



Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre

A case for support

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report was published in June 2015, Canadians were confronted with the reality of our nation's history as viewed through the experiences of Aboriginal people. The report shared a devastating history of abuse and neglect, and revealed the attempted cultural genocide of Indigenous cultures. It provided not only a sobering look at our history, but meaningful context for the reality many Aboriginal people face today, and for the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Before the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, few Canadians were aware of this history or its lasting effects. This ignorance is no accident. Expressions of Aboriginal culture were banned by Canadian law from 1885 to 1951, and only recently has significant address of Aboriginal culture and history been included in school curricula at any level. For that, we all pay a price. With no widely shared understanding of the circumstances that have shaped Aboriginal experience in Canada or of the actions taken by our institutions, we are unable to understand each other or begin to talk from a common understanding. Yet the issues we must navigate are critical to our common future.

"This is not an Aboriginal issue- it's a Canadian issue"

Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild

The UBC Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre

The Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre is part of the University of British Columbia's longstanding commitment to Aboriginal engagement. The university is committed to becoming a centre for positive action and understanding among Aboriginal communities and all British Columbians.

UBC has committed \$5.5 Million to cover the capital costs of building the Centre, and, with the approval of the UBC Board of Governors, given in June 2016, construction is now underway in the heart of the Vancouver campus, with the entrance off the Library Garden.

The University of British Columbia is seeking your support to animate this vital centre for researchers, students, Aboriginal leaders, and community members.

The work of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre will be significant. Its aim is not only to preserve the past but to create a better future for all Canadians, one that is rooted in a more truthful understanding of our shared history and society. Your generosity will support community access, public programming, curriculum development, advanced research, and intensive and regular discussion on issues of common concern.

"Starting now, we all have an opportunity to show leadership, courage and conviction in helping heal the wounds of the past as we make a path toward a more just, more fair, and more loving country."

Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of Truth and Reconciliation Commission





Remembering and Honouring the Past

The Indian Residential School system operated in Canada for more than a century, with the last school closing in 1996. For much of its 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 behaviors to subsequent generations. The devastating legacy of the schools is with us to this day. Nearly every Aboriginal family in Canada has been affected.



*Tsimshian boys at the Anglican Metlakatla Indian Residential School (1891-1962); Metlakatla, British Columbia
Photo Credit: Library and Archives Canada*

“Think about how what you discover here is reflected in the present day. Think about the conversations we need to have in this country to heal the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples that has existed for far too long.”

Ry Moran, Director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

UBC’s Commitment to Aboriginal Engagement

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 forms a key part of the UBC strategic plan, in student experiences, research excellence, and community partnerships. Evidence of this commitment includes the First Nations Longhouse and X̱wi7̱x̱wa Library, over 60 student awards specific to Aboriginal students, and more than 20 Indigenous professors who, with their colleagues, conduct focused teaching and research on Aboriginal topics. The establishment of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre is another manifestation of that promise.

As a strategically located teaching and research institution, consistently ranked among the top 40 universities globally, UBC is well-positioned to gather together students, researchers, governments, Aboriginal leaders, and the public to address the pressing issues of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system.

Engaging Multiple Communities

The Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre will exist as a physical space and have a substantial online presence, making its information available to Aboriginal communities as well as students and educators from other post-secondary institutions and primary and secondary schools throughout the Lower Mainland, British Columbia, and Canada. The Centre will operate in close



collaboration with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society and other Aboriginal community groups, whose partnership and guidance will be critical to its operations.

Our vision for community engagement includes creating:

- ◆ A place where former students, their families, and communities can have ready access to national Truth and Reconciliation Commission records, and expert help in navigating them
- ◆ A place where community members and families can explore historical and interpretive materials and see Aboriginal history acknowledged and publicly recognized in the centre of a major university campus
- ◆ Digital access to materials, and the potential for mirror sites in communities, schools, cultural centres, and other regional institutions

Educating Future Generations

The Centre will be an active driver of educational change in a system that has, to date, been painfully slow to respond. Faculty and staff will develop educational materials that are fully responsive to the needs of students and schools in British Columbia and include modes of access that will support and extend their reach. Our vision for education includes:

- ◆ Materials displayed at the Centre that will offer a powerful introduction to residential school history and allow for further exploration by visitors
- ◆ Curricular materials for both the K-12 and post-secondary school systems
- ◆ Programming for groups of visiting students, from both schools in the Lower Mainland and from more distant parts of our region
- ◆ Online resource materials
- ◆ Live interactive programming, using two-way video conferencing, connecting Aboriginal and other students throughout our region with faculty, staff, and community experts at the Centre

“Our hope lies in learning, and an unwavering commitment to tolerance, respect and inclusiveness in our relationships. If we are to teach these values to our children, we ourselves must learn. This is the only way forward—the path by which we will create a country for all of our children and grandchildren to share. A country we can all be proud of.”

His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada

Educating our Leaders

The Centre will not only provide a visible, accessible location through which UBC students and educators can access resources to explore residential school history and many other aspects of Aboriginal relations, it will offer that opportunity for deeper understanding through executive programming.

Many university leaders and scholars come to UBC without the awareness of Indian Residential School history or other Aboriginal issues that would fully inform decisions they will have to make. The Centre will provide the means of grounding them. Many businesses, corporations, and governmental and service organizations also lack the in-house means to orient leaders and employees to the rapidly changing landscape of Aboriginal relations. The Centre can provide a starting point for their orientation and direction for their specific business needs.





Better informed leadership means more informed analysis, better direction, and more functional interaction with future partners. With better interactions, everyone wins.

Partnering with UBC

The plan for the Centre is ambitious. At the turning point between a difficult past and the prospect of a better future, it offers a critical opportunity for thought, reflection, and growth. The Centre's focus will be the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools. It is from this core that broader issues, opportunities, and programs will emerge, with impacts throughout the university and in our communities.

A better future begins with speaking the truth. It begins with resolving the gaps in understanding that make other forms of discussion and negotiation so difficult. We begin by preserving the past and look forward to redefining relationships and building a more collaborative future.

The UBC Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre is at the forefront of a new understanding of Canadian history and society. Your gift will support public programming, curriculum development, community access, and intensive and forward-looking discussion on how we can build a better country for us all.

Join us.



*Aboriginal Graduates, Class of 2015, University of British Columbia
Photo Credit: Don Erhardt*

For more information on supporting the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, please contact:

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