

FINAL REPORT

March 31, 2023

Walking the Steps of Our Ancestors: NWTRPA Walking Challenge Review



Source: Sheena Tremblay

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Content/Trigger Warning

This document discusses the impacts of the Canadian residential school system in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Please reach out if you require emotional support, we've provided a list of Wellness Support Information (See Appendix 1).

Acknowledgements

Máhsı | Mársı | Kinanāskomitin | Hą́ | Quyanainni | Quana | Qujannamiik | Thank you | Merci

Many thanks to all the people who made this review possible. We understand that discussions surrounding the impacts of the Canadian residential school system can be very difficult. However, we recognize that working towards reconciliation requires that we learn and heal from the past to move forward.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to the families of the three boys: Dennis Dick, Lawrence Jack Elanik, and Bernard Andreason. We also acknowledge the hard work of the Walking Challenge Advisory Committee members, the Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA) staff & Board of Directors and Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser (University of Alberta).

Thanks again to the lovely residents of Tuktoyaktuk, Mayor Erwin Elias, Nellie Cournoyea, Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation staff, Tuktoyaktuk Hamlet staff, Darlene Gruben (Government of the NWT), and all NWTRPA Walking Challenge funders, sponsors, champions, and teams.

Message from the NWTRPA

As we wrap up the Walking Challenge review process, I'm reflecting on what a year it has been. We started the review knowing we could make mistakes, unsure of the proper process and the desire to do this work respectfully without causing further harm. We have learned so much throughout this process, and undoubtedly it has been important, meaningful, and impactful. All those involved were so compassionate in sharing their stories, knowledge, and feedback. Learning from such great knowledge keepers has been a privilege and honour.

In addition to those listed in the acknowledgements, I would like to thank Jennie Vandermeer Consulting, who took on this project with courage, professionalism, and grace. We are very fortunate to have had her guidance and support.

At the NWTRPA, our intention is to advance decolonization and reconciliation through our work. We continue to ask ourselves; *how might we transform our organization so that it is representative of the communities that we serve? How might we reimagine our organization and programs to reflect and honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being? How might we, through our programs and how we work, help to nurture Indigenous self-determination and resurgence?* We recognize that reviewing the Walking Challenge is just one action. Still, I hope the NWTRPA can continue learning, growing, and changing to become a more decolonized organization.

Many thanks,

Sheena Tremblay, Executive Director

NWTRPA

Executive Summary

The NWTRPA was already well underway into their decolonization and reconciliation journey when they were informed that the name of their annual winter walking challenge (Walk to Tuk) was offensive to residential school survivors. The name “Walk to Tuk” had created an unfortunate connection to the experiences of three Indigenous boys who ran away from a residential school in the early 1970s. Tragically, two of the young boys lost their lives during the ordeal.

The organization took this feedback very seriously and decided to temporarily change the name from “Walk to Tuk” to the “NWTRPA Walking Challenge”. In their 2021 statement¹, the NWTRPA apologized for the harm the name may have caused and committed to hearing from Indigenous Peoples and the public on how to proceed in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner. The main goal of this review was to determine a name and direction for the Walking Challenge Program by conducting a literature review and but more importantly, creating opportunities for all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples of the NWT, NWTRPA members, Walking Challenge participants and NWT residents to share feedback.

Some main highlights of this report include background on the NWTRPA Walking Challenge, a brief history on Canada’s residential school system in the NWT, feedback from our stakeholders and recommendations on the name and the program design. We received many recommendations on how to incorporate Indigenous culture, language, and knowledge into the Walking Challenge program design but also into all of the NWTRPA’s programs and services. With regard to the name for the program, we heard from many Northerners, and it was very clear that they wished to keep the name “Walk to Tuk”. It was also unanimously decided by the Walking Challenge Advisory Committee and the Community of Tuktoyaktuk that the NWTRPA keep the name “Walk to Tuk”. The view was that by keeping the name, this could create opportunities for conversations about the history of the Canadian residential school system in the NWT and also celebrate the survivors of that system.

We received some really powerful feedback during our stakeholder engagement, including the importance of walking to Indigenous Peoples, “northern Indigenous communities were nomadic, and the symbolism of walking is very important to us”. And “walking is also how we move our bodies; we walk for many reasons, including health, recreation, and travel”. We also heard about the important healing aspects of walking and how the Walking Challenge has helped so many people, “I don't think I'd have been able to function without the Walking Challenge after losing a child, it was so healing”.

As Northerners and Canadians, it’s our responsibility to educate ourselves on our nation’s atrocities against Indigenous Peoples in order to reconcile and heal that relationship. We can improve the NWTRPA Walking Challenge program through the lens of decolonization and reconciliation by acknowledging the past and committing to being respectful and learning from each other. The lessons learned here can be applied to larger issues. Only then, can we clearly see how racism and colonialism impacts and limits all of us as Northerners and Canadians.

Introduction

In January 2021, the NWTRPA Board of Directors released a statement that they were temporarily changing the name of the annual winter walking challenge from Walk to Tuk to the NWTRPA Walking Challenge (hereinafter referred to as the “Program”). This was due to feedback that the name Walk to

Tuk was disrespectful and harmful to survivors of residential schools in Canada. The name had created an unfortunate connection between the Program and the experiences of three young boys who tried to walk to Tuktoyaktuk, NWT (hereinafter referred to as “Tuk”) after escaping from a residential school in Inuvik, NWT. Bernard Andreason, Lawrence Jack Elanik, and Dennis Dick escaped from Inuvik’s Stringer Hall residential school in 1972 before embarking on a two-week trek on foot through the bush towards Tuk. Bernard was rescued two weeks later but tragically, Lawrence Jack and Dennis died on the way.

