

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

English Transcript | Volume 26

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So, we're ready to start again.

Okay, so [redacted] whenever you're ready, and just speak of your experience, however you want to speak of it. Take your time. If you need a break, short break and to come back, or to come back at another time, you're certainly welcome to.

So, when you're ready.

[redacted] Hi, my name is [redacted]. I find when I'm in a microphone, it sound like I'm gonna cry already.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted] I'm from Sheshatshiu, but I've lived in Halifax now for 25 years. For the first 19 years of my life, I grew up in Sheshatshiu with my family. My mom is [redacted], and my dad is – his name was [redacted]. He's from Newfoundland.

I can't remember any direct interaction with Social Services with my immediate family, but there was a lot of – I don't know if there was need for it; there was a lot of alcoholism. Like, the same kind of stories everyone else has in community, a lot of abuse, physical and emotional abuse. But we always seem to be the family that when my other aunts' and uncles' children needed a place to stay, they would stay with us.

Growing up, I felt very ashamed to be Innu. I feel ashamed to say it now. Now, I'm proud but when I was younger, I wasn't 'cause I wasn't seeing good things. But, now that I'm older, I understand why those things were happening. I would always see white, non-Innu people putting Innu people down, and I didn't want to be in the group that was put down.

And it was within my family, my father would say not good things about my mom. And then I started to see her like that. When I think of my mom now, she's a very strong woman. Everyone has issues. She doesn't claim to be perfect; none of us are.

As I've been sitting – I've been to the Inquiry sessions in Sheshatshiu and listened to people speak there. And all of the hardship that everyone has to – seemed to have endured without – just kind of been placed on them and not – what am I saying? It just kind of happened to them.

When we talk about Sheshatshiu – and it's only been 70 years that Innu in Sheshatshiu were settled there. I have aunts and uncles who lived on the land. And the systems that were placed on them once they were settled in community changed everything. And it wasn't something that they wanted. Do you know what I mean? It was forced upon them.

I think when we listen to Elders, we never hear stories of people being violent or not loving their families or their children. And I feel like once we had non-Innu people come to us that that's what they brought. They brought – taught us how to use alcohol and drugs and be violent, which leads to violence.

I think Innu people – I think everyone knows Innu people love their children and when everyone loves their children, they wants to do the best for them. But if you're not taught, if things are taken away from you, how do – if you're not taught the proper way or – I assume my grandmother was taught by her mother how to take care of kids. I think that's how Innu people learn, is by showing and teaching.

It's led to a breakdown, I think, of families. You can see the – just from a couple of generations, such a big shift.

Now I work for the government, which really is a – my Innu words – like a struggle 'cause the government is the same system that imposed their – everything on the Innu. But I hope that being Innu, I mean, will bring understanding when we say we're trying to find solutions, to bring an Innu point of view to the table where normally there wouldn't be Innu people.

I think family is very important [redacted] He's – we adopted him from the hospital. The social services was going to send him to St. John's but my grandmother said no and asked my mom to take him, so she did.

One of the last things I wanted to say is I think – I know Innu people know it, it's how many times we have to say it to non-Innu people. They'll never understand the importance of culture. When I was growing up, we would go into Nutshimit for three months with family and extended family.

I just think that culture is one of the things that strengthens yourself and the people around you. It provides healing. It provides a framework for you to be able to – like a base for your strength.

I think that's all I want to say for now.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: First of all, [redacted] thank you for speaking to us today and sharing some of your thoughts and feelings.

I think that you've summed it up very well in terms of referring to Sheshatshiu and some of the hearings that you attended there, and the fact that it's only 70-odd years since this happened, but you also identified how it's been passed now from generation to generation, the impact of that forced settlement and how they traumatized people and – but nobody ever provided any kind of help or support to anyone.

And so, people were left – basically, as you just mentioned at the end, their culture was kind of wiped. It wasn't anything that happened slowly. It was very swift and very powerful and, obviously, had that kind of an impact on the people. And so, I think that – you know, what I'm hearing from you saying today is that we've got to deal with that. That there has to be something done, not just to deal with the symptoms, if you like, but to look at the underlying problems and try to get to that and bring some healing to people.

'Cause that's the other thing I've heard from people, despite all of what's happened, many people talk about the fact they want to move forward and to heal and to have a positive outcome from this.

So, thank you very much for that.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Thank you.

Translate.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]