

KINDERTRANSPORT LIFELINE

Thanking the Quakers

PETER KOHN

THE Religious Society of Friends – Quakers has been honoured by the Jewish Holocaust Centre (JHC) for the Quakers' role in the kindertransports ferrying 10,000 Jewish children out of Nazi Germany to Britain on the eve of World War II.

Now in his late 80s, Vienna-born Frank Baumann of Melbourne was 8 and his sister Erika was 9 on Kristallnacht, the Nazi pogrom in Germany and Austria. Baumann's father was arrested and spent six months in Dachau.

On July 12, 1939, Frank and Erika boarded a train with many other children, travelling via the Netherlands to England, where the two children's grandparents cared for them.

"We arrived in England in mid-summer, but carrying our winter coats. We must have looked strange when the newspapers took photographs of us," Baumann told the November 2 JHC event.

Vera Werder, also of Melbourne, in her early 90s, was a child sent from Berlin to relatives in Prague to escape the Nazis. But when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, they were trapped.

With her father, Vera boarded a train that was sealed for its transit across Nazi Germany. "We could see the people staring at us as our train passed through the stations without stopping," she recounted. "But once the train entered the Netherlands, the local Dutch people welcomed us and



From left, Warren Fineberg of the JHC, Alan Clayton of the Quaker community, Viv Parry and Gary Peer.

gave us flowers."

These young people did not know then that the kindertransports were organised by Britain's Quakers, in their tradition of war relief, particularly after World War I.

Comparing Quaker principles "to tikkun olam (repairing the world)", Alan Clayton, a Quaker archivist, said after Kristallnacht Britain's Quakers pleaded with their government to allow in Jewish children from the Continent.

Prime minister Neville Chamberlain refused, but changed his mind on the urging of home secretary Samuel Hoare and MP Philip Noel-Baker, both Quakers. However, Quakers had to pay a 50-pound bond for each child, totalling "around 17.5 million pounds (\$A2.9 million) in today's money", said Clayton.

Jewish children were housed at

schools and hostels around Britain. The kindertransports continued until Britain declared war against Germany, with the final transport tragically halted, said Clayton. After the war, Quakers aided a legion of orphans.

Gary Peer, whose mother was on a kindertransport, presented Australia's Quakers with a certificate of recognition, noting "they stood up and allowed us to have our most precious gift, our lives".

Viv Parry, chairperson of Child Survivors of the Holocaust, said the JHC event was inspired by the research of Holocaust scholar Amy Williams, a JHC intern.

JHC executive director Warren Fineberg said the Quaker intervention and the acclaimed Aboriginal delegation to Melbourne's German consulate stand out as two remarkable feats in the wake of Kristallnacht.

FACTS ON THE GROUND

Israel's Progressive Judaism blossoming

PETER KOHN

QUIPPING he was sent Down Under in exchange for visits to Israel by Australia's leaders for the Beersheba centennial, Rabbi Gilad Kariv, president and CEO of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), noted the deep significance of two milestone events this month.

In an address to Union for Progressive Judaism (UPJ) supporters in Melbourne, the rabbi, visiting for the United Israel Appeal Progressive Trust, said today's Israelis must build on the historic foundations created by the 1917 Anzac Beersheba charge and the 1947 UN vote for a Jewish State. "We must work hard to make the most of the opportunities that came out of the events of 100 and of 70 years ago."

Comparing the approaches of Zionist pioneers Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, Rabbi Kariv said Herzl believed the Jewish State needed "diplomacy and politics" on its side to succeed, but Weizmann spoke of a more pragmatic "synthetic Zionism" of grassroots substance, and was emphatic that "facts on the ground" mattered at least as much as global relations.

In that vein, the IMPJ is now involved at two important levels in making Israel a more religiously pluralistic society, the rabbi noted. "We need to engage in the politics, but we also need to continue



Rabbi Gilad Kariv of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism speaking in Melbourne.

Photo: Peter Kohn

to create facts on the ground."

He said the IMPJ continues to be active in lobbying Knesset members and in legal action before Israel's High Court to try to reverse the government's pull-out from an agreement to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Kotel, and also to fight against the monopoly of the Chief Rabbinate on conversion, and to push for civil marriage and divorce.

But away from the MKs and the lawyers, "a quiet pluralistic revolution" is developing, he said. The number of Israel's Progressive congregations has doubled in the past nine years and up to 10 new rabbis are ordained each year.

"Every second Israeli Jew has already taken part in a life-cycle event led by a Reform or a Masorti rabbi," he said, adding that polling shows that "80 per cent of Israelis identify Progressive Judaism as a positive".

DAY OF GOOD

It's time for magical mitzvahs

REBECCA DAVIS

MITZVAH day is back for its seventh year running. On Sunday, November 19, individuals and groups will unite around Australia to spend one day volunteering in a variety of projects within the Jewish and wider communities.

"We are so excited that different community groups have got on board again this year," Mitzvah Day organising committee member, Kerry Lowe told *The AJN*.

"Sixty-seven individuals or groups have already registered their interest online, but we are still expecting to reach around 80 projects," she added.

The global movement aims to bring together individuals and groups from all corners of the Jewish community, with age and background no boundary. The focus is to reduce hardship, poverty, or help the environment through acts of volunteering. There is an emphasis on supporting existing charities, and building stronger communities.

The day of volunteering is an extension of Mitzvah Day international which launched in the UK in 2008. Each year, the day has



A Random Acts of Flowers volunteer from Mitzvah Day last year.

floral bouquets, resulting in more than 160 bunches of blooms. de Solier then delivered the flowers to Jewish Care's Montefiore home where residents received their own bouquet – and a special performance from the TBI choir. Random Acts of Flowers is just one of the projects that will return for 2017. This year an additional flower wholesaler has also jumped aboard, and bouquet deliveries will be made to Central Park Nursing Home.

Bridging the generation gap between young children and seniors is what particularly excites Lowe.

"Mitzvah day is just a fabulous opportunity to see people of all different ages come together, particularly those who may not necessarily be involved in the community or in volunteering" said Lowe.

"It is short-term impact, but long-term gain, the hope being that it is the beginning of something special, forging new relationships that can be ongoing."



From left, Former VAJEX president Judy Landau, Julie Leder, Major General Jeffrey Rosenfeld, Squadron Leader Peter Meehan, Tim Williams, Rabbi David Gutnick and Major General Jim Barry at a previous commemoration.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

VAJEX to honour Kokoda bravery

THE 75TH anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in New Guinea during World War II will be a major theme of this year's Remembrance Day activities by the Victorian Association of Jewish Ex & Servicemen and Women Australia (VAJEX).

A wreath-laying service, to be held on Sunday, November 12 at 11am, will honour Jewish veterans of all of Australia's military campaigns.

Afterwards a Book of Remembrance Reception at the Caulfield RSL will feature David Howell, historian, author, tour guide and Army Reserve member, who has done over 40 crossings of the Kokoda Track. VAJEX president Harry Lubansky said his organisation "looks forward to an inspiring presentation" from Howell about the Kokoda campaign, a series of battles between July and November 1942 which repelled invading Japanese forces in New Guinea during the darkest days of the Pacific campaign.

The VAJEX Book of Remembrance Reception will take place at the Caulfield RSL Function Room, 4 St Georges Road, Elsternwick, at 12.30, Sunday, November 12. For further information on the morning event and on the reception, contact 1300 824 000 or SMS on 0407 801 992.

Mitzvah Day is on Sunday, November 19. To register or join an existing project, visit <http://mitzvahday.org.au>.