



September 30th, every year, wear your orange shirt.

Why an Orange Shirt? Former residential school student Phyllis (Jack) Webstad has shared her story of her first day at residential school when her new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was taken from her as a six-year old girl. This act left Phyllis feeling invisible and worthless and affected the way she lived for much of her life.

September 30th is annually recognized as Orange Shirt Day, highlighting the damage the residential school system did to the well-being of Indigenous children. Equally, it serves as a healing journey for the survivors and a commitment by all who wear an orange shirt, that every child matters.

Chief Fred Robbins, a former student of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School in Williams Lake, BC started Orange Shirt Day to ensure that residential school survivors are not forgotten. Through his vision, Chief Robbins brought together First Nations, Tribal Councils, local government leaders, school districts, and former students to remember, recover and reconcile. Chief Robbins was recognized as a BC Achievement Community Awardee in 2017, for giving voice and hope to reconciliation in BC.

Orange Shirt Day can be hard for those who survived residential schools and their families. Over 150,000 Indigenous children attended residential schools in Canada from the late 1800's until the last one closed in the 1990's and of those attending, it's estimated that over 5,000 died while under residential school care. Many survivors are still dealing with the trauma of abuse experienced at these schools, and the impact it's had not just on them, but on their families as well.

Now is the time to listen to the stories of survivors and their families and learn from them, so that these mistakes are not repeated. It is a time for conversations about understanding the survivors' truths and beginning the journey toward reconciliation. Now is the time for an exploration of opportunities to do better for generations of children to come.