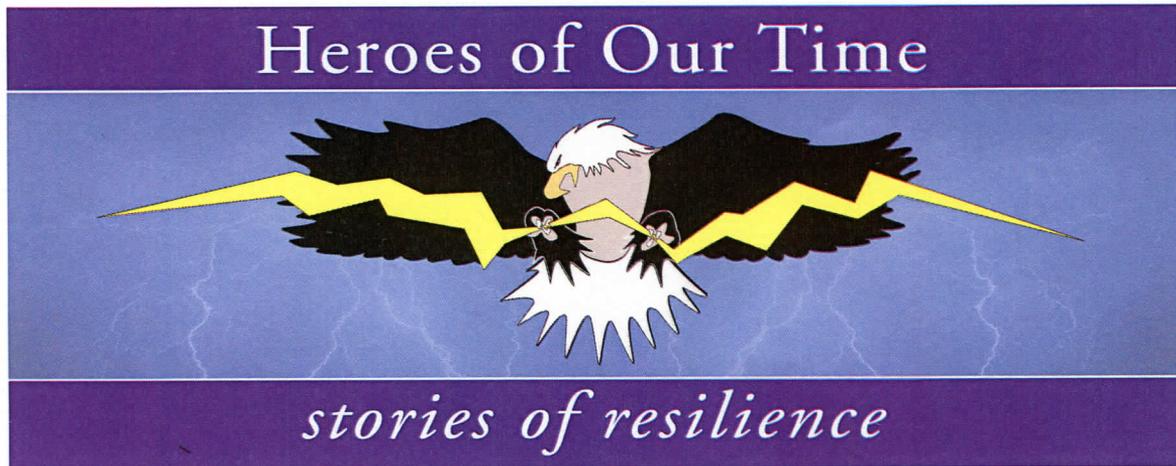


**Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre  
Truth & Reconciliation Commission**

**“Hero’s of Our Time Stories of Resilience”**



**Final Report**

**Commissioners**  
Gordon Peters  
Darlene Ritchie  
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### **Introduction to CF truth and reconciliation**

Council Fire is an agency in downtown Toronto located in the Regent Park area, an area built in 1949 as being Canada's first public housing project. It is in this area where the marginalized, including Indigenous peoples live, work and fight to survive. The Centre works for peoples in helping them rebuild their self-esteem, find places to live and provide a range of services to help in their daily lives.

It is well documented that many survivors of residential school tried to fade into the urban sprawl of large Canadian cities like Toronto and usually found ways to come together based on family, heritage or social gatherings. Council Fire has run a Healing Foundation program targeting former residential school students to assist in their recovery from the trauma-based experience of the Federal policy of "kill the Indian in the child".

This situation has led Council Fire to take strong action when the National Truth and reconciliation commission was plagued by a lengthy delay. A delay with consequences to those already aged and fragile, with visible impacts to their bodies and mind and spirit, who could leave this earth and travel home without being afforded the opportunity to tell their story.

There comes a time when responsibility must be undertaken no matter how difficult the task. This is so for Toronto Council Fire with the planning and implementation of their own truth and reconciliation commission to hear the voices of those who want to tell their story of how the residential school experience has impacted their lives, their parents and their own children. This bravery of survivors in coming forward to tell their stories of "*spiritual rape*" must be acknowledged as an important step in the healing process and as a way to shed light on a part of Canadian history which has been ignored and hidden for too long.

When the government's apology *minimizes* the residential school system to that of a sad chapter in a book, it characterized the situation as encased in the past where an apology could be made, a page could be turned and wounds would be healed. It is important to note that comparing the residential school system to a sad chapter creates the illusion that like a chapter in a book, the impacts of its words can become more easily forgotten as time moves on, but for the survivors and the community, the impacts continue.

## Historical Background

Residential schools are not a single chapter in the dark history between Indigenous Peoples and Canada. *Rather*, the residential school system is just one chapter of an overarching assimilation policy. *Which has been* formally in place since 1763 to achieve an objective of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands and resources. This has been an ongoing deliberate and systematic method, which continues in force even to this day.

The Indigenous world at contact was based on peace and reconciliation between Indigenous Nations. Treaties or arrangements were common practice amongst Indigenous peoples for trade goods and the general keeping of the great peace. Territories were well defined and relationships to the natural world were well understood and practiced as a way of life.

