

*Perspective*

# Residential School Community Archives: Spaces of Trauma and Community Healing

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## ABSTRACT

Colonial archives are sites of trauma, erasure, and grief for many marginalized communities. In Canada, the vast majority of archives relating to Indigenous peoples are held by government, church, and non-Indigenous archives. Colonial archives have actively taken Indigenous culture and heritage away from communities and made it inaccessible to those who the records are about. Many archives containing information relating to residential schools have just begun to grapple with the ethical and professional obligations that come from holding records that document colonial violence, abuse, death, and assimilationist practices.

This article explores the practices of the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC) community archive and the ways in which the SRSC supports community healing and navigating traumatic archival records. Since its establishment, the SRSC archives has been a place of raw emotion and grief, but also a place of tremendous community strength, healing, and resilience. This article will explore the trauma associated with archives of residential schools and the ongoing navigation of archival spaces which embody loss and community.

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## INTRODUCTION

Decades before politicians, educators, and the general public began discussions about Residential Schools, the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC) was established by the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association, a Residential School Survivor organization<sup>1</sup>, with the desire to document Residential Schools from the perspective of those who attended them. Since its establishment, the SRSC archive has emphasized representing the lived experiences of those being silenced by colonial archives. The SRSC fits within Caswell's understanding of community archives as dedicated grassroots efforts for communities to document their own lives outside of the constraints of formal archival institutions.<sup>2</sup> While this grassroots archive is a place of raw emotion and grief, it is also a site of tremendous community strength, healing, and resilience. As a means of exploring the role of archives as spaces of community healing this article will highlight the historical and contemporary context of the SRSC, followed by an examination of the unique ways that archives connected to Residential Schools can be spaces of both loss and community healing. To conclude, the authors will address the idea of trauma informed archival practice by examining how the SRSC provides support for researchers and staff engaged with records which document Residential School trauma.

The Canadian Indian Residential School system was designed by the Government of Canada and administered by religious organizations across the country. Residential Schools operated in Canada for over 150 years and it is estimated that 150,000 Indigenous children attended these Schools.<sup>3</sup> The system was designed to assimilate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children by separating them from their families while actively taking away their traditional culture, language, and heritage.<sup>4</sup> The last Residential School located in Canada closed in 1996, and in the decades that have followed there have been increased calls for conversation about the harm, trauma, and damage inflicted by these institutions.<sup>5</sup> The harm of the Residential School system extends not only to those who

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<sup>1</sup> *Survivor* is the preferred term when referring to those individuals who attended Residential Schools. For more information see: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (2015), [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (November 2014): 31.

<sup>3</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015), [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> J.R. Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Canada Confronts Its History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

attended but to intergenerational survivors and Indigenous communities more broadly. There are quantifiable links between familial Residential School attendance, poor mental and physical health, and poor socioeconomic status.<sup>6</sup> The long-term, intergenerational impacts of Residential Schools are widely felt by Indigenous peoples and communities today.

In 2007 the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was established by the government of Canada to provide compensation for damage inflicted by the Residential School system. The Settlement Agreement also provided money to support healing initiatives for Residential School Survivors across Canada, and in 2008 it established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. The TRC was tasked with collecting and documenting the history of Residential Schools in Canada, teaching the general public about Residential Schools as a means of fostering reconciliation in Canada, and creating a comprehensive report on the operation of the Residential School system.<sup>7</sup> The TRC and Settlement Agreement represent a shifting of narratives and growing public awareness around the importance of acknowledging the damage caused by Residential Schools. In this era of reconciliation, the community archival work began by the SRSC in the 1980s has been recognized for its importance in community-based healing.

## SITUATING THE SHINGWAUK RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS CENTRE

The Anglican Church of Canada operated the Shingwauk Indian Residential School in partnership with the Canadian government in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario from 1874-1970. The programming at Shingwauk, like the other Residential Schools across Canada, was designed to assimilate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children.<sup>8</sup> Children came to Shingwauk from all across Canada, many of them travelling hundreds of miles away from their community and spending multiple years away from their family while at the School.<sup>9</sup> In the spring of 1970, the Shingwauk School ceased operation. The closure of Shingwauk

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<sup>6</sup> Amy Bombay, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 21, no. 3 (2014): 320-338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461513503380>.

