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**From Sunrise to Sunset... A Haven for Forgotten Children:
Prince George's Development of the Aurora School, 1958**

Education for children with mental disabilities was not involved in Canada's Provincial educational operations until the 1950s. Interests were sparked when psychiatrist Edward Levinson developed a curiosity for children "who appeared to have only mild behavioural difficulties, seemed to have average intelligence, but had significant problems with school functioning."¹ His studies gained traction within the region and prompted the creation of the Montreal Children's Hospital Learning Centre which opened in 1960. Progressively, the West Coast was working on the topic of inclusive education whereby the University of British Columbia created the first department of special education by 1958, funded by the Mother's March foundation and Kinsmen Club of British Columbia. The reason for British Columbia's quick involvement in the matter was due to the polio epidemic. The illness hit the Province leaving several families with children that were born "normal" and now disabled without the resources they previously had access to. The school encouraged the rest of the Province to contribute through the Mother's March foundation to go towards expanding the program. Not only did Prince George hear their call and fundraise for the Mothers' March, but they also pushed too conversation further and opened up the first school for special needs in the Province. Although Prince George was part of a larger movement going on in the nation, the building of the Aurora School held much larger significance. No other town had done what Prince George did; they had the entire community support a singular issue, they devised a plan, and within the

¹ Judith Wiener, and Linda Siegel, "A Canadian Perspective on Learning Disabilities," *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, (1992), 340.

span of one month changed British Columbia's perspective on disability education. This was only achievable because the citizens empathized with the forgotten children. They understood what it felt like to be neglected by society; the development of the Aurora School was in part, a reflection on how they wished to be treated.

Canada since Confederation in 1867, education was under the jurisdiction of the individual Provinces and Territories. Due to this, the definition of a "learning disability" can vary throughout time and place as well as the research and stigmas' surrounding that community. For the context of this analysis, the terms "retarded" and or "handicapped" are often used when describing people with mental disabilities. Up until the 1950s, inclusive education was not implemented. For the most part, children who had such disabilities were often left at home for the parents to educate. The dramatic shift in thinking towards this group of neglected children began for two reasons: Dr. Edward Levinson's research on learning disabilities, and the effects of the polio epidemic. Psychiatrist Edward Levinson seems to be the first person significantly recognized to speak on the topic of learning disabilities.² His queries on children who have such difficulties with school functioning were partnered up with psychologists Sam Rabinovitch, Margie Golick, and Ellen Duschenes, to find answers as to why these children are the way they are, and to create treatment plans for them. Although their research was targeting learning disabilities, there is a large spectrum of mental disorders that fall within their discoveries. Such studies were supported by many mothers in the region and eventually opened the Montreal Children's Hospital Learning Centre in 1960. This drastically opened the professional practice with learning disabilities. Adjacent to Montreal, British Columbia was also discovering the need for such professional investment towards the topic of special education.

² Judith Wiener, and Linda Siegel, "A Canadian Perspective on Learning Disabilities," *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, (1992), 341.

For Montreal, the conversation of special education was promoted due to the curiosity of a psychiatrist and invested in by the medical field, similarly, British Columbia began the conversation because of a medical emergency: the lasting effects of polio. Between 1927 and 1953, Canada was battling the paralytic polio epidemic. Although it was one of the first nations to successfully eliminate the disease with the distributions of vaccines, it was also one of the hardest-hit countries. How polio was fought so fiercely was due to the active community involvement. There was a massive movement called the “March of Dimes” that was created by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP) in 1938 as a voluntary organization in the United States.³ It was a fundraising campaign that was put towards the development and distribution of the polio vaccine, and the medical, hospitalization, and rehabilitation costs for the victims. Because of the globalization of this disease, Canada responded to the success of the March of Dimes by organizing their own. British Columbia was the most significantly affected by the epidemic and as a total, by 1934, almost half of Canada’s disabled population could be traced to polio.⁴ The need for support was crucial thus the creation of the Mothers’ March in British Columbia. The Mothers’ March was a branch created from the March of Dimes that was a “far-reaching program designed to bring rehabilitation services to every handicapped child in British Columbia,”⁵ undertaken by the Kinsmen Club of British Columbia. Although the initial target goal for the foundation was for the fight against polio, it became the leading organization for special needs education in the Province.

