



Nova Scotia
Home for Colored Children
Restorative Inquiry

Reflection and Action Task Group

Report to Legislature





SANKOFA:

“To reach back and get it”

Sankofa is a Ghanaian word that translates as “to reach back and get it.”

The principle of Sankofa is that one should gather the best of what the past has to teach in order to succeed in the future. It is expressed visually as a bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg in its mouth.



About this report

As outlined in the NSHCC Restorative Inquiry Mandate and Terms of Reference, the Reflection and Action Task Group works with and responds to the Council of Parties to ensure public and government institutions are fully engaged with the Restorative Inquiry. It also considers learnings throughout the process to make plans for appropriate action and implementation within the planning and action stages of the Restorative Inquiry.

The Reflection and Action Task Group has a mandated responsibility to report to the Legislature on government's participation and engagement in advancing the goals, objectives, and impact of the Restorative Inquiry. This reporting reflects principles of the Inquiry to ensure deeper understanding of the issues related to the NSHCC and their importance for the province. It is essential that all members of the Legislature be part of this learning and understanding process and engage in the collective responsibility to realize a better way forward.

This report reflects this commitment and summarizes government's engagement in and support of the Inquiry work at this phase in its mandate. The Council of Parties, as "commissioners"—the governing body leading the Restorative Inquiry—reports on the overall work of the Inquiry. It released a report in February 2017 summarizing the work and themes emerging from the relationship-building phase of the mandate.

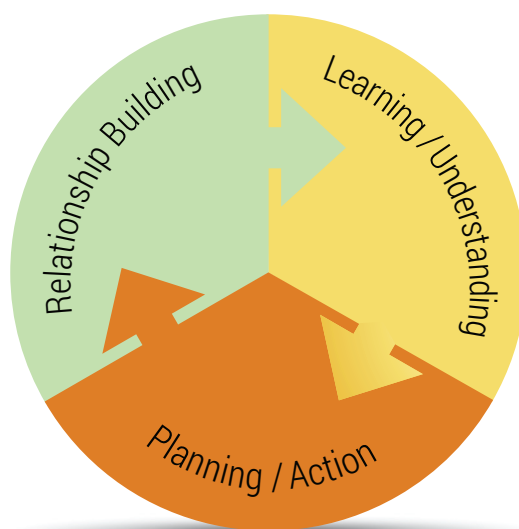
Context of NSHCC Restorative Inquiry

The Government of Nova Scotia committed to hold a public inquiry into the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children (NSHCC) as part of a comprehensive response to the history and legacy of the Home and the abuse that occurred within it. Through the lens of the experiences of former residents and the history of the NSHCC, the Restorative Inquiry will reveal and examine this part of the harmful legacy of systemic and institutional racism in Nova Scotia. Its mandate is to examine the impact of this harmful legacy on affected families and communities and attempt to address the harms and consequences in a meaningful, forward-focused way.

The Restorative Inquiry has a mandate to engage former residents, affected communities, and public partners—including government—to examine what happened, why it happened, and why it matters for all Nova Scotians. Through this engagement, Inquiry partners will work together to address this history with a focus on future solutions—solutions that not only prevent further harm, but make meaningful changes toward a more just and equitable future.

While the Restorative Inquiry has the full powers, privileges, and immunities of a public inquiry, it differs in focus, design, and process from traditional inquiries. It approaches its work based on restorative principles that bring parties together not as adversaries but as partners, to give a clear account of the past and create solutions together. As part of its mandate, the Restorative Inquiry will examine the role and contribution of various systems, sectors, and institutions in the harmful history and legacy of the NSHCC, including education, justice, health, and community services. The intent is not to assign individual blame for past harms, but to understand what happened and why it matters, and work together to build a better future.

The Restorative Inquiry has a 2.5-year mandate with three articulated phases of work: relationship building; learning and understanding; and planning and action. Currently, the Restorative Inquiry is working within the learning and understanding phase of the mandate.



Reflection and Action Task Group

A Council of Parties appointed under the Public Inquiries Act serves as Commissioners to fulfill the mandate of the Restorative Inquiry. Reflecting the Inquiry's collaborative approach, the Council includes former residents, government liaisons, members of the African Nova Scotian community, along with a judicial representative, a process advisor, and a representative of the NSHCC board. As part of government's commitment as a full partner in the process, Deputy Ministers from the departments of Community Services, Justice, Communities, Culture and Heritage, Health and Wellness, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Labour and Advanced Education offer their full engagement and support as members of the Reflection and Action Task Group.

This Task Group, which also includes representation from Council, former residents, and community, facilitates the collaborative action across government in the work of the Inquiry. As they represent one of the central parties in the Inquiry, government partners believe this is an important and unique opportunity to work together—through and within the Restorative Inquiry processes—for positive change and to make a difference in real time on the central issues identified by the Council of Parties as relevant to the Inquiry.

Government Engagement

The Restorative Inquiry process is a first for Nova Scotia—not only a different way forward for an Inquiry, but a different way for government to collaborate and participate.

This different way forward is reflected not only by government's commitment to hold a public inquiry, but also—and perhaps more importantly—in how it honours and animates that commitment.

Creating Conditions for Inquiry

To help the Restorative Inquiry achieve its goals and disrupt old patterns of relationships, government has acted to create conditions for the Inquiry to be successful. This began by engaging former NSHCC residents in the earliest stages to center them in helping build a healthier future for all Nova Scotians. In working closely with former residents, government settled the class-action lawsuit related to the abuse within the NSHCC. Following the settlement, Premier McNeil offered an official apology in October 2014 to former residents on behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia. The apology acknowledged the harms that former residents experienced and the NSHCC's connection to the history of systemic and institutionalized racism faced by African Nova Scotians in this province.

This formal recognition remains a foundational pathway to reconciliation and building healthier relationships as we move forward together.

Government supported a collaborative design process with leadership from former residents, African Nova Scotian community members, and the NSHCC to create the Mandate and Terms of Reference reflective of restorative principles and commitments to do no further harm. Recognizing that full participation of multiple parties is integral to the restorative process of the Inquiry, government made legislative changes necessary within the Public Inquiries Act to allow former residents and others to participate fully without risk of legal action. An amendment to the act was passed in December 2015 to lay the groundwork in support of the Restorative Inquiry.


Sustaining Conditions for Inquiry

Facilitating Support

Government remains engaged in the structure of the Restorative Inquiry as it has both representatives on the Council of Parties and Deputy Ministers from relevant departments who sit on the Reflection and Action Task Group. This Task Group helps ensure the necessary conditions of the Inquiry are fully supported. Government provided former residents with access to health supports throughout the settlement process to ensure their needs were met in the intervening period before the Inquiry began. Additionally, government provides infrastructure and administrative support, such as information technology services, finance, and human resources, to sustain the independence of the inquiry.

Research and Information

The Reflection and Action Task Group meets regularly and is committed to learning in real time. This Task Group mobilizes and assists in coordinating government support at different stages in the Inquiry. As the Inquiry is currently in Phase II, Learning and Understanding, of its work, government supports the information-gathering necessary for Council's deliberations and analysis. This includes making relevant records and information available to help Council direct the Restorative Inquiry's research activities and compile the comprehensive narrative and history of the NSHCC. Recognizing the Restorative Inquiry principle that understanding the past is necessary to build a better future, government is committed to critically examining its role in the history of the NSHCC as a pathway to address how the



legacy of systemic and institutional racism has impacted individuals, families, and communities for generations in Nova Scotia. This learning is essential to support the Restorative Inquiry and all its partners in working together to plan and act on central issues revealed through the process to make a lasting difference for the future.

Health Support and Service Delivery

Government has also supported the goals and objectives of the Restorative Inquiry through departmental participation in support mechanisms such as the Restorative Inquiry Health Support Advisory Committee, which provided strategic advice on how best to support former residents and other participants in the Inquiry processes. Participation in the Restorative Inquiry process is also an avenue to explore how to provide more collaborative, culturally competent care across healthcare sectors.

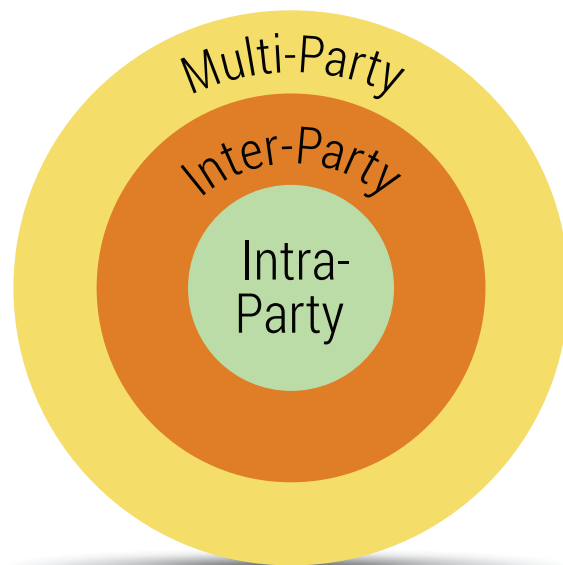
Learning Together

Other support includes learning opportunities such as a workshop co-hosted by the Restorative Inquiry and the Department of Community Services called “One Community Learning Together: A Restorative Conversation on Supporting Families.” This day-long event was held in conjunction with an International Restorative Approaches conference IT, brought local government and community practitioners together with experts from around the world in community-focused, culturally competent care. These types of events are important relationship-building pieces that enable continued learning together in preparation for the planning and action phase of the mandate.

Partner Circles

The Restorative Inquiry has a mandate to examine the role and contribution of various systems, sectors, and institutions in the harmful history and legacy of the NSHCC, including education, justice, health, and community services. This requires public institutions to commit to and engage in a thorough and complex examination of the issues and circumstances related to the NSHCC. To support the learning and understanding phase of the Restorative Inquiry process, government has co-hosted with the Inquiry a series of partner circles with relevant provincial departments to help deepen the collective learning, build upon the relationships for anticipated action, and inform the Council of Parties in their understanding and identification of issues for further exploration and action. To date, an initial round of partner circles has been completed with Community Services, Justice, Health and Wellness, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Labour and Advanced Education.

Through these partner circles, the Inquiry works with participants in government and public agencies to examine the contexts, causes, and circumstances and ongoing legacy of harms related to the experience of the NSHCC. As this work is taking place, the Restorative Inquiry is also conducting circles with former residents and community members to gain a full and informed understanding and lay the groundwork for learning, planning, and acting together in the phases of work to come.



As the process proceeds, each part of the work will involve meetings with a different scope of participants, from individual parties through to multi-party processes in order to build and prepare relationships between and among the parties so they can participate together in the work of learning, planning and action.

The Way Forward: Understanding, Planning, and Acting Together

The NSHCC Restorative Inquiry provides inspiration and a pathway for recognizing and addressing the presence of institutional and systemic racism in our province. As articulated in Nova Scotia's Culture Action Plan released earlier this year, we will take insight and positive momentum from the Restorative Inquiry to work collaboratively with community, across government departments and agencies, and others, to continue to address systemic racism and discrimination and acknowledge head-on that these remain problems.

The next phase of the Restorative Inquiry's work will bring the various parties together to examine what has been learned so far and begin to plan and act together for the future. The Reflection and Action Task Group is committed to supporting the Restorative Inquiry in the work of engaging with former residents, community, and all relevant partners to ensure and support a different way of working together. Government has participated fully as one partner in the Restorative Inquiry, and its continued commitment is key in learning and acting toward meaningful and sustainable change.






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