



SASKATCHEWAN INDEX OF  
**WELLBEING**  
**Guest Blog**

# Using Treaty to Address Inequities in Saskatchewan Standards of Living

by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner



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## Using Treaty to Address Inequities in Saskatchewan Standards of Living

*by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner*

If we needed a reminder of the importance of truth and reconciliation in Canada and Saskatchewan, the current situation in the United States is sadly providing it to us. The American troubles demonstrate that historical wounds and racism do not just go away. Healthy societies and sustainable living standards cannot be built upon systems designed to reflect a belief in the superiority of one group of humans over another. In Canada too, we need to examine our historical past in order to build a promising future for all.

Five years ago, the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) released their report on the horrors and long-lasting impacts of Indian Residential Schools, along with [94 Calls to Action](#) to initiate change in Canada. The Calls to Action touched many Canadians in ways that previous reports had failed to do. Thousands of residential school Survivors from across this country courageously shared personal stories that had often been buried for years. Perhaps Canadians responded this time because these were stories of children. Those children are now men and women – parents, grandparents and great-grandparents – kookums and mushums. But these Survivors were once innocent children who fell victim to a system designed to steal their Indigenous identity and replace it with racist ideals of “civilization” and “progress”.

[The Office of the Treaty Commissioner \(OTC\)](#) works to facilitate Treaty implementation in Saskatchewan. Treaties were entered into in Saskatchewan as a series of nation-to-nation agreements to work together for shared prosperity. They were agreed to through ceremony and were intended to last “as long as the grass grows, the sun shines and rivers flow.” The spirit and intent of Treaties were of kinship, mutual benefit and shared management of these lands.

The Indian Residential School system is sadly just one example of Canadian governments pursuing policies contrary to the Treaties. But the Treaties remain in place. We are all Treaty people. The OTC believes that a return to the spirit and intent of Treaty is the way to ensure we build a better future for us all. We believe that Treaty implementation is a pathway to truth and reconciliation.

So in 2016 the OTC started travelling the province, asking Saskatchewan residents about the future they want to build for their children. Our guess was that most of us want the same things and we hoped that if we could build a vision that all could relate to, that we could better work together – in the ways intended by our ancestors who entered into Treaty.

After four years of asking and listening, we released in September 2019 a Vision for Truth and Reconciliation through Treaty Implementation.

The Vision built by Saskatchewan voices states that building a better future includes four elements: ensuring we have a shared understanding of our history; working to build authentic relationships; empowering and learning from our vibrant cultures and world views; and ensuring that our systems represent and benefit us all.

## **We Are All Treaty People**

A Vision for Truth and Reconciliation through Treaty Implementation



There is a long journey ahead of us. As the [Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing](#) indicates, there continues to be social and income inequality in our province. And the gap is widening. As the report notes, in 2016 “First Nations peoples reported median incomes (\$18,840) that were less than one-third of those reported by residents of Saskatchewan overall (\$59,700).” These different living standards are rooted in history – the trauma of residential schools, the pass system, 60’s Scoop and the Indian Act. But we’ve seen a renewed interest in Saskatchewan residents in repairing the Treaty relationship. They’ve told us that fixing our problems will require trust and relationships, and policies and systems that are rooted in vibrant cultures and worldviews, and which reject racism.

In Saskatchewan, people of action are coming together to build relationships, trust, and understanding and to make a positive change in their community. Coalitions of people working towards reconciliation are forming in Saskatoon, Regina, Heart of Treaty Six (Lloydminster, Onion Lake, Frog Lake, Poundmaker), Yellow Quill/Kelvington and surrounding communities, Prince Albert, Prairie Rivers Reconciliation (Warman, Martensville, One Arrow, Osler and surrounding communities), Nipawin, the Battlefords, Swift Current, and Yorkton.

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner is supporting these groups by facilitating connections between those who wish to lead their communities in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation. We hope to provide these change-makers with the tools and space to learn and engage in collective action. We’re also working to develop a framework for organizations and communities to develop plans for action, and to measure their progress.

We hear stories of progress regularly – of relationships and trust-building leading to action. For example, the reconciliation circle in Yorkton responded when they heard concerns of First Nations community members meeting restrictions on buying bulk on behalf of their communities during COVID-19. The group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members came together, met with local stores and found solutions. It is small steps of togetherness like this that will make our communities stronger.

Ensuring that we all have a dignified and sustainable standard of living is what was intended by the ancestors of this land who entered into Treaty. We owe it to those ancestors and to our children yet to come to make that happen. It will take significant work; we must learn and embrace our history, build authentic relationships, respect and revitalize cultures, and remake inequitable and sometimes racist systems. The United States is clearly demonstrating right now where avoiding that hard work will lead us. We have a chance to take a different path, one based on the original intent of Treaty – toward shared prosperity for all. There are people who want to carry that relationship forward! There are people who want to be good neighbors!

*More information on the Office of the Treaty Commissioner: [otc.ca](http://otc.ca)*

*More information on the Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing: [saskwellbeing.ca](http://saskwellbeing.ca)*

