



THE  
FUTURE  
IS DUE  
NORTH

# ENDING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE NORTH

The Next Step in Reconciliation

JULY 2019



BY CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER



## ABOUT PPF

**Good Policy. Better Canada.** The Public Policy Forum builds bridges among diverse participants in the policy-making process and gives them a platform to examine issues, offer new perspectives and feed fresh ideas into critical policy discussions. We believe good policy is critical to making a better Canada—a country that's cohesive, prosperous and secure. We contribute by:

- Conducting research on critical issues
- Convening candid dialogues on research subjects
- Recognizing exceptional leaders

Our approach—called **Inclusion to Conclusion**—brings emerging and established voices to policy conversations, which informs conclusions that identify obstacles to success and pathways forward. PPF is an independent, non-partisan charity whose members are a diverse group of private, public and non-profit organizations.

© 2019, Public Policy Forum  
1400 - 130 Albert Street  
Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1P 5G4  
613.238.7858

ISBN: 978-1-988886-67-1

[ppforum.ca](http://ppforum.ca)

[@ppforumca](https://www.instagram.com/ppforumca)

The opinions and recommendations expressed in this piece are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Public Policy Forum.

## WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNER



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: Candice Ward Photography

Shoorzri' Crystal Gail Fraser v̱aazhii. Shiyughwan kat da' Juliet Mary Bullock shahanh t'iinch'uu ts'at Bruce Fraser shityè' t'iinch'uu. Guuyeets'i'dechuu. Ts'at Marka Andre shitsuu t'iinch'uu ts'at Richard Bullock shitsii t'iinch'uu. Inuvik ts'at Dachan Choo Gèhnhjik gwits'at Gwichyà Gwich'in ts'at ìhii.

Crystal Gail Fraser is Gwichyà Gwich'in and is the daughter of Juliet Mary Bullock and Bruce Fraser. Her grandparents were Marka Andre and Richard Bullock. Crystal is originally from Inuvik and Dachan Choo Gèhnhjik.

Crystal is currently completing a PhD in Canadian History at the University of Alberta and her research focuses on the history of residential and day schooling in the Northwest Territories during the 20th century. In 2017, she and Sara Komarnisky published the immensely popular [150 Acts of Reconciliation for the Last 150 Days of Canada 150](#). Crystal owns Indigenous Consulting Services Inc. and can be found on Twitter at @crystalfraser.

## FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR

Almost five years ago, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) held its final event in Ottawa. Beginning in 2008, the commission sought to document the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada, collect the testimony of survivors, compensate former students, and provide recommendations in [94 Calls to Action](#) that seek to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation in Canada.” Through these calls to action, the hope was (and is) that various governments, institutions and organizations would begin a period of self-reflection and reform to begin to mend relationships with Indigenous nations.

Although I did not attend residential school, the effects linger in my Dinjii Zhuh family (some know us as Gwich'in). My didıy (great grandmother) Julianne Teh'dahcha<sup>1</sup> and her husband Jean Tsell were forced to institutionalize their children; my grandmother Marka Andre Bullock resided at Immaculate Conception Indian Residential School in Aklavik and her older sister, Angele, died at the residential school in Fort Providence, Northwest Territories (NWT). As such, my interests as a Dinjii Zhuh mother, historian, scholar and feminist are centered around histories of Indigenous peoples in the North, the effects of residential schooling and other colonial policies, and how we can make certain that our children have a bright future and are safe from the trauma that our ancestors endured.

## CANADA'S GOVERNMENTS NEED TO HEAL A LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

One way to ensure a bright future for our children is to end domestic and family violence through efforts that target not only violence but the scope of inter- and multi-generational trauma. Here, I examine how northern governments have responded to the TRC's final report and, specifically, Call to Action 55, which calls upon all levels to government to report on the progress on reducing the rate of criminal victimization of Aboriginal people, including data related to homicide and family violence victimization and other crimes.

Additionally, Call to Action 36, in relation to justice, calls for inmates to be educated on these sensitive yet critically important topics, and Call to Action 39 asks the federal government to develop a national data collection plan related to the criminal victimization of Indigenous people.

