



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

English Transcript

Volume 21

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

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Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Good afternoon everyone and welcome back.

Just go though some of the housekeeping things, again, in particular, healing services. And we understand that, you know, sharing your story with us or if you're someone who's listened to stories that may affect you, may trigger you, you might have some – some difficulties you might have, so please think about family, friends, others that you can reach out to.

But also, in addition to that, we do have healing support workers here and so I just want to go through them again, so we'll do this every morning and afternoon.

So this afternoon, the healing support workers that we have are Deborah Nuna Montague, either here or in the building, she's not here in the room right now.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Audrey Snow.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She's not here yet.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. She's on her way.

That's Louise – Louise Bradley and Elizabeth Sheppard.

Also, just briefly, there's coffee and –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Edward Nuna is around, too.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And Edward – okay, Edward Nuna. Sorry, Edward.

There is coffee, tea, water available and some nourishment there for people if you want it. So you can get up any time and go to get that.

And so we're ready now for the first speaker this afternoon that Judge Igloliorte will introduce.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Today, this afternoon, we welcome Kevin, Kevin Pastiwet.

And Kevin, you're here and very welcome to tell your life story, your family history, who your family is or anything that you feel the Inquiry should hear. Thank you for being here.

So what we try to do is if – even if you speak English or Innu-aimun, we try to give our interpreter, Anne, a chance to speak after you – after you've spoken for a while. Don't go too long, and sometimes I interrupt people. I don't like doing that. But if you can give her not too much information, so that she can keep a note of it. She does a really good job but we don't want her to have too much. I appreciate that.

K. PASTIWET: Yes, I understand.

Well, I'd like to start off, you know, say a moment of silence to remember those murdered Indigenous women and the children that had never made it home through residential schools.

And still, today, residential school is still alive and well, today. It's called child welfare system.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Please stand.

(Moment of silence.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much. Thank you for that.

K. PASTIWET: Well, to start off and say my name. My name's Kevin Pastiwet. I was born in North West River, November 9, 1979. My father is Etienne Pastiwet and Vivian Pastiwet. My parents were divorced at a young age – separated. They had family issues a lot, violence and drinking issues.

I got adopted by late William Katchnak and Philomena Katchnak in Davis Inlet at two or three months old, that my mom told me.

Growing up in Davis Inlet was very hard. I know my grandfather was a former Chief. The first elected Chief in Davis Inlet that my grandfather and my late dad told me. There was a lot of issues to deal with there. We had no running water, no sewage, we had to use honey buckets and we had to haul water by Ski-Doo's or walk in the summertime or quads – ATV.

My life has been profoundly affected by the foster care system in Newfoundland and Labrador. My three kids are in care right now since last year of August. They have been removed because, I guess, I couldn't provide the service. I got into drinking and heavy drugs, as well.

Growing up in Davis Inlet with the – my adopted grandparents, I had no relation. They were – my mother was adopted by the late William Katchnak and Philomena Katchnak. That's how I became the – a part of that family as well.

But my grandfather always said to me education was very important, wished me to go to school. If I didn't listen or didn't pay attention in school, my grandfather would – my grandparents – late grandparents would always take me to the country, which my grandfather always said to me: If you don't wanna learn something in school or non-Aboriginal education, you're gonna learn something on the land. Which I am very grateful I had that opportunity to learn how to trap and to survive on the land and to

respect the animals and respect Mother Nature in the land, on the land.

We would be in the country from spring to ice break. We would travel there in – on Ski-Doo in winter and through summer and we'd go on the boat back to Davis Inlet in summer.

In the fall, we would go in – on the boat in the country and we'll come out in the Ski-Doo in the winter. We'd be there two or three months at the most, at a time out on the land.

I'm grateful I got to spend a lot of time on the land and, at the same time, learn the non-Aboriginal lifestyle. There was another world out there that I can educate myself and profoundly pass that to my children, that education is important.

Growing up in – as an adopted kid, my grandfather drank, my grandmother didn't drink until her last breath. She passed away a few years ago. My grandparents would take me wherever my grandfather was offered to get the next drink, I guess, or get a quick fix, wherever he was invited by his friends. I see a lot of the violence throughout those – throughout that journey. I know my dad was very violent towards my mom, as well.

There were four of us boys that my parents had. I lost my brother through suicide at age 18. When he was 18, he committed suicide. After parents – growing up in adoption, as a young age to a teenager, we – all four of us were in separate – we didn't live together in one household, we were all separated. So I didn't really had a chance to know my older brothers that well, because we were all scattered in different homes. I do recall my two late brothers – they're older brothers – were in and out of group homes – boys' home.

