



# OUR HISTORY, OUR STORIES:

PERSONAL NARRATIVES &  
URBAN ABORIGINAL HISTORY  
IN NEW BRUNSWICK

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# OUR HISTORY, OUR STORIES: PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND URBAN ABORIGINAL HISTORY IN NB

**BECAUSE URBAN ABORIGINAL** populations are largely invisible and poorly understood, the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network Atlantic Research Centre's (UAKN Atlantic) Executive Committee commissioned the *Our History, Our Stories* research project. The goal was to produce an accessible urban Aboriginal history for each of the Atlantic Provinces that could be readily shared with community organizations, the education system and all levels of government.

The 2016 census data determined Atlantic Canada to have an Indigenous population of 129,340. Of that population, 20,070 (15.5%) live on-reserve and 109,265 (84.5%) live off-reserve in rural and urban settings. In other words, **in Atlantic Canada five out of six persons who self-identify as Indigenous live off-reserve**. This suite of *Our History, Our Stories* for NB, NS, PEI and NL, combines personal stories with brief historical narratives. Each document also includes a discussion guide. Our hope is that our histories and stories will increase the general public's understanding, recognition and inclusion of urban Aboriginal populations in Atlantic Canada.

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# INTRODUCTION

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**TRADITIONALLY, ABORIGINAL PEOPLE** have used stories to pass down beliefs, traditions and history to future generations. Following this tradition, our purpose in sharing the personal stories of three community members living in urban New Brunswick—Gary Gould, Patsy McKinney and George Fanjoy—is to honour their life experiences and also, importantly, to teach those in the non-Aboriginal community about the history and experiences of the fast-growing urban Aboriginal population.

The following document is a combination of historical data gathered from secondary sources and the personal stories of community members. The personal stories are an integral part of the document as this oral history captures the lived experience of off-reserve people and adds depth to the historical narrative. It also provides an opportunity to place local urban Aboriginal history within the context of the larger, national Aboriginal urban history and experience. The purpose of this project is to create awareness of the growing urban Aboriginal population by offering easy-to-read and accessible resources to community members, teachers, government agencies, researchers and public organizations.

The project coordinator worked collaboratively with three urban Aboriginal community members to create this document for use as an educational resource. The document includes a brief historical narrative that highlights issues of importance to urban Aboriginal persons and includes the personal stories of the community members who not only shared their personal stories during in-person discussions but also offered readings, guidance and suggestions that informed the focus and content of the Aboriginal history chapters included in this document.

The history and personal stories that the average Canadian hears about are mostly from the perspective of Aboriginal people living on reserves. While some of the experiences of Aboriginal people living on-reserve may be similar to those of off-reserve people, some of their experiences can be quite different. In some cases, off-reserve and urban experiences have been shaped by divisive policies.

For others, choosing to live in an urban area is a way to secure more sustainable employment or to provide greater opportunities for themselves and their children.

*“...urban Aboriginal people have, in the province, three paths into modern-day society: those of us who have connections to the tribes here and have evolved totally under the status umbrella, and those who evolved under the non-status umbrella. Then, there’s what I call our non-territorial cousins who’ve come to live here.”*

— Gary

The urban Aboriginal population in New Brunswick includes persons from many different tribes across Canada. Some of these persons have never lived on a reserve; however, the majority of Aboriginal persons living in urban areas in New Brunswick are of Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, or Passamaquoddy ancestry and, similar to other parts of the region, it is highly likely that there are persons living in urban areas and off-reserve that, at some point in time, have lived on-reserve and who consider the reserve their spiritual and cultural home.<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, a history of urban Aboriginal people in New Brunswick would not be complete without an examination of the history of the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy.

In order to trace the growth of the urban and off-reserve population, we must also consider the important ways that history has impacted members of the urban Aboriginal community. To this end, this document pays careful attention to historical events that have shaped the experiences of the urban Aboriginal community, in particular: pre-colonial history, the creation of the reserve system, the Indian Act, and the development of child welfare and education policies.

# EARLY HISTORY AND PRE-CONTACT

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**PRE-CONTACT MI'KMAQ, MALISEET** and Passamaquoddy were hunter-gatherer peoples who were well-adapted to the natural world. They knew how to hunt, fish, and harvest their own food, how to build their own shelters, make their own clothes, and manufacture a wide variety of tools, weapons, and other implements. Extensive knowledge of the natural world was essential to their survival. Aboriginal peoples of the region have been living in their traditional homelands (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and parts of Quebec and Maine) for at least 10,000 years.

