



Witness Statement

March 17, 2021

Good afternoon everyone, we hope that you have enjoyed all of the learning over the past few days.

In case you missed our introductions yesterday

My name is Layla Dumont...

And My name is Seneca Dueck...

And we are the co-founders at Roots of Resilience Education Foundation. Seneca and I have had the honour of being invited to witness the 2021 CASS FNMI-Gathering and had the incredible opportunity to facilitate the youth panel, participate and listen to all 16 break out sessions as well as the ceremony and keynotes. We are really excited to share the highlights of our experience with each of you.

Sean Lessard taught us that we need to stop listening like the system tells us to listen and start listening with our whole body.

We need to CO-CREATE space in our communities and we need to Co-Create space with our young people.

He spoke about the need for disruption – to disrupt the schedules, the way we interact with young people. Our own rhythms. To listen in a different way and to sit with young people to learn ALONGSIDE them.

Sean acknowledged that showing the same respect to language teachers as you do University certified teachers need to be happening more often than it is. We need to highlight the fact that a PHD from the land is just as important and valuable as a PHD from any post-secondary institution.

He spoke about the power of relationship - and how having an adult believe in and encourage you can change everything. We need to change the way we think about education and place relationships at the center of our work.

He also reminded us to never underestimate the strength of our little ones... some of them have a mean right hook!

The incredible students in our youth panel shared such great advice and wisdom about what needs to change in the education system. They brought up such powerful and thought provoking points for us to consider as educators and policy makers.

Sean Lessard spoke about the importance of story, and hearing from young people. And the power of this was demonstrated yesterday. These young people inspired each of us watching. They remind us to be honest, courageous and not to be afraid to take action.

Keri Moore reminded us about the importance and power of having pride in who we are as Indigenous peoples, how this is essential in developing a strong cultural identity and how this is necessary for healing.

Calgary Catholic taught us that there is no limit to what you can do with a land acknowledgement. They worked with Elders and community members to help build theirs and I would recommend if you missed their session be sure to check out their land acknowledgment video!

Josephine and Sheila from Wolf Creek Schools spoke about getting comfortable with being uncomfortable, and how there is no rule book to reconciliation. They reminded us that reconciliation is about having tough conversations, that it is hard work and exhausting at times. And that we are going to make mistakes in this process but that its okay as long as we have good intentions, are learning and are moving forward.

Lisa Cruikshank and Billie-Jo Grant with Rupertsland Institute shared all of their amazing resources and many great ideas to help incorporate Metis teachings in education spaces.

Cameron Crowchild and Teena Starlight with Tsuut'ina Education gave many ideas and examples on how to incorporate and connect Indigenous language and culture within curriculum, as well as how important it is to have these connections and opportunities embedded throughout k-12 for all students and staff. It is our hope that all students have opportunities like the ones you have shared with us.

Josh Morin reminded us of the importance of keeping our languages alive. He really embodies the pride that Indigenous people carry when they share who they are and where they come from.

Josh refers to our young ones as “Little elders” and I know after the youth panel we definitely see why they are called that.

Michelle Range-er spoke about the importance of place - having safe spaces for students, Elders and community and how having a welcoming and safe space has the power to heal. She also spoke about the importance and impact of having youth, Elder and community voices in everything that we do and how this creates healing for everyone.

Phil Butterfield and Sarah Heimbecker shared the importance of bringing the students into the conversation to benefit their learning.

They also spoke about the need to build authentic and sustainable relationships.

They shared that there are going to be moments of discomfort along the way and that we need to have genuine leadership.

This includes all leadership. Not just the teachers and principals. Superintendents need to be just as invested in these relationships as the teachers. That's how we will create and sustain authentic relationships as Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people in education.

This morning in our opening keynote we heard Tomas speak about the power of having someone believe in you, and how important it is for educators to believe and know that Indigenous kids are capable, strong, and proud. That Indigenous kids are worth it. And that as educators, we need to actively create space where Indigenous students feel safe, and welcomed and cherished. Not less than, not different than.

Tomas shared an important note about the unbelievable difference between positive and not so positive examples of educators. The power that one positive uplifting teacher can make in building confidence can lead to an unstoppable future and endless possibilities for Indigenous students.

Compare that to a teacher who is all too comfortable with unacceptable and flat out racist stereotypes.

When educators are comfortable with acting in this way. They give their non-indigenous students an excuse to behave in an equally racist manner.

It is great to believe that this Country is STARTING to move in the right direction, however, hearing Tomas speak and seeing how young this man is, we have no other choice but to face the reality that we still have an incredibly long journey of change ahead of us to get to the place that truly values Indigenous people.

We saw in the comments more than once that every educator needs to hear this but what you need to know is that every indigenous student has heard this and has similar experiences.

We want to thank Tomas for being vulnerable, and so courageous in sharing these experiences with us.

Tomas left us with so many powerful and alarming things to take in and really think about. Who are we as educators and how do we want to be remembered?

Canadian Geographic shared how teachers can connect with and access all of the different resources that they have. We thank them for their work and commitment to having Indigenous educators and community guide the development of all of their Indigenous resources.

Alberta School Councils Association highlighted the importance of parents in the conversations surrounding their children's education. Specifically Indigenous Parents and families. If we don't create meaningful relationships with Indigenous parents we are missing out on so many possibilities to support and enhance student learning.

Desmond Nolan with Aspen View spoke about the impact of being able to work with and learn from Elders and how important land-based learning opportunities are for students AND staff, and provided us with so many different ideas on how we can do this.

In the Sixties Scoop presentation with Melissa Purcell, Melissa shared a powerful fact about the number of Indigenous children in care. In an interactive game she asked the question "Have Indigenous children always been the highest represented children in care?" The answer that almost everyone guessed was Yes. This was incorrect. In the 1950's Indigenous children made up only 1% of children in care and by the 1960's those numbers skyrocketed.

She also shared a shocking “sales video” that aired on the news about adopting “unwanted” and “hard to home” Indigenous babies.

One man in Saskatchewan was “awarded” salesman of the year for the amount of children he managed to place in care. This is a part of our reality that everyone needs to learn.

Dr. Genevieve Fox offered the principles of reverence, relationship, responsibility and respect to guide the way we live, learn and teach.

Terry Wortherspoon and Emily Milne shared their view of the TRC’s Calls to Action from an ally perspective. They conducted research on current public attitudes regarding reconciliation overall within Alberta and Saskatchewan schools.

Melissa Purcell taught us tap-way-win – looking at truth. How we must examine stereotypes and biases, and look at how they have shaped relationships with Indigenous peoples. We need to ask ourselves, where do your stereotypes and bias stem from? What informed your knowing? What relationships do you have? And how can you increase and strengthen these relationships?

Wilson Bearhead shared about loving and respecting our four legged relatives. He reminds us of the many lessons and gifts they have to share with us if we take the time to learn from them. Mother Earth is our greatest classroom.

Sharon Morin called upon us to respect the earth. This includes everything connected to the earth. The animals that give their lives to provide for us and the plants that give us our medicines. We never disrespect the earth by wasting anything or throwing trash on the land-our mother.

We want to acknowledge and thank CASS for always respecting and honouring First Nation, Metis and Inuit protocols and practices in the work that they do. The CASS First Nations, Metis and Inuit Gathering is a highlight of the year for us and we are so thankful that CASS managed to find a way to carry on with this year’s gathering in the best and safest way possible. We are looking forward to next year... Hopefully in person! In the words of young Kail, hiy hiy and buh bye