Survivors and their families needed to hear those words. They had lived with pain, fear, and anger for most of their lives, resulting from the abrupt separation from their families and their experiences at residential schools, and they wanted desperately to begin their healing. They needed to have validated their sense that what had been done to them was wrong. They wanted to believe that things would begin to change—not the schools, which had long been closed, but the attitude and behaviours that lay behind the existence of the schools. They wanted to believe that the government that had so long controlled their lives and abused its relationship with them now "saw the light." They wanted to believe that the future for their children and their grandchildren would be different from their own experiences; that their lives would be better. The apology gave them cause to think that their patience and perseverance through the trauma and negativity of their experiences in and beyond the residential schools had been worth the struggle. It gave them hope.

At the TRC's Saskatchewan National Event, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Shawn A-in-chut Atleo said,

> I think as was heard here, what I'm so grateful for is that there's a growing experience … about the work of reconciliation.… How do communities reconcile? Well, it begins with each and every one of us. How fortunate I am as a young man to have spent time with my late grandmother. I held her hand. She was eighty-seven years old, still here. During that apology, she said, "Grandson, they're just starting to see us, they're just beginning to see us." That's what she said. And she found that encouraging, because it's the first step, actually seeing one another, having the silence broken and the stories starting to be told.… I think that's where it begins, isn't it? Between us as individuals sharing the stories from so many different perspectives so that we can understand.[59]

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples noted that for some time after settler contact, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples had been one of mutual support, co-operation, and respect. Despite incidents of conflict, Aboriginal peoples' acceptance of the arrival of Europeans, and their willingness to participate with the newcomers in their economic pursuits, to form alliances with them in their wars, and to enter into Treaty with them for a variety of purposes, showed a wish to coexist in a relationship of mutual trust and respect.[60] That aspect of the relationship was confirmed on the non-Aboriginal side by evidence such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, as discussed earlier.

The trust and respect initially established ultimately were betrayed. Since Confederation in 1867, the approach of successive Canadian federal governments to the Crown's fiduciary obligation to provide education for Aboriginal peoples has been deeply flawed. Equally important, the consequences of this broken trust have serious implications well beyond residential schools. The trust relationship and Canada's particular obligation to uphold the honour of the Crown with regard to Aboriginal peoples goes to the very heart of the relationship itself.