<sup>7</sup> Canada, *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*, May 8, 2006, <http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/IRS%20Settlement%20Agreement-%20ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 4-6.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the First Nation communities which Shingwauk students came from see the "Shingwauk Students Home Communities" interactive map created by the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1D9rNoAj\\_tZvScZcdxjY2sPtysDRnfj\\_u&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1D9rNoAj_tZvScZcdxjY2sPtysDRnfj_u&usp=sharing) (accessed August 5, 2021).

was part of the Canadian government's broader decision in the 1960s and 1970s to begin phasing out Residential Schools across the country. Following the Shingwauk's closure and the vacancy of the Shingwauk Hall building, Algoma University, in partnership with the Keewatinung Institute<sup>10</sup> moved onto the Shingwauk site in 1971. Algoma University is one of the only universities in North America located in a former Residential School building.<sup>11</sup> The uniqueness of this location came with responsibilities - Algoma is called upon to do better, respect the heritage of the land upon which it sits, and reflect on what it means to inhabit a space directly connected to the intergenerational trauma of Residential Schools. Since its relocation to the Shingwauk site, Algoma University has undertaken many initiatives in cross-cultural education and prides itself on working with local Indigenous communities to create an inclusive and multicultural education environment. Cross-cultural programming is directly tied to the Residential School legacy that Algoma became part of upon relocation.

One of Algoma's most enduring and significant cross-cultural efforts has been establishing and developing the SRSC starting in 1979. The SRSC, previously known as the Shingwauk Project, is a cross-cultural research and educational development initiative of Algoma University and the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA). Professor Don Jackson founded the Shingwauk Project in collaboration with Dr. Lloyd Bannerman of Algoma University, Chief Ron Boissoneau of Garden River First Nation, and Shingwauk alumni and Elder Dr. Dan Pine Sr. of Garden River First Nation. The Project was founded to preserve the history of the Shingwauk Residential School, acknowledge, and honor the long history of Indigenous life on the land, and educate the local community about Residential Schools. The first significant initiative undertaken by the Shingwauk Project was to host a Residential School Survivor reunion for former students of the Shingwauk School. In 1981 over four hundred students, family, staff, and community members gathered on the Shingwauk site for a reunion and to begin to address their communal past. After attending the 1981 reunion, many students, families, and former staff felt compelled to share photographs, scrapbooks, and documents with each other. To facilitate this sharing, Jackson established the Shingwauk archives to promote the sharing of Residential School records and resources. The archives were established with joint governance between the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA) and Algoma University. From 1981 to 2008, the archives were staffed by volunteers and coordinated by Jackson. Funding for the project was minimal, and it initially had no dedicated space.

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<sup>10</sup> The Keewatinung Anishinaabe Institute was an Indigenous-operated educational organization founded by community members and former Shingwauk Residential School students in the 1970s in Garden River First Nation. Inspired by the American Indian Movement, the Institute was dedicated to the preservation of Indigenous knowledge and fulfilling the vision of Chief Shingwauk through Indigenous culture-based education.

<sup>11</sup> Algoma University, "Special Mission," *Algomau.ca*, 2018, <https://www.algomau.ca/special-mission/>.

The archives had no governing policies, no real organizational system existed for the collections, and no one with archival experience was associated with the initiative. Its primary focus was to provide copies of materials to Indigenous communities and act as a community repository for materials relating to Residential Schools.<sup>12</sup> Today, the CSAA and Algoma University jointly governs the SRSC. A heritage committee comprised of both organizations guides archival best practices, outreach programming, and policy development.

Both authors have experience working at the SRSC and are connected to the Survivor community in different ways. McCracken is a settler who lives and works in Baawating (Sault Ste Marie, Ontario) on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and Metis people. They have worked at the SRSC since 2010, and learning from CSAA members and local intergenerational survivor communities has heavily shaped their views on archival power and ways of knowing. Hogan is of the Mohawk nation of Kahnawá:ke. They lived and worked in Baawating at the SRSC from 2014 to 2018. Through their time on the territory, Hogan learned of ancestors and community members who attended the Shingwauk Residential School and the Residential School in Spanish, Ontario. They worked closely with McCracken and the CSAA member communities. Hogan developed a passion for examining the relationships between Indigenous knowledge keeping and what settler archival institutions present as ‘official history.’ This article is deeply informed by McCracken and Hogan’s personal, familial, and professional relationships with the CSAA community, and the records found in the SRSC.

