



1000 CONVERSATIONS

ACROSS CANADA ON RECONCILIATION

Brief History of Residential Schools

- In the 1870's, the Government of Canada partnered with Anglican, Catholic, United, and Presbyterian churches to establish and operate boarding and residential schools for Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) children.
- The intent of the Residential School System was to educate, assimilate, and integrate Aboriginal people into Canadian society. In the words of one government official, it was a system designed "to kill the Indian in the child."
- Attendance at residential schools was mandatory for Aboriginal children across Canada, and failure to send children to residential school often resulted in the punishment of parents, including imprisonment.
- The federal government and churches operated over 130 residential schools across Canada. The number of active schools peaked in 1931 at 80. The last federally-administered residential school closed in 1996.
- The federal government currently recognizes that 132 federally-supported residential schools existed across Canada. This number does not recognize those residential schools that were administered by provincial/territorial governments and churches.
- Over 150,000 children (some as young as 4 years old) attended federally-administered residential schools.
- It is estimated that there are approximately 80,000 Residential School Survivors alive today.

Residential School Experience

- Many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed and separated from their families by long distances. Others who attended residential schools near their communities were often prohibited from seeing their families outside of occasional permitted visits.
- Students were forbidden to speak their language or practice their culture, and were often punished for doing so.

- Many students were forced to do manual labour, and were fed poor quality food. There are many accounts of students being provided moldy, maggot-infested and rotten foods.
- Other experiences reported from Survivors of residential schools include sexual and mental abuse, beatings and severe punishments, overcrowding, illness, children forced to sleep outside in the winter, the forced wearing of soiled underwear on the head or wet bed sheets on the body, use of students in medical experiments, disease and in some cases death.
- Many students received a sub-standard education. As late as 1950, according to a study by the Department of Indian Affairs, over 40 per cent of the teaching staff had no professional training.
- Some students have spoken of the positive experiences of residential schools, and of receiving an adequate education. However, overall it was a negative experience as indicated by various statements of apology issued by the churches and federal government.

Residential School Impacts

- In many cases, the abuses, and even the common experiences of having attended residential school have caused impacts such as post traumatic stress syndrome and have made it difficult for Survivors to engage in family, social, and professional circumstances.
- Survivors were often away from their parents for long periods of time and this prevented the discovering and learning of valuable parenting skills.
- The removal of children from their homes also prevented the transmission of language and culture, resulting in the fact that many Aboriginal people no longer speak their language or are aware of the traditional cultural practices.
- Adaptation of abusive behaviors learned from residential school has also occurred and caused *intergenerational trauma*, the cycle of abuse and trauma from one generation to the next.
- Aboriginal communities are still in need of healing with high rates of substance abuse, violence, crime, child apprehension, disease, and suicide.

Healing and Reconciliation

- In the early 1990's, as a result of escalating social problems in Aboriginal communities throughout Canada, the federal government created the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). RCAP confirmed a link between social crisis in Aboriginal communities, residential schools and the legacy of intergenerational trauma. In response to RCAP, the federal government initiated the Gathering Strength initiative which then led to the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) in 1998. The AHF funds community based healing initiatives that address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the Residential School System, including intergenerational impacts.
- Hundreds of healing initiatives and projects have been funded through the AHF, and many other independent programs and initiatives have been created throughout Canada to heed the healing objective.
- In 2007, the Government of Canada implemented the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The settlement agreement included: Common Experience Payment to all former students of federal administered residential schools; the Independent Assessment Process to address compensation for physical and sexual abuse; establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; healing initiatives; and a fund for commemoration projects.
- The churches and government have offered various statements of regret, condolence, sorrow and/or apology for their roles in administering residential schools including:
 - United Church of Canada (1986)
 - Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (Roman Catholic) (1991)
 - Anglican Church (1993)
 - Presbyterian Church (1994)
 - Government of Canada (2008)
 - Roman Catholic Church (2009)
- The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008, with a mandate is to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools. The TRC will document the truth of Survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience. The TRC hopes to guide and inspire First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and all Canadians in a process of truth and healing leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.
- In response to the loss of language, there is a growing movement to revive and preserve unique Aboriginal cultural beliefs, social structures, and spiritual values.

- Through initiatives of the Legacy of Hope Foundation and National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, Canadians are learning this history and understanding the impact that it has had and continues to have on their communities.