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

English Transcript | Volume 18

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

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INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

F. PINETTE: Hi, my name is Frederick Pinette. I moved back here back in 2006, when my mother passed away. She had cancer.

You know, I never had any issues with the CSSD until the past eight years. All the history they're talking about nowadays is about what happened to our ancestors. Mistreated, physical abuse, sexual abuse, all that. You guys know that now.

I grew up in Schefferville, back in 1983, and then, I was taken away when I was probably eight, nine years old. Back then in Quebec, Quebec law used to be if a kid don't go to school, CSSD would be involved. We had to go to school. Or if we get sick, the principal would come in our house, put a – to push us to go to school. Which I never graduated of anything – going – have a degree or anything like that, you know?

And then my grandfather told me one time, I quit school. I quit school – I didn't want to learn French. Back then it was French, yeah? I used to go in the school French – French school.

And then my parents became alcoholic. There was no drugs back then and I seen violence. Violence, what happened, and I lost a brother back in '92.

The first time the CSSD in – from Quebec took us I was about 13 years old. It was hard – to get separated from your parents. Where am I going? What's going to happen to me? That's the kind of question that I had.

And they put me in the French – with French people. So I stayed there. That's the first time I ever had rules in my life. Rules, you know, and a routine. If I wouldn't do anything, what my foster parents ask me to do – you little Indian, you go to your room and stay there.

I'm not Indian. I'm not from India, you know? I used to talk like that. I talk back. I'm not gonna let anyone disrespect me. They want to show us the disrespect. If you expect respect – you gotta give respect to receive respect.

Well, you know, and then my dad went to – incarcerated for three years. I was about 14 years old, back then. And then from there, three years I was taken away, but I went back to my parents – to my mom 'cause my dad was incarcerated. He was doing federal prison in Montreal, Donnacona.

You know, I seen violence, I seen parties, I seen a lot, back in the day. There was no law. Men used to beat up women on the street. That's how it used to be in Quebec.

And then I became a father when I was 17. I found out I was gonna be a father. You know, I get excited and worried and you got that feeling: I'm gonna be a father. I'm gonna have to teach my kids what's needs to be taught, like in school.

And then my daughter – and then when I was with my daughter back in 2003, she was only three years old. And then when my – something happened to my daughter. She had the guts to tell his dad: Dad, somebody touched my private. She was 13 back then.

So I arrange a flight to go get my daughter back to my custody. Ever since, my daughter has stayed with me and when she was 13, she asked questions for herself. She said: Dad, what is about life?

Life is about go to school, graduate, become a RCMP, become someone, work for the government, nursing, you know? And she's 21 today and she's pursuing her dream. She's in college. She's doing practical nurse. I'm proud of my daughter to listen to me. Tell her what's – what is about life.

And then I met another woman back in 2015. I didn't have any issues with the CSSD or anything like that, and I have two daughters on my own and they're all grown up. One, she's 21; the other one is 19.

The 19, I see her now, she's struggling with relationship. But I tell – I keep telling her, you know, 'cause I've been there. Relationships and all that, broken heart, suicide thoughts, all that. But I talk to my daughter and so I tell her he's not the only man in this earth, right?

And then I met this woman, she had a – I met my partner back in 2015 and made another baby. My baby, she's now seven years old. I name her after my name: Fredericka Putuiskuess Pinette.

She was probably only three years old when she was taken away. There was no safety plan; they just apprehended my kids like that. And I keep fighting, almost seven years and when we goes to court, they don't let you speak for yourself; it's all about CSSD can say negative things.

First, they said I was selling cocaine; second, they said I was drinking; third, they said I was hurting one of the workers. It don't make sense. And all the effort I done for them – they want me to go treatment, they want me to go anger issues – it's frustrating for me, you know?

And then they wanted me to go to treatment, I goes to treatment and I graduate parenting and I learned the history. History about what happened to our ancestors. What they done to the babies. How they get the mental health.

The government always try – always took the lives of the Natives – still today. I'll tell you a story about someone else in my community. I'm not going to mention any name, but it's really sad. There was a woman there, too, who lost her kids and committed suicide. And now I see the boy walking around in our community without a mom.

That frustrates me. I don't want ever that happen to my kids. Now I got a grandchild; my stepdaughter had a baby. Still today, I'm still fighting for the CSSD and every time I goes to court, I can't even speak for myself. I know to be a parent you gotta give the love, the peace and joy. All those rules I came from, the CSSD didn't like the way my rules were.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I don't want to interrupt you, except we really would like to allow translation into Innu-aimun so let's see how much –

F. PINETTE: Okay, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – you got there. You might have to repeat.

F. PINETTE: All right. I want –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Let's try it.

F. PINETTE: All right.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay, thank you very much.

And did you want to add anything else – did she forget anything?

