

Surrey First Peoples Guide for Newcomers

Reconciliation
Strategy



SURREY
LOCAL IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP



Acknowledgements

This work is taking place on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), ᑕᐢᑖᐱᑦ (Katzie), kʷikʷəłəm (Kwikwetlem), ᑭᐱᑦᐱᑦ (Kwantlen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam) and s̓cəwaθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen) First Nations. The knowledge, traditions and ongoing contributions of these communities are significant in providing context to the work of this resource. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership would like to thank Micheal Kelly Gabriel, Allie Keitlah and Len Pierre for providing their wisdom and truth and sharing their heartfelt intentions for their communities. We also extend our gratitude to Jeska Slater and the team at Littlecrane Consulting for the writing, research, and engagement that made this resource possible.

Introduction and Background

“Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts.” - Senator Murray Sinclair

This Reconciliation Strategy will use a community-centred method that uplifts the stories of the land-based Nations, urban populations, and Indigenous champions. Anti-Indigenous racism is a common experience for Indigenous people living in Surrey. Racism and stereotypes negatively affect Indigenous people, including health, justice, education, and social services. When these racial stereotypes are normalized, Indigenous people face more considerable barriers in their communities. Actively dismantling these stereotypes and normalized biases will work to ensure that Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit people in Surrey live free from colonial harm.

What Should I Know About Undergoing Meaningful Reconciliation?

Meaningful reconciliation is not easily accomplished. It can be deeply uncomfortable to confront our privilege and take action to address inequity.

Meaningful reconciliation takes commitment, consistency, time, and continued resources and funding. It requires confronting Canadian colonial narratives through learning about systemic racism and assimilation policies that sought to rid Canada of “the Indian problem” and how these policies have impacted, and continue to impact, Indigenous communities and people. It demands that we learn to identify and mitigate our conscious and unconscious biases and leverage our privilege to take action where we have influence. It requires deconstructing colonialism, learning about Indigenous peoples, cultures, and perspectives, and creating space for them in daily interactions and processes within educational and institutional settings.

What Terms Do I Use?

Like Aboriginal, the term Indigenous refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, collectively or separately. It is the preferred term in international usages, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous is increasingly selected over ‘Aboriginal’ formally and informally in Canada.

History of Indigenous and Newcomer Relationships in Surrey

In 2018, a Capstone Report called *Decolonizing Capacity Building and Leadership Development for Indigenous and Newcomer Youth through Intercultural Dialogue: A Case Study of Surrey, British Columbia* showed that the newcomer youth population had grown by 4.7% between 2011 and 2016¹. It also showed that the median age of Indigenous people in Surrey was 25.6 years old. As a result, the Surrey LIP undertook a project, in partnership with the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) called Building Solidarity Between Indigenous and Refugee Communities in Surrey², where refugees and Indigenous peoples made connections over experiences of displacement, discrimination, and violence.

This project spurred additional gatherings like the Indigenous & Refugee Youth Intercultural Dialogue. During this facilitation of reconciliation, newcomers witnessed and, at times, were part of ceremonies, singing, dancing, sharing circles, and exercises that opened their perspective on Indigenous life. One particular exercise was the Kairos Blanket Activity, where refugees physically walked through the Indigenous history on a blanket of stories.

These engagements have led to good relationship building with Indigenous communities in the Surrey area, resulting in empathy from newcomer youth about Indigenous rights and issues in Canada.

¹ Zand, A. (2018). Decolonizing capacity building and leadership development for Indigenous and newcomer youth through intercultural dialogue: A case study of Surrey, British Columbia [Master's capstone report]. School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia.

² <https://www.surreylip.ca/project/bridging-indigenous-and-newcomer-communities/>
<https://www.surreylip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/January-2018-Retreat-Program.pdf>
https://www.surreylip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Indigenous-Refugee-Youth-Intercultural-Dialogue_WEB.pdf

What is Reconciliation?

“We know we are doing reconciliation well when Indigenous people feel nurtured in the process.” – Jada Pape

Residential Schools

Some attitudes towards reconciliation are that wrongs against Indigenous peoples were long ago and are best left in the past. But this attitude does not acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are still experiencing systemic oppression, systemic racism, and legislative and funding inequities. For example, the last Residential School was only closed in 1996, where Indigenous children were sexually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically traumatized, even to death, which we learn more about as we find unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the so-called “schools.” Approximately 40-60% of children attending these schools died at school.³ Moreover, many of these facilities’ predators and perpetrators are alive today without any consequences for their crimes against humanity.

Approximately 160,000 children have attended Residential Schools since the 1800s. 90-100% of the children forced into Residential Schools experienced abuse. The purpose of these schools was to erase Indigenous culture from their children. Due to a lack of mental health services and support, this major trauma has negatively impacted Indigenous families and communities for close to 200 years.

