

## Extend compensation to all victims: Dix

Those who suffered abuse before 1974 should be eligible, too, NDP leader says

BY MATTHEW ROBINSON, VANCOUVER SUN AUGUST 2, 2011



Len Zimmer was in Woodlands from 1952 to 1964. A group of former students gathered at the Woodlands memorial in New Westminster on Monday to demand they get the same compensation as those who were there after 1974.

Photograph by: Ian Smith, PNG, Vancouver Sun

All students who suffered from abuse at the Woodlands provincial mental institution should be compensated, not just those who were there after 1974, says B.C. NDP leader Adrian Dix.

Joining survivors for a news conference near the notorious New Westminster facility on Monday, Dix said B.C. Day is an occasion to review the province's history and a chance to remind legislators that one of B.C.'s "darkest chapters" must be closed.

He urged the B.C. government to extend a settlement package it has offered those who lived at the facility after 1974 to those who were there before that date as well.

"The compensation has not been just and fair," said Dix. "The government is using a legal technicality ... to divide survivors into two groups: those who do and don't get compensation."

In December 2009, the B.C. government announced that 1,000 Woodlands survivors would receive between \$3,000 and \$150,000 as compensation for abuse suffered while at the government-run facility. But survivors who resided in the school before 1974 were deemed ineligible to receive any money.

Their exclusion stems from the fact that the Crown Proceedings Act, which gave citizens the right to sue the B.C. government for wrongdoing, didn't take effect until Aug. 1, 1974.

Dix said the decision may be legally sound, but he believes it is morally wrong. He wants all survivors to be eligible for compensation, regardless of the date they were in the institution.

Among the survivors who attended Monday's news conference was Richard McDonald, who said he

was at the school from 1952 until 1962. That makes him one of the approximately 300 people the NDP estimates are ineligible to apply for compensation.

"It was a no-good deal," said McDonald. "I figure everyone should be compensated at the same time."

Bill McArthur, who attended the school sporadically for about four years in the '60s and '70s, said he missed the compensation date by just 10 days.

"Abuse is abuse," said McArthur, adding that he witnessed and suffered from many acts of physical and sexual violence during his time at the school.

"This province is capable of righting a wrong," said McArthur. "It was as illegal then as it is now."

The government's decision to compensate survivors came after former residents argued sexual abuse was systemic in the school, and a group of survivors sued the provincial government for damages in a 2002 class-action suit.

Originally termed a "lunatic asylum," the institution became known as the "Woodlands School" in 1950 and began housing mentally disabled children, as well as runaways and wards of the state.

Woodlands School closed permanently in 1996.

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