In the 2021 statement, the NWTRPA apologized for any harm caused by the name Walk to Tuk and committed to hearing from NWT residents on the matter (especially from Tuk residents). The main goal of this review was to determine a new name and direction for the Program by completing the following objectives:

- Create opportunities for all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples of the NWT, NWTRPA members, Walking Challenge participants and NWT residents to share feedback related to the temporary name change and the Program review.
- Identify and list relevant sections of three reference materials (listed below under methodology) and provide recommendations about the Program to the NWTRPA.

This review is not intended to focus on the operational aspects (website, registration, etc.) of the Program. However, it should be noted that some of the recommendations could impact operations (e.g., communication plans). Please refer to the *NWTRPA Walk to Tuk 2019-Internal Final Report* (March 26, 2019) for more detail on operations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) states that **reconciliation** *is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country*². *In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour*³.

In 2017, the NWTRPA board and staff participated in decolonization training with the intention of exploring how the NWTRPA could actively work towards reconciliation. During the training, the group arrived at the following definition. **Decolonization** *is about transformation and the dismantling of an unjust system. It is about revealing and owning the harms of the past, raising awareness about inequities of the present, but most importantly, about remaking social and political systems in order to truly respect the rights and well-being of Indigenous peoples.*

You may be asking yourself, “*how is this relevant to a winter walking challenge*”? Its relevant because Indigenous Peoples have always used the Land; connection to the Land and being able to walk on the Land was vital to our way of life. Indigenous Peoples today are following their ancestors’ footsteps by hunting and gathering to provide for their families, practicing their cultures, languages, & customs, and making observations on the weather, wildlife, and landscape. This connection to the Land is vital to our spirituality, healing, and way of life; this worldview needs to be shared and understood in hopes that it helps to build a better future for all.

Background

About the NWTRPA

The NWTRPA is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1989⁴. They're located in Yellowknife and work with communities across the territory to promote recreation by supporting leaders, communities, and partners through training, advocacy, and networking. As a membership-based organization, they're governed by an eight-person volunteer Board of Directors elected from every NWT region (currently, five members self identify as Indigenous). They currently have a staff of six (one staff member self identifies as Indigenous). The organization is funded by NWT and Nunavut lotteries, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), sponsorships, consulting projects, memberships, and registration fees.



Figure 1. Teams over the years (Source: Sheena Tremblay).

NWTRPA's Commitment to Reconciliation & Decolonization

The NWTRPA is committed to reconciliation and decolonization with respect to all of their program content, delivery, and protocols. They have undertaken many initiatives to meet this commitment and both of their recent strategic plans (2018-21 and 2023-26) includes goals that align with these commitments. Please see below for a timeline of their journey:

2016- The NWTRPA formally initiated their reconciliation and decolonization journey. The Board of Directors formed a working group to explore how the organization might best engage in the 94 calls to

action listed in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (TRC) report. At their 2016 annual general assembly, the NWTRPA membership voted to endorse the TRC Calls to Action and adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) as a framework for future activities.

2017- The Board and staff participated in training facilitated by Dene Nahjo, a Yellowknife based Indigenous leadership organization⁵, resulting in a shared understanding and definition of decolonization (see definition above in introduction). Training on decolonization, reconciliation, and racial equity for Board and staff has remained a priority since that time. Topics of subsequent sessions have included: MMIWG2S, anti-racism, facilitated book clubs, ethical space, creating colonial constellations presentation, and UNDRIP. The theme and program of the NWTRPA and Youth Conference, held in Inuvik, was focused on decolonization. Notably, the keynote presentation was about recreation at residential schools in the Inuvik region.

2018- The NWTRPA completed a Strategic Plan (2018-2021) with a primary goal to work with intention to advance decolonization and reconciliation through their work, workplaces, and relationships. The organization's strategic plan included developing a program review process to guide and determine if NWTRPA program content, services, and delivery are in line with their commitment to decolonization and reconciliation. In 2018, in partnership with Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser, a Gwichyà Gwich'in historian at the University of Alberta, the NWTRPA initiated a research project called *"How I Survived": Recreation at Northern Residential Schools*⁶. The purpose of the project is to gather stories from survivors in order to document and understand how recreation was a part of the residential school, hostel, and day school experience, as well as the significance of recreation for students. This project is guided by an advisory committee of survivors and intergenerational survivors.

2019- The NWTRPA advocated the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) to include TRC and UNDRIP into their strategic outlook.

2020- Released a statement on racism in recreation and parks⁷.

2021- The NWTRPA awards program was reviewed with the support of Bushkids⁸ (an on-the-Land learning initiative based in Yellowknife), and a committee composed of staff, board, and past award recipients. The committee was to provide recommendations on the awards program and on the review process. The NWTRPA is working to implement the recommendations and have updated the terminology, nominations form, criteria, the selection committee composition, and provided options for the physical award and recognition. The NWTRPA Board of Directors also approved a territorial land acknowledgement for the NWTRPA website, and they implemented a "respect of the land" as the first agenda item for all Board meetings. They also posted a statement of solidarity with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc⁹

2022- Announced a temporary name change of the annual walking challenge. Jennie Vandermeer Consulting was hired in May 2022 to complete a review of the Program. Jennie Vandermeer is Sahtúgot'ı̨nę Dene from Délı̨nę, NWT and has extensive experience working with communities across the NWT. She specializes in the decolonization of policy, programs and services through the acknowledgement and incorporation of Indigenous culture and knowledge. In that same year, in an effort to implement ethical space principles, a board meeting was hosted on the Land. The NWTRPA also posted another statement about National Day for Truth and Reconciliation¹⁰.

2023-The number one goal in the NWTRPA's 2023-26 Strategic Plan is *decolonization, reconciliation, and racial equity: Continue to transform the NWTRPA through a commitment to decolonization, reconciliation, and racial equity*. That same year, the NWTRPA Board of Directors approved a Racial Equity Plan as well as a diversity statement to be present on all job descriptions.

