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

English Transcript | Volume 41

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

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Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so we're back.

So we're pleased to have Joey Michel – is it Joseph or Joey?

JOEY MICHEL: Joey.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Joey Michel –

JOEY MICHEL: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – to speak.

We can go for about a half an hour or less, if you want, this evening and then, if you can come back tomorrow morning to finish. Is that okay with you?

JOEY MICHEL: Yes.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

And you're going to translate for yourself?

JOEY MICHEL: Yes.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Perfect.

Okay, anything else to add?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible.)

JOEY MICHEL: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So if you're familiar, just tell –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. Just tell your own story in your own way. It's wide open in that regard, so start wherever you want and however you want.

Thank you.

JOEY MICHEL: Okay. My name is Joey Michel. I'm from Sheshatshiu and I was born January 26, 1981.

I'm trying to go back when my grandmother told me when I was mature enough to realize what happened when I was young. So I think it was in '86 or '87 that I know there was a lot of alcohol involved – in the late '80s – because that's where I grew up because I grew up with an alcoholic family. But I was removed, my late grandmother was telling me, when I was about three months old.

So I was moved around a lot because my mom and my dad were drinking all the time. But I do respect them because I never got the chance to grow up with them. But I grew up his family – my dad – so my uncles and my aunts. I've been living with her mom and his dad since they passed.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Translate, then?

JOEY MICHEL: Yeah.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So for the time, that being related to alcohol, I start using it too because I seen it when I was growing up. And it was adapted to my parents, I guess, because that's all I ever seen, is alcohol.

Because there are days, maybe when I was thinking when I was mature enough, that I thought my parents don't love me because they didn't have me for a child to learn from the ways that other children that they grew up with their mom and dad. But I never had it because the other people gave me that.

The Elders that I lived with, they gave me that. They told whatever they were learning in the past, because they were Elders that passed a long time that I was living with. They told me how to clean their huntings,

whatever: fish, partridge, rabbits and all that stuff.

My grandfather, Simon, used to make snowshoes and making tents and making tents for the people. And they used to bake a lot of bread – bannock, they calls it. Because that's what I was doing all the time because I was really into my grandmother, her traditional cookings.

Over the years then, I was starting to be an alcoholic as well, because it was related to my dad and my mom. So I never experienced any behaviours from the social service, you used to call it, because I never experienced any kind of anti-depressant pills or anything like that. So maybe I was lucky, I guess, for me because I know lot of people went through a lot of stuff today because I know I seen it a lot.

[Dialogue between Commissioner Qupee and Joey Michel in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

JOEY MICHEL: Okay, I was talking about the way I grew up and the way I see it for the children – I should say, the living of the CSSD, I guess. It used to be Social Services back then.

But I said that we have to be strong and we need to be heard and we need to focus on brighter, much better communication with the youth. And I said that I did not see so much, for me, it being a very bad position in CSSD before. So that's what I'm liking it about because people needs to trust because they kept it so long because it's hurting them.

So we need to be heard. We need our voices back. Okay, thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you very much, Joey.

We certainly appreciate you giving us the background of your own life and how things were for you at a very, very young age. I wasn't sure of one thing so if I can ask you just one question.

So you lived with, you say, your uncles and aunts and, I think, grandparents. Was CSSD involved at all – oh, they were as part of that. Okay.

So that was just one point. And, certainly, when you talk, you're absolutely right about people having a voice and they have to be strong because it's their lives. And it's very much about the Innu culture. And, you know, CSSD is a system that's not Innu.

But, of course, we know that Innu plan to take it over. The Inquiry will, I think, help what we hear from people to share so that it will help the Innu as they go forward with their own system.

So thank you.

JOEY MICHEL: And my grandmother used to get $162 every two weeks child welfare. It was not a lot for me, I guess, to buy food with that, I guess, because it was hard back then, to look for a ride to Goose Bay. Yeah.

P. RALPH: You would remember that too.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, I remember that too.

P. RALPH: Translate.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The child welfare – oh sorry, you translate first.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, I was going say I remember that back in those times working on the Island as a social worker. And the child welfare allowance was one that was woefully inadequate. It wasn't near enough for people to provide even the basics, like you say food.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Microphone.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I invite Joey, again, if you want an opportunity to speak at our next time we're here, that he's more than welcome to come.

P. RALPH: And there's time tomorrow morning if you want to come back tomorrow morning.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes.

JOEY MICHEL: Okay

P. RALPH: Would you do that?

JOEY MICHEL: Yeah. Thank you.

P. RALPH: Okay, yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

P. RALPH: Again, no pressure.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: There's no pressure.

JOEY MICHEL: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yes.

P. RALPH: Yeah. If you want to come and when you come if you don't feel up to it, then don't worry about it.

JOEY MICHEL: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Thank you.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

JOEY MICHEL: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so shall we do a closing prayer?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

Nympha?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I thought everybody was taking off.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, good.

P. RALPH: Yeah, want to do it again tomorrow?

JOEY MICHEL: Yeah.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) here you go.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So we'll do a closing prayer now when Nympha's ready.

N. BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Excuse me, yeah.

Sorry, Elizabeth? Sorry, we're going to have a few minutes of a prayer.

N. BYRNE: Okay.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Thank you, Nympha.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you.