



VERNA J. KIRKNESS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

FOUNDATION SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS STUDENTS RETURNING \$500,000 DOLLARS TO THE SISTERS OF SAINT ANN

KAMLOOPS, BC, June 28, 2022 — On the territory of the Tkumlups te Secwepemc near the Kamloops Indian Residential School, where unmarked graves were found in June 2021, the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation Board Chair, Tony Williams, announced the termination of the relationship between the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation (VJKF) and the Sisters of Saint Ann (SSA) by returning a \$500,000 endowment donation.

The VJKF Board finds it impossible to maintain a relationship with the SSA after learning about their involvement in the Indian Residential School in Canada. In June 2021, when Kukpi7 Casimir announced the findings of the 215 unmarked graves, the VJKF Board learned of the SSA's direct involvement in running the Kamloops Indian Residential School and other Indian Residential and Day schools. The VJKF board was disturbed to learn this information and arranged a meeting with the SSA.

It is the VJKF's belief that the SSA have not taken responsibility or apologized for their role in Residential Schools and the harm done to Indigenous children and their families. Therefore, the SSA's actions are irreconcilable to the values and mission of the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation.

The Board hears the Survivors and finds the stories of the abuse that happened to them as children at Indian Residential Schools (IRSs) located in Kamloops, Kuper Island, and other locations to be true. Many children did not survive Indian Residential School, which is direct evidence of the terrible conditions the children were subjected to while attending. The purpose of our Foundation is directly related to correcting the harms caused to Indigenous children by IRSs and those organizations that were in charge.

The VJKF board no longer feels it is appropriate for our Foundation to retain the gift from the SSA, a branch of the Catholic Church, while agreed compensation from the Church to Survivors remains unpaid. We do not have the authority under our agreement with the SSA or our charter to use the money to benefit Survivors. But we strongly urge the SSA to use any funds they may have to honour previous commitments by the Catholic Church to directly benefit Survivors.

As an organization focusing on supporting Indigenous students, we want to show our complete and unwavering support for the Survivors and victims of Indian Residential Schools. This necessitates that we, the VJKF board, wholly disassociate with the SSA by terminating our 4.5-year-long agreement.

It is the hope of the VJKF Board that the Sisters of Saint Ann will one day take full responsibility for their role in Indian Residential Schools and begin to work toward Truth and Reconciliation.

ABOUT THE VERNA J. KIRKNESS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation works to address the under-representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students at Canadian universities in science, technology, engineering, and math programs.

MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION

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