

A DAY TO LISTEN - DR. ALIKA LAFONTAINE

My name is Alika LaFontaine. My ancestry is Métis, Cree, Anishinaabe and Pacific Islander. I'm the great-grandchild of two residential school Survivors.

So I look at the impacts of the residential school system, both personally through my own family, but also as a professional, as someone who works as a physician within the medical system. You know, we all live in the context of our experiences. Having had family that have gone through residential schools, I can see the impacts that it's had on my grandparents and my father and other relatives and how that's changed the way that they interact with me, but also in the greater context of what it means to be Canadian.

One of the things I've realized in going through this new cycle of truth is that Indigenous communities never forgot these children, but Canada forgot about them, even though the 2015 TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report talked about these lost children. I don't think we were ready as a country to actually have this discussion. And so, unlike the last cycle of truth, where we were fighting to have the acknowledgment of residential schools taken as truth, I think we've definitely moved forward with this news cycle where we've now come back to talking about these lost children, these unmarked graves. And it shows that Canada is really moving forward in its discussion. We have a long way to go before we reach reconciliation, but we are becoming closer and closer to accepting the truth of what's happened historically.

The 215+ Pledge is really a way for non-Indigenous Canadians to know how to enter into that relationship with Indigenous communities and Indigenous Peoples that live in the same places that they do. That way they're ready to hear our stories. They're ready to understand what they can do in order to help and support us. The 215+ Pledge focused around the five stages of grief, it asks five commitments from them. It asks them to deny the narrative that suggests that this was an isolated event, that these unmarked graves or one-off situations, but part of a broader story across Canada. It asks them to embrace those feelings of being upset and angry at a system that would allow this to happen, to build momentum towards the justice that these children deserve. It asks them to support the search for undocumented gravesites across Canada, asks them to help to reunite families with their range of loved ones that are uncovered in this search. And then the fifth and final thing that we ask non-Indigenous Canadians is to accept the experiences of all those who've been affected by residential schools, to learn about the 215+ Pledge visit 215pledge.ca. You'll have information about the pledge, as well as resources on how to be supported through this process if you're going through grief yourself. And there'll be some suggestions about what you can do right now in order to move things forward in this discussion.