Also, my late brother died 2014 with complications with his health, died at the hospital here at Goose Bay in the emergency room in a washroom.

You know, losing my two role models, I guess, my older brothers, was a big loss to me. After my brother committed suicide when I was 11 or 12 years old, it was very hard because you – he make sure I go to school every day and that I didn't get in trouble with the law. After the loss of my brother through suicide, I guess the world came down upon me, you know, it shattered.

I ended up losing school, you know, I went when I feel like it. I lost – my grades went down, my marks went down. I ended up with a – I guess, I was looking for somewhere to try to fit in, to be comfortable and be accepted after I lost my brother. And growing up, me and my dad didn't really had the connection at a young age, or bond, I guess, we'd call it.

It was only my dad had to go to federal prison in '90s. I can't recall the year but my start – my mom left to divorce and separating with my parents. My dad started to come around in my life, slowly. But I had a lot of anger at that time towards my parents. Always – each year in school when I see other students with their families in there, it was very hard for me, especially Christmas when – or special occasions happening in school; it was very hard for me because I didn't have my biological parents there.

My grandparents were nomadic people. They live off the land and they travel with the caribou, they – in their time on the land; so they had no education, they had no English. And so they never came to the school. They were always busy, I guess, the lifestyle that they – they knew how to survive on the land and how to support us, I guess.

There were other – there was other older guy, he's my adopted brother, that we grew up together, and my – when he – when I start to grow up, older, he told me education was important, too. And I remember, after school, there were times he would do up math with me and just to – and I remember my late grandfather, we had TV. CBC, that's the only channel we had and my

grandfather always wanted me to watch the news, "The National" or CBC – whatever.

And that's how I knew – that's where I – and my grandfather would come from his meetings when he was a leader and he would bring newspapers and he – and I remember my grandfather and my adopted brother always push me to read the newspapers. And I knew Davis Inlet wasn't the only town. There was other world out there that I can explore, that I can educate myself or I can see.

At a young age, you know, I started using alcohol and drugs to numb the pain, what I went through as a kid. I don't ever – I don't recall being physically abused by my adopted parents, but I do recall when I didn't listen, my grandmother would hit me with the boughs on my feet.

Also, that I recall, I started getting up – ending up in trouble with the law at a young age when I start to put myself in the wrong crowd, I guess. You know, I tried to fit in somewhere where I'd be accepted, who I was. But I made a lot of bad choices throughout my life. I ended up in group homes. I ended up in Whitbourne detention centre a few times.

I had a kid when I was 14, 15 years old, my first child. My change – my world changed when I first had my child. You know, in old – in the old days when you become a father, I guess, or a family member or start your own family, I guess, our ancestors and our Elders thought you're a man already, because the way that they survived on the land, that's how it was.

So I lost my teenage years, I guess, throughout – when I had my first child. My first job I landed at Voisey's Bay at 15 years old. I was a driller assistant. My dad somehow got me that job 'cause he had a connection with the mining company.

So I'm here today to tell my story in how – in my life and how child welfare system, which is known in Newfoundland and Labrador as CSSD, I believe, how it affected my life and my children's lives.

Also, I'm very honoured to be honoured and to have the privilege to be given the opportunity to tell my story here at the Inquiry. I know my story will help other – a lot of people to come out and share their story with dealing with CSSD or child welfare system.

Still today, I thinking there's only few – two or three province have admitted and the premiers itself; I can't recall which province admitted that they have done a lot of damage to Indigenous people across Canada. And here we are today, the system is still well alive – it's well alive. Like I said earlier, it used to be called residential schools, where kids were removed from their homes. A lot of those kids never made it back home, and I'm very honoured to speak here at the Inquiry.

Just over a year ago, maybe 14 months now, my three children were removed from my – our care, at the time, my partner, but I'm no longer in that relationship with the mother – that my children were removed because the addictions and the trauma I was going through. But since then, my kids have been in care, a lot of things have happened to my kids.

There have been many issues and problems that have been happening to my kids while in their care. They were placed in a foster home here in the community, where one of the foster parents was allegedly charged with sexual interference. I made the inquiries, talked to CSSD about if my children were touched or sexually abused at that home. Today, I don't have that answer. I've been waiting for that answer for a long time.

My son was born with a heart murmur at the – you know, when he was born, he had – we had to be in St. John's for so many months. Then had to be transferred to Halifax at the IWK Children's Hospital to get his heart fixed for the heart murmur. And he has cardiology appointments, special appointments in Janeway since he was born. Since he's been in care, he has missed quite a few appointments with cardiology and other appointments that

were important for him – for his to be healthy, to be healthy and be in good spirits.

