

**MANITOBA INDIGENOUS  
CULTURAL EDUCATION CENTRE**

**CENTERING SURVIVOR VOICES**  
**ON THE NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**  
ORANGE SHIRT DAY



**A GUIDE TO MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION AND  
OBSERVANCE**

FOR CORPORATIONS, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS & MORE

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PROJECT FUNDED BY  
THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Canada 



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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# INTRODUCTION

A decorative graphic featuring a central five-petaled flower with a circular center, flanked by two sprigs of leaves. The graphic is rendered in a light blue color against the dark blue background.

## HISTORY OF THE DAY

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - also commonly referred to as Orange Shirt Day - is a significant day of observance in Canada that commemorates the experiences of Indigenous children in the residential school system and raises awareness about the intergenerational impacts of these harmful institutions. The history of Orange Shirt Day is closely tied to the experiences of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, a residential school survivor who attended St. Joseph's

The story behind Orange Shirt Day dates back to 1973 when Phyllis Webstad, a young Indigenous girl from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation in British Columbia, started her first day at a residential school. Her grandmother had gifted her a bright orange shirt to wear on her first day of school. Unfortunately, upon arriving at the school, her orange shirt was taken from her, and she was forced to wear a uniform provided by the school. The traumatic experience of having her clothing taken away, along with the harsh conditions and abuse she later endured during her time at the school, had a lasting impact on Phyllis.

In 2013, Webstad shared her story at a residential school commemoration event, and her experience inspired the creation of Orange Shirt Day as a way to honor the survivors of residential schools and remember those who did not survive. The color orange was chosen because it was the color of the shirt that Phyllis had worn on her first day of school, symbolizing the loss of identity and culture experienced by Indigenous children in the residential school system.

Since then, Orange Shirt Day has grown into a nationwide movement in Canada. It is observed annually on September 30th to acknowledge the pain and suffering endured by Indigenous children and their families in the residential school system. The day also serves as an opportunity for education and reconciliation, with various events, ceremonies, and activities taking place across the country to promote awareness, understanding, and healing.

The discovery of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada in recent years has further emphasized the importance of the need to confront the dark history of these institutions. In 2021, the day was elevated to a statutory holiday for federal workers and workers in federally-regulated workplaces by the Parliament of Canada, officially named the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day continues to be a reminder of the ongoing journey toward truth and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to provide guidance to both non-profit organizations and for-profit corporations keen on commemorating, witnessing, and honouring the healing journeys of residential school survivors and their families. While commemorating this important day of remembrance, it is crucial to approach it with utmost respect and sensitivity. Here, we outline how to center residential school survivors, where to buy orange shirts, how to partner with survivors, Indigenous organizations, or create your own commemoration event, including what not to do, while emphasizing the need to avoid self-centered actions and instead focus on genuine support for the cause and those affected by it.



# COMMEMORATING THE NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION



First and foremost, it is essential to refrain from centering your own organization or profiting from the event. Orange Shirt Day is about honoring survivors and their families, not about financial or other gains. Supporting organizations that have long been dedicated to this work and prioritizing their voices should be the primary goal.

Furthermore, using free artwork for profit or turning this commemoration into a one-off profit-making event is discouraged. Instead, genuine commitment to the cause and its ongoing support is vital. In fact, there are many ways to meaningfully commemorate Orange Shirt Day. Organizations may want to attend Indigenous-led community events, buy orange shirts, partner with survivors, partner with Indigenous organizations, and/or create their own commemoration event. Below we outline the best practices for each.



## PURCHASING ORANGE SHIRTS

When procuring orange shirts for your organization's participation in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, it's essential to prioritize sourcing from Indigenous organizations or those dedicated to giving back to Indigenous communities. By doing so, you not only obtain a symbol of remembrance but also directly contribute to Indigenous initiatives and economic development. Seek out businesses and artisans within Indigenous communities who produce these shirts, as your purchase supports their livelihoods and strengthens the local economy.

Additionally, be discerning in your choice of supplier. Ensure that a portion of the proceeds from the sale of orange shirts is reinvested into initiatives that benefit Indigenous communities, such as education, cultural preservation, or mental health support for survivors and their families. Transparent and ethical sourcing not only aligns with the spirit of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation but also serves as a tangible way to demonstrate your organization's commitment to reconciliation and social responsibility.

Finally, consider using your orange shirt purchase as an opportunity to educate your staff and stakeholders about the importance of supporting Indigenous businesses and communities. Share the story of the shirt's origin and the positive impact your purchase is making. By taking these steps, your organization can actively contribute to the betterment of Indigenous communities while commemorating Orange Shirt Day with authenticity and respect.





