

## INFORMATION SHEET

Tuesday September 30, 2014

### Orange Shirt Day: Ask Why

Prepared by Aboriginal Education Department  
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#### For Administration and Teaching Staff:

**Tuesday September 30<sup>th</sup> is Orange Shirt Day.** This day is designed to acknowledge the 150 000 school aged First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who were forcibly removed from their families and land in order for them to attend residential schools from 1830 – 1990. These schools were established by the Canadian government and designed to control and transform Aboriginal people. In these schools, Aboriginal children’s Indigenous culture and language was replaced with Euro-Canadian culture and language. Many people who attended these schools have said their experience was a positive one. Unfortunately, far too many have come forward with stories of how they were isolated from their families for years, taught they were inferior and abused in various ways. In addition, tragically, we now know that over 4000 children and counting died while attending these schools. It is in response to these findings that September 30 has been designated as the day we remember all of those children and families who were affected by this dark chapter in Canada’s history. You may be wondering “How do we move forward from here?” “How do we restore friendly relations between Aboriginal people and Canada?” We can begin by acknowledging the harms of the past and embark upon a new relationship between Canada and Aboriginal people that embodies mutual care and respect. You may also be wondering “Why is it important to learn about these Residential Schools created by Canada for its Indigenous people?” In the words of Mary Kosta of Ontario, it is important for us all to learn and understand our shared history so we can become healthier by respecting each other and eliminating racism and discrimination.

The story behind the orange shirt can be a difficult topic for many younger audiences. Therefore, we are presenting a couple of versions depending on audience. At the primary level, our goal is to focus on raising awareness. At intermediate, there would be more information given and with more specific details introduced. At secondary, the goal would be to have a deeper discussion on residential school in some classes. The community goal of orange shirt day is to acknowledge Residential School survivors by hearing their stories and beginning to understand how these schools impacted survivors and how they continue to impact society today, especially Aboriginal peoples. It is not to be celebration or political action; it is standing in solidarity with those who are journeying along the path to healing.

Here are **three age-appropriate versions** of the story from Phyllis Jack, on how Orange Shirt day was born.

#### **Secondary and some intermediate audiences.**

“I went to the Mission for one year. I had just turned 6 years old. We never had very much money, and there was no welfare, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission School in. I remember going to Robinson’s store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had eyelets and lace, and I felt so pretty in that shirt and excited to be going to school! Of course, when I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt. I never

saw it again, except on other kids. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! Since then the colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing.

"I finally get it, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years. Even now, when I know nothing could be further from the truth, I still sometimes feel that I don't matter. Even with all the work I've done!

"I am honoured to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories. I want my orange shirt back!"

—Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, Dog Creek, BC

Phyllis' orange shirt is a symbol of so many losses experienced by those who were sent to Indian Residential Schools over several generations. Losses of family, culture, language, freedom, parenting, self-esteem and worth were experienced by everyone. Beatings, sexual abuse and neglect plagued many. Let's not forget the children but honour them on September 30.

### Intermediate Version:

*"I went to the Mission for one year. I had just turned 6 years old. We never had very much money, and there was no welfare, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission School in. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had eyelets and lace, and I felt so pretty in that shirt and excited to be going to school! Of course, when I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt. I never saw it again, except on other kids. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! **Since then the colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing.***

*"I am honoured to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand..."*

*Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, Dog Creek, BC*

Phyllis' orange shirt is a symbol of so many losses experienced by those who were sent to Indian Residential Schools over several generations. Losses of family, culture, language, freedom, parenting, self-esteem and worth were experienced by everyone.

### Primary Version:

"Phyllis Jack went to Indian Residential School when she was six years old. Before her first day, her granny took her to the store to buy a new shirt. It was orange. Getting a new shirt was very special to her because her family did not have much money. She felt proud of her new shirt. When she arrived at Indian Residential School, she was told to give the shirt to the teacher. She never saw the orange shirt again. She felt very sad (upset). She did not understand why they would not give it back. The Indian Residential School was not a place where Phyllis felt happy. She missed her family."

Her story and orange shirt helps us to remember that many Aboriginal children had unhappy memories of residential school. It reminds us to make school a better place for all and that we care for those affected by residential schools.

## Questions and Answers:

Some students may have questions and we hope the following aid your responses. However, there is always that one student special to our hearts that may come out of left field.

### *Why orange shirts?*

One elder, name Phyllis went to residential school in her new **orange shirt**. She was proud of it because it was new. However, once at school she had to give it up and wear something else, because she was not allowed it. This made her feel sad, maybe even bullied, so we wear **orange** to remember her story and stand strong beside her to make her and others feel better.

It is a symbol of unity, showing survivors that we are witnesses to the atrocities of residential schools. By showing support, we are helping in the healing process because we are listening to their stories.

### *What is residential school?*

It was an early school system across Canada where Aboriginal children went to school. Often they were taken from their families and they only saw their families in the summer. It was not a happy experience for many Aboriginal people. They were not allowed to speak their Aboriginal languages or practice their traditions. The last school closed in 1996, only 18 years ago.

### *What does it mean to be Aboriginal?*

The term Aboriginal has come to mean belonging to three of Canada's original peoples, First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

### *How did it begin?*

School District 27 Williams Lake is given credit for the spark and campaign. Phyllis Jack was from the Dog Creek Indian band, near Williams Lake BC. By sharing her story, she hopes to help other heal and feel safe in coming forward with their stories. It is one step in the long journey of healing Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are making around residential schools.

## **Actions:**

**For Assemblies:** Have someone read the appropriate version to the school.

**Posters:** Encourage wearing orange on Tuesday Sept 30, post Phyllis's story if appropriate.

**Teachers** read appropriate version to their classes on Friday and Monday.

**Leadership students** could go around to each class and read versions.

**For More Information:**     [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)     or     <http://www.legacyofhope.ca/home>  
[www.projectofheart.ca](http://www.projectofheart.ca)

As well contact our Lead Teachers Aboriginal Education, Lori Phillip, Ben Louis, Greg Ellis 250-549-9291