History of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission

Between 2007 and 2015, the Government of Canada sponsored the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with \$72 million to engage with 6,500 Indigenous witnesses and survivors of Residential Schools, and to host seven national events across Canada to educate the Canadian public about these atrocities.

The TRC created a historical record of the residential school system, including over 5 million government documents. The final report is kept at the University of Manitoba.

³ Bryce, Peter H. “Report on the Indian Residential Schools of Manitoba and the North-West Territories” Ottawa: 1907 https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/aanc-inac/R5-681-1907-eng.pdf

Why Does It Matter?

For Indigenous People for Newcomer Organizations

Reconciliation is necessary for Indigenous peoples because all levels of society are biased against First Nations, Metis, and the Inuit. This bias can range from alienation in the general public to kidnapping and murder, as is seen in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Report. For Indigenous peoples, reconciliation, having good relations, is not just an ideal but a matter of life, death, and justice.

But reconciliation is also crucial for newcomers because studies have shown landed immigrants almost immediately adopt prejudice against Indigenous peoples. The adoption of biases is because the dominant culture in Canada is anti-Indigenous, so newcomers unconsciously adopt this attitude because they desire to fit into Canadian norms. Therefore, to uphold the UN's Declaration of Indigenous Rights, newcomer organizations, such as those associated with the Surrey LIP, must build communities that foster good relationships with Indigenous communities.

The TRUTH in Truth and Reconciliation

To reconcile, we must look at Indigenous People's realities today. According to Statistics Canada, in 2014 records show that in the twelve months prior to the survey, Indigenous Peoples were violently victimized (sexual and physical assault) at a rate close to twice as much as non-Indigenous peoples (for Indigenous Peoples approximately 155 per 1,000). For Indigenous women, rates of sexual assault were 3.28 times higher than non-Indigenous women⁴ and homicide rates were six times higher for Indigenous Peoples.

Current Facts:

- 20% of women and children in non-Indigenous shelters, identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. In contrast, Indigenous persons represented 4% of Canadian women (age 18 and older) and 8% of children as a whole.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00007-eng.htm>
- 9.7% of Canadian Aboriginals understand their Primary Language well or relatively well. 61.1% of Canadian Aboriginals do not understand any Aboriginal language.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4110004301>
- In 2016, half (52%) of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had a post-secondary qualification, including 14% of Indigenous women with a bachelor's degree or higher. By contrast, 46% of Indigenous men obtained post-secondary qualifications including

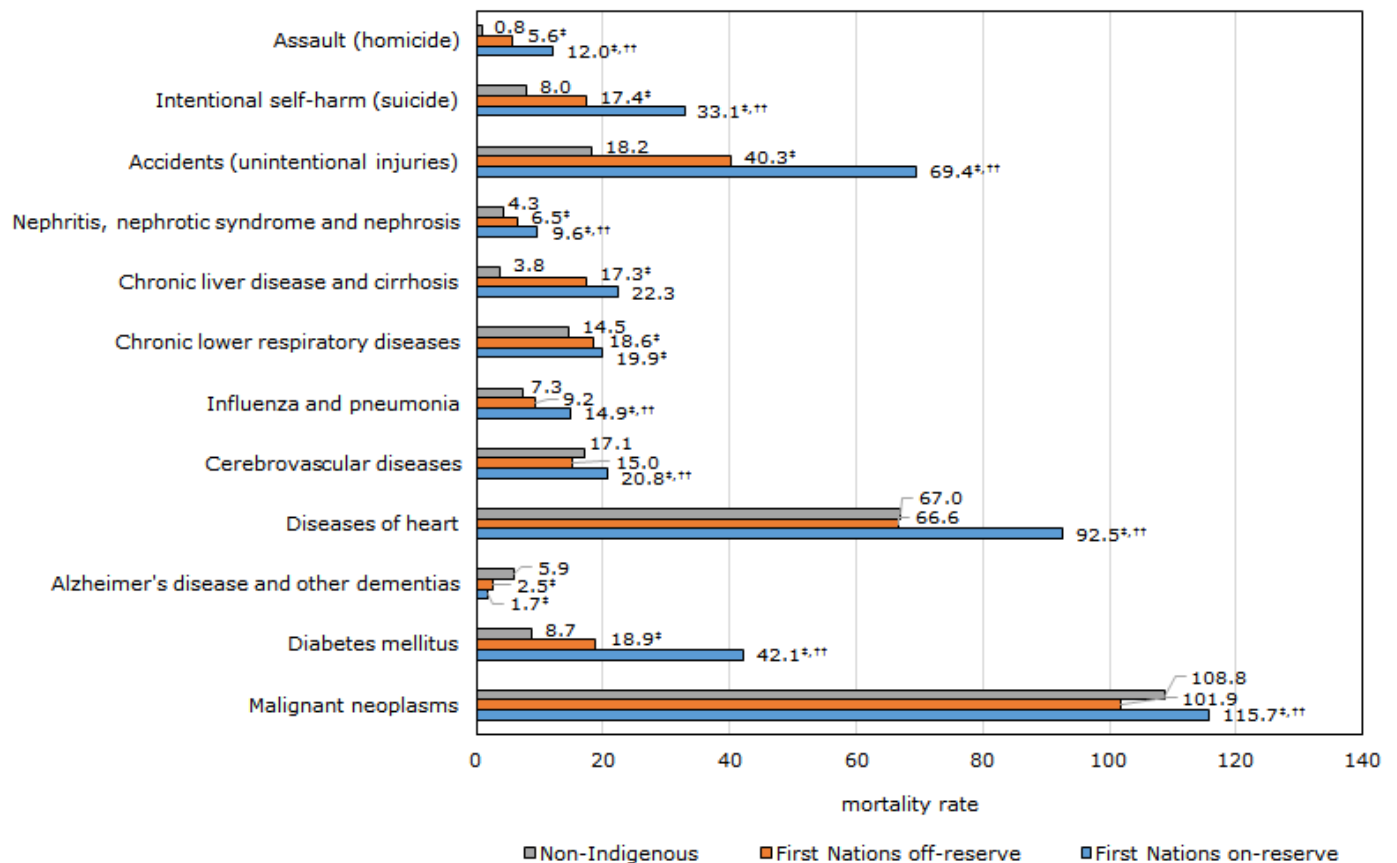
⁴ Boyce, J., Victimization of aboriginal people in Canada, 2014, Juristat- Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2016). Statistics Canada. Pg. 16

