

One Hundred and Fifty Thousand

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Member's Luncheon

Presented by Jamie Wilson

Written by Zoé Buissé

September 25, 2024

12:00 p.m.

RBC Convention Centre

[Slide 1 – “Reconciliation for business” on the projector]

Good afternoon.

I’m Jamie Wilson...Vice President of Indigenous Strategy... Research... and Business Development at Red River College Polytechnic.

Before I begin... I want to show you a number.

[Slide 2 – “150,000”]

One hundred and fifty thousand.

Six digits... four zeros.

Maybe you’re thinking... “alright Jamie what does this number represent?”

To put it into perspective...it’s enough to fill the seats at the Canada Life Centre.

[Slide 3 – Canada Life Centre]

More than nine times.

[Slide 4 – 9 Canada Life Centres]

But this number is not just about seats.

[Slide 5 – “150,000”]

One hundred and fifty thousand represents the number of children who were taken from their families... removed from their communities... and forced into Canadian Indian Residential Schools.

It represents the one hundred and fifty thousand children who were forced to abandon their language... their culture... and everything else they knew.

It represents the one hundred and fifty thousand children who were scared... alone and enduring trauma that would ripple through generations to follow.

For every child taken... there was a mother... a father... grandparents... and communities left behind.

[Slide 6 – 1 in 4]

For over six thousand families... or one in every four children... their child did not return home.

[Slide 7 – “Truth and reconciliation”]

As someone who is half Cree... I’ve seen firsthand how history has shaped the lives of so many.

I’ve had the privilege of sitting with Elders... listening to their stories... learning their language... and understanding the values passed down through generations.

These conversations have shown me what true resilience looks like and have deepened my understanding of the lasting impact Canada’s history has had on my ancestors.

[Slide 8 – “Truth and reconciliation 2]

In response to this pain and strength... the Truth and Reconciliation Commission laid out 94 Calls to Action.

These Calls are concrete steps designed to guide Canada toward healing and reconciliation.

But what does reconciliation truly mean... and how do we achieve it?

Well... it starts with education and acknowledgment.

It means learning the histories that brought us here and then using that knowledge to drive meaningful actions.

Reconciliation is not a trend or something that can be achieved overnight.

It's a shared responsibility... a journey that requires everyone's contribution.

Every organization... every leader... and every individual here has a role.

As business leaders... your influence can shift perspectives... foster lasting change... and set new standards for a more inclusive future.

[Slide 9 – “What can be done?”]

Call to Action 92 specifically addresses the role of businesses and corporations... urging them to make meaningful changes in their policies... practices... and opportunities.

[Slide 10 – “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/ Orange Shirt Day”]

As we approach September 30th... the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation... also known as Orange Shirt Day... many people and organizations will wear orange to show solidarity.

As you prepare for this day... I encourage you to consider where your orange shirt comes from.

[Slide 11 – “Support indigenous creators/designers/artists”]

Purchasing shirts from Indigenous artists and businesses not only supports their work but contributes to the economic well-being of their communities.

This is a direct way to support real change... rather than mere profit.

[Slide 12 – “What else can businesses do?”]

Start by educating your staff about Indigenous cultures... histories... and the lasting impacts of colonization.

This can be done through workshops or presentations.

Also... assess your business practices.

Are you working with Indigenous suppliers and contractors?

Are you creating space for Indigenous talent in your workplace?

Representation matters.

When Indigenous people see themselves in leadership roles or as part of your business...it sends a powerful message of inclusion and respect.

Support initiatives that promote Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

Your business can help drive positive change through partnerships with Indigenous organizations or contributing to causes that benefit their communities.

Finally... create spaces for Indigenous voices within your company.

Encourage open dialogues... support Indigenous leadership... and take action to address the challenges faced by these communities.

Reconciliation isn't just about words...it's about action.

[Slide 14 – “Why reconciliation matters to business”]

You may be asking... why should my business do this?

What difference can it really make?

Reconciliation is not just a moral responsibility... it's also an opportunity for growth.

[Slide 15 – “Why reconciliation matters to businesses 2”]

Building relationships with Indigenous communities and supporting Indigenous-led businesses can bring fresh perspectives and open new opportunities.

By embracing Indigenous knowledge... your business can improve its practices and deepen its connection with the community.

[Slide 16 – “WASAC night”]

A great example of this is the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre... or WASAC night at the Winnipeg Jets... a game dedicated to honouring Indigenous history and culture.

The response has been incredible, with the WASAC jerseys becoming one of the highest-selling themed jerseys the Jets have ever had.

While this is on a large scale... it highlights how supporting Indigenous communities can lead to meaningful engagement and positive business outcomes.

[Slide 17 – “A collective responsibility”]

You have the tools... the platforms... and the influence to make reconciliation part of the way Canadian businesses move forward.

So... take the steps.

[Slide 87 – “A collective responsibility 2”]

Hire... promote... and support Indigenous voices.

Invest in Indigenous businesses and artists.

Educate your team and set policies that reflect your commitment.

Wear orange not only as a symbol but also as a reminder that reconciliation requires daily action.

[Slide 19 – Orange shirt]

Thank you for listening.