When colonizers first arrived on Turtle Island, they relied on the goodwill of First Nations who were generous to share their knowledge to these newcomers in surviving this harsh new terrain. But once our peoples' use was no longer needed, due to the decline of the fur trade; and an end to most of the armed conflict between the various new arrivals, the value of *Indigenous* peoples diminished and acquiring wealth through natural resources predominated. Committing cultural genocide through government sanctioned assimilation policies became the preferred way of taking away land from its original peoples.

Government could not follow their own belief system based on the Christian mandate on the ethics of reciprocity of "due unto others" but could easily force such religious dogma onto *Indigenous* peoples based on White Christian superiority justified by carefully crafted false assumptions.

## False Assumptions

These false assumptions originated during pre contact where White capitalist European powers began to expand globally, through amassing natural resources and cheap labour from foreign soil. Colonizers were able to justify their actions by theorizing that the difference in skin colour of Indigenous peoples made them less civilized and less deserving of keeping this land and culture.

These assumptions of superiority underpinned the move by government to employ *terra nullius*, which stated that if the land was not being used by a civilized group it was within the discoverers rights to take full control of the land over an inferior people. This mode of thinking, which originated with colonization and further, entrenched by *terra nullius*, continues to overshadow a number of false assumptions, to this day:

1. First Nations peoples are inferior and incapable of governing themselves: This mode of thinking is based on a Eurocentric norm where those who fall Outside of this ideal, such as *Indigenous* peoples are incapable of full autonomy and must rely on others for appropriate governance.

2. Treaties are not covenants of trust but devices of state craft – seen as bureaucratic MOU

This discourse is grounded in the theory of terra nullius justifying land to only those capable of utilizing it to its full utilitarian potential. *This evidence of intergenerational trauma passed down to today's generations is a direct result of government-sanctioned legislations designed to assimilate our peoples. In 2009, The United Nations Human Development Index ranked on-reserve Indians 79<sup>th</sup> pertaining to life expectancy, education and income, whereas non-Indigenous Canadians rank among the top three countries worldwide.*

3. That ward ship was appropriate Actions that were taken for the benefit of First Nation's - so those actions were taken without consequence

This long-standing assumption is based on theories of European superiority and the need to assimilate so called uncivilized peoples toward a better end.

4. Concept of development –not defined by First Nations values–so assumption that progress to was seen as FN being civilized or assimilated

This assumption furthers the notion that forced assimilation policies are an accepted measure due to the fact that Indigenous Peoples are not equipped with skills to survive in modern society.

Even though First Nations have long known the many injustices, which have occurred since contact, little to no acknowledgement was ever noted until The Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released its final report on First Nations issues in 1996. The report mentioned false assumptions, such as the ones noted above. It also outlined 440 recommendations to begin the process of redress pertaining to the devastating consequences of government policy based on domination and displacement of *Indigenous* peoples.

### **Indian Act**

Already caught up in the swell to eliminate Indigenous peoples the assimilation policy continued in full force. It was believed that if First Nations could be assimilated into the general population, that this would end Indigenous land claims. These policies brought about many devastating changes such as loss of governance, the banning of cultural activity and ceremonies, implementation of the status system, enfranchisement, and no access to lawyers for land matters to name a few.

One of the most detrimental policies designed to gain control of land and dominate was the Indian Act of 1876. The Act made *Indigenous* peoples wards of the state, it replaced self governance with the band system and forced peoples onto reserves, ignored treaty rights, and conducting traditional ceremonies were punishable with jail time. The Act also eliminated autonomy where peoples became dependant on Indian Agents under the authority of the Canadian government.

The status system was designed to define and determine status in order to exert significant control over *Indigenous* peoples. Eligibility was based on criteria established by government.

*“The double mother rule stated that a child lost status at age 21 if his or her mother and grandmother obtained status only through marriage to a man with Indian status. The implementation of the status system was also a direct attack on women and children leaving them vulnerable. This was due to the fact that women lost status if they married outside their community and any children born would also be without status and without rights based on unjust government policy.*

The Enfranchisement Amendment was also added to further strip *Indigenous* rights. Under this amendment, *those of us* who voted, attained a university degree, moved outside of Canada or served in the military, lost Indian status. Despite the fact that the status system has been denounced for creating separate laws for a specific group based on race, and continues to remain outside of the control for those of which it defines, it still remains in use to this day.

