



INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL HISTORY AND DIALOGUE CENTRE

A CASE FOR SUPPORT, DECEMBER 2014

The Indian Residential School system operated in Canada for more than a century. The last school closed in 1996. For much of this history, Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families to distant schools where they were forbidden to speak their native language or practice traditional culture. Many suffered physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Many died: the mortality rate in some schools was at times over 60%. With no parenting skills or experience of family life, many survivors transmitted abusive behaviours to subsequent generations. The devastating legacy of the schools is with us to this day, and nearly every Aboriginal family in Canada has been affected. Despite this, Aboriginal culture continues to thrive, especially as communities work collectively to recover from the effects of the residential school system.

Few Canadians are aware of this history or its lasting effects. Their ignorance is no accident: expressions of Aboriginal culture were banned by Canadian law from 1885-1951, and only recently has this important culture and history been included in school curriculum at any level. We all pay a price: with no widely shared understanding of the circumstances that have shaped Aboriginal experience, we are unable to communicate effectively or speak from a common understanding, yet the issues we must navigate are critical to our common future.

To continue moving forward from the effects of residential schools, we as a society need to preserve this essential cultural memory and promote awareness that will ensure that this history is understood, but not repeated. Recognition and understanding can create dialogues that not only educate about the past, but build relationships for the future.

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that resulted from the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history. Part of the commission's mandate has been to gather government, church, and school records and survivor testimony. An outcome of the commission was a proposed centre developed in close collaboration with the Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society and other Aboriginal organizations to give specific attention to the experiences of Aboriginal people, to promote research, education, and public awareness, and to preserve cultural memory.

A PLACE OF PROMISE

The University of British Columbia strives for mutually supportive and productive relationships with Indigenous communities. With its two primary campuses located on Musqueam and Okanagan lands and in a province rich in Aboriginal culture and history, UBC has long worked to integrate Indigenous cultures and histories into its curriculum and operations.

Aboriginal Engagement is a core commitment of UBC: the university's *Aboriginal Strategic Plan* highlights the importance of expanding educational opportunities for Aboriginal people and widening opportunities for all students to learn about Aboriginal issues and perspectives.

Aboriginal initiatives at UBC permeate the three key areas of student experiences, research excellence, and community partnerships. Examples include:

- The **First Nations House of Learning**: A centre for Aboriginal students and programming on the Vancouver campus
- Over 60 **Student Awards** specific to Aboriginal students
- More than 20 Indigenous professors who, with their colleagues, conduct **focused research** on Aboriginal Issues

In fulfillment of the commission’s recommendation, UBC is establishing the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre on its Vancouver campus to complement the National Centre at the University of Manitoba. The university has already committed \$5.5 million of private donor funding to construct the centre itself, and is now reaching out to individuals, organizations, and others who recognize the significance of supporting the curriculum, public programming, and digital tools necessary to allow the centre to fulfill its core mandate.

UBC INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS HISTORY AND DIALOGUE CENTRE

Committed to intercultural understanding and Aboriginal engagement, the University of British Columbia is home to numerous programs that integrate Aboriginal culture into its programs and operations and engage communities in collaborative work. As a top-ranked and strategically located teaching and research institution, UBC is well positioned to gather students, researchers, government stakeholders, Aboriginal leaders, and the public together to address these pressing issues through the establishment of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre.

The purpose of the centre is not to dwell upon the injustices of the past. Rather, the centre will:

- establish a resource and place of recognition for survivors, their families, and communities,
- bring Aboriginal, academic, and other communities together in purposeful dialogue,
- develop the research, advanced and basic educational materials, programs, and public information that will allow us to meet the challenges of the present and future, and
- provide a basis for a more complete and truthful understanding of Canadian history and society: by more fully acknowledging and understanding the past and where past events have left us, we can more equitably and productively move towards a better future.

Centrally located on UBC’s Vancouver campus and having a substantial online presence, the centre will be a resource for Aboriginal and other communities and educators throughout the province. It will operate in collaboration with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society and other Aboriginal community groups, whose partnership and guidance will be critical to its operations. It will be point of access to records and will support both research and the addition of new records and recollections of survivors. It will be a centre for the development of educational materials in both the physical and digital domains for use in universities, K-12 systems, communities, and public venues. Finally, it will be home to an inspiring memorial sculpture promoting reflection and acknowledging the experience of residential school students throughout Canada.

CREATING A PARTNERSHIP

The University of British Columbia is seeking your support to animate this vital centre for researchers, students, Aboriginal leaders, and community members to recognize survivor experiences, remember and understand the past, and share in substantive, focused discussions about the future.

Funding Opportunities	Cost
Programming: K-12 and post-secondary curriculum development; public programming; interactive exhibit design	\$1,500,000
Sculpture monument	\$1,000,000
Total	\$2,500,000

Since primary capital costs have now been secured, your generosity will provide the opportunity to develop vital and sustainable programming and operations for the centre and further development of the centre complex through the inclusion of an inspiring and thought-provoking monument. Through our work together, your gift will help lead to better understanding and more fruitful dialogue that strengthens Canada's future for everyone.

For further information on supporting this initiative, please contact:

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