

Beverly Doran: 500 Woodlands School survivors denied justice by B.C. government

Publish Date: February 25, 2010



By Beverly Doran

Some 500 victims of systemic abuse at the hands of a provincially run school have been denied justice and compensation, not to mention the courtesy of an apology. I'm referring to the [recent negotiated settlement](#) between the government of B.C. and 1,100 former [Woodlands School](#) residents. While the majority of victims will be compensated according to a formula prescribed in the settlement, a full one-third of them will get nothing for their pain and torment.

It's unconscionable that these souls, who suffered the same physical and mental abuse as the other 1,100 survivors, continue to be victimized because of an arbitrary date. A date set by the same institution that was in charge of the goings-on at the school for 46 years—the B.C. government. August 1, 1974, isn't infamous to most of us, like the day JFK was assassinated or when New York's twin towers were blasted out of existence. However, for those 500 neglected Woodlands survivors, who left the school prior to that date, it is a date etched in their collective memory because they are not eligible for any acknowledgement, compensation, or even an apology for all the bad things that happened to them at Woodlands.

Despite two investigations, one by the B.C. ombudsman and the other by the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, the province only admitted to its mistakes after a class action lawsuit was launched on behalf of all Woodlands School survivors. The class action was originally certified to include all former residents but the courts subsequently limited the class definition to people who lived at Woodlands on or after August 1,

1974, the date when British Columbia's Crown Proceeding Act came into law.

With a convenient stroke of a pen, the B.C. government has effectively ripped away the rights of 500 people, many of them aged and suffering chronic conditions as a result of their treatment at Woodlands. The decision to limit the class action was appealed without success, but if this government had a heart, it could exercise its power to disregard the August 1, 1974, cut-off date and include all the former residents of Woodlands. Instead of looking at the victims as casualties of a strictly legal circumstance, the B.C. government can and should look at them as valued individuals who suffered a great tragedy during the entire time they were at Woodlands, notwithstanding the date they left the institution.

According to David Klein, the lawyer who is acting on behalf of the former Woodland residents in the class action, there is considerable precedent for both federal and provincial governments to set aside arbitrary cut-off dates. He used the example of the federal compensation to victims of residential schools and the tainted blood affair, as well as the Alberta government's compensation to women who were forcibly sterilized.

It is my sincere hope that Premier Gordon Campbell and Attorney General Michael de Jong will rise above the legalities of this case and elevate all victims of the Woodlands School abuse to a place where they can move on with their lives in dignity and hope. Like the other 1,100 victims, they deserve an apology and compensation.

Beverley Doran is a former corporate communications consultant now enjoying retirement and writing op-ed articles in her Burlington, Ontario, home. She was a resident of Vancouver from 1980 to January 2010.

Source URL: <http://www.straight.com/article-293909/vancouver/beverley-doran-500-woodlands-school-survivors-denied-justice-bc-government>