³ Christopher J. Ruddy, Luis Barreto, Rob Van Exan, and Shawn Gilchrist, "Conquering the Crippler: CANADA AND THE ERADICATION OF POLIO/Pour invalider la polio: LE CANADA ET L'ÉRADICATION DE LA POLIO," *Canadian journal of public health*, (2005), I-4.

⁴ Christopher J. Ruddy, Luis Barreto, Rob Van Exan, and Shawn Gilchrist, "Conquering the Crippler: CANADA AND THE ERADICATION OF POLIO/Pour invalider la polio: LE CANADA ET L'ÉRADICATION DE LA POLIO," I-6.

⁵ *Coast News*, “Here is why Mothers will March for Kinsmen club on February 16,” (January 31, 1957), 3.

The Kinsmen club raised \$50,000 through their B.C. Polio Fund by 1957 for immediate care for handicapped children, and the rehabilitation processes. The club did not stop there, they set a goal for \$400,000 to finance Canada's first handicapped child care program. Dr. D.A. Steele (former chairmen of the Polio Fund) shares that "There are at present in B.C., some 27,000 children who need help but for many of whom, at this moment, there is no source of help because treatment facilities and trained staff are not available."⁶ Further, he claims that children who are considered "retarded" would not be so if proper facilities were available, which is why the Kinsmen club has sought to solve this problem. Because of how hard the Province was hit by polio, it backed the Kinsmen's goal without hesitation. The plan was that a 300-bed specialized hospital for polio affected children was to be built, and the establishment of the School of Rehabilitation at the University of British Columbia. The budget was set where the \$400,000 goal would be distributed as such: \$150,000 for continued polio care; \$50,000 for immediate medical care; \$50,000 to start the Rehabilitation program, and the other \$50,000 for the child development and rehabilitation centre.⁷ This single club sparked a Provincial wide movement and aided in the first-ever university program directed toward handicapped children in Canada.

Come 1958, the Kinsmen club's goals were put into action. The club organized the Mothers' March which was a fundraiser joined with the March of Dimes in the United States. The Mothers' March spread throughout the Province as it was rallying to fund the opening of the first department of education for handicapped children in Canada established at UBC. This program was going to be run by Professor J.A. Richardson who originally taught in Australia, whereby his qualifications included 14 articles on "retarded children," and extensive work with clinical services of handicapped children who have both mental and physical disabilities. His

⁶ *Coast News*, "Here is why Mothers will March for Kinsmen club on February 16," 3.

⁷ *Coast News*, "Here is why Mothers will March for Kinsmen club on February 16," 3.

appointment was the “result of a grant of \$36,000 to UBC’s college of education from British Columbia Foundation for Child Care, Poliomyelitis and Rehabilitation, which raises its funds through the Kinsman-sponsored Mothers March.”⁸ The school was going to offer three courses in the teaching of handicapped and “retarded” children that is co-chaired with UBC’s programs of medicine at the rehabilitation centre at the Vancouver General Hospital. The program became popular as there were 40 students registered with an additional 50 on the waiting list. Due to this, the school and the Kinsmen club continued to advertise for more funds to expand the program.

The World Health Organization spoke on the matter saying:

“Every Child has the right to expect the greatest possible protection against the occurrence of preventable physical or mental handicap before, during, and after birth. Every child also had the right to develop his potentialities to the maximum... They should be able to satisfy fully the needs of their own personalities and become, as far as possible, independent and useful members of the community.”⁹

This public declaration on inclusivity and care for disabled children goes beyond the plea for money, it, for the first time, set a baseline on how education should be distributed. That education of the youth is not for the privileged society, rather, it should be accessible to all abled or none abled minds and bodies.

What Montreal’s development of the hospital and UBC’s opening of educational programs have in common is that these two movements were funded by mothers. Why this is important to this topic is that it highlights the societal implications this movement had on the private sphere of the family. The separate sphere complex is a term crafted in the 1960s whereby women were in the private sphere dealing with the domestic life of the family, and the men were out in the public sphere working and socializing. Why this is essential to mention is that the Mothers’ March blurred the lines between the spheres and allowed women to publicly and

⁸ *Coast News*, “Mothers’ March collections are put into active use,” (October 30, 1958), 2.