## ATTENDING INDIGENOUS-LED EVENTS

When participating in an Indigenous-led community event commemorating the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, organizations can take proactive steps to ensure their involvement is respectful and meaningful. Beyond mere attendance, it's essential to engage in actions that demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context year-round.

## CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

A great place to start is by investing in cultural competency training for your staff. Cultural competency training can provide valuable insights into the historical significance of Orange Shirt Day and the broader Indigenous experience in Canada. Examples of cultural competency training available include:

**INDIGENOUS CANADA BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA** Indigenous Canada is a 12-lesson Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) from the Faculty of Native Studies that explores the different histories and contemporary perspectives of Indigenous peoples living in Canada. From an Indigenous perspective, this course explores complex experiences Indigenous peoples face today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations.

See <https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html> for more information.





**INDIGENOUS INSIGHTS BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG** The program educates Canadians and clarifies commonly held misconceptions about the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. It is ideal for educators, public health workers, employees in the public and private sectors, NGOs, faith-based and spiritual organizations, and those seeking to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Peoples. It is an overview of Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, and relationship with Canada. Indigenous Insights has two options, online video modules and facilitated group training.

See <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/indigenous-insights/> for more information.

## FINANCIAL AND ONGOING SUPPORT

Instead of using the event for publicity or profit, consider making a financial contribution to Indigenous organizations or initiatives that support survivors and their families. This demonstrates a commitment beyond the event itself, acknowledging the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous communities. Moreover, look for ways to provide ongoing support through resources, spaces, or mentorship, contributing to long-term empowerment.

## VOLUNTEERISM AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTION

One powerful way for organizations to demonstrate their commitment to an Indigenous-led Orange Shirt Day event is through active participation. Encourage your employees to volunteer their time, skills, and expertise to assist in event logistics, whether it's setting up, assisting with activities, or helping with cleanup. Volunteering fosters direct engagement with the community, promotes a sense of unity, and showcases your organization's dedication to the cause.

Additionally, consider providing valuable resources to enhance the event's success. This could involve offering event space, technical support, or materials and supplies needed for workshops, presentations, or cultural activities. Resource contributions can significantly alleviate the logistical burden on event organizers and contribute to a more enriching experience for all attendees. Demonstrating your organization's willingness to go beyond financial support by actively participating and offering resources underscores your commitment to making a positive impact on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and supporting the broader goals of reconciliation.





## **PARTNERING WITH SURVIVORS**

Partnering with residential school survivors is a powerful way for organizations to foster genuine connections and support the education of staff and community members. Beyond forming partnerships, it's crucial to actively engage in activities that honor their experiences and amplify their voices. By forging these partnerships and actively collaborating, organizations can contribute to a more profound understanding of the legacy of residential schools and demonstrate a long-term commitment to truth, reconciliation, and Indigenous well-being.

## **CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND SENSITIVITY**

Ensure that your organization's employees and leadership are educated about the history and legacy of residential schools, Indigenous cultures, and the experiences of survivors. This knowledge is essential to approach Survivors with sensitivity and respect.

## **REACH OUT TO SURVIVORS IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

If any previous relationship has been established with a Survivor, it is best you reach out to that person first. If this has not been done, try reaching out to a local Indigenous organization such as your local Native Friendship Centre, that can refer you to a Survivor in your community.



# BUILD A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

Be clear about your organization's intentions and how you can support the Survivor and their community. This might include financial contributions, resources, or assistance with community projects. Additionally, showing up to events can help build trust and relationships. Attend community events, participate in ceremonies if invited, and engage in open dialogue. Trust is the foundation of any meaningful relationship.

## ENGAGE SURVIVOR IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

Ask the Survivor how they would like to be included. Residential School Survivors have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share. Engage them in ways that are meaningful to them to collaboratively plan their involvement. Remember that Survivors may have different preferences and comfort levels in terms of engagement, so be flexible. Being open to feedback is another great step organizations can take to foster meaningful relationships that will sustain.

## PROVIDE AN APPROPRIATE HONORARIUM

An appropriate honorarium should be offered for any service the Survivor is requested for, including not only their time at the event, but also any planning time and the cost of accessing mental health support afterward. If possible, have the honorarium available for the Survivor to access at the end of the event, rather than them having to wait weeks for a cheque in the mail.





