

## **British Columbia Technical Working Group on Indian Residential Schools (BC TWG IRS)**

Archives are a key resource for survivors and their communities. These are places where information is compiled and stored. Survivors can both draw information from archives and give information to them. There are many kinds of archives. Some are government-run, others are held by individuals. Archives tend to be well managed but organized by specialized indexing systems, which can make it difficult for the non-expert to locate information. Archives are for storage and retrieval of items like documents or recordings. Analysis of the information within archives is an additional step faced by survivors.

### **What are Archives?**

Archives are places where information is collected and stored. Archives exist in many forms. They are usually physical spaces where items like documents are stored, much like in a library. Many archives are converting their items into digital form, becoming storage houses of computer files. This allows researchers easier access to items but creates issues of [data sovereignty](#).

Archives usually store information by the items that contain information, such as documents, recordings, maps, etc. These are catalogued by who made them, where and when they were created and how they entered the archive. Archives use cataloguing information (sometimes called meta-data) to sort and access items. This system does not always reveal the contents of an item – which is usually what most researchers and survivors are looking for. Finding the contents of archived items can be a time consuming and specialized task. Archives tend to access information in items by the words and numbers they contain. Spatial information is more difficult to find in an archive, but [GIS](#) is a kind of spatial archive.

### **What Role Can Archives Play in Identifying Missing Children?**

Other than the knowledge of survivors, archives are the main location of information about missing children. The NCTR is the national archive dedicated to collecting all the relevant information on missing children. Provincial, community, church and other archives also contain relevant information. Finding where this information is and getting access to it is a difficult task, especially if the archive is held by private entities or out of the country.

Archives are also places where survivors and communities can add information. Archives can hold information as recordings, images, and documents. The NCTR has developed a system for communities to connect to its archive and use a secure and private digital space to hold its own information.

### **What Are the Challenges Faced by Archives?**

Archives face three difficult tasks: 1) collecting and storing all the relevant information, 2) making sure storage is secure but giving access to appropriate people and communities, and 3) helping people locate information within the archive. Most archives are working hard at the first and second. Many communities are hiring their own archivists to develop tools for doing the third.