F. PINETTE: I'm not done yet. I'm halfways.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, keep talking.

F. PINETTE: Okay.

Then I met this woman, ah? We were together about nine years. And she had a file with the CSSD with her other kids. And the kids were taken away to Roddickton. That was back in two – that happened before I met her, you know? And then I got her pregnant and now my daughter, she's seven years old.

And then they – every time I goes to them, they're always negative, negative, you know? You can't even explain for yourself in court and I'm – sometimes I'm tired thinking about it. Like, when are my kids – will come home. Two of my sons are not even home yet.

My baby daughter, she wasn't in custody, the newborn, the eight months. I brought her here this morning. And it's the same old story all the time with them: Lies, lies, lies after lies, you know? And then one time I got so tired and then – I got so tired of the CSSD, I said: Okay, I'm tired of you guys. If you're gonna decide to bring my kids back home for good, then you contact me.

And then they put my kids – the teenagers, stepdaughters, they're all home and my baby, eight-month-old, she's home. And my daughter – my other daughter lives with my sister and I don't get how they proceed like – how come they don't want to return all my children in once so we can be a happy family again? So we can have love, peace and joy. So we can spend time with their kids.

And still today, I still fight for my kids and my son. They never brought my son once here. Now he's – my kids lost their language. I'm not a – proud of, you know? I'm not proud of that. Now my kids – I have to speak English in my household, you know, English. I only got one baby. I – she gonna have to learn Innu, her own language.

And when the kids – my stepkids were in Roddickton, CSSD wanted me to bring my Fredericka. She's seven years old now; she was baby back then. So we went back and forth visiting my stepkids so they can know their little siblings.

So one year, I done what they told me to do – once they told me to do, I said: Nope, that's enough. No more listening to you guys. Now, I want my stepkids to come in our community where they belong.

Oh, that's gonna be hard to do. No, it wasn't hard for you to apprehend kids; it's not gonna be hard for you to bring the kids back in our community. Which they agreed. Now my stepkids are teenagers. One of them 16; the other one is 14.

I may have been struggling with the parenting part. There were disagreements with my stepkids. It has to be always yes; when I say no, it's no, you know? You're not gonna go your own way. If you want to go your own way – oh.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup, good.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

F. PINETTE: And then, the CSSD agreed to bring the kids in our community. Then the kids came, the kids – my stepchildren thought they were white. They didn't even know they were Native. They were small back then.

And they said – then they called me dad, 'cause their dad is never gonna be there. 'Cause of the – their real biologic dad, he has a problem with alcohol still. Still in the – how can I say? How can I explain that? Probably, problems, like irresponsible –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We understand.

F. PINETTE: – like, alcoholic and addict, you know?

But ever since I got those kids back and then they came back to the reserve, they were surprised. Took them to the gathering, they were surprised and they asked me: Why do we have to stay in tent?

And I told them the story, what happened in our history. This is how our ancestors used to live with the caribou skin, making tents. But the new design with the Innu tents, this not our design. It came from army style. Our real design is caribou skin and – you know? And I explained to the kids where we came from, who is the Innu. Those are my stepkids.

And then the CSSD tell us: They gonna just be here one week and they will return to Roddickton. And then I see my partner, my girlfriend, crying, sad, lonely, saying: They're gonna bring the kids back. So, that hurt me to see family like that and it's my partner and my stepkids.

On top of that, they drug the kids. They drug my stepson, 'cause my stepson – kids, they're hyper, they're happy, they're excited. You know what they done to my kid? They drug his brain. So the kid can just sit down and don't move.

But when he got back to our reserve, Jack Penashue was still working in over there. I go see Jack Penashue, I say: I don't know what to do. My woman is crying, sad and lonely, is talking about the kids going to return to Roddickton. So, I said: No, it's not gonna happen. Not today.

So, I contact the Chief. I seen the Chief on the news. This is why I contacted the Chief. I seen the Chief and the – all the people going all the way to St. John's, bring our children home – bring our children home.

So I says to the Chief: Okay, Chief, I seen you a couple days ago, a couple weeks ago, you were on TV and you wanna bring the children home. We got children from Roddickton and I don't want them to go back. Are you gonna help me? We gonna do a meeting? You're gonna have to do it and I don't want the children to go back.

