

Remarks to the Indspire Institute Launch

STEPHEN HUDDART, President and CEO, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
Calgary, Alberta
March 15, 2013

Elders, partners, honoured guests, fellow citizens,

Building a better future with fellow citizens who are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit is the most pressing social challenge of our time. It is also a compelling call to come together to build a better Canada – one that offers equality of opportunity to all of its citizens.

It is helpful to remember that this country originated in a partnership among First Nations and early settlers from France. Champlain's dream was of a nation built on principles of equality and mutual respect, and it was actively shared by the Elders of many of the nations he encountered here.

While these values may lie near the heart of Canada's founding, they have been forgotten or willfully ignored too often – most tragically in the terrible policies that resulted in the Residential School System. The Prime Minister has issued an apology to all those who suffered under that system, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has held hearings across Canada to gather and share the stories of what happened there, but this is a corner recently turned. It is important that this history be understood by all Canadians, and in particular that it form part of the education of future generations.

What makes today such an important milestone, is that as we cleanse our vision of where we come from, of who we are and where we might want to go, we are given another chance to get it right – to build an education system and a country that reflect the vision that Champlain and the Elders of his time had for us. Our task is to draw lessons and strength from our past, and to use them as a basis for moving forward.

The history of organized philanthropy's involvement in Aboriginal education is not a long one, but it is getting larger and stronger with every passing year. The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, now Indspire, is one of the first instances in modern times when philanthropic innovation has played a role in strengthening hope and change through partnership. It has shown us what is possible when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, governments, and private donors work together.

More recent examples include the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, which recently launched a 'Collaborative Circle on Youth and Education' and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative. And we cannot fail to note the courageous work being done by the AFN and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to bring about equality of funding for Aboriginal learners on reserves.

Speaking on behalf of a foundation that places emphasis on funding social innovation, we congratulate Indspire for taking a systemic approach to innovating across the entire educational

spectrum – from kindergarten to post-secondary – while paying extraordinary and close attention to individual teachers and learners. And here we must acknowledge the foresight and dedication of Roberta Jamieson and Noella Steinhauer, and the generosity and commitment of our fellow funding partners, Suncor Energy Foundation and the federal government. We look forward to many more joining us in supporting this great initiative.

To conclude, I would like to leave you with a thought from Thomas King's book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, which should be read by all Canadians:

Instead of trying to 'kill the Indian to save the child' [as the residential school system set out to do], North America might have gone into partnership with the various nations, and together they could have come up with an education plan that complemented native cultures and perhaps even enriched White culture at the same time.

The Indspire Institute is poised to help us do just that, and we wish you every success.