



OUR HISTORY, OUR STORIES:

PERSONAL NARRATIVES &
URBAN ABORIGINAL HISTORY
IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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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.

This research was supported by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network Atlantic Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS WORK WOULD not have been possible without the generosity of the urban Aboriginal community organizations that gave of their time and expertise in helping to shape the narrative of this document. Special thanks to the Mi'Kmaq Family Resource Centre in Charlottetown for all their help and support. The author would also like to express her deepest gratitude to the individual collaborators whose stories are featured within these pages. Their direction, wisdom and openness were invaluable to the creation of this document.

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INTRODUCTION

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 Prince Edward Island—Sharon, Julie and Neil—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 offers 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.

The urban Aboriginal population on Prince Edward Island 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 on the island are of Mi'kmaq 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.^[1] Therefore, a history of urban Aboriginal people on Prince Edward Island would not be complete without an examination of Mi'kmaq traditional lifestyle and culture.

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: MI'KMAQ

THE ORIGINAL INHABITANTS of Prince Edward Island were the Mi'kmaq, who called the island Epekwitk which means “resting on the waves”. The traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq, known as Mi'kma'ki, consists of all of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick (north of the Saint John River), the Gaspé Peninsula, part of the state of Maine and part of Newfoundland. The presence of the Mi'kmaq goes back more than 11,000 years.^[2] For millennia, the Mi'kmaq have referred to themselves as L'Nu or “the people”.^[3]

Mi'kmaq oral tradition tells the story of Kluskap—a Mi'kmaq hero who placed the island on the gentle waters in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Kluskap fell asleep on the shores of Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island) and woke a year later with the conviction to protect the integrity of the quiet island. He then devoted his life to that task.

Pre-contact evidence shows that the Mi'kmaq moved according to the seasons. They spent summers on the coast and winters inland. The Mi'kmaq relied on all available resources, including shellfish, sea mammals and land animals for clothing, food, tools and dwellings. They also used timber for canoes, snowshoes and shelters.

Mi'kmaq settlements could be individual or multi-family households. Communities were connected by alliance and kinship. Historically, the Mi'kmaq formed a tribal network of related bands and, to some extent, Mi'kmaq identity is still determined by band affiliation.^[4] The Mi'kmaq Grand Council was the traditional government of the Mi'kmaq people and was created before the arrival of the Europeans. The council still exists today and advocates for the preservation and celebration of Mi'kmaq language, culture and spirituality. The Grand Council has members from across all districts of Mi'kma'ki.

One of the foundations of traditional Mi'kmaq spirituality is the belief that all of creation is imbued with a spiritual force called mntu. The greatest spirit force is the sun, which the Mi'kmaq saluted at its rising and setting. Mi'kmaq people also believed in shamanism and sought the help of shamans during times of sickness.^[5] However, after the arrival of the Europeans, particularly when the French arrived in the 1600's, there was an intense conversion to Catholicism. And while Catholicism became the predominant religion of the Mi'kmaq, there was, and still remains, an intermingling of Mi'kmaq customs and Catholicism in religious ceremonies.^[6]

Like many Aboriginal people, the traditional Mi'kmaq were intrinsically connected to art and music. Traditional chanting and drumming are still popular today and the Mi'kmaq are still expert quill workers, basket weavers and leather workers. Powwows are an important part of Mi'kmaq cultural celebration and take place all over Mi'kma'ki in the warmer months.^[7]

PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY

IT IS ESTIMATED that the Mi'kmaq population in Atlantic Canada was roughly 15,000 before the arrival of the Europeans.^[8] Due to living on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, the Mi'kmaq were the first of many Aboriginal groups in North America to have contact with Europeans. This would prove to be disastrous. Estimates indicate that between 50 and 90 percent of the Mi'kmaq population was lost due to European diseases for which they had no immunity.^[9] Not only was the arrival of the Europeans devastating to the Mi'kmaq population, it was also devastating to Mi'kmaq society.