And then he said – I brought my stepkids with me, all three of them. I said: I don't have the power to – I don't have the – I told my stepkids: I don't have the power to keep you in this reserve. This guy have the power, the Chief.

And then like – the – my stepchildren saying to the Chief: We don't wanna go back. And the Chief says to the kids: I'll make it happen.

So, we had a meeting.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to stop you once more and Anne can –

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

F. PINETTE: And then they – and then we had a meeting and they really wants the kids to go back to Roddickton. The Chief contact St. John's, whoever was there on that meeting, and I even explained to them like, I will do anything to get you back in the community and they – ever since, the kids were back.

Now they're teenagers. One of them has a baby. And they didn't – my stepkids, they didn't like me the way I parenting them, you know? When you say no, it's no.

And then we had a big meeting and the big boss of CSSD was there. We talked to the people, the political people from St. John's on the phone, and we made it happen. So the kids never returned to Roddickton ever.

But one of them, we were struggling with one of the oldest. She really wanna return to Roddickton. I says: You don't belong there.

And on today, the things I see with the CSSD, how they proceed in the past, some of them, they return. They're like 30, 40 years old. They're lost. And I asked the CSSD: Since you took the Native away from Innu care, how many succeeded in life? How many succeeded in life when you took them away from their parents? How many succeeded? Oh, I don't have a number for that. I said: You got none – you got none.

And the suicide – I almost suicide myself and I'm gonna tell you. Almost got a gun and go to that office and shoot myself in the front of the door. That's how they frustrated me. No, I decide no. I'm not gonna do the stupid thing. I was going to do it, but I said to myself, no.

Just to look at the government, the way they acts. You know, the trauma, how many people they broke: our Natives, Inuit. Just go to LCC. Only Natives on there? That's the trauma. That's what the government – what happened in decades, they said they're gonna learn in residential school.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

F. PINETTE: Okay, I gotta go. Sorry.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No sweat.

F. PINETTE: Just got an emergency.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, no problem. Very sorry.

So, we'll take a few minutes break and then make a determination of where we are. Just five minutes.

Thank you.

(Inaudible.) Feel free to check out the tent. It's all nice and warm out there if you want a change of ambiance but we're going to be back here again in about 10 minutes.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Audio silence. No recording loss; mics not yet enabled.] – that impacts people.

So, you – please continue with your statement.

F. PINETTE: Yeah, in the way I was talking about traumas, some people have seen a lot, right? And some of my friends committed suicide. And I'm proud of myself I'm still here, 40 years old, you know? Never give up. I lost a lot of my friends. What happened to them in their own history.

But the kids got back in our community and they're still here. And it's just two of my sons never returned home yet. They don't make sense. The CSSD don't make sense. They say they wanna help you and when you goes to court they were – they're – they have statements with negative. Negative statements.

They send us to treatments. Only three of my daughters are home and my other daughter is still living with my sister. And every time we goes to court it's the same old story. They never even mention once: Oh, he graduated from treatment. Oh, Frederick done this. Frederick visits his kids, visit – none of that.

It's all negative: Oh, Frederick's selling cocaine. Oh, Frederick that. And I asked myself one day: When – is there going to be a day so I can speak for myself in court?

Ever since, like, the past six years, you know, same old story: postpone, postpone, postpone, postpone, postpone, postpone. All the children lost their language, now we gotta speak English.

Like I said, I learned my English since I move out here 20 years ago. I couldn't even say a word. Couldn't even say a word in English. My own language is my own language, like, Innu, French, and I learned to speak English. I done my carpentry course in English. My average were 86, 90. I graduated.

Since I moved back to Labrador, since my mom passed away, I stayed here. And then this – the only issue I've been having with the CSSD, they keep postpone; they keep badmouthing about us. Always same.

One time I asked them to bring my son and then we had to go back to home. And the way they want us to visit my son, they wants us to visit virtually. Don't make sense. And they gave us the oldest and the baby and my five-years-old boy, he still lives with white people, and why is that?

I asked them to bring my son one time so he can get to know us. But that never happened and they even said we don't wanna visit our son. I would – I disagree with them. Why would I visit my son just to FaceTime? No.

And my son, he lost his language. I know the Innu language is not important as you are, right? Some white people, some Inuit people learn our language. I want my kids to learn their language like the teenagers, my stepdaughters. They're learning the Innu since they got brought to the community. They're learning. Sometimes they try to speak Innu to us. They try to understand the words. Well, we explain to them what's – what don't – what word that mean.

