

BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

STORIES FROM YOUR COMMUNITIES

A STORY TO TAKE TO THE WORLD

ORANGE SHIRT DAY, EVERY CHILD MATTERS

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Think of your outfit for the first day of school. You choose it yourself. Something that will help you feel excited, so you won't be scared. You have to leave your family to go to school. You don't know when you'll see them again. You choose an orange blouse. Shiny fabric. Eyelets. Lace. So pretty. Your grandmother buys it for you. You wear it to school that first day. They take it away. Your orange blouse. They take a lot of things away. They take you away.

So it was for Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, of Dog Creek, British Columbia. Sent to the St. Joseph Mission Residential School when she was six years old, Webstad has lived with the memory of that sorrowful first day ever since. "Nobody cared that we had feelings," remembers Webstad. "We didn't matter."

Now in its third year, Orange Shirt Day is a day of reminding ourselves, and each other, that every child matters. It is a day when the stories and experiences of residential school survivors, and those who did not survive, are remembered as a step forward in healing and reconciliation. On September 30, 2015 in the North Vancouver School District, orange was the colour of the day.

At Norgate Elementary, elders from the Squamish Nation spoke for staff and students, about the importance of home, family and education.



Staff and students create a heart for Orange Shirt Day on the field at Norgate Elementary

"We have a story to take to the world from this school," Chief Robert Joseph, Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation. "That story is every child matters. We have a new future [to create] where all children feel good about themselves."

In his gentle, clear voice, Chief Joseph continued: "When I was a little boy, I was six years old, they came and took me away. And for a long time I thought that nobody loved me. No child should grow up that way. Here we have a chance to create a world that we have not seen before. That is more caring and compassionate. This is a good idea that we are all one family here at Norgate. You are so precious. Deeply loved. Always hold on to that idea. Go from here always loving, always caring."