

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

www.scoinc.mb.ca Facebook: @SCOIncMB



SCO CONCLUDES MONTH LONG CAMPAIGN BY HONOURING SURVIVORS ON NATIONAL TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION DAY

**It's critical that we not lose momentum and that we keep the
conversation alive- Grand Chief Daniels**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 30, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — Today, on this inaugural National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) honours all who attended Indian Residential Schools and their families, and the thousands of children who never returned home.

“While I am pleased to see our federal Treaty partner designate September 30th as a statutory holiday, this day of commemoration is a painful one,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “As First Nations people, we keep our relatives and families in our minds and hearts all year, along with the ongoing inter-generational traumas that were inflicted on us. We can never forget the losses we experienced and continue to experience through this colonial genocide project.”

September 30th is also known as Orange Shirt Day. It was first marked in 2013 and emerged from the story of Phyllis Webstad. In 1973, at the age of six, she was sent to the St. Joseph Mission Residential School wearing a brand new orange shirt, given to her by her grandmother for her first day of school. Staff at the school quickly stripped her of the new shirt and replaced it with the school's institutional uniform. By sharing her story, Phyllis reminds us of the assimilationist system, and the thousands of accounts of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse experienced by those who were wrenched away from their families and communities while the schools operated over more than 150 years.

This year, and in light of the discovery of thousands of unmarked graves at former Indian Residential School sites, we remember the children who did not make it home and all those who attended Assiniboia, Birtle, Brandon, Elkhorn, Fort Alexander, McKay, Pine Creek, Portage la Prairie, and Sandy Bay Residential schools in the south, and the five residential schools in northern Manitoba.

“Having a day of observance and reflection is welcome and profound, but it's definitely just the beginning,” said Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation Chief Trevor Prince. “My sincere hope is that this amplifies the dialogue to honour the truths of Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.”

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SCO marked the entire month of September with reflection, commemoration and solidarity beginning with an awareness and education campaign on billboards, transit buses and shelters throughout southern Manitoba, and then by supporting Survivor led events and providing t-shirts and lawn signs to the public. Several SCO-member First Nations held special ceremonies, such as Birdtail Sioux Dakota Nation, which officially opened its new Healing Garden to honour and remember all of its citizens who were forced to attend residential schools.

“I am so proud of the way our community came together for that ceremony,” said Birdtail Sioux Chief Lindsay Bunn Jr. “The garden is a place where knowledge and action meet. By honouring the dark past we then prepare for a brighter future and truly commence a healing journey.”

Rolling River First Nation also held a special event today which included sponsorship and input from neighbouring municipalities and corporate communities.

“I am heartened to see the participation of our non-Indigenous partners in something as important as this to my people,” said Rolling River Chief Wilfred McKay. “By being here, they are showing a willingness to learn and to commit to their significant roles in reconciliation.”

Despite the month of September coming to a close, SCO will continue to work tirelessly to advocate for more awareness and funding for healing programs and other supports for Indian Residential School Survivors. Last week, the SCO Chiefs-in-Summit passed a resolution calling for more long-term permanent funding for healing programs and other supports for Survivors. Last year the healing programs supported more than 40,000 Survivors and their families in Manitoba. The federal funding, which stems from the Indian Residential School Settlement agreement, has been at risk and on short-term extensions for the last several years.

“A re-awakening is an appropriate way to describe this year’s acknowledgement of September 30th,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “While I am pleased to witness heightened awareness and conversation about this tragic time in Canadian history, and its ongoing legacy, I am also struck by just how much work needs to be done to truly right this wrong. I can promise that I will not rest until that happens.”

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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**For Media Inquiries:**

Al Foster, Senior Correspondent, Southern Chiefs' Organization

Mobile: (204) 806-6837 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca