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

English Transcript | Volume 39

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

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[Smudging performed.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

P. RALPH: Thank you, Nympha.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I want to thank you for joining the Inquiry today.

Thank you to Nympha for the smudge and the prayers. We are very happy to be back in Natuashish for our week's sessions here. Yesterday was an important day for the community, so that we did not sit but we'll be here until Friday.

Nastash?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'd just like to say that welcome people here that have come to the Inquiry. And that we're here this week and welcome [redacted] as the first speaker for this morning. And I'm glad to be here.

Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes. Good morning everyone and thank you for inviting us back here again for community meetings.

We want to, of course, acknowledge and let you know about the healing services that are available at all of these meetings. So we have: Ivy – oh sorry. I went too far.

P. RALPH: Yes, give Nympha a chance to –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Do you want to translate that?

[redacted] I think I can understand what he was saying.

P. RALPH: It's also for other people too, that could be online or watch the – [redacted] English is very good.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

P. RALPH: But this is for the benefit of others, [redacted] not for you.

[redacted] Okay. (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken].

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Ivy is here today. She's not in the room right now but she's here. And she's our healing services coordinator.

And we also have in the room, Elizabeth Sheppard, who is a counsellor and who can provide support to people if they need it.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

What was your name again?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Hmm?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mike.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Huh?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mike.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh, Mike. Mike Devine.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mike Devine.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We also have, just outside the room here, coffee and snacks for nourishment for people. And as well, we have a quiet room just down the hall if people need to go and have some quiet time to reflect.

We also wanted to share that when you're hearing stories at these community meetings, whether you're telling your own story or if people are just listening to the stories, they can be triggering. So we ask people to think about those who they can go to, whether here or afterwards when they go back to their community, for support.

And as well, if they need any supports here, then they're available, as I already said. And it takes great strength to be able to share your story and to come here and, also, to reach out for help and support. So we remind people and appreciate that it is a show of strength.

So thank you for being here this morning. We look forward to spending time with you this week.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin.

I also want to remind people, since we have not been here for some time, what the Inquiry is all about. We understand that for a long time now the Innu people of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu have known they want to make changes in the way that the child welfare system operates in their communities.

The Innu leadership many years ago signalled to the governments, Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador, that they would like to see changes in their community, especially around the delivery of child welfare services. That was after many years of hardships that Innu had endured in both communities.

And as children were being sent outside the community and people were experiencing hardships with alcohol, they realized that they have to work together to make changes. So the Innu Round Table, Innu leadership, provincial and federal government, all agreed that an Inquiry should be established.

Now, one of the things all these parties wanted the Inquiry to look at was Innu history. And we were asked to come to the Innu communities and listen to the history and the stories of community members. The history of Utshimassit, Natuashish and even times before that have been told to us by both Elders and young people.

People have told us about the pride of being an Innu person and how people are so happy to say that they still speak their language, and they can still live the Innu way of life. And we have also learned from many people how lives have been affected when children have been removed from them or from the community, and that needs to change.

So we have found that respecting the Innu language, the different dialects in the two communities, allows us to learn a great deal about Innu people. The storytelling and the truth of ordinary people will be a large part of how we write the history and give a report to the Innu Round Table, the provincial government and the federal government.

So we welcome [redacted] and anybody else who wants to come forward this week. We'll be here 'til Friday afternoon.

We welcome our senior lawyer for the Inquiry, Peter Ralph, to start the day's session.

P. RALPH: Yes.

Good morning, Commissioners, and everyone that's in attendance.

So [redacted] has been kind enough to come here this morning and share with us her experiences. And –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, let's let Nympha –

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: So I guess we'll ask [redacted] to start. But perhaps, [redacted] you can tell us when you were born and where you grew up and who your parents are a and then tell us your story.

[redacted] My name is [redacted] I'm 35 years old. I grew up in Davis and I grew up in Nain, then Davis again. I have one younger brother and two older brothers that passed away, and I lost my mom due to cancer. And my dad, I don't know my dad, so it's just me and my brother left – my brother Gregory.

And I want to talk about my experience when I was living in – after my mom had cancer. I experienced a lot of trauma over the years with my mom having cancer. And she didn't survive the cancer. And then we got removed.

