

The legacy

I want Canadians to understand that [the legacy of the residential schools] does not just affect the lives of the person who actually attended the school, but family members, such as spouses and children, are also very deeply affected about this sad legacy in history.

— Johanne Coutu-Autut, spouse of former Turquetil Hall resident¹

Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. It is reflected too in the critically endangered status of most Aboriginal languages.

Current conditions such as the disproportionate apprehension of Aboriginal children by child-welfare agencies and the disproportionate imprisonment and victimization of Aboriginal people can be explained in part as a result or legacy of the way that Aboriginal children were treated in residential schools and were denied an environment of positive parenting, worthy community leaders, and a positive sense of identity and self-worth. The schools could be brutal places, as Joseph Martin Larocque, a former student at the Beauval residential school in Saskatchewan, told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

[Residential school] was a very harsh environment. They, they treated us like criminals.... You, you had to, it's like a prison. But we were small kids, and we didn't understand. We didn't understand harsh discipline. We, we understood love from our, our parents. But the harsh discipline was hard to take, and that happened to everybody, not only me.²

The impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the Survivors' partners, their children, their grandchildren,