



LEVEL
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

tapwewin: The Truth.

Sharing the True History of Indigenous Peoples in
Canada With a Focus on Resiliency and Reconciliation

SAVANNAH WIEST

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

**LEVEL CONSISTS OF
THREE PILLARS OF
WORK TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY:**



ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

¹ <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



SAVANNAH
WIEST

Originally from Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Savannah Wiest now lives as an uninvited guest on traditional Coast Salish territory. Savannah completed a Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work and Certificate of Reconciliation Studies at the First Nations University of Canada. The First Nations University is where she began to reconnect with her culture and language and to learn more about how she can bring Reconciliation into her career. She has a passion for working with women and bringing healing into the work she does.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The history of Indigenous people's interactions with residential schools, Indian hospitals, and the long-term effects of colonization has not been previously taught in mainstream Western academia. Lack of education on this subject has resulted in stereotyping, racism, and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, both individually and systemically. The lack of this history being included in mainstream academia has resulted in individuals denying the existence of the schools, let alone the extent to which they irreparably damaged the lives of Indigenous peoples. It has also resulted in people trying to reinforce the idea that these schools were a positive experience for students and that good came from them. It's not uncommon to find that an older generation is stuck in a mentality based around bias, stereotyping, and blatant racism. Although there is no excuse for this behaviour, I do believe a lot of it stems from a lack of education. We have a responsibility to acknowledge and teach the truth. As said by Pamela Agawa, a curriculum coordinator for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education (FNMI) at York Region District School Board in Ontario, we need to figure out the truth for ourselves: "What biases do we carry; what learning do we need to do to better understand the true history of the country?" (Schiedel, 2018).

The role that leaders have in Reconciliation is to bring an awareness of the history of colonization and the long-lasting effects of intergenerational trauma, including Residential School Syndrome. This is defined as the result of children experiencing trauma, physical and emotional abuse, shame, neglect, feelings of abandonment, marginalization, and racism. When all of that is unresolved, those experiences and emotions become internalized. Those emotions manifest into depression, anxiety, addiction, suicidal inclinations, rage, and mental illnesses (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2014). There is a need for insurgent education as an important part of the anti-colonial struggle and the pedagogies of decolonization. Insurgent educators will exemplify Indigenous forms of leadership by relating their struggles for Indigenous resurgence to a broader audience using innovative techniques to inspire activism and reclamation of Indigenous histories (Corntassel, 2011). Leaders in Reconciliation also need to help restore the balance of power when it comes to decision making. The decision-making process has fallen into the hands of Canada for too long.

PROBLEM DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

The Canadian residential school system was created when the federal government commissioned a report of Aboriginal children schooling and resulted in the Davin Report of 1879 recommending the adoption of the American model of residential schools. The schools were run by various Church denominations and the intent was to remove the Indian from the child and Westernize them. Children were banned from speaking their languages and forced to speak and learn English, weren't allowed to practice ceremony, had their hair cut short, and were subjected to gender segregation, which separated siblings. Come the early 1900s, it was realized that assimilation wasn't working as planned; children who left the schools didn't fit in with their own communities or Euro-Canadian society. Mandatory attendance was passed in 1920 and if parents resisted, they would face jail time. Duncan C. Scott so famously quoted, "I want to get rid of the Indian problem" in 1920. Enrolment peaked in 1930, and approximately 9,000 students were enrolled in mainly residential and day schools. There were approximately 80 residential schools in operation across the country by this point. During this time, abuse and neglect were widely documented, as well as medical and nutritional experimentation. The long-lasting effects of colonization is seen through the loss of language and cultural traditions, the high numbers of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, Indigenous youth and adults in the prison system, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the high rates of addiction and suicides in Indigenous communities.

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood, today the Assembly of First Nations, wrote and released the Indian Control of Indian Education paper. In the statement of values, they state, "We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honoured place in Indian traditional and culture. The values which we want to pass on to our children, values which make our people a great race, are not written in any book. They are found in our history, in our legends and in the culture. We believe that if an Indian child is fully aware of the important Indian values, he will have reason to be proud of our race and of himself as an Indian. The gap between our people and those who have chosen, often gladly, to join us as residents of this beautiful and bountiful country, is vast when it comes to mutual understanding and appreciation of differences. To overcome this, it is essential that Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs, and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens. We propose that education authorities, especially those in Ministries of Education, should provide for this in the curricula and texts which are chosen for use in Canadian schools." (National Indian Brotherhood/ Assembly of First Nations, Statement of Values).