The various forms of violence that thousands of Indigenous children experienced at Indian residential schools in Canada are now well documented. Without recounting the utterly harrowing and devastating experiences that so many endured, childhood trauma took many forms: neglect, physical abuse, sexual assault and psychological maltreatment. Additionally, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, in its 2003 report entitled [Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada](#), notes that the colonial residential schooling system represented another tier of violence against Indigenous peoples: political state violence. In 2015, the TRC

---

<sup>1</sup> She also went by names of a Julianne Jerome and Julianne Andre.

called Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples "cultural genocide," while the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls simply called it "genocide."

Calls to thwart domestic and family violence in Canada have been ongoing for decades and policy changes have long been discussed at the federal level. For example, in 1996 the [Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) noted that "Abuse and family violence are the most dramatic problems, but they are the tip of an iceberg that began to form when Aboriginal communities lost their independent self-determining powers and Aboriginal families were deprived of authority and influence over their children."

According to scholars Cindy Holmes and Sarah Hunt in the 2017 report [Indigenous Communities and Family Violence: Changing the Conversation](#), "intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools has been identified as a reason that conventional strategies have failed to reduce family violence." Specific to the North, the Government of Canada published [Understanding Family Violence and Sexual Assault in the Territories, First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples](#) in 2008, which found that approximately 77% "of those accused of a family violence offence suffered at least one form of abuse." The legacy of residential schools in Canada, then, lives intergenerationally through the staggering statistics of domestic and family violence in Indigenous communities and among families.

The three northern territories in Canada have committed to adhering to the TRC's 94 Calls to Action in some capacity. According to the 2013 report [Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends](#), the North has the highest numbers of police-reported domestic and family violence in Canada, and Nunavut has rates over 10 times the national average. Thus, implementing the several TRC Calls to Action that address domestic and family violence is of crucial importance. The territorial governments cannot tackle the enormous injustices of domestic and family violence alone. Rather, cultivating partnerships between Indigenous organizations, corporations and governments is a good first step in initiating conversations.

Several months after the TRC's final report was released, the NWT government tabled a document in the territorial legislative assembly entitled ["Meeting the Challenge of Reconciliation: The Government of the Northwest Territories Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action."](#) The responses were an "initial response to the Calls to Action and are intended to help further the engagement on this subject, and to highlight what is already being done in the NWT," while also noting that their "responses are only intended to speak to the circumstances of the NWT" and "should not be construed as statements of policy."

Responding to the final report, Nunavut Premier Joe Savikataaq publicly stated that his government was committed to "working with the federal government to move forward in a renewed commitment to healing and becoming stronger than ever." For their part, the governments of Nunavut and NWT had collaborated on mandatory Grade 10 residential school curriculum long before the TRC's final report and Calls to Action were published.

Finally, the Yukon government [promises](#) to:

- work with First Nation governments to address the legacy of residential schools by closing the gaps in service delivery and creating a culturally relevant justice and corrections system;
- work with Yukon First Nations to identify how the Yukon government can implement its responsibilities stemming from the calls to action of the commission, and;
- implement training programs for Yukon government employees on the legacy and impact of residential schools.

How have these three governments been demonstrating their commitment to reconciliation, specifically related to domestic and family violence?

In the recent report, [Hearing About the Realities of Intimate Partner Violence in the Northwest Territories from Front Line Service Providers](#), researchers found that the rate of violence against women in the Northwest Territories is nine times the national average. The report stated that “Community healing must acknowledge an Indigenous world view, traditional knowledge and culture as well as include Indigenous communities’ participation in this journey.” In other words, Indigenous ontological methodologies are crucial in solving the problem of domestic and family violence.

The Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) historically has sought solutions to reduce violence, notably in 2003 through its response to the Coalition Against Family Violence’s calls to action. They directly linked high rates of violence to intergenerational trauma brought on by residential schools. Then, in 2011, the coalition published *Recommendations for Addressing Gaps, Shifting Attitudes, and Enhancing Services to Reduce Family Violence in the NWT*, and the GNWT has since implemented some of its nineteen recommendations. Additionally, the GNWT has supported renowned and critically important organizations geared towards the North’s large youth population, such as [FOX](#) (Fostering Open eXpression among Youth) and [SMASH](#) (Strength, Masculinities, and Sexual Health).

