

# Professional Help: Survival a testament to unimaginable strength



By Michael Pond, Special to the Sun June 24, 2013

Friday, June 21, was National Aboriginal Day, a day to honour our First Nations citizens. But too often instead of honour, they get disrespect. When people find out I see a lot of First Nations clients, I still get asked, “why can’t they get their act together?” This is my answer.

I see a young client who is not doing well in school. He gets himself out the door every morning, some days with breakfast, most not. All the adults in his house are still sleeping, because they are up all night.

They have nightmares or insomnia and can’t sleep. Or they drink and fight all night. No one helps him with homework, because he’s progressed past what they know.

He tells me, “I’m tired of living in constant chaos.”

Every adult in that house went to an Indian residential school.

It’s hard to grasp the degree and horror of systemic abuse of children in residential schools. My clients have revealed abuse that sickens me. We all know how a warm, nurturing environment in the first six years of life is critical for humans to flourish. Seven generations of First Nations have been robbed of that experience.

They were routinely beaten, forced to speak another language, not cared for when they were sick and worst of all, sexually abused sometimes for years.

If you grew up in this environment, how would you cope? If your mother grew up in that environment, what kind of mother might she be? What about if your grandmother did too?

The result? Misery statistics. A relatively small group of our population represents a very high percentage of those who are in foster care, incarcerated, involved in crime, live below the poverty level, have serious mental health issues, suffer addictions and drop out of school.

That First Nations people have survived at all is testament to an unimaginable strength. First Nations are getting their act together, mostly due to their own initiative, but there is no quick fix.

The damage was done over decades and it will take decades to make it right. There are encouraging signs:

- A growing middle class in First Nations communities. Communities thrive when a middle class thrives.
- Idle No More. A well-organized grassroots protest that made headlines.
- B.C. now has a First Nations Early Childhood Development network. The nations themselves have made investment in early childhood a priority, incorporating First Nations culture.
- And soon, First Nations will administer their own health care in B.C., with culture and beliefs built into healing. First Nations will administer their own multimillion-dollar health budget.

No doubt cynics will say corrupt leaders will squander the money or use it to self-aggrandize. And maybe some will. Every form of governance is open to abuse. Look no further than the Senate.

When it comes to understanding the reality of life as a First Nations citizen, I think many of us could use an attitude adjustment.

*Michael Pond is a North Vancouver psychotherapist and a recovered alcoholic. See [michaelpond.ca](http://michaelpond.ca).*

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

Read more:

<http://www.vancouversun.com/business/Professional+Help+Survival+testament+unimaginable+strength/8572402/story.html#ixzz321zZKpOy>