About the NWTRPA Walking Challenge Program



Figure 2. Walking challenge participants (Source: Sheena Tremblay).

Established in 2010, the Program is the organization's most well-known initiative and is the largest and longest recreational physical activity event in the NWT. This annual walking challenge runs during January and February and is a great opportunity to win prizes and get active in a safe, healthy, and engaging way during the winter. It encourages community members, schools, and workplaces to form registered teams and conceptually 'walk the distance' along the Mackenzie River (1658 km). In the NWT, the Mackenzie River is also known as Kuukpak (Great River in Inuvialuktun) and as the Dehcho (Big River in Dene). The river has a rich and storied history that dates back thousands of years. The river is a vital source of transportation, food, and resources for the Indigenous Peoples who live along its banks¹¹.

The Program has had several names: it originated from the NWTRPA Nordic Walking Program (2009-2010), after which it was called the Mackenzie River Nordic Walking Challenge for a short time in 2011. The name Walk to Tuk was adopted by the NWTRPA in 2012, as they found that the name had gained popularity with many participants who were using the name to describe the event.

The Program has received national recognition as an Innovative Case Study and was published in World Leisure Centre of Excellence, 1st edition, Vancouver Island University (2015), was featured on CBC's *The Play Exchange*, one of Canada's top initiatives (2015) and was recognized through the Governors General Award (2017).

It should be noted that participation in the Program dropped substantially (by roughly 50%) in 2023. Participants provided feedback and this decline was attributed to several factors including: the temporary name change, the new website and tracking process, and because t-shirts were no longer being provided free of charge. Unfortunately, the Program’s administrative and financial capacity has not grown with its popularity and may result in a continued decline in participation. Despite being one of the most popular recreational events in the NWT, the Program is lacking in funding and support compared to other events (e.g., Arctic Winter Games).

Table 1. 2011-2021 participation data on the Program.

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Participants	550	1388	2565	2686	4404	4825	4387	5570
NWT Communities	13	17	24	29	28	30	26	—
Teams	37	73	188	257	310	349	356	495
Total Hours Walked	12,458	38,175	108,055	157,248	174,238	159,609	164,189	—
Total distance Walked (km)	87,205	190,877	453,442	659,708	729,802	822,747	—	752,215
Average weekly walking (minutes)	170	202	316	320	292	232	280	241

Walking Challenge Advisory Committee (WCAC)

Throughout this review, the NWTRPA was committed to engaging with stakeholders, participants, Indigenous groups, NWT residents and members of the NWTRPA. In the summer of 2022, the organization promoted a call out¹² for advisory committee members on their website and social media platforms. The criteria for the call out included the following:

- Open to all NWT residents
- Preference given to Indigenous applicants
- Knowledge of Indigenous culture and history

There were 22 applicants and after careful deliberation, the NWTRPA selected six members’ total: two members from the Inuvik region and one each from the remaining four NWT regions. All members are Indigenous to the NWT. The NWTRPA decided to provide two seats to the Inuvik region as the concerns regarding the name originated there. As per the Terms of Reference (see Appendix 2), the committee members agreed to provide direction and general guidance to the NWTRPA on matters relating to the Program name change and review.



Figure 3. WCAC members (missing from photo-Les Blake) (Source: Jennie Vandermeer).

Composition of Walking Challenge Advisory Committee

North Slave Region: Diane Gordon (front left) lives in Yellowknife and is a semi-retired nurse. She wanted to join the committee as she thought it would be a welcome challenge. She's very interested in being active in decision making and improving the Program.

Dehcho Region: Christina Holman (front middle) lives in Fort Simpson. She feels that it's important to keep record of historical travels of our people (Metis, Inuit, Dene), and others.

Inuvik Region: Annie Steen (front right) is originally from Tuk and currently resides in Yellowknife. She works with the Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation and joined the committee to ensure the Program includes community interests, knowledge, and awareness.

Sahtú Region: Hannah Taneton (back left) is from Délı̨nę and very active in her community. She enjoys spending time with her friends and family out on the land. She's always up for learning and practicing her Dene culture.

South Slave Region: Elizabeth Stirrett (back right) resides in Fort Smith with her spouse Dwight. They have four children and two handsome grandsons. She lives by the Dene teachings and is always practicing her traditional knowledge. Her hobbies are beading, harvesting sage, reading, traveling, enjoying the outdoors, and camping.

Inuvik Region: Les Blake (missing from photo) is from Fort McPherson and joined the committee as he wanted to help the program continue to be successful for years to come. Les has a lot of knowledge to share and things to learn as well. Les love sports and activities that promote healthy living.

Brief History on NWT's Residential Schools



Figure 4. Aklavik - Roman Catholic school pupils (Source: ECE/NWT Archives).

The term “residential school” refers to an extensive school system set up by the Canadian government from the 1880s into the closing decades of the 20th century. For over a century, there were dozens of residential schools operating in the NWT; the first residential school opened in Fort Providence (Sacred Heart Indian Residential School) in 1867¹³ and the last school closed in Inuvik (Grollier Hall) in 1997¹⁴.

The schools were mostly administered by churches and had the objective of educating Indigenous children but also, they had a more damaging and equally explicit objective of assimilating them into mainstream white Canadian society (Euro Canadian and Christian). Essentially, the main goal of the schools was to “kill the Indian in the child” by cutting off thousands of Indigenous children from their families for extended periods of time and not allowing them to practice their Indigenous language, culture, and traditions. Generally, residential schools provided Indigenous students with inadequate education, often only up to lower grades. They focused mainly on prayer and manual labour in agriculture, light industry such as woodworking, and domestic work such as laundry work and sewing¹⁵.

