

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

Wednesday | Sheshatshiu | 18 October 2023

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Folks, our next speaker was going to be Michel but he's busy right now. So there's nothing happening between now and lunch, so we'll be back at 1 –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: 1 o'clock?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – 1:30.

Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good afternoon, everybody.

We'll start now if everyone's ready.

I guess the first thing on behalf of the Commissioners, we wanna reiterate, just to repeat, that we do appreciate people coming forward to tell their story and appreciate it can be very difficult to do that, but at the same time it shows great strength for people to be able to come to us in this forum.

Did you miss something there?

INTERPRETER NUNA: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I was just saying we appreciate people coming forward to speak to the Inquiry. Just say we appreciate (inaudible).

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And once again this afternoon we want to, again, mention the healing services workers that are here and to say to you that whether you're talking to the Inquiry or whether you're listening, that sometimes that can trigger thoughts in your mind from the past and so you need to be mindful of that. If there's family or friends that you can go to or, if not, the healing support workers that are here that I'll name in a second when Annie gets a chance to translate.

And the healing support workers here this afternoon are Edward Nuna, who may not – why, yes he is, Edward is here in the room and Deborah Montague is here, but I think is outside, and Tiffany Nuna is there and, of course, Louise Bradley and Elizabeth Sheppard.

And the Commissioners also wanna say, at this time, a very special thank you to those folks for the great work that they're doing and being very present for the Inquiry and for people as they tell their story, tell their truths or as they listen. So thank you to all of them, both here and those who are not here this afternoon but have been part of that process.

So thank you.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – Edward Nuna, Deborah Montague, Tiffany Nuna, Louise Bradley, (inaudible) Paula Battcock – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And just for correction is, the last person was Elizabeth Sheppard.

Thank you.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

We welcome Michel.

Michel, as we have said to everyone, don't be afraid to speak what's on your minds. We recognize that people want to speak to the Commission. They want to explain where they've had issues with CSSD. We want to hear experiences people had. We want to know when things have gone right or have not gone right and, at the end of the day, Innu Nation, Innu Round Table, the governments, want us to tell them what we heard. And that's – we're here to gather information.

M. NUNA: Good afternoon.

I'm here to share a little story about, you know, my life and not having my parents in my life.

I was traditionally adopted by my grandparents, so I wasn't in the system with CSSD. But in saying that, I had a lot of feelings that came with it, not having my parents in my life. And I can only imagine what these kids are going through that are being tooken away and outside of the community.

I didn't realize it at the time, I was probably about four or five years old when I was traditionally adopted. I didn't know that there was a lot of pain, a lot of hurt and a lot of uncertainty that came with it, growing up with my grandparents. I consider myself very lucky that they came and took me when my parents were not able to care for me at that age. And there's a lot of pain, hurt and blame and uncertainty in my life when I was young.

So when I became a young adult and not understanding why I didn't have my parents in my life and with all that hurt and that pain, as I got older it progressed into anger. So I was – had a lot of anger becoming into my teenage years. And trying to kill that pain and that hurt, that uncertainty, I used drugs and alcohol to avoid the feeling of abandonment and so on.

So that's what happened. And then I had to – and then I had kids of my own. You know, with all the chaos that came into my life with the drinking and the drugging, I became a father at 25 years old and still not knowing why I was doing the things that I was doing, you know, using and drinking.

I never could figure it out. Not until I came into a treatment centre when I was 32 years old. So the pain and the hurt I carried for about 30 years and, like I was saying, using drugs and alcohol to not feel the things that I was feeling.

And when I – in my opinion, with what's going on with the kids that are apprehended, I feel there should be a process of them, upon returning, to have treatment of some sort for them to help take care of probably going through the same feelings that I was going through when I didn't have my parents in my life.

I feel that it's all interconnected with what we go through as young kids and with the hardships of life, with all the pain and all the hurt that we go through and not being able to deal with those, and it continues upon to the next generation of our kids.

I have, now, a 17-year-old son who is struggling with the same things that I was struggling with. And I feel that I'm trying to give him what I needed as a young boy, and that's love from a father. And my wife is trying to do the same because we both were traditionally adopted, for the both of us.

And yeah, I think it's all interconnected with it. It just keeps going and going. We almost need a good, healthy treatment centre in the community to help the younger generation and not wait for it to – or not hold it in, I could say, for 30 years, like I did when I went through it.

And I see that when kids come back. I worked at the group home just when I was coming out of recovery. I see the kids as having the same struggles that I have. There's no transition of taking care of them, other than they just, at that time with CSSD, sign themself out and there's nothing in place for them to proper transition or proper self-care for them to have a plan.

And they're doing the same things that I did and that's turn to alcohol and drugs. And then in my opinion – my personal opinion – CSSD has a role to play into helping the kids that are returning or becoming the age of not being able to be in the system anymore.

And that is my opinion of everything of my life, of not having parents in my life and what I've been seeing in the community. I've been living in this community for 42 years – that's my age.

And that's my input onto hoping that you'll bring that to the table when you guys see the government.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much, tshenashkumitin, Michel.

Like so many other people who have come to tell the Commission, this Inquiry, about Innu life, you are also getting us valuable information.

You have told us that a child who is apprehended and is returned to the community should receive counselling and help so that they understand and appreciate that it's not their fault that they're in care. And they should be helped to understand what is happening around them.

You're telling us that it is very traumatic and harmful and painful for children not to be raised by their parents and, whenever possible, the parents should be helped when they need help to raise their children.

When Simeon spoke, he told us that we have to understand and appreciate Innu history. That what has happened for so many centuries, taking away Innu culture, Innu religion, Innu spirituality, harms people.

Frederick told us that the way that the law works now is very harmful to Innu. It's very harmful to Innu culture and the Innu community has to be able to handle their own child protection matters. He said that this is an Innu community and people are tired of being told what to do when they should be able to control their own laws about how children are taken care of.

So thank you to you and to the dozens of people we've heard in this community and in Natuashish. Many people are giving us the same message and we hear it loud and clear.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I was just saying to Michel to thank him for coming and sharing his story.

That was – that's what has happened in our communities, that there's been a lot of traditional adoptions in our communities, in both communities. And I wanna thank Michel for coming forward and telling his story, and I invite him again to talk more about that as well, because that's something that people need to hear more of. It wasn't through courts that our parents went through when they adopted their grandchildren, it was traditionally adoption.

And so, again, thank you. Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, Mike.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I also want to say thank you very much.

I'll just speak to two of the things that you said. There's many things you said that are very important.

The first thing was when you talked about trauma and it being passed on from one generation to the next.

I'll let Anne translate first.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And so I think that's very important that going forward, you know, for us as Commissioners, that we'd want to include that as a recommendation of some – in some way, so that there is something that can be put in place to deal with that, to help the Innu with that. And the Innu would decide on what that way would look like.

And the second thing that I wanted to talk to is, you talked about a transition plan when young people come back into their community and how there needs to be something to help them to deal with that, because you've seen first-hand the struggles that they have.

Many times now we've heard in both communities about the struggles that people have told us about, they had when they come back. They're reflecting back as adults in most cases – in all cases, I think. But that that's the very thing that they talked about that you identified today.

And so this is something I think is very important, this transition plan and how they come back and how they deal with their issues. Particularly when they get to the age of being a teenager, I think there's many struggles there, also.

So I think that's a very good suggestion that you put forward. Thank you for that and thank you for your presentation.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, again.

I see Julianna is here. Are you here to present as well?

CAITLIN URQUHART: She needs to speak with (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

So we need a break at this time and then we'll come back in 15 minutes.

Recess