

Guide

Coming Together to Create Impact:  
**How Companies  
Can Aid  
Indigenous People  
in Canada**

OCTOBER 2021

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# Coming Together to Create Impact: How Companies Can Aid Indigenous People in Canada

Published: October 2021

A human rights violation involving Indigenous children is rocking Canada and gaining worldwide attention. And corporations with Canadian headquarters and hubs are getting involved, as are those in the United States.

Here's the tragic story: **Over 1,300 unmarked Indigenous children's graves** have been found throughout Canada at the nation's former residential schools. The Indigenous children who were forced to attend these schools and survived are **speaking out about the injustices** they faced. Until the discovery of the graves, only some of the atrocities that occurred at these schools were known from first-hand accounts of ripping children away from families at young ages, sometimes taking them hundreds of miles away from their communities, and restrictions on parental visits through the use of a pass system designed to keep Indigenous people on reservations.

Indigenous residential schools were established in the late 1800s. These were mandatory boarding schools for Indigenous children to attend, funded by the Canadian government's Department of Indian Affairs and run by Christian churches. The goal of these establishments was to assimilate Indigenous children into the White Canadian culture. Between 1883 and 1997, **more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forced into boarding schools nationally**, which amounted to almost 83 percent of Indigenous children attending these schools. The schools were officially dismantled by 1997.

Research by the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** has stated thousands of Indigenous children sent to these schools never made it home because of physical and sexual abuse causing them to run away or because of death by disease or neglect. The official count of children lost to the practices of the residential schools, before these new graves were found, was **4,100**. The death rate at these schools, from the late 1800s to their closure in the late 1900s, was marked at **five times higher** than the rate for other Canadian schoolchildren. Indigenous people are mourning these children and feeling the loss of culture as each grave is discovered.

Many **called for accountability** by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) through an acknowledgment of the wrongdoings. In August 2021, the **CCCB released a statement** outlining their commitment to settlement payments to residential school survivors through the establishment of community programs that would aid in healing efforts for the survivors. They also stated that they are thoroughly investigating the happenings in the residential schools that would have led to these unmarked, unreported graves, but it has been challenging as the CCCB was not a party to the residential school agreement and the Corporation for the Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential School Settlement (CEPIRSS) is no longer operational, leading to difficulties in finding records. They concluded by saying the reconciliation process they are undergoing is a long journey that they will continue to share updates on as work progresses.

**Many cities across Canada cancelled Canada Day celebrations**, held on July 1, this year out of respect for the First Nations. **Companies can continue to support and build on these social movements by releasing statements of solidarity with the First Nations people, holding internal conversations about the discoveries to focus on employee wellbeing, and supporting organizations pushing for Indigenous protections in Canada.**

An example of how companies can make an impact among employees is by creating **Legacy Spaces** in their Canadian offices. Open to everyone, an Indigenous Legacy Space is a safe space for open dialogue for all employees. These spaces also allow people to perform the **ritual of smudging** – when specific Indigenous herbs are lit together and the smoke is fanned over the observer’s head. Performing this action cleanses and purifies the soul of negative thoughts about a person or place.

Below is a case study from Manulife detailing how the company held internal group sessions and difficult conversations about the Indigenous grave findings. Below also find a list of organizations actively involved with improving the wellbeing of the First Nations in Canada that accept donations.

### **DBP Member Manulife: How to Bring Awareness to Inequities in the Indigenous Community**

Manulife’s Indigenous People employee resource group, **Indigenous people and Their Allies (IPTA)**, has hosted lunch-and-learns with external speakers to bring awareness and educational opportunities to the employees. They have specifically held conversations for employees to join on **Orange Shirt Day**, a day to honor and remember Indigenous children sent to residential schools, during Indigenous Peoples Month, and on Indigenous Peoples Day to highlight strengths and inequities in the community.

Manulife’s Employee Resource Group (ERG) Indigenous People and Their Allies (IPTA) was founded by Manulife Bank’s Quality Assurance Specialist **Tanya Stevens**. In 2018, she recognized the gap in representation for Indigenous employees and wanted to raise awareness through a new ERG.

To create an ERG at Manulife, there are a few steps required, including creating a business plan and securing at least one executive sponsor at the vice president or above level.

Working with one of their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee members, Stevens was able to launch the ERG after about 18 months. Today, IPTA has over 725 global members, is one of the fastest growing ERGs at

### **Indigenous Canadian Demographics**

There are more than **630 First Nation communities in Canada**, representing more than 50 nations and 50 Indigenous languages. In 2016, **Indigenous people composed almost 5 percent**, or 1.67 million people, of the Canadian population. In 2017, **over a quarter million First Nations people**, between 25 and 54, lived off their reserves and had an employment rate of almost 67 percent. Men (70.8 percent) were more likely to be employed than women (63.4 percent) and men under 44 were more likely to be employed than women of the same age.

Based on the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, First Nation people who lived in the Atlantic provinces had the highest rates of employment (71.8 percent) and had the lowest rate in Saskatchewan (57.6 percent). Within the 25 to 54 age demographic, just over 84 percent had obtained at least a high school certificate and about one-third of this population were employed. Men in this group without a completed high school education were twice as likely (50.4 percent) than women (23.9 percent) to be employed.

The top five industries of employed First Nations men are: construction, public administration, manufacturing, retail trade, and transportation and warehousing. Industries common for women are: healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, educational services, public administration, and accommodation and food services.

Manulife, and continues to gain new members as more connections are made with other global ERGs, including the Association of Multicultural Professionals (AMP), Global Women's Alliance (GWA), and Professionals Reaching out for Unity and Diversity (PROUD). Demographic tracking is done through a human resource management platform and, officially, IPTA has attracted 4 employees who openly identify as Indigenous. A few members, while not comfortable self-identifying as Indigenous through this platform, have spoken about the impact Stevens has made through the creation of the ERG.

Events hosted by CEO Roy Gori have also attracted attention to the ERG as he has spoken about the importance and impact of IPTA, as well as the impact Stevens has had on the company's Indigenous Relations strategy. Further, both executive sponsors of the ERG, Vice President of Enterprise Strategy and Transformation and Global Head of Transformation Delivery Lisa Mladenovic and Chief Customer Centricity and Innovation Officer James Vogtle, have advocated on behalf of the ERG internally and externally through various speaking events. IPTA makes an impact in the following ways:

- Regular lunch and learns where all Manulife employees are invited to learn more about issues impacting the Indigenous community
- Communications shared through an organization-wide social networking tool and social media by members of the ERG, highlighting important days, such as Canada's **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**
- Internal cultural awareness projects and events such as designing shirts for **Orange Shirt Day** and inviting **Phyllis Webstad**, founder of Orange Shirt Day, to speak to Manulife employees
- Leveraging resources from Manulife's recent membership with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB)

This year, in recognition of National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, Manulife held an employee webinar with an Indigenous presenter on the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Recommendations. Through their internal microsite, Manulife also made learning resources available to employees related to the legacy and impact of residential schools and Indigenous cultural sensitivity.

## Organizations Promoting Indigenous Canadians' Rights and Wellbeing

Disclaimer: These resources and their subsequent links are updated as of the date of publication.

**To ensure an organization is one a company should support in respect to Indigenous rights, there are a few things to ascertain:**

**Certified Aboriginal Business (CAB):** The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) has a program that certifies that Aboriginal businesses are at least 51 percent owned and controlled by an Aboriginal person(s). To determine if an organization has CAB distinction, search for it on the **member directory** found on CCAB's website.

**Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE) Network Member:** CRE's The Network is a membership of national organizations and groups that work with Indigenous youth, aged 14 to 29. Being a member of The Network allows groups to join an online community where members can share information and resources, opportunities (such as jobs and volunteer opportunities), and connect with organizations and young Indigenous leaders across the country. Membership demonstrates a commitment to engaging with Indigenous youth to better their futures and prospects.

Check the board of the organization. If representation is not diverse and does not include at least one Indigenous member, be wary of supporting unless their impact is truthful and supported by the First Nations.

## Here are some organizations that accept donations:

**The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF):** DWF provides access to education on the true history of Indigenous people in Canada and the history and legacy of Residential Schools, and encourages reconciliation by way of our programming and events.

**Habitat for Humanity Canada, Indigenous Housing Partnership:** Indigenous families and communities partner with local Habitats across Canada to help create safe and decent places to live – through both affordable homeownership and other housing solutions. An important part of this initiative is providing skills and training opportunities to young Indigenous men and women to equip them with the trade skills they need to maintain and/or build new homes in their communities. Habitat for Humanity Canada partners with Indigenous communities throughout the country, and has aided 245 Indigenous families since the program was created in 2007.

**Honouring Indigenous Peoples (HIP):** The mission of HIP is to catalyze societal change by inspiring Indigenous and Non-Indigenous relationship building, strengthening community well-being and advancing the next generation of leaders. The vision is that all Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples work together, interconnected and interdependent, for the benefit of future generations.

**I Love First Peoples:** I Love First Peoples empowers Indigenous children and youth to succeed through education and the motivation to stay in school. The organization bridges communities through practical projects that promote reconciliation and education. Awareness about reconciliation across Canada is also performed through the celebrity platform.

**Mennonite Central Committee:** MCC Canada's Indigenous Neighbours program strives to build respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by facilitating opportunities for constituents to learn about Indigenous history, rights and concerns using workshops, speaking engagements, publications and online resources; supporting connections between MCC constituents and Indigenous partners to build respectful relationships; collaborating with Indigenous partners on advocacy to promote positive political, social and economic change for Indigenous Peoples; and providing opportunities for international exchanges between Indigenous people.

**Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami:** This organization works to improve the health and wellbeing of Inuit communities. The work includes research, advocacy, public outreach and education on the issues affecting the Inuit population. They work closely with the four Inuit regions to present unified priorities in Ottawa.

**Circles for Reconciliation:** The aim of Circles For Reconciliation is to establish trusting, meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as part of the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The means to achieve this is the creation of small gatherings of an equal number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in discussion circles.

**Indspire:** Indspire is an Indigenous national charity that invests in the education of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada.

**Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE):** CRE is a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who believe that in order to bridge the gap between Canada's peoples and work towards reconciliation, the country needs to become educated and aware of the teachings, triumphs, and daily realities of Indigenous communities. Through gatherings, workshops, and leadership training, CRE brings together youth in cities, towns, and traditional territories across Canada in an effort to break down stereotypes, open a dialogue, and build honest relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living on this land.