This system viewed Indigenous language, culture, and traditions as inferior, and the children were forbidden to practice and/or celebrate who they were as a unique and diverse people. Children were often severely punished if these rules were broken. Although some students recall good experiences, many more suffered severe neglect and horrendous abuse at the hands of residential school staff. Residential school survivors are calling for justice to be brought against those who physically and sexually assaulted them at the schools. Many Canadians were outraged that the Federal government spent millions of dollars to locate the abusers but in most cases, charges have never been brought forward.

Those who survived this system continue to carry the effects of this trauma throughout their lives and many pass it on intergenerationally to their families and communities, continuing the damaging cycle.

Tragically, many children died and never returned home. In 2021, Canadians were shocked by the sheer number of unmarked graves of children who died in residential schools. Sadly, thousands of unmarked graves are still being uncovered at former residential schools across the country. The TRC concluded that residential schools were *“a systematic, government- sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples.”* The TRC characterized this intent as *“cultural genocide”*¹⁶.

Story of the Three Boys



Figure 5. Left to right: Bernard Andreason, Lawrence Jack Elanik & Dennis Dick (Source: CBC).

According to a CBC interview¹⁷, in the summer of 1972, Bernard Andreason (age 11), Lawrence Jack Elanik (referred to as Jack, age 11), and Dennis Dick (age 13) ran away from Stringer Hall residential school and attempted to walk the 130 km distance to Tuk. The three boys fled the residential school as they were fearful of the repercussions of stealing and smoking a pack of cigarettes belonging to one of the dorm supervisors.

The three young children started their journey on foot with only the clothes on their back, making their way through the bush, crossing rivers and lakes. There was no road leading to Tuk, so they followed the telephone pole lines as markers to guide the way. They ate berries and drank water to sustain their journey.

What started out as an adventure quickly turned into a nightmare. After a few days, the weather turned for the worse and Jack got sick. Worried about his health, Bernard wanted to go back to Inuvik, but Dennis wanted to continue walking to Tuk. Dennis left the two boys and continued his journey alone, *“that was the last time we seen Dennis,”* said Bernard.

Jack and Bernard tried to stay warm and found shelter from a storm by huddling together in some bushes. With Jack's health quickly declining, he was soon unable to continue the journey. After ensuring that Jack was comfortable, Bernard reluctantly continued the journey. Bernard walked for two weeks on his own, before finally reaching the outskirts of Tuk. He recalls hallucinating and being scared throughout the end of his lone journey. Thankfully, Bernard was rescued and sent to the Inuvik hospital for treatment. He had lost over 30 pounds and remembered that his feet were so swollen that he was unable to walk for several weeks afterwards.

Tragically, because the boys were so fearful of returning to the residential school; Dennis Dick, and Lawrence Jack Elanik lost their lives. A search party was sent out to find the boys; Jack's body was located but Dennis Dick's body was never recovered. Bernard stated that, *"we were scared to go back," and "we didn't know what was going to happen ... the supervisors weren't very nice people. They were really mean toward us — so mean that we were scared of them."* Andreason confirmed there was physical and emotional abuse at Stringer Hall — he said he suffered both — and the three boys were terrified of the consequences they would face for stealing.

In 2017, some Tuk residents were pressing the GNWT to change the name of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway to the "Freedom Trail" to commemorate their story. The GNWT acknowledged the damage that the residential school system caused but stated that the name of the highway shall remain as is¹⁸.

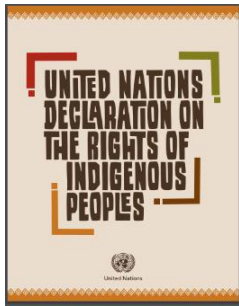
Methodology

The review included the following activities:

1. **Planning Phase** - Involved a examination of relevant background documents, preliminary discussions with NWTRPA staff, and the development of an ongoing project plan.
2. **Research Phase** - Involved a perusal of reference materials (see below for more information) to identify any material that may be relevant to the Program and provide recommendations. Criteria for selection included any text related to health, recreation, and the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement Phase** - Involved the formation of a Walking Challenge Advisory Committee (and subsequent meetings) plus two public engagements sessions: one in Tuk and another held virtually for all NWT residents.

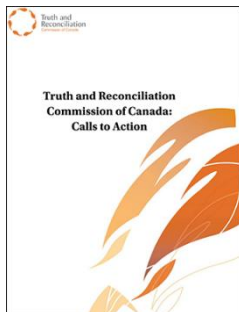
Reference Materials

The following reference materials were included as part of this review because of their national and international prominence. They are viewed as being grounded in community and are considered to be the most current and relevant materials related to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples:

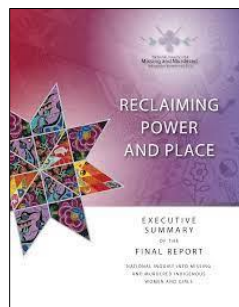


United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles¹⁹:

Released in 2007 by the United Nation General Assembly, this international declaration has been adopted by every country in the world. In 46 articles, it describes minimum standards for Indigenous human rights worldwide, for all governments and institutions to recognize and uphold.



Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (TRC)²⁰: This report was released in 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission was unlike any other at the time, they spent six years travelling across the country hearing from over 6,000 witnesses: mostly residential school survivors and/or their families. From this work, 94 Calls to Action were brought forward to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.



Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice²¹: Released in 2019, this report *calls for transformative legal and social changes to resolve the crisis that has devastated Indigenous communities across the country*. It includes testimony gathered over two years from more than 2,380 participants, including: survivors of violence, their families, and experts in the field. From this work, 231 individual Calls for Justice were directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Canadians.

