



Orange Shirt Day on September 30 – a time to remember and reflect on Aboriginal children in the residential school system

On September 30, HEU will join with Canadians from coast to coast to recognize **Orange Shirt Day: Every Child Matters**, a day to remember the atrocious treatment of more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, who were taken from their families and forced into residential schools to assimilate into white culture.

During a commemorative event in 2013, residential school survivor Phyllis (Jack) Webstad addressed the St. Joseph Mission (1891-1981) in Williams Lake to share a painful, personal story.

“I had just turned six years old,” she recalled. “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 – a shiny orange shirt. It had eyelets and lace, and I felt so pretty in that shirt and excited.

“[But] 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.”

September 30 marks the time of year when Aboriginal children were removed from their homes and sent away to residential schools.

“As we enter into a new school year, it’s a perfect opportunity for schools to introduce, or revisit, their anti-bullying and anti-racism policies,” says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside.

“It’s critical to recognize Orange Shirt Day as a time for us all – as Canadians – to stand together and make a commitment to protect future generations of our children from ever experiencing the appalling conditions of residential schools.

“It’s a devastating part of our Canadian history, but it’s important that we unite in the spirit of respect, healing, reconciliation and hope for a safer and better tomorrow. At the same time, we must always remember the legacy of the past and its impact on Aboriginal communities.”

Run by churches and funded by the government, residential schools existed in Canada for more than 100 years. While most reports indicate that the practice first began in the 1870s, others suggest residential schools go back as early as the 1840s.

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By the time Canada's last residential school closed in 1996, thousands of Aboriginal survivors had come forward to tell horrific stories of abuse, eventually leading to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2008.

The Assembly of First Nations continues to lobby the federal government to officially declare September 30 as Orange Shirt Day.

And at 2014 convention, HEU delegates passed Resolution 21 to recognize Orange Shirt Day.

To read a personal account about B.C. residential schools, check out the Summer/Fall issue of the *Guardian* for exclusive interviews with HEU members ("Reconciliation process promotes deeper understanding of residential school system", page 11).

For more information on Orange Shirt Day, visit <<http://orangeshirtday.weebly.com/> or <http://www.trc.ca/> or <http://www.afn.ca/>>.

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