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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible) Christine. Thank you very much for your prayer.

We're very happy to be starting our hearings here in Natuashish. We will be back and forth to your community as well as Sheshatshiu at least for the next year.

We want you to be comfortable when you're here, because we would love to hear what you have to say, talking about your life, your stories and your experiences.

So to my right here is Commissioner Mike Devine and he comes from Newfoundland. He has been a professor at Memorial University in Social Work.

INTERPRETER NOAH: What's his name, Mike Ryan?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mike Devine.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Devine – Mike Devine.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

To my left, everybody knows Anastasia. The Prime Minister knows Anastasia. A Queen of England knows Anastasia.

So we're very happy to be a three-person Commission who will be hearing all of your experiences.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – Commission – can you repeat that again? The –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

So the three of us are very happy to be your Commissioners here in Natuashish for this Inquiry.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

Also I will introduce you to people who have come from away, and are part of the Inquiry process. You all know Judith Rae; she's a lawyer with the Innu Round Table and John Olthuis' law firm. She has known many – many people in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu for many years.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – Judith Rae?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup, Judith Rae.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

J. RAE: May I just clarify.

We're for Innu Round Table but also for Innu Nation and for both First Nations.

Just as a lawyer for Innu Nation and First Nations.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – what else?

J. RAE: Mushuau-Innu First Nations.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

J. RAE: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Where's Annie?

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

J. RAE: – of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We also have appearing here, a person representing the Federal Government, Annie Randall.

A. RANDALL: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay, and your role – tell us what you do.

A. RANDALL: So I represent the Federal Government to be here, to answer any questions that may come up. It's probably (inaudible).

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – Eddie?

A. RANDALL: Annie.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Annie – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

A. RANDALL: Randall.

INTERPRETER NOAH: – [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thanks, Justine.

Over on this side, we have a lawyer who represents the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and her name is Nikita Sheaves.

INTERPRETER NOAH: (Inaudible) –

N. SHEAVES: Nikita.

INTERPRETER NOAH: (Inaudible) – (inaudible) –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mosquito.

Nikita – Nikita.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And sitting next to Nikita is Louise Bradley and we are asking her to oversee all of the healing services program we have.

Louise Bradley – will you stand please, ma'am. Thank you.

Our Commission lawyer who has the baby – not you. You don't –

P. RALPH: I have two babies.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Our – our – our Commission – our Commission lawyer who has the baby that is here, everyone – I hear a lot – quite a few people know who the lawyer is; it's Caitlin Urquhart, but she has also worked with the community members and for the community as well.

Thank you.

Yes and the guy who's stood up. He's not a mother – yeah –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: He's – he's –

P. RALPH: Dragonfly.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – he's a hockey player –

M. DEVINE: Went viral on Facebook.

P. RALPH: Woodchopper.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah – Facebook – that's right, woodchopper – this is Peter Ralph, he's a lawyer with the Commission for the Inquiry as well.

C. URQUHART: And he still has both his eyebrows.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Our staff – the lady operating the equipment is Paula. She cries whenever she hears a sad story, so she'll be doing a lot of crying on this trip.

Paula, thank you.

Yeah – no – we will all be crying together. I know that.

And as well, one of our staff, Ruth – Ruth Steele. She handles all of our travel, all of the hotel stays, all of the office administration work here and in St. John's.

And the very famous Nui family member – one – I call her one of the Nui boys actually – is Mary Anne, so glad to have you here.

M. A. NUI: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Where's Jeannie?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And where's Jeannie? Jeannie's here too.

Oh there she is in pink. Jeannie, thank you.

Thank you, Jeannie.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Did you turn it on?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup. You turn yours on.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So, Anastasia, we each have one more.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I think (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good afternoon everyone.

There are several things that we want to cover before we – before we start.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No – what were you gonna – I thought – (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: Ehe.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: Ehe.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Now do I do the whole thing?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay so I'll continue with this section in English and then Anastasia will speak in Innu-aimun.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: No, you can do –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: – the whole thing.

