

in the Northwest Territories; and Williams Lake, British Columbia, led to several police investigations, and a limited number of prosecutions and convictions. They also led to the creation of local and national organizations of former residential school students. Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, placed the issue on the national agenda in October 1990 when he spoke publicly about the abuse that he and his fellow students had experienced at the Fort Alexander school.<sup>662</sup>

Former students also filed lawsuits against the federal government and the churches over the treatment that they received in the schools. Although they were successful in a number of these cases, courts were not willing to provide compensation for some issues of importance to Aboriginal peoples, such as the loss of language and culture. By October 2001, more than 8,500 residential school Survivors had filed lawsuits against the federal government, the churches, related organizations, and, where possible, the individual who committed the abuse.<sup>663</sup> By 2005, it was estimated that the volume surpassed 18,000 lawsuits.<sup>664</sup> Former students also commenced class-action lawsuits for compensation. Although lower courts rejected their right to pursue such claims, in 2004, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that one of these cases (known as the “Cloud case”) should be allowed to proceed.<sup>665</sup> Within months, the federal government agreed to enter into a process intended to negotiate a settlement to the growing number of class-action suits. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was reached in 2006 and approved by the courts in the following year. The IRSSA has five main components: 1) a Common Experience Payment; 2) an Independent Assessment Process; 3) support for the Aboriginal Health Foundation; 4) support for residential school commemoration; and 5) the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Through the Common Experience Payment, former students would receive a payment of \$10,000 for the first year that they attended a residential school, and an additional \$3,000 for each additional year or partial year of attendance. The Independent Assessment Process adjudicated and compensated the claims of those students who were physically or sexually abused at the schools. Funding was also provided to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to support initiatives addressing the residential school legacy. The Settlement Agreement committed the federal government to funding initiatives to commemorate the residential school experience. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was mandated to tell Canadians about the history of residential schools and the impact those schools had on Aboriginal peoples, and to guide a process of reconciliation.

The court approval of the IRSSA in 2007 was followed in June 2008 with Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s apology on behalf of Canada. In his statement, the prime minister recognized that the primary purpose of the schools had been to remove children from their homes and families in order to assimilate them better into the dominant culture. Harper said, “These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, ‘to kill