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

English Transcript | Volume 9

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Hello, Beverly, so nice to have you here, and your sidekick, Emma.

INTERPRETER ASHINI: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you for being here with us, Emma.

Feel free to talk about anything that interests you, because we need to learn everything we can about your community, your work, your experiences.

B. NUNA: My name is Beverly and I've been working as an Indigenous Representative for the last three years with IRT.

I decided to speak today because I feel like people should know, you know, what we do. You know, we work around the clock with child protection. We work with CSSD.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.] I enjoy working with – with the people, helping people. And when I first started at IRT I didn't know what I was getting myself into. I thought – I was just: Hey, I like working with people. I should work with people.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah. Cool.

B. NUNA: But, you know, I didn't think I was – it was traumatizing.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Ashini and B. Nuna in Mushuau-aimun.]

I'm – I'm a mother to four children, and – well, five, because my nephew's moved in with me, he's a teenage boy. So I – I love children, and I feel – I feel very deeply for other people's children, especially the children that are in care.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.] When I – after – after a year of working at IRT, now I decided that I was gonna be a foster parent, and try to help out in any way I can. And, you know, I said: When I have my house, the foster kids are gonna be coming in and out. And already I have eight children come in and out, and one foster kid.

You know, some of these kids, they don't have anybody. And they don't have anybody because CSSD has a big list of requirements for – you know – visitations. And it makes it very hard for – for the parents to keep up with that. And I feel like, what I see is when parents do all the – all the things on the list, and then when they're done they expect that they're gonna have their kids back, and a lot of the time they don't. They just extend the list.

CSSD extends the list and these parents, they feel defeated when CSSD does that, and that's why a lot of people don't trust CSSD. It's because they have more to add after they're done.

We had this – this – these parents that we were working closely with, and, you know, they've been – they've been in and out of treatment for years, for so many years, and some of their kids grew – grew out of the system. And it's been a year since we've been – since last time that I was dealing with them, and I think they given up.

And there's – there's more and more parents that are like that. They give up and now these children doesn't – don't have anybody make an effort for them.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Interpreter Ashini and B. Nuna in Mushuau-aimun.]

B. NUNA: In my role at IRT I've – I've seen a lot of heartbreaks from families, from the children that are being taken away.

And sometimes – sometimes I would get a call after hours, and there would be, you know, a situation rising and, you know CSSD, they need to place these kids somewhere right away. And immediately I would – I would offer my home.

I believe there's an – a lot of good people at CSSD; they really do try, and some of them even bend the policy for us. But a lot of the time, they – they just can't, and these – these workers at CSSD, their intentions are good but their policy makes it impossible.

And we've seen a lot of CSSD workers quit. They quit. I can't count how many times that I have seen a new face at CSSD and, you know, I'm – they know that, you know, their policy isn't working, and they're not doing anything about it and it's tiring. It's tiring to see that.

And, you know, the parents that are involved with CSSD, they're tired of having new workers all the time, building new relationships.

INTERPRETER ASHINI: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Interpreter Ashini and B. Nuna in Mushuau-aimun.]

B. NUNA: I've – you know, when I was working – while I was working, I took home two babies from the clinic here and into my home. And then the last time, it was – it took a toll on me, you know, as a worker, as a mom, as a friend. And it was very traumatic for me, having to do that twice.

And, you know, there's – these children, they have families. They have families that want them. They – they want them. But CSSD just makes it so hard. They – they – if – if a relative has a criminal record from five years ago, it shouldn't be relevant. It really shouldn't be relevant.

And its stuff like that that prevents a relative from taking in their – you know – the children. And we – we always try to prevent children being flown out and we've been – you know – I guess – we have been making a difference. I know it. At our – with our team at IRT, you know, we try to help CSSD with suitable people for the children to come, but sometimes they make it so hard.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Ashini and B. Nuna in Mushuau-aimun.]

B. NUNA: Um, I think that's – you know, I have unresolved trauma from – I don't wanna tap into; so I'm gonna end it here.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Beverly, tshenashkumitin. Thank you so very much.

Your level of knowledge and your insight into how things work – more importantly, what does not work – is really helpful to us. Also, your insights of how things could work better is really useful for us.

The Commission can tell the community that we will be looking into extensive records, in the police detachment here, in CSSD's work here, and also what is in the government. And I am sure when we look at those records, those policies, those reports, they will back up what you are saying.

We know that there is much work to do with respect to a child protection in the Innu communities. We know that if you want work, you'll always have work in child protection here. But we know that with your support, and so many people like you, it should be a much better way of taking care of children.

Also, on behalf of the community, we want to say thank you for your work in actually taking care of children as well, not only in

the office. The good thing is, it's not left up to just one or two people. We have heard from so many families, relatives who are willing to step up.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I was just saying, too – I keep forgetting to translate for myself – that I want to thank her for her contribution, and that hopefully, that we will have more opportunities to hear from other staff the challenges that they face working, and looking at opportunities, what works in our communities.

And I thanked her for her contribution as a foster-care provider. That is a big contribution that she is making to the community and to the children, so thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Michael, please.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Not a whole lot to add after Jim and Anastasia's comments, but just to echo them and also to say once again, thank you for your contribution through IRT to your community, as well as being a foster parent.

One question, I don't know if you can answer this in – from your position, but do you know about how many children would have gone out of the community, say, in this past year?

INTERPRETER ASHINI: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: About.

INTERPRETER ASHINI: – [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

B. NUNA: I don't have a number at the top of my head, but it's around 50 that are placed outside this community.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So 50 today in total?

B. NUNA: Yeah.

But there's around 150 in care –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

B. NUNA: – from Natuashish. Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Thanks.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so very much. Thank you.

Ten minutes please.

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