

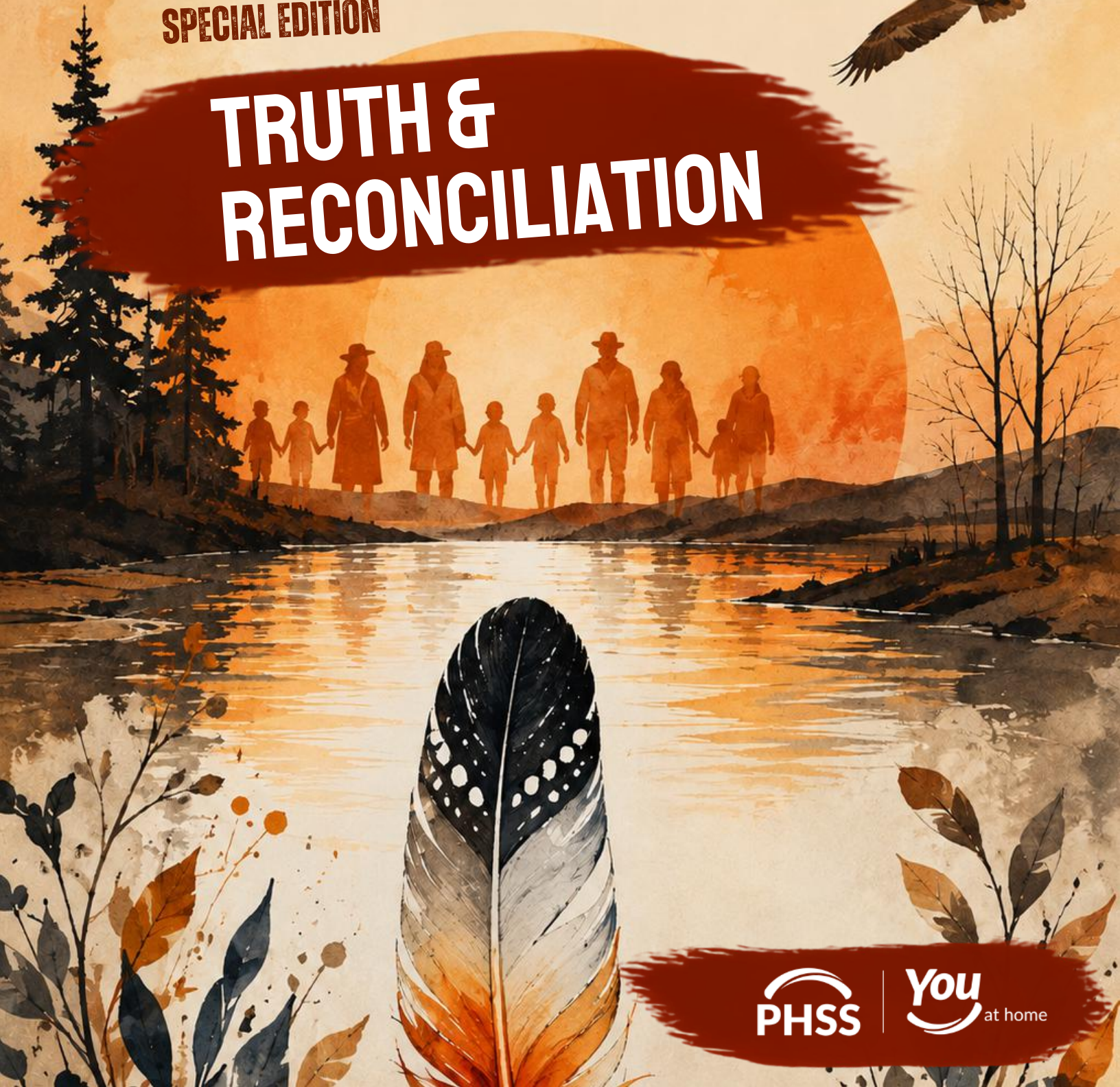
FALL 2026 VOLUME NO.16

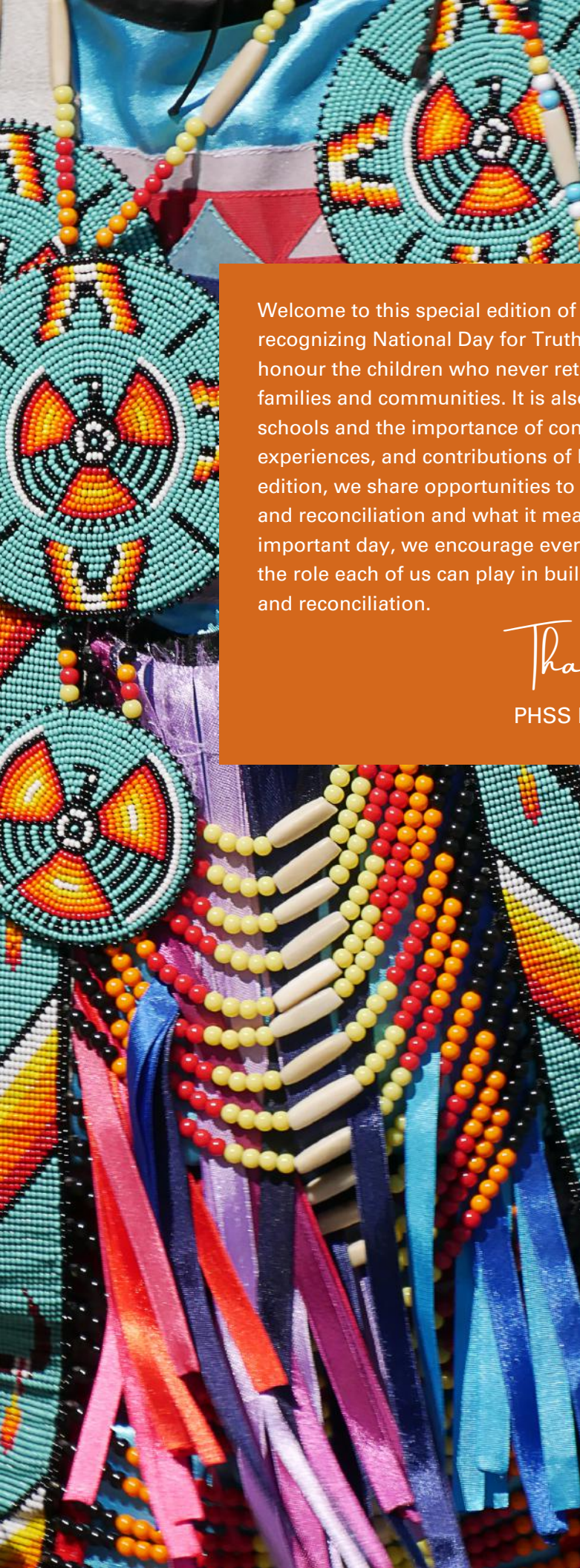
DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDITION

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION





FROM THE COMMITTEE

Welcome to this special edition of the PHSS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion newsletter, recognizing National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This day is an opportunity to honour the children who never returned home, Survivors of residential schools, and their families and communities. It is also a time to reflect on the lasting impacts of residential schools and the importance of continuing to learn about the histories, cultures, experiences, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. In this special edition, we share opportunities to learn, reflect, and deepen our understanding of truth and reconciliation and what it means in our communities today. As we recognize this important day, we encourage everyone to continue listening, learning, and considering the role each of us can play in building relationships rooted in respect, understanding, and reconciliation.

Thank You!

PHSS DEI COMMITTEE

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September 30th is National Day for Truth & Reconciliation

AND Orange Shirt Day

HOW YOU CAN TAKE PART

Wear Orange

Show solidarity with Indigenous communities and residential school survivors.

Show Your Support

Take a photo of yourself, your family, or your team in orange and send it to DiversityTeam@phsscommunity.com to be featured in the PHSS social media post and/or the next Diversity newsletter.

Learn More

[Orange Shirt Day](#)



[National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation](#)

[Phyllis Webstad YouTube Video](#)

[We Were Children by Tim Wolochatiuk](#)



Access Local Resources

London: [N'Amerind Friendship Centre](#)

Owen Sound: [M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre](#)

Ottawa: [Odawa Native Friendship Centre](#)

A HISTORY OF THE *Residential* SCHOOL SYSTEM



For over 160 years, Canada maintained an active boarding school system for Indigenous children and youth, with the purpose of assimilating Indigenous children into Canadian society. It is now widely known that students were removed forcibly from their homes, given European names, forbidden to speak their first language, and experienced widespread abuse.

On June 2nd, 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was formed by the federal government, with the mandate to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools and document the experiences of Survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience.

The Commission was active for seven years, carrying out extensive research, meeting with Survivors and other family and community members, and hosting national events across the country to share stories and encourage public awareness.

While the history of the residential school system is now regularly taught in Canadian schools, there are still many who may not be informed on the history of indigenous people in Canada and how the schools came to be. While this history cannot fully be captured in a single newsletter, the information shared here can start to paint a picture of the magnitude of its impact, and the long journey ahead to reconciliation.

1831

The Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario, began to run as a boarding system, with a mission to assimilate Indigenous children by severing ties to culture, language and traditions.

1883

Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald authorizes the creation of the residential school system. Schools are funded and operated by the Government of Canada, alongside various Christian church organizations. The Secretary of State tells Parliament "In order to educate the children properly, we must separate them from their families." Those who resisted faced imprisonment and fines.

1886

40 residential schools are operating across Canada.

1907

Medical Inspector for Indian Affairs, Dr. Bryce, reports that health conditions in residential schools are a "national crime." It is found that children are dying at alarming rates, with mortality rates up to 30% at some schools. Schools are subject to overcrowding, illness, and abuse by those operating the schools.

- 
- 1920 Residential schools become mandatory for all First Nations children between 7 and 15 years of age. This policy was also inconsistently applied to Métis and Inuit children. By 1930, residential schools expanded to 80 institutions across the country, with over 17,000 children enrolled.
- 1940/50s Some schools subject children to nutritional experiments without consent, approved by the federal government. Experiments included restricted access to essential nutrients and dental care.
- 1958 Indian Affairs regional inspectors recommend the abolition of residential schools.
- 1960 As residential schools begin to be closed, thousands of Indigenous children are removed from their families and placed in non-Indigenous foster or adoption homes in what is called the “Sixties Scoop”, cutting them off from their families, culture and language.
- 1970 The Mohawk Institute, Canada’s longest running residential school, is closed after 140+ years of operation.
- 1996 The Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples calls for a public inquiry into the effects of the residential schools on generations of Aboriginal Peoples. The last residential schools close in Saskatchewan and Nunavut. It is estimated that over 150 000 children attended residential schools.
- 2008 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is established and given authority to document the truth of Survivors, families and communities. Prime Minister Stephen Harper makes a formal apology for Canada’s role in the operation of the residential schools.
- 2013 Phyllis Webstad shared her story of arriving at residential school at six years old wearing an orange shirt from her grandmother. Staff took it away and never returned it. Her story inspired Orange Shirt Day and the “Every Child Matters” campaign on September 30th, with the orange shirt symbolizing the loss of identity and culture experienced by children in residential schools.
- 2015 The Commission releases a final report, detailing the history and lasting impacts of the Indian Residential School system in Canada, with 94 Calls to Action.
- 2021 September 30th is formally declared a “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation” in Canada.

Truth and Reconciliation

September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—a day of remembrance, reflection, and recognition of the devastating and lasting impact of the residential school system. It is a day to remember the children who never returned home, to honour the survivors who carry the memories of what they endured, and to acknowledge the profound harm inflicted upon generations of Indigenous families and communities. For survivors and their families, this day can reopen wounds that have never fully healed, reminding them of loss, grief, separation, and the intergenerational trauma that continues to affect families and communities today.

It is also important to recognize that there is no single Indigenous perspective on this day. Feelings and opinions differ among individuals, families, Elders, leaders, and communities. For some, the day represents an important opportunity to educate, remember, and honour those who were impacted. For others, it can bring frustration, anger, or even pain because

recognition without meaningful action can feel hollow. Reconciliation cannot simply be words spoken by governments and institutions once a year. It must be reflected in real and measurable change—through access to clean drinking water, safe and affordable housing, equitable health care, improved child welfare, the honouring of treaty obligations, and meaningful implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.

Reconciliation cannot begin and end on September 30. One day of recognition cannot undo generations of injustice. Reconciliation is an ongoing responsibility—a commitment to confronting the legacy of residential schools, supporting Indigenous rights and cultures, respecting self-determination, and turning acknowledgement into action. If we truly want to honour the children and survivors, then September 30 must not simply be a day when we remember what happened. It must be a reminder of what we still have to do.



A large, detailed feather is shown on the left side of the page, set against a warm sunset background. The feather is dark with lighter tips, and the sun is visible in the lower left, creating a golden glow.

I am First Nations. I am Haudenosaunee.

By Tanya Schuyler

The term “Indigenous” is a broad umbrella term that includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. While it is an appropriate collective term, it does not tell you which Nation, community, culture, or identity a person belongs to.