Though the depopulation that occurred with first contact was significant for the Mi'kmaq, until the early 1800's their population likely outnumbered that of the colonists. The Mi'kmaq made their own decisions and were not the subjects of any ruling power; however, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the Mi'kmaq did ally themselves with the French for a number of reasons. The Mi'kmaq found that the French showed more respect for their Chiefs and social values than the British, and by the 18th century many of the Mi'kmaq Chiefs were participating in annual gift giving with the French.^[10] The Mi'kmaq and the French shared a common religion in Catholicism, and the Mi'kmaq sometimes intermarried with the French and Acadians. During the 18th century the Mi'kmaq found that they were forced to take up arms against the British to defend their traditional territory.^[11]

The British gained control over the territory during the mid-18th century and, in 1758, deported thousands of Acadians from Prince Edwards Island. The Mi'kmaq never ceded any land to the British, but they did sign a number of treaties over the course of the 18th century focused on peace and friendship. The treaties allowed for full access to their fishing and hunting grounds, ensuring, on paper at least, that the Mi'kmaq could continue to live as they had traditionally.^[12] However, as more British and Irish settled on Prince Edward Island, the land became increasingly occupied and farmed. There was far less land for the Mi'kmaq to hunt and fish, and the treaties were not upheld or seen as important by the newcomers. By the 1860's the Mi'kmaq were impoverished and seriously outnumbered; there were about 250 Mi'kmaq and 94,000 settlers on Prince Edward Island at this time.^[13]

“Left without space they could legally claim as their own, the dispossessed Mi'kmaq had become squatters on their own land and poachers of their own game. Earlier devastated by war and diseases, they were now threatened with starvation. Whatever their misgivings, they were forced to humiliate themselves and petition the British colonial administration for relief. Moreover, they were told to apply for parcels of the rapidly shrinking amount of available Crown land. Without an official permit, they could not reside on the lands that they had occupied since time immemorial.”^[14]

SHARON'S STORY

SHARON WAS BORN in Ontario, and most of her childhood was spent in foster care in downtown Toronto. Until she was five years old, Sharon lived with her father, but when she reached school-age, her father, a travelling amusement park worker, placed her into care. During her childhood Sharon continued to have visits with her father when he was in town and was never put up for adoption. Sharon's mother was Ojibwe, but Sharon says she never knew the native part of her ancestry. When she was teased in school for being Aboriginal, Sharon's dad instructed her to pretend she was part Hawaiian or Latin American, anything other than what she really was.

Sharon remained in foster care until she was sixteen. She married a man from Prince Edward Island and attended college in Toronto. The couple moved to Prince Edward Island in the 1970's where they have lived ever since. Sharon and her husband went on to have three children.

Over the years, Sharon has had a changing and sometimes challenging relationship with her Aboriginal identity. As a child, she was told to pretend not to be Aboriginal, and until 1985, Sharon was ineligible for registered status under the Indian Act, which made her feel some hostility towards the Aboriginal community. She describes the situation as being in a kind of identity limbo: "Indians don't want you and the whites don't want you. You are in no man's land."

In her early years on Prince Edward Island Sharon was successful in her career but felt somewhat unfulfilled. Soon a chance opportunity came along—to work on a study focusing on Aboriginal women and drug and alcohol use. This would be her first experience working within the Aboriginal community. During her career, Sharon worked with the Status of Women and the Native Women's Association, and she eventually accepted the position of Executive Director with the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre in Charlottetown—a position she has held for the past 25 years. For Sharon, working with Aboriginal families definitely feels like it was meant to be. "I'm here because I truly love the community. They are wonderful, worthwhile people."

CREATION OF RESERVES ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

PRIOR TO COLONIAL settlement, the Mi'kmaq on Prince Edward Island occupied the island in its entirety, but some areas were of particular importance for sustenance and tradition, notably the Malpeque Bay area and areas around Morell and Rocky Point. Between 1870 and 1913, Lennox Island, Morell, Rocky Point and Scotchfort were designated as reserves for the Mi'kmaq. Currently, these reserves have been grouped into two First Nations: Lennox Island and Abegweit (made up of Morell, Scotchfort and Rocky Point reserves).^[15] The Crown land that was reserved for Mi'kmaq use and occupation was small and did not allow for any significant mobility, but these reserves had the unintended benefit of providing buffers against some of the impacts of settler society. They became bases of cultural resistance where the Mi'kmaq could hold on to their language, spiritual beliefs and elements of their dress and family structure.^[16]

In 1867, Prince Edward Island became a province within the new Canadian Confederation and by 1873 responsibility for the Mi'kmaq had passed to Ottawa. The Mi'kmaq resisted the new jurisdictional pressures to be confined to these small parcels of land and maintained that all of the land on the island still belonged to them. This is demonstrated by the fifty Mi'kmaq campsites scattered across the island at the time of confederation.^[17] However, over the ensuing decades, land and resources became harder and harder to access and the Mi'kmaq on the island descended into deeper poverty.

