

Statement of Apology on Behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to the Former Students of NunatuKavut Who Attended Residential Schools in Newfoundland and Labrador

I respectfully thank you for coming together today for this important occasion.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the former students of the residential school system, their families and loved ones, and special guests who have assembled to hear this Apology.

We are pleased to be joined by the President of NunatuKavut, Todd Russell, and members of the Governing Council.

I wish to acknowledge the support of the NunatuKavut Community Council, and the leaders and officials who provided assistance, as we engaged to deliver this apology.

Let me say from the outset that the treatment of NunatuKavut Inuit in residential schools represents a tragic and sad chapter in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have a responsibility to acknowledge the past. When we look back at what former students endured; when we hear stories from former students and their family members today, we commend them for continuing to share their stories. Their bravery and resilience are a strength to us all. Therefore, we make the solemn pledge that history is not forgotten and must not be repeated.

The International Grenfell Association established schools with dormitories. Their stated purpose was to educate children primarily from the communities of Spotted Island, Batteau, Seal Island, Black Tickle, Cartwright, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, North West River and other parts of Labrador.

Children in these schools were physically separated from their communities, traditions, and culture.

These children were placed long distances from their families and with strangers who did not share their ways of knowing nor their values. We understand that these actions disconnected children from their Inuit culture.

For many of you, this loss was severe. Many of these impacts are still felt across NunatuKavut today. Many students were neglected. Others have recounted recollections of physical and sexual abuse. However, all of the students shared the loss of their attachment to family, community, and traditions.

Following their times at the schools, some students returned home to their families and communities they used to know. It was especially difficult for students who carried the incredible weight of traumatic experiences – grief, violence, abuse, social and family dislocations, and mental and physical health issues.

The benefit of hindsight tells us that the practices and traditions, learned at an early age and developed through the formative years, became eroded by a system that was intended to assimilate Inuit children into a different culture.

There were attempts to make amends for what had happened. On September 28, 2016, the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador approved a settlement for the survivors of residential schools.

There was a financial settlement to compensate students who had attended the residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador after 1949 and who had suffered abuse. This came about because former students stepped up and spoke openly, however painfully, about their experiences.

This settlement did not come about overnight. As time passed, so too did some of the students. They were not able to hear an apology nor receive compensation. However, they are remembered for their bravery. They are not forgotten.

So today, with a heavy heart, I respectfully and humbly offer an apology to the students of NunatuKavut who attended residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. As Premier, and on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I extend this apology to the students, their families, and the people of NunatuKavut.

We are sorry.

We are sorry that former students experienced neglect, abuse, hardship, and discrimination at the hands of people and institutions who were entrusted to provide care and nurturing.

There was a failure to treat the children of NunatuKavut with equality and respect. There was no regard for Inuit traditions, values, and ways of knowing and being.

As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated, saying sorry is not enough. Simply apologizing cannot turn back the clock and undo the harm. The tragedy of enduring separation from families and communities is something you live with every day.

My words here today do not suggest that an apology relieves the weight of the pain and suffering that you have endured. However, by coming here today, and expressing with complete sincerity that I am sorry, it is my wish that your journey of healing can continue.

There is admiration for the strength demonstrated by former students and their families. It is your strength, determination, and commitment to healing that inspires us today.

It is my belief, and the belief of the Government that I lead, that we have to truly understand the history of residential schools if we ever hope to advance Reconciliation.

Only by coming to terms with the past and apologizing for our failures can we forge a path towards re-shaping a future for our children and our grandchildren.

Reconciliation is a difficult process. It takes time, effort, and sincerity.

Today is an important step in rebuilding our relationship – a relationship that must be founded on respect, cooperation, partnership, and trust.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come to Cartwright today to say I am sorry on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nakummek



Honourable Dr. Andrew Furey
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador

September 29, 2023
