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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[redacted]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good afternoon, everyone.

On behalf of Commissioner Qupee and Igloliorte I'd like to thank the community of Sheshatshiu for attending the community meetings this afternoon.

Are you going to do it back and forth?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We are now going to hear from [redacted] If there is time we will hear from others in the room after we have finished.

Good afternoon, [redacted] I want to point out that there are cameras here. They are recording what is happening now. The camera will be recording everything that happens in this room during the week but it – cameras are not broadcasting the meeting – oh I'm sorry. I went too – yeah, sorry.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The cameras are not broadcasting the meetings. No one at home can watch what is happening here on their computers or televisions.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [redacted] tshenashkumitin. We would like you to present to us for about an hour, and one of us will give you a gentle reminder when you're getting close to the hour so that we can hear other people.

We're very grateful that you're willing to start us all off; then people can see what it means to give – give your testimony to the Commission. And after today if you have more information you want to give us, we'll be back again anyway.

You have asked to remain anonymous so you will only be known as a person, [redacted] who testified before the Inquiry today. And we will ask the media not to identify your name, even they know who you are if they make any report.

Yep.

Anything you want to add?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Nope, I'm good.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So [redacted] please feel free to tell us why you are here today. What is it that you wanted to tell the Inquiry with respect to what you're aware of regarding children in protection? We prefer not to interrupt you, so we will let you carry on, making sure Anne is given enough time to translate. You know all that stuff.

[redacted] [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): Ehe.

My name is [redacted] There are three things I would like the Commissioners to know but I don't know if an hour will be enough for me to talk about my story.

First thing I would like to talk about is the CSSD, he said, Social Services. My wife was told she was an unfit mother when they took our children away – young children away from our family. I really found it very hard that my kids were taken and they were in custody in North West River. Two of my girls, about two or three years ago, that I have learned that they were sexually abused. When our daughters told us about the abuse, my wife was very upset and I was very upset. We both cried.

I think Social Services did wrongfully for my children to be put in custody. I am very frustrated when I think about the Social Services. It is very hard to lose our kids into custody and today my kids who are married, they are afraid of their marriage to go and to be heard unseen, and that they would have troubles in their marriages as of today, because of what had happened in the past.

Not only the Social Services makes me upset. The government also makes me angry. It was the government who had these organization work for them. My kids had shared us their stories. My married kids who had shared with us as a family, their husbands, their wives were not in that family meeting we've had.

I'd like to quote what Elder Elizabeth said: When – when will this stop? When will the government stop this? When will the government stop taking our children away from families?

Right now, while I'm sitting here, I am taking two of my grandchildren and the other two – my married daughter has the other two, also. The kids were taken from my son because of drinking. That is what I am afraid of, for my grandchildren to be – end up like their parents did in the past.

When me and my wife talk, like wondering – telling her: What would have happened to them – to the grandchildren – what would have happened? And I'd like to say also that my wife is not feeling well. She's ill. She is a diabetic.

[redacted] [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Two sixty.

INTERPRETER NUNA: My wife weighed, before diabetics took over, she was 260 pounds. Today, she's only 70 kilograms. I almost lost my wife due to diabetic and the stress does – was on her.

This is what – this is the result of what Social Services had done; and the government, what they have done. I do not blame my kids, because of the drinking, of what has to happen. I blame the government for what they had done to us.

Sometimes I have – I feel stressed because of all this, of what had happened, but I do try to take care of myself in my own way and with the help that I need, I do sweats.

That's the first story I'm telling now, and now I will go to my second story is when I went to school. The school, Peenamin McKenzie School, did not offer Grade 9 so I was sent out to Corner Brook and that's where I did my schooling.

When I first started I was doing very well, that I had high marks. Went home for Christmas and after that I went back to Corner Brook. I went back to Corner Brook in March, and that's when one of the Brothers who abused me sexually. I knew something was not right and I knew that I wasn't myself after what had happened and that's when I was hurt mentally.

I could not tell anyone. There were two other young Innu men that were there, but they were in a different grade; I couldn't tell them. But I did tell them when I tried to go home. I felt unease when I went back to the school, especially when I saw the Brother. Sometimes I would say that I was sick but I wasn't sick. It's just that I was sick of looking

at that Brother. And then that's when I turned to alcohol. I abused alcohol. Because I could not tell my parents, I started drinking.

I did not have any care at all when I was drinking. I did not care about anybody. I did not care about myself. And that's what – what the Brother had done to me, that's what it was all the time in my head thinking about it. And I thought I would have a good education.

I've tried many times to tell both of my parents but I couldn't because I thought: Will they believe me or not believe me? That's what I thought.

It also came a time when I thought about suicide. I was suicidal, and I tried three times. What happened in – to me in the past, I would bring it up on my wife and also to my kids. I kept this all to myself for 30 years and now I put it out there.

I decided to go to the meetings – the AA meetings. That's when late [redacted], late [redacted], my sister, and [redacted] and [redacted] were working then. I really worked hard on myself. So hard that I say it was a hard ice, that's what I – that's what I called my way of healing. Some of my family; my siblings, parents, I haven't told them my story about what had happened to me. I really found it very hard – very, very hard. I felt the heaviness in me. I had a lot of headaches and took medication for it.