Again, like I said, my kids have through – went through a lot since they've been in care. I have advocating for my kids since January when I came on board with my family lawyer. It took some time to get a family lawyer. There was no family lawyer in the Legal Aid Office at the time, so it took some time. And I've been working with CSSD from day one and I've been advocating for my boys, for their well – for their best interests and their well-being while in their care. Those needs have been broken many times by the system, CSSD.

I'm – all my – when my first children were removed, they were all in one place. After the – those allegations, the sexual interference allegations were – I didn't hear it from CSSD itself. I had to get the – I had to hear it from the local community – a third party.

As soon as I heard that these things were happening, I contacted the CSSD, my social worker, along with my family lawyer. And my kids were put at EPH, Emergency Placement Home, here in Sheshatshiu, which three of them have been separated. Two of my boys are still living at the EPH here in Sheshatshiu. Their sister was separated, put to another foster home.

My daughter has been house to house and foster home to foster home since she's been in care. And it's quite concerning, you know, not knowing what could happen in the foster home where I wasn't consulted by CSSD.

About two weeks ago, where my daughter was, the family broke down. They couldn't give the services and care for my daughter. So my daughter was put in a home here in Sheshatshiu. I had a case conference with the CSSD, with the assistance with Innu Round Table staff, that not long after my daughter was soon placed at a home, my daughter was taken to emergency department here in Goose Bay, where I got informed that she had a lot of lice from that home, and she had infection in her private

area. At two years old – 2½ years old; she just turned three there last week.

And a lot of questions came to – came to me, you know. I had – I requested, through my family lawyer, have a meeting – case conference: Why is this happening to my children while in their care?

When I have to go to Family Court, CSSD lawyer and the CSSD social workers are always argue that, you know, the best interest of the child for their safety and well-being. But since my kids have been in care, the system has failed. There are many, many holes in the system and I have – I even have brought those concerns to child advocate, Newfoundland and Labrador.

And many – I have sent emails and I have sent emails to the child advocate myself, directly, and my family lawyer has followed up with the child advocate. Still today, we're in October, I haven't heard anything or any response from the child advocate. You know, these stuff are very serious to me as a parent. This will traumatize and be affected my kids, what's going through them while they're in care.

When my son had those appointments, before he got removed from our care, he never once missed those appointments. My son that – two of my sons who are living at EPH gotten beaten up by older kids at the EPH. My son that I talk about earlier who had a heart murmur, has medical issues, was rushed to hospital emergency department 'cause repeatedly one of the children there keep repeatedly kick him in the head.

I don't know how many times my older son has been scratches on his face. And I brought these attention and my concern to a CSSD and – through email, 'cause I like to deal with CSSD through email, it's recorded. If I speak over the phone, anything, it's – the words might be never heard or documented.

Like I said – also, like I said, there was many holes in the system here. It has brought a lot of families to devastation, I believe, not only me but other families, other

Indigenous groups and non-Indigenous groups as well, I believe, that have – the system had broken families apart, have caused a lot of headaches and burdens to the kids and parents.

When I have a meeting with the CSSD, they all – they always have these beautiful words but there's no action to follow up on that when I raise these concerns.

I have dealt so many social workers since my kids have been in care. I had so many social workers I had to deal with. My social worker had to leave and another social worker had to be signed, and the list goes on. And it took a lot of burden on me. I know my kids are – wanna come home early, but I'm stuck with the system.

Also, since my boys, my two boys are still living at EPH since September of last year, one of my sons, one of my boys – they're my sons, that's the one I have mentioned earlier, he has a medical condition – was physically assaulted by staff at EPH.

I didn't hear it from directly from CSSD, I had to get the third party. Local member told me that from the community. When something serious or that concerns me, I always have to find out from – through a third party, not from CSSD. And like I said many times, they have told me – they have said it in the meetings I had with them that they will notify me if there's anything important like appointments.

Since my kids in – been in care, I only attended one appointment with my children, that was a dentist appointment. I was promised in January I will be attending every clinical or medical appointments with my children.

Only recently my daughter, last month, was medevaced to St. John's because she had infection in his ear. She had to have a small operation surgery. I asked for assistance through the CSSD to get me out there and to cover the cost so I can be with my daughter since my daughter was in care. I didn't get any assistance from CSSD.

Mushuau Innu Band Council, my band where I'm originally from, covered the cost and my meals and my accommodations.

When I was out in St. John's for the time being my daughter was out there, I asked CSSD for meals because in hotels it cost a lot of money. I was only covered \$50 a day by the – by my band for my meals. Oh, they said to me: We're going to send a PO at your – where your hotel is and we'll take care of the meals. I was there maybe two or three weeks, I follow up with the managers and the restaurant if there was anything from CSSD to cover my meals, there was nothing.

