**“Maintaining our Jewish pride in the face of adversity”**

**Nechama Bendet**

The global Jewish Education Leadership mission had a profound impact on me and the way I view Jewish education in the diaspora and I am deeply grateful to the organisers, and the opportunity to have participated in this life changing experience.

50% - 60% of Jewish children attend Jewish schools in Australia, and our Jewish day schools are the jewel in the crown of our community.

The mission helped me understand that the atrocities of October 7 and its aftermath, including the wave of antisemitism that swept through the world, is a watershed moment for our community, highlighting the critical and transformative role of Jewish education.

I saw the power of education. The power of an UNWRA education to create a hatred so all prevailing that 3,500 terrorists breached our borders to commit the most horrific atrocities, knowing they might die but not caring because their hatred of Jews is so overwhelming. And I saw the power of a beautiful Jewish education in Ofakim, to heal and restore; to provide children who have seen what no one should ever see, the resilience, strength, and impetus to live a full and meaningful life as upstanding and proud Jews and Israelis.

The key lessons I learnt are:

1. Visiting Israel to bear witness and to lend a hand at this time is critical. Sometimes in life we just need to show up and this is one of those times.
2. In the face of adversity, Israelis have come together in an incredible display of unity to support each other, and this is a defining lesson we must take back to our schools and communities.
3. I no longer see the Jewish world as being divided into Israel and the diaspora. We are a people, and intrinsically linked. We have a shared past, and a shared future, and being Jewish means, you never stand alone.
4. Antisemitism is a global Jewish event that needs a global response. It’s for all of us to solve. And one of the most effective ways of protecting our children from the scrouge of antisemitism is through a Jewish education. We don’t need to teach our children what to think but we do need to teach them how to think. How to apply critical thought to navigate right and wrong, and to distinguish between legitimate social discourse and what lies beyond it. To learn about our history, culture, traditions, and values, so they can form a strong sense of their Jewish identity and feel proud of the role they play as the next precious link in the chain of our glorious 5,000-year story. Antisemites seek to dehumanise Jews, and cancel us out, and the most effective response to this is to ensure our youth are well educated, knowledgeable and informed, invested in Jewish life, and passionate about our right to exist.
5. We can’t let the immense tragedy of October 7 and the other devastating events in our history, define us. We need to teach our children what happened, mourn for the terrible losses we endured, advocate for the safe return of our hostages, and stand united with our brothers and sisters in Israel, and our heroic IDF. But we must also give our children hope, instil pride in all that we have achieved, and inspire them to live a full and proud life, as a Jew, contributing positively to their local communities, and to world around them.