

SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM

# Education honour for Wakils

SHANE DESIATNIK

IN a heartfelt gesture of appreciation, the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM) officially launched its core education department – headed by Rebecca Kummerfeld – as the Susan Wakil AO Chair of Education at a special ceremony on May 8 in front of members of the Wakil family, museum board members, David Gonski and former NSW governor Dame Marie Bashir.

SJM CEO Norman Seligman said education is a massive component of the museum’s main activities – which sees 25,000 students visit for guided tours each year – “and the Wakil family (Susan and Isaac) have been sponsoring us in education in several ways, and tonight we are recognising that through our Chair of Education.”

The museum was the beneficiary of a \$1 million endowment from the Sydney couple for its lower ground floor Anna and Mark Reznik Centre of Learning, named after Susan’s parents.

After presenting a framed photograph of the education team to relatives of the Wakils, SJM development manager Robert Schneider said “I was struck by a comment that Isaac and Susan made some time ago, that they wanted to give back to the community in appreciation of what they gained from the citizens of Sydney and Australia.



From left: Gus Lehrer, Norman Seligman and Robert Schneider from the SJM presenting a framed photograph to relatives of Isaac and Susan Wakil, Adam Lippmann and David Khedoori. Photo: Shane Desiatnik

“Bear in mind, they’ve come from difficult backgrounds. In Susan’s case from Bessarabia where her father was interned and her mother died. She came to Australia with her aunt at the age of seven.” Isaac was born in Baghdad and he experienced the Farhud – the pogroms against Jews in Iraq.

“So the Wakils are no strangers to tyranny and oppression – and the museum stands for fighting and combating that through our education programs.

“Therefore it is particularly fitting to have the Chair of Education here named in Susan’s honour.”

Evelyn Khedoori, Isaac’s sister, told *The AJN*, “This is such a lovely gesture by the museum – a very nice thing to do.”

SJM president Gus Lehrer said the museum’s education program is large and growing.

“We show, by personal testimony and exhibits, what the consequences are of abandoning freedom and democracy and we try to inculcate a sense of personal responsibility in each of our visitors,” he said.

“We show students how they can make a difference and, overwhelmingly, this message is enthusiastically received and embraced.”

The ceremony was followed by an education panel moderated by Dr Avril Alba and featuring Chancellor of the University of NSW David Gonski, Chancellor of the University of Sydney Belinda Hutchinson and SCEGGS Darlinghurst’s headmaster Jenny Allum.

LAW REFORM COMMISSION

# NCJWA gett submission

AJN STAFF

THE National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (NCJWA) and Unchain My Heart have lodged a joint submission on gett (Jewish bill of divorce) to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC), which is conducting the first comprehensive review into the family law system since the commencement of the *Family Law Act* in 1976.

Titled *Gett Refusal, Jewish Divorce and Family Law*, the submission makes a number of recommendations – among them, an order that the civil Decree Nisi shall not become absolute until the court is satisfied that both parties have taken all steps reasonably within their power to ensure barriers to a Jewish re-marriage have been removed.

“Gett refusal is a form of family violence and a violation of human rights,” stated Susie Ivany, chair of Unchain My Heart – a Melbourne based not-for-profit organisation that advocates for agunot (Jewish wives affected by gett refusal).

NCJWA acting national co-presidents Sylvia Deutsch and Victoria Nadel commented, “We hope that progress will be made as a result of the submission to make it easier for Jewish women to obtain a gett and move on with their lives within their religion.”

The submission defines refusal to agree to a gett as a tool to control, intimidate and extract concessions from women, with grave consequences if they wish to remarry.

Without a gett, children born in a new relationship will suffer compromised status within Judaism.

For NCJWA, the issue of religious divorce has been a concern for decades.

The organisation’s first national conference in 1929 pledged to advocate for agunot and put pressure on rabbis to find a solution.

In 1970 then NCJWA NSW president Ray Ginsburg and Rebbetzin Marion Apple of the Great Synagogue formed the NCJWA Status of Women in Judaism and Jewish Law Committee, established to inform and educate Australian lawyers on the need for Jewish couples to obtain a gett along with a secular divorce.

Submission authors are Talya Faigenbaum, principal of Faigenbaum Family Lawyers and Dr Ann Wollner, special counsel at International Social Service Australia, clinical psychologist and vice president of NCJWA (Victoria).

Faigenbaum and Wollner are executive committee members of Unchain My Heart.



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