

# Roots of Reconciliation

## AT LAKES DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL

### PART ONE

Lakes District Secondary School has been engaged in a journey this past year into a part of Canadian history that was dark and unjust. We, as a group of teachers, administrators and support staff, decided it was time to open up our hearts and minds to the painful truths of the past. We decided to begin to educate ourselves and our students on the impacts of residential schools on past generations as well as present and future generations. We believe that understanding is the root of reconciliation.

The goals of our project were as follows;

- To deepen our understanding of Aboriginal culture, local and national, so that we can honour diversity and develop positive relationships that support student learning
- To educate ourselves about the impacts of residential schools so that we can teach the required curriculum with sensitivity, empathy, confidence and accuracy.
- To teach the required curriculum from grade 8-12
- To recognize the resiliency and strength of First Nations people and culture.



For years prior to our big journey we took time to pre-pave our path. We gathered to discuss and brainstorm the best way forward. By the spring of 2015 we took our first big step and with hereditary chief

Robert Charlie by our side, teachers Steve Wilejto, Jeremy Gooding, Pat Dube, Walt Van der Kamp and Rayanne Charlie went out to the shores of Ootsa Lake to find a tree which would anchor us and give us strength in the year ahead. This tree was under water since the 50's and we lovingly pulled it out and brought it home. In the months ahead this tree would be the platform for a collaborative school wide art installation that would stand outside our school to commemorate the survivors of residential schools and to remind us of the lessons we were about to learn.

In September of 2015 the teachers and support staff were invited to attend a sweat lodge at the Spirit of the Land Healing Camp on one of two Sundays. This was a voluntary experience into one of the

many healing ceremonies used by Aboriginal people all over North America. There was a growing awareness that the path we were on was based on a different world view. We were becoming a team and experiencing a whole new perspective based on ancient beliefs of connectedness, relationships and love!



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Over the next two Non Instructional days we worked together to review our goals, incorporated Aboriginal content into our courses where possible, and continued to get in touch with exactly what happened in residential schools to create the dire situation we face today. We cried a river of tears as we watched the film "We Were Children"

and then spoke about our thoughts and feelings in a traditional sharing circle.

On November 20th we brought in Patrick Young, a residential school survivor who worked for Health Canada. He, along with hereditary chiefs Ron West and Robert Charlie and elder John Cuthand, led our team of educators through the story of residential schools in Canada. Patrick talked with gentle honesty about his experiences and others'. His humour helped to soften the blow of the brutalities his people faced at the hands of government and religious institutions. We used talking circles to dig into our feelings and try to understand why all of this happened. We were beginning to see the truths of colonization.

The leaders then shifted their focus to resilience and healing. Our afternoon brought new understandings of just how strong the Indigenous people of this land have been to survive the dire situations they faced. We began to see hope and a way forward. Where the mind and heart meet there is clarity and in that clarity our excitement grew. We were experiencing the power of a newfound awareness and we now had the strength of love and compassion to move us out of the tears and into action.



The students would step up to the plate in the weeks ahead and we all set to work to ensure the path was as clear as we could make it. It would be challenging but we were much better prepared than ever before to guide our students through the questions and the tears.

Part 2 will bring you further along the story of our "Roots of Reconciliation" project. We will talk about the process the young people went through to raise their awareness. Part 3 will highlight the Collaborative art installation and inform you all about our celebration on June 3rd! Please feel free to write that day on your calendars as, of course, you will all be invited!

