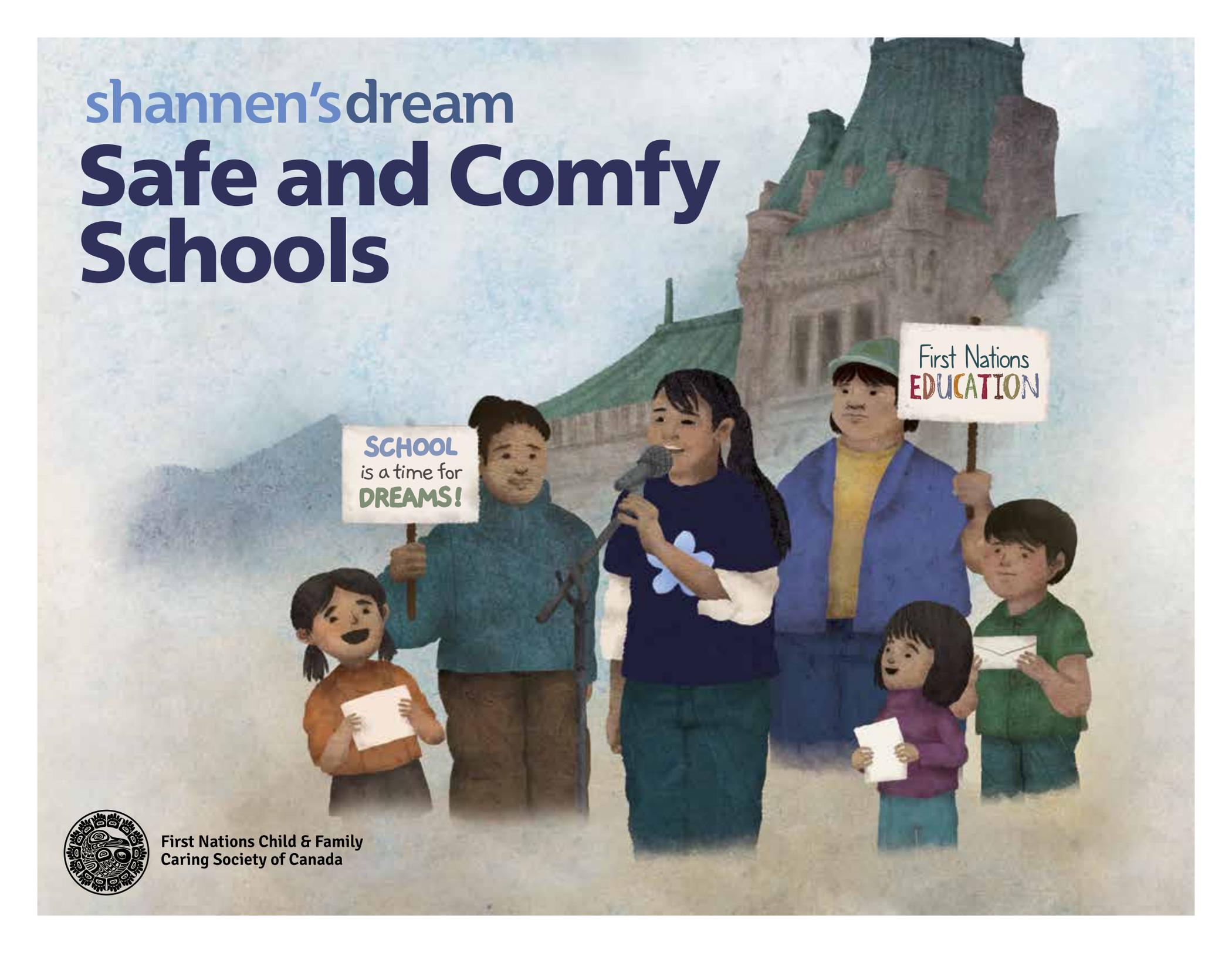


# shannen's dream

# Safe and Comfy Schools

An illustration of a group of people, including children and adults, standing in front of a large, multi-story building with a green roof. One woman in the center is speaking into a microphone. To her left, a man holds a sign that says "SCHOOL is a time for DREAMS!". To her right, another man holds a sign that says "First Nations EDUCATION". In the foreground, three children are holding papers or envelopes. The scene is set in a snowy or misty environment.

