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

English Transcript | Volume 20

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, again, folks.

We're going to pick up where we left off, and the next presenter is David Rich.

Also, we have two people speaking this afternoon. No one's scheduled for 5 to 7, so this'll be the last two speakers for today.

The Inquiry welcomes David Rich.

Thank you very much for being here and being willing to speak with us.

D. RICH: Yeah, I –

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

D. RICH: My name is David Rich and I'm glad to be here today and say a few words.

[Dialogue between David Rich and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

D. RICH: I heard people speak, I came here when they first started. And I work with the Mary May Healing Centre, I'm a counsellor. And I work with the treatment centre, and

I'm glad that I work with them and listen to them as they – I sits with them when they're – when they share. It was – it is hard to see the younger people, younger generation, where they came from, not knowing where to turn to.

To me, growing up from the drinking and the violence, I don't know – I never knew where to turn to. I seen my father rang – mad.

Can you gimme a minute, please? I'm gonna have to pray.

Yeah, it is hard to go back in the past. I never understood growing up and I lived it, the anger. As I getting older and I come to see where it came from. Like when there is drinking, I used to stay away from home. I was 15 years old when I have panic attacks and I didn't know what causes it. I went to the hospital and they didn't say anything, 'cause there were no counselling or anything like that. They just sent me over, they just told me I needed to go somewhere.

So – and then I grow – as I – my dad then, they always go in the country. But I only stayed a week in the country and start feeling good again. All the anxiety is gone. But when we come back it started getting to me again and then – and I can feel it. I can – I notice it's only when I'm back in the community.

So I stayed – so I moved out my house, I stayed with my grandfather and grandmother. They used to have – they used to go to Mud Lake, town nearby, and I used to spend a lot of time with them. My grandfather built his own little cabin made of cardboard boxes and plastic over, and it kept us warm. I used to go with my grandfather every time he goes hunting and realize this is what I've been missing.

And my parents, as I grow older, I was 16, I think, they start going in country, so I said they're gonna be safe. So I went out and trapping. Do all the trapping. I mean, I used to go out and feel so free. We'd live off the land, birds, fish. We didn't have to go to the store. We walked everywhere when we wanted to get something.

But listening to my clients that I've been working with, they're so hurt and they're so mad and angry at their parents. I said: We don't need to do that. It's all come from when we moved here, 'cause it's not their fault they gone back drinking, they got nothing to do. All they see is alcohol, smoking.

And sometimes I feel like if you can help us break the cycle of what we brought here for, in the middle of nowhere, I can say it, that the younger generation wouldn't go through.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to interrupt you, simply because we need Anne to translate.

D. RICH: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

D. RICH: And I'm so happy I sober up. I have three boys and three girls. Me and the wife were separated for 18 years 'cause of the alcoholism and the pain, I guess. But I sobered up and I have three step – two stepdaughters. They were only – one was two years old and the other one was four, I believe, when we were back together and I'm so happy to raise them as my own.

If I never sobered up with forgiveness in my heart, I would never raise them the way I raise them.

This fall, one of them went to university in Corner Brook, going to school, and the other one is going to be finished next year. And I'm so happy for them that the way I raised them.

And I'm so glad that me and my partner sobered up together after 16, 17 years, I believe, we were separated. It is hard where we came from, for the both of us. We share together our pain with our families. I said our parents don't know the difference. There's so much going on, I said, when we were settled here in – there was so much

damage done in our parents, even, like, the Social Services.

I had a call from the hospital and I hand over the phone to my wife, I said it's his nephew and his girlfriend in the hospital. I didn't even know what's going on. I thought something was wrong with the baby. And she told me – put it on the speaker – she told us: They took him. And I said: Who? Social Services. He said the nurses came out and said: You can go for a smoke. We'll watch the babies for you – the baby for you.

And we jumped in the car. I caught them outside the parking lot in the hospital. I said: Do you have to do this? Why don't you call the Healing Centre and let 'em know this is gonna happen so they can have support? But they never.

I can't believe it, I said, they're stealing kids from the hospital. They never stopped, I said, stealing kids from the home, back then. I remember it when my cousin – when the priest came over to the house he said you gotta go. And he ran away. He ran away. He went in the woods, I don't know how long. This happen – could of happen to him, or do harm to his self.

And about the law. All the Innu people used to go to court. I remember I used to go to court. I was innocent. But they told me: Oh, if you plead guilty, you're only gonna get probation. What can we do? We're scared.

We never had no law in our community – in the country because we used to have peace. Everybody get along together. They don't fight. But when we'd come back from the community, big party down below the house there, next door, I can almost always hear my dad coming home fighting to the neighbour. We were so blinded with the drinking problem. Next morning, they come to the house like nothing happened. They were ready to look for a taxi to go up again.

Yeah, it is a hard going.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to interrupt you once more.

D. RICH: Yeah.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

D. RICH: And that's about all I'm gonna say, I think, but I wanna thank you for listening to me and I'm so thankful to be here to share this.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you for your insights, your service to the community and the way that you turned your life around. We really appreciate you being here today.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Tshenashkumitin.

In English?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I think you're all right.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: If you wish.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah. I just wanna thank David for coming.

I want to acknowledge his story, because the stories of the community are important as well. Even though you may not have the first-hand dealings in CSSD, but you do have the experience of what it's like living in the community and seeing the changes from going to Nutshimit and living in the community and the impacts of that.

So I want to thank him for his story.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I also wanted to say thank you for your story, and there's a number of things that you said that were very important and insightful.

I just wanted to mention the one where you talked about – you said: finally to break the cycle. And I think that, you know, no truer words were ever said.

D. RICH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So thank you for that.

And also, in particular, with the many challenges that you've shared with us, is that you have turned your life around and to hear that you're happy in your life is –

D. RICH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – is reassuring, I think, for all of us here.

Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm. Tshenashkumitin.

D. RICH: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

We have another presenter, but we'll just take a couple of minutes break, and then Maggie you're free to come up here with your family if you want to, no problem.

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