In contemporary New Brunswick, the traditional land of the Mi'kmaq is in the eastern part of the province. The Maliseet lived along the St. John River as well as above Lake Témiscouata along the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. Passamaquoddy peoples lived close to the St. Croix River and coastal areas bordering Passamaquoddy Bay.<sup>[2]</sup>

Perhaps the most significant impact on pre-colonial Aboriginal people was early contact between French fishermen and traders, which had started in Acadia by the 1550's.<sup>[3]</sup> Aboriginal peoples in contact with the French adopted European tools and technologies, resulting in their dependence on these tools. Over time, this dependence would decrease traditional ways of living and Aboriginal

autonomy. While this dependency created loyalty to the French—notably as allies against the British—the Mi'kmaq and the Maliseet did not see themselves as inferior to the Europeans.<sup>[4]</sup> Their relationship was reciprocal in nature, as early colonists often married Aboriginal women. Also, the colonists were dependent on Aboriginal people for the fur trade, and for their help in surviving the harsh seasons. Europeans and Aboriginal peoples shared the land, but if any conflict arose over its use, Aboriginal people took precedence due in part to their larger population.<sup>[5]</sup>

By the middle of the 18th century, after years of European conflict, the French lost control of Acadia to the British. The Aboriginal people of the region had become increasingly dependent on European trade goods. During the first half of the 18th century, the British created a number of treaties and agreements to ensure that white settlement would not disrupt where and how Aboriginal people used the land.<sup>[6]</sup> Despite the fact that these treaties and agreements existed, by the beginning of the 19th century and after the end of the American Revolutionary War, the best lands for hunting and fishing that had been promised for Aboriginal use and occupancy were sold or given to British settlers.<sup>[7]</sup>



The first acknowledgement of Aboriginal land boundaries came when the British government began to issue “licenses of occupation” to Aboriginal people in New Brunswick. This meant that the government controlled where Aboriginal people could live, hunt, and fish and was essentially the start of the reserve system. By 1815, Aboriginal people living in what is now known as New Brunswick had to get permission from the British government to live on land that was reserved for them.<sup>[8]</sup> This is not to say that Aboriginal people in the region necessarily settled onto these reserved lands. Many continued to hunt, fish and travel the land like they had for centuries before.<sup>[9]</sup>

As settlers continued to encroach on their traditional lands, using and occupying the land as they always had became more difficult for Aboriginal people. The British government and settlers used the reasoning that if Aboriginal people were not cultivating the land then it was free for settler farming activities. Less land for fishing and hunting meant that the Aboriginal peoples were less able to sustain themselves and subsequently needed help from the government. By the 1840’s, British officials were reporting that they were spending too much money in relief efforts and that Aboriginal peoples should be treated as wards of the state.<sup>[10]</sup>

In many parts of the Atlantic region, reserves were a fair distance from towns and cities, leaving Aboriginal people geographically and culturally isolated from colonial settlers. What is unique about New Brunswick is that many of the reserve communities (there are currently 15 in New Brunswick) were situated in close proximity to larger towns. Karen Bridget Murray argues that the proximity of reserves to larger towns in New Brunswick has shaped a unique history of Aboriginal relationships to urban areas. Murray found that the relationship between Aboriginal people on reserve and urban areas has evolved in four distinct stages. The first stage took place during the pre-Confederation era, a time when colonial officials preferred that Aboriginal people be geographically close to their settlements so that they could better “supervise” Aboriginal activities and deter their nomadic way of life. The second stage took place during the late 1800’s, a time when policy shifted toward a goal of segregation and greater distance between Aboriginal people and cities and towns. The third stage took place after WW II when policy was geared toward an eradication of reserves in order to steer Aboriginal people into the urban labour market. The fourth and current stage is one that Murray describes as a relationship based on constitutional and economic partnerships.<sup>[11]</sup>

# THE PASSAMAQUODDY IN NEW BRUNSWICK AND MAINE

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**THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY** 300 known Passamaquoddy people residing in New Brunswick. They are led by Chief Hugh Akagi who is the great grandson of Passamaquoddy hereditary chief, John Nicholas. Linguistically, the Passamaquoddy language is very close to the Maliseet language—Passamaquoddy and Maliseet speakers can understand each other’s language fairly easily.

Despite their long history in the region, today, the Passamaquoddy are not recognized as an official Indian nation by the Canadian government. The United States government did not recognize the Passamaquoddy until 1975.

In Maine, the affairs of Indigenous populations living on reservations were exclusively and completely administered by the State. Legally, this made it challenging for the Passamaquoddy to lodge land claims against the State. Despite earlier treaties and agreements, in the late 19th century, the Maine Supreme Court held that the Passamaquoddy were not an official Indian tribe and, therefore, had no Aboriginal rights. This left the Passamaquoddy without any official recognition of Aboriginal rights or Indian status in Canada or the US.

