

Kesser Torah students experience the Courage to Care



COURAGE TO CARE

Students at Kesser Torah College last month met with volunteers and Holocaust survivors from the Courage to Care NSW Classroom Program. The students met with survivors Mimi Wise and Ernie Friedlander OAM who shared their experiences during World War II to Boys' Years 9 and 10 and Girls' Years 10 and 11.

Mimi shared her riveting account of her family's travails in the French countryside, dodging the attempts by the Gestapo to round up and deport the local Jews. Mimi described how they were sheltered by a French farmer and were hidden in a chicken coop. This assistance was provided despite the great risk faced by farmer and his family who could have been killed if they were caught. The Kesser Torah students were especially rapt when Ernie told his story of survival. As a young child, Ernie had to endure the Allied bombardment of Budapest, his schoolmates mistreating him for being the only Jew in the class, and the forced incarceration of his father at an unknown location. Ernie and his mother were forced to endure one of the notorious death marches. However, on this occasion, a Nazi Arrow Cross officer signalled to Ernie's mother that he would look away while she and Ernie rolled down the side of an embankment and escape.

This small act meant the difference between life and death for them. Ernie's

lesson to the students is that even in terrible times, every person has the capacity to be decent. This experience has shaped Ernie's personal philosophy that one should always try see the positive in life.

Mimi and Ernie's stories are the heart of the Courage to Care educational program, an initiative of B'nai B'rith, which offers the students in the Jewish community a unique experience to recognise the importance of standing up for others.

The stories of the Righteous Among the Nations that Mimi and Ernie owe their lives to is a potent lesson for young people from all backgrounds to be kind to those who are suffering from bullying or discrimination. One student's response afterwards was quite telling, that they would try harder to ensure their classmates got along and were more inclusive of those left out.

After these stories were shared, the Courage to Care volunteers set up interactive workshops to help the students explore these issues further. The students considered and discussed the various forms of discrimination and prejudice that face different people today. The Courage to Care volunteers and survivors were proud to help empower students in our community with the essential message of empathy and hope, inspiring them to treat others fairly and help make the world a better place.