The relationship between the federal government and Aboriginal peoples is deteriorating. There have been massive divisions stemming from Aboriginal education, child welfare, and justice instead of movement towards Reconciliation. The lack of knowledge about Canada's colonial history has serious consequences in today's day and age. This lack of knowledge results in misinformed decisions being made at a government level and reinforces racist behaviour, which has further fuelled distrust between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canada. Although some schools have begun to implement teaching the history, it is often reduced to a single day. It would be more beneficial for this history to be implemented within the curriculum taught all semester or yearlong. Reducing this history lesson to one day adds to the erasure of Indigenous people's experiences. In other cases, there are an abundance of resources available to educators, but

the issues remain in the educators being properly trained to teach this history. Without the knowledge of how to deliver this information in a historically accurate and culturally safe way, people fear causing more harm than what has already been done. If educators are going to be properly trained to take on teaching this history, the training cannot be a one-hour workshop, it must be more comprehensive than that. It would be most beneficial to engage with local land-based nations and Elders in training and creating this curriculum specific to the area. The history is complex and quite different from region to region, so communities must be engaged with, and have a voice in, creating this curriculum and helping prepare our educators to pass this history on to the next generation. It can also be difficult to navigate teaching this history to implement Reconciliation when educators may not understand what Reconciliation is or what their role in it is.

WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was tasked with: “There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing. This is a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future. The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation” (TRC). The need to be resilient comes from a long history of oppression. That history is long, complicated, and still being unearthed and shared. Those complexities can also make it difficult to understand what exactly needs to change or more importantly where to begin.

The purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was to create an awareness of the past where survivors could share their experiences for the rest of Canada to learn from in order to prevent the past from being repeated. It was made to create an acknowledgement of harm done and to help in creating a change in behaviour and foster peaceful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The TRC ensures that “former students and their families have access to their own history, educators can share the Indian Residential School history with future generations of students, researchers can more deeply explore the Residential School experience, the public can access historical records and other materials to help foster reconciliation and healing, and the history and legacy of the residential school system are never forgotten” (The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation/NCTR).

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Actions, many Canadians have found themselves wondering what Reconciliation is and what their part in it may be. Many Canadians did not have prior knowledge of what had occurred in these schools before Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered the Statement of Apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian residential school system in 2008. After that, it was the Idle No More movement in 2012 that brought awareness to Indigenous issues in Canada through round dances and social media. In 2015, the TRC report and 94 Calls to Action were released, which resulted in many individuals and government systems realizing they had more than just a role to play in Reconciliation, but a responsibility in it.

Reconciliation is a complex process that requires Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to not only work together, but for power and autonomy to be restored to Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is about working towards solidarity as a country, honouring treaties, acknowledging and respecting Indigenous rights and title, learning about Indigenous history, and

acknowledging the past so that history never repeats. By learning this history, it is a recognition of the intergenerational impacts of colonization, attempts at assimilation, and cultural genocide. It is taking responsibility to never utter, accept or ignore a statement that includes a stereotype about Indigenous peoples. It is having respect for Indigenous individuals and their beliefs, cultures, traditions, worldviews, challenges, and goals. It is a recognition and support of the deep connections Indigenous peoples have to the land and supporting the reclamation of identity, language, culture, and nationhood. Reconciliation is a commitment to taking a role and assuming responsibility in working towards a better future for every Canadian. What Reconciliation is not is a single gesture, action, or statement. It is not about blame or guilt. Reconciliation is not someone else’s responsibility. For true Reconciliation to take place, it requires everyone to do their part (Indigenous Cultural Training Inc./ICTINC). Education is an integral part of Reconciliation, and people always refer to education as the new buffalo. It is essential to the process.