SCHOOL  
is a time for  
DREAMS!

First Nations  
EDUCATION



First Nations Child & Family  
Caring Society of Canada



## Did you know?

Did you know that the Government of Canada gives less money to **First Nations** schools than other schools in Canada? In Canada, education is paid for by provincial governments, but education for First Nations kids who live on **reserves** is paid for by the federal government (also called the Government of Canada). The problem is that the Government of Canada gives a lot less money to schools for First Nations kids than the provinces give to schools for other kids. This means that schools for First Nations kids often don't get the things they need to give their students the education they deserve. As we'll learn from Shannen's story, this can make it very hard for First Nations kids to get the education they want and live their dreams.

## Words to understand

**First Nations:** First Nations are Indigenous people who are not Inuit or Métis. First Nations are a very large and diverse group of people: there are several hundred First Nations groups in Canada today who speak over 50 different languages and have their own cultures and traditions.

**Reserves:** Reserves are pieces of land that the Canadian Government forced First Nations to live on. Today, many First Nations in Canada live on reserves.

# Shannen's story

Shannen Koostachin was a brave leader who fought for the rights of First Nations children to go to safe and comfy schools.

Shannen grew up in Attawapiskat First Nation on the coast of James Bay in Ontario. All of the people there are Cree, a group of First Nations people who live across different parts of central Canada, northern Quebec, and other parts of Canada.

Shannen and her classmates never got the chance to go to a real school. The only school in her community was closed because of a diesel fuel leak in 1979 that poisoned the land under the school building. Before long, the fuel leak made people and animals sick.

It was the government's responsibility to clean up the leak and build a new school, but it did nothing for many years. Parents and families told the government that the school was not safe, and decided not to send their children there. Eventually, the school closed and the government set up trailers for the students to learn in until a new school could be built.

The government promised the families of Attawapiskat that it would build a safe school, but years passed, and the government didn't keep its word.

Shannen and her classmates went to school in portable trailers that were set up in 2000, and started falling apart as the years dragged on. As the ground shifted beneath the trailers, the windows jammed open, letting mould grow inside, and making it freezing cold in the winter.

Unlike other kids in Canada, Shannen and her friends didn't have a library, computers, a gym, or even a place for the whole school to gather together. The classrooms became so run down that some students were losing hope in school and stopped going.

When the government canceled its plans to build the school the students had waited eight years for, Shannen and her friends decided to fight back.

## Did you know?

Every kid has the right to a good education. To learn more about kids' rights, check out Spirit Bear's poster on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which is a list of rights that all kids have at [fnccaringociety.com/sites/default/files/crc\\_poster\\_rasterized.pdf](https://fnccaringociety.com/sites/default/files/crc_poster_rasterized.pdf)



They started a **movement** on Facebook and YouTube to tell people about how the government was treating them in 2007. They asked kids across Canada to support them by writing letters to the Prime Minister and **Members of Parliament** demanding good schools for First Nations children. They asked kids across Canada to support them by writing letters to the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament demanding good schools for First Nations children.

In 2008, Shannen's Grade 8 class went to Ottawa to meet with the **Minister** in charge of education for First Nations kids to ask him to keep the government's promise to build a new school. He told Shannen, the other youth leaders, and the **Elders** that went with them, that the government would not build their school. He said the government did not have the money, and that it had more important things to take care of.

Shannen and her friends didn't believe the Minister. They knew that a country as rich as Canada could afford to build a school for kids who needed one.