It has and continues to be an unjust struggle with treaty rights ignored, and it was illegal for lawyers to represent First Nations’ land claims without the consent of the government. The system also forced families to give up their children to the residential school system under the threat of prosecution.

### **Residential Schools**

*The Indian Residential school system was founded on the principles of the Gradual Civilization Act and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, which promoted the superiority of white European Christian beliefs. Under such a system, for Indians to become fully assimilated into dominant culture, they required becoming educated as English speakers, Christians and farmers, with little emphasis on academic learning, in an attempt to civilize and educate children to the ways of mainstream society.*

*Regarding the Residential School System, the Canadian government admitted, “The two primary objectives of the system were to remove and isolate children from their homes, families, traditions and cultures. These objectives were based on the assumption that Aboriginal cultures and beliefs were inferior and schools were designed “To kill the Indian in the child” (AHF, 2009).*

Years of being separated from their families, and often being subjected to physical, emotional and spiritual rape had devastating effects on students who had endured such institutionalized settings for most of their formative years. Children were often forced to work long hours in the fields, kitchens, and makeshift farms of the schools, as well as spend hours praying with little time spent learning outside of these forced labour situations

*Not until after the Second World War and the formation of the United Nations in 1951 does Canada even attempt to change the manner in which they deal with Indians. In the residential school qualified teachers are sought to replace the unqualified teachers who*

filled every residential school in Canada. The last Indian Residential School finally closed in the 1990's after decades of being responsible for many enduring years of abuses, which continue to impact generations today.

## **Residential Schools – Impacts**

The full impact of the Indian Residential School System continues to unfold as more survivors come forward to share stories of isolation and abuse. A common complaint among many has been the devastating trauma that occurred, not only from oppression faced by forced assimilation policies of the government, but mostly due to the years endured within the Residential School System.

*Survivors were taken away from their families and communities at any time of day or night and forced to live in hostile surroundings for most of their formative years. They endured ongoing isolation and trauma as a result of such institutionalized living conditions, and generations of peoples have come to rely on unhealthy coping mechanisms such as drugs and alcohol to live with the pain of such a compromised existence.*

*“...I lost everybody that I love...I was having those dreams [of school]...I started talking about it and remembered what happened to me when I was young...I would wake up crying...Like they are going to do something to me and it seems so real and when you wake up, there's nothing there and you are just sweating and crying too ...I had a double barreled shotgun[and thought that was the only way to end the memories but couldn't go through with it because of my kids, but I had to send them away because I didn't want them to see me that way]””*

*Impacts of the Residential School System has manifested in family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, poverty and social chaos. After generations of spiritual rape due to loss of language and culture the collective trauma continues today where those who were abused as children at residential schools have developed significant difficulties as adults, which continues to be passed down to our children and our children's children at an alarming rate.*

*“When I was six years old and on I suffered a lot of abuse. I have a lot of aunties and uncles that spent a lot of time in residential school, today they don't drink [but it used to be a lot worse with the drinking]...I didn't have a childhood; third generation residential school survivor”*

## **Settlement Agreement**

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released its final report with significant concerns about the Indian Residential Schools System. Specific recommendations were aimed at attempting to redress the overarching abuse inflicted on

children while attending such schools. The core recommendation of RCAP's final report, called for a public inquiry into the impacts of the residential school system.

Two years later, the Government's statement of Reconciliation *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* helped to establish the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for grassroots community based organizations to provide a number of services to residential school survivors.

In 2007, the court ordered Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement came into effect with a stipulation pertaining to compensation for residential school survivors, and the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to give students the opportunity to share their stories of abuse while living within the confines of the residential school system.

### **Compensation Summary**

Approximately twenty years ago, it was estimated that 105,000 to 107,000 Indigenous people were alive who attended Residential schools. Today, that number has dwindled to about 86,000 people who are now finally being given some financial reparation for their years in the Residential school system.

Four kinds of Lump Sum payment options have been offered to the survivors to compensate them for the suffering they experienced at residential schools. The first option secured Lump Sum Payments through civil and criminal lawsuits initiated by survivors themselves against the government and the churches. This Process, which began in the 1990s, was criticized by some survivors as exclusionary, time-intensive, financially and emotionally draining and less than rewarding.

The second option, the Alternative Dispute Resolution process, was intended as a less formal, less complicated, and faster alternative to the courts. However, it only dealt with physical and sexual abuse, and imposed rigid compensation guidelines for different types of abuses. Similar to court cases, survivors following the Alternative Dispute Resolution route needed to prove their claims.

