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# Portage la Prairie News

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## Survivors take steps towards healing

Posted By Leah Kellar, The Daily Graphic

Posted 6 days ago



Residential school survivors from local First Nations communities came out to release their pain and be empowered yesterday.

Survivors were invited to tell their stories during the Residential School Survivors Empowerment Gathering, a two-day event to promote healing, health and legal understanding, which continues today at the Keeshkeemaquah Conference and Gaming Centre on Long Plain First Nation's urban reserve east of Portage la Prairie.

"I am a survivor. I still speak the language frequently. When I arrived (at the residential school) I didn't know a word of English, but I'm a survivor and I want to keep our story alive," said Cecil Desjarlais, from Long Plain prior to a pipe and healing ceremony where survivors could publicly share the story of their experience of residential schools.

"We want to encourage our survivors to tell the story and we want to give them strength, encouragement and healing when they do tell have to tell their stories at court hearings," said Jacqueline Daniels, a band councillor for Long Plain First Nation and an organizer of the event.

"It gets very emotional when they tell their story and it's a really hard story to tell, so we just want to give them strength through prayer and ceremony to continue on that healing path."

Desjarlais described how the pain is kept alive for him by having to retell his story during a recent court hearing for compensation from the federal government.

"Instead of the compensation package, it would have been better to get a letter saying, 'Dear Cecil, We are very sorry for what we did,'" he told a crowd of approximately 40 residential school survivors who gathered at the Keeshkeemaquah Centre.

"To relieve all those hurt feelings and to identify all those who abused me ..., it hurts, it really hurts," he said.

Residential schools were established in the 1920s. Native children were forcibly taken from their parents by priests, Indian agents and police officers. By 1931, there were 80 residential schools across Canada whose objective was to assimilate aboriginal children into mainstream society. In the 1980s, residential school students began disclosing emotional, sexual and extreme forms of physical abuse including regular beatings at residential schools.

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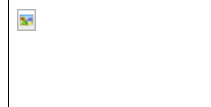
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