I'd like to have a short break, if it's okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

We'll have a break for 15 minutes.

Thank you very much.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Please feel free to continue, Sir, if you're ready.

Thank you.

K. PASTIWET: Yes, thank you again.

Despite this frustration, I tried to remain calm to deal with CSSD, through assistance with IRT and my family lawyer.

I came to Goose Bay this year to see my kids in person. When I was in Natuashish, it was through video call, Google Meet, and that time I've been away so long in Natuashish. I moved out of Natuashish in 2014 and I've been living here, Sheshatshiu and Goose Bay. I guess the main reason I moved to Goose Bay and Sheshatshiu was there are resources here that I can get help. There was less resources in my community of Natuashish. I can easily go to LG Health, to mental health, to addictions counsellors to speak to there.

Throughout this – throughout my journey here and living – since 2014, I've been – I'm a part of this community, Sheshatshiu. I have a lot of assistance and very wonderful people, and I have a lot of family here, as well.

I'm profoundly proud that I came this far, to where I am. Yes, I still struggle. I was sober for eight years for a long time – alcohol and drugs. The loss of other family members: grandparents, my late dad, close family and friends that I lost throughout – you know, death after complications with health and other factors. Dealing with the CSSD, you know, I relapsed. I relapsed last year and – but I always manage to pull myself back again. Then the stress, you know, the stress was – the loss and depression was eating me up. I thought I could do it on my own without asking help, and it was only a matter of time I went back out there and drinking again.

Also, I have requested, when I hear serious issues that are happening my kids in care, I always ask for have a meeting with CSSD case conference through assistance with IRT. There was times I would wait for them to reply. Sometimes I don't get the reply from my own social worker or a supervisor from CSSD, many, many occasions I have to go through my lawyer.

I have to send my email to my family lawyer, that's when the ball starts to kick in. I have to go through many, many occasions through my family lawyer to get meetings to meet with CSSD and to have a plan for my children.

And I notice lately, since my – since the mother of my kids, my ex-partner now, has come on board, they have spoken and met with my – the mother of my children a lot, instead of me because, I feel they don't wanna deal with me. The CSSD don't wanna deal with me because I have a lot of concerns and brought a lot of issues. More likely, they don't wanna hear my story.

I – my ex, right now, partner, the mother of our children that are in care, has a language barrier, has low education, cannot speak

freely the way I can speak and I even brought that up to my family lawyer and we – she collaborate that with a CSSD lawyer.

Still, today, the bullying and – the bullying at EPH by two older other kids that are staying there as well are happening with my children. My son is seven years old and my – the other son who's at the Emergency Placement Home is five years old.

They still encounter bullying over there. They still being attacked. Only a week ago my son had a lot of scratches on his face because an older kid there beat him up again. And I'm questioning myself: How can this happen while my kids are in care? Why is this happening?

And I brought those concerns to CSSD. I'm always – like I said earlier, they always give me beautiful words for me to hear. I feel like they only want to shut me up because they give me those kind and beautiful words, but no action. There is no action. And I even told them before: I know how the system works. I know how bureaucrats work. I dealt with provincial and federal government before, when former – Simeon Tshakapesh was Chief, I was his Band manager.

So I know how bureaucratic works. The government likes to throw money at the Indigenous group to shut them up – gonna give them so much money to calm them down, which is – you know, the – which a lot of agencies in government, provincial and federal government, can't admit they're doing wrong. Not – they're just band-aiding the problem, not fixing solution. And I have brought that up to CSSD many, many times.

I even wrote to Minister of CSSD last year, brought those concerns, what was happening to my children. I never once heard from the minister who was – who is not the Minister of CSSD any longer.

I have advocating my boys every day since I came on board with CSSD and when I had my lawyer, the family lawyer assigned to me. Still today, I'm advocating for my boys, for their best interests to have a better life.

So they don't have to be traumatized what's happening while in their care.

None of this stuff happened to my boys and my children before they got removed. So much damage has been caused and a lot of pain on me and my children and I – also, the mother of our children – my children. And here, you know, I asked for assistance from CSSD on many, many occasions, numerous times through emails; not once they have supported me on anything.

I feel like, as an Innu person in this – with this system that I'm stuck with, CSSD or child welfare system, as an Indigenous man here in Labrador, I'm not only am I only speaking myself, I guess I can speak all of us as Indigenous groups, Labrador, that we face with its (inaudible) system. We're not treated the same as the non-Aboriginal get the treatment.

Since my kids – my daughter was placed in a foster home my – the foster parents have requested assistance from CSSD on many occasions to get clothing, bedding, which the foster parents were promised when they first took my daughter in their home.

