

Part 1: What were Residential Schools?

In 1883 Canadian government believed that Indigenous peoples should give up their languages, cultures and beliefs so the Government could assimilate them into European-Canadian society. They believed the easiest way to do this was to take the children away from their parents and enroll them in special schools.

Residential schools ran for over 100 years, until 1996. There were at least 150 of these schools. The Government paid the churches to operate them. Indigenous children were forced to live at the schools for months or years without ever going home. Parents who tried to keep their children at home could be sent to prison. More than 150,000 Indigenous children attended these schools.

Part 2: What happened in the schools?

In most residential schools the children were abused. Their clothes and belongings were taken away, their hair was cut, and they had to wear uniforms. They were given new English names and could no longer be called by the names their parents gave them. They went to class in the morning and in the afternoons worked for no money on farms or cleaning the schools.

They were beaten for speaking their own language. They were beaten if they were caught doing anything the staff at the school considered "uncivilized". The living conditions were so bad that many children died of disease. They were buried in unmarked graves. Others died while trying to escape, and some even committed suicide.

They had to go to church where they were told that their cultures were inferior, wrong and even sinful, and that they would never be as good as Euro-Canadian people.

Some residential schools were good, and children had good experiences and education there. But their languages, cultures and beliefs were still taken from them and they were separated from their families for many years.

Part 3: What are the effects of residential schools?

Residential schools continue to have lasting, serious effects on Indigenous people. Most people received very poor education, and they believed it was shameful to be an Indigenous person. Many also suffered severe trauma from their abuse.

When the children left the schools, they couldn't speak their original language anymore, so they could not talk with their relatives back home, especially their grandparents. The tradition in Indigenous communities is for knowledge to be passed on by telling stories. Because they couldn't communicate with their grandparents meant they were unable to learn about their own culture.

Many found it hard to fit into Canadian society. They found racism when they tried to find work. Many Indigenous people felt like they did not belong anywhere. The impact of residential schools began to pass through the generations leaving a legacy of joblessness, poverty, family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, family breakdown, sexual abuse, prostitution, homelessness, high rates of imprisonment, and early death. It is very clear that Residential Schools did terrible harm to Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Part 4: What is being done to repair the damage done by residential schools?

There have been many lawsuits and legal claims against the Government and churches that ran the schools. Eventually, the churches began to apologize for how they hurt the children they were looking after.

In 2007, one of the largest class action lawsuits in Canada was settled. A class action lawsuit is when a group of people gather together to bring a person, or group of people to court. This lawsuit resulted in the Residential School Settlement and payment of \$1.9 billion to survivors of residential schools. It also required an official government apology and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized

on behalf of all Canadians for removing Indigenous children from their homes and cultures in order to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture.