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

English Transcript | Volume 6

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

Monday | Natuasish | 17 April 2023

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

<u>Recess</u>

P. RALPH: You're inside (inaudible). Can you maybe just let him go?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

My name is George Gregoire.

First of all, I would like to tell you about myself – where I came from, then you people will know.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

G. GREGOIRE: I'm – I'm 76 years old. And I was married in 1968, I – the day – the year I moved to Davis Inlet, and I was a very heavy drinker – very heavy drinker. I drink many years, end up in jail many times.

(Inaudible) I was always drinking but I was always working in the summer to support my family. But there are times when I stopped drinking for months – a year – two years. I start using my hunting skills, which my father – my father taught me – teach me. I hadn't forget what my late father taught me about hunting, trapping or about life in the bush.

Now I'm – I'm not young anymore, I can't do any hunting. I don't remember having – I don't think I've ever had any problems with social workers. Now all of my children are grown up, had a grandchildren and a great-grandchildren. The trail I came from is not very – very nice road. Some places they

used to rough walk, the other place very easy to walk – I hope you know what I mean – 'cause my said – it's not easy.

Now, I have been in Davis Inlet since 1968, then to Natuashish. Thirty-two years in Davis Inlet and 22 years in Natuashish.

I have seen many children taken away from their parents and placed in foster homes outside the province. Not to the Innu foster parents, but to the white foster homes. Those who came back cannot communicate with their parents because they lost all their language. Can't speak Innu, especially for those who were taken away when they were just baby – young babies.

Newfoundland Government has placed social workers in Natuashish for what reason, I don't really know. So they visit the parents, or they just wait 'til someone to call, someone to say the parents don't look after their children. Well, they will see the – then they will see the parents

To the social workers working with Innu person – I don't think there's any Innu workers (inaudible) Social Services. The white social workers don't know anything about Innu culture or Innu way of life.

I remember when I was still in Davis Inlet – that was a long time ago before they ever talk about relocation – I went to Sheshatshiu to visit my late father and mother. A few days stayed with them, then I decided to go back to Davis Inlet.

My late sister used to work with Social Services. She said our niece, a small – had a small baby. The socials workers gonna take her – the baby and place him at white foster parents outside the province. She said: Would you like to adopted this baby and take him with you when you go back?

Since she's my niece baby I will have to take the – the baby with me. And she says she will talk to Social Service today and get back to me. That evening they bring the baby to my mother's place, then I call my wife and she was okay with her, she was very happy to hear. My two daughters are very interested to see the baby.

My adopted son has been with us for many years, until he finally get married. I have adopted two of my grandchildren; one of them already have two children, the other one is only 15 years old.

Once the social worker from Schefferville was placed here in Natuashish. I heard a lot about her. People from Schefferville told me what she was like when she was in – she was working in Schefferville.

I once – I once see – I – once I see her when she visit a single mother in Natuashish. She may have – she may have called police before she visit the single mother. As I passed the house where – where she stays, there are two police car – trucks parked outside – single mother's house.

I said to myself: Why do the – why do she needs police escort to visit the young single mother. I know this young mother very well. I don't think she would ever try to hurt any – anyone.

When is child placed in a white foster home, we will never know what happened inside foster – white foster homes. I know white social workers (inaudible) towards the parents once in a while. If the child – if the child is abused she would never report to the white social worker, because the child knows social workers will never believe him.

When the time comes to release to her own parent, she or – she the keep the pain she had, while she was in white foster home. When the child can't handle the pain, the next comes the suicide.

This is what happened to the Innu children placed in the white foster home. I believe the white government thinks don't – the Innu don't know how to look after the children.

Since I can remember, Innu never had that much, but they survived in hunting and trapping.

White social worker, they are help – they are here to help Innu, but help is not there when they take the children away. They hurt the parents and the whole community.

'Cause I'm going to say it. We don't – we don't really know what happened inside foster – foster homes. I read many books in Newfoundland and Labrador, about foster parent. Some children were abused – sexual abuse, but they don't report. They can't, they're afraid of the foster parent. And I don't think Social Services would report even if the children report it.

This is what happened to the Innu people. Now the child protection, we look after here, how can we do that? What way?

Innu – when the social workers took the child away from the parent, it's not protection. It hurt the parent, it hurt the child, it hurt the whole community. That's not a good idea. To do that – to have a child protection, we have to find a way how to do it. Maybe talking to the parents, make sure they understand everything what the people see.

Another thing we have a very big problem too. In white man's language there are many words. Innu – well we don't have it in Innu – the white man's language – we don't have it.

We've had it all the time. In court, same thing. Many people have never really had a fair trial in court because they don't have the Innu language with what the judge (inaudible) say. This is what happens. Same thing with the children.

Social Services using the language – white man's language – the children don't really understand and people don't really understand. Some – some young people will speak English pretty well. They probably knows what – what the person say, but cannot say that in their own language, to explain to the people.

I was – interpreter was in a court, (inaudible), I find very hard to say to interpreter, very hard. Because we don't have a word in Innu, many of us don't have a word.

So, like I said, we have to find a way to – if we talk about child protection, we have to find a way to – how to do it.

It – it – in many ways it hurt the whole family – family, this community or in Sheshatshiu. Same thing's happening, it's not much different in Sheshatshiu. They take the children away and place in a white town.

Many of them came back; they cannot communicate their own parent, because they lost the language. They can't speak the Innu anymore. That's very sad; they can never learn. They tried to learn. The – one priest would speak – he used the English to talk to the parent, so the parent don't understand a word they say.

This is what happened and it's happened everywhere, I guess. It's happen in residential schools like that – I read a lot of books of resident schools, a lot of books of foster homes. I read a lot of books because I heard about stories about it, what happened.

So everyone has to work together in Social Services and with the Innu and people who are on the Commissioners, must work together to find a way about child protection. It is important – very important to protect a child.

When I – when my – I think about it, the suicides – how many suicides I seen here in this community, it's really hurting me. Even they are not my children, but it's hurt me bad – really bad.

I feel (inaudible) hurt, how many kids he has commit suicide.

I hope you people understand what I'm trying to explain, and say to you. Like I said, we must try to work together to find a way for the child protection. It's not just: go to the parent, okay, you don't look after your child, I'm gonna take him and place him. That's not protection. That's not what I see it, myself.

It's – it – it hurt the whole community, the families and the children. I didn't know what the (inaudible) my – my adopted granddaughter wasn't close to home; out somewhere in Ontario.

She never – as – (inaudible), there are a lot of – a lot of younger – they're not girls anymore – they're not young anymore, they're here but they're not here.

They were supposed to be invited up here to talk about what they were like in foster home. This is what I was hoping to happen. Just a few of us is not enough.

So I guess that's what I have to say, if I have something else to say I will say something.

Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Should I translate it in Innu –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sure.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – or is it okay in English?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Too bad I can't hear you if you have to ask me a question. (Inaudible) I can't hear you.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Do you want it –

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She was asking –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She was asking did anyone want it –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: – translated? Does anybody want it translated?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Can you ask George if he would give us his notes or, does he want to keep them? If he can give them to us we'd love to have them.

C. URQUHART: We could scan them.

P. RALPH: If we could get a scan if possible, yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll ask.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Hmm?

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Say what –?

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Could we just copy them. We can borrow them.

INTERPRETER NOAH: He's – [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Let me see it. (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

He is asking if –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – if he can have your –

P. RALPH: A copy – a copy of your notes.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – copy of your –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Notes.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – notes.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We'd give them back, of course.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: When? [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

We will give you back [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – right.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Judge Igloliorte –

G. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

He's asking if –

G. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – if he can have your copies –

G. GREGOIRE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: – of your letter. [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Okay.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. GREGOIRE: Yes, Jim –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

G. GREGOIRE: – you can have them.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

G. GREGOIRE: While the – now my English is not that good but I hope you can understand –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

G. GREGOIRE: – yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Yes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

G. GREGOIRE: (Inaudible) written down –

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) yup (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: Are you gonna make a copy –

P. RALPH: Yup.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – now?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup. Ten-minute break again please, Justine – thank you, Justine.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Do we have someone else here?

G. GREGOIRE: Copy – [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

INTERPRETER NOAH: Ehe. [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good. Good.

INTERPRETER NOAH: And she will –

P. RALPH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – will give –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Great. Break.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – it back to you.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Recess

[redacted]