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

English Transcript | Volume 19

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

We're about to start with a prayer.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER J. MICHEL: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, good morning, everybody.

Since we're about to start, just a few things to say before we have our first presenter. And as mentioned yesterday, we have healing services workers here and I wanted to call their names so that people would know who they are.

So if you're feeling you need to talk to somebody and need some support. If you're the one that's talking then you can have someone there with you. So, I'll just give you the names of the people here and – so that you know who they are. So, the first name I have is Edward Nuna. Edward is – just stepped out; Audrey Snow –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Audrey.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – Audrey is here. Michel Nuna; Nanshi Rich is in the tent; and our consultant, Louise Bradley; and Elizabeth Sheppard is our counsellor.

Okay so, again, it's really important that people are aware that as they hear somebody speak or as they're speaking, there can be – you know, it can bring up memories and – that you don't expect or emotions you don't expect. So if you need someone to talk to then those are some people. But also, if you have family and friends that you can reach out to then just think about that now and – in case that you do need to contact somebody.

Also, just wanted to mention again the tent. There is a tent outside and it's heated. So it's a place for people to go if they want to rest or just to have some quiet space and quiet time.

And, finally, we have coffee down here to my left and some food. So if people want to avail of that, it's there for you throughout the day.

Care to say anything?

C. URQUHART: Thank you, Commissioners.

Oh, sorry.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: No, go ahead.

I just wanna welcome everybody. And our first speaker will be Mânîmat – Martha Andrew, for this morning, and Penote.

So you can go over the housekeeping.

C. URQUHART: Thank you.

Tshenashkumitin, Commissioners.

Good morning, everyone. Nin au Caitlin and I am one of the lawyers with the Commission, and as most of you know, we'll be here for this week from 9:30 to 4:30 most days, but this evening we're holding a special session from 5 to 7 p.m.

Each session – morning, afternoon and evening – we schedule two speakers and in order to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to speak, we ask everyone to keep their statement to one hour. After our scheduled speakers, anyone in the room is invited to speak and if you would like to speak or to sign up for a time to speak, please connect with Nathan Penashue, our community liaison, or Paula Battcock, who's at the back of the room here, at the red table.

We're so grateful to Anne Nuna to – for being here to translate for us. These sessions are being recorded and are public; however, the recordings and the names of the speakers will only be shared with the permission and on the request of the speaker and so we also offer the opportunity for private meetings if people do not want to speak in public like this.

And you'll also notice today that we have photos around the room. If you see anyone you recognize, we have Post-its at the back and you can write their name and stick it next to their photo so that we can have some record of who's connected to who and help the *Them Days* collection to identify some of the folks in these photos.

So if anyone has any questions, please feel free to ask Nathan or Paula or myself, or Peter or any of the Inquiry team. We're happy to answer your questions anytime. This morning we're gonna hear – as Commissioner Qupee mentioned, we are gonna hear from Marie Martha Andrew and Penote Antuan. This afternoon we're going to hear from Matthew Andrew and Simeon Tshakapesh and this evening we're gonna hear from Chelsea Penashue.

So we're – have a full day today and now I'm gonna welcome Marie Martha.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mânîmat, welcome and we invite you to talk about anything that you wanted to bring to the Inquiry.

ELDER ANDREW: Good morning, everybody.

I would like to welcome the Commissioners, again, and to listen to our stories. And I'm thankful Audrey's sitting here for – with me for support and I appreciate that. I'm a bit nervous, but I'm going to try to tell my – how I look at what's happening or what has been happening for a lot of years. Like, through watching my people being damaged.

First of all, I would like to say I want you to see the difference, like, when our parents were in – living in Nutshimit; that's in the bush, the country. They were raised – like their – my brothers and some of my sisters – two of my sisters and I think three of my brothers were born in the country and I see the difference in them. Like, they haven't been into – they love the country. They love to go there and take their kids there and teach them that way of life.

And then I see, as we were in 1960, I was born across the river at the hospital when there was no cable car yet. And I see the changes when my mother and them were in the community and that's when there were a lot of changes. We seen a lot of people. There was a priest, there was doctors and teachers and a lot of people, which was very new to the people in the community of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, too.

And then we started to see changes. People were – like, with social issues. There were – people started to drink, people started to – then we seen some neglect of the children. But before they were really taken care of. People looked after them really well in the bush and it was them that did all the work. Nobody interfered and as soon as that was taken away from them, then you could see the difference.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mânîmat –

ELDER ANDREW: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – allow me to jump in here and give Anne –

ELDER ANDREW: Oh, Anne.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, no, not to worry. That's fine. She can do it.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER ANDREW: I had to write down some notes 'cause I forget what I wanted to say.

Like, if you have to come in the community and ride around, because I see it myself and I witness it. Social workers or CSSD will come in the community and they will apprehend a kid, a child. And – but they're being accompanied by the RCMP, so that's support for them.

