

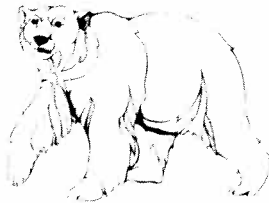
Residential School History: A Legacy of Shame

In 1846 the Canadian government began a policy of "aggressive assimilation" under which Aboriginal children were taken to residential schools, far from the "uncivilizing influences" of Aboriginal family and community life.

From 1850 to 1970 *one third of Aboriginal children in Canada spent most of their childhoods in these schools.* The impacts of this tragically ill-conceived policy continues to reverberate in Aboriginal families, communities and nations.

Colonization is a term that describes the process of encroachment and oppression through formal government policies of assimilation that Aboriginal peoples have struggled against for centuries. From an Aboriginal perspective, it refers to theft of ancestral homelands, resources, and self-determination and accumulated losses of sacred traditions, customs, values and languages.

Colonization and the Indian Act also **dispossessed Aboriginal women** from traditional leadership roles, creating a serious **imbalance in Aboriginal society** that still accords Aboriginal men greater political, social and economic influence than Aboriginal women.



While Aboriginal women represent half of the total on-reserve population, less than 10 percent of chiefs are women.

"With colonization and "churchianity" we stopped talking about sex. Parents listened to the church injected doctrines of the Puritans and sex became a taboo subject for discussion. The church spoke often of the sins of sex and the sins of the woman temptress. Respect for women was lost, and with that loss, came the loss of the natural teachings.

Barbara-Helen Hill,
Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization

Chronological History

1879 Sir John A. Macdonald's government creates church-run boarding schools to assimilate Aboriginal children into white culture.

1884 Bowing to pressure from churches, Ottawa passes an amendment to the Indian Act making attendance for native children aged 7-15 mandatory at the schools.

1907 The Montreal Star, reports *42% of children attending residential schools die before the age of 16* calling the situation a "national disgrace".

1947 The United Church requests residential schools be shut down in favour of non-denominational day schools, citing harm to children in being separated from their families. Over the next two decades, many residential schools did close.

Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa, Ontario

Shakotsien:tha Research Project Funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation 1999-2000

1960-69 The federal government takes over full management from the churches of the 60 remaining schools that have become dumping grounds for by now, extremely troubled Aboriginal youth. New "child protection" legislation is created with provincial Children's Aid Societies becoming new partners in the continued forced removal of Aboriginal children. This period came to be known as "the 60's Scoop". (See fact sheet)

1973 A new federal policy gives control of native education to the bands and tribal councils.

1984 The last residential school closes.

1986 The United Church is the first church in Canada to apologize to its Aboriginal congregations.

1989 The first residential school lawsuit is filed in British Columbia.

1990 Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and former leader of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, discloses publicly that he was sexually and physically abused at the residential school in Fort Alexander, Manitoba during the 1950s.

1998 Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart offers a "Statement of Reconciliation" for residential schools and establishes a \$350 million healing fund for survivors.

2000 The number of individual plaintiffs in residential lawsuits reaches 6,324; churches begin to publicly voice fears of bankruptcy.

WHO RAN THE SCHOOLS ?

Residential schools were a joint government-church initiative. The following chart provides an overview of schools run by the four main churches.

Organization	# of Schools	# of Students (% of total)
Roman Catholic	70	68,250 (65%)
Anglican	37	23,100 (22%)
United	14	10,500 (10%)
Presbyterian	4	1,050 (1%)
Government-Only	7	2,100 (2%)

When the last residential school closed,



another door opened. Although the federal government's "Statement of Reconciliation" of January 7, 1998 was a first step on a new path, much more remains to be done.

As the National Chief of the AFN stated in response to the government's announcement, "Let us go forward together."

Fact Sheet Sources: Maclean's June 26, 2000; Residential School Update, 2000; Emma LaRocque, Violence in Aboriginal Communities, 1994; A Recognition of Being, Kim Anderson 2000

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Human Rights Violations and the Abuse of Aboriginal Children in Residential Schools

From 1892-1984 eighty-eight Indian Residential Schools operated across Canada under a joint initiative of the federal government and christian churches aimed at *“rescuing children from evil surroundings and keeping them constantly within a circle of civilized conditions”*.

By the 1960's tens of thousands of Aboriginal children had been forcibly removed from loving parents, extended families and communities and placed in institutions among unfamiliar people, customs and languages. By the time 2-3 generations of a family had experienced this disconnection, any sense of belonging to family, community and culture had been lost.