Leaders in Nunavut have acted too. In response to the murder of Sula Enuaraq and her two daughters in Iqaluit, Nunavut’s Chief Coroner and the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario investigated the Enuaraq case and other similar ones. This investigation resulted in [15 recommendations](#), largely consisting of public education campaigns and rigorous employee training. As a part of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) Sula Enuaraq’s mother, Micah Arreak, and cousin, Killaq Enuaraq-Strauss, recommended changes to Royal Canadian Mounted Police such as mandatory cultural training and Inuktitut-speaking staff.

There is no one better to consider Indigenous knowledge than Indigenous peoples themselves. Across Yukon, NWT and Nunavut, the implementation of modern treaties has created new spaces for the



resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and resources for the implementation of new programs. Although the implementation of social programs and the delivery of justice are squarely within the purview of the territorial governments, perhaps the various northern Indigenous tribal councils, First Nations, corporations and governments that were created as a result of modern treaties might also help to heal the intergenerational effects of residential schools and reduce the abysmal statistics around domestic and family violence. Indeed, northern Indigenous governments and organizations have brainstormed ways to address broad social issues that might help with domestic and family violence, such as on-the-land wellness programs, language revitalization campaigns, cultural programming, traditional knowledge workshops, mentor-mentee relationships, and community-driven projects.

The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, based in Inuvik, for instance, offers [Project Jewel](#), which provides culturally sensitive resources for people who want to “manage stress, grief, trauma or any emotions they are experiencing.” For their part, Nunavut Tunngavik has long [offered resources](#) around suicide prevention, community-specific wellness plans and food security, all of which are important factors in contributing to the wellness of families.

Dedats’eetsaa, the Tłıchǫ Research and Training Institute, hosts the [Healing Wind Advisory Committee](#), a group of Indigenous Elders, Community Health Representatives and community volunteers who are committed to using community knowledge and values in healing and wellness projects, programs and services.

Finally, the Vuntut Gwitch’in First Nation partnered with the Government of Yukon to plan and [construct](#) a \$750,000 new health and wellness centre that will host services invested in “collaborative care” models. This building will strengthen the good work that the Vuntut Gwich’in First Nation is already undertaking through home support services, Elder care, the appointment of Indigenous court workers, and dedicated staff for community health and wellness.

Across the mountains in the Gwich’in Settlement Area, the Gwich’in Tribal Council offers the Gwich’in Language Mentor-Apprentice Program, which pairs fluent and learning speakers in an effort to preserve and revitalize the use of Dinjii Zhuh Ginjik. Based on experience, this program has the power to strengthen Dinjii Zhuh identities and culture.

On June 3, 2019 the NIMMIWG released its final report, [Reclaiming Power and Place](#), along with 231 [Calls for Justice](#). Based on the involvement of more than 2,380 people and 15 community hearings, the inquiry sought to understand the violence that disproportionately affects women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people who live in Canada. It investigated the systemic causes of all expressions of violence against Indigenous women and girls, as well as institutional policies and practices. According to the NIMMIWG, the “Calls for Justice represent important ways to end the genocide and to transform systemic and societal values that have worked to maintain colonial violence.” They call for sweeping changes to the justice system but also

acknowledge that punitive justice fails to address the ingrained and systemic nature of racism and violence in Canada. The inquiry argues their Calls for Justice are “legal imperatives—they are not optional.”

The great deal of research that has been conducted on domestic and family violence indicates that these issues continue to plague society, particularly Indigenous families and especially those living in the North. The effects of residential schooling are manifested daily by those who are struggling with substance abuse, have not yet found suitable healing programs, and are suffering from other debilitating issues such as food insecurity, a lack of education and unsafe housing conditions. But through the release of *Reclaiming Power and Place* and *Calls for Justice*, all governments, including those in the North, now have invaluable resources that, if carefully considered and followed, have the potential of vastly improving the lives of domestic and family violence survivors.

Partnerships, however, will be crucial. Success will come by allowing Indigenous communities to develop their own unique and specific plans in these collaborative relationships, but supported by government. This will not only empower Indigenous communities to foster change among their own people, but also challenge the contemporary and intergenerational consequences of residential schooling in Canada.