# SUPPORT THE SURVIVOR BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER AN EVENT

If engaging a Survivor to be part of an event, there are some steps you can take to ensure the Survivor is cared for before, during, and after the event. Before the event, it's crucial to establish open communication, ensuring the Survivor feels comfortable attending. Often, Survivors may bring a helper with them, so compensating the helper is ideal too. Additionally, you will want to address any concerns or triggers the Survivor may have and offer assistance with transportation or logistics if needed. During the event, it is best to maintain a supportive presence by sitting with them, offering reassurance, and respecting their boundaries. Having water available for them to drink and ensuring they know where to access the washroom facilities is helpful. Be attentive to their emotional cues, and provide opportunities for breaks or private moments if they become overwhelmed. Ensure a space is set up for this. After the event, check in with them to offer emotional support and provide a safe space for them to share their thoughts and feelings, or a smudge. Encourage them to access counseling or mental health resources if desired, and continue to be a compassionate presence as they process their experiences and emotions. Ultimately, the key is to prioritize their well-being, respect their autonomy, and be there as a caring and understanding friend or ally.





## **PARTNERING WITH INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS**

Collaborative planning with Indigenous community leaders and offering your support is an effective way to contribute to Truth and Reconciliation. Engage in open and inclusive discussions to align your organization's participation with the community's vision for the event. This approach not only fosters mutual respect but also ensures that your organization's presence is in harmony with the event's true purpose.

## **LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Strive to build long-term relationships with Indigenous communities, moving beyond one-time engagements. Building trust and fostering ongoing collaboration is crucial for meaningful support. After the event, engage in self-reflection and evaluation to assess your organization's impact. Be open to feedback from Indigenous communities and use it to improve your approach in the future. Ultimately, your organization's respectful and meaningful participation can contribute to the broader goals of reconciliation and honoring survivors and their families on Orange Shirt Day.

## **REFLECT AND EDUCATE**

Continuously reflect on your organization's role in reconciliation and educate your team and stakeholders about the importance of these relationships.





# CREATING A COMMEMORATION EVENT

In select cases, businesses and organizations who have the capacity to and relationship with Indigenous communities may want to host their own National Day for Truth and Reconciliation event. It is imperative that your desire to host an event comes from a good place, and will work towards advancing one of the 94 Calls to Action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

**EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS** Offer workshops and presentations that educate attendees about the history and legacy of residential schools, Indigenous cultures, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. Invite Indigenous speakers, historians, and survivors to share their perspectives.

**ARTISTIC EXPRESSION** Showcase Indigenous art, music, dance, and storytelling as a way to express the resilience and creativity of Indigenous communities. Consider organizing an art exhibit, live performances, or storytelling sessions.

**GUEST SPEAKERS** Invite residential school survivors and their families to share their personal stories and experiences. This can provide attendees with firsthand insights into the effects of residential schools and the journey toward healing and reconciliation.

**INTERACTIVE EXHIBITS** Set up interactive exhibits that allow attendees to learn about residential schools, the survivors, and the reconciliation process. Incorporate multimedia elements, historical artifacts, and personal testimonies.

**COMMUNITY ART PROJECTS** Encourage attendees to participate in community art projects that promote healing and unity. For example, a mural, quilt, or communal artwork that symbolizes reconciliation.



# SUPPORTING INTERGENERATIONAL SURVIVORS



Businesses and organizations commemorating the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation can demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation by providing meaningful support to staff members who are intergenerational survivors of the residential school system. Intergenerational survivors include the children, grandchildren, and any other relation to a residential school survivor.

This support can take various forms, including creating a safe and empathetic workplace environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their experiences, if they choose to do so. Employers can also offer flexibility in work hours or provide mental health resources, recognizing that this day may evoke complex emotions and memories for survivors and their families. Furthermore, organizations can actively engage in Indigenous cultural awareness and sensitivity training to foster a more inclusive and understanding workplace. By acknowledging the unique challenges faced by intergenerational survivors and taking steps to provide support, businesses and organizations can contribute to the healing and reconciliation process while promoting a more inclusive and compassionate workplace culture.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society  
<https://fncaringsociety.com/reconciling-history>

National Centre for Truth And Reconciliation - Truth and Reconciliation Week  
Video Series <https://www.youtube.com/c/NationalCentreforTruthandReconciliation/videos>

Reconciliation Ambassadors, Spirit Bear's Beary Caring Curriculum  
<https://fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/reconciliation-ambassadors>

Shared Health Manitoba "10 actions you can take today in the spirit of reconciliation"  
<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/news/2021-09-27-reconciliation/>

Southern Chief Organization SCO reflects and honours Survivors and children who didn't make it home through their annual "Every Child Matters" Truth and Reconciliation campaign.  
<https://scoinc.mb.ca/>

The Wa-Say Healing Centre Inc. mission is: "Understanding the History; Accepting the Present; Planning for the Future"  
<https://wa-say.com/>





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