

QUOTES ON NEW COUNCIL TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS-LED SEARCHES FOR BURIAL SITES OF CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

“Our government is committed to work alongside the council to support Indigenous-led, survivor-centric and culturally sensitive approaches to the difficult but essential work ahead to locate burial sites, and commemorate children who were forced to attend residential schools – as survivors, families and communities work towards healing and closure.”

— The Honourable Marc Miller, Federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

“Communicating with survivors and gathering their ideas as to how they wish to initiate the forensic and archival research to reclaim the identity of the little ones buried in unmarked graves is key to moving forward regionally. We know that searching the grounds, gathering the historical records and gathering statements across this province will be complex work that requires coordination as First Nation children were transported from the north to south, east to west in the fourteen residential schools located throughout Manitoba. Those First Nations who had residential schools on their lands or adjacent to will require meaningful and long-term support to reclaim and commemorate their loved ones in a culturally meaningful way. We want to respect the wishes of the affected families and the AMC is committed to working with the First Nations, the province and the federal government to seeing this community-led work through to completion.”

— Interim Grand Chief Eric Redhead, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

“It is time for all levels of government to support First Nation families and communities. We must work to help the spirits of our children come home to rest. It is time to right the wrongs. It is time for our people to author the narrative of our history. It is our history, it is our truth, it is our children, it is our spirit, it is our healing, and it is our time to lead. For many years, our elders have told us of the unmarked graves they knew were at residential schools. We now have the ability to bring the truth to light and through technology, we can now help the spirits of our children to rest. Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak will continue to honour our children following our protocols and using our ceremonies that they were denied. When directed by the First Nations, we will work to repatriate the remains of our children who are buried in unmarked graves, away from their home communities. We will work to ensure First Nations have the opportunity to memorialize their children and create commemorations in honour of our ancestors who died at residential schools.”

— Grand Chief Garrison Settee, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

“Many Métis children who went to residential schools never returned home. They were lost to their families and communities and buried away in long-neglected – many unmarked – graves. This has been traumatizing to family members who have lost their loved ones. The Métis government representing all Red River Métis citizens and their families is pleased to work with our provincial and Indigenous counterparts to do this important work and bring peace, healing and closure for our loved ones and their families. Pekiiwetatanaan nutr zanfaan leur zisprii – we are bringing our children’s spirits home.”

— Minister of Residential Schools Andrew Carrier, Manitoba Métis Federation

“The Inuit experience of attending residential school is unique in as much as the vast distances Inuit children were forced to travel, stolen and alone in small planes, flying across their homelands and at times into southern regions of the country like northern Manitoba to then endure the atrocities of residential schools that for some resulted in death. Manitoba Inuit Association brings the voices of our children and their families to this table to ensure our little ones are returned to Inuit Nunangat and to the families that grieve for them. We will ensure an Inuit-led approach to the repatriation of our children’s remains and commemoration of their lives that honour our Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles and those of reconciliation.”

— Rachel Dutton, executive director, Manitoba Inuit Association

“As mayor I appreciate that the City of Winnipeg is involved in this council and that we are able to contribute to the search for the children lost at the hands of the residential school system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action speak to this work and its importance cannot be understated on the journey of reconciliation. Over the last year, Canadians have been confronted with horrifying evidence of the truths that survivors of residential schools, their families and their communities have always known.”

— Mayor Brian Bowman, City of Winnipeg

“As searches continue and more truth is under covered, our thoughts are with survivors, their families and communities. This council will help ensure searches are conducted with the care they deserve, while continuing to honour the children who never made it home. It is our hope that all Canadians will join together in learning and unlearning, in a shared commitment to reconciliation.”

— Stephanie Scott, executive director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

“As a survivor, my spirit is touched every time a discovery is made of the children who did not make it home. I often wonder whether their spirits are able to complete their journey on Earth and enter the spirit world once they are located. Lots of questions remain unanswered, but I’m grateful that work is underway to bring those children to their families, land and community. Qujanamiig nutaqakuluit agiratitaunialiqmata nunaginut.”

— Maata Evaluardjuk-Palmer, survivor circle member, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

“The council is truly an acknowledgment of the truth that our IRS survivors have been saying for years that many of the children did not make it home and were buried in unmarked graves. Having Indigenous-led searches are key to ensuring that the spirits of the children and their families are respected and honoured in a culturally appropriate and supportive way.”

— Eva Wilson-Fontaine, team leader, Anish Corporation