

Kinchela family member condemns the brutality inflicted on Aboriginal boys removed from their parents

Mike Head
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Jenny, the former wife of a Kinchela boy, Manuel, said she was not surprised by the news that unmarked graves had been located at the site of the facility. “A lot of things happened there that people don’t know about,” she said.

“It needs to be written about. The whole story needs to get out there. People don’t want to believe what happened.”

Jenny lives in the western-Sydney suburb of Mt Druitt, which is home to many Aboriginal working-class families. When she and some members of her extended family went to the Kinchela site last year, they were concerned to find no memorial or even sign identifying the location.

“There were no signs. Nothing to say even that the boys’ home was there. It needs to be put back into the hands of the descendants of the boys. I think there are about 60 of the KBH [Kinchela Boys Home] mob left alive.”

Jenny said a photo of herself and family members outside the unmarked site was a statement in itself of how what happened at Kinchela was still being buried.

“There should be a further investigation into the deaths at Kinchela. Things have been swept under the rug.”

Jenny said the Kinchela boys, including Manuel, used to be chained to a tree for alleged misbehaviour. They used to have to milk cows at 4 a.m. with no shoes on. “It was a terrible place. My husband never used to talk about it.”

Boys as young as six were treated brutally, she said, causing misery that was intended to break them down and force them to abandon their culture and languages.

“One boy was bashed seriously after he ran away.

Some of the men in charge were ex-British army. There were trained to be brutal. If a boy did not do what he was told, he would have to walk down the line, with all the other kids hitting him. If they didn’t, they would get hit themselves.”

Jenny described other cruel methods of punishment. “Boys would be ordered to clean the concrete with a toothbrush. There were bashings and sexual assaults.”

The conditions were soul-destroying. “Their food was flour, sugar and other rations. They only had ‘gubby blankets’ [government-supplied blankets] to sleep with. Every morning their huts were inspected to see if they had cleaned them enough, even though they were overcrowded,” she said.

Kinchela was part of an entire New South Wales (NSW) state government-run regime that lasted 90 years. Boys were sent to Kinchela around the age of six or seven after being earlier kept at a babies’ facility at Bomaderry, on the state’s south coast (see: “Horrific abuse of children at Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home”).

Manuel’s sisters were sent to a similar state government home at Cootamundra in the state’s south, hundreds of kilometres away from Kinchela, which is in the state’s mid-north coast region.

“This has affected me and my family for many years,” Jenny explained and added, “It was all swept under the carpet. It was not until the 1990s that people started speaking out. That is inter-generational trauma.”

Jenny said she did not know how many boys could have died at Kinchela but she knew many had died after leaving the place. Often they had difficulty locating their families or getting back into life. “Some of them felt they had to get into alcohol or drugs. They were

angry all the time. This affected our kids too. Our lives were crazy,” she said.

Jenny said the official parliamentary apology made by the Rudd Labor government in 2008 to the “stolen generations” of children forcibly removed from their families had made no difference.

She said one of her friends had high hopes of change when the Rudd government took office in 2007 but “things never changed” and Labor had also continued the police-military intervention in the Northern Territory “to keep people down.”

“Governments never listened. We still have the stolen generations trying to find their way. They have no sense of belonging. And there are more kids being removed today than in the past,” she continued.

Jenny said she had wanted to support a Yes vote in the current Labor government’s Voice referendum to entrench an indigenous advisory body in the Australian Constitution, because of the past history of indigenous families being confined to reserves and missions.

Yet she had little confidence that anything would improve. “We are still being treated as low-caste people. But the white people around here are feeling the pinch too. The rich are just getting richer,” she said.

Note: Under conditions of compulsory voting, which makes it a crime to urge a boycott of the vote itself, the SEP calls on workers and youth to register their opposition by casting informal ballots and join our active boycott campaign in the lead-up to October 14, that goes well beyond the individual act of voting.

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