Well, even my stepdaughters, I explained to them it's really important. Education is important. You – these days it's really

important. It's us – as a parent, it's me to push my children to school to succeed. Just like what I done with my 21-year-old, even my stepdaughters. The 16-year-old, keep going to school.

I want to avoid the struggle we've been. I want them to succeed in life. That's like one of my – my 21 daughter – 21-year-old daughter, she's doing it. She's in college now, right at the moment. She's in college.

I'm proud of myself, the way I spoke to my daughter. Now, she's doing this for herself so she can succeed. I don't want her to struggle like we struggled in our generations. Struggle with problems – family problems. Struggle – and how we are struggling with the CSSD.

You know, just like I said to you guys, almost committed suicide in front of their building 'cause I was sick and tired of it overwhelming. And then I said to myself: No. What about if I – I'm not here, what's going to happen to them, ah? What's going to happen to my kids if I'm not here? If I done what I want – I was gonna do last year?

I know, when my mom taught me, a hug – a hug is really important. To hug a kid, tell them you love them. Our ancestors, they seen it.

Now you government, after they done so much damage to our Natives, they get what, 200,000? My father got 150,000 just to make them shut up. So we can forget about our history, our – I'm not gonna forget my history. I'm 40 years old; I'll keep talk about it.

And then, we have problem in our reserves all over Canada: suicide, alcohol, drugs, all that. I seen a lot when I was young, you know? My grandparents doing caribou, share. It wasn't like nowadays, we live by – nowadays, your government – I'm a hunter myself. I hunt caribou and now your government don't want us to hunt no more. I still eats Innu food. I know how to cook Innu food. I learn it from my grandparents. I learn it from my parents. I still have that in me.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to interrupt you once more so that Anne –

F. PINETTE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

F. PINETTE: Done?

INTERPRETER NUNA: Mm-hmm.

F. PINETTE: Well, that's like – it's frustrating, too. If I go there today to ask for a visit with my son, which I don't want a visitation with my son in virtual.

We don't have any power. They all decides what they wants to do, you know? I even asked them: I want my son for the weekend so he get to know us. Nope, nothing has been done. I'm just waiting for them to bring my son so we can be a family again. So he can have a routine with our kids.

But, I'm glad I'm here to explain, you know? It's been seven, eight, years now back and forth, back and forth. Well, I'm glad we're where we at, but it's just the thing is – bugs me is my sons. How come my sons are not returned and the others are returned? And how come they want me to visit my son. He's my son. He came from inside of me.

If they look at me as a failure; I'm not a failure. If I was a failure, I wouldn't be here by now. Probably I would be six feet underground. The struggles – you know.

Even my parents always pushed me to go to school. The priest said I was that kind of guy who did not listen. But I know I can succeed, whatever I does in my life. I know there's going to be a struggle but I still have to.

And I'm glad to be here to express myself. To express how I feel, how we've been mistreated, how – you know? Yeah, I get mad at them. That's normal. Everybody gets frustrated by them. I – I'm just hoping me

sitting here talking, hopefully things will change, how they process – how they proceed things.

When I was looking at the news one time, even one of their workers – their own workers – they said they have a poor management, which is true. They took away one kid in another reserve and guess what happened? The kid, he's six feet underground. And they were talking about it on the news, how the CSSD social workers felt about their poor management.

And I will stand – I will stand all the time and I'm not gonna give up. I'm not gonna give up. Just like other parents done. I will chase my happiness with my kids, my children. If anything happened to them, anything at all, I'll be there for them, even my stepdaughters. I've been in their life past eight years. They calls me dad. Sometimes they disagree with me. When it's no, it's no and if they don't listen to me – nowadays it's Internet. There's no communication like it used to be in our generation.

In our generation, we used to play outside, have fun. No technology – no technology, yeah? There's no communication in our – in my house. Everybody's on the phone. That's in their generation. It's not like in the old days, us, so happy going in country with our parents. It's not like that anymore. Since the governments take away our rights to hunt caribou. He's taking away everything.

Now the government, he sells weed. How fucked up is your government? Selling weed. Now, our new generation, we have a problem with the mental health about weed. One of my stepdaughters use weed and she had that problem hearing voices. Your government don't make sense.

In 19th centuries, they said we're gonna teach – like, our – my ancestors, my grandfather. My grandfather's father, he was – that's the one who has passed it on: physical abuse, physical – sexual assaults. All that, it came from priests. And the priest one time ask me: Why do – how come we don't have many people now? I told the priest: Did you see the history, what they done to our ancestors? That's what's going on.

Back in the days, you had to go to church. After everybody found out what's – what kind of lies was that. All the government created all those status, Jesus Christ; nowadays, what do you see when you go to church when somebody commit suicide?

The priest will say: Oh, oh, he's going to heaven. And there's children in our community goes to church and listens to that – to the priest: Oh, he's going to heaven, and that's why the suicides keep coming back here. That's why people don't go in churches no more.

My grandfather's father, that's the one who went to residential school and learned physical abuse, sexual, all that. All the negative and pass it on to my grandfather, and then pass it on to my dad and they try and pass it on to me. I stopped that cycle. The cycle of physical abuse, the cycle of, you know, disrespecting, mistreating. Me, I'm a father who's gonna love, be there, attention – give attention, hug my kids. I done everything for my daughter to not commit any suicide, what happened to her in the past.

It's really sad, you know? It's sad to see. But the new generation, like my kids, my children, I don't want them to struggle. I want them to succeed. I want them to go to school. I want them out of the reserve. Do something. If you wanna work for the government, go RCMP. If you wanna work for the nurse, go for it.

Now, one of my daughters is doing it, for herself. She's 21. She's in college. And it's frustrating when you're a father. When you're a father and try to get your kids back, it's a hard struggle. Struggled a lot with the CSSD, same old story. Even – I even asked them to come to my graduation one time; they didn't even wanna show up. If they wanna work with us, just keep your words. Don't lie to us.

Now, what I see here, me sitting here, what's that's gonna change? Nothing.

Nothing will change. It's just a story. Even the – some people didn't even know what's going on when I was in treatment with white people. I was in the white people treatment one time. They even know their – our history. The – they're like us, they're lost. Don't know who they are. What are the purpose in life? What – you know?

But in our reserve there's so much done now. Things change and then the government gonna give funds. It's really sad, though. Like, I feel sorry for that boy, you know? Lost her mom, no mother and she walks – he walks around on the reserve. That wouldn't be my kids. I took the right choice to not do it.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to interrupt you –

F. PINETTE: And –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Oh, go ahead.

F. PINETTE: Okay.

And I was talking to a lawyer one time. I told him they were trying to bring the CSSD and the cops at my house. I said: Do what you gotta do. I'll do anything for my kids to protect them. It's not the authorities gonna scare me like that, no. And they try to bring the cops and all that, no. I disagree with them.

It's really sad though to see the people – a lot of suicide. How do you – the government created, you know? I seen some people were taken away back in '70s and they come back to Shesh, some of them commit suicide. They're lost. They don't even know who they are – confusion. But I'm glad I'm here to explain myself, but nothing will change even though I speak to you guys. Nothing will be done. I've been seeing this Inquiry over a year now. Nothing has been done.

You just wanna hear the stories and make up stories from the Innu, well, what else? What's here's gonna change? Nothing. Once I'm done my meeting here nothing will change. Just think about it, now your government sells drugs. He used the doctors to approve that. I wonder if the government and how he – how much – he must make billion dollars for the weed. I see that. Don't make sense to me.

I – this is how much it don't make sense, Canada of government – the federal government: Okay, there's a war in Russia and they don't want to do business with the Russians and they take away the vodka all over liquor stores all over Canada. This is how stupid the government – federal government, provincial government are.

And now, teenagers are using. They have mental health, schizophrenia. They're not gonna be able to learn. They're gonna be retarded.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to get Anne to translate.

F. PINETTE: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to give you a chance to finish up for the day, but you're always invited to continue –

F. PINETTE: So, when there's changes going to be made? That's the only question I have for you. When the changes gonna be made?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: The only answer we have for you at this point is to say: Our job is to listen; tell the governments and the Innu Nation what we heard; and we all believe that the way things are working today is not working. Do – we have new suggestions based on what you said about how things should change.

When? Who knows –?

F. PINETTE: When –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – who knows, who knows?

F. PINETTE: I don't think it's never gonna change. I don't think it's gonna change.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: But, please, come back if you're not finished – please.

F. PINETTE: All right.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And thank you very much.

F. PINETTE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

F. PINETTE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So, we'll convene tomorrow morning at 9:30. People were wondering when, it's 9:30. Okay, I have a note, 9:30 – yeah. And tomorrow night it's from 9:30 to 4:30, and then we're back again from 5 to 7 tomorrow night.

Thank you very much.

ELDER ANTUAN: [Audio silence. No recording loss; mics not yet enabled] – the residential schools in our area and in all, everywhere in Canada.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

And have a good day – a good evening.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Sir.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You, too.