

Their stories live on....

A Message from Carola Knockwood, Executive Director for Mi'kmaw Services Branch

On May 27, 2021, the first news story of the mass grave found at the Kamloops Residential School in the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory was released; this news hit hard within all First Nations across Turtle Island (North America). The discovery of the remains of 215 children triggered a ripple effect of emotions from extreme sadness and hurt to anger and outrage throughout Indigenous communities. Non-Indigenous Canadians have also expressed shock and sadness.

Many of our colleagues in education have asked, "*What can we do?*"

Firstly, we must honour these 215 children. That begins with educating ourselves about the truth of residential schools and the trans-generational trauma the system caused. For our older students, we need to grow their knowledge of these truths, sharing information that is appropriate to their emotional maturity and in ways that support understanding and empathy. For our younger students, we focus on the importance of valuing and preserving cultural teachings and traditions, even when others try to take them away. And, we teach that all children are to be loved and honoured for the gifts that they are and the gifts that each brings to share with the world.

Secondly, we must fulfill our responsibility to Reconciliation. We always have a choice as to how we respond, and this must be ours. There are many aspects of our shared history, including the legacy of the residential school system and present-day examples of systemic racism, that contribute to the need for Reconciliation. Within our chosen profession as educators, we must commit to Reconciliation and actively work together to honour, educate, and promote healing. Our response to this tragedy needs to embody the message that every child DOES matter. Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students of our system need to see an earnest, active response so that they feel validated, as is promised through our *Inclusive Education Policy*.

Every Indigenous community was called upon to support one another as the impact of this devastating news was felt by all. We are grieving. For many, deep-rooted feelings of sadness, hurt, and anger have surfaced, negatively impacting their well-being. It is important to support Mi'kmaw students and staff in their journey of healing during this time, as many will turn to

traditional ways to strengthen their well being. We ask our non-indigenous brothers and sisters to stand beside us, as we continue to support one another on this journey of healing and work together towards Reconciliation based on understanding and acceptance. Only then can we move forward together in peace and with mutual respect.