RESEARCH

There is an abundance of online resources for learning about this history. There are websites that offer teaching kits and resources for educators who will be teaching this history in their classrooms. The website Where Are The Children (<http://wherearethekids.ca/en/resources/>) offers resources, education kits, teacher bundles, and reading lists. Project of Heart is a project that exists to examine the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and to seek truth about that history while calling Canadians to actions through social justice endeavours, and to help change the present and future history collectively. They offer many lesson plans for teachers who teach anywhere from Kindergarten to high-school aged students (<http://projectofheart.ca/teacher-guideslesson-plans/>). The Legacy of Hope Foundation is a national Indigenous-led, charitable organization founded in 2000 with the goal of educating and raising awareness about the history and legacy of the Canadian residential school system, including the direct and ongoing impacts on survivors, their communities, and descendants. Their mission is to educate towards creating equal relationships of Reconciliation and healing for all Canadians. They offer many resources and reports for what Reconciliation looks like outside of Canada as well (<http://legacyofhope.ca/>).

Some school boards across Canada have begun the process of teaching the history and adding it into their curriculum, while others are negotiating with local Indigenous boards and members to create this content. Provincial school districts have committed to teaching the legacy of the Indian residential school system.

- The British Columbia Ministry of Education acknowledges TRC Calls to Action #62 and #64 and is working to positively support Indigenous students at both a Ministry and School District level. They are doing this by incorporating Indigenous history within their curriculum and working towards seeing higher rates of Indigenous graduates (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/ways-to-learn/aboriginal-education/trc-calls-to-action.pdf>).
- The Alberta school district has created an Indigenous Advisory Circle that aims to provide leadership, education, and support for students, families, and communities, as well as provide guidance and direction. Since the creation of the advisory, they have provided professional learning opportunities around foundational Indigenous knowledge, the history of colonialism, Indigenous governance, collective social justice, and more (<https://www.asba.ab.ca/about/indigenous-advisory-circle/>).

- In Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan School Board's association Advocacy Paper for Mandatory Curriculum includes the "rich and diverse history of First Nations and Métis Peoples pre-contact and the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools" (<https://saskschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/SSBA-Position-Paper-Mandatory-Curriculum-FNM.pdf>).
- In 2016, the Manitoba School Board Association created an action plan detailing their plans on addressing key issues regarding Aboriginal and Indigenous education, such as expanding board capacity and proficiency in Aboriginal and Indigenous matters, promoting greater equity and justice through inclusive workplaces and organizational practices in the public school system, fostering a culture of creativity and innovation for Aboriginal and Indigenous student success, and acknowledging truth and championing Reconciliation through public education, to name a few. Timeframes for these action plans to-be-completed range from 2016 to 2019 (<http://www.mbschoolboards.ca/documents/finalReportAbEdAction2016.pdf>).
- In Ontario, the Indigenous Trustees' Council is made up of First Nations trustees appointed to school boards and are responsible for supporting the education of Indigenous students and ensuring all students are educated about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples. They have successfully worked on revisions to the mandatory curriculum to include treaty education, the history and legacy of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, the High Arctic relocation, the Powley Decision, and the impact of the Indian Act (<https://www.opsba.org/who-we-are/structure/indigenous-trustees-council>, <https://www.opsba.org/advocacy-and-action/first-nation-m%C3%A9tis-and-inuit-education>).
- The Yukon school board established the First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit to ensure First Nations perspectives are reflected in Yukon schools' culture, curriculum, and programs by building productive relationships with First Nations communities, improving the academic results of First Nations students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and enhancing First Nations effort to revitalize their languages (<https://yukon.ca/en/first-nations-perspectives>).
- The Canadian School Board Association (CSBA) addresses Aboriginal issues at the national level and seeks to develop and support a framework for analysis of how they can contribute to action and deliberation. Recent advocacy efforts include letters to the Prime Minister of Canada, AFN, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada (<http://www.cdnsba.org/resources/aboriginal-education>).
- The Council of Ministers of Education Canada has worked to support Indigenous education data collection and analysis, created a best-practices database for First Nations, Métis and Inuit education, begun to work on teacher training as it relates to Indigenous education, and established an ongoing dialogue with national Indigenous organizations and the federal government on a variety of issues pertaining to Indigenous education (https://www.cmec.ca/53/Indigenous_Education.html).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

My policy ask is to teach Canada's true history of colonization with its Indigenous peoples within mainstream academia, particularly in the elementary school curriculum. I believe there should be a focus on the resiliency of Indigenous peoples and the goal of teaching this history should be to find ways to implement Reconciliation in the schools. This will help to promote unity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students and help to prevent stereotypes and racism. It will also honour Indigenous peoples who have been affected by residential schools and colonization to move forward in a meaningful way that promotes healing.

