

Returning to Spirit, for whom?

Returning to Spirit (RTS) is designed to address the issues around the legacy of Indian Residential Schools (IRS).

Who would benefit from participating in the RTS workshops? An immediate answer is that it is for all those who attended or worked in IRS. But the reality goes much deeper. In the First Nations' communities, we talk of the generational impact of the schools, affecting even those who have not attended the schools. The schools also affected the relationship of the First Nations with the rest of society.

Here, it is a two-sided picture. On the one hand, the experiences of IRS colour the way First Nations see and experience themselves in relationship with the dominant society. On the other hand, the dominant society's ways of relating to First Nations amplify, confirm, and/or reinforce the First Nations' experiences in the IRS. An unending cycle of no possibilities develops and persists. It takes on the colour of discrimination, racism, separation, and struggles at all level of society. Time and time again, various individuals/organizations/communities try to fix the situation through various efforts/projects with no headway being made, just more of the same.

The basic truth is that since all of society is affected by the IRS experience, then all of society is also responsible for the legacy of IRS. The dominant society interacted with the First Nations through its members working in the IRS. These acted within the parameters of the culture of the dominant society bringing its perception and ways of interaction. Therefore, to place the responsibility only on those who worked in the IRS is unjust and inaccurate. Each member of the Canadian society (civil, religious, political), be they Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, is responsible for the resolution of the legacy of IRS.

The RTS workshops give the participants the opportunity to grow in awareness, to own that responsibility and to be transformed. The healing and reconciliation that follow opens a space, making it possible to powerfully create life within families and communities, as well as between communities. It empowers individuals and groups to create a just, life-giving society wherein all members, no matter to what faith, race, ethnic group, or community they belong, can create their life to the full instead of just coping with or surviving life.

Who is the Returning to Spirit program for? Returning to Spirit is for all those who are committed to making a significant difference in our society as to the legacy of IRS.

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