Common Themes

During the research phase, it became apparent that providing recommendations for each section of relevant text was not the best approach. Instead, the recommendations needed to be focused on programming that met the needs of the following common themes:

- Indigenous Peoples, culture and language
- Residential school survivors and their families
- Indigenous women, girls & 2SLGBTQQIA people

It was also clear that the recommendations could apply to all of the NWTRPA's programs and services, not just the walking challenge. Please see Table 2 below for a brief list of relevant material that were selected from the three reference materials. See Appendix 5 for a detailed list (including text) of the selected material.

Table 2. Relevant sections selected from reference material.

Reference Material	Applicable section
UNDRIP Articles	7.1, 11.1, 15.1, 15.2, 16.2, 22.1, 23, 24.2, 29.3, & 31.1
TRC Calls to Action	7, 13, 28, 44, 53.iv, 57, 62.iii, 66, 87, 88, 89, 90 & 91
MMWIG Calls for Justice	1.4, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 4.4, 6.1, 6.1.i, 6.1.ii, 6.1.iv, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 11.1, 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.4, 15.5, 15.6, 15.7, 15.8, 16.2, 16.4, 16.7, 16.7.ii, 16.7.iii, 16.8, 16.11, 16.12, 16.13, 16.25, 16.27, 16.33, 16.41, 16.43, 17.3, 17.5, 17.6, 17.8, 17.10, 17.20, 17.24, 17.25, 17.26, 18.1, 18.2, 18.4.ii, 18.5, 18.6, 18.10, 18.11, 18.18 & 18.19

What we heard - Stakeholder Engagement Phase

Three WCAC meetings and two public information sessions were held throughout 2022-2023 to discuss the temporary name change and Program review.

It should also be noted that the two public information sessions were widely advertised through the NWTRPA's website, social media platforms, email distribution list, Tuk community radio, and printed posters.

In order to gain insight on the issue, the NWTRPA staff and a former consultant reached out to the individuals who brought forward the concern regarding the Walk to Tuk name. Unfortunately, these attempts at contact were unsuccessful. Since we were unable to connect with these individuals the WCAC members struggled with their decision to keep the "Walk to Tuk" name; the decision was based on what was heard during the stakeholder engagement sessions.



Figure 6. WCAC meeting in Tuktoyaktuk (Source: Nuka De Jocas).

WCAC Meetings

1. **This first meeting was held in Tuk from Nov 30-Dec 1, 2022.** Special thanks to Darlene Gruben, Community Wellness Worker (GNWT) for providing counselling support during the events in Tuk. The agenda included:
 - Background on the NWTRPA, the Walking Challenge, and the decision regarding the temporary name change.
 - A pre-recorded presentation and live virtual Q&A with Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser (University of Alberta) on *Inuvik's residential schools and their impacts*. Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser is Gwichyà Gwich'in and originally from Inuvik and Dachan Choo Gèhnjik, NWT. Dr. Fraser's PhD research focused on the history of student experiences at Indian Residential Schools in the Inuvik Region between 1959 and 1996. Her work makes a strong contribution to how scholars engage with Indigenous research methodologies and theoretical concepts, our understanding of Indigenous histories during the second half of the twentieth century, and how northern Canada was unique in relation to the rest of the settler nation.
 - Meet and greet with Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation staff/leadership, Hamlet staff/leadership and community members: Mayor Erwin Elias, Nellie Cournoyea, Kendyce Cockney, Peter Nogasak, Eileen Jacobson, Carmen Kuptana.
 - Breakout group discussions with the WCAC members on recommendations regarding the practical vision, Program review and naming process/new name.

Main discussion points:

- Most of the meeting participants had taken part in the Walking Challenge in the past or walked regularly; viewed it as being very impactful, healthy, and healing. "Good for the community's health; good for the mind; get a lot of people active; lots of youth and Elders who participate".
 - The temporary name change really affected the community of Tuk; "felt like a lot was taken away". Many from the community were unhappy as the temporary name change was seen as more damaging than the name "Walk to Tuk". Reconciliation is about moving forward and the Community leaders of Tuk didn't see the name as being negative. "If the name changes possibly better to not incorporate Tuk".
 - WCAC discussed the need to move carefully and respectfully with regard to the name change and review: "the Walk to Tuk name hurts some people; we need to relate to the survivors; fear is why the survivors didn't speak up earlier".
 - Please see Appendices for agenda and detailed summary notes.
2. **The second WCAC meeting was held virtually via Zoom on Feb 17, 2023.** Main discussion points:
 - Updated on the 2023 Walking Challenge program.
 - Reviewed and discussed the Nov 2022 WCAC meeting summary notes.
 - Updated on new timeline for review.
 - Invited WCAC to Feb 23 virtual public info session and discussed their potential role during call.
 3. **The third WCAC meeting was held virtually via Zoom on March 22, 2023.** Main discussion points:
 - Reviewed this draft report; WCAC provided thorough written and verbal feedback.
 - Discussion on next steps.

- Please see recorded Zoom video for more detail.



Figure 7. Public information session in Tuktoyaktuk on Dec 1, 2022. (Source: Nuka De Jocas).

