



RECONCILING US

Building Partnerships Through Community Truths

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council

Thank you to our partners and funders

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Partner Contributions



Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

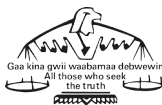
TASSC PARTNERS



Native Canadian Centre of Toronto



Na-Me-Res Native Men's Residence



Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto



Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training



2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations



Native Child and Family Services of Toronto



Nishnawbe Homes



Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre



Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto

Cover

Toronto Council Fire, Truth and Reconciliation Walk
Toronto, May 31, 2015

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Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)

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www.tassc.ca

INTRODUCTION

On November 12, 2013 the City of Toronto in partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released a proclamation declaring November 2013 to November 2014 the year of Truth and Reconciliation in the City of Toronto.

Following this assertion, a number of capacity building projects were launched through the Service Development Investment Program (SDIP), to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal organizations in the city.

In its bid to build and develop its agency under the SDIP program, the Toronto Aboriginal Services Council (TASSC), also sought to identify those most closely affected by the declaration of Truth and Reconciliation, to hear and share their stories.

- We seek to provide all Toronto residents with the history of residential schools and their effects on Aboriginal people in Toronto.
- We seek to determine what Truth and Reconciliation means to the larger Aboriginal Community in Toronto.
- We seek to enable our communities to tell their stories about reconciliation which is an important step towards healing.
- We seek to increase community engagement within the Toronto Aboriginal community and the Toronto community at large.

To begin this process, TASSC conducted three separate engagements in the community at selected member agencies, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT), the Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res) and Toronto Council Fire.

At the engagements we began by asking members "what does Truth and Reconciliation mean to you". From this finding we felt that a number of individuals struggle with that question. It was mentioned at one of the engagements "why do I have to reconcile with Canada, I didn't do anything wrong I was just a little boy"

At NaMeRes some participants didn't fully know the history of residential school. Being raised in foster care a large number of them were removed from the families that itself created barrier but there were able to see and understand the generational impacts. This was through a form of sharing circle.

"Why do I have to reconcile with Canada, I didn't do anything wrong I was just a little boy."

TASSC first shared some facts regarding residential schools:

- The goal of Indian residential schools was to assimilate Indians into society.
- The Canadian government operated Indian residential schools in partnership with the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, among others.
- The Canadian government was financially responsible for Indian residential schools.
- Indian residential schools operated in all Canadian provinces and territories except Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland.
- Indian residential schools operated in Canada between the 1870s and the 1990s.
- The last Indian residential school closed in 1996.
- Children between the ages of 4-16 attended Indian residential school.
- It is estimated that over 150,000 Indian, Inuit, and Métis children attended Indian residential school.

For the most part, children do not recall positive experiences while attending Indian residential school. They were forced to abandon their language, cultural beliefs, and way of life, and mandated to adopt the European languages of English or French, foreign religious denominations, and new habits.

N.C.C.T.

Native Canadian Centre of Toronto



At the Native Canadian Centre gathering, attendees participated in the creation of 2 drawings. One panel (next page /spread) depicts a historical and emotional chronology of Residential School and 60s Scoop survivors and their families. The second panel is a cultural guide for moving forward as empowered individuals and a strengthened community.

The drawings were displayed at Dundas Square during Aboriginal Day celebrations on June 24, 2015 and at the St Lawrence Market July 1, 2015 Canada Day parade.



Participant from the Native Canadian Centre proudly carried the workshop banners during the July 1st Canada Day Parade

Reconciling us



OSIBWAY SPOKEN
My Parents were Loving
NO alcohol
EUREKA BARK SCROLLS
We knew our History
I didn't do anything wrong....

our Teachings are POWERFUL
REDISCOVERING the Drum
1970's
WISCONSIN
REDISCOVERING our Culture
KRAZY PEOPLE

our Language has DEEP MEANING
DIVERSE CULTURE & PEOPLE
LANGUAGES
HARD to talk about SEXUAL ABUSE
OPENING the GATES of GRIEF
SO MANY QUESTIONS

I NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY MY DAD NEVER SHOWED ME Love... NOW... I know
HARD TO SAY... "I LOVE YOU!"
HELPING PEOPLE SEE WHO WE ARE....
I CAN BE A GOOD FATHER
our history is G.E.N.O.C.I.D.E
WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE

9 Bad Stories
Good Story

I am going to CONQUER this
FEELING SO ALONE
NEEDING to KNOW MORE...
CONNECTING the STORIES We heard....

Difficulty in RELATIONSHIPS
many women but no children
LEARNING to live with MYSELF
family community nation

"I'm SORRY" from GOVERNMENT
THE AGREEMENT DOESN'T COVER ALL OF THE ABUSES
HAD TO OPT OUT or agreement applied
NO to RACISM
My child stands up to RACISM!!

CHANGES in Attitude
THINGS MEAN NOTHING YOU HAVE Value
POWERFUL TO HEAR THIS PEOPLE HELPED
Meaningless on its own
making us terrorists if we protest

caught between different SPIRITUAL WORLDS
It was RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL NOT AN..... ORPHANAGE
LEVELS of RACISM
PUNISHMENT
SEXUAL ABUSE
PRIESTS: NUNS: FAVOURITES
HOW DO WE DEAL WITH EVIL
SO MANY TEARS

NO RESPECT FOR OUR CULTURE
CHURCHES on the RESERVE
Laying BLAME on U.S....
MANY of US DID NOT SURVIVE
1919-1930
drinking.... street life.... suicides
SO HARD FOR THE CHILDREN of Survivors....
WHERE WAS THE CREATOR? WHY DIDN'T WE STOP IT?

ANGER
WE CARRY IT.... TRY TO GET RID OF IT....
LEARNING from it

SPIRITS of our ANCESTORS
HEALING REDISCOVERING our CULTURE
I Love OUR CULTURE
our ceremonies HEALING CIRCLES
opening up....

MEMORIES
my GRANDMOTHER still remembers
I still Remember
LEARNING from my FAMILY..... FINALLY
I WORRY ABOUT my Kids...

THEY WANTED ALL of the BOYS
Don't look at your Brother
TAKE IT

SO MANY TEARS

WE CARRY IT.... TRY TO GET RID OF IT....
LEARNING from it

HEALING REDISCOVERING our CULTURE
I Love OUR CULTURE
our ceremonies HEALING CIRCLES
opening up....

WE KNEW... OUR SPIRITS SAW YOU...
my uncle



NA-ME-RES

Native Men's Residence

“What does reconciliation mean to me?”

- Patience
- Forgiveness
- Acknowledgment, resilience, be strong and proud
- Learning and finding a way to heal
- Acknowledgement and acceptance
- Freedom of shame that does not belong to us.



Na-Me-Res participants first went through a process of letter writing to family members, relatives or community members affected by the Residential School system. This creative collaboration assisted them with their own understanding of the impacts created by their shared history. Important words and sentences from the participant letters were shared on the representation of a large birch tree.

Photo (left): Kevin Copegop preparing his personal statement. This is an excerpt that he has allowed us to share:

The Truth of our relatives has been told! The apologies have been recorded and witnessed! Now is the time to reconcile!

COUNCIL FIRE

Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

On May 31, 2015, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre organized a Walk for Reconciliation in downtown Toronto that preceded the historic Truth and Reconciliation Closing Ceremony, held in Ottawa, May 31st to June 3rd.



On May 31st, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre organized a Walk for Reconciliation in downtown Toronto that preceded the historic Truth and Reconciliation Closing Ceremony, held in Ottawa, May 31st to June 3rd. Among the 100+ walkers who participated in the Toronto walk in solidarity with the TRC walks in other urban areas across Turtle Island were several IRS Survivors and family and community members, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The Walkers wore rainbows of coloured ribbon roses to highlight the vision and hope of reconciliation and to commemorate the life work of respected late Elder, Rose Logan.

“I have hope in our young people and future generations, that they will carry on the work of truth and reconciliation because I think it will take non-Indigenous Canadians more time to come around to acknowledging and understanding the true impacts of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system so that we can all participate together with heart on the journey to reconciliation.” - IRS Survivor

The three-day event was an intensely emotional, energizing, expanding and, at times, overwhelming experience for many of the participants. For some of the Survivors, this was a final opportunity to participate in the TRC truth-telling process and share their personal experience, courageously and powerfully told through the oral tradition. Full coverage of the Closing Ceremony, including the open Sharing Circles, was broadcast to an international audience. Media personnel called upon several Toronto Survivors to publicly share their personal experiences with Indian Residential Schools. Survivors also had the opportunity to give their statements in a private recorded session. These statements will join the large body of archival documents housed at the National Research Centre at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. On the second day of their engagement, Toronto Survivors joined thousands of other Survivors and participants to bear witness to the release of the TRC’s highly anticipated findings and recommendations. The Commissioners’ presentations could not accommodate the overwhelming audience, many of whom took in the proceedings through broadcast outlets throughout the venue site.



Survivor Murray Crowe, participating in an Open Circle

Response to the highlights of the 94 recommendations were nothing short of electrifying, the audience rising to their feet to applaud the recommendations in rhythm to drum beats, with the exception of a lone seated audience member,

the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Bernard Valcourt. Many of the Survivors responded with guarded optimism, citing that only action can realize true reconciliation.

On a lighter note, the TRC Closing Ceremony activities were not entirely overshadowed by somberness. The finale gave Survivors an opportunity to unwind with family-oriented activities. Humour, dance and music took center stage prompting Survivors to showcase their musical talents and fancy footwork. The healing power of laughter echoed beyond walls and barriers.

As the hour approached to return to the hotel and load up luggage, the weary but spirited travellers are homeward bound, reflective of their overall experience. One Survivor comments with a smile, “This has been a life-changing experience for me.” Another adds, “I am ready now to keep telling my story. It’s only now that I’m ready.”

The priority that was left with the Survivors on their return to Toronto was the 94 recommendations and how the road to reconciliation was a considerable distance away and the work that remains incomplete. It has given Council Fire much to consider regarding the implementation of the recommendations within the Toronto community.

TASSC with programming assistance through funding initiatives such as the SDIP will be able to assist the community in meeting their priorities. This work forms part of TASSC’s vision as a community organization.

To build a healthy and vibrant environment while increasing the capacity of Aboriginal people to create a self-sufficient community in Toronto – To guide future generations as strong carriers of Aboriginal culture while achieving socio-economic success.



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