Using the broad term “Indigenous” can sometimes overlook the distinct Nations, languages, cultures, histories, and identities that exist within that larger group. Those distinctions matter, particularly when discussing culture, history, rights, and reconciliation.

For me, saying “I am First Nations. I am Haudenosaunee” is more than choosing a label. It speaks to who I am, where I come from, and the Nation and culture to which I belong. My identity should not be reduced to a broad category when there is a more specific name.

The most respectful approach is to use the name a person or community uses to identify themselves. **Indigenous is a collective term; First Nations is more specific; Haudenosaunee tells you who I am.**





Learning, Listening & Reconciliation

By Mridul George Rajan

As an immigrant from India, my understanding of Truth and Reconciliation has developed through my experiences of living and working in Canada. As a child, I learned about India's history of colonialism and the resilience of communities that preserved their cultures despite significant challenges. Since coming to Canada, I have learned that this country has its own unique history of resilience, one that must be understood through the experiences and voices of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

Working in healthcare has reinforced the importance of respecting each person's lived and living experience. Learning about the legacy of residential schools and the ongoing impacts of colonial policies has deepened my understanding of how history continues to shape life for Indigenous communities today. Reconciliation begins with acknowledging these truths and remaining open to continuous learning. As someone who now calls Canada home, I believe I have a responsibility to understand the history of the land where I live and work. I can listen to Indigenous stories, learn from lived experiences, and contribute to creating an inclusive workplace where respect and cultural humility are valued.

For me, Truth and Reconciliation is an ongoing commitment, not a single event once per year. It means taking time to learn, reflecting on my own assumptions, and supporting actions that help build meaningful relationships. I believe that each of us, regardless of where we come from, has a role to play in fostering a workplace and a society where Indigenous voices are respected, diversity is celebrated, and everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

The Medicine Wheel

The term “Medicine Wheel” is a broad term used to describe circular Indigenous teachings and structures. However, there is no single, universal Medicine Wheel. Different Nations have their own teachings, symbols, and interpretations. Respecting those differences is part of respecting the cultures from which the teachings come.

At its core, the Medicine Wheel can represent balance, harmony, interconnectedness, and the continuous cycle of life—there is no beginning and no end. Depending on the Nation and cultural tradition, circular teachings have been associated with ceremonial, astronomical, spiritual, and philosophical purposes.

In some teachings, the four quadrants or directions are connected to:



Four Stages of Life

Infancy > Adolescence > Adulthood > Elderhood



Four Seasons

Spring > Summer > Fall > Winter



Four Directions

East > South > West > North



Four Dimensions of Well-Being

Physical > Emotional > Mental > Spiritual

Some teachings also associate colours with the four directions, but these colours and their meanings are not universal. For example, one teaching may associate yellow with the East, red with the South, black with the West, and white with the North, while another Nation may use different colours or interpretations.

The important message is that the Medicine Wheel is not simply a diagram divided into four parts. It represents relationships and balance—between different stages of life, aspects of ourselves, the natural world, our communities, and the spiritual world.

Indigenous Organizations in Your Community

There is immeasurable value in being connected to your community, stories, and identity. As a result of the devastating history of colonization on Turtle Island, Indigenous communities have experienced the pain of being pulled apart by government systems, lost children, language and histories to residential schools, and systemic racism and barriers that prevent access to housing and dignified health care.

The process of rebuilding is the work of generations, and requires support from all, whether you identify as Indigenous, Canadian, or immigrant to the land we call home. Supporting local Indigenous organizations is one way we can come together to break down barriers and address the harm done to Indigenous communities.

How to find a Friendship Centre in your area

[Friendship Centres - OFIFC](#) is a website that can help you find a Friendship Centre in your area. Friendship Centres are places for Indigenous people living in urban spaces to gather, connect with one another, and receive culturally based services.

London, Ontario



Atlohsa Family Healing Services offers Indigenous-led programs and services, providing low-barrier wrap-around services to community members. Atlohsa has a vibrant website that shares significant information and resources, as well as educational tools for the wider community.



N'Amerind Friendship Centre supports the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous people in London, Ontario and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1967, serving as a vital resource for urban Indigenous people seeking connection, healing and growth.

Owen Sound, Ontario



M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre seeks to address the needs of the Urban Aboriginal population of Owen Sound and surrounding areas in a safe environment, breaking down the cultural and systemic service barriers between local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.



Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) provides wholistic health and wellness services throughout Southwestern Ontario, including Owen Sound, with the purpose of improving access to high quality health services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Ottawa, Ontario



Odawa Native Friendship Centre offers opportunities for learning, connection, and growth for all ages. Celebrating 50 years of dedicated programs and services to the Indigenous community in Ottawa and surrounding areas, Odawa is a significant cornerstone of support for the area.



Wabano Centre is an Indigenous health and cultural centre supporting community members in the pursuit of "mino bimaadiziwin" which means "living the good life". Rooted in culture and serving Indigenous people of every background and stage of life, Wabano offers health services, wellness programs, education and housing support.

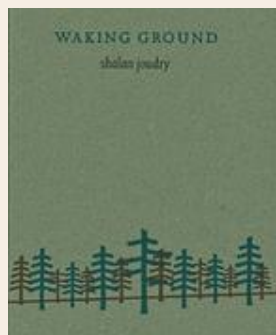


Tungasuvvingat Inuit is an Inuit-specific urban service provider that offers community supports for Inuit of all ages, assisting community members to build a life in the south while staying connected to culture in the north.

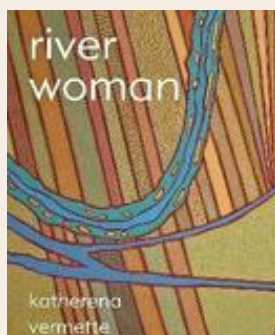
Indigenous Literature

A BOOKLIST FOR ALL AGES

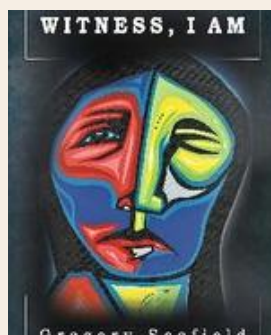
Poetry/ Short Stories



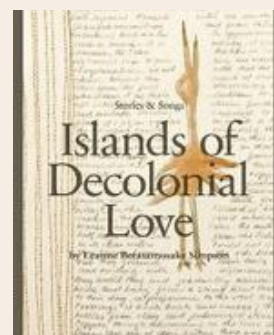
Walking Ground
shalan joudry



river woman
Katherena Vermette



Witness, I Am
Gregory Scofield



Islands of Decolonial Love
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson



A Really Good Brown Girl
Marilyn Dumont



The Pemmican Eaters
Marilyn Dumont

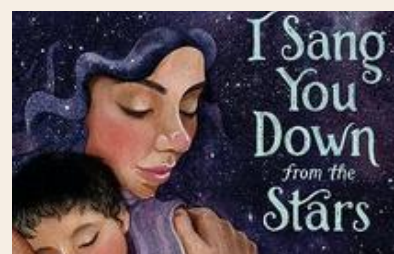
Picture Books



Phyllis's Orange Shirt
Phyllis Webstad (author)
Brock Nicol (illustrator)



Go Show the World
Wab Kinew (author)
Joe Morse (illustrator)

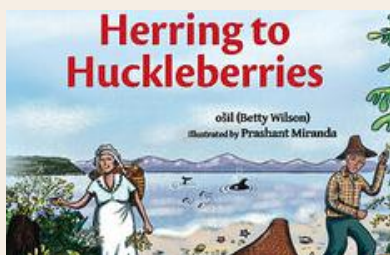


I Sang You Down from the Stars
Tasha Spillett (author)
Michaela Goade (illustrator)



**All my Reletives
(Indinawemaaganidag)**

Storm Angecone
(author and illustrator)



**laget hiyt toxwum /
Herring to Huckleberries**

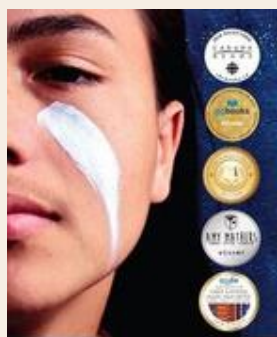
ošil Betty Wilson (author)
Prashant Miranda
(illustrator)



**Jay and Gizmo Become
Best Friends**

Kristi White
(author)
Shari Campbell
(illustrator)