Public Information Sessions

1. **The first in-person public information session was held in Tuk on Dec 1, 2022.** Approximately 30 people from Tuk met at Kitti Hall for a dinner and discussion. Background information was presented on the NWTRPA, the Walking Challenge, and the decision regarding the temporary name change. Time was also provided for questions and discussion. Main discussion points:
 - The temporary name change is understandable, because of the families that lost their boys.
 - Was initially lazy about the idea of doing the challenge, but once the walking commenced it was loved and appreciated. The Walking Challenge helps get back to a healthy lifestyle; by getting exercise.
 - Uncertain if they will still walk with the Challenge if the name changes; the idea of the challenge is important; the name “Walk to Tuk” should stay, started as something to keep participants healthy.
 - The original name brought larger participation. Would the new name include a different place or a new destination in the NWT?
 - The community would like to keep the “Walk to Tuk” name; it’s about being positive; people are drawn to the name; the people who had issues with the name are not here at the meeting.
 - Make sure to keep the name Tuk in the name; “Trails to Tuk”; every walk is a tribute to the ones who passed away.
 - Possibly change name to an Inuvialuit name.
2. **The second public information session was held virtually via Zoom on Feb 23, 2023.** Approximately 15 people from across the NWT attended the session. Background information was presented on the NWTRPA, the Walking Challenge, and the decision regarding the temporary name change. Time was

provided for questions/discussion and a Google form link was provided for written feedback. Main discussion points:

- Many people enjoy the Walking Challenge in the communities, good way to connect with Elders, Youth, and others. It's very encouraging and helps get people active.
- General satisfaction on how respectfully the WCAC and the NWTRPA are working with Indigenous groups and residential school survivors through this process.
- Ease and simplicity in saying the name. "Walk to Tuk" was great from the perspective that it was fun and easy to say. Needs to be inclusive, a long mouthful of a name is more difficult to use. "Keep it short and snappy".
- If the name is changed, "we lose of the story of the three boys" and we don't want to forget these things. We should connect the name somehow to their story. Another name would have no relevance or meaning; it would cause us to "lose an opportunity to have a conversation and remember what happened".
- Commemorate Indigenous walkers in the NWT (e.g., late Jim Burke).
- Hoping that NWTRPA does some good communication planning around this work (name change, process, and review).
- Please see recorded Zoom video for more detail.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Name of the Program

Although the NWTRPA Board of Directors was well intentioned in temporarily changing the name in 2021, making this change without first engaging with the public caused many complexities during this review. Due to the popularity of the program, the WCAC members (as well as many community members from Tuk and across the NWT), questioned why this decision was made without proper engagement. It's highly recommended that if similar issues arise in the future, that stakeholder engagement be carried out before any decisions are made.

There were extensive discussions held with the WCAC, the community of Tuk and the general public on the Program design (please see below for a detailed list of recommendations). However, despite a few suggestions (e.g., Big River Challenge, Trails to Tuk, use an Indigenous name, etc.), a new name for the Program was not determined as the WCAC and the Community of Tuk unanimously decided to keep the name "Walk to Tuk". We repeatedly heard that by keeping the name, it could be an opportunity to honor those who attended residential school by educating Northerners and the general public on the history of residential schools in the NWT. Tuk community members were very strong in their view that the name should remain "Walk to Tuk" as it showcased the community; "Tuk loves Walk to Tuk".

Recommendations for Program Design

During the first WCAC meeting in Tuktoyaktuk (Nov 30-Dec 1, 2022), the committee members were asked two focus questions and given time to brainstorm responses on post-it notes (individually and as small groups). Their responses were then clustered and named (see Tables 3 & 4 for their direct responses).

Focus Question 1: Practical Vision-*What future do we want to see for the Program in 5 years?*

Summary of recommendations (please see Table 3 below for a list of detailed recommendations):

- Increased awareness and participation through NWT specific communications and incentives.
- Improved programming through culturally relevant and respectful education.
- Continued success through efficient and fully supported administrative and technical support.

Table 3: Direct responses from WCAC members to focus question 1.

Increased awareness and participation through NWT specific communications and incentives.	Improved programming through culturally relevant and respectful education.	Continued success through efficient and fully supported administrative and technical support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Contest-completed teams get to walk in Tuk (outside of the Tuk team) -Huge walking event (teams walking highway to Tuk) -More male participants -Testimonials-keep capturing stories -Super Challenge-Walk to Tuk/Dempster Highway (e.g., Arctics Ultra) -Photo challenge #hashtag e.g., frosty face -12,000 participants - More school participating - National event (recognition) -All communities involved -Promotion in schools -Increased public interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Make program more family-oriented - Challenge nearby communities (e.g., Hay River vs. Ft Providence) -Create “Walk & Talk” themes (e.g., discussing Indigenous podcasts or audio books) -Music (create playlist of Northern artists) - Identify and map community walking trails -Champions/trainers needed to encourage for Seniors/Elder to participate - The program is respectful of Indigenous culture and knowledge -Teachers of the land-being respectful -Include official Indigenous languages on all merchandise and communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy flow to organize (administratively) - App (tracking time and give information) - More funding needed - Get key sponsor/funder (e.g., Diavik or community organization) - Hire more employees for NWTRPA -Still walking (trekking) - Name remains “Walk to Tuk”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create jingle for program -Video or pics of experiences from participants from each region -More public input -New logo -design graphic -Merchandise (water bottles, wind pants, mukluks) - Awesome website! -Awareness of landscape -Updated promo video - Provide winter safety gear/kits (matches & fire starter) - Educate on dress code-winter gear (warm clothes) - Create safety awareness for wildlife/animals (bear/fox) -Honoring our loved ones -Northerners are proud (to participate and of program) -Profiling of communities (in communications) -Showcase how Walking Challenge helps to connect to the land (in communications) -Provide clarity on what it is (the program) - Sharing or educating on health benefits - Include all physical activities e.g. Skiing, hiking, etc. *raise awareness -Communicate purpose clearly (2 months for Jan/Feb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek Elder guidance on programming (community based) - Include all NWT official languages - Expand time/walk year-round (because environment is changing) - Make program more inclusive - Create awareness on environment & changing weather 	
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Common themes:

- Indigenous Peoples, culture, and language
- Residential school survivors and their families
- Indigenous women, girls & 2SLGBTQIA people

Focus question 2: *What ideas do you have to successfully implement these common themes into the program?*

Summary of recommendations (please see Table 4 below for a list of detailed recommendations):

- Create culturally respectful and culturally relevant communications.
- Include culturally relevant programming addressed to meet the needs of the three common themes.
- Increase inclusivity by creating partnerships and collaborations with people associated with the common themes.
- Provide prizes/incentives that are culturally relevant and socially responsible.