In a landmark decision in 1980, the United States courts ruled that the Passamaquoddy were to be federally-recognized as a tribe with official Aboriginal rights. This made way for the Passamaquoddy to launch a land claim for a significant portion of the state of Maine. In 1985, that recognition led to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act which gave the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians an \$81.5 million settlement. Some of the Passamaquoddy in New Brunswick are still receiving some of these settlement benefits today.

*“What I’ve always tried to get across to the non-native people when we speak is that Aboriginal people are all over the province. You’ve got to think about outside of the reserve. Not all Aboriginal people live on the reserve or come from the reserve. Especially now that we’ve had these two pieces of legislation that have reinstated people back into the Federal Indian Act. It is very simple for people to just say all the Indians are from St. Mary’s.”*

— Gary

# PATSY'S STORY

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**PATSY MCKINNEY IS** the Executive Director of Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre located in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Patsy is a long-time advocate for inclusive child welfare policy and the rights for all Aboriginal persons, regardless of where they live. She is a strong believer in the power of education and, working by example, she is teaching the next generation of Aboriginal peoples how to build up their communities.

Patsy has lived in the Fredericton area for about 40 years and has been involved in off-reserve community programming and politics since she was 18 years old. Born into a large family of eight sisters and two brothers, Patsy's entire family, including her mom, her dad and all of her siblings lived with her paternal grandmother. Her grandmother was a Mi'kmaq midwife and medicine woman in the small community of Eel River Bar located in northern New Brunswick. Patsy recalls that as a child, being Aboriginal was something that was better to hide than celebrate.

*"The message was loud and clear as a child ... you are an Indian but better for you if you don't reveal that."*

Unfortunately for Patsy, the burden of being Aboriginal was reinforced when Patsy and her brother were subject to terrible mistreatment at the hands of a racist and intolerant nun during their early years at a Catholic school. Being Aboriginal brought mistreatment, so Patsy would essentially ignore and avoid her Mi'kmaq identity until she reached adulthood.

It wasn't until Patsy's father applied for the family's membership in the New Brunswick Association for Non-Status and Métis (now known as the New Brunswick Aboriginal People's Council) in Fredericton, that Patsy became involved with the Aboriginal community. Membership in the NBAPC gave Patsy the opportunity to become employed by the organization. She was hired to work on a demographic study of the off-reserve population in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. While attending college, Patsy went on to hold two additional summer positions with the Association. During this time, Patsy was exposed to many passionate speakers and rights activists within the off-reserve community. Persons like Gary Gould and Melvin Nash ignited her interest and involvement in off-reserve politics and community issues. Many of Patsy's family members also became involved in the off-reserve community and politics. Some went on to take on leadership roles in the organization, serving on the board of directors and even becoming president of the NBAPC.

Patsy does not believe that her Aboriginal identity is tied in any way to the Indian Act, although, like many Aboriginal persons living off-reserve, the Indian Act legislation has impacted the past and present lives of family members. Patsy's grandmother lost her official Indian status when she married Patsy's non-Indian grandfather. As a result, Patsy's father did not qualify for Indian status until the Indian Act was amended with Bill C-31 in 1985. And for Patsy and her siblings, it wasn't until the Sharon McIvor ruling in 2009 that they had legal authority to apply for official status under the Indian Act. With that ruling, all of Patsy's siblings received their Indian status. Patsy, however, declined the opportunity to apply.

*"Multiple people and events mark our identity and it's problematic ... it's complicated. There are multiple references to our people and we are forced to stand in those identities that are meaningless: on-reserve, off-reserve, status, non-status, treaty, non-treaty. That is not what identity is ... colonization runs deep and for me, it's never been about getting a status card."*

Through her involvement with the Aboriginal community Patsy met her husband and moved just outside of Fredericton, where they raised two children who are now adults. Since moving to the Fredericton area at 18, Patsy has worked for a number of Aboriginal organizations including NBAPC, the Congress of Aboriginal People, and Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation. For many years, Patsy has been the Executive Director of the Under One Sky Aboriginal Head Start. This past year Under One Sky expanded and is now also home to the Under One Sky Friendship Centre. As its Executive Director, Patsy hopes she can make Under One Sky Friendship Centre into what NBAPC was for her: "if we get them young enough, we build responsibility to build up the community."