My recommendations for moving forward would be to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Actions #62 (Develop and fund Aboriginal content in education), #63 (Council of Ministers of Education Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues), and #65 (Establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance the understanding of reconciliation). All three of these Calls to Action are currently in progress as projects have been proposed. Key influencers in making this happen would include local nations including Elders, Chiefs, and band governance systems, the Ministry of Education, the Canadian School Board Association, provincial school board ministers, and the Prime Minister of Canada.

University students should be required to take Indigenous Studies courses taught by an Indigenous professor to increase traditional teachings and history in Western education spaces. Indigenous institutes of learning offer courses on Indigenous history, languages, health studies, art, and education, which aids in keeping culture and history alive. The First Nations University of Canada in Saskatchewan offers academic programs in Indigenous education, environmental science, health practice, languages and linguistics, social work, and Indigenous studies. To make this knowledge accessible these programs are open to all university students and are not intended specifically for Indigenous students. Indigenous leadership is important for the preservation of culture, language, ways of life, knowledge, and people. Preservation is necessary for the journey of self-determination.

- "Stripping Indigenous peoples of our languages was a deliberate policy of the residential school system, and despite a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that acknowledges this, there is yet to be any concrete action to reverse this damage," wrote Métis author Chelsea Vowel in 2017 (Krasovitski, 2019).

We need to start Indigenousizing the academy in order to regain power and presence within mainly Western spaces. Indigenousizing the academy is challenging the dominant, colonial discourse and raising awareness of Indigenous histories and place-based existences as part of continuing the struggle against the shape-shifting colonial powers. This can create decolonizing and discomforting moments of Indigenous truth-telling that challenges the colonial status quo. It does this by questioning settler occupation of Indigenous places through direct, honest, and experiential forms of engagement and demands for accountability. Insurgent educators exemplify Indigenous forms of leadership by relating their daily struggles for Indigenous resurgence to broader audiences using innovative ways that inspire activism and reclamation of Indigenous histories and homelands. Indigenous peoples reclaiming this makes settlers uncomfortable, but it is through this discomfort that meaningful cross-cultural education, awareness, and action can happen.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Canada needs to start teaching the true history of what has happened in this country without hiding any details out of shame. Understanding what colonialism is and how it affects us all to this day is the first step in repairing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada. It is important to teach about the legacy of residential schools so we can honour those who attended. Acknowledging what has happened is an important step in Reconciliation. Colonialism has been proven to be detrimental to Indigenous people's health and well-being in countries where settler and colonial power continues to dominate. For this change to happen, there must be a shift in power and restoration of self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Although some provinces and school boards have begun to create change by modifying curriculum to include Indigenous history and culture, this needs to be carried out Canada-wide and created with local nations. We are now seeing schools beginning to teach the history of residential schools, cultural safety training in workplaces, and Indigenous peoples taking back their identity through Indigenous universities and degrees. Reconciliation will be an ongoing process and we are far from where we need to be, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped jumpstart the process and lay out the groundwork for what needs to be accomplished.

