

# Norgate Xwemélch'stn Cares

*We would like to thank the Coast Salish people, specifically the Skwxwú7mesh Nation and Tsleil-Waututh Nation, on whose unceded traditional territory the North Vancouver School District resides. We value the opportunity to learn, share and grow on this traditional territory.*

## 215 Children

**430 Parents, 860 Grandparents, thousands of Aunties, Uncles, Cousins, Relations...**

Last week the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation confirmed what long has been known by Indigenous Peoples in this country: *Indigenous children died as a result of colonization and residential schools.*

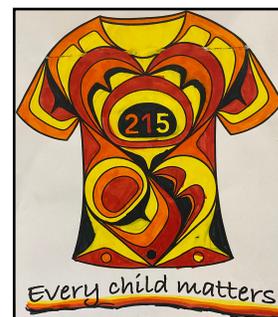
What is hard to face as a settler born and raised here on the traditional un-ceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples is it's taken this tragic discovery to make the truth *really unsettle* me, and I know I am not alone.

It's been years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and final report were published, and while the United Nations Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, it took until last year for the Government of Canada to introduce legislation to implement the UNDRIP. Something one of my former students said when I taught them about the UNDRIP just over three years ago hasn't left me. She asked, "If the UN's Declaration of Human Rights has been in place since 1948, why do we need the UNDRIP?" I didn't have an answer. The profundity of this question will never leave me. *Why indeed?*

I was never taught the true history of how Indigenous Peoples were mistreated and marginalized through colonization and its imposed systems. In fact, even in university when I took a Canadian History course the truth was conveniently omitted, and this was a course intended for future educators! My knowledge base consisted of what was so stereotypically taught in one chapter of a Social Studies text book. I had already been a teacher for a number of years before I learned about residential schools even existing, let alone existing right here. I didn't know about how land was taken, reserves were put in place, the Pass System was imposed, families were torn apart, languages were lost, and, and, and...

Because of my ignorance I formed false and uninformed opinions about Indigenous people and it's taken me a long time to come to terms with my own biases and assumptions. I am ashamed to admit to having said and thought racist things about Indigenous people and I've been sitting in this discomfort for many years now. It guts me to know that my privilege as a settler-Canadian came at the expense of Indigenous Peoples - including ancestors, family members, and relations of the children who attend this school.

While becoming uncomfortable is an important step in the right direction, learning and unlearning is the continuation of the journey. As an educator I generally love learning, but I haven't enjoyed learning and confronting hard truths about history as well as the present, surfacing my own and systemic assumptions



and biases, and recognizing wrongs. What I know as a passionate teacher and learner, however, is that learning happens on the edge of discomfort.

To grow in my understanding I have taken part in professional development sessions, participated in the Blanket Exercise and Circle in a Box, read publications and books, listened to podcasts, been part of dialogue sessions, and most importantly listened to and learned from the Indigenous educators and allies I am so fortunate to work with. I am learning alongside many other educators in our district and school, and am grateful for the leadership of Tsnomot (Brad) Baker and to all members of the Indigenous Education team for their teachings, guidance and bravery. Words can't do justice to how much I admire their courage to work within a system that has caused them and theirs so much hurt and harm. The work they have done and continue to do within the system is changing it and the people who work within it are changing too. Their work to educate the educators, to teach and support the children with us is so impactful and genuinely appreciated.

Fortunately, your children are learning to value the rich culture, contributions and knowledge of Indigenous peoples. They are learning the truth about Canada's past and present so that they can shape a more positive future for all people. What is so heartening is to see and hear your children share with pride who they are and to notice that they don't look past differences, but rather see them as what makes each person unique and special. Each of them is special. Every one of them matters.

That thousands of children were taken from their families, abused, shamed for who they were, and that so many perished at the hands of colonizers is unconscionable. What is more unconscionable, however, is that the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, not the BC government, were the ones to step forward to reveal the unmarked graves of the children who died at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Thankfully these children can return to their families. But, how many more deaths were not documented, how many more children have not been found and returned to their families? Not good enough!

Today, I have sent three letters to the Member of Parliament for my constituency: one to request that a forensic search be completed of all residential school sites and surrounding areas; a second to demand that clean drinking water be provided to all Indigenous people in this country; and a third to request that housing for Indigenous families is built and maintained according to provincial building codes.

At the school, I am not alone in my efforts to be part of positive change. I am grateful to learn and educate alongside a team of deeply caring and devoted staff members. We are honoured that you entrust your children to us daily and will continue our efforts to work together towards reconciliation.

***Ché'nchenstway ~ We are in this together.***

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