However, many Aboriginal children endured more than the trauma of disconnection from family and culture. Tragically, many also suffered the pain of physical and sexual abuse and neglect. The following are types of abuse described by survivors.

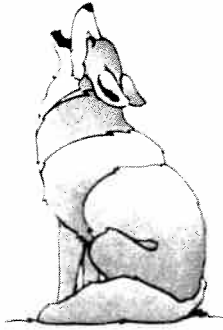
Physical and Sexual Abuse

- Sexual assault, including forced oral-genital, masturbatory or sexual intercourse between men or women in authority and the girls and boys in their care.
- Sexual touching and fondling of children by men or women in authority.
- Private pseudo-official inspections of genitalia of girls and boys.
- Arranging or inducing abortions in female children impregnated by men in authority.
- Severe punishments and torture when children would speak their own language, such as needles stuck in the tongue, mouths washed out with lye soap, and beatings.
- Burning or scalding children.
- Beating children to the point of unconsciousness, drawing blood and/or breaking or fracturing bones
- Beating children to the point of inflicting serious permanent or semi-permanent injuries such as deafness, permanent limp or chronic pain.
- Beating naked or partially naked children before their fellow students and/or other institutional officials.
- Using electrical shock devices on physically restrained children.
- Forcing sick children to eat their own vomit.
- Unprotected exposure to the elements as punishment, sometimes to the point of inducing life-threatening conditions such as frostbite and pneumonia.
- Withholding medical attention from children suffering the effects of physical abuse or illness, sometimes to the point of causing death.
- Starvation as a form of punishment.



Psychological /Emotional Abuse

- Publicly shaming Aboriginal Peoples and cultures as “savage” and “doomed to hell”, teaching children to reject and even hate their parents and Elders and communities.
- Cutting children’s hair or shaving their heads as a form of punishment and humiliation.
- Undermining contact between parents and children at residential school by withholding their presents and letters.
- Isolating children by locking them in closets or basements, as punishment.
- Having older children bury the bodies of younger children who had died.
- Not allowing any way to complain, seek help, inform parents, or notify external authorities of abuses; using the RCMP to track down children who escaped and return them for further punishment.



Religious Abuse

- Mocking, belittling and prohibiting Aboriginal spiritual beliefs as “evil” and “savage”.
- Abusing the christian religion and church authority to control, humiliate and dominate children.

The intergenerational impacts of traumatic disconnection from families and communities and the horrific abuses suffered by these children reverberates today in Aboriginal communities across Canada.

But the long silence of the past has finally been broken and Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples are now not only seeking justice and redress, but reclaiming the rich cultural heritages that are our birthright.

One outcome of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in 1998 was the creation of a \$350 million healing fund for residential school survivors and their families. The Shakotsien:tha Project is one such initiative funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Living Conditions

- Inadequate nutrition (e.g. nutrition levels below that needed for healthy growth and development); providing food unfit for human consumption or not compatible with Aboriginal regional diet.
- Child labour, to the point where many children received little or no education because they had to cook, clean and mend to provide church income.

Statistics on residential schools from *Residential School Update*, 2000. Human rights violations excerpted from *The Circle Game*, 1997. Also see plays by Vera Manuel and Thomson Highway and art exhibits such as “Rielism” in Winnipeg.



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VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Vicarious means rather than experiencing something directly and personally, we are impacted by the experiences/stories of someone else.

Vicarious trauma refers to the short and long term consequences of working with victims/survivors of trauma and the painful, disruptive effect this can have on the worker.

Characteristics

VT includes the strong feelings that may emerge during or after sessions with clients as well as our defenses against those feelings.

Reactions of grief, rage or despair can intensify over time as we repeatedly hear about incidents of extreme cruelty or indifference to suffering.

Context

Vicarious trauma is intensified by the magnitude of the suffering witnessed by frontline workers. It is compounded by the frustration of too few resources to meet the urgency of the needs.

Symptoms

- Intrusive imagery and thoughts; repeatedly visualizing traumatic events described by clients.
- Sleep disturbances, unable to quiet the mind and/or stop thinking about client's problems.
- Personal beliefs begin to change; increasing loss of faith and inability to believe life can be meaningful and beautiful.
- Troubled and self-critical feelings; increasing difficulties in relationships with others.
- Reduced sense of commitment and motivation for the work; increasing "knee-jerk" reactions and intolerance towards coworkers or clients; and/or feelings of numbness and disconnection.
- Changes in appetite; fatigue; swollen glands; physical illness.
- High staff turnover and sick days; increasing costs to the organization.