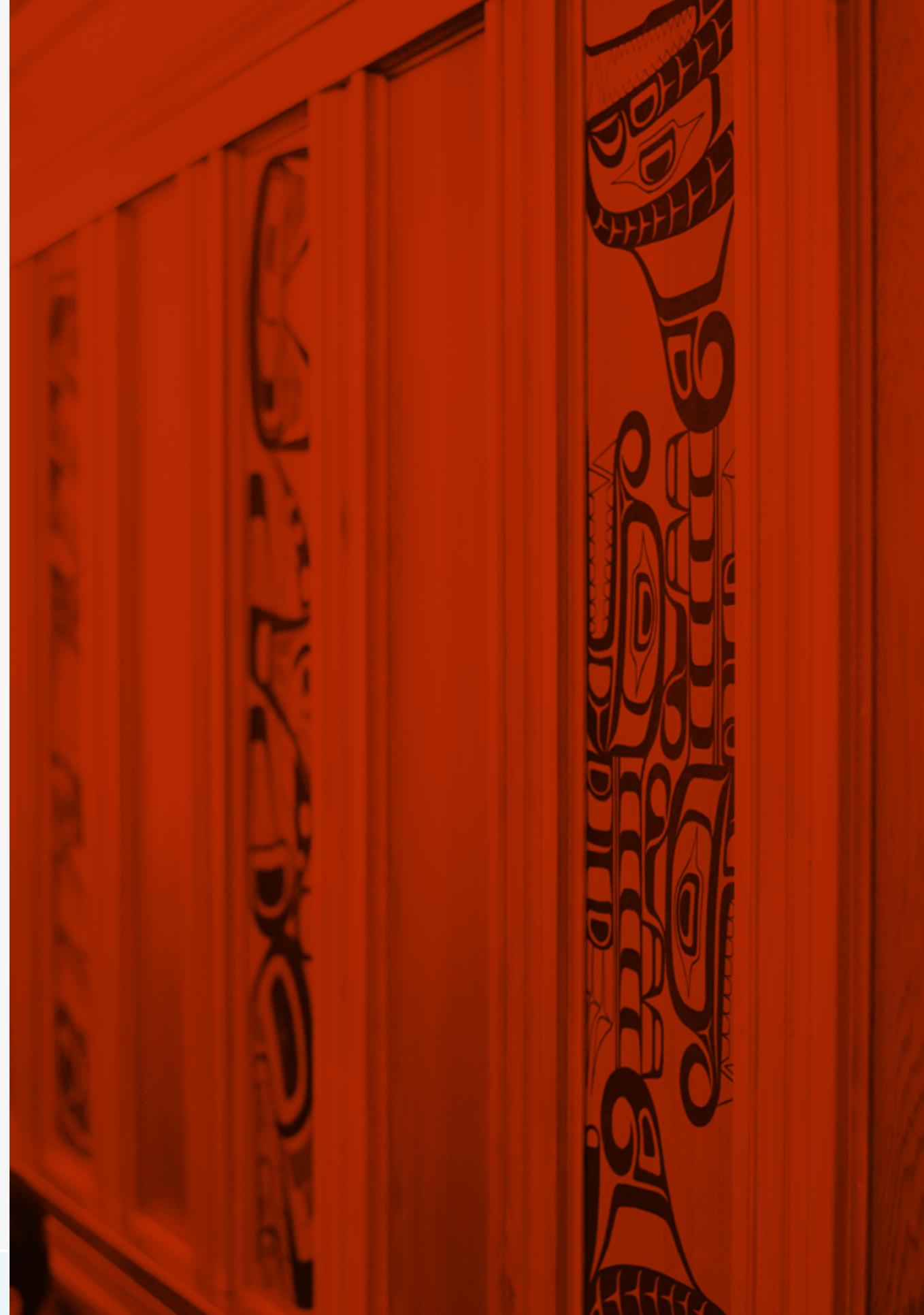
Decolonization is the undoing of colonialism and results in communities, nations, and people affected by colonialism reframing, regaining, and revitalizing their own frameworks, knowledge, and systems to become self-determining. We need Reconciliation in order to decolonize. Reconciliation is an awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. It is the restoration of friendly relations and the action of making one view of belief compatible with another. Reflection is a necessary part of this healing. There needs to be a recognition of the past harms that have been committed, but instead of getting stuck in the hurt that has occurred we need to look at the resiliency of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Despite colonization and the Indian Residential School system, Indigenous people are still here even though these policies and acts of terror stood to decimate them. There are Indigenous institutes of learning, the languages are being revitalized, there are healing lodges to help those who are hurting, and the teepees and longhouses are still standing.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

We are seeing Reconciliation take place in many different spaces and ways. It should be noted that there are many individuals who have attended residential schools, or who had loved ones who attended, who may not be ready for the process of Reconciliation. This must be respected. For survivors and their families, the truth part may not be fully completed, or it can be difficult to get to a point where Reconciliation can be achieved. There have been entire generations who have not been taught about this history, and some families may not be ready for these conversations. Residential schools have negatively impacted Indigenous peoples and created inter-generational trauma including cultural shame, loss of language and traditional ways, and so much more. Often, we find this history being taught by white-led education systems, which can be triggering as well. An important part of telling the history is to heal by acknowledging what has occurred instead of dismissing it. It is important to note that not everyone will be ready or able to heal, and that healing is not a "one size fits all" process. We should recognize that healing happens at different paces for everyone.

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ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



LEVEL

AN INITIATIVE OF **vancouver**
foundation

200-475 W. Georgia Street,
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9
604.688.2204

level@vancouverfoundation.ca
www.levelvf.ca

 @LEVELVF

 @LEVEL_VF

 @LEVEL_VF