

February 24, 2021

To the Mayor & Council:

I cannot believe that I, and many others, are being asked to write letters such as these to convince our town to re-name Colonization Road.

It has been asked in a letter to Mayor and Council on this issue, "Who are the councillors of this town representing?" Let me start by introducing myself. I am a First Nations Woman; a member of Couchiching First Nation. I reside in the Town of Fort Frances where I pay property taxes and support the local economy. Our First Nation is but a few minutes drive away and the members that reside there also support the local economy. As do many other surrounding First Nations communities in this area. Our communities have members that are employed by the Town of Fort Frances and own businesses in the Town of Fort Frances. I am raising, with my husband, three children who are also First Nations. We volunteer in our community of Fort Frances. We make donations to various organizations as our hearts lead us and we are happy to call Fort Frances home. Like so many others. These are a few examples of who you are representing. But, perhaps the more important question is, "What are the councillors of this town representing?"

I am confident that I do not have to educate our Mayor and Council on what Colonization is and what it means to some of your community members and your neighbours. It has been in the forefront of the news for many years now. Unfortunately, it appears that many in our community are not educated on the issue nor do they understand the impact of Colonization on First Nations people and communities.

Colonization, by definition, is the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. The only indigenous people of Canada are First Nations people; everyone else immigrated and settled here. Their ancestors then did the unspeakable. They stole our First Nations children from their homes and sent them to schools where they suffered unspeakable abuse. Children as young as four years old. These children were beaten, raped, malnourished, their hair was cut short, they were dressed in uniforms and their days were strictly regimented by timetables. Siblings rarely interacted with one another. They did not get to see their families. Parental visits were further restricted by use of a pass system designed to confine Indigenous peoples to reserves. They were punished and disciplined for speaking their language. The only purpose of Residential schools was to eliminate all aspects of Aboriginal Culture, "to kill the Indian in the child." They removed their legal identity as Indians.

Then, when these children were old enough, they were tossed out on the doorstep of society and left to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, many of the children that were sent to Residential schools never did leave. They died there.

The Residential school system is a very recent history. My mother and her siblings attended the residential school that was located in Couchiching First Nation. The last school remained in operation until 1996, only 25 years ago. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was

established in 2008 and in 2015 it concluded with a publication of a multi-volume report detailing the testimonies of survivors and historical documents from the time of Residential schools and it concluded that the school system amounted to cultural genocide.

Even to this day, communities including Fort Frances, are dealing with the impact that the Residential school system and Colonization had on the First Nations people. The trauma that many continue to suffer because of the broken homes, broken spirits and broken communities from Colonization. The drinking, the drug abuse, the repeated behaviours of violence. The coping mechanisms and the learned behaviours from Colonization.

The word Colonization is a stark reminder of the brutal and traumatic history of First Nations people in Canada. Changing the name will not erase the past, that is true. We are not responsible for the past history created by our ancestors... we are responsible for the current time and the history we are creating for those generations to follow. We all want better things for our children and grandchildren. The town has talked about its commitment to reconciliation, it is time to walk the walk and demonstrate that the Town of Fort Frances is truly committed to reconciliation with this name change.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” – Maya Angelou

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely;

A First Nations Member of Couchiching and a Town of Fort Frances Resident

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole D.S. Miller', with a stylized, flowing script.

Nicole D.S. Miller