Table 4. Direct responses from WCAC members to focus question 2.

Create culturally respectful and culturally relevant communications.	Include culturally relevant programming addressed to meet the needs of people associated with the three common themes.	Increase inclusivity by creating partnerships and collaborations with people associated with the common themes.	Provide prizes/incentives that are culturally relevant and socially responsible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include ambassadors in communications from 3 themes - Share stories of survivors - Create calendar of events/highlight upcoming walks (National addictions awareness walk) - Create Facebook group and/or have zoom kickoff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Every year, choose a theme name for annual event (i.e. honoring our ancestors, tribute for missing, murdered and abused victims) -Provide prize for learning about culturally significant places in your area -Host discussion groups (share resources, educate on Indigenous issues in NWT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reach out to Indigenous TikTok influencers to take part in and promote event -Sponsor should be socially responsible -Corporate teams from responsible organizations -Adopt an Elder -Continue to include Walking Challenge advisory committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For prizes-include red dress and/or orange t-shirt or rainbow -Sponsor prize (canvas tent or sleigh) -Prizes should showcase Indigenous culture (traditional arts and garments, books, music, etc.) -Award towards themes

<p>party meeting in the regions, share on Facebook live</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share profiles and testimonials focused on three themes (external communications) - Outsource communications (to those who specialize in these areas) - Hire spokesperson to talk to media (e.g., Dr. Crystal Fraser) - Create themed versions of logo (e.g., red dress, etc.) -Work with translators -Ensure branding is done with respect -Create Facebook page -Have a mascot (Indigenous focused) e.g., polar bear, ptarmigan, etc. -Communications: ensure it's accessible, plain language, using official Indigenous languages and proper orthography -Continue with blogs, newsletters, email (info, mailchimp) -Promote Indigenous language on merchandise and printed matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Share cultural traditional practice (e.g. sharing stories about how our people walked in cold weather) -Promote Indigenous language team names -Dedicate a week to common theme through captain (e.g., map route by putting small red dresses throughout route) -Walk to culturally significant symbolic spots -Promote traditional food -Provide contact info for mental health workers -Provide notebooks, keeping a diary of feelings -Encourage participants to think about/ honour murder victims and victims of abuse -Dedicate your walk or share a story -Walk for residential school survivors (I'm walking for my mom) -Promote walk & Talk-directed themes -Improve appropriate data collection in registration (self-identify as Indigenous, gender, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ask specific organization for feedback (e.g., Native women's association or Northern Mosaic) -Going to Elders for traditional knowledge - Collaborate with partners - Ambassadors in each community -Disability access group awareness (inclusivity) -Empowering women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA to participate (included) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consider 3 common themes when purchasing merchandise (buy local) -Donate to favourite organizations e.g., food hamper to foster families
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Additional Recommendations on Program Design

From NWTRPA staff, WCAC members and Jennie Vandermeer Consulting on how to implement the three common themes:

- Conduct a facilitated visioning workshop for the NWTRPA Board and staff to explore the recommendations in this review (narrowing and prioritizing the list) and how they could be implemented into all of the NWTRPA's programs and services.
- Keep the current WCAC active and expand their focus for all NWTRPA initiatives or form an Indigenous Advisory Committee.
- Professional development for Board and staff:
 - Complete *150 Acts of Reconciliation*²² together.
 - Professional development: complete the University of Alberta's *Indigenous Canada*²³ and the GNWT's *Living Well Together*²⁴ training together.
 - Host a monthly Indigenous Culture Day (e.g., hire Elder or invite Indigenous staff or Board members to tell stories or teach a traditional skill in a land-based setting).
- Communications:
 - Release the final version of this report to the public: can be done in sections through graphics, text, and videos. It's highly suggested that a graphic designer work on the report before being released to incorporate NWTRPA branding.
 - Create communications (e.g., graphics, text, and videos) showing how the NWTRPA are implementing specific actions (i.e., document and share the professional development process: how it feels, lessons learned, etc.).
 - Build off existing work (e.g., "*How I Survived*": *Recreation at Northern Residential Schools* project) to showcase a residential school survivor and how they used (and still use) recreation to connect to community and the land & keep healthy.
- Collaborations/partnerships:
 - Collaborate with existing organizations that serve the NWT's Indigenous population (E.g., Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation, Street Outreach Yellowknife, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, Dene Nahjo) to offer your programs and services to their clients/network.
 - Reach out to Indigenous communities, specifically Indigenous youth to hear what they want for recreation in their communities (e.g., how recreation and healthy living can help with addiction, mental illness, etc.).
- Program ideas:
 - With permission, create audio playlists of Elders stories related to each region or language or ask communities to share theirs.
 - Create music playlists showcasing Northern Indigenous artists.
 - List the distances around significant places in the NWT (e.g., distance around Sahtú-Great Bear Lake or Great Slave Lake) and have people aim to walk that distance throughout the challenge.
- Hire more Indigenous staff and LISTEN to them when they offer advice. This is an issue across all sectors and why many Indigenous people leave organizations.
- Keep it up, remember that the NWTRPA is doing great!

Conclusion

Some of you reading this report may still be asking yourselves how decolonization and reconciliation are related to a recreation activity. It's a good question to ask as you challenge yourself to think about what decolonization and reconciliation mean. Ultimately, this means challenging everyone (including ourselves) to acknowledge our unconscious bias: the way we've been conditioned (due to racist policies and systems of governance) to think that Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and knowledge are inferior.