So my experience, I grew up in a foster care after my mom died. So my brother was still alive. I grew up in Nain and that's when I found out my older brother has passed away too. So it's just me and my brother left.

But I grew up in Nain for about six years and I experienced lots of abuse after I was removed from my home community. My aunt offered to take me in, to be her step – like, her mother figure, but it didn't work out because she was very violent mother, very violent person.

And I grew up practically in the basement on the weekends. On the weekends I would sleep in the basement 'cause that's where my aunt would keep me.

I had a lot of friends there. The only time I would have a good time is when I would go out with my friends or do stuff with my friends. But other than that it was really bad situations where my cousins were out for the weekend and I would sleep in a corner of the basement where there's cement there. And I would eat wieners just to help me get through the weekend because my aunt wouldn't come downstairs and feed me anything. Sometimes she would just throw the water at me. Throw it down the stairs and close the door back again. So it was practically dark in there. I made my own little bed in there.

The abuse went on for a couple of years. I didn't know where to turn to. That's when my older brother passed away. He was trying to take us but CSSD didn't want us to go back to Davis Inlet. That's when I could've had a chance to live with my older brother, but he passed away after a while.

Yeah, so I lost my Innu language when I grew up in Nain. I don't know how to write in my Innu language but I can sing at the church in Innu. But I can't recognize the Innu words anymore 'cause I was removed from my home community.

It was very abusive. My friends were starting to notice I was getting abused in that house there. They all always ran away every time my aunt would come in and grab me by my hair. My friends would run outside and they would run home. I couldn't have my friends over.

This was going on for a couple of years at this house there. I went into that house since I was growing up and I completely seen everywhere what I experienced in that house. I've walked in and I seen whatever; everything what I experienced in there I just wanted to see it, and it was a bad idea for me to enter that house again.

My aunt used to stock up food 'cause she worked with Air Labrador. She used to stock up food and put food in the basement. And the only thing I would eat is wieners because that's the only thing that I could open 'cause those wieners you can open them, but the other ones I can't open, all the other canned foods.

So I hate wieners today. I don't like wieners but they kept me alive. Kept me alive for the weekends, whenever I'm in there for the weekends.

I think I was the only – well, my brother was living with us too. My brother was about this small here probably – like this tall or I don't know how old was he. But he lived with us too and he experienced a lot of abuse in that household.

And sometimes my aunt will take me to get water in wintertime 'cause she always took me to get water. And then my experience

was really bad because whenever she would get water she would be pissed off. She would be travelling really fast on the gravel and then she would put my face in the cold water 'cause my grades weren't good when I was going to school, 'cause I failed a lot of Inuktitut. I failed a lot of that. So I had lots of consequences because I didn't know how to speak Inuktitut and I didn't know how to do the tests.

I used to go to school a lot. And one day the counsellors and the cops and the CSSD came to our school and they spoke to us in our classroom. And they told us that no one has a right to hurt you guys. No one has a right to hit you, abuse you.

And there's a counsellor that – the school, there's buildings next to the school where the teachers and the counsellors stay. So it's just right next to the school area. And the counsellor showed me where she was staying. She's like, I'm staying just right here – just right here if you guys need to talk to someone regarding if there's abuse going on. Come to us.

So after those years I experienced lots of abuse. There's more I experienced that I didn't mention while I was talking. But my aunt was very abusive and she told my mother that she was going to take good care of us.

But there was another person that wanted to take us, but my aunt didn't agree with it. My Aunt Theresa didn't agree with getting us – like, stay in our community in Davis Inlet. She didn't agree with it.

And it was that day at the school when the cops and the CSSD and a counsellor came and they told us where – she told – there was a counsellor that told me where she was staying. So it was after school I went home and that's when I experienced another abuse. My aunt was already waiting for me in the porch.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted] My aunt lost her husband in that house. Her husband had a heart attack and we're all in there. And then it got worst after the husband died because the husband was a very nice person.

I experienced a lot of abuse after the husband had heart attack in that house. And then that's when I started to realize what my aunt was doing to us was very wrong. And I think she was going to go to the dance or a bingo, but when she left, that's when I climbed out the window.

I couldn't get my brother out because he was small and I thought it was really high from the window I was climbing out of. And I climbed out and I ran to the counsellor's house where she was showing me where she was staying.