# POST-CONFEDERATION AND THE INDIAN ACT

**THE CREATION OF** the Indian Act in 1876 would see unprecedented incursions into the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Indian Act has governed every aspect of Aboriginal experience including but not limited to: who was considered an Indian, how one could cease to be an Indian under the law, where Indians could live, what cultural practices could be performed, and how education would be administered. Indian agents enumerated Aboriginal persons living in Aboriginal communities with the purpose of creating a list of all Aboriginal persons. Those on the list would be considered “status Indians” if they were deemed to be “living as an Indian” by a government agent at the time the lists were compiled. The rules and regulations of the Indian Act would thereafter be applied to all status Indians.

Though they were discriminated against in their own country and were not afforded many of the same civil rights enjoyed by other Canadian citizens, many Aboriginal men joined the military to fight in major international conflicts. Sadly, many Aboriginal **veterans** found that when they returned home after fighting for Canada overseas, they were no longer considered Indians. Once a person was absent from the reserve for four years, they lost their Indian status. Further, many Aboriginal soldiers had to become enfranchised in order to meet eligibility requirements for enlistment, which meant that they had to give up their Indian status in order to become Canadian citizens in order to enlist. When they were discharged from the military and returned to their home communities they no longer had Indian status and were ineligible for housing in their own communities. Additionally, Aboriginal veterans did not have access to the same benefits and services that were made available to help non-Aboriginal veterans adapt to civilian life.<sup>[12]</sup>

The Indian Act was designed to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into mainstream Canadian society. Over time, the Indian Act would effectively decrease the number of people with official Indian status by enforcing a number of discriminatory provisions that stripped them of their

registered status. For example, an Aboriginal person would lose official Indian status if they enlisted in the army, received a post-secondary education, or became a doctor or minister. If an Aboriginal woman married a non-Aboriginal man she lost her status and her children would not be eligible for Indian status. This particular section of the Indian Act (12 (1)(b)) would have a lasting impact on the lives of many urban Aboriginal people.

*“There are many different personal circumstances and histories that have contributed to the growth of the urban Aboriginal population in New Brunswick. Certainly, the Indian Act directly impacted the ability of mostly women who married-out and their children to live on-reserve before amendments were passed to stop this in the 1980’s. But for many of these women—and their children—it was too late. The Indian rules made it so they could not reside on the reserve they left, and many didn’t make it back. This is a big factor in the growth of the urban population in New Brunswick, but it isn’t the only one.”*

— Gary

For many Aboriginal people living in urban areas today, this section of the Indian Act gave root to the growth of the urban population by stripping Aboriginal people of their rights and began the tenuous legal conundrum that continues to affect generations of families. A perfect example of this can be found in Gary Gould and Alan Semple’s book, *Our Land the Maritimes*. The authors describe the experience of a non-Aboriginal man and an Aboriginal woman who married in 1881. Upon marriage the woman lost her

Indian status and was pressured by the Band Chief and the Federal Indian agent to move off-reserve. The couple did move off reserve but remained close by and went on to have a large number of children. Because of their proximity to the reserve, the children spent a great deal of time there with family. However, because they were denied status and were not allowed to live on-reserve, they were excluded from band politics and representation. And because they had no status, the federal and provincial government would bear no responsibility for them.<sup>[13]</sup> There are many Aboriginal people living off-reserve and in urban areas today whose personal stories start with their mother and/or grandmother losing Aboriginal status as a result of discriminatory sections in the Indian Act.

Indian Act policies created in 1876 subjected Aboriginal women and their children to generations of discrimination still felt today. Until 1985, the Indian Act defined Indian status only on the basis of paternal lineage—that is, only a male Indian, the wife of a male Indian or a child of a male Indian was eligible for Indian status. If an Indian woman married a non-Indian man, a situation commonly referred to as “marrying-out”, she and the children of the marriage were **denied Indian status**.<sup>[14]</sup> After years of protests and legal battles, in 1985 the Indian Act was finally amended by the passage of **Bill C-31** to remove this discrimination against women.

Serious concerns have been raised among Aboriginal people regarding Bill C-31. For First Nation bands that control their own membership, it allows the restricting of eligibility for certain rights and benefits that had previously been automatic for holders of status cards. And with respect to passing on status to children, in some families, Indian women who lost status through marrying-out before 1985 can pass Indian status on to their children but not to their children’s children—commonly referred to as the “second generation cut-off.” Conversely, male Aboriginal people who married-out before 1985 can pass on status to their children for at least one more generation. Even though in both cases the children have one status Indian parent and one non-Indian parent, eligibility for status continues to depend on the gender of one’s lineage rather than on the lineage itself.<sup>[15]</sup>

