



Statement

Sept. 30, 2021
For Immediate Release

Today we don orange shirts to recognize the history and troubling legacy of the residential school system in Canada. We wear orange in memory of the children who did not survive residential schools, those who did and who were traumatized by the experience, and for all the descendants who feel the continuing negative effects.

For myself and my staff, wearing orange gives us all an opportunity to reflect deeply upon our own individual roles in reconciliation because, no matter who we are, each of us has a part to play. I encourage everyone to honour this day by asking, “What truths do I need to understand? What contribution will I make to reconciliation?”

This year, my Office is also officially recognizing the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation by closing to honour the day. This national recognition has been a long time coming. I hope that settler-Canadians will engage and gain a deeper understanding of the many harms experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families due to colonization, assimilation and racism and how to effect positive change. The National Day is a positive step towards creating open conversations between individuals, communities and governments to continue our path to reconciliation.

In May, after the discovery of the mass graves of precious children, I made a statement to show my Office’s support of the Tk’emlups te Secwépemc Nation. We shared in their grief, heartache and sadness but also acknowledged the importance of addressing the trauma and harm caused by residential schools. Two weeks later, after careful consultation with First Nations Chiefs and leaders, my Office released a report on Skye, a First Nations youth who had been separated from her mother, family, community and culture, who experienced a profound lack of belonging and who died on her 17th birthday as a result of the toxic drug supply.

Intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools played a major role in Skye’s life – and death. Her story continues to guide and inform our work; in particular, a new initiative underway that emphasizes the need to support families

and communities to nurture their young children in the early years, especially those who experience racism, stigma and intergenerational trauma.

My Office is also working on an in-depth study on provincial and federal funding for child and family services for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children, and examining whether existing financial structures align with current ideas around keeping families and communities together. This study will also look at how current funding compares to funding for non-Indigenous child welfare services.

This Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity for all British Columbians to reflect deeply upon the thousands of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous people who continue to feel the effects of residential schools either directly or through intergenerational trauma – every single day. There are increasing concerns over the mental health of Indigenous youth, whose lives have been disproportionately affected by the stress of the ongoing global pandemic, toxic drug supply, dislocation and loss due to the wildfires and the recoveries at former residential schools. I want to emphasize my continued commitment to work alongside First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous leaders, communities, families and young people to improve the lives of children and youth now, and to support their aspirations and plans as the Nations and communities resume jurisdiction.

Join me today in our pledge to continue advocating for the improvement of child-, youth- and family-serving systems in B.C. for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous communities across the province.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth