

THE STORY OF 215+ ORANGE STONES

Our purpose as the Truth and Reconciliation Community - Bobcaygeon is to foster and develop respectful relationships among Settlers, Indigenous neighbours and the Land. We encourage and support one another, and anyone who will join with us, in moving towards restitution and decolonization. We are learning, educating and working towards reconciliation locally within the Settler community and in relationship with the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. We are actively engaged in learning about and honouring Treaties, both locally and in the wider Canadian context. We continue to work towards restitution of wrongs as we respect the values and cultures of Indigenous communities.

Basically we focus on relationship building – leaning heavily on listening and asking for guidance on how we can best serve. We also focus on furthering our own learning and sharing that in the larger settler and newcomer community. Finally we understand that Truth is not enough especially if it does not inspire right action designed to move reconciliation forward.

Like so much of the rest of Canada, we were struck numb by the discovery of the 215 buried bodies of young First Nation children in Kamloops at the residential school in Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc territory. We quickly went into action to find a way to tell people who may have missed this news and to visually illustrate the extent of this tragedy. We did this with approval from Elder Anne Taylor of Curve Lake First Nation, who assured us that this was a respectful response.

THE STORY OF 215+ ORANGE STONES

In 2015, Truth and Reconciliation Community-Bobcaygeon was formed in a meeting room of the local United Church. Initially, this group of settlers began as a response to the attack on Manoomin (wild rice) and Indigenous harvesters on Pigeon Lake. Manoomin has remained a central issue. However, we have been working on many different projects over the past 6 years.

The "215+ Taken" Art Installation is one such project.

On May 27, 2021, the remains of 215 Indigenous children were detected, children who had been buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia.

We mourned these children and the possibly many thousand more who never came home. We expressed our support for residential school survivors, their families, and all First Nations, Inuit and Métis people who are grieving and mourning. Residential schools were part of a colonial policy to eradicate Indigenous cultures, languages and communities. Even though the last school closed in 1996, intergenerational trauma, ongoing harms and discriminatory practices continue.

Since May 27, governments, non-governmental organizations and community organizations took action – from lowering flags to half mast in honour of the 215 children, wearing orange shirts to proclaim that "Every Child Matters" – and many more actions and art installations across country. Calls for other schools to be investigated, for burial sites to be located and protected (if in fact, that is what Indigenous communities want to happen) have come from various organizations. Calls for those responsible to be held accountable for these atrocities and human rights violations have come from many places too. The most common call has been for the Canadian government and other institutions and governments to act on the numerous calls to action documented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.

Here, in the City of Kawartha Lakes, TRCB decided to commemorate the lives of the 215 children with the "215+ Taken" Art Installation. River stones were painted orange in the spirit of the "Every Child Matters" orange t-shirt campaign. The orange shirt represents the story of a student named Phyllis Webstad, who was given a new orange shirt by her grandmother for the first day of school at St. Joseph's Mission residential school in British Columbia. Sadly, Phyllis did not get to wear her orange shirt proudly as it was taken away, along with her other personal items.

Barr's BMR, W&G Landscaping and Construction and Home Hardware in Bobcaygeon generously donated the river stones and paints needed for our project. Once the white base coat and orange paint were done, community members were invited to join us in painting each of the stones with a heart, keeping in mind that each stone represented a child - one who walked on this Earth, loved, played, one who had a long life ahead of them, a life that was taken early. Over 50 community members joined us in celebrating these children - and mourning their loss.

BMR in Bobcaygeon donated the river stones



The stones were washed and dried.

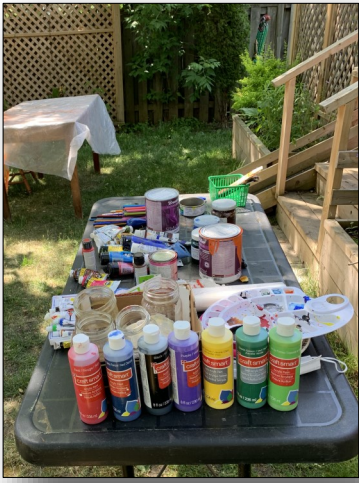


They were then given a white base coat.

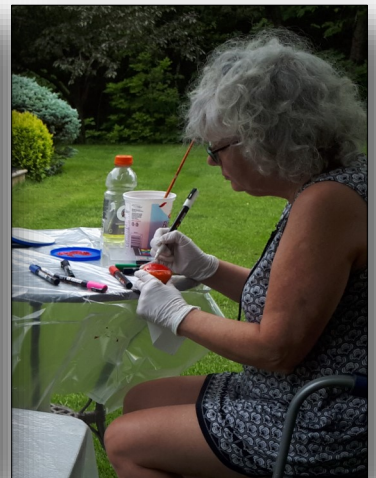


And then they were painted orange.