“Native people lost their land, and it’s challenging for those living in urban areas who don’t know how to create their own place within a city. It’s important for them to have places to get together because being together is how we celebrate our culture.”

— Sharon

JULIE'S STORY

JULIE PELLISIER-LUSH WAS born on Prince Edward Island but lived a significant portion of her life in different parts of Canada. Julie's mother was a Mi'kmaq woman from Lennox Island First Nation, but when she married Julie's dad she lost her status because he was non-Aboriginal. Within weeks of their marriage, Julie's mother received notice that her status card would soon be null and void. Even though she lost her status, Julie's mother and young family continued to live on-reserve, but when her mother became seriously ill, the family moved off-reserve out of fear they would not have any long-term, on-reserve housing. Tragically, about a year after moving off-reserve, Julie's mom passed away. Julie was about three years old. Julie's dad relocated with the children to Ontario where he went to school to train as a Minister. The family eventually settled in Manitoba—where Julie lived for 26 years.

By the time Julie's oldest son was 15 years old, Julie and her husband had made the decision to move back to Prince Edward Island. Raising kids in Winnipeg was challenging, and although Julie maintained a structured and warm family environment, the city was "not without a shortage of bad influences." Some of her oldest son's peers were into gang activity and the city just didn't feel safe. Julie says moving may have saved her children's lives and feels that Prince Edward Island was a good choice for raising kids.

For Julie, coming home wasn't as easy as simply settling onto Lennox Island with her mother's family. Julie's siblings had faced some seriously hard times over the years and her father was worried about Julie being affected by family issues. Since Julie had spent so much time away from the island, there were community members who viewed her with some wariness, but Julie's sister was Chief of Lennox Island First Nation and for this reason Julie believes she had an easier time being accepted back into the community. Julie did spend time on Lennox Island reacquainting with family but she ended up settling in Charlottetown with her husband and children.

"Here I come back into the picture and they had never known me, especially the younger ones, and they wouldn't have known my mother ... so there was tension."

Julie has worked within the Aboriginal community in many roles including outreach, administration, creative arts, and with youth and families. She is also an actor, poet and the author of *My Mi'kmaq Mother*, a beautiful collection of stories that explore her life experiences and memories of her mother.

Currently, Julie is working with the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre in Charlottetown administering programs and projects and providing support to Aboriginal families. Personally and professionally, Julie has created a life celebrating the culture and nurturing the health of Aboriginal families.

"We are all connected, but being off-reserve is isolating. You don't have your auntie next door, your grandmother, mom and dad ... and if you're talking about rural PEI it's even more of a factor, especially if people don't have their license or access to transportation. One of the things we do with our programs is we make sure [transportation] is not an issue. We will help people come if they want to access services."

POST-CONFEDERATION AND THE INDIAN ACT

THE INDIAN ACT was designed to assimilate Aboriginal people 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. An Aboriginal person would lose official Indian status if they enlisted in the army, received a post-secondary education, or became a doctor or a 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 (12-1b) would have a lasting impact on the lives of many urban Aboriginal people.

The creation of the Indian Act and its discriminatory provisions has directly contributed to the increase in the numbers of Aboriginal persons moving off-reserve and to cities. Until 1985, the Indian Act defined Indian status only on the basis of paternal lineage—that is, only along male Indian bloodlines. The wife of a male Indian or a child of a male Indian was considered a status Indian. Conversely, if an Indian woman married a non-Indian man (commonly referred to as marrying-out), she and the children of the marriage were **denied Indian status**.^[18] For a century, Indian Act rules stripped Aboriginal women and their children of their status as Indians under the law. As non-status Indians, these women did not qualify for on-reserve housing and were often left with no choice but to live off-reserve and in urban areas away from their families and support systems. Indian Act policies created in 1876 have subjected Aboriginal women and their children to generations of discrimination, the repercussions of which are still keenly felt today despite the fact that in 1985 the Indian Act was amended, by the passage of **Bill C-31**, to remove the act's discriminatory provisions 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.” Meanwhile their brothers, who may also have married-out before 1985, can pass on status to their children for at least one more generation, even though the children of the sister and the children of the brother all have one status Indian parent and one non-Indian parent.^[19]

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.^[20]

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 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. Almost half of all eligible Aboriginal men on Prince Edward Island enlisted to serve in WWI. Thirty-four men

from Lennox Island enlisted to serve in WWII and seven served in the Korean War.^{[21][22]} 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. 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.^[23]

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.

