

RICHARD CAMPBELL



Richard Campbell is a Dunghutti/Gumbaynggirr man from Bowraville on the New South Wales mid north coast.

At Richard's Catholic School the nuns thwarted several attempts by the Aboriginal Protection Board to remove the Aboriginal kids. Then on October 12 1966 the school was caught unaware.

"All of a sudden they grabbed our younger sisters. Threw them in the back of the car, you could hear them screaming," Richard remembers.

He and his older brother were also forced into the waiting police car. The five children were taken to court, where they were charged with neglect.

"We weren't neglected! We had a life. We had culture, we had language. We had a way of living."

Richard and his brother were taken to the notoriously cruel Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home where their identities were systematically stripped from them. Richard said they were given numbers, not names, and were severely punished if they used their Aboriginal language.

"We were told not to speak it. And not to look for your parents because they're dead. And they sayin' you're not Richard Campbell, you're now number 28. And you are not black, you are white."

Richard suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse at Kinchela. He says trauma followed all the boys out of the institution.

"So the next step for us was incarceration in a bigger jail ... straight into Long Bay, Goulburn, Grafton Gaol ... you could see them travel through their lives, through drugs, alcohol, stealing, things like that."

Richard is now a Board Director of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation and has only recently begun to tell his story. He is deeply distressed about the continued removal of Aboriginal kids into out of home care, including four of his own grandchildren.

Richard wants governments to stop taking Aboriginal children away from their families, and to offer more support to Indigenous parents. He says Intergenerational Trauma must be better understood.

"Time is not on our side. We have lost four men this year alone and this ... means they cannot be part of their families' healing ... who are left living with the pain of questions unanswered."

IAN HAMM



Ian Hamm is a Yorta Yorta man from Shepparton in central Victoria. In 1964, he was separated from his family when he was three weeks old. He grew up just 50 kilometres away from them, unaware of their existence.

That changed when he went to college and met an Aboriginal education officer who asked him if he knew where he came from. Ian replied his birth name was Andrew James. The person said: “Yeah. I think I know who you are. I’ll get back to you.”

Six months later a worker from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency visited Ian in Bendigo. She told him his birth family, the James family, was a big Aboriginal family in Shepparton. Ian then realised he’d already met some of his birth family, but was unaware of their relationship.

“It blows you away. She told me I was one of five, ‘You have two sisters and two brothers’. And I asked about my mother. She said my mother died in 1966, when I was two,” he said.

“I’ve only got a few photos of my mum. It’s enormously frustrating when people say to me I’m like my mother. I don’t know what that means. It puts into perspective where you fit in. Or don’t fit in as the case may be,” he said. “The hard part of this is I didn’t meet any of them until I was in my twenties. You’ve only known each other as adults,” Ian said.

“It will be the same for anybody who’s been through this experience, the thing that’s the most confronting, the one that you live with every day—that you’ve had to start a relationship as an adult. How do you create those relationships? How do you make them work?”

He described the uncertainty of identity he felt as the only Aboriginal man growing up in Yarrowonga.

“People would tell me I’m Aboriginal, but what does that mean? My only source of information was what people told me and what I saw on television. This is the ‘60s and the ‘70s, and that wasn’t great.”

Over the years, moving forward has had its own challenges, especially in finding a way of getting on with things. “When I say heal, for me, I don’t think you get over it, you just get used to it. It’s how I get by.”

Ian says he’s largely made peace with his past, but it’s more like a cessation of hostilities than a lasting peace.

“There are days when sometimes it just gets to me. I get this overwhelming sense of sadness. And I know exactly what it is. It’s that ‘Where do I fit in?’.”

FLORENCE ONUS



Florence Onus is a descendant of the Birri-Gubba and Kairi/Bidjara clans of north-east Queensland.

She is the fourth generation of women from her family to be forcibly removed from land, culture and family.

“My grandmother and my mother were both trained and sent out as domestic servants on properties. They weren’t allowed to speak their native language or practice cultural ceremonies, or they would be severely punished,” Florence said.

“And then I became part of the Stolen Generations when I was removed from my family to be raised in a white foster home.”

Her two older sisters were sent to Rockhampton to live with nuns, while Florence and her two other siblings went to Townsville foster homes. There, Florence spent most of her childhood.

“I embarked on my healing journey when at 21 my mother attempted suicide and I became her full time carer and together we began the journey of healing.”

“It wasn’t until I started doing my own research and had access to policies that I truly realised that my mother was suffering from the impacts of Intergenerational Trauma.”

Florence has four adult daughters and she is a grandmother. She is passionate about breaking the cycle of trauma through healing, education, cultural identity and spiritual nurturing.

Florence is an educator and an advocate for social justice. Her maternal grandfather died in custody in the early 1960s following his arrest as an agitator.