**Bill C-3**, introduced in March 2010, was supposed to be the answer to the continued discrimination created by Bill C-31. However, there are issues with this amendment as well because the reinstated status is still discriminatory. Under this bill, grandchildren born before September 4, 1951, who trace their Aboriginal heritage through their maternal parentage are still denied status while those who trace their heritage through their paternal counterparts have ongoing inherited status.<sup>[16]</sup>

Throughout the 20th century, there would be a number of amendments to the Indian Act that, when applied, would restore status lost due to discriminatory provisions; however, despite these amendments, the underlying discrimination remained and the differing privileges and classifications that resulted from the Indian Act continue to divide Aboriginal people. Whether they left for marriage, to fight in the war, or to pursue an education, the Indian Act made it more difficult for those who had left the reserve to return.

*“That must be nice—you don’t have to pay income tax.” Hah! I wish I didn’t. “No, you don’t have to pay property taxes. You got a free house. You got a free this.” Never got anything free. People have that mindset. And a lot of it is based on jealousy. Like since I got reinstated, one of the biggest benefits that I ever had is whenever I go buy a vehicle and we do the paperwork and it goes to the reserve so I don’t have to pay the sales tax on it. But that’s about the only benefit that I’ve ever received.”*

— George

# GARY'S STORY

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**GARY WAS BORN** and raised in the lower St. John River Valley, a proud descendant of the St. John River Indians. His mother was a victim of the Indian Act who lost her status in 1931 because she married a man who was non-Aboriginal. Until he was 15 years old, Gary would often go to the Woodstock reserve and reconnect with all of his family that still lived there. His grandmother was the matriarch and midwife of the reserve and housed an orphanage. Gary grew up seeing all of the special relationships that existed in the old village.

*“Very few people left the reserve for an education in the 1950’s and 60’s. If people left the reserve it was generally to go to the United States. They went across the lines. They joined the military. If I traced my ancestry I have more cousins that were in the US military, marines, army and navy than I could shake a stick at because that was a way out of poverty.”*

Gary was always very aware of the division created by the Indian Act. He has uncles who married non-Aboriginal women and their children had official Indian status, yet Gary’s mother could not pass her status on to her children because of the discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act that prevented Aboriginal women from passing on their status to children with a non-Aboriginal father. Gary said that even though his mother dearly loved all of her family members and they loved her back, the inequality of the Indian Act was a bone of contention among family members. Gary’s mother eventually regained her status, as did Gary.

*“Get rid of the myth that we’re all from a reserve, because we’re not. We may have a connection in the past to a reserve, but many of us have evolved outside of the reserve communities. That doesn’t mean we don’t have relatives in the reserve communities. I have relatives in all the reserve communities along the St. John River Valley ... but see, I don’t consider the reserve my home. I don’t consider the reserve where I hang my Aboriginal hat. I hang my hat on the fact that I’m a descendent of the St. John River Indians.”*

Gary and his wife live in Fredericton and have one adult son. Gary’s son has also been impacted by discriminatory sections of the Indian Act. Like Gary, his son was non-status until the passage of Bill 3-C in 2010, but the status provisions in the bill do not extend to further generations; the grandchildren of not only Gary, but also those of Patsy and George, will not qualify for official Indian status.

*“[They will] be the next generation that I’m gonna have to fight for until we get rid of this damn Indian Act and we get back to traditional membership rules.”*

Gary made Fredericton his home where he has had a long career working on behalf of Aboriginal people in New Brunswick and throughout Canada. Gary has led and been a driving force behind the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council and Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation. He is an accomplished author, advocate, community educator and member of the Order of New Brunswick.

# EDUCATION

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**THE ELIMINATION OF** official Indian status through Indian Act provisions was just one of the ways in which government policies forced Aboriginal people to move from reserve to urban settings. There were other, more overt systems that would further alienate Aboriginal people from their cultures and traditional homelands. The day school and residential school systems had a profound impact on Aboriginal peoples in Canada and in New Brunswick. While there were no residential schools in New Brunswick there were Indian day schools, and Aboriginal children from New Brunswick did attend the Indian residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia.<sup>[17]</sup>

Day schools did not serve Aboriginal children well in New Brunswick. Until 1928, day schools only provided education to students up to grade six. Schools were often severely under-funded and were not operated efficiently. For example, due to a lack of funding for space in Eel Ground, New Brunswick, classes were held at the Chief's home.<sup>[18]</sup> And like residential schools, the curriculum and teachers were working with the goal of separating Aboriginal children from their culture and language. Many day schools closed because they could not afford fuel to heat the space, or because they could not find and keep teachers for lack of attendance. There was very little control or inspection of the schools—in 1935 there was only one inspector for dozens of schools in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.<sup>[19]</sup> It has been argued that the lack of funding or improvement of day schools was part of a plan to force Aboriginal families to “choose” residential school for their children.

