

## Land Acknowledgement

Setting: A benefit dinner for an educational institution

As we gather together this evening, it is important for us to address the significance of the territory we are on and what that means to each of us. This land is the land that many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples call home and have for thousands of years. What we know today as Toronto, is a city prized for its diversity and integral to that diversity is the rich Indigenous history that this land holds.

The land we are on is the traditional territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. As we reflect on that fact, let us remember “the land is the keeper of stories (Settlement.org, 2023).” Those who are non-Indigenous cannot be ignorant to the reality that these stories include the horrific mistreatment of Indigenous peoples originally by settlers and continuously by the Canadian government. One example is that “between 1883 and 1996, up to 150,000 Indigenous children were separated from their families, often by force, and sent to government-funded, church-run schools (Murray, 2019).”

All those in attendance tonight can surely agree that education should be an equalizer in society. However, “residential schools were mechanisms used in efforts to crush Indigenous Peoples’ resistance (Murray, 2019).” With this in mind, many policy makers have embraced the concept of resilience in an effort to acknowledge the atrocities Indigenous peoples have suffered. In the words of Vinita Srivastava and guests of her podcast entitled ‘Don’t Call Me Resilient’, the biases of ‘strong communities’ undermines the need to find lasting solutions (Toronto.com, 2024). It allows for the belief that the system can remain the same. The implication is that the onus belongs to the strength of the community to rise above, in turn absolving others of their responsibility to make changes. “More than two-thirds of Canadians surveyed in June 2021, said they knew little or nothing about the residential school system (The Lancet, 2021).”

One of many responsibilities non-Indigenous people have is to embrace awareness and the discomfort that this awareness brings with it. Education is key and it’s what brings us together tonight. Throughout my research for this land acknowledgement, the power of the collective kept coming up - in order to unitedly promote “compassion, understanding and advocacy (The Lancet, 2021).” True cohesion and being of one mind is not about being the same but honoring our differences.

Those of us who are non-Indigenous can adopt the Haudenosaunee teachings of a Good Mind – the concept of interacting with people and the earth with pure thoughts and intentions, including being grateful for the land we are on (Martin, 2024). Always respecting that the land is the “keeper of stories” and each one of us carries the responsibility to acknowledge that the “past is not the past when it shapes the present so profoundly (The Lancet, 2021).” Let each of us leave here tonight; asking ourselves “What can I do to contribute to awareness and positive changes for the future?”

Sources:

The Lancet, “The past is not the past for Canada’s Indigenous Peoples,” The Lancet, Volume 397, 2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01432-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01432-X/fulltext).

Michael Martin, “Creating a ‘Good Mind’: The Power of Giving Thanks,” TEDxBuffalo, 2024, [ganondagan.org](http://ganondagan.org).

Karen Bridget Murray, “Canada’s residential school history includes state-sanctioned violence,” York University, 2019, [yorku.ca](http://yorku.ca).

Toronto.com, “Indigenous podcasts to listen to for National Day for Truth and Reconciliation,” Toronto.com, 2024, [Toronto.com](http://Toronto.com).

Settlement.org, “Indigenous Peoples in Toronto,” Settlement.org, 2023, [settlement.org](http://settlement.org).

Toronto.ca, “Land Acknowledgement,” City of Toronto, 2025, [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca).