September 27, 2018

URFA is joining other Unions, Indigenous Communities, governments, schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation by recognizing Orange Shirt Day.

The annual Orange Shirt Day on September 30th commemorates the residential school experience and marks the ongoing commitment to the process of reconciliation. With September 30th falling on a Sunday this year, many organizations have chosen to mark the date this Friday, September 28th.

The Orange Shirt Day campaign began in 2013 in Williams Lake, B.C., inspired by a story told by Phyllis Webstad, a residential school survivor. On her first day at St. Joseph Mission residential school, an orange shirt bought for her by her grandmother was taken away by school officials.

To highlight the importance of Orange Shirt Day in the wake of a Saskatchewan radio station airing advertisements claiming many of the known facts surrounding residential schools and their harmful and damaging effects on indigenous children and families were “myths,” First Nations University of Canada Professor Dr. Blair Stonechild offered the following statement:

“Dear fellow colleagues and URFA members,

In the wake of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy statement that suggested that few Indigenous children attended residential schools, that the schools had little aftereffect on families and in fact produced leaders, as a residential school survivor I can guarantee:

1. The federal government went to great effort to force as many Indigenous children into residential schools as possible,
2. Residential schools were intended to destroy the cultural integrity of families and in fact succeeded in doing so, for example with the Sixties Scoop, and
3. The last thing government intended was for survivors of residential schools to become leaders who would champion the reclamation of their rights and cultures.

I encourage everyone to support Orange Shirt Day as part of the important ongoing work of reconciliation.”

We ask all URFA members to please join us in remembering those who were and continue to be impacted by the residential school system here in Saskatchewan and across Canada.

More information on Orange Shirt Day and resources are available online at www.orangeshirtday.org.