8% who graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher. However, the educational attainment at the post-secondary level of non-Indigenous women (67% any post-secondary and 32% bachelor's degree or more) and men (64% and 27%, respectively) remained higher.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00009-eng.htm>

- Mortality rates of Indigenous Peoples far exceed those of non-Indigenous people (Figure 1 below)

Figure 1
Age-standardized mortality rates per 100,000 person years at risk, by cause of death, on- and off-reserve First Nations, and non-Indigenous people, Canada, 2006 to 2016



* different from non-Indigenous population

** different from First Nations people living off-reserve

Note: Mortality rates have been standardized to the Indigenous population age structure (both sexes combined) using the 2006 Census of Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort, 10-year (2006 to 2016) mortality follow-up period.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2021010/article/00001-eng.htm>

- Roughly 25% of Indigenous households report that their income is not enough to meet basic household needs (2017)

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4110005601&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B4%5D=7.2>

- See more statistics at https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/indigenous_peoples

‘Letsémot: One Heart, One Mind

Mental

Knowledge Systems - Building good relations between Indigenous peoples and newcomers starts with acknowledging, respecting, and validating Indigenous knowledge systems, such as: how to care for the land, Indigenous histories, medicines, lived experiences of oppression, pressing issues, concerns, and crises, and other topics that are important to Indigenous communities. This practice is also known as decolonization.

Decolonization is very important in reconciliation because it undermines colonial attitudes that see Indigenous Peoples as inferior to Western peoples, which leads to discrimination (such as alienation), displacement (such as pipelines and other natural resource extraction enterprises) or possibly violence (such as Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, or Residential Schools).

As a newcomer organization, you work with immigrants and refugees from various cultures who might be able to relate to discrimination, displacement, and violence from a dominant culture or group. These factors could even be the reason they are coming to Canada. While learning about Indigenous Peoples’ reality, it is essential to make these connections so newcomers can see that Indigenous People are demanding the same things they might be searching for.

To move through bias against First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures and communities, newcomers must undergo a process of decolonization and appreciation for Indigenousization.

Decolonization is a process whereby the organization reviews and reworks policies, values, and procedures which raise Western ideals and peoples above Indigenous ones. This process is vital in reconciliation because biases such as white-supremacy lead to discrimination or possibly overt forms of violence against Indigenous Peoples.

Enroll your staff on all levels to engage in discussions, workshops, or programs for guidance through this process. To build good relations between Indigenous peoples and newcomers, we must start with the simple questions: “How do we bring about reconciliation?” and “What does reconciliation look like?”

To answer these questions, we need to hear from Indigenous voices. Indigenous Elders, Chiefs, Truth Holders, Representatives, and Youth all have important things to say about reconciliation, so read their books, articles, essays, and speeches, or watch their documentaries or other media. Become acquainted with the issues first, then respectfully reach out to an Indigenous Community Representative.

