

PRESENTATION TO CITY OF REGINA MAYOR & COUNCIL – AUGUST 26, 2020
BY JOELY BIGEAGLE-KEQUAHTOOWAY, BUFFALO PEOPLE ARTS INSTITUTE

Buffalo People Arts Institute's mission is to bring back the buffalo mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally through sharing our traditional Indigenous arts practices such as storytelling, visual arts and teaching others the importance of how buffalo shaped this land and our hearts.

Historically, Indigenous people have been considered obstacles to settling Canada. Pre-confederation strategic military and government strategies were enacted to reduce the Indigenous population through tactics such as the intentional genocide of the millions of buffalo that lived on this continent. The colonial culture wanted the land and were intentionally cunning about it. They knew we relied on the buffalo for everything. The buffalo was our food, shelter, clothing, culture and ceremony. With no buffalo to hunt meant the inevitable demise of many First Nations peoples. And many people did die along with the buffalo.

Indigenous people have persevered but suffered through trauma after trauma since colonial contact. One thing Indigenous people have is a resilient spirit and one that was developed because of that close connection to the buffalo and a way of life that was generated for thousands and thousands of years. The loss of the buffalo has meant a forced creation to evolve and create a new way of life. Today we suffer from a myriad of complications related to this loss of life. Many people have forgotten our connection to the buffalo and the colonial systems have almost erased them from our memories.

Buffalo People Arts Institute shares their love of buffalo through stories, culture and land-based education. In this age of truth and reconciliation, the truth must be shared about what happened

to the buffalo. Reconciliation may be possible if the buffalo are returned to the land. Ranchers and landowners have a duty to assist in restoring this connection, but so do our politicians.

I stand before you presenting my case about the importance of buffalo because my ancestors have been on this land for thousands and thousands of years; however, if you were to walk these streets and parks of Regina with names like Victoria Ave, Albert & Broad St, A.E. Wilson, Regent and Parkdale Parks. There are virtually no identifiers to who the original inhabitants of this land were. It is almost as if our ancestry and connections here to this land have been erased.

Truth and reconciliation to me, is that the truth about how the buffalo were killed off for the sake of settlement be shared via educational and political institutions such that it is understood by the people of this land and the inter-generational trauma that still lingers within our Indigenous communities. In this era of reconciliation, as noted effectively in the newly released city of Regina community plan; when these plan creators surveyed people from this community, “How should we celebrate the contributions made by Indigenous peoples in our community? The response was “Design public spaces designed for the general public to visit and learn about contributions by Indigenous peoples. Maybe spaces like museums or art gallery like places. Maybe model what South Africa did in some cities and assigned Indigenous names to some of the streets...”

When I first heard that our elected officials were considering renaming the downtown plaza after an ex-mayor. I felt like all these years of consultation for the truth and reconciliation community plan meetings was for naught. We have been consulted for years on how to make our city feel better for the citizens within it. I personally, have made it a mission of mine to request that Dewdney Ave be changed to Buffalo Avenue and our supporters Decolonizing Relations have been requesting Dewdney Pool and park be renamed to Buffalo Meadows and Pool. This has

been an on-going community non-violent direct action in response to addressing some of these TRC recommendations. This renaming of this plaza to honour an ex-mayor is a slap in the face to all our efforts of requesting not only a name change but to address the present and future legacy renaming projects that this city endeavours to support. This is nothing against the ex-mayor, as I respect him and the work he has done for our community. But there is so much more to address with respect to name changes and reconciliation. I request that this mayor and council reconsider their name change for this plaza and address the name change from Dewdney to Buffalo as a priority over naming the plaza. I also request that this plaza be renamed something that is more reflective of the truth and reconciliation community action plan recommendations to be more inclusive of Indigenous peoples of Treaty 4.

Joely BigEagle-Kequahtoway