

# WIPING OF THE TEARS CEREMONY

♥ 215 ♥



June 18, 19 and 20, 2021  
Lejac Residential School Site  
Hwy 16, Fraser Lake, BC



Nadleh Whut'en



CARRIER SEKANI  
FAMILY SERVICES

Stellat'en





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## **A message from Warner Adam, Carrier Sekani Family Services CEO**

On behalf of the Carrier Sekani Family Services Board of Directors, Leadership team, staff, and communities, I would like to welcome all of the participants to this important ceremony.

This memorial is intended to honour the 215 children found buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School and to release their souls to the Creator. We are here to help all people, Indigenous and also from all cultures, grieve and let go of the pain they may be experiencing as a result of finding those 215 unmarked graves.

Healing the spirit is a lifetime journey, and this event is one step in helping you accept the past and let it go so that our future generations can learn from this era and ensure that it never happens again.

Part of this process includes embracing our culture and using it as a tool to help us release the pain. The healing process also includes Carrier peoples taking their rightful place in governing their own lives; a right that was removed during the residential school era.

CSFS has been working diligently to assume a wide range of services from government control and reassert Carrier control of systems of knowledge and governance responsible for the health and wellbeing of our nations. In recognizing that our vision and efforts are only accomplished through the commitment of individuals who support CSFS, we wish to say *mussi cho*, big thanks.

- Warner Adam, CEO



# Wiping of the Tears Ceremony

## **An Introduction to Carrier Culture**

The Carrier People are the original inhabitants of Central British Columbia. Their self-identifying name "Dakelh", is translated to mean "people who travel by water". "Carrier" is an English translation of the word "Aghele", the name given to the Dakelh by the Sekani people to the North. It is widely believed that the name Carrier was given to reflect the practice of widows carrying their deceased husband's ashes for a period of mourning.

Prior to colonisation, Carrier people moved as groups throughout the central north between camps and villages to gather, hunt, and fish, as the seasons dictated.

The Carrier governed themselves through the Bah'lats or "Potlatch" system where community members belonged to one of four primary clans of the Likh ji bu (Bear), Gilhanten (Caribou), Jihl tse yu (Frog), and Likh sta Mis yu (Beaver), each with several sub-clans. This practice, although outlawed by British rule during colonisation from 1880 to 1951, is still practiced today.

Dakelh people often introduce themselves at gatherings based on where they come from. They will often state their clan, who their parents and grandparents are, and which home community they come from.



## **Carrier Sekani Family Services**

Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) was created in 1990 as a response to growing concern from Elders and leaders regarding the wellbeing of children and families. CSFS's beginnings focused on work with the Ministry of Children and families to bring home children who were in care and keeping them from entering care.

Today, CSFS employs over 200 people and offer a variety of health and wellness services including child protection, primary medical care, mental health and addiction support, and cultural teachings.

Of the 23 identified Carrier and Sekani Nations in the central north, 11 First Nations choose to be members of our organization. Each Nation has unique characteristics in culture and language.

These member communities span over 76,000 kilometres and include Skin Tyee, Nee Tahi Buhn, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation (Burns Lake Band), Stelat'en, Nadleh Whut'en, Takla First Nation, Yekooche First Nation, Saik'uz First Nation, and, Wet'suwet'en First Nation.



## **History of the Indian Residential School System**

An amendment in 1894 to the Indian Act made it mandatory for Indigenous families to send their children to residential schools. The government of the day thought it necessary to assimilate First Nations children into Canadian British society by forcibly removing them from their homes and placing them in an orphanage-like setting based on Canadian British society.

Children were clothed in uniforms, and were forbidden to speak their own language. Rules and discipline was harsh in keeping with British models of residential child care. Children did not receive the love and care of a parent required by a child and were subjected to cruel and neglectful treatment.

Many children were physically and sexually abused. Poor living conditions and malnutrition caused many children to become ill and some died of disease while in the school. Intergenerational trauma stemming from residential schools has affected many survivors of the school system and their families. Intergenerational impacts can be seen widely and people have had to relearn their culture and regain traditional parenting skills.



