

My name is Florence Glanfield. I'm a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and I serve the University of Alberta as Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research).

It has been eight years since the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report.

Since then, the testimonies of residential school survivors have opened a critical discussion on the harms of the Indian Residential School system, and other colonial measures, which aimed to have First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples “cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada.”

Long silenced, in the years since the Truth and Reconciliation report came out, a painful part of our history has emerged and Canadians have begun to learn about the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

Seven generations of Indigenous children were taken from their families to attend these schools. Survivors have detailed the systemic abuse, malnourishment, indoctrination, disease and death that took place over the hundred plus years that the schools operated.

An estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were denied the fundamental human right to be with their own family members, to speak their own language and practice their own beliefs or way of life.

We also remember those that were taken from their families never to come home.

The National Student Memorial Register currently holds the names of the 4,127 children who died while attending.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada estimated that the numbers are significantly higher, and we know from community, and the ongoing work to investigate residential school sites, that the final count of loved ones lost will be a sombre testimony to the experience of those places and losses we mourn still.

The legacy of the Indian Residential School system is still with us ... in trauma; intergenerational trauma; linguistic, cultural and spiritual destruction and resurgence; structural racism; and persistent barriers to education and employment.

To move forward with reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued 94 Calls to Action to governments and other entities, including post-secondary institutions.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission noted that universities are “uniquely and powerfully positioned” to enact reconciliation and the Calls to Action, and those Calls to Action touch on every aspect of the university mandate, with work in teaching, learning, research and community engagement.

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its report, the University of Alberta has begun implementing the Calls to Action in thoughtful, meaningful and sustainable ways.

A number of key leadership roles have been put in place to support, resource and coordinate the work needed to carry out the Calls to Action and Indigenous Initiatives more broadly.

The role that I currently serve in, as Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research), was tasked with the creation of an Indigenous Strategic Plan to bring about the kind of foundational change imagined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the expectations that have emerged across organizations and the general public.

The University of Alberta is at the beginning of this journey and recognizes that to truly carry out the full scope of the Calls to Action is an enormous undertaking that will take a substantial amount of time and effort as there is so much work to do.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report to Community Dashboard realizes an institutional commitment to report on this work and aims to identify where the University of Alberta is in this journey of reconciliation and where it still must go.

The report details what has been done, thus far, to respond to the post-secondary-specific Calls to Action and the broad range of aligned work happening in the University of Alberta spaces.

In examining the work done to date, there's an attempt to distinguish between efforts that are structural and permanent, changing policy and praxis, and those items that are ad hoc, part of the learning journey but with more needed to result in changes within our spaces.

As a university, we take seriously the need

- to tackle the systemic barriers in education that Indigenous Peoples face;
- to support curricular change and scholarship that corrects the historical record and gives voice to silenced Indigenous narratives that significantly impact the lives of Indigenous Peoples;
- to utilize the power of research to actively and responsively partner with Nations and organizations to find solutions to pressing problems;
- to question the validity of concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and Peoples;
- to consider the structural causes of the inequities that persist and how those can be addressed in our work;
- and finally, to support Indigenous resurgence.

This commitment was endorsed unanimously by General Faculties Council and the Board of Governors in June 2022 through Braiding Past, Present and Future: The University of Alberta Indigenous Strategic Plan.

The Indian Residential School story is a difficult one, and only part of the Indigenous colonial experience, but I have been reminded throughout my career as an educator and researcher that it is also a story of Indigenous resilience.

If we, as humans, are sincere in our efforts to realize reconciliation, then we must attend to all parts of our collective history, utilizing the power of the university to uplift all.

I am reminded of the responsibilities that the Sweetgrass Teachings teach us: we, as humans of this Earth, must acknowledge our responsibility to those not yet born, knowing that everything we do in our lifetime carries forward to impact them. We also carry the hopes of those that came before us. The work that the Calls to Action represent meets our responsibilities to both. I invite each one of you to consider your personal and professional role in this long and critical journey in reconciliation.