



Aboriginal Healing Foundation

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*Our mission is to encourage
and support Aboriginal people in
building and reinforcing sustainable
healing processes that address the
legacy of physical and sexual abuse
in the residential schools, including
intergenerational impacts.*

*Notre mission est d'encourager
et d'appuyer les autochtones afin de
bâtir et de renforcer les processus
de guérison souhaitables qui
s'attaquent aux séquelles
des abus physiques et sexuels
dans le système de pensionnats,
y compris aux séquelles*

OPEN EDITORIAL

February 24, 2000

Kirk LaPointe
Editor-in-Chief
Hamilton Spectator
Via fax (905) 526-1395 and e-mail

Ahnee:

I am responding to the Hamilton Spectator's comments on the expenditure of funds by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Both the article and editorial by Howard Elliott are unbalanced and inaccurate. Your suggestion of "a new political and ethical controversy" and what can only be an opportunistic attempt to piggyback on the HRDC coverage are uncalled for and repugnant.

Mr. Erasmus' track record is clear. Even a casual glance at his resume attests to his leadership and exemplary work on behalf of Aboriginal people—first in the North and later with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The qualifications of the Board to act in the best interests of Residential School Survivors are equally apparent. The majority of Board Directors are Residential School Survivors, as are a number of the staff. The vast majority of us have suffered intergenerational impacts in one form or another. The healing process is therefore close to our hearts. The accusation, based on misuse of information, that these people carry out Foundation work for personal gain is irresponsible.

Georges Erasmus and the Board of Directors of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation have been libelled and we expect a complete apology.

I would now like to clarify some of the more glaring factual errors put forth in your paper.

Honoraria

The Foundation was allowed one year—the 1998-99 fiscal year—to set up operations. In the absence of staff during that year, the Board functioned as both a governing and an operational body and therefore invested a great deal of time and energy in the work of the Foundation. As a result, honoraria in the start-up phase was paid more frequently than it is currently. Meetings at that time were required monthly. They now occur quarterly. The article states that Board members receive an additional annual honorarium of \$2K each. There is no such annual payment. The article refers to honorariums as "tax free". The Foundation is not a tax exempt organization.

The article presents two conflicting amounts for honoraria. To set the record straight: the Foundation paid \$310,837.00 in honoraria, to 15 Board Directors, during the 1998-99 fiscal year. The figures quoted by the Spectator include honoraria, travel, accommodation, meals and occasional child-care paid to operate a national Board. It should also be noted that a Board Director must participate in a Foundation meeting for at least 4 hours in order to qualify for a full honorarium.

Current honorarium rates are comparable to other organizations of this type. This has been verified by external consultants. Every effort is made to keep honoraria to a minimum. With respect to travel, ours is a national board with Directors from every region of the country. Bringing Directors to any meeting, regardless of where it is located, will incur us some costs. The Foundation pays no honoraria or travel costs for the two Government of Canada representatives on the Board.

Residential School Healing Strategy Conference

The \$426,964.00 referred to in the article as a December 1998 meeting was actually a national conference held in the summer of 1998. From the start, the Board wanted to ensure the money they've been entrusted is administered and invested in the most effective and fair manner possible. It was deemed essential to seek the guidance of survivors in order to ensure the work of the Foundation is relevant. The Residential School Healing Strategy Conference, held in Squamish Territory on July 14, 15 and 16, 1998, was organised for that purpose. It was a consultation, not a "public relations" event. Logistical arrangements included travel and accommodation for several hundred survivors of residential schools from across the country. The conference resulted in a consultation document which is the basis of our funding programs (criteria and Program Handbook). Our 1999 Annual Report clearly indicates, on page 30, that the Foundation received a contribution of \$400,000.00 towards this conference and that the Foundation covered the balance (\$28,889.00).

Project Funding

Every proposal received before deadlines underwent the same evaluation process. The Foundation takes great care in screening and assessing proposals. Both staff and external reviewers are used. The Foundation has so far approved approximately 20% of the applications received. Proposals that were not funded this time around can be resubmitted. In fact, we've contacted every applicant whose proposal sought to address the legacy but did not receive funding, to let them know we will work with them to help them meet the established funding criteria.

The Foundation's Board of Directors has recommended funding \$48M in projects in our first funding cycle. We have signed contracts with these recommended projects for approximately \$30M. The contracting process is a careful one and is 80% complete. The \$12.3M in expenditures quoted in the article refers to quarterly payments that have so far been made to these funded projects. The Foundation pays funded projects quarterly, rather than paying the full amount of our contracts up-front. We have, in fact, committed most of the \$50 million we projected for the first funding cycle. We have taken a measured approach. This is prudent funding management and is common practice within funding agencies.

Proposal Development Assistance Funding

The department referred to as having been established to provide assistance in writing applications is actually our Proposal Development Assistance Funding program. The \$3.2M referred to in the article is actually grants sent out in response to applications and is not an internal expense for operations. We invested this money for good reason. Not all communities have the resources to develop healing proposals. It is also reasonable to expect that some people who remain traumatised by the legacy of physical and sexual abuse arising from the residential school system cannot always prepare good

proposals. We felt it important to provide assistance to individuals and communities in order to ensure residential school survivors, their families and descendants get the help they need.

Staffing

Staffing at the Foundation is modest. Other similar operations operate with twice the number of staff. Staff salaries have been reviewed by an outside consulting firm, and are 97% correlated with what the market typically pays for similar work.

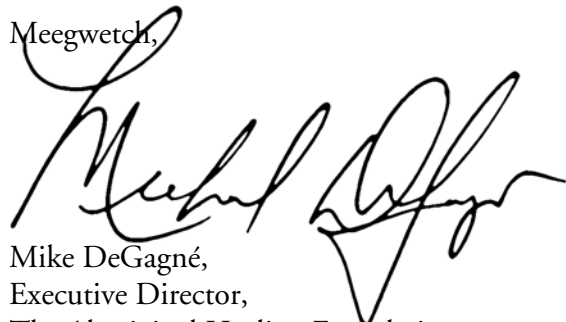
In closing, I would like to say that any funding agency will have people dissatisfied because they did not get funded or did not get the level of funding they asked for. The goal of the Foundation is to fund quality proposals that ensure maximum benefit to Survivors, their families, and descendants. These are the clear guidelines we received from survivors at the Residential School Healing Strategy Conference held in Squamish territory in July 1998. We were told to make sure we invest the healing funds that have been entrusted to us wisely. Survivors cautioned us to proceed carefully, ensuring the proper safety nets are there for people who are trying to address the trauma inflicted by the Legacy of Physical and Sexual Abuse arising from the Residential School system.

We could easily have distributed the entire \$350 million in our first call for proposals by funding every proposal we received. A good number of them did not meet our criteria, however. They were not clear on how they would involve Survivors, how they would be accountable to their constituents, and how they would form linkages and partnerships. We could legitimately have been accused of being irresponsible had we not stuck to the process we established. The Foundation's funds are limited given the magnitude of the problems plaguing all our people, communities and nations.

Our selection procedures are careful and fair, our audits indicate all is in order, our processing and paperwork are exemplary, and our monitoring is well in hand for an organisation with less than one year of funding projects.

As for the Hamilton Spectator, you cannot have it both ways: you cannot, on the one hand, criticise us for being too cautious in allocating funds and accuse us, on the other, of being reckless in our administration. Perhaps the Spectator would have better fulfilled its responsibilities to its readership by seeking and presenting the views of those who have received funding from our program. This would surely have presented your readership with a more balanced picture.

Meegwetch,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike DeGagné". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "D".

Mike DeGagné,
Executive Director,
The Aboriginal Healing Foundation.