And like I said earlier, that home had broke down, and my daughter had to be removed from that and placed to two different homes. But, today, my daughter is staying with the mother's uncle and my – the mother of our daughter, my ex, lives in the same household so she sees our daughter often.

I've been sober 26 days, today. To me, it's a milestone. I have come long ways. And I don't think we're all bad people, but we're condemned by the system, who we are as Indigenous groups.

I recall there were 94 recommendations made by Justice Sinclair when he did the inquiry through murdered Indigenous women. He talked about the child welfare system, as well, in that point. I have brought that up to social workers I dealt with; I have brought it up to supervisors, they have no clue what those recommendations are.

And I said – and they asked me: Where do you get this stuff? How do you learn this stuff? Where did you go to school? Did you go to university? I said – I point out in the woods, I said: That's where my school was as a young age. That's where I learned. I had a really good teacher, which my late grandfather was. And I said to them, my grandfather balanced the non-Aboriginal culture and our culture had the same balance. He knew those things were profound about that would help me in long term in my life.

Talking about those recommendations, as well, I believe even the United Nations made recommendations to Canada, the Government of Canada, that Canada has failed an obligation to meet Indigenous groups before the child welfare system; not only the child welfare system, but legal aspect, as well, to deal with agencies.

Still, today, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Government of Canada are fighting against Cindy Blackstock who is a child advocate. I met Cindy at one point. I admire the work she has done and I hope there is someone else – in her retiring, there will be someone else continue to advocate for Indigenous group to fight for their rights.

And I believe even – human tribunal even said it: Canada has failed the obligations to meet Indigenous children and Indigenous people across Canada, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador. And like I had mentioned earlier, only two or three provinces, like I said, have admitted they have done wrong to Indigenous groups – Indigenous people across Canada. I congratulate those provinces that they've made – they admit that they didn't – they done harm and failed and broken many families because of the system we're stuck as Indigenous group.

Also, I noticed that, too, dealing with CSSD, ask to services, I asked if they could – they said verbally but no written documentation that they said they would offer me taxis to come down to Sheshatshiu for men's support group they have here twice a day.

Only last week they replied to my email, 'cause I send so many emails, that there's no POs for me to be down here to get help, to pursue or continue helping myself to remain sober.

My son was sent – had to go see cardiology a week ago. Again, over the phone I was promised there would be transportation offered by CSSD, a taxi for me to go to the airport to meet my son. Her mother travelled with her and another worker at EPH. I did follow up with the taxi stand if there was a PO for me to get up to the airport and then get home after my son was departed. I was told there was none.

Here is a government who has the power to get me to the airport; who has the money to get me to the airport. I had to walk to the airport just to see my son before he departed to St. John's for his cardiology appointment. I had to walk back that very day after my son departed. An Innu man saw me, I guess, walking on the road – on the Canadian side – on the base side – picked me up and offered me the – offered me ride home.

Like I said many times, the system – there are many, many holes in the system and no one from CSSD or the Minister of CSSD is taking responsibility. These things are happening. They're failing the children. They're failing the Indigenous groups. They're failing the families.

I have never been more stressed in my life until I became a part of the CSSD. My children were happy. My children met their appointments on time. My children never got scratches or black eyes. My five year – my four year old, at the time, had a black eye while he was in care. Where he was living, he got beat up by older kid there.

Only recent weeks ago, I'm told that EPH will be shut down and my kids, CSSD is scrambling to find a place for my boys that are living there. It'll be shut down at the end of the month.

Again, I am very fortunate to have my ex-partner, his uncle step up to the plate to

give a home while we're before CSSD or before the courts, for my children so they have to be – that they – so they don't have to be sent out from their own community. My son tells me he loves it here in Sheshatshiu. He has a lot of good friends in school. He don't wanna move. He wants to be here – part of here.

Again, like I said, the planning is – that's the initial plan, but there's no confirmation that my kids will be there.

I always get calls or emails at the very last minute when something like this happens with my children and I have to scramble. Like, myself, I don't have a big family. You know, Pastiwet is my last name, there's only few of us. And I had to scramble to find a place for my boys and I'm very fortunate to work with my ex-partner, the mother of our kids, to work with her today, that we have a communication together for the best interests of our children, to have a home here and to be part of their community.

My seven year old has been removed three times since he's been seven because I relapsed, I went to drinking. And today I take that full responsibility, I have no one to blame but myself that these things happen. But, again, I've been working very, very hard with CSSD to implement, to improve, for my children's future and their health and the other factors that are played in, while in their care.

Also, I can add that I'm trying – I'm working very hard with CSSD, along with the assistance IRT. It's so hard, because even while I do so work with them closely, my children are experiencing trauma. No children should ever – no children that are before or in care of the child welfare system or CSSD should never experience this. My children are very innocent. They don't have to be beaten up. They don't have to go through this while they're in care.

