



Statement

June 21, 2023

For Immediate Release

National Indigenous Peoples Day is an occasion to commemorate and celebrate the rich cultural traditions and contributions of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples on whose lands we live, work, learn and play.

It is also a time to remember the past and present pain that forces of colonization have inflicted on Indigenous communities. In this country, there exists a history of harmful legislation, institutions and policies that were intentionally created to assimilate and subjugate Indigenous people, including the *Indian Act*, forcible removal from traditional homelands, Indian Residential Schools and “The Sixties Scoop.” These colonial practices have left lasting and ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities, and their collective pain and grief is real and must be acknowledged and supported so that healing can take place.

This spring marked two years since the recovery by the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc Band of at least 215 children buried in unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Sadly, this was but the first of many such recoveries, and it affirmed what many family members, Elders, Matriarchs and leaders had been saying for generations. With a heavy heart, I would like to remember and pay respects to the children lost and missing in so many communities, while also, holding the knowledge that there are many more Indigenous children and youth who have yet to be found. RCY stands in solidarity and allyship with Indigenous communities,

recognizes the ongoing trauma and grief arising from the loss of their precious children and commits to ongoing advocacy and action towards decolonization and healing.

Despite these atrocities, Indigenous communities have demonstrated incredible courage and resilience in the face of oppression and failed attempts at forcible assimilation. We hear and wish to amplify the powerful voices of children and youth, family members, Elders, Matriarchs and leaders who carry a vision of well-being for their communities and advocate for Indigenous rights and self-determination.

The intergenerational harms caused by historical wounds have contributed to the significant over-involvement of government – particularly the Ministry of Children and Family Development – in the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children, youth and families. Too often, this has resulted in the devastating separation of young people from their communities, culture and sense of belonging. We are committed to supporting Nations as they re-assert jurisdiction over the well-being of their children and families, and we will provide assistance and allyship in any and all ways we can.

At RCY, we have created a multitude of projects aimed at supporting the well-being of Indigenous children and youth – especially those receiving services and in care. For example, earlier this year, our Office launched a microsite about belonging, inspired by our 2021 investigative report, *Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging*. This ongoing work has included the expertise and lived experience of Indigenous community members, experts, and care-experienced youth who have guided us in our journey to better understand how important it is for children in government care

to feel a sense of belonging to family, culture and community in order for them to thrive.

At our Office, we are committed to continuous self-improvement and reflection. This entails educating ourselves on Indigenous cultures, being aware of the impacts of colonialism, and supporting the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice from the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. We continue to support and walk alongside First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous communities as we work to forge a brighter future for this generation and those to come.

Today, I encourage you to join us in recognizing the diverse cultures, visions, contributions, and acts of resilience displayed by First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous Peoples, while also reflecting on our positions in life, and how we may become the allies and supporters that are needed now, and then commit to meaningful action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth