

Restorative Inquiry – Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children

Journey to Light: A Different Way Forward - A Restorative Approach to Inquiry



A 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. The Mandate and Terms of Reference were written by a collaborative design team including former residents, representatives from the former Home board, the government and the African Nova Scotian community.

Part of its mandate was to:

- **examine** the history of the NSHCC and the experiences of former residents as part of the history and legacy of systemic and institutionalized racism in Nova Scotia.
- **empower** those involved in, and affected by, the history and legacy of the NSHCC to learn about what happened and the contexts, causes, circumstances and ongoing legacy of the harms related to the NSHCC.
- **engage** affected and responsible parties in collaborative planning and action to address this history and its legacy and create change to secure a better future for African Nova Scotian children and their families and communities.

The experience of former residents was central to the focus of the Inquiry. From this starting point, the Inquiry broadened its lens to consider the contexts, causes, and circumstances of their experiences and the lessons and implications that extend beyond the Home and into the future.



Who Led the Inquiry

The Inquiry was led by a group of Commissioners appointed by Order-in-Council under the *Public Inquiries Act*. The Commissioners served together on the Council of Parties which worked collaboratively as the overall governance and decision-making body for the Restorative Inquiry. Membership on the Council of Parties included former residents, those with connections to the former Board of the NSHCC, the African Nova Scotian community, and the Government. Commissioners were also selected for their knowledge and experience with the legal system and a restorative approach.



Principles

The Inquiry undertook many different activities and processes in fulfilling its mandate. While these activities and processes took different forms – they all reflected the same underlying principles of a restorative approach.

- Relationship & Community-focused
- Strengths-based
- Comprehensive/Holistic
- Inclusive, Participatory and Accessible
- Justice-seeking
- Do No Harm and Support Healing
- Contextually Grounded
- Action and Change-Oriented



3 Phases of the Process

Much of the work took place in restorative circles where participants were brought together by facilitators around a series of focused questions for discussion and reflection to support individual and collective consideration of responsibilities and next steps.

Relationship Building Phase

The initial phase concentrated on building relationships between and among former Home residents, community partners, and Government and public agencies. This phase was also focused to explore and understand relationships to the history and experience of the NSHCC.

Learning & Understanding Phase

The Inquiry brought parties from different backgrounds, sectors, and areas of focus together to examine and understand the causes, contexts, and circumstances of what happened at the Home to develop a deeper common understanding of why it happened and the implications of the insights and lessons for today. Relevant parties in community and Government engaged to identify issues that need to be addressed and the changes needed to make a difference.

Planning and Action Phase

The Restorative Inquiry differed significantly from a traditional public inquiry model in its commitment to planning and action within the mandate of the Inquiry. The Inquiry supported action by bringing multiple partners together to build the relationships, understandings, and commitments needed to support long-term and sustainable change in future.