The third option, the recently negotiated Indian Residential School Agreement, includes the Common Experience Payment process that would offer a common financial package to all survivors. Each survivor alive as of 30 of May 2005 would receive \$10,000 for the first year of attendance at a residential school and an additional \$3,000 for each subsequent year.

The final option, the Independent Assessment Process, was part of the Settlement agreement. This meant to replace the Alternative Dispute Resolution, and promised to process any residential school abuse-related claim with a 9

month period. In the final Indian Residential School Agreement on 8th of May 2006, approximately 86,000 former residential school students stood to receive, on an average \$28,000 each in compensation through Common Experience Payments, which includes an advance payment of \$8,000.

As noted, there are certain fundamental problems with the set up and implementation of the government's compensation package. Due to the fact that the onus is placed on Indigenous peoples to prove their attendance at a residential school in order to receive compensation; concerns have arisen regarding the potential for being re-traumatized upon revisiting such painful memories to a government tribunal, and the cumbersome task of enduring this process, which can include a number of lengthy appeals.

This wave of payments also represented a massive amount of money into Aboriginal communities across Canada including urban Centres like Toronto. This influx of money into a community that has experienced generations of trauma resulting in certain family malfunction has introduced the possibility of further abuse of survivors at the hands of family members over quantities of money.

Even though financial compensation can be helpful to those who may be struggling with impacts of abuse and subsequent poverty, no proper government supports were in place to deal with the backlash after certain vulnerable and elderly members had been financially compensated. Financial reparation was also denied to the children who continue to suffer today as a result of intergenerational impacts of the Residential schools.

The lives of survivors" affected the whole family" as the follow-up effects of prior trauma suffered at residential school are transmitted to the next generation. On more than one occasion, participants noted the frustrations and anger of young generations mistreated by parents who went through the schools. These young people were often left wondering, "where is our money." One survivor said "They will be taking care of us soon. But we have got to take care of survivors now". No more delays, no more room for abuse, and acknowledgement that all generations are entitled to reparation.

*With long delays, and survivors being re-traumatized by government tribunals, it is not surprising there have been a number of concerns that come into play regarding governments' process. With this in mind, it is important to examine what reconciliation means.*

## RECONCILIATION

Who really knows what reconciliation means as part of the overall settlement package for former residential school students? From an Indigenous perspective we will first identify what it does not mean and articulate these notions.

1. First and foremost this apology does not let the government off the hook for their role in the genocide of the first peoples
2. It certainly does not give governments the ability to define what reconciliation means and move on and close the era of decimation of Indigenous Nations
3. It does not mean that Canada has moved forward within its borders and that racism and discrimination is somehow put to bed and all is well in society.
4. It does not mean that history is rewritten and Indigenous peoples sovereignty is wiped out by an apology by Canadian Governments who want Indigenous peoples to simply become Canadian citizens or the they describe it "Aboriginal Canadians
5. It does not mean that there will be a blind loyalty to support the Conservative government or believe that great and amazing changes will follow.

It does not mean that we should graciously accept the notion of equality, or simple financial compensation and be seen as upholding the status quo, all the while the Canadian government holds all of the power and jurisdiction over Indigenous lands and resources

What does it mean?

1. That this is the first step towards reconciliation for the Canadian Government to admit to the planned genocide foisted upon Indigenous peoples. There has been evidence world wide with respect to apologies that substantial change has followed
2. The development of a, long term plan to undo the damage done, not only to the person, but their family, the community and the Nation must be constructed by Indigenous peoples and negotiated with Canada.
3. When, where, and how the government apologizes for the residential school, to kill the Indian in the child will not change today's devastating reality of poverty and colonialism, it will only change through our determination and dedication to actively struggle against the invaders and reassertion of our Indigenous Nations
4. There are lots of justifications for the Canadian public not feeling Responsible. The most obvious is the argument that "I was not personally

responsible. “ Are people are not responsible for what goes on in their countries?”

5. The challenge is to educate people so that they accept collective Responsibility, even if they were not personally involved.