On many occasions I have been before the Family Court, and their lawyer always argued continuous custody to care for them and I read – I said it on the record at the last court of – Family Court we had: The system

has failed my children. There is many holes in the system. I brought my concerns to the judge to hear these, because even though my lawyer didn't want me to say these things but I said it has to be recorded.

I have a right. Even though I'm Indigenous or Innu man, I said I still vote to Canada. I still pay taxes 'cause I work part-time with the court, as well, as interpreter from time to time. I used to work with Legal Aid probation when I was still living in Natuashish.

This issues that going on with my children and with the system is – child welfare system or CSSD, whatever the name they have – wanna use. They have changed so many names but they're all still the same. And like I said earlier as well, residential school is still well alive in Canada today, but they have changed their name to CSSD or child welfare system.

If I do recall, there's only – there are so many Innu and non – other Indigenous groups in Labrador or place outside Labrador. A lot of these children, even my son today, he's seven years old, don't speak Innu, don't understand Innu because he was removed three – this his third time, the older one, the seven year old has been removed. He was placed in Goose Bay with non-Indigenous foster homes and I'm very, very sad when I speak to my son in English.

I recall, before my – before they were removed, we had to go to St. John's for my son, who has a medical issues, appointment. Here I am in a taxi. You know, we always deal with – we always – I always use one taxi when I'm there, it was an older gentleman. I recall we went to a store and we came back and it was the same gentleman I called to pick us up after shopping, he was mad at me when I spoke to my son in English. He said: How can you speak your own son in English when you have your own language? And I told him my reasons. I said my son was removed from my care many months ago – many years ago. He was placed in non-Aboriginal town, non-Indigenous group family foster home. And I said my son don't understand me if I speak to him in my own language.

It's very sad, you know, what's transpired to my kids since they been in care. It's been 14 months since my kids are be in care. I was at the point to get 'em back in my life, and stress and health – my health has declined as well, only recently – a lot of worries. I lose sleep. I had to be medicated, given medication to help me to sleep by a doctor because what I encounter with CSSD – not only CSSD but other factors that are going on in my life as well.

I have – I know I have a long ways to go. I don't dwell on the past. If I dwell on the past that will hold only my happiness. It would take my freedom. It would take my inner peace that I have. If I think about the future, I will only be worried what's gonna happen the next day. Tomorrow will take care of itself; it's not here yet. I have to live in the present and I have to occupy myself, keep myself busy, to maintain my sobriety.

Since I've been sober 26 days, I only see my kids once through a visit. And I have been asking, asking CSSD when are they going to set up visitations for me to see my kids. Still, today, I have never got a confirmation. Matter of fact, I sent an email this morning and still I have no reply when I will be able to see my kids. But I talk to my kids through the phone two or three times a day.

It's very, very hard for me, and I believe the mother of our children as well. We can't have access really, especially me. She sees kids time to time since she came on board with CSSD but it's only been me, I felt it pushed me aside since my ex-partner came on board. I felt like they don't wanna deal with me because I have so many questions and concerns that I brought to them and it seems like they don't wanna hear my concerns.

And I even brought that up to child advocate. A few months ago I follow up with child advocate, Newfoundland and Labrador. She stated in an email she was gonna follow up with CSSD what's going on, what's happening. I never heard anything. A few weeks ago, since I've been sober 26 days, I sent another email directly from

myself and afterwards my family lawyer follow up with child advocate: I will talk to my director, see what we can do.

It's been so many, many months that these things are – that I brought up, that I believe that will help me and my children to address those things that are happening to my children. Even today, the child advocate is not doing her job, I guess, his or her job. That's the reason why child advocate is there, to assist families with this serious stuff, problems going on in – with the agencies.

Like I said earlier, as well, on many occasions I have been promised by CSSD, my social workers, the social workers I deal with, the supervisors at CSSD that I'll be notified, that I'll be a part of each – every appointment that my children have to go through – have to go here in Goose Bay and outside Labrador – the Janeway. Like I said earlier, I only attended once out of those appointments. That was last – that was in March of this year when my son had to go see the dentist.

Also, I have never been notified my kids were taken to an emergency or appointments by CSSD. I always have to find out from a third-party management, locals in the community here in Sheshatshiu, that my son was there at the hospital. As soon as I hear from these individuals, I follow up in email with my – with CSSD: How come my son was at emergency? What was going on?

There was times I never get a reply and I have to go through my family lawyer, to send email directly to my family lawyer. Then my family lawyer emails CSSD lawyer. That's when I feel the ball started to kick in – roll in when I have to go through them, through those people, instead getting directly answers from CSSD.