P. RALPH: Do the whole thing.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I can do the whole – yeah –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible) –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – the whole section.

P. RALPH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible) –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And then – okay.

I didn't understand a word.

Okay so – yes. During this week the Commissioners will be listening to people tell about their stories and experiences with child protection. This is a very important part of the Inquiry. The Commissioners are going to give the government a report from what you have told us, and in that report we'll be telling the government back what you have said during these meetings, and making recommendations on a way to go forward to make a better system for the people.

We want to hear from as many people as possible, so we ask that you try to speak for an hour or less. That's very flexible, but we do want to hear from as many people as we can.

Before the Inquiry is finished, every Innu who wants to share their experiences with us will be given an opportunity to do so. And it may not be this week, but we will be back as often as we need to be to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to speak.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: She's all right to finish it off.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So there are cameras here; you can see them – those little round things – and we are recording so that when we need to refer to the testimony that was given in this community then we can use that – that cameras. But they're not broadcasting out to anybody today; we're just using them for our purposes. No live-streaming.

And it'll be up to you if you would like to share what we take pictures of. And the lawyers will be speaking with witnesses so that you can clarify that, after you've had a chance to think about the sessions when they're over.

So what you say, we will transcribe into English for our report so we can use it, and of course once again you'll be able to tell the lawyers – our lawyers and Innu Round Table lawyers – if there's anything you want left out, or if you want the whole proceedings that you say, part of this Inquiry.

Everything will be translated. So when you speak, we'll make sure it's translated, and when we speak we will make sure that's translated. And we would love to hear you speak in your own language when you – when you present to us.

And, of course, tell us to slow down if we're talking too fast or if we look like we're trying to rush you. We are not in a rush.

Also, this is not the only place you can tell your story. If you want to tell your story alone, or in your house, then we will make arrangements to hear you one-on-one. So maybe one of us, as a Commissioner, will

come to your house if you want that privacy; or if you want to have it in another room and still be private, we will also do that.

Don't forget that our lawyers, Peter and Caitlin, can take your names and make a list anytime, that you would like to present to the Inquiry.

Go ahead, Mike.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We know that these stories will be hard to tell and hard to hear, so we have Innu healing supports here in the room to provide support, and Jeannie is – I think – the contact and they're down in the back.

It does not matter if you're speaking or just listening. Sometimes it can be very difficult for you, and so we want to know that you have those kinds of supports there. These people are from the community, and have agreed to help.

So if you're finding it hard – you find it difficult – just approach one of the home support workers and we do have spaces out – out here where people can go in private, as well as the private meeting room for people who want to hear from the Commissioners in a private space, in addition to your own home.

And also these workers can connect you with other people if you need that kind of help.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's it.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Introduce the speaker.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Introduce –?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: The speaker (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] Can you stand up, like, the workers that are here to support people: Beverly, Daniel [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] Jeannie [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] Nympha.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

When you're ready.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER NOAH: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So if you prefer us to ask you – to ask you questions, we can do that. If you'd like to just tell your own story, please feel free to do that also.

[Dialogue between Nympha Rich and Interpreter Noah.]

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH (providing English translation): Hi. I'm feeling scared and nervous.

The only thing I'm here is I want to say to – something about the CSSD and I don't care about the past, but I'm here to say something to the CSSD and I'm very mad at them and I'm – I'm very angry.

On May 20 – May 20, 2022, my – my – my son commit suicide in Goose Bay.

It's been many years that my kids were taken away. I – it was – it's me that I didn't do – that I didn't do good parenting to my – to my children. Last year I got my – I got all my kids back and my daughter is living with – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – my mother.

When I think about it – when I think about it, why didn't they gave me back my – my children. Today my son would have been still here if – if the – if the Social Services bring – give – if they would have give – if they bring me – give me back my children, my son would still be here today.

I'm very – very angry at the Social Services. I'm very, very angry when I think about it.

I miss – I miss him. I miss my son a lot.