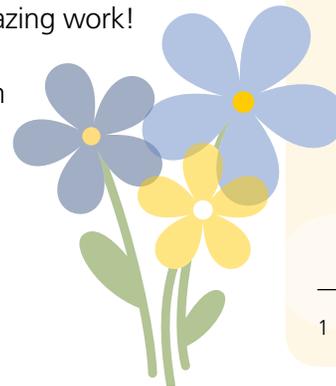
Even though Shannen was very disappointed with the Minister's answer, she gathered her strength, and gave an inspiring speech on the steps of Parliament. In her speech, she said she would not give up until all First Nations kids got the education they deserve, and the chance to live their dreams.

Shannen and her fellow youth leaders returned home to Attawapiskat, and started writing a letter to the **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child**, an organization that looks out for kids all over the world. In that letter they explained to the United Nations that the Canadian government was **discriminating** against First Nations kids by not giving enough money for their education and other important services.

In 2008, Shannen was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize for her amazing work!

Sadly, Shannen didn't get to see a school built in Attawapiskat. She moved away from home to go to high school and passed away in a car accident in 2010 when she was 15 years old.

Shannen's friends, family, and community were heartbroken, but carried on her brave work by starting the movement, Shannen's Dream in her memory. Learn more about Shannen's Dream at [shannensdream.ca](http://shannensdream.ca).



## Words to understand

**Movement:** A group of people working together to make a change in society.

### **Member of Parliament:**

A politician elected by the people of a region to speak for them in Canada's government.

**Minister:** A politician in charge of a specific topic or a group of topics.

**Elder:** In Indigenous communities, elders are important people who are respected for their knowledge of their community's culture and history.

**Discriminate:** To treat someone unfairly because of their age, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or because they have a disability.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> First Nations Child and Caring Society, 2018, p. 2.



## What you can do to help Shannen's Dream come true

Even though a new school was finally built in Attawapiskat in 2014, Shannen's Dream for all First Nations kids to have safe and comfy schools has not come true. There are so many things you can do to help:

- 1 Stand up against discrimination by writing a letter to your Member of Parliament or another elected official like Shannen and her friends did. In your letter, tell them that they need to respect First Nations kids' right to a good education.
- 2 Learn more about First Nations education by reading Spirit Bear's second book, *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*. You can order the book from [fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bears-second-book](http://fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bears-second-book)
- 3 Watch the documentary movie about Shannen, *Hi-Ho Mistahey* in the National Film Board's library. Watch it here in English or French at [nfb.ca/film/hi-ho\\_mistahey\\_en](http://nfb.ca/film/hi-ho_mistahey_en)
- 4 Make art with a message related to Shannen's Dream and share it on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram using the hashtags **#ShannensDream** and **#RêvedeShannen**

Participate in **School is a Time for Dreams** and help spread Shannen's belief that every kid deserves to live their dreams. For ideas on how to celebrate, Learn more at [fncaringsociety.com/school-time-dreams](http://fncaringsociety.com/school-time-dreams).

Participate in **Have a Heart Day**. Usually celebrated on or around Valentine's Day, Have a Heart Day is an event where kids come together to help make sure First Nations children have a fair chance to grow up safely with their families, get a good education, be healthy, and feel proud of who they are. Check out the **Have a Heart Day** webpage at [fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart](http://fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart).



## Ways to celebrate

### School is a Time for Dreams:

- Share your dreams with others in your classroom or on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram using the hashtags **#ShannensDream** **#RêvedeShannen**.
- Start a Shannen's Dream Club.
- Send letters to your elected officials and help raise awareness so that all young people in Canada can live their dreams!

### Have a Heart Day

- Spread the word through social media like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Use the hashtag **#HaveaHeartDay** and/or **#JourneeAyezUnCoeur**.
- Send a Valentine's Day card or letter supporting Have a Heart Day to the Prime Minister and your Member of Parliament.
- Host a Valentine's Day party to raise awareness.



## Questions to talk or think about

- What did you learn from reading this article? What questions do you still have?
- Did anything surprise you? How did the article make you feel?
- Can you make any connections to Shannen's story? What does her story remind you of?
- What things do you plan to do to help make Shannen's Dream come true?

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## First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

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