

Local heritage organization commemorating 100 year anniversary of Bryce Report

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Defining Moments Canada, a heritage education organization based in Dufferin County, has announced a national commemorative project entitled 'The Bryce Report @ 100: The Story of a National Crime.'

Launched on March 9, the commemorative project shares the story of Dr. Peter Bryce, who self-published a 17-page pamphlet in 1922 known as 'The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal of Justice to the Indians of Canada' detailing the horrific conditions at residential schools.

'We felt we could honour the story of Dr. Bryce as a real Public Health champion in this country and also shine a very important light upon the need to educate Canadians about what had taken place in the Indian residential schools and put to rest this notion that we didn't know what was going on in the schools,' said Neil Orford, president of Defining Moments Canada.

Over the last five years, Defining Moments Canada has been marking a variety of milestone anniversaries of historic moments that most Canadians will have heard of but not known much about, through national commemorations projects.

'We spend a great deal of time as an organization examining Canadian history for opportunities to tell stories that have not traditionally been told and are not commonly understood because of school curricula, but require attention because of what's going on in the context of today,' said Orford.

Orford said the local organization came across Dr. Bryce's story almost two years ago through work led by Cindy Blackstock and other prominent Canadian Indigenous leaders to lobby the government in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action.

A former Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), Dr. Bryce initially submitted a report on the state of residential school in 1907. Surveying 35 residential schools at the request of the Department of Indian Affairs, the report detailed the poor health conditions at residential schools in the Prairie provinces.

While his report highlighted the staggering death rates at the schools, the DIA did not publish the 1907 reports, which was later leaked to journalists.

Dr. Bryce's recommendations were largely ignored over the years, officially prompting him to publish the 1922 pamphlet 'The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal of Justice to the Indians of Canada' at the end of his career.

Using the centennial anniversary of the Bryce Report publication to acknowledge a dark chapter in Canadian history and current issues, Defining Moments Canada is hoping to help shape a learning journey of reconciliation for youth and the general public.

'All Canadians are called on a path of reconciliation right now, it doesn't matter who we are,' said Orford. 'This is one of those opportunities where we can teach young Canadians particularly about what went on more than a century ago and illuminate the story of a public health champion who blew the whistle on government inaction.'

Of the 94 calls to action included in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the project looks to target three calls to action focused on education including actions 53, 62, and 63.

The Bryce Report @ 100: The Story of a National Crime is a free digital commemoration accessible to every province and addresses

each one's education curriculum. Learning materials have already been released with more content scheduled to gradually come out over the spring and summer.

As part of the project, Defining Moments Canada is developing a framework which utilizes the 'Two-Eyed Seeing Approach' pioneered by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall.

'What we try to do is find the points at which we can weave together traditional Indigenous knowledge of the world and our western modes of thinking so that we can deliver lesson to students that see with both eyes,' said Orford.

He added that they plan to bring teachers from across the country together to develop the Two-Eyed framed and provide resources to teachers to hopefully offer to students in September.

Defining Moments Canada received \$500,000 in funding to help develop The Bryce Report @ 100: The Story of a National Crime.

Orford said the money will be primarily targeted at working with Indigenous partners to build the educational framework that will eventually be used in the classroom.

As the project rolls out over the next two years, Orford said he hopes it serves as model of reconciliation.

'We need to know that there were people who stood on their convictions event at great costs. It's important that we also recognized that the intergenerational trauma that comes from the residential school experience is very much still present with us. I really hope this project is a model for reconciliation.'