



As the Town of Ajax remembers and embraces its Indigenous history, we have encouraged residents, their families and the wider community to learn about Canada's history pre-Confederation. In an effort to foster a culture of inclusion and understanding, we have had meaningful discourses regarding our history as Canadians. **Unfortunately, that history also includes the residential school system.**

These schools were established with the assumption that aboriginal culture was unable to adapt, and therefore should assimilate into the Canadian culture and embrace Christian values and learn English or French. In its height in **1931**, and with the last school closing as recently as **1996**, the Residential School System was an attempt to erase indigenous identity and history.

Young children were forced from their homes and often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. ALL were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents. Many died, their deaths unreported for years and the causes still unknown. Many more are still missing and have never returned home.

In all, about **150,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Metis** children were removed from their communities.

One of those children was Phyllis Webstad.

Phyllis was 6-years-old when she started her first day of school.

She was been noted as stating the following about her first day,

“When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including my orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn’t understand why they wouldn’t give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn’t matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.”

In an attempt to commemorate Phyllis’ story and the history of residential schools, in 2013, Orange Shirt Day was declared in Williams Lake, BC.

THE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN THESE SCHOOLS IS A SAD AND REGRETTABLE CHAPTER IN OUR HISTORY.

Orange Shirt Day is an opportunity for First Nations, local governments, schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope.

Every September 30th, the Town of Ajax remembers and reflects on Orange Shirt Day.