While formal acknowledgements from governments—particularly in light of their resistance to doing so—are one part of a reconciliation process, movements pushing for government apologies rarely further the demands for restitution, reparations, transformation of power, abolition of a repressive system, or solidarity with other communities. Instead, such movements often reinforce the status quo by seeking equality with, and financial compensation from, an oppressive and colonial state that continues to maintain the power to grant or withhold rights and jurisdictions over Indigenous peoples.

With this in mind, history must be learned and understood by all peoples living in this land. It is reminder that we hold the responsibility to never let this happen again, as well as the duty to find the seek reconciliation and rebuild a place where nations can co-exist peacefully side by side. If reconciliation is to be accomplished,

Toronto Council Fire feels the urgency to contribute to an accurate history based on the stories of survival that have been silenced for too long.

### **Council Fire Truth & Reconciliation**

*Due to the difficulties that have arisen* pertaining to the set up and implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the national level, accessibility to the process continued to be stalled for most survivors. Toronto Council Fire’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was implemented to capture community member’s stories before they were lost forever.

The commission was also established to help survivors heal through the telling of their stories; expose the truth pertaining to Canada’s hidden history based on the Residential School System, and explore the legacy of these schools based on first hand accounts so that survivors and communities can move forward and heal from the trauma.

With this in mind, the commission’s mandate is to hear from Indigenous peoples in a cultural manner that allows people to express clearly their views on issues relating to the impacts of residential schools; to hear from Indigenous peoples who attended residential school on tape if so desired; to promote public awareness of the impacts and future of those who attended residential schools, and to provide a report to the Federal Government and the National Truth and Reconciliation commission.

The methodology utilised by the Commission comprised of a multilevel approach enabling the process to be supportive, culturally-based and long term. The concept used to describe the bravery of survivors was encapsulated in the theme: “Hero’s Of Our Time- Stories of Resilience, which reflected survivors’ life experience and willingness to move forward.

Council Fire was dedicated to providing follow up and ongoing support to those brave enough to step forward and share their stories. Follow up consisted of identifying the most critical needs of the former students, and providing ongoing counselling and community support as the need continues to arise.

A number of tools were developed to ensure that the process continued in a manner that was designed around the needs of survivors. Tools such as a mandate with terms of reference; Pre-Interview Questionnaire; Interview Guideline Questions; Recommendations for programs and services for follow-up, a Tracking System, and a Self Assessment Tool were carefully implemented into the process. Once all of the appropriate tools were developed and in place, the commission compiled its findings.

## **Findings**

*Toronto Council Fire has been steadfast in assisting those who have been reminded of the trauma they endured when the government began to dredge up such memories through its public apology. It has also been at the forefront in documenting survivors' stories in order to expose the lasting impacts on health and well being of those who lived through these experiences.*

Through TCFNCC's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, findings have stated that survivors emphasized commonalities pertaining to the residential school experience.

Most survivors detailed not only the traumatic feelings of abandonment and isolation due to being forcibly removed from their homes and communities, but they also noted similar impacts pertaining to the lasting effects of growing up in an institutionalized, and often abusive environment. These impacts not only affected survivors themselves but also generations before and after them.

Findings stated that the impacts of residential schools on the day to day lives of Individuals', families and communities continue to manifest in a variety of ways such as:

- broken homes and lives
- high alcohol and substance abuse
- loss of parenting skills
- loss of culture and language
- family violence
- loss of extended family relationships
- shame of going to hell for situations outside of their control
- higher incarceration rates
- loss of traditions
- poor stewardship of mother earth
- *suicide*
- *physical & sexual abuse*
- *self inflicted wounds*

- homelessness
- prostitution

There were also stories of resistance and resilience despite the consistent efforts of cultural genocide by government. A number of survivors spoke of repeated attempts of running away by themselves or by others despite very serious repercussions. There were also efforts to communicate in their own languages even though punishment and shame were possible outcomes of any attempt to maintain their culture through the spoken word. Survivors also emphasized the most extreme form of resistance and escape where a number of students attempted suicide, with some succeeding and leaving broken hearted siblings and family members not knowing the potential demise of those who were successful in taking their own lives.

*I was eleven there was a knock at the door at 4 o'clock in the morning, I know that it was still dark, and my mother answered the door and it was the nuns and priests who came in and they took us away from my mother – the six of us. This was in 1956 and put us on a boat and took us to Fort Albany to Fort Anne Residential School. That was in the beginning of July, that summer. They took us on a mission boat. It was a different experience for the six of us because we had never been away from our parents. The boys were on another side and the girls were separated from our brothers and sisters when we were always together.*

*“I ran away from school once, I got as far away from the graveyard [where they buried the kids who died or killed themselves]... they started looking for us after a couple of days... we stayed in the bush, and we used to eat rabbit [when we were caught] we had punishment – we were just black and blue [the nuns and priests] they were the worst people in the world [for punishment they strapped me into the electric chair, I was in that chair] at least twenty times, [because I tried to escape].”*

*“They had a chicken farm, but we never had eggs. They had about a hundred chickens, but it was all for them. I used to work in the chicken house. It was to supply the schools. They had jersey cows, pigs and horses for raising the wood, they had chickens, rabbits; it was all for the mission. You got to work and they ate the food”*

Malnutrition, disease and harsh punishments were also responsible for a number of children's deaths as a result of such disparate and neglectful conditions. Survivors noted that siblings and friends had died as a result of such circumstances, and were often left in unmarked graves where they were not given a proper burial. Students also explained of nightmares, flashbacks and anxiety attacks that continue years after their time at residential schools had ended.

*“If you didn't want to eat it when it was hot, then they shoved the spoon inside your mouth when it's hot and that would make you sick and the vomiting would start and then you would have to pick it up off the floor and you had to eat your own vomit...I didn't tell anybody [about the abuse] until I went to see a psychiatrist, I told him I was dreaming about it all the time. I used to cry in my dreams and I used to scream”.*

This cultural, physical, sexual, and spiritual rape continues to linger in all Indigenous peoples lives as they remain connected to friends, family and community who had experienced these devastations first hand. Due to the fact that survivors often internalized these memories for many years due to the devastation and shame of what they were forced to endure and sometimes participate in for most of their childhood, sharing their stories were accompanied by mixed emotions of pain and relief of unburdening themselves from such abhorrent memories.

It is important to recognize however that these are not just memories but rather the documenting of the culmination of years of abuse, which is finally being brought to the forefront through the efforts of TCFNCC's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. With this in mind it is anticipated that this report is not only significant for communities to begin the healing process but also to expose this truth of Canadian history that has been hidden for too many years.

*"They put me to school half a day, and the other half to do work...I had to make all of the beds...washing dishes...laundry... I never missed my prayers; if you were [rebellious, our teacher] would hit you on the head with a ruler. [When I got out, I couldn't read well] ...my mom...she would kiss me and I would wipe it off, maybe I was angry [with her] leaving me in there]"*

### **Summary of Hearings**

Hearings were held within a safe environment, focused, in depth, and structured around questions pertaining to school attended, years of attendance, length of time at school, school experiences, whether other family members had attended, and short and long term impacts on self, family and community. All participants were provided with consent forms and had agreed to hearings based on informed consent. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, every precaution was implemented to ensure that the well being of survivors was central to the process.

As previously mentioned, general findings had touched on a number of themes that survivors had emphasized such as isolation, trauma, lack of identity and personal acts of resistance and resilience by themselves and others during and after their attendance at residential school.

*"[Even though I knew I would be punished] I used to go in the barn and steal turnips, we used to go in and steal carrots too. [As punishment for such acts] they would put me into a coffin for twenty four hours. That's why I'm scared of the dark – I'm scared of small holes and I 'm scared when there's lots of people".*

With these findings in mind, it should prove beneficial to also provide specific quantifiable outcomes based on the hearing process.

All participants were residential school survivors, with the vast majority having attended schools in Ontario (97%), with the remaining 3% who had attended schools scattered

throughout the rest of the country such as Quebec, the North West Territories, and Saskatchewan. On average, survivors had attended school for 5 1/2 years, with the majority of individuals interviewed, having attended between the years of 1940 to 1960.

Only 2% noted having attended in the '70's and 80's with interview findings varying greatly from stories of those who had attended residential school decades earlier.

For those who had attended in the '70's and '80s, more negative experiences were attributed to the communities that they were leaving and school was sometimes seen as a minor reprieve from the abuse that they had experienced within their own families. Whereas, most stories prior to the 1970's recounted being removed from primarily happy and stable communities to abuse within the residential school system.