## **Lejac Residential School**

Lejac was one of 22 Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in BC and of 130 schools across Canada. Lejac was in operation from 1922 through to June 1976. Students at Lejac came mainly from Carrier communities although Sekani and Gitksan children also attended. Lejac was run by the Catholic Church.

Like so many IRS survivors across the country, Lejac children suffered loss of culture, a disconnection with family and community, and abuse. The school was torn down shortly after it closed in 1976 to remove the physical reminder of the school for the residents who suffered there.

The grave of former Lejac resident, Rose Prince, remains on the grounds. Rose is thought to be a "Saint" by people "in life and death" due to her caring nature and devotion to her faith in life and strange circumstances in death. Rose was sent to Lejac at 6 years old and never left, moving from student to a member of staff. She died in 1949 at the age of 34 after contracting tuberculosis. Two years later when workers were moving graves at the site, it is said her coffin was opened and revealed a perfectly preserved body. After a report of healing properties associated with her grave in 1990, people from across the country make pilgrimage to her gravesite every July.



## **Other Impacts of Colonisation**

The impacts of colonisation in Canada is far reaching for Indigenous people. The Indian Residential School experience was devastating for children, their families, and entire community, but was only part of colonisation events that negatively impacted the health and wellness of Indigenous people while increasing dependence on the government.

The implementation of the reservation system, for example, heavily impacted traditional ways of living through hunting and gathering at traditional camps. Indigenous people were forced to remain inside areas designated by government. A government issued pass was required for anyone wanting to leave the reserve.

The outlawing of the Bah'łats system removed traditional ways of governing, leaving the Canadian government that was unfamiliar with traditional ways of life and culture, the authority of matters normally managed through the Bah'łats.

The introduction of alcohol on this now traumatised and sedentary people was devastating and led to the physical and social health decline of Indigenous people.



## Truth and Reconciliation

In 2007, survivors of Canadian IRS launched a class action lawsuit against the federal government to seek acknowledgment and retribution for their involvement in the IRS. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was created as a result of this lawsuit through a legal settlement between Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, the federal government, and the church bodies.

There were 94 “calls to action” identified in the 2015 TRC report aimed at improving the lives of all Canadian indigenous people in the four areas of child welfare, education, health, and justice.

The TRC’s mandate was to support former students and their families in telling their own stories of their residential school experiences, to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools, and to encourage reconciliation between all Canadians. This work continues today.



## **Resources:**

### **WEBSITES:**

#### **Carrier Sekani Family Services Nowh Guna Cultural Agility Training:**

<https://www.csfs.org/events/nowh-gunaour-way-carrier-cultural-competency-training>

#### **Residential Schools:**

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>

#### **Truth and Reconciliation:**

<http://www.trc.ca>

#### **UN Rights of Indigenous People:**

[https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

### **BOOKS:**

#### **21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality**

– By Bob Joseph

#### **Cis dideen kat - When the Plumes Rise: The Way of the Lake Babine Nation**

– By Jo-Ann Fiske

#### **Nowh Guna, Our Way: Carrier Culture, Knowledge + Traditions**

– By Marlaena Mann, Warner Adam

#### **Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John**

– By Bridget Moran

#### **Savage Anxieties: The Invention of Western Civilization**

– By Robert A. Williams Jr.

# REACH OUT TO SEEK HELP

Help is available in culturally-appropriate, safe, and trauma-informed emotional and mental health counselling services:

**National Indian Residential School Crisis Line:**

1-866-925-4419

**Indian Residential School Survivors Society:**

604-985-4464 or 1-800-721-0066

**KUU-US Crisis Line:**

1-800-588-8717

**Suicide Prevention:**

1-800-SUICIDE

or:

1-800-784-2433

**Northern BC Crisis Lines**

24/7 Crisis Line:

1-888-562-1214

There are non-crisis Carrier Sekani Family Services mental health and addiction recovery supports available for children, adults, and families in our member communities and in the urban communities of Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort Saint James, Fraser Lake, and Burns Lake. Please check with your health centre or call the Health and Wellness Program at 250-567-2900 for more information.



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Every Child Matters



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Creating wellness together.