The SRSC is an example of a community archives born out of a desire to see the history of Residential Schools told from the Survivor perspective. When the SRSC was founded, there was no national conversation occurring about Residential Schools and the publicly available information was primarily written by government or church officials. The SRSC was established to challenge mainstream narratives about Residential Schools and begin to document the harms associated with the Residential Schools system. SRSC programming actively engages Residential School Survivors, families, and communities in collection development, description, and education programming. As Caswell et al. have noted, many individuals view “community archives metaphorically as home...home is a space where their experiences and those of their ancestors are validated. For others, still, it is a space where intergenerational dialog—sometimes difficult and unsettling—occurs.”<sup>13</sup> The work engaged in by the SRSC is informed by intergenerational connections to the Shingwauk site and the desire to provide space for truth-telling concerning

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<sup>12</sup> Krista McCracken, “Community Archival Practice: Indigenous Grassroots Collaboration at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre,” *The American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 181-191.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Caswell et al., “Imagining Transformative Spaces: The Personal-Political Sites of Community Archives,” *Archival Science* 18, no. 1 (2018): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9286-7>.

Residential Schools. The SRSC continues to prioritize telling the history of Residential Schools from a Survivor perspective and aims to extend its archival resources beyond the colonial words and images captured by Residential School records.

## ARCHIVES AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL TRAUMA

Many government, church, and private archives document both historical and contemporary trauma inflicted against Indigenous communities. Archives can hold political power. They can be spaces which document human rights abuses, spaces which reinforce or challenge political relationships and privileges.<sup>14</sup> Archivists have a responsibility to acknowledge and address the symbolic violence in archival records and to challenge the social inequalities reinforced by archival practice.<sup>15</sup> Archival materials relating to residential schools document the abuses, neglect, systemic racism, and other atrocities that occurred as part of the residential school system. Additionally, even archival records such as colonial administrative correspondence, which might seem benign, can actually be representative of historical trauma and be triggering to Indigenous archival users and archival staff. Using archives which document colonial relationships can be a form of witnessing and can be an emotional experience.<sup>16</sup> For many Indigenous scholars, archival research which involves reading racist texts can be emotionally distressing and taxing.<sup>17</sup> Historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum has discussed the emotional burden of reading Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) archival records, noting her experiences in:

reading correspondence, mostly between people who clearly dislike Indigenous people or at best see them as a problem to be solved. They wrote documents that they never intended to share with the people they were writing about, even while they were making decisions that would intimately affect the lives of the people they were discussing. Reading these records involves trying to understand a logic

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<sup>14</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> T-Kay Sangwand, "Preservation is Political: Enacting Contributive Justice and Decolonizing Transnational Archival Collaborations," *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018), <http://doi.org/10.5334/kula.36>.

<sup>16</sup> Nathan Dize, "Feeling Grief: On Emotions in the Archive of Enslavement," *Nursing Clio*, January 22, 2019, <https://nursingclio.org/2019/01/22/feeling-grief-on-emotions-in-the-archive-of-enslavement/>.

<sup>17</sup> Lynette Russell, "Affect in the Archive: Trauma, Grief, Delight, and Texts. Some Personal Reflections," *Archives and Manuscripts* 46, no. 2 (2018): 200-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2018.1458324>.

that changes somewhat over time and from one DIA staff member to the next, but which at heart holds that the purpose of the Department is to discipline and control Indigenous people and to minimize treaty and other relations of accountability. In short, reading DIA records—and the archive itself—can be emotionally and intellectually exhausting, exacerbating the physical strain of archival research.<sup>18</sup>

Even when not detailing specific instances of abuse, archival records which document residential schools are filled with government-sanctioned colonial violence, racism, and casual disregard for Indigenous life. These records use language that is derogatory and filled with colonial perspectives on Indigenous bodies, intellect, and life. Furthermore, when marginalized communities are represented in archival records which were written from the view of a missionary, there is often a wide disparity between the perception of lived experience and the actual lives of marginalized communities.<sup>19</sup> What was documented by the residential school staff rarely does justice to what students actually experienced while in residential school.

For example, Shingwauk Principal Rev. E.F. Wilson authored and edited a series of publications during his time running the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Homes. These publications served to generate income and interest for residential schools, offering accounts of his travels among different Indigenous groups and edited stories of student daily life. Passive recollections of punishments and strict schedules were relayed in a manner that feels disconnected from the experiences of trauma and dehumanization that students faced on a daily basis. For example, a fire broke out on September 12th, 1889 and the Shingwauk Fire Brigade, comprised of students were tasked with putting it out. Once the fire was extinguished, the cause was found to be a boy confined in what Wilson described as “the lock-up.”<sup>20</sup> The written account of this experience uses impartial language and does not speak to the fear the boys might have felt of the fire or the extent of the physical and mental harm being inflicted as punishment. Likewise, the Shingwauk residential school register maintained by Rev. E.F. Wilson contains information about the lives and identities of Shingwauk students between the years of 1872 and 1893. The register documents student names, family relations, locations of home communities, education levels, admission and discharge dates from the school, and details about the

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Jane Logan McCallum, “Indigenous Peoples, Archives, and History,” *Shekon Neechie: An Indigenous History Site*, June 21, 2018, <https://shekonneechee.ca/2018/06/21/indigenous-people-archives-and-history/>.

<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> E.F. Wilson, “Fire at The Shingwauk Home,” *Our Forest Children: And What We Want To Do with Them* 3, no. 5 (1889): 77-78. [http://archives.algomau.ca/main/sites/default/files/2009-081\\_001\\_001\\_007.pdf](http://archives.algomau.ca/main/sites/default/files/2009-081_001_001_007.pdf).

students' lives following their departure from Shingwauk.<sup>21</sup> The very context of these records and their connection to the Residential School system ties them to historical trauma and Indigenous experiences of loss of language, culture, and identity. Each name listed in the register represents a child who was torn away from their family, community, and culture. Additionally, the language used throughout the register represents the colonial, missionary perspective of E.F. Wilson. In the "condition on arrival" and "progress made" columns of the register, students are described using language such as "wholly untaught," "not very bright," "bad tempered," "wild," "unintelligent," "deformed," "bad," "not honest," etc. Likewise, the "after" record, which describes what the students did following departure from Shingwauk, exposes similarly harsh views of student intelligence and life choices. The "after" column also includes information about student illness and death.

In the *Algoma Missionary News and Shingwauk Journal*, Wilson recounts the death of a student named John Rodd. John was one of the school's first students and later worked as a printing shop apprentice. He was originally from Sarnia and had arrived in Garden River when he was eleven years old.<sup>22</sup> After becoming ill in November 1877, he died of cerebrospinal meningitis by the end of the month. When his mother had heard of his death, she requested that his body be sent home. Wilson refused her request, and offered for her to come stay at Shingwauk. It is not clear if she ever came. With his brother and a fellow student, John had tried to run away in late 1875 or early 1876. He was buried in the Shingwauk Cemetery and is one of the few students with a marker. In the report on John Rodd's death, Wilson's tone of judgement towards his students echoes his assessments made in his register—he repeatedly disparages the morals, lives, culture, and intelligence of the Indigenous students and families mentioned in his correspondence.

In many cases, the information contained in the Shingwauk register or Wilson's publications is the only archival information that has survived about individual students. The register is Wilson's assessment of students and represents his role in assimilation. His remarks dismiss the wealth of traditional knowledge, Indigenous languages, and the ways of knowing which students brought with them to the Shingwauk School. Reading the descriptors used by Wilson in today's context is challenging, perhaps doubly so for intergenerational Survivors and Indigenous community members. Wilson's descriptors paint Indigenous parents as pagans, ignorant failures of a dying culture. It takes an active effort to read beyond these Eurocentric viewpoints and discover what the student

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<sup>21</sup> E.F. Wilson, "Our Indian Homes," Indian Homes Committee Series, Shingwauk Indian Residential School fonds, 2014-020/002(001), Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, Algoma University, Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, <http://archives.algomau.ca/main/?q=node/33452>.

<sup>22</sup> E.F. Wilson, "John Rodd," *The Algoma Missionary News and Shingwauk Journal* 1, no. 8 (February 1878): 63. [http://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8\\_06673\\_9/3?r=0&s=3](http://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06673_9/3?r=0&s=3).

register can tell us beyond Wilson's perception of the students.<sup>23</sup> Wilson's register is not the exception, rather it is the norm for correspondence and administrative records which document the operation of residential schools. Attendance registers from the Spanish residential schools, Mohawk Institute, and St. Margaret's Indian Residential School also use comparable language. Likewise, administrative correspondence from every residential school shows a casual disregard for student well-being, while repeatedly using derogatory language to describe students. Viewing attendance registers and other residential school archival records has the potential to bring to the surface intergenerational trauma and be triggering for both researchers and archivists. However, with community input and support, archival records that document trauma can help reduce shame, encourage education, and be used for community healing.<sup>24</sup> But this does not happen without work, community participation, and the creation of health supports.

## HEALING THROUGH ARCHIVES

Since its establishment, the SRSC has been dedicated to "Sharing, Healing, and Learning" about the legacy of Residential Schools. This emphasis on healing has permeated throughout the SRSC's activities. It is essential when put in the context of the traumatic nature of Residential Schools and the corresponding legacy that can be found within the SRSC's archival records. The 1981 Shingwauk reunion, which saw the return of Survivors to the Shingwauk site and the founding of the SRSC, included an active reclaiming of histories, reshaping of narratives, and creating space for community healing.

Following the success of the first Shingwauk reunion, the SRSC worked to secure funding for community-based healing projects centered around sharing personal experiences about the Residential School Project. Over the next two decades, the SRSC held reunions in 1991, 1996, 2000, 2002 and 2006. Starting in 2011, the CSAA turned these reunions into annual Gatherings. Every reunion and gathering has placed a strong emphasis on connecting Survivors and their families to archival records. This often took the form of photo displays, small exhibits, and opportunities for Survivors to identify themselves and others in Residential School photographs. Additionally, each reunion was recorded and provided Survivors with a chance to have their personal testimony recorded for preservation in the SRSC archives. In addition to the reunions, the SRSC has facilitated regional healing circles, community-driven dialogue sessions and the development of a Survivor network to begin to address the trauma and loss experienced as a result of the

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds. *Reading Beyond Words Contexts: For Native History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2003), xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Tonia Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 14. <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.42>.

Residential School system. This programming has been designed to connect Survivors and intergenerational Survivors with archival material on a personal level and to encourage the sharing of stories and memories within the community. Much of this programming is facilitated by Elders or cultural workers experienced in trauma-informed care, providing a safer space for connecting with potentially traumatic histories. Other outreach programming has included supporting visiting Indigenous artists to work with the SRSC collections and Survivor community and developing a permanent exhibition space guided by the wishes of the Shingwauk Survivors. The SRSC's outreach programming is built on the principles of community, healing, and education. This programming is also designed to activate the archive and connect Survivors and intergenerational Survivors to archival material.

For example, every reunion has included a photo room or a dedicated space for Survivors to view archival material held by the SRSC. This emphasis on photographs has developed out of the CSAA's acknowledgement that archival photographs have tremendous potential to be used as part of community dialogues and community healing initiatives.<sup>25</sup> Photographs preserved in archives are deeply connected to concepts of evidence, power, and silence. This is particularly true in archives representing historical trauma, human rights, and marginalized communities. Susan Sontag has argued that "the photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it."<sup>26</sup> The connotation of a photograph can change drastically depending on how it is displayed, preserved, and archived. Likewise, how a photograph is named and described shapes how individuals understand the events depicted in the image. By asking Survivors and their families to describe Residential School photographs and provide information about the individuals pictured, the SRSC is creating space for community authority and allowing the Indigenous communities impacted by Residential School to shape the stories told by archival images.<sup>27</sup> Adding names to archival photographs can have a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities that have been directly affected by Residential Schools, and while "this act of matching names to photographs in the process of archivization is seemingly small and simple, it has had an overwhelming impact on countering societal silences."<sup>28</sup> The act of naming begins the process of

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<sup>25</sup> Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, "The Shingwauk Project," *Engacia De Jesus Matias Archives and Special Collections*, [http://archives.algomau.ca/main/?q=shingwauk\\_project](http://archives.algomau.ca/main/?q=shingwauk_project) (accessed August 5, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 39.

