

# MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO

## ORANGE SHIRT DAY (SEPTEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup>)

The Orange Shirt movement began in 2013 as a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School Commemoration Project in William's Lake, BC (Orange Shirt Day). Orange Shirt Day comes from the story shared by Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, from the Secwepemc Nation, a former student of St. Joseph's, and an Indian residential school Survivor. Phyllis recounted her experience arriving at the school in 1973, at the age of six, wearing a brand-new orange shirt purchased by her grandmother. She explained that her shirt was confiscated upon arriving and never seen again. The colour orange came to represent the feelings of loneliness and worthlessness Phyllis experienced during this time at the Mission.

While not all stories are the same, Survivors from across the country recount shared experiences of being subject to verbal, physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse at the hands of those in charge (TRC, 2015). These schools aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Euro-Canadian society by removing them from their homes, family, community, and culture/way of life. While often framed as a historical issue, Canada's last remaining residential school closed in 1996 (Miller, 2012). The lived experiences of the survivors are of the not-so-distant past, and the multi-generational implications are still felt today. It is important to note that in addition to Indian residential schools, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit also attended Industrial Schools and Indian Day Schools (Milloy & Milloy; Federal Indian Day School Class Action).

Orange shirts have become a nationwide symbol of the movement, illuminating the systemic discrimination of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students who attended residential Schools in Canada. From coast to coast, you can see Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada wearing orange shirts and orange shirt pins on this day. Year-round, you may be able to spot orange ribbons tied to trees, displays of children's shoes laid out and "Every Child Matters" flags and banners.



Orange Shirt Day is a day to honour Survivors, recognize the experiences and intergenerational impacts of the residential school system on former students, families and communities, and remember our relations who never returned home.

The official day of recognition is September 30th; this date was selected as it is around the time when children were either sent to or forced to attend residential schools each year (Government of Canada, 2021). As part of the Calls to Action highlighted in the Truth and Reconciliation Report (call to action number 80), Orange Shirt Day was made a statutory holiday in Canada in 2021 and is known as the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Since telling her story, Phyllis has become the founder and ambassador of the Orange Shirt Society. She continues spreading awareness of Orange Shirt Day's impacts on residential schools and supporting community reconciliation events and activities (Orange Shirt Day).

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<https://data2.archives.ca/rcap/pdf/rcap-126.pdf>.

Government of Canada. (2021). "Statement by the Prime Minister on the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation," <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/09/30/statement-prime-minister-national-day-truth-and-reconciliation> (Orange Shirt Society, n.d.).

*Orange Shirt Day.* (n.d.) Orange Shirt Society, <https://orangeshirtday.org/>.

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