

Community gathers for Orange Shirt Day Walk



PAULA BROWN PHOTO

ORANGE SHIRT DAY WALK: Matriarch Bewasaya Shawanipinessi (LeeAnne Stevens), Crown Anishinaabe Princess, Keeper and Heiress of the 1763 Peace and Friendship Treaty Medal, from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, walked with Mayor Wade Mills, Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson and Coun. Shane Hall during Shelburne's Orange Shirt Day Walk on Oct. 2. Community members, leaders, and participants in Shelburne's Orange Shirt Day took a moment at Jack Downing Park, where, the Every Child Matters was raised to honour survivors and missing children of the residential school system.

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Shelburne residents' clad in orange t-shirts gathered on Saturday (Oct. 2) to take part in a local Orange Shirt Day Walk in honour of residential school survivors, and missing Indigenous children.

The remembrance walk started at Greenwood Park and lead towards Jack Downing Park, where the Every Child Matters flag was raised in recognition of the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Dewe'igenkwewuk, a drumming circle of Indigenous women ages 5 to 60, began the walk with traditional drumming and sharing community songs.

“Drumming represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth, it connects us to our ancestors,” said Nicole Reynolds. “It's important to me, drumming during the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, because my ancestors and my great grandfather, who went to residential school, was told his songs and his language were wrong. The fact that we're here today able to drum our songs and speak to our ancestors in this way, is one small step in honouring what was lost.”

Mskwaasin Agnew, an Indigenous activist who lives in Brampton, led a smudging ceremony and shared the intergenerational trauma and impacts of Canada's residential school system on her family.

From Salt River First Nation, in the Northwest Territories, Agnew's grandfather attended residential school and her father was part of the '60s Scoop. Angew shared that because of the trauma they experienced in the system, they developed a relationship with alcoholism, which she too inherited.

“As a young woman, I didn't have connection to my teaching, and I noticed I was a little different than some of the rest of my family? how come I didn't have this connection to the land, to the earth; my spirit was missing,” said Angew.

Angew, at the age of 15, visited a friendship centre where she said she was able to form a connection with her culture and after 10 years received her Indigenous name, Mskwaasinkwe “Red Stone Woman.”

“I have these experiences where I meet a lot of people who are also the children of residential school survivors, and they all have the same stories; we're all still looking for language?” said Angew. “You'll talk to people here, they'll tell you the same thing? every

single Indigenous person has been affected by residential schools, every single one.?

Speaking to the Free Press about walking in the Shelburne Orange Shirt Day Walk, Angew said, 'I'm for these children and babies who never came home, and the ones who survived. I'm walking for my grandfather, I'm walking for my father, and I'll be walking for all those children who are still in foster care to this day, in what we call the Millennium Scoop.?'

Charlene Jones, who is Ojibwe and a member of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, recalled being taken during the '60s Scoop, and watching her family being thrown into vehicles by the RCMP.

'It's nice to see that you're all walking for this truth and reconciliation. There's lots of healing that everybody has to do, we all have to realize that we all are relations,' said Jones.

Alongside conversations of recognition to the experiences of survivors and those facing intergenerational trauma, attendees of the Shelburne Orange Shirt Walk also spoke of the role of allies.

Eghenariore Omoghan, attended Shelburne's Orange Shirt Day Walk on Saturday in support of her friend, who moved to Shelburne in early 2020.

'I see her go through the struggle of trying to be proud of her identity and her culture without the backlash, and everyday she's becoming stronger. This day of reconciliation, it's a good step in the right direction. More needs to be done, but for moments like this where my friend is happy and surrounded by her culture with her family, it makes me honoured to have a small role in it,' said Omoghan.

Mayor Wade Mills concluded the Orange Shirt Day Walk, with closing remarks about the actions and roles Canadians and Shelburne community members have towards reconciliation.

'Each of us, regardless of position or standing, regardless of background or heritage or blood - each of us has a vital role, an inescapable role in our national efforts toward reconciliation.?'

'Canadians of all backgrounds and origins need to stand shoulder to shoulder committed to walking the path of reconciliation together. This is the journey, to which we must all commit; a journey that may be long, one that may not always be straight or easy. One that will almost certainly include, still yet unforeseen challenges and pitfalls, but a journey nonetheless, which must be undertaken and a journey which can only be finished together.?'

Jonathan Lemoine, a member of the Indigenous community in Shelburne, spoke about the local support during Orange Shirt Day and the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

'When you move from the city to a smaller town, you're not expecting to see that kind of solidarity and people thinking about different communities within the community. It's moving even just to have the town do this kind of work toward truth and reconciliation,' said Lemoine. 'A lot of people think that Indigenous people only live on reserves up north, but we're in every community so when smaller communities do this kind of work it's important.?'

Lemoine added that community allyship can start by reading the 94 calls to action laid out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.

'I promise you that there's something in there that will speak to every individual, one of those 94 calls to action will relate somehow, to somebody. It's not just organizations and government that need to do that work, it's everybody.?'

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