<sup>27</sup> Krista McCracken, "Archival Photographs in Perspective: Indian Residential School Images of Health," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 163-182. <https://doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.10>.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 96.

individualizing the historical record and eliminating the erasure enacted through past archival and government approaches to recordkeeping. In the case of images of Residential Schools, the act of naming can be seen as writing personal experiences back into the historical record. Jarrett M. Drake has argued, “the action of belonging and the action of believing are two of the most fundamental exercises of the human spirit...liberatory archives possess the potential to engender both actions within communities whose humanity traditional archives fail to recognize and respect.”<sup>29</sup>

Traditional archives have repeatedly marginalized or silenced the voices of Indigenous peoples and Residential School Survivors. As a grassroots community archive, the SRSC creates a physical space for Survivors and provides avenues for Survivors to document and describe their own history. The SRSC operates in relationship to Algoma University, making it a community archive within a colonial space. This can be challenging, however by being guided by Survivors, the SRSC pushes back against Euro-centric structures and puts community first in all of its practices. The SRSC often brings the voices of the Survivor community to committees and decision-making bodies within the institution. The SRSC maintains its autonomy within a larger colonial structure by using community-driven decision-making processes such as sharing circles and putting ceremony first. The SRSC’s approach to integrating Survivor perspectives into the historical record has resulted in the development of an archive that is constantly being added to and reinterpreted based on the needs of the Survivor and inter-generational Survivor community. Furthermore, the SRSC is a space that disrupts traditional archival power structures. The SRSC, through its Survivor centered mandate and governance structure, allows those impacted by trauma to hold power -- it is the Survivors who have determined the collection mandate of the SRSC and who have the final say on how the material is displayed or accessed. This level of community archival control allows the SRSC to move away from colonial definitions of archival and intrinsic value - instead turning to community members to determine what is essential for remembering and healing.

## Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

Given the trauma and potentially triggering nature of the archival material held by the SRSC, the staff have carefully considered ways that archival staff can better support Residential School Survivors and intergenerational Survivors when they access archival material. For example, the SRSC does not have a formal sign-in procedure for access to its visitor space. Individuals are not required to show identification, and visitors are welcome to just physically sit in the Centre’s space. Similarly, the SRSC is happy to host community

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<sup>29</sup> Jarrett M. Drake, “Liberatory Archives: Towards Belonging and Believing (Part 1),” *On Archivy*, October 22, 2016 <https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-1-d26aaeb0edd1>.

groups and families—visitors are encouraged to come into the space with whomever makes them comfortable. This lack of formal archival research procedures is intentional. The SRSC does not want Survivors to feel as though they have to jump through hoops to gain access to Residential School records that are about them. Likewise, the lack of visitor forms is an active attempt to avoid creating strict institutional policies similar to the regimented nature of Residential School or other government institutions.

All SRSC staff have engaged in basic training around trauma and how to support someone who is experiencing emotional distress. Part of this training emphasizes how archival staff can interact with and support Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, and families looking at archival material relating to their personal, family, or community history. This means understanding that working with archival records can be deeply personal and that research can “be the key to their identity, prompt reconnection with lost family members, confirm doubted memories of the past, or provide the sought-after evidence required to seek justice.”<sup>30</sup> For many individuals entering the SRSC, it may be the first time they are interacting with photographs of relatives, making their archival experience profoundly personal and at times emotional. Some people come to the archive looking for confirmation that a relative attended Residential School or looking for an answer to a question about their family. These searches can result in a vast range of emotions depending on the individual. Providing quiet private spaces, facial tissue, water, and access to space to smudge in are part of the SRSC’s efforts to support individuals who may experience trauma in the archive. Given the potentially triggering nature of the records held by the SRSC, the Centre also works closely with the Ontario Indian Residential Schools Support Services (OIRSSS) to facilitate access to trained mental health and cultural support workers to visitors to the archives. In virtual spaces, the SRSC also provides warnings about the potential triggering nature of Residential School archival material and provides links to a 24-hour health support hotline for Survivors and their families. These warnings acknowledge that looking at records connected to Residential Schools can be triggering and emotionally draining and connect users with health support resources.<sup>31</sup> The SRSC’s effort to support those engaged in research with Residential School records isn’t perfect, and staff are currently looking at ways to improve on-site resources. In 2019 staff participated in basic first aid and CPR training, mental health first aid training, and suicide safetalk training. This ongoing professional development is part of a commitment

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Jones, “What Would Trauma Informed Archival Access Look Like?” *Context Junky: History, Archives, Collections, Art* (blog), November 4, 2014, <http://www.mikejonesonline.com/contextjunky/2014/11/04/trauma-informed-archives/>.