The Social Services are the – were the ones that I felt it's their fault and, uh – they should have given me my son back. It's – it's – I'm very angry at them.

It still hurt me today the – the Social Services are – I'm – I'm – they still hurt me today and I don't – I don't often go there and – and see them or talk to them.

And even – and – and when I – I think about it, how many more – how many more children are going to be – lose their lives. How many – how many more children are going to commit more suicide – the ones that are being taken away from the Social Services today. And I don't like to see – I don't like to see – to continue that happen.

And I drink sometimes but I don't drink very much, back then that I used to be.

When I first hear about my son, I was the one who – I – I heard about it, and it was on – on Facebook – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – on Messenger Facebook.

There's a girl who sent me a message on Facebook, in Goose Bay – a group home.

She told me – on her message she told me: Can you give – can you message to Wally? He won't – he won't respond to me on Messenger – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – he won't respond to me, she – she said.

So I sent a message – I message him at 5:30 in the morning? [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – in the evening and at 5:30 – at five – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – 5:35 – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – he saw – he saw my message – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – but he didn't respond to me back.

So – so I went into my – into my bedroom and then – (inaudible) – and someone message me back to call – to call the RCMPs here – in – in – in that place.

So I called the – so I called in Goose Bay – [Mushuau-aimun] – the group home – so I called the – so I called the group home in Goose Bay.

So I – one of the staff there answered the phone and I told – I asked her to – how are – how are my children doing.

She said wait – wait for a minute and I waited 15 or – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – 15 or 10 minutes, she said.

Then finally – then finally the – the female cop answered the – was – took the phone – (inaudible) – finally the female cop took over the phone and – saying to me – I don't know her name, she said.

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – is this Nympha Rich? [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] Yes.

INTERPRETER NOAH: And she said to me: Is this Nympha Rich and I said yes.

N. RICH: Wally is dead. Wally is dead. Wally is dead. Wally is dead. Wally –

INTERPRETER NOAH: And he said – she said: Wally is dead.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You can take a rest any time – this is too hard – up to you.

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: I can't forget – I can't forget what the female cop told me, that Wally is dead, Wally is dead; and I can't – I can't forget it.

I miss my son. I miss him – I miss him very much.

He would have been still here today if the Social Services gave me a chance – give me another chance to my – for my kids.

And, ah, what I heard, the stories over at group home, they gave me some misunderstanding – or wrong stories, or answers.

And I felt like – I felt like – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] – I felt like someone is doing this to – to him. 'Cause one of the staff told me there that he's hanging by the – by the window.

And the other staff told me he's hanging in the closet.

I – I was at the group home, I went there and look around.

When I looked – when I looked in there I felt like I – I felt like someone is doing to him – someone is doing that to him.

When I looked in the closet, it's – it's not very big – it's small in the closet. How can he do that in – himself in the closet? And when I look by the window it doesn't look – it doesn't seems to look like he can hang – hang him – hang – hang himself in there, by the window and –

I used to tell my – my children, in past, I used to tell them that I don't ever – don't ever do – don't ever hurt yourselves. Don't ever commit suicide and – and I'm – I'm surprised that my – my son did that.

And today when I – when I think about the Social Services now, I think they should give a second chance to give the – the parents to their children back. They should – they should give a second chance to give the kids – their parents – their children back to them.

I know very well today how the Social Services are, since my children were taken away from me. And I – and I think today they should give their – their – the Social Services should give back their second chance to their children – to their parents, before something happens again.

That's it for now, she said.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nympha, thank you very much for your strength and being so brave as to tell these very painful – part of your life.

Did you get that, Justine?

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah, yeah she understands that.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Because we're strangers, myself – maybe – maybe Anastasia knows your family – but Mr. Devine and I don't know your family, so can I ask you some questions to help – in our mind – to help us know more about you?

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yes, she said yes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

First of all, what is your name?

N. RICH: Nympha.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And who are your parents?

N. RICH: Mary Margaret.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

And how many children do you have right now?

N. RICH: Wait, I have to count.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah – well tell – just tell us their names – just tell us their names.