In New Brunswick, parents of Aboriginal children challenged the day school system out of concerns of cultural assimilation. In New Brunswick, there were five Mi'kmaq teachers who were highly sought after by Mi'kmaq communities because they conducted their classes in the Mi'kmaq language. Aboriginal parents wanted a culturally specific education for their children. And although there were parents who did wish to send their children to public schools in the province they could not always do so. Some schools in the province did not accept Aboriginal children as students.<sup>[20]</sup> Importantly, for children living off-reserve that did attend public or Catholic schools, racism on the part of teachers and other students was a daily reality. Each person whose story is featured within this document faced mistreatment in various forms during their time in school.



# CHILD WELFARE

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**IN NEW BRUNSWICK**, Canadian child welfare policy has contributed to the separation of Aboriginal children from Aboriginal communities and culture throughout the 20th century. In 1951, the introduction of Section 88 of the Indian Act made it possible for provincial child welfare legislation to be applied on reserve. This resulted in a sharp increase in Aboriginal children on reserve being placed in foster care.<sup>[21]</sup> During the 1960's, Aboriginal children were taken from communities at an alarming rate and raised in non-Aboriginal communities. This is known as the Sixties Scoop. This legislation directly contributed to the loss of Aboriginal culture and language across the country. It is quite likely that it also contributed to the growth of the urban and off-reserve Aboriginal population, as many of those children that were disconnected from their families would not return to reserves. In the 1980's, Aboriginal groups in New Brunswick expressed public dissatisfaction with this system and lobbied for an agreement that would allow New Brunswick reserves to develop and administer their own child welfare policies in compliance with the provincial government. While this was an important step for social autonomy, the agreement generally served only on-reserve children. Current child welfare policy in New Brunswick continues to prevent those without status or those without a band affiliation from receiving culturally specific services equal to those offered on-reserve.

# GEORGE'S STORY

**GEORGE WAS BORN** on Saddle Lake Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan but has resided in New Brunswick for pretty much his whole life. George's parents relocated for employment to Minto, New Brunswick, a small, rural community where he lived most of his youth with his mother, an older sister and an older brother. Because George's family was the only Aboriginal family in the community, his mother—out of fear of racism and hardship—downplayed the family's Aboriginal identity and traditions. George's mother's fears were justified: George and his siblings faced racism and discrimination throughout their time in the public school system, getting into fights and hearing children call their mother names. The fact that George and his siblings excelled at sports and that their grandfather was a prominent and respected figure in the community did give the children some relief from the discrimination, but the struggles of being Aboriginal in a predominantly non-Aboriginal community took an emotional toll.

*“Even though we always self-identified as Indians, my mom didn't want to recognize us as Indians because of all the crap we went through. So we didn't have a lot of the traditional stuff ... my mom kept it away from us to try to keep us shielded from all the bad stuff that was happening. So that's how we got into sports and that's how we adapted.”*

Although most of those who had an influence on George's young life encouraged him to live the “white man's way,” he does recall that as a child the two months spent on his home reserve in Saskatchewan was one of the best times of his life. Spending time with his cousins, practising his traditions and being immersed in his culture

were invaluable to him, but they were experiences he really wouldn't have much of again until, when in high school, he became involved with what was then known as the New Brunswick Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians (now the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council). George says that NBAPC became like a home to him and that the people there became a supportive network, helping him with work placements and with funding for education.

*“I went to the reserve for the first time when I was seven ... I was there for two months. It was the best two months of my life. Very good memories. But I never made it back there again ... I'm a true off-reserve Aboriginal Indian. I got my status back with the Mclvor deal.”*

George currently enjoys a career in government and has a family of his own. George and his wife are raising their daughter in Fredericton where she fully embraces her Aboriginal culture and identity. For George, and especially for his daughter, the fact that St. Mary's reserve is so close to Fredericton is a huge benefit—she has found a supportive community in the youth of this reserve.

George's story illustrates the very real and sometimes overt discrimination that Aboriginal people can experience living off-reserve. It also illustrates the importance of the presence of supportive urban Aboriginal organizations to ensure that Aboriginal people off-reserve have equal opportunities to succeed in an urban life, whether it be through education, employment or cultural programming.