⁹ *Coast News*, “Retarded child needs help,” (November 20, 1958), 8.

independently spearhead this project. At the time this all came about, women were beginning to enter the workforce more, which meant child support was more difficult to find. As mentioned prior, the education system was not necessarily inclusive and most families with disabled children had to provide their own means of schooling and support. This meant that parents (especially mothers) were at a crossroads when it came to balancing work and child care. Developing these programs in Montreal and Vancouver, it gave hope for potential means of child support. It could allow many households the relief that more privileged families were being offered. The Mothers' March was initially targeted for the fight against polio, however, it grew so much bigger than that. It was the foundation for social reconstruction in the face of educational equalization.

The plethora of newspapers about the Mothers' March stormed the Province. Headlines like "Mothers' Will Fight Polio"¹⁰ and "Mother's Asked to Join Polio March"¹¹ promoted the rest of British Columbia to contribute. The Kinsmen club called on the Province and Prince George responded. The hinterland town took on the challenge and campaigned for the event. The town's goal was to raise \$4000 under the authority of 150 mothers.¹² Citizens were asked to keep their porch light on for the women to come and collect funds, and if a "Marching Mother" has not come by the evening, call in yourself and donate. Prince George's involvement in the Mother's March was advertised strictly towards "the fight against polio" however, in their active involvement with the Kinsmen Club and the foundation, Prince George thereby contributed towards the UBC special education program. The complexity in this is that the topic of disabilities is sensitive. To this day many people are not exposed and or taught about the

¹⁰ *The Vancouver Sun*, "Mothers' Will Fight Polio," (December 24, 1952), 2.

¹¹ *The Province*, "Mothers Asked to join Polio Battle March," (December 27, 1952), 2.

¹² *Prince George Citizen*, "Join Marching Mothers In Fight Against Polio," (February 3, 1959), 2.

spectrum that makes such children the way they are thus judgment is asserted on that community quite easily. Especially in the 1950s, the topic of accessible education and support for families with special needs children was so new that people were not going to be immediately empathetic. Social change is a slow brewing cup of impurities mixing with bravery. Bravery is the means of acknowledging the inequity or problem, developing a platform to reform said issue, and finally exposing those thoughts to the public. That is what happened in Prince George. By involving itself with the Kinsmen club and directly through the Mother's March, the conversation surrounding special education took hold. *The Prince George Citizen* wrote an article "UBC First With Department for Handicapped," where it shares what the new department will be, who is running it, and most importantly, that it was funded by the Kinsmen Club.¹³ The town knew what they were getting involved in, and yet they were not shy to join. They saw the issue, they agreed to reform, and they took action. However, the community clubs did not stop with the Mothers' March; on June 21, 1958, Prince George opened the Aurora School for Handicapped Children.

The Prince George District Association for Handicapped Children had begun their services aiding children with special needs in an old converted army building in 1956.¹⁴ They were even traced back to 1952 when Mr. Byarnason (B.C. president of the Retarded Children's Association) commended the local association when the "first parents joined together to plan a program for their retarded children and to prove that retarded children could be trained to the best of their ability, however limited."¹⁵ Such spotlight on Prince George did not stop there; the group quickly realized their operations needed to be expanded and developed to provide an

¹³ *Prince George Citizen*, "UBC First With Department For Handicapped," (October 6, 1958), 2.

¹⁴ Barbara Hall, Fris Nellis, and Tiiu Nougat, "Aurora Elementary," in *Historical Memories: People, Places Programs & Services*. (Prince George Retired Teachers Association: Education Heritage Committee, 2014), 2.

¹⁵ Kiwanis Club of Prince George, "Scrapbook, J.Newby," 2015.10. Kiwanis Club of Prince George Fonds. (Northern BC Archives, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC).

adequate education for these children. Although the group first came together in 1953, it was not until 1958 their goals for a bigger and better institution were supported. To reiterate the timing, the polio epidemic developed a stage for the conversation on disability resources. For Prince George, they joined in on the Mothers' March and significantly contributed to the foundation. The Prince George District Association for Handicapped Children saw their opportunity to expand their practices by taking advantage of the emotionally vulnerable society. Children that were once "normal" and had access to education, work, and sports were now at a loss due to the paralytic disease. As Byarnason put it, there was a serious need for sheltered workshops which contained better-trained teachers, improvements in diagnostic services, parent counselling, and finally, research into the causes and possible prevention of "retarded" children.¹⁶ Thus the planning and building of the Aurora School did not commence till June 1958.

