

Sooke Orange Shirt Day to Be Held September 26, 2020

The Sooke Truth for Reconciliation (T4R) Group will gather for its 3rd annual commemoration of Orange Shirt Day. This event was initiated by T4R founder, Linda Bristol, who died in Oct 2018. As she would have wanted, everyone is invited to join in the spirit of reconciliation to raise awareness about the residential school system in Canada and honour the experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

For those unfamiliar with Orange Shirt Day, the orange shirt refers to the new shirt that a young Phyllis Webstad received from her grandmother for her first day of school at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School in British Columbia. When Phyllis arrived at school, her clothes, including her new orange shirt, were taken away and never returned, replaced with a school uniform. Ms. Webstad's story has led to a national movement to recognize the experience of survivors of Indian Residential Schools, honour them, and show a collective commitment to ensure that every child matters.

Officially, Orange Shirt Day takes place on September 30th. However, this year it will be commemorated in Sooke on September 26th. This initiative calls for every Canadian to wear an orange shirt on September 26th (and Sept 30th) in the spirit of healing and reconciliation. Anyone wishing to attend the Orange Shirt Day gathering will be welcomed.

This year, Linda's daughter, Monique, has arranged for distinguished guests to join the Sooke circle:

Alex Nelson of the Musgamaqw Dzawada'enuwx First Nation is best known for hosting the 1997 Indigenous Games in Victoria. He was co-founder and Executive Director of the Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Association of BC for 20 years. He guides the Partners Council as a respected Elder and Senior Advisor. Alex is a survivor of St. Michael's residential school in Alert Bay where playing soccer was the one bright spot in his experience. He is a gifted speaker and through his stories, he is able to bring personal, emotional awareness to the issues important to reconciliation.

Nella Nelson was with the Victoria School District for nearly 40 years including 29 years as Administrator for Aboriginal Education until she retired in 2018. She is a published author and recipient of numerous awards.

Details regarding Sooke Orange Shirt Day:

When: Saturday, Sept 26, 2:00-3:00 pm

Where: St Rose of Lima Church, 2191 Townsend Rd, Sooke

Blessing: Shirley Alphonse

Speakers: Alex & Nella Nelson

Fr. Dean Henderson has kindly offered the St Rose of Lima Church and parking area for the event. Please plan to park as deep in the parking lot as possible, or on the street to maximize space to gather.

Participants will form a circle outside, weather permitting – dress for it! A tent and a few chairs will be available for elders but bring a folding chair if you need to be sure you can sit. Please wear orange! Some orange shirts will be available for purchase from Monique.

COVID precautions will be observed including 6' distancing. Please bring a face mask. Do not attend if you or anyone in your “bubble” is unwell. Attendance will be recorded for contact tracing purposes. If the weather is terrible, the event will be held inside the church in pre-arranged seats (not a circle) for up to 40 people.