

## The limitations of archives

We have outlined how Library and Archives Canada has dealt with its residential school records. Other records that are relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system are scattered across the country in provincial, territorial, municipal, and local archives, as well as in government departments and agencies that were not parties to the Settlement Agreement. All this has made it extremely difficult for Survivors, their families, and communities to access the very records that hold such critical pieces of information about their own lives and the history of their communities.

The Settlement Agreement church archives, to varying degrees, have endeavoured to make their residential school records more accessible to Survivors, their families and communities, researchers, and the general public.<sup>166</sup> For example, the United Church of Canada has made all its residential school photographs and school histories available online to make them more accessible to Survivors and others, and “as a form of repatriation to First Nations communities.”<sup>167</sup>

## The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: An emerging model

Archives may be viewed with distrust by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Many feel that much of their lives is contained in documents (most of which they have never seen) kept by the state in order to study and categorize them in a depersonalized way.<sup>168</sup> In various ways, existing archives have been ill suited to serve the needs of Survivors, their families, and communities. What Aboriginal peoples required was a centre of their own—a cultural space that would serve as both an archives and a museum to hold the collective memory of Survivors and others whose lives were touched by the history and legacy of the residential school system.

With this understanding, the TRC mandate called for the establishment of a new National Research Centre (NRC) to hold all the historical and newly created documents and oral statements related to residential schools, and to make them accessible for the future. This NRC, as created by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and now renamed the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), is an evolving, Survivor-centred model of education for reconciliation. Implementing a new approach to public education, research, and record keeping, the centre will serve as a public memory “site of conscience,” bearing permanent witness to Survivors’ testimonies and the history and legacy of the residential school system.<sup>169</sup> Along with other museums and archives across the country, the centre will shape how the residential school era is understood and remembered.

The concept of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has deep roots. For many years, Survivors and their supporters called for a centre that would be their lasting legacy