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## Helping survivors to heal

Residential school cash can create more problems — group

By MICHAEL LIGHTSTONE Staff Reporter

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Post-compensation challenges that could face residential school survivors are the focus of meetings in metro involving the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, a spokeswoman said Tuesday.

Violet Paul said the three-day session, which wraps up today in Dartmouth, has been addressing issues that include mental health, community crime and survivors' traditional mistrust of police.

"Money doesn't heal everything," she said, referring to payments former residential school students are receiving for having been uprooted from their homes and forced to attend church-run institutions. "That's just an interim solution. We have to deal with the long-term healing process."

In September, a \$2-billion compensation deal came into effect for about 80,000 natives in Canada.

For some recipients, the influx of cash could cause problems at home, outreach workers say. Those compensated might end up being victims of crime, may want to use the money to pay for unhealthy habits or might be harassed by friends or relatives requesting money.

Outreach workers are also aware that native youth could be negatively affected by the compensation program.

"Money is coming into (aboriginal) communities," Ms. Paul said. "If your child asks you for money, you're going to give them a few dollars. And that's the same with anyone else, especially with our people who don't have a lot of money."

Ms. Paul said young people asking compensated relatives for cash might not use whatever funds they get legally.

"Then our youth are at risk" of conflict with the law, she said. "We have to be prepared, and that's part of our whole crime-prevention strategy."

The congress, an advocacy group that analyzes and develops "culturally relevant alternatives" to federal policies affecting First Nations peoples in the Atlantic region, says about 1,200 native children attended the Shubenacadie residential school between 1930 and 1967. The average age of survivors is 57, but many former students are aging seniors in the last years of their lives.

According to the organization's website, the congress has had a mandate since November 2004 to "provide outreach and information to Atlantic survivors, their families and communities."

Ms. Paul, who grew up in Indian Brook but never attended the Shubenacadie school, said this week's meetings at an area hotel are closed to the media. She said survivors attending the sessions are still leery about discussing their experiences, which could include child abuse, in public.

"As part of (guarding) their dignity, we're respecting their privacy," Ms. Paul said.

The once-mandatory school system was created to "Christianize" native kids. The Shubenacadie school was one of about 70 of its kind across the country.

Ms. Paul said one of the post-compensation goals is to get survivors to trust police officers again.

"The police played a role because they were directed by federal policy to go out and apprehend these children and take them to these institutions," she told The Chronicle Herald. "The kids were impacted by that, their parents were impacted by that, (and) community members were impacted by that."

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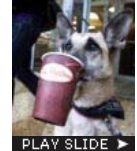
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