But what I'm trying to say is: How would you feel? Like, just try to imagine if you're standing there with your child being taken. I bet you would try to fight.

They take the children and take them outside and the young child, it's so small. Sometimes it makes me wonder how that child feels when he's out in – outside of this area. Could be in Newfoundland; could be in Ontario. Do they really know the people, the foster parents? Do they know them really well to put that child in there? Do they know if the foster parents have criminal records? Do they investigate? Do they really, actually know them people?

And them small kids can't speak for themselves. Like, being in a very new environment, they must be scared. That's what – like, how do they treat them?

I know – do you want to repeat that?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER ANDREW: And what I was gonna say, too, is are they, the foster parents out in Newfoundland or Ontario, are they abusive to the kids? 'Cause the kids, they don't – they can't speak for themselves. They talk in their language when they leave and they can't understand, like as a small child, what these people are saying.

And another thing is, you take kids, like an older person, and they're out in Ontario somewhere and that's a big loss there. They lose their language, they lose their culture, they don't know anything about their history; so, when they come back here, they seem like they don't belong. And yet, he's an Innu person.

But what the – this person once said to me: It's very hard when you – when you're out there and you come back at – when you're old enough to return back home; I have no hope. That person kept coming back then finally he overdosed.

These are our people and we care about each other because everybody in this community knows everyone. It's – what I'm trying to say, it's easy for me to say it but very hard to when you're dealing with non-Native people. They look at things differently. It's very tiring, draining, emotional, when you have to work with people that don't understand nothing about Innu.

All I want to say is, like, to give back our children and our right to control our people and our services. You guys has been too many, many years. Like, some people that had wanted to see changes have passed away. They never had the chance to see it coming.

Sometimes I feel like – you know how the cows are put in the field or other types of animals that people – the farmers look after. It's like if they wanna run away, you try and catch them and get them back in the field. That's how I feel. That's the way I look at it. You can't go outside, you break the law. You do something right, trying to do – fighting for your – what is yours, but then they looked at it: You're wrong.

We're not wrong. We are human beings just like anybody else here. It's very – I know people will – like, it's not only gonna be me. It's gonna be a lot of people crying, telling their stories, telling their testimonies. It's not only gonna be me. There's gonna be younger people, too.

Like, if I – I'm glad that I had the – to say this to people. Sometimes it feels like it's so much. I know there's a lot of work to be done but at least it's getting started. And I'm thankful for the Commissioners for doing the – gathering our voices and to be heard. It's good to be – to talk and let your feelings out.

And before, I used to be – I felt like – to be honest with you, I felt very powerless. But when I see Innu people, when I look at them, when they speak, when they protested, they were powerful. And it was good that it was a non-violent protest we used because if you used a violent protest, it doesn't – I don't agree with that.

And that's what I would like to say to CSSD. I know they have policies to follow, but let us make our own policies. Maybe it will work. Give us the chance. Give us back our children. They aren't yours, they're ours.

Go on.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER ANDREW: And I'd just like to thank everyone for listening, and thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin.

And Mânîmat, we thank you for your kindness, your thoughtfulness, your encouraging words and your expression of how we should look at these issues through the eyes of the Innu, and how you're encouraging us to say that the Innu should be given the opportunity to direct policies like these for child protection and child welfare.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Just a couple of comments, too.

First of all, thank you for your words. Some very thoughtful things that you said in terms of, you know, the change has been so long – that you're waiting for changes and that you haven't seen them yet. But, I like the way you talk about, on the last little bit about how – to give the people a chance to develop their own policies.

And I would hope, and certainly I think, that's where the three of us, Commissioners, are is that it has to be an Innu-led kind of change. That they're the ones who are controlling what happens.

So thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I just wanna say that I want to thank Martha for joining us here this morning. I think it's important to always tell those stories, to share those stories with – either through government representatives sitting with us to listen, as well, and to listen about the history and the changes, and the changes that we're going through now. And so giving the opportunity for people to come forward and tell their stories, helps us all to understand.

And, again, I wanna thank her for joining us.

Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

I notice at the back of the room, we just had a couple of our St. John's team come to the community because we wanted to make sure that even people who work in the offices as part of the Inquiry, look at the names and hear the names of all the documents that they are reviewing for us, and they have to see the faces of the people, they have to see the community. And they were extremely happy to have been invited to come here to Sheshatshiu and appreciate what the community looks like, how the people speak so eloquently.

And they have – what they have to do is sit in an office and review documents that come from governments. So we want to give them the real experience. So we have Heather and –

C. URQUHART: Kandice.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Kandice.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Kandice.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – Kandice in the back there. Really glad to have you.

And we're gonna take a break now for –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Anne gotta translate.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – 10 or 15 minutes.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.