N. RICH: Okay.

Donny Rich, he's 19; Ronny; he's 13; Katie and Kayden, they're 11; Etyanna, he – she's nine – I think.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

N. RICH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

At the time that you're talking about, how many of your children were taken into what is called custody? Can you remember?

[Dialogue between N. Rich and Interpreter Noah in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: I can't remember what year when they were taken away from me, she said, Don and Donny [read: Ronny], and I just have them back, not – not too long ago, she said.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: At the time Wally was taken, how many of your children were taken into custody then; just Wally?

INTERPRETER NOAH: Can you repeat that?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah. Remember – going back to when Wally was in the group home, were any other children of yours besides Wally taken into custody?

N. RICH: Yes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Who was – can you remember who the – who else?

N. RICH: Ronny and Kayden.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: If you think about those days, were they taken out of Davis Inlet right away and down to the group home?

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: They were in Sheshatshiu, that group home first.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

How long was Wally in care before this incident happened? How many months, how many weeks, how many days – can you remember?

N. RICH: No.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

Was it a long time or a short time?

N. RICH: I think it was short time.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Can you tell me how Wally was feeling when he was in care? What was he saying to you?

N. RICH: He always wanted to come home. He keep begging me. He keep telling me to – to ask social workers, and I did.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Can you remember how old he was at the time?

N. RICH: He was only 16 when he took his own life.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Do you have any questions? (Inaudible) yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: As Commissioner Igloliorte said also – you know – the strength and courage you've shown here today are something to be admired in you and – and certainly so sorry to hear of the tragedy of your son.

Again, for – just – sort of, one question, basically, for understanding and just for – I think – focusing more on the future, as you had mentioned. If – if that were to happen today, if your children were to be taken into care or the possibility of it, what would have been a better way to do it, in your mind?

Like to give – you said – talked about giving them a second chance, for example, can you talk a little bit about what you would see – might work –

INTERPRETER NOAH: She can't hear you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh. Okay, sorry.

So when you talked about – earlier about a second chance, my question is: What would that look like today, in terms of if there was that – you know – if Social Services or CSSD were coming to you regarding your children, how would you see it working differently so it would be a better outcome?

Is it clear?

[Dialogue between Nympha Rich and Interpreter Noah in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: Repeat that again, please.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

Maybe I'm not being clear – I'll try to be clearer this time.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Make it a little bit short.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Short – okay.

So you talked about – when you – when you spoke, you talked about – you know – the CSSD giving parents a second chance.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So if it were to happen today, what would that second chance be like? How would you see that happening?

[Dialogue between Nympha Rich and Interpreter Noah in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: I think if the parents get a second chance, I think they would wake up from there, and realize what happened, what's going on in their lives and they would, like, see the – the – see their children look –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible) –

INTERPRETER NOAH: – they would – they would wake up –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And – okay – thank you.

And just one more question: So when this happened, when your children were taken into care in the past were any of – like your – was your mother approached to see if she could provide care, or any other family or kin?

INTERPRETER NOAH: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Did they ask was there somebody else who could care for your children if you can't do it today, like, right now – back – back in that time?

N. RICH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: They used to look after my children in the past, my relatives and – and – and when I was – I – when I was still drinking back then, they used to look after my – my children.

And what is that last question – word that you were saying – you mean about today?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, I'm just asking if – if – if CSSD inquired about other families that could help you with the care of your children at that time. Did they ask you: Is there someone who can help you with your children – with care of your children at that time?

N. RICH: Yes, they asked me.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

All right, thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nympha, if you want to continue telling us about those experiences, things that come back to your mind, you know that we'll be back here several times, so always come in if you'd like to speak further at any time.

But for today, thank you very much for being so brave and we are – we're sorry that you had to go through this experience, but you are helping other people by explaining what went on. You really are helping us and you're helping the Innu in this community as well.

N. RICH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Hold on.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll have a break –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – I'm sorry. Anastasia first.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ten minutes.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Recess