Young Adult



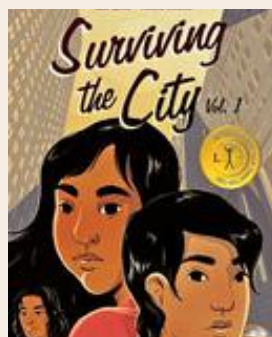
**The Marrow
Thieves**

Cherie Dimaline



**Looks Like
Daylight: Voices of
Indigenous Kids**

Deborah Ellis



Surviving the City

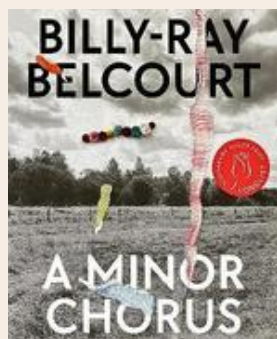
Tasha Spillett



**This Place: 150
Years Retold**

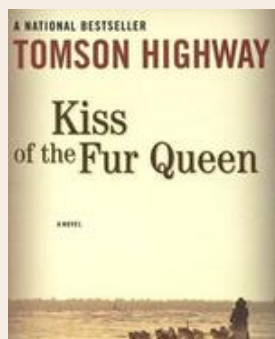
Kateri Akiwenzie-
Damm (author)
Tara Audibert
(illustrator)

Adult Novels



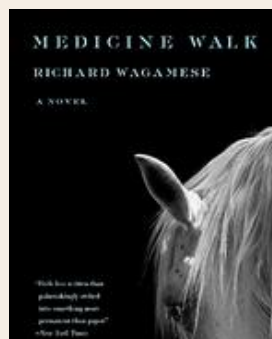
A Minor Chorus

Billy-Ray Belcourt



**Kiss of the Fur
Queen**

Tomson Highway



Medicine Walk

Richard
Wagamese



**Moon of the
Crusted Snow**

Waubgeshig Rice



Terms to Know

Indigenous

This word is used globally as an umbrella term referring to groups of people who are the original inhabitants of a land. In Canada, it refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Aboriginal

This word was used in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 as a legal term to refer to Indigenous people in Canada. In modern communication, Indigenous is now more commonly used.

First Nations

The original peoples of what is now Canada, other than those who identify as Métis or Inuit. This term came into use in the 1970s, replacing the historically used “Indian”. Within the First Nations there are many distinct bands (communities) with unique histories, languages, and traditions.

Métis

People with mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, often descended from early contact with French and Scottish fur traders. Over generations, these communities formed a distinct society with unique traditions, and the Métis nation played a significant role in shaping the early history of Western Canada.

Inuit

The Indigenous peoples of Northern Canada, living mainly in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, northern Quebec and Labrador. In the Inuktitut language, Inuit translates to “The people”.

Indian

This term came into use when European explorers first landed in the Americas with the mistaken belief that they had landed in the Indian subcontinent. Despite the error, the term was used widely, including in legal and legislated documents. Some Indigenous people continue to identify as Indian, though it is no longer a term commonly used in Canada.

The Indian Act

A Canadian federal law passed in 1876 that controls the administration of Indian status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve lands. It has been amended at various points through history, but remains the primary federal law referring to Indigenous people in Canada.

Indian Status

This is a legal identity defined by the Indian act, applying to some Indigenous peoples in Canada. People with status may be eligible for certain benefits and government programs. There are many non-status Indigenous peoples in Canada. Legal status does not define one’s ancestral or cultural identity.

Did you Know? At many points in history, Canada offered the right to vote only to Indigenous people who agreed to surrender their official Indian status.

Resources



The Canadian Encyclopedia: Residential Schools in Canada

A comprehensive overview of the history, legacy, and key facts about residential schools in Canada.

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

Explore educational resources, Survivor stories, and information about the TRC and its Calls to Action.

www.nctr.ca

Indigenous History Timeline

Discover a comprehensive and detailed timeline of Indigenous history in Canada.

www.fb.historicacanada.ca/education/english/indigenous-perspectives/18-19/

Videos

Residential School Survivor Explains the Impact on Her Family
CBC News – 3:38 mins

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ64Ditsli0

Canadian Shame: A History of Residential Schools
TEDx Talks – 15:25 mins

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIEDbbse2BM

A Beginner's Guide to Decolonization
TEDx Talks – 14:18 mins

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFUwnMHN_T8

The Mohawk Institute Residential School: Speaking with Survivors

Rogers tv – 28:02 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAXHm2ViSOQ>





EMPLOYER
PARTNER

As an Employer Partner with the Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion (CCDI), PHSS is able to provide a number of resources for staff to support us on our diversity and inclusion journey! If you haven't already; be sure to self-register today by scanning the QR code!

(Be sure to use your PHSS staff email address when signing up!)



CCDI Registration

Accredited by
Canadian Centre
for Accreditation



Agréé par
Centre canadien
de l'agrément

www.phsscommunity.com