



Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw

Squamish Nation

Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations Announce Investigation at Former St. Paul's Indian Residential School Site

August 10, 2021

CONTENT WARNING: This news release contains information about Indian Residential Schools.

Beginning of a sacred and culturally safe healing journey

Coast Salish Territories | August 10, 2021 — Today, the Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) announced it has embarked on an Indigenous-led initiative, on behalf of its people and in partnership with its relatives, the x̓w̓m̓əθk̓w̓əy̓əm (Musqueam) and sə̓lilw̓ətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, to find answers about the children who attended the former St. Paul's Indian Residential School but never made it home.

Over 2,000 Indigenous children, representing six generations of Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh, x̓w̓m̓əθk̓w̓əy̓əm, and sə̓lilw̓ətaʔ Nations, and other Indigenous communities, were institutionalized at St. Paul's from grades one through eight. Many of these same children were then forcibly relocated to Kamloops Indian Residential School, where the remains of at least 215 children were confirmed this May. Oral histories told by St. Paul's survivors include stories about children who disappeared.

According to public records, 12 unidentified students died while attending St. Paul's between 1904 and 1913. The Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw's goal with the investigation of the former residential school site, located within Squamish unceded territory, is to find the location of each of these children and bring them home to rest.

"It's important to note that our People's experiences with St. Paul's Indian Residential School are well known and healing is needed to move forward. This work is being done to respect and address both known and unknown knowledge, and is a critical part of reconciliation," says Khelsilem, spokesperson for the Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw.

The investigation plans will be developed collaboratively among the three Host Nations, with support from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver. "We welcome and value the involvement of our relatives, as we hold each other up through this healing journey. We also appreciate others in the community who are committed to respectfully and meaningfully supporting us as our process unfolds," says Khelsilem.

The process will be supported and sustained by Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh culture and customs. "As a Nation, we are in motion, committed to guiding the investigation in a way that protects,



supports, honours and brings peace to our members, survivors, their families, x̱w̱m̱ə̱θ̱ḵw̱ə̱y̱əm and s̱əḻiḻw̱ə̱ṯa̱ɫ̱ relatives, other Indigenous communities, and to the children who attended St. Paul's and remain separated from their families," says Khelsilem.

Though the process planning is still taking shape, it will involve an inquiry into St. Paul's Indian Residential School and field investigation at the site. A preliminary workplan detailing the high-level phases of work is summarized in the accompanying background. The phases of the investigation include:

- a formalized interview process with survivors who attended the school and whose accounts may assist in helping to narrow down, or expand, investigation search areas;
- the gathering of all records related to the school throughout its history (from all levels of government, the Catholic Church and religious entities affiliated with St. Paul's, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission); and,
- remote sensing searches in defined areas of interest, which may include ground-penetrating radar studies or other suitable methods.

While other residential school settings have quickly been the subject of ground-penetrating radar studies, this setting has some unique considerations:

- Unlike other residential school sites, which are located on First Nations reserves, the St. Paul's Indian Residential School site is currently owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver.
- Extensive development has occurred within the past 60 years on the property or properties of interest.

The results of the field investigation will guide next steps. "Whether or not unmarked graves are found, there is enough documented oral and archival evidence to say that these burials do or did exist," says Khelsilem.

"No one in our communities is untouched by the intergenerational harm of residential schools. Our process will prioritize listening and caring for our people first and foremost. This sacred and healing work is very difficult, but will directly contribute to the health and wellbeing of present and future generations of S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú̱7̱mesh, x̱w̱m̱ə̱θ̱ḵw̱ə̱y̱əm, and s̱əḻiḻw̱ə̱ṯa̱ɫ̱ Peoples," says Khelsilem.

St. Paul's Indian Residential School, located in present-day North Vancouver, was located next to the S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú̱7̱mesh community of Eslhá7an. It was operated for 60 years by the Catholic Church until its closure in 1959. St. Paul's was Metro Vancouver's only residential school. St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School, a private Catholic school, currently operates on the former St. Paul's site.



Media Backgrounders

Two media backgrounders are available:

- [St. Paul's Indian Residential School and the connection to Squamish Nation](#)
- [Preliminary Workplan for the St. Paul's Indian Residential School Site Investigation](#)

About the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw

The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) is a vibrant and dynamic Coast Salish Nation that has existed and prospered within its traditional territory since time immemorial. The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stélmexw (Squamish People) continue to reside in the area now described as the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The largest proportion of Nation Members live in several urban reserve communities in the present-day cities of Vancouver, North and West Vancouver and the municipality of Squamish, B.C. Over 47 per cent of the more than 4,050 Members live on-reserve, and membership is determined by guidelines set out in the Squamish Nation Membership Code. The Nation has never ceded or surrendered title to its lands, rights to its resources or the power to make decisions within its territory. Learn more: squamish.net/about-our-nation.

Support services, resources, and donations

- Crisis support lines are available 24/7 through Indian Residential School Survivors Society at 1-800-721-0066, through KUU-US Crisis Line Society at 1-800-588-8717, and through the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419.
- The Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSS) assists Survivors with counselling, court support, information, referrals, workshops, and more. It is a registered charity where donations can be made at: irss.ca
- The KUU-US Crisis Line Society provides 24-hour crisis services through education, prevention and intervention programs. It is a registered charity where donations can be made at: kuu-uscrisisline.com
- Yúustway (Health & Wellness) Department provides community health programs and services to Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Members. Contact them at 604-982-0332 or wellness@squamish.net.
- The [94 Calls to Action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including Calls to Action 71 to 76 that call for information, records, online registries, documentation, and commemoration of missing children and their burial information, as well as protection of residential school cemeteries.
- Charitable donations in support of the St. Paul's Indian Residential School Investigation process can be made to the Squamish Nation by referencing 'St. Paul's Investigation'. Mailing address: PO Box 86131, North Vancouver, B.C., V7L 4J5, Canada.

Media Contact

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Photos from the press conference are available for download [here](#).