



School of Social Work

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

215 Lives Lost: Statement of Acknowledgement

The School of Social Work, Carleton University, is mourning the 215 children whose bodies were recently discovered by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in an unmarked grave site at the Kamloops Residential School.

Canada's residential school system, including Day Schools, were in existence for well over a century touching thousands of lives of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children and their families from coast-to-coast-to-coast. The last school closed in 1996. Kamloops Indian Residential School operated between 1893 and 1969. It remained a Day School until it closed in 1978.

The physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual harm inflicted upon the most vulnerable and innocent – children – in these schools is shameful. The killing of 215 children can only be described as genocide. Many more remains of young lives stolen are yet to be found at other residential school sites. Canada, again, stands at the crossroads of reconciliation; Canada now must grapple with its own moral consciousness and awareness of the past and its continuing effects in contemporary times.

The horrific discovery of these children's hidden deaths shows how little Canada regarded the lives of the children, their families, and communities. First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children, some of whom were toddlers, were ripped from their families and taken far away, taken from their way of life, their languages silenced, their traditions mocked, and their cultures trampled. And while Indigenous families knew their children had disappeared, their voices of concern were systematically ignored or dismissed.

Thousands of children never made it home again. The heartache and grief were as real to the families then as it is now.

While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that thousands of deaths occurred at residential schools – many of these deaths were unrecorded. This incomprehensible discovery is a stark reminder of how many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children lost their lives and how many families were harmed. The countless young lives that have been lost impresses upon Canada that a full accounting and recognition has yet to be made and that the deep responsibility for this

harm remains unacknowledged as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities continue to experience colonial violence on their bodies and in their traditional territories.

This national tragedy is not “history”. It represents ongoing intergenerational trauma for families and communities. It is an urgent call to Canadians to create a different and better future.

Social workers actively participated in shaping this ongoing trauma and tragedy. Social workers are among those who removed and continue to remove Indigenous children. We remain intimately involved in undermining First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities through colonial acts of violence. We must hold ourselves and each other accountable for these actions.

Social workers are also among those who provide support, solidarity, mental health and social services, and political action. As a social work profession and educators, we can do better with how we engage Indigenous Peoples, families, and communities respectfully, including how we conduct our research. It is important to the School of Social Work, Carleton University, that we – faculty, contract instructors, and staff - ensure that present and future social work students graduate from our program with the knowledge and awareness of the role social work had and continues to play in perpetuating racist stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples to ensure that atrocities like this one never happens again.

At this time, the School of Social Work recommits our energies and efforts to culturally responsive and informed social work practice. We walk in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and communities. The harmful impacts of colonial legislation, policy, institutions, and systems have on Indigenous Peoples must be acknowledged, addressed, and ended. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *94 Calls to Action* remain unfulfilled. Both Social Work and educational institutions were specifically targeted with recommendations for change. It is our collective responsibility to listen, to learn, and to act.

The School of Social Work acknowledges the overwhelming hurt, sadness, and anger that Indigenous students, faculty, and staff must be feeling right now. We recognize it must be retraumatizing and painful but know that you are not alone. We stand with you.

We make this statement and recommit ourselves to reconciliation through decolonizing our understanding and approaches to social work education and practice. Over the summer, the School of Social Work will:

1. Develop an Indigenous-specific Social Work Action Plan to respond to important work outlined to the *TRC’s Calls to Action*, the *National Inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice*, and the Carleton University’s *Kinámágawin Final Report*.

2. Organize a “Call for 215 Beaded Baby Vamps to Commemorate the 215 children who lost their lives at Kamloops Residential School.” The goal is to gather 215 single beaded vamps (not a pair) by September 30, 2021, Orange Shirt Day. Vamps will be framed and donated to the School of Social Work, Carleton University, to honour the 215 young lives lost at Kamloops Residential School as well as all the children yet to be found.

We commit to these actions for all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children.

For all who suffered and died.

For all that live today with the trauma of our past.

For the 215.

In Solidarity,

School of Social Work faculty, instructors, and staff

Our School would like to share the following resources – support and information links:

Indigenous Students:

- *National Indian Residential School 24-hour national crisis line: [1-866-925-4419](tel:1-866-925-4419)*
- *Centre for Indigenous Services, Carleton University - <https://carleton.ca/indigenous/students/individual-counselling/>*
- *Post-secondary students in Ontario can get support via text through *Crisis Text Line*. Text GOOD2TALKON to 686868.*
- *You can receive professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being by calling *Good2Talk* at 1-866-925-5454.*

Staff and Faculty:

- *Employee & Family Assistance Program - <https://carleton.ca/health/counselling-services/employee-family-assistance-program/>*

Support Services:

- *Carleton Health & Counselling Services - (613) 520-6674*
- *Mental Health & Well-Being - <https://carleton.ca/wellness/living-well/>*

Further Information:

- *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Summary of the Final Report - [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future July 23 2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)*
- *TRC's Calls to Action - [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls to Action English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)*
- *The National Inquiry to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report - <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>*
- *The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) – Reconciliation and Social Work and Social Service Practice - <https://youtu.be/idYMqW2y7OU>*
- *Nisitohamowin ᓂᓯᓄᓐᓂᓪᓂᓐ ᓂᓪᓂᓐᓂᓪᓂᓐ An Introduction to Understanding Indigenous Perspectives in Canada (**Free course – June Only**) - <https://www.fnuniv.ca/partnerships/reconciliation/>*