

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

English Transcript Volume 43

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, good afternoon, everybody. We're ready to start.

Our first speaker this afternoon will be Pien Gregoire.

Good afternoon, Sir, and welcome. Whenever you're ready, you can start. And of course we have translation services there for you, so if you wanna speak in your own language, in Innu-aimun or English and –

P. GREGOIRE: I'll be okay in my – English.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay with English. Okay.

P. GREGOIRE: I think I'll manage.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And Anne will translate.

Thank you.

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

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So by the way, Pien, Anne is very good at the translation –

P. GREGOIRE: Yup, mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – but we try to give her – not say too much, so she can do the translating.

P. GREGOIRE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So just a reminder – I still have to be reminded all the time; I forget, so if you forget that's okay.

P. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.] Okay, I'll try!

I want to start this Inquiry and finish it with a – I was here, I think, December or January, and then they moved on, I didn't have time to have closure on my speech. So this is going to be my last speech, then. I'm truly honoured to talk in the Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcome of the Innu children.

I have a child, her English name is Raphael Gregoire. She's now 22 years old. I have asked him to speak on behalf of himself when he was in – apprehended to London, Ontario, to Goose Bay and to Saskatchewan. I already told the stuff about what happened when he was in Goose Bay, he tried to run away from the people that were looking after him.

He was mixed up in – parents were into drugs, and they didn't really take him, but he went to Social Services. He had a older brother, maybe two years older, and when he lost that brother he wanted to go where that brother lived and, I think he went to Social Services and a couple times and one day when I came home from work, there was a social worker showing me paper that my foster kid, Raphael Gregoire, was being apprehended in the child Social Services and there was RCMP there too, and I couldn't fight back.

So they took him to Goose Bay, and we had a couple visits and so on, and we shared what we didn't like because his room was quite small. He was sleeping in the laundry room. There was a laundry room there, there was a washer and dryer and some place there where they put the dry clothes. It was a very small room. I did not appreciate seeing that. That didn't seem to me, that Social Services should be – that a child apprehended should have a nice room where he have his closet and things like that, a desk and so on. But this is in a laundry room. That was the first part that I noticed that things weren't done right. And I think we mentioned it to the social workers here in Sheshatshiu, but –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Sorry, if you could just give Anne a chance now, she can translate. Thank you.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. GREGOIRE: Well, after that, a Christmas came along, I remembered – this was October, this where I'm talking about – and then a Christmas came along and I was working, and my wife was working and we bought him presents, anyway, to make – and then we went to take the presents to him in the Goose Bay.

But when we got to around 15 miles up the highway, one of our telephones rang and said that – a social worker said that Raphael didn't want us to visit him. So we went Goose Bay anyway, but we couldn't go where – because they told us Raphael had told us he didn't want his visit. So it was going to bring the presents and Raphael already knew that.

So we couldn't go there. We took the presents home, and we waited for the call and, eventually, we took the presents after Boxing Day, and our son started to cry when he seen us. He said: Why didn't you bring the presents to me when there was Christmas? We told him the story, that the Social Services said that you didn't want us to visit you. I don't know why Social Services would do that to Raphael or to us. I found that really, really strange. But, anyway, that's when the stories become more worst I guess.

After that, we tried – sometimes he had hockey. He loved hockey. We went to his games and then we went home and he would be upset that we didn't visit him. They didn't tell us that we could go see Raphael after his hockey games and say, Son, you did well, you was really good and so on.

But, anyway, that was the kind of things that frustrated Raphael or upset her. We didn't understand what's going on with the social workers. And then I pulled – I wanted him back. I didn't like this Social Services thing, taking our child, but then they wouldn't give him back to us. They said they – I started a hunger strike. I had a hunger strike outside

the Social Services building for one whole week.

But they didn't give him back. They didn't give him back – my child – and then, eventually, they sent him to London, Ontario. They didn't tell us that. They said they would never send Raphael outside without – they will never send him back, that's what they told us. But without our knowing, Raphael was gone.

We went to the Social Services building and they didn't tell us nothing. Instead, we heard it from somebody else; a girl named Jackie Ashini told us that he overheard the social worker saying that Raphael is gone to London, Ontario.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So we'll give Anne a chance.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: (Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.)

P. GREGOIRE: Well, anyway, we got that straightened out a little bit. We was able to call him, or he was able to call us, and he said he didn't like it over there. So I went to Social Services to say that he didn't like it over there; he should be sent back home, but that didn't turn out that way.

My son told me that he was in a little jail there – maybe a detention centre, that small, little jail in there. He said he was in there three months. That was, you know, you say to yourself, oh my goodness. What, a little jail in there, three months? They never told us anything.

So the next thing we know he was gone to Regina. He was in Regina. We got arranged for me and my other grandson to visit him. My other grandson's name is William. We went to visit my grandson and my wife was working. We visit him for, I think, a week. We went to movies, and we went to a store. We went to a mall and then – but he was always supervised. There was always a worker there beside us. It's like as if we're going to kidnap him or run away with him.

But after a while we parted. He was okay. He seemed okay. He was starting to grow up. I think he was, probably, now 10, 11, maybe 12 because when they took him, he was eight years old but now he must be getting really big. He was going to school and he was playing basketball. He liked sports and then he came home for while. They put him – he came home for a funeral. His grandfather, Dominic Pokue, passed away and he came for a little while, a few days, two or three days and then he went back home, and he was very – a poor setting.

I looked at the place there where they were keeping him. It was away from Regina, maybe 20 miles outside. There was nothing in there, just the school looked like an old barn renovated and there was three buildings where the dorm was, and where the school was looked like a dorm and there was an office building there. It looked very shabby, no good. To me that looked like no good. It didn't seem like there was no other people out there; just them and the kids who were taken from –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Just – Anne again.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay. Yeah.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. GREGOIRE: And then, I think, Raphael grew up. He grew up to be a young man. He came for a visit there on a Christmas and then they brought him back when he was 15 years. He stayed at a group home down there. We have a group home here, that's where he was. He was 15. They told us that he was transitioning to come back again to our home.

So that's what happened and when he did come back to us, they told me that we have to tell you something. So I said, okay, I'm listening. They told me: When your son was taken away, shortly after he was in Regina, maybe when he was 10 years old, that he was already starting to smoke weed. Whatever you call that, weed, that'll make

you high. I didn't – and I said to myself this was a failure. It was all a failure when they took my son, but he will be smoking weed over there and that's not anything successful, in rehabilitating the little boy.

And that was a lie that they never told us for those whole five years until he was ready to come home to our, back to us, that he was already smoking a lot of weed. And he still smokes a lot of weed and he has a baby girl, three and a half years old and we look after the baby girl because we worry. He lives in Montreal, he don't like to live in Sheshatshiu at all because it seems like they took away – it seemed like that he lost where, really, his home was. And he lost everything that he used to ask her mother what he liked, like Aunt Jemima and so on. He never asked that for her mom to cook her again.

And the baby, she loves her baby, but he was really smoking weed really every day, or every chance he got, every chance he could. And then he went to Montreal three years ago and he hasn't come back since. He comes back once in a while. Her mother ask him to come back and look after the baby; that she told my son that we're getting old and we're getting tired and baby's autism and they tell us when a baby that has autism, she's like three babies in – three separate babies that is hard to handle the baby. You can't take the baby outside very much. He grabs the sand and try to eat the sand and things like that. We can't let him out – she likes the water so much that I took him in there and let him see what she's gonna do, and he went straight out to the water. I told him, you can't go in there anymore.

If I wasn't watching, she would drown right there. We live right beside the water. When she's – the autistic children are very intelligent. I put a porch down there to block the home so she won't get out of the porch, but when I see him that a cop came by and bring my granddaughter, he told me he was on the beach. I told him, I put all the – to block him to not to run away, but he had put pans right on top of each other and climbed over, jumped over the fence.

We have our worries, and we ask for a babysitter, but we still haven't got – that's still in the works, I guess. And we hate to give him back to my boy. We feel like he might end up in a accident, run away into the street in Montreal, or anything would happen in there, and we don't want him to go to Montreal. We fear something might happen, or the family services over there might take it away from him because he's into drugs.

But he seems like he's doing okay, Raphael. He's working in a restaurant, and she said she's taking French courses, and he says he's going to – still into sports. He said he's doing – what do you call those, MMC, whatever that is, fighting?

That's what he's doing, and he calls once in a while and sends in the Pampers and a little money here and there. But she don't wanna come home. I told my wife, leave him alone. He can't handle the baby. Look at us when we were younger, we worked hard to handle two. But that's where we're at. Okay.

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

P. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Well that's about my story, but I feel like we lost our family unit, where you have the father and the mother and the sisters and the brother and the children and a home. We're separated, we're not together but we still manage to communicate or get together in the Facebook through chat and so on, on telephones.

I don't know what's in the future, but I hope it gets better; that it don't get worse anymore and how it already have been.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you very much.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you very much, Mr. Gregoire, for coming in today and sharing your story. Certainly, I think you were saying at the end is that it does point out some of the systemic problems that were in the system that you dealt with, so we'll certainly be looking out for those.

P. GREGOIRE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And, you know, and ensure – the other point was, of course, supports that are needed to caregivers, in whatever role they may be. So we do thank you very much.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so our next speaker is scheduled for 3 p.m., so we will wait for that person. If they arrive early, we'll let you know, and we can start a bit early. But the appointment was for three, so we'll wait for that.

Thank you.

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