

Survivor-led healing to preserve, restore, and reimagine the former Kinchela Boys Home as a national site of truth-telling and healing

MEDIA RELEASE Wednesday 2 March 2022

The Kinchela Boys Home (KBH) site in Kempsey has today been announced at the 2022 World Monuments Watch as one of 25 heritage sites of worldwide significance whose preservation is urgent and vital to the communities surrounding them.

Among Australia's most notorious Stolen Generations institutions, KBH saw an estimated 400 to 600 Aboriginal children exposed to routine acts of cultural genocide between 1924 to 1970.

Survivors from KBH are among thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly taken from their families and communities as part of official government and church programs to assimilate First Nations children into non-Indigenous society.

Today's announcement by the World Monuments Fund (WMF) acknowledges the pain and suffering of KBH survivors and their families, while highlighting the need for greater action to support heritage places and the people who care for them.

Kinchela Boys Home survivor Uncle Roger Jarrett, referred to as #12 while in the institution, looks forward to the day that KBH is handed back to survivors so they can complete that part of their healing journey.

"My love in my heart, as a kid, is still in that bloody home. It's a fact," he said.

"And returning the ownership to KBH survivors is going to allow me to return the love that I lost in that place.

"Just the thought of going there (KBH) makes you feel a little bit better than you were before – giving you a feeling that you achieved something – I achieved my last little bit of pain easing, you know?"

The children who passed through the gates of KBH were stripped of their names, given numbers, and subjected to 'reprogramming' and strict regimes of manual labor.

Physical hardship, punishment, alienation, and abuse were part of everyday life until the campus was shuttered in 1970.

Kinchela Boys Home survivor Uncle James Michael 'Widdy' Welsh #36, still holds on to the pain from his days at KBH.

"Our silence allowed a lot of evil pain to be given to us to pass onto our children," he said.

"That's as simple as you'll get, and as truthful as you'll get.

"I still hurt from it, and the only way that it will go away is for a museum and healing centre to be built on this site.

"I really think this will bring this community together."



Today, the remaining buildings and landscape of the former KBH offer evidence of a dark period in history that continue to affect generations of people still living in Australia.

The site stands as a testament to the strength and resilience of Stolen Generations survivors, whose stories and lived experiences are paving the way for justice and healing.

Uncle Roger #12 and Uncle Widdy #36 both sit on the Board of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), which has a vision to restore the now vacant complex into a place where historic cruelty and abuse can be recognised, and where survivors can heal.

KBH survivors have fought long for recognition of what happened at the former KBH site. In 2012, the site was finally listed on the NSW State Heritage Register, and in 2013 it was listed as an Aboriginal Place under the *NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

KBHAC has long advocated for an agreement that would allow it to manage the grounds and implement plans for a new interpretation, and the organisation is now in the process of securing the right to transform the site into a centre for truth-telling, survivor stories, and healing.

It will be the first of its kind to address the legacy of violence against Stolen Generations survivors and communities, not only as an exhibition of this painful history but also as a living force that must be confronted by people today – as is acknowledged by the World Monuments Watch.

The 2022 Watch spotlights 25 heritage sites of extraordinary significance that are facing pressing challenges, where World Monuments Fund's partnership with local communities has the potential to make a meaningful difference.

Representing 24 countries and 12,000 years of history, the 2022 Watch calls for greater and urgent action to protect heritage places, such as KBH, experiencing pressures relating to climate change, imbalanced tourism, underrepresentation, and recovery from crisis.

The Watch demonstrates how these global challenges are experienced at the local level, while pointing toward community-driven solutions that have global relevance.

The Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation is a survivor-led Stolen Generations organisation dedicated to improving the wellbeing of those impacted by removal. KBHAC has championed truth-telling to disclose what happened at the Kinchela Boys Home and raise awareness about its significance to survivors, their families, and communities.

Media contact: Ben O'Halloran 0474 499 911 or ben@healingfoundation.org.au