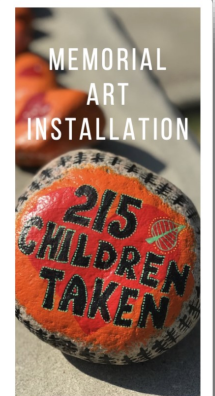


Over 50 community members helped us paint the orange stones.





Once all 215 stones had been painted, the next step was to number and seal them. There were also 2 larger stones with "215 CHILDREN TAKEN" painted on them to mark the beginning and end of the installation. Another stone contained information to connect people to our TRC-Bobcaygeon website trcbobcaygeon.org. And one last stone contained contact information for the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line (1-866-925-4419) in case the memorial triggered painful memories for members of First Nations, Inuit or Métis communities. Pamphlets were designed to give context to the installation and, later, a QR code was created to link people to the pamphlet digitally using their phone.



TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMUNITY BOBCAYGEON





Determining where our memorial art project would first be installed took some work. Because of the way we had created and protected the stones, it could be an outdoor art installation which left us with a number of options. At first we thought that it would be powerful to have it displayed on the Mishkodeh/ Boyd Property across the road from the Bobcaygeon Library. According to Curve Lake First Nation Elder, Gidigaa Migizi (Doug Williams), Indigenous people gathered, camped, and cultivated this site on the shallow rapids between Pigeon and Sturgeon Lake. The conversation with one of the current owners of that land, Shiraz Jetha, took a whole bunch of us on a different adventure, but that's a story for another time. Next we thought about using the wall that encompasses the Bobcaygeon Library and Boyd Heritage Museum. We got permission from the City of Kawartha Lakes and worked with Barb McFadzen of the Boyd Heritage Museum Board to determine where it would be best to arrange the 215+ stones. This site was perfect as there is lots of car and foot traffic near Lock 32. There would be a great opportunity for lots of people to see the stones and, hopefully, start some meaningful conversations.

On June 16th, 2021 our "215+ Orange Stone" group, consisting of Ann Davidson, Brenda Wall, Elaine Bird, Glenna Burns, and Pam Koekebakker brought boxes of our precious orange stones to the stone wall. We took their representation of those 215 Indigenous children very seriously - carried them in our hearts through this entire process. The sun was shining on us as we placed them on the wall. They immediately started to attract attention. Even as we were placing them, people were stopping to look and ask questions.



That afternoon, standing in circle with those who gathered to begin the exhibition in a good way, Michi Saagiig Language Activist Anne Taylor of Curve Lake First Nation shared difficult stories of how the Indian Residential School system has impacted her and her family and friends. In fact, as Anne says "There is not an Anishinaabeg person who has not been impacted by the residential school system in some way." These impacts vary from direct lived experience to the continued challenges of intergenerational trauma and the ongoing energy required to try to be heard by governments and to demand justice. It is exhausting and Indigenous people in Canada should not have to bear the burden of making things right. "Indigenous women have laid their hearts on the ground," said Anne, and ... "it is time for settler Canadians to step up as never before". The river rocks on display with their beautiful hearts and their numbers can only be the beginning of conversations and actions. As Anne says, there is so much more to be done and non-Indigenous people in Canada need to do more. All Canadians need to know Canada's real history and be aware of what systemic and discriminatory obstacles continue today.





On the night of June 30th, TRC-Bobcaygeon members held an over-night vigil with the art installation. Community members joined them at 9 pm to honour the children who went missing from Indian Residential Schools. Students from IE Weldon's Drummers in Action shared the song they wrote with the group.

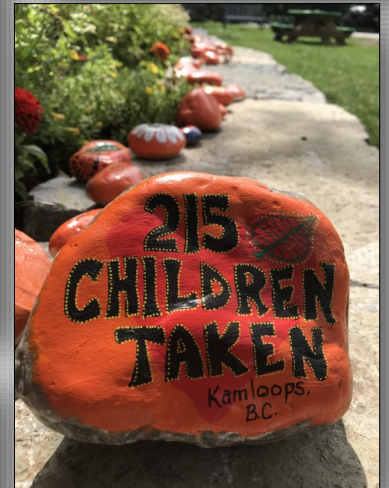
There was a debate across the country about how to approach Canada Day this year. The recent discovery of children's bodies in unmarked and mass graves brought a new level of awareness to many. Canada Day celebrations were being questioned as we were being confronted with hard truths about



our history. In Bobcaygeon the committee in charge of these plans went ahead with the a drive-by planned to go past the long-term care facilities in town to bring greetings to residents and to acknowledge the staff. However they honoured the families and the memory of all the children who never returned home from residential school by carrying appropriate signs and tying orange ribbons on the vehicles in the parade. The lead truck in the caravan carried a land acknowledgement and a sign that reminded people that "We are all treaty people". Shadow Minister for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Jamie Schmale hopped off his ride to connect over the stones. It was encouraging to see how many people in the vehicles driving past were wearing orange in solidarity. At the Boyd Museum TRC-Bob members were visible and many people dropped by to view the '215+ Children Taken' Art Installation. We had some good conversations where feelings and insights were shared and there was The opportunity to explore what actions they might wish to pursue. A card was signed by many for CLFN.



The **215+ CHILDREN TAKEN** Memorial Art Installation moved to Maryboro Lodge Museum in Fenelon Falls on July 16th. The museum is currently closed to the public due to the pandemic, so the stones were placed along the rocks of the flower bed at the front of the building. Stones have been added to honour other communities where unmarked graves have been found. Summer students Anna E-T., Sophie K., and Iris H. kept care of the stones while they were in Fenelon. They also asked people to sign a big card that was given to Anne Taylor from Curve Lake First Nation once the month in Fenelon was over. There was lots of interest in them, even as we were setting them up and taking them back down. They returned to Bobcaygeon on August 16th and remained there until September 20th when they went on their next journey.



The EVERY CHILD MATTER orange flag was raised to half mast on September 8th by Mayor Andy Letham and TRCB's Sherry Hillman. The Mayor asked if the '215+ Children Taken' art installation could come to the east stairs of City Hall during September to be with the flag that was to stay at half mast until September 30th.



On September 20th, the stones were brought to the stairs and arranged beautifully along with the children's shoes and boots that had been dropped off at City Hall soon after the 215 unmarked graves had been detected. The Mayor, his EA Christine Briggs, and Cheri Davidson (Manager of Communications, Advertising and Marketing) came out to welcome us and make arrangements for an official welcoming of them on the 21st (the next day) just before the Council Meeting.



At 11 am on Tuesday, September 21st, the stones were officially welcomed to City Hall at 26 Francis Street in Lindsay. Several Councillors were in attendance, all wearing their orange shirts which was designed by Freddy Taylor, artist in residence at the Whetung Gallery, Curve Lake First Nation, and residential school survivor. TRCB Co-Keeper Rodney Smith - Merkley began the welcoming in a good way with a heartfelt land acknowledgement and several members of the TRCB shared the story of the

stones and the connections and relationships that have been built as they have travelled around the City of Kawartha Lakes. Gratitude was given for the opportunity for the art installation to be in Lindsay until the morning of September 30th.



Later that day at the Council Meeting, Mayor Andy Letham shared this speech...

It is with heavy hearts we gather here today, with the orange flag flying at half-mast, to mark the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. We gather to commemorate all the Indigenous children who were taken against their will from their families and communities and never made it home again - and remain buried at Indian Residential Schools across Canada. Please join me in a minute of silence. The orange t-shirt and flag are a symbol of the Every Child Matters movement. September 30th was declared Orange Shirt Day in 2013, in recognition of the harm the residential school system did to children's sense of self-esteem and well being, and as an affirmation of the commitment to ensure that everyone around us matters. It was inspired by Phyllis Webstad's story. She wrote " We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school! When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! ...The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared."

September 30th has been a day to recognize the devastating impact of the Indian Residential School system and commemorate all of the children taken. It has been observed at the end of September in indigenous communities across the country. Now that the federal government has implemented the TRC Call to Action #80 and designated September 30th as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation all of

Canada can join in this day of remembrance and reflection, as we are doing here today.

In the words of the TRC, this new statutory holiday is *"to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process."*

As we learned from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first step towards Reconciliation is acknowledging the Truth of the tragedy of those colonial policies designed to assimilate indigenous peoples, removing them from their culture, languages and lands, with inter-generational continuing traumatic consequences. While the first step towards Reconciliation is hearing, knowing and teaching the Truth, the TRC tells us the most meaningful step is committing to take action as recommended in their 94 "Calls to Action".

As we mark the first National Day for Truth & Reconciliation, we commit to implementing the Calls to Action and to charting a new path forward based on building relationships with the First Nations that we live with here in Michi Saagiig Anishnaabe Williams Treaty and Treaty 20 territory. In walking this new path we hope to move together towards Reconciliation and a better future for all.

In closing, I also want to acknowledge and thank the Truth and Reconciliation Community of

Bobcaygeon for sharing the "215+ Taken" Art Installation consisting of 215 painted orange stones created with the help of over 50 residents of the Kawartha Lakes. It is a very moving tribute to the indigenous Little Ones who were taken. It will be on display here in Lindsay until September 30th.



On the morning of September 30th, the art installation was packed up for the next part of the journey - back to Bobcaygeon. This was the first **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**. They were arranged back on the library's stone wall in anticipation of a ceremony later in the day. At 5 pm, over 200 people gathered by the orange stones. After a land acknowledgement and welcome from the TRC-Bobcaygeon Co-Keepers,

Sherry Telford and Rodney Smith-Merkley, everyone was invited to drum and sing the Secwepemc Honour Song. The Tk'emlúps Nation called on people worldwide to drum simultaneously for the missing children of Indian Residential Schools for the first Canadian National Day of Truth and Reconciliation at 2:15 pm Pacific time (5:15 pm Bobcaygeon time). After a global outpouring of interest and support for the missing children from the Kamloops Indian Residential School, they offered a way for people to connect, support and ground into the importance of this very first Canadian National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. They called upon people around the world to gather – safely – to drum and sing with them for the missing children of Indian Residential Schools. "It's time to honour the children, and the unrelenting spirit of these Ancestors. It's time to drum for the healing of the Indian Residential Schools Survivors who carried the burden of knowing where the children were buried, and to drum for the healing of the families and communities whose children did not come home," stated Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir.





The Secwepemc Honour Song

(vocables taken from the video sharing the song)

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MP Jamie Schmale (Shadow Minister for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Vice Chair of the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee) shared the poem THE MONSTER by Dennis Saddleman, and Councillor Kathleen Seymour-Fagan gave greetings from CKL. TRCB members also spoke to share information about the importance of the day, the story of the stones, the Mishkodeh project, and actions we can all take to help learn the truth and move towards reconciliation.

The stones stayed in Bobcaygeon until close to winter when they moved indoors at Fenelon Falls Secondary School.





215 stones

MEMORIAL ART INSTALLATION



TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION
COMMUNITY
BOBCAYGEON



LOVINGLY PAINTED

Truth and Reconciliation Community Bobcaygeon honoured the 215 Indigenous Children found buried next to the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. More than 50 community members, including children painted 215 river rocks with orange paint and hearts and other designs for a memorial art installation.

ANNE TAYLOR'S MESSAGE

At the exhibition's launch outside the Bobcaygeon Library on June 16, 2021, Michi Saagiig Language Coordinator, Anne Taylor of Curve Lake First Nation shared a heartfelt message.

She shared difficult stories of how the Indian Residential School system has impacted her and her family and friends. In fact, as Anne says: "There is not an Anishinaabeg person who has not been impacted by the residential school system in some way." These impacts vary from direct lived experience to the continued challenges of intergenerational trauma and the ongoing energy required to try to be heard by governments and to demand justice.

It is exhausting. Indigenous people in Canada should not have to bear the burden of making things right. "Indigenous women have laid their hearts on the ground," said Anne, and "...it is time for settler Canadians to step up as never before".

TAKE ACTION

CONTACT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Write letters to the Federal government supporting calls to find and identify the children who did not return home from Indian Residential Schools when that is the wish of their communities.

Pressure governments and businesses to respect the will of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

READ REPORTS

The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada Summary Report (2015) and work to ensure its 94 Calls to Action are met.

Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) 231 Calls for Justice.

MORE ACTIONS:

- Take a free on-line course on Indigenous histories and contemporary issues through the University of Alberta or through Indigenous Canada's Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).
- Educate yourself about the land we now call Canada and the treaties on the land where you live.
- Visit the Settlers Take Action page of the On Canada Project.
- Respect Indigenous peoples by respecting and protecting the land, water and animals.

Donate to Indigenous organizations such as:

- Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation (Kamloops): donations@kib.ca
- Indian Residential School Survivors Society: irss.ca
- First Nations Child & Family Caring Society: fncaringsociety.com
- Native Women's Association of Canada: nwac.ca



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