I drove through Corner Brook one time and saw where the school stood once and it burned down. I felt relieved. I felt happy to see that it had burned down. And that is my story of going to school in Corner Brook.

Next thing I would like to talk about is incarceration. I really found that hard, too, when I was incarcerated. I was about 30 years old when I was first incarcerated. I find it hard. I didn't think about – much about being locked up in a lock-up but the hardest ones that – when you are incarcerated are the ones like the correctional centres – penitentiaries. Those are the hardest ones that I found.

First time I went to a correctional centre, a guard asked me to take off all of my clothes, but I refused. I refused for them to take my clothes off and I fought – I fought them. The reason why I fought back, because the past came back. The flashbacks of what happened in the past with – with that incident with that Brother. That's why I fought back.

I don't think no one knows what it's like to be locked up in a correctional centre. It's hard – it is hard. Only they will know when they've been there themselves. I guess the government thinks that it is the right thing to do to incarcerate Aboriginal people – Indigenous. They ask you sometimes if you have been abused or not abused. No one will ever tell that to the courts.

I don't think no one here would – not like that, being taken – your clothes being taken off from you. When clothes have been taken off, they ask me to bend over and that's when they stuck their finger in my anal. There is racism in LCC. There are no programs for the people that are in there, to seek help, or brought help to them in that facility.

When a kitchen utensil is being lost, like, let's say a fork or a knife, that's what they do to us. They take off all of our clothes and that's when I don't feel real good about what they do – what they did. And it is the government's fault of what is happening. One of the inmates that I befriended – that I had made friends with did federal time, and he told me in federal prison they kill each other. And he told me to watch out for myself, to look after myself.

The government must think that prisons are good, but to me prisons are not good. And I think, may this Inquiry be brought to the government, tell our stories, and these are true. Is it really true that the Inquiry will get us there?

I hope the government sees what they have done, broken our lives. I look at the pictures that are around in this room; they were healthy. That's what I see, and happy.

These are the three things that I wanted to say. And I hope the government will listen, and that's my only hope. And that's all I want to say for now.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin, [redacted]

Congratulations for having the strength to come here in a public place and tell your story; for speaking on behalf of your wife and your children and your grandchildren; for taking the difficult steps to deal with alcohol and alcohol addiction; and we hope that by speaking about it, you've relieved some of the burden you have carried for so long.

Just to ask you a couple of questions to try and get some dates straight, about what ages the children were and when you gave up drinking; when you think your life changed. So I'll ask you some of those questions.

When your two girls were taken into custody by the social workers, can you remember how old they were?

[redacted] [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Ten years old. Sis – the oldest sister, and the other sister, seven.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Can you remember what year you went into the penitentiary the first time, and the things that you described that were so humiliating, when that happened – what year? Do you know, roughly?

[redacted] 1989 [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Around 1989.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

In your opinion, is a system where children are removed from the parents – are they better off by being placed in their own community?

[redacted] [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Yes, he likes the idea of the children being taken care of, a family member. When a family member takes care of the parents' kids, then it maybe will tell the mom and dad where they are, where the kids are. That they are well taken care of.

And, again, I want to look at it also, in our community, there are sexual offenders in the community and that's another thing we should look out for.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Are you sober these days? Did you – did you give up alcohol abuse?

[redacted] [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Yes, I drink, but responsible. I don't drink where my grandparent – where my grandkids are.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I want to congratulate you for taking that kind of mature step towards watching out for yourself and your family.

I'll ask the other Commissioners if they have any questions they would like to ask you.

Anastasia?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah. I – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I can translate for myself.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You can go right ahead.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I just wanna thank [redacted] It's a – it's a big step to come forward and tell his story. And these will be the stories that – that we'll be hearing as Commissioners, and working together.

And I just kind of explained the process in the longer term, that when we do come up

with a report, these are the stories that we have to think about, in terms of making recommendations for when – in the future, for when Innu people take control of Child, Youth, Family Services and run their own – run their own organization.

So I just, again, wanna thank [redacted] for coming forward.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Commissioner Devine, please.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: First of all I just wanted to say on behalf of myself, and I'm sure my two fellow Commissioners, that – really sorry to hear of what you've had to go through in your life thus far.

I also wanted to quickly add, though, it takes great courage to do what you've done here today; and I certainly applaud you on that. It's – it's – certainly – you showed great strength today.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Interpreter.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: What I – pardon –?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: The interpreter.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh, sorry.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I think – Commissioner Qupee has said basically what I wanted to say, in terms of going forward to be able to have these stories to put in our report and tell the government what has happened, and how it has affected people in their lives to such a degree that it has.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [redacted] if you have other thoughts later on as we keep coming back to your community, if you have opinions about what you have observed in your lifetime and you wanna speak to us, feel free to do so.

Okay. It's a good time to take a 15-minute break and then we'll pick it up after that.

Thank you.

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[redacted]