

Six Nations members recognized for their work with residential school survivors

By Stephanie Dearing
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As the two-day Truth and Reconciliation event hosted by Six Nations this past weekend wound to a close, Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild said the event, called Strengthening Survivors Connections, was positive.

A keynote speaker at the event, Littlechild was asked Sunday by Tekawennake how he coped with hearing the horrible stories he must have heard over the past few years. Littlechild said he himself had been a residential school student

for 14 years. "Many times what I am hearing is my own story."

Littlechild said it was "quite amazing" how many people experienced a similar experience as he had.

"I simply cannot believe the depth of abuse across the country. But at the same time, I see the changes happening in front of me ... the resilience of the people."

There was anger, said Littlechild. But, "I see really good things happening in communities... It's really good, it's energizing to see the good that can come out of the harm."

"The challenge is how to engage the rest of Canada



Diane Hill is teaching her students at Oliver M. Smith, through curriculum, "about the residential school and what has been done to our community, what it did to our families..." said Ida Hill, one of the organizers of the two day Strengthening Survivor's Connections held at Six Nations this past weekend. Diane Hill was honoured by the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association for her work with students. (Photograph by Stephanie Dearing).



The first to be recognized by the Children of Shinguak Alumni Association for her work with residential school survivors, Jan Kahehti:io Longboat was visibly moved by the honour, but when accepting her plaque, said with great modesty: "The ancestors left us with all these beautiful teachings. It's my responsibility as a woman to pass them on." (Photograph by Stephanie Dearing).



Geronimo Henry was one of four Six Nations people honoured Saturday at the event, Strengthening Survivor's Connections, with a plaque from the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association. "Geronimo started long before" others began offering healing programming, said Melba Thomas, one of the organizers of the event. A survivor himself, Henry started a group called The Lost Generation in 1997. He was also a key figure in the class action lawsuit that got compensation for residential school survivors. (Photograph by Stephanie Dearing).

in this story, because this isn't an Aboriginal story. It is a Canadian story," said Littlechild.

But the palpable emotions that accompanied the closing ceremonies on Saturday as four Six Nations members were recognized for their work around the former Mohawk Institute demonstrated how raw the wound really is.

Diane "Punky" Hill openly wept when she was presented with a plaque for her work with students at Oliver M. Smith Elementary, and Laurel Curley was barely able to hold back her tears as she was honoured for the counselling work she has done with survivors.

Geronimo Henry was inscrutable, but when he spoke about the residential school class action lawsuit that was originally filed by Six Nations survivors of the Mohawk Institute, there was a bitterness that tinged his words.

Jan Kahehti:io Longboat was obviously touched by being recognized for her healing work with residential school survivors. Blanche Hill-Easton presented Kahehti:io (which means, she has a beautiful garden) with a plaque on behalf of the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association.

A healing circle song and a traditional closing brought the two days of recollection and connec-

tion to an end.

Six Nations has a survivor's group that meets on a regular basis called "We are still here."



Laurel Curley showed her hair, which is down to her waist, when she received her plaque from the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association that recognized her counselling work with residential school survivors. "This was one of the first things they took from me," she said. Curley was also honoured for teaching traditional ways and for her participation in the residential school class action lawsuit. (Photograph by Stephanie Dearing).