

Syilx Nation

Information and Updates



The Spirit of Syilx Unity Run: Community Profile

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 Nation. From this the Spirit of Syilx Unity Run came to be. 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.

cewelna (Leon Louis) and Grouse (Wilfred) Barnes are members of the Okanagan Nation Response Team, a team made up of community members that support the Nation communities to prevent and respond to suicide, suicidal behavior and other crisis, for numerous years utilizing their cultural knowledge and perspectives. It is through this role that they have been a guiding presence on the run year after year.

“By running on the land our people are connecting to each other, to the tmx^wulax^w, and to all of our ancestors. When they are on the Run we are teaching them about our culture, place names, our captikwł, it gives them an identity of who they are. To be proud of who they are.”
– Grouse (Wilfred) Barnes



As the cultural support people on the Run they often gather the participants to give teachings rooted in our Syilx worldview (when we are able to gather in person)— shining a light on the transformative power of prayers and intentions while they leave their footprints across Syilx territory. Whether it has been through sharing *captikwł* or parts of the language, they have worked tirelessly to provide hundreds of Unity Run participants with a sense of pride and honor in being Syilx. There is probably no better show of this support than in how they pass the feather off to the first runner to launch the event every year.

cewelna is also a member of the Syilx Indian Residential School Committee, so this year the run has a special weight and importance — as this year we run for the 215 children who never made it home from the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

As we face a particularly heartbreaking moment in our Nation, and take on the pain unearthed from the findings at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, such words give us hope and guidance as we grapple with the violence that our communities have faced.

In 2018 the Okanagan Nation Alliance and this Committee released the ‘Take the Indian Out the Child’ book, which gathered stories from Syilx Indian Residential School survivors and their families and told the story of the extremely violent and forced assimilation that they faced at these institutions. To learn more about the Syilx Indian Residential School experience visit: www.syilx.org/wellness/indian-residential-school/

“The people who went [to Indian Residential Schools] encountered a lot of hurts and pains. When they had children, they passed that on to them. And then their children pass it on. It’s in our genes, the hurts and pains we’ve been through. When we begin to heal, then we don’t pass these on. Then it’s not in our genes anymore.”
—Leon Louis, Son of Leonard Louis, who attended Indian Residential School

