

Transcript - Meeting Place Youth Conference - Youth Voices of Canadian Roots Exchange

**Featuring: 'Today I'm Going to Try and Change the World'
by Johnny Reid**

>> My name's Lacey Williams. I'm originally from Victoria, BC and I moved here a couple years ago to Toronto for school to do my Masters of Urban Planning. So I'd like to begin... I'm here with open eyes, open ears, and open mind, and open heart. Although there's no way I can possibly relate to what happened to the first Indigenous peoples in the residential school system, I do feel pain. I feel guilty for the ignorance that continues to exist in Canada, even amongst my friends as non-Aboriginal peoples.

>> My name is Patrick Ethernton, Jr. I'm from Moose Factory, Ontario. And I actually walked here from North Bay, Ontario. And the reason I walked is I want to raise more awareness about the impacts of residential schools.

>> When I was 14 I started relearning Ojibway and Anishinaabemowin in my language. And the people that I learned from were survivors of residential schools. And those survivors, who had went through fairly difficult circumstances, had maintained their language. And I always remember the story of one of my teachers telling me that she used to lie in her bed at night and whisper to herself in Anishinaabemowin and in her language, and conjugate verbs so that she could remember -- so she could remember her language and that she would be able to speak it when she went back.

>> The young ones, they're the ones that are going to stop this. They're the ones that are going to make residential legacy a thing of the past. But it's up to us to teach them that; to educate them.

>> I hope to gain a better understanding of what my ancestors and what members of my family have gone through, because this isn't something that they were ever willing to talk about when they were alive. It's something that was, kind of, not allowed to be talk about. And just something that was swept under the rug.

>> Sometimes the biggest thing that goes missing is that listening piece...that people aren't heard or they don't feel heard. And so if the little that we can do is, you know, help them feel heard and then take their stories back to our own communities, then that's what I'd like to do as a youth. Yeah.

>> At first when something bad happens to you, such as, you know, some of the abuses and trauma that stem from residential schools, that you're a victim. And after a while you start to kind of heal a little bit and you become a survivor. But then when you're able to speak about some of the things that you've been through in a positive way to give information...you're something called an "Okichitaw." Okichitaw means warrior.

>> When I speak that language, when I use the words that they've given me, I like to think that it honours...it honours that spirit of strength and honours that spirit of courage that let them keep that language.

>> To walk across the country to raise more awareness about residential schools...I think that in itself is a pretty good way to show my respect for them...to raise more awareness about what happened. Because when I'm walking, some people come along and they don't even know about residential schools.

>> There's a responsibility as a Canadian to understand what my ancestors did. And especially as a young Canadian to change the shape of the place that I live in. And to change the relationships -- change our relationships to each other, change our relationships to the land...change our relationships to our past. And today I'm here to learn from my elders, to learn from my leaders about their experiences and the path that they've walked. And to learn a bit about how I can make my life and make the lives of those around me a little bit better.

>> What an honour it is to have someone like them in my life. To do what they have done and to go through what they have... Even if they thought that they were so, you know...like, so hurt, so not a good role model...that they got through it. They pushed themselves. And that to us is just a message saying that we can do -- we can do stuff. We can change, like, our future. That's what I would say. Yeah.

>> My goal here is to learn about the layered and complex histories of Canada, to support and embrace these cultures, and to share the historic truths to anyone I can. I feel honoured to be a part of this reconciliation process. Thank you for welcoming me here without judgement.

[Music]

Today I'm gonna try to change the world
Yeah, today I'm gonna try and change the world
Gonna take it one day at a time.
I made my resolution
I've opened up my eyes
Today I'm gonna try and change the world.