EDUCATION

ONE OF THE most visible symbols of cultural repression was the creation of residential schools for Aboriginal children. There were no residential schools in Prince Edward Island. The nearest was the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, and although the Lennox Island reserve did have a day school, over the course of its operation, the Shubenacadie school had dozens of island children in attendance.^[24]

Part of the reason why Aboriginal children from Lennox Island attended the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie was because of the poor quality of the curriculum and teachers at their reserve school. In 1938, 23 members of Lennox Island reserve, concerned about the poor quality of teachers at their school, actually petitioned the Department of Indian Affairs to have their children sent to the school in Shubenacadie. They couldn't possibly have foreseen or imagined the abuses that their children would face as a result.^[25] In 1945, the PEI Indian Superintendent reported that approximately twenty students from Lennox Island were attending Shubenacadie "that might well be going to our own school on the Reserve where there is accommodation for them."^[26] The enrollment of these children at the residential school illustrated the significant and ongoing issues with the day school system and, as

Martha Walls has said, "was by no means an endorsement of Shubenacadie's curriculum, policies or staff." Walls also writes that "these enrollments illustrate both Ottawa's utter failure to provide Aboriginal people the community-based educational opportunities for which it was responsible, and also the subtlety of its coercive power."^[27] The inter-generational trauma of the residential schools can still be felt today within the Aboriginal community on Prince Edward Island. Currently there are 26 residential school survivors living throughout the island.^[28]

Unfortunately, education continues to be a source of tension for those living both on and off-reserve in PEI. Neil Forbes, Education Director for Lennox Island First Nation, reports that there are jurisdictional disputes regarding what level of government should be responsible for First Nations education in Canada. Regarding off-reserve Aboriginal students, Forbes asserts that greater supports are needed. Currently, only Aboriginal children who reside on-reserve are eligible to receive federal educational support provided through their First Nation band. The same problem exists when it comes to postsecondary education. As a result, off-reserve children and students are often at a significant disadvantage when it comes to accessing education and supports.

NEIL'S STORY

NEIL GREW UP in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, and was raised by his mother and surrounded by his mother's side of the family. Neil didn't spend much time with his father—a Cree member of Saddle Lake—whom his mother had met while teaching in Northern Alberta. Though Neil spent some time as a child in his father's community, he and his mother returned permanently to Prince Edward Island when he was an infant. Neil says growing up he identified with his mother's non-Aboriginal side of the family and because he doesn't necessarily look Aboriginal in the context of PEI, he has "received the benefits of white, male privilege." Neil also understands his path is somewhat different from other Aboriginal persons who have had to fight for recognition under the Indian Act. As a child born prior to 1985, to an Aboriginal male with status, Neil's father automatically passed his status on to him, but Neil stresses that "it's a completely different situation for native women ... the legislation is sexist."

Neil's outlook on his own Aboriginal identity has evolved over time. In high school, he didn't take his Aboriginal identity seriously; however, when he received funding for university from his band, it forced him to acknowledge his identity in the context of Aboriginal rights and benefits. While attending university at St. Francis Xavier, Neil began to tutor Aboriginal kids in the Pictou County reserve. This was the first time Neil had spent time on a reserve and remembers, "not feeling home but feeling a connection." After taking a full-year course in Inuit history during his Bachelor of Education degree, Neil completed his month-long teaching practicum in Pangnirtung, Nunavut. At this point, Neil recalls feeling "a real connection." Neil returned to take a summer job with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island, which turned into a teaching position at John J. Sark Memorial School on Lennox Island. Seven years ago he began his current position as Education Director with Lennox Island First Nation. In his work he confidently and easily bridges the gap between Aboriginal students and government and academic agencies to secure post-secondary educational opportunities for band members.

