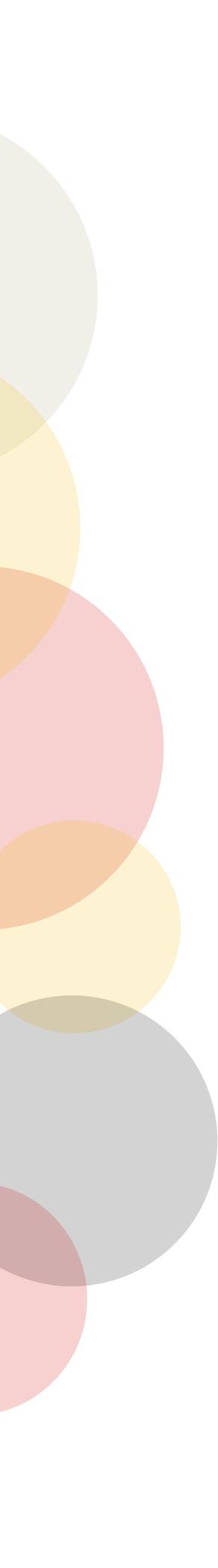




VISION FOR THE FUTURE:  
**Alberta Youth's** Perspective on  
**Reconciliation**





**O**n March 19th, over 300 students, representing Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8, Metis, non-status and non-Aboriginal communities, from five schools across Alberta came together to collaborate, through the use of technology, in a Virtual Town Hall to discuss the youths' vision for Reconciliation. From the rural communities of High Prairie and Fort McLeod to downtown Edmonton, we, the youth of Alberta, came together to exchange ideas, debate alternatives and ultimately create a document that represents our voice.. The Virtual Town Hall, called an "archetype of grassroots democracy" by Senator Grant Mitchell, was the culmination of over a month of online teamwork, 1500 hours of student collaboration and a passion by Alberta's youth to engage in the dialogue.

In the month prior to the Virtual Town Hall, student leaders from each school, systematically chosen to represent Alberta's diverse geographic and demographic population, met on a weekly basis to exchange ideas, listen to experts and create a common framework upon which their fellow students would be able to enter into a dialogue themselves on Reconciliation. Concurrently, the students were trained on how to use an arsenal of Web 2.0 tools (YouTube, Twitter, cell phone voting, Google Docs, H.323 Video Conference, discussion boards, blogs, etc.) to collaborate, build consensus and create community regardless of time or location.

Equipped with this knowledge and empowered through 21st-century technology, we facilitated a full day virtual town hall. In the morning, we led 300 of our peers through a dialogue with local experts and elders. In the afternoon, the students worked in breakout groups to address three critical questions:

- 1) What does Reconciliation mean for you? Your Community? Alberta/Canada?**
- 2) What can be done within our local communities to promote healing and reconciliation?**
- 3) What does Alberta/Canada need to do as a country to promote healing and reconciliation?**

The data collected in response to these questions was synthesized into a survey which was, in turn, made available to be voted upon by the 3000+ students in the five represented schools.

This document written by a committee of students, is the direct result of that process. The evolution of the document involved equipping leaders with knowledge and technology, having those leaders facilitate a larger conversation among their peers, taking the data generated to their community at large for feedback and direction, and then synthesizing the results in the student white paper. It represents the voice of thousands of youth, educated in the reality of Residential Schools and their impacts, unified through the power of 21st century technology, and sharing a passion to contribute to the shaping of a new future for all Canadians.

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## What does Reconciliation mean for you? Your Community? Alberta/Canada?

To address the needs of the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, and work towards the healing of the residential school legacy, we must first understand and recognize the importance of reconciliation. The youth of Alberta believe that reconciliation, beyond its dictionary definition, contains four key elements:

### Understanding Unity Healing Shifts in perspective

**T**he first step of reconciliation is understanding. We must first gain a clear understanding of ourselves before we may begin to reach out to others. This includes realizing the mistakes we have made in the past to ensure we do not repeat them in the future. In order to provide healing to the survivors of the Indian Residential School System, we must establish our purpose, which is not to assign blame to any individual or party, but rather to bring healing through the fellowship of all groups involved.

We believe that once all parties have come to a common understanding, it becomes possible for the stakeholders to have meaningful positive communication. We must cooperate in order to accommodate each other and further our solutions for the future. Working towards a common goal will strengthen this relationship between all the parties involved and achieve a unity between the groups.

After this foundation has been set for healing it will provide a basis in which trust can be restored between the affected groups and a mutual respect can be achieved. Mending these broken relationships will be important step in

making amendments for the past wrongs. Starting at the root of the problem we can address the main cause of the harm effectively rehabilitate and revitalize the damaged culture. Through all of this it needs to be acknowledged that reconciliation is a long term process that is going to require continued action.

Through this process we will begin to see a shift in perspective of all Canadian citizens aided by a deeper understanding of each other. Reconciliation is clearing misconceptions and stereotypes of aboriginals. It will facilitate forgiveness and allow those who have been negatively affected by the past to move forward and begin to own their grief.

The youth believe that reconciliation is the way to reestablish lost trust and open the doors to positive and productive communication. When we affirm every culture's pride in their heritage, healing can take place through both traditional and contemporary models. Working together we can ensure that our generation has the best opportunity possible to build a stronger nation for the future.



