

Community urged to take action on National Day for Truth and Reconciliation



Community members were urged to be change-makers on September 30 as the Town of Aurora hosted a series of events to mark National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The observance began at Town Hall with a ceremony to raise the 'Every Child Matters' flag by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who was joined by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Costas Menegakis, Councillor John Gallo (Ward 5), and Councillor Ron Weese (Ward 1), where the Mayor described the era of residential schools as 'the darkest chapter in this country's history.'

'This year marks 10 years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its 94 calls to action aimed at redressing the legacy of the residential school system and advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people,' he said. 'These calls to action urge all levels of government to work together to prevent future abuses and to create a just, respectful and healing relationship for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. As of late 2024, Indigenous Watchdog reported that only 14 of the 94 calls have been completed, which shows that there is so much more to be done to heal the harms of the past and build a more just and equitable future.'

'Here at the Town of Aurora, we've already taken meaningful steps towards reconciliation, such as creating Aurora's first Land Acknowledgement, granting staff access to 4 Seasons of Reconciliation, an online course on Indigenous history, organizing annual September 30 gatherings to recognize National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, supporting the Ancestral Voices podcast hosted by [Traditional Anishinaabe] Grandmother Kim Wheatley and developing an Indigenous Veterans Memorial. These steps are small but important and they help build understanding and connection right here in Aurora.'

'Together, we share the responsibility to unite our community in reflection, education and action in support of Indigenous peoples and part of that is committing ourselves today and every day to fully understand the extent of this history, to building cultural understanding and respect and to working together as partners with Indigenous communities to carve a path forward. Above all else, today is about honouring the survivors, the children who never returned home, as well as their families and communities.'

These themes, particularly what hasn't been accomplished, were underscored later that evening by Wheatley, who presided over a gathering at Aurora Town Square with Elder Pat Floody and Fire Keeper Raiden Levesque.

'Cultural genocide has such a place in this country. It is real,' Wheatley said, addressing the Aurora Town Square audience. 'Over 150,000 of our children were ripped from our arms and forced into a way of knowing that has never been us. We didn't have a choice. They made the laws to ensure that this happened. They took our children at the youngest of ages - four-years-old is still a baby. They took some of them younger. They said they were going to educate them so that they could integrate' but what they didn't tell us is the kind of integration was to harm another, how to suffer.'

Wheatley added that on the tenth anniversary of the report by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, Canada has a 'failing grade' when it comes to addressing its 94 Calls to Action.

'Changes we need to see along the path of reconciliation will lead us to healing' I hope, but I am not so sure, because it's been ten years, that's a whole decade? progress is so slow, I think a snail will beat them. Do we have to wait another eight, nine decades to see this list all done? I want you to know that this list is just the starting point. In case you couldn't think of what to do [to work towards reconciliation] there are 94 suggestions and hopefully you have 100 more, 200 more, 1,000 more ideas to help provide restitution to people who never asked for this.?

Last week's gathering was the fifth such gathering hosted by the Town of Aurora.

In the first iteration, which was held at Town Park shortly after work began uncovering graves at a residential school site in Kamloops, British Columbia, crowds filled almost every part of the popular green space. Subsequent years have seen fewer and fewer residents come out, but this year saw an uptick in attendance.

When asked how momentum and awareness can be maintained into future, Wheatley told The Auroran that it is a 'complicated question' as so many factors are at play.

'If there was one person here [at Town Square] I would still do the same, and when there's more than one, it feels good and I know the message can go a little further, but what can be done? I'm asking that myself because when I put my finger on the pulse of the 10-year anniversary of the TRC report, and the lack of movement that has happened, there are maybe 11 (Calls to Action) completed. There are some years in that 10 years where none are completed, or maybe two in one year, none in another, and it shows me that the commitment to reconciliation is definitely falling off everybody's radar and the kind of instant gratification mentality, because we're so addicted to the socials, people aren't willing to invest the time, make the effort, and walk their talk in a visible fashion' individually and collectively.

'I don't know what can be done to change that, realistically speaking, because everybody has free will and whatever they choose to do is what they choose to do, and what we experience, but I am hoping that the report of failure will reignite the interest, and the attendance moving forward, because we're talking about it broadly, we're posting it on our socials, we're writing about it' we're watching and listening intensely.?

By Brock Weir
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