

Orange Shirt Day

September 30th

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission (SJM) Residential School (1891-1981) Commemoration Project and Reunion events that took place in Williams Lake, BC, Canada, in May 2013. This project was the vision of Esketemc (Alkali Lake) Chief Fred Robbins, who is a former student himself. It brought together former students and their families from the Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in, Southern Dakelh and St'at'imc Nations along with the Cariboo Regional District, the Mayors and municipalities, School Districts and civic organizations in the Cariboo Region.

The events were designed to commemorate the residential school experience, to witness and honour the healing journey of the survivors and their families, and to commit to the ongoing process of reconciliation. Chief Justice Murray Sinclair challenged all of the participants to keep the reconciliation process alive, and as a result of the realization that every former student had similar stories.

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of this project. As spokesperson for the Reunion group leading up to the events, former student Phyllis (Jack) Webstad told her story of her first day at residential school when her shiny new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was taken from her as a six-year old girl.

The annual Orange Shirt Day on September 30th opens the door to global conversation on all aspects of Residential Schools. It is an opportunity to create meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind. A discussion all Canadians can tune into and create bridges with each other for reconciliation. A day for survivors to be reaffirmed that they matter, and so do those that have been affected. Every Child Matters, even if they are an adult, from now on.

The date was chosen because it is the time of year in which children were taken from their homes to residential schools, and because it is an opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year. It is an opportunity for First Nations, local governments, schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for generations of children to come.

It all started in the Cariboo, and as a result, School District No. 27 has been chosen by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to pilot curriculum changes for all Grade 5 and Grade 10 students reflecting the residential school experience, to be implemented province-wide.

Resolutions have been passed in support of Orange Shirt Day by local governments, school districts, and First Nations in the Cariboo, at UBCM, and at FCM. The AFN Chiefs-in-Council passed a resolution declaring Orange Shirt Day "a first step in reconciliation", and pledging to bring the message home as well as to the government of Canada and the churches responsible.

On this day of September 30th, we call upon humanity to listen with open ears to the stories of survivors and their families, and to remember those that didn't make it.

<http://www.orangeshirtday.org/>