INQUIRY RESPECTING THE TREATMENT, EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF INNU IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

English Transcript | Volume 16

Commissioners: Retired Judge James Igloliorte, Dr. Mike Devine and Anastasia Qupee

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Audio recording loss due to technical issue.] – for the community visits. I'll ask Elizabeth to say a prayer for us, as well as Anne to interpret.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Okay, do you want us – do you want wanna stay there? Elizabeth, do you wanna stay here?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin, Tshaukuesh. Thank you very much for your prayer.

We understand that you're a very busy person and that you have recently just come back from a workshop – or a conference. Can you tell us what it was about, and what you found interesting about the workshop that you just attended?

P. RALPH: Anne, do you wanna translate?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Ehe.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): She said: This was my first time attending a conference in Innu-aimun that was held in Sept-Îles, Quebec. There were a lot of Elders and the work – the conference was on the Innu drum.

I thought a lot about what the Elders were saying about the drum; what it represented in our culture, and I truly believed when they spoke about it.

The Innu drum – the traditional drum is very sacred to our culture; and the way the Elders talked about it, what I think is, the drum is still much alive in our culture. It will and it is support us in any way that we show our respect to the drum, and there is trust in the drum.

When the Elders spoke, there were also others that wanted to speak, but the time was very short and they were told that maybe another conference will be held again in the future.

The conference went on for four days. The Elders that wanted to speak spoke, and then there were others that did not have time to speak. And when they spoke, there was a meaningful description of why the drum is very important in Innu culture and that is part of our lives.

The themes – some of the themes that we also – were in the conference were on medicine; Innu medicine, traditional medicine.

There was one elderly woman from Schefferville, Quebec. She was a medicinal woman. She described the medicines that she showed in the conference, and one of her – one of the doctors in her community asked her where she got the medicine, and how it worked and which animal, which plant?

But she did not tell the doctor where it came from and what kind of help that medicine gave her, and how healthy she looked as being an Elder. She did not want to share that with the doctor.

And I also wrote that in my writings in my journal that I have, and I am still writing.

Everything that I heard and that I learned from each community – Innu communities and at – at the end, I was given to speak. And I gave them my thoughts and this is what I told them:

I talked about the environment in our land, in our territory. I talked about our community, what we are going through, the hard times. Because I told them I did not

see this in my childhood. I did not see nor hear suicidal – suicide.

What is happening to our communities, each one of us know, and we talk about it and this is what I mentioned in my closing remarks as well: Not to forget our communities.

Two things I kept in mind when I spoke. I told the Elders that were there: The only two that I blame of what has happened to us, the Innu, I blame the government and the priest. They tried to change our lives.

The priest would visit each tent in those days. I remember this and I heard. He would compliment my parents about the way they set up the tent and he would tell them how nice and how beautiful it was, and how much the parents would have been grateful for their kids helping them with the tent.

He then later told my parents that not to go back in the country. That to stay in that same place as the others were there – the other Innu – and to – to get her parents to get her – get their kids to get education, to go to school. And if they did not obey this, the priest told them that the monies that would be going to them, such as the family allowance that was called back then, it would be removed if they went back to the country.

If there are any other questions that you would like to ask me about the conference that I went to, she said that she only wrote in as much as she could with the important things that she thought, and she always wrote in trying to catch up with the language, catch up with the Elders who were talking. And it was – she said it felt good that she went to this conference, and this was her first conference.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Elizabeth, thank you for sharing that with us.

What impressed you about the young people who attended the conference?

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: I was grateful to see young people there, the students from those reserves: The – the Sept-Îles and an – another reserve close by, it's called Maliotenam.

Those students were allowed to attend, and I was very grateful to see that, so they can learn and listen what was being said by the Elders at the conference.

ELDER PENASHUE: Ehe.

INTERPRETER NUNA: But they were not allowed to speak, because there were too many people speaking, and some others couldn't – they did – the – the conference didn't have time for all the people to speak, because it was a huge conference.

So I am available if, again, you want me to speak but I don't want to take out the other Innu people that will be speaking – their space. I don't want that but I am available, she says.

ELDER PENASHUE: Ehe.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you for that and thank you for your thoughtfulness. Would anybody like to ask Elizabeth any other questions before we move on?

Thank you so much.

At this time, the Commissioners want to say to the community: We're very grateful for the welcoming that you have always given us, especially today. We realize that we are a day late, because of all the snow we had.

This morning is simply an open house for people to come in and have a coffee with us, but we're gonna take a few minutes to explain what'll be happening this afternoon and for the balance of the week.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.) We need Anne to interpret. We'll just get –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Correct.

P. RALPH: So what we'll do is get you to go through it –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: That's right.

P. RALPH: – and then what about –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, we got that done.

P. RALPH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Relax.

P. RALPH: Yeah. It's good.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

The topics we're going to cover this morning, to give you some information about what's happening, will be: How each person who wishes will have an opportunity to speak; when you will see cameras working –

INTERPRETER NUNA: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – cameras. When you – when you will see the cameras turned on and turned off.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll be talking about translation into Innu-aimun and English. We'll be telling you about what happens in private meetings with individuals, where that will be held and how that will be held. And we'll be talking about how the healing services individuals will be here to assist. And we'll be talking about the rules around releasing people's names, because they are speaking in a public forum.

