



Statement

June 21, 2022

For Immediate Release

National Indigenous Peoples Day is a time to hold up and celebrate the culture, resistance and vision of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples. It is also a time to lean into the grief and pain of historical and ongoing harm caused by colonization and the racist and assimilationist beliefs and intentions that gave rise to Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, Indian Hospitals and countless other harmful programs and policies.

As we mark this important day, I want to take a moment to reflect upon the one-year anniversary of the discoveries by the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc Band of at least 215 children buried in unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Residential School. While it is important to highlight and celebrate the diverse cultures and outstanding contributions of Indigenous peoples across the land, it is also vital that we continue on the journey of healing.

Sadly, the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc discoveries were only the first of many that continue to follow, bringing to light the tremendous pain, trauma, loss and anger felt by First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous communities for decades. So many beautiful, innocent children were taken away from their loved ones, their culture and community to be subjected to unimaginable cruelty at residential schools throughout the country. These young, vibrant, budding spirits with hopes and dreams never had a chance to bloom.

It is a somber and heartbreaking reality – one that we will never forget.

The ongoing discovery of unmarked graves at the sites of the former residential schools reminds us of the continued harms caused by these institutions. The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report described the government-led policy of removing children from their families and placing them in residential schools far from home as “cultural genocide.” We also know that a direct line exists from residential schools to contemporary child welfare issues and discrimination. These injustices are not historical – they are ongoing.

These practices have a direct bearing on the fact that, today, 68 per cent of the children in government care are Indigenous, despite the fact Indigenous children comprise less than 10 per cent of the total child population in the province.

Despite the intergenerational harm caused to their people, First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous communities continue to move forward with resiliency and courage to ensure that their children and future generations can be treated with the respect they deserve and have the opportunity to be raised in the Indigenous ways that will provide them with the sense of belonging

they need in order to thrive. In this past year, there have been some remarkable developments including Cowessess First Nation being the first under the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families* to assert jurisdiction over their own child welfare, with many other Nations proceeding towards reclamation of their laws and practices and establishing their Indigenous Governing Bodies.

At RCY, it is imperative for me that, as an Office, we continue to support and walk alongside First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous communities as they move toward assertion of this jurisdiction. We are working hard to promote the importance of belonging in the lives of all children, but particularly First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children. We're slowly seeing those changes reflected in the government's practice, policy and legislation – but there is more to do.

On this, National Indigenous Peoples Day, join RCY as we celebrate the diverse cultures and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and reflect upon what else we can do to lift up the voices of those who have endured and pushed forward through such difficult times.

Lastly, please take a moment to watch our video statements on the effects of residential schools [here](#).

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth