



Community Wellness
Dylan Thomas (2016)

“A Poem for Our Children”

Statement from the School of Child and Youth Care
in observance of Orange Shirt day and residential
school Survivors and their Families, Communities and Nations.

September 28, 2021

It was long ago and not so long ago, that the children from this land were stolen from their homes. An agreement between State and Church, to appropriate the land and to harm Indigenous people by taking the children from the land, families and identity.

Schools-- residential schools opening and grabbing, taking the children, by boat, air and land. Ripped from families, culture, belonging, language, and the land. The colonial chant of making way for “settling the land” and a better use of both land and water than just letting it be for kinship, travel and sustenance.

Kookums, Mushums, Nimis and Nikomis, all *Nowtweenan* are wailing for the loss of their little ones. There are no voices, no laughter, no presence of them in families and communities. Their parents and relatives legally bound, restricted under the watchful eyes of law, state and church, while the snatching of children occurred for almost 200 years. Well over a century of weeping for those children to return home, over a century of missing children in families and communities all over the land.

Wisdomkeepers, Elders, Old Ones, community members keep asking: “Where are the children?” Many of the children never returned home, year after year. “Where are the children?” There is no answer. They can’t communicate with new or old authorities who discriminate against them and continue to subjugate and oppress. They believe the authorities act as if they are superior in intelligence, perspective, innovation, industrialization and character. They cannot communicate with these people that work their own women, children and beasts in brutal ways. They cannot sue the government or church—it is illegal. They have no representation, no access, no voice. They are relegated and anchored to the reserve. “Where are the children”? they whisper to each other.

In 1831, the first residential school was built and occupied Six Nations territory, in the East by the Grand River. One of the last residential school was in Saskatchewan at the Gordon Residential school. It closed in 1996. In total, over 130 residential schools operated in Canada between 1831 and 1997. “Where are the children”?

Spring 2021: a discovery on former site of residential school grounds in Kamloops reveals “Where are the children”. In one part of the site over 215 graves are discovered, unmarked, undocumented, untold... silenced, part of the cost of occupying Indigenous lands. They target First Nations, Inuit and Metis children. If you take the children, you have the land; you seek to break the people. You may even cause genocide. But you will never break us. We remain unbent and unbroken.

Howling, keening and endless grief have developed torrents of tears over the years asking, “Where are the Children”? We are here... they replied. We are here . . . in the ground. We have been silenced and put out of sight. We are the secret they don’t ever want to reveal. This is genocide. They have experimented, abused, abducted, punished and killed us. No one knows, because we have been secreted to our mother earth to cry no more, to escape no more, to fear no more. We are here!

Genocide, colonialism, is not a thing of the past. It is here and present and thriving and growing amidst all of us. We allow it because it is the path of least resistance and it serves so many of us in privileged and unspoken ways, that we are the ones that usher it around.

Now is the time for unfettered truth telling and action, and anything less than that deserves nothing in return. It is time to bring the children home to families and honour their lives and the people that they could have been in their own lives, families and communities. It is time to nationally observe that Canada is and still remains a colonial country with a colonial obsession with land occupation and theft, and has made the first 250 years of profit off the backs and deaths of Indigenous peoples, and children. Canada will always choose profit over people and all that is, all that was and all that will ever be.

This is a day for our children. They have answered our call; Where are the Children? We are here. And-- we are here for them, with them, and to ensure that State, Church and social policy will never hurt our children again. That they will be brought home and honoured. Those who have instilled, implemented, and maintained colonial genocide will be brought to the light and seen.

Our children will come from our mother to be brought home again through our spirits, words, songs and hearts. We love you all, care for you and hear you... you are found and will be in our circle again. We are here.

We invite all members of the School of Child and Youth Care community to step forward into action and support vital Indigenous fundraising efforts:

- ITOTELNEWTEL LTE: LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER - ELDERS ENGAGEMENT FUND
<https://extrweb.uvic.ca/donate-online/iace>
- Indian Residential School Survivors Society
<https://www.irsss.ca>
- <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/orange-shirt-society.html>
- <http://conservancy.bc.ca/2021/02/halibut-island/>

UVic events:

Three days of programming for truth and reconciliation: <https://www.uvic.ca/news/topics/2021+orange-shirt-day+news>