

College opens 'legacy room' to spark discussion about residential schools

SLUGLINE

Norquest signs Indigenous Education Protocol, too



Kevin Maimann
Metro | Edmonton

Edmonton's Norquest College became the first institution in Western Canada to open a "legacy room" honouring residential school survivors Thursday.

The Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund Legacy Room, situated on the main floor of the school's Heritage Tower, will soon be renovated to accommodate learning about residential schools and the story of Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who died while running away from his school in 1966.

On Thursday, a plaque was unveiled detailing the reconciliation wishes of the late Tragically Hip singer and Wenjack's family in creating the fund.

"It's pretty amazing," said Gordon Holub, an Indigenous student from the Schuswap Nation in B.C. and representative of Norquest's Students' Association.

"I think it's a good idea, for sure. We've got to get this conversation going."

The room is located in a busy



Gordon Holub with the Students' Association at Norquest. KEVIN TUONG/EDMONTON FREELANCE

corridor and will be dedicated to learning and starting conversations about reconciliation.

Holub said spaces like the legacy room will help speed up the healing of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous families.

"We were in class one day and

probably a quarter of our class was from Edmonton, the rest of our students were from out of the country. And they were very surprised about what happened at residential schools. They had no idea," Holub said.

The fund's co-chair, Charlene

Bearhead, said she reached out to Norquest because of its ongoing work toward reconciliation.

Norquest President and CEO Jodi Abbott said the school has been rethinking the best ways to help Indigenous students since the Truth and Reconciliation

Report.

"Understanding the stories of residential schools is, I think, very important for all people to understand," she said.

"Indigenous communities have experienced it, they've lived it. So it's really important

for everyone.

"The choice of putting (the legacy room) into a student activity centre is so people will take the opportunity to read it and learn about what happened, so we can, overall, create a better environment for everyone."

Also on Thursday, the college became the first post-secondary institution in Canada to sign the Indigenous Education Protocol for Colleges and Institutes of Canada.

The protocol includes seven key points for schools to follow, including "ensuring governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous people" and establishing "Indigenous-centred holistic services and learning environments."

In August they opened a ceremonial room where students can speak with elders, and on Thursday to coincide with the legacy room, Norquest also released its Indigenization Strategy based on the Seven Sacred Teachings from Indigenous cultural traditions.

Abbott said the school currently has about 700 self-declared Indigenous students in Edmonton.

"This is really about creating equality and opportunities for everyone," she said.

Denise Amyot, Presidenta and CEO of Colleges and Institutes Canada, said she hopes Norquest can mentor other post-secondary institutions that will sign the Indigenous protocol in the future.