The drive for funds was underway, the advertisement "A retarded child without help is a child without hope!"¹⁷ was a slogan used to entice citizens to donate. The Kiwanis Club and District Association for Handicapped Children posted through *The Citizen* the budget required for the two-room school. Only three days before the planned building day, the clubs needed another \$2000. Supplies such as joists, plywood, Stone Board, roofing gravel, ceiling tile, paint and further hardware were still needed. Additionally, an oil tank, electric fixtures, and doors were required.¹⁸ To be blunt, the Clubs had practically no materials prepared till the days leading up to the actual event. Because it was such a small lot and building plan, there was no need to spend excessive amounts on it. In total, the school was too cost \$15,000. The school was planned

¹⁶ Kiwanis Club of Prince George, "Scrapbook, J.Newby," 2015.10. Kiwanis Club of Prince George Fonds. (Northern BC Archives, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC).

¹⁷ Kiwanis Club of Prince George, "Scrapbook, J.Newby," (Northern BC Archives, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC).

¹⁸ *Prince George Citizen*, "Retarded School Needs Donations," (June 17, 1958), 1.

to be built in one day because they needed it ready for enrolment come September. Called the “Sunrise to Sunset Project” the Prince George Aurora School for Handicapped Children quickly became famous. The school gained national recognition as it was the first of its kind in the Province, as well as it was to be built in one day. CBC caught wind of this historic event and planned to send television cameramen to film the construction on June 21.¹⁹ The cement foundation was laid a day or two before so that come the 21st, it was strictly structural work. When the day came the 100 workers started at 3 a.m. with the floor work; by 4 o’clock the walls were going up, and the electricians and plumbers moved in; by 10 p.m. the school was officially

¹⁹ *Prince George Citizen*, “Nation Will ‘Eye’ One-Day School Building Project,” (June 2, 1958), 1.

completed.²⁰ Some photos were preserved in the Kiwanis Club scrapbook held at the Northern



BC Archives, that showcase the day:²¹

²⁰ *Family Herald*, "From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children," by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 11.

²¹ Kiwanis Club of Prince George, "Scrapbook, ca.1950-1970s," 2015.10. (Kiwanis Club of Prince George Fonds., Northern BC Archives, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC.).

The location of the Aurora School was built on the plot that is now Harwin Elementary.

Before and after the school was completed, parents were asked to contact a screening board if

they wanted their child enrolled as there was a limited 30 spaces in the two classrooms. Once

excepted the family had to pay \$10 a month as a nominal charge which was open to children

outside of the Prince George city limits as transportation options were being supplied.²² The

²² *Prince George Citizen*, "Retarded School Needs Donations," (June 17, 1958), 1.

school offered “‘trainable’ mentally challenged children [skills which] included personal

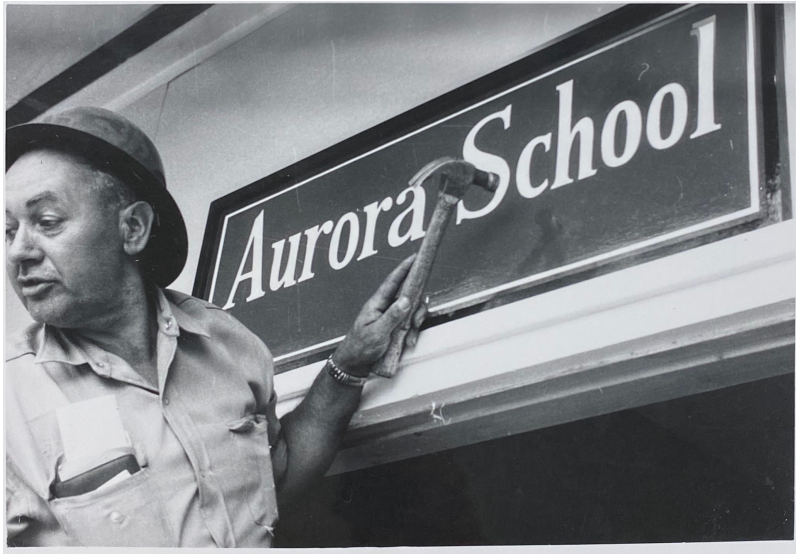
grooming, social adjustment, physical and mental coordination and citizenship... life skills, good

manners and behaviours, safety, work habits and independence in the community. Sewing,

cooking, and washing dishes for the girls and woodworking sessions for the boys were

included.”²³ There is an emphasis on the idea that this school was to train these children to be

²³ Barbara Hall, Fris Nellis, and Tiiu Nougat, “Aurora Elementary,” in *Historical Memories: People, Places Programs & Services*. (Prince George Retired Teachers Association: Education Heritage Committee, 2014), 2.



more excepted into society. That the skills of personal hygiene would levitate time off of the

parents. Having good manners and safe work habits could potentially set them up with an entry-level job somewhere. The Aurora School was more of a support system for parents in the community where it hoped to have these children leave more independently than they arrived. The first instructors of the school were Mrs. Linda Hope and Mrs. Emily Wyles. They taught for three hours Monday to Friday, grades 1-7. The starting class for the school was only ten students, two teachers, and a bus driver. This small and close-net group did not last too long once the word was out that there was a school specifically for handicapped children. Soon families were seeking help to get their children enrolled in the school. For the local students, their transportation was easily accessible by the Blacktoppers Custom Club ("hotrod" club) who volunteered a member each week to bus the students. However, students who were from out of town had a more difficult situation. One case study on this issue is Sandra from Dome Creek.

Sandra was a nine-year-old child pronounced "retarded" and in need of support. She had not a day of schooling because Dome Creek did not have the resources to provide her with the adequate training her parents sought for her. The Prince George Association for Handicapped Children offered her the specialized training she would need to become a more functionally independent person as long as she could physically attend. Why this became a "stumbling block" is that the family could not afford daily transportation to and from Prince George. Additionally, Sandra's mother alongside the official Association for Retarded Children and social workers "agreed that it would be cruel to take Sandra away from her home permanently. Sandra needs her mother and father and six brother and sisters more than any other child because of her handicap. She is of the mental age where their guidance and leadership will undoubtedly be one of the strongest formative forces in her life."²⁴ Her parents requested from the potential Prince George

²⁴ *Prince George Citizen*, "Family Seeks Help For Stricken Child," (February 6, 1958), 14.

foster family that they would keep her for the five school days and then on weekends, she would come home to Dome Creek. In addition to fostering her, the family would receive \$20 a month for the child's upkeep. Before all of this, Sandra had been refused entry into public school so her mother had looked into the Woodland's institution designed for handicapped children at Essondale. Nevertheless, the institution had no available spots for her. This was fortunate for Sandra because the Woodlands institution was a Provincial asylum that was simply renamed. Moreover, its legacy is tainted with abuse and overcrowding. Sandra would have been put on a waiting list which defeated her mother's immediate concerns for her daughter. Why Sandra's story is so important is that it highlights how progressive Prince George was in their schooling for special needs children. The town did not build the Aurora School as a hostile place children needed to be sent to keep separate from the world; rather, the school was a place that put these children in the spotlight. That it was the "first chapter of the B.C. body to have the retarded children's classes in a public school setting."²⁵ That Sandra was going to be the first of many distant children looking to Prince George and the Aurora School for help.

A second example of how progressive the Aurora School had become is the story of Michael. At the age of five, a doctor pronounced his case hopeless and had advised his parents that he should be put into an institution as soon as possible. His parents did not want to be parted with their son so permanently so they chose to keep him. When the Aurora School opened, Michael was one of the first to attend. Within four years of working with the school, he could recite long poems, ride a two-wheeled bike, and display manners that would "put many a normal child to shame."²⁶ At the age of 9, Michael went from being essentially written off by medical

²⁵ *Prince George Citizen*, "Family Seeks Help For Stricken Child," (February 6, 1958), 14.

