

Collaboration Through Orange Shirt Day -- Reflection

In September 2018, I had the honor of executing Heritage Woods Secondary's first-ever Orange Shirt Day. For years I had been shocked of the atrocities that Indigenous Peoples faced in Canada throughout history, and though I have no First Nations, Metis, or Inuit heritage, I felt very compelled to act on the subject. I began researching, with my parent's support, ways to spread awareness and educate others on the injustices inflicted on the Indigenous population, specifically the Residential School System. Through listening to speaker Wab Kinew talk in late 2017, I learned about Phyllis Webstad and her legacy of Orange Shirt Day.

In grade 10 (2017-2018), it really began to bother me that our school did very little to honor our Indigenous population and the unceded land we reside on today. So, I met with a leadership teacher Kelly Powell, my principal, Todd Clerkson, and my school counsellor, Shaunna Martin, in hopes of receiving guidance and expertise in initiating wide-spread school events. Through collaboration with these three mentors, I gained valuable insights into how to successfully start a leadership project, as well as I gained three mentors that I will continue to look up towards. Together, we demonstrated advanced communication skills through collaboration, which resulted in meaningful relationships and a mutual growth in knowledge of each other. Without them, I couldn't have executed Orange Shirt Day.

Though these three mentors were instrumental in helping me carry out the milestone, I also sought guidance from other people. My original inspiration in initiating Orange Shirt Day came from Jen Duhamel-Conover, a counsellor at Burnaby Mountain Secondary. She has implemented and grown the event at schools she has worked at, and kindly prepared me with many resources to consult while planning HWSS's Orange Shirt Day of its own. As well, I was lucky to balance the workload by hiring a few friends to help me in the day-to-day basics of the job: selling shirts, putting up posters, informing classes on the day, taking photos, etc. These are friends I will be forever thankful for, and I truly couldn't have carried this day out successfully without them.

Overall, collaboration was key in making Orange Shirt Day successful. Though initially my idea, my parents, teachers, principals, mentors and friends were paramount in accomplishing our shared goal. Through developing meaningful relationships through healthy communication, I not only bettered my school environment, but I bettered myself. I am endlessly grateful for these people and opportunities.