

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

English Transcript | Volume 7

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What time?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: 1:45.

Thank you.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much for being here and being willing to participate in the Inquiry. Please feel free to begin wherever you're comfortable, and afterwards we might be asking you some questions.

First tell us your name, so that we can have it on the record.

[redacted]**:** My name is [redacted]. I'm one of the members in Natuashish and I have five children and they're all grown up and adults and I have 20 – 20-something, my grandkids.

I'm here to share for my experience and in the path. I don't have CSSD in the (inaudible) of my children but I'll share what I experience and what I see in my community, what's happening to the parents.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much.

[redacted]**:** And another thing is, this morning, about when David was – was talking. I – I – I didn't like – I didn't like this, when people are asking – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

[redacted]**:** Oh the – when he was cut off while he was talking. And he never – because of that – when people are cut off while they're sharing, they forgots what they – they forgot what they supposed to be –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sure.

[redacted]**:** – shared.

So while I'm sharing, I don't want anybody cutting me off while I'm speaking.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Understood.

[redacted]**:** I'll – I'll stop when I – when I'm done.

Anyway, my English is not very good. Like, the – like, the other people can speak really good what – their English. Because English is my second language. So I'll share what I – what – what's in the past, first.

I grow up with my grand – grandmother; she adopted me when I was a baby. I don't – I don't – my grand – my mother never raised me. And while growing up with my grandmother – yes, she was alcoholic, and she taken good care of us by herself. She was a single – single mother to us. There were three of us, raising – raising us, my sister and my – my other – my cousin, but my cousin passed away of commit suicide.

I – I'm enjoying living with my grandmother very much and she teach me a lot of stuff, and listening to her stories as well when she was a young girl. But I didn't – but I didn't take – I didn't take what she was saying. I didn't keep it to myself until I – until I growed up.

And – and I was – she was teaching a lot of stuff about us in – in her own way. She didn't use books like we use now. She do it on her own and – like, when she makes a bread, bannock, she don't measure anything on – while she's making things – while she's cooking. She don't – she already knows what she – she's doing. That's what I'm learning from my grandmother, from her when she's making things.

Like now, today, we use all kind of stuff, like white people stuff. Like, we measure – we measure the stuff when we make something, like, cooking. But I still don't do that. I don't measure stuff when I'm cooking. I just knew how much – what I – what I put in my cooking.

And when – when we was out in the bush, we always there alone with my grandmother. That's how – that's how I know things about – about the – my culture while growing up.

Yeah; I know my grandmother was having a hard time being alone all – all the time by herself. Yes, she was lonely; but I don't – I can't remember when my grandfather passed away. I don't – I don't remember him.

And I agree with David, was – he was saying this morning about not only SC – S – CSDD [read: CSSD] involved in inquiring [read: the Inquiry]. I believe it's for everything what – I believe everything should be – should be in – should be in – like, policing and everything, even the health system.

And all is – I – I also wants to talk about experiencing – about CSSD. Like, they all – when they send the kids out of the province. What I heard, they give them medication for them not to get homesick or get lonely.

Because I know; I took them pills before, too, and the way I feels while I'm taking those medication is I don't feel anything. I don't feel lonely. I feel happy all the time when I'm alone. And I'm – after – after I knows what the medication doing to me, I had to stop them on my own and to deal with my – with – to deal with my own – my – like, I'll say, healing.

To – so – so that's what I thinks, when the kids takes those medication, they feels – they feels good about themselves because – because I know what – I know what them medications feels, when I's take – when I take them before. And when I stop taking them medication, I'm – I'm everywhere. Maybe that's how the kids feels like when – when they stop taking those medication.

There's also another thing that I wants to share about the Social Services. I wants to share about my – my – my brother. He was – he was involved with CSSD, that was in – back in Davis Inlet. He's now over 40 years old now. And my brother is in – he's thinking like a five-year-old; and now – and now my – my sister is taking care of him, because he can't take care of his self.

We – I don't usually saw my brother before coming – to come to visit in Davis Inlet before. And about a long while ago, my brother was talking to my sister about being abused where he was staying. So I – I – my sister asked me to go with him in Sheshatshiu to remove my brother out of the house where she – where he was abused. So we did take him out, where – where he was – where he was in that house.

I can feel what parents are feeling for their – for their children, when they are taken away. I – I – because I – because they're my people, and I love my people very much. It is hard for me to see when – when CSSD takes kids away from their parents. I don't show – I don't show my feelings to others when I feel this way. I – I just feel it – feel it somewhere else.

And when's all this happening, I don't know – I don't know what to do sometimes when there's – when – when there's a SS – S – Social Services takes the kids away from their – from their parents. I have raised a child when she was one week old and she's 17 years old now. But it – but it wasn't adoption. I never signed anything, so I can't stop her when she wants to go back to her parents or …. So she – I just told her that she can go stay with her parents any time she wants. I give her the permission to do that – do that for her, so it's her parents – her own biological parents, to go to them – to her.

I also wanna share something about the – about in the path – past – what I – what I saw about – about kids being taken away, from [read: by] CSSD. I saw – I saw one of my – my cousin. They were taken – they were taken out from her house and the RCMP was involved. I seen this happening all the time – lots of times. I – I always feels emotional when I – when I see this kind of stuff to – to the parents.

And when – and when parents took their kids to the clinic, even the clinic gets involved to Social Services. Why – I was wondering why – why is that? Why is this happening, while this parent took her kid to the clinic to be seen by the nurse? That's why I don't understand that either.

It breaks my heart to see my people get taken their kids away from them. I also used to work at the Healing Lodge as addiction counsellor. And when the parent can come to me, then she wants go to – apply for treatment and – because Social Services sent them – sent them to the treatment, so they can have their kids back after the treatment; but that's not – that wasn't happen.

They keeps coming back – the parents keep coming back after treatment, and they said they will get their kids back after the treatment, but – but I don't see that. And then – and they start – and the parents start drinking again.

I – I – I seen that – I seen that's happening so many times, when Social Services told the parents to go to treatment to – and another – another – another – another something that he had to go.

Other thing is important for – for the parents – I mean for the SC – the Social Services to – to call their parents at home, while they just go in and never – never ask them to come by.

I don't know if that's – and – make any sense, what I'm saying.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: It makes sense.

[redacted]**:** 'Cause sometimes I'm confused when I – when I talks in the public.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, we understand what you're saying.

[redacted]**:** I have – I have my – I kind – I kind it – find hard to speak to – I mean, to share my – my feelings for myself, but I – but I manage. And, I'm – I'll share a little bit of story about myself.

I – I – I used to drink heavily before, too, also, and I abandoned my kids when they were small. So something changed me when I had my first – when I had my first grandson, that's changed my life around. And – he's 15 years old now. I have two grandkids taking care of, and the other girl who's 17 years old now.

It's like, I find a way – it's like the way my grandmother raises us, like, three of us, and that's the way I was raising my – my grandkids.

Yes, it's hard – it's hard where I come from. All seeing this – all seeing these people who are drinking back in – that's where the – in Davis Inlet. I didn't – I didn't know – I didn't know the way the – they were – where they're acting, like, they're – yes, I know they were drinking but I – they were acting, like, I don't know.

So when – when my grandmother used to go out drinking I – I stayed home with my – my – my sister and my cousin. And when I don't have nothing for us to eat, I used to go to someone's house and steal their food just to feed them. Sometimes when I get so angry when we don't have nothing, I just dump their homebrew out, throw their buckets out. 'Cause that's what's makes me angry, when I see people only drinking, not caring – not taking care of us.

And when we don't have nothing for heat in the house, I burn the clothes, just to – for us to have heat in the house. We don't have running water, we don't have water and sewage, whatever, what – there, back in Davis Inlet. Only white people do have running water.

And I also remember when I was in school, they used – the teachers used to make fun of us, and I remember there's two nuns; one of them is – one of them was a teacher and one of them was a nurse. I remember I used to have sore – sores on my head, and I used to go to the clinic, they used to take us to the clinic.

I know there was two – two girls – two girls, me and – and other two girls, bring us to the clinic and they – and this nurse was bathing us in – bathing us in the bathroom in – three of us in a tub. And she was – she was – she was scraping our – our hairs with little – with that little comb, like it's a sharpie-like comb. And they, like they took – comb us with our sores, when we had sores on head, until they – until she's done scraping it off.