²⁶ *Family Herald*, "From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children," by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 11.

professionals to a rather independently successful child with much more to offer. His case for the Aurora school is a true testament to the change Prince George had undergone when defining mental disabilities. The town no longer looked at these children as a separate society from that of a fully functioning child. Mental disabilities were now looked upon as a tragedy that can happen to any child, and with proper education, some of those challenges could be alleviated. The *Family Herald* covered the story of Michael, as well as spoke on behalf of what a momentous victory Prince George achieved in building the Aurora School. The nationally recognized magazine claimed that “The building of Aurora School tested one town’s faith in its people and their ability to solve a problem together. Most Canadian communities face similar problems which could be handled in the same spirit. All it takes is an awakened interest, a compassionate heart, and a determined will.”²⁷ With this in mind, one may ask why was Prince George the town to lead the Province in this issue? What makes this community so willing to help a group which at that point had been neglected for so long? Its citizens have no more time or money than the people in other towns. I argue that this project was a testament to how Prince George felt about themselves; they too were a forgotten society, looked down on and not given the same opportunities larger hubs had access to.

The discovery of the Aurora School’s history as a leading institution for disability education came as a shock. As a Prince George citizen myself, there holds a stigma that this town was the least advanced hinterland that to this day, takes a much longer time to level up to larger cities like Vancouver. Fellow students, friends, and family responses to my telling them that Prince George had opened the first school for special needs children were similar to each others commenting: “this is going to be bad right,” to a very surprised “really?” From this

²⁷ *Family Herald*, “From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children,” by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 11.

experience alone, it is easy to say that Prince George is not held to a standard of progressive leadership or authority. It was, and in most ways still is known as a town with a lot of lumber produce to offer the rest of the Province. The question then becomes: how did Prince George gain the support from the entire town to build this school? Several clubs were involved in both the planning and building of the school and even so, more clubs aid in transportation and services for these children after the school was operating. Such high demand from a town is not necessarily an appealing project a city would want to take on. However, the Kiwanis Club and the Prince George Association for Handicapped Children devised the plan to sell the project as an investment into Prince George's economics. When "looking at the cold hard facts of economics, they knew that it is far cheaper in the long run, to spend money on a child who is at a trainable age and can be helped than to keep them in an institution."²⁸ As shown in Sandra's situation, placing a child in an institution would not only separate families but be a continual drought on a families income. Early intervention will provide more useful and contributing citizens for the town. Even those who may not agree with the policies of special education could not deny the logistics of the economic benefits that would come out of this school.

Prince George felt a responsibility to these children. The narrative changed whereby a disability should not define how a community treats those struck by such misfortunes; if anything, it is the town's obligation to help said people. This was shown with the actual fundraising for the project, the construction of the building, and then afterward the support the town continued to give. The school was literally built in one day by 100 volunteers, and all of the

²⁸ *Family Herald*, "From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children," by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 10.

supplies and additional funds were donated through the community clubs.²⁹ The children were bussed to and from school by volunteer drivers through the Blacktoppers Customs Club. Even the bus had been donated through the Lions Club.³⁰ Although the project was promoted with the idea of economic growth for the town, it goes without saying that amount of community support on one issue alone speaks volumes as to how this issue was catered to in Prince George. As the *Family Herald* put it, Prince George is a “town which has a heart. When they were faced with a problem common too many other towns, they did not shelve it till a later date hoping that more funds would be available in the future, but decided to tackle its solution together.”³¹ There was pride brought forth with the idea that Prince George was the first to have something like this. All the town needed was the conversation being started through the Mother’s March and university program for the town to take action. As seen, the clubs directly in charge of the Aurora School’s development had been waiting several years to take on this big of a project. Once started, it could not be stopped. The school gave a voice to the families who had children with disabilities who otherwise had been abandoned by the Provincial education system. On a larger scope, the ensuing years of the Aurora School’s enrolment expanded as did the building. The school started with 10 students and within 4 years it was up to 17; they ran fundraisers throughout the year as well as participated in many sports activities.³² Come a little over ten years of it running, it sent

²⁹ *Family Herald*, “From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children,” by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 11.

³⁰ Barbara Hall, Fris Nellis, and Tiiu Nougat, “Aurora Elementary,” in *Historical Memories: People, Places Programs & Services*. (Prince George Retired Teachers Association: Education Heritage Committee, 2014), 2.

³¹ *Family Herald*, “From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children,” by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 10.

³² Barbara Hall, Fris Nellis, and Tiiu Nougat, “Aurora Elementary,” in *Historical Memories: People, Places Programs & Services*. (Prince George Retired Teachers Association: Education Heritage Committee, 2014), 2.

two young boys to the Special Olympics for Handicapped Children in Toronto.³³ Such successes were achievable because of the continued community support. Such support goes beyond Prince George's borders however. It set a principal for the rest of the Province, and further, the nation.