# URBAN AND OFF-RESERVE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

THROUGHOUT THE 20TH century, Aboriginal people living off-reserve or in urban areas did not share the same benefits, rights or political representation as those living on-reserve in New Brunswick. Some of those living off-reserve in the 1960's did not have their status restored and were still considered "unregistered" or "non-status" under the Indian Act. The Indian Act created different categories of Aboriginal people (status and non-status) with different rights afforded to each category, which made political representation and advocacy for the recognition of rights more complicated.<sup>[22]</sup> Until 1970, the Union of New Brunswick Indians (UNBI) represented registered and non-registered Indians. However, in 1971, the UNBI made the decision to only represent those with official Indian status, a move that made more sense to them politically<sup>[23]</sup> as the Canadian government sought to negotiate with only those Aboriginal organizations representing individuals with official status.

*"We were born on the backs of non-status Indian women. That's the message that I always speak. If it hadn't been for our mothers and our grandmothers, the organisation [NBAPC] would never have been born."*

— Gary

As a response to the lack of representation of non-status Aboriginal people in the province, the New Brunswick Association of Non-Status Indians was launched in 1972. The organization was given limited funding for small scale programs such as housing, employment and youth services mostly in the Fredericton area. Over the next few years the organization became the New Brunswick Association for Métis and Non-Status Indians and finally the New

Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council. NBAPC is affiliated with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples which represents over one million Aboriginal persons across Canada living off-reserve. The organization continues to be the representative voice of the off-reserve and urban Aboriginal community in New Brunswick.

*"NBAPC helped me with schooling. They helped me with employment. They helped my daughter with employment. They helped my sister, my brother, my mother. So yeah that was where we went. Because that was the only Aboriginal link that we had ... There's no doubt about that."*

— George

Membership has grown to include Aboriginal persons from all over the province, and social programs continue to be offered. According to the latest Canada Census data, there are nearly 22,000 Aboriginal people living off-reserve and in urban areas in New Brunswick, meaning that 75% of New Brunswick's Aboriginal population currently lives off-reserve<sup>[24]</sup>. A number of organizations are in operation to service the employment, housing, early education and wellness needs of the population in urban areas, especially around Fredericton. Although services available in urban areas are increasing, there are still a number of deficiencies in the inclusiveness and availability of services for urban and non-status Aboriginal people in the province.

# URBAN SUPPORTS IN NEW BRUNSWICK

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**STUDIES ACROSS THE** country show that housing shortages, increased population and the lack of employment on reserves are the most common reasons why Aboriginal people migrate to urban areas. Some urban Aboriginal people return regularly to their reserves while others settle permanently in the cities, and some have never lived on-reserve.

Often, when the general public thinks about Aboriginal peoples they assume that all Aboriginal peoples have the same rights and benefits no matter where they live, but those living off-reserve in many parts of Canada do not share the same rights, nor do they have access to the same services. For decades, the off-reserve community in New Brunswick has worked to build programs and services to support the urban Aboriginal population in the province.

The New Brunswick Aboriginal People's Council represents over 20,000 status and non-status Aboriginal people living off-reserve across New Brunswick. The organization works to protect and defend the rights of off-reserve Aboriginal people in New Brunswick and also works to strengthen the cultural ties and leadership of its members. NBAPC offers many programs and services to its members including housing, employment, and education supports.

Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre is a culturally relevant organization that services off-reserve families in Fredericton. The centre offers families programs and services relating to health and wellness, language revitalization, land-based learning, and cultural and traditional knowledge and practices.

Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation is an organization that provides affordable housing to off-reserve Aboriginal people residing in Fredericton and across New Brunswick. It offers numerous housing programs including rental and home ownership programs to help people of varying income levels.

These are the core organizations servicing the urban Aboriginal community in New Brunswick; however, there are other organizations also doing important work for off-reserve Aboriginal people. These include Gignoo Transition House; Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS); the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI); New Brunswick Aboriginal Workplace Essential Skills (NBAWES); and the Aboriginal Workforce Development Initiative (AWDI). Additionally, the University of New Brunswick's Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre and St. Thomas University's Aboriginal Education Initiative offer invaluable services to Aboriginal people pursuing a postsecondary degree in Fredericton.

# CONCLUSION

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**MANY FACTORS HAVE** contributed to the growth of the urban Aboriginal population over the years. Certainly, the Indian Act policies that worked to remove Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, and later from their reserves, contributed to the movement of some Aboriginal people to urban areas. More recently, studies across the country have shown that housing shortages, increased population and the lack of employment on reserves are the most common reasons why Aboriginal people migrate to urban areas. Some urban Aboriginal people return regularly to their reserves while others settle permanently in the cities. In spite of sometimes challenging conditions on reserves in New Brunswick, there are many Aboriginal people that live off-reserve who still consider the reserve their spiritual and physical home. For them, reserves are a place where traditions and cultures are most visible in their lives. But many others practice their culture, traditions and language off-reserve within the urban Aboriginal community. This is especially true for Aboriginal persons in the province who are not members of a regional band or who do not have strong ties to a New Brunswick reserve.