And I – and I also see lots of stuff going on in school. With this teacher, what's he's doing to the boys. They haul their – he haul his pants down and make them bend and hit them with the ruler, in their bum. All the – all the students was there. I know this was talkin' about before and they get some monies from it, but I – I knows the – I knows some of them didn't share their stories.

And the teachers used to make fun of girls when they're on their moontime. I didn't sometimes go to school when I'm on moontime. When I told my grandmother I'll go to school but I didn't, I go somewhere else.

I – I'm not – I'm not ashamed what I'm telling my story here of myself, because when I do share with my – my stories, I get so relieved and I know it's really hurtin' – hurtin' me still, but I still have to share it.

And we are late in school, like one – one minute late, we goes to stand up on the wall. We looked at the wall and we stand there how many minutes we're late and sometimes they hit us with the ruler in our – on our hands.

And when I – when I don't go to school, I used to stay out up on the – up on the hill there, by the school there. I just goes there because I couldn't go to school because I'm on moontime. I'm too – I don't wanna get – I don't wanna get make fun of. And when – when that started – when that started – when they – when this teacher was making fun of us; that's when I start sniffing gas, because I see the other people doing it.

This is what makes me sad, when I see people – these teachers who – hurtin' them boys, and these nurse, what they doin' to us. I – I cried hard when – when this nurse comb – combed my hair. And I – and the other girls won't – won't cry because I don't – I don't know.

I saw – I don't – I don't sometimes share for others to what I'm sharing in here right now. But I'm glad I – but I'm glad I'm – I'm here today, and – and to be on – on my – on my healing journey and I'm still – and I'm still going through it.

All this stuff, I've been experience it. It's – it's – ah, I don't how to say it for the …

Sometimes I feels very alone – alone because – because – because I'm – because I don't talk to my mom very much anymore, only once in a while. And I don't talk to my sisters very much either. It's kind – I find it kind of hard sometimes in life, but I manage to talk to my daughters.

Anyway, I want to thank you for listening and maybe I'll share some more some other time.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, [redacted].

I believe that the Innu should tell off government officials and Commissioners and white people, because the white people have been telling off Innu for so long and it's time, like you have done, to explain what our actions and how they have hurt the people for so many hundred years. So when you come in and you tell us that we should listen and not interrupt you, it is good that we get that message from you.

Also, it takes a lot of courage for you to say what you have said and you – you're a very honest person. So we're – we're happy that you have the strength to do that.

Yes, I think you're a leader, and as David Nui told us this morning, the Elder told him: Just because we're changing communities, you know that there are going to be some – a long time before things happen. He told

David: People will start locking their doors, and it won't be as friendly, and it won't be easy.

So it's the same for us when we talk about how the community should take over the care of children, right from the start to the end so that finally we give Innu a chance to do a better job than white people have done – non-Innu have done.

So you're teaching – you're teaching us that, and you're teaching us that you're very proud of your culture, that you love Innu people and that everyone should be given a second chance or a third chance or a fourth chance, and not just close the door after one opportunity.

So these things we have learned from you and from what you're saying.

And I'll ask Mike and Anastasia if they like to have any more comments.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: First of all, thank you for – for speaking to us today. You've said very many profound things in terms of the problems and issues that – and challenges that have been faced, and as Commissioner Igloliorte referred to, from the white people's approach to – to the Innu.

Just one more thing that I would – if I can quote you back, which – a statement which I found quite stirring, and which I've heard now a number of times from others in your community already, and you said something to the effect that: I can feel it – I can feel what people feel while children are taken away because they are my people.

And it's that kind of connection within the community that I find quite – quite stirring, and it really speaks to, I think, the strength that exists in the community and the connections between people.

So thank you for that.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I was just saying, for the record I guess – for the recording – I'm just thanking [redacted] for her contribution and being able to have the courage.

I said: Once you start speaking publicly then you're gonna – it's gonna get comfortable, get easier, because when people start hearing your stories, other people will think about those stories too, and it's not – and that you're not alone. There's so many other stories out there that – within our generation, our parents' generation, what they've been through, even at schools, the experiences she talks about. So I thank her for that.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

We'll take a short break before we go to the next session.

Thank you.

P. RALPH: Thank you.

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[redacted]