



AAMJIWNAANG FIRST NATION Band Council

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June 30, 2021

Boozhoo Aamjiwnaang:

The last few weeks have been emotional for many across Turtle Island due to the remains of hundreds of children found in mass graves at various residential schools in Canada. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015 documented 3200 children died while at residential school, and Justice Murray Sinclair estimated that number to be much higher, and by some accounts up to 6000.

The Tk'emlups te Secwepemc, formally Kamloops Indian Band, was responsible for finding 215 children buried at the Kamloops Residential School which brought this horrific tragedy to the attention of the entire Nation. Since that time, other discoveries have been made in other locations in Manitoba as well as Saskatchewan.

During the Residential School era, most of the children from Aamjiwnaang were taken primarily to Shingwauk Indian Residential School, Mohawk Institute, and Mt. Elgin Industrial School. Others who now call Aamjiwnaang home went to other schools such as Spanish, St. Mary's, and St. Margaret's. At Shingwauk, seven Aamjiwnaang are known to be buried at that school, namely (with ages): Solomon Corning 8, John Rodd 15, Peter Jacobs 9, Llewellyn Jackson 10, Frank Gray 7, Jacob Gray 9, and Willis Fisher 15. Research led by the late Geraldine Robertson lists a known 161 Survivors from Aamjiwnaang.

Despite the documented deaths in the TRC Report, many Canadians appear to not know about this part of our history. We have heard these stories from our Elders and Survivors of these institutions, and the courage they displayed in sharing their stories should be recognized as heroic. 6750 statements made to the TRC from survivors and members of their families led to the 94 Calls to Action in the Report. Research compiled by the Yellowhead Institution of Ryerson University has stated that of the 94 recommendations listed in the Call to Action only 13 have been completely enacted, 60 the government has taken some steps to implement, and 21 where there have been no real steps taken. This must change!

At a recent announcement, the Ontario Government committed \$10 million over three years to support Indigenous-led investigations into burial sites at Ontario's 18 former residential schools. That alone will not make an impactful difference. I call on Ontario to write curriculum that teaches students about the legacy of Indian Residential School in addition to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into provincial curriculum. We must collectively work to understand this piece of our shared history, no more hiding the truth. We must also press for full implementation of the remaining Calls to Action from the TRC Report to both levels of government.

As the Nation comes to understand the magnitude of the losses of children at these institutions, we have seen an outpouring of support from several Canadians who ask what they can do to help, or where they can learn more, and why they weren't aware? As a start, steps you can take to help include:

- Call on your local MP and MPP to press for full implementation of the 94 Calls to Action
- Familiarize yourself with the reports of the TRC <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>
- Call on Canada to comply with a legal order to remedy discriminatory child welfare funding for on-reserve First Nation families
- Call on Canada to stop fighting First Nations in court
- Enroll in a free course through the University of Alberta <https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada>
- Educate yourself and family members with appropriate resource materials found at <https://projectofheart.ca/what-is-project-of-heart/resources/>
- Watch the documentary We Are Still Here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJtM-YEGpKc>

Aamjiwnaang like all other communities, has a long history of intergenerational trauma due to the impacts of these institutions, and we also have a long history of resilience as a result. We have much work to do, and collectively we will strive to continue our resilience as a community, however as we continue to expose these truths only then can we expect to strive for reconciliation.

On July 1st from 11:30 – 1:00 pm we will come together once again for a Moment of Reflection to honour those who never made it back, as well as those Survivors and the impacts that continue to exist today. Tobacco offerings left over the past few weeks will be offered to a sacred fire with appropriate songs and prayers. Aamjiwnaang will continue to acknowledge this part of our history in a respectful way, and we remain grateful to our Survivors for sharing their stories and teaching us to be resilient and proud despite the attempts to kill the Indian in the child.

If you are feeling grief or anguish, I encourage you to reach out to our Health Centre for supports, or alternatively please contact:

Indian Residential School Survivors and Family Hotline: **1-866-925-4419**

Métis Nation of Ontario 24hr Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line: **1-877-767-7572**

Native Youth Crisis Hotline: **1-877-209-1266**

Kids Help Phone: **1-800-668-6868**

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line: **1-855-242-3310**

Please continue to be kind to one another and let us continue to educate ourselves and our non-native allies. We are all in this together and please remember Every Child Matters.

Respectfully,



Chief Christopher Plain