

Former residents cheer as tainted Woodlands demolished

BY ANDY IVENS, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 19, 2011



Workers demolish the last section of Woodlands School in New Westminster on Tuesday.

Photograph by: Jason Payne - PNG, The Province

As demolition began on the last part of Woodlands School in New Westminster on Tuesday afternoon, a heartfelt cheer erupted from a throng of about 200 former residents and their supporters.

Within minutes, some of the victims of physical and sexual abuse at the infamous institution, run by the provincial government for children with developmental problems, were hugging and weeping openly, gripped in a moment of joy and terrifying memories.

"I wanted this torn down for years and years," said Leonard Zimmer, a former Woodlands resident. "Every time I go past here on my way to Port Coquitlam, it brings back a lot of memories of the abuse [that went on] here.

"I suffered a lot of abuse." Carol Dauphinais was sent to Woodlands in the 1960s after being sexually abused by family members and labelled a "moron" by psychologists.

"I spent two years here, but I died a thousands deaths," she said above the din of ancient brick walls crashing to the ground.

Zimmer, who doesn't qualify for compensation because of a time-based legal technicality, said he would like to see a settlement for all survivors of Woodlands School.

He left Woodlands before Aug. 1, 1974, when the Crown Proceedings Act took effect, making him and others ineligible to sue the government over abuse that took place before that date.

Despite calls for justice for the pre-1974 victims, Attorney-General Shirley Bond is sticking by the decision not to expand the number of people eligible for compensation, now standing at about 750.

"The B.C. government reached a settlement process with the former residents who participated in the classaction proceeding and is committed to resolving the individual claims as quickly as possible," Bond said in an email to The Province.

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