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10 Things You Can Do: Kamloops Indian Residential School

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Trigger Warning: This article includes information about Residential School experiences

In May 2021, the remains of 215 young Indigenous children were found in a mass grave at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. While the school may have closed down in 1969 (and the last school in Canada closed in 1996), this news has brought the tragedy of the residential school experience to the forefront of the minds of Canadians and the world. Reactions from the federal, provincial and municipal governments have poured in, along with public outcry for further action.

Nanaimo Pavillion at Swy-A-Lana Park following a vigil for the children| Courtesy of Bob Joseph

We wanted to share what you can do to ensure that every child is recognized and accounted for. There are many ways to support Indigenous communities every day, here is a list of what you can do today to show your support:

1. **Write a letter to your Member of Parliament - seeking a forensic search of all property used at any time for Residential Schools.**

Many are calling upon their local government to potentially find more unmarked and undisclosed graves as a result from the conditions of residential schools. Call, or write to your local member of parliament (MP) to have more sites looked into, to ensure all children can "go home".

2. **Write a letter to your MP seeking clean and potable drinking water for every Indigenous person in Canada.**

Among other issues that Indigenous people face in this country to this day, clean drinking water is still causing major health issues to 126 nations and remote communities in Canada. It is an essential part of life, and something we cannot take for granted.

3. **Write a letter to your MP seeking a minimum standard of housing according to provincial building codes for all Indigenous Peoples in Canada.**

According to the 2016 census, one in five Indigenous people lived in a dwelling in need of major repairs. Unsafe or crowded living conditions can cause major health problems, and is a constant and recurring issue for many communities.

4. **Lower flags at half-mast for 215 hours in honour of Canada's children.**

Many municipalities have lowered their flags in response to the discovery and resulting news coverage of the 215 children. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has asked that all federal buildings follow suit.

5. **Wear an Orange Shirt and encourage others to learn about the Orange Shirt.**

Orange Shirt Day falls on September 30 every year, however, now more than ever, wearing orange to support Indigenous children (those who made it home, or not) is a simple way to support communities. You can purchase an orange shirt from Orange Shirt Day, and partial proceeds go toward the foundation and awareness activities.

6. **Take a Pledge of Reconciliation**

If you have not already, check out our different ways to continue showing support and sign our pledge.

“It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of the Department, which is geared towards a final solution of the Indian Problem.”

Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 1910

7. **Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.**

It took many years following former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology for Canada to complete the TRC's report. In order to further understand the tragedy of Residential Schools, and the impact they have on communities today, the report accounts testimonials from survivors, and their experience attending these schools.

8. **Take action on any of the Calls To Action.**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released their calls to action in 2015. So far, only 10 have been met. Please read the full document here and continue to practice the actions toward reconciliation. Share with friends and family. Further your research and learning through our Indigenous Relations Academy courses.

9. **Learn about The UN Declaration**

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People is a comprehensive document outlining the different rights given to all Indigenous Peoples of the World. It is a defining piece of legislation that Canada is working towards implementing. See more on it here.

10. **Donate to the Indian Residential School Survivors Society**

The IRSSS is a British Columbian society that provides counselling services to survivors and descendants of the Residential School experience, and relies on the support of individuals to continue providing that support. Check out their website to learn more, and find out other ways to help.

Looking to do even more? Consider asking questions of church officials on their knowledge of reconciliation. Encourage faith leaders to enact and participate in reconciliation. Share this article with your family and friends, support more Indigenous-led community organizations, stand up against stereotyping and continue to practice empathy and patience.

Topics: Indian Residential Schools