the impact of the programs."

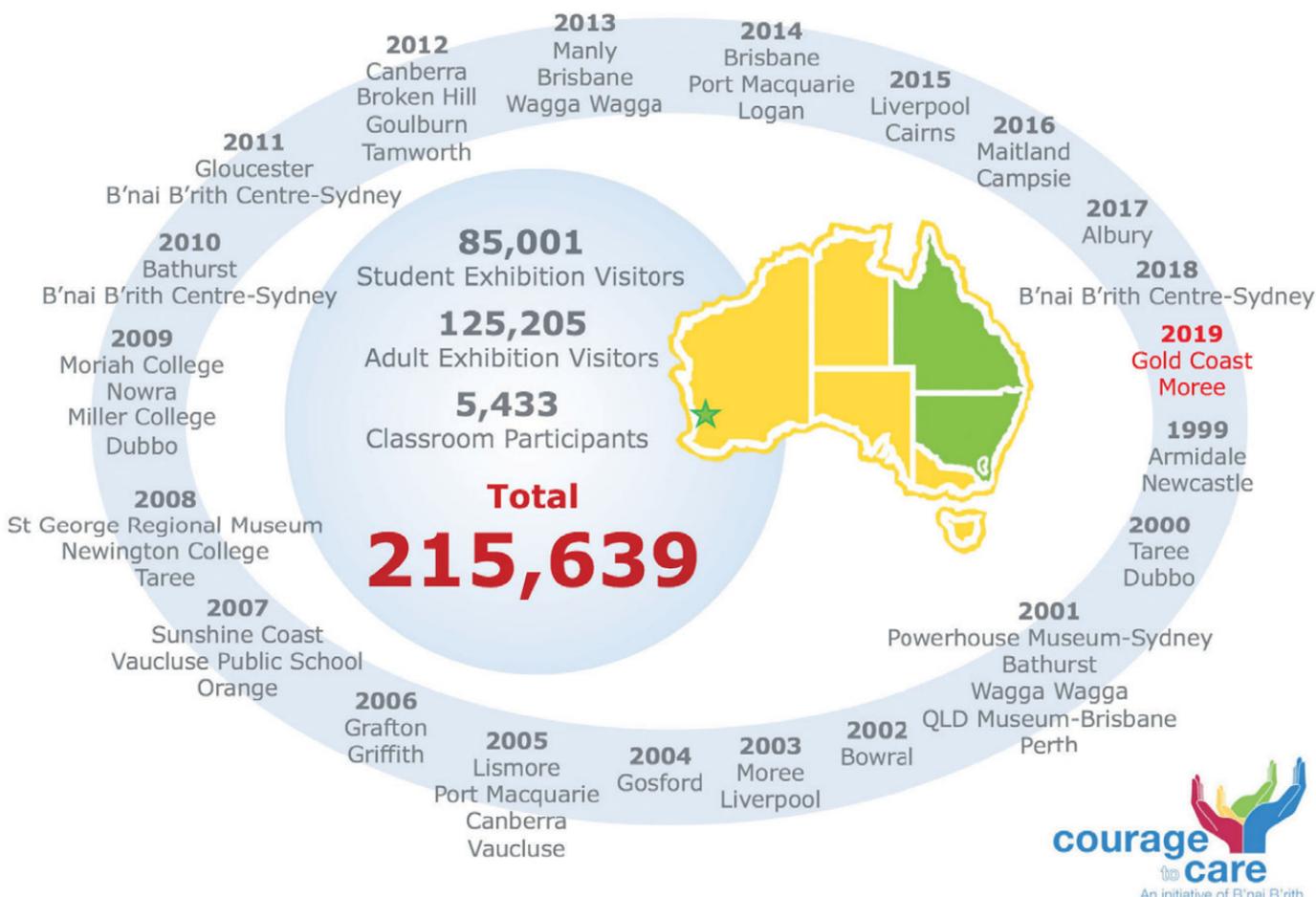
She said Courage to Care's recent national conference saw the various state branches unite behind a common purpose statement: To promote acceptance across society by doing four things: Creating awareness of the dangers of discrimination, injustice and prejudice; providing education to challenge attitudes and behaviours; demonstrating that every individual can make a difference; and transforming bystander behaviour to upstander.

"These elements give us a basis on which to structure what we do. If everyone signs up to the four parts of the purpose then you can work on those parts and develop something really cohesive," she said.

"So I hope to see us really push that forward."

For more information about Courage to Care, visit couragetocare.com.au

COURAGE TO CARE EXHIBITION & CLASSROOM TIMELINE



Juliet Seifert, Chairperson Courage to Care (NSW).



Righteous Among the Nations Adrian Vanas, who helped save more than 1100 Jews during the Holocaust, was involved with Courage to Care for 15 years, telling his story to students. He passed away in 2014.