That's when I was knocking on the door at the counsellor's house. And I told her me and my brother are abused and I need your help. And she got me in the house and then she told me she was taking me to the police station. And I went to the police station with her and then I showed her all my bruises.

And then my aunt was holding back my brother and I told the cops. And they were trying to get me to Davis Inlet but I said no, I can't leave without my brother; my brother has to get out of there. I want my brother with me; I don't want us to be, like, separated.

And then one week later, my aunt got – I told the cops. I said, you guys need to do more 'cause I want my brother out. So when my brother got out, I was staying in Nain for a couple of days until – I was like, I'm not going back to Davis Inlet without my brother. So I stayed with my friend for a couple of days and she agreed, her mom agreed with it.

CSSD got involved and put me at my friend's house until I got my brother out. And I told the CSSD and the counsellor and the cops I'm going to talk more until you get my brother out. So I start talking more of what I was experiencing in that house and that's when they got my brother out. And that's

when we moved back to Davis Inlet, but we got separated in Davis Inlet.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nympha, you can let us know when you need a break?

[redacted] Yeah.

P. RALPH: Or [redacted] I guess, too, because [redacted] is –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, both of you.

[redacted] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Don't be afraid to take a little break.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

[redacted] Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: But go ahead when you're ready.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

Break, I take it?

[redacted] Uh-huh.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay. We'll take a break.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ten minutes please.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: The last thing that [redacted] was talking about was when they came back to Davis, she was separated from her brother. You can pick up from there.

[redacted] We got separated when we got to Davis Inlet, me and my brother. My brother was placed into my uncle's care, and I was placed with my aunt in her care. So the separation was very, very sad for me because he's my only brother.

And then I grew up with my aunt. My aunt and – it was everybody, was starting to relocate from Davis to here. It was that time around when we got removed and sent back to Davis. It was very abusive – another abusive aunt I lived with.

It was very bad because – it was very embarrassing for me. Because my aunt, who I lived with when I was still in CSSD care, it was very embarrassing for her to send me to – she sent me away because she wanted to get rid of me.

My aunt treated me like a slave in her house. I took care of her foster kids. I practically almost raised all of them when they were little babies, so I grew up at a young age very fast. So I practically didn't experience much of childhood. I experience growing up taking care of my cousins.

Where I was living with her, she sent me to a treatment. And then she stole my man. And then she lived with my man. That's when I was 16, I moved out of there.

[Dialogue between [redacted] and Interpreter Byrne in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted] So I couldn't live in the same household with her because she was messing around with my man. So I told her, I was like, I'm moving out of here 'cause it feels really awkward and really weird to have to live with my aunt.

She attacked me when I was trying to get out of the house. She told me I'm still under CSSD, that I shouldn't move out. But I moved out when I was 16. That's when I moved out and moved with my cousin. He's a male.

So I moved out of there. She beat me up a couple of times. Like, two times she beat

me up because I didn't want to stay there anymore. Because I felt like I was just babysitting and helping her out, whatever she was doing. And whatever she was doing, I didn't like it too, because she was selling booze and I was young. And I was selling booze at a young age.

Yeah, so I was practically raising all my little cousins on my own. My aunt was always out of town or she was partying a lot. I would take her booze and sell it so I can buy food for the kids. I didn't like what I was doing because I know it wasn't a good thing to do, because I seen a lot of people drinking.

And then my aunt was very controlling. I didn't experience Christmas; I didn't experience anything. I was always the left out one in the family. I was never invited to Christmas dinners or anything. She would …

I think that's all I can talk for now. I can talk again later today. I have too much on my plate now. I need to go for a walk.

That's all I can talk for right now. Is it okay with you guys?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Of course.

[redacted] I can come back again. I need some air.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Of course.

P. RALPH: Yeah. If she could talk to Paula, she could find out what's a good time to come back.

[redacted] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE Thank you.

[redacted] You're welcome.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you to –

[redacted] Yeah, so I'm not done yet.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I know.

[redacted] So I'll keep talking again.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No problem.

[redacted] Thanks for –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay. Well, thank you –

[redacted] Thank you for hearing my story.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, we're happy to be here.

Okay, we'll have a short break now.

Recess

[redacted]