"What's done is done, and there's nothing anyone can do about it anyways...it hurts me to talk about it [and it has hurt my relationship with my family]. [We have] no contact really...the only time they talk to me is when they want money...[I don't go home] the only time I've gone back there is for funerals and I can only stay for one or two days and I want to go home right away"

It can be surmised that due to the legacy of intergenerational trauma on communities, abuse learned from the residential school system beginning in the 1920's had fully impacted communities (over the course of 50 years to such an extent), that by the time children (from the '70's) had entered residential school, they had already endured a series of abuses, and therefore the treatment they received at school was not as unfamiliar as the children who had been forced into the system decades earlier.

Over 50% of survivors noted that their parents had attended residential schools, 73% had mentioned siblings attending, with 77% stating ongoing dysfunctions with parents, 63% experiencing abusive marital relationships, and 60% expressing ongoing difficulties with their own children. Many survivors attributed these compromised relationships as associated with having attended residential school where they were denied the opportunity to learn positive relationship and parenting skills.

The overwhelming majority (close to 80%) noted that they did not feel comfortable in either their own community or mainstream society, and subsequently had severed most ties to their home of origin, while also experiencing ongoing challenges toward achieving success in mainstream environments. With these findings in mind, 98% of survivors noted that they had minimal schooling to prepare them for any type of career aspirations, while most mentioned ongoing difficulties such as substance abuse, and anger issues further impeding their ability to succeed.

"...I was so ashamed to be native because I couldn't even read or write...I had this teacher who would call me stupid...I had nobody that cared enough to help me [and I felt all alone]...[when I left school] I ended up with abuse [that was all that I knew, and the abuse continued my whole life] and through all of this not knowing how to read or write [and not knowing my own family or language]"

When queried pertaining to the apology, the majority stated that it “was too little too late”, how do you undo what the government has done” and “seems sincere, but needs action”. When asked about the Governments reconciliation process, most survivors were reluctant to answer or stated unfamiliarity with the terminology attributable to their lack of education from the residential school system itself.

## **Conclusion**

*This report has detailed the legacy of the Indian Residential School System as part of a broader socially sanctioned assimilation process based on Eurocentric assumptions of superiority and desire to take lands from its original inhabitants of Turtle Island. It has also outlined the subsequent initiatives by the government of Canada to begin the reparation process and the various challenges and shortcomings that have arisen out of the set up and implementation of such initiatives.*

*It has been emphasized that Canada cannot apologize and walk away; apologies rarely further the demands for restitution, reparations, transformation of power, abolition of a repressive system, or solidarity with other communities. Instead, such movements often reinforce the status quo.*

*With this in mind, Toronto Council Fire’s bold step forward through the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was put in place as a response to the delays and inaccessibility of government programs to residential school survivors who make up the Toronto Council Fire community.*

*It is anticipated that information from survivors will shed light on the truths surrounding the traumatic intergenerational impacts on Indigenous peoples that continues to be diminished and hidden from formal Canadian history. Insights on recommendations and initiatives toward looking forward and beginning to heal must be emphasized so that legitimate steps toward truth and reconciliation can begin to take place.*

## MANDATE

The mandate of this Truth and Reconciliation Commission was approved by Motion of the Council Fire General Assembly on July 23, 2008

### **Recitals**

WHEREAS, since late 1800's to early 1970's, the Government of Canada has forced Indigenous children into residential school to change their identity through banning languages, cultural ties and ceremonies.

Whereas Indigenous peoples were psychologically, emotionally, physically and sexually abused while in these institutions

And whereas, the challenges to re introduce peoples to their own ways of life has faced Indigenous peoples enormous challenges required securing a sustainable and healthy future:

Therefore this Truth and Reconciliation Commission be acknowledged as another step in aiding people with taking full control of their lives

### **Purpose of the CFT&C**

Without limiting the mandate of the commission, when conducting the inquiry this Commission can investigate and receive representations on the following matters:

- (a) To hear from indigenous peoples in a cultural manner that allows people to express clearly their views on issues relating to the impacts of residential school and their ongoing life.
- (b) To hear from Indigenous peoples who attended residential schools in camera if so desired
- (c) To promote public awareness of the impacts and future of those who attended residential school
- (d) To provide a report to the Federal Government and the National Truth and Reconciliation commission

### **Membership**

The Board of Directors of Council Fire has the authority to appoint the members to a maximum of three. The chair of the commission will be an Indigenous person while the remaining two can be from the public at large.

