

Intergenerational youth across cultures

At the British Columbia National Event, the Commission, in partnership with the Inspirit Foundation, hosted a Youth Panel, “Be the Change: Young People Healing the Past and Building the Future.” In this cross-cultural dialogue, youth leaders described the intergenerational impacts of human rights violations such as the residential schools, the Holocaust, Canada’s internment of Japanese Canadians during World War Two, and the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants to Canada. They spoke about community and about turning reconciliation into action. Tsilhqot’in intergenerational Survivor Kim Harvey said,

I encountered many uncomfortable moments trying to explain what happened to my people and why there is so much alcoholism and drug abuse. There is so much focus on all the negative things.... No one talked about the residential schools.... There are so many horrible stereotypes that our young people face every day. I struggle with issues of family, identity, and community every day.... Reconciliation to me comes down to truth, education, and knowledge sharing practices.... Reconciliation is about relationship. To reconcile, I really need to understand what happened to you, who you are, and what, as a community member, I can do to make our community better....

Reconciliation is a shared experience.... The residential schools were done [to us] by an outside party ... when people ask “why don’t you just get over it?” I find that frustrating because it takes the onus off the shared relationship [as if] somehow this entire country is not involved in the reconciliation process.... That, to me, is a disservice to this nation in terms of reconciliation.... It’s everyone’s responsibility to educate themselves about what happened.... With relationship comes respect.... What helps young people, Indigenous or not, is to find your role, have adult allies to help you find that role, fulfill your responsibilities within that role, and then be of service to the community.... If we all did that ... to me that would be reconciliation in action.... It’s about finding out about your neighbour.²⁹²

Kevin Takahide Lee, an intergenerational Survivor of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, said,

I acknowledge that we are on Coast Salish lands. It was also on these very lands here at the PNE [Pacific National Exhibition fairgrounds] that my family was held during the war before being sent to the internment camp. It is my parents and grandparents who are Survivors.... [They] never talked about what happened in the internment camps ... even after the Japanese-Canadian redress happened ... hearing these stories from our Elders is very rare.... When I was four or five, I came here to the PNE as most families do.... When it came to going inside the barn here, just two doors away, my grandmother would not come in. That’s because that livestock building was used to hold her and other women and children, during the war, for months.... When I was a child, I couldn’t comprehend this, but as an adult, I understand.... This is