

Day of Reflection: Shelburne honours victims of residential school



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As the sun set over the Town of Shelburne, casting a hue of orange, residents clad in orange-coloured t-shirts honoured residential school survivors and missing Indigenous children by recognizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The Town of Shelburne held their 2nd annual Orange Shirt Day event at Jack Downing Park in Shelburne on Saturday (Sept. 30).

"This is something that's vitally important to recognize as a community. Like so many things that we do in the community, it's about raising awareness, providing an opportunity for people to educate themselves and creating a space for people to actually take the time and think about what this means, not just as a community, but as individuals," said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills. "I was thrilled to see that turnout that we had here tonight. This is something obviously much larger than just our own community, but for us to do our small part in a much larger effort is encouraging."

Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day that honours the children who survived residential schools and remembers those who did not.

The naming of the day is inspired by the experience of Phyllis Webstad, a Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation. On her first day of school, she arrived dressed in a new orange shirt, which was taken from her.

The orange shirt symbolizes the stripping away of culture, freedom, and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations. The day looks to raise awareness of the inter-generational impact of residential schools on individuals, families, and communities.

Residents, councillors, town staff and members of the Dufferin OPP marked Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with the raising of the "Every Child Matters" flag followed by a 1.8-kilometre candlelight reflection walk.

Roberta Scharuda, a resident from Conn, Ont., took part in the walk to honour her 13 family members who attended Kamloops Indian Residential School.

"Today is about survival and resilience. My mom survived nine years of residential school so I could be here," said Scharuda. "They

survived that and I wanted to do something to recognize even a little bit of what my mom and her family went through.?

In 2021, the remains of 215 buried children were detected on the grounds of the former residential school located at Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation.

Scharudo explained that for most of her life, she didn't know what her mother had experienced in residential school, and it wasn't until she passed that her aunts began to share their stories.

?It's something that no child should have had to experience,? she said.

Recognition of National Truth and Reconciliation Day brings to light the ongoing response or lack thereof to the 94 calls to action brought forward in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Ryan Degan, chair of Shelburne's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, spoke with the Shelburne Free Press about what is being done on a local level to address truth and reconciliation.

?The Town is really focused on kind of educational and engaging opportunities with the community; helping to build collective knowledge about the history of colonialism in Canada, legacy of residential schools and the impact that's had on local Indigenous communities,? said Degan.

When asked whether the Town could be doing better in addressing the calls to action at a municipal level, Mayor Mills admitted that the Town could be doing more.

?The honest answer is we can always do better,? said Mills. ?Oftentimes, you may think that there isn't a whole lot that a municipality can do when it's something as broad as this, but quite frankly, I think there are a lot of things that can be done at a local level.?

A report is expected to be brought forward to Shelburne Town Council from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee to discuss the calls to action related to municipal government.

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