

Friday, September 23, 2022 | For Immediate Release

Xe Xe Smun' Eem-Victoria Orange Shirt Day Ceremony is September 30 in Centennial Square

VICTORIA, BC — The public and media are invited to wear orange and attend the Xe Xe Smun' Eem-Victoria Orange Shirt Day: Every Child Matters Ceremony on Friday, September 30 from 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. in Centennial Square. All are welcome to this free event which will take place rain or shine. The ceremony will also be live streamed on the City's Facebook page and on the CHEK+ app.

Orange Shirt Day is a grassroots event that encourages Canadians to learn about and acknowledge the harm that the residential school system had on generations of Indigenous families and their communities. September 30 was chosen because it is the time of year in which children were taken from their homes to residential schools. It is also the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The Orange Shirt Day: Every Child Matters initiative grew out of Phyllis Webstad's account of having her shiny new orange shirt taken away on her first day of St. Joseph Mission residential school, during a commemoration in Williams Lake, BC in 2013. Since then, Orange Shirt Day has become an opportunity to keep the discussion happening about all aspects of residential schools.

Residential school survivor Eddy Charlie and friend Kristin Spray are organizing the Xe Xe Smun' Eem-Victoria Orange Shirt Day: Every Child Matters Ceremony, which they developed in 2015 while attending the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College. Xe Xe Smun' Eem means "Sacred Children" in the Cowichan or Quw'utsun language. This is the sixth consecutive year that the City of Victoria is supporting the event to mark the City's commitment to reconciliation.

The ceremony will consist of the blessing of the land and welcome by Tsartlip Nation Elder May Sam, a land acknowledgement by Songhees Nation member Brianna Bear, and Indigenous performances by Westwind Intertribal Drum, spoken-word poet Shauntelle Dick-Charleson, and singers Nicole Mandryk and Adam Gauthier who will be accompanied by students from the Tree of Life Playschool.

The event will include the annual raising of the Victoria Orange Shirt Day flag and a minute of silence to honour and remember the children who did not survive residential schools. The ceremony will be emceed by Indigenous Perspectives Society Executive Director Rachelle Dallaire who is from the Montagnais people in lower Quebec and is an intergenerational survivor.

Eddy Charlie and Kristin Spray will speak to the importance of raising awareness about residential schools to honour the more than 6,000 children who died, and the sacrifices that were made by 150,000 residential school survivors and their families across Canada. The residential school system in Canada operated 139 schools from 1831 to 1996.

Indigenous guest speakers will include Tsartlip Nation Elder Tom Sampson; Ry Moran, Canada's inaugural Associate University Librarian - Reconciliation at the University of Victoria; and residential school intergenerational survivor Holly Charlie. Each will share their personal experiences with residential schools and reconciliation.

Tsartlip First Nation Elder Tom Sampson is of Coast Salish and Nez Perce ancestry who has dedicated his life to fighting for Indigenous rights, through equality and inclusion. Elder Sampson is a trailblazer advocating for self-government and reconciliation before it was fashionable, advocating for Indigenous inherent rights through the revitalization of Indigenous languages, community health, sports and the protection of natural resources. Elder Sampson has taken a leadership role for most of his adult life being involved in Indigenous politics at the local, regional, and national levels, serving as Chief of Tsartlip for 24 years, chairperson of the South Island Tribal Council for 22 years, vice-chief of the BC Assembly of First Nations, chair of the Assembly's Constitutional Working Group for Status Indians, chair of the Douglas Treaty Council, and chair for the Native Participation Committee for the 1994 XV Commonwealth Games and serving on the Board of Directors. Elder Sampson is an Indian Day School survivor.

Ry Moran is a proud member of the Red River Métis. His role within UVic Libraries is to decolonize the university's archives and collections, including bringing in new materials that reflect Indigenous knowledge and history to further truth and reconciliation. This is the first role of its kind at a Canadian university. Moran was the founding director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation hosted by the University of Manitoba, and prior to that, served as the Director of Statement Gathering at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Hollie Charlie is from the Cowichan Nation in Duncan, BC. She is a graduate, a social worker and a parent who believes her children should have access to culture and language. As the child of a residential school survivor, trauma has played a role in the family model that Hollie grew up in. Through sharing her story, Hollie is determined to educate her family and community about the impact of trauma to help end the cycle.

Mayor Lisa Helps will be joined by other special guests, including the Honourable Laurel Collins, Member of Parliament for the NDP; the Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing; and Capital Regional District Chair Colin Plant.

Xe Xe Smun' Eem-Victoria Orange Shirt Day T-shirts, hoodies and socks designed by artist Bear Horne, Every Child Matters orange blankets and The Orange Shirt Story children's book by Phyllis Webstad are available at local venues around town and will be available for purchase at the ceremony. All proceeds go towards supporting this annual initiative. For performer and speaker bios and more information about the event, visit: victoria.ca.

Community partners include the City of Victoria, CRD, CHEK TV, Big Wheel Burger, Caffé Fantastico, Discovery Coffee, Saanich Parks, Recreation and Community Services, Goldstream Gazette, Imagine Studio Café, Red Barn Market, Royal BC Museum and Victory Barbers & Brand.

Quotes:

Mayor Lisa Helps, City of Victoria

"On behalf of the City of Victoria, I want to express how honoured we are to be collaborating with Eddy Charlie and Kristin Spray for the sixth year on this important initiative, which serves to remind and educate non-Indigenous Canadians of a devastating part of our history, and that the harm caused by residential schools continues to impact survivors and intergenerational survivors today."

Eddy Charlie, Event Organizer, Xe Xe Smun' Eem-Victoria Orange Shirt Day: Every Child Matters

"All change happens in small steps. Remember that you are worth sacrificing your strength, your place on a path to show your passion to reach for change that brings equality into existence. Be gentle – an attitude of caring can contribute meaningful choices and change that is important for all of us."

For More Information:

Kristin Spray and Eddy Charlie
Event Organizers

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