

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Courage to Care NSW

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Committee Secretary

Inquiry into Antisemitism in NSW

Parliament House Sydney 2000

Dear Committee Members,

I write this submission as the Chair of Courage to Care NSW, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to combating antisemitism by delivering anti-discrimination programs to school students in regional and metropolitan NSW.

We are pleased that this Inquiry has been established and are grateful for the opportunity to present the information herein to you.

Established in 1999, Courage to Care (C2C) was founded by Holocaust survivors to highlight the vital role that others played in their survival from the horrors of Nazism during WWII.

The founders based their message around the word “Upstander” to describe someone who acts with courage and empathy when they observe someone being confronted with an act of discrimination. It’s a deceptively simple idea, because at its heart it implies that in a civil society, we **all** share a collective responsibility to reject hatred and prejudice.

Today, the C2C program is still delivered by Holocaust survivors and their descendants, along with a small army of Jewish volunteers. Our purpose remains as it always was – to inspire young people to be Upstanders to all forms of discrimination, especially antisemitism.

Antisemitism is an insidious social disease. If allowed to take hold of broad swathes of society, it results in the destruction of civil life.

And I speak from personal experience.

I am 65 years of age. My parents were Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust. From the stories they told me about their wartime experiences in Hungary in 1944, I feel I understand the ultimate destruction that comes from allowing antisemitism to become an accepted norm of behaviour in a society.

I write this submission in their memory, for the benefit of my children, for any future grandchildren and because I love my birthplace Australia where my parents came as refugees after WWII.

In a grotesque twist, in the shadow of the October 7 massacres in Israel, antisemitism has become today’s go-to form of racism. And the Jewish community has once again had to mobilise to explain why antisemitism is wrong, to counter the alarming rise of disinformation in the media, and to propose solutions.

Any organisation (social, governmental, corporate, religious or educational) which allows antisemitism to take hold and persist is complicit in the potential deterioration of civil society. And yet for many Jewish people in NSW today, we appear to be surrounded by such organisations.

If I've learnt anything in my 65 years, it's that antisemitism is an evil that must be rejected emphatically and without qualification, whenever or wherever it appears.

In addition to learning this fact from my parents' experiences, I learnt this from my non-Jewish headmaster of my high school, a Sydney all-boys school that I attended in the 1970s in which about 10% of the students in my year were Jewish including a number who were a descendant of a Holocaust survivor. I would describe that number as a noticeable minority.

Every boy in that school knew what the Headmaster's attitude was: that expressions of antisemitism were not acceptable. He had zero tolerance for it. Students knew that antisemitic behaviour, when proven, could possibly result in their expulsion.

As a result, I experienced very minimal antisemitism at high school.

This experience tells me that although antisemitism is an insidious social disease which cannot be eliminated, people must be taught that the expression of antisemitism is unacceptable.

As the Chair of an organisation that delivers educational programs to young people, I'm a strong believer in the power of education when fighting antisemitism. Education can convey the message that antisemitism is unacceptable in our society - because it has the potential to spread and thereby destroy social cohesion.

C2C collects extensive survey data after every program delivery in a NSW school. This data demonstrates unequivocally that our programs inspire young people to reject racism and to be Upstanders:

- 93.5% of students say they have a better understanding of what it means to be an Upstander after experiencing our program.
- 90% agree that it's important to be an Upstander
- 85% say they came away from our program with strategies to be an Upstander, and
- 78% of students said they would recommend our program to others.

Today, almost 50% of Jewish children attend Jewish day schools ("The Jewish population of Australia" Dr David Graham – Published by Jewish Communal Appeal - May 2024) and, as a result, fewer children in non-denominational private and public schools and schools of other faiths interact with Jewish children. Consequently, negative thoughts and misconceptions of Jewish people can arise easily, and antisemitic behaviours can be the outcome.

Together with many members of the Jewish community I am a strong believer that young people need to be educated on behaviours that promote social cohesion in our Australian multicultural society.

C2C presented to almost 20,000 students during FY2024 ("Courage to Care Annual Report"). This is just a drop in the bucket of the number of young people who need to know the lessons taught by C2C. In NSW alone there are approximately 75,000 students in Year 12, many of whom will move on to study at university.

With regards to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, we can confirm that incidents of antisemitic behaviour in Australian schools have risen dramatically. We can offer no empirical data to support this – after all, many cases of antisemitism are not officially reported or recorded – but we can certainly offer the anecdotal evidence that virtually every school we visit acknowledges

the enormity of the problem within their own school walls. We hear distressing stories of antisemitic behaviour at NSW schools on a daily basis.

Australia is often hailed as the most successful multicultural society on Earth. For Australia's Jewish community, that's certainly not how it feels right now.

I'll conclude by wishing you every success in conducting your Inquiry. C2C would be pleased to appear before the Inquiry if you think it would be helpful.

Kind regards

Tom Curtis

Chair

Courage to Care (NSW)