Working within the on-reserve community for the past decade while living off-reserve gives Neil a unique perspective on what it means to be Aboriginal in Canada. Over the years, Neil has cultivated interests outside the mainstream—which, combined with an upbringing where he identified with the non-Aboriginal community, has left him feeling slightly disengaged from Aboriginal identity both on and off-reserve. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that Neil isn't passionate about identifying and advocating for the supports that are needed for the Aboriginal community to thrive. Neil's position as Education Director allows him to witness first-hand the federally funded on-reserve deficiencies and the lack of public school supports for off-reserve Aboriginal community members.

“No level of government wants to take any responsibility for Aboriginal education. Educational support for kids off-reserve is lacking.”

Neil also feels that non-Aboriginal students in PEI are painfully unaware of Mi'kmaq history. Speaking about an informal study conducted at the University of Prince Edward Island, Neil says “[the study] shows how little PEI students in Prince Edward Island know about the Mi'kmaq in Prince Edward Island.”

“In this age of liberalism we are failing our communities because they don't know their history or even that they are studying on unceded Mi'kmaq territory.”

Neil believes that there is real value in the increasing numbers of Aboriginal role models on social media who have a large following of Aboriginal youth. In this age where social media reigns, there is a huge benefit for kids to have access to Aboriginal youth on YouTube and Facebook who have a positive outlook, who are finding new ways to teach Indigenous languages and who are showing other kids what's possible for their futures.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS IN THE URBAN AND OFF-RESERVE ENVIRONMENT

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 when they are young. Some urban Aboriginal people return regularly to their reserves while others settle permanently in the cities. 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. Prince Edwards Island is no exception. Aboriginal persons living off-reserve and in urban areas no longer receive a tax exemption for point-of-purchase sales at certain stores now that the HST has replaced the PST/GST system. To offset this loss, members of both Abegweit and Lennox Island bands who live on reserve receive a rebate based on the number of family members—no such rebate is given to those living off-reserve.

“It used to be you could use your status card to go purchase a big item at certain stores in Charlottetown. It didn’t matter where you lived. Now it’s where you live that gives you access. Not only that, people on reserve get the bonus of HST [rebate] cheques every few months.”

— Julie

Elders who live off-reserve and in urban areas also face additional challenges compared to those living on-reserve. Health services are often available on-reserve or are paid for by the band for those living there but Elders living off-reserve or in urban areas can’t generally access these services. Sadly, some of these Elders living off-reserve and in urban areas are residential school survivors and are unable to receive culturally sensitive care and services.

“If an Elder is on-reserve they have transportation picking them up once a week for an Elder’s lunch. Off-reserve, it’s almost a completely different way of experiencing being elderly.”

— Julie

Those who work on the front lines of urban/off-reserve social service delivery report that supports are lacking for those children at risk of apprehension by child protective services. While these extra supports exist for children who normally reside on-reserve, children who live off-reserve and children who belong to a band from outside of PEI do not qualify for culturally specific care and early intervention programs.

Social service workers in urban areas are pleased that there are a variety of services offered on the reserves to band members, but many of those front-line workers believe that all Aboriginal people living on Prince Edward Island should be able to access those services. Aboriginal people living in Charlottetown are only 30 minutes away from the reserve at Scotchfort and could greatly benefit from being able to access the diabetes services, screening clinics, foot care and Aboriginal addiction services, which are not available in Charlottetown.

“There are all of these dividing lines that can be very isolating, discriminatory almost, amongst our own community members that shouldn’t be in place. Maybe it should be that if you are a native person, you can access Aboriginal-specific services.”

— Sharon

Successful urban Aboriginal life is related to many factors, but for some urban Aboriginal persons—especially those who may have never lived on a reserve—it is the urban Aboriginal support organizations that play a key role in fostering a sense of identity and a sense of belonging. They provide safe spaces where cultures, languages and traditions are celebrated. On Prince Edward Island there is a number of organizations serving the off-reserve community.

The Mi’kmaq Family Resource Centre in Charlottetown has been operating for more than 25 years. The centre provides programs and services to Aboriginal children and their families in areas of food security, parenting supports, play-based learning for children and other cultural and community supports and events. In addition, the centre operates an Aboriginal Head Start, which is an early learning program for pre-kindergarten Aboriginal children. The Family Resource Centre is also an informal community gathering place for Elders and provides transportation for those who need to access services. Although their mandate is to serve children and families, the staff at the centre will do their best to help any community member in need.

