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

English Transcript | Volume 22

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

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ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Elizabeth.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Anne.

The Commission welcomes Mr. Kenny Nuna, and he's here to present today.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And healing support workers are here.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes, and Commissioner Devine will also let everyone know about the healing support workers who are here.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, good morning, everyone. Welcome back.

As we do in each session, I just wanted to mention the healing support services and for to, kind of, remind people that if you – you know, some of what you hear or when you're presenting, you might find it difficult and so, you need to think about what people you can go to, to – when – if you find it too difficult, whether family or friends, but also we have here healing support services people.

So I just wanted to mention the four that are here this morning, if you could identify yourselves also. So we have Tommy Penashue and Rebecca Gregoire –

R. GREGOIRE: Hi.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – Elizabeth Sheppard and, of course, Louise Bradley.

Just to mention quickly, too, there's some coffee and tea and water down here and some food. So if anybody wants to partake, then it's there, available.

And I think that's everything, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Sir.

We'd love to hear what you have to say, what your thoughts are. And give Anne a chance to translate in between your presentation.

K. NUNA: I'm gonna speak Innu, 'cause if I speak all in English I might forget some of the words that I was – that I'm trying to say.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): My name is Kenny Nuna. I was going to come here with my wife, but she is babysitting. I have been together with my wife for 19 years. We have one girl, two boys.

I have thinking about what I came here to say, to tell my story. When my first child was apprehended by CSSD, she was two years old and then the other one was one year old.

My wife was distraught; had anger issues toward CSSD. And I, too, had some anger issues with them. Sometimes I wonder how I have come this far, knowing that my kids were apprehended, with the feelings I had towards CSSD.

Sometimes I don't know what I am thinking, I don't know what I am feeling, but I do know being together with my wife is better than what I had thought before. I thought of leaving our relationship. I told my oldest – my daughter was afraid of me to leave her mom. I have seen couples separate after their kids were apprehended, and we have tried to work things between us, and I think the strength that both of us have today came from our daughter, our first-born.

I know I would have hurt my kids if I had left. Yes, we argue a lot when our kids were apprehended, but we always stuck together. Sometimes I had a feelings to leave, take my belongings because of what I had felt after my kids were apprehended.

It has been three years now that my daughter has been with us, came back home; and our second boy, we had given him up to traditional adoption. My youngest son does not want to come home, as of today.

Our youngest son asked me one time why was he apprehended. I told him because of our drinking and we could not look after him. My son has autism. He is in St. Anthony, Newfoundland, with foster parents. We tried to bring him home to attend school here in Sheshatshiu, but CSSD told us he is good where he is now. He's working with a speech therapist.

And we approach the principal here in Sheshatshiu school that – if there was someone to work with him for his speech. At that time, we did not know any resources, how to get them. And when he asked why he was apprehended, sometimes I would find it hard to explain it to my son.

I hated that my kids lost childhood. My son was apprehended at five years old; he's 15 today. He has been placed in two homes in those years. As for my daughter, she was probably placed, I would say, 20 different homes since her apprehension. I think of everything that had happened, not being there for them, and I have lost all that time to have been there for them.

We were not told that they were flown to Newfoundland, St. Anthony and St. John's. CSSD did not tell us where they were. But I did find out my daughter attempted to run away, so me and my wife did not take that well when we found out. We could not see them. That's when our drinking – we were drinking again.

I think CSSD should have given us a chance to give back our children. And yes, we would work on ourselves. But I would find it hard. Even today, as I sit here, only if my wife was here to give me the strength. And yes, we do talk to each other.

When looking back, I also thought about burning the CSSD building. My wife wanted to go their office and vandalize their office. And I knew that not – that it was not the right thing to do and I began to talk to her: We're not doing it. Not to do it, because I knew it was not the way to fight for our children. My wife would make me cry, as I would for her, too.

My kids have been apprehended, I will say, 13 years. We have worked with CSSD but found it hard because a different worker would work with us. The trust would build along with the workers. Just as we were working hard for ourselves, to get our children back, then another worker would be there.

They kept changing over the years, the workers. They would be without – within the CSSD in the community, they would probably be here two or three years. And I think CSSD did not do their job as they should have, because it has been a long time now.

One time a friend of mine went with me to see CSSD, for support, to talk about our daughter and her aftercare. I did not want any pity from what had happened to my kids, because I wanted to work on ourselves to have – to get our children back.

There are different things that I have been thinking about, about my kids. My daughter is a diabetic, he's ADHD and we were told she was FASD. But, deep in my mind, I think she is not FASD because my wife did not drink that much when she had her. And my other son is also diagnosed with ADHD.

Thinking of my kids, who we have been told that they are – that they have these illnesses, made me think twice of what is going on within our lives. Not too long ago, one time my daughter did not come home. She went to CSSD and told them that I had hit her, but I did not hit my daughter. I only told her that I was upset that she did not come home. And I found that hard when I learned about what had happen. So, I went to see a counsellor because I knew that was the good thing for me to do. She later apologized, after coming back from treatment. CSSD sent her to the treatment program.

And I will tell this also: All of my kids lost their language, Innu-aimun. My daughter tried to speak it at a young age, but she was apprehended. When she came back, she spoke English. All of my kids speak the second language, English.

I have tried to speak my language with my daughter, but I must say she tries. I feel sorry for my kids, for not speaking their mother tongue. Then again, I want to think positively, to be – to stay positive. I told her maybe when I have grandchildren, then I will start over, speaking to them Innu-aimun.

Yes, it has been many years that my kids were apprehended, and all those years it made me think. Sometimes I had suicide thoughts because I found it too hard. We would see our kids every three to six months, not every two or – two days or more.

My thoughts of not being there, for me, I really wanted to see my kids. Sometimes I could not tell my wife of my feelings I had. But today I am proud to be here, to be with my wife. We talk. She tells me sometimes she is lonely for our kids and I hear her.

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

INTERPRETER NUNA: He's asking for a break.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Of course.

We'll have a break for 10 or 15 minutes, when you're ready.

Thank you.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good day, everybody.

Mr. Nuna would like to be here at a later time, when he can have the support of his wife, so we are now taking a break. We'll see you back at 1:30.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Just in case you are wondering, we are waiting for a presenter. So it shouldn't be too much longer. We'll find out.

Recess