It is okay if an Indigenous Representative declines to speak with you. Remember, many Indigenous peoples are exhausted from this work because most of it triggers lived trauma.

Physical

Action Processes - As we continually decolonize, we must put our new understanding into actions that build good relations, such as new policies and procedures for your organization. To monitor, nurture, and build upon these policies and procedures, consider forming a committee or department that prioritizes reconciliation. Options could include screening staff and administrators for anti-Indigenous bias, cultural safety training, or sponsored Indigenous History courses for new employees.

Once we understand what local First Nations and Indigenous communities need for reconciliation, we must act on it. Actions can be physical, like building spaces and facilities, or procedural and policy based. For newcomer organizations, this could look like building an art space for newcomers and Indigenous Youth to connect. A policy related to anti-Indigenous attitudes found in your organization is an important action step too.

Spiritual

Sharing Worldview / Spiritual Beliefs - Reconciliation is not just “avoiding wrong” or “doing right,” but having a breathing relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Being in a relationship means making space for Indigenous worldviews in your organization, both conceptually and physically. This process is known as Indigenization. Indigenization can look like incorporating Indigenous voices and attitudes into your programs, and holding shared events for storytelling, food, music, dance, or even art.

It is important to note that Indigenization does not mean replacing Western thoughts with Indigenous ones or morphing the two together. Instead, it means weaving both worldviews together to make a stronger organization. Both threads, and possibly others, are distinct, but they join forces to become stronger.

Emotional

Values and Protocols - As we work on Decolonization and Indigenization, we must take time to reflect on what would bolster our spaces, committees, and initiatives. Every action will have unique needs, so it is best to consult members of Indigenous communities, newcomer communities, and staff of your organization for specific values and protocols that will reinforce building better relationships. Examples of values are inclusivity, autonomy, integrity, and holistic points of view. Examples of protocols are inviting Indigenous Youth or Elders to meetings, consulting Indigenous community representatives to co-create policies and initiatives, land acknowledgments, and uplifting Indigenous voices at events.

Political Environment

Despite significant gains regarding Indigenous rights, such as UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, many governments, including the Canadian government, fail to meet international standards. For example, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau went on vacation on the first Truth and Reconciliation Day and never addressed the issue the day represents. Though the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a good step, the federal government still tried to appeal a court decision to compensate Indigenous survivors of the foster care system. Provincial governments are also fighting Indigenous peoples' sovereignty, as is seen in the BC oil pipeline crisis and also the old growth-forest crises at Fairy Creek.

Many protests that aim to protect Indigenous rights are met with state violence through local police or RCMP, including battery, arrests, pepper spray, and psychological warfare tactics. There are also ongoing reports of "Starlight Tours," which are popular with the RCMP in Saskatchewan, where Indigenous men and youth are escorted by police outside of city limits at night in the middle of winter and forced to walk many kilometres home. Without proper clothing and ways of communicating for help, chances of survival are slim.

As noted previously, according to Statistics Canada⁵, 2014 records show that Indigenous Peoples were violently victimized at much higher rates than non-Indigenous peoples, sexual assault rates are 3.28 times higher than for non-Indigenous women, and homicide rates are six times higher for both Indigenous men and women.

⁵ Boyce, J., Victimization of aboriginal people in Canada, 2014, Juristat- Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2016). Statistics Canada. Pg. 16

Surrey LIP's Commitment

Since 2018, Surrey LIP has engaged in reconciliation through intercultural dialogue, events, focus groups and reports. An example of this work is the *Surrey First Peoples Guide for Newcomers*, which dispels falsehoods and misinformation regarding Indigenous realities and circumstances and shines a light on Indigenous Peoples' true history and resilience in the Surrey area. This guide is available in English, French, Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese⁶. The British Columbia Reconciliation Awards defines the guide as "building solidarity between the Indigenous and newcomer communities in Surrey."

⁶ <https://www.surreylip.ca/project/bridging-indigenous-and-newcomer-communities/>

Closing

As a whole, reconciliation is an undertaking that will stretch into multiple generations. Colonization has taken place over the past 500 years. It is complex and has many threads that stretch across all aspects of life. It is not something that will be unraveled or undone in a short amount of time. Reconciliation requires commitment from all levels of government, public service, and society. While we often talk about reconciliation at a government or organization level, it also requires a commitment from each individual. We all have a voice that we can use to advocate for equitable spaces in our communities. It is daunting and it will be uncomfortable, but the results will get us closer to a more just society for all.

Local Immigration Partnerships, such as the Surrey LIP, play an important role as more newcomers make Canada their home. By uniting community partners across sectors with a shared commitment to building inclusive and welcoming communities, LIPs not only foster belonging – they also uphold truth. By sharing the realities of Canada’s colonial history, LIPs help lay the foundations toward respectful and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities.



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