

Flags lowered at Shelburne Town Hall to honour indigenous children

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The Town of Shelburne has lowered the Canadian flag at Town Hall to half mast, in recognition of the 215 Indigenous children found buried beneath a former residential school in B.C.

Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills addressed the lowering of the flags during the regular town council meeting on Monday (May 31).

"To honour the lives and spirits of those 215 children, and others who we may not know about, we have lowered our flags at Town Hall to half-mast. On behalf of Council and the residents of the Town of Shelburne, I want to extend our deepest collective condolences to all of those who are directly or indirectly affected by this," said Mills. "I also want to make it clear to members of our indigenous community both locally and nationally, that the Town of Shelburne grieves with you and we stand with you."

Last Thursday (May 27), preliminary findings from a ground survey at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School uncovered the remains of 215 children. Some of the remains belonged to children as young as three.

The Kamloops Indian Residential School operated from 1890 to 1969, and was run as a day school for nine more years before being closed in 1978. Built on the territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, Kamloops Indian Residential School was at one point the largest residential school in Canada with up to 500 students registered and attending.

"This discovery has been a stark and stinging reminder of the shameful legacy of residential schools in our country," read Mills. "To be sure, this is a legacy which leaves deeply marring scars on our character as a nation. It is a legacy that some may find tempting to try to ignore or hide from. We cannot let that happen."

"We have to acknowledge fully what happened to these children, to the families from which they were torn, and to the many others who survived residential schools but who were left deeply traumatized and injured by their experiences. It is only through that full acknowledgement by owning up to this as a real, yet tragic and shameful part of our nation's past that we can ever hope to move forward. As we move forward we cannot only be focused on healing the wounds of the past but we must also address the real and immediate issues that continue to plague our indigenous communities across the country today," he added.

The flag will remain at half-mast for 215 hours in honour of the 215 children whose remains were found.

For immediate assistance, the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line is available 24/7 at 1-866-925-4419.