Indigenous Peoples are strong, resilient, and adaptive. But many Indigenous communities are also deeply traumatized by the effects of colonialism and racism. Government policies were established to either assimilate or destroy Indigenous Peoples. These policies forced thousands of Indigenous children into residential schools where many faced extreme abuse and/or neglect. The effects of this trauma are intergenerational and has devastated many communities. Now, many of Indigenous Peoples are disconnected from their culture, language, and the land. Due to this disconnection, many struggle with addictions, mental illness, and poor health due to lifestyle choices. Dr. Thema Bryant is a renowned psychologist, her clinical and research interests center on interpersonal trauma and the societal trauma of oppression. With regard to how people deal with trauma, she's been quoted saying, "when the house is on fire, we don't tell people to watch their tone when they yell for help. Be mindful of trying to dictate how people respond to trauma."

Reconciliation involves repairing relationships and is not the sole responsibility of Indigenous Peoples, it is crucial that all Northerners and Canadians understand the devastating impact that the residential school system continues to have today and commits to working together to repair relationships with Indigenous Peoples. To move forward together, all Canadians need to understand and acknowledge this dark part of our ongoing history. Everyone has a personal responsibility to repairing the relationship with Indigenous Peoples. We often think that the responsibility lies with governments but it's this mentality that is keeping us from moving forward. We need to ask ourselves, *"what action can I take to improve this relationship"?*

When the TRC released their report in 2015 to deal with Canada's ongoing legacy of residential schools, the Federal government stated its commitment to implement all 94 Calls to Action. Nearly 8 years later, the majority of those Calls to Action haven't been implemented. So, instead of asking ourselves why this is relevant to a walking challenge, we should be asking ourselves, *"what can I do to hold the governments accountable and support residential school survivors"?* To repair this relationship, everyone has to take part and lead by example. Hopefully by starting with like a walking challenge, we can learn lessons that can be applied to larger programs and policies. The tragic story of the three boys, Dennis Dick, Lawrence Jack Elanik, and Bernard Andreason, is as an opportunity for change. We can create real change by sharing their legacy and using it to guide how we work with Indigenous Peoples. The NWTRPA has an opportunity to show others how this can be done and to lead the way.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Wellness Support Information²⁵

- **Indian Residential Schools Survivor Support Line** provides crisis counselling and emotional support for survivors and intergenerational survivors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Telephone (toll free): **1-866-925-4419**
- **Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program** provides mental health and emotional support services to eligible residential school survivors and their families. There are Resolution Health Support Workers across the North. Telephone (toll free): **1-800-464-8106**
Website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/health-care-services/indian-residential-schools-health-supports/indian-residential-schools-resolution-health-support-program.html>
- **NWT Help Line** offers confidential support to residents of the NWT, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is 100% free and anonymous. The help line also has an option for follow-up calls with a Care Coach. Telephone (toll free): **1-800-661-0844**.
- **Hope for Wellness Help Line** offers immediate help to all Indigenous peoples across Canada. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer counselling and crisis intervention. Telephone (toll free): **1-855-242-3310** or connect to the online chat at www.hopeforwellness.com.
- **NWT Community Counselling Program** helps people deal with a variety of issues including family violence, mental health issues, and addictions. It is available free-of-charge to every NWT resident, in every region of the NWT. Local phone numbers for the community counsellors are available here: <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/contact/community-counsellor>.
- There may be other people and organizations in your community who are available to provide support to you, including: Elders, Community Wellness Workers, Alcoholics Anonymous groups, Canadian Mental Health Association, and others.

Appendix 2: Walking Challenge Advisory Committee Terms of Reference (see attachment)

Appendix 3: Agenda-WCAC Meeting Nov 30-Dec 1, 2022 (see attachment)

Appendix 4: Final summary notes-WCAC Meeting Nov 30-Dec 1, 2022 (see attachment)

Appendix 5-Detailed list of relevant material from reference materials (see attachment)

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/post/nwtrpa-walking-challenge-temporary-name-change>

² Language evolves and many Indigenous Peoples do not refer to themselves as “Aboriginal” or “Indian” any longer. Note that the term “Indigenous” is used throughout this document except when quoting specific reference material.

³ https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/>

⁵ <https://denenahjo.com/>

⁶ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/how-i-survived-webpage>

⁷ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/post/racism-in-recreation-and-parks>

⁸ <https://bushkids.ca/>

⁹ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/post/statement-of-solidarity-with-tk-eml%C3%BAs-te-secw%C3%A9pemc>

¹⁰ <https://www.nwtrpa.org/post/september-30-national-day-for-truth-and-reconciliation-1>

¹¹ <https://nwtrpawalkingchallenge.ca/the-big-river/>

¹² <https://www.nwtrpa.org/post/expression-of-interest-walking-challenge-advisory-committee>

¹³ [https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/entities/1305#:~:text=Sacred%20Heart%20Indian%20Residential%20School,%2D%201961%20\(74%20years\).](https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/entities/1305#:~:text=Sacred%20Heart%20Indian%20Residential%20School,%2D%201961%20(74%20years).)

¹⁴ <https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/occurrences/206>

¹⁵ https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/#:~:text=The%20term%20residential%20schools%20refers,Canadian%20and%20Christian%20ways%20of

¹⁶ <https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history/>

¹⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/bernard-andreason-tuktoyaktuk-journey-1.4297798>

¹⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuvik-tuktoyaktuk-highway-freedom-trail-1.4263449>

¹⁹ https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

²⁰ https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

²¹ https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

²² <https://150acts.weebly.com/about.html>

²³ <https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html>

²⁴ <https://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/en/services/diversity-and-inclusion/living-well-together>

²⁵ https://5a004a92-3f3c-4a7d-82c3-6fda87669c26.filesusr.com/ugd/fcfd58_1c39bc8502354465a80124f06d49ae51.pdf