Prince George demonstrated that there are alternate forms of care for children with disabilities such as specialized schooling. The prosperity of the Aurora School presents a much larger feat for the town than just a centre for its local handicapped children and families. It pushed the boundaries of British Columbia's education system and potentially other Provinces'. It forced British Columbia to reconsider how the public education system was being delivered whereby its exclusive screening of children was actually hindering the economics rather than bolstering it. For example, mental institutions were a major drain on financial resources because those who were sent, often stayed because they did not receive any training that would advocate them to be let back into society. Not all students are capable of living outside of the home, but the general abilities of hygiene, safety, and manners could allow enough parental relief so that families could have more work and life flexibility. The Aurora School set a precedent for its neighbouring communities. It took education from being categorized by a child's mental ability and made it accessible to all. The Prince George Association for Handicapped Children has now been renamed AIMHI which is one of the town's current leading support groups for children with disabilities. To its core, the Prince George Association for Handicapped Children took action for the kids, its effect on societal reconstruction was an ensuing factor. Encouraging the town to donate was in actuality a plea to the town to change its perspectives on children who have special needs. Redefined the title of being disabled was a true testament to the success that

³³ Barbara Hall, Fris Nellis, and Tiiu Nougat, "Aurora Elementary," in *Historical Memories: People, Places Programs & Services*. (Prince George Retired Teachers Association: Education Heritage Committee, 2014), 5.

came from the Aurora School. One man who had volunteered for the Sunrise to Sunset Project simply put, “They go to school now on the same grounds as the regular children; they play with them and see the same sights and hear the same sounds, they’re slower, that’s all. It’s not their fault; it’s just the way things are sometimes.”³⁴ His perspective allocates the beauty of this school; it recognized the neglect these children had faced as something that was easily fixable. With that being said, the affordability and manageability of the Aurora School showcased that more cities could do such that. The only thing holding other communities back from making their own local school for special needs children was the passion, support, and overall drive to make it happen. Prince George understood what it was like to be forgotten and unfairly categorized. The citizen’s empathy for the children was put into action. By helping the children it helped their image as well. The quid pro quo relationship between the Aurora School and Prince George’s conceptual image as a progressive society established a new standard of care for children with disabilities across the Province.

Education up until the late 1950s was exclusive to seemingly “normal” children without any known mental or physical disabilities. Dr. Edward Levinson opened up the conversation within the medical field concerning mental disabilities and how can they be treated. His work opened up a hospital specifically for said children who’s families were looking for answers and support. Alongside Levinson, British Columbia was establishing a department of education partnering with the medical department in hopes to expand education throughout the Province to children with disabilities. Because of the paralytic epidemic that was polio, half of Canada’s disability population could be traced to the disease. The push for help was underway. From the March of Dimes in the United States came the Mothers’ March in Canada. British Columbia

³⁴ *Family Herald*, “From sunrise to sunset, the people of Prince George worked together to build A Haven for Forgotten Children,” by Beth Kendall, (January 7, 1960), 11.

specifically used the funds earned from the Mothers' March and put it towards developing the university department. The Mothers' March took on so many societal implications that it spread throughout the Province quickly. For Prince George, the town used it as a foundational basis for Aurora School. What is meant by this is that having the town support the Mothers' March meant that they supported their funds going into developing an educational department for special needs; thus it would not be an isolating request for funds to go towards building their own local school for children with disabilities. The one-day Sunrise to Sunset Project was nationally recognized through a variety of media sources as it was the first of its kind. As a seemingly successful prototype, the Aurora School proved that others communities throughout the Province could take on the responsibility. That the investment in these children would provide economic growth in the long run instead of having these families secluded from society. However, the reason the Kiwanis Club and the Prince George Association for Handicapped Children were so capable of completing and running the school was that the entire town got involved. Other communities could not achieve that same level of communal commitment to one issue the way Prince George had. The difference was that Prince George understood what these children had gone through, a platform based on forgotten children resinated with the community due to the fact they too were unfairly categorized and judged. The Aurora School was a reflection upon what Prince George had to offer; a determined will and compassionate heart.

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