

Historical Overview

Throughout this manual, there are references to the residential school experience as a factor that has led to issues such as low educational achievement, family violence, sexual exploitation, and homophobia. In order to provide context to the many of the challenges that Aboriginal individuals and communities currently face, it is important to acknowledge the many issues that can be directly attributed to the experiences of colonization and residential school enrolment. The Government of Canada has acknowledged that many abuses took place in these schools that have had long-lasting and devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities. This is not an excuse, but rather some historical context so that City staff may better be able to understand and work with Aboriginal communities to work towards positive change.

Residential schools operated across the country until the mid 1990's, so most Aboriginal people have either gone to residential school, or are the child or relative of someone who has. "It is estimated that approximately 100,000 children attended these schools over the years in which they were in operation ... most residential schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, with only seven remaining open through the 1980s. The last federally run residential school in Canada closed in Saskatchewan in 1996." (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada)

"Department of Indian Affairs' policy that aboriginal children must not be educated "above the possibilities of their station", were upheld. As such, the schools' curriculum included moral training (through physical labour), academic training (although many teachers were insufficiently educated) and industrial training (for farming and menial jobs). Engaged in the classroom for only half a day, the children were responsible for the complete maintenance (cooking, cleaning, laundry, grounds keeping, farming, etc.) of the school for the remainder of their day. Grade three was the acceptable standard of education."

- *Indian Residential School Survivors Society*

Excerpts from the Government of Canada's Statement of Reconciliation

As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians seek to move forward together in a process of renewal, it is essential that we deal with the legacies of the past affecting the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Our purpose is not to rewrite history but, rather, to learn from our past and to find ways to deal with the negative impacts that certain historical decisions continue to have in our society today.. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were disaggregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory, by the relocation of Aboriginal people, and by some provisions of the Indian Act. We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of Aboriginal people and nations. One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse.

More information can be found on online:

**Indian Residential School Survivors
Society**

www.irsss.ca

**Indian Residential School Resolution
Canada**

www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca