

Working under the direction of these community members, and in collaboration with her colleague, Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Dr. Robina Thomas), and TRC staff, Walsh began preparations to bring the artwork to the Learning Place at the TRC's Victoria Regional Event in April 2012. In a powerfully moving ceremony, Nuu-chah-nulth Elders, Survivors, and Hereditary Chiefs drummed, sang, and danced the art into the Learning Place. In this way, each painting, carried with respect and love by a Nuu-chah-nulth woman dressed in button blanket regalia, was brought out to be shared with others.

The community later received commemoration project funding to hold a traditional feast on March 30, 2013, in Port Alberni to reunite artists and their families with the paintings. Robert Aller's family members were also invited to attend. They were visibly moved when they heard the stories of the paintings, and said that Aller would have been happy that the paintings were being returned. Paintings were returned to those who wished to have them; the remaining art was loaned to the University of Victoria, where it will be housed, cared for, and exhibited, based on agreed-upon protocols with Survivors and their families.²¹⁹

In a media interview, Survivor and Hereditary Chief Lewis George said that the art classes probably saved him from being sexually abused by convicted pedophile Arthur Plint, who had taught at the Alberni residential school. He remembered the kindness shown to him by Aller as being in stark contrast to the harsh realities of life at the school, and he said, "I want my story kept alive." Wally Samuel, another Survivor of the Alberni school who helped co-ordinate the project, said everyone reacted differently when told about the paintings. "Some got really quiet and others looked forward to seeing them ... but they all remembered being in art class."²²⁰

In May of 2013, the Alberni residential school paintings were displayed in a special exhibit, *To Reunite, To Honour, To Witness*, at the Legacy Art Gallery at the University of Victoria. Survivors, Elders, and community members continue to work with Walsh and Qwul'sih'yah'maht to document the story of the creation and return of the children's paintings as part of reconnecting individual, family, and community memory, and educating the public about a previously unknown part of the history and legacy of the residential schools.

In September 2013, the paintings returned once again to the Learning Place at the TRC's British Columbia National Event in Vancouver, and the group made an expression of reconciliation by providing copies of the artwork to the Commission's Bentwood Box, to become part of the permanent record of the Commission's work.

Canada's public commemoration initiative

The Commission takes note of the federal government's own national commemoration initiative, which was described as an "expression of reconciliation" when it was publicly