

## MINUTE FOR RIGHT RELATIONS RESOURCE TEAM

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### **INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

Intergenerational trauma, or transgenerational trauma, is what happens when untreated trauma-related stress experienced by survivors is passed on to second and subsequent generations. (The Globe and Mail – Feb. 16, 2015)

For more than one hundred years the Canadian government supported the residential school program that forcibly removed 150, 000 Indigenous children from their families and communities, depriving them of their culture and their language, under the guise of educating and preparing Indigenous children for their participation in Canadian society. The Federal Government and Churches (including the United Church of Canada, the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches) administered the residential school system, which has been described as an act of cultural genocide. In addition, the Canadian Government initiated the 60's scoop – the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or band. It is estimated that approximately 20, 000 Indigenous children were apprehended and then fostered or adopted to primarily non-Indigenous families.

In Richard Wagamese's book, "One Story, One Song" Wagamese recounts his early years. "I am not a victim of Canada's residential school system. I never attended a residential school, so I cannot say I survived one. However my parents and my extended family members did. The pain they endured became my pain". Abandoned in the winter of 1958, he and his three siblings were found and put into the child welfare system. Wagamese was adopted at age 9, but eventually left home at 16 to live on the streets where he battled addiction. Wagamese did not see his family again for twenty one years. Throughout "One Story, One Song", Wagamese reflects on his journey to wellness, offering his gratitude for the gifts of his First Nations customs, language, culture, community and land that renewed his sense of belonging, hope, meaning and purpose.

The loss of culture, community and language and the impacts of the residential school experience and the 60's scoop are intergenerational – passed on from generation to generation. Reconciliation includes recognizing and understanding the affects of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous communities and looking at ways to support the health and well-being of Indigenous children and families.

One excellent way to support reconciliation is to participate in "Have a Heart Day." Created by the *First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada*, it encourage us to remember those children who are growing up far from their homes. It urges us to take action so that First Nations children have the opportunity to grow up safely at home, to get a good education, to be healthy, and to be proud of who they are.

Look for more information about how to participate in Have a Heart Day in the weeks to come.

*Submitted by Maxine McVey, on behalf of the CSRC Right Relations Resource Team*