The Native Council of Prince Edward Island (NCPEI) provides political advocacy, programs and services to the off-reserve and urban community. The council was

started in 1973 as a local branch of the New Brunswick and PEI Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians, but as membership grew on the island, the group became an independent association and by 1978 was known as the Native Council of Prince Edward Island. Until the creation of the Mi’kmaq Confederacy in 2002, NCPEI was the only representative voice of the off-reserve and non-status community in Prince Edward Island. The council provides services and programs including supports for post-secondary education, fisheries management/programs and health and wellness initiatives. Over the years the council has been a space for the off-reserve/urban community to celebrate culture and connect with other community members.

The Mi’kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI) is mandated to advance Aboriginal rights and increase capacity with the First Nations on Prince Edwards Island. While their primary focus is to support and advance the Mi’kmaq First Nations, MCPEI also provides some services and programs that can be accessed by any Aboriginal person on Prince Edwards Island, regardless of their band affiliation or whether they live on or off-reserve.

The Native Women’s Association of Prince Edward Island has its main office on Lennox Island First Nation but the organization does offer some programming in off-reserve and urban settings. Generally, the Association partners with other organizations off-reserve to deliver a specific program or service for a limited duration.

The service delivery landscape on Prince Edward Island is ever-evolving. Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people continue to migrate from the reserves to urban centres, but unfortunately funding levels for the urban Aboriginal service organizations remain the same or have even decreased. Yet through it all, they continue to offer essential social services, act as a political voice, and provide physical places where Aboriginal cultures and languages are practiced and celebrated. The fact that many of these organizations continue to grow and thrive despite the challenges, is perhaps the greatest testament to the strength and passion of the individuals and teams who run these urban Aboriginal organizations.

CONCLUSION

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 when they are young. Some urban Aboriginal people return regularly to their reserves while others settle permanently in the cities. In spite of sometimes challenging conditions on reserves on Prince Edward Island, 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 Prince Edward Island 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

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 (80.5%, 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 island 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 on PEI 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 on PEI?
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] "Prince Edward Island," AboriginalCanada.ca, last accessed August 26, 2017, <https://aboriginalcanada.ca/en/regions/prince-edward-island/>

[3] Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth Sawtell Wallis, *Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 15.

[4] Harald E. Prins, *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation and Cultural Survival*, (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 11.

[5] *Ibid.*, 71.

[6] "Mi'kmaq," Canadian Encyclopedia Online, last accessed August 26, 2017, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/micmac-mikmaq/>

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Prins, 27.

[9] Jesse Francis and A.J.B Johnston, *Ni'n na L'Nu*, (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2013), 48.

[10] John Reid, *Nova Scotia: A Pocket History*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 23.

[11] Francis and Johnston, 50.

[12] Prins, 140-145.

[13] *Ibid.*, 164.

[14] *Ibid.*, 166.

[15] "How Reservations are Formed", Native Traditions By Circle of Friends online, Ashley Jadis, last accessed August 26, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061216083940/>

[16] Prins, 167.

[17] L.F.S Upton, "Indians and Islanders: The Micmac in Colonial Prince Edward Island", *Acadiensis* 6, 1 (Autumn 1976): 41-42. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/Acadiensis/article/viewFile/11421/12171>

[18] *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 (accessed December 20, 2016).

[19] 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.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] "Aboriginal People in the Canadian Military," National Defense and the Canadian Forces Website. Government of Canada, last accessed August 26, 2017, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/pub/boo-bro/abo-aut/chapter-chapitre-05-eng.asp>

[22] "Mi'kmaq Warriors (Sma'knisk): The Supreme Sacrifice, Kwimu Messenger: The Voice of the Island Mi'kmaq, December 6, 2010, 6. http://www.mcpei.ca/files/Kwimu%20Nov_Dec%202010%20Updatedb.pdf

[23] 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/>

[24] 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): 372.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] "How One Residential School Survivor Hopes a New School Course will Build Compassion," Laura Chapin, CBC News Online: Prince Edward Island, May 17, 2016, last accessed August 26th, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/p-e-i-residential-school-course-1.3585543>

