



Our Commitment in Response to the Residential School Deaths

The horrific news about the remains of 215 Indigenous children being found at a former residential school on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, British Columbia is making headlines.

We cannot ignore this heartbreaking evidence of the profound harm and ongoing impact of colonization and systemic racism in our country.

Today flags are flying at half-staff across Canada as a symbol of sadness and grief. But we need more than symbols. We need actions.

What can we do right now, today?

At Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region, we feel an additional sense of responsibility. We were part of the social services community supporting the Residential Schools and separating families. We took children from their Indigenous families to place with white families during the "Sixties Scoop."

Today, we continue to have an over-representation of First Nations, Inuit and Metis children in foster care.

After the discovery of the children's grave, members of the Agency's Two Row Understanding Service Team, a team dedicated to serving First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children, youth and families who are in contact with the child welfare system, shared their thoughts about truth.

With their permission, we would like to share them with you:

"Today, 52% of children in the foster care system in Canada are Indigenous. This is the Truth!"

Today, we mourn the loss of 215 murdered children at the Kamloops residential school and we grieve with 430 parents, 860 grandparents and countless aunts, uncles, friends and relatives. This is the Truth!

Today, over 200 Indigenous children remain out of parent care as the result of interventions by our agency; 420 parents, 840 grandparents and countless aunts, uncles, friends and relatives will forever be impacted. This is the Truth!

Today, we come to work despite the pain, frustration, anger - and despite the barriers and resistance we face on a daily basis. We do so in an effort to disrupt the shameful policies and practices that continue to steal and separate Indigenous children from their family and communities. We will not, and cannot not stay silent in the face of attempted genocide.

We as an agency need to acknowledge these truths, accept these truths, and be accountable for these truths before we can move forward with Reconciliation."

Family and Children's Services has recently approved a new Strategic Plan that is strongly focused on equity. The Plan promotes preventive programs that address systemic issues to keep Indigenous children and youth safely with their families and decrease the need the need for child-welfare involvement.

We are committed to supporting our Indigenous staff and the Indigenous families we work with during this time of heightened grief and loss. We are committed to working with our community partners to find culturally-appropriate supports and solutions for the challenges families are dealing with.

We are committed to addressing individual biases and systemic racism in our work and interactions.

We know we have more work to do and that this is just the beginning, but change is necessary. Our Indigenous colleagues and families have waited more than long enough.

Karen Spencer,
Executive Director, Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region