



## MEDIA RELEASE

June 7, 2021

### **Okanagan Nation's Spirit of Syilx Unity Run Makes Emotional Journey to Kamloops Indian Residential School to Recognize All Children that Never Returned Home**

**tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory:** From June 2-5 Syilx Nation members from across the territory ran out on the land as part of the Spirit of Syilx Unity Run. On Saturday, June 5, 2021, a special component of the run included an in-person event that went from *nkr̄apəłqs* (Head of the Lake) to the Kamloops Indian Residential School (KIRS) on Tk'emlups te Secwepemc territory, in just one day, and was a recognition for all the children that never returned from the KIRS. For participants in this year's Unity Run was particularly emotional and hard hitting as many are the children and grandchildren of Indian Resident School Survivors.

"Watching our youth run for the 215 children that never made it home was a humbling and emotional experience. It was healing for our people, healing for our survivors, and lifted the hearts of a Nation in mourning. Witnessing this historic run and to be welcomed with song and ceremony by Tk'emlups te Secwepemc people is something we will all remember. It was an historic event, that was led by our youth, and inspired by the 215 children. *Limlemt* to all those who participated and to those who organized this historic event," Chief Chris Derickson states.

Leaders from multiple Nations — alongside Syilx Okanagan members — welcomed the runners as they crested over the hill at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, including *ýilmixʷm* (Chief) Keith Crow (LSIB) and *ýilmixʷm* Chris Derickson (WFN) from the Syilx Okanagan Nation, kukpi Rosanne Casimir, Councillor Marie Baptiste and Councillor Jeanette Jules of the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nation and kukpi Judy Wilson from the Neskonlith Indian Band.

As we wrap up this event we recognize that actions such as these support our youth and ensure that they are able to affirm a better life moving forward, while also raising awareness of the colonial violence that our people have faced and continue to face.

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*In 2009, Syilx youth had requested a Run to promote unity as well as bring awareness to the issues of suicide and violence within the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The annual run provides the opportunity to experience being out on the territory, being together as a Nation as a means to address a broad range of community and societal issues from suicide and mental health to cultural rejuvenation and reconnection with nationhood and the land. It also brings together youth to create awareness, cultivate pride, and promotes the continuation of Syilx culture for generations to come.*

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