## What can be done within our local communities to promote healing and reconciliation?

The youth of Alberta believe that in order to reach reconciliation in communities, we must focus upon these three aspects:

### Teaching and Awareness Cultural Appreciation Healing and Restoration

The youth of Alberta believe that through reeducation of Residential Schools and their lasting impacts upon contemporary Canadian society, members of all communities will be taught of the importance of community, healing and how they can make a difference. By introducing students to this curriculum at a young age, they will grow up with the knowledge and understanding of all cultures, and the importance of identity from a very young age. Students should be taught of the healing process through the use of restorative justice in schools and in communities, teaching the positive effects of being proactive instead of reactive.

Another means by which the youth of Alberta believe that we will strive to achieve healing and reconciliation is through the celebration and appreciation of Aboriginal culture. This can be done through celebrating Aboriginal Awareness Week in all communities. Local governments and organizations can provide funding for various events, which create awareness and appreciation for the culture, also erasing and correcting negative stereotypes. Such events could include speeches and traditional teachings from elders, powwows, sweats,

pipe ceremonies and traditional sports and games. These events would give citizens a more in depth appreciation for the culture and way of life.

Healing and restoration is another vital channel the youth of Alberta believe will lead towards reconciliation. First Nations traditionally operate through oral storytelling, so speaking to elders will be a great way for communities to learn about the culture while also maintaining it. Speaking as a collective about what was endured is a means by which accepting, healing and overcoming can be achieved, once this acceptance has taken place, restoration can begin.

Students firmly believe that for major change to happen at the community level, communities must take part in owning the responsibility for rediscovering and educating its members on its heritage. When this happens in conjunction with all levels of government participation, there is no reason that Aboriginal cultures cannot be as vibrant and alive as they have in the past. We as students are willing to make the commitment to show the rest of the nation that they can make this commitment too.



# What does Alberta/Canada need to do as a country to promote healing and reconciliation?

The youth of Alberta believe that in order to move towards healing and reconciliation, on a national and provincial level, we should focus on:

## Establishing trust to facilitate reconciliation Enhancing Cultural Awareness and Education Using contemporary and traditional methods to promote healing efforts

The youth of Alberta believe that governments, both national and provincial, need to co-operate with Aboriginal nations and bands in order to make these efforts towards reconciliation successful. Trust needs to be reestablished between these two collective groups. Formal discussions need to occur between Aboriginal leaders and the government throughout the different steps of this process in order to ensure their effectiveness. The government must ensure that they honor, acknowledge and respect the treaties and settlements made between the government and the Aboriginal peoples.

It is strongly believed by the youth of Alberta that it is important to educate young Canadians about Aboriginal cultures, history, as well as reconciliation. This could be done through changing the curriculum so that it includes more about the evolution of the Aboriginal peoples from Pre to Post contact, Residential Schools and contemporary issues. This new curriculum would focus on the many different nations that make up the Aboriginal peoples of North America and the hardships that have been faced, as well as the associated legacy issues. Another method by which we could promote healing and reconciliation is to immerse Canadians in Aboriginal culture through the support of traditional celebrations and ceremonies. This could also be done through speeches and presentations by members of the Aboriginal communities, as well as members of other marginalized cultures. Social media and other technologies can play a key role in educating Canadian citizens on Aboriginal heritage and history, as it is an accessible and affordable way to make this information available to all.

A stronger Aboriginal presence in mainstream media will also help to promote healing and reconciliation. The federal and provincial governments should provide more incentives,

working in consultation with Aboriginal artists and media providers, to produce more Aboriginal media of all forms, which showcase Aboriginal success in overcoming adversity. By shining a more positive light upon the Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal youth can gain pride in their culture and thus who they are.

By improving quality of life, living conditions on reserves and the quality of needed services in Aboriginal communities, the federal and provincial governments can support healing and reconciliation. In order to promote the healing of Aboriginal peoples, counselling programs and other mental health services should be improved to suit the needs of Aboriginals. This would mean making these services more readily available, as well as accommodating the needs of the healing process and the issues that affect the community. The funding and organization of traditional Aboriginal healing rituals could also help to promote healing and reconciliation. Furthermore, the government could dedicate funds to improve infrastructure in Aboriginal communities Canada-wide. An example of such would be developing or supplying communities with proper water and sanitation systems, as well as improving living conditions.

The government must work in collaboration with Aboriginal groups and other outside organizations, to provide members of those communities with opportunities for further education and employment. Not only will it reduce dependence upon social assistance and government aid, but it also fosters a sense of independence and pride within oneself. This pride can then inspire other members of the community, most importantly the youth, to strive towards success. The flourishing legacy of these members will create a positive chain reaction that will leave an impact on generations to come.

## ■ Conclusion

**W**e, the youth of Alberta came together as a diverse and dynamic group with representatives from Treaties 6, 7, 8, Métis settlements and non-aboriginal communities. And together, we created our vision of the future. This will serve as hope for our province and nation as we seek to facilitate reconciliation and healing for the survivors of the Indian Residential School System, their families and communities. This will take the commitment of multiple generations and stakeholders but when reconciliation is achieved it will make for a better, stronger Canada.

We, the youth of Alberta, are a tremendous resource. We know how to use social media and organize in this political era. We can help you and we will be a powerful ally. We only have one request: we want to be an active part of the conversation, a part of the solution.

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