Today, I can say that I'm proud where I am sober. I'm waiting to go to a 90-day program out in Windsor, Ontario. It's called Brentwood Recovery Home.

I'm happy where my kids are gonna be placed, but it's not really – I never had the really confirmation if they're gonna be really placed in my – in their uncle's mom's house and I never got any – a record of it. It's only verbal over the phone and I'm very worried about my boys.

My boys are very close to each other. When my son – only recently, a week ago, a week and a half ago, had to go – the one I mentioned earlier, had medical issues – had to go to his appointment. His older brother was crying most of the time that he was out, because they have that bond together. They have that relationship together as brothers, and I know he's a role model for his little brother.

And I had to deal with CSSD when my son came back from his appointment. I had to go extra mile to deal with CSSD to make sure my son meet his brother at the airport. And it took a couple of days for them to reply to me. And I had to send numerous emails to them, that it was very, very important for his older brother to meet him at the airport because when I spoke to my older son, when – while his little brother was out for his medical, he was crying: I miss my brother. When is my brother coming home? Is my brother okay? Is my brother sick? What's happening? I don't want him to get sick.

When a seven year old to ask those questions to his father, it's a lot of pain there – a lot of pain. Not only me, but my own seven-year-old son is asking these questions, and he told me himself: I don't want my little brother to die. I don't want my little brother to go away. He said: I won't have anything if my little brother is gone.

I tried to put the words for him to understand. I said: You know, your brother will be home in a few days, he just had to go see a doctor. And he told me: I wanna go meet him at the airport when he comes. I told him I'll work on it right away. That's when I asked to go up there, too, to meet my son when he came from the airport. Again, they told me they would get me up there in taxi. I had to walk that day all the

way to the airport, from Lower Valley to the airport.

I called the social worker when I follow up with the taxi stand, a few hours before my son arrived in Goose Bay. The social worker told me: Don't worry. Don't worry. We'll get you up there. Don't worry. Don't worry.

She called me back in 10 minutes and told me: I'm very, very sorry, Kevin, we cannot get you up there. We don't have a purchase order. We don't have authorization to get you up there in taxi.

So I said to her: What's the point? You told me don't worry, you'll get me up there. Now you're telling me I can't get up there. I said – I hung up on the phone and I said I'll walk. I said if my ancestors and my late grandparents can travel with the land for a thousand years with the caribou to hunt, to survive, I said I'm sure I can make it out there as well. And I said God gave me a life, a purpose to use and legs to use, and if you can't provide those services, I said, I'd be ashamed to be sitting at your office, as yourself today, and pat yourself on the back every day when you go home.

I know in going to Brentwood, I know it's gonna help me and to be a good father. I know I'm a good father but I made bad choice in my life – bad decisions. I have no one to blame but myself. I don't blame the mother or blame God. I think which a lot of us in this world would blame the God when things happen in our own – the way we like to make it happen.

We're all good people, but we're condemned by the system as an Indigenous group. We are less represented in jails, courts, in hospitals, with many agencies as an Indigenous group – Indigenous groups that Canada and the provinces has failed to meet the obligations.

Like I said on many occasions, even United Nations said Canada has failed to Indigenous groups, families, children that are in care. Even the 94 recommendations I mentioned earlier from Justice Sinclair,

talking about child welfare, that Canada has failed to meet the needs of children in care.

In all aspects of life, Canada has an obligation to fulfill those recommendations by the highest court, the Tribunal, the United Nations, even from Justice Sinclair when they did the inquiry. I have brought those recommendations before every social worker I meet with, if they know the recommendations. Not one ever come up to me and know these recommendations were implemented or ever been placed. They have no knowledge these recommendations came from Justice Sinclair and even from the United Nations.

I said, I'm sure wherever you went to school, I said, I wish I have that professor, too, so I can have that education – that certificate you have. Because how can you not know these things when you're work with the – with children. I said to them, you can come any time to anybody's home and take away the kids but you cannot provide the services that – and the obligation the children needs in their best interest.

Me, as an Innu man, I'm 43 years old. I'm not intimidated by any uniform figure or government figure, police, courts, CYFS. I'm not intimidated. I'm proud I'm Innu and I'm proud my kids are Innu. I'm proud my kids are in their communities.

And that being said, I'm very honoured to be speak at this Inquiry. Not only this will help me, it will help my story out there, as well, that more people may come speak at the inquiries and help the – especially the children, especially parents.

Time to time I have parents call me or message me asking advice. How I'm not intimidated by this system? I said, I went to school in it, but these people are just humans just like us. Yes, they have job titles, but at the end of the day they have families, too. We have to respect those, you know, in all aspects.

