
September 29, 2023

Learning and Reflecting: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day

Dear Residents and Residents' Council Supporters,

On September 30th, we recognize the [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#), a day dedicated to reflecting on the history and intergenerational impacts of the residential school system in Canada. It is a time to honour the survivors of residential schools and mourn the tremendous loss of thousands of children who never returned home, as well as their families and communities.

This is a time to listen and learn about the wrongs of the past, and to explore how we, individually and collectively, can commit to ensuring that harm like this never happens again.

The origins of the Orange Shirt Day movement, which is also recognized on September 30th, can be credited to a woman by the name of [Phyllis Webstad](#), who bravely shared her story about having her orange shirt taken from her when she was forced to attend residential school in British Columbia. Wearing orange helps us to remember these tragic historical events, and it conveys the powerful message that every child matters. The practice of wearing orange shirts can help spark discussions with others to raise awareness – something that we can all plan to do tomorrow.

Many residents living in long-term care homes have asked OARC how they can start to learn about the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, including their history, traditions, and culture, and support the “[Calls to Action](#)” from the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#). What is most important is that we each start somewhere, and that we respect and meet others wherever they are on their journey of learning and understanding.

OARC has heard that some long-term care homes will be hosting special guests tomorrow to share some of the sacred teachings and stories with residents and team members. Just today, we learned that [Extendicare Brampton](#) hosted their first smudging ceremony with residents, and other homes have taken time throughout the week to explore the works of Indigenous authors and artists. Some

organizations have committed to forming book clubs to read and discuss literature that they have found to be meaningful. A discussion group or learning circle might be another opportunity to learn and share together with peers in your home.

Residents' Councils Can Craft an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

Taking the time to learn the history of the land on which your long-term care home is built is one tangible way that Residents' Councils can support reconciliation. Consider working together with members of your Council to create an Indigenous land acknowledgement, which can be incorporated into the [opening remarks](#) of each of your meetings throughout the year.



To assist Residents' Councils in this process, a resource called the '[Behavioural Supports Ontario Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Guiding Framework](#)' (July 2021) has been developed to provide guidance on how to incorporate land acknowledgements into education events and meetings, as well as explanations about why they are important, when to provide them, and who can provide them.

Another informative resource that might be helpful was developed by Public Health Ontario: [Indigenous Land Acknowledgements to Inform Public Health Professionals](#).

Our friends at the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care have also compiled a list of resources to support you on your journey: [Resources to Support Advancing Truth and Reconciliation in Long-Term Care](#)

OARC Building Relationships

In June 2023, four members of the OARC team had the opportunity to travel to Northwestern Ontario to visit nine long-term care homes and meet with their Residents' Councils and team members. This trip was particularly special because it also gave the OARC team (Dee, Stephanie, Mel and Melissa) the chance to spend time with OARC Board Director, [Calvin Morrisseau](#), who is based out of Couchiching First Nation, just outside Fort Frances, Ontario.

Pictured below: OARC team & Director Calvin had an inspiring visit with residents and home leadership at Rainycrest LTC.



The group set out, often travelling in opposite directions, in two separate vehicles, with the goal of listening, learning, and building relationships, which was made possible through memorable long-term care home visits in Atikokan, Dryden, Emo, Fort Frances, Kenora, Sioux Lookout, Rainy River and Red Lake.

In addition to being our tour guide, Calvin graciously gave of his time and energy to share his life experiences and stories, which helped to open our eyes to a different way of seeing the world and supporting the health and well-being of Elders.

During each home visit, the OARC team had the privilege of spending time with residents and team members, learning about the nuances of each home and Residents' Council, and the broader community. At Rainycrest LTC home, a special connection was made with Resident Leader, Gary Strickland, who has since agreed to join OARC's [Resident Advisory "REAL" group](#). We look forward to introducing him to you soon in a future communication.

The timing of OARC's visit coincided with [National Indigenous Peoples Day](#) (June 21) as well as the [150th Anniversary](#) of the signing of the Treaty document, which was commemorated through a series of lively community events. In Dryden, the OARC team attended a celebration organized by the Treaty #3 Grand Council and got to experience seeing the physical treaty documents that had been carefully and lovingly transported from the Archives in Ottawa. The OARC team also had the special honour of meeting with the Treaty #3 Grand Council to learn more about their work and goals for the community, and to discuss future opportunities for partnership and collaboration. The week concluded with members of the OARC team taking part in a sweat lodge ceremony with community members – an experience that was both powerful and transformative.

Visiting the beautiful communities in the Northwest and connecting directly with the people who call this part of Ontario home has reminded us about the critical importance of aging within your own community and staying connected to the people, culture and traditions that shape and honour our identities throughout our lives. We observed first-hand that this is not always possible for people in the North, including Indigenous Elders, where access to timely and appropriate care and services comes with unique barriers and challenges related to resources and infrastructure. OARC is committed to learning more about the current and future needs and goals of Northern communities, and long-term care homes across Ontario that serve Indigenous Elders, so that we can be supportive allies in mobilizing the changes needed for equitable and inclusive access for all.

Miigwech – and thank you to our new friends and connections in Northwest Ontario. Our collective voice is strengthened with yours included.

[From the OARC Team](#)