



**MEDIA RELEASE** | May 8, 2019

## **Syilx Nation's Unity Run Continues to Raise Awareness About Suicide and Violence Prevention**

**tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory:** From May 9-12, 2019, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) will host the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Spirit of Syilx Youth Unity Run. This event brings over 100 Syilx youth from across the Nation together to run through 350 kilometers of Syilx territory.

The Okanagan Nation is currently facing an opioid overdose crisis, alongside disproportionate levels of violence and suicide. In the face of these urgent and serious issues the Okanagan Nation's Chief Executive Council (CEC) are developing and implementing well-being strategies that are based in all aspects of Syilx culture. The Unity Run is one of these impactful approaches, used to raise awareness and education with all youth members, citizens and the public on issues of suicide and violence that continues to confront Syilx communities.

Beyond these foundational goals, the Unity Run provides an innovative and holistic means of promoting wellness to Syilx youth. By engaging a wide range of tools - from physical activity, recognition of connection to land, and implementation of the Syilx teachings, culture and language - the Run provides participants with a deep sense of well-being. It educates on healthy lifestyle alongside facilitating the experience of community, connection and belonging. Syilx youth are also provided connection to their territory together as a Nation, while building relationships with Syilx elders, thus enacting our inherent responsibility to each other, the land and for generations to come.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, ONA Chairman, states, "The Spirit of Syilx Youth Unity Run affirms the Okanagan Nation's dedication to coming together and holding up our youth. In line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 22 we must all ensure that our children are provided with full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence. This Run not only raises awareness on these issues of violence, but instills wellness and pride in our culture and *nsyilxcen* language for generations to come. The youth that take part in the Unity Run are tomorrow's leaders. It fills me with pride to witness this young people rising up, building and fostering strength in each other and our Nation".

This year the Unity Run begins on May 9 at Polson Park in Vernon, heads across to Douglas Lake, down through Kingsvale and finishes on May 12 in Manning Park, BC. A wide range of participants take part in the Unity Run every year, including Syilx youth, elders, leaders, Nation members and a range of other participants that wish to contribute and support to the event.

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