Urban Aboriginal well-being and success is related to many factors but for some urban Aboriginal people—especially those who may have never lived on a reserve—urban Aboriginal organizations can play a key role in fostering a sense of belonging within the Aboriginal community. Here is where we see the important role of urban Aboriginal organizations; they are safe spaces where cultures, languages and traditions are fostered and celebrated. Not only do they offer the off-reserve community culturally-relevant programs and services, they offer urban Aboriginal people a sense of belonging, a place to be themselves, and a place to call home.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

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1. Thinking about your own community, what urban Aboriginal organizations are you aware of and how can we increase their visibility and better support the work that they are doing?
2. Given the high percentage of Indigenous persons in our province who live off-reserve (74.6%, Census 2016), what are some ways that we can ensure their voices are represented in our communities, our health and education systems, and at all levels of government?
3. Research demonstrates that an urban Indigenous community's identity, cultural needs and well-being are best served when they can access health and social services through a Family Resource Centre or a Friendship Centre. What is it about the way that these organizations provide programs and services that makes them so effective?
4. Thinking about the long history of colonization in this country, from the early settlement of the land by Europeans, to the Indian Act and residential school system, and even including the current child welfare system, in what ways does this history of colonization continue to impact urban Indigenous populations in New Brunswick today?
5. How can the general population, the education system and all levels of government use this *Our History, Our Stories* document to establish and maintain respectful relationships with urban Indigenous populations in New Brunswick?
6. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission says "*reconciliation offers a new way of living together.*" How does better understanding the history of off-reserve Aboriginal people impact your perception of urban Aboriginal people in Canada?

# NOTES

- [1] Data determining the number of people currently living off-reserve/in urban areas who have also lived for a period of time on reserve are non-existent. None of the interviewees for this project have lived on-reserve though the author assumes there is a significant portion of the urban community that have lived on-reserve at some point during their lifetime.
- [2] Karen Bridget Murray, "The Silence of Urban Aboriginal Policy in New Brunswick," in *Urban Aboriginal Policy Making in Canadian Municipalities*, ed. Evelyn J. Peters (Montreal: MQUP, 2011), 57.
- [3] Gary P. Gould and Alan J. Semple, *Our Land: The Maritimes: The Basis of the Indian Claim in the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton: Saint Anne's Point Press, 1980), 1.
- [4] *Ibid.*, 2
- [5] *Ibid.*, 4.
- [6] W.D. Hamilton, "Indian Lands in New Brunswick: The Case of the Little Southwest Reserve," *Acadiensis* 13:2 (1984), 3.
- [7] Gould and Semple, 12.
- [8] *Ibid.*, 30-56.
- [9] L.F.S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian White Relations 1713-1867* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 27.
- [10] Gould and Semple, 56-58.
- [11] Murray, 56- 57.
- [12] R. Scott Sheffield, "Status Indians and Military Service in the World Wars" in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post-Confederation*, 2015, BC Open Text Book Project, last accessed August 26, 2017, <https://opentextbc.ca/postconfederation/chapter/status-indians-and-military-service-in-the-world-wars/>
- [13] Gould and Semple, 95.
- [14] *An act to encourage the gradual civilization of the Indian tribes in this province and to amend the laws respecting Indians, Statute of the Province of Canada*, C. XXVI (assented to 10th June, 1857), Early Canadiana Online, [http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/mtq?doc=9\\_07030](http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/mtq?doc=9_07030) (accessed December 20, 2016).
- [15] Sections 6 (1) and 6(2) of the amended Indian Act outline the new classification and provisions governing Indian Status. Section 10 enables Aboriginal bands to enact their own band membership codes.
- [16] *Ibid.*
- [17] Murray, 65.
- [18] Martha Walls, "Part of the Whole System": Maritime Day and Residential Schooling and Federal Culpability," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XXX, no. 2 (2010): 365.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 365-67.
- [20] *Ibid.*, 367.
- [21] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, (1996).
- [22] Sections 6 (1) and 6(2) of the amended Indian Act outline the new classification and provisions governing Indian Status.
- [23] Murray, 70.
- [24] Statistics Canada. 2018. *New Brunswick [Province] (table). Aboriginal Population Profile. 2016 Census*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-510-X2016001. Ottawa. Released July 18, 2018. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/abpopprof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed February 1, 2019).