<sup>31</sup> For an example of the health support resources shared online, see the website for the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/health-care-services/indian-residential-schools-health-supports/indian-residential-schools-resolution-health-support-program.html>.

to providing support to those looking at records of trauma. Future plans for supporting this work also include the development of an Elder in-residence program, the creation of a broader range of physical spaces where individuals or groups can look at records, and increased access to local traditional healing programs.

In addition to providing support for visitors, the SRSC has actively worked to create space for staff working with records of trauma. Cvetkovich has argued that archival materials and material culture items are embedded with emotion and are spaces that embody emotions.<sup>32</sup> These emotions and their associated trauma permeate through archival work and are hard to avoid. Archiving records of trauma can be viewed as a form of witnessing and require the navigation of empathy, compassion, anger, guilt, and other emotions.<sup>33</sup> Experiencing these emotions as part of your daily work can be draining and physically exhausting. Given this reality, it is unsurprising that there is a high rate of burnout among those working with archival collections which document trauma and human rights abuses.<sup>34</sup> As an attempt to prevent staff burnout, the SRSC has actively worked to develop a supportive workplace and policies which build in opportunities for self-care, staff reflection, and regular check-ins on the mental and emotional health of staff. This level of care has been particularly important for the staff members of the SRSC who, during the course of their work, have found records relating to the treatment of their relatives at Residential School. Unexpectedly coming across archival records with a personal connection to Residential Schools can be extremely triggering and require substantial space to process.

SRSC staff also routinely interact with the general public and provide public education around the history of Residential Schools. This work involves speaking with and providing site tours to elementary, high school, post-secondary, and professional development groups about the trauma at Shingwauk and other Residential Schools. SRSC staff currently offer over 200 of these tours a year, and repeating the details of the horrific history of Residential Schools over and over to a public audience can be extremely taxing. Additionally, at times staff encounter visitors who are actively hostile to the truth being told as part of this educational programming. This hostility has taken numerous forms including individuals denying what happened in Residential Schools, people insisting that something “good” must have come out of the schools, and tour participants sharing extremely racist views about Indigenous peoples. As an attempt to minimize staff harm, SRSC staff often provide these tours in pairs, limit the number of tours a week, and

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<sup>32</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Marika Cifor, “Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 7-31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5>.

<sup>34</sup> Verne Harris, “Antonyms of Our Remembering,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3-4 (2014): 215-229. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9221-5>.

attempt to build in periods of reflection following a busy tour season. SRSC staff have access to space for traditional medicines, counsellors, and mental health support through their health insurance plan, an employee assistance program, and OIRSSS. Student employees are also able to access counselling via student services and the Anishinaabe Initiatives department on campus. The SRSC also now has a policy that the Centre should be closed if a full-time employee is not available. This decision comes from a desire to ensure that part-time student staff are being supported adequately and that visitors to the SRSC are supported when looking at potentially triggering material. Staff care strategies at the SRSC are still evolving, and there is hope that with increased staffing and administrative support, the SRSC can do more to support front-line staff engaged in educational work.

## CONCLUSION

Archives can be deeply personal spaces of emotion. In archives connected to Residential Schools these spaces are often directly linked to colonial violence and trauma. However, when decisions about archival management, use, and access are determined by the community, we can transform archival spaces into spaces of community truth. The work of the SRSC provides an example of how a Survivor community has transformed trauma-related archives into a space that serves the needs of Survivors and their families. In 1979 while working to preserve the history of the Shingwauk site and organize the first Shingwauk reunion, Dan Pine Sr. said, “The Shingwauk School never closed. It just entered a new phase of development. It has to be given a chance to finish what it started. It has to put back what it took away. It is the people who went there that will care. Bring the people together. Let them gather and they will know what to do.”<sup>35</sup> Decades later Dan Pine’s words still ring true. It is the Shingwauk Survivors who have driven the mission of the SRSC and the Survivor community that continues to decide how archival records that relate to their personal experiences are preserved and accessed. The work of remembering, honoring, and telling the truth about Residential Schools is still ongoing and continues to be part of a new legacy of resilience driven by the Survivor community.

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<sup>35</sup> Dan Pine, (public discussion, Algoma University College, Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, 1979).

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