Florence has carried on his fight for social justice, with a particular focus on the impact of Black Deaths in Custody and Stolen Generations issues.

“There needs to be an increase in healing resources for the Stolen Generations and our families to heal from the trauma, pain and suffering that we’re still dealing with today,” she said.

LORRAINE PEETERS



Lorraine Peeters is a Gamilaroi/Waliwan woman from central west New South Wales.

At the age of four she was forcibly taken from her family in Brewarrina. Along with hundreds of other girls she was placed in the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.

“We were brainwashed to act, speak, dress and think white and we were punished if we didn’t,” said Aunty Lorraine. “We were not allowed to talk in our language or about culture or about our families. It wasn’t until I was in my fifties that I suffered a mental health issue, trauma. There was an Aboriginal person inside, screaming to get out.”

As a result of undertaking her own healing journey, Lorraine developed the Marumali Program™, which is based on the Marumali Journey of Healing Model. It’s a unique program to increase the quality of support available to Stolen Generations members.

“When you’ve been through as much as we have, the trauma can easily be reactivated by those who don’t understand it. To prevent this, trauma-informed training should be mandatory for everyone working with our mob, especially Stolen Generations members and their families, as recommended by the Bringing them Home report.”

Lorraine works with survivors, service providers, health practitioners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates within correctional centres and has delivered the program to more than 3000 participants.

Lorraine says Western style counselling is not appropriate for the Stolen Generations. “Collective healing is so important for institutionalised people, you don’t have to tell or explain your story to anybody, we just know the trauma that everyone has experienced.”

Lorraine played a key role in the 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations, presenting the Prime Minister with a glass coolamon, a vessel traditionally used to carry babies, as a symbol of hope.

Lorraine says Australia needs to understand it’s not just the Stolen Generations that have been affected by trauma.

“Behaviour is learnt. If my children are watching me have anxiety, fear, drinking issues to numb the pain, that behaviour is learnt by little people. That will continue. We have to address this for future generations,” she said.

DOREEN WEBSTER



Doreen Webster is a Barkindji woman, born in Wilcannia, in the north west of New South Wales.

“I remember happy times with my parents before I was taken. My dad worked on a station. I loved it. I had a younger sister. She was a baby when she was taken.”

Doreen and her brother John were taken to the local police station and locked up in a cell. The next day she was put on a train to Sydney, where at Central Station, she was separated from her brother.

“A man was waiting there for my brother, from Kinchela Boys Home. I said ‘Where are you going?’ And I was pulling at him, trying to pull him back,” she said. “Here I am on the station, a little eight year old, screaming and crying because they were taking my brother away.”

Doreen was taken to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.

“When I got up to Cootamundra I was thinking, ‘What’s going on here? Where am I?’ I had no idea where I was or what was happening to me. I was screaming for my mum and dad. When we got there we were treated so cruelly—so cruelly,” Doreen said.

She recalls the matron asking a police officer to punish her.

“I was sitting down on the ground and he got me by the hair of the head and just pulled me up, straight up to my feet—lifted me off the ground and stood me on my feet—and then he stood on my foot. I had no shoes on. I was screaming out in agony. It was just horrifying. I used to run away all the time,” she said.

Doreen, who is now on the Board of the Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation, is a vocal advocate of appropriate aged care for the Stolen Generations. She wants the survivors of Cootamundra, and the infamous Kinchela Boys Home, to have their own joint aged care facility, so they can spend their last years together.

“For when we get older, a place where we can be. We are family, we are sisters to the Kinchela boys. They are brothers to us. And there is a closeness. That is our family.”

MICHAEL WELSH



Michael Welsh is a Wailwan man from Coonamble in New South Wales. He was eight when he and his brother Barry were taken from his mother and five of his siblings.

Michael was told that his other brothers and sisters would follow on the next train. He knew it was a lie.

He was taken to the notorious Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home. An institution near Kempsey on the New South Wales mid north coast, Kinchela was renowned for its physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse of Aboriginal children.

The children weren't allowed to use names. Instead they were given numbers. Michael was number 36.

Michael said the aim of Kinchela "was to degrade us and set us up for reprogramming our brains".

For decades afterwards, Michael struggled with the trauma he experienced at Kinchela. He finally reached a stage where he couldn't hold the pain back any longer.

He made contact with the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), an organisation established by Kinchela survivors to support them and their descendants.

"When we get together as a group of brothers who've gone through that place, it feels good. The fear that was there is not there anymore," Michael said.

Michael is passionate about ending the cycle of Intergenerational Trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. He also serves on the Board of Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation.

"I'm not the only one who feels this pain, I've got eight children and they all feel the same," he said.

"We do not want this hate to go to our children or to our grandchildren and great grandchildren."

"Our children need to be connected to this healing process too. Our journey's almost over, our children's journeys are only just beginning."