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

English Transcript | Volume 24

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

Thursday | Sheshatshiu | 26 October 2023

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Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Will you be translating what you say, summarizing yourself, Eugene?

E. HART: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

This is Mr. Hart.

E. HART: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So I wanna try to translate a little bit of what I said. I can't remember it all. I don't have a memory like Anne Rich.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, nobody does.

E. HART: I'd like to thank you guys for being here today and the invite that Anastasia gave me yesterday. That – I know, it's like the topic is not easy, and I'm thinking about Simeon and his wife that time, we protest in Toronto. They were Deputy Grand Chief and Grand Chief and John Nui was there.

And I keep thinking there was hundreds and hundreds of people that day, at the picnic day they had in Toronto. I never thought we were going to get in there because when we got there, they stopped us at the – 'cause we were basically barging in the – 'cause we were trying to see the minister, and they – people from the outside were like, so who are you guys? What are you guys doing here? And there was just like maybe 12 of us, but there was like hundreds and hundreds of them. They were still looking for their residential school records but they weren't given their records. They were still, back in the day, like nothing was happening.

And so one guy, I can't remember his – I don't even know what he looks like, he stopped and he said, wait, he said let them in. He said: Let them lead and see what they want to – see what they have to say. So we marched – we were the first ones to march towards the picnic, where the minister had her picnic and we j7ust sort of screwed up her picnic day.

But the respect that we had after Simeon and Anastasia and we all spoke, was amazing how the other Indigenous people came up to us. And we demanded to meet with the minister and we demanded to meet her that day. First she was avoiding us, but I guess in order for – to get rid of us, she had no choice but to meet us.

But I brought up how children in care needs to be brought back in our home. And that was the first thing because where I used to work at the school for 15 years, and I was a vice-principal for five, I witnessed first-hand when kids used to come back to school. And I said it in my language, how a lot of kids came back, they'd be – probably been gone for 10 years, some of them five. That's a long time, and they're coming back to the – they don't know their history, they don't know their language and maybe some of them had already lost a mom or dad or both.

So when they got to – when they got to the age they can go home, they probably were brought home, escorted back and then dropped off. There was no introduction. And then the kids would get confused and they probably, just at the end, they're like, they're so confused, they end up just taking their lives 'cause they're always – you're given the wrong message in the white world.

Because I was a foster parent for 14 years and the kid I had that was in foster care, he was in foster care 14 times before we took him in. I think we were 14. And he graduated with honours in high school. That's all I told him I ever wanted from him, was to graduate from high school. I said: That's your key to success. I said, whatever you do after, I said, that's your choice. I said from me, from – all my kids, I say: All I want from you guys is your high school diploma, that's it, and if you guys continue, you continue, but that's your choice. But I rather for you to continue.

But that's where I decided to run for Chief, when I ran for Chief, eight years ago. Because I know that leadership in the past were trying to bring the children back in care 'cause that's the – we hear that a lot. So when we – when I met with the province, some of them is now retired, and then we went to meet with the province and I said: We wanna bring our kids back in care. And they said: How late are we? When we first went to the meeting. I don't know if Anastasia was there (inaudible).

So I said we're paddling on. I said we're gone without you. That's what I said. I said I don't care. I said if – we're not gonna give up until we – I said we're gone anyway. I said we've been waiting too long.

So the guy, I can't remember his name at the moment, he said paddle back, paddle back. And I said, it sounds like you're on board. I said, only if you're on board, we'll paddle back. He said, yes, paddle back; he said we're on board. So this is where the key started to bringing the childrens home in Shesh.

But there was another catch to it, when we – I said – I told him, I said I'll make a deal. I said we'll build a duplex in Sheshatshiu to bring the kids home. Probably – we had probably 30, probably, in Roddickton, and other places, more. And they weren't prepared for us when we came back, the building was done in less than seven months. So our work was done. While our work was done, their work was just starting.

So then we had to negotiate the operational funds and everything – the feds, who was going to fund the EPH homes. So then again we had to negotiate, I don't know, months and months, probably at least two months before everything was approved. And then the EPH homes were a success, now that we have two EPH homes in Shesh.

So that's – I think that's a big success, but this still needs work and that's how we learn. That's – it's just like the doors that's opened here now; we still got a lot of learning to do when we close the door. Like that's it, when you close a door another door opens.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Eugene, push that microphone away. I can hear –

E. HART: Bit muffled?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – Andrew, the technician, saying to me over the air.

E. HART: Okay.

Good?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: They're very sensitive.

E. HART: Yup.

So that's what I wanted to just talk about a little bit, what we'd been doing in the past and if the work continues, we'll see success; and if the work stops here, everything stops. But if the – the more you continue this now, and until we find more keys to open the other doors – 'cause we can't just stop here, because once we stop here, that's it.

But I think you guys will – your work will be used as a role model to other Indigenous communities. Because I brought health partnerships here in Sheshatshiu before, and they were amazed how – to how we have a lot of structure in the community, more than their reserves had. Like, they were amazed. And they were still – like, the Inquiry was just on the tip, the group homes, and there's still a lot of work.

And I'm sure there's a lot more work that needs to be done, but with the work of the community members and the staff, we'll see success, if it doesn't stop here.

But I'd like to thank you guys, again, and – but I'm sure there will be other opportunities to speak because I think there's people in lineup to speak. So thank you for the invite.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah. Well, we're so impressed by the Innu leadership, not today, but the entire history of Innu: the low-level flying, the leaders in Utshimassit, Mr. Rich and Simeon's grandfather and all the grandparents shown on the walls today. So you're continuing a very strong tradition and we're very grateful.