



A Peaceful Protest – An Opportunity for Public Mediation

It began as a protest in February following the acquittal in a murder case surrounding the death of Colton Bushie in Saskatchewan and Tina Fontaine in Manitoba. A single tepee on the grounds of the Saskatchewan Legislative Buildings. A silent protest against injustice.

Eventually, the Provincial authorities ordered the tepee be removed. It was on public land and the protestors had no legal authority to erect the tepee there. The tepee came down. Another protest soon to be forgotten?

But on National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21) the tepee returns and became the Justice for our Stolen Children Camp. No one stopped the protest. Provincial authorities demanded the protest end. A second tepee was erected...and a third. Now there are fourteen tepees. The Regina City Police has said they have no intention of intervening over a peaceful protest.

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Chief Bobby Cameron said, "The child welfare system is currently failing our children. This is the focus point and we will continue to do what we can to rectify it, to fix it so no more of our children will suffer." While meetings between the government have been held, the Minister of Justice has said that no further meetings would be held until the tepees were taken down.

There is a significant over representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. The foster care facilities are overburdened. The Indigenous community are trying to find solutions. They want to care for their own children. The root causes are complicated. The government seem reticent.

Thirteen Tepees – a peaceful protest or an opportunity? Now is the time for a mediated solution. Bring the parties together and start a structured dialogue. Public policy mediation is not a time for politicians to make speeches. It is a time for them to allow the interested parties to come together and find solutions.

I recently received training at Harvard Law School, Program on Negotiation regarding public policy mediation, a process whereby public and social problems of the day can be resolved through multi-party mediation. Instead of treating the current situation as a standoff – a Canadian stalemate, public policy mediation can be employed to bring the parties together for dialogue and a solution.

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