STAFF ARTICLE

Truth and Reconciliation programming in long-term care

Updated October 2025

September and October bring Orange Shirt Day, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and questions from families about what your home will do. Recreation staff are hosts who create quiet space for reflection, learning, and respect, alongside approved partners. This article is for recreation therapists and life enrichment leads in Canadian long-term care who plan programming around 30 September at a listening pace.

Start with relationship, then your plan

Every home sits on a different treaty or traditional territory. Use the land acknowledgement your leadership already approved. Host activity rooms with approved partners for any ceremony, sacred objects, or teachings. If residents ask about practices they grew up with, connect them with Indigenous staff, elders, or community partners your organization has vetted.

In Manitoba, teams have paired quiet reflection with donated books from local Indigenous authors. In British Columbia, some homes stream licensed concerts with permission from artists. The through line is listening, with staff supporting partners who hold relationship.

Orange Shirt Day is quiet and respectful

Orange Shirt Day on 30 September honours residential school survivors and missing children. It is reflection, at a listening pace. Use approved text, licensed art, and calm room setup.

Appropriate options include a gentle reading circle with approved text, a moment of silence at 2:15 pm where policy allows, orange ribbon pinning with consent, and space for Indigenous residents and staff to lead or decline. Post resources at eye level: phone numbers for crisis lines, links to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and local friendship centre contacts.

National Indigenous Peoples Day in June

21 June invites celebration of living cultures through music, food, and art with proper licensing. Book Indigenous performers through formal contracts. Pay

artists. Kitchen teams may offer bannock or fish when menus already support cultural meals. Ask dietary and cultural liaisons first.

Programming can include map tables showing nations in your region, with calm prompts: **Tell me about a lake you knew.** Let conversation stay personal.

Language aides can use at the bedside

Use person-first phrases: Indigenous residents, First Nations, Métis, Inuit when context fits. Use current respectful terms. When a resident shares residential school experience, respond with **Thank you for trusting us with that story.** Follow their pace.

Train volunteers to listen with one quiet presence. Each story stands on its own.

Working with leadership and communications

Send recreation plans to communications before posters go up. Align with any organizational statement for 30 September. If a donor offers orange shirts, confirm sizes and whether residents want to participate. Some will prefer to wear their own clothing.

Document what you did and what you learned for next year. Note which partners to thank. Note which ideas to refine for next year.

Risk notes for memory care

Sudden schedule changes can distress some residents. Keep rooms dim and voices low. Offer headphones with gentle music for those who opt in. Have a comfort object ready. Watch for vicarious grief among staff and offer debrief time.

Resources staff can bookmark

Point teams to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website for educational material vetted for schools and public institutions. Local friendship centres often lend speakers or pamphlets. The Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line number should appear on internal sheets, with communications approval for any public post.

Libraries in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver frequently host Indigenous author displays in September. Ask your local branch if they will deliver large-print excerpts for a reading circle.

When families ask hard questions at the desk

Some families want bold programming. Others want silence. Use the same line: **We are following guidance from Indigenous partners and our leadership team.** Offer to connect them with the administrator or cultural lead. Recreation handles programming; leadership handles policy debate at the nursing station.

Children visiting on Orange Shirt Day may wear orange. Remind them voices stay soft in memory care halls.

Art and music licensing

Stream only music and video your organization has rights to use in a communal setting. Contract Indigenous musicians when budget allows. Credit artists on the poster.

Crafts stay generic orange paper only when leadership approves. Prefer listening circles and donated books.

Year-round integration

Truth and Reconciliation runs all year. Land acknowledgements at staff meetings, hiring Indigenous recreation aides, and purchasing supplies from Indigenous-owned businesses belong in operations plans. Your September program is one visible week in a longer commitment.

Document partner names and thank-you notes. Relationships matter more than poster colour.

Sample quiet schedule for 30 September

Time	Activity	Lead
10:00	Optional orange ribbon table at entrance	Volunteer + RN
14:00	Reading circle, approved excerpt	Recreation therapist
14:15	Moment of silence	All staff invited
15:00	Tea service as usual	Dietary

Adjust times to med passes. Post only after leadership signs off.

Your next step: open your approved land acknowledgement, email one Indigenous partner or internal liaison, and ask what quiet format they recommend this year. Build your plan from their answer.

BetterCare printable recreation resources for Canadian long-term care, personal care homes, and retirement residences. Share with your team. Adapt for local policy and clinical direction.