### **Power to adjourn**

And for better enabling you to carry this Our Commission into effect you are authorized and empowered, subject to the provisions of this Our Commission, to make and conduct any inquiry or investigation under this Our Commission in the manner and at any time and place that you think expedient, with power to adjourn from time to time and from place to place as you think fit, and so that this Our

Commission will continue in force and that inquiry may at any time and place be resumed although not regularly adjourned from time to time or from place to place:

## **PRINCIPLES**

That all hearings will function within a culturally based environment

The hearings will be accessible to those who register with the commission subject to available time

This process is voluntary and the Commission has no power of subpoena

When required all proceedings will be confidential

The Commission will be accountable to the Board and to those it hears from

All proceedings will be handled in a just and fair manner so that all persons who come before the commission will be safe and secure

### **Commission Hearings Procedures**

1. to adopt procedures that will encourage people to express their views in relation to any of the matters referred to in the immediately preceding paragraph; and
2. To consult and engage with indigenous peoples in a manner that specifically provides for their needs; and
3. To conduct, where appropriate, research
4. To prepare and publish discussion papers from time to time on topics relevant to the inquiry; and
5. Unless you think it proper in any case to withhold any evidence or information obtained by you in the exercise of the powers conferred upon you, Confidentiality

### **General Rules**

Without limiting any of your other powers to hear proceedings in private or to exclude any person from any of your proceedings, you are empowered to exclude any person from any hearing, including a hearing at which evidence is being taken, if you think it proper to do so:

## Apology of the Government of Canada

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history.

In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools.

Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.

These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal.

Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child."

Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United churches.

The government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities.

Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed.

All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools.

Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today. It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered.

It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures.

Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation.

Therefore, on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian residential schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you.

Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long.

The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country.

There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

We are sorry.

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian residential schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement began on September 19, 2007.

Years of work by survivors, communities, and aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership.

A cornerstone of the settlement agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools system.

It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

Responses for Former Residential School Survivors RE: the apology  
For the most part the response from those who have testified we have not seen overwhelming relief or support; indeed it was largely the opposite. One person said, it doesn't mean anything to me – it too little too late. Another person said okay the apology is done, where is the action to rebuild our world. Another said it another part of history – it's done.

The admission on the part government cannot be simply swept away as a good thing. What Canada is finally admitting to is known in international circles as genocide and it must be clear that when admits to genocide it must be accompanied by a plan with reparations for what has been done. To do otherwise is a hollow apology used for the Conservative Governments own political purposes

## Recommendations

Based on findings, the TCFNCC's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has formulated a number of recommendations necessary for reconciliation to take place. As echoed in the voices of survivors, "there needs to be action [if true reconciliation is to be achieved]. With the notion of "action" in mind the following recommendations had been put forward along with the following actions:

### 1) Residential School Awareness

#### a. to be built into the First Nations Schools curriculum

Currently being established within the Education Sector of Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

#### b. to be built into the mainstream Ontario curriculum

To be initiated at a later date

### 2) Family Sessions

#### Including facilities such as healing lodges

Reconciliation An Indigenous Perspective – Brickworks Toronto Ontario focus on - Creation Stories – Our Relationship to Mother Earth, Water Air and Environment – Impact on our People and our Relatives – Finding a Common Path

### 3) Cultural Camps

#### For survivors and their families

To be hosted in the near future

### 4) Public Awareness Campaigns

Reconciliation An Indigenous Perspective – Brickworks Toronto Ontario

### 5) Church Policy

Currently Working with Ecumenical Council

### 6) Family Events

Hosted several family oriented feasts and events through out the last 2 years

### 7) Reconciliation Conference

Reconciliation An Indigenous Perspective – Brickworks Toronto Ontario focus on - Creation Stories – Our Relationship to Mother Earth, Water Air and Environment – Impact on our People and our Relatives – Finding a Common Path

### 8) Availability of Resources: Self Assessment Tool

Implemented

It is also important to acknowledge that certain initiatives must have appropriate Measures in place so that ongoing services can continue to be made available To survivors and their families:

Follow up:

- a. on going support
- b. specific resources (updated as the need arises)
- c. general sense of belonging (access to differing programs)
- d. access to safe ceremonies and practice

It is anticipated that if the recommended initiatives and follow-ups are implemented, survivors, families, community and nation can continue the healing process, and rewrite history, in the hopes that all Canadians can begin to understand the legacy of colonization, and cultural genocide as mitigated through the Indian Residential School System, toward achieving truth and reconciliation.