

CALL TO ACTION STATEMENT

Faculty of Social Work
Manitowapow
Treaty 1 and 5 Territories
Homeland of the Metis
Unceded Territory of the Dakotah



Recently, Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Marie Wilson called the use of ground penetrating radar to locate the bodies of 215 children on the grounds of a residential school a “validation.” She added, “I don’t use the word discovery because we’ve known about this for some time now” (Front Burner). The TRC reports have already established that there were far more physical deaths at residential schools than were recorded. While the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba is heartbroken by the validation that had to be so hard-won by the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc First Nation, we are not surprised. The TRC report Canada’s Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials clearly shows that far more children died at residential schools than have been recorded. Calls to Action 71-76 call for thorough collaboration with Indigenous communities to investigate and honour all who did not return from residential school. Obviously, this includes working with Indigenous communities in Manitoba to honour their missing loved ones who did not return from Manitoba’s 14 residential schools. This support should have been offered 6 years ago when Canada received the TRC reports. No, we must not be shocked or surprised.

Instead, we must be determined and courageous as we commit to making real progress on the Calls to Action. Despite what Prime Minister Trudeau said in a TRC 5th anniversary statement—“80 per cent of the Calls to Action implicating the Government of Canada are completed or well underway”—we know that there are generations of painful, but necessary work ahead of us. We know that the most difficult work of truth telling must be completed before any meaningful steps toward improved relationships can take place. The very first thing that the Executive Summary of the TRC reports say is that residential schools are but one example of Canada’s genocide against Indigenous people. The findings by the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc First Nation are a validation of how painful this truth-telling about genocide is going to be. Let this be the last validation required before beginning in earnest to respond to the Calls to Action

While we, as a social work faculty, fully support the work that must be done regarding Calls to Action 71-76, we are also committed to doing other difficult work. Social work, child-welfare specifically, must respond to Calls to Action one through five. The TRC reports have found that the genocidal policies of residential schools have never stopped and that the main front of this colonial violence is social services: “Canada’s child-welfare system has simply continued the assimilation that the residential

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school system started” (p. 138). Nowhere is this ongoing genocide more easily demonstrated than in the province of Manitoba, where nearly one quarter of all of Canada’s children living in care are located. 90% of these children are Indigenous. This is especially poignant when we realize that Manitoba’s population makes up less than 4% of Canada’s population.

As the most urgent of all the Calls to Action are introduced in the executive summary, the report notes that “3.6% of all First Nations children aged fourteen and under were in foster care” (p. 138). That was based on census figures from 2011. Using the most recent census figures available (2016) and the well documented number of Indigenous children in care in Manitoba, 13% (1/8) of all Indigenous children 14 and under are in care in this province. These figures are not current because provincial and federal governments have failed to make adequate progress on Call to Action two. Let that number sink in. One of every eight Indigenous children in Manitoba is living in care. Manitoba’s Child and Family Services has ten times more Indigenous children in care than most other provinces in Canada and nearly twice as many Indigenous children in care as Saskatchewan, which is the next closest. There is no rationalization that can justify the devastation that taking 10000 children away from their families is causing to Indigenous people in Manitoba. It must stop now.

There is no mystery about what to do. The first five Calls to Action are specific and if they are implemented fully, the number of apprehensions in this province will drop dramatically. The hesitation to redirect funds away from apprehension and into prevention and the reluctance to fully fund Indigenous lead child-welfare services is genocide, not mismanagement. This is an established fact. All people in Canada are at last facing the centuries over-due reckoning with the absurd and evil illogic of the “doctrine of discovery.” However, social workers are ethically bound to respect the “inherent worth and dignity of all persons.” As a faculty, we know we must act now to properly educate future social workers about the impact of residential schools as per the first Call to Action.

We insist that government fulfill its duty to fund annual reports and fully implement Jordan’s principle in correspondence with Calls to Action two and three. We demand national and provincial legislation guaranteeing culturally appropriate care for Indigenous children, no matter the cost, as per Call to Action four. We require funding and infrastructure to assist in establishing culturally appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous parents in correspondence with Call to Action five. Further, we call on the Federal Government to comply with the 2016 Human Rights Tribunal’s findings by ending its discriminatory practices against First Nations Children in First Nations communities receiving child welfare services, to provide the full range of services mandated under Jordan’s Principle for Indigenous Children and provide compensation as set out in the ruling, to Indigenous Children inappropriately removed from their homes.



REFERENCES

Front Burner. CBC Podcast. June 4, 2021. "Kamloops residential school: what happens next."
<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/209-front-burner>

TRC Volume 4 Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials:
http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume_4_Missing_Children_English_Web.pdf

TRC executive summary
http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

PM Trudeau's statement:
<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2020/12/15/statement-prime-minister-fifth-anniversary-final-report-truth-and>

Child Welfare Reform report:
https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/child_welfare_reform/pubs/final_report.pdf

CASW Code of Ethics:
https://www.casw-acts.ca/files/documents/casw_code_of_ethics.pdf

Child Welfare Portal on Human Rights Tribunal Ruling Re Indigenous Child Welfare
<https://cwrp.ca/canadian-human-rights-tribunal-first-nations-child-welfare>

If condensed versions of the official TRC reports are still too long, please read A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.