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Survivors upset over lost residential school files

Terry Green was taken from his parents when he was just five years old.

By Mike Aiken
Miner and News
Friday February 08, 2008

Terry Green was taken from his parents when he was just five years old. Like his brothers, he was sent to Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School, where he studied and worked for a total of 15 years. "I was forced to go there. The government forced us to go there, and I'm still angry about that," he said Thursday. While his brothers have been compensated, under the Common Experience Payments program, Green's claim hasn't been approved. He's been told his records can't be found.

According to the settlement agreement between the federal government, churches and survivors, there were measures to accommodate applications like Green's. Claimants weren't supposed to supply their own records, as part of their initial claim.

The government staff were meant to help processing by searching through historical records. The application wasn't supposed to re-victimize former students, by forcing them to remember the past.

In Green's case, he also has a claim for physical and sexual abuse, which took place at the school. He'd filed supporting documents with a local lawyer as far back as 2000, and it was copied to the government lawyers involved in the case.

However, the information wasn't shared with the claims department for his compensation claim, and the government lawyers aren't able to provide sufficient proof of Green's attendance at the school.

There are also photos and affidavits from family members, fellow survivors and school staff, but these may also be insufficient.

"This process is not working," Green said in frustration. "Now it's becoming a big bureaucracy again."

According to Indian Residential School Resolution Canada, the agency mandated with the job of settling claims, there's also a mechanism in place for providing additional information to support a claim, which can be reviewed by an advisory panel.

"It is important to note, once again, that throughout this process the government's primary principle will be to assist you to confirm that you resided at an eligible residential school, not to try to prove that you didn't," it says on the government web site.

Green doesn't see it this way.

"Now they've put the onus on me to prove that I was there," he said, noting it's up to him to find records the claim centre



will recognize and get them approved.
He said it's forcing him to go back to a time he'd rather forget.
"I'm trying to get passed what happened to me he said," noting some records go back 50 years.
There are also others in the area coming forward with similar stories, and Green's trying to meet with them, so they can get more support from community leaders.
Out of 85,667 claims received, an estimated 54,322 have been paid out, but another 13,025 have been denied.



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