And I have a lot of respect for the system but the system has failed continuously, continuously – 14 months for my children to meet their obligations and their needs.

My daughter is being placed house to house, like I said earlier. Most of the family, you know, foster parents that she's been with have asked assistance to assist for CSSD. Which CSSD, at the beginning, said: We'll provide you this. We'll help you with this. But most of the time they had to pay out their own pockets while my kids are in care. And I think that's where there's sometimes there's a breakdown in foster care because they're not getting the service that they were told they would get the assistance from CSSD when they become a foster parents.

But I know when kids are with non-Indigenous foster parents, the services are there automatically right away. But with Indigenous group, Innu, when they become foster parents, they have to go barrier after barrier, wall after wall, to get those services or to get those assistance from CSSD.

And, again, the – I conclude that in my last word. I thank the Inquiry. I thank everybody here, you know, hearing my story. And I'm very honoured to be here, grateful to be here. I thank God allowing me, giving me those words to speak here at the Inquiry.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'm just saying to Kevin that I – I'm glad that he came here and talk about his story.

And what really hits me is when he said that there will be others behind him that will hear his story and will come forward. And I think that's the important piece of this Inquiry is that people come forward to share their stories. And I know there's a lot of pain and a lot of hurt in his story, but it's very courageous to come and share that with us today.

And I wish him well and on his healing journey, that he's going to treatment and the focus of the – would be his children, as well. So I wish him well.

Thank you.

Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mike, please.

Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, you –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

Well, first of all, I would just like to say how sorry I am to hear about the many challenges you've had to face, both as a child and as a young person and, in particular, the challenges that you have expressed so very clearly to us about working, or trying to work, I guess, with CSSD.

I think that there – you've also demonstrated a lot of insights in terms of your own self and reflecting upon yourself and that I think shows great strength.

I think that one of the things I wanted to say also is that your ability to advocate on behalf of yourself in – with CSSD is remarkable and admirable.

And, also, one of the many things that you mentioned was not knowing about things that happened to your children and having to find out from elsewhere, when, certainly, as a parent, you would have a right to be the first one to hear and you should have.

I think one of the terms you used which you described it as a broken system, that CSSD is.

I also wanna say, too, that I think that it's obvious from what you have said and how you've spoken to the Inquiry about how much you love and care for your children because of the tremendous efforts that you've put forward.

The other thing I wanna say, also, is that I think that you've really demonstrated today and spoken to the Inquiry and to all people present that it's not just about the challenge that you face, but that the Innu Nation face as a people. And that, you know, as the failures of Canada, as a country, that have been expressed, as well as international.

So it – it's – you kind of went from here, your own story, to bring it to like this is a much broader issue and this is what the Inquiry is trying to get at, the systemic problem. So thank you for that part, too.

And, finally, I just wanted to say all the best to you and really hoping and praying that things will work out for the best for you.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin, Kevin. You're a thoughtful and powerful speaker.

So this Inquiry has been established by many years of advocacy by Innu and Innu Nation. So the Innu, Innu Round Table, Innu leadership have convinced the province and Canada, we first need to look into the treatment and experiences of Innu families, Innu children in what was called the child welfare system.

But, thankfully, the law in Canada is changing so that now Canada, rightfully, states that they're responsible for Indigenous people and Indigenous children. They have an obligation to take care of that. Before that, it was only the province that had that responsibility and authority. But now the hope is that Innu, themselves, can fashion laws about child protection.

So when you tell us about treatment that you've received and children have received, we have to ask ourselves: Was the provincial laws wrong in their attitude towards Innu, in their actions toward Innu, in the way the laws may work for non-Indigenous people, but does not work for Indigenous people? That is what we have to look at.

So with your testimony, you are supplying that answer – you are giving us that answer. And what is even better for your community is that Innu can now determine the way that new laws should be stated regarding child protection.

So it's no longer good enough to talk about what wrong decisions were made, how the law was wrong; we can also go further and recommend changes.

I regret that we can't give you any quick answers or solutions for the way you have been treated. Our job is to record that, but make sure that when Innu laws are made, they recognize how harmful it can be if it's done wrong.

So you have taught us that simply taking a child out of a situation that is harmful today, means that you may also be harming the Innu culture, the Innu community, the Innu family, if you don't do it right.

So we'll take your advice, we'll take your statements and we will try to help fashion a better system.

Tshenashkumitin.

So we'll have a short break, I think. I know one person has been unable to make it.

P. RALPH: That's right.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Is that the last person?

P. RALPH: That's right, the last public person. We have a private session.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you again for your attention.

We always close with a prayer and we'd like to do that once more.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Tshaukuesh.