

Building Reconciliation at the U of S

St. Thomas More College^a Marguerite Riel Centre^b

Indian Residential Schools: Healing and the Role of Mental Health Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

- Studies of the long-term impacts on former Indian residential school (IRS) students and the subsequent effects on their families document the need for reconciliation¹⁻²
- The literature on healing from IRS impacts is relatively scant³⁻⁴
- This research builds on a pilot study⁵ of former IRS student and what healing means

OBJECTIVES

- To understand what healing means to former IRS students
- To gather information on what was needed to promote healing among former IRS students
- To explore the role of mental health professionals in meeting healing needs



MATERIALS & METHODS



- In partnership with the Marguerite Riel Centre in Melfort, Saskatchewan, which houses one of Saskatchewan's Resolution Health Support Programs (RHSP) we began our snowball sampling of Support Workers and Elders
- RHSP Support Workers and Elders provide emotional and cultural support to former IRS students and their families
- We interviewed 11 Support Workers and Elders in four sites in Saskatchewan and asked what was needed for former students to heal from IRS impacts
- We were particularly interested in their perceptions of the role of mental health professionals in the healing process

RESULTS

- Participants identified two main themes regarding what mental health professionals could do to promote healing

a) Understand culture and personal history

They don't understand us. So, like if there was a therapist that came or a counsellor that came to talk to you. 'No. I don't want to listen to them.' I've heard that! Because they don't understand us. They won't believe us. So how—how can the white community help us when they don't believe what happened to us.

b) Need for continuity and proper diagnosis

Sometimes our people are not as fortunate and they get misdiagnosed and they get placed on medication and then they stay there for forever and a day.

We need to have some kind of continuity in regards to the program delivery, in regards to the kind of people who are working in our communities.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our findings indicate that intercultural competency must be based on relationship building and exposure to Indigenous cultural practices
- A strong and distinct theme from our interviews was participants' perceptions of the lack of cultural understanding among mental health professionals – a direct tie to Call to Action (#57) the need for skills based training in intercultural competency.
- This study emphasizes Call to Action (#23): the need for all levels of government to provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals

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Marguerite Riel Centre