

Braving the Storm to Hear from the Stolen Generation

COURAGE TO CARE NSW

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On Sunday, 20 February, a deluge of wind and rain-soaked and battered Sydney (thankfully assisting with the ongoing NSW bushfires) and over 50 Courage to Care volunteers and friends braved the elements to hear the remarkable testimony of Uncle Michael "Widdy" Welsh, a member of the Stolen Generations, who was taken from his family as a young boy and placed in the Kinchela Boys Home.

Kathy Sharp, Vice-Chair of Courage to Care NSW introduced the guest speakers from Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), a charity supporting Aboriginal men who were placed in the home as children. The Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home was operated by the NSW Government from 1924 to 1970, housing 600 boys over the years. Uncle Widdy recounted how the boys were not permitted to speak their mother tongue, associate with the Aboriginal community in any way, or use even their birth names. Instead, the staff called the boys by number only. Uncle Widdy was number 36.

The event's speakers also included Dr Tiffany McComsey, the group's CEO, and Dr Ari Lander, the group's Education Officer. Ari previously served as the Education Officer at the Sydney Jewish Museum and has done remarkable work bridging the Jewish community and other communities of genocide survivors such as the Armenian, Rwandan, and Cambodian communities.



Dr Tiffany McComsey, Ari Lander, Uncle Widdy.

Of particular interest to our Courage to Care audience was how the former children of Kinchela had committed to sharing their stories to Australian children and now use a travelling bus that features a mini-history exhibit and seating space for students to hear firsthand accounts from members of the Stolen Generations.

As our volunteers can attest, live storytelling captivates listeners and reinforce

the lessons of history. In the case of Uncle Widdy, we learn that coercive assimilation efforts produce disastrous consequences for Aboriginal children and their families.

For the Jewish community, Uncle Widdy's story may inspire us to learn more about a difficult chapter in 19th Century Jewish history when Jewish boys (known as 'Cantonists') were abducted from their families, forced to live in boarding schools

and later serve in the Czarist army. These largely forgotten stories may help us better empathize with the experiences of the members of the Stolen Generations.

We hope these stories will encourage young Australians to combat racism and prejudice in all its forms and to work toward building a kinder and more harmonious society.