




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Survivors get some help

Kerry Benjoe, Leader-Post

Published: Friday, February 08, 2008

Former residential school students who are not satisfied with assessment of their application for the Common Experience Payment (CEP) have a couple of options.

Since December the Star Blanket Cree Nation has been helping former students of the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School, which was renamed Whitecalf Collegiate, access their student records.

The reserve operated the school located in Lebret from 1983 until it closed in the late 1990s.



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"We didn't know we had the records until we looked in our old files," said band Coun. Michael G. Starr, who added the records were located by some band members in November.

Starr said since finding the records in storage -- some dating back to 1884 -- the First Nation has set up its own system to track down and certify the documents for students who went to residential school in Lebret.

Locating the records, which are stored in boxes, can be time-consuming so it hired a part-time co-ordinator to assist former students. At last count the co-ordinator was working on 60 different requests.

"The people that do come here and find their records we have to make sure the records are photocopied. We don't let them just take them. We make sure they sign for them," Starr explained, adding the documents are notarized to verify their legitimacy.

He said some records are proving more difficult to locate especially for those students who started in the middle of the year and maybe only attended for a very short time.

Starr reminds people that the First Nation doesn't have all the records, but says students are welcome to contact the office and put in a request to access their records.

He was surprised at the number of former students requesting copies of their records.

"We weren't prepared for this because each and every year the records are sent into (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada). It's what they call a nominal roll. They should have a good majority of student records," said Starr.

"All the documents should be at (INAC). That was our understanding and that's what we're telling people as well."

David Russell, director of national research and analysis with the Indian Residential School Resolution Canada (IRSRC), said individuals do not have to locate their own records to apply for a CEP.

He said the government is utilizing a variety of documents to help process payments. The nominal roll is just one document that's being used to prove an applicant's past residency in a residential school included in the settlement.

"No one in CEP is being denied because there are missing records," said Russell.

"We are contacting all applicants with a letter inviting them to send in or call in with additional information so that we can assess or confirm whether or not they are eligible for CEP."

He said the government is working with churches, tribal councils and individual First Nations communities to access the records to add to the data the federal government has already gathered.

Russell said the government has recently gained access to the records maintained by the Prince Albert Grand Council for the residential school it administered from 1985 to 1996. The IRSRC is now able to process applications from the more than 900 applicants who attended that school.

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