So right now, Anastasia is gonna covey – cover and speak in Innu-aimun about the first topic.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And now Commissioner Devine will go through the first topic, which has to do with –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The opportunity to speak?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes, the opportunities that you will have to speak to us.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, good morning.

So during this week, we'll be listening to people tell their stories about their experiences of child protection. And this is a critical part of course, of the Inquiry, in that – you know, even in the title of the Inquiry it's about hearing from people about their experiences of child protection.

Each day we plan to have at least four people speak, in this forum here. So it'll be two in the morning and then two in the afternoon. At the same time, we'll also be having private sessions here in the building in another room, for people who are not comfortable or don't want to speak in this kind of a forum, and they can speak privately to one of the Commissioners.

So what you'll see here, well that'll be two Commissioners here, and the other Commissioner will be attending the private session.

If there is time during any of those sessions in this forum, we will hear from other people. We've asked people to consider about an hour but we don't want to – to – you know – we want to make sure the people can say what they have to say, so if people go over that, then that's okay.

Before the Inquiry is finished, everybody will have an opportunity to speak who wants to

speak to the – to the Commissioners and we don't expect that we will hear from everybody this week, and so we'll come back as often as – as we need to.

And so if people are interested in speaking to us, then they can talk to any of the staff here of the Commission, or the healing services, and let them know their intent.

We'd like for people to register, because in that way we can kind of keep track of who's going to speak and when, but we don't – that's not an essential or a required part of it.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'll do the next one.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Do you want to – camera – cameras and anonymity?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So Anastasia spoke in Innu-aimun about cameras, and how we want to make sure that we don't hurt people by releasing their identity.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So there will be cameras. Right now, there are no cameras recording –

P. RALPH: Commissioner, I'm sorry. They're – they're – they are recording right now, actually.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Oh, this session? Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And they will continue to be recording this week and they will – when we put a person on the stand, they will record what the individual has to say.

But, the difference is what is being recorded by the cameras won't be broadcast to the public. There's no live-streaming of any of the proceedings, and people at home can't watch what's happening here today.

And of course, everyone who speaks will have the choice of whether they want their name used or they simply want to tell the Commissioners their story.

Translation.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So the next part then is on translation.

Everything at the meetings will be translated. It is important that people be able to share their experiences in the language that they're – that they're comfortable with. And so that means that it can be from Innu-aimun to English, or English to Innu-aimun. We want to make sure that everybody in the room understands what has been said; and this will make things a bit slower, but that's okay because we want to make sure that people hear everything that is being said, and we're in no rush in that regard.

Translation.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'll do the private meetings too, right?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah. Private meetings.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So private meetings that we'll be conducting will be held simultaneously with what's happening in public in this room. We have a room set aside for people to tell us their story privately. Some people want to talk about their experiences with child protection in public, some people want to do it in private. So sometimes you'll see two Commissioners here and one in the other room.

And many people have stepped forward and said we are ready to put our names down so that we can be put on the list for who participates. But don't worry, there's lots of time to consider doing that later on this week or when we come back again.

Nathan Penashue will be here, and if you want to let him know that you'd like to be placed on the list, you can do that. You don't have to register, but if you want to the opportunity is there. If you want to be heard, you will still be heard.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Healing services too, right?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah, the workers.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So during the week we'll have healing services here. So there will be people in the room to provide support for people who may be having a difficult time. And that – that can be for people who are themselves telling their story, or if you're listening and you find that you're affected by that. And they are here, they have the – the blue vests on that they wear. So there's – you can approach them, and you may know most if not all of them.

Also, if you need additional services, we have someone in the name of – a mental health counsellor in the name of Sean Allen, who I think some people may know here. And as well we have Ellen Oliver who is a counsellor that will be hired – that was hired by us, the Inquiry. So we're – they can connect workers with other people also to ensure we have the appropriate support.

The next one's the media.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So some notes about how the media – some notes about how the media will be instructed to conduct themselves.

The media will be here this week. There will be people from TV, radio and maybe newspapers, and will be watching you as you present. And what they hear they're permitted to use if they want to do a – a report. But they – you are protected, if you want to remain anonymous. So if you don't want to give your name but you want your story be heard, you can do that part of it.

And, of course, when we do our final report you can think about this and if you prefer not to have your name published in the final report that we give government, you don't have to.

The cameras will be recording what people say and, again, the recording will not be made public later on, unless you're satisfied and give consent to making it public.

So a person can speak in this room, they can speak whatever's on their mind, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be heard outside this room. But if you want the community and the media to report your name, you're quite free to do so. And also the – the Inquiry will also make available to the public the recording made of what a person said but again, only if the person tells us that is what they want to do.

So that is an overview of where we are. Thank you for attending. Please continue to stay and have more coffee if you want, but we pick up again this afternoon, Peter?

P. RALPH: Yes.

Maybe you should just take a short –

[20 seconds of audio recording lost due to technical issue.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Anything else, Peter?

P. RALPH: Nathan is – is gone to help someone who's stuck with – in the – a couple of hours from here, I think, in the Ski-Doo, so he's not here this morning.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

P. RALPH: But anyone who wants to register this morning, just speak to me or Ruth or Paula. And again, we don't – you