



Thursday, September 30, 2021

Content Warning: Mention of residential schools, murder, settler colonialism, genocide, abuse

National Truth and Reconciliation Day

On September 30, 1973, Phyllis Webstad from Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation was preparing for her first day of school. When she arrived at the St. Joseph's Residential School in Williams Lake, British Columbia, her orange shirt was stripped away from her. To Phyllis, the colour orange reminded her about her experiences at the residential school. She said "how [her] feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and [she] felt like [she] was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared." 40 years later, Phyllis finally talked about her experience and that is why Orange Shirt Day is commemorated.

Orange Shirt Day, now also referred to as National Truth and Reconciliation Day, is meant to create space for discussion, reflection and learning about the impacts of Residential Schools on Indigenous communities and our society. It is a day for reconciliation between cultures and ethnicities to build bridges without hate or discrimination among local governments, first nations, and communities. It is a day to reaffirm that the survivors of Residential Schools matter and that their suffering was not in vain.

Residential schools were church-run institutions where 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children were forcibly removed from their families, forbidden to speak their mother tongue and forced to speak English or French. Between the 1860s and 1990s, Indigenous children were forced to "assimilate" into Christianity, where many of their names, clothing and hair were altered against their cultural traditions. Many children were also killed, left to suffer illnesses and verbally and sexually assaulted. This has had long lasting, intergenerational trauma within Indigenous communities.

The Canadian Government officially offered an apology in 2008, however, an apology is not enough to help support Indigenous communities or end ongoing anti-indigeneity.

In honour of the victims of residential schools and survivors who are with us today, the UTMSU reemphasizes the fact that Truth and Reconciliation is a responsibility for everyone across Turtle Island. We invite you to take this time to learn more about the injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities and create a plan to be part of reconciliation. Whether you are a settler on Turtle Island by choice or not, we directly benefit from the colonization and genocide of Indigenous communities, but we must do better to uplift Indigenous communities.



Below are resources to learn more about the history of residential schools and ways that you can be part of bringing forth truth and reconciliation to your home, campus and larger community:

Videos and Films:

- Phyllis' Story - Orange Shirt Day
- National Film Board Shorts - Residential Schools
- Residential Schools Canada: A Timeline
- Murray Sinclair, Former Senator and Former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission - Response to the 215 Unmarked Graves

Learn more about:

- [Orange Shirt Society](#)
- [Stories from Residential School survivors](#)
- The [UTM Indigenous Centre](#)

Take action:

- Write to your elected officials. Elected officials such as the